

Demanding Innovation

articulating policies for demand-led research capacity building

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Keynote Address

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DEMANDING INNOVATIONS

From a Southern Perspective

- My heart is with ECPDM and all of you in this seminar as you try to find a way forward on these issues which have so affected the implementation of development policies for over four development decades.
- In contemplating my participation at this seminar, I have tried to give some attentions to these issues, and I shall try to share some of them with you in this brief presentation.
- It is my assumption here that it is our collective responsibility to make this partnership and dialogue work

From where I stand, there are over-arching matters that are of great concern to us all, and which in one way or the other, affects our work. I shall present these in three broad categories: the ***development imperatives***; the ***ghosts of implementing development policies***; and ***ways forward***.

DEVELOPMENT IMPERATIVES

1. The world stands at crossroads in search of new human-centered visions for development. All agencies and players at all levels of policy are seeking to promote paradigms of sustainable human development and innovation that build on knowledge resources and insights existing in communities.
2. At the same time we live in a world in which relations of subjection, suffering and dispossession, and the contempt for human dignity and the sanctity of life are at the center of human existence. These are getting routinized as a matter of course.

3. conflicts rack the African continent as well as a great part of the world, and it is clear that our understandings of innovations should extend to the re-discovery of traditional or indigenous resources for peacebuilding and human security.
4. In looking at issue of poverty: both in terms of alleviation and eradication, it is clear that there is a gross asymmetry in the rights and responsibilities between those who produce knowledge, particular in the “informal” sector, and those who go about valorizing it in the formal sector. We also now know that assumptions embedded in the definitions of poverty bypasses critical terrains by always equating frugal subsistence with poverty, and assuming that rural (i.e. the least western looking) is always equal to impoverishment. Today, a closer scrutiny reveals realistic, and more appropriate conceptions such as “**knowledge rich and resource poor**”.
5. In the meantime, we are faced with globalization, which is doing several things to different people at the same time: among other things, it is threatening the appropriation of the collective knowledge of non-western systems into proprietary knowledge of a few; bringing to attention issues around value addition and benefit sharing especially with regards to indigenous knowledges...Knowledge and ideas being accepted currencies in today's world order.
6. Then we have the strong injunctions and creative reminders engraved in the Science Agenda (Budapest 1999) which spell out, among other things, that what the world most needs is:
 - a more inclusive, a more responsive, and a more dialogical science
 - that there is a need for a vigorous and informed, constructive intercultural and democratic debate on the production and use of scientific knowledge
 - that ways must be found to link modern science to the broader heritage of humankind
 - that any kind of central monitoring, whether political, ethical, or economic, needs to take into account the increasingly diverse actors entering into the social tissue of science.

Finally, through International Customary Law and the International Bill of Rights (Human Rights Convention), we are also reminded that the appropriation of knowledge of indigenous communities and people by industrialized firms and scientists both locally and internationally without fair compensation or reward or explicit recognition **contravenes** fundamental moral, ethical, and legal norms that protect people from any form of ecological, political, and social abuse. We, as local institutions, are active proxies in this abuse, and middlemen in this untrammelled exploitation. We must take a stand accordingly.

THE GHOSTS

Listening to the presentations this morning, I could only concur and reaffirm the following:

1. that there has not been a shortage in **capacity building** endeavors over the last forty years. The problem has been revolving around the true objectives of those capacities that are to be developed, and whose interests they would serve in the end. Here memories awaken to the days of structural adjustment when “capacity building” was intended to mobilize entire national systems towards accepting, endorsing, and implementing policies that countries themselves knew and felt were poisonous, and were the reverse of what they wanted. Just picture what went on in those endeavors. The resentment was real (see Audience Africa and the Working group documents of the time)
2. **Partnerships** have been particularly elusive. No sooner had this established itself into international discourse, than it was quickly realized that it was in practice, an exercise in consolidating surface partnerships (on the part of the strong) and structural subservience or structural incapacitation (on the part of the weak).
3. **Ownership and partnership** became quite difficult to operationalize as conceptual understandings of development were not resolved, and critical issues that have traditionally haunted dialogue with recipients had not been brought in as *a prioris*. Credibility of external partnerships moreover, were not helped by shifts in “home” policy landscapes which pop us to recipient countries NOT as a consequence of severe contestations, but as words of God – a-historical, omnipresent, and omnipotent.
4. The image of “**rats in the cage**” is still very much present in North South collaborations. Watch for example on whom studies are targeted. Here, I must hasten to illustrate the fact that there are VERY FEW studies of how international development agencies draw lessons about the consequences of their policies and practices. While there are several studies on “best practice”, there is little known about how development agencies - -as organizations - - develop knowledge of what fosters social change in a positive direction and the role and limitations agencies face in this process.
5. There are also issues about how **meta frameworks for collaborations**, or state to state partnerships translate into institution to institution learning, and back again up. Neither has the vertical assimilation/integration path of innovative projects been mapped out in order for us not to respond with knee jerk reactions as whether we must begin with systems level initiatives, or with pilot projects or with programmes.

