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Development Studies and IDS

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INTRODUCTION

Development: What should we be studying?

Academics are usually reluctant to study what they cannot define, and yet a quick look at the literature on development leaves one with the uncomfortable impression that what the discipline of development studies is based on is as little understood as the discipline itself.

Our predecessors were quite happy to equate development with progress and then proceed, to enumerate all else that the latter entailed. A typical list would include industrialisation and the creation of national markets, creation of democratic states and creation of new forms of collective identity, to replace traditional forms based on ethnicity. From the 19th Century perspective, this is the list, which should interest both the African development practitioner as well as the development studies scholar. Furthermore, to make sure that the generation of knowledge keeps pace with the ideology of progress, each of the items

on the list should be assigned a congenial social science discipline.

The problem is that this definition by enumeration, while taking care of matters for our 19th Century colleagues, is inadequate for us. A quick survey of what has been written shows that both the subject matter of development and the term itself have changed drastically.

Moreover, the relevant literature reveals another thing: that even documenting the subject has become such a complex industry that no one can claim to be an expert in this aspect of development, let alone the subject matter itself. Few would attempt a synthesis in the manner of the 1960s when review articles were in vogue. What we now have are anthologies, either on theoretical issues or on specific topics. Even then, none of the numerous volumes is bold enough to claim to have captured the totality of the subject at hand. Indeed, the practice of dealing with selected issues seems to be a clever and perfectly acceptable ruse for escaping

the impossible task of attempting to deal with the entire subject as 19th Century thinkers would have done.

There is not one theory of, or approach to development, though there have been dominant paradigms. This, in turn, implies that development studies and practice should not be afraid to explore the possibility of paradigm changes by generating innovative ideas and useful theories. The latter is best achieved through empirical research. Failure to explore new openings can easily lead to an impasse (Schuurman, 1993). Failure is something that will always spell doom for any human endeavour, in this case, development studies. The lively African debates of the 1960s and 1970s, both theoretical and practical, in nature, were in retrospect, an attempt to explore new openings.

Perhaps, because it is so vague, the idea of development easily lends itself to re-invention. The best-known re-invention of development is from the western capitalist society, which has equated development with capitalist

development and modernisation. This view invites development studies - properly done - to seek to answer the question: Is the development being studied that of, alongside or against capitalism? Whichever way one looks at it, the dominant perception is that it is not quite development if it is not capitalist. It is not even modern.

Related to the above is the view that development is a doctrine, a myth and an ideology that has been given false scientific precision by both capitalist and Marxist thinkers for the purpose of advancing an ideological agenda. Implied in this view is the thought that development studies should, among others, seek to uncloak the doctrines, myths and ideologies and not simply to underwrite them. A combination of approaches derived from sociology of development, anthropology, socially sensitive economics, political science, history and even philosophy would be the most useful way of unearthing this aspect of development. In a word, development studies is either interdisciplinary or not

development studies at all. One has a nagging feeling that African scholarship, except perhaps the grand theories of the Left, has not fully appreciated this argument. In this regard, practice seems to be ahead of theory, as any African minister for finance struggling with SAPS will testify. The practitioners have rightly assumed that African development is all of the above, ranging as it does from the world of the peasant to that of the high tech multinational!

If one accepts that doctrines, myths and ideologies are about power, it follows that development as all these, has something to do with empowerment and inclusion even though we cannot agree on the exact nature of these two. Development studies should, therefore, not shy away from the evaluative role of assessing whether development has indeed led to empowerment and inclusion - and if so - of whom and at whose expense? In addition, one sympathizes with the moralist view that development research should seek to be action-oriented with a view to creating nodes of empowerment, hopefully without dis-empowering someone

else. African radical critiques of capitalism and the more Left-leaning varieties of African Socialisms - when the latter were in vogue - were especially sensitive to the power implications of development. Their approach to doing and analysing development was essentially socio-political.

Regardless of what approach we use, we must be sensitive to the-not-so-obvious fact that doing development is learning a process, not a state of being. As such, it cannot be neatly frozen and captured, from time to time, in the Logical Framework commonly favoured by development agencies in their hurry to demonstrate results, with the latter measured by pre-established benchmarks.

If one accepts that development is a state of becoming, rather than a state of being, it follows that development's desired end is always changing. One day the desired end might be economic growth and another day it might be social equity. At the beginning of a project cycle it might be food, but at the end of the programmed cycle it could very

well be water. One gets the feeling that the African development practitioner, including the most avid development planner, instinctively understands development as a process, perhaps much more so than the development studies analyst does.

