

Epilogue

Abstract

How will development thought and practice evolve over the next fifty years? Looking back, there has been tremendous progress in well-being among nations. The objectives of development broadened, from income and distribution, to education and health, to political empowerment and human capabilities. Looking forward, the development agenda is diversifying and consolidating: Brazil and Burundi have different priorities, yet all countries share common challenges in fulfilling the aspirations of their citizens. The old dichotomy of North versus South is giving way to a more porous ecology, drawing on insights from across the natural and social sciences and thinking generated within developing countries. In an interconnected world, ideas and approaches must be relevant to poverty and distribution in both richer and poorer countries. The era of grand narratives may be closing, but it opens opportunities for practicing development as “one experiment at a time.”

Keywords: international development, future of development, discourse, developing countries, thinking, practice, discourse, experimentation, poverty, distribution

Where We Are

The chapters in this volume have addressed the evolution of development thought and its interactions with development practice over the past seven decades since the Second World War. Will the trends identified in the volume endure? How will development thought and practice evolve over the next fifty to seventy years? We speculate on the answers to these questions in these brief concluding lines to the volume. In doing so we draw on the chapters in the volume but also on the proceedings of a very special meeting of development thinkers and practitioners held outside New York City in September 2012. The two days of discussions compared development thought today to fifty years ago, how development thought and practice have influenced each other, how economics has interacted with the broader social sciences in the development discourse, and what influence the natural sciences have had for their part. Most importantly, however, the group looked to the future to identify key features of the development terrain that are already visible as we look ahead, and features and contingencies we are very likely to encounter in the next half century.

The background to the forward-looking exercise is the charting of where we are today, particularly in comparison to fifty years ago. This backdrop can be summarized in terms of five propositions:

- There has been tremendous progress in virtually all dimensions of well-being among nations that were regarded as “developing” fifty years ago. On average, incomes have risen, poverty has fallen, health and education have improved for men and women, and democracy has spread.
- However, this progress has been uneven over time, across nations and within nations. Economic growth has started and then faltered. In Africa, only the last ten years have brought a period of sustained economic growth. Latin America, Africa and Eastern Europe all had their “lost decades.” East and Southeast Asia, and after them China and then India, have seen spectacular advances. But even in India and China regional inequalities have grown, gender inequalities persists notably in sex-selective abortion, and (in the case of India especially) malnutrition is higher than would be expected given income growth.
- In development thinking, the objectives of development have broadened, from a narrow focus on per capita income growth to its distribution, to education and health, to political empowerment, to capabilities in the broadest sense, and now perhaps even to include

“happiness.” However all-encompassing or seemingly infinite, ideology and the nexus of interests and ideas is critical for understanding development policy making. The opportunities for any nation are constrained not only by the availability of resources and access to international finance, trade, and technology, but by established interests at home, including the desires and patience of citizens.

- The actors in the development discourse have changed, too. There has been a broadening from the initial focus on individuals toward groups as the distinctive role of women as economic actors in development has been addressed, and as ethnic and other group based identities have been recognized as important. Further, civil society has been inserted into conventional debates on the balance between the roles of market and state in development strategy.
- Political economy frameworks for analyzing development have become more prominent as discussion of the role of groups has become important, and as the gap between technocratic proposals for development intervention and their actual implementation has come into focus. As part of this movement, economics, though still dominant in the development discourse, has increasingly been challenged, complemented and

supplemented by other disciplines such as sociology, political science, philosophy, history, and the natural sciences.

The Next Fifty Years

The changes identified in the lines above are big changes. How will they play out? What will the development terrain, in thought and practice, look like fifty years from now? Some thoughts in the form of interconnected propositions for debate and discussion:

- In some dimensions, the development agenda will become hugely diversified. Managing middle class vulnerability in Brazil and managing conflict in Burundi cannot easily be brought into the same framework. But in other dimensions, the development agenda will become more unified, as the globalized integration of production and finance can be expected to continue, unless this is disrupted by catastrophic events or untoward political developments. The middle classes of all countries will face similar pressures. How the interests and actions of the middle class conflict—or cooperate—with those of the disadvantaged and the elites in each country will play critical role in shaping domestic politics and opportunities for development.

- Ongoing trends in international migration, financial flows and climate change will ensure that cross-border, regional and global spillovers and interactions will come to be as important in the development discourse as national development policy.
- Within countries, the policy importance of addressing inequality will increase even as average incomes grow and human development indicators improve overall. And horizontal inequality across socio-politically salient groupings, including by gender, ethnicity, religion and region, will be central, not least to political stability and national cohesion.
- The appropriate balance between state and market will still be a central focus of development debates. However, the nature of the state itself will come under pressure in the next fifty years, first from global forces requiring pooling of sovereignty, and second from demands for democratic devolution of power. As incomes grow, and even if they do not, demand for participation in decision making in general, and in development policy making in particular, will grow. Social technology will aid this process, including new forms of communication, which enable people with shared interests to connect,

organize, and form new collective identities and generate action. Autocratic approaches will not be the wave of the future, and purely technocratic approaches will invariably fail to satisfy the aspirations of all citizens.

- Global issues and national development will jointly frame the global compact, which will not be limited just to development discussions. The current international architecture of cooperation will undergo change in a number of fundamental ways. Aid from rich countries will not play as salient of a role as it has had over the last fifty years. Hitherto developing countries will have more voice in organizations dominated by currently industrialized countries. Some institutions created to address immediate post-war problems will become increasingly irrelevant while new ones emerge to deal with problems like climate change. Development organizations per se will give way to other mechanisms to address poverty and inequality, not just in poor countries—indeed, these issues may be mediated in a decentralized manner through social technology, without the need for a formal official organization at the center.
- Development thinking as we have known it for the past five decades, as a North-South or poor country-rich country dialogue, will give way to a more porous ecology. Insights on

development come from a wide array of actors, across the natural and social sciences, and not just those self-identified with the narrow disciplines of international relations, development studies, or development economics. More importantly, development thinking will come from developing countries themselves, and ideas and approaches will be seen to have relevance to poverty and distribution challenges in both richer and poorer countries in an interconnected world.

What Role for Thinkers?

Fifty years ago much thinking about development was “overarching” in nature. The Big Push, Marxian interpretations, Dependencia theory, Basic Needs, the Washington Consensus, these labels provide a signpost to the evolution of development thinking. Will development thinking be similarly “overarching” in the coming fifty years? Certainly the issues are no less important—climate change, ethnic conflict, rising inequality, global financial coordination, etc. And yet it seems to us that the future of the development discourse will have to address a diverse reality (Brazil versus Burundi) and multiple objectives of development (per capita income, sustainability, human development, empowerment, happiness), with the result that no single discipline and certainly not economics will be able to span the discourse by itself.

There will continue to be a debate between “big ideas” in development versus development seen as “one experiment at a time.” But the greater diversity of country and region specific development circumstances does seem to suggest that the era of overarching frameworks or nostrums is over, because the development discourse itself has become wide and ambitious, with multiple locations.

This does not of course mean the end of development thought. It will be needed for careful and rigorous building of arguments and analysis of evidence along the many dimensions and the many locations of development. And it will increasingly come from developing countries themselves. While inter-linkages between different aspects of development will still need to be explored, grand overarching theses that encompass the whole of the development paradigm are unlikely to thrive, and development thinkers of tomorrow will need a new humility when faced with growing complexity of the development terrain.

This does not make development thought and practice any less exciting than the last fifty years. Just different. And perhaps more so.