Online Conference – Decolonising Development: Whose Voice, Whose Agenda?
Summary – Day 1
22 May 2017

Session 1: Who Holds the Power?
Session 2: From Response to Change

Our first day has been overwhelming in a very positive way, and judging by the liveliness of the discussion boards even as I write this, we look forward to reflecting on what colleagues from other time zones think of the discussions so far and to learn from their insights and experiences when we wake up in GMT+1 tomorrow morning!

We have held two half-day sessions on separate but inter-related themes. In the morning we considered 'Who holds the power?' and in the afternoon we wanted to galvanise our shared thinking in order to consider 'From response to change', reflecting on how we might think about power and change differently.

It is also worth emphasizing that all the threads from today will continue to be open for the three days so if you have registered for the conference but have not yet had a chance to contribute please do read through all of the contributions and let us know your thoughts on the discussion so far.

How do you synthesise all the voices of this one-day (out of three) in a way that is not reductive and doesn't miss all the nuances? It has been a rich discussion so far, but as promised, we will try to do justice to some of the key themes emerging out of today's conference proceedings and share some thoughtful quotes from participants over the day.

'Development' is a very powerful idea: whose knowledge counts?

The power of a certain idea of 'development' itself and the hierarchies that operate at all levels in both North and South seemed even to transcend the stakeholders that occupy the so-called development 'space'. As on partcipant suggested:

The fact is that the way we understand and practice development, majority of us endorse fundamental underpinnings of one model of economy.

With others sharing concerns about how development is done, concuring with another post about the 'structural' concerns raised in development practice:

[I] would like to add that much of the development interventions are too 'cosmetic' and short-lived and to a large extent divorced from lived- realities on the ground. It is very disturbing that some donor communities would rather provide partial funding for instance; are quick to commission studies with no meaningful outcomes for affected communities.

Some of you suggested that you 'struggle' with the idea of sustainability, which seemed in many instances more about building capacity for an individual or organisation to be financially independent rather than any serious consideration of what this term means or why it might be important for people and planet.

There was also agreement that this notion of 'development' is then produced, proliferated, then reproduced, re-interpreted, circulating from the local to the global and back again through a narrow range of 'acceptable' mechanisms, 'frozen' and 'decontexutalised' as one participant suggested, in textbooks used in formal education, written up and then launched in academic reports and books as 'expertise' or applied as part of funding cycles, programmes and projects and policies.

And what about people's existing knowledge? The shared emphasis on longer-term goals of social justice, voice and inclusion captured by elements of the SDG agenda, for instance, are not just contradicted but actively undermined by short-term funding and project cycles, as another participant highlighted. And all the stakeholders are caught in the middle between their own longer-term goals and their own survival that responds to the (sometime perverse) incentives in the system, as one contributor noted. For some of you it was very clear whose knowledge did(n't) count:

But who takes small farmers, peasants and their economies seriously. They are considered vestigial and policies around them facilitate their disappearance to be superseded by industrial agriculture all over the world. And their values, ethos and practices are considered retrograde.

Is the idea of development really fixed? As yet another participant suggested, perhaps there is a danger of essentialising those people at the margins as if they are also part of fixed-space cultural constructs or that capitalism/development has nothing to do with them – can we have a development that takes account of culture, any so-called local knowledge, that does not either essentialise what 'local culture' means or indeed what 'development' might mean? As the discussion evolved over the morning, it became clear that there were shared concerns around narrowing how we talk about development that has material consequences, and so this discussion around what we mean about, for example, 'gender equality' or what role this has in development needs to be examined carefully.

Another important theme was how then do we 'do' development? A number of issues were raised here, including around existing feedback and accontability:

Unfortunately, in my experience, the very definition of (the industry of) "development" is a series of disconnected "projects" that don't even refer to one another, much less build on them. For this reason, any "feedback" is filed with the project evaluation, and there's no incentive to make changes nor to value feedback. But I think the problem is far deeper than that. The intense rejection of feedback that I've experienced (over and over again) comes from INGOs, donors and the United Nations being unwilling to consider alternative views and especially not criticism! Many people feel that their "doing a good deed" should exempt them from accountability and even from scrutiny. The power dynamics of exclusion work at all levels.

