Preface

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The articles in this *Reader* are taken from a special issue of *Development in Practice* (Volume 9, numbers 1&2) that was commissioned and assembled by guest-editors Tom Hewitt and Hazel Johnson of The Open University (OU). Drawing largely on the content of two of the core courses in the OU's programme for the degree of MSc in Development Management, the volume brings together an unusual collection of essays on and insights into the ethical dilemmas and real conflicts posed by doing 'development management in practice'.

The *Reader* reflects the view that 'development' is not exclusive to developing countries, and that 'management' refers to far more than merely operational or bureaucratic matters. Thus, development management encompasses *'the management of intervention aimed at external social goals in a context of value-based conflict'* (Thomas 1996:106). 'Intervention' in this sense means influencing social processes, rather than using resources to meet goals directly. 'External social goals' are achieved by actions in the public sphere, directed outside a given organisation rather than internal to it. Social goals are of course often contested: opinions differ about what they are, as well as how to achieve them. Since individual social actors seldom have more than partial control over a given development process, value-based conflict is an intrinsic part of development management.

The definition of development policy and its subsequent translation into practice constitutes a set of processes — not just tangible inputs and outputs — that are themselves shaped by the relations and dynamics between a multiplicity of interests, which are in turn represented by state and non-state organisations and associations. Policies and strategies are the products of inter-related pressures and processes: political action

(arising from movements and ideas); state action (influenced by the former); non-state political action; and private responses. These pressures and processes are all played out within institutions (norms, values, and practices) that filter and mediate their outcomes. It is therefore only in retrospect that we can know what strategy(ies) emerged.

Negotiation over policy is at the heart of public action for development. Thus development managers and their organisations are as much a conscious and central part of public action as other players are; they do not simply act on development from the outside. And although the uncertain nature of public action and its outcomes means that one cannot predict exactly what kind of expertise will be called for, development managers do need distinctive skills and understanding, in order to cope with and respond to 'tension, conflict and [re]negotiation' (Wuyts 1992:280). The question of management *for* development as opposed to management *of* development, and whether indeed there is anything distinctive about 'development management' is explored by **Alan Thomas**, in a paper that acts as a springboard for some of the central ideas and practices featured in this *Reader*, namely the following:

- *The management of specific tasks in development interventions*. This may include the conceptualisation of such tasks and the ways in which tools and techniques can be used in a process-based way (see both **Simon Bell** and **David Wield**); or it may involve approaches towards building institutional sustainability through stakeholders negotiating agendas for action in development programmes (see **Hazel Johnson** and **Gordon Wilson**). In a complementary fashion, the composite paper 'Day in the life of a development manager' charts some of the routine and non-routine concerns in managing development tasks, while papers by **John P Grierson** and **Ato Brown** and by **Marielle Snel** consider such negotiations in the context of public-service provision.

- *Management oriented towards development ideals*. Chapters on a range of themes and practices, all based on experience from various parts of the world, describe the tensions between development ideals and the realities of practice. **Ramya Subrahmanian** analyses some of the contradictions inherent in attempts to decentralise the delivery of primary education in India, asking 'what if local preferences run counter to policy interests?', while **Dorcas Robinson** explores the policy arena of health-care delivery in Tanzania and asks whether different agendas and actors can in fact join together in an effective

programme of action. **Jo Chataway** and **Tom Hewitt** cross the North—South divide by comparing the experiences of Poland and Tanzania in their respective attempts to develop non-linear and learning-centred approaches to technological change. Shorter pieces about difficulties and achievements in seeking to orient management towards development ideals include the papers by **Richard Pinder**, **Norma Burnett**, **Purna Sen,** and **Lina Payne** and **Ines Smyth**.

