

# Social development policies: new challenges for the social sciences

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## Introduction

The International Forum on the Social Science – Policy Nexus (IFSP) is intended to highlight the importance of social science engagement in a number of today’s critical issues, especially as they relate to developing countries. Social scientists are inundated with exhortations to be relevant to the societies they live in. They are implored not to subject social science to the imperatives of analytical tools and methods. Policy-makers bemoan the drift in the social sciences towards what they consider irrelevant abstractions. This is a fair complaint. All too often, research driven by tools or methods has led to the mastery of new techniques rather than to identifying – let alone answering – questions of immediate importance. The theme is a recurring one and its persistence must be a sign that no satisfactory answer has been found.

I touch in this article on three issues. First, I consider the forces driving the new interest in research on development, and how this constellation of forces shapes the research agenda. Second, I address the problematic nature of the interface between researchers and policy-makers and third, I outline what I understand to be the current challenges for the social sciences. I then suggest a new way of synthesising theories and techniques from various social science disciplines and study areas to produce knowledge

that is appropriately structured for the issues now on the social agenda, especially the problems of poverty and underdevelopment, democratic transition and consolidation, and social protection and inclusion.

The IFSP is premised on the belief that (a) the problems of development warrant close and critical attention by the social sciences; (b) the social sciences can contribute to addressing many of the problems on the development agenda and (c) there are numerous social actors eager to listen to social scientists and willing to put to use the knowledge and insights from the social sciences. Only 30 years ago none of these propositions would have raised an eyebrow. In the heyday of development studies, leading social scientists, at least those in the developing world, paid close attention to the problems of development and took it for

granted that serious study and research would contribute to development. It was further assumed that policy-makers were out to maximise a social welfare function for the benefit of society. For a while, social scientists working on developing countries saw themselves as engaged in an emancipatory project of modernisation, development and nation-building. There was a general acceptance of Marx’s proposition in his 11th thesis on Feuerbach that the task of philosophy was not simply to engage in exegesis

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on society's problems within the cloistered ivory tower of academia, but to change society for the better.

In today's world there is much less certainty about the veracity of these propositions and people are much less sanguine about the intentions of policy-makers. In some academic circles development discourse became a subject of academic derision, especially among those of a post-modernist disposition who harboured a deep suspicion of "development", considering it as the child of the flawed Enlightenment project. In some academic circles the crisis of the emancipatory project of nation-building and development also induced a sense of despondency and cynicism.

Several factors account for this disenchantment with and recoil from the utopian ambitions of the nationalist and developmentalist project. The development project had failed to be inclusive. It had authoritarian and dirigiste features and was embedded in an international order of extreme asymmetry in power and access to resources, and was used in geopolitical games to manipulate. All these features were made even more repellent by the development crisis of the 1980s and the subsequent lost decades, especially in Latin America and Africa. Furthermore, many of the new social movements spawned by the crisis were suspicious of meta-projects such as development, which they viewed as Eurocentric, elite-driven and "antipolitics". They thus confined themselves to micro-level projects in which local participation was a key factor. In addition, the rise of ideologies in which greed played a central role posed a challenge to the many utopias that had placed various forms of social solidarity at their core.

These factors nourished doubts not only about the capacity of researchers to inform policies and the moral appropriateness of their doing so, but also about the commitment of policy-makers to use rational and evidence-based research recommendations. Given the assumption that policy-makers were driven by crass material self-interest or retrograde primordial ties, it was difficult to argue for research addressed to them. At best, research might be useful to donors and insulated technocratic change teams.

For a while there was a glut of literature declaring that the disciplines devoted to

addressing problems of underdevelopment were dead or, at least, terminally ill. Development theories that had been associated among aid donors with the putatively failed developmentalist project lost ground. Strategic thinking about development was accused of lying behind the interventionism that had produced bloated states and distorted markets. In any case, given the triumph of what Hirschman has called *monoeconomics* (Hirschman 1981) and its colonisation of other disciplines, it was believed that there was no need for a specialised discipline called development studies. The new social movements viscerally opposed to top-down development policy-making believed that what was needed was participatory research that was directly linked to action. In the more extreme cases of voluntarism, this tendency seemed to focus on changing the world without really knowing or understanding it. Although this period was mercifully brief, much was lost due to the gap in accumulation of policy experience in the South. The baby had been thrown out with the bathwater.

