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Development Research: Quo vadis?

1. Introduction

The combination of a growing population and worldwide increasing standards of living threatens to overstretch the carrying capacity of our planet at both ends: in the use of finite energy and non-renewable natural resources and in the capacity to absorb the polluting effects of human activities. The impact of past and present carbon dioxide emissions is now felt around the world in turbulent weather conditions and, over the years, the phenomenon seems to have worsened.

Global trends such as climate change and other environmental disasters affect all countries whether developed or developing. Poorer countries and the poor in all countries will be the most affected as they have fewer resources to protect themselves against the new risks of global warming, rising sea levels, desertification and the loss of biodiversity. They will need more assistance to meet those complex and interconnected challenges. On the other hand, the rapid industrialisation of China and India and other large emerging economies like Indonesia, Brazil, Mexico or South Africa weighs increasingly on the acceleration of climate change. Understandably, the 'late-comers' claim the right to industrialise as Europe and North America have done during the past centuries, or Japan and 'the Asian Tigers' during the last decades.

Thus, the challenges of sustainable development are manifold: how can the economically more advanced countries be persuaded to accept their responsibility for the protection of global public goods? Can a grand bargain between the developed and the rapidly developing countries give the latter an opportunity to raise their living standards without compromising the future and sustainable development of all countries? How can the poorest

countries of all be protected against the impact of climate change and the depletion of other natural resources? Finally, what are the policies that would serve to reconcile diverse and conflicting interests?

Largely, the management of global policies has been shaped by the 'powerful' players. Most developing countries still have very limited influence in setting the agenda of global negotiations and in the determination of policies by key financial and economic institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank Group. These institutions, along with the World Trade Organization (WTO), have played an important role in global economic management. But while opportunities have been created, the outcomes have manifested a degree of imbalance. The current multilateral system responsible for designing and implementing international policies is under-performing and lacks policy coherence as the social and environmental dimensions of globalisation tend to be overlooked. The shortcomings of the current waves of economic and financial globalisation, i.e. rising inequalities in and between nations and the neglect of the destructive effects of unfettered economic growth, are only too obvious. How can this problem be dealt with?

Increasing asymmetries in power and inequalities in living standards within and across countries are a fertile ground for violent conflicts, terrorism and, ultimately, insecurity. In this context, religion plays a decisive role for development. To date, the international discourse on cleavages has become obsessed with the supposed threat of the 'clash of civilizations'. It is therefore imperative to search for possible remedies to prevent this and rather initiate a peaceful and constructive dialogue aiming at a universal ethic for sustainable development. How can the positive elements of each culture and civilization be identified and mobilised for peaceful international co-operation and sustainable development?

The credit for putting these pertinent questions on the global agenda goes to far-sighted researchers and puts to the test all development scholars in a special way. They must take into account the fundamental challenges stemming from these global paradigm shifts to keep their research policy-relevant. This means in fact that the profession has to rethink its own role and has to acquire competencies accordingly by adapting methods and theories. This includes thoroughly examining past and present debates on development research. What are the central characteristics of develop-

ment research? What has marked the discipline at its origins and what is of relevance today? Addressing these questions is the *conditio sine qua non* for drawing lessons for the future, and fits with the overarching question of this article: *Development research: Quo vadis?* In other words, which determinants will shape its paths in future? Which fields will be of interest? And, above all, to ask how it can exert a stronger influence on the political decision-making process.

This article deals with these questions by exploring the role of development research in different contexts. Firstly, it provides a brief overview of development research from its early stages after World War II until today. Secondly, it analyses the status quo of our knowledge by identifying central characteristics and current deficits that need to be addressed. Thirdly, it sheds light on possible future research paths and provides insights into potential ways of enhancing the influence and impact of research on development policies.

2. Brief Overview

2.1 Initial Situation

The emergence of development research in the second half of the twentieth century is in large part due to increasing concerns about socio-economic prospects for the so-called ‘Third World’ after decolonisation. The inauguration speech of the US President Harry S. Truman in 1949 announcing ‘a bold new program [...] [to] make the benefits of industrial progress [...] available for the improvement and growth of under-developed areas’ (Sumner 2006: 645) is widely seen as the starting point of development aid and corresponding research activities. In the beginning, the central area of focus was the cluster of ‘Third World’ countries which were considered, until the late 1960s, to be a relatively homogenous ensemble of developing countries. The overarching principles of the profession can be characterized by normative policy concerns leading to efforts that find possible solutions for development problems, e.g. the inhuman living conditions in poor countries.

