The Study of Development

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Abstract

This chapter examines the ways in which the problems and processes of ‘development’ have been studied. The study of development has been beset by a series of tensions. First, there is a tension between generating widely applicable knowledge and policy prescriptions and generating knowledge of particular development successes and failures. Second, there is a tension between generating knowledge of ‘development’ as a process of structural transformation (that in some way replicates the transition to ‘modernity’) and generating knowledge of the particular problems and issues associated with a lack of development (access to clean water, maternal mortality and so on). Third, there is a tension between economics as the primary discipline within which development was studied, and the contribution of other academic disciplines. The chapter concludes by suggesting that in recent years some of these tensions have been recognized and that this holds out the possibility of steering a path through them.
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Introduction

The study of what we now call ‘development’ goes back at least to the Scottish Enlightenment, emblematically in the works of Adam Smith. As an institutionalized and specialized academic area of study, however, it emerged in the period after World War II under the auspices of U.S. hegemony and it expanded dramatically as the number of developing countries rose, especially from the 1960s. In many ways the study of development has been a tremendous success. It has become a vital component of the work of bilateral and multilateral development agencies, led by the work of the research arm of the World Bank (for some history see World Bank 2010). A significant number of specialist research centers have been established to study the processes and problems of development, and it has become a well-established academic area of study, with professional journals, conferences and professional associations. It has also become an increasingly popular area of study for students, with many degree programs, particularly at the postgraduate level. The study of development has also dramatically expanded in scope alongside the expansion of the agenda of development agencies themselves. In the contemporary period it includes a huge variety of things from trade policy to marine conservation, and from banking regulation to maternal health.

The sheer size and variety of the study of development makes any kind of simple summary impossible. There are too many issues, too many institutions involved, and too many
approaches for them to be even sketched out. But some kind of overall account and even assessment of the study of development is possible by viewing it at a somewhat higher level of abstraction. The approach taken here is that the study of development has been characterized by three tensions right from its origins in the post-war period. First, there is a tension between generating widely applicable knowledge and policy prescriptions, and generating knowledge of particular development successes and failures. Second, there is a tension between generating knowledge of ‘development’ as a process of structural transformation (that in some way replicates the transition to ‘modernity’ with all that implies —industrialization, urbanization and so on) and generating knowledge of the particular problems and issues associated with a lack of development (access to clean water, malnutrition, maternal mortality, and so on). Third, there is a tension between economics as the primary discipline within which development was studied, and the contribution of other academic disciplines (politics, area studies, anthropology). In many ways these tensions have very productive, but they have also been very hard to overcome, and the challenges they pose remain.

**Origins of the study of development**
The full title of Adam Smith’s most famous book, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, provides the founding questions of the study of what we now call development (Smith tended to use the term ‘improvement’): what did being ‘developed’ look like, what made it different from its opposite, and how did countries achieve it? The intellectual ambitions of the Scottish Enlightenment shaped the grand narratives of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, whether in the form of Marx’s account of the development of capitalism or the sociology of Weber and others who concerned themselves with the origins and characteristics of ‘modernity’. But the study of ‘development’ only emerged as an institutionalized and professionalized area of study in the period after World War II, and it is this period that forms the focus of this chapter. The study of development in this period is defined by attempts to understand the process of ‘development’ in the less-developed world, and, importantly, to provide knowledge that could generate policy prescriptions to be used by developing country governments and development agencies.