## The research drivers

Fortunately, even as development was declared dead in some academic and policy circles and among some social movements, political actors in governments and various other institutions insisted that the issues of development remain on the agenda. Indeed, one can speak of a resurgence of interest in development issues towards the end of the 1990s. Aid donors once again insisted on the importance of carrying out research that would be relevant to developing countries. There was considerable soul-searching among the researchers themselves over the relevance of their work to burning issues of our time. Many social movements also demanded knowledge about development processes. The forces that have driven these sentiments and demands serve to focus and drive research and determine what research will be carried by whom and at whose behest. Thus, they need to be understood.

One such driving force has been the seriousness and recalcitrance of the social problems crying out for attention, and the belief that social sciences can in fact contribute to the

resolution of some of these problems. Poverty will simply not be silenced.

A second has been the demand of various social actors at the national level, many of whom have only recently been empowered by the wave of democratisation sweeping the world. Scandalised by the persistence of poverty, many social and political movements in the developed countries have begun once again to engage with issues of development and are clamouring for alternatives to the anti-development agenda of stabilisation and debt servicing. They have called for alternatives and paradigm shifts, appealing to researchers to come up with new ideas. The resurgence of interest in development by the so-called “third sector” has also created new demands for research as an input in advocacy and service delivery.

The emerging global agenda pushed by the international system, including the UN and transnational civil society, has been a third driving force. Numerous international conferences have insisted on the importance of issues such as poverty eradication, social justice and human rights. The great UN conferences of the 1990s placed these issues on the development agenda, along with democratisation, social protection and equality. Many declarations of universal goals of social well-being have been adopted, the most significant of which are the Millennium Development goals (MDGs). This new international agenda has given impetus to new research efforts and has already spawned a research industry on how individual countries will be able to meet these goals, or whether they will be left behind.

A fourth driver has been the strong belief in evidence-based policy-making, which was partly driven by consensus on most matters pertaining to development policy. The end of the Cold War and the putative triumph of the west led to the euphoric pronouncement that we had come to the end of history, which had hitherto been characterised by great ideological divides. Ideological blinkers and commitment had made it impossible to make rational policy decisions on the basis of evidence. It became possible to argue that the end of the sharp ideological divisions both globally and within nation states was facilitating consensus on key issues. Differences of opinion could be resolved simply by bringing more empirical evidence to bear on an issue. This

new era opened space for evidence-based policy-making by obviating the need to pay attention to conflicting claims on ways of knowing. Science entered policy in a more roundabout way, involving dialogue, conflict and compromise, than is suggested by the positivist view of evidence-based policy-making.

The last but not the least driving factor that I mention has been the needs of the donor community, which discovered that many ideas around which it had formed a consensus simply did not work. They began talking about second generation or post-Washington consensus reforms. While the phase of market liberalisation was relatively easy, requiring a few technocrats at the Central Bank and Ministry of Finance, supported by a “strong” executive, to push through currency devaluations and fiscal policies, the institutions required by the new agenda are much more complex than those implied by the mantra of getting prices right. Indeed, aid donors themselves have concluded that for their interventions to be effective they must be sector wide, comprehensive, evidence based, cutting edge, best practice, outcome oriented, empowering, accountable, transparent, participatory, and so on. The new agenda has placed a premium on such matters as knowledge about governance, social capital and institutions.

But this broad new agenda encompasses two contradictory propositions. One is that the ownership of policies should be returned to the developing countries after decades of untrammelled remote management of these economies by international financial institutions, yet, on the other hand, there are demands for increasing the monitoring of aid. This hands-on approach and the need for greater control of policy processes in what is essentially a terra incognita increase information requirements, placing, in turn, a high premium on usable knowledge in the form of consultancies. Donors have found themselves on the edge of a yawning gap between the knowledge required for their broad agenda and their self-imposed monitoring and evaluation procedures that come with their more hands-on approach to policy-making. To put it simply, they do not have the capacity to generate, manage and use the required information. The new agenda has thus required the mobilisation of sociologists, anthropologists, human geographers and political scientists. Undaunted by this

gap, many donors now see themselves as knowledge institutions, without really thinking through what would be required of them to merit such a lofty status or what this would do to the accessibility of knowledge in developing countries themselves.