Yet, in the context of the Cold War, development policies were definitely shaped by bloc thinking. Running counter to its self-proclaimed

honourable objectives, there were in fact geo-strategic questions of power on top of the – not necessarily hidden – agenda. Since the two rivalling superpowers (USA and USSR) wanted to maintain and expand their spheres of influence and thus had a genuine interest in strong economic – and reliable military – partners, development co-operation was mainly reduced to economic issues. Other aspects such as human rights or good governance played a subordinate role. Moreover, the research community was dominated by economic thinking as well; in particular, modern development theorists equated development with economic growth and propagated the flow of capital as a quick-fix solution and the best and only recipe for development.

2.2 Status Quo

With the end of the Cold War, development co-operation suddenly ceased to be a strategic policy tool of the two blocs. Though the ambition for development co-operation was reduced in the aftermath of the East-West conflict, the new situation permitted the emergence of an enlarged concept of ‘development’ reflecting a multitude of aspects like natural resources, human rights, public affairs and human security. This was an important step, since the economic-centred approach had finally proven to be a failure. The more the developing world tried to integrate itself into the world economy, the more it became heterogeneous and it became evident that a single approach was insufficient and obsolete for trying to manage or even explain the whole Third World. The phenomena encountered were just too varied and intertwined. Today, in the context of globalisation, they are all the more differentiated and this complexity can hardly be properly addressed or understood from a solely mono-disciplinary perspective. Only a multi-disciplinary approach is adequate for understanding not only economic, but also political, social, cultural and technological aspects of societal change.

Furthermore, even industrialised countries face serious difficulties in adjusting themselves to the neo-liberal world order. Growing parts of their populations are, or risk being, economically and socially marginalised. The economic fragmentation of societies has increased, economic and social costs attached to unsustainable levels of resource consumption are excessive and some economic sectors are faced with the challenge of adjusting to

structural changes at home or abroad. This is just to highlight a few developmental problems of industrialized countries and to refute the presumption that generally associates development problems with poor nations. Today, apart from being confronted by the inherent problems of development, developing countries (and especially those with emerging economies) find themselves facing the developmental problems characteristic of rich countries as well. Therefore, development, as an issue, simultaneously challenging both rich and poor countries, implies that the paths that proved successful for industrialised countries can no longer serve as *the* model for development. Conversely, these established development routes are areas of substantive development research themselves, given that their concept for development is inadequate in dealing with their own problems.

Besides that, a development concept can never be simply transferred, because contextual factors must be considered closely. It is crucial to take into account the specific characteristics of different societies in terms of history, ecology, culture, technology, etc. and determine how these differences can be translated into varied strategies of development. Also, since contextual factors change over time, development research is a dynamic and self-evolving field of study. It covers burning issues and recurring themes most relevant for development such as growth strategies, poverty reduction, gender equality, migration trends, environmental degradation, socio-political change or cultural diversity. However, the range of topics covered by development researchers is not cast in stone. They will inevitably evolve as they have over the past decades.

3. Present and Future Trends

3.1 Challenges

As described, development research can be characterized by its inter- or multi-disciplinary perspective, its normative orientation, its awareness of cultural diversity and context sensitivity as well as by its changing and evolving field of research topics (Maurer 2006). These central characteristics implicate different imperatives.

In particular since the 1990 launch of the annual United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) *Human Development Report*, one

has emphasized the wide range of disciplinary perspectives in approaching development issues. However, there is still a lack of inter-disciplinary exchange. Therefore, scientists should explore the questions: What are the mental and organisational prerequisites for a fruitful dialogue across the disciplines? How can the gaps be bridged? Further, an important area for future discussion is how development research moves from an 'additive' inter- or multi-disciplinary to an 'integrative' trans-disciplinary perspective (Sumner 2006).

