

Reinventing Development Research

Listening to the IDS40 Roundtables

Lawrence Haddad
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1. Introduction

The title of this paper is knowingly immodest. Who, you may think, says development research needs to be reinvented?¹ Who are IDS to encourage a series of meetings on such a theme? To tell you the truth, I do not think many at IDS had given the first question enough systematic thought – I certainly had not. And while IDS is one of the largest and oldest development research institutes in Europe, we fully recognise that in the UK alone there are 160 other organisations undertaking development research.² But any organisation that prides itself on challenging the *status quo* has to also challenge itself, especially in its fortieth year. And taking on the current state of development research is surely the key element in such a self-assessment.

In an attempt to be true to our values of listening, of widespread participation and to searching for a diversity of views we invited our partners and alumni to organise one-day roundtables as part of the IDS fortieth anniversary process to identify and discuss the development issues of the day, the medium term opportunities and threats to development, and the implications for development research.³ Currently 45 roundtables have been held – 12 in 10 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, 11 in 9 Asian countries, 3 in South America, 1 in the Caribbean, 3 in North America, 8 in continental Europe, 6 in the UK and 1 in cyberspace.⁴ Each roundtable prepared a short report summarising the discussions that took place and most of these are available on the IDS website.⁵

We will make every effort to ensure that the reports and documents flowing from them are fed into a number of research prioritising exercises. In the host countries this will be for the hosts themselves to decide – many reports state the need to have further such roundtables – and we remain ready to support such activities, likewise to the agencies that supported the work. In the UK, the reports will be made available to DFID and the ESRC for their upcoming development research prioritisation exercises. They will feed into the IDS strategy update in 2007 and we will share them via the UK Development Studies Association and European Association of Development Research Institutes (EADI). This paper and the roundtable

¹ I have taken the easy way out of the ‘what is development research’ and ‘what is development studies’ debates. I acknowledge the importance of these issues and I hope this paper can provide further input for those debates. But here I have been liberal in defining and interpreting the domain of development research—research that self-defines itself as focused on development (whatever that self-definition), encompassing single and cross-disciplinary work.

² L. Haddad, H. Rowsell, C. Gee, J. Lindstrom, and M. Bloom (2006) ‘Mapping Development Research Among UK Organisations and their Partners: Report to ESRC’.

³ We would like to thank the agencies provided financial and moral support for the series of roundtables – they include the Agence Française de Développement (AfD), DFID, the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Irish Aid, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Rockefeller Foundation, Save the Children UK, USAID and World Food Programme. None of these agencies stipulated where the roundtables should be or the specifics of what they should focus on which was essential to maintain the spirit of the exercise.

⁴ See Annex for a list of roundtable locations dates and hosts. The cyberspace roundtable was an e-roundtable of Michael Lipton’s former doctoral students.

⁵ www.ids.ac.uk

reports will be made available to all participants at the IDS 40th Anniversary Conference at IDS (20 to 22 September 2006). At the Conference, plenary speakers will be asked to reflect on some of the material contained in this paper and the reports and the 12 working groups will be co-chaired by roundtable organisers. An *IDS Bulletin* will be published in early 2007 that will seek to capture some of the issues raised by the roundtables and the conference.

This paper is my attempt to convey what I heard from these roundtables. I attended 13 of the roundtables in 10 countries. I have read the other reports with a great deal of interest. While I have been methodical in going through all of the roundtable reports,⁶ the paper is not an overview or a synthesis, but a rather personal reflection on what the reports have to say. I hope we can persuade others to reflect, in writing, on what the roundtables say to them. My interpretation will inevitably be influenced by my own values and experiences. As an economist I have a taught tendency to the technocratic and to avoid messy reality, so look out for occasional apolitical and ahistorical perspectives. Concerns with social justice run deep in my psyche – so watch out for any downplaying of growth and efficiency. My positionality is also important – as IDS Director I always want IDS to look good, so be on the lookout for a certain lack of reflexivity on my part.

The essay is structured in the following way. First, there are the observations that are common to many roundtable participants, particularly the acceleration in the pace of change of international power balances and in the environment. This acceleration is combined with a sense of growing commonality in the issues that concern the participants – regardless of their location or relative affluence. Such a growing commonality moves some roundtables to suggest that development must become a global discourse – a discourse that does not problematise around the haves and the have-nots. Second, there are issues that seem specific to particular regions. These are met with very different context-specific responses – observed and proposed – but perhaps with increasingly common causes. Third, there is a discussion of what is implied for development research in terms of scope, priorities, methods, actors and relationships. It is clear from this section that if development research is to be reinvented it is because the changing nature of development demands it.

But before moving to these issues, it is worth describing the roundtable approach that generated them.

2. Roundtable methodology

The word ‘methodology’ implies a certain purposiveness in how information is generated. But our preference for the roundtables to be an organic, self-motivated set of events mitigated against us determining the roundtable location, host, participants, topic and method of reporting. IDS was able to support very modest local costs in each location and was able to have a staff presence at the majority of the roundtables, when invited, but otherwise these were events driven by alumni, partners and potential partners. Given the past and present IDS links of most of the hosts, we were mindful of the danger of group-think and encouraged the hosts to ask the really difficult questions and to be honestly critical of IDS, if necessary.

Of the 45 hosts, 24 were partners, 8 were alumni, and 13 were potential partners. In terms of institutional type, 11 hosts were universities, 10 other research institutes, 6 NGOs, 4 bilateral donors, 1 national government, 2 private sector, 3 multilateral agencies, and 8 roundtables were hosted by alumni.

⁶ At the time of writing 5 of the planned 45 reports had not yet been received.