## **The interface between research and policy-making**

These forces, together with the new interest in development research, are pulling in different directions that do not make the life of researchers easy. In many cases the public demand on social scientists is driven by the simple appeal either to the adage, “who pays the piper calls the tune”, or to some moral imperative derived from the view that the problems facing contemporary societies do not allow the luxury of a research agenda that is determined entirely by the whims of academia. Such demands are made even more persistently on institutions designed to address policy matters. Sometimes the demands are couched in the language of the market, which insists that research should be demand driven. The more populist variants of this argument insist that the research agenda should be determined by the grassroots and be conducted and disseminated in a manner that leads to popular empowerment. However, taken to their extreme, both positions can be self-defeating, rendering the social sciences worthless by denying their creative and critical roles. Simply playing the paid-for tunes might lead to research whose horizon is limited by the views of those with money. At worst, it might lead to research that is relevant only to narrow interests. We see the effects of such a position in the growth of a kind of barefoot empiricism engendered by the demands of NGOs for actionable knowledge, or in thick consultancy reports churned out by the aid industry. The effect of all this is to undermine research by tying it down to the mindless production of reports.

## **The hiatus between knowledge production and its use**

A frequent concern of policy-makers is the gap between their own needs and the production of

knowledge in research institutions. I believe this is a legitimate concern, but I also believe that the hiatus between research and policy is often exaggerated. Policy-makers are influenced by the intellectual climate and, even, by the fads and fashions of the time. This is partly because, in many ways, they are products of their countries’ research and educational systems and get glimpses of academic thinking in various consultancy reports and some of the middle-brow media. Much of the toolbox that policy-makers carry around is cobbled together from the research results that have filtered down to them through a variety of channels.

Policy-makers often share the same *Weltanschauung* and often think within the same paradigm. Paradigms can remain dominant if there are no alternatives and if they continue to answer satisfactorily the questions posed within them. But all paradigms have their blind spots, so that at least some of the evidence undermining them will simply not be seen. It is this, rather than an absence of knowledge, that accounts for the persistence of policies that are contradicted by actual experience and available knowledge. So the issue, often, is not one of knowledge versus ignorance, but of knowledge authorised by different paradigms and acquired by policy-makers at any given time. As Mark Twain observed, what does damage is not what we do not know, but what we do know that is just not so. In the development context, one is not dealing with donors who know nothing about a recipient country, but with donors who bring along with them a baggage of knowledge that is often highly stylised and preconceived.

I noted that the view that we had somehow come to the end of history has nourished the belief that policy can be made on the basis of evidence. It has also encouraged the insistence on consensus. Part of the new, supposedly evidence-based, consensus reflects unilateral declarations by those with the most influence and power of what is “universal” or “true”. But much of this is artificial; an artificiality that is often concealed by buzzwords that falsely suggest common understanding.

This poses two problems for researchers. First, it entails a premature foreclosure of inquiry and debate, and the insistence on “one-size-fits-all” policy proposals. Second, it puts pressure on researchers to fit their work into the

mould cast by this consensus. Aid donors' quest for knowledge is thus vitiated by the attempts of researchers to substantiate the a priori beliefs of policy-makers; beliefs that do not always make them receptive to discomfiting research outcomes. Research might be pleasing when it supports existing prejudices and is produced off the peg to meet the deadlines of men and women of action, but this also makes it a less useful social activity.

