

I. DISCOURSE ON DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH FUNDING

Development Studies Between Fashion and Reality: Reflections on a Norwegian Impasse

Olle Törnquist

1. Poor and Limited Research

Obviously, development studies have become unfashionable — even in the richest of the three Scandinavian countries that used to be in the forefront of enlightened support and solidarity with downtrodden people in the South. In *Forum for Development Studies* No. 2, 2001, for instance, the author of a commissioned report to the Norwegian Research Council (NFR), Johan Helland,¹ says that the standard of development research is so poor that it cannot survive as such (p. 341). And the recently retired head of the only major programme in support of development research within the NFR, Professor Stein Tønnesson,² apparently proudly states that he has never considered himself a development researcher (p. 345).

Both these critics agree that today's development research has become too limited, restricting itself to the specific requirements of development aid authorities and their funding. According to Helland, there is a need for much better, wider knowledge of the Third World than merely what is relevant in terms of efforts to combat poor people's problems of development. Tønnesson concurs: so many other processes in the South (other than problems of development)

Revised and extended version of keynote address at the NFU (Norwegian Association for Development Research) Conference, Tromsø, 13–14 Nov. 2001.

1 Senior researcher with the Chr. Michelsen Institute, Bergen.

2 Currently Director of the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, PRIO.

affect us. Moreover, some Southern countries are getting ‘rich’, while there is poverty in the former socialist states, in our own countries and especially among our immigrants as well. In short, everything on earth has become interrelated. Development is ‘out’, globalisation is ‘in’.

Further, both critics agree that the quality of development research is inadequate. According to Helland, the field is marginalised and looked down upon within academic disciplines. Mainstream professors feel that it is ‘second-rate (...) and prioritises applied value and relevance over scientific quality’ (p. 341). Hence, says Helland, development studies should be integrated and subordinated to the disciplinary mainstream. Tønnesson, in fact, has already started to implement a policy change: ‘As chair of the programme committee [within this field of study], I saw it as my task to try to engage the best qualified Norwegian scholars within and across academic disciplines [to study globalisation] ... [not] to allocate money to a particular group calling themselves “development researchers”’ (pp. 345–346). Unfortunately, he admits, there was no money for those broader aspirations. So the already minimal sums for development research from the development aid budget soon melted away. For 2002 there is not even a penny left.

Is Helland’s and Tønnesson’s harsh critique of development studies valid and are their recommendations fruitful? I shall argue that their assessments are based on half-truths, that their recipes would kill rather than cure the patient – and that there are better alternatives.³

2. Who is too Narrow?

‘Misunderstand me correctly’!⁴ It is true that more globalisation and less state regulation imply that the politics, economy, social and religious conflicts of the Third World (not to mention drugs, crime, terrorists, and refugees) affect and at times threaten us even up North. It is important for a country like Norway to be aware of this, and become more knowledgeable. Not all by itself, of course, but by supporting its internationally recognised researchers in ex-

3 I wish to thank all the colleagues and practitioners who have provided valuable information, discussions and constructive criticism, but I remain, of course, solely responsible for all the shortcomings in the text.

4 A literally translated Scandinavian idiom for when you have expressed yourself in such a way that in order to understand what you mean, the readers may have to misunderstand what they at first hand thought you were saying.

change for access to the global pool of knowledge. Similarly (though much less often emphasised), we also need to understand better how Norway's own increasingly global policies affect the weak people and nations of the South. And when it comes to the South as such, Norway cannot continue with only the 'traditional' kind of development research that is rooted in aid and solidarity and focuses on the poor and oppressed people's problems of development.

But what scholars need to be convinced about this? Surely Tønnesson and Helland know that many development researchers today do more than simply carry out applied studies for aid offices and do not set aside broader issues. So why generalise without nuances? Where is it that the shoe pinches? Tønnesson prefers studies of globalisation; and Helland wants to do away with the criteria of development relevance in favour of general studies of the South. Maybe the real trouble is that some of us do not wish to follow suit and that while also doing wider studies we refuse to abandon contextual development research?

Problems of development less relevant?

What do we mean by development studies? It is true that the subject may be related to grand theories (like those of globalisation) and to the difficulties in making the best possible use of resources and capacities in almost any part of the world. But it is also true that 'development studies' has become the generally accepted shorthand for enquiries into the more specific problems of the South. This delineation has come about both because these problems were most severe and because they were historically and contextually special. Similarly we also paid attention to those problems both in order to act like civilised human beings and because the obstacles were partly due to our own countries' expansion and domination. Has this, then, been invalidated by the fact that South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore have become 'rich', or that some former socialist states have become 'poor'? Or has globalisation altered the fundamentals? Quite a few of us would say instead that globalisation has increased the urgency of the problems of development and the need to back up downtrodden people's own efforts at fighting them. Are we so wrong? And why should not at least the research that is financed by aid money continue to be relevant to these problems and efforts?

Also, we insist on the need to conduct *contextual empirical enquiries*, as against generalising desk studies on the basis of grand

theories, including those on globalisation. Globalisation does not mean that we can ask similar questions and use similar theories all around the world, just because the USA dominates nearly everywhere, Master Card can be used almost all over the world, a Big Mac can be had in most cities, and the middle classes of all nations have united around the Internet – while most workers of the world are marginalised behind national iron curtains. People react differently to this universality in diverse contexts, especially as the nation-state is becoming hollowed out and the localisation of politics, business and identities is growing increasingly important.

