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Reimagining Development:

How do practice-based approaches shape the localisation of development?

Papers from Reimagining Development Workshop Series

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Foreword

Everyone agrees that change is required in the way development is thought of, talked about, and done. Various efforts over the past decade have attempted this change. Significant resources have been spent in fine tuning approaches, sharpening tools, and adapting methods. It can be argued, however, that these efforts have neither adequately reflected development contexts nor have shown the ability to be agile. Where they have been contextual and relevant, they have not been able to scale. A variety of reasons may have constrained attempts at changing our practice of development. These include some fundamental realities that ought to be recognized and incorporated in our work.

First, the shifts and disruptions in context are substantial and cannot be problematized in the way we have done thus far. From the rise of China, to the mobilities of persons and ideas, and climate change-related calamities, twenty-first century contexts are quite different….and uncertain. The uncertainty should be engaged knowing that calculated ambiguity, i.e. human agency intersecting with information and knowledge, plays a part. How do we do account more fully in our work for the manipulation of information and knowledge in “uncertain” or “risky” development contexts?

Second, the landscapes of inequality and justice no longer remain confined to other places; they are also at home and a source of great disruption to the politics of development. How do we approach these?

Third, we need to acknowledge the path dependency of funding that both enables and constrains the way that development unfolds. This dilemma must be soberly considered and thoughtfully engaged if real change is to take place.

Fourth, rethinking is insufficient: reimagining is required. We ought to be childlike in our curiosity about the contexts that are before us, not being constrained by settled wisdom that is based on a different, previous imagination of context. Investing and searching in this way requires a reimagination of the way we have appraised context, the way we have talked about it, and the way we have practiced in it.

Dr George Varughese
Niti Foundation

Background

On 9 November 2020, the Institute for Global Development hosted a virtual roundtable to explore why our ways of thinking and engaging development thus far may be inadequate, and to discuss some of the struggles we have in understanding uncertainty from practice and disciplinary lenses, how locally rooted insights assist us, and how we approach and craft the participation of local communities in development efforts. Participants interacted around five short papers with the help of authors and designated commentators. The intention was to have an open-ended conversation that echoed, challenged, and supplemented the reimagining ideas explored in the papers. A summary of the papers, available in this report in full, is available here:

Paper 1: Reimagining Development for a Disrupted World
Dr George Varughese argues that the disruptions and shifts in development contexts of the 21st century are substantial enough to require a reimagining of disciplinary referents, signifiers, and orientations while supporting activities that (re)insert deeply contextual and practical knowledge to reframe the discourse and the practice of development.

Paper 2: The Significance of History for Development
Professor Bernardo Michael reflects upon how the work of historians can provide lessons for development practitioners on how to be more critical of their own starting points, assumptions, and expectations.

Paper 3: COVID-19: An opportunity to localise and reimagine development in the Pacific?
Professor Chris Roche and Dr Lisa Denney draw on emerging research from the Pacific to explore the ways in which localization/locally led development, conditioned in uncertain and ambiguous contexts, shapes new approaches to development practice.

Paper 4: Public Participation in Development Initiatives within Conflict Affected Contexts

Dr Dinesha Samararatne analyzes experiences in public participation in constitution-making in Nepal, Myanmar and Sri Lanka to suggest six dimensions that must be taken into account in developing and implementing programs for public participation whether in development initiatives, policy-development, law reform or constitution-making.

Paper 5: Reframing Developmental Practice: Learning from Deliberative Practice and Action Research-based Strategies

Dr Mani Ram Banjade and Dr Hemant Ojha review, from the perspective of knowledge politics, action-based learning, and deliberation, a set of experimental, successful practitioner initiatives in Nepal that seek to develop strategies and methods to improve the knowledge interface and policy learning in development contexts.

Reimagining Development for a Disrupted World

Dr George Varughese
Niti Foundation

A key message that emerged from the historic global agreements signed in 2015 - Sustainable Development Goals, Paris Climate Agreement, and Sendai Framework – is that international development practice needs to be changed in a fundamental away. Five years on, and now in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, the inadequacy of the development sector to address emergent issues, novel or otherwise, is more keenly felt.

Following on from post-war rebuilding of infrastructure the existing paradigm of development continues to be preoccupied with Eurocentric perspectives on what constitutes development and how it should be done. Tied to expert knowledge and rooted in the political economy of aid flows, everyday issues around security, governance, livelihoods, and economic growth have been framed and interpreted through Western worldviews based on industrial development as well as science and technology-led development, even when development practice is now purportedly locally-led, participatory, and inclusive.

A burgeoning literature containing critical scholarly and practitioner-led contributions has informed the ongoing conversation on 'rethinking' development in the twenty-first century. It is clear that the intellectual underpinnings of development thinking have turned decisively away from a preference for technical problem solving in development towards adjusting and adapting the paradigm to account for the difficulties of engaging power, asymmetry and incompleteness of information, incentives, culture, and so on. As part of the rethinking of development, a number of innovative ideas have been injected in the global debate and, to some extent, into practice in the Global South, such as thinking and working politically (TWP), doing development differently (DDD), and problem driven iterative adaptation (PDIA).

Alongside such innovations, a number of practical experiments by local organizations have also emerged across the Global South demonstrating alternative ways of addressing socioeconomic development challenges, as well as navigating the political process of planning and decision making on allocation of state resources for development. However, these critical projects of developing alternative approaches too have struggled to scale and articulate a clear narrative of how a constant renewal can happen in both discourse and practice of development to remain responsive to disruption.

Recently, critical commentary about development has not only enlarged its focus but also acquired a certain urgency. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were calls for an interrogation of all levers of societal, political, and institutional transformation in order to achieve a "re-imagination" of our collective futures. 'After and beyond development' is now part of mainstream discourse (Kothari et. al. 2019). Now in 2020, there are earnest exhortations to meet this moment of pandemic crisis with enquiries of models of aid, in order to come up with a "new way to think about our world and what we do in it."

Such calls convey a rising worry about the disconnect between the realities of the context of development and the discourse shaping its funding, research, and practice. Correctly, attention is being called to the need to practice reciprocity and respect in research collaborations with local partners and to move beyond innovative ideas of development to actual change in practice of development. But where to begin?

Constraints to Reimagination

In the face of the pandemic crisis, it is unsurprising that there are sincere calls for solidarity and renewal of commitments to the international system to bring global development efforts back on track. However, hard assessments of resources and capability, as well as the reassertion of national interests will shape resumption of foreign aid and international development assistance. In addition, the emergence of a multipolar geopolitical order--most importantly, the rise of China and its instruments of engagement domestically and internationally—now stand in stark contrast to long-established patterns of aided development led by western "developed" countries.

Indeed, while development in the twentieth century was synonymous with the giving

and receiving of foreign aid, development beyond foreign aid will increasingly define the twenty-first century, as less and less countries require or receive external assistance to support development for their people. This raises a number of important questions, including the extent to which 'development' should encompass those areas and populations in the 'developed world' that are experiencing economic and social stress, as well as the nature of "development" in indigenous communities in the colonised world. Questions around what is happening inside and around Australia, for example (linking up with the indigenous agenda: First Nations' Voice, recognition, reconciliation, indigenous knowledge for development etc.), are critically important. Therefore, doing development elsewhere must be reimagined.

Clearly, the fiscal pressures caused by the pandemic crisis are of grave concern and a key determinant of how international development will be done going forward. In fact, funding considerations for development have been the one constant throughout; impelling and guiding debates on development in various consequential ways. The ebb and flow of discourse, design, delivery of development has mostly reflected the preferences and interests of those who fund development. Therefore, however honest, thoughtful, and well intentioned, most commentary on development generally aligns with funding sources and streams, durably shaping research and implementation in ways that inadequately represent ground-up realities. It follows that reimagination of development becomes compromised in design; significantly incentivized to reproduce tweaked versions of extant discourse, design, and delivery.

Perhaps then, this path dependency constrains genuine reimagination and potentially consigns any resultant change to the periphery of the development ecosystem of the twenty-first century. A shift in development's paradigm ought not to be expected on this path: recognizing that funding will remain a key determinant, donors must be purposeful and bold in supporting a move away from the status quo path dependency. A fresh imagining requires deliberate emphasis on investing in searching for and supporting contemporary ground-up expertise, knowledge, and analysis. Working out how to achieve this during uncertainty and disruption is not only a worthy intellectual exercise but it is essential to help address the disconnect between the realities of the context of development and the discourse shaping its funding, research, and practice.

