

Development Studies Association Conference

7 - 9 September 2005



Connecting People and Places

THEY came, they saw, they debated – and they resolved to do even more through development to eradicate poverty and injustice across the world.

The Development Studies Association's biennial three-day conference was a huge success, attracting around 300 delegates from more than 130 organisations to The Open University's central campus in Milton Keynes, UK.

Organised by The Open University's Development Policy and Practice Department and the International Development Centre, the conference was titled *Connecting People and Places*. The delegate list alone achieved that. Participants came from Zambia, Ireland, Brazil, Australia, Nepal, Swaziland, Japan, India, Malaysia, and the USA and from a host of other nations and international organisations – to hear six plenary presentations and choose from more than 50 sessions showcasing more than 150 research papers.

At the heart of the conference was a passionate address by Hilary Benn, the Secretary of State for International Development who impressed most of the delegates with what he called a "realistic" mission to end poverty.

The business end of the conference also saw the DSA's annual general meeting, the election of a new president, a public meeting of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) with its Chief Executive Ian Diamond, and a consultation session on the Research Assessment Exercise.

But it wasn't all work – delegates also enjoyed meeting each other in social contexts including the conference dinner, where outgoing DSA President Simon Maxwell ensured a relaxed atmosphere with an address titled "Momentarily Angelina Jolie rested her hand on my knee!"

And amid all this, delegates were able to chat, look at research projects in the form of posters by the Department For International Development-sponsored PhD students and buy the latest books on development from a number of stands.

They were able to chat, to exchange ideas, to learn from each other, to build connections and listen to the latest ideas.

Most importantly of all, the DSA conference 2005 fulfilled its main objective – to inspire people to continue their work to use development studies to tackle poverty and injustice – still the greatest challenges facing the planet.



Workshops

DELEGATES had a choice of 50 parallel workshop sessions during the conference – which covered an extraordinary range of subjects.

A major topic, tying in with the overall conference theme of connections, was technology and its relevance to development, with many sessions focusing on the need for its appropriate introduction and use in the context of other development issues.

Other topics focused on themes such as poverty, migration and livelihoods – most notably in agriculture, sustainability, the work of NGOs, economics, tourism and public engagement. Many highlighted individual case studies mainly in Africa, Asia and South America, with researcher perspectives from all over the world.

More than 150 researchers and other experts shared their papers with the conference.

Defeating global poverty

“IF WE work hard, I think we can defeat global poverty.”

That was the message from Secretary of State for International Development Hilary Benn in his keynote address to the conference.

He added that people must believe they can change the world or its problems of poverty and injustice would never be solved.

“Cynicism scares the living daylights out of me,” he said. “Cynicism will not save a single starving child or a single mother from dying in childbirth.”

Mr Benn told delegates he became “depressed” by those who thought it impossible to effect change. “It’s a bit fashionable to say politics never changes anything, all politicians are liars,” he said.

“Because politics is not about what politicians do on their own. Why do politicians move? Because people demand.”

Mr Benn said recent months had seen “significant steps” to address some of the world’s problems, including aid commitments from the USA, Japan and Canada and what he described as “the historic agreement on debt”.

But he said people needed to be made aware that, far from the public perception that most poverty exists in rural areas, it is becoming far more urbanised. “We have to address an increasing need in towns and cities,” he said. “Many benefits of urbanisation bypass poor people and poverty and social exclusion are all too evident in urban areas.” And quoting figures that suggest two billion people will be urban slum dwellers by 2030, he added: “We have to adjust in the way we think.”

The Secretary of State said infrastructure was the key. “Economic development is the single most important means to build economies,” he said. “We need to create opportunities for trade. Investment creates jobs, people earn and pay taxes and governments get money.”

Mr Benn went on to suggest there was a moral obligation to rid the world of such problems – and that self-belief played a vital role. “The best way is to look positively,” he said. “Imagine if you’d said to someone 200 years ago ‘we will have a world without smallpox’ or 100 years ago ‘there will be a world without polio.’

“Politics in its broadest sense is the best way to make progress. This has never been more important. We can’t say we didn’t know this was happening.”