In other words, there are quite a few of us who do broad studies of Third World countries *and* their global framework, but who also continue thematic co-operation on what remains the major problem for the weak and oppressed majority of the people in the world: *their* problems of development, which *they* have to lead the struggle against.⁵ If that is unfashionable, I think many of us would state that we are proud of not just being conventional political scientists, economists, historians or anthropologists on the South, but also development researchers! First, since *people's* problems of development are as vital as ever; and, second, since good studies of those dilemmas and their contexts require technical skills and theoretical and empirical scholarship that do not automatically come because one may be a good economist or historian.⁶

3. Poor Quality of Critique

Our critics may rejoin that they do not mind this: what they are worried about is the quality of research. Today's development research is simply not good enough.

This is a poor critique. To begin with, there is nothing like a quality

5 The professorship that I have been appointed to, for instance, involves roughly 80 per cent 'ordinary' politics and administration with a focus on Third World countries and 20 per cent on how this is related to interdisciplinary problems of development.

6 An additional possibility is that the critique is rather about those of us who have supplemented our discipline activities with development research at the expense of area studies and some knowledge of local languages. If so, I am prepared to accept parts of that point. At least within Scandinavian studies of politics of development, contextual knowledge of the South is still rather poor, and much remains to be done. But has Helland said anything of this? He rather seems to focus on general theoretical and perhaps methodological problems. And from that point of view, area studies, with its tradition of rather weak theory and methodology in favour of close empirical analyses, would hardly have been a better alternative.

test in Helland's report to back up its indiscriminate accusation that development research in general is not up to the standards of the other academic disciplines. There are definitely problems, but these drawbacks must be specified and analysed. What is bad, and who is bad? I am not sure that it is acceptable neither in terms of courtesy nor academic principles to base a serious report to a research council about the standards of an entire research community on some kind of hearsay of the conventional truth among unspecified mainstream disciplinary scholars who quite often (I dare say after a few decades in their corridors and seminar rooms) know embarrassingly little about the relevant theoretical discourses, the empirical realities and the appropriate methods of studying them.

Who is bad?

It is true that parts of the development research which initially benefited from special institutes and milieus may suffer from the negative aspects of their relative isolation. This is not uncommon in any sort of productive milieu when researchers do not have to live with colleagues whose attention and appreciation are far from self-evident, and moreover do not have to read and teach and supervise in relation to literature and subjects that do not always fit into their own pet projects. Having some experience from this kind of dynamics,⁷ I would say that the risks are so serious that, if one is not virtually up against the wall, it is preferable *not* to have separate research institutions, especially outside the universities, and instead opt for large academic departments and flexible programmes and centres within big universities.

The troublesome relative separation, however, is not the full picture of the current situation in development research. Many of us who address Third World development problems do work from within our larger academic disciplines and/or have been judged and made our careers there. In addition to assessments of our work within the interdisciplinary development research communities, we have been grilled with regard to our own theoretical and empirical fields, on the one hand, and the schools of thought and empirical contexts that are regarded as more mainstream within our disci-

⁷ A self-critical evaluation of the attempts to generate and sustain a partly separate international milieu for politics and development research (based in the Uppsala–Stockholm region) from the early 1970s till the early 1990s can be found in my 'Of Concerned Scholarship', in Williams, ed., forthcoming.

plines, on the other. What is wrong with building higher standards and better linkages between disciplines and development studies on our kind of combined work? Who are better suited? Is Helland or someone else questioning our merits and positions? Are we not good enough by international standards or special local criteria and priorities? Have not many of us even resisted fragmenting and opportunistic attempts at forming autonomous institutes such as those for peace, development and area studies? Could our critics be more specific? After all, these are academic issues that should be decided on the basis of the primacy of the argument, not as matters of power and interests to be horse-traded behind closed doors.

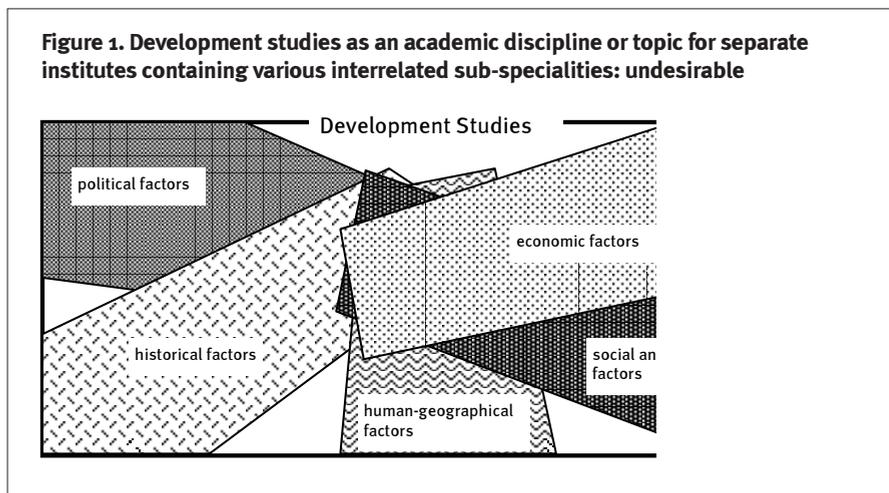
Dubious potential of mainstream institutes and scholars

Obviously, our critics would like to attract mainstream discipline researchers to carry out not just general analyses of globalisation but also studies of Third World problems. But what is there to indicate that these colleagues would be better suited to analyse the problems of the South? In my experience, such an open invitation would rather put the quality (including relevance) of research at risk! Mainstream colleagues are rarely encouraged to consider that interdisciplinary research on the South is a skill that has to be learnt from years of theoretical and empirical studies and experience. I am not in favour of closed-shop unionism. Our colleagues within the various disciplines or the field of globalisation are most welcome to study the Third World. But they should carry along means from other sources than the aid budget when going beyond studies that are relevant in view of poor people's problems of development. And they should set about learning as much about regional and local theoretical discourses and empirical contexts as they, rightly, demand from us when it comes to their grand and comparative theory on the basis of Western contexts. In order to make a solid contribution to the scholarly discourse, one cannot act like IMF economists or instant political science democracy-makers who travel between the world's Sheraton hotels with their standard tool-boxes and know next to nothing of contexts and regional and local theoretical discourses beyond the seminars and cocktail parties of their own cosmopolitan colleagues.