Raising questions around the role of NGOs and aid systems:

The aid system is riddled with incentives that prevent well-meaning individuals from practising what they preach; just as the academic system is riddled with obstacles for researchers to shift the power dynamics in research. In all my dealings with practitioners from all over the world in huge institutions and tiny voluntary groups, I don't find anyone who would disagree with much of what is being said here. But changing many of the embedded practices of the system is a much harder task. For every good pilot initiative or research project there are many, many more examples of poor practice.

And states:

My deep believe - and I know that I am not enough imaginative - is that ultimately states have to be accountable towards their citizens but especially in the so called failed states, where there is a generic lack of accountability, virtually no one is accountable towards the citizen and those working on development have the moral obligation to build such a culture - at least those who still really care about the people we are supposed to serve.

Taken together, it set a firm basis to continue into the questions of how we respond to these challenges and promote change that were then considered in the afternoon.

Moving forward?

In the second session we went beyond just the North-South, East-West discussion and into the power and knowledge hierarchies that exist within communities, between genders, between citizen and state, and between the private and public sectors. Perhaps, it was mooted, IT investments offer one possible approach:

I wish to suggest that innovative methods of communicating with poor communities should be found. The developments in IT enable communicators to use social media to reach a wider audience. Where modern IT devices may not be

widely available, the traditional literature, radio, TV and road shows/theatres could be used.

We considered how to identify the windows of opportunity for being creative. There are times and places when saying no and pushing back are possible and we need to be brave enough to highlight the real failures and terrible practices in development. Sometimes though institutional barriers are difficult to challenge:

Donor agency staffs, especially local ones in foreign donor agencies, mostly do not want interviews on their perceptions on foreign aid recorded. Sometimes beneficiaries will say somethings off record that are very much contrary to their written submissions. Local employees in foreign donor agencies may be considered not to know the field very well and puppets not able to make decisions to benefit locals. Their foreign managers are also considered to have condescending attitudes towards recipients. Sometimes, during workshops and conferences, racial divides are visible among employees of some foreign agencies. There, is therefore, need by some development agencies to fight what is perceived as a snobbish attitude of some of their staff. Development agencies need to respect their beneficiaries and opinions.

As this quotation reiterates, there are other times and places where challenging the status quo is a risky strategy, for us as individuals who have our own livelihoods to consider and as organisations and institutions that have incentive structures that can mitigate against upsetting the status quo. Working with the grain is one option, using the dominant discourses, to educate (and re-educate) those in positions of political, economic or social power to think differently about how to approach development. We can bring those with power into learning spaces, build trust and openness and push them to rethink. There are many alternative models and spaces that are gaining traction.

There was not much dissent within the group – so far. There does seem to be a shared sense that our collective interest lies in finding ways to support long-term change that works for all those involved, particularly in relation to inclusion of marginalized groups:

Many of us probably agree that in many cases the voices of the poor and underprivileged who apparently should be the subject of development interventions do not count. Because they lack power and voice, their concerns at best can only be heard by the powerful but such concerns do not form the development agenda in their countries. Having participated in a baseline study in which we sought to establish the degree to which citizens' participation and needs were considered in service delivery in one of the country's in East Africa, I was surprised at the findings. Those who have power simply ignore the poor and set their development and service delivery agenda based on information from politicians and government technocrats. What must I do as a development practitioner to ensure that power is used to serve the greater good rather than the agenda of a few?

As one contributor put it, not everyone wants to be an engineer or a mechanic. However, I think the consensus that we saw today is that people who have traditionally been marginalised and without power should have a choice about whether a car is the best option, the type of car that is being bought, and the direction that the car is travelling. There are some great ideas and examples about how to do this; we need to build that into a critical mass.

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Online Conference – Decolonising Development: Whose Voice, Whose Agenda?
Summary – Day 2
23 May 2017

Session 1: Targeting evidence more effectively?
Session 2: Setting priorities for research

Day two of the conference focused on accountability, evidence and impact. The morning session concentrated on the issue of 'Targeting evidence more effectively' and the afternoon session was concerned with 'Setting priorities for research.' Some initial questions for the discussion included:

- How can we improve links between evidence, action and outcomes?

- What types of indicators make sense and in which situations?

- Does impact have to be 'measurable'?

- What counts as 'impact' from research partnerships that stretch across different disciplines, development issues and cultural contexts?

- Who decides on what counts as quality and rigour in research?

- How can we ensure development accountability frameworks and language are meaningful and not purely meeting bureaucratic needs?