Relationship between rich and poor

“WITH Tony Blair in China and then in India this week on behalf of the EU, this conference could not be more timely.”

That was the view of Simon Maxwell as he oversaw his last DSA meeting as President.

“Development has never been about the study of developing countries,” he added. “It’s about the relationship between rich and poor nations and how they can work together.”

In an interview at the end of the second day of the gathering, Mr Maxwell said he was delighted by the event’s success. “This conference has some very explicit purposes,” he added. “It gives us the opportunity to identify and debate key theoretical and research issues in development studies.

“It also provides opportunities for younger researchers to display their work and, vitally, brings researchers together with policy makers. The researchers can test their findings and the policy makers can learn about new work in the field.”

But he added the conference also had a more implicit, social purpose. “It enables people to come together from all over the world, and to find ways of working together. A lot of these delegates are long-standing friends and colleagues, and those who aren’t are building relationships.

“And of course there’s also a job market element to a meeting like this – people can find a supply to meet the demand.”

He praised the venue – The Open University’s central campus at Walton Hall, Milton Keynes. “The OU has done us proud,” he said. “The venue is excellent and the organisation has been immaculate. And the OU’s own International Development Centre is an excellent example of the benefits of bringing together different disciplines and research methods.”

Most of all, he said he was impressed and pleased by the quality of the presentations. “Researchers are all passionate about ideas, but they are driven by putting those ideas into action and affecting change to address poverty and injustice, to understand their causes and consequences.

“We’ve brought people together from across the world for this meeting. The DSA has to keep thinking about global solutions for global problems and this conference is enabling people to do that.”

New appointments

PROFESSOR Cecile Jackson is the DSA’s new President after being elected unopposed to the position at the annual meeting held during the conference.

Professor Jackson, known to colleagues as “Sam”, takes over from Simon Maxwell, who stood down at the end of the conference after four years in the post, during which substantial changes have occurred leading to growth in membership and in activities.

The Professor of Development Studies at the University of East Anglia, Professor Jackson was born in southern Africa and is an anthropologist who has been working on gender and development since her PhD research in northern Nigeria in the late 1970s on rural Hausa women and their experience of a large scale irrigation project.

Professor Jackson, who has also conducted research in Zimbabwe and India, jointly established the UEA’s MA Gender Analysis in Development. She also held an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Research Fellowship under the Global Environmental Change Programme and was Dean of the School of Development Studies from 1999-2003.

The AGM, held on the final day of the conference, also saw three new elections to the DSA council – Professor Maureen Mackintosh from The Open University, Dr Uma Kothari from IDPM and Professor Alan Thomas from the Centre for Development Studies in Swansea. Dr Hazel Johnson and Dr Allister McGregor have been co-opted as additional members.

Health inequalities

THE migration of medical professionals from Africa to Western health services is providing a “perverse subsidy” from poorer to wealthier nations.

So said Professor Maureen Mackintosh, co-chair of The Open University’s International Development Centre in a plenary address to the conference.

She said the movement of staff from the continent means that patients in Africa on very low incomes are losing out, to the benefit of high income users of health services – while the financial benefits are also being transferred from low income to high income governments’ budgets.

This perverse subsidy, said Professor Mackintosh, further widens existing global gulfs in health and well being, is morally obnoxious, and appears to contravene UK and many other high-income countries’ treaty obligations in the field of human rights.

In an address titled *Aid, Restitution and International Fiscal Redistribution in Health Care*, the economics professor highlighted the number of nurses actively recruited from Ghana, Nigeria, Malawi and South Africa – while demonstrating how much better off the UK is in terms of life expectancy, child mortality rates and instances of preventable

illnesses. She also drew attention to the number of health professionals in each country - for example, 166 physicians per 100,000 people in the UK, compared with just one in Malawi.

“Out-migration of health professionals worsens global health inequality,” said Professor Mackintosh. The Millennium Development Goals in health cannot be delivered unless this situation is reversed. Furthermore, the consequences for low income populations of the loss of trained staff, nurses as well as doctors, are very severe not only in absolute labour shortage countries, notably Sub-Saharan Africa.”

