

DPRN PHASE II – REPORT NO. 1

Understanding Development Better



Colophon

This document reports on the process titled 'Understanding Development Better' which was carried out within the framework of the Development Policy Review Network (DPRN) and was organised by the Management for Development Foundation (MDF), Vice Versa and the Institute of Social Studies (ISS). With a view to stimulating informed debate and discussion of issues related to the formulation and implementation of (Dutch) development policies, DPRN creates opportunities to promote an open exchange and dialogue between scientists, policymakers, development practitioners and the business sector in the Netherlands. For more information see www.DPRN.nl and www.global-connections.nl.

Contents

	Page
Introduction	3
Background to the theme	3
Activities	4
Results	6
Contribution to the DPRN objectives	6
Reactions and evaluation	7
Plan for follow-up	9
Appendix 1 – List of participants	11
Appendix 2 – Programme	18
Appendix 3 – Overview of position papers	20

Report on ‘Understanding development better’

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Period:	May – November 2008, with a conference on 27–29 August 2008
Responsible organisations:	Management for Development Foundation (MDF), Vice Versa and the Institute of Social Studies (ISS)

Introduction

On 27–29 August 2008, MDF/Vice Versa and ISS organised a conference within the framework of the Development Policy Review Network (DPRN). In line with the DPRN objective to stimulate informed debate and discussion of issues related to the formulation and implementation of (Dutch) development policies, this conference was the starting point of a multi-annual process whose objectives are:

- To enhance the aid effectiveness of development interventions instigated by Dutch organisations by increasing their insights into the complexity of development processes and mechanisms;
- To get these issues back on the Dutch debate agenda; and
- To raise awareness that effective development assistance is not genuinely possible without an understanding of development processes.

Following the intentions of the DPRN Vision Plan 2008–2010, the conference was not an event on its own, but was embedded in a web-based discussion on the specific perspective on development initiated in July 2008 and which continued until December 2008.

This report documents the theme addressed, the activities realised, the target groups reached, and the output and outcome realised, particularly in relation to the DPRN objectives.

Background to the theme

Development assistance has been a cornerstone of the international policy agenda of all Dutch governments since the mid 1960s. The most important reason for these governments to allocate substantial amounts for development assistance was their profound intention to contribute to global poverty reduction. Most of this assistance was meant to catalyse development processes and was accompanied by efforts to create a more equitable international economic order. This calls for a solid understanding of development processes

and the inter-relationships with the dynamics of international (economic) power relationships.

In the Netherlands, discussions regarding the fundamental drivers of development have faded into the background since the 1970s whereas the present aid architecture, which sees poverty reduction and the Millennium Development Goals as the fundamental objectives, requires a solid theoretical framework as regards development theories, models and approaches.

Activities

In order to achieve informed debate, policy review, common agenda setting and inter-sectoral cooperation, the conference was embedded in a process that was targeted at bringing together the various sectors and identifying opportunities for cooperation. To this end the process included the following activities:

- *Getting the issue on the agenda (preparation)*

Position papers

All speakers were asked to write a position paper and formulate 3 'challengers' as a starting point for the debate in the workshops. An overview of these position papers is given in Appendix 3 and is available on the seminar's website at <http://udb.global-connections.nl>

Website

The website <http://udb.global-connections.nl> was launched a month before the conference. The website facilitated exchange opportunities before and after the conference so as to ensure that the conference would not be a stand-alone event. Before the conference, the majority of the website was only accessible after logging-in to make sure that only conference participants could use the facilities and discussions and that the website would not be dominated by 'outsiders'. The login was removed after the conference to give non-participants the opportunity to download the reports and take part in the discussion as well.

Important modules of the site:

- Logistics: information about programme, transportation, location.
- Communities of Practice: a forum for exchange. The forum was structured per day and per workshop topic. The position papers of all speakers were made available on the forum.
- Workshops registration: the possibility to register for four workshops.
- Registration for the conference was also possible via the website (without logging-in).

