

A Deeper Look: A perspective on “good” development

August 2021

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[Music]

Dr. Otto Chabikuli: Welcome to our new and returning listeners of *A Deeper Look* podcast. You are probably used to hearing this voice welcoming you to the podcast:

Patrick Fine: Hi, this is Patrick Fine, and this is *A Deeper Look* podcast.

Dr. Otto Chabikuli: But, today, we are flipping the mic, and Patrick Fine, CEO of FHI 360 and host of *A Deeper Look* podcast will be in the interviewee seat.

Voiceover: *A Deeper Look. Exploring what works and what doesn't in development, and the changes we can make together to turn ideas into action.*

Dr. Otto Chabikuli: I am Dr. Otto Chabikuli, Director of Global Health Population and Nutrition at FHI 360, an avid listener of *A Deeper Look*, and your host of today's final episode of the season and of the series. Over the past four and a half years, we've heard from creative thinkers, respected leaders, and development practitioners about what works in development and what does not. We've heard more about the sustainable development goals, discussed trends affecting the humanitarian space and explored the darker side of development, the intended and unintended consequences of development efforts. We have heard focus for the shape of things to come and talked about and with the people who are disrupting development, often for the better. Now, we get a chance to hear from the host himself.

Patrick, we have heard a lot about the background and experience of our guests. Now, let me ask you, tell us a little bit more about your story, your career story. What led you into development work? Was there an expected path within your career and journey, and from your observation and experiences, do you have any reflections on what works in development or what does not work in development? Over to you, Patrick.

Patrick Fine: Thank you, Otto. It is great to be with you. And, thank you to our listeners for tuning in. It really does feel like I am on the other side of the table, now having to answer the questions instead of pose them. Otto, in response to your first question about my career path and what led me to development, it was a completely unexpected set of circumstances, and it really arose from an experience I had as a young man. I found myself in Pakistan in the Swat Valley. I

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wasn't here to work; I was just really an international hobo, drifting around the world.

In Pakistan, I had some very profound experiences living with a family up in the mountains that really taught me about the commonality of all people, and about how what we share in common is so much stronger and more important than the differences that we have. And that experience really changed my life for the better, the kindness, the generosity, the hospitality that I encountered. I also, for the first time, encountered extreme poverty. That really opened my eyes to both the basic human needs of communities and also to the potential to play some kind of positive role in addressing those needs. And, that really was the start for me.

After that, I traveled to other parts of the world. Those observations deepened. I discovered that I had a real interest and respect for other cultures, for learning about other cultures, for understanding that the world was so much bigger than the small view that I had from a rural Midwestern farm. I realized that there was so much to learn, and as I learned more, of course, you realize how much you don't really know, it built in me this great desire to find some niche or some place from which I could make a positive contribution to the world that I lived in. But, it was not intentional. It didn't start out with any grand plan. It was really me learning from people along the way.

Now, in terms of big lessons that I can draw about what works and what doesn't in the realm of human development, I think there are two things that are fundamental to successful efforts to address the challenges of human development. The first is trust, that without trust, it is really not possible to have the kind of collaboration and authentic partnerships that create the enabling environment to solve very difficult problems, and I think that an essential ingredient to building trust is time. Taking the time to get to know people, just spending time with people, and being your authentic self when you are with people.

The second essential ingredient that I have found is humility, and with humility, I would combine respect. It doesn't matter whether you're a technical expert, whether they're a community member, whether you're a government official, no matter what role one plays in a collaboration, we all have to understand that none of us have the solutions. We have to create those solutions together, and the only way to do that is to be humble in the face of the challenge,

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and respectful of the partners or the other people that we are working with, respectful of their culture, of their language, of their life experience. That gets interwoven with that concept of trust. They go together, and if you can take the time to get to know the people that you're working with, to let them see you, warts and all, and then to approach the challenges in an open manner, willing to listen to other points of view and not impose your point of view, then I think that creates the basis for real progress and for mutual understanding. So, that's what I think works.

What I think doesn't work is when a person comes in who may have great experience, they may have wonderful expertise, they may really know what they're talking about, but if that person arrives and seeks to impose their knowledge, their perspective, their experience on others, that does not work, and it often is counterproductive. And, it often leads us to places that have not improved the situation, but have actually made the situation worse. So, that's how I look at those questions of what are the essential ingredients to a constructive approach for addressing human development challenges, and what should we avoid.