4. Improve Existing Links between Disciplines and Development Studies!

To sum up so far, it is increasingly important to study also other aspects of the Third World (not least within the framework of globalisation) than solely the development problems of the poor and oppressed. But these problems remain as important as ever, so the former must not be done at the expense of the latter. Rather we should encourage those researchers who are already trying to combine the two. Yes, the quality must be improved. But it is no solution to denounce the entire development research community. Rather we should work to expand the capacity of the qualified scholars who are already seeking to combine development research with discipline- and area-based studies of the South.

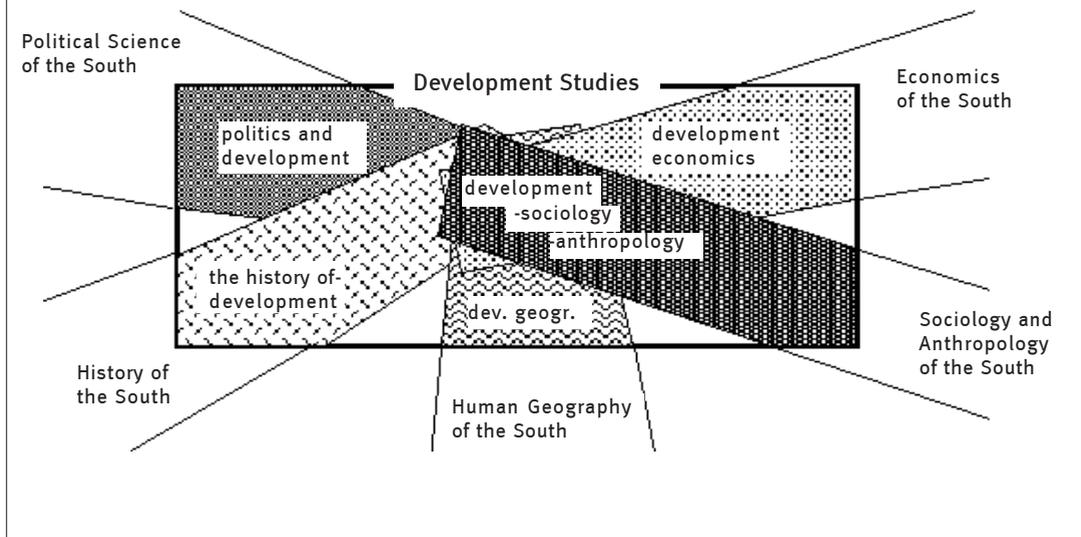
In principle, this means giving up any perceptions of development studies as a kind of interdisciplinary academic discipline with various factors involved (political, economic etc.) and organised as a university department or a separate institute – as illustrated by Figure 1.



Rather we need to approach development studies as an inter-disciplinary theme or programme within which scholars from various disciplines with a Third World and development orientation work together at universities. This is illustrated by Figure 2.⁸

⁸ The argument and figures are based on Törnquist (1999: Chap. 2).

Fig. 2. Various Third World and development oriented sub-disciplines co-operating within the field of development studies: recommended.



5. Can Discipline-cum-Development Researchers Propel This?

Thus, the best solution is to improve the work being done by already acknowledged scholars who try to link discipline- and area-based studies on the one hand and development research on the other. The next question is: do they have a fair chance of making a difference? It would seem that, in Norway, they are up against five obstacles.

Within the academic disciplines, Helland is right in noting the scepticism about the non-academic institute sector, but wrong in assuming that discipline-related development researchers are looked down upon as second-class scholars. A major problem is instead that, with the exception of anthropology and at times human geography, we are typically in a minority position without associated rights and affirmative resources.⁹ In my experience, the institutional logic of the individual departments is simply too rigid and conservative to

⁹ Among the 25 full professors and 3 'professor II' within one of the largest department of political science in Europe, that in Oslo, for instance, I am the only one who works on contextual politics in the South and associated problems of development.

alter this without seed money and preferential treatment from central university authorities, external research councils, development aid agencies, or even governments.

Second, there is no money available for independent and basic development research from the NFR, Norway's sole public research council (there exist no substantial private alternatives). Everything with regard to the South lies within the purview of the council's administratively and top-down identified programmes, within which equally administratively and top-down appointed persons¹⁰ select various projects.¹¹ Moreover, there are very few means for such free research from within the universities. Remarkably, not even responsible persons within the NFR and its major programme for development research seem to have been aware of this, at least till recently. They apparently thought that scholars with permanent university positions and thus some free time for research have reasonable basic resources to cover their expenditures. In reality, these resources are minimal (in the case of my own department, for instance, not higher than those of colleagues who study the Parliament downtown). Aside from desk studies (with insufficient library resources on Third World matters), this means that noted development-oriented researchers simply lack the funds necessary for first-class empirical research. We may even query whether abundantly rich Norway should have full access to the global pool of knowledge in exchange for this insufficient level of support to its own internationally recognised researchers.

Third, therefore, the capacity of these scholars to communicate academic 'research-based education and supervision' to a new generation of scholars and practitioners also tends to be undermined. To make things worse, master-level students in, for instance, political science wishing to write about Third World problems rarely have the chance to learn from carrying out proper empirical studies in the field.¹² Even the previous insufficient funds for 'non-European

10 The criteria for the selection of these people are hardly clear, but international academic recognition within the field is nevertheless not the major factor.