Training costs

Professor Mackintosh pointed out that the UK and other major employers of African health professionals, such as America and Canada, also benefited financially from not having to train them. “The employment of these staff represent a direct subsidy to UK health service users, since the training costs have not been borne in Britain,” she said.

“It is estimated that it costs approximately £220,000 to train a doctor in the UK and £37,500 to train a nurse. This would imply a one-off saving in current training cost terms of about £64.5 million from the employment of Ghanaian doctors, and about £38 million from Ghanaian nurses. For all staff trained in

Sub-Saharan Africa the savings would be rather more than £2bn for the doctors and £518 million for the nurses.”

Professor Mackintosh called for restitution. Restitution implies compensation but also carries stronger meanings around repair, restoration and the righting of ethical wrongs. She noted that once the quite widely mooted proposals for compensation emerges into the political arena, they disappear into more general recommendations for aid to health systems. Why? Does it, she asked, reflect a balanced judgement on political feasibility and economic desirability? Or is it rather an unwillingness to adopt a policy that would commit the UK to a continuing obligation to support the African health systems from which we benefit?”

She argued that the current international labour market integration in health care and associated patterns of migration provide the basis for different – less neo-colonial – developments in international fiscal transfers.

In a world where the boundaries between health systems are increasingly blurred by both migration and other forms of aid, exchange and co-operation, international transfers across borders in the form of sustained redistributive commitments between health systems (not year on year charity) would constitute an ethically desirable, politically feasible example of fiscal reform rooted in international treaty obligations.

Professor Mackintosh noted that health systems are a “stable site” for tax and expenditure-based redistribution within countries. She added: “Public and environmental health policies, and the level and spread of access to high-quality health services, create strong externalities especially where people and resources are mobile across boundaries, hence there is a case for redistributive grants to support enforced minimum standards and moves towards fiscal equity.

She argued not for a global solution to the increasing labour market integration in health care, but for a specific and adaptive response.

Get connected

HELPING people make electronic connections doesn’t necessarily mean their lives will improve, according to plenary session speaker Professor Robin Mansell.

“Any and all forms of connection to electronic networks bring new ambiguities into people’s lives,” she told her audience.

“The technologies of information and communication have a politics. That politics affects everyone in one way or another. I think we have an obligation to talk about entitlements and responsibilities and how these are perceived and understood by different participants in the debates about what has come to be called ICT4D.”

The professor, from the London School of Economics, added: “Much of this debate is about whether and when to allocate scarce resources to investment in these new technologies, especially where there are many other priorities requiring a response.”

In a speech titled *Ambiguous Connections: entitlements and Responsibilities of Global Networking*, Professor Mansell said there should be “no sense in which it is automatically assumed that connectivity to the internet is simply a ‘good thing.’ Quoting Langdon Winner, she said: “What matters is not technology itself, but the social or economic system in which it is embedded.”

And although Winner’s words were from 20 years ago, she contested the explosive internet revolution had made them as relevant today. “The substantial efforts being made to measure the impacts of investment (in ICT)... are misguided,” she said, “because in general, studies of impacts do not examine political or social or cultural contexts.

Investment

“And instead of refining methodologies that enable us to search for ‘impacts’ of investment in technologies, we should, as researchers, be locating questions about ICT investment and practices within the specific contexts where people are trying to bring improvements into their lives. Contextualising means much more than being sensitive to the local and its interdependence with the global. It means how power relations are reproduced or changed.”

To illustrate her point, Professor Mansell highlighted microchip manufacturer Advanced Micro Devices’ (AMD) personal internet communicator (PIC). The device, which she said cost US\$185 before taxes and without a video monitor, enables users to access the internet and email and is being launched across the world to enable people with a variety of financing options enabling people on limited incomes to, as the company puts it, ‘fulfil their desire for computing and access to the internet.’

“Is the PIC or its relatives an appropriate or proportionate response to the challenge to connect all the world’s people?” Professor Mansell challenged: “And if this is achieved, will it bring the ambiguities of connection to the internet into play in ways that could disadvantage the poor?”

“ill-informed or non-participatory imposition of new technologies might actually harm the intended beneficiaries”



Picture: Getty Images

She added that such devices were designed to promote broadband connectivity by existing telecoms operators such as Cable & Wireless, whose broadband subscriptions could swallow up as much as 30 per cent of a low-income user’s annual salary.