Participants & Publicity

Since the conference was held at the end of the summer holidays, potential participants were hard(er) to contact. A considerable effort was made to reach potential participants by mailing through DPRN, distributing flyers at the 'Beleidsdialoog', placing advertisements in Vice

Versa, hanging up posters at MDF and by personal mailings by Hans Rijnveld. Although the number of participants stayed low for quite a while, in the end all the efforts resulted in 94 participants, of which 23 were (part-time) speakers and 8 facilitators (see Appendix 1 and observations below). Participants continued to register even in the last few days before the conference. The mix of policymakers, practitioners and academics was a reason for maintaining the right balance between different groups.

- *The conference*

The conference was organised as a 3-day event. A very varied, full programme was drawn up (Appendix 2). The first day was dedicated to 'Theories on development and social transformation'. After keynote speeches by Jan Breman and Jan Pronk and an initial discussion of these keynote speeches, those attending participated in workshops. On the first day, there were two workshops each lasting two hours. Participants appreciated the length of the workshops since it gave them time to reflect and engage in in-depth discussions. After two rounds of workshops, the day was closed by a session on Complexity Theory.

The second day of the conference was dedicated to 'Practical Hindrances' for development. After Louk de la Rive Box had spoken about his personal impressions, a first round of workshops on the day's theme followed. After the workshops, Jan Breman again spoke. This time he gave a very critical reflection on the achievements of development cooperation in the area of social transformation. His criticism was not acknowledged by all participants. After lunch a second round of workshops was held. Later in the afternoon participants were taken to a development scene in Hoenderloo, where the historical perspective on development cooperation was shared. Participants were taken out of their normal context and this sudden change in the programme was greatly appreciated. The atmosphere during the first day of the conference had already been very good, but this 'therapy' brought removed any remaining barriers and made exchanges even easier.

Paul Hoebink started day 3 by sharing his personal impressions of day 2 (and beyond). He then gave the floor to Jan Breman who shed some light on the historical perspective as covered by Henk van Loo on the second day. Jan Breman connected the historical perspective to the current context of development cooperation. In order to prepare for the panel discussions which were to be held as the closing event of the conference, participants were again asked to participate in workshops and reflect on the last two days in order to broaden the discussion and link up with development cooperation issues. After a heated debate between panel members and an excellent lunch in the glorious sunshine, Hans Rijnveld made some final remarks and closed the conference.

- *Follow-up*

All the materials collected during the conference (speeches, presentations) were posted on the website as soon as possible. The website was well visited, but unfortunately no discussion took place on the forum. On the last day of the conference all the participants were invited to participate in the online discussions and a provocative text was posted in the

forum in order to stimulate reactions. Hard copies of the report were sent to those who requested them.

Results

The conference was in itself a success. Participants – ranging from policymakers, to academics and practitioners – were very pleased with the open, in-depth discussions and the well-balanced programme. The objective of the conference – to bring all kinds of different players together for a discussion – was largely fulfilled. The people present engaged in fruitful discussions. However, some potential participants, such as the private sector (only consultants represented the sector), were absent. The age range of the participants was not considered balanced because there were hardly any young development practitioners present. Remarks were also made about the fact that only ‘white’ Dutch people were present, although this was a deliberate choice of the organisers. The short-term objective of the activity was to ‘get development issues (please see proposal for specific terms) back on the Dutch debating agenda and raise awareness of the fact that effective development assistance is not genuinely possible without an understanding of the development process’. It can be said that the objective was achieved, at least in part. Awareness was raised, people were triggered to learn more and be critical about their present level of understanding. Unfortunately, there was no proof of the raised level of awareness in the form of lively discussion on the online forum. Hardly any visits were made to the forum for discussion purposes, despite all the promotional efforts. It is doubtful whether the number of reactions on the forum is a good indicator of the awareness level of the participants (maybe there are other, more important reasons). However, this is – in addition to the direct responses by participants at the end of the conference and the number of reports downloaded from the forum – the only tangible measurement we have at the moment. The reactions immediately after the conference were very positive and a lot of reports (including position papers) were downloaded.

However, the facilitation and purpose of online discussion should be reconsidered. In our opinion, participants will only take part in online discussions if there is enough added value for them. This is an important lesson for the organisers. Another lesson is that the topics for the workshops were chosen too hastily so that they could be included in the tender dossier. The lesson to be learned here is that the choice of topics should be part of the preparation process, in order to get a widely acknowledged set of topics on the agenda.