11 It is tempting to buy the big brother Swedish way of derivatively labelling such phenomena 'aspects of the only remaining Soviet state', but generally speaking the characterisation is wrong since the seemingly closed framework rather suffers from political and institutional fragmentation.

12 Remarkably enough, it is also difficult for students to get access to relevant scientific books and journals. This is not just because Norwegian libraries have limited collections with regard to the Third World but also because students have to pay personally for consulting literature from abroad and at times even to get access to journals that are available in Norway but not in their own university library.

studies' are drying up.¹³ It remains a mystery to me that the Norwegian aid authority NORAD has not yet found this situation unacceptable, and has not yet come forward with the necessary means. Why should NORAD accept having to recruit from a pool of less qualified potential staff than its Swedish counterpart?

Fourth, most of the support for development research as well as separately commissioned studies (from national and international aid authorities, for instance) is channelled to a whole set of separate institutes outside or on the fringes of the universities. Aside from the question of academic standards, this sustains a ridiculous fragmentation in such a sparsely populated country as Norway, and a lack of broad and dynamic milieus among researchers as well as doctoral and master students. Nor do the institutes even cover some of the central aims and themes within Norwegian development aid and Third World policy. In Oslo, for instance, one is forced to run a virtual marathon race between widely dispersed institutes in order to meet the rather isolated scholars who, if only they had had the opportunity to work together, could have produced high-quality studies and education about the role of human rights based democratisation.

Fifth, even recognised and continuously evaluated university researchers have to spend huge portions of their working hours producing funding applications to that sole research council in order to do their job (i.e. research and research-based teaching and supervision). Moreover, it is not 'just' a question of total lack of funds for independent basic research with the council, or shortage of resources for guided (programme) research on development problems. Equally seriously: where is that 'good governance' which Norway itself requires from its developing-country partners? There is a lack of consistent criteria and institutional memory. Furthermore, there is a great deal of allocation by informal quotas (such as between different institutes and geographical regions) at the expense of transparent adherence to academically judged quality, including relevance in relation to the scholarly discourse on the problems of development. Like similarly 'soft' forms of rule-governed Weberian systems in the South, this 'flexibility' serves to undermine planning and capacity building, and to favour *ad hoc* activities and opportunism.

13 And when students collect minor funds from various sources to carry out fieldwork, they often lack proper planning and guidance for going beyond semi-academic tourism.

6. The Root of the Problems

Is there a common denominator behind those obstacles? Here we should appreciate parts of Helland's critique that the integrity and quality of development research are undermined by vested interests. I shall soon return to some important qualifications. Generally speaking, however, I shall argue that the fundamental problem is the lack of balance between support for independent basic research on the one hand and 'guided' (programme) research and applied studies on the other. The production of new academic knowledge is badly affected. Even 'policy relevant' conclusions and recommendations are often inconclusive, and the training of the next generation of researchers, experts and administrators is insufficient.

The general trend: New public management of research and education

This problem is not unique to development researchers. Helland is mistaken in assuming that his mainstream discipline colleagues do not experience similar demands and expectations from various vested interests. No, this is a widespread and potentially devastating international trend, even at big universities. Now it has reached Norway as well.

We may not have attained Australia's level of new public management, but in the criteria for appointing professors at the University of Oslo, for instance, academic scholarship is about to be downgraded in favour of capacity to function as an entrepreneurial manager with good contacts and fund-raising skills. Moreover, high representatives of government, business and even the research council keep demanding that the universities should become more 'externally oriented'. What reality are they taking about? At least the situation that I know of from Oslo is that the academic staff as well as the students are already busy running around to external meetings and seminars and extra jobs to such an extent that there is little time for regular, uncompromising, academic deliberation.¹⁴ Yet, we are supposed to produce new knowledge, and on the basis of this to train and supervise students. Thus we have to set priorities among our tasks.¹⁵ We are not networking advocacy NGOs or

14 At the Department of Political Science, University of Oslo, for instance, we do not even have a mandatory joint research seminar.

15 Personally, for instance, I have given priority to guidance of local research on and with the Indonesian democracy movement, and have limited the number of appearances and articles in the media to what is absolutely necessary. If one shall

investigating civil servants under the various government ministries. Of course we should produce readable texts and summaries and be accessible, including for journalists and government officials. But why must we also have to regularly carry out journalists' job of reporting academic results, or compensate for the fact that government officials are rarely interested in or allotted enough time to keep themselves updated about relevant knowledge?¹⁶

Most seriously: more and more associate and full professors are turning into master craftsmen without hammers and nails. Of course we can recycle the knowledge produced by others. But that is not research-based education; that is not production of new knowledge; and that is not the capacity to service the society at large with critical independent evaluations. So since we cannot carry out our research in the library only, or take the tram downtown to conduct our interviews, we need to hunt for external funding with direct or indirect strings attached. Consequently the classical idea of the university as a modern monastery, which remains relatively independent of the worldly struggles for money and power and is peaceful enough for concentrated work and deliberation among scholars of various specialisations, but where God has been replaced by the primacy of the argument – so that politics and society can benefit from independent and critical studies rather than correct interpretations of the Bible – this modern university, as a basis for a similarly modern state and society, is now being undermined.

The specific trend: Scandinavian development research without security net

While this is the general trend, the specific tendency is that development research in Scandinavia has proved particularly vulnerable to vested interests. Historically this is because there was almost no solid academic basis (in terms of respectability, relative autonomy, theoretical tradition and empirical knowledge) for our initial studies of Third World problems of development, as compared to the old colonial mother countries. Similarly, we were novices in relation to those who could benefit from the area studies programmes in the

write on the basis of systematic research (and not just produce statements, speculate and boost one's ego), it takes too much time to both compose a draft scholarly paper and then turn it into a good piece of cultural journalism.

