

# 1 Introduction: hope and despair

The emotional geography of development spans the twin poles of hope and despair. Development is a powerfully affective world that touches us all. Despair at failure, corruption and enduring suffering sit alongside hope invested into how we imagine the future, but they are not the only responses. Guilt, anger, cynicism and piety all charge development encounters with emotion and morality.

## Key points covered by this chapter

- This chapter outlines different theoretical bases by which policy-makers, scholars and practitioners have sought to understand development.
- We describe how ways of thinking about development influence practice.
- We look at a number of points of similarity between globalised narratives and describe how these common assumptions may limit understanding of the complex reality of change.
- We outline the basis of recent anthropological approaches to the study and practice of development.
- Finally the main themes and the chapters of the book are introduced.

Viewed from the comfort of social and geographical distance, economically ‘poor countries’ are conjured up as places of unrelenting misery by the US and European media.<sup>1</sup> They are beset by social breakdown and endemic corruption, where state failure results in endless cycles of civil conflict. Grinding poverty and senseless violence, ‘biblical’ famines, disasters and killer diseases are depicted. Poor, Third World or developing countries are populated by the starving, the destitute, the displaced and the marginalised. They live in unsanitary conditions, are unable to access clean water and lack adequate standards of healthcare. To make the subject of development ‘newsworthy’, the mainstream media tend to employ extreme and sensationalist images of suffering and despair. But such portrayals are not restricted to news reports. Fundraising drives and awareness-raising campaigns also rely on the evocation of despair to provoke a reaction. Shocking images are accompanied by passionate pleas for support.

These invented pictures of despair are only one slice of the story. Set against situations of hopelessness, development agencies offer potential supporters

an imagined future that will bring miraculous improvements in people's lives. Mission statements ask us to imagine 'a world free of poverty and injustice'.<sup>2</sup> Others inform readers that 'No child is born to die'.<sup>3</sup> Ambitious if not impossible targets were set in 2000 the Millennium Development Goals adopted by the United Nations promise to halve world poverty by 2015. The battle against poverty may be a 'massive challenge' but 'we are winning the battle, right now, in all sorts of ways – big and small'.<sup>4</sup> In rich countries, people are told that our support 'can, and does, make a difference'.<sup>5</sup> The message is clear: 'Dig down the back of the sofa. Empty your pockets. Raid the piggy bank. Why? Because every penny you give will help us realise our vision – an end to poverty'.<sup>6</sup> Proposals and plans chart paths to better futures. Guarantees of a better world are supported with evidence of previous success stories, the tangible outcomes and past achievements that illustrate mastery and competence.

Sensationalistic portrayals of development serve to attract attention, galvanise support and direct practice. But in making these dramatic claims, the realities of life are distorted – not just the 'everyday' experiences of poverty and marginality but other aspects of life are lost: work, play, fun, friends, as well as deals, gossip and quarrels. Nor does the impatient optimism of fundraising literature or planning proposals conform to the sometimes mundane realities of development work, such as the endless committee meetings, training courses and testing of toolkits. Such down-to-earth realities are not 'news'. Meanwhile 'donor fatigue' encourages ever more extravagant claims to be made to save us all from the depths of despair with visionary optimism and hope.

Rather than the polarised pessimistic depictions and exaggerated promises permitted by distance, in this book we will engage with a range of representations and realities through close-up examinations of everyday experience. Important sets of actors in 'Aidland' are the planners, consultants, advisors and policy-makers (Apthorpe 2011). Our starting point is aid, but our focus extends beyond at points to consider all who are touched by, involved in or affected by processes of planned (and occasionally unplanned) change, even including celebrities (see Box 1.1). In defining the object of study so broadly, we move constantly between the big picture and the fine details that make it up. This book considers 'the spaces in between', the gaps that exist between the past and the future, between policy and practice, developed and developing or between success and failure. In the space between these binary oppositions lies the real world of aid and development.

So what is development? The meaning of anything interesting is usually unclear and 'development' is no exception. Even concepts with one meaning can be hard to reduce to their essence. When comparing different examples of a phenomenon it can be more instructive to consider the overlapping similarities (like threads in a rope) rather than the one common feature they all share. When you have a concept with many meanings, as you do with development, the task of finding comparative meaning gets even more complex.

**Box 1.1. Band aid or brand aid? Celebrities in development**

In counterpoint to the anonymous, silent black recipient of charity (see Box 1.2 on page 14), individually named, fabulously wealthy, easily recognisable and (mostly) white celebrities are often chosen as the public face and voice of international fundraising campaigns.