A Ground-Up Perspective

A ground-up perspective requires respect for and acceptance of expertise, knowledge, and analysis of practice in and from development contexts. Projectized or donor-driven research about development contexts is necessary but insufficient not only because it can be inequitable but also because it uses evidence that is simplified and incomplete. This results in a misalignment between the development sector's discursive orientation and the reality of the context in which it operates, which in turn results in delivery approaches and mensuration techniques that are not fit for purpose.

Ground-up perspectives of the multi-layered, intertemporal, and multi-agent nature of evidence need to inform any re-imagination of development. Absent those perspectives, more information and analysis does not necessarily translate into better development design and engagement.

For example, a ground-up practice-based perspective assesses 'uncertainty' in development contexts-- perhaps more usefully--in apposition with 'ambiguity'. Countries that are mired in conflict and misgovernance arguably struggle with a calculated ambiguity -- as to who wields power, and as to which norm or rule is to apply in any given context. Often, this contextual ambiguity is deliberately engineered by political elites to diminish the role of state institutions and regulation, promote ad hoc unaccountable decision-making, and perpetuate rent seeking, corruption, and impunity (Niti Foundation 2019; Chayes 2017). Local organizations and practitioners have shown that they can deliver results under these conditions even when many development funders and implementers default to time-bound, risk-averse strategies.

Prevailing development approaches do little to equip development functionaries to engage the calculated ambiguity that pervades most of today's development contexts. Reimagining development's paradigm will instead require putting trust in ground-up expertise and embrace the risk of relying on the ability of local organizations to inform, intermediate, and navigate uncertain, disruptive development contexts, especially where the politics of development has overwhelming effect.

Reconnecting to Context

As the most significant disruption in recent decades, the COVID-19 pandemic crisis has amplified and sharpened critical commentary about the suitability of development's current paradigm — both as regards its conceptual frameworks as well as in terms of its delivery mechanisms — to engage the uncertain, disruptive contexts of the twenty-first century. Among development scholars and commentators, there appears to be a broad willingness to question historical orientations and an openness to break free from disciplinary loyalties. Development funders are already adjusting the scope of their support, asserting heightened self-interest, and preferring modest geographies. There is perhaps no better time for a bold reimagination of development.

To begin with we must ask how well we have done in understanding and engaging context. In broad terms, whereas the context of development has shifted to episodic and novel disruption, we remain in a paradigm of rebuilding. Our failure to appraise

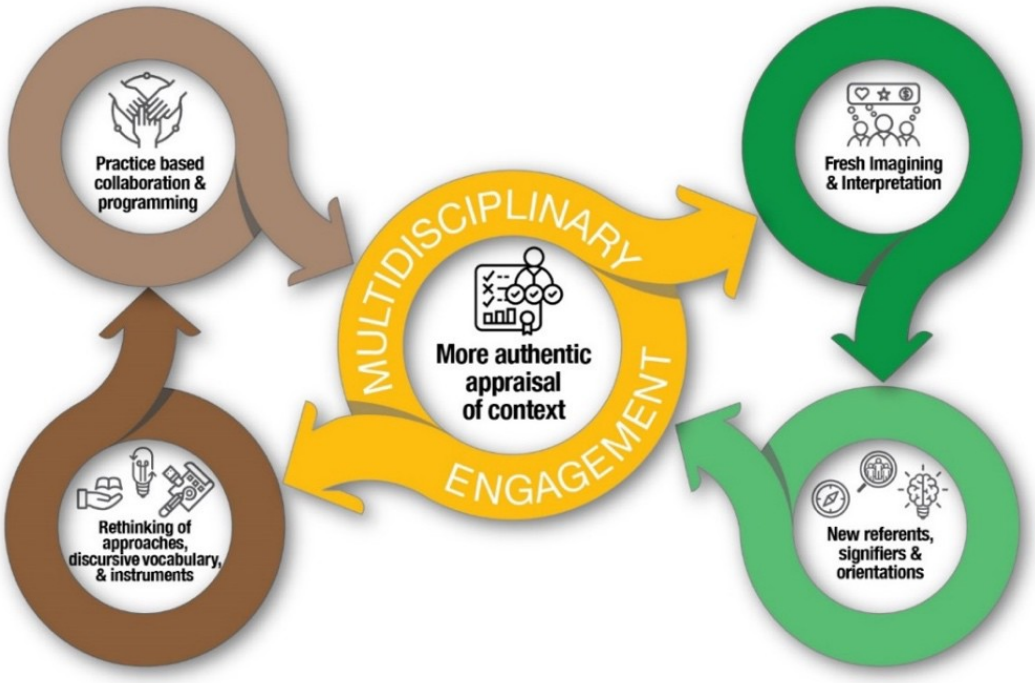

Figure 1: A visual representation of the reimagining development

contexts continuously and more authentically has compromised our ability to be helpful during uncertainty and disruption. The COVID-19 pandemic reminds us that context matters even more now: investing in methods to reconnect with context points towards a pathway for reimagining development.

An emphasis on reconnecting with context requires an honest look at the value placed thus far on practice-driven enquiry and insights, and the lopsided mixture of academic disciplines that undergird such enquiry. For example, the dominant focus on and investment in political economy and its emphasis on interests and incentives has, in many ways, taken away essential attention from a very particular politics of change that is driven by values, norms, and other forms of social capital held by local communities. This requires deliberately balancing support for political economy approaches with support for critical, processual insights from, for example, history, sociology, anthropology, and geography to enable discovery and use of practice-based knowledge.

Support is also needed for collaborations and partnerships that coproduce deeply contextual and practical knowledge to help interpret and reframe the discourse and the practice of development. Sadly, for all of the rhetoric of local ownership and collaboration, development delivery mechanisms are not attended by an enlightened understanding of how to partner with locally owned initiatives (Roesdahl & Varughese 2017). Among the most important shifts from current funding practice will be to invest in designing *longue durée* approaches to local partnerships, easing up on expediency and control while being attentive to shared vulnerability, dignity, and reciprocity.

A sincere effort to reimagine development must place context at the centre, insist on genuinely multidisciplinary appraisal open to ground-up interpretation, accept evidence that uses more local referents and signifiers to develop fresh approaches and instruments of practice. Thus shifted, the locus of imagination can more authentically and usefully understand and engage disruption.

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The Significance of History for Development

Professor Bernardo Michael
Messiah University

Development in History

The one feature that has characterized the "big history" of hominidal life on this planet has been the pursuit of order, stability, and predictability in a world marked by change, constraints, challenges, and complexity.[1] In this sense, while the notion of "development" has a modern aura to it, the impulse to "develop" is an ancient human response to create order out of the flux of life itself. This enduring story of the pursuit of order cannot be viewed as the mere outcome of a cold, calculating, efficient, and "rational" intervention by humans. The individual and cooperative capacities of humans have not been solely shaped by the political economy of incentives and struggles to maximize access to and control over various kinds of resources. They are much more than that. Humanity's development projects that mark the Anthropocene have been deeply historical enterprises—undertaken within the ebb and flow of time—and marked by continuity and change, and marbled with the rich ambiguities and even uncertainties of the human experience. In this connection, there seems to be a 'historical turn' taking place in writings on development especially when it comes to understanding the institutional characteristics of societies that might promote or

1 The term "big history"—or the history of the world on a grand, even cosmic scale is David Christian's. See David Christian, Origin Story: The Big History of Everything (New York: Hachette, 2018).

hinder economic growth, social and political development.[2] This paper seeks to add the voice of a historian in the mix.

The Work of Historians

Nearly a quarter century ago, the late Eric Hobsbawm pointed out that "Modern social science, policy-making and planning have pursued a model of scientism and technical manipulation which systematically, and deliberately, *neglects human*, and above all, *historical experience*."[3] Hobsbawm's point is well taken because historians seek to understand the **formative role of the past in creating the conditions** that people have to live into. This calls for the reconstruction of context, studying continuity and change, determining cause and effect, and acknowledging the role of contingencies and unintended consequences. Historical analysis assumes that humans live in a world where change is the only constant. There is a growing need for such a critique in a world saturated with big data, algorithms, metrics, and regimes of assessment and compliance. Consequently, historians may have valuable insights to share about the human and historical forces that have shaped development as a field of inquiry and action.[4] Development plans that are future oriented need to look back into the past as

2 There is a long history of such "historic turns" taking place in diverse discipline in the humanities, social and natural sciences. A sampling of writings on the subject include the following: Philip Abrams, Historical Sociology (Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press, 1983); Bernard S. Cohn, An Anthropologist among the Historians and other Essays (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987); Barrington Moore, Jr., Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World (New York, NY.: Beacon Press, 1966); Theda Skocpol, States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); H. Aram Veeser, ed., The New Historicism (New York, NY.: Routledge, 1989).