16 One alternative would be to subsidise good journalistic reporting from the front-lines of research. In Sweden such a project and a special paper, 'Dagens Forskning', is on.

hegemonic post-world war countries such as the USA, where there was a need for accurate information on subordinated countries and areas.

In part, we were able to compensate for this ignorance and lack of academic basis by formulating clear-cut and challenging problems, and by applying radical comparative theory. But this was rarely because Helland's mainstream disciplines had a positive influence. No, these advances were due to external support to concerned Third World oriented researchers from like-minded politicians and development-aid institutions against the dominant groups within rigid and conservative (and, in Scandinavia, also ridiculously provincial) university departments in, for instance, political science. To some extent we were able to ride on the wave of solidarity, anti-imperialism, expanding development-aid budgets and (particularly in Norway) ideas of sustainable development in vogue at the time. The criteria for what was relevant development research were reasonably clear, and opportunists were kept at bay. Quite a few young researchers were thus able to make an academic career within the system, and it was during this period that much of Scandinavia's internationally exciting Third World studies emerged.

But then that wave petered out. Structural adjustment affected development research as well. New requests for studies of human rights and democracy, for instance, were separated from the development discourse. New public management entered the university system. Suddenly, development researchers found that they had not just lost the backing of the earlier progressive wave. They also lacked a safety net in the form of the older, academically well-established university departments from the colonial period in, say, the Netherlands and Britain, and the area studies in, say, North America and Australia. These institutions may not have been overly progressive (though several scholars were) – but they offered an academic retreat from the neo-liberal onslaught. By contrast, we in Scandinavia were directly up against the market of politically sensitive ministries and aid communities without historical and cultural experience.

A room of one's own

This lack of an academic shelter constitutes the basic problem of today's development-oriented research. This is not to agree with Helland's thesis that development research should be subordinated to the mainstream disciplines. Most of our own departments lack

the fundamental culture and capacity that is needed to compensate even for the dearth of academic institutions similar to those in old mother countries and new hegemonic states. Rather we should appropriate Virginia Wolf's metaphor and note that good scholarship, like women's writings, calls for a room of one's own (Wolf, 1929). We too need that kind of space. Not in terms of total autonomy or separate institutes – but a reasonable balance between independent basic research on the one hand and the wishes and realities of the practitioners and financiers on the other. I, for one, do not mind working closely with, for instance, Indonesian or Indian democracy activists, or for that matter with Norwegian aid and foreign policy officers in charge of promoting human rights based democracy, if there is mutual respect for our respective tasks and work. But today there is not space enough to develop theoretical and empirical knowledge and infrastructures without being dependent upon resources and guidance and expectations from various semi-politicised funding agencies within which the main 'clients' of research, such as the actual democracy activists, have no influence at all. Suddenly, Wolf's female authors who suffered from the lack of a fixed income and a room of their own in order to write well seem all too familiar.

7. Don't Trust Independent Researchers!

So why are not recognised academics given 'a room of their own' to expand their already existing links between disciplinary work, area studies and development research?

This question relates to the general lack of balance between independent and guided research. Why does not even economically well-off Norway improve on the situation? The standard answer is that the country is so fragmented that one cannot expect an enlightened and coherent state policy in support of independent research and education as a foundation for advantageous commissioned research. Or as the present junior minister in charge has put it: 'The cabinet as a whole is not likely to engage itself (in favour of research) if the individual ministers have no say as to what the money is to be used for'.¹⁷

Such logic may appear as irrefutable as a law of nature. But closer scrutiny reveals that there is also a major argument involved

¹⁷ Statssekretær Bjørn Haugstad, Utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet, interviewed in *Forskning*, Feb., No. 1, 2002, p. 4.

– about the limited value of independent basic research. On a more optimistic note, then, it might still make sense to take this argument seriously and put it to the test. The claim is that one cannot fully trust independent scholars to be able to identify the major themes and issues within research, since these individuals are neither disciplined by the voters nor the market: they ‘only’ follow the primacy of the argument in some kind of public discourse as well as the logic of the academic research itself. More responsible persons than the scholars themselves thus have to ensure that the research will be relevant to society a whole. Of course, the argument continues, nobody should intervene in the technical part of the job. But in addition to the commissioning of some research, there must be general guidance in terms of thematic and properly led programmes. The alternative would simply be too risky – politically and economically.

Since this argument is supposed to be generally valid, invalidation only requires that it has proven terribly wrong in a relevant, vital, decisive and non-exceptional instance. To be on the safe side, let us take two. The first critical case is the inability of politically and administratively guided research¹⁸ to foresee and analyse the crisis in Asia in general, and in Indonesia – the world’s fourth most populous country – in particular. Surely this must rank among the major fiascos in the history of social science. The second case concerns how political trendiness and guidance have so dominated even discipline-based studies of democratisation in the South that scholars have not always been able to contribute critical reflection and new and relevant knowledge.

Lack of independent basic research politically devastating and expensive

For decades, various research communities applied the most simplistic calculations of the potential and importance of the rapid economic expansion in not just East but also Southeast Asia. Some used this to mobilise funds for research about what was projected as ‘the next centre of the world’. More seriously: very few studies linked to the success scenarios and the expectations of the financiers¹⁹ were able to foresee the crisis even roughly and then offer good explanations and remedies. Most of the gigantic funding spent on top–down directed non-basic research led to misleading, as well

18 Whether mainstream disciplinary, development or area research.

19 Whether World Bank, Asia Development Bank or some research council.

as politically and economically disastrous, results. The few innovative enquiries were those carried out by individual researchers who kept on analysing conflicts of power on the sidelines within 'conventional' academic disciplines or units for area studies, where some little money kept their basic research going.