The wise view for donors to take is that expressed by the head of the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) who said, after noting that DFID likes to think of itself as a department that stresses evidence-based policy and that actively supports research and capacity building:

We worry that like all large bureaucracies, we probably find it easier to take on board research that calls for incremental shifts within our existing paradigm and to dismiss the first buds of research which are harbingers of paradigm shift. I welcome the Development Studies Association's role in challenging the status quo and as the champions of change. Autonomous research carried out by researchers not preoccupied by today's policy imperatives is more likely to be ground-breaking in terms of changing the way we work – so retaining independent, autonomous space for research by academic institutions, civil society organisations and others is critical. (Ahmed 2004)

Policy-makers also frequently lament that research results take too long to reach them. This is a valid concern. It is true that there is sometimes too much of a lag between the production and utilisation of knowledge. Some of this is inevitable. However, while the time lag can be reduced, it cannot be entirely removed, given the nature of research and its cumbersome but essential protocols of validation. New knowledge must undergo complex processes of academic and scientific validation before it can be implemented. The rhetoric notwithstanding, social science is financed largely as research for knowledge rather than research for action. This being said, researchers must take their social responsibility by critically examining their part of the bargain to see whether they are doing useful work and are doing their best to make their work relevant and accessible without compromising the integrity of the research process.

## The appropriation of knowledge

The disparate driving forces behind development research and the asymmetries among them in terms of power and influence raise serious questions about the appropriation of knowledge. Development is a process of self-discovery involving learning by trial and error and by selective borrowing to fit the context and specificities of particular country situations. The implication here is that more of the knowledge on development generated by research ought to be aimed at informing the citizens of the poor countries themselves rather than aid donors. I stated earlier that the need for closer monitoring and the broadening of the development agenda had led to greater donor demands for information. One effect of this is the increased appropriation of knowledge on the developing countries by the donors themselves. By design or by default, significant research results circulate among donors even when the nationals themselves have conducted the research. The commodification of development research through the ubiquitous consultancy industry has compounded matters. In some poor countries national governments have simply been priced out of the knowledge market and can access national research capacity only through externally funded consultancies. The knowledge produced at the behest of external funders may be useful knowledge about developing countries, but it is not necessarily knowledge for developing countries.

## Contemporary challenges

Let me now turn to the third part of this article – that dealing with the contemporary social sciences challenges. Ever since their modern reincarnation, the social sciences have had to deal with at least four aspects of change. The first and most basic of these has been the process of biological and social reproduction. The second has been the concern over what Adam Smith called the “wealth of nations”. The third has been the question of the distribution of such wealth and its translation into the life chances of individuals and different social categories. The fourth has stemmed from the fact that progress has always been Janus-faced, in a sense

something of a Faustian bargain, the creative destruction of which has brought forth both the positive and darker sides process, disrupting the security of people's livelihoods, social relations and social institutions and inducing societies to seek ways of protecting individuals or communities from the ravages of change and attaining some modicum of social progress. Successful policies have achieved in all these tasks, although the weight given to each of them has differed between countries and, within each country, from period to period.

Even today social policy must be concerned with the redistributive effects of economic policy, protecting people from the vagaries of the market and the changing circumstances of age, enhancing the productive potential of members of society, and sharing the burden of reproduction and reconciling it with other social tasks. The pursuit of only one of these goals to the exclusion of others can cause problems that might undermine the goal chosen. Thus, for example, a focus only on the distributive functions of social policy would ultimately be unsustainable as both demographics and economic stagnation asserted themselves. It would thus have no moral or political basis for its legitimacy, and would therefore implode politically. A purely distributivist state would run aground because it would not have the material wherewithal for its policies and no political support from the middle classes. This was the fate of the populist regimes, whose exclusive focus on distribution often led to an inflation and stagnation that left the poor worse off than they were initially. And a purely protectivist regime would fail on both grounds, and would not cope with the dynamics of demography.

### **The issue of agency**

One other old concern of the social sciences has been the relation between structure and agency. Indeed, one distinguishing feature of theories of social change is the relative weight they attach to each aspect, and their understanding of the dialectical interplay between them – that is, the interplay between intention and process.

The point about agency now extends to our understanding of poverty. As emphasised by Amartya Sen, the concepts of human development and human rights share an underlying

universalistic vision of the human being as an agent. This vision leads to ask what may be the basic conditions that normally enable an individual to function as an agent. The aspect of agency and intention as central to development has thus given rise to the question, "Who is developing whom?" Who is entrusted with the task of development by whom, and with what degree of autonomy and accountability? Until quite recently in much of the world, colonial powers assumed the trusteeship of development, whether as "the white man's burden", or the French "*mission civilisatrice*" or America's "manifest destiny". The anti-colonial struggle and wars of liberation challenged such premises and insisted upon national ownership of the development process. However, with the attainment of independence together with the continued colonial ties and the emergent imperial order, the question of trusteeship was quite left unresolved.