The 45 roundtables assembled over 1300 participants: 33 per cent from sub-Saharan Africa⁷, 15 per cent from East Asia, 5 per cent from South Asia, 10 per cent from LAC, 24 per cent from Europe, 5 per cent from North America, and 8 per cent from the UK. Note that there were no roundtables in North Africa and Middle East, Central Asia or Eastern Europe. This reflects the Institute's relative lack of partners and alumni from these areas, in turn a consequence of the geographic priorities of IDS funders and IDS research staff. Of the total of some 1300 participants, 52 per cent were from universities or research institutes, 15 per cent from NGOs, 14 per cent from international organisations, 8 per cent from national governments, 5 per cent from donors, 4 per cent from the private sector and 2 per cent from the media. While we wanted to hear from a wide range of people from all over the world, we recognise that nearly all of the meetings were held in capital cities and as such the roundtables certainly will not hear first hand from those living in poorer more remote areas. We also note that the roundtables do not speak for an entire country or city – but that they merely reflect individual assessments and perceptions, albeit conditioned by location.

Beyond the three broad questions we posed – the challenges to development in the short term, opportunities and threats in the medium term and the implications for development research – different roundtables organised themselves very differently. The locations in Africa, Asia and Latin America tended to focus on issues affecting development and research in their countries and regions. Some donor country roundtables were issue focused (e.g. Stockholm on agriculture in African countries, London on security) while most were more open-ended.

3. Acceleration and commonalities

Whether global economic, physical, political and social phenomena follow some kind of Moore's Law⁸ is difficult to verify, but clearly the participants felt that they do. The perceived acceleration of trends such as climate change, migration, economic growth, democratisation and increased information availability creates a sense of uncertainty and, in the context of weak capacity to manage that uncertainty, leads to vulnerability – real and perceived.

The global scope of these phenomena obviously ensures that their effects are felt in many different places. And notwithstanding the fact that all the organising hosts had some connection to IDS, there were a number of issues that nearly all the roundtables raised as affecting them in their backyards.

China and India

“China seems to have a strategy for Africa, but Africa
does not seem to have a strategy for China”
(Nairobi-IDS roundtable)

Nothing seemed to have changed the backyard view more than the economic and political emergence of China and India. By now the economic back-story of these two giants is well known – long periods of high growth, with significant government involvement – although in very different ways. Such growth is not unprecedented – South Korea and Japan had similar long booms, but it is the sheer size of these two giants that is sending reverberations around the world. Whether garment industries in Bangladesh and Kenya, the soy bean export industry in Brazil, or oil and gas extraction in Cambodia and Nigeria the roundtables stressed the need for countries the world over to be able to seize new economic opportunities and minimise new risks.

⁷ In Nairobi there were 2 roundtables, one organised by the Institute for Development Studies at the University of Nairobi (Nairobi-IDS) and one organised by Youth Agenda (Nairobi-Youth Agenda). There were also two in Dakar, one organised by CODESRIA (Dakar-Codesria) and one by AfD (Dakar-AfD).

⁸ Roughly speaking, the speed of computer processors doubles every 18 months.

The political ramifications are also beginning to be worked through by many countries. Beyond high profile issues such as the pressure for the reform of multilateral governance a number of power shifts are playing out the world over. When the donor community is worried about loss of influence to China in a country as heavily aid dependent as Cambodia, you know they are really worried (Phnom Penh roundtable). The democracies probably feel that India, as the world's largest democracy, is the more predictable to deal with, with the Chinese approach being the hardest to navigate. Certainly, as the Tokyo roundtable noted, the world is sitting on the edge of its seat wondering if and how the Chinese transition to political pluralism will happen and how fraught will be the transition from a unipolar to a multipolar world. The Karachi roundtable concluded that the nature of the trade and security agreements between and with China and India would be key to the development of the region and perhaps the world.

On aid, as the Ottawa roundtable pointed out, it will be important for all to understand China and India's 'framework conditions for ODA'. The conditions or motivations are not post-colonial, nor will they necessarily be based on typically stated Western motives such as aid for trade, charity, social justice or human rights. Whatever they are, they will be influenced by having millions of people living in abject poverty in their own countries. What can we expect – what combination of pure self interest and idealism will we see and what will it mean for recipients and the 'first wave' donors?

The loss of certainties about neoliberal orthodoxy

“We must neither submit to nor break away from globalisation”
(São Paulo roundtable)

The discontent with the neoliberal orthodoxy – both content and the way in which it was pushed – ran high among the roundtable participants. The Santiago roundtable said it was time to reconsider past ideas such as 'redistribution with growth' and urged the development of new paradigms of development to fill the void. The Sao Paulo roundtable stated that 'economic orthodoxy has been a formula for neutralising growth'. Moreover it was simply not good enough any more to assign any lack of growth response to a standard economic package to a country's 'democratic deficit' (Dhaka roundtable). This debate has been given fresh impetus by China's economic performance. Will the West be forced to consider and draw on new intellectual bases? (Tokyo roundtable). Is the experience of China turning growth models on their head? Or just a validation of a long-forgotten truth about the sequencing of growth and openness and the need to recognise that there are key poverty-reducing variations on the capitalist model of growth (Cape Town roundtable). Two of the Latin American roundtables – São Paulo and Santiago – bemoaned a lack of a national development vision – it is not just enough to go wherever the market leads. Finally, the Sydney roundtable wondered if the relative neglect of the ethical dimensions of development was due to the decline of socialism creating a moral vacuum.

Growing inequality

At least 11 of the roundtables--São Paulo, Santiago, Cape Town, Bangalore, Nairobi-IDS, Phnom Penh, Dhaka, Bangalore, Yunnan, Sydney and Copenhagen--mentioned growing inequality as a key concern. In the boomtown of Bangalore (described by the participants as a 'successful outpost of globalisation') the roundtable participants stressed that while the municipal and State governments do not need to do much to promote growth, they have a big role in making the city liveable for all, especially for people in poverty. But no matter what Bangalore city and state government does, the executive management teams from Bangalore's most successful firms feel the need move to US to 'share in the command and control' of globalisation processes – leaving even successful outposts such as Bangalore at 'the other end of globalisation'. Many of the participants noted that while measures of relative

inequality were stable and in some cases, falling (São Paulo): (a) absolute income inequality (the absolute gap between the incomes of the rich and poor) was rising, (b) other inequalities were increasing (health outcomes-Yunnan; the ability to manage information – Nairobi-IDS; gender inequalities – Leeds; Yunnan and Colombo), (c) that it is only a matter of time before instances of growing increases in absolute inequality result in a surprisingly large number of violent conflicts, especially if we take note of inequality across regional, religious and ethnic lines ('horizontal inequalities' – Nairobi-Youth Agenda roundtable).