This locates the origins of the modern study of development in a particular international and institutional context. Internationally it emerges alongside the institutionalization of the ‘project of international development’ itself in international politics —the establishment of bilateral and multilateral development agencies and the provision of foreign aid (Williams 2011). In turn this is significantly the result of the emergence of the U.S. as the hegemonic state in international politics. 'Development' played an important role in the hegemonic order
established by the U.S. in three related ways. (Gilman 2003: ch. 3). First, US policymakers recognized the need to integrate developing countries into the multilateral political and economic order they were creating. Of the forty-four countries present at the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944, nineteen were from Latin America, and they generally enthusiastically supported the agreements reached at the conference (Helleiner 2006). Second, the broad aims of U.S. hegemony were advanced through the development of developing countries. As Truman put it in his famous 'Four Point' speech, “all countries, including our own, will greatly benefit from a constructive program for the better use of the world's human and natural resources”. Economic development expanded economic opportunities for the U.S. and reduced the likelihood of war. As Cordell Hull put it, “if we could get a free flow of trade . . . so that one country would not be deadly jealous of another and the living standards of all countries might risen thereby eliminating and economic dissatisfaction that breeds war, we might have a reasonable chance of lasting peace” (Hull 1948: 81). Third, and increasingly, development played in important role in Cold War competition. The promise of 'development' was the U.S. alternative to communism and the practice of aid giving was shaped by the logics of Cold War competition. In terms of the study of development this meant, as Lucian Pye noted, that 'the increasing academic interest in the problems of new states . . . has been inspired more by world events than by any indigenous advance in . . . theory' (Pye 1966: 31). In other words, the study of development was driven as much by the need on the part of the U.S. to manage its relations with developing states as by purely
academic interest. And as the number of developing states grew rapidly with the process of
decolonization, so this need only increased, and over time the study of development
expanded in other countries, such as Britain, France and the Netherlands that also needed to
find ways to manage their relations with their ex-colonies.

The emergence of the modern study of development was also shaped by other related factors.
It can trace part of its lineage to the explosion of public policy 'expertise' more generally and
developments within the discipline of economic more specifically. In the late nineteenth and
early twentieth centuries 'experts' were playing an increasingly important role in public policy
debates, and the New Deal, for example, was imbued with the view that social and economic
problems were to be solved through the application of expert, 'scientific' knowledge, and that
attitude carried over into the study of development (Maier 1978). The emergence of
economics as a separate and specialized academic discipline was also associated with this rise
of public policy 'expertise'.

As noted above, in many ways the study of development has been remarkably successful. But
it has also been beset by at least three tensions that, while they have been productive in many
ways, have also created a series of intellectual and practical problems.
General vs. specific knowledge

The first is a tension between generating knowledge and policy prescriptions that are generally applicable to a large class of developing countries and generating knowledge of the success and failures of particular countries at particular times. There is something of a paradox here. The Keynesian revolution in economic theory provided an important precondition for the emergence of a specific economics dedicated to the study of 'development' by showing that different kinds of economic circumstances might require different kinds of economic policies. This break with what Albert Hirschman (1981) has called the 'mono economics' claim was vital in carving out an intellectual space dedicated to the study specifically of development. The division of countries into those for which classical economics was appropriate and those for which some other kind of economic theory and polices were appropriate can also be found as early as List and later in thinkers such as Rosenstein-Rodan and Gershenkron (List 1846; Rosenstein-Rodan 1943; Gershenkron 1962; see also Harriss, this volume). The legacy of this generated two issues that were played out in this tension between the general and the specific. The first was a questions of where to draw the line: it might be that developing countries had different circumstance such that they required a different kind of economics, but did they have enough in common such that
meaningful generalizations could be drawn about them, or were they all so different from one another that such generalizations were likely to be very difficult? Second, there were always students of development who rejected the claim that developing countries were relevantly different such that they required a different kind of economics (Bauer 1976, 1984; Johnson 1964, for example). While this view was marginal during the 1950s and 1960s, it emerged very forcefully in the late 1970s and 1980s.

The first generation of development economists accepted that developing countries were different and then tried to generalize about them, focusing particularly on the problems and possibilities of industrialization. As Hollis Chenery put it, “successful development in virtually all countries has been characterized by an increase in the share of manufacturing in total output” (Chenery 1979: 70). Classic studies of this kind include those by W. Arthur Lewis and Albert Hirschman, and in a slightly different vein by Raul Prebisch. Lewis argued that within subsistence (or ‘traditional’) agriculture there was a high level of under-employment of resources and low productivity, and thus very little surplus was produced. Given this, there were potentially large supplies of labor in the agricultural sector that could move to the industrial (capitalist) sector without any decrease in agricultural production (there were ‘unlimited supplies of labor’ for the capitalist sector). Wages in the industrial sector would remain low (depressed by the unlimited supply of labor) and thus profits would accrue quickly within the capitalist sector, providing a surplus that could be taxed and
invested. In this dualist model the industrial sector would be the dynamic element, sucking labor out of the stagnant subsistence agricultural sector (Lewis 1954). Lewis was clear that this model was designed to ‘help understand the contemporary problems of large areas of the earth’ (Lewis 1954: 140, italics added). While Hirshman’s account was different, stressing the role of ‘forward and backward linkages’ in stimulating industrialization through a cumulative process, it was also clearly a general theory (Hirschman 1958).