3 Cited in C.A. Bayly, Vijeyendra Rao, Simon Szreter & Michael Woolcock, eds., History, Historians, & Development Policy: A Necessary Dialogue (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p. 3. Emphasis mine.

4 Pamela Cox clarifies that in "…a world that is increasingly ruled by evidence, evaluation and audit may well wish to know more of the history of these things and their increasingly powerful influence across many fields of public life. Historians, as 'steady propagator[s] of that methodical doubt on which enlightenment so largely depends' should capitalize on this and stake their claim as constructive sceptics in the knowledge economy." See Pamela Cox, "The Future Uses of History," p. 142.

well. The past always imposes significant constraints or costs on present choices. The past sets the stage on which human and institutional actors (planners and policy makers) have to perform. That is, the context that shapes their work emerges from *somewhere*—out of a particular historical constellation of social, economic and political forces. That is, history is not just the prefatory paragraph that opens a report or a strategic plan; it is the received context for any plan, as well as the stage on which the plan has to work itself out. *History is the future of the plan*.

Historians understand the past in terms of the same **complexity and uncertainty** that marks their own present. Perhaps no existentialist philosopher emphasized the importance of understanding the uncertainty that marked the human condition than the philosopher Karl Jaspers (1883-1969). Jaspers, whose quote opens this paper, insisted that uncertainty was something to be understood, *not overcome* and constituted an essential prerequisite for acting in the world. Historians like the late Chris Bayly and his collaborators point out that "the canonical skill of historians is being able to immerse themselves sufficiently in the full context of a period or a juncture faced by those in the past that they can recreate that openness to the alternatives that were available at that time, in the way that our own future is currently indeterminate to us today."[5] Here, historians (who examine the past) share with policy makers (who seek to determine the future) a concern for complexity and uncertainty. This gives historians the opportunity to cultivate the skepticism, humility and self-awareness needed to avoid the overdetermined notions of predictability in outcomes,

5 C.A. Bayly, Vijeyendra Rao, Simon Szreter & Michael Woolcock, eds., "How and Why History Matters for Development Policy," in History, Historians Development Policy: A Necessary Dialogue (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 11-12. In this connection, historian David J. Staley has noted that thinking about the future is actually the historical method in reverse. See Coleen Flaherty, "Historians as Futurists," Inside Higher Education, 12 January 2016 at https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/01/12/are-historians-ideal futurists?utm_source=Inside+Higher+Ed&utm_campaign=cf4c931911-DNU20160112&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1fcbc04421-cf4c931911-198439141 (accessed 15 January 2016). The anthro-historian Greg Dening clarified by noting that, "The past happened in a totally particular way in time and space. That is its realism…we have to enter into the experience of those actors in the past who, like us, experience a present as if all its possibilities are still there…To give back to the past its present, one has to be a little humble about what one can know." Greg Dening, Performances (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. xv & xvi. See also The point has already been made by the historian/anthropologist Greg Dening. See Greg Dening, "Why History?" Australian Book Review (Dec 1995/Jan 1996). See especially p. 16.

order, and rationality that policy makers might espouse.[6] That is, development policies, programs, and outcomes are invariably incarnated in a social field that is shaped by past conditions, unforseen interventions, and the unintended consequences of a wide range of actions. Historians can contribute by representing the "incoherence that lurks at the heart of all development efforts."[7]

History also provides an important "**memory function**" that marks human and institutional activities over time. [8] This can inform the goal oriented work of administrators, policy makers and planners. Its absence might compromise their best efforts to effect change in their worlds. Take the example of the Survey Committee of 1904-05. The committee was instituted by the Government of British India to assess the functioning of the Survey of India, the premier mapmaking agency on the subcontinent. However, members soon discovered that no detailed history of that institution and its activities existed! There was no way to understand the complex forces that had coalesced to produce the Survey of India as it stood in 1904. Lacking this historical context, gave the committee little grounds on which to base its recommendations for improvements leading one member to lament, "I venture to think that had such a history been made available, the labours of the present Committee [to formulate new measures that would resolve outstanding institutional puzzles] would have been considerably facilitated."[9]

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6 Adapted from Margaret MacMillan, The Uses and Abuses of History (London, 2009), pp. 169-70. Cited in Pamela Cox, p. 129.

7 See K. Sivaramakrishnan & Arun Agrawal, eds., Regional Modernities: The Cultural Politics of Development in India (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 49-50.

8 C.A. Bayly, Vijeyendra Rao, Simon Szreter & Michael Woolcock, eds., "How and Why History Matters for Development Policy," in History, Historians Development Policy: A Necessary Dialogue (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p. 19.

9 See Replies of "Colonel J.R. Hobday, I.A., Officiating Surveyor General of India," dated 14 December 1904 in Report of the Indian Survey Committee, 1904-05, Part II: Appendices (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1905), pp. 78-86. The quote is from p. 86. It was only four decades later that a multivolume history of the Survey of India was finally published. See R.H. Phillimore, Historical Records of the Survey of India, 4 Vols. (Dehra Dun: Survey of India, 1945-58).

Historians can expand their portfolio of best practices—research, publications, and teaching—to address pressing questions of planetary living, liberation, and survival that the field of development tries to address. Since historians are **storytellers**, they can craft new "true stories" of social change that are not deterministic but faithfully represent the human condition.[10] Such storytelling might have a limited commitment to linear development and more willing to consider the complex and contingent ways in which development narratives unfold.[11] Policy makers who tell stories about, for instance, social protection, health & education, and natural resource management may benefit from the work of historians to become more critical of their own "starting points, assumptions, and expectations."[12]

Historians too **have much to gain** from such an encounter with development planners and policymakers. They can broaden their scholarly practices concerning fields like Public History by investing in those forms of community engagement followed by development practitioners. Nepali historians Pratyoush Onta and Yogesh Raj echo this when they state, "History faculty and researchers must persistently substantiate the public relevance of their discipline by demonstrating critical engagement with the public issues all the time, not as political analysts or commentators *but as historians* (emphasis mine)."[13] Historians will need to leverage their historical training to interrogate the terms and typologies used by development policy makers and planners–path dependence, process tracing, causal inference, standards, statistical

10 The notion that stories can be 'true' is Inga Clendinnen's. Such stories more truthfully capture the drama, contingencies, and transformative potentials of human actions, encounters, and projects. See Inga Clendinnen, True Stories (Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 1999). See also Pamela Cox, "The Future Uses of History," pp. 141-142.

11 See K. Sivaramakrishnan & Arun Agrawal, eds., Regional Modernities, pp. 30-31.

12 Pamela Cox, "The Future Uses of History," History Workshop J (Spring 2013) 75 (1): 125-145. See p. 126 & 132.

13 Onta and Raj, History Education and Research in Nepal (Kathmandu: Martin Chautari, 2014), pp. 62-63.

modeling, digital tools, and impact assessment—to name just a few.[14] They will need to critically engage the arena of development theory and practice created by think tanks, government agencies, private consultants, and non-governmental organizations.[15] For this to happen, they will need revision the socialization process in graduate school and academia by which their intellectual labor is valued, rewarded, and applied.

A Historian's Development Story

Historian can bring a different perspective to the puzzles they encounter in their *avatars* as administrators. Between 2009 and 2017, the author assumed the role of a chief diversity officer in an institution of higher education (2009-2017). Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in higher education represents an arena of development work in American Higher Education. It seeks to redress imbalances arising out of historic inequities and exclusions practiced in the country for generations, especially slavery, racism, and white supremacy. As a field of professional endeavor, it has been largely driven by theories of leadership and organizational change where rational and goal-oriented actors marched in predictable ways towards the final consummation of strategic outcomes.[16] The entire development regime has increasingly been organized around a strategic planning process, leadership development, recruitment and retention, teaching and learning initiatives, campus climate, metrics, assessment and

14 An introduction to these and other terms can be found in Robert E. Goodin & Charles Tilly ed., The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). See also Tim Buthe, "Taking Temporality Seriously: Modeling History and the Use of Narratives as Evidence," The American Political Science Review, Vol. 96, No. 3 (Sep., 2002), pp. 481-493; Christopher Politt, Time, Policy, Management: Governing with the Past (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

15 Historical critiques of the production of knowledge in past times and especially under the aegis of European colonization are plentiful. See for example, Bernard S. Cohn, Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

16 See for instance, Damon Williams & Katrina C. Wade-Golden, The Chief Diversity Officer: Strategy, Structure, and Change Management (Sterling, VA.: Stylus Press, 2013) & Damon Williams, Strategic Diversity Leadership: Activating Change and Transformation in Higher Education (Sterling, VA.: Stylus Press, 2013).

compliance requirements. This telos has informed much of the writing on the creation of diverse, equitable, and inclusive persons and communities on college campuses. Most administrators remained disinterested in understanding how the quirky presence of the past, the idiosyncrasies of human behavior, or a more dynamic understanding of historical context could inform such a model of institutional transformation.[17] What would happen to impact trajectories that had to navigate the variables of scale, context, contingency, and process? This made outcomes less predictable and called for an agility in thinking and action to find new, open-ended pathways to achieve DEI goals and outcomes, without the necessary guarantees of success. However, this was view was not a widely shared one among administrators.