Normative orientation, as identified previously, implies the commitment of development research to policy relevance. This means that development researchers are driven to pro-actively contribute to the formulation of relevant policies and to build bridges between theory and practice. However, the harsh realities of implementation lag far behind the proclaimed goals. There is a need for research programmes that analyse the role of research in the political process. Whose and which knowledge are policies formulated upon? Why do some knowledge producers and providers have a privileged position, especially with donors? These are intrinsic questions to be addressed by the profession of development research. It seems that policy-makers in the multi-lateral institutions and industrialised countries value research undertaken by financial institutions (e.g. the World Bank) more highly than any local ('Southern') research or indigenous knowledge. What an alarming observation! It is crucial to make research available. Tangible results must be heard, especially the ones of Southern institutions which are generally deprived of a direct access to 'Northern' or 'Western' policy-makers. Research must be made available and communicated more effectively to policy-makers and to development practitioners. How can the link between development research and policy be strengthened? This is an important research question, because knowledge does not automatically flow into political decision-making processes. Differences in methodology and discourse between academics and policy-makers as well as mutual prejudices interfere with this flow. Thus, it is indispensable to analyse why and where research does or does not influence policy, and what can be done to achieve greater impact and to better communicate knowledge at the political level (Maxwell/Stone 2004).

Context sensitivity can be better achieved through the inclusion of area studies. Since area studies analyse specific global regions, their findings

should ideally be shared by development researchers. Besides that, context specificity can also be better achieved by the inclusion of research findings of local research institutes that are more aware of local conditions from live-in and face-to-face perspectives. To this end, one must especially strengthen the voice of Southern researchers by promoting their research results and by interconnecting Northern and Southern researchers, for example through scientific partnerships. It is extremely important that Northern and Southern countries learn from each other, draw lessons from past development experiences and, of course, from research findings.

Since development research is a constantly changing and evolving field of study, scholars are continually challenged to elaborate new subject areas. Just a few years ago, the world leaders celebrated the signing of the 'Millennium Declaration' and the global consensus on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with concrete objectives, especially in relation to the eradication of extreme poverty. These were put forward as forming the overarching aim for the international development agenda and thus research activities focussed on this aim. Priorities for research interests delineated questions for more and better aid, improved policy coherence and a new strategy for Africa. In the follow up, the 'principle of recipient ownership' as developed in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) and the harmonisation and alignment of donor policies and procedures (Rome Declaration) have been accepted as key policy instruments for poverty eradication. Today, just a few years later, the concept of the MDGs, although already out-dated, is not obsolete. Of course, poverty is still a very grave problem and even in rich countries questions of growing social inequalities and distributive justice (a case in point being the concept of the 'new poverty') are rising. However, the relationships between the developed and the developing world are more complex than the MDG agenda suggests. Development issues now go far beyond aid and poverty reduction: they are supra-national in scope as they link international relations, trade, aid and security policy. Development research is forced to focus to a greater extent on strategies that manage the dynamic challenges of globalisation, on regional and inter-regional collaboration and on linkages with non-aid development issues like security and the management of the 'global commons'.

The emphasis laid on non-aid development issues can be exemplified by the issue of security. This stream of research emerged with the national secu-

rity strategy that was submitted by the United States after 9/11 and focussed on fragile states and weak societies. As a result, there is a need for contributions of development research in the field of conflict prevention, political stabilization, nation building or transformation. It is also interesting to examine the relation of security to development for other regions. How does Europe, for example, integrate its vision of security into its development agenda? Several studies analysing the link between security and development have shown that both concepts are experiencing an important widening, inclusive of political, social, cultural and ecological aspects. But the question persists: do the two aspects reinforce each other or can there be a trade-off between them? Is security a precondition for development or vice versa?

