

# Editorial

## *Deborah Eade*

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As **Mike Powell** notes in his Guest Introduction, this issue has undergone a long process of gestation, dating back to conversations that we began several years ago about the nature of knowledge for development (its provenance, how and by whom different knowledges are produced, defined, appropriated, and shared) and the conceptual frameworks and worldviews embedded in language – and why all this matters. Most of these discussions have taken place in the specific context of *Development in Practice* and have been the catalyst for some of our more innovative developments.

In this issue we are privileged to bring together authors who challenge the international development industry in its various expressions – from aid agencies to computer boffins, from development academics to communications specialists. Mike Powell starts by exploring the various definitions of knowledge in a world of many cultures and intellectual traditions, in relation both to each other and to the many and varied ‘informational developments’ – information-related changes in work, culture, organisations, and technology across the world. Looking at the sources that development organisations use to obtain their information and knowledge, he concludes that most current practice consistently militates against the type of relationship and type of communication that are essential if development policy and practice is to be anything other than an imposition of external ideas, however well intentioned.

**Adebayo Olukoshi** and **Reginald Cline-Cole** focus on the role of academic research in creating some forms of knowledge while simply ignoring others – if not actively denying their validity. In the context of African Studies, Olukoshi is concerned with the relationships between African scholars and African scholarship and their Africanist counterparts in Europe and North America. He points to numerous problem areas, one of which is the way in which international development policy actively draws on Africanist research, thereby marginalising the contribution that African scholars could and should be making to the theory and practice of development in the continent. A corollary of this is the ease with which Northern researchers ‘play the role of the transmitters of ideas from their regions of the world and interpreters of developments in Latin America and Asia for African audiences’, a dynamic that reinforces asymmetries in global knowledge and understanding that in turn undermine the scope for societies to shape their own destinies. Cline-Cole takes readers through an intellectual autobiography as he describes the processes by which his own understanding of the importance of wood-fuel production brought him into conflict with orthodox ideas of what constitutes academic enquiry, and where relevant knowledge is to be found. His experience, and the subsequent recognition of the global importance of fuelwood, highlights the fact that knowledge processes cannot be separated from the complex and diverse ‘lived contexts’ in which they are generated – in people’s homes and communities, rather than in academic ivory towers or the offices of development experts.

Other articles consider different aspects of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and new approaches to knowledge production that are made possible in an on-line environment, though emphasising that technical capability in and of itself does not resolve exclusion and the underlying asymmetries of power. **Antony Bryant** argues that those who wish to harness the empowering potential of ICTs for development need first to understand that this technology opens up alternative models of co-operation and collaboration that make it necessary to break away from 'traditional' command-and-control models of management. The open-source software movement, exemplified by Wikipedia, offers ways in which development agencies, and NGOs in particular, might build their strategies by fostering greater participation within and among their local counterpart organisations.

These points are taken up in a short piece by **Chris Addison**, who describes a range of facilities and new developments in Web-based and Internet services and asks how far international development agencies have fully understood and engaged with the new applications in dialogue, research, and feedback in their dealings with their counterparts and colleagues. **Sarah Cummings, Richard Heeks, and Marleen Huysman** focus on online development-related networks in development and examine whether the (contested) concept of social capital is applicable to such initiatives and, if so, how far it helps us to understand their functioning and importance.

A collection of short papers illustrates some of these wider issues by reference to specific experiences. **Firoze Manji and Patrick Burnett** describe the African electronic newsletter, *Pambazuka News*, an initiative that is rooted in the relationship between ICTs and the struggle against impoverishment and injustices. They argue that electronic publishing is a long-term commitment because of the trust established between the service providers and its user community, and its very immediacy exerts new forms of mutual accountability. **Deborah Heimann** introduces The Communication Initiative, a network of those using communication to foster community-based economic and social change through a set of global and regional knowledge websites and their associated electronic newsletters. She refers to these on-line spaces as components in a process of 'horizontal communication', which is central to providing a non-judgemental, level platform, giving users access to information and creating the possibility of engagement in bilateral and collective interactions relating to development, irrespective of location or place in their respective organisational hierarchies. **Alfonso Gumucio Dagon** argues that the vertical 'North to South' or 'expert to ignorant' approach to knowledge in development echoes the vertical approach to development in general, whereby knowledge is perceived as an ingredient of the technical assistance given by those who have it to those who do not. He emphasises that organisations cannot share knowledge if they are not themselves engaged in an internal learning process that systematically questions certainties, authorities, and decision making. **Anita Gurumurthy** argues that, while ICTs have created new economic and social opportunities worldwide, women tend to be disadvantaged in relation to such benefits. Thus, examples of organisations that are working to use ICTs to further gender equality are set against the more problematic question of women's work in telecentres. Coming from an academic perspective in the field of health, **Susan H. Walker, Veronic Ouellette, and Valéry Ridde** call for donors and academic authorities to give priority to ensuring that global health research is geared towards equitable global health and solutions to priority health issues.

This issue also includes two review essays. One is a brief review of Development Studies by **Andrew Sumner**; the other, by **Helen Hintjens**, is an extensive overview of the theoretical and practical insights emerging from the Global Justice and Solidarity Movement, also known as the Anti-Globalisation Movement, or the Movement of the Movements. It offers an overview of the literature written by those closely involved, as well as by outside observers.

Our aim in this special issue has been to convey some of the cutting-edge debates and experiences in relation to how particular forms of knowledge shape formal development agendas; and to show that emerging ICTs and related applications, and their use by previously excluded or silenced sectors, have the potential to reverse conventional understandings of whose knowledge and what knowledge matter, and to subvert existing hierarchies of knowledge, both overt and implicit. The question remains of whether the more powerful (essentially Northern) players in the international development sector can re-orient themselves in such a way that 'horizontal communication' and collaboration becomes their natural mode of engagement with their counterparts around the world. While this obviously poses undeniable challenges, it also offers what Mike Powell calls 'a real opportunity for practitioners and scholars to move on from existing straitjackets and form new working relationships'. An annotated list of resources on these issues will be published on our website at [www.developmentinpractice.org](http://www.developmentinpractice.org).