The sensitivity to context, process, and contingent evolution called for a historically informed approach to DEI—one that tried to discern the forces of culture, power, and history at play at the institution. *For one*, it called for undertaking an informal institutional ethnography with key constituencies, in an effort to gain insight into the constraints and possibilities for this work on campus. It called for building powerful and personal relationships with a diverse set of individuals in ways that built social and symbolic capital. *Secondly*, it induced an 'archival turn' in administrative work. Often, this meant a return to the archive in order to understand the historical context that shaped the institutions' (involving leadership, educators, employees, and students) stance towards diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). This historical context was the stage on which all work would have to unfold. That is grasping this past was crucial to the future of any DEI work at the institution.

Consequently, work at the university emerged on at least three fronts. *First,* research assistants were hired to comb the archives for all kinds of information on the history of underrepresented populations on the campus, campus leadership, curricular development, strategic planning & finance, and student life at the college. *Second*, employees & student leaders were invited to participate in a 10 day Civil Rights Bus Tour that took them to the American South to meet with survivors of the Civil Rights Movements, and visit memorials and places associated with it. The idea, informed by the importance of history in reorienting the institution away from its segregated past,

17 For a similar argument, see Linsey McGoey, "On the Will to Ignorance in Bureaucracy," Economy and Society, Vol. 36, no. 2 (2007), pp. 212-235.

was to create a new corps of leaders among employees and students who would return to their respective areas of work and become advocates for diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. *Third*, in understanding how a predominantly white institution (PWI) functioned—recruited, developed, and sustained itself over a century called for insight into how these practices were routinized throughout the institution's history. It also called for an understanding of the broader history of segregation in the Northeast United States and the institutions' hinterland. All too often, PWIs had failed to develop little or no connections to communities of color in their geographical locations or beyond. Their limited historical experience with such communities—for recruitment, fundraising, and programming meant that such links needed to be intentionally cultivated. It called for not just a change in administrative routines, but also *a change of heart* that could then infuse strategic planning to create new intentional programs for *community engagement*. Finally, given the growing importance of *the digital*, the office of diversity affairs pushed for historical research in the two areas identified above by providing seed money for digitally informed research to be undertaken by teams of faculty and students. The Digital Harrisburg initiative grew out of this effort, and continues to this day. Ultimately, diversity, equity, and inclusion work is a type of development work that benefits from taking a historical perspective as it plots its outcomes. That is, the deductive considerations of strategic planning need to take shape within an institutional context that did not emerge out of nowhere or anywhere, but *somewhere*—a specific historical context that provides the shifting envelope to work in. Discerning this envelope might be key to launching new initiatives that sought to promote intercultural understanding, cooperation, desegregation, healing, and transformation.

Development & History: An "Artful Science"?

Can development administration and policy-making be reduced to the status of a science? Perhaps, it might be more useful to view it as an *artful* science.[18] The world in which policy recommendations have to be implemented cannot be grasped solely

18 Reference to artful and scientific character of development work in the area of diversity leadership and inter-faith dialogue can be found in the following: Damon Williams, Diversity Strategic Leadership (Sterling, VA.: Stylus, 2013) and Eboo Patel, Sacred Ground: Pluralism, Prejudice, and the Promise of America (Boston, MA.: Beacon Press, 2013).

through statistical models, tables, and graphs. Whether it be the pyramids of Egypt, the construction of the Indus Valley cities or modern universities and hospitals, human projects of "development" or worldmaking are equally informed by abstractions such as ideologies, religious fervor, desires, traumas, ethical considerations, social identities, emotions, notions of personhood & self-making, and other symbolic variables. While it would trite to assume that administrators and policy makers are unaware of the role played by such variables, it might be fair to argue that they could infuse their social science informed studies of the human experience with richer doses of the artful to write fuller stories. No one knew the value of developing deep, sustainable, and meaningful human relationships better than the Anglican educator and activist Charles Freer Andrews (1871-1940). Andrews spent most of his adult life in India living in intimate friendships with people across the divisions of empire, nation, race, gender, caste, and religion. In 1906 at a speech delivered at the Lahore Diocesan Conference in 1906 he noted, "We are so wrapped up in our organizations, schemes, and institutions that we may lose the one thing needful, the personal touch."[19] Today, over a century later, nothing has validated the truth of this claim more than the loss of the personal touch brought about by the global spread of COVID-19.

Furthermore, confessing the "artful" calls for submitting the frameworks, strategic plans, and policies that development workers labor to design and execute, to historical scrutiny. Human beings live in a world that has been marked by centuries, and even millennia, of historical dynamism. Knowing how we came to be is just as important as designing a future we can live into. More recently, David Hudson and Adrian Leftwich remind us that political economy is not just about the incentives that shape behavior but should also incorporate questions about "power, interests, agency, ideas, the *subtleties* of building and sustaining coalitions, and the role of contingency [something historians have always been attentive to]."[20] Development planners and historians

19 C.F. Andrews, at a speech delivered at the Lahore Diocesan Conference in November 1906 (cited in Chaturvedi and Sykes, p. 66).

20 David Hudson & Adrian Leftwich, "From Political Economy to Political Analysis" (Developmental Leadership Program, 2014), p. 5 and available at http://publications.dlprog.org/From%20Political%20Economy%20to%20Political%20Analysis.pdf (accessed 31 May 2016). The emphasis is mine.

have much to learn from each other's perspectives. Such "adaptive" approaches might be usefully applied to political economy analysis, development evaluation, participatory program development, and the study of indigenous knowledge systems.[21] They have also been applied to the study of sentencing policies and the criminal justice system,[22] the legacies of British slave-ownership,[23] and housing inequality in the United States.[24]

In all this, historians have an important contribution to make about understanding the contingent and even unpredictable ways in which humans enter into relationships with each other and their surroundings and all the unintended consequences that are their inevitable fallout. Indeed, the nomothetic impulses of development planning and intervention might benefit from an engagement with historical thinking in ways that might be of use to its practitioners, and are in no way the monopoly of historians.

Viewed in this way, historical thinking would emphasize the following key takeaways:

1. Development projects unfold within *specific and shifting conditions* of culture, power, and history.

21 See the following: Craig Valters, Clare Cummings, & Hamish Nixon, "Putting Learning at the Centre: Adaptive Development Programming in Practice," (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2016); Lance Gunderson & Stephen S. Light, "Adaptive Management and Adaptive Governance in the Everglades Ecosystem," Policy Sci, Vol. 39 (2006), pp. 323-334; Fikret Berkes, Johan Colding, & Carl Folke, "Rediscovery of Traditional Ecological Knowledge as Adaptive Management," Ecological Applications, Vol. 10, no. 5 (2000), pp. 1251-1262.

22 See Barry S. Godfrey, David J. Cox, and Stephen Farrall, Criminal Lives: Family Life, Employment, and Offending (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). See Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, "Convict Transportation from Britain and Ireland, 1615-1870," History Compass, Vol. 8, no. 11 (2010), pp. 1221-1242. All this cited in Pamela Cox, "The Future Uses of History," p. 129, 130, & 144 (endnote 18 & 19).

23 Hall's work can be found at the 'Legacies of British slave-ownership' website at https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/

24 See Richard Rothstein, The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How our Government Segregated America (New York: W.W. Norton, 2017).

2. The human intentionality that drives development plans can be motivated by desires, emotions, and symbolic attachments that cannot be easily explained away in terms of the calculus of rational behavior.

3. Even the most durable institutional arrangements and goals, must unfold in the world riddled with contingencies—where all kinds of human and non-human forces interact in unpredictable ways.

4. Finally, the outcomes of human projects of living and liberation cannot be predicted with any degree of certainty. Human choices and actions are always accompanied by unintended consequences.

Humanity's development projects have always confronted and tried to overcome this existential experience of uncertainty. Historians, on their part, have devoted their energies in trying to understand this uncertainty. The human story of constituting order out of uncertainty and the resurfacing of uncertainty out of order requires both storytellers to be present at the table.

