

# Editorial

*Deborah Eade*

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What counts as development depends very much on who is doing the counting, what measures they use, and how these measures are valued and given meaning. Despite increasing signs of dissent, there is little evidence yet that the development industry as a whole is ready to move on from quantifying inputs, outputs, and outcomes, or from a linear 'cause and effect' approach to understanding and intervening in, or seeking to influence, the processes of change (Eyben 2006). There is considerable lip service paid to the fact that change is not only complex but also shifting and unpredictable, affecting different sets of people in quite different ways.<sup>1</sup> However, the emphasis on 'delivering results' can in the end 'distort relationships, hide much that should be understood, reduce responsibility and block the capacity to learn in an unpredictable world'; instead, perversely, it 'ignores other ways of understanding the world and weakens the effectiveness of aid' (Eyben 2006: 56).

Critics of development might argue that this is exactly as things are meant to be; that aid is really not about being effective in terms of bringing about social and economic justice for all, but is at best a palliative measure, and at worst a hypocritical exercise in self-interest disguised as altruism (Hayter 1971, 2001; George 1999). In this view, most NGO advocacy work may be just as much part of the problem, in that it holds out the possibility of reforming a system that is essentially wrong. While this criticism may apply to some aspects of development assistance, there is surely a real difference between, on the one hand, the historical aim of food aid to enable the dumping of subsidised Northern food surpluses while creating new markets (Barraclough 1997:124-5), and, on the other hand, the motivation of those who became involved in the global Jubilee 2000 popular campaign on international debt. The question then becomes: whose meanings and values will prevail in shaping global trends and local realities?

In this issue, **Andrew Sumner** examines the discrepancy between the general consensus that poverty is multi-dimensional and the continued reliance on dubious economic indicators, such as 'a dollar a day', arguing that it is the perceived objectivity of economic rather than social indicators that explains their persistence. In a similar vein, **Susanne Schech** and **Sanjuga Vas Dev** examine the gap between the formal commitment to gender justice by agencies such as the World Bank, and the social and economic policies of these same institutions which render such goals unachievable. When the goal of addressing gender inequality is located within the orthodox (neo-liberal) paradigm of development as economic growth, then it loses its power as a transformatory agenda and becomes merely an aspect of 'poverty'. With reference to his work in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, **Guillaume Iyenda** illustrates that differing definitions of poverty will lead to different choices in social research methods, which in turn will affect how poverty is perceived and addressed on the ground. Drawing on experience in Cameroon, **Rogers Tabe Egbe Orock** argues that when gender activism is monopolised by relatively powerful women, it may be used not only to consolidate their

own position by opening up new employment opportunities, but also to broaden the gulf between them and the majority of women in society. At the level of formal trade and aid arrangements, **Zein Kebonang** also argues that what the international community gives with its right hand it often takes away with its left, effectively negating the very outcomes that it claims to seek.

**Joabe G Cavalcanti** relates what happened in north-east Brazil when an aid-friendly set of assumptions about what development should be clashed with the values and views of small farmers who were meant to change their ways in order to 'be developed' by embracing the processes of modernisation. He argues that the communities were effectively expected to mortgage the life that they knew for benefits that they had not sought or had much part in choosing. In contrast, **Tawhidul Islam** and **Peter Atkins** describe the indigenous practice of cultivating vegetables and other crops on floating beds in the freshwater lakes and wetlands of Bangladesh, seeing farmers' experience, rather than academic research into hydroponics, as the essential point of reference for exploring its application elsewhere. **Harriet Matsuert, Zahir Ahmed,** and **Shah Abdus Salam**, also writing about Bangladesh, present a case study of a local NGO that decided to turn its attention to local actors and indigenous networks and away from externally driven agendas. Although this offended local political elites, the process helped the NGO to sharpen its focus on pro-poor partnerships. **Andrew P Davidson** argues that such cases raise issues about not only the practice but also the ethics of agricultural extension, and the basis of the relationship between an extension worker and farming communities. **Jane Strachan, Janet Samuel,** and **Minnie Takaro** consider the difficulties faced by small-island women who receive government bursaries to study abroad and, once qualified, are left to deal not only with finding appropriate employment, but with all the complexities of both living in two very different worlds and managing their own cultural re-insertion. Arguing that each livelihood has literacy practices embedded within it, **Alan Rogers** with **Judy Hunter** and **Md Aftab Uddin** make the case for adult literacy programmes based on 'literacy for livelihoods', drawing on case studies from New Zealand, Bangladesh, and Egypt.

Two articles present efforts to promote health rights, one in the formal education system and the other in the non-government sector. In Uganda, the challenge of HIV and AIDS has been addressed both through the curriculum and through less formal means, such as drama, music, and Parent-Teacher Associations. **W. James Jacob, Stacey S. Mosman, Steven J. Hite, Donald E. Morisky,** and **Yusuf K. Nsubuga** report on their research into what the different interest groups – teachers, parents, and students – best responded to, and recommend some reforms to the curriculum. **Vidyamali Samarasinghe** and **Barbara Burton** describe some of the many ways in which NGOs are trying to tackle the problem of female sex trafficking. Despite some local successes, this challenge clearly requires the combined efforts of a range of competent authorities, in collaboration with NGOs, women's organisations, and local communities. The authors call for greater attention to the problem in community development programmes, and for more strategic links between these and global efforts to combat trafficking in people.

Three contributions examine internal management issues within the development context. **Vijay Padaki** argues that the differences between management in NGOs and other kinds of organisation are more imagined than real, and that the failure of management to engage effectively with the frontline staff can undermine morale and ultimately damage the organisation's capacity to achieve its aims. **Maha Abdelrahman** addresses these issues from the perspective of labour rights, arguing that NGOs need to see themselves as employers, and that salaried staff, however idealistic their motivation, are their employees. Much of the focus to date has been on the relationship between NGOs and 'beneficiaries', but collectively NGOs are now significant players in the labour market, a role that brings with it greater responsibilities than they always

exercise. The fact of being dependent on external funding can sometimes provide opportunities that would not otherwise present themselves. **Pierson R. T. Ntata** describes a secondment from a donor agency that was intended to assist in building the capacity of its Malawian NGO partner. The arrangement was fraught with difficulties and misunderstandings. Once these were overcome, however, there were indeed some modest benefits – although, to return to our opening comments, whether these ultimately outweighed the costs is perhaps a moot point.

## Notes

1. Mark Duffield's (2001) insight that the aid industry and the development paradigms within which it operates produce losers as well as winners has been more readily understood in the context of humanitarian assistance, which has in turn given rise to a plethora of accountability standards and mechanisms (Vaux 2006).

## References

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