

Understanding development better

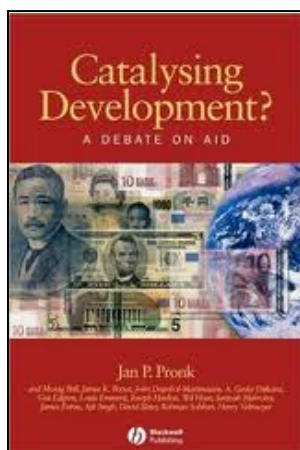
Do we truly understand the how aid relates to development?

☉ Different perspectives

Over the last 60 years, many different development paradigms have been adhered to. Approaches, modalities and instruments were challenged accordingly, and altered or adjusted very frequently. It is, however, still questionable whether we truly understand the relationship between aid and development.

Former Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation Jan Pronk summarised the evolution of development aid approaches over the last 60 years as follows: 'Technical assistance of the early years was followed by community development support in the 1950s, aid to fill trade and investment gaps in the 1960s, aid to provide for basic human needs in the 1970s, assistance to structural adjustment and debt relief in the 1980s, humanitarian assistance in combination with support for rehabilitation of countries after the civil wars of the 1990s and at the turn of the century, aid for human development and aid to prevent violent conflicts and foster democratic governance' (Jan Pronk, 2004, *Catalysing Development?*).

Despite the wide-ranging experience with all these different approaches towards development aid there is still a lot of uncertainty and



Former Minister Jan Pronk played an important role during the UDB conference. In his book 'Catalysing development?' (2004) he states that aid is not the prime mover of development, but rather a catalyst.

Process organisation

The 'Understanding Development Better' conference was organised within the framework of the Development Policy Review Network (DPRN) by:

- MDF training & consultancy
- Vice Versa/Lokaal Mondiaal
- Institute of Social Studies (ISS)



confusion about the relationship between aid and development. There are doubts as to whether increasing aid levels are effective, or whether an emphasis on other approaches, such as trade & aid and a more equitable international economic order, are needed to catalyse development. Under what conditions can aid promote development and when does it stifle development? And do we even understand what 'development' really is?

☉ Understanding development better

In 2008, MDF training & consultancy, Vice Versa, and the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) organised a broad discussion designed to get development theories and models back onto the Dutch debate agenda. The aim was to revive the debate on the fundamental drivers of development in order to come to a better understanding of development and the ways aid may catalyse it. The main event within this process was a three-day conference organised

on 27–29 August 2008 in Ede, the Netherlands.



Hotel 'De Bosrand', venue for the UDB conference.

🌐 Aid as a catalyst of development

During the conference, speakers approached and analysed the relationships between aid and development from different theoretical and practical angles. Fifteen papers were written as input for the discussion. The meeting brought together 96 development experts, including senior staff from funding agencies, government and semi-government organisations and researchers and development practitioners.

Complementary development theories

On the first day participants discussed position papers that outlined different academic disciplinary perspectives on development, varying from macro-economics to anthropology. The various papers emphasised different forces in development processes. At the same time, however, it became clear that most papers challenged the dominant neo-liberal vision on development, due to its lack of attention to politics and power. The discussions revealed that, even though there is no single comprehensive theoretical model for development, most theoretical insights are still largely complementary. At the end of the day, the discussion zoomed in on complexity theory. While some think this theory can provide the over-

arching theoretical framework for analysing development more accurately, others are sceptical, arguing that complexity theory is still in its infancy.

Practical hindrances

The position papers discussed during the second day dealt with practical hindrances to development, such as bureaucracy, corruption, conflicts and failing states. Participants emphasised the context-specific nature of development and its hindrances, and stressed that context should be an essential element in any analysis of development processes. Experts also argued that theories are needed to provide a starting point for the formulation of development-related policies and practices. Experiences of practitioners should be collected and analysed to provide the information that is needed to falsify or verify existing development theories.



Participants in the UDB conference

Do not confuse aid with development

Synthesising the discussions on the third day, participants reflected on the conditions under which aid could enhance development. They warned that development aid should not be confused with development. Instead, development aid should be understood as something that is intended to address the bottlenecks for development in the most effective way. As such, aid should work as a catalyst of development.

Papers on development theories and practical hindrances to development

A total of fifteen position papers were written as input to the conference. The first series of nine papers discussed development theories from different academic disciplinary perspectives. The second series dealt with practical hindrances to development. During the conference small workgroups were held in which the authors presented their papers and discussed them with other participants.