In Indonesia, most economic studies overlooked vital information beyond the official 'basics' such as 'soft data' on private debts and unaccounted 'funny money' in various foundations. Some economists, also from Scandinavia, claim that they knew of this but did not write about it. In their own words²⁰ they were paid by governments, banks and companies that had no wish to lose out. It took at least until open conflict erupted between their international masters and the Indonesian government in late 1997 before some of them began to speak up. Interestingly, however, most of them, like other 'guided' researchers, have remained unable to explain the crisis, and thus also to come forward with realistic recommendations. Those who put the blame on crony capitalism have no answer to why the crisis did not come much earlier, even though Indonesia had topped the World League in corruption for years. And those who focus instead on the international deregulation, circulation and speculation of capital have failed to tell us why that became untenable in East and Southeast Asia, and in Indonesia in particular, and only after several years. The most plausible explanation, of course, is that it was the combination of both, the combination of privatisation plus deregulation under continuous crony-rule, or 'liberal despotism', that paved the way for the crisis. But even today, most top-down guided research and experts continue to recommend deregulation and privatisation against corruption, without any decisive measures against the remaining oligarchy and international financiers.

Similarly, almost all well-sponsored research failed to foresee the sudden birth of democracy in Indonesia. The conventional truth was that economic modernisation and the middle class would eventually grow strong and independent enough to pave the way for economic and political liberties. Those who kept studying the more immediate potential of pro-democratic resistance were advised not to waste their time. Not until the very fall of Suharto did the turncoats give up: and then most of them switched to the fashionable position of crafting instant democracy, as in Latin America and

20 Stated, for instance, by the international director of Bank of Norway, Audun Grønne, who reported on discussions with the IMF at the Asia crisis seminar at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 14 October 1998.

Southern Europe. Just like the economists, they have now failed miserably once again. How can one exchange guaranteed property relations for instant human rights and liberal political democracy, when those in command of the economy and in charge of rights and politics are tightly interlinked and in desperate need of each other? And how can one promote the rule of law when this symbiosis remains intact? Hence, more substantial democratisation has to be promoted in order to alter the relations of power. But that approach has been consistently neglected also by most external democracy-makers.

The failure of top-down prioritised research has not only contributed to enormous financial and human losses, Norway has also been humiliated. Suffice it to mention the embarrassing Asia plan from 1995 and the flirtation with Suharto. By 1998 the whole idea was deactivated. I can remember a year or so when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was actually interested in communicating with independent scholars on what had really happened and would happen. But then the old pattern of deciding politically and administratively what one needs to know returned to the fore, as witnessed by a series of 'strategic' country-plans.

Little knowledge of fundamental principle for aid and foreign policy

The fiasco of politically and administratively guided research with regard to the Asian crisis is nothing unique. Let me take another example that I have some knowledge about: how, over the years, the quality and relevance of political science oriented analyses of democratisation in the South have suffered from political influences.²¹

What is interesting here is not that various schools of thought and related theories have changed over time. That is normal. We improve our knowledge and adjust to new realities. It was only natural, for instance, that early theories about the development of democracy with modernisation were followed by revisionist perspectives of the additional need for the rule of law and 'politics of order'. Similarly it became necessary to add the problems of international dependency and the role of powerful classes. In several respects our understanding benefited also from studies of devastating politi-

21 For a more comprehensive analysis, see Törnquist (1999).

cal monopolies and rent seeking, plus the need for a balance between state and civil society as well as basic human rights. Nor would many deny the crucial role of research into the ability of political actors to strike compromises and exchange political liberty in order to protect existing relations of social and economic power, and the importance of political and administrative institutions, within the political system and in civil society. And there is growing acceptance of the need to know more of social movements and identity politics, of the connections between decentralisation and superficial elections on the one hand and bossism on the other, and perhaps even of the importance of political parties and popular organisations.

What is really interesting is that this story is largely a fake! The major changes over the years have not come about because of academic improvements and independent analyses of actual development. If we relate the ups and downs of the various schools of thought with the political conjunctures, we find an embarrassing correlation. On a closer look it soon becomes obvious that most theories have come and gone not because they are found to be more or less valid, but because they are carried by fashionable waves which the scholarly community has been too weak to withstand. Almost all the major approaches have included important aspects, but few of them have been accepted and taken on board by new schools of thought, as the latter are largely shaped by timely politics. Much of the insights from the modernisation perspectives (Marxist as well as liberal), for instance, were neglected by the dependency theorists, and vice versa. Nobody ever proved that the class analysts did not have an important point – because then was the time for neo-liberal perspectives. And their masters in turn neglected even modest insights from revisionist modernisation theories. The analyses of political negotiations and crafting of institutions got added to the structural adjustment theses only when all the theories of the problems of democratisation in the South had failed to predict the third wave of democracy. This trend was boosted by the fall of the Berlin Wall; with the Asian crisis it spread to the Far East as well. But while some normative remnants of modernisation theory were resurrected, most earlier insights in terms of preconditions and historical processes of democratisation were once again kept at bay. Few linkages were established with new studies of social movements and popular aspirations. So, once the currently dominant voluntaristic attempts at supplementing neo-liberal economics by human rights and the crafting of democracy begin to face

mounting problems, earlier ideas of the need to first promote stability, rule of law and ‘politics of order’ may once again come to the fore – if indeed this has not already happened with the events of 11 September.