“In the words of one community-based specialist, ‘the received truth about the impact of ICTs is that it is a blessing, technology put to the task of aiding humanity at a time of impending crises. The combined effect of technological limitations (old configurations, slow internet connections and a premium on being logged on) together with new ICTs, tend to become... new expressions of existing relations of inequality between individuals and between societal groups and categories.’”

Professor Mansell quoted an NGO worker who said that “effective participation in making choices about whether to invest in new technologies... always results in a situation where ‘participation challenges power. In my experience no co-operation institution wants to share power’”

And she warned that ill-informed or non-participatory imposition of new technologies might actually harm the intended beneficiaries. “An LSE PhD student is documenting the threat to the livelihoods of many micro-business entrepreneurs in the Mueblista industry in Chile because the new electronic commerce networks have completely bypassed them as suppliers of their markets. That is symptomatic of the all-too-common politics of technology.

“Advanced technologies do not ‘fix’ underlying problems,” she said. “It is people who do this.”



North-south divide

THE increasing stature of knowledge as a critical factor of development has led to an ever-wider north-south divide, Professor Lynn Mytelka told delegates.

The Professor, a former director of UNU-INTECH who now holds a Chair in Development Economics at the University of Maastricht, spoke from a paper which examines the impact of the last 30 years which she described as a “watershed” in the transformation of human society and economy.

“It was in this period that labour and mechanical artifacts began to cede their place of preference to knowledge in the production of goods and service,” she said in the abstract of the paper titled *Divides And Rules, The Impact Of New Wave Technologies On Learning And Innovation In The South*, which formed the focus of the conference’s final plenary address.

“It is now commonplace to assert the importance of knowledge as a critical factor in development in the North, where policies and programmes have been put in place to strengthen learning, innovation and the accumulation of knowledge,” she said.

“Changes in international trade, investment and intellectual property rules have further contributed to the speed with which new waves of technological change are succeeding each other and technological trajectories and competitive practices are being shaped globally.”

It was in this process, said Professor Mytelka, that the divides had emerged, adding that she intended to explore “the opportunities and capacities needed to make technological choices and innovate in developing countries” – in particular through biotechnology and its application in agriculture and in the pharmaceutical sector.

A critical view of development studies

“DEVELOPMENT studies cannot escape the dirty worlds of practical policy-making, which lend it a reason for being, and which render it impotent, apolitical, or supportive of a series of interventions that disempower the poor.”

So conceded Stuart Corbridge from the London School of Economics during the fourth plenary session of the conference. But he added: “It is of the utmost importance that Development Studies faces up to these criticisms.”

Corbridge highlighted five major criticisms of the field in an entertaining address titled *Queuing, Complaining and Photocopying: Notes of the (Im)possibility of Development Studies*.

He told his audience that part of the subject’s vulnerability was due to being committed to the principle of difference (the Third World is different) and to the principle of sameness (“it is the job of development policy to make ‘them’ more like ‘us’). And in highlighting criticisms by Deepak Lal, Arturo Escobar, Jean-Philippe Platteau, James Ferguson and the less-well known but no less critical Partha Chatterjee, he said: “Development studies is under attack as never before.”

But Corbridge added: “But it should not be put on the defensive because of its commitments to difference and sameness.

What matters is the way in which these commitments are combined, not the fact that they are made at all.”

Corbridge conceded there was a “growing sense of unease about the enterprise of development” but said this was due in part to a misunderstanding of development studies. He briefly touched on familiar counters to the four main critics’ arguments before concentrating on Chatterjee, a Bengali writer with positions at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences in Calcutta and Columbia University in New York.

Concepts

“Chatterjee... can be taken to argue that the impossibility of development studies resides in its fetishisation of concepts – civil society, untutored participation, generalised morality, decent behaviour, the sanctity of the law – that have little meaning for ordinary people,” said Corbridge.

But he argued Chatterjee had “largely ignored” the question of the relationship between economic growth and the alleviation of poverty and had drawn too stark a distinction between political and civil society and the supposed alienation of the poorest people by an elite political class.