Celebrities have become so integral to development fundraising that agents tend to advise their clients on how to handle the endless requests; some suggest choosing three organisations and giving them twelve days a year. The UN agencies meet quarterly to make sure they are not approaching the same people. From the development agency viewpoint, celebrities often have to be ‘tracked’ for up to a year before they can be asked to help. For both sides it is about promoting ‘the brand’ – that of the celebrity and the organisation – but to make it look authentic, some connection has to be found. Anthropologist Dan Brockington writes, ‘authenticity is forged in the public domain. It is performed to publics and represented by the media’ (2011: 20). Corporates are particularly star struck when it comes to famous people – business people fawn over someone reasonably well known and attractive, according to one informant – so when offering assistance to NGOs they love getting free association with celebrity.

Public figures such as Bono and Bob Geldof are now as well known for fighting poverty and famine as they are for their music. But celebrity involvement in international development tends to polarise opinions. Brockington suggests that activism by famous figures tends to generate more heat than light. He identifies the following two typical types of response to celebrities: (1) celebrities should devote themselves to tackling development problems, speak out against injustice and tackle the root causes of poverty. By using the media spotlight celebrities put their fame to good use to highlight important issues. (2) celebrities just jump on bandwagons, embrace easy causes and shy away from difficult and unpopular issues, all to advance their careers. Celebrities do not understand enough about development issues and cannot claim to speak as experts; they fail because they do not tackle the structural causes of poverty.<sup>7</sup>

The term ‘development’ was initially used to refer to processes of social and economic change. Starting with the ancient Greeks, Cowen and Shenton trace this sense of development as a *process* that is both natural and inevitable (1996: viii–ix). But the focus of this book is on a slightly different meaning of the word. Here we use ‘development’ to refer to the purposeful pursuit of economic, social and political goals through planned intervention. Development interventions are conscious acts carried out through projects, policies and programmes by governmental and non-governmental actors. Though primarily applied to efforts to bring about improvements this definition may be extended to encompass attempts to ameliorate the negative effects of change.

Notions of development as *natural process* and development as *planned intention* are not inseparable; nor are the boundaries between aid and development. The

contemporary reality in our globalised world is that all planned change involves both indigenous and expatriate stakeholders and therefore it is hard to separate *national* ‘development’ from *international* ‘aid’. If ‘development’ is used for attempts to produce long-term social, economic or political change then, in contrast, ‘humanitarian aid’ responds to disruptions and emergencies, such as war, famine and natural disasters, with an emphasis on the short term. But the boundaries are blurred: development usually involves some shorter-term aid – helping the poorest families out when they are destitute – and humanitarian aid often aims for longer-term service provision. In this book most of our examples are drawn from the anthropological literature, much of which focuses on international aid and development cooperation between the global ‘North’ and ‘South’, although at points we refer to a fuller range of development encounters. So, while we may relax our definition at times, we follow Cowen and Shenton by asking not ‘What is development?’ but rather ‘What is intended by development?’ (1996: xiii). This leads to a further question: ‘Who decides what development should be?’

Development has become an industry that has grown up around efforts to engineer social change or eradicate poverty. Again, we find that people working in the development industry use the word in different ways and either understand, or misunderstand, each other in the context of its use. Nandy and Visvanathan recognise development as both an *idea* and a *community*:

The idea of development has served many purposes in our times. It has served as a reason of state, as a legitimiser of regimes, as part of the vision of a good society, and, above all, as a shorthand expression for the needs of the poor. It has produced a new expertise and created a new development new community of scholars, policy-makers, development journalists, reader of development news, development managers, and activists – who together can be said to constitute the development community. (1990: 145)

In this chapter we discuss the ideas of development planners and practitioners and how they mobilise and justify action. Planned interventions require desirable destinations to be identified and supposedly linear routes to them to be carefully charted. But questions about desirable ends and the means by which they should be attained are not simple ones to answer. Embedded in the cultures of communities, collectivities and institutions, these questions are shaped by the moral values of those that hold them.<sup>8</sup>

### Development as easy

In the search for the foundational text for the idea of development as the fight against poverty, ignorance and disease, a good candidate would be the inaugural address made by President Truman in Washington, DC on 20 January 1949.<sup>9</sup> Truman spoke of the misery that afflicted ‘more than half the people of the world’. Handicapped by poverty ‘their food is inadequate, they are victims of

disease, their economic life is primitive and stagnant'. This could not be allowed to continue: 'For the first time in history, humanity possesses the knowledge and the skill to relieve the suffering of these people ... Greater production is the key to prosperity and peace. And the key to greater production is a wider and more vigorous application of modern scientific and technical knowledge.' After the horrors of the Second World War and with newly independent states emerging from decades of colonial rule, eyes were turned towards the future. Proclaiming the end of the old order Truman spelt out a vision of a better world for all: 'The old imperialism – exploitation for foreign profit – has no place in our plans. What we envisage is a program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair-dealing ... We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas.' So began the great progressive project of freedom and prosperity promised for all. The age of empire was at an end; the age of development had begun.