In the process of globalisation, power constellations are subject to permanent change and thus global interdependencies are shifting constantly. On the regional level, the enlargement process of the European Union (EU) is a striking issue of interest. The accession of Romania and Bulgaria has raised the EU population to around 490 million people and the EU now represents the world's third largest population area after China and India. While the incorporation of twelve new EU member states since 2000 has further increased the EU's overall research capacity, it has also increased the diversity in terms of development gaps, scientific cultures, and specialization patterns. There is a need at all levels for coordination, coherence and visibility that must be carefully taken into consideration by researchers. The success of the EU in coordinating policies among member states and in achieving more coherence between different policy fields is a prerequisite if Europe is to play a more effective role in the field of development co-operation. Research papers are therefore welcomed to analyse the integration and transformation of Eastern European countries and their experiences to cope with these changes on the one hand and to find solutions to the policy incoherence and legitimacy deficit in the EU on the other. What form of specialization do the new members bring to the European Union? How will this transform the policy focus of the EU? Where does the coordination among the European Commission and member states in third countries work? Where does it not work? How can it be improved? What are the institutional mechanisms which enable the EU to respond to man-made disasters? Does the EU serve as a model for post-national problem-solving? Questions galore!

On the international level, relationships are changing, too. Growing tensions between the Western world and Islamic countries can hardly be overlooked. This highlights the need to examine more deeply the role of religion in development. Also, new actors are emerging and positioning themselves on the international stage. The so-called anchor countries – leading regional economic powers such as China, India, Brazil and South Africa – are showing signs of becoming significant drivers of global change. Due to their economic weight, political influence and increasing determination to participate in international processes, they have become indispensable partners in searching for solutions to global structural problems. There is a need for research programmes looking into possibilities to put development co-operation with anchor countries on a new footing of strategic partnership and to place the various instruments of co-operation and other policy fields in a common substantive corridor. The role of these countries as new donors and their impact on the demand for energy and raw materials as well as challenges linked to population growth, urbanization, technological change and economic globalisation require close analysis. There is a special need for research programmes dealing with this subject, because the expected period of ‘turbulent multilateralism’ (Messner et al. 2007) arising from the new multi-polar power constellation and the competition for power and policy options resulting from it may become the central line of conflicts in the next five decades.

Besides that, private actors are increasingly gaining political importance. Transnational Corporations (TNCs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are getting more and more involved in local, national and global politics. Together with regional and international organizations, they must take their role as global players seriously and are obliged to fulfil conditions of transparency, accountability and good governance. Therefore the scientific community must find a global governance model which sensitively manages international co-operation through international norms and multi-lateral policies. This is perhaps the only way to deal with global problems. Development research will have to concentrate on global issues more than ever before, notably on the impact of global problems on public resources, on different individual regions, on the interactions between global problems such as the influences of climate change on poverty, and finally on the role of main actors.

3.2 The Way Ahead

An opportunity to think about future development issues and to assess actual development policies is given by development reports. For example, there is the annual *Human Development Report* published by the UNDP, or the *World Development Report* by the World Bank. They provide a means to allow reflection and critical appraisal of past action and performance in the decision-making process. Similar reports should be initiated at the regional level to set out clearly the different perspectives on development co-operation of different regions. What are the differences between US-led development research and European development research, for example? Which kind of development discourse is state-of-the-art in which region?

Providing a genuinely European view to the global debate, a draft concept for the production of a first *European Development Report* (EDR) has recently been submitted by a task group commissioned by the European Commission/DG Development. It aims at strengthening the link between research and policy by initiating a dialogue between policy-makers and researchers in order to identify problems, design research priorities and conduct analysis. This is a substantial step towards creating more visibility and influence for Europe on the international stage. Understandably, there is immense scope for more.

At the heart of the thinking behind the design of the EDR is the normative idea of global well-being or a 'globally inclusive society' based on 'fair multilateralism' (Messner et al. 2007). The EDR firstly endeavours to develop a concept of global social inclusion; secondly, to take stock of reactions of developing countries; lastly, to examine Europe's position and to identify the scope for new approaches. Therefore, it foresees the development of a cluster of global challenges, namely development-security issues, global issues where common action is in every nation's interest and competition issues where interests between countries diverge.

According to the European Consensus on Development, the EU should stimulate the international debate on development and promote best practice examples (Council of the European Union 2005). Concretely, a European network of research centres for development policies is to be promoted – the already existing European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI) has offered to fill this gap.