As with yesterday's discussion it is difficult to do justice to the rich debate, which raised a number of shared concerns as well as highlighting positive examples of ways forward that could be adapted, replicated or simply provide inspiration. However, here is an initial synthesis of some of the key themes, questions and examples.

The politics of evidence: who is deciding what to measure?

Decisions about what should be measured and how are too often being made by donors and others with power (read money and influence), who often have little direct experience or knowledge of the places, people and issues they are funding. The lack of consultation with local NGOs and other stakeholders is not only a characteristic of donor funding; INGOs acting as intermediaries or designing projects are also perpetuating these 'top-down' a-symmetrical relationships.

'One key challenge is around who develops the metrics and indicators that we put so much time and resource into measuring and reporting on. Often these are guided by donor priorities or by the INGO receiving the funding – while the actual project is

implemented by a local NGO or CSO partner which often has very little say in setting the indicators and deciding what impact means in their context.'

Setting ourselves up to fail (or bend the truth): whose ideas of success matter?

Are we too wedded to trying to achieve the type of change that donors want to see? Is that types of change even possible or does it belong to a (Western-centric) notion of linear change and of development interventions as neat 'stories' or fairy tales with happy endings and predictable circumstances? Change is a far messier, circuitous process that rarely leads where we expect it to (and so belies the idea of a theory) but hierarchies of power and funding modalities seem to make it impossible to state this explicitly in project design.

'Enter evidence… If impact must be shown, it must lend itself to a narrative that has a beginning, middle and end… Evidence is the story with a face, a story that allows linear readings and a story that seldom tolerates ambiguity.'

The requirement to develop logframes that centre around often arbitrary numerical indicators and a prediction of results before the research 'story' even starts further closes of the space for questioning the terms on which research and funding are often based.

'The planning and assessing of most programs are still based on linear log frames that are overall insufficient for complex change processes that will need to ultimately contribute to shifting power and addressing injustice.'

'It is really, fundamentally important to think about the link between knowledge and power in development. At the moment my sense is that power is linked to knowledge that is produced to conform to a certain set of principles about 'measuring' change and ensuring 'evidence' for the change that donors want to see. Theories of change often reflect assumptions that underpin existing hierarchies of power. Where the power is increasingly absent is in knowledge that is created/generated through relationships with people - and for me, especially through movements of people who are demanding that we challenge the existing hierarchies of power.'

Is questioning these unrealistic terms even possible – if researchers and practitioners dare to communicate to donors the reality that they have not achieved what they intended or hoped for, what might be the risks in terms of losing funding for expenses already borne, or jeopardising future funding?

'The representative of [one] donor agency told us – "dont come back after two years and tell us that this failed. What we want to know is what worked." (read, come hell or high water, you better make it work).'

'Success' is contextual and subjective

Imposing a narrow set of indicators may satisfy donor requirements but if they do not facilitate or contribute to transformation can projects be seen as successful? One participant raised this issue in relation to gender responsive programming:

[A] key issue has to do with the capacity of a selected set of indicators to represent advancement (or not) regarding social change, frequently in non-Western contexts. In extreme though not infrequent situations, we have encountered programs that have "successfully" complied with their "standard" gender indicators and targets…. but have

contributed little in terms of transforming gender power relations and women's status quo.'

Who is evidence being generated for and how is it being applied?
High-level numerical indicators may be useful for making global comparisons but to what extent can they be translated into action on the ground that addresses very specific challenges such as gaps in childhood education? It seems very obvious that it is the practitioners and communities grappling with global challenges on a daily basis are best placed to assess the situation using indicators that are locally relevant, and understand exactly what is needed and what will work best. So why does the bulk of funding still go towards generating 'metrics intended to measure and track countries' progress towards the 17 agreed on Sustainable Development Goals and their respective targets'?

Participants highlighted the need for evidence systems and processes that are transparent, 'user-friendly: 'How do we make work accessible to stakeholders for accountability and build capacity among 'ordinary' people?'

One contributor from India drew our attention to the development of locally relevant citizen-focused assessment tools for informing decisions and planning on education and foundational learning, engaging a wide variety of stakeholders.

