

The Geographies of Development Studies and Research

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Judging from the phenomenal response by graduates and friends of IDS who took up the Institute's invitation to prognosticate on the future of development research, there might be a temptation to argue that the support IDS enjoys will propel it confidently into the future. Wisely, the IDS40 conference was designed to critique the past and question whether the direction steered over the last 40 years is the right trajectory.

Having facilitated one of the many Roundtables that preceded the conference, I was asked by the editors to reflect on my involvement with a view to identify what I felt were the more poignant issues that connected the conference held in Sussex with the Ottawa Roundtable. Given these parameters, the most obvious connection was the role of the North in comparative research.

When first approached to organise a Roundtable, I wondered how Canada-based graduates would interpret the framing questions. As an aide to Roundtable organisers, IDS suggested we map out the critical development issues from a country or regional perspective and, extrapolating from these, identify the implications for research in the coming decades. The question for me was whether participants would see the merit in exploring Canada's future challenges. Would this exercise speak to participants' interests or be of interest to IDS?

As a student, I recall there being little interest in the global South. When a classmate of mine submitted a paper on the economic, social and political conditions of First Nations peoples (i.e. Native Americans), focusing the lens of development studies on a contemporary Canadian issue was deemed creative but not central. However, to many Canadians, the contemporary history of First Nations peoples would be an obvious example of

underdevelopment at the hands of the church and the state. In other words, this example and other framing questions of development studies would apply even in a country that has ranked consistently high in the Human Development Index.

As the participant list for the Ottawa Roundtable took shape, two camps emerged. There were those who worked on international issues, either critiquing or contributing to development cooperation, and several who applied their studies to domestic issues. Given this composition, my co-organiser Chris Smart and I decided that we should start with an exchange on how participants viewed their Sussex learning experience and how it prepared them for their future careers. We felt it to be tactical to approach development research and practice thematically, and thus avoid the specificity of identifying country-level research priorities. Interestingly, the question of whether development *studies* needed to be reinvented was not one of the framing questions suggested for the IDS40 Roundtables.¹

In our discussions, the analytical tools that help us to understand social change processes or policy outcomes were illustrated through examples of application in both the North and South. The relevance and utility of gender analysis, power dynamics, participatory methods, structural analysis (among others), were equally relevant to those located in the North looking South and to those who had studied the South but now worked in the North.

When our conversation was written up into a report, I had some doubts on the centrality of our deliberations to the core questions IDS had grappled with in the past and were likely to frame its research agenda in the foreseeable future. After all, much of our discussion centred on the relevance of development studies to a wide range of professional

careers. My recollection of the relationship between teaching and research at IDS was that research was paramount. Fellows were first and foremost researchers, and the applied nature of their research offered a unique perspective on the practice and politics of development cooperation.

Prior to the IDS conference, Roundtable organisers were reminded that we would be called on to bring insights from regional Roundtables. A message I could convey from Canada was that graduates were applying the lens of development studies in a range of professional capacities in both the North and South.

Thinking this message would echo Dudley Seers' early remark that the purview of development studies and research were not limited by geography,² I soon realised that Seers' message had already been resurrected. It was immediately evident to me in three places:

- Lawrence Haddad's Roundtable overview paper which called for '360 degree research' which would supplant the geographical markers of 'North' and 'South' with a focus on the global-local linkages that drive differentiation.
- Adebayo Olukoshi's keynote presentation which suggested that as the values of participation, local ownership and endogenous intellectual development take root, it will become increasingly illegitimate for Northern-based researchers to conduct research on Southern problems. (Presumably explicit attention to comparative research on global-local linkages would see Northern-based researchers focusing their attention to the domestic impacts of global processes.)
- The choice made by the editors of the special 'reprint' issue of the *IDS Bulletin* to include

Richard Jolly and Robin Luckham's 1977 article as a classic (Jolly and Luckham 1977/2006). This had been an early attempt by development researchers to turn their analysis to domestic UK issues. The editors also mentioned subsequent efforts by Simon Maxwell and Arjan DeHaan to do likewise in a 1998 issue of the *IDS Bulletin* on poverty and social exclusion.

In the forward-looking spirit of IDS40, where do the Ottawa observations on development studies and the examples listed above take us? On the teaching side, alumni noted that their use of the theories and tools of development studies was not bound by geography. Therefore, a case could be made for greater geographical representation in course and case study material both to complement the diversity of careers alumni pursue after graduation and to recognise and acknowledge the knowledge of the Global South. This would help make the linkages between the North and South that Seers identified as a potential direction for research. It is also consistent with the notion of '360 degree research' which encourages enquiry into our interdependent system. As a government policy statement told Canadians not too long ago, our foreign policy is domestic policy, and domestic policy is foreign policy. The implications for development research are exciting. It may, for example, encourage researchers to look beyond the aid industry at the ways in which other agents of government or multilateral cooperation cause or alleviate poverty. Climate change, migration and communicable diseases were other potential research directions mentioned at the conference and the other Roundtables that have obvious global-local links. Finally, as noted in the overview of the Roundtable process by Haddad (this *IDS Bulletin*), a redrawing of the geographic boundaries of development research may reconfigure how development research is conducted and the roles of those involved.

Notes

1 See the introduction to this *IDS Bulletin* for a note regarding the discussions about the location of development research and development studies which took place in the planning phase for IDS40. In the end, it was decided to focus on development research (which can take place in many different contexts) rather than development studies (as connected to the academic academy).

2 In Dudley Seers' 1968 formulation, IDS was created to help countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America reduce poverty, inequality and unemployment. He noted that these conditions were not unique to the developing world, and that as the field develops, it will 'throw an increasing amount of light on our problems too' (Seers 1968).

References

- Jolly, Richard and Luckham, Robin (1977) 'Britain: A Case for Development', *IDS Bulletin* 9.2, reprinted in *IDS Bulletin* 37.2 (September 2006)
- Seers, Dudley (1968) 'From Colonial Economics to Development Studies', *IDS Bulletin* 1.1