Cultural cleavages

“Cultural cleavages – within the West and within Islam”
(Oslo roundtable)

Both the Oslo and London roundtables drew parallels between the impact the Cold War had on development priorities and approaches and the impact the 'war on terror' might have. In the Lilongwe roundtable there was a concern that Malawi is aligned too closely to the USA and that this would increase tension with Muslims in Malawi and its neighbours. The Paris roundtable was the only one that mentioned the importance for development of resolving the Israel-Palestine situation. The Paris participants also stressed the apparently contradictory trends of the globalisation and harmonisation of certain norms of behaviour, for example in regard to genocide, human cloning, torture and the increasing fragmentation and 'retreat into exclusion' along identity lines increasingly defined by religion and culture. But whenever this topic was raised, it was done in a way that stressed nuances well beyond a 'clash of civilisations' model. The Oslo roundtable stressed that it is cultural cleavages *within* the West and *within* Islam that will be equally and perhaps more important for development. Religious fundamentalism in the USA has certainly had consequences for development and development policies in many parts of the world. And the nature of Sunni-Shia relationships in multiple locations are critical to governance, security and international relations. But the Oslo roundtable participants noted the tendency in development circles to be blind to something one minute and blinded by it the next. They urged caution to not overspecify religion as the cultural cleavage that always matters most. The Ottawa roundtable participants thought that race had for too long been underemphasised in development and the Dublin roundtable asked a most fundamental question – how will networks of trust and reciprocity be shaped by the forthcoming waves of opportunity and risk? As a footnote to this issue, it is worthwhile to note that this issue came up more frequently in roundtables located in the West.

Climate change

“We are all in this together and we can make a difference”
(Brighton roundtable)

Only the Dhaka, Cape Town, Brighton and Dublin roundtables mentioned climate change explicitly as a priority for development. The roundtables in Bangkok, Ottawa, Santiago, Leeds, Abuja, Kampala and Yunnan mentioned environmental sustainability in quite general terms. Being located in the UK, where the issue seems to be in the headlines nearly every day, the fact that this issue is not coming through loud and clear in the roundtables is a salutary reminder of how 'issue bubbles' do not necessarily travel well within the development discourse. I would argue that how those with the smallest carbon footprints – but the least ability to manage the big footprints of others – adapt to this new reality is going to be one of the three or four development stories of the next 40 years. The issue suffers from the fact that it is perceived as everybody's business, but nobody's responsibility and from fact that its consequences are either contested or manifest in some disguised fashion. It is gradually attracting the attention of development stakeholders, but, I would argue, not quickly enough.

Growing tensions around energy and natural resources

“Are future conflicts more likely to be over mineralogy than ideology?”⁹
“Conflict might be an integral part of development and change
– not something that is an aberration; that gets in the way”
(Karachi roundtable)

The near four-fold rise in the price of crude oil in the last five years has put energy consumption and production centre-stage – from G8 meetings to ‘energy-centric nationalisation in Latin America’ (Dhaka roundtable) to China’s investments in African energy reserves. Similar rises in the prices of mineral resources have led to an increased interest in Africa from rapidly growing nations and to windfalls for those rich in such resources. Indeed, the Abuja participants considered movements in the world price of oil to be one of the key risks facing their country in the next 10 years, and it was not clear which was the bigger risk – a downward or upward movement. The Cape Town roundtable – which brought together several of the roundtable organisers from elsewhere in Africa noted that resource based industrialisation was one key advantage that the continent holds, but worried whether governance structures in Africa and elsewhere were strong enough to prevent the traditional resource curses of distorted investment, rent-seeking, delegitimised government and, ultimately, conflict. The Karachi roundtable, more generally, noted that because development approaches tend to be dominated by economic constructs – that conflict has been abstracted from development and it is time to consider the former a component of the latter. Several roundtables highlighted issues of over-consumption and the unsustainability of current economic growth models (Bangkok and Sydney) but over-consumption did not seem to capture the imagination of too many roundtable participants.

The role of outsiders

“Africa is still seen as a place to experiment without
accountability to African people”
(Accra roundtable)

“Authentic sustainable development created by outsiders has
something of an oxymoron about it”
(Ottawa roundtable)

“Of all development initiatives, the domestic ones
had been the most successful”
(Dhaka roundtable)

“The challenge for those working on HIV/AIDS interventions is ‘how to learn
from community responses rather than import Northern solutions’”
(Brighton roundtable)

The number of quotes I can include here is an indication of the intense level of discussion this issue generated across the roundtables. Donors were perhaps the easiest target and they were on the receiving end. First, who are donors really accountable to? Not the populations they were trying most to help. Nor, *de facto* to the citizens that pay their salaries – the consequences of donor actions – good and not so good – are less visible to the donor citizens than are the actions of a ministry of health in the North. Second, donors do have to be seen doing something and this can generate two disconnected political spaces ‘one largely virtual, made up of publicised spaces elaborated with and validated by donors and one made up of the overwhelming majority of the population who will not have been involved

⁹ I remember hearing this at one of the roundtables I attended, but I cannot find it in any of the reports.

and will resist change' (Dakar-AfD roundtable).¹⁰ Third, donor preferences do affect choices. The Accra roundtable suggested that donor priorities limited the diversity of manifestoes that can be offered by different Ghanaian political parties. Fourth, is accountability being helped or hindered by direct budget support and donor harmonisation (Maputo roundtable)? In such a pooled resource environment – with its potential advantages of alignment and country-ownership – it will become harder than ever to trace the consequences of donor actions, at least in terms of outcomes. Fifth, although there is a lot of donor talk about country ownership, few of the roundtable participants felt that there was genuine ownership by recipient governments, who, many thought were more accountable to the donors than to their own citizens. Sixth, there was a sense that the power of the purse strings still imbued donor ideas with a much greater resonance than they deserved and discounted home-grown ideas and solutions. Social protection as an essentially outsider concept was highlighted in the Lilongwe roundtable. Seventh, some of the donors recognised the dilemma between wanting to help and not always being able to. In the context of the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Plan (CAADP) the Stockholm roundtable asked 'how can donors get involved in supporting CAADP without taking away ownership?' They also answered the question 'by signalling commitment to meet capacity gaps identified by African governments'.

