Editorial

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Development in Practice actively encourages the exchange of ideas and experiences among academics, practitioners, and policy shapers. This reflects our belief that scholarly enquiry is enriched by being informed by and relevant to practice, while practice – which, broadly defined, includes social and political activism as well as professional development and humanitarian work – is similarly enhanced through its sustained engagement with the world of ideas. All too often, however, it appears that academics and practitioners are standing back to back, neither examining the same issues nor speaking the same language. The difference between researching a problem and actually grappling with it ought not to imply that one approach is intrinsically superior to the other, any more than an apple is 'better' than a mango. But the distinct pressures and incentives on development researchers and those directly involved in practice can serve to deepen the sense that they have little in common, and not much to learn from each other. This is hardly helped by the pervasive 'anti-intellectualism' within the Northern NGO sector (Lewis 2001), which tends to foster suspicion of academic enquiry, though hands-on practitioners are understandably wary of 'ivory tower critics' who, they may feel, have the luxury of keeping their own hands clean while criticising those who are willing to get them dirty. NGO researchers, on the other hand, may argue that their own heterogeneous methods of gathering and analysing information make up in real-world impact what they may lack in the scholarly paraphernalia of footnotes and bibliographies. Leaving aside the role of formal academic research, however, development agencies seldom reward reading and reflection over frenetic activity, despite their professed commitment to being or becoming 'learning organisations'. Activists, on the other hand, may be irritated by both sectors, arguing that researchers and development agencies alike are governed by their need to keep themselves in business, the price of which is an increasing dependence on government funds. The process is inherently depoliticising, according to one commentator: 'As soon as the activists become dependent on aid they are forced to break the link with politics. In the NGO world politics becomes a taboo word, and all energies are focused on framing problems as essentially and entirely "social"' (Iqtidar 2004).

In reality, of course, the contrasts are far less stark. First, there is considerable movement among the different sectors, and many hybrid forms and ways of working, as is clear from the existence of various communities of activist-scholars. Moreover, donors now place increasing pressure on academic institutions to show the impact of the research they sponsor—often defined in terms of policy relevance—and researchers are therefore required to have a communication strategy, not merely a plan to get it published in a scholarly journal. North-South academic partnerships are formally encouraged by DFID, which argues that for its research 'to have an impact on developing country governments, it must closely involve developing country researchers: they, rather than researchers from abroad, are more likely to interact

with policy-makers – even extending to researchers themselves becoming policy-makers years later' (DFID 2004). A laudable goal, no doubt, though scholars such as Rehman Sobhan lament the 'colonisation' of research as 'the best intellectual talent is being sucked into the international (consultancy) market', and Marcia Rivera describes the process whereby Southern scholars have to compete within the international subcontracting and outsourcing market in ways that generate income rather than building research capacity. Adebayo Olukoshi challenges the way in which 'African scholars who are involved in the formulation of policy proposals are generally relegated to gathering data and producing case studies, while the theoretical frameworks and analysis come from institutions in the North. This amounts to making policy for Africa without engaging the perspectives of its intellectuals' (UNRISD 2004:10–11). The contribution to this issue by the management expert **Henry Mintzberg** adds a telling dimension to this debate, arguing that the 'outside-in "globalisation" approach' denies countries of the South the very basis on which the North developed its economies. Just as leaders will not emerge from programmes that purport to create them, but from the life experiences of individuals, so true development will be 'inside-up' rather than depending upon foreign 'expertise'.

This issue of *Development in Practice* focuses on collaboration between academic and other kinds of researcher, and on the relevance of research to social and political activism and to the shaping of policy. **Barbara Cottrell** and **Jane L. Parpart** look at the difficulties of making collaboration between academic and community-based researchers work well, even when both share similar values and are committed to the partnership. Apart from the obvious questions of how to conduct the research on the ground, the uneven balance of power often gives the university-based partner access to more resources of many kinds. This can give rise to misunderstandings and resentment that undermine the collaborative relationship. **Jonathan Fox** gives an engaging account of the potential for research partnership between scholars and activists, arguing that this depends on recognising difference in order to bring people together. Given that the needs and perspectives of Southern activists and Northern academics cannot be identical, and that their differences cannot simply be willed away, the question becomes that of how to handle the various agendas in ways that are honest and mutually constructive. **Caleb Wall** and **John Overton** take up the issue of research ethics in the context of a country such as Uzbekistan, where the rigid application of university ethics committee requirements can, because of the local political context, in fact lead to unethical outcomes. The authors instead propose observing a series of fundamental ethical principles, adapting these as necessary to the local context. Based on their work at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), **Julius Court** and **John Young** set out a framework to help policy researchers to increase the likelihood that their work will help to shape practice. This requires researchers to develop a better understanding of the policy-making process and the various stakeholders involved in it, and ensure that their evidence is credible and of practical application; develop an overall dissemination strategy, taking advantage of as many opportunities as possible; and being more entrepreneurial in establishing and maintaining channels of communication. **Sarah Walker** and **Imran Matin** describe some preliminary field research to test the impact of BRAC's programme to assist the 'ultra poor' in Bangladesh; a relevant point in the terms of the application of the findings is that BRAC is now not only large enough to maintain a substantial in-house research capacity, but also has its own university. While this may not be a model that many NGOs could replicate in full, it is nevertheless a landmark attempt to link research and practice.

Drawing on an example of their work in Papua New Guinea, **Carole Kayrooz, Barbara Chambers**, and **John Spriggs** introduce the Collaborative Problem Solving Methodology for dealing with the problems that tend to arise in North-South research collaboration, especially when there are differences among the 'four worlds' of sponsor expectations, national development objectives, diverse research traditions, and different cultural practices. Underpinning this

methodology is the commitment to mutual learning referred to by **Chie Takahashi** in her paper on inter-institutional learning between two sets of aid partnerships in Ghana. She argues that the failure to exercise this capacity will continue to undermine any project-level successes. **Ke Fang** also offers a comparative study, this time of two contrasting pilot projects within a World Bank programme aimed at promoting Community Driven Development in Indonesia. Looking at women's participation in urban agriculture in Botswana and Zimbabwe, **Alice J. Hovorka** argues that unless development agency support is informed by an emancipatory agenda, then it may tend to add to women's existing burdens rather than addressing the underlying reasons for their involvement in such activities in the first place. **John Cameron** describes the challenge of applying a participatory approach to evaluating a DFID-funded programme in Nepal that itself aimed to promote participatory development through supporting local NGOs. Finally, **Samuel Assembe Mvondo** reports on the impact of legislation in Cameroon intended to ensure that local communities benefit from the exploitation of their forests, but finds that the incomes derived from such activities are generally poorly managed; far from reducing poverty at the community level, the money is often diverted by local elites to line their own pockets—a practice that will ultimately be stopped only through more serious efforts to encourage local governance.

On a more domestic note, we welcome Richard Sleight who has recently joined the *Development in Practice* team. He will be dealing with our subscriptions as well as developing our contacts database. I am also pleased to announce that Liz Cooke has become our new Reviews Editor. In addition commissioning book reviews, Liz is also responsible for the new Book Site feature on our website. This includes several valuable features: Book Shelf provides brief information on a selection of the most relevant recent publications; there are quick links to the Annotated Resources lists included in our topic-based *Development in Practice Readers* series; and the Book Buys section enables you to go straight to the websites of publishers whose books have been featured. In addition, Book Site also includes the full-text version of reviews published in the journal. So do take a look at **www.developmentinpractice.org** and let us know what you think.

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