References

References are provided as footnotes.

COVID-19: An opportunity to localise and reimagine development in the Pacific?

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Locally led development has received significant attention over the last 20 years as a principle and process that can lead to more effective and sustainable social change. There are also a number of documented examples of how development agencies can sensitively support these processes through a better understanding of context, politically savvy and adaptive approaches and helping to create greater space for local leadership to emerge. Numerous policy statements manifestos and communities of practice espouse the importance of locally-led development work and make commitments to deepening the practice of doing so (OECD 2008; OECD 2012; TWP Community of Practice 2013; The DDD Manifesto 2014).

But despite this, progress to implement localisation agendas in development assistance has been patchy at best. There is certainly much mention of localisation in program documents and some efforts to ensure that 'partner' voices are more routinely included in program design, implementation and monitoring. Yet the command-and-control style approach remains dominant, where donor staff retain most of the levers of power and expect 'partners' to perform tasks and report on metrics set out by the donor (Honig 2018). As Degan Ali noted recently (2020), 'localisation' has also been used as a fundraising tool by many international NGOs that know it is a popular donor trend, but do not follow through in ceding power to local actors in practice. As a result, localisation is too often a reframing of existing ways of working with a shift in emphasis, rather than a meaningful transformation of development practice.

This paper first briefly outlines the role of 'the local' in aid discourse, highlighting its importance but also the need to engage critically with the concept. Second, it seeks to

explain the dissonance between rhetorical commitments to localisation on the one hand, and limited changes in practice. It points to the importance of organisational processes and procedures that act to retain, rather than share, power, and the incentives of the aid sector and associated identities that maintain 'othering' at their core. Third, the paper considers whether and how critical junctures like the COVID-19 pandemic provide opportunities to support greater localisation, combined also with momentum from the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, efforts to decolonise development practice and greater recognition of truly global developmental challenges. It suggests that the natural experiment of expatriate aid staff leaving Pacific Island nations during COVID-19 has revealed opportunities for deepening localisation efforts that must be grasped before staff return to 'normal' ways of working. The final section of the paper sets out some initial ideas as to how the aid industry might avoid the return to normal by recognising the importance of day-day practices and their origins, starting with social change processes – not development projects; coming to grips with uncertainty; valuing multiple forms of knowledge; and thinking hard about identity – not just strategy.

In making this argument, the paper brings together three strands of research. First, it draws on the growing literature on critical localism (see, for instance, Mac Ginty 2015; Roepstorff 2020; Dinnen and Allen 2018) to frame the importance, but also the perils, of engaging with 'the local'. Second, it builds on academic and grey literature that investigates how development agencies can support local leadership, much of which has been undertaken as part of the Developmental Leadership Program (Roche and Denney 2019; Denney and McLaren 2016). Third, it relies on ongoing primary research being conducted by the Institute for Human Security and Social Change (IHSSC) at La Trobe University, in collaboration with the Australian Red Cross and the Humanitarian Advisory Group, on COVID-19 impacts on organisational adaptation and ways of working in the Pacific (paper forthcoming; see also Australian Red Cross et al 2020).

What is it about 'the local'?

The aid industry has been the focus of sustained critiques for its top-down, externally-led, social engineering projects that result – at best – in 'thin' change or isomorphic mimicry (see, for instance, Pritchett, Woolcock and Andrews 2012). In response, development agencies have increasingly turned to 'the local' as a legitimising claim,

suggesting support for, or ownership of, programs by those they are intended to assist and sustainability beyond the timeframes of donor funding. As Roger Mac Ginty notes, development agencies have seen the local as able to 'rescue internationally funded and directed peacebuilding by giving it authenticity and paving the way towards an exit strategy for international actors' (2015: 840). This is perhaps demonstrated no better than by the proliferation of 'partnerships' with 'local' actors that remain entirely transactional in nature but provide a nod to wider donor trends (Smith 2017).

Yet, the ways in which 'the local' is used in development and humanitarian discourse is problematic. It is imagined as both the problem (the source of governance dysfunction, conflict and poverty), as well as the solution to the shortcomings of development assistance (Mac Ginty 2015: 847). It is also often unhelpfully 'constructed in binary opposition to the international' – as if these are two discrete geographies (Roepstorff 2020: 285). The local is thus demonised, romanticised and reduced to a caricature of parochialism. Moreover, where international organisations co-opt 'the local' as merely the latest trend without it transforming their engagement with people who constitute this 'local', the shift becomes hollow, involving no change to existing power relations, and risks doing harm to the legitimacy of those they work with.

'Critical localism' has emerged as a response to these slippery uses of 'the local', recognising its multiple and contested meanings, its intersections with and embeddedness within other scales or geographies, as well as its ambivalent nature (Mac Ginty 2015; Roepstorff 2020; Dinnen and Allen 2018). This in turn leads us into more complex understandings of what constitutes legitimacy, representation and elite capture at different local levels (Craney, 2020), as well as helping to explain how conceptions and presentations of the local can be deployed and mobilised to further particular interests (Roche, 2020). This paper attempts to engage with this more nuanced depiction of 'the local' – recognising its usefulness where it genuinely transforms power relations and prioritises change processes driven by local actors who would pursue them regardless of external support (McCulloch and Piron 2019: 8).

Dissonance between localisation in theory and practice

Although many international organisations are onboard with the idea of localisation and can see the value that more localised response is likely to provide, they

nonetheless struggle to cede power in meaningful ways. This is not (in all cases) a cynical effort to deny real localisation. Rather, it speaks to the organisational identities and incentives that skew the international aid community into sustaining particular worldviews and ways of working, even when we know that these are not the most effective ways of achieving change (Faustino and Booth 2014; Roche and Denney 2019). Increasingly, these worldviews and ways of working are described as colonial or indeed racist, given the inequitable power relations they are borne from and perpetuate (Pailey 2020).

The seemingly boring, bureaucratic processes within international organisations are themselves deeply political and act to ensure that power remains in the hands of the organisation, rather than those it supports (Honig and Gulrajani 2018). This extends from human resources processes that enable the organisation to control decisions about whose expertise is suitable and valued, for what timeframes and at what pay scales (Peake and Spark, forthcoming). It includes finance departments that devise pro forma contracts for partners that stipulate what is to be delivered when and to what standards, as well as who owns intellectual property developed from projects. And it includes reporting requirements that replicate abstract metrics for judging what constitutes success and whether it is being achieved in timescales demanded by predetermined logic models (Eyben et al. 2015). Allowing local leadership of the change processes is incredibly difficult when organisations retain these kinds of operating processes (Smith 2017). These ways of working in international organisations are, in turn, shaped by the demands of donors, further orienting ways of working towards headquarters in capital cities and away from people on the ground (Roche and Denney 2019).

Staff working within aid organisations frequently refer to the need to work ‘politically’ within their own organisations to navigate these processes and offset their most pernicious effects (Denney and MacLaren, 2016). The procedures are seen to be necessary controls and checks, often to fulfil accountability functions, but are simultaneously recognised as making good aid practice more difficult. What is acknowledged less frequently is that these ‘necessary’ controls and checks are themselves deeply political and maintain the inequitable power relations that the aid industry is, at least in theory, in the business of trying to change.

Such organisational processes are rooted in broader sets of ideas and the wider political economy. These include the conscious and unconscious biases, values and social norms which are inherent in the notion of a 'development' agency – that is, an institution which has helping or developing 'others' as its primary purpose and identity. This identity is itself problematic given the othering that it involves – holding 'beneficiaries' as separate and apart from those who bring the 'benefits' of development (Flint and Meyer zu Natrup 2018). And, of course, that identity is further shaped by political demands to serve other interests whether that be domestic (Yanguas 2018), economic, or simply driven by the primacy of organisational survival. Moves towards more locally led development practice may thus be well-intentioned, but remain thin because when they run into the stumbling blocks of organisational processes, and the wider political economy and identity of aid organisations themselves.

COVID-19, Black Lives Matter and Decolonisation of Development: Critical junctures for change?

Enter 2020. A confluence of events in 2020 have brought the limitations of existing ways of working in international development to the fore. The COVID-19 global pandemic, the BLM movement and growing calls for the decolonisation of international development have combined with ongoing advocacy for tackling shared global challenges, such as climate change and inequality, to fundamentally question existing ways of working. Stemming from this, the scales seem to be tipping towards greater emphasis on locally-led processes but the extent to which this occurs – and, importantly, is sustained in ways that genuinely seek to change power relations – remains to be seen.