- *Management in a development context.* The management of development organisations that try to achieve external social goals, and perhaps to represent or lay claim to certain values, is the focus of another set of case studies. With reference to Bangladesh, **David Lewis** and **Babar Sobhan** focus on whether trust can be built between bilateral donors and the Southern NGO recipients of their aid, and on challenges to Northern NGOs arising from the expansion of direct official aid to those in the South. **Michael Bailey** addresses the problems of local fund-raising among civil-society organisations in Brazil. How can they increase and diversify their incomes, and what are the compromises they may have to make in doing so? What role can foreign donors and aid agencies play in fostering financial autonomy among Southern organisations?

The latter set of papers in particular reminds us that the question of resources, especially money — where it comes from, the conditions attached to it, how much there is, to whom it is (to be) given, for what purposes, and for how long — is never divorced from the business of development and, therefore, of development management. For organisations that depend on external resources, this may amount to the management of scarcity: how to retain one's integrity and core values when these are being eroded by lack of funds, or tangled up in the strings attached by the donors; and how to be most effective when resources are inadequate and sustainability is far from certain. For those responsible for deciding how to allocate resources and/or manage grants budgets, the question is how to manage the power that derives from relative wealth: how to define core values and honour ideals in making choices between competing demands — critical decisions that will affect another organisation's whole future; and how to be effective when power relations obscure an understanding of what is at stake for the beneficiary organisations whose survival and direction are under threat. Although these dynamics are present in any relationship between someone who gives and someone who receives, they are particularly marked in the

context of what is today often called the 'development industry'. While this industry involves a vast range of actors — from governments to grassroots organisations, from multinationals to home-based enterprises, from academic think-tanks to groups proposing radical change — (international) NGOs are distinguished by their attempts to bridge the gap between the North and the South and in some sense to interpret the tensions inherent in seeking to do so. (Here, 'North' and 'South' serve as proxy terms for those institutions that are in a position of power and those that depend in some way upon them, and not just as synonyms for industrialised and developing countries. It is important to recall that there are many thousands of voluntary-sector agencies all over the world that channel government grants or public donations to deprived or marginalised sectors in their own societies, while at the same time seeking to influence public policy and sensitise public opinion.) Within the particular context of aid, however, international NGOs can choose simply to transmit the norms, values, and culture of the North to the South. But as civil-society organisations in their own right, such NGOs and their counterparts may also be in a position to hold up a critical mirror to the North, from the perspective of those who are marginalised.

Within the broad arena of development, international NGOs almost by definition cut across the three main areas of development management with which this *Reader* is concerned : namely, the management of specific tasks in development interventions (for instance, service-provision), management that is oriented towards specific ideals (as expressed in NGO 'mission statements' and policies), and management in a development context. Because of what NGOs can show us about how these various aspects of development management both influence and are influenced by the aid chain, **Tina Wallace** opens with some sobering reflections on the changing ways in which these various roles and the tensions they generate are themselves managed. Back in the 1960s and 1970s, when the development NGO sector was smaller, less competitive, and more voluntarist in nature, 'management' was often seen as a perjorative term; at best irrelevant, at worst incompatible with commitment — not something for which the average supporter collected funds, went on sponsored walks, or responded to appeals and adverts.[1] However, with the increased competition for public donations, and the rise in official assistance being channelled through them from the mid-1980s onwards, the NGO sector urgently felt the need to professionalise itself.[2] This coincided with a period when the certainties that had guided much post-war thinking about development began to crumble along with the Berlin

Wall, and then to capsize in the tidal wave of economic globalisation, the rolling-back of the state, and advances in information technology. That the roles of government and the private sector were changing so rapidly, and so profoundly, compelled all development agencies — NGOs included — also to rethink their own *raison d'être* and direction. Corporatism, strategic planning, and formal accountability became the order of the day; a way to contain if not to understand the complex environments in which development and humanitarian programmes now had to function. Having discovered a particular brand of corporate management, however, many Northern NGOs and official development agencies began to seek spiritual and practical guidance not from within their own unique and multicultural experience, but from the orthodoxies of the for-profit sector (Powell and Seddon 1997; Lewis 1998). Ironically, many observers and insiders fear that in nailing themselves so firmly to the mast of strategic planning and market-led approaches, NGOs risk casting their central values and accumulated wisdom — their distinctiveness — overboard.