Of course, many of these same arguments can be (and were) made about Northern researchers, especially when they are financially supported by the same donors. We will return to these issues when we discuss the implications for research.

Capacity

Capacity is by far the most frequently occurring keyword in my background summary of the roundtable reports. The capacity of donors to deliver reliably in ways driven by the recipients is perceived to be extremely variable, as is their capacity to use knowledge to deliver more effectively and unobtrusively. The capacity of recipients to use the resources effectively is thought to be weak (and if relatively strong on formulation of policy, then weak on implementation, enforcement and negotiation). Parliaments have a weak capacity to hold governments accountable (Nairobi-IDS roundtable). NGO capacity is dissipated – too many NGOs, especially in new democratic situations are struggling to find a new mission (Abuja, Nairobi-Youth Agenda roundtables). Civil society has a weak capacity to question those in authority (Phnom Penh, Kampala roundtables). Researchers have a weak capacity to speak to friendly audiences and are even worse in communicating with unconventional audiences (the private sector, the military, ministries in the rich world that are not designated as for development). Researchers in Southern Universities (especially in Africa) are very poorly supported and have little capacity to hold their governments and NGOs to account. All of the above are notoriously poor in assessing the consequences of their actions and inaction. Why do some households, communities and societies have a greater capacity to resist negative shocks and take advantage of positive shocks?

Given this widespread lamentation of capacity deficits, and the large amounts of money spent trying to build individual, organisational and institutional capacity, why has the research community not problematised the issue more?

Population

Few of the roundtables prioritised population policy as such, but many of them discussed a whole range of demographic issues. Urbanisation, ageing and migration were all cited. It was surprising that urbanisation was not cited more widely. Migration, as an issue that clearly has the ability to link North and South, development and security, rights and sovereignty, livelihoods and citizenship was on the agenda of many roundtables. Several

¹⁰ This analysis echoes that of Bill Easterly in his 2006 book *White Man's Burden*.

roundtables noted the potential tensions that could be generated from the mismatch in extent regulation of capital flows and labour flows and their politicisation.

It is worth mentioning that many of the roundtables (especially those in sub-Saharan Africa, most notably the Nairobi-Youth Agenda roundtable) highlighted the need to connect with youth on issues of development – to inspire, engage and build their commitment to the development of their planet. There was no clear consensus on how well development stakeholders were doing in this regard. But one of the roundtables I attended was at our local high school in Brighton¹¹ and I was amazed at how knowledgeable the 17-year-old participants (admittedly a self-selected group) were about international affairs and development issues. This is partly the result of initiatives such as Make Poverty History – it may be that the achievement of such movements will only be able to be assessed in 10 to 20 years' time.

Convergence?

“Problems are not a monopoly of the South and solutions are not
a monopoly of the North”
(Dakar-Codesria roundtable)

“Many points would also have held for France. This is a symptom of the invisible
convergence and globalisation of political consciousness across continents”
(Dakar-AfD roundtable)

Many of the above issues are experienced in multiple locations – all along the income distribution. With the emergence of China, and global concerns such as security, migration, climate and identity there no longer seems to be ‘two (rich and poor) development stories’ (Dakar-Codesria roundtable). A more relaxed formulation would be to posit a family of development stories – a family of stories that can learn from each other. Whether they will converge or not – and whether that even matters – is something for the next 40 years to tell us.

4. Region-specific issues

Given the small number of roundtables by region, it is difficult to try to draw any region-specific conclusions. With 12 roundtables in ten countries, sub-Saharan Africa might be the exception. I noted five issues that came up much more frequently in these roundtables than in the others.

The legitimacy of government and the transition to democracy

“Democracy could have been a really good thing had we built it ourselves.
Instead it has fallen from above onto our heads against the background
of an asymmetric power relationship”
(Dakar-AfD roundtable)

“In Kenya economic and political power are fused
and this compromises accountability”
(Kenya-Youth Agenda roundtable)

The roundtable participants in the 12 African roundtables felt that the advent, on balance, of greater democratic space within the ten countries has been accompanied by many missed

¹¹ The school is called BHASVIC and the report from the roundtable in July is not yet complete and therefore not listed here.

opportunities. The Kampala roundtable noted that the spaces opened up by the multi-party elections in Uganda had not yet been adequately cultivated by any set of stakeholders. In particular the government was, the participants concluded, obsessed with the short-term over the long term – although I cannot think of many democratically elected governments that would do anything else.

In the Abuja roundtable held in February, one of the biggest obstacles to development was the issue of Presidential third-termism – the issue paralysed the political process in Nigeria for many months and was seen as a test of the legitimacy of the government. As of writing, the test seems to have been passed, just. The Abuja roundtable also stressed the need for political reform (lagging) to accompany economic reform (showing positive movement). As Dudley Seers noted in the first *IDS Bulletin* – in many countries the development problem is not how to achieve economic advance within a given set of political and social constraints, but how to achieve political and social change within an economic framework that delineates the limits of change.¹²

At the Nairobi-Youth Agenda roundtable it was suggested that post colonial investments in Kenya tended to follow colonial designations of high and low potential areas and perpetuated regional imbalances that have been difficult to change since. Greater democracy has encouraged political movements aligned around these regions and associated ethnicities. These horizontal imbalances or inequalities have crowded out vertical inequalities which are class based and therefore better able to negotiate for better wages and working conditions.