Contribution to the DPRN objectives

Stimulating informed debate

The organisers wanted to stimulate a debate on development. They therefore deliberately included ‘development’ on the agenda and not development cooperation. The facilitators of the plenary sessions and workshops sometimes had to push the debate back to the core issues (development) since the participants tended to talk about development cooperation. Workshop speakers provided the theoretical (day 1) and practical (day 2) input on

development to stimulate informed debate. Every session started with an introduction by an expert, after which the floor was open for all participants.

Involvement of relevant partners

The objective of the seminar was to bring together academics, policymakers and development practitioners, including the private sector, with a view to initiating discussions and setting the agenda for the years to come. Appendix 1 lists the seminar participants and their respective backgrounds. This overview shows that the conference was attended by 96 people, 40 percent of whom were researchers, 10 percent were policymakers and embassy staff, 40 percent practitioners, 5 percent represented the business sector (consultants) and 5 percent belonged to other groups. Only two people participated in the web-based discussion.

In preparation for the conference, the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) was involved for the 'scientific' part of the preparation, while Vice Versa was involved in order to generate interest in the conference. The organisers invited stakeholders from the various sectors and almost all groups (policymakers, practitioners, scientists) were represented.

Relevance for policy and practice

Development occurs in a complicated area of constant tension between factors that minimise or maximise, slow down or quicken the development process. It is therefore very important to view each development process in its own context. Practitioners are aware of the realities they face while working in this field and they are aware of the results of the policies implemented. However, the question is how was the policy, on which they base their intervention, established? In 2008, a major evaluation of 'the Dutch Africa policy' was undertaken by the *Inspectie Ontwikkelingssamenwerking Beleidsevaluatie (IOB)*. The evaluators urge us not to look at development in terms of 'failure or success', but to appreciate the process in which development takes place. Evaluations like this help us to acquire an insight into the development results we achieve with 'our' aid, but these glimpses into history should not be the only resource providing a starting point for new policies. With the process 'understanding development' the MDF and ISS consortium aimed to bring theory and practice together in order to facilitate a critical reflection on both aspects of development. Practice can provide us with information for the falsification or verification of existing development theories, while theories should form a good starting point for development related policies. In the follow-up to this conference Dutch development policies and practices will be reviewed in several seminars taking account of a renewed theoretical basis as to how growth and development takes place. This information enables us to address one of the most relevant issues for all policymakers and others involved in development cooperation in the Netherlands, namely the extent to which, and under which conditions, aid catalyzes development?

Enhancing cooperation and synergy

Bringing different groups of the sector together for a 3-day conference immediately stimulated cooperation between all the people present. Since the participants were assigned to workshops most of the time, in-depth discussions with a small group stimulated a lot of

interaction between these people. The exchange was highly appreciated and serious debates continued on into the free hours and the evenings. Even after the conference had ended, participants kept inquiring about the results of the conference and people who had not participated also contacted MDF to find out more about the conference results as they felt the desire to take part in the follow-up discussions. MDF does not know of all the initiatives that were started as a result of the conference, but is aware of the following trajectories:

- The Civic Driven Change Project of ISS, Hivos, Cordaid in which the political relations/balance between people are key;
- The essay by Rens Twijnstra and Rob Visser: 'Gooi het kind niet met het badwater weg' in Internationale Samenwerking (February 2009);
- The DPRN debate on the architecture of the Dutch Development Cooperation. This is to be a process parallel to the 2nd MDF/ISS/Vice Versa trajectory;
- Follow-up to the 'Understanding Development Better' conference; 'Singing a different Tune'. Collaboration MDF, ISS and Lokaal Mondiaal/Vice Versa in close consultation with DGIS on evidence based policy making.

Reactions and evaluation

An evaluation form was distributed among the participants. Only one of these was filled out and returned to the organisers. The reactions the organisers received directly after the conference were positive. Participants were very appreciative of the time granted for in-depth discussions and enjoyed the variety of work forms which allowed a lot of development dimensions to be covered with participants able to zoom in on their particular area of interest. Critical comments were made regarding the type of participants: the average age of the participants was quite high (no young professionals) and also migrant organisations and the private sector were not sufficiently represented.

Another conclusion drawn by the organisers was that professionals in the sector have difficulties detaching their thinking on development from development cooperation. It also became clear that it is hard to come to grips with development??, that development is a hugely complex field and that it will take many more years to fully understand the concept (if ever possible).