Should development studies then have a *telos*, a morally desired end goal such as elimination of poverty? For some, the answer is yes and the justification of the answer is history. Development studies were born out of moral concerns over lack of development in the Third World, more specifically inequalities between the North and the South. That is what the Truman origin of development studies was all about. Therefore, the morally desirable goal of development studies should be the elimination of inequality within and between nations. For others, especially the process-oriented thinkers, it is disingenuous for development studies to be teleological in arguments about development, as if it has a beginning and an end. Indeed, development studies should not even be certain about the ontological status of its proper subject.

Reflection on this thought should invite humility as well as appreciation of the related idea that development is a multi-faceted creature that, furthermore, might often prefer to walk along twisted paths. This certainly seems to be the African experience where development has simply refused to be about economic growth along a pre-determined pattern. Development studies should, therefore, be a delicate multidisciplinary affair at the very least, and interdisciplinary at its best. Few self-respecting students and practitioners of development dispute this. Most, especially the practitioners seem to also agree that development is a process. However, most would argue that the fact that development is a process does not in any way imply that it is a goal-less process that cannot be called upon to show results against set objectives. Indeed, it is desirable to set such objectives in order to hold the process accountable. The objectives are, therefore, essentially an attempt to provide some direction to the process.

If we agree that some needs have to be met, then we should also agree that there are identifiable challenges to development, however one conceives it, and that these challenges have given rise to equally identifiable "core" areas of development studies. These include analysis of poverty, gender, institutions and governance, technology and industrialisation, urbanisation and rural development. It is, therefore, unlikely that we shall soon see the end of development, even if development manages to overcome all the current challenges, unless, of course, we deny its very existence as the post-modernists do and, therefore, decree its end by definition. If we also agree that development is not an end but a process, we are obligated to also agree that there will always be more challenges arising from the very nature of a process. In this regard, the mission of development studies is not simply to understand the current challenges but also to try to anticipate upcoming ones. Meeting this challenge would bring great joy to the practitioner.

What is being studied?

We might not agree on what is development or its derivative, development studies, but that has not stopped anyone from teaching and studying the subject, no matter how uncomfortably.

Public universities are the main providers of the majority of postgraduate training Programmes in development studies, even though there are a few non-university public administration and management centres offering MBA degrees. The enrolment figure is on average between 10-15 and declining mostly because of poor funding. From an academic perspective, the training is development-relevant but nearly all of it is mono-disciplinary with nearly all the degrees offered being in the traditional disciplines of economics, sociology, political science and public administration. Thus the institutions are remaining true to 19th Century origins of the social sciences. However, there are a few development studies programmes offering interdisciplinary training. These include IDS, (University of Dar Es Salaam), IDS, (University of Nairobi), both of which offer

Masters degrees in development studies, and SARIPS, which offers a Masters degree in policy analysis with specialisation in a number of policy areas. A few others are coming up, some of them in the Kenya public university system, but they are yet to get themselves fully established.

In an era when policy analysis has become the buzz word in development thinking, thanks to the influence of the Breton Woods institutions, there are some institutions that are, quite rightly, beginning to offer specialised policy analysis courses. SARIPS, for example, offers a Masters degree in policy studies in five policy areas - Sectoral Economics, Research Methods, Governance and Policy Making, Gender Issues in Policy Making, Economic Analysis and Development. The African Economic and Research Consortium (AERC) - supported Masters degree programmes in Economic Policy Analysis also fall into this category and so does the MA in Gender Studies offered at the Makerere University's, Department of Women and Gender Studies. One would, however wish to see more institutions extend

the training to cover policy analysis in specific sectors. Venturing into some of the more highly specialised areas, such as policy analysis, would require some innovativeness in both the design of options, and the methods of delivery. In this regard, most of the course options are limited to the main economic sectors, such as agriculture, industry, international trade e.t.c, and standard development topics such as entrepreneurship, and rural- urban migration with students typically taking a relatively small number of core courses and an equally limited number of optional courses. Thus, the available options are fairly traditional and, maybe, cannot be otherwise unless the capacity to deliver more innovative options is created in both quality and quantity. The demand must change too.

Also not very innovative are the teaching methods. Most teaching is based on formal 'chalk-and-talk' delivery. Apart from the few Open Universities in the region, in particular the Masters degree programme offered by the Zimbabwe

Open University, there is no other distance learning opportunities. Study materials are mainly standard textbooks and journal articles, and even these are not exactly in abundant supply.

The issue of relevance is central to any training programme and also to many teaching programmes, even though the latter are sometimes excused on the grounds that relevance is only one of the many reasons why teaching is mounted in the first place. In this regard, evidence from the region is disturbing. The first issue related to relevance is that the programmes are mostly targeted at young social science graduates with little or no development experience, who would like to specialise in one particular area. This is especially so for the mono-disciplinary programmes based at the conventional teaching departments. This raises the question whether this is the correct target group. Some would argue that the programmes should be targeted at the more relevant group of mid-level public servants, seeking to upgrade on-the-job skills. If this were the case, then we

would see more short courses on service delivery in specific sectors, such as health and education, unlike the present situation where these types of courses are very few, indeed, and are usually offered by northern institutions at very high costs.