'The Citizen-Led Assessment (CLA) model is designed to generate evidence on scale around the key issue of foundational learning, while at the same time informing and engaging a wide variety of stakeholders. Because the latter objective is as important as the former, assessment tools are designed to be 'user-friendly' rather than 'expert-friendly' – simple to understand and use by almost anyone. Beginning in 2005 as the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) in India, the model has spread organically over time to include fourteen countries on three continents, now collectively known as the People's Action for Learning (PAL) network. At the core of the CLA model is a set of principles rather than a fixed set of indicators.'

More often than not 'beneficiaries' are not being consulted at all

'The prima-facie position is that all of us are focusing on understanding the best way to deliver meaningful outcomes for the farmers. But in the process of setting up the research program other agendas intrude – the northern universities need the southern university otherwise they cannot access the funding they need. The southern
university is looking for opportunities to send their masters students to universities in the north. In this shuffling of unspoken bids the farmers are a silent note on the table. purse-strings'

Poorly targeted, inappropriate programming too often results from this failure to put initial time and resources into simply talking to people, asking them what they need and want, and understanding the local socio-cultural and economic context.

'Our researcher [in Zimbabwe] found that the rigid requirements and standards of value chains on households where the context is entirely different from the one in which the project was designed, had created a substantial burden on the lives of the farmers'

But making space to hear 'local perspectives' alone is not enough if they are not being recognised as valid or credible evidence

One participant shared examples (of a child marriage programme in South India and an impact programme in South Florida) where the rich insights gained through lengthy participatory planning processes were dismissed because of the dissonance in ideas about what constitutes valid, credible evidence.

'Consultants, staff and participants alike were enthusiastic both about how local field staff and mobilizers were learning to value, facilitate and lead the critical reflection process, and how connections were being formed and strengthened amongst participants. It was clear that the conclusions, questions and ideas emerging from the processes were highly insightful, emerging from a process where people's voices, particularly the most marginalized were given space and weight. Interestingly, in both of these cases the process was hijacked, or at the least knocked off track by the calls for "evidence" and "rigor".

In the case of the Child Marriage work, I recall a conference call I participated in …where we were enthusiastically explaining the outcomes of two weeks of training, piloting and experimenting in the field with creative approaches and techniques, when a staff person from the global office said, "but where is the data?'

More efficient, coherent reporting systems are badly needed

One key shared concern was the need to create less onerous, more streamlined accountability mechanisms for CSOs so they can spend more time delivering and less time (and money) reporting in multiple formats and against multiple targets.

One participant noted:

'the development of numerous national, regional, global and sector-specific CSO accountability codes is highly relevant. Current literature lists more than 300 partly competing and overlapping codes asking for a number of similar requirements in different formats and referencing language.'

She went on to describe a new initiative design to create more coherent requirements:

'In fact, nine CSO networks are currently working together for aligning their accountability codes and practices and devising a collective Global Standard on CSO Accountability. These networks from all continents, whose constituencies represent nearly 1500 CSOs across the world, are constructing a global reference standard to enable CSOs worldwide to improve and harmonize their accountability frameworks and practice. They are in the second year of a three-year project with two important objectives, besides the one referred to improve their own accountability practices and codes.'

How can evidence be more demand-driven?
There was a very constructive discussion on how to move beyond the self-perpetuating, top-down agendas that often drive the identification of development research questions

and indicators and the types of evidence being gathered. The need for policy-makers in developing countries to play a more active role in shaping research agendas was raised.

'Start with the users'. In order to see research feed meaningfully
into policy in developing countries, we need to understand how policymakers
these countries view evidence and what their needs are.'

But there are caveats here: 'how can we ensure that policymaker-researcher discussions are inclusive and diverse? *Even when meaningful collaborations emerge between researchers and policymakers, there are other kinds of marginalisation at work in those spaces.'

How can we move beyond entrenched (and often unspoken) political and power dynamics in the production of research?

Participants raised the issue that deeply politicised hierarchies of knowledge operate on a global scale, often marginalising research from Southern research institutions that often have a far clearer understanding of complex challenges facing the countries in which they work.

'Most international development research continues to be funded from the North and published in the North'

'Power relations in research are a real and present issue, which can have a significant impact on the outcomes, but is rarely acknowledged. We need to think hard about power in development research (and power cannot be endowed, it can only be achieved).'

How do we promote learning as a key reason for generating evidence?