EADI is committed to fostering linkages among researchers and promotes Europe-wide, cross-border, multidisciplinary and policy-relevant debates on the full range of development issues. As the leading network of development research institutes, it offers knowledge brokering and research services as well as training in development and job and funding services. It sets quality standards for development research and fosters links with international research organisations. For example, it has developed a knowledge and information management network aiming to collect and to promote research findings from all over Europe. The best example of successful networking for over thirty years has been its triennial general conference. The next conference will be held in June 2008 in Geneva and will present the opinions of leading European and international development experts and their associates in developing regions on dramatic global challenges as well as on possible policy options and governance models to meet the challenges of sustainable development. Hence, this conference will provide yet another occasion to pursue the discussion on issues touched upon in this article.

4. Conclusion

Efforts such as the ones described above are a good example of ways of fostering the dialogue on future development matters within the scientific community as well as between scholars and practitioners. As this paper has shown, it is vital to review applied research methods and theories again and again to ensure the quality of research and to keep it policy-relevant.

As described, the content of development research changed quite dramatically from its origins in the 1950s and changes were particularly conspicuous during the 1990s and the first years of the new century. The qualitative shift in development co-operation that has been underway still needs to be strengthened. High quality research is fundamentally needed to explore strategies of coping with development problems.

Existing approaches like the MDG concept are laudable in terms of having achieved a global consensus on concerted action in development affairs. But what can be stated at the midterm of the MDG timeline? The

targeted problems persist and in addition other problems that have been neglected so far are becoming aggravated.

Consequently, development researchers must adopt a decisive role in advising policy-makers and practitioners. Otherwise, aid will be delivered less effectively, rather than in accordance with the approved strategy of the European Union, which focusses on responding faster to unexpected events and striving to find better ways to reach those most in need.

Even if scepticism on the effectiveness of development policies has been expressed, progress can be observed: The donor community is uniting and new donors are emerging. It is now the task of development researchers to take stock and positively respond to changing donor-recipient relationships and other global trends. This implies developing new ways, mechanisms and strategies to address and manage the profession and enable its members to better face the inter-related complex problems in the era of globalisation.

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Abstracts

This article provides an overview of past and present debates relating to the essential terms and role of development research. It starts by briefly exploring the paradigm shifts in (research on) international relations from post-colonial area studies and the evolution of development research from the second half of the twentieth century until today. It considers their inter-relationship and links to various past and newly emerging development challenges. The authors argue that global paradigm shifts posed a number of fundamental challenges to development research and the profession had to re-think its role and acquire competencies accordingly. The second part considers how to make development research more relevant for the twenty-first century. Today, the prospects for development research are much better than usually acknowledged, for a host of different reasons. However, development research needs to develop new ways and strategies in order to address complex inter-related problems in the era of globalization as well as changing donor-recipient relationships. This is even more important since policies regarding the Millennium Development Goals would seem to be insufficient in the future. New threats such as security risks or climate change and the emergence of China and India must be considered carefully.

Der Beitrag gibt einen Überblick über vergangene und gegenwärtige Debatten über die Rolle und Aufgaben von Entwicklungsforschung. Der erste Teil behandelt die Paradigmenwechsel im Forschungsfeld der Internationalen Beziehungen von postkolonialen *area studies* über die Entste-

hung der Entwicklungsforschung zur Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts bis heute. Diese werden jeweils in Zusammenhang mit den damals bestehenden und aktuellen Entwicklungsproblemen gestellt. Die AutorInnen zeigen auf, dass globale Paradigmenwechsel eine Reihe grundlegender Herausforderungen an die Entwicklungsforschung stellten, die die dort Tätigen veranlassten, ihre Rolle zu überdenken und sich neue Kompetenzen anzueignen. Im zweiten Teil werden Überlegungen darüber angestellt, wie Entwicklungsforschung eine größere Relevanz für das 21. Jahrhundert erlangen kann. Für die AutorInnen sind die Aussichten für Entwicklungsforschung heutzutage aus mehreren Gründen besser als gemeinhin angenommen. Jedoch müssen in der Forschung neue Wege beschritten und neue Strategien entwickelt werden, um den komplexen Problemen der Globalisierung und den geänderten Beziehungen zwischen GeberInnen und NehmerInnen gerecht zu werden. Dies ist umso wichtiger, als sich die Politiken, die zur Erreichung der Millennium Entwicklungsziele eingesetzt werden, in Zukunft als unzureichend erweisen werden.

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