Reflection

The conference and on-line exchange were set up with a view to getting the issue of development theories and models back onto the Dutch debate agenda, as it was felt that discussions regarding the fundamental drivers of development had faded to the background since the 1970s. The underlying thought was that the present aid architecture might lack the much-needed solid theoretical framework with regard to development theories, models and approaches. In order to enhance aid effectiveness of development interventions instigated by

Dutch organisations there is need for enhanced insights into the complexity of development processes and mechanisms.

The conference met the objective of stimulating informed debate and discussion among the various sectors, although it must be said that the private sector (represented only by consultants) and the policy sector were underrepresented. The main result of the conference was that the issue of development theories was put back on the debate agenda and that awareness was raised about the idea that effective development assistance is not genuinely possible without an understanding of the development process.

During the conference participants had the tendency to talk about 'development cooperation' instead of 'development'. It had to be made clear that development assistance should be understood as being something that is intended to address the bottlenecks of development processes in the most effective way. Furthermore, discussions did not focus readily on development processes and the factors that would initiate, stimulate or slow down these processes, as participants and speakers often emphasised the normative aspects of the effects of development processes. Perhaps this means that there is a need to upgrade the level of intellectual debate and conceptual thinking in the sector.

An important conclusion was that there is no single comprehensive theoretical model for development. Rather, there are different theoretical insights originating from different academic stances, which are largely complementary to each other, although contradictory as well on some issues. Even though some hope that complexity theory can provide the overarching theoretical framework through which we are able to analyse development more accurately, others are sceptical about it, mainly because complexity theory is still in its infancy.

As far as the outputs and outcomes are concerned, the intention was for the discussion to continue on the online-forum after the conference. Even though a lot of people downloaded reports from the website immediately after the conference, the number of participants in the online forum was restricted to two. However, the process has raised awareness and the organisers will continue the debate on development theories in close cooperation with the Directorate General for International Cooperation in a new process entitled 'Singing a different policy tune' (*'Uit een ander beleidsvaatje trappen'*) to be started in 2009.

Plan for follow-up

As already mentioned, a sound basis for further discussion was created during the conference. A debate on policies and policy creation can now follow.

The conference tried to enhance the debate on development cooperation in the Netherlands in the form of a critical reflection on what development actually is, what we want to achieve with development cooperation and how this can be achieved. The conference has stimulated a broad group of professionals in the sector and policymakers, scientists and practitioners were triggered to tackle these difficult issues. The conference has enhanced thinking, reflection and discussion on the fundamental question of what development is.

Development-oriented work of any kind should always be performed on the basis of knowing what you are work and striving for. We believe this issue should be regularly reflected on. By facilitating the discussion, practitioners who were present during the conference again realised the complexity of development and were triggered to continue unravelling part of the complexity and initiating relevant debates and discussions. We believe that professionals have taken their gained insights back to their organisations and that the conference has encouraged them to provoke discussions and to challenge their own organisations to continue improving their approach to complexity.

During the conference, MDF was already exploring possibilities to facilitate a follow-up discussion to the conference on the themes of sector-related policymaking and architecture. In the meanwhile, MDF, ISS and Vice Versa/Lokaal Mondiaal are being given the possibility to coordinate a follow-up DPRN trajectory called 'Singing a different tune'. This project is going to explore policymaking in the sector. The DPRN Task Force is going to facilitate a process on the architecture of the sector. These two trajectories will run parallel to each other and provide mutual input. The 'Understanding Development Better' conference provides a perfect starting point for both trajectories since initial, critical thinking on *what* the whole sector wants to achieve creates a perfect basis for discussions and decisions on *how* to proceed.