Second, the Masters in Development studies courses, on their part, place relatively little emphasis on the design and management of service delivery. The courses in management and public administration - available from both private and public institutions - come nearest to addressing service delivery. However, in most cases, especially in the case of the Masters degree, they tend to be "of-the-shelf" and not targeted at any one sector or issue. In general, most Masters programmes whether in one discipline or in development studies, are judged by public service practitioners as "too theoretical" and "divorced from the real world." In other words, they reflect a poor balance between development theory and practice. In addition, there is little integration between the core theory courses and

the sectoral courses and, equally, little integration between the theory part of a course and the rest of the course.

Related to the above is the fact that there are few Masters programmes in development planning, one of the courses considered "relevant" by the public sector. In those cases where development planning is offered, the tendency is to concentrate on project cycle components and project management as suggested by numerous Log Frames. The more "creative" courses might contain elements of donor procedures and requirements, particularly financial and reporting procedures. Clearly this is a very limited conception of planning.

Not unrelated to relevance is the quality issue. There is wide spread concern in the region about the quality of the degrees. Under normal circumstances teaching should be informed by research, resulting in more relevance for both. Evidence from the region reveals widespread concern to the effect that there is little integration between curriculum/

teaching and research. This is due to a number of reasons, the major one being poor funding of research. A second one could be poor organisation of research programmes compared to teaching programmes. Most institutions view research not as equal to teaching in their mandates, but as secondary to teaching. Thus, while all institutions have clearly outlined teaching programmes few, if any, would boast of a programmed approach to research.

What then does the evidence suggest about the discipline of development studies? Overall, the evidence suggests that the discipline of development studies is still in the process of emerging as a discipline in its own right. This is reflected in the staff backgrounds of those teaching the discipline. Most are trained in the traditional university disciplines, mostly in the social sciences and as pointed out, questions can be raised on the low-level of integration between teaching and research, a fact that is not helpful to the development of the discipline.

Where does this leave the institutions with regard to the issues raised in the first section of this essay? First, what is being taught seems to reflect national conceptions of what is important, rather than an attempt to evolve a common understanding of what development means. From a practical point of view this is perhaps what it should be. Second, to the extent that a meaning of development is being sought, the answer seems to be that *development is that which is relevant in the attempt to improve the quality of life at the national level*. Relevance in this case includes considerations of the specific development history. Again, this is a very practical conception of development.

Third, evolution of development studies is more likely to follow in the footsteps of practical development rather than the other way round where the discipline is first conceptualised then applied. This view, in our opinion, is quite consistent with the origins of development studies in practical concerns. These practical concerns seem to be fairly similar though and are essentially the same as what

we refer to in section one as “core areas of development studies”. Fourth, the discussion so far raises a number of questions including: How does one go about creating a discipline called development studies without betraying the old disciplines? What is the target audience? How does one balance universal academic requirements with local non-academic demands such as local public policy demands? What is the appropriate balance between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge? These are old questions but they are still being raised.

Where does IDS fit in all this?

The IDS has the distinction of being one of the oldest development studies institutes in the region. As such the Institute has a rich history, which, among other things, reveals a bold attempt to come to terms with nearly all the issues raised above. In particular, it is a history of taking part in the national endeavour to do and to define development, and therefore, development studies.

In the early days of independence, a number of African countries, like their counterparts in the rest of the developing world, followed the dominant models of the day. In Kenya the accepted model was modernisation through a mixed economy in which both the private sector and the state were expected to play complementary roles. Development was not only conceived as an intentional process, but it was also expected to have clearly defined objectives, in this case, elimination of ignorance, poverty and disease.

In addition to setting the objectives, there was also the strong belief that the objectives were achievable. It is in this optimistic development milieu that IDS was born and given a broad mandate, which included provision of consultancy services to the government, with indications that its research was expected to be of some practical value. By and large, the IDS has fulfilled this expectation.

The IDS contributions touch on all major development issues, research and movements that have been witnessed in Kenya since the Institute was established. Ready examples include its research contributions to growth-oriented national development strategies of the 1970's, the role of foreign capital in Kenya's development, concerns about rural development, the establishment of the informal sector, coming to terms with SAPs, and the shift to a more socially conscious approach to development. In all these areas, the Institute's contributions have been documented locally and internationally.

One of the most noteworthy cases is the Institute's current role in shaping development agenda through its collaboration with the UNDP, as well as through other research initiatives such as the industrialisation research programme.

