

Development Studies in 2012: What's New?

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On November 3rd, the Development Studies Association (DSA) held its annual conference in London. It was attended by 360 participants from more than 23 countries. The day opened with a keynote plenary lecture – “Bringing Production Back In” – by Ha-Joon Chang (University of Cambridge), and closed with a roundtable discussion on emerging social trends and political possibilities, with keynote interventions from Guy Standing (SOAS) and Jo Beall (British Council); and in between, during the day, there were 79 papers and presentations organized into 28 panels divided within 11 work-streams.

The conference was not based on any specific theme but rather on an open call for papers. The response to this call is indicative of the key issues which are regarded as important by development scholars and practitioners in 2012. The conference thus provides a rough guide to what's new in the field and where it is going.

The 11 work-streams identified by the organizers of the conference were:

1. Understanding change and impact
2. Crisis and responses
3. Effective states, institutions and governance
4. New forms of development partnership
5. Security and development
6. Global poverty issues
7. Social development through the organization of production
8. Well-being and life-course research
9. African development issues
10. Environment, development and justice
11. Live debates and workshops

But looking back at the presentations, which are available on the DSA website (www.devstud.org.uk), it is possible to identify five major issues which are burning bright within the development studies community. These are:

- The effects of Northern economic crises on developing countries and the implications for development theory and practice
- New development actors, new forms of development cooperation and new development partnerships
- Moving beyond income poverty as the central objective of development policy
- Bringing production back in
- Political and institutional sources of development effectiveness

Northern Crises and Southern Development

The financial crisis which threatened the collapse of the global economic system in 2008 and led to a global recession in 2009 still rumbles on. Although developing countries, particularly the large

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emerging economies, are often touted as the locomotive which can pull the global economy out of its slump, papers presented at the conference provided a much more nuanced view of the idea that Southern development was de-coupled from Northern crises. In particular, a careful empirical paper (Isabella Massa, ODI) showed that a large number of low income countries (almost half the sample for which data were available) are highly vulnerable to a Eurozone crisis and a slowdown in India and China.

Attention was also given in the conference to the idea of reviving the role of capital controls as a policy instrument and as part of an economic policy alternative to neo-liberalism. The case of Iceland suggested the value of this instrument but caution was expressed about how the removal of the capital controls would work (Aguire, Dierckx and Helgadóttir). In general, the mood of the conference could perhaps be expressed as being one which was highly critical of “business as usual” – particularly market fundamentalism, finance first, and a narrow focus on economic growth – but at the same time an uncertain sense of what might be a workable alternative as the new is still struggling to be born.

New Development Actors, New Modes of Development Cooperation and New Development Partnerships

In this in-between moment of difficult gestation, the issue around which most energy was generated was certainly the potential role of new development actors, the possibilities for new forms of development cooperation, and the nature and effects of new development partnerships which have flourished over the last few years. The interest in this area has been pushed to the fore partly by the vibrant expansion of South-South cooperation and the increasing role of non-state actors of various kinds in development activities, but also by fact that, as one participant put it, “Old Aidland is in existential crisis”.

Papers in this area included: conceptual frameworks for understanding the policies and practices of rising powers as emerging donors (Shankland, Mawdsley); empirical study of the logic of aid provided by new EU members, where aid provision was, like human rights, required as a condition of membership (Szent-Ivanyi); studies of how new sources of official development finance from developing countries were working on the ground (in Nicaragua – Roussel – and China in Angola and Sudan – Mohan, Macdonald, Biya Han); analysis of the Busan follow-up process and Korea’s role within it (Eun Mee Kim); evaluations of new initiatives through which international NGOs have sought to become more accountable (Crack, Krösschell, Conlin); analysis of the bases for more effective research capacity building in Africa (Uduma, McEvoy, Munck); estimation of European commitment to development, using a broad measure encompassing policies towards aid, trade, investment and remittances (Barder); analysis of trends in Fair Trade and their impact, showing in particular that they matter more for market access and capability-building than for profitability (Elliott); and an assessment of the possibility of using natural resource rents for a citizen dividend and how such an initiative could be supported to avoid the resource curse (Gelb). One panel, based on the New Ideas initiative of the DSA financed by DFID, also set out preliminary explorations of the military as a new development actor (Kothari) as a strand within the closer intertwining of security and development.

Moving Beyond Income Poverty as the Central Objective of Development Policy

Whilst the new actors, partnerships and modes of cooperation were central to discussion and debates in the conference, attention was also given to ways in which development theory and practice could be re-framed. In this regard, the two principal issues addressed were: firstly, ways of moving

beyond income poverty as a basic objective of development policy; and secondly, bringing production back in.

The need to build a broader vision of development which goes beyond GDP, material incomes and personal consumption expenditure is of course a long-standing concern. But the papers in the conference gave a good idea of the state of the art in addressing this concern. Papers included: (a) demonstration of the value of new multi-dimensional indicators of poverty in India and Bangladesh (Roche, Alkire); (b) identification of qualitative dimensions of well-being which are contextually rooted in local values (White, Brangan); (c) conceptual explorations of the implications of a life course view of deprivation and well-being (Lloyd-Sherlock and Camfield); and (d) explorations of the use and abuse of MDGs as they materialize in people's lives (Gabay).