Many participants raised the point that the implicit value of gathering evidence as a iterative, learning process is being lost in the focus on proving and generating 'hard facts.' 'Why is there so little funding available for knowledge sharing and for learning?' How can we create space for the type of reflection and reflexivity that is critical to improving research and practice, and to bringing about the social justice and positive change we want to see?

'There is too much emphasis on only doing what we can 'prove', that which is much harder to measure like advocacy may be sidelined, even though it has the potential to bring about large scale change.'

'What can be done at the level of organizations/NGOs, local development actors? Evaluations/assessments should be converted in learning experiences that do not have negative consequences for program/project managers in implementing agencies. There is much to do at the level of organizational cultures to make them learning organizations that listen to the voices of the marginalized populations they serve. The regional & national voluntary professional evaluation organizations (VOPES) are moving towards promoting learning & accountability systems that may help address this important issue in development.'

'I think there is also a clash between accountability and learning and a difficult balance to strike here – often the focus is on collecting data for accountability which means less

time or resources to a) figure out what change in people's lives in that context might look like (perhaps starting by asking the communities we work with rather than developing a new spreadsheet or complex tool…) and b) figure out if our work is making a difference and how we can improve, change and learn.'

Written and compiled by Alyson Brody

Online Conference – Decolonising Development: Whose Voice, Whose Agenda?
Summary – Day 3
24 May 2017

Session 1: Adaptive, Partner-led Responses
Session 2: Looking to the future …

Day three of the conference focused on different aspects of partnership. The morning session concentrated on the issue of 'Adaptive, partner-led responses' and the afternoon session was concerned with 'Looking to the future', considering how we move forward given all of the sharing, listening and learning that has taken place over the three days. Some initial questions for the discussion in the morning included:

- What are the benefits and challenges of doing locally-led adaptive development with partners?

- How do we avoid replicating post-colonial relationships of power in work with partners?

- Why and how should we work with partnerships in fragile states and other challenging environments?

- How can development organisations and researchers work more effectively with informal structures such as movements (including women's movements) and 'unusual partners' such as Trade Unions?

- How are people already working more creatively within the current frameworks and with donors?

As with all of the discussions so far, it has proven a real challenge to do justice to the richness and depth of debate, which has consistently raised multiple shared concerns alongside continued attempts to highlight positive examples of ways forward that could be adapted, replicated or simply provide inspiration. However, here is an initial synthesis of some of the key themes, questions and examples covering discussions in both the morning and afternoon that will help to ensure that everyone can remain a part of this on-going and vital dialogue.

Partnerships and power

The morning's discussions added more thoughtful reflection about power dynamics in partnerships and the limits of the partnership discourse.

'Partnerships' are becoming more complex as we recognise the value of much more interaction across sectors and actors as one key contributor noted:

- *Efforts to bring about more systemic change in the approach to development will be assisted by building those partnerships across sectors, across types of entity (e.g. government, business) so that there is continuity even if there isn't specific funding at a particular time*
- *Rather than going from single project to single project, it can be valuable to build partnerships across many activities at the same time so that you are operating more like a distributed, highly flexible social movement united by the desire to bring about that wider change*
- *Real partnership is facilitated by co-production, where the partners work on project ideas from the very outset rather than outsiders merely trying to transfer a 'good idea'.*

Questions were also raised against 'partnership' as a notion. Is it the 'new tyranny' as one participant asked? Something imposed by new funding arrangements and development discourses? Or we can own it – after all, we are here in this setting right now because we want to get out of our silos and interact beyond our usual networks and comfort zones. One participant suggests that the history is not so easily undone:

It is important to note that the issues of institutional racism, short-termism, and the many other ills associated with donor-driven development is an institutionalized attitude that has been nurtured over decades and would take many more decades to re-write. However, it is important not not that, if the agenda to decolonize development would achieve any tangible results, it must first start with the donor having a self-consciousness that, the support being provided is not a 'free lunch'. It is the idea of self-entitlement and the self imposed development bearer that creates the 'tyranny of partnership'.

Partnership: working with states, movements

At the same time, some contributors highlighted the difficulties of working with the state, including protecting local actors from state institutions. DO we need more checks and balances, e.g. regular power analysis and political economy analysis?