By the late 1970s the kinds of policy prescriptions that followed from these accounts came under attack as a result of the growing economic crisis affecting many developing countries, the more general global economic slow-down and the resurgence of neoclassical economics (for more detail see Toye 1987 and Williams 2011). In its place emerged another kind of generalization derived from what was seen as the universal applicability of neoclassical economic theory. Deepak Lal, one of the most famous advocates of this position, argued that “there is by now a vast body of empirical evidence from different cultures and climates which shows that uneducated peasants act economically as producers and consumers” (Lal 1983: 105). In other words, developing economies were not different in their fundamentals from developed economies: they were poorer of course, but the same kind of economic theory and the same kinds of economic policies applied to them as to all economies.
This position characterized what became known as the 'Washington Consensus' and has continued to shape the study of development in important ways (Williamson 1989). The assumption of economic rationality has been extended and elaborated in both the New Political Economy and New Institutional Economics approach to development. The former extended the rational actor model to politicians, bureaucrats and social groups more generally, and in doing so drew on theoretical accounts of the process of decision-making and the role of 'interest groups' in the politics of western states (Krueger 1974; Bates 1981; Olson 1982). The latter stressed the role that institutions, broadly understood, might play in shaping the decisions of rational economic actors, and showed that the institutional structures could play an important role in determining a country's developmental path, especially by changing the transaction costs facing economic agents (North 1990; more generally Williamson 1979). Both of these approaches were melded into the concern with good governance that emerged through the end of the 1980s and into the 1990s (for more detail see Williams 2008). Here again, the approach taken was that the consequences of good and bad governance could be generalized, and hence that policy prescriptions could be designed that were applicable to a large number of countries.

Another very important strand in the study of development that took as its aim producing generally applicable knowledge has been economic growth theory (see Yusuf, this volume). The general impetus behind this has been to develop and then test theoretical models that can
explain differential rates of economic growth. Within this broad analytical tradition there have been a number of different models. The Harrod-Domar model was an important influence on early development economists, and to some extent the World Bank too (Harrod 1948; Domar 1957). Derived from Keynesian economics, it purported to show the links between changes in investment and changes in national income. In turn this model was amended and critiqued by other growth models, including the Solow (neoclassical) Growth Model and more recently by Endogenous Growth Theory. Associated with this was also a significant amount of statistical work on the correlates of economic growth. Here again, the idea was to determine the contribution of certain factors to economic growth by using data sets that covered a large number of countries (for a discussion see Kenny and Williams 2001). The underlying assumption of both growth theory and this kind of statistical work was that economies work in fundamentally the same way and thus that it was possible to discover general causes of growth that applied to a large number of states.

These forms of generalization have always been challenged by studies of particular development successes and failures that have located the reasons for success and failure in the specific conditions and circumstances of particular countries at particular times. The most obvious examples here are the East Asian success stories. A lot of effort has gone into capturing the experience of these states under more general theories. So, for example, the World Bank in its *East Asian Miracle* report, argued that while governments in these
countries did intervene selectively in the economy, the bulk of the success of these states can be put down to sound macroeconomic policy, high level of private investment and export growth (World Bank 1993). Somewhat paradoxically, of course, some years later it was argued that some of those countries experienced a financial crisis because they did not have adequate regulation or appropriate relations between the government and the private sector (‘crony capitalism’) (Johnson 1998). But there have also been studies of these countries that challenge this kind of generalization. So, for example, studies of the developmental success of South Korea have identified a long list of contributory factors: Japanese colonialism, land reform, high levels of literacy, nationalism, geography, Confucian culture, U.S. support and protection, regional investment and trade flows, the suppression of social divisions, the particular circumstances of the global economy, and the emergence at a particular time under a particular regime of a 'developmental state' (for a selection see Leftwich 1995; Amsden 1994; Belassa 1988; Kholi 1994; Wade 1996). And, of course, all developing countries have their own set of specific features, derived from their own specific histories, including the form of colonialism, the make-up of society (social forces), forms of economic specialization, level of human capacity, and forms of government, to name just a few.