Referring to the “queuing, complaining and photocopying” of his title, Corbridge asked his audience to consider an Indian widow collecting her pension at the local Block

Development Office. “She will expect to be kept waiting in a queuing system that privileges rank over rights,” he said. “She will expect to be spoken to roughly by a stare official and might even expect to make a small payment to get what should be hers by right. But she will also have legitimate expectations of the state.”

He gave examples of the rising awareness of ordinary people of their power to complain about public services or utilities. “It is through such activities and experiences that a sense of being a citizen is being built up,” he said. “Ordinary people might come to see the state in ways they have not done before.”

Finally, he referred to the power of “mundane” technology of the photocopier, which had helped Rajasthan NGO Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sanghathan to store a “paper memory” of government documents dealing with actions and promises rather than relying on impromptu conversations.

“It is not inconsistent to argue for the re-politicisation of development studies while also directing attention to the politics of policy-making and governmentality,” said Corbridge. “Being able to complain effectively is not as glamorous as taking part in a revolution, but in some cases it can count for a great deal. It is a sign of the growing maturity of development studies that this point is widely accepted.”

The future of African farming

SOUTH African Deputy Minister for Science and Technology Derek Hanekom’s plenary address posed the first question of the 2005 conference: Can we support African agriculture through transfers of knowledge, ideas and capital?

The politician told a packed theatre that it was vital to ensure any such transfers were based on evidence that would help the very poorest farmers who, he said, were in danger of missing out on some of the benefits of development projects.

“There is a need for applied research and access to technology which prioritises peasant or resource-poor farmers,” he said. “Technology tends to benefit those in a position to benefit, and the losers are those who have less to begin with. Our objective is not merely to enhance agricultural productivity but to do so in such a way that smaller-scale producers benefit the most.”

Mr Hanekom said the key to the solution was partly “a need to get internal governance right” but said foreign influences remained the greatest barrier to small African farmers being able to make a living.

He drew comparisons between questions and recommendations in the 1981 Berg report, Accelerated Development In Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Commission for Africa Report from earlier this year. “The Berg report recommended cessation of restrictions including export taxes and other market controls,” he said. “The Commission highlighted the unfairness of the international trade regime. Global markets are met with competition against agricultural subsidies and market access barriers.”

Denied fair access

He added that exports were “denied fair access” to the global market and the domestic market was “restricted by imports. Barriers to trade hurt,” he added.

“Why are we having the same discussions 25 years later? Because in terms of equality and provision, the challenges have still not been met.”

Agriculture, he argued, was the most important economic activity on the continent – in Sub-Saharan Africa it accounts for 30 per cent of gross domestic product and 40 per cent of exports, and employs 80 per cent of people in this region.

The situation had been exacerbated, he said, by a 250 per cent rise in rural population in the last half-century, combined with slow export growth and an increased dependency on the imports of cereals, including through emergency food relief.

But Mr Hanekom said farmers, particularly the very poorest, would continue to suffer “until the West removes or dramatically reduces its agricultural - subsidies and its damaging trade barriers”.

He said the solution would be found in making the poorest farms economically viable, providing a basis on which the rest of the industry could grow.

“Small producers are the target,” he said. “If this was done across the land it would inevitably improve the gross agricultural output. Small producers can be the engine of agricultural growth.”

Picking up on the “connections” theme of the conference, he told his audience: “Some people in this room are very well connected. Unfortunately five billion people are not.”



“Bangalore has become a vampire”

Professor Gita Sen too quickly highlighted the perils of too much development in a fascinating address to the conference.

Surviving In The Boom-Town: Bangalore As A Metaphor showed how “coping with an economic boom can pose as serious a challenge to development as being stuck in an economic backwater”.

Professor Sen, who is Sir Ratan Tata Chair Professor at the city’s Institute of Management, detailed how Bangalore had “exploded” from what she termed a “pensioners’ paradise” with 1.2 million residents to a boomtown with more than five times that figure in just 40 years.

Bangalore was two towns that grew up together, she explained, one a traditional Indian mill town, the other a British colonial settlement. They diverged into one but now the traditional milltown, still operating through indigenous, traditional skills, sits alongside a district that attracted public sector investment following independence and now, with the growth of private investment by IT companies in the 1990s, lies at the heart of India’s silicon valley.