All that has been discussed resonates a lot with us on 'whose knowledge', 'whose action' and 'whose funding". Frankly the issue of development – its decolonisation is anchored in the issue of 'government ownership and action' as much as in 'citizens' ownership and action' of critical issues. With the right to eduction and right to information discourse and entitlements space becoming so populated the first action lies in our
backyard; the governments must be willing to engage for the long haul. The question is do we invest in this aspect sufficiently as civil society/independent movements? Do we do this with a strategy that is fully worked out with the partner both with the intellectual and social capital it deserves viz., with the government? Do we under-invest or over-invest? There are many questions and challenges for us

to make this paradigm a
reality for us where the predominant sustained funding must come from domestic
financing - if this has to be a scaled up effort. Crafting the challenge and crafting
the solutions backed by financing from sustainable sources has to first and
foremost on home ground and co-crafted. is that happening sufficiently? This is
what is making me toss and turn along with our teams ...

We've heard additional reflections and examples of creative, locally-led adaptive
development, with fascinating experiences of collaborative and participatory
initiatives in Haiti, Lebanon, UK, Somalia, Central & West Africa, East Africa and
beyond. A notable element of this discussion was to do with how NGOs might
take control of partnership by supporting 'real movements':

... many of us who work with NGOs and similar organizations feel this disconnect in
our work, where power = money and even a good NGO's ethos can't avoid the
accountability to report on the use of funds, according to a contract, even when
better opportunities for development are available. But, we have found that we can
use the resources and informal power of funded organizations, when they have a
progressive set of values, to support real movements. That can involve simple,
informal efforts such as providing a place for people to meet and discuss issues (no-
cost, no-strings), or more structured steps such as including grass-roots movements
in convening formal meetings with government and decision-makers, ensuring time
during meetings for their independent voices, etc. ...

This contributor goes on to share an example of their work with a locally-led
movement:

There is no budget, often no formal organization, and the implicit requirement is
that you contribute (ie, not receive) resources. The members include grassroots
activists, small organizations, along with some national universities and
international NGOs. Often, things stay quiet for too long, but when the energy
comes together, we find real change. It works on the sheer force and diversity of its
members. This is just an example of how we sometimes leverage the resources and
power we have in NGOs (and other groups) to democratize development, beyond
funding contracts and log-frames. There are certainly internal contradictions, but
that is also a reflection of reality in development. Our main point is keeping our
eyes open, to see how to engage with people beyond our formal roles ...

These examples reinforce points raised in previous sessions on the need to
beware destroying dynamics that are working in our eagerness to help. It is
possible to provide support in ways that don't require huge amounts of funding
or bureaucracy.

Building capacity in the North and the role of scholarship

We also had discussion around what might be termed 'reverse capacity-building'
and 'two-way capacity building' which gives space for innovative learning and
re-education of northern/global actors. Working in this way requires challenging
narrow, top-down interpretations of the operation of North-South dynamics:

A tremendous amount of the effort will have to be focused on educating, changing and indeed developing global Northern institutions: working in partnership requires capacity building among ALL concerned – there is a huge amount that institutions in the global North lack capacity to do. We need to think about development as global development, not something that the North has and will do for the South. It would be considered nothing short of insane if say a group of [French-speaking East Africans] who spoke no English said they were going to go from [East Africa], base themselves in Paris and try to tell some part of the UK how to do something better. And yet that is pretty normal for much of development, with people who speak no [East African language]and don't go to [East Africa] basing themselves in Nairobi and deciding what will happen in [another East African country] to 'develop' it.

Finally the session threw up some challenges for research and researchers: when and how to engage and at what cost? What about academic objectivity versus 'scholarly activism'? One participant suggested that research is important as both 'objectivity' and 'activism':

… the philosophy of research matters a great deal. That is how we view what is truth or fact. From my anthropological background I see all knowledge as socially constructed and subjective. What is defined as quality evidence or as valid is shaped by powerful actors and institutions, and is not a technical judgement only. Very often within research partnerships (and across academic disciplines) we do not explore our starting assumptions - and these vary hugely from discipline to discipline, as well as within disciplines. There are plenty of spaces within academia and many academics who also conceive of themselves as activists … Research is only one part of activism, and the activities of teaching and learning are at least as important components of this … In academia there does remain a space for critical thinking and challenging dominant narratives.

Overall, the session seems to be asking us to be more humble and self-reflective, be flexible enough to grasp opportunities when they arise and be willing to push-back and say no. We need to not just decolonize development but also decolonize ourselves.