Participants in the Maputo, Addis and Accra roundtables all said that decentralisation of government was a good idea in principle, but that the capacity to implement it was sorely lacking and may even be a negative development at that level of capacity.

HIV/AIDS: This was mentioned by several, but not all, of the African roundtables. The specific issues raised related to the fact that the disease is still seen as an outsider health problem (Maputo roundtable) and is unnecessarily politicised (Cape Town roundtable). But all in all I got a sense that this was an issue where roundtables felt they needed to ‘tick the box’. I hope my interpretation is wrong.

African universities: The under-investment in African universities, in part a legacy of structural adjustment, was thought to have severely compromised civil society’s ability to hold donors and governments to account. It has also undermined the ability of African researchers to influence the body of knowledge on development with their own constructs, analyses and conclusions. The sometimes uneasy relationships between the universities and the newly democratic governments was also noted (Abuja, Nairobi-Youth Agenda).

Agriculture: There seemed to be a worry that the rhetoric behind the new donor and African government emphasis on agriculture as an engine of growth would not be matched by action due to the new scramble for resources playing out across the African continent. If the opportunities for rent-seeking in energy and mineral resources are more significant and more opaque than in agriculture, wouldn’t, some participants worried, governments become distracted? There was also a sense among some participants that not enough attention was being paid to past attempts to get agriculture moving and it was still largely conceived of as a technocratic challenge – with few causes for optimism that the attempts would succeed this time around (Addis Ababa, Dakar-AfD, Nairobi-IDS, Lilongwe, Cape Town, Stockholm roundtables).

¹² Dudley Seers (1968) ‘From Colonial Economics to Development Studies’ *IDS Bulletin* vol 1, no 1 (available at www.ids.ac.uk/ids/bookshop/classics.html).

Regionalism: The Kampala roundtable argued for greater East African integration and the Dakar-AfD roundtable reported that ‘regional integration was deemed a first order necessity by the group’. The reasons for these calls related to reduced transactions costs, improved negotiating positions in international fora and an increased ability to handle cross-border issues.

5. Implications for Research

The participants of the roundtables were users and producers of research. As such, there was much critical reflection and self-reflection on why development research is done, who researchers are accountable to, who does the research, where it is done, who sets the research agenda, and the tools we use.

Accountability

“Do researchers contribute anything beyond justifying more aid?”
(Paris roundtable)

“Whose agency has development research best served?”
(Copenhagen roundtable)

Several roundtables stressed the normative nature of development research. Development research is worried about the ‘what is’ and the ‘what should be’.¹³ This puts a greater emphasis on us as researchers to be accountable for the influence our work has – positive, negative or none. But accountable to whom? Typically accountability mechanisms are strongest to peers and to donors. They can also be strong to in-country partners if those are long-term relationships, but the mechanisms are very weak when it comes to the people whose lives we say we are trying to make a difference to. The Copenhagen participants wondered if development research has best served the agency of researchers more than any other stakeholder. The lack of interest that development researchers have displayed in assessing the influence of their work – in terms of its ethical and practical dimensions – is not terribly encouraging. Some at the Oslo roundtable wondered if this lack of curiosity about ethics and influence betrayed a lack of confidence as to whether our work had any influence at all. The Ottawa participants thought that the extent to which China used Western development research would be a test – of sorts – of usefulness.

Control of the Research Agenda

‘In intellectual terms, the possibility of the Unknown has been removed from the horizons of impoverished and under-capacitated societies such as Sri Lanka.’
(Colombo roundtable)

Nearly every roundtable said that the rich countries had too much influence in determining the research agenda. The main culprits were listed as the World Bank, the donors and the donor-financed northern research institutes. African universities in particular had been starved of funds for research and funding levels had not yet recovered from the structural adjustment era nor was there much optimism for the calls for greater investment in the Commission for Africa report being met. Finding ways for greater Southern input into Southern and Northern research agendas was considered a priority by most roundtables. A failure to do so would help perpetuate the two disconnected development spaces highlighted above: one virtual, publicised and elaborated by donors and the other populated by the majority of the population who are supposed to benefit. The model whereby Northern donors

¹³ Although this ‘difference’ can be overstated—most research would consider itself being geared towards advancing humanity.

funded Southern research organisations in partnership with Northern research partners was welcomed, but it was noted that just as there are ‘aid darlings’ there are ‘development research darlings’ – for obvious reasons, often one and the same (Bangkok roundtable).¹⁴ The Kampala roundtable summed up the issue by stating that elite research tends to replicate dominant agendas using convenient to conduct ‘roadside research’.

Research cannot be outsourced

“There is a tension between the complexity of development situations and the urge of donors to engage with simple problems and solutions”
(Ottawa roundtable)

“How does the UN think?”
(New York City roundtable)

This theme emerged in many contexts. The Madrid, Oslo, Ottawa and Dublin roundtables focused on the pressures facing donors of disbursing more money with fewer staff in increasingly difficult contexts such as fragile states or direct budget support. The returns to donors of embedded knowledge – about local politics, about what works from around the world, and about reputations – were thought to be higher than ever and yet the tide is going in the other direction. The Geneva and New York City roundtables focused on UN research capacity. The governance of the UN in terms of respect for sovereignty and diversity led to aspirational apex agreements, participation in which had to be built up, often sacrificing conceptual clarity along the way – a clarity that is to redefining the UN’s mission in the next 40 years. At the CODESRIA roundtable in Dakar, the consequences of assuming that universities could be outsourced from Africa was discussed. Too great a dependency on donors meant that there was no independent African research voice to challenge donors, governments or Northern researchers. Finally, in terms of governments, the Phnom Penh and Nairobi-IDS roundtables highlighted the difficulty of building government capacity for the judicious use of research findings in policymaking.