The experience of many development programs around the world throughout COVID-19 has laid bare that local people, organisations and the local staff of international organisations can often fare just fine when expatriates step back. This is not to deny the impacts of COVID-19, particularly on Pacific economies and the risks that large outbreaks would pose. Nor is it to deny the importance of continued financial and technical support when it is requested. But as expatriate staff returned home from the countries they were working in, a significant shift in the demography of aid staff occurred. Particularly in the Pacific, where many Australians rushed home as Australia

closed its international border, there was an exodus of expatriate staff. So how did these programs fare, with international experts all back home? Ongoing research with Pacific Islanders suggests that, on the whole, programs adapted and pivoted to respond to the COVID crisis and that remote support has largely been successful where local staff were empowered. Importantly, Pacific Islanders note a change in their working environment to be more culturally literate stemming from this. Tapping into momentum from the BLM movement, efforts to decolonise development and greater recognition of shared global challenges, this changed working environment is also more fundamentally challenging existing development practice.

Learning, adapting, pivoting

Rather than collapsing or stalling in the wake of COVID-19, aid programs continued, pivoted and even expanded to address the acute needs arising from the crisis, governments responded promptly and local communities adopted coping mechanisms based on decades of experience. In most Pacific countries COVID-19 cases have remained very low, as of 30/11/20 Nauru, Tonga, Kiribati, Micronesia, Palau, and Tuvalu have had zero cases. With expatriate staff operating largely at a distance, local staff have had greater opportunity for leadership and authority. High quality Pacific Islander staff with deep knowledge and networks were resourcefully drawn on at short notice to ensure program responsiveness to emerging needs.

For instance, the Australia-Pacific Training Coalition (APTC) utilised its deep knowledge of the Pacific, its broad networks within the region and its flexible and adaptive program modality to reorient training programs to respond to the COVID context. This included supporting Pacific Island people working in hospitality and tourism in Australia to quickly retrain to Australian standards in aged care, to ensure their ongoing employment. It also involved rapidly leveraging networks to develop online micro-credentials to continue the upskilling of hospitality workers who lost their employment as tourism in the Pacific quickly declined. Working in collaboration with local tourism associations, United Nations agencies and mobile phone companies to provide data at reduced rates to students, APTC was able to ensure that those who lost their jobs due to COVID still had access to opportunities to support their longer term economic wellbeing. And in Vanuatu, APTC collaborated with DFAT and a local

theatre group to produce radio training programs supporting work-readiness, based on adapting an existing APTC curriculum.

In the Solomon Islands, Pacific Islander staff working for development agencies found that the limitations on what orthodox data collection methods were possible during the pandemic provided greater space for experimenting with more varied forms of monitoring and evaluation. This has included forms that draw on narrative storytelling, such as Talonoa and Tok Stori – common ways of capturing and sharing knowledge in the Melanesian context that values experiential knowledge (Sanga and Reynolds 2020). In some cases, these forms of monitoring and evaluation have resulted in more locally meaningful data that staff would like to see retained beyond the pandemic. During this period time the Pacific Community has also launched a Pacific-centred and owned approach to Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL). This is itself the product of a region wide talanoa process of consultation, and which references the Kakala framework from Tonga, the Rebbilib navigational stick maps from the Marshall Islands, and the Vanua framework (Nabobo-Baba, 2008) from Fiji, seeking to reclaim notions of monitoring and evaluation in ways that are consistent with Pacific understandings and worldviews. (SPC, 2020)

Remote support worked where trust rather than surveillance prevailed

Seventy per cent of Pacific Islander staff surveyed indicated an increase in remote support in the context of COVID-19 (Australian Red Cross et al: 7). Interviews with Pacific Islanders on the whole revealed strong approval – and even a preference – for remote support where it was based on trust, rather than surveillance. Moreover, those programs that coped well with expatriates leaving were those that had consciously invested in local staff, local ownership and local relationships prior to COVID-19.

Many Pacific Islanders interviewed noted the usefulness of having assistance from expatriate colleagues available at the end of the phone, or for short-term assistance. This was often expressed as the preferred option, compared with technical assistance being based in Pacific offices full-time, which was perceived to create relationships of dependency (Australian Red Cross et al 2020: 7). Remote support arrangements were viewed most positively where international staff provided needed technical advice, coaching and mentoring from a distance, with local staff filtering that with their cultural/political expertise, and then having the freedom to lead on the ground

(Australian Red Cross et al 2020: 7). Remote support was also valued for allowing local actors to get on with the job by 'buffering' them from the compliance demands of international project management systems (Australian Red Cross et al 2020: 7). Sometimes the preference for remote support was simply expressed as a rejection of surveillance or control: 'We don't need white people hovering over us.'

Thus, international staff have been providing effective and valued remote support, but past relationships, strong cultural and country understanding, and trust are vital to this being productive. Where remote support has been experienced more as surveillance to ensure that Pacific Islander staff are working and meeting the expectations of expatriate staff, with little power to actually get on with things, it has – unsurprisingly – not been empowering. Yet paradoxically, the characteristics of good remote support – strong understanding, relationships and trust – all require knowledge of, and experience in, the region to work well; they cannot be easily built without being physically present.

Pacific experiences of the workplace

Interviews with Pacific Islander staff found that whilst they were initially concerned about the new responsibilities they had suddenly inherited with the departure of their expatriate colleagues, they felt that they learnt to adapt quite well and realised that actually they did not even need the expatriate advisors they had become used to and assumed they needed. Moreover, the workplace environment was described to have changed in ways that required less negotiation of their personal and professional lives. Quite practically, this meant things like more meetings happening in local languages, prayers more routinely integrated into meetings, children more frequently in the office after school. Importantly, Pacific Islander staff described this as resulting in more laughter and a more comfortable working environment where they felt less surveilled and freer to think creatively and identify options and solutions. In some cases, jockeying for power amongst senior Pacific Islander staff was said to occur, but also that reduced formality meant that there was increased communication and collaboration within and across organisations. Having experienced this new way of working, Pacific Islander staff now they want to do things differently beyond COVID-19.

Nonetheless, the empowerment being reported still reverberates with legacies of colonial approaches to aid practice and Pacific Islanders also noted a nervousness to step into leadership roles due to fears that this must resemble the model established by international managers, and that they will not be supported by their international colleagues if they fail. 2020 has also witnessed the rise of the BLM movement and associated efforts to decolonise international development, drawing attention to and challenging the structural racism implicit in many of our accepted practices and institutions (Mwambari 2019; Leon-Himmelstine and Pinet 2020). The BLM and decolonisation of development movements have amplified existing calls from the global South for those involved in the aid industry to recognise how power and privilege is experienced and make practical changes in how they work to address inequities (Pailey 2020). This speaks directly to the need for greater local leadership and better allyship by supporting organisations. But it also highlights the scale of the challenge. Pacific Islanders interviewed spoke about a continuing 'colonisation of the mind,' whereby they feel as if they are unable to match the expertise of expatriates, even when they know this is not the case. Such legacies continue to have an impact beyond the simple presence or absence of actors from outside the region.

Finally, greater global advocacy and attention around issues such as climate change, violence against women and equity is also prompting reflection on whether current ways of working in development and humanitarian action are up to tackling these truly universal challenges (Oldekop et al. 2020). As the universality of these challenges is recognised, cutting across any notion of 'developed' or 'developing' countries, outdated ideas of development and humanitarian response being a one-way transfer of knowledge and skills become impossible to maintain. Rather, such challenges require a truly global response, bringing to bear the knowledge, innovation and ideas from all parts of the world and learning together. The very challenges with which we are increasingly confronted thus also push towards international development and humanitarian actors ceding power and sharing leadership with local actors. In this sense, the experience of aid programming in the Pacific during COVID-19 builds on wider momentum from the BLM and decolonisation of development movements, as well as the growing attention to shared global challenges, to level a challenge to conventional development practice. The aid community has an opportunity to respond by committing to transform its ways of working before defaulting to business as usual.

Implications for how development might be reimagined

What then, might these critical junctures mean for reimagining development? COVID-19, the BLM and decolonising international development movements and increasingly global challenges all highlight 'the falsity of any assumption that the global North has all the expertise and solutions to tackle global challenges, and … the need for multi-directional learning and transformation in all countries towards a more sustainable and equitable world' (Oldekop et al. 2020: 1). For international organisations, as Degan Ali notes (2020), those that survive this turbulence will be those that are willing to change their business model and ways of working to be a real partner. If localising development is to be achieved, then international organisations and donors will have to be willing to change their internal day-to-day workings in ways that fundamentally cede power.