Development theories

- The anthropological perspective – *‘When ‘development’ enters the village’* by Sjoerd Zanen (MDF training & consultancy).
- The macro-economic perspective – *‘Economic growth: A necessary, yet neglected condition for development’* by Geske Dijkstra (Erasmus University Rotterdam).
- The empirical perspective – *‘Free to choose?’* by Antonie de Kemp (Policy and Operations Evaluation Department, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs).
- The entrepreneurial perspective – *‘Small and Medium enterprises and Business Development Services: are we missing something?’* by Klaas Molenaar (Triodos Facet).
- The geographical perspective – *‘Can Africa learn from the Asian miracle? Yes it can!’* by Lia van Wesenbeeck (Centre for World Food Studies, VU University Amsterdam).
- The politicological perspective – *‘Politics and development: the governance debate’* by Wil Hout (Institute of Social Studies).
- The sociological perspective – *‘Development, capitalism and class. Some notes about understanding development’* by Jos Mooij (Institute of Social Studies).
- The technological perspective – *‘The dynamics of innovation: Development from a technology and society perspective’* by Wim Ravesteijn (Delft University of Technology).

Practical hindrances

- Bureacracy and corruption – *‘Corruptiebestrijding: mag het een tikkeltje effectiever?’* by Martin Koper (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs).
- Capacity development – *‘The Localisation of Capacity Development Efforts’* by Jan Ubels & Kees Zevenbergen (Netherlands Development Organisation SNV).
- Conflicts & failing states – *‘Conflicts & Failing states’* by Helen Hintjens (Institute of Social Studies).
- Entrepreneurship & Business environment – *‘Small and Medium enterprises and Business Development Services: are we missing something?’* by Klaas Molenaar (Triodos Facet).
- Globalisation, value chains and development organisations – *‘Global standards, small producers’* by Peter Knorringa (Institute of Social Studies).
- Migration – *‘Migration and development: What development, and for whom?’* by Joris Schapendonk (Radboud University Nijmegen), Lothar Smith (Radboud University Nijmegen) and Annelies Zoomers (Utrecht University).
- International financial relations – *‘Economic Partnership Agreements: Help or hindrance?’* by Stephen Browne (International Trade Centre, Geneva), and *‘Access to finance and private sector development’* by Stan Stavenuiter (FMO Finance for development).

🌐 Different policy perspectives

After the conference, the process organisers wrote a paper assessing how several Dutch ministers of development cooperation have interpreted development and the ways aid can spur it. The paper is entitled *'Een wereld van verschil – Een zaak van iedereen. Ontwikkelingssamenwerkingsbeleid van Pronk tot Koenders'* [A World of difference – A matter concerning all. Development policy from Pronk till Koenders].



The paper compares and reflects on the policies of Minister Pronk, Herfkens, van Ardenne and Koenders. It clearly shows that the differences in perspective, experience and political colour of the various ministers significantly shifted the focus of Dutch development policies over the last decades. There are some common elements that recur in each policy term, such as a neo-liberal perspective and attention for poverty alleviation, but each minister tended to approach them from a different

angle. The authors conclude that, since the time of Minister Pronk, little attention has been paid to the analysis of development processes and policy formulation on the basis of empirical research. There is no robust theory which underlies development policies.

🌐 Follow-up: Towards a policy theory

The three organising institutions, in close cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, followed up on the conference in 2009 with another DPRN process entitled 'Singing a new policy tune'. This process aimed at improving the quality of policy-making in international development cooperation in the Netherlands by revitalising the discussion on underlying policy theories.

Process output

The 'Understanding development better' process included a three-day conference, for which policies were reviewed, papers were written and an online forum was created.

This resulted in the following publications:

- Fifteen position papers written by conference participants.
- Policy review paper: 'Een wereld van verschil – Een zaak van iedereen. Ontwikkelingssamenwerkingsbeleid van Pronk tot Koenders'.
- DPRN process report.

All publications are available on the website:

<http://udb.global-connections.nl>

Development Policy  Review Network

This infosheet was made by DPRN. With a view to stimulating informed debate and discussion of issues related to the formulation and implementation of development policies, DPRN created opportunities to promote an open exchange and dialogue between scientists, policymakers, development practitioners and the business sector in the Netherlands and Flanders from 2003–2011.