“Development research is not about two stories” (Dakar-Codesria roundtable)

The above quote that serves as the section heading refers to the colonial economics origins of development research – research ‘of the other’: how can the poor emulate the rich? If development research is at a crossroads, with one path being a move towards a greater focus on Africa (pretty much the current identity of ‘the other’) and the other path being a greater focus on the global family of development stories and the possibility for cross-learning, the roundtable participants clearly chose the latter route.

As already noted, the many participants rightly concluded that the North does not have a monopoly on solutions nor does the South have a monopoly on problems. Many development issues are common to countries with a wide range of human development levels – for example, issues relating to managing changing relationships with China and India, getting the balance right between security and rights, stimulating real participation in local government, designing sustainable social welfare, adapting to and mitigating climate change, improving the functioning of health systems, getting the balance right between immigration, assimilation and multiculturalism, and the increasing absolute gaps between rich and poor. Many of the best solutions to these issues are home-grown – for example the conditional cash transfer programmes of Mexico, Brazil and South Africa.

Current development funding incentives and research norms tend to pair a Northern research institute with Southern research institutes in relationships that strive to be as equal

¹⁴ Of the 22 African research organisations involved in the 26 active DFID research programme consortia, over half are from South Africa and Ghana.

as possible. The Southern institute does work in its own context and the Northern institute collaborates with the Southern partners in some of the Southern contexts. This model is an improvement over the model where there were no Southern institutes involved or where the Southern institutes were subordinate to the Northern partners.

But the model has a number of failings – these were discussed at some length in the Dakar-Codesria, Nairobi-IDS, Dublin and Oslo roundtables. First, comparative work on development issues between the North and the South is foregone. If we believe there is at least as much value in comparing Accra with Alabama as opposed to comparing it with Abuja, then we are missing out – in the North and in the South. Second, we are missing opportunities to connect the origins of issues and the theatres in which they play out. If fundamentalism is brewing in one part of the world and finding unintentional succour in another far flung part, we need to be able to connect the two. Finally, we are missing out on multiple perspectives on a given issue. Like the film that shoots the same set of events from the perspective of several protagonists, getting a view on the problems of exclusion and alienation in disadvantaged areas of Brighton from those familiar with such issues in Rio and Phnom Penh many not be such a strange idea. A research model that looks at an issue across a wide range of contexts, unencumbered by labels of North and South, that can connect chains of events across the world and that can see an issue from multiple perspectives – ‘360 degree research’ – has to be more independent, legitimate, rounded, and integrated than current models. It is also likely to be more expensive in terms of funding required and egos checked at the door.

The model also means that the key partnerships would not necessarily be between African (say) researchers and overseas researchers of Africa (Dakar-Codesria roundtable). The more relevant partnership may be between Ghanaian researchers working on (say) social programmes and Swedish researchers working on social programmes.

If we believe this to be a superior research model, self-declared development research institutes will have to become places that focus on a comparative understanding of development – wherever it occurs or is needed – in a way that encourages symmetric learning between partners and connected analysis across places.

The Role of Northern Development Research Institutions

“The development industry has become self-serving with little to justify its contribution to reducing poverty and inequality”
(Copenhagen roundtable)

“We are often talking to ourselves”
(Brighton roundtable)

So, in light of the above discussion are development research organisations like IDS part of a sunset sector and doomed to irrelevance? That depends on the model of change one chooses to believe at any one time in a particular context. If one believes any of the following, then the answer is no: (a) development agencies still matter in setting the development agenda and Northern institutions, by virtue of a common location and culture are best placed to influence them, (b) other Northern stakeholders – large multinationals, the security sectors, Ministries of Finance, Trade, Environment, Home Affairs and Defence matter for development in the South (‘the people who run the world’ Ottawa roundtable), (c) Northern research institutions can learn from and play a supportive role in developing the capacity of Southern research institutions and networks (and the majority of Southern roundtables thought this was a key role for Northern institutes), and (d) Northern research institutes can partner with Southern institutes in ways that enhance understanding of

development across the widest possible spectrum of contexts (Yunnan, Dhaka and Oslo roundtables).

Independence

“The market has become the god of development research”
(Dakar-Codesria roundtable)

“Research must talk about things that cannot easily be
talked about in development agencies”
(Stockholm roundtable)

Whichever partnership configuration or specialisations are developed, good research has to be as independent as possible. The perception – world wide from the roundtables – is that, as the Dar es Salaam roundtable put it ‘he who pays the piper, calls the tune’. Certain funding sources are more unrestricted than others – some foundations, some research councils – but many are very specific in both short consultancies and sometimes longer term programmes. Part of this is finding the right equilibrium between the demand for and supply of research, but it is a buyer’s market, and it will remain so for the next decade or so. Participants felt that the research community needed to convince donors that it was in their interest to be more supply driven – researchers are constantly looking for the next big thing on the horizon. Sometimes they get it spectacularly wrong, but sometimes they get it spectacularly right (e.g. donors have been slow to pick up the need to assess the actual and potential impacts of China and India on Africa). Difficult as some may find it, researchers have to be braver too – they have to convince themselves and the donors that rather than being involved in a monologue, they are engaged in a dialogue where one of them just happens to be a transitory steward of the money. Such a dialogue is potentially easiest when the development research is done through university funding, and there was a feeling among many roundtables that universities in the North should be diverting more of their higher education funding to development issues and that universities in the South should have the funding to do the research that will advance their societies and those of the North.