Dr. Otto Chabikuli:

Patrick, thank you very much for that. It resonates quite a lot with me. I remember the first time we made – you were visiting our office, and it became clear to many of us that you had a mission. You are a mission-driven person, and I just want to make a distinction here between somebody who's mission driven and just a professional, somebody who's doing a job. A mission-driven person is the one who's been touched from an experiential level, and it is much easier to commit to be engaged to spend time. And, the second piece I wanted to add and see your reaction to it is the dignity, that by being respectful and trusting, you are not only just creating a recipe for successful partnership, but also building dignity of the recipient so that the recipient is not just somebody who gets books and education and health care, but they also feel for field from a dignified – from their own dignity perspective, and that will go a long way in terms of ownership and sustainability.

Patrick Fine:

I think that the way you put it, about their own dignity is the key point, because it's recognizing a person's own dignity and their agency. My experience has taught me that everybody deserves to have their human dignity recognized, the dignity that all people inherently have. We aren't conferring it upon them, but we can recognize it, and we can respect it. I think far too often, we're taught to discriminate against people on the basis of education or socioeconomic status in a way that seems to confer more dignity

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upon the educated person, or more dignity upon the wealthy person, or more dignity upon the high-status person than upon, say, a farmer or a person who is not educated.

And what I've learned through my experience in Pakistan and in Africa was that wisdom, capability, insight, these are things that aren't reliant on education or wealth or status, that all people carry these things. So, whenever I seek to engage with people, I am often humbled by the wisdom and insight, by the skill and knowledge of people who don't have the educational status.

Dr. Otto Chabikuli: Patrick, since you started your career, a lot of things have changed. There have been disruptions in the sector, in the way we conduct business and the way we do development, generally speaking. What are the biggest disruptions, and who do you think is the most impactful disruptor?

Patrick Fine: So, I've seen many, many changes in the 40 plus years that I have been working in international development. By and large, I've seen things move in a positive direction. So, when I look at this endeavor that we're engaged in of human development, of trying to reduce extreme poverty, trying to empower people so that they have more opportunities and they can live better lives, the lives that they aspire to live. I think that as a global community, we have made a lot of progress. Living standards have gone up, extreme poverty has been reduced. Things like the number of deaths from malaria has been cut in half in just the last 12 years or so. The HIV/AIDS pandemic, while not under control, now it is not a death sentence, and people do have access to treatment and there's been tremendous progress at reducing the spread of that pandemic.

In terms of education, the number of children and youth who now have access to formal education, massively expanded from when I first started working in Africa in 1980. And what I've seen in Africa and Latin America and Asia is a tremendous growth in the capability, in the talent pools in those countries, and in many of those countries, in the strength of the institutions. When I first started working in Africa, there was a relatively small pool of African professionals with advanced degrees, with Master's and PhD degrees. In 1980, it was still the post-colonial period. Some countries had only had independence for 10 or 12 years, and there was a real shortage of qualified, talented, experienced, seasoned professionals. That's not the case anymore.

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Right now, in Africa, in Asia and Latin America, in most countries, you have a big pool of talented professionals. So, in addition to having a much larger pool of qualified people to draw from, there are also stronger institutions. There are high-quality universities and technical schools. There are think tanks, there are institutes that are producing that quality at a level that did not exist 40 years ago. So, the entire environment in many, many countries has fundamentally changed, and those countries have far more capability than they had in the past. We've also seen the growth of the private sector. So, there are just far more opportunities for people to develop leadership skills, to be productive within their communities and to contribute to the communities as the business sector has grown.

And more recently, we've seen social enterprises playing an important role, so taking a commercial approach but addressing long-term human development needs by developing sustainable businesses to address those needs. So, the environment is fundamentally different than it used to be, and that is positive.

Dr. Otto Chabikuli: This is very interesting. If I may just come in here, because you just mentioned the benefit that, you know, the development work we have seen, progress on impact, but we've also seen progress on capacity, human capacity and institutional capacity. And, as I assume that you are making a correlation that it is that progress in improving the capacity of human resources and institutions is directly responsible for the impact that we're observing. Is that correct, or are there other things that can be attributed to the progress that you've seen on impact level?