There are indications that the World Bank is beginning to expand its approach to poverty reduction to the more familiar

territory, at least for IDS, of rural development and its role in poverty alleviation. In this case, the Institute can use its vast experience in this sector to position itself in the centre of international development research.

Several observations can be made by way of summarising the Institute's approach to its mandate. One, like similar organisations in the region, the Institute has approached development studies from a perspective of issues of development concern to the country. This approach is reflected in the kind of issues that keep re-appearing in the research coverage of the Institute, some examples of which have been sketched above. These issues quite often, though not always, reflect the nature of the international development arena, and in this regard, IDS is an active player in this arena.

Two, again like most similar organisations in the region, the Institute has, so far, not shown an inclination to indulge in, the-often frustrating, grand theorising of the kind that attempts to define and conceptualise development.

The Institute has, however, made considerable contribution to development concepts, including the concept of the informal sector and its Kiswahili equivalent, *Jua Kali*.

Three, the Institute has avoided a doctrinaire approach to development, and development studies. Thus, as is shown elsewhere in this document, most of the research is highly empirical and based on data. However, the IDS seems to display what might be termed as "ideological development sympathy" with the kind of research work the Institute prefers to do. Quite a large chunk of the work is about rural development, the poor in both urban and rural areas, the marginalized in the arid and semi-arid areas, the *Jua Kali* operators - in a word, the development underdogs who are most likely to be excluded from the process of development.

This ideological sympathy is also reflected in the Institute's long-standing concern with various facets of development participation; again an inclusion/exclusion issue. This ideological sympathy does seem to suggest that the Institute

does have a conception of development after all! *It suggests that development is a process that is meant to be inclusive, and whose major objective should be to improve the quality of life.*

Four, the comparative advantage of the Institute, in relation to others in the region, lies in its long history of research and establishment history. Few of the other research institutions have the long history of the IDS and even fewer can boast of the network that the Institute has established through its publications, visiting fellowships, collaborative research partnerships and other methods of network establishing. The challenge to the Institute is to maintain the lead and the advantage.

Whither IDS?

A quick review of some theoretical literature shows that development controversies are not just about to go away. If anything, development will get even more controversial with each new entrant into the field. IDS has, in the past, been fully enjoined in these controversies in a number of areas.

However, one different feature of current academic and other controversies is that the players enter the arena with clear strategic objectives. These objectives are, in turn, derived from institutional visions and missions of the kind that IDS has now developed. The vision and the mission statements have been developed in an effort to go beyond the general mission of the University of Nairobi, in order to carve an international niche for the Institute.

Our review of research and teaching in development studies in the region reveals major challenges, some of which are, as outlined above: teaching vis-à-vis. research, theorising vis-à-vis. empirical research, individual consultancies vis-à-vis teaching and related institutional work, relationship between teaching programmes and research programmes, e.t.c. These challenges are not easy to tame, let alone likely to disappear. The questions that IDS is attempting to answer are: which of the challenges are applicable to the Institute? Which ones can be tackled without losing momentum and, in which order?

What resources will be required for the job and when?

In the context of the public sector, the Institute has all along provided major inputs in shaping public policy. In recent years though, the challenges facing this sector have become more complex, especially since the onset of current public sector reforms. One has no doubt that, compared to other players, the comparative advantage of the IDS in public sector reform, again lies in the Institute's tradition of research. However, it should be borne in mind that the reform process requires personnel trained in very specific aspects of development studies, and this is where the Institute might create a niche for itself: - training in specific areas.

Except for some hard-liners at the IMF, it is evident that the global mood is to go back to development studies of the earlier days. There might be any number of reasons for this change, including disenchantment with SAPs and the advocacy triumph of the Alternative Development School.

Regardless of the reasons, the change of mind is evident in the current emphasis on the social aspects of development, including the stress on poverty analysis and alleviation. What this change implies is that there might be more resources available for development studies. However, access to these resources will most likely demand on aggressive institutional profile and, equally aggressive, institutional projects, among others. The now-stated vision and mission of the Institute are in the direction of establishing the necessary profile.

Globally, again, the new mood is tending to throw up a number of areas as the core of development studies. These include globalisation, governance, poverty alleviation and rural development, sustainable development including environmental sustainability, and even more recently, human resources development is making a comeback through renewed interest in higher education. While IDS cannot, and should not, respond to every global fad, it has some capacity to respond to, at least some of the issues that are most urgently relevant to the country.

This will require a delicate balancing act between the forces of globalisation that would seek to push development studies in that direction, and the need for local relevance. The Institute is aware of the need for this balance, as evidenced in the new thematic research programme, with a strong orientation towards the concerns of the ordinary person.

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