The issue here is not that some countries do not 'fit' a general theory (no general theory and no statistical conclusions can 'work' for all countries and their proponents do not argue that they can); it is that the development success (or failure) of individual states might be down to
particular, country-specific, contingent factors. And the more we know about individual countries and their particular contingent factors, the less plausible the general theories become. The final twist here is that the more we know about particular cases, the less likely it seems that general 'lessons' can be drawn for other states. The utility of the ‘developmental state’ cannot be doubted, but it certainly can be doubted whether any such state might plausibly be created in countries with very different histories and characteristics.

So we are left with a tension. On one hand, the condition of being 'underdeveloped' seems like a general one (lots of countries have experienced this) with certain general features (poverty, dominance of agriculture and so on), thus it seems to require general theories and accounts to explain it and to provide policy prescriptions for overcoming it. On the other hand, the more we know about individual countries, the more we find significant particularity and contingency that makes general theories seem inappropriate.

'Development' vs. the problems of underdevelopment

A second tension revolves around what the study of development should be generating knowledge of and for. Within discussions of 'development', a situation of 'underdevelopment' or a ‘lack of development' is usually understood to involve two related components. The first
is 'development' in some large sense —that process of economic and social transformation to something like Western modernity— with all that entails, or at the very least sustained levels of economic growth. The second is a series of particular problems that are associated with a lack of this, from malnutrition, lack of access to clean water, and high levels of maternal death, to poor infrastructure and a 'shallow' financial system. It is this that generates the enormous diversity in the study of development, but the links between knowing something about the large-scale process of development (or even the causes of sustained economic growth) is not necessarily the same as knowing how to deal with child malnutrition, for example. And of course the reverse is also the case.

As noted above, a significant part of the study of development has been concerned with large-scale transformation, whether in the form of industrialization or long-run sustained economic growth. The most ambitious of these attempts was 'modernization theory'. For modernization theorists, development was a transition to something like 'modernity' as evidenced in the industrialized West and was accompanied not just by economic changes but by a host of other related shifts in the character and organization of politics, the spread of 'rationalization', the growth in technology, and the diffusion of certain norms, habits and attitudes (for discussions see Gilman 2003; Higgott 1983). At its most simplistic the 'transition' from 'backward' to 'modern' was presented in an almost mechanical and certainly linear way as a series of 'stages' (Rostow 1959, 1971). For Gabriel Almond the
stress was on *political* modernization, and he regarded ‘modern’ political systems as those that exhibited a high degree of functional specialization, a secular political culture, a skepticism towards overly ideological politics (and a concomitant stress on the importance of bargaining and compromise), and a commitment to pluralism (Almond and Powell 1965; Almond and Verba 1965). Lucian Pye stressed the commitment to equality, the growth of the capacity of the political system, and the growth of specialization and differentiation within politics (1965). David Apter took a broader focus and argued that ‘modernization’ could be defined as the growth of complexity in human affairs, the growth of an attitude of enquiry and a questioning about the sources of political authority, and a growth of organizational complexity and functional differentiation (1965). For Dankwart Rustow, ‘modernization’ involved the growth of centralized authority, the formation of a national identity, the growth of political equality and participation and the ‘widening control over nature through closer cooperation among men’ (1968: 40).

This kind of stress on the large-scale transformations that accompanied the transition to modernity, and which in these views define the process of development itself stands in contrast to a focus on the particular problems associated with a lack of development. It has often been argued that large-scale changes might be a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for the amelioration of some of these other problems. Classically in the 1970s there was an increasing recognition that economic growth had not done enough to alleviate
poverty, particularly rural poverty. As the then President of the World Bank, Robert McNamara said in 1973, ‘the data suggest that the decade of rapid growth has been accompanied by greater maldistribution of income in many developing countries, and that the problem is most severe in the countryside (McNamara 1973). This led to a concern with, among other things, ‘basic human needs’ as a way of thinking about the problems and possibilities of development (Streeten 1981). In more recent years more stress has been laid on the alleviation of the problems associated with a lack of development, inspired in large part by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Fukado-Parr 2004). Indeed, given the evident difficulties experienced by many states in achieving sustained development, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, tackling the problems suffered by individuals as a result of a lack of development has taken on a new urgency.