The result, she told the conference, is a vast migration into a city that is not prepared for it. “The city always attracted inward migration,” she said. “People came to work in the traditional textile industries and in service.

“But since the 1990s rural Karnataka has also started to pour in, and with such a rapid expanse it has become very diverse. One result is that only 35 per cent of the population of Bangalore now speak the local language. About 60 - 70 per cent of people are from somewhere else.”

But she said that rather than funding the much needed infrastructure for the whole city, the city’s new money from IT was dividing the city by being used mainly in the interests of the industry. “There’s a rapid demand for infrastructure,” said Professor Sen. “In the traditional half of the city people will say services are now all in short supply.

“But if you ask the IT crowd, they’ll say they there’s a lack of roads, power and Greenfield

sites. They want to insulate themselves from the rest of the city and create an IT/ biotechnology corridor.”

She added that such infrastructure to benefit them directly was seen by many companies as an “entitlement” for bringing in the money that has turned Bangalore into a boomtown – and the division is growing wider.

“People in traditional industries such as textiles or domestic service want public transport – yet it is private transport that has increased by 400 per cent in ten years. The health services are falling apart because of investment in private hospitals.”

Professor Sen added such division brought other problems. “This shows up in the enormous problem of corruption in the city government. The boom has fuelled corruption and there’s the issue of demography – the biggest challenge is who is a citizen? Who is recognised as such?

“It’s not the haves and have-nots who argue. It’s the have-nots who fight with themselves. There are struggles for jobs and space – struggles which define citizenship.”

But she added the traditional side of the city still had a powerful voice. “In Karnataka the chief minister supported the industrialisation,” she added. “He was trounced in the elections.”

But she added the perils of development that happened too quickly were plain to see. “Bangalore has become a vampire,” she said. “Sucking up resources, offering in return a life of the undead.”

Fertile ground for new ideas

RESEARCH students’ work presented at the conference will provide fertile ground for new ideas in development - and elicit future policy strategies.

The DSA’s Research Students Study Group hosted four sessions throughout the conference, which, said organiser Joseph Assan from Liverpool University, could provide “rigorous empirical findings (that) could form the basis of development theory and direct new paths for policy”.

The first session used case studies from Ghana, China, Iran and Zimbabwe to illustrate how government policies influence the private sector and the limitations on resource management within fragile development strategies.

Findings on the high mortality rate from HIV/AIDs in Malawi were the

main focus of the second session, which highlighted contemporary development issues in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The third session used India as an example of how some forms of development in some countries reveal the irony that while transnational corporations are thriving in these locations, there are no social responsibility policies to complement development.

The final session highlighted the disasters caused by flooding which, said researchers, had exposed the lack of policy awareness and action.

The Study Group also displayed 25 research posters, which had been judged the best in a DSA competition sponsored by the Department For International Development and won their creators entry to the conference.

Vox pops

THE DSA considered it a high-quality conference at a superb venue with some excellent speakers and first-rate presentations. But what did the delegates themselves make of it? We chatted to a few of them during the three days to find out...

“This is my first DSA conference and I’m really enjoying it. As a junior consultant it gives me maximum exposure to the world of development. I went to the communications presentation and found it very useful.”

CORRIE BELL, ITAD Ltd

“This is a great opportunity to get to know the issues and to meet people. But I would like to see more presentations on Latin America, where I’m from. When people in the UK talk about development, there seems to be much more of a focus on Africa and Asia – we have poverty in Latin America too!”

CARLO PARDIZ, IDS

“This is the first of two conferences I’m attending while I’m in Europe and it’s good to be able to talk to such a wide range of people about research. I’m also here to make a presentation and it will be good to get feedback on my work. I’m interested in attending the poverty-related sessions and hearing people analyse poverty from different perspectives.”

RIA MAKITA, PhD student,
Australia National University

“This is a great opportunity for us to showcase our work, see what themes are developing in the field and to commission new authors. We have stands at a few events like this but the DSA conference is always the most important one of the year for us. We get to meet and greet lots of people with whom we could potentially work.”

ANNA HARDMAN, Zed Books