Looking to the future …

The final session of the conference brought out a number of views based on questions firstly around the role of 'philanthropy', particularly given the number of large, private donors who now operate in development practice. Contributors suggested that the private nature of some of this giving can at times lead to more dynamism and responsiveness to partnership demands and local needs, but has caused a backlash in the context in which participant operates:

For one thing, the sector itself - in fact, the civil society sector overall - is facing many challenges in legitimizing itself and being allowed the space to function untethered by increasingly restrictive policies. We are seeing this across the region and the fallout has some potentially devastating consequences. Everything from the

ability to conduct "philanthropic business" in a local context, whether it's due to banking restrictions or suspicions cast over the sector as a whole, to allowing for reliable and consistent movement of funding across borders, the sector is stifled and is under constant scrutiny to prove its merit and worth. The amount of self-censorship philanthropic organizations have to exercise is stunning. So the mere term "philanthropy" can have quite negative connotations, which is discouraging to say the least.

There was agreement that we need more data and understanding of how private/philanthropic organisations operate in this space and the extent to which the issues discussed over the three days resonate with the experiences of working with private philanthropic donors and foundations.

There was also a final discussion on how we move forward, bringing the focus back on to the main theme of the conference i.e., how do we 'decolonise' development? For some, collaboration, particularly in relation to teaching and capacity-building, is key:

Can we design more collaborative programmes which expose students to different environments and ways of thinking about all the things we've discussed here during their programme with a much greater emphasis on transnational learning, marrying theoretical grounding with exposure to the real worlds of policy, civil society and privately-funded initiatives? Can we do this in a way that breaks down the hierarchies and the binaries, that turns capacity building on its head? It sounds infinitely sensible, but I've designed and taught development at a UK university and I know the barriers are huge to making such programmes work for many of the reasons we've explored. However, does that mean we shouldn't try or try harder? So is there scope to collaborate to identify interesting models for more grounded academic 'development studies' programmes and build from there?

Some participants suggested that we start with ourselves:

1. *Yes, let's take pride in and recognize our contributions absolutely, but never stop turning the mirror on ourselves, our "industry" and the decision-makers and asking the hard questions.*
2. *How about building the capacity, opportunities, support for discussion about development/social change in Southern institutions? So that there is a cadre of young people with the analysis and tools to create their own definitions and vision for 'development', and engage in the conversation on equal footing? How can this happen?*
3. *Love the focus of becoming researchers, consultants, practitioners, and partners 'with soul', and think it is connected to this idea of relating individual with societal transformation that was raised the first day in the discussion …*

Still others suggested that we need to more actively challenge donors about important systemic disjunctures that persist in practice, a message we need to proactively take to donors who fund development work:

The generalized topic of concern was the "donor driven development" and how this approach affects the advancement towards development goals in a coordinated and concerted way. As an independent consultant I have had the opportunity to evaluate programs and projects of different sectors in Latin America, most of them working in the same communities, with very similar purposes but under different financial sources from the international donors and totally disconnected between them. As several people have expressed in this conference, this is a waste of time and resources, and we all know that there are ways to make more efficient use of those funds without losing the much needed support from individual donors from the public and private sectors. And of course finding ways to ensure accountability but also learning from experiences. So, in terms of what is next after this meeting, I would suggest bringing the results of this global interaction to the donor's table, maybe in a form of a global forum with them, but organized by local communities? … The bottom-up approach has started to take off, let's don't lose this momentum!

Others see this as a challenge we all need to share but that it takes time and maybe we work together to find resources as well:

Wayforward-wise, I come from a culture where after a heavy meal or feast, it is critical to digest and reflect before taking the next step. From that angle, I am still thinking about a really meaningful future from all these ideas/emotions/good intentions/suggestions. To sustain the momentum, we may need to evolve into an active online group that continues to discuss/share and deepen the issues. Since most these initiatives require a team that steers and consolidates things together, the organizers of this conference may consider leading in either coming up with a collective, funded programme that can use these ideas to slowly influence the current development paradigm.

The conference has generated so much engagement, enthusiasm and goodwill from all over the world to openly share good practice, links to documentation and reflexive critique about the real problems we all face as people committed to facilitating, in whatever way we are able, improved social and economic development for everyone. For us as organisers, this is clearly just the start of a much-needed and long-overdue dialogue about how we decolonise development in practice.

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