The idea of a global geographical divide between 'haves' and 'have-nots' is one that, until recently, has been central to the idea and the practice of development. In deploying the term 'underdeveloped' Truman identified a new global geography marked by disparities in wealth and technology. Set against the term 'developed', this division highlighted an incompleteness, an absence or backwardness. The peoples and nations of the underdeveloped world needed to improve and to grow. The solution was obvious: development could be effected by the export of money, technology and expertise from the developed to the developing world.

Truman's vision for development is a simple one in the sense of identifying the goal of a world freed from poverty, disease and oppression. Who could disagree? The following decades brought together a powerful coalition of policy-makers, academics and development professions united by a shared belief about the possibilities of development. But, in more than half a century since Truman delivered his address the better, healthier, more prosperous future that he envisaged has materialised only for some. Over the past half-century substantial differences have emerged to account for this failure and suggest what the goals of development should be and how they might be achieved. At the root of these divergent views lie fundamental questions about the meaning of development. These questions entail moral and political judgements about social change as well as technical questions about how to achieve it. However, anthropologists tend to argue that the problems and consequent solutions to development have been simplistically defined, as if development were easy, and even misconceived.

The idea of easy development persists in the face of deepening poverty in sub-Saharan Africa with the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). In 2000 the UN countries agreed to halve poverty by 2015; despite significant decreases in poverty in East Asia, Africa only saw poverty drop from 58 to 51 per cent between 1990 and 2005. Further echoes of this naivety can be found in the participatory development movement (see later in this chapter and Chapter 4). It lives on in

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fundraising images and the publicity materials of aid agencies of all types and sizes (see Box 1.2). Finally the bureaucratic demands of development require the applicants and supplicants to give an impression that development is easy – with impossible visions, ambitious targets and positive reports (as described in Chapter 9), whereas it is clearly fraught with endless difficulty, difference and conflict, as we aim to show in this book.

### Development as modernity

With the dismantling of European colonial rule, the two decades that followed the end of Second World War saw the birth of newly independent sovereign states across much of Africa and Asia. Development thinking during this period was dominated by the notion of a straightforward route leading upwards to the goal of modernity. Alongside the geographical divide identified by President Truman, we find a temporal divide that makes development a question of *time* as well as *space*. Proponents of modernisation theory saw all societies arrayed at various points along a linear progression. Viewing the developed world's past as the undeveloped world's present, it follows that the developed world's present is the undeveloped world's future. To modernisation theorists and proponents, development can be achieved by mimicking the historical experience of the industrial states of Europe and North America.

Modernisation theory has cast its spell across all development institutions at some point in their history and remains in implicit forms. Among the most influential of the modernisation theorists is Walt Whitman Rostow (1916–2003). In his *Stages of Economic Growth* (1960), Rostow outlined a series of evolutionary levels – starting with 'traditional society', and moving through 'preconditions for take-off', 'take-off' and 'the drive to maturity' – through which all societies had to pass before reaching the final age of 'high mass consumption' characterised by high productivity, advanced technology and urbanisation. In this evolutionary schema those countries at the earlier stages of economic growth were bound by 'traditional' modes of social organisation resistant to change. Rostow optimistically promoted the idea that ultimately all societies would progress beyond this initial backward state. Developmental efforts should therefore concentrate on re-orientating conservative norms and values towards those associated with capitalist development: individual initiative, risk taking, innovation and freedom from kinship constraints and customary obligations.

The deficits of underdevelopment could be made good by a simple replication of historical conditions of the already developed. But which conditions should be replicated? Large-scale and capital-intensive infrastructure was the means by which development was to be achieved: centralised states invested heavily in projects of road-building, the provision of irrigation and the promotion of heavy industry. Despite broad consensus on the fundamental desirability of development, agreement on the actual direction that change should take has proved less



settled. The early prioritisation of industrialisation and economic growth in the newly decolonised countries of the ‘Third World’ had, by the 1970s, shifted towards a focus on reducing poverty. Initial ideas of political independence, industrial progress and urban expansion gave way to new notions that suggested development was equivalent to, and achievable through, a greater degree of integration into a capitalist market system. The primacy of the state as the provider of development was replaced by an emphasis on the market as the driver of progress. Structural Adjustment Programmes provided blueprint solutions for taming macro-economic imbalances, dismantling barriers to trade and reorienting production towards export markets. More recently the ‘Washington Consensus’ of a mix of economic neoliberalism and ‘good governance’ has attained significant influence among key international policy-makers.