Over the years, there has been such a lack of balance between independent basic studies on the one hand and the political and administrative fashion on the other, that scholars of democracy and development have rarely been able to fulfil their task of contributing not ‘just’ new knowledge and critical reflection but also policy-relevant conclusions. Today, studies of elitist crafting of human rights plus political pacts and ‘good institutions’ are, of course, important. But they are so politically fashionable that they tend to be separated from less popular, though no less vital, studies of social and economic conditions, conflicts and collective organising. This has become a reality even in Scandinavian countries where popular organisations played a crucial role in the transition to democracy and where scholars of social and economic conflict like Stein Rokkan are still respected. Norway is lacking proper research, education and training with regard to the most fundamental principle of its own development aid policy and relations with the South: that of human rights based democratisation as part of development!

The NFR committed to supporting independent basic research (?)

These critical cases do not prove that commissioned and guided research should be totally avoided – only that the general argument about its superiority does not hold true, and that things seem to go terribly wrong, both in terms of academic quality and policy relevance, if it is not balanced by independent basic studies.

Is, then, it so unrealistic to request such a balance? Fortunately this does not seem to be the case, at least if we are to take seriously the statements of the administrative director of the Norwegian Research Council, Christian Hambro. He has already sent clear signals that full priority must be given to enhancing independent basic research within development-related Third World studies! In a recent opinion piece in Norway’s largest daily *Aftenposten*,²² Hambro states that it is unfruitful to separate basic and applied research. By implication, therefore, he accepts that both basic and applied research are necessary, and should balance and interact with each

²² *Aftenposten* (kronikk), 21 January 2002.

other. So, as there is today scarcely any support for independent basic research within our field – from the NFR or from the universities – let us hope that Hambro and the council will now set about giving top priority to substantial improvements in this respect.

What should be done – by the NFR, the universities, and the others involved? Let me first summarise the major problems of development-oriented studies, before turning to possible ways ahead.

8. Summary: The Lack of Balance

Everyone seems to agree that we need more, broader knowledge about wider aspects of development (including globalisation) than only about the problems of downtrodden people. But that, I have argued, should not be at the expense of the latter, which remain as important as ever. Further, everybody also agrees, the quality of such studies must be enhanced. The best way to do that, as well as to widen the studies, I have argued, is to invest in the capacity of recognised scholars who are already trying to combine discipline-plus area-based studies of the South with specific development research. Other mainstream researchers would first have to bring along means from other funds and learn as much of relevant theories and contexts as they rightly demand from us when it comes to their grand theories and empirical cases.

The real crisis of development research is that these best agents of improvement are prevented from making a difference. This is due to their weak positions within existing university institutes and the shortage of funding for research in general and independent basic research in particular, which also undermines the capacity to communicate good education and training of new researchers and administrators. An additional cause is fragmentation and insufficient broad and dynamic milieus among researchers as well as doctoral and master students, and lack of good governance of funds and other promotional efforts.

This sorry state of affairs has come about largely because Scandinavian education and research have become particularly sensitive to vested interests. Our studies of Third World development lack the same academic roots and shelter as in the former mother countries and the dominant post-war states. There is a lack of balance between guided and independent research and education. During harsh periods, this lack of ‘a room of one’s own’ can be devastating. The major argument against providing such a space for these qualified researchers is the too-prevalent assumption that

persons more responsible than the scholars themselves need to guide research in order to make it relevant to society as a whole. This, as we have seen above, can be proven invalid, by two critical cases. First, most of the gigantic funds spent on top-down directed research regarding economic and political development in Asia in general and Indonesia in particular led to misleading and politically as well as economically disastrous results, while neglected independent studies proved more fruitful. Second, over the years the various theories and prescriptions about democratisation have reflected political conjunctures more than scientific development. Scholars of democracy and development have rarely been able to contribute critical reflection and new exciting knowledge. Today we do not even have milieus and funds for the study of human rights based democracy *and* development – a principal pillar of Norway’s policies toward the Third World and toward development.

9. Conclusion: Make the 50/50 Principle Real!

How should these problems be approached? Clearly, more funding is necessary, both to achieve a better balance between guided and independent research and to provide more doctoral and post-doctoral scholarships to generate and sustain better quality for the future. Equally important, however, is the provision of favourable institutional frameworks and good governance. The obstacles are many, complicated, and interrelated. We cannot count on detailed regulation with more administrators and politicians involved. There is a need for a simple and strategic formula that requires less administration and can generate positive processes among the researchers themselves.

One point of departure could be to ask what Swedish colleagues find to be better and potentially very fruitful in Norway. This usually boils down to the 50/50 principle: that all senior scholars with permanent positions shall be able to not ‘just’ educate and administer but also produce new knowledge. Such a formula can serve to break down hierarchies, promote co-operation, generate research-based education, and stimulate researchers to relate to wider discourses beyond their pet projects and perspectives. The only major problem is that the preconditions for successful implementation are lacking. So our recommendation may simply be this: just make the 50/50 principle real!

What would it mean to implement this principle within our field? Three major actors are involved. First, those whom we have iden-

tified as the best agents of change: the recognised scholars already seeking to combine discipline- plus area-based studies of the South with specific development research. Let us call them *discipline development researchers*. Second, development studies oriented scholars at the various research institutes. Let us label them *institute development researchers*. Third, experts and practitioners in government departments and agencies, NGOs and certain companies, in Norway and internationally, whose work should partly be based on research and education within our field. Moreover, we must also include the practitioners and activists in Third World countries who fight problems of development. Let us call both these groups *development experts and practitioners*.