Appendix 1 – List of participants

Speakers	Organisation	E-mail
1. Mr Frans Bieckmann	The Broker	fbieckman@chello.nl
2. Mr Louk de la Rive Box	Institute for Social Studies	box@iss.nl
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Appendix 2 – Programme

Programme

Day 1: Theories on development and social transformation

10:30	Registration & coffee
11:00	Opening speech – Hans Rijnveld, managing director MDF
11:10	Speech – Jan Donner, chairman DPRN
11:30	Keynote speech(es) by Jan Pronk (ISS) and Jan Breman (UvA)
12:15	Discussion (on statements)
12.45	Lunch
13:30	Workshops, 1 st round: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- A (macro) economic perspective – <i>Geske Dijkstra (EUR)</i>- A sociological perspective – <i>Jos Mooij (ISS)</i>- A geographical perspective – <i>Lia van Wesenbeeck (VU)</i>- An anthropological perspective – <i>Sjoerd Zanen (MDF)</i>- A technology & innovation perspective – <i>Wim Ravensteijn (TUD)</i>- A politicological perspective – <i>Wil Hout (ISS)</i>- An empirical perspective – <i>Anthonie de Kemp (IOB)</i>- An entrepreneurial perspective – <i>Klaas Molenaar (Triodos FACET)</i>
16:00	Workshops, 2 nd round (same as 1 st round)
18:30	Complexity theory; a tool for a better understanding of development? <ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Frans Bieckman – editor the Broker</i>- <i>Louk de la Rive Box – Rector ISS</i>- <i>Harry van der Graaf – Prof. Physics NIKHEF TUD, CERN Geneva</i>
20:00	Dinner and informal chat groups

Day 2: Practical hindrances

- 09:00 Personal impressions day 1 and beyond – *Louk de la Rive Box*
- 09:30 Workshops, 1st round
- Globalisation, Value Chains and Development Organisations – *Peter Knorringa (ISS)*
 - Trade Regimes – *Stephen Browne (International Trade Centre, Geneva)*
 - Bureaucracy and Corruption – *Martin Koper (MoFA)*
 - Migration & Brain Drain – *Lothar Smith (RU)*
 - Entrepreneurship & Business Environment – *Klaas Molenaar (Triodos/FACET)*
 - Capacity Development – *Kees Zevenbergen & Jan Ubels (SNV)*
 - Conflicts & Failing States – *Helen Hintjens (ISS)*
 - International Financial Relations – *Stan Stavenuiter (FMO)*
- 11:30 Development and social change – *Jan Breman*
- 12:30 Lunch
- 13:30 Workshops, 2nd round (same as 1st round)
- 15:30 Visit to former development project in Hoenderloo.
Speech by Henk van Loo: The Holy Fire; thinking and acting in poverty reduction – then and now.
- 19:00 Dinner and farewell speech by Henk van Loo, founder MDF

Day 3: Does aid help or hinder?

- 09:00 Personal impressions day 2 and beyond – *Paul Hoebink (CIDIN)*
- 09:30 Synthesis – *Jan Breman*
- 10:00 Workshops: “How can aid contribute to development and social change?”
- 11:45 Panel discussion
Panel: Jan Pronk, Jan Breman, Paul Hoebink, Maarten Brouwer, Stephen Browne
- 13.00 Lunch
- 14:00 Conclusions & follow-up – *Hans Rijneveld (MDF)*

Appendix 3 – Overview of position papers

The following position papers are available at the DPRN website: <http://udb.global-connections.nl>

1. When 'development' enters the village by *Sjoerd Zanen*
2. Corruptiebestrijding: mag het een tikkeltje effectiever? by *Martin Koper*
3. Economic Partnership Agreements: Help or hindrance? by *Stephen Browne*
4. The Localisation of Capacity Development Efforts by *Jan Ubels & Kees Zevenbergen*
5. Small and Medium enterprises and Business Development Services: are we missing something? by *Klaas Molenaar*
6. Free to choose? by *Antonie de Kemp*
7. Conflicts & Failing states by *Helen Hintjens*
8. Development, capitalism and class. Some notes about understanding development by *Jos Mooij*
9. The Geographical perspective. Can Africa learn from the Asian miracle? Yes it can! by *Lia van Wesenbeeck*
10. Migration and development: What development, and for whom? by *Joris Schapendonk, Lothar Smith and Annelies Zoomers*
11. Politics and development: the governance debate by *Wim Hout*
12. The dynamics of innovation: Development from a technology and society perspective by *Wim Ravesteijn*
13. Economic growth: A necessary, yet neglected condition for development by *Geske Dijkstra*
14. Global standards, small producers by *Peter Knorringa*
15. Access to finance and private sector development by *Stan Stavenuiter*