Policy Relevance

“Research should focus on the poetics of the imagination –
not only on the politics of the belly”
(Abuja roundtable)

The old chestnut about the nature of the tradeoffs between rigor and relevance were given a thorough airing in many of the roundtables. For me, the above quote did a nice job of capturing the prevailing sentiment: poor quality research no matter how immediately gratifying cannot be policy relevant but good quality research usually is, but it takes a bit of imagination to make the connections. Given the capacity shortages in research consumption in many agencies noted above this is a real concern, but the issue is how to direct and connect good quality work to those who need it rather than succumbing to a perpetual cycle of short-term assignments that inevitably result in methodological short cuts. Several roundtables also stressed the contradictions between the drive for ‘new’ research results and the vast wealth of knowledge that is untapped or yet to be wrung dry for policy work (Bangkok roundtable) – either because it is not in the easy to get places (via Google, Google Scholar or perhaps even Eldis) or because the capacity to access information even at the click of three buttons is two (or even three) buttons too many. The São Paulo roundtable reminded all of us, that even if the state can access our good quality policy relevant information, researchers, at least in Brazil, tend to assume the state is all-powerful and they need to better appreciate the art of the possible.

Disciplinary Pluralism

“Doing good development research is not like Suduko...it is not about lining up the right technical answers...human beings are central”¹⁵
(Dar es Salaam roundtable)

As behavioural economics continually forces many of us to confront the fact that at certain times and in certain situations humans are not perfectly able or predisposed to accurately weigh up the pros and cons of a series of options, flings the doors wide open for other disciplines to help us understand human behaviour in an economic policy context.

The Yunnan roundtable stressed the importance of the culture of Chinese development being understood by its neighbours and of a persistent ‘trade gap in cultural communications between China and West’. The Dublin roundtable also stressed the need to do more work on the psychological dimensions of development, specifically the conditions that foster an entrepreneurial or a dependency mindset. The need for more expertise in history was highlighted in the Karachi and London roundtables on security and conflict – issues that frequently rest on decades and centuries of distrust, real and perceived injustices, and the constant churning of political alliances. The need for more expertise in law is obvious given the issues of global governance and human rights and more expertise in understanding how people, organisations and institutions build capacity would seem essential given the centrality of the capacity issues highlighted in the earlier sections. The suggested additions to club of disciplines will not necessarily be easy to incorporate into an interdisciplinary approach. As Dudley Seers, in the first *IDS Bulletin* says, interdisciplinarity in 1968 was far from widespread or straightforward and I would venture that this ideal is rarely attained today.

6. Conclusions

This is the first draft of this paper and I am still digesting the huge panorama of information represented by the 42 roundtables, so conclusions will be brief and tentative.

First, there were a few surprises. Some issues came over more strongly than I expected them to – donor accountability; the need to target powerful but non-conventional development audiences; the openness to comparative development research across the spectrum of contexts, rich and poor. Some issues came out more weakly than I thought they would – science and technology, gender, vulnerability to shocks, hunger and food insecurity. There was also less reflection on the successes of the past 40 years but to be fair we did not prompt participants on this. Finally, there was very little mention of the MDGs – either for or against. I raise these issues, not because I have answers to why they differed from my expectations, but just to give you an additional insight into my own prejudices.

Second, I am exhausted. The roundtable approach yields a rich body of opinions, values and attitudes, but is difficult – at least for an economist – to try to steer through in a ‘balanced’ way. I found it particularly difficult to not be able to get behind the roundtable report and probe more deeply to make my interpretation of what was written more certain. My path through the material has involved hundreds of choices about what to include and what not. My take is very partial. I have probably, unconsciously, highlighted the things I am most interested in – personally and institutionally. It would be fascinating for others to go through the same exercise, although my initial comments under this point might put some off (but a good exercise for a student dissertation). Does the approach have value for others? I think it would. We completed the 45 roundtables on a relatively modest budget of under £100,000

¹⁵ A popular numbers puzzle in the UK and elsewhere

and large donor agencies should surely be able to commission something more formal, focused and structured.

Third, looking back at the issues raised it seems clear that it was difficult for the roundtables (and me) to separate the short term from the medium term issues and you will note that I have not attempted to do this. Another reflection on the issues – it resembles a bit of a shopping list. At least this is the easy reaction – I need to think about that a bit more.

Finally, if the list of issues raised is more descriptive than analytical, and is lacking a conceptual framework to pull it together, the section on the implications for research seems more 'of a piece'. My take is that the development research community has a lot of work to do: making a serious and sustained effort to assess the influence (or otherwise) of our work; achieving greater independence while engaging with policy debates; connecting a wider range of voices and bodies of knowledge in the agenda setting process; proactively making connections with disciplines not typically associated with development research; taking some responsibility for building the capacity of research generators and research users and finally, and perhaps most importantly, expanding the geographic scope of the analysis of development – especially in a comparative manner in which researchers from the South team up with researchers from the North to study development in the North.

As Dudley Seers concluded in his introduction (*IDS Bulletin* 1.1):

‘the development of development studies will, therefore, throw an increasing amount of light on *our* problems too’.

Seers was referring to problems in the UK, but as the roundtables suggest development research, if framed as a dispersed but connected family of development stories, can shed light on development challenges wherever they are faced.

Has the time has come to turn Seers' statement from a 1968 justification for development studies into its 2006 *raison d'être*?