At one level it seems quite reasonable that the study of development would include attempts to understand the process of development writ large, and attempts to understand how to alleviate the problems experienced by people in less-developed states. There is a tension, however, because the causal connections between the two are not always clear. As noted above, it is possible to have growth without significantly alleviating some of these problems (and growth always throws up new problems); it is possible that growth might in the end be necessary to alleviate some of these problems, but we also know that the problems themselves can be tackled with some success in the absence of sustained development. Many
human development indicators—such as life expectancy, infant mortality, and maternal death rates—have improved over the years in many countries, even those that have experienced sustained economic crisis (Kenny 2011). Finally, it is not clear (at least not in any straightforward way) how tackling these specific problems will lead to 'development' in the larger sense, raising the possibility that a country could experience higher life expectancy, greater access to clear water, a reduction in infectious diseases, and so on, and still not experience sustained development.

Another way of coming at this is to recognize that within the study of development there just are different ways of understanding the term 'development' and different priorities attached to elements of it. Studying the process of modernization or the causes of sustained economic growth is just not the same as studying how best to eradicate polio or ensure access to clean water. The contemporary situation reflects this. Achievement of the MDGs remains central to the work of many development agencies and students of development, and even if they are unlikely to be fully realized, the view that one of the principal tasks of the provision of development assistance is to reduce the suffering of people in poor countries is unlikely to go away. At the same time, as a number of countries, particularly China, have experienced high growth rates, industrialization, and urbanization, so there has been a renewed emphasis on growth strategies and what is in some respects a return to older concerns with transformation (World Bank 2005; Lin 2009).
Disciplinarity vs. inter- (multi-) disciplinarity

A third tension relates precisely to the very evident disciplinary diversity found within the study of development. The study of development has sometimes been captured under the label of 'development studies'. But this is not a discipline in the classic sense of that word. It is an object of study, but it is not a discipline because it does not have at its core a series of theories, methods, or even a clear intellectual history through which students are initiated into the discipline. As such it lacks some of the conditions for the integrated accumulation of knowledge (Harriss 2002: 487). Instead, there are lots of different disciplines that contribute: economics, politics, sociology, anthropology, agricultural engineering, marine conservation, public health and so on. This diversity is in many ways entirely appropriate as the problems experienced by development counties are diverse and multi-faceted. This has led some to suggest that 'development studies' is inter-disciplinary, although it is probably better labeled as 'multi-disciplinary' or 'cross-disciplinary'. This is because there are significant barriers to what Kanbur has called the 'deep integration' of the different disciplines (Kanbur 2002). There certainly are ways in which the different disciplines have interacted fruitfully, but the diversity of ways in which development can be studied creates its own set of problems.
One issue here is about the particular contribution of various disciplines to the study of development and whether there is some kind of hierarchy among them. In one sense economics has clearly been a dominant discipline within the study of development, and changes within that discipline have had a profound impact on the study of development (development economics, neo-liberalism, new institutional economics). In addition, it has often been assumed that economics should be the dominant discipline as the problem of development is significantly an economic one —low growth rates, low levels of investment and productivity, and high rates of poverty. This view certainly informed much of early development economics, for example. In this view, other disciplines might have something to contribute, but often in a subsidiary way —providing some insight into the difficulties of economic policy change, for example, or providing technical solutions to particular developmental problems (how best to design irrigation systems, for example). It is also fair to say that the major development agencies have been dominated by economists and economic thinking (Kanbur 2002).

While there is a certain plausibility to the dominance of the discipline of economics, there have always been approaches to development that privileged other disciplines. For many modernization theorists, the sphere of politics was the most important (Almond and Verba 1965). Samuel Huntington, for example, stressed the importance of political order, created through strong political institutions, as the key to the process of development (Huntington
1968). In the period after the Cold War, with the emergence of good governance and democracy promotion as important parts of the agenda of many aid donors, political variables were seen as not just important, but in some respects as primary. The logic of this is clear: it is only through 'good' politics that appropriate economic policies and strategies can be developed and implemented. In other words, while the discipline of economics might be able to identify the right thing to do, it is only students of politics who can know whether and how this knowledge can be implemented.