Such explicit modernisation theory has long since fallen out of intellectual fashion in some circles. However, it persists in the mainstream, even if in subtler forms: the hierarchical notions of knowledge and expertise that lay at its heart continue to inform approaches to development. Despite variations in the way development is conceived, the means of delivery through particular institutions and approaches have remained remarkably resilient. These ‘travelling rationalities’ inform contemporary development policy and influence practice. According to Mosse: ‘There is today unprecedented expert consensus on how global poverty is to be eliminated and the poor governed, brought about by new processes of aid “harmonisation” or “alignment”’ (2011: 3). Anthropologists have shown that homogenised development policy knowledge is socially produced out of ‘locally transient but internationally permanent and close-knit communities of experts’ (*ibid.*: 14).

Within aid agencies extraordinary faith continues to be invested in ‘global’ policy ideas, models or frameworks whose universal applicability is expected to affect predictable economic, social and political transformation around the world. From the capitals of ‘Aidland’, powerful policy-makers direct the courses of action. Armies of expatriate development advisors and consultants transmit these plans around the world. Later in this book we will examine in detail the international consensus that they promote around issues of poverty (Chapter 4), rights (Chapter 5), technology and knowledge (Chapter 6) and neoliberal economics (Chapter 6).

Assumed to progress in a linear and predictable manner, development projects are planned with predefined objectives, outputs, targets and indicators (see Chapter 8). Development’s ‘liberal and travelling formalism’ constantly works to frame places in terms of lessons distilled from elsewhere. This practice allows ‘for the universal to assert itself over the particular, the travelled over the placed, the technical over the political, and the formal over the substantive’ (Craig and Porter 2006: 120). The main mode of development can be caricatured as built on external assistance and expertise being delivered to a passive and uncritically accepting local population of grateful beneficiaries. In spite of recent official rhetoric about increased participation, little space is left for debate, contestation

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and variance from the plan. This is centralised development as conceived from above, and often from the global North, devised and delivered by external experts. Timothy Mitchell's *Rule of Experts* (2002), a study about the constitution of expertise in post-colonial Egypt, illustrates how experts are integral to the process of giving the impression that the logic of modernity is working despite the gaps between intention and reality.

### Development as control

In the immediate decades after Truman defined the terms of post-colonial development assistance, successful examples of the predicted take-off into economic growth were thin on the ground. Clearly something was not working. Much of the research of scholars in the development studies departments that have sprung up in universities across Europe and the USA was concerned with explanations of failure. Donor governments and international agencies typically blamed the victim by identifying further deficiencies in the weak and corrupt states of the developing world. While some scholars supported this view, during the 1960s and 1970s counter-arguments emerged. Some neo-Marxists highlighted the way in which developing economies have become enmeshed in systems of international trade and development that were not in their own interests. Responding to the 'rule of experts' offered by the global North, new voices emerged from the South calling for acceptance to be replaced by resistance. Challenging the evolutionary assumptions of modernisation theory, the notion of forced dependency pointed to an alternative understanding of relationships of development and underdevelopment.

As part of a more general challenge to established values, recognition of unequal trade relations between the global North and South grew into a more general critique of the notion of a straightforward linear progression towards development. The modernisation ideal that nations could independently determine their own futures was dismissed as apolitical and ahistorical. Instead neo-Marxist theorists such as Andre Gunder Frank (1966) and Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) adopted a political economy approach to highlight the negative effects on the underdeveloped world of global historical processes, including colonialism and capitalist expansion. Far from progressing along the road to development in the manner suggested by modernisation theory, the countries of the global South were being actively *underdeveloped* through deeper involvement in an unequal and exploitative global economic system. Dependency theory recognised *development* and *underdevelopment* as being different sides of the same coin. Departing from the promise of a brave new post-colonial order, the 'anti-development' critique argues that the formal granting of independence masked a reality of continued dominance by the former colonial powers. With the end of the colonial era, the 'civilising mission' became a modernising one. Again rational external progress would be delivered mainly by foreign experts; central planners would provide



progress to the backward and ignorant masses. Aid conditionality meant that the prime ‘beneficiaries’ were not the poor, hungry or marginalised in Africa or Asia but rather the states donating funds and agencies tasked with delivering aid.