One notable feature of all this conceptual and methodological work is the willingness to study and compare developed and developing country contexts (Tiwari, Ibrahim, Hampton), a move which provides the basis for understanding similarities and differences in notions of well-being in North and South. Some of the papers were experimental, in early stages of research and reporting preliminary findings. But the insights from the life course research were particularly innovative. Locke linked analysis of reproduction and social reproduction within an analytical framework embracing migration, life course and masculinities, and Locke, Thi Thanh Tam and Thi Nga Hoa showed the importance of this for notions of the good life in Vietnam with low-income migrant men trapped in dilemma between making money and keeping the family together. Zhang showed how even a small sample with a longitudinal study could throw doubts on the conventional wisdom regarding social assistance provided to the urban poor in China.

Bringing Production Back In

The idea of bringing production back into development involves a more radical and controversial shift in the recent trajectory of development thinking and practice. The call to do so was set out forcefully in Ha-Joon Chang's opening plenary keynote. He argued that the need to develop a society's productive capabilities had been central to early development theory and practice but had become marginalized, particularly with the declaration of the MDGs and their widespread uptake by OECD donors. The shift away from production had been rationalized through a combination of neoliberalism, with its concentration on the market, humanism, with its focus on the individual and their capabilities, and post-industrialism, with its focus on services. But Ha-Joon showed that all these arguments had weaknesses and that it was important not simply to develop individual capabilities but also societal productive capabilities which occurred at the level of productive enterprises and required the existence of collective institutions that encourage and help different economic actors work together, such as capital-labour collaboration within firms, cooperation among firms within and across sectors, and government-business interaction (including, but not just, industrial policy). He advocated the reconstruction of development discourse in a way which would not simply focus on macro-economic aggregates, such as investment and savings, as the old development theory had been inclined to. Rather it should combine old insights with new work on technological and enterprise development. Moreover, it should retain the importance of individual capabilities but it should see individuals not simply as consumers (in the market place) and citizens (with entitlements) but also as producers (concerned with employment and conditions of work).

Ha Joon's call to re-focus on production entails a shift away from a focus on symptoms of poverty, deprivation and ill-being towards causes. His call found echoes in the final plenary where Guy Standing argued that the flexibilization of work associated with globalization had created in new global

class which he named the “precariat”, and where Jo Beall emphasized the importance of the changing national context of development as the majority of people no longer depended on rural livelihoods but lived in cities. But significantly, a key aspect of the emerging South-South development cooperation is its concern with the transformation of production structures. Moreover, an important stream of work in the conference was concerned exactly with the type of turn which Ha-Joon was advocating, focusing on how the organization of production mattered for people’s lives and how changes in the organization of production offered key intervention points for improving those lives.

Papers addressing this issue included: empirical studies of how cooperatives in Brazil and Africa improved individual agency by helping people gain access to training and credit (Hartley, Hannan); analysis of the impact of standards on labour regimes within the Kenya cut-flower industry where, within large-scale farms certified to standards with social clauses, a norm of fairer, stable and secure employment has been instituted even though real wages have fallen (Riisgard and Gibbon); deeper understanding of how the standards of big retailers work in global value chains (Stephanie Barrientos); conceptualization of the potential for political corporate social responsibility (Edward); the identification of the combinations of private self-regulation, public regulation and civil society soft power which can enhance pro-development outcomes (Knorrinda); an understanding of safety net programmes in Ethiopia as an imperfect substitute for land and agricultural development); and dilemmas facing an international NGOs supporting enterprise development and international development goals (Brière). Production was also at the heart of the panel which engaged in a live debate on the future of farming, considering in particular the role of smallholders and the potential of science and GM crops, which was organized by *The Guardian* and chaired by John Vidal and which is available as a podcast on the Guardian Global Development website (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/2012/oct/23/talk-point-farming-crossroads-future-agriculture>).

Political and Institutional Sources of Development Effectiveness

The final important issue which was taken up across a number of panels within the conference was a concern with how a positive process of change happens and how development practice can be made more effective. The main foci of attention in this area were: the application of theories of how change happens, with greater attention to power analysis (who is encouraging or inhibiting change) and the design of change strategies (including greater advocacy and influencing by civil society organizations) (Duncan Green, Basu Ray); the politics of accumulation, social provisioning and international economic interaction which underpin effective states (Mohan, Kunal Sen and Armando Barrientos); forms of knowledge which can inform practice, with a focus on the potential of appreciative enquiry (emphasizing what’s good rather than what’s wrong) as a tool for change (Nunes) and the ways of ensuring research impact on policy (Mitlin); and case studies of success (the role of local government in Colombia demobilization to transform soldiers into citizens – Carranza) and failure (historical roots of state collapse in DRC – Hartmann).

Conclusion

One striking feature of the conference was the continuing existence of a gulf between human rights discourse and development policy discourse, with only one paper taking up the human rights issue (Howe), and also the lack of attention to the implications of climate change and environmental sustainability for development theory and practice which was addressed by just one panel on environmental justice – convened by Sikor, and one paper on South Africa (Chikulo). As was discussed in a live debate panel reflecting on the question “Does development studies have a future?” (Wiemann),

the future of development studies must entail a deeper articulation between old concerns about national development and such new global issues, a shift which certainly entails major professional challenges. But it was clear from the conference that some moves in this direction are already being made, and that research, discussion and debate remain vibrant within development studies in the UK. In general, the papers presented in the conference and the collective deliberations helped to *re-occupy* the concept of development at a moment of great economic uncertainty, rising global inequality, ecological overload and ever-widening political protests.