For a while, the view prevailed that trusteeship would be given to local elites who would act unencumbered by societal demands for immediate gratification. Development, so the argument went, entails traversing a vale of tears of inequality, forced savings and discipline which would be best guided by strong governments. Such strength was often interpreted to mean authoritarian rule. The developmentalist state thus emerged as the map of the future through its plans, as arbitrator of social conflicts, protector of the nation-state and, generally, as a blessing to society. But even in this context of modernisation, democratisation never completely disappeared from view. Modernisation predicted that the social change (including education, urbanisation, unionisation and professionalisation) that follows industrialisation would produce a chain reaction that would lead, in turn, to more open, participatory politics. But one had to wait for this linear process to unfold.

Today the issue of democracy has been brought back onto the development agenda, in part by the clamour of large sections of society for their human rights and in part due to the recognition that the ownership of policies matters. There is now a general view that good governance must entail democracy, although even today participation is still circumscribed to the spaces authorised by the powerful.

## **The challenge of poverty and development**

Poverty, we now know, is a multidimensional syndrome and the linkages among its constitutive elements imply that the eradication of poverty requires a broad policy agenda. Indeed, the agenda spans the gamut of development. The recognition of this multidimensionality is partly reflected in the new international and national poverty agendas, including the MDGs. There is, however, no one-to-one link between an MDG relating to a particular sector and policies relating solely to that sector. The outcome in a given sector depends to a great extent on factors outside it. The combined effects of interventions and policies, and their articulation as social policy, are likely to yield the greatest returns. Multidisciplinary research will be required to avoid the danger that specialised international agencies and their ministerial counterparts at the national level each focus on a particular goal that falls under their mandate, thus losing sight of the interconnectedness of all the goals. There is an even more real danger that the broad agenda of development implied by the multidimensionality of poverty may be undercut by some of the current strategies on poverty reduction.

## **The challenge of social inequality**

One major trend of the 1980s and 1990s was the increase in social inequality in virtually every country, and the persistence of what the World Bank has called egregious disparities. Now, the growing interest in equity and poverty brings to the forefront of development policy the social question that has preoccupied thinkers about social policies ever since the beginning of the industrial revolution.

## **Towards a new synthesis**

In the past it was widely assumed and accepted that the means would be different from the ends, that countries would ultimately traverse the vale of tears and overcome authoritarian rule, inequality and social exclusion. It seems to me that the real challenge of social policy is how promote the ends of democracy, equity and

social inclusion with the means of democracy, equity and social inclusion. If one accepts this new understanding, one is immediately struck by the fact that research on development is not structured in a manner that would address these issues; the interconnections between which are often merely given perfunctory recognition. There is still a striking disjuncture among various areas of concern and fields of research, all of which claim to address issues of human equality and agency. I will illustrate this by juxtaposing some research areas.

## **Democracy and development**

Theorising about developmental states has only marginally concerned itself with issues of democratisation and is only now coming to terms with democratic developmentalism. There is a vast literature on developmental states that says very little about democratisation, except perhaps to point out to the oddity of an actually democratic developmental state. In many countries the developmental state was authoritarian. The theoretical arguments advanced for the need for such an authoritarian order, such as the trade-offs between economic growth (efficiency) and social and political rights and the need for a hard state to conquer the steep ascent of development, are well known. In such a view, both democracy and equity constitute end states of the development process and could not be part of the process itself. There was, however, never convincing empirical evidence for such iron laws, and even if they were suggested by the past these did not constitute the final word on how societies would move forward. Many political actors today reject these putative iron laws and seek ways of building societies that are developmental, democratic and socially inclusive.