The recognition by development agencies that, in order to be effective, people and resources must be managed makes a welcome change from the 'muddling through' of an earlier era. Development management is about making choices, and this is possible only if decision makers' roles are clear and if the organisational culture (and structures) encourage accountability and transparency. Assumptions and values *do* need to be challenged: complacency is not an option for NGOs, any more than it is for businesses that must compete in the market place, or for governments that are accountable to the electorate. But as Tina Wallace (1997) has suggested, the turbulent environment to which their conversion to a particular brand of professionalisation was a response has been surpassed by the welter of cultural and structural changes, strategic reviews, and often losses of staff that so many international NGOs continue to inflict upon themselves.

The question is one of balance as well as overall direction. No healthy institution can allow its professed values to be a smokescreen for unprofessional and poor performance. Nor, however, should development agencies, governmental or non-governmental, concentrate so much on their own management that they lose sight of where they really stand in the overall picture. Reputations cannot be taken for granted in an increasingly competitive environment, and development agencies now have to cultivate a high public profile as well as seeking to achieve excellence. Thus even household-name UN agencies and multilaterals invest huge resources in producing annual flagship reports, fearful that, as Michael Bailey puts it, 'lights under bushels are invariably short-lived'.

But when does publicity-seeking become an end in itself? How far do NGOs and other development agencies still believe that they should be working for their own extinction, or be actively seeking to transform their relationships with their local counterparts into genuine partnerships? Without strong values to inform them, planning and evaluation quickly become bureaucratic ends in themselves. Processes then lose their dynamism, documents are viewed as reality, and aid is thought to be synonymous with 'development'. All too easily, management gets reduced to managerialism. Addressing these tensions, Tina Wallace asks how far the methods brought in from the business sector are suitable for, or even compatible with, the values of empowerment and commitment to social justice that NGOs as well as other social actors would claim. Perhaps only history will reveal why development agencies in general, and the NGO sector in particular, have at the close of the twentieth century shown such a collective lack of confidence in their uniqueness; and so little capacity to look to their own experience, their own ideals and values, as a basis for generating development- management tools that might enable them to deepen and broaden their impact, and to become genuinely accountable for it.

Though it is caricatured as being top-down and bureaucratic, management is basically a process of getting things done by the best means available. However, this *Reader* shows that development management is more about dealing with the messiness of intervening for change, with the importance of feelings and intuitions, with uncertainty and risk-taking, with handling conflict and diversity, with mutual respect, with what is *not* said or is *not* visible than it is about establishing concrete facts and objectively verifiable indicators, quantifying achievements, or seeking to put reality into neat packages labelled 'projects'. Development management is, then, concerned not with exercising control or counting beans, but with seeking to act on an understanding of how change processes intersect with power, and of how best to shape these processes in favour of those who are excluded from resources and decision making.

Notes

1   A notable exception is the NGO Management Network, which began in the 1980s, well before most development agencies thought they had anything to learn in this field.

2   In the UK, and partly because of historical assumptions about the voluntary nature of charitable work, NGOs imply in their publicity that they can deliver development more cheaply than can governments or official agencies. Thus, they compete to keep down their declared overheads, as though spending on management were synonymous with inefficiency. Low overheads are thus still a criterion against which public opinion measures an NGO's effectiveness. However, the professionalisation of the sector has involved a shift towards paid staff and away from the appearance of 'do-goodery'. Since such spending has always been embedded in other budget lines, accurate figures do not exist. However, it is probably true to say that no major NGO today spends less on itself than it did ten years ago. This would not be problematic if the donating public regarded NGO spending on competitive salaries, modern communications, and international travel as the best way to achieve the goals for which they gave their support.

References

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