Some attempts have been made to marry economics and politics. One of the most important was the extensive literature that emerged about the political economy of adjustment (see Kreuger et al 1991/1992, and Kreuger 1993 for some examples). The problem here was how to understand the successes and failures of attempts to liberalize the economy and reduce the role of the state in developing countries. While some important conclusions no doubt emerged from this effort it was in fact largely an attempt to use the tools of economic analysis in the study of political processes, rather than any genuine dialogue between economists and students of the politics of developing countries (Harriss 2002). This is one example of what has been criticized as the intellectually domineering character of economics more generally (Milonakis and Fine 2009).
Beyond the discipline of politics, other disciplines have also been seen as crucial to understanding the problems and processes of development. Both sociology and anthropology have been seen as making a vital contribution. This can be seen at both a macro and a micro level. At the macro level it has often been argued that forms of politics in developing countries derive from the kinds of social forces or groups that make up society. This has been argued to be important in both successful countries such as South Korea, where the state was able to achieve a certain kind of autonomy from social groups, and in more troublesome cases in Africa where the state is 'captured' by its society (White 1988; Hyden 1983). In both these cases the ability of politics to deliver developmentally successful economic policies is shaped by the society over which it governs. At the more micro level it has been argued that anthropology for example, can tell us a lot about the local circumstances within which development projects and programs are implemented and, following from this, how these might be made more effective. The increased importance attached to community participation and ownership and to the role of civil society organizations reflects in important ways this more anthropological approach to development and the necessity of gaining more detailed knowledge of the local and particular. At their most ambitious these kinds of approaches have produced a kind of anthropology of economic policies and practices, stressing the ways in which certain kinds of economic practices —market exchange for example— get adapted and transformed within existing institutions and practices (Harrison 2010). In turn, however, this kind of knowledge forces us to question the utility of certain economic theories, for example,
as the expected outcomes derived from them are often not forthcoming because of the ways local actors adapt or subvert them. Privatization of state-owned enterprises might be a very sensible way to reduce government deficits and increase productivity, but it also provides an opportunity for local actors to adapt this process to their own political or economic ends in ways that may subvert these aims (Tangri 1999).

This points to the complexity of the issues involved in development, and it might simply result in a call for the various disciplines involved to learn from one another. But there are serious barriers to this. In the first place each discipline has its own journals, professional associations, academic departments, conferences, and so on. Students of development, from whatever discipline, face pressures to work within these to gain promotion or peer respect. Related to this, but probably more serious, is that different disciplines value different kinds of study: they have different epistemological orientations. The production of general models and theories is highly valued in economics, but much less so in anthropology, for example. Detailed local knowledge (and language acquisition) is the cornerstone of anthropology (and area studies), but not something most economists bother themselves with. Associated with this has sometimes been a mutual antagonism between disciplines based on what they perceive as the evident methodological inadequacies of other disciplines. Economics, for example—with its emphasis on parsimony, logical deduction and hypothesis testing, often
involve extensive quantitative analysis— has sometimes presented itself as being more 'rigorous' than other social sciences disciplines. According to this view, those disciplines that are more qualitative, or do not generate testable hypotheses can be seen as less rigorous or 'softer'. On the other hand, of course, anthropologists often counter by criticizing economics for being too abstract and formal and uninterested in the detailed understanding of the rules, norms and self-understanding that, anthropologists think actually shape human choices (see Harriss 2002 for a discussion). Anthropologists also sometimes counter by applying the tools of anthropology to economic study of development, exposing, so they think, the contextual character and unacknowledged assumptions that underpin it (see Escobar 1995; Li 2007; and for a discussion Kanbur and Riles 2004). Related to this, different disciplines simply see different things when they look at the world —they have different ontological orientations. It is all very well to say that economics and anthropology ought to learn from each other, but it is not clear how this can begin when the starting point of each discipline comes close to denying the utility of the other: economists see a world of economies many of which are thought to operate in the same kind of way and which can be perceived as a discrete 'things' that can be analyzed in isolation from their broader context; while anthropologists tend to deny that there are any such generally applicable economic laws, or at least if there are, they operate within a dense web of other social and political interactions.
There is a danger here of a kind of mutual rejection, a disciplinary policing that demarcates what can count as proper knowledge of developing countries. But there seems no very good reason why different disciplines might not be able to contribute in different ways to different kinds of questions. Anthropologists might not have much to say about exchange rates, but equally, economists might not be best placed to talk about gender dynamics within households. The real difficulty comes when some more substantial combination of the insights from different disciplines is attempted. As we have suggested there are some real difficulties with this. On the other hand it may be that one way to do this is during the process of policy formulation: ensuring that different voices can be introduced into the conversation and some kind of rounded account of the problems and possibilities of different policy options developed (Kanbur 2002). This puts the onus on development agencies to create the conditions for these kinds of exchanges, but at least in principle there is no reason to think this cannot be done.