Outside Latin American literature, which had problematised the developmental states by stressing the bureaucratic and authoritarian features of such states and the socially exclusive nature of their policies, the developmental state literature rarely talked about problems of democratisation and human rights. Much of the literature on Asian developmental states tended to consider their authoritarian character as simply one aspect of the autonomy of the state, which was somehow made bearable by its

embeddedness and its spectacular success in development. The African literature focused on how to make authoritarian regimes stronger and more developmental. Indeed, the high economic growth rates achieved by authoritarian regimes were used to support the view that the suspension of human rights was the price one had to pay in the process of development. This was part of the full belly thesis (you can't eat democracy) or the vale of tears that had to be crossed before entry the promised land of economic well-being. States themselves often claimed there was a sequence of rights and the right to development took precedence.

Similarly, the literature on democratic transitions and consolidation, while acknowledging the importance of material conditions, said very little about what democratic practices and capabilities can be brought to bear on development. We are only now beginning to examine how the intrinsic properties of democracy can facilitate development. In some circles democracy is as seen as good for development because it ensures accountability and property rights. For some, democracy is desirable because it places human agency at the core of the development process. For others, any attempt to relate democracy and development is seen as a retreat from the view that democracy is an end itself, and a surrender to the substantivist/instrumentalist discourse linking democracy to material well-being and placing the right to development on a par with human rights. And yet I believe democracies must be preoccupied with the material conditions of their reproduction and consolidation. Even for the developed countries the debate about the quality of democracy suggests that concern with the substantive, developmental aspects of democracy is not merely a developmentalist prejudice.

### **Equality and development**

Over the years a trade-off between equality and growth had been taken for granted. Recent empirical evidence, however, suggests that such a negative relationship is not robust and that in fact equality may be an important stimulus to growth through various channels such as human capital formation, political stability, market size and overall macroeconomic policy. In the developmental state literature, equality was

thought of as simply one of the enabling initial conditions often imposed by some exogenous force. There was much less interest in the study of growing inequality in developmental states. This question concerns development paths that could ensure virtuous cycles of increasing equality and growth. Once such paths are identified, however, the transition costs to move from an undesirable to a desirable path are not always well understood. The literature of developmental states is replete with arguments that welfare initiatives have played an important role in consolidating the power of authoritarian regimes. In contrast, very little work shows how social policies might play similar roles in democratic transitions and consolidation, and how this can be done without undermining the developmental efforts of new democracies.

### **Welfare and democracy**

The concern for both human development and democracy is premised on the notion of agency, which, in turn, builds on the capabilities of the agent and suggests the importance of social policy and social mobilisation for enhancing those capabilities. Democratisation has brought to the forefront issues of social inclusion, both as a demand from the newly empowered social class and also as a constitutive element of quality of democracy. And yet the rich theoretical and empirical understanding of the politico-economic processes underpinning welfare policies is rarely drawn upon in the development literature.

Although in many cases social policy is reduced to cushioning the effects of adjustment, it generally has a broad explicit or implicit mandate that has serious implications for the quality of democracy. Indeed, this question concerns not only the institutional reach of the quality of democracy, and but also the substantive outcomes of the politics engendered by it. The literature on the quality of democracy and the gender critique of democracy provides a useful framework for making links between democratisation and social policy.

Similarly, debates on democratisation do not integrate distributive issues in the core of their concerns and do not inform debates on the institutional prerequisites of development or



redistributive social policies. The rich literature on welfare regimes and their historical trajectories has some useful and suggestive insights here. Much of this literature has remained outside development studies because of the often implicit view that the current condition of the developed countries provides little that is of use to developing countries. This static conceptualisation of the welfare state erroneously holds that the theoretical insights of the welfare regime literature are of little relevance to developing countries. If, however, we understand that the institutionalisation of the welfare state was a long-term historical process, we immediately see the relevance of that literature to the developmental arena. This point has been strongly argued by people like Evelyn Huber.

If the remit of democratic governance is a broad one, including equity and growth, then we have to address the question of whether in such a context the reduction of the state to Smithian night watchman makes political sense. Democracy contests the hollowing out of the state. Both the social demands for improved welfare and the material exigencies of such demands need something more than what a merely regulatory state can provide and therefore require the state to play a more developmental role. Until the late 1980s it was assumed that the right policies could be implemented only by authoritarian regimes or technocrats insulated from democratic supervision. On the assumption that an economic crisis was the result of excessive demands on the state by organised interest groups, much political theorising about tended to favour setting up institutional arrangements to circumscribe the reach of democratic institutions. In the more extreme versions of this account, the rise of neo-liberal authoritarian regimes was attributed to the non-governability of civil society and social movements, with the implication that social movements should moderate their demands so as not to overload the political system. Not surprisingly, the new democracies have been at great pains to demonstrate that they, too, can impose discipline and implement orthodox policies just as well as, if not better than, authoritarian regimes. What has not been adequately considered is whether circumscribing democratic governance is good for democracy. Policy-making that hollows democratic policies can undermine democracy itself.