Some starting points for thinking and acting differently might include: recognising the importance of day-day practices and their origins; the need to decentre the development industry and the development project which can dominate debate; to take uncertainty and ambiguity – and the politics of both – much more seriously; noting the importance of valuing and weaving together different forms of knowledge; and thinking much harder about identity and the act of being and becoming as the spring board for reimagining development. Below, each of these starting points are elaborated.

1. **Recognise the significance and origins of day to day practices**

The subtle shifts in ways of working which have occurred in the Pacific during the pandemic have revealed not only local preferences, but also exposed how power relations are embodied in everyday practices. The fact, for example, that some teams are now holding meetings in local languages or more regularly praying during meetings is starting to provoke questions about why these practices were not happening before, simply because non-locals were in the room. This in turn raises interesting issues about the way that habits can become routines, and then part of an organisation's culture. It sometimes takes a shock to the system for these habits to be illuminated, and their origins to be debated. In the same way that exploring unconscious bias is seen as important in revealing hitherto concealed assumptions and stereotypes, analysing and shifting day to day practices can have disproportionate effect given

organisational ways of working are in some senses a 'lagging measure' of habits. This is not to deny of course, as noted above, power relations are also embedded in the policies and procedures of organisations, and these are in turn shaped by the broader political economy of the sector. Rather it is to suggest that there is an important linkage between everyday practices and structural drivers, and perhaps there is more scope to adjust internal ways of working than is generally thought.

2. **Start with social change not the development project**

Those initiatives which seem to have adapted well to the shock of COVID-19 share a number of characteristics with other programs which have been able to support locally led change. These include a significant investment in local staff, organisations and relationships; the adoption of learning and reflection process that have allowed for flexibility and adaptation; and the creation of space for experimentation. Furthermore, recent research on locally led non-aid social change initiatives in the Pacific points to the importance of preferences for informal ways of working, holistic ways of thinking, the importance placed on maintaining good relationships and collective deliberation (Roche et al, 2020). The authors note how these preferences and ways of working are often seen, or felt, to be at odds with western modes of thought and the conventional practice of development agencies (Roche et al, 2020). All of which suggests that the search for genuinely locally led development practice needs to start somewhere different. Not with the projects or programs of development agencies, but with the emergent and more immanent processes of social and women's movements, activists and collective action. This provides a useful reminder of how decentring the world of formal institutionalised development can help reveal not only how more fluid processes of social change occur, but also what the shortcomings are of more deliberate, intentional project-based attempts to promote local leadership. Further exploration of other 'indigenous' processes of locally led change in the Pacific and beyond might be instructive and help to build a broader and deeper repository of case studies and avoid development as social engineering.

3. **Come to grips with the politics of uncertainty**

The COVID-19 pandemic in the Pacific has also brought to the fore issues of how to cope with uncertainty and shocks, as well as what resilience in the face of the unknown

looks like. As John Kay and Mervyn King have recently noted, there has been a long debate – particularly between economists – about the difference between risk and uncertainty (Kay and King, 2020). Exploring the politics of uncertainty more fully reveals the dangers of how the search for certainty can lead to 'foreclosing futures' and excluding diverse perspectives, and therefore why we need to avoid the 'calculative control' that comes with the pursuit of certainty (Scoones & Stirling, 2020). Scoones and Stirling argue that 'the embracing of uncertainties – as constructions of knowledge, materiality, experience, embodiment and practice – means challenging singular notions of modernity and progress as a hard- wired 'one-track' 'race to the future' (Scoones & Stirling, 2020: 1). They therefore advocate for 'qualities of doubt (rather than certainty), scepticism (rather than credulity) and dissent (rather than conformity)' (Scoones & Stirling, 2020: 11). Notwithstanding the recent chorus of 'adaptive management' in the international development community, and nods towards non-linear change, much of this is still grounded in notions of predictability and much of it remains apolitical. This would suggest that any reimagining of development needs to also be founded on reimagining not only how to think about uncertainty and ambiguity, but the practices which might flow from that. This in particular suggests revising and resisting forms of planning and reporting which are premised on order and control, particularly in unpredictable environments (Honig, 2019). And avoiding forms of monitoring, evaluation and learning which are focused on assessing progress on the basis of pre-determined indicators set at the outset of an initiative when least is known, or indeed knowable. It also means, as Yuen Yuen Ang cogently reminds us, that what might be deemed weak 'institutions' from one narrow teleological or normative perspective, can in fact be 'functionally strong' in other contexts (Ang, 2016). All of which suggests that building the environment which enables locally led processes of improvisation, dialogue and adaptation is of particular importance.

4. Value multiple forms of knowledge

The increased space for experimentation that seems to have emerged in recent months in the Pacific has seen a revaluing of indigenous forms of knowledge and research, as noted above. Andy Haldane of the Bank of England noted following the Global Financial crisis that one of the reasons that they were not in a good position to 'see it coming' was the uniformity of their thinking, particularly when it came to risk

and how it might be best managed. Experience in research-policy collaborations – recently applied to the COVID-19 pandemic – similarly underscores the value of bringing scientific, policy and community stakeholders together in open and transparent ways, and how 'bounded mutuality' i.e. the ability to accommodate conflicting evidence and 'sustained interactivity' between actors are key (Georgalakis 2020). In indigenous Australia, processes which have successfully 'weaved together' knowledge and experience which encompass both indigenous and western knowledge, have pointed to ways in which 'multiple evidence bases' and knowledge systems can be mobilised with appropriate expertise and care (Austin et al, 2018). Others have long pointed to the prospects for deliberative and democratic processes involving citizens in renewing political life, but also point to the fact that this won't happen by itself (Dryzek et al, 2019). At the heart of this issue is recognising the politics of evidence, and the recognition of the importance therefore of the governance of evidence production and use, or indeed misuse (Parkhurst, 2017).

This is not a romanticised call for ousting of all generalisable knowledge and replacing it with local knowledge. Rather, and in line with notions of 'critical localism' it is a recognition that some forms of knowledge and evidence tend to be privileged over others, and this is part of how power and politics operate locally, as well as globally.

5. Think hard about identity

There is evident interest in the Pacific about Black Lives Matter and the decolonising of development and research. Indeed, we believe that these phenomena have also contributed to what we have observed in the Pacific in the last nine months. These movements have galvanised activists[1] and a growing community of Pacific academics are part of this process as they try to 'rewrite Pacific research from Pacific people's ontological understandings of the world' (Naepi, 2019). Development agencies spend a lot of time thinking and talking about strategy: what they are going to do and how they are going to do it. They spend much less time talking about their identity: who they are. However, recent experience in New Zealand/Aotearoa of an international NGO seeking to come to grips with its bicultural and Pacific identity points to the potential of agencies – at least in settler states such as Australia and New Zealand – to more deeply question the degree to which their values, world views

[1] See https://www.thecoconet.tv/coco-talanoa/blog/black-lives-matter-protests-galvanise-pasifika/

and relationships might be transformed by a richer engagement with indigenous peoples and knowledge, and the history of their own nations (Finlayson, forthcoming). This does not suggest a return to a more domestic or parochial view of the world. Rather, it represents a kind of simultaneous exploration of both intimate and personal as well as what some have called a 'larger us' (Evans, 2019). Asking questions about identity and place, also demands that bigger questions are asked about the 'othering' of development discourse, and about collective investment in the common good and our common humanity.

Conclusion

There is a range of literature which seeks to reimagine or reclaim development, to pursue postdevelopment, and/or to decentre or bury the notion of development for good. Much of this scholarly work critiques traditional development agencies, and the ways they tend to reproduce inequitable power relations, as well the concepts of development they propagate. At the same time this body of work emphasises the continuing need to address questions of global equity and injustice, whilst also emphasising that understandings of development need to remain plural and evolving (Escobar, 2018; Klein & Morreo, 2019).

We have suggested that the experience in the Pacific we have documented above gives rise to a number of issues which those working in add around the international development sector might well consider. They give rise to questions about ways of being and interacting as the starting point, rather than questions of strategy or tactics.

Arguably the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects has shone a bright light on pre-existing inequalities whilst at the same creating new spaces and opportunities for different forms of collaboration and ways of working to emerge. As the natural experiment that has been unleashed evolves, and as the porosity of national boundaries becomes even more evident, it would seem critically important to be sharing experiences of how locally led practices can inform a broader debate on the new forms of international collaboration which our world so urgently requires.