6. **Multidisciplinarity** has been an issue especially in tackling applied research. Gibbons has dwelt on this and served the intellectual community well with the mode 2 proposals with its ramifications. However, for African realities, the issue may not simply be that of multidisciplinarity but transdisciplinarity, where scholars and analysts transcend the limitations of exiting disciplines, recognize their inherent problems with regards to issues of knowledge and diversity as well as the fossilization of their parameters in the fundamentally colonialist mode: *ignorance of the western alphabet is absolute ignorance; Rousseaurian images of rural areas of Africa milling with infantile noble savages* devoid of rationality, volition and intent. That is why knowledge accreditation follows culturally defined patterns in such a way that excludes indigenous knowledge systems as a system.
7. **Transdisciplinarity** therefore imposes an obligation to competence and versatility of capacity. It is greater than the sum of its parts.
8. **Elegant power** has moreover, converged and made sages of development agencies, and many have thrived on the ensuing dependency, while power remains locked in geo-political formations that leaves an acute imprint of protracted western domination everywhere.

SO WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT ALL?

Let me begin by reiterating Foucault. "Discourse" Foucault wrote, "are about ***what can be said and thought, who can speak, when, where, and with what authority.*** If you cannot say what you truly want to say, then it is not dialogue.

We have to declare what we do not want, what we recognize as unacceptable conducts in unethical legacies. (Sweden goes through this soul searching from time to time on this).

THERE IS A LOT THAT IS POSSIBLE

1. ***Take the spaces for dialogue seriously.*** Dialogue can be remedial (i.e to fix what was not working well); or it can be product-oriented (to produce a specific output); or it can be an open-ended process about a potential idea - - an innovation. It is not about a rosy consensus, but also about conflictual and competitive relations which reinforce the value of the contract and actions. It is not about the powerful talking among themselves, but about cross-fertilization, and contributions to a genepool of ideas. It cannot be about sugar-coating coded threats in agenda choices. A good dialogue process leads to collective identity being formed and durable commitments to action being made. It incorporates dissent, struggle and collective action that are necessary to transform fundamentally unequal, unfair, and often oppressive relations.

2. In big or small groups, we can **conspire to succeed**, within known limitations. We can conspire to make things work. We can take a stand for a preferred future, and make the fingers that seek to point at other's mistakes shorter and shorter. We can agree to define agendas which we can see through to their very end.
3. We can **disarm globalization** and give it a different reading. We can, in our communities-in-dialogue, frame the globalization we want as one that should *lead to shared understandings, values, and cooperative actions on a transnational and trans-societal scale*. If globalization is the Midas curse, we can make this forum a third interstitial space in which social trust can be negotiated, and a new social contract for expanded citizenships can be shaped. If globalization forces sharks and fishes to swim in the same pond before the menu for dinner has been decided, a dialogical platform CAN make us decide on feeding schemata and main courses, before some of the dialoguers become dinner items.
4. In working to articulate policies for demand led research and capacity building, let us **identify which ideas we feel ARE innovative** – truly innovative - - not cliché questions. What is it in the way a table is laid that makes us laugh or want to cry (i.e. issue from the heart and gut): not those that we pick up from unsuccessful attempts to eavesdrop behind the closed boardroom doors of Northern aid agencies.
5. These issues, we must hold against time, against our profession, and against our indifferences and opportunism. The transfiguration to emerge would then constitute the union of heart and mind (*amor intellectualis*). We are, ourselves, the place of things, of their variety and common load. We cannot treat circumstance as background. It is only by this path that we can figure out our return to to what is around us: their touch, smell, seasons, uses, and explore how they can offer us a chance of redemption and innovation rooted in those things which constitute our existence, and our truth.

In conclusion, I cite for you from Royce (1892), and Freire (1972):

Josiah Royce 1892

A great truth is a truth whose opposite is also a great truth. Viewing things from outside, considering its relations of action and reaction with other things, it appears as MATTER. Viewing it from the inside, looking at its immediate character as feeling, it appears as consciousness... But look at the whole appreciatively, historically, synthetically as a musician listens to a symphony, as a spectator who watches a drama. Now you shall have seen, in a phenomenal form, a STORY.

Freire:

Dialogue is an existential necessity. It is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized. It cannot exist in the absence of profound love the world and of men [human]. The naming of the world which is an act of creation and recreation, cannot exist if it is not infused with love. Love is at the same the foundation for dialogue and the dialogue itself.

I thank you for your patience.