### **Why the divide?**

I hope I am persuasive on the need to tie together the literature on democratisation, development and welfare regimes. This leads to the question: Why the divide? A number of factors account for this separation of the literatures. One is the particular way in which these literatures are apportioned among academic disciplines. Development studies emerged from the view that developing countries should be understood on their own terms, on the assumption that while neoclassical economics might apply to developed countries, too many of the structural characteristics of developing economies diverged from those of advanced economies. This led to a need for the special discipline of development economics. The point, however, was to be so misconstrued as to suggest that it should be understood only on those terms. This, I believe, pushed a good point too far, since as we know developing countries share many features with developed countries. The problem with neoclassical economics was not that it was somehow appropriate to the developed countries but not to the developing ones: it was that the model itself was simply a misplaced abstraction of any known economy.

In its early years development studies attracted some of the leading figures in the various fields of social sciences. Since then, in many universities, the study of development has been relegated to specialised development institutes or area studies. While this may signal the recognition of the specificities of the problems of development or certain geographical areas, development studies have lost some of their intellectual moorings as a result of being excessively driven by the development establishment. One consequence, as noted above, is that valuable lessons from the experiences of developed countries have had little resonance in developing countries, and vice versa. Opposition to a linear theory of development has led to the neglect of the study of the histories of the developed world. Thus, the literature on welfare regimes is rarely evoked in considering both democratic and developmental regimes in the development process, presumably on the grounds that its analytical tools are relevant only to developed countries. There are many areas in which the studies of these different

societies can be mutually rewarding. A number of problems that seemed exclusively developmental now impinge on developed countries as well. Thus globalisation and the quest for competitiveness have aroused interest in the productivist features of productivist social development regimes. The call for a social investment welfare state is a case in point. In developing countries there is growing interest in developmental welfare states and hitherto authoritarian developmental states have had to rethink their welfare regimes in light of democratisation processes that are tending to push these states towards the European model.

Researchers working on democratisation in developing countries have often operated from the standpoint of political development, which has, until quite recently, been anchored to the beleaguered field of area studies. Those coming from development anthropology have generally been preoccupied with questions of micro-level participation and have eschewed the macro-level issues of democratisation, and they have thus paid little attention to actors, actions and power relations involved in developmental projects, except as they impinge on micro-level actors. This fragmentation according to geography or level does not help much in producing a truly multidisciplinary understanding of the processes of development and social change. Indeed, it produces the parochial understanding of the blind men vis-à-vis the elephant.

Many societies are managing the dual transition from authoritarianism to democracy and from being developmental to becoming

regulatory states. Practical concerns over this process and the need for knowledge about it are strong enough reasons for bringing the disparate literatures of development, welfare and democracy together.

The WHO has observed that with respect to medical research, something like 90 per cent of research funds are spent on diseases that are of concern to only 10 per cent of the global population. Just as the ailments that afflict the poor are relegated to poorly funded institutes of tropical medicine, the ills afflicting the poor are relegated to poorly funded institutes of development studies. The point is not to mainstream development studies, but to engage actively with the mainstream and challenge it to take the problems of global poverty seriously.

There are many more challenges facing the social sciences. The issues that I have chosen here were what could be culled from the many declarations of the 1990s. They also seem to me, at least, to be what the general public and political actors are grappling with. To deal with these issues I have had to paint on a very broad canvas. The new synthesis will entail rethinking the validity of the Chinese wall between development studies and other areas of the social sciences. To end on a positive note, however, let me mention that there are some research sites where such synthesis is being tried – the literature on democratic developmental states, on developmental welfare states, and varieties of capitalism – to name only a few that are pointers to these endeavours.

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