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Public participation in development initiatives within conflict affected contexts

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In conflict-affected states, some kind of public participation in development initiatives is assumed to be an essential ingredient in development initiatives, constitution-making processes as well as in policymaking. However, in practice, public participation gives rise to dilemmas about impact, design and risk. In conflict-affected contexts, what approaches are most useful in dealing with these dilemmas? Drawing from the experiences on public participation in constitution-making in Nepal, Myanmar and Sri Lanka I suggest that the dilemmas that arise in public participation throw into sharp relief six dimensions that must be taken into account in developing and implementing programmes for public participation whether in development initiatives, policy-development, law reform or constitution-making.

The Norm

What is the thrust of the idea of public participation in developmental initiatives? Is it a legal right, a legal principle or a political norm? The growing recognition for public participation is supported by normative arguments about the constituent power of the People and 'the rights-based approach'. The idea that People are sovereign and therefore ought to have the opportunity to participate and be consulted in decisions that relate to public affairs is widely held. Keeping the public 'informed' is no longer considered to be adequate. This intrinsic justification for public participation is further supported by two consequentialist arguments. One is that public participation generates political legitimacy or 'social capital' for initiatives as well for the substance of such initiatives. Another is that it encourages inclusion in debates and decision-making in governance.

The counterarguments are as follows. Firstly, public participation might generate expectations that may not be fulfilled in the design, development or implementation of

a specific developmental initiative. Secondly, the act of participating in the process itself can polarize a society and be a cause of political instability. Thirdly, unfulfilled expectations and polarization of society can aggravate levels of political dissatisfaction resulting in disenchantment with the entire process. Sceptics of public participation therefore argue in favour of a process driven primarily by political elites and experts. In such a process the public participate indirectly through public officers, civil society representatives, elected representatives etc. Such sceptics have further argued that in societies emerging from conflict public participation might be more problematic given the sensitivity of and urgency for developmental, policy, legislative or constitutional reform.

Today the obligation of states to respect human rights is interpreted as including the obligation to ensure and facilitate public participation and consultation in public affairs. The *Guidelines for States on the Effective Implementation of the Right to Participate in Public Affairs* adopted by the Human Rights Council in 2018 recognizes that the right to participate in public affairs is integral to the realization of other human rights such as the right of access to information and the right to freedom of expression. The right to participate in public affairs is essential for the realization of the internal right to self-determination as well. The Guidelines are particularly useful for their emphasis on the responsibility of the state to ensure the participation of marginalized groups in public affairs. For instance, the Guidelines state that in the context of peace-building or in post-conflict contexts public participation must be designed to ensure the participation of those most affected – such as 'children, young people, minorities, persons with disabilities, internally displaced persons, refugees and women and girls' (para 60). The guidelines recommend measures to be followed to ensure participation before and after decision-making. Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the Security Council Resolution 2122 (2013) which call for consultation with women in peace-building and peace-keeping, target 16.7 of Sustainable Development Goal 16 which relate to participation in decision making, and now the Guidelines, together offer a rights-based defence in international law for ensuring public participation in constitution-making.

Constitution-making in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Nepal

Myanmar, Nepal and Sri Lanka have attracted the attention of policymakers and scholars worldwide in the last decade as states emerging from conflict. In all three countries, constitution-making and implementation have been central to their contemporary state-building experiences. Nepal adopted a new constitution in 2015, following the 2006 Peace Agreement Myanmar is engaged in constitutional reforms of the Constitution of 2008 which however are heavily contested. In Sri Lanka, constitutional reform post-war has included a failed attempt to adopt a new constitution (in 2016). The recently elected new Government has signalled its intention to engage in constitutional reform by proposing the 20th Amendment to the Constitution and the appointment of an Expert Committee for drafting a new constitution.

Nepal, Myanmar and Sri Lanka represent three different points in constitution-making in a post-war scenario. Nepal's experience suggests that even when the leading parties to the armed-conflict reach a peace agreement, including an agreement on the agenda for constitution-making, the actual task of constitution-making itself remains challenging. The experiences of Nepal and Sri Lanka suggests that public participation can be symbolic and, much more importantly, that when it is not 'successful', it can be counter-productive. Myanmar will no doubt, be expected, at least by the international community, to ensure direct public participation in constitution-making, should the process advance.

All three jurisdictions have a pre-modern history of governance, disrupted through direct or indirect forms of violence or colonisation. The establishment of the modern state in these three jurisdictions is intrinsically associated with negative conceptions – of extraction for private gain, violence and arbitrary categorisation and exclusion. These tensions continue to impact the state-formation and democratisation projects in these jurisdictions, including in constitution-making. Only when we understand state formation and democratization in this way can we fully appreciate the significance of public participation within a specific process.

The 'transnational' has a significant impact on direct public participation in developmental initiatives and even in policy, legislative or constitutional reform. The extensive development of the peace and security agenda of the United Nations

Security Council, the development of the Sustainable Development Goals and the proliferation of international non-governmental organisations explains, partly, these effects. Inter-governmental organizations, non-governmental organisations (international, inter-governmental, regional and national), networks and experts/advisors can all be vectors of transnational legal norms. In Myanmar, Nepal and Sri Lanka, this influence was evident in varying degrees. The impact is 'multi-directional' and takes the form of contestation between a range of actors – local, national, regional and international. Paying attention to the 'transnational' nature of constitution-making in Nepal, Myanmar and Sri Lanka and historicising constitution-making in these jurisdictions, therefore, clarify distinct challenges regarding public participation

Direct public participation comes with practical and material challenges. A critical aspect of the practical is of sequencing. A related but separate concern is how much time should be allocated for public participation in constitution-making? The South African example of public participation, now considered to be the gold standard, took more than two years and was undertaken in two stages. In Nepal too, the process continued for longer than expected. The time that would be required to ensure direct public participation can be extensive. A further important practicality is determining what resources ought to be made available for the process. Particularly in post-war contexts, human and financial resources ought to be available, for instance, for translation work, the development of communication strategies and public messaging as well as travel across the jurisdiction. These initiatives can be resource-intensive and therefore, in some contexts, not feasible.

Evidence Deficit

The stakes of public participation are high, particularly for post-war societies. Therefore, a utilitarian approach to it would be misleading. While there is consensus on the intrinsic value of public participation, very little guidance is available on how each country can determine how, when and to what extent the public should participate in public affairs. It is essential to acknowledge that the practical benefits of direct public participation are unknown. However, the lack of evidence itself does not mean that direct public participation is unnecessary or should be ignored. Rather, what we require is a call for honest and transparent reflection on the expectations and

function of direct public participation. In other words, while recognising the significance of the values in operation here, it is equally important to understand that we are yet to understand how we can give it effect in a meaningful way.

Six Dimensions of Public Participation

In post-war contexts, the volatile political, social and economic context provides an ideal scenario for ignoring the public or paying only lip-service to the idea of public participation. An acknowledgement of the tension and the limitation clears the way for an honest consideration of what is possible in such circumstances. In developing such an approach, public participation ought to be understood as involving six dimensions. Understanding how these dimensions operate and engage with each other, in a given context, would help to develop a more modest, honest and transparent account of public participation in public affairs.

Dimension 1: Conflict Resolution and State Formation

Public participation in public affairs can reveal the fragility of state formation (constitution-making, developmental initiatives, legislative reforms etc) projects in the post-colonial world. Post-war contexts in which a stable political resolution to the conflict is absent heightens this fragility. Through public participation, the constituent power of the People may come alive, even while the idea of 'the People' remains contested. The process may implicate other problems that were unresolved during the formation of modern states in addition to the issues of ethnicity and self-determination. Those issues include the role of religious institutions, recognition of equal rights for women, the applicability of religious and customary laws, and the role of the military. Public participation is not limited to questions about the process for constitutional reform, constitutional design or systems of government. It can also have the intended or unintended consequence of bringing to the surface complex latent issues about state formation, left unresolved over a period of time. In post-war contexts this dimension implicates, among other things, competing narratives of historical events and contestations over transitional justice.

Dimension 2: Democratisation

A closely related dimension is that of democratisation. In many states of the Global South, experiences in armed-conflicts and before that of colonisation have led to resistance to democratisation. At least some pre-colonial social and political institutions continue to play a central role in political matters. In such contexts, public participation is not only about the specific task at hand – such as drafting of a specific constitution. It is also a process in which democratization continues in close interaction with the dimension of state formation. Democratization in this context would involve deciding on questions of citizenship, the development of an appreciation for constitutional democracy and its expression through constitutional governance.

Dimension 3: Transparency and Accountability

Appreciating a difference between transparency and accountability and public participation is necessary, particularly in post-war contexts. This dimension has at least two different aspects. Firstly, the volatility of post-war political relationships might reduce the prospects for public participation. Even in such a context, maintaining some respect for transparency and accountability might satisfy the political obligations that ought to be met. This obligation could extend to representatives involved, to advisors and