Appendix 1. IDS40 Roundtables

ID	Date	Country	City	Organiser	IDS relationship	Host organisation	Number of Participants	Report
	21 Apr 2006	Australia	Sydney	Marc Williams	Staff/former staff	University of New South Wales	6	yes
2	24-25 May 2006	Bangladesh	Dhaka	Martin Greeley	Staff/former staff	Centre for Policy Dialogue & Danish Institute for International Studies	29*	yes
3	25-26 May 2006	Brazil	Sao Paulo	Zander Navarro	Staff/former staff	CEBRAP	60	yes
4	22 Jun 2006	Cambodia	Phnom Penh	Larry Strange, CDRI	Partner	CDRI	38	yes
5	20 May 2006	Canada	Ottawa	David O'Brien (MP17)	Alumni	International Development Research Centre	15	yes
6	29 Nov 2005	Chile	Santiago	Emmanuel de Kadt & Osvaldo Sunkel	Staff/former staff	Osvaldo Sunkel	7	yes
7	4 Jul 2006	China	Beijing	Li Xiaoyuan, China Agricultural University	Partner	DFID China	15	no
8	7 May 2006	China	Yunnan	Fang Jing (DP06)	Alumni	Institute of Health and Development Studies, Kunming Medical College	12	yes
9	29 Apr 2006	Colombia	Bogota	Jacques Merat (MA Gov 02)	Alumni	Jacques Merat (MA Gov 02)	7	yes
10	31 May 2006	Denmark	Copenhagen	Mammo Muchie (MP4, DP87)	Staff/former staff	Aalborg University	28	yes
11	26 May 2996	Ethiopia	Addis Ababa	Mohamed Diab (MP5, DP89), WFP	Alumni	WFP	24	yes
12	30 Mar 2006	France	Paris	Nicholas Meisel, AFD	Partner	AFD	22	yes
13	4 May 2006	Ghana	Accra	Takyiwaa Manuh, Institute of African Studies	Partner	Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana	22	yes

14	29-30 Apr 2006	India	Delhi	Surendra Vetrivel (DP84); Arjun Khajuria, (MP25)	Alumni	Surendra Vetrivel (DP84); Arjun Khajuria, (MP25)	29*	no
15	10 Jun 2006	India	Bangalore	Gopal Kadekodi, ISEC	Partner	Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC)	40	yes
16	May-Aug 2006	E-RT		Michael Lipton	Staff/former staff	Michael Lipton	24	yes
17	25 Apr 2006	Ireland	Dublin	Mary McKeown (MP14)	Alumni	University College Dublin	60	yes
18	30 Jun 2006	Japan	Tokyo	Ken Inoue (MP7), Sanae Ito (MP15, DP99)	Alumni	British Council	21	yes
19	15 Jun 2006	Kenya	Nairobi	Biki Kangwan (MP27)	Alumni	The Youth Agenda	11	yes
20	14 Jun 2006	Kenya	Nairobi	Dorothy McCormick, IDS Nairobi	Partner	IDS Nairobi	49	yes
21	25 Jul 2006	Malawi	Lilongwe	Stephen Devereux	Staff/former staff	Action Aid Malawi	18	yes
22	3-4 Aug 2006	Mexico		Roberto Castellanos (MP22)	Alumni	Roberto Castellanos (MP22)	60	no
23	11 Dec 2005	Mozambique	Maputo	Richard Jolly	Staff/former staff	Richard Jolly	5	yes
24	27 Jun 2006	Netherlands	The Hague	Peter Ballentyne	Partner	Euforic/ISS	25	yes
25	8 Feb 2006	Nigeria	Abuja	Nkoyo Toyo (MA Gov 01)	Alumni	Gender and Development Action	30	yes
26	21 Apr 2006	Norway	Oslo	Ruth Haug, NORAGRIC	Partner	Department of International Environment and Development Studies, Norwegian University of Life Sciences	25	yes
27	15 Apr 2006	Pakistan	Karachi	Haris Gazdar, Collective for Social Science Research	Partner	Collective for Social Science Research	29*	yes

28	18 Jul 2006	Senegal	Dakar	Jean-Bernard Ouedrago, CODESRIA	Partner	CODESRIA	36	yes
29	26 June 2006	Senegal	Dakar	Nicolas Meisel, AFD	Partner	AFD	29*	yes
30	22 May 2006	South Africa	Cape Town	Mike Morris (DP81), University of Cape Town	Alumni	University of Cape Town	31	yes
31	3 Jul 2006	Spain	Madrid	Stefan Meyer (MA Gov 04), FRIDE	Alumni	FRIDE (Fundacion para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Dialogo Exterior)	30	yes
32	19 Jul 2006	Sri Lanka	Colombo	Sepali Kottegodra (MP7 and DP91)	Alumni	Women and Media Collective	19	yes
33	12 Jun 2006	Sweden	Stockholm	Mats Hartsmar, Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Partner	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	15	yes
34	18 May 2006	Switzerland	Geneva	Alan Leather (MP1), Anne Posthuma (DP92)	Alumni	ILO Geneva	25	yes
35	1 Jun 2006	Tanzania	Dar es Salaam	Roy Trivedy (MP9)	Alumni	DFID Tanzania	14	yes
36	30 Nov 2006	Thailand	Bangkok	Anne-Marie Harrison, IMA	Partner	IMA International	25	yes
37	19 Apr 2006	Uganda	Kampala	Evelyn Nyakoojo (MA4, SC15)	Alumni	Gender Maintreaming Division, Makere University	33	yes
38	3 Apr 2006	UK	London	Tim Shaw (MP1)	Alumni	Institute of Commonwealth Studies	19	yes
39	6 Jul 2006	UK	Brighton	IDS	Staff/former staff	IDS	60	no
40	31 May 2006	UK	Brighton	Lizzie Valdivieso and Carina Mendonça, UoS	Sussex Alumni	University of Sussex	120	yes

41	17 Jul 2006	UK	Brighton	Tarquin Grossman and Amanda Brimble	Other	BHASVIC	18	no
42	16 Jun 2006	UK	Brighton	Andrew Barnett	Partner	The Policy Practice	18	yes
43	30 Jun 2006	UK	Leeds	Ruth Pearson (DP81)	Alumni	School of Politics and International Studies, University of Leeds	25	yes
44	3 Aug 2006	USA	Washington	Susan Fleck (MP9), Aaron Schneider	Alumni/Staff	Susan Fleck (MP9), Aaron Schneider	20	yes
45	27 Jun 2006	USA	New York	Anne Marie Goetz	Staff/Former staff	UNIFEM	5	yes
46	16 July 2006	Trinidad and Tobago	St Augustine	Dennis Pantin, UWI	Partner	Graduate Institute of International Relations, University of the West Indies	60	yes

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* Where actual numbers of participants are not known, they have been estimated as an average of the total (29).