The potential of *discipline development researchers* can be more fully utilised if the 50/50 principle is implemented consistently. As to the research part of their job, the financing of projects that involves costs for additional researchers should still be applied for separately and in advance. (We shall return to that.) But at least these internationally recognised discipline development researchers themselves have already been sufficiently evaluated within the framework of their tenured positions to be trusted to do their own job. In other words, what they need are simply the essential resources necessary for them to do their work – the work which they have been employed to carry out and which is regularly evaluated afterwards. This implies expenditures for independent basic research that require co-operation and collection of data in and on distant parts of the world. This system would also save a lot of time and money, for the researchers and the administrators alike. The universities and the research council would have to provide the money jointly. The assessment of work undertaken and the allocation of basic resources, plus the consideration of different needs of the individual researchers over time and due to various orientations, can easily be dealt with through general rules and the usual academic principle of collegial evaluation. (Funds from the development aid budget should be allocated only to researchers who study downtrodden people's problems of development.)

Second, the education part of the job: this must not 'just' be a question of teaching and individual supervision. It is equally important that senior discipline researchers are entrusted with and given resources for co-ordinating collective milieus for critical deliberation of both junior and senior research. This can serve to create a good foundation for educational programmes and facilitate better research through links between fragmented researchers, projects

and institutes. It should also provide sufficient training in the collection of materials in the field to future researchers as well as, for instance, development aid workers and administrators. These collective promotional tasks should *not* be seen as part of each individual scholar's own research work.

Institute development researchers are currently not covered by the 50/50 principle. Obviously not everybody can be included, but today even the potential capacity of those with good academic credentials is under-utilised. They can rarely benefit from organised and regular contact with education and supervision within the discipline framework. Temporary engagements are no substitute here. Moreover, they are not entrusted with contributing to the creation of less fragmented dynamic milieus within the framework of the universities – even though their contribution to such milieus is a precondition for the improvement of development studies in general. Those concerned scholars who are already seeking to contribute typically have to do so on top of their regular institutional duties. Hence, the 50/50 principle should be extended to those institute development researchers who have been positively evaluated academically and granted financial support by the research council or equivalent agencies.

The funding that the universities would save (from 'gratis' contribution to education) should be earmarked for improving education and the collective milieus. The latter, as already indicated, should be convened by the senior discipline development researchers within the collective education and administrative part of their positions and on the basis of organised co-operation between university institutes and centres-cum-programmes. Pilot-cases have shown that this is quite possible but is difficult to sustain without necessary institutional and financial backing.

Development experts and practitioners are not covered by the 50/50 formula either. Of course it is unrealistic to ask that they should spend half of their time to take refreshment courses regularly, keeping themselves updated on relevant research, as well as to putting the crucial questions and communicating the vital experiences that can generate better research. But if public administration and NGO work is to be no less based on R&D than in private companies, at least 10 to 20 per cent of their time will have to be set aside for this task. Similarly, they will have to sponsor necessary but expensive parts of education and training, such as minor field studies in order to create a pool of good potential aid workers and administrators. All of this should be financed by the state and state-sponsored NGOs,

which are supposed to be no less enlightened than, for instance, the pharmaceutical industry or the various companies that have been paying for ‘squatters’ rights’ in special villages around faculties of technology. Surely, the enlightened Norwegian government should also sponsor similar participation by practitioners from the South, not least since we are supposed to be doing our research precisely with them in mind.

With this pragmatic implementation of the 50/50 principle, the NFR could focus on facilitating and defending the working of the formula and thereafter only do the job that remains to be done. On the one hand, much more funding would thus go directly to the qualified, already evaluated and regularly accountable discipline-researchers, as well as to including NFR-selected and -funded institute researchers into academic education and unifying milieus. Some money would also be used to stimulate the parallel involvement of experts and practitioners. On the other hand, the Council would retain its general allocation of money to various institute researchers and to projects where discipline researchers need to finance the involvement of collaborators.

It is essential that this should be all administered by way of good academic governance –which means transparent open discourse with elected and accountable representatives of the parties involved, plus criteria that are consistent, clear and simple. Funds for independent basic research must be available in addition to generally guiding programmes. Such programmes, moreover, must at least relate to both fundamental themes within Norwegian policy towards the South: the need for wider knowledge of globalisation and the persistent need for special knowledge about the downtrodden people’s problems of development. And although a certain politician named Gro has been highly influential, the permanent focus should not be solely on the Norwegian principle of sustainable development: it should also involve linkages to the other major principle: democracy based on human rights. Moreover, all project proposals must be transparently ranked with regard to academically judged quality, including their relevance to the scholarly discourse about downtrodden people’s problems of development or pertinent aspects of globalisation, or both, *before* one begins discussing how they shall be financed – within programmes or also, or only, by funds for basic research. Otherwise we will not see an improvement in the quality of research by way of long-term planning, integrity and consistency. The need (or wish) to provide special support for this or that, or to help special institutes or regions, will have to be dealt with sepa-

rately and with special seed money. Finally, implementation of this good governance requires that evaluations and final decisions should be made by accountable representatives of the major parties involved – among whom leading academic scholars (selected by the academic community itself) must be in a clear majority. They are the only ones with recognised independent capacity to judge the primary principle of quality, including relevance in relation to the prioritised discourses of globalisation and development.

In short, make the 50/50 principle a reality for discipline-development researchers, so that they can do their job. Extend the formula to NFR-financed institute researchers, so that they can contribute to and benefit from academic teaching and unifying dynamic milieus. Introduce a similar formula (80/20 or 90/10) for development experts and practitioners, so that they can ground their work on relevant results from research and add good questions, experiences and resources. And facilitate it all by way of good academic governance.

References

- Törnquist, O., 1999, *Politics and Development: A Critical Introduction*, London: Sage.
- Williams, G., ed., forthcoming, *Essays presented to Björn Beckman on his 60th birthday*.
- Wolf, V., 1929, *A Room of One's Own*, London: Hogarth Press.