Dependency theory was rooted in the conviction that development as conventionally practised was no more than an exercise in power. Through development, powerful international actors were able to impose their interests, values and beliefs onto the people of the developing world. This was a continuation of colonialism by other means. But, the question was asked, how was the domination of the global North maintained following the dismantling of the structures of formal colonialism? In contrast to the overt political and military force employed during the colonial era, the workings of power in the age of development required new understandings.

Before we move on to the new understandings, it is worth noting that various other strands of development theory have put the spotlight on control. Feminists argued that male-dominated systems at all levels of society ensured that women and girls engage in economic, social and political life on adverse terms. Women are subordinated through poorer access to and control over resources, lack of adequate representation and violence. Until the 1980s mainstream development institutions failed to acknowledge gender inequality in society and the ways that their initiatives were exacerbating it. Since then gender mainstreaming has swept across development bureaucracies as a goal but, many feminists and anthropologists would argue, with only limited impact on women’s subordination in many parts of the world (see Chapter 4). Environmentalists have also perceived control as a central mechanism of development. The way we control and lose control over our physical world through development – extracting resources, filling it with pollution, meddling with genes and warming the atmosphere – are major threats facing the globe. As Apffel-Marglin puts it: ‘development as greater control by man of his environment ... rests on a logocentric mode of thought. In this definition of development is embedded the opposition between man and his culture on the one hand and the environment on the other hand’ (1990: 140) (see Chapter 6).

Finally, against the Cold War backdrop, aid and development were used to reinforce political interests; not only the economic but also the *security* concerns of the donor countries have shaped international development. Since the end of the Cold War the threat of interstate war between the communist bloc and western bloc receded but new regionalised forms of conflict emerged (Duffield 2001: 1). Since the mid 1990s the issue of conflict has become central to humanitarian aid and the development agenda and new conflict university departments, NGOs and units in global agencies have sprung up. According to Duffield, new forms of global capitalist expansion means incorporation for some countries but exclusion for others; for example, commercial investment in Africa has collapsed since the 1970s (*ibid.*: 4). The resulting ‘Fourth World’ – sub-Saharan Africa and poorer areas of Latin America and Asia – is targeted for conflict prevention and the creation of stability rather than capitalist expansion. Reflected not just

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in policy, but also in the thickening of networks that link UN agencies, military establishments, NGOs and private security companies, development and security concerns have merged (*ibid.*: 15–17, 22–43).

### Development as empowerment

Many critics attributed the failures of development to the top-down nature of development processes. The arrogant assumptions underlying modernisation theory, reliance on national statistics and blueprint standardised policy prescriptions doomed development to bringing benefits only to a few. Although he had antecedents (notably the liberation theologian Paulo Freire), Robert Chambers has become the most famous proponent of bottom-up participatory development. When Chambers drew attention to ‘bias’, and argued passionately in favour of reversals within relationships, he initiated what has become a huge industry promoting participation. The initial method – participatory rural appraisal – is defined by him as ‘a family of approaches and methods to enable rural people to share, enhance, and analyze their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act’ (Chambers 1994: 953). The point is to try to avoid the dominance of development by outsiders but also by elites within intended beneficiary communities – whether richer, male or older – by using techniques to encourage participation by all. Participation has become so much part of the orthodoxy that all donor agencies require any initiative to have at least an element of PRA or its equivalents.

Paul Francis tells us how the World Bank uses PRA. The repertoire of tools that encourage both verbal and non-verbal communication include mapping, ranking, use of diagrams, all described in manuals and guides (2001: 76). PRA supposedly gives greater value to emic (insider), rather than etic (outsider), viewpoints, which sounds commendably humble but underplays the importance of acknowledging (and dealing with) conflicts and differing views within categories (e.g. between ‘marginalised women’). Although wealth ranking does explore differentiation within communities, most of PRA elicits community priorities or plans as if whole communities can share the same priorities despite wealth, gender, caste, and age differences and inequalities. And although its stress on the informal, and non-verbal communication such as drawing pictures on the ground, are well meaning, Francis asks whether the simplification of complex knowledge and views is helpful (*ibid.*: 84). It can be highly manipulative. He relates how the PRA approach is popular within the Bank, and especially its assumption that empowerment involves individual rather than collective transformation. So, it can be interpreted as improving processes through consultation to get better results, rather than forcing the Bank to give attention to class, power or gender inequality.

The critique of participation – for example, by Cooke and Kothari in their book *Participation: the New Tyranny* (2001) – is that it is inherently flawed; in fact, the more participatory a method claims to be, the more it will mask local inequalities