Patrick Fine: Fundamentally, I think it is the growth in capacity, both human capacity and institutional capacity, that enables progress. Again, we have to kind of take the long view, because if you look at the here and now, what you see are the challenges and the problems. There are plenty of examples of countries or communities or institutions that have moved forward, and then they've had a setback. But, looking at it over the decades, what I see is that these efforts we've been engaged in to improve water and sanitation for example, and better sanitary practices, to improve public health, to improve education, not just access to education, but the quality of education, to expand that access, not just to the first six or eight years or 10 years, but into higher education where people get higher-level skills.

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I think the track record shows that, as a global community, we've made substantial progress. That progress has contributed to building the human resources and institutional resources, which, in turn, can create the means for nations and communities and institutions to continuously improve and to tackle new challenges. And here, Otto, I just want to point out something that I think in the development community we often get wrong, which is this notion that there's a fixed destination, that if we just do these projects correctly, if we just take the right actions, that then we will have achieved our objectives, and there will no longer be a need for organizations to address human development challenges, because we will have solved them.

And that is an ahistoric point of view that is not rooted in the reality of the human condition. As long as there are humans, there will be human development needs. They will evolve. They will change. Right now, we are having to pivot to focus on climate change, for example, which is a human-produced set of problems that the whole global community is grappling with. This notion that human development needs are something that will just go away if we do the right thing makes no sense.

Dr. Otto Chabikuli: Interesting that you take that view, Patrick, because even when we're talking about disruptors, we sometimes try to refer to technology and science, the notion that there will be that one invention, that one person and that one moment in time that we could look at and say this is when things changed. But you just described a phenomenon where in development, things grow organically, things take time, and you have to have a long view of disruption, if you will, that there will be things within the environment that clearly can become a disruptor. Like the pandemic that we're living right now may change in a very abrupt way the way we function and the way we look at development. But historically, it hasn't been – we haven't had many of these such big events that disrupt abruptly, if you will.

Patrick Fine: Yes, I do think that there can be inflection points. Say, for example, where technology really shifts the way in which we operate. Like, right now, you are in South Africa and I am in Washington, D.C., and we're having this conversation. I think there are also tipping points where science and technology can equip us with a new set of tools or knowledge that can move us forward, or, in some cases, can create the conditions that move us backward and retard us, because science and technology are neutral, and it

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depends on how they are used, whether they're used for good or whether they're used for bad.

Dr. Otto Chabikuli: This may be a good time to talk about – I just saw a question from Oko Sunday via LinkedIn. Oko Sunday asks you, Patrick, how does a development aid program survive long after funding is reduced or eventually stopped? And, we were just talking about the sustainability and the long-term view of development.

Patrick Fine: So, first, I think we have to uncouple our definition of development from the concept of a funded project. The desire for communities and for individuals and for institutions to improve themselves, to better their conditions, to tackle challenges that they face is not tied to a particular project or to a stream of funding. And, part of it is shifting our mentality so that we're not reliant on external resources in order to tackle human development challenges. I think that what we're going to see in the coming years is more and more examples of institutions and nations mobilizing their own resources – human resources, financial resources, political will – to address challenges, and that the external component of those resources will be a minority share.

And, as those external resources are a minority share, then the locus of control and of decision making will naturally shift to the local actors. That's one of the evolutions that I see gaining momentum within our field of work. At the same time, I think it's important to point out, I do see a kind of bifurcation occurring in the world between countries that are on a path of positive development, where living standards are increasing, opportunities are increasing, capacity is growing, and then those countries that are in a poverty trap, where you have internal conflict and state institutions. Both public and private institutions are too weak to generate the kind of momentum to power those nations ahead. One of the challenges is how do we interact with government institutions that lack integrity and are unable to govern effectively, and do not have the confidence of the governed. And, as a result, you have conflict in a variety of social pathologies from realizing their full potential.

Dr. Otto Chabikuli: Yeah, so clearly, it doesn't seem like there will be a one-size solution that will fit every circumstance and every context. We will need to be adapting and assessing the need as we engage with the various contexts and countries. But, still, coming back again, Patrick, to the notion of disruption, the many years that I have worked alongside you and as a leader, you spoke a lot about being

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comfortable with change. And in my mind, you represent one of those people who would be open to disruption. Do you consider yourself a disruptor?

Patrick Fine:

I don't, except to the extent that I believe so firmly in the power of people to drive positive change, and I believe so firmly in the power of achieving things together by working together, by authentic collaboration. That, in itself, may be disruptive, but it also may be naïve. So, but I think of myself more of a moderate, Otto, a person who has tried to affect change, not through grand initiatives but as somebody who recognizes that progress is incremental. It takes place one step at a time, you have meet people where they are and work with them over time. And, I believe that human development is a long-term undertaking, and that we have to be prepared for the disappointments and the setbacks as well as the successes and the excitement when things go right.

Dr. Otto Chabikuli:

Thank you for that. One of the reasons that I ask the question is I was inspired by the question from Virginia Boloma. She sent a question by email and wanted to know the ideas and tools to use in order to develop and also highlight things which hinder development. In other words, do you think that to affect change, do we necessarily have to be disruptors, or are there ideas, tools that everybody, even moderates, just like yourself, have access to that could help us remove some of the challenges that hinder development?

Patrick Fine:

Yes, I think that the tools that we have at our disposal today are far more powerful than we had in the past. But, they really come down to being able to communicate effectively and to listen to each other. So, we have better tools for doing that, and we have better methods for doing that, for collecting information, for informing ourselves, for understanding the views of different constituent groups that have a stake in a particular action. I think that better equips us to tackle the huge problems that we face as a world community. So, in terms of disruption, I think that the disruptions really are the challenges that we have to face.

Climate change is massively disrupting. It's disrupting food systems, it's disrupting settlement patterns, it's disrupting the internal politics, and the international politics. Our role, if we're going to work in this arena, is to confront these disruptions. I see us not so much as the disruptors, although many people like to claim that title, because it has some cache associated with it, but development professionals, by and large, are not the disruptors. We

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may bring new ideas, which are great. But, I think that the challenges we face are the disruptions in the lives of our communities and of our nations, and so they require new ways of thinking, and they require us to confront old orthodoxies that people believe in, that they cling to, because they get comfort from these old ways of doing things, and we're going to have to confront them and see that those old ways of doing things, or those old ways of understanding the world no longer apply, and they're not going to move us forward. We need new ideas, new methods, new ways of doing things.

Dr. Otto Chabikuli: Great. Patrick, on that note, I will just want our listeners to know that this year we're celebrating the 50th anniversary of FHI 360; that's half a century. And, as you mentioned earlier on, in the past 50 years, a lot of progress has happened, and in a small way, FHI 360 played a role. And of the 50 years, certainly you didn't lead through all of them ... how long have you been with FHI 360?

Patrick Fine: So, about 12 and a half years.

Dr. Otto Chabikuli: Great. So, if you look at the 50 years of FHI 360 providing solutions to some of the challenges in the contexts where we serve, was there a pivotal moment that you could recall that stands out for you?

Patrick Fine: I think there are several pivotal moments where FHI 360 as an organization made really valuable contributions to the global community and to the way we think about international development and human development.

In terms of FHI 360's contributions, first, FHI 360 started in 1971 as a nongovernmental organization focused on modern contraceptive and family planning. Then, 50 years ago, that idea of modern contraception, of providing access to women and empowering women to have control over their fertility, that was a pretty radical idea. And, FHI 360 played a prominent part in helping to advance an agenda that really empowers women to have bodily autonomy, to make decisions around their fertility, and to have access to modern contraception, and to have knowledge about family planning so they and their families can make informed choices. That has been an important contribution of the organization, not just on the technical side, but also to the body of knowledge that has informed those actions over the last 50 years, so that area of reproductive health.

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In the mid-1980s, as the HIV/AIDS pandemic grew, and as we began to understand what this new disease was, FHI 360 expanded its work in public health from reproductive health to address infectious disease and to address, in particular, HIV/AIDS. And there, again, the organization brought new thinking, and it brought some innovative approaches and some courageous policy positions that have had a significant impact on how we as a global community work on the prevention, care and treatment of people living with HIV/AIDS.

And, in particular, in the early ‘90s, when ARVs, antiretroviral drugs, were starting to become available, and finally, there was a treatment for HIV so it was not a death sentence, but that could be treated. Those early treatments, they were difficult to administer, they were complex – you had to take 12 pills during the day at specific intervals for them to be effective – so, the administration of the treatment was complex and difficult, and there was a thinking amongst many medical professionals and development professionals at the time that these treatments were just too difficult to apply in remote or rural or low-resource settings, such as in Africa, which was the epicenter of the HIV epidemic by that time.