**Conclusion**

It is important to note that in spite of these tensions, and possibly because of them, we have learned a huge amount from the study of development. Our knowledge would certainly be
depleted if we only had general theories of development or if development was only studied within economics or politics. And in many respects the study of development has generated significant knowledge that has proved vital to the process of development itself. One cannot help feeling, however, that these tensions are going to be hard to overcome, and it is going to be hard to reach any kind of middle ground within any of the three that have been identified here. There are too many disciplines and methodologies involved and too many different kinds of problems to study. And the great diversity evident in the study of development illustrates the tremendous complexity and multi-faceted character of the process itself and the wide scope of the agenda of development agencies.

There are, however, some signs that at least some of these tensions have been recognized, and perhaps some tentative signs that students of development are trying to think again about how the study of development should proceed in the future. At the most general level this involves trying to balance general accounts of the necessary conditions for development with a recognition of the specific circumstances facing different countries at different times. The World Bank, for example, has recently argued that more attention needs to be paid to “the need for differentiated policy recommendations for different countries at different stages of development. Differences between countries . . . lead to different implications regarding the appropriate institutions and policy frameworks” (World Bank 2010: 10). “Greater emphasis on development strategy must be balanced against the now well-understood fact that there is
no ‘one size fits all’ solution to the challenge of promoting growth and overcoming poverty” (World Bank 2010: 11). Associated with this, the Bank argues that a ‘more pragmatic and empirical approach to policy making' needs to be encouraged' (World Bank 2010: 9). This points in the direction of recognizing more explicitly the limits of general models or theories of development, or at least of trying to understand where and when divergences from the policy implications of general models might be appropriate. It also points clearly to the need for more country specific knowledge —a recognition of the fact that countries are different in their physical and human capital endowments and in the structures of their economies.

In the course of discussing the future direction of its research on development, the Bank has also made some important points about the economic study of development. It argues that “many research economists do not start with the key knowledge gaps facing development practitioners but rather search for questions they can answer with the field's currently favored tools. Considerable emphasis is given to internal validity, but external validity is not addressed with the same rigor” (World Bank 2010: 11). In other words, economists approach development through the theories and methodologies that dominate the discipline, and the value of this work is defined in these terms rather than in terms of what it might contribute to the business of development policymaking. This points in the direction of recognizing that the sometimes rather abstract work done in the discipline of economics needs to be more firmly anchored in an appreciation of the complexity of the process of development.
For an institution like the World Bank, which has long been criticized for having a 'one size fits all' approach to development policy derived from general economic theories, to make these claims is an important sign of how some of the tensions within the study of development have been recognized, and it is also a sign of an attempt to make more explicit the need to steer some kind of middle path through them. A number of others have made similar points. Justin Lin, until recently chief economist at the World Bank, has argued that the role of the government in the process of development might be significant, and importantly, that it will vary from country to country (see Lin 2009). Dani Rodrik has argued that while certain basic conditions are necessary for development, “the appropriate growth policies are almost always context specific” (Rodrik 2007: 4).

It is too early to say how widely adopted these general prescriptions for the study of development will be, and they do not resolve in any simple way the tensions this chapter has identified. But they do suggest a potentially important way forward. They also suggest that there some kind of 'learning process' is at work within the broad field of the study of development. It might be slow and faltering, but as the example of the World Bank shows, the commitment to development can drive a process of reflection that holds out the possibility that the study of development will tell us more and more about what governments and development agencies ought to do to encourage development.
References