And FHI 360 took a contrary view that, no, these treatments can be administered in low-resource settings, and FHI 360 using its own resources proved that that could be the case. And, that kind of trailblazing that we did to show that these treatments can be administered effectively to those people who need the treatment most had a huge influence on practice across the globe and within public health. So, that’s a second kind of inflection point where FHI 360 played a real instrumental role.

Dr. Otto Chabikuli: Thanks. I mean, those are really terrific examples and when you look at how it was brought to scale and the number of lives that have been impacted, it is really amazing what FHI 360 has done. Staying with FHI 360, looking into the future, where do you hope to see FHI 360 in another 50 years to come?

Patrick Fine: I hope that FHI 360 will guard its character as an international organization that draws on talent and experience from around the world. If you look at the makeup of the people who are FHI 360, we are development professionals from around the world that bring a variety of perspectives, a variety of cultural attitudes, a variety of professional experience and expertise. I hope we maintain that, because I think in a globalized world, it will be essential to have

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organizations that can bring together this diversity of experience and expertise and perspective. So, I want to see the organization continue to constantly adapt itself to the changes in the world.

We always talk about how rapidly things are changing. That means institutions have to change rapidly as well in terms of adopting new technologies, in terms of developing their enterprise platforms for effectively managing resources, for improving our ability to use information and use evidence to inform programs, our ability to share knowledge so that the entire community benefits, and, most of all, for us to continue to be a learning organization that approaches human development challenges, not with the idea that we have a solution, but with the idea that we can play a positive role with those people who are grappling with a challenge or affected by a challenge, that we can play a positive role by working in partnership with them to find ways of confronting, managing and, in some cases, resolving those challenges.

Dr. Otto Chabikuli: Indeed, it looks like the future will have challenges just like the past had challenges. Now, Patrick, you have posed a couple of questions to your guests, and I would like to pose some of them to you today. What is the biggest trend you see shaping human development that FHI 360 and companies similar to FHI 360 should be aware of?

Patrick Fine: I think the biggest trend shaping human development is – it's not a new trend. It's been with us all along, but I think it's being articulated more clearly, and because of the growing capacity in countries around the world, that the demand is stronger for local actors to have real agency over the programs, over the initiatives, and over the resource utilization that is directed towards addressing human development challenges.

Dr. Otto Chabikuli: Great. And do you consider yourself an optimist or a pessimist and why?

Patrick Fine: I definitely consider myself an optimist, and I'm an optimist because I believe in the power of people to work together to overcome challenges, to solve problems. I've seen it throughout my entire life. I've seen where people come together – very different people, often people who you would not expect could work effectively together – and they come together, they work in good faith, and they achieve amazing results that improve people's lives. So, I have a strong belief in our ability to tackle these problems, to come together, to be resilient in the face of those

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things that we cannot solve, but also to make progress across the entire spectrum of human development changes.

Dr. Otto Chabikuli: Great, and for the future development disruptors out there, Patrick, what advice do you have for them?

Patrick Fine: I'll go back to where I started, Otto. My advice to anybody who wants to work in the field of human development is approach the problems and approach the people that you work with without preconceived notions, with respect, and with a large dose of humility. Be willing to listen to others and to hold back your own preferences or your own ideas. Hold those until you've listened to others and you understand what their preferences and ideas are.

Dr. Otto Chabikuli: Great, thank you so much for your wisdom, Patrick. We are coming to the conclusion of this podcast. I don't know if you have some concluding remarks for the listeners.

Patrick Fine: I just want to thank the listeners of *A Deeper Look* podcast for tuning in over the last four and a half years. It has been absolutely inspiring to be with you, to listen to amazing leaders working on human development, who've brought so many perspectives that we have learned from, that have informed us, that have helped shape the work we do. So, listeners, thank you, and I also want to thank the team that has produced *A Deeper Look* podcast. Our producer, Katherine Wise, who was one of the people who came up with the idea in the very beginning, four and a half years ago, that, hey, we should have a podcast because that is a way of sharing ideas, sharing knowledge, sharing perspectives about important things that people care about. So, Katherine Wise, thank you very, very much for your work on the podcast, for making this such an engaging four and a half years.

Dr. Otto Chabikuli: And thanks to you, Patrick, for asking the tough questions and encouraging others to do the same. Thank you, listeners, for tuning into this final episode. You can check out our previous episodes, favorites, or ones you have missed on Sound Cloud, iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts. Thank you.

Patrick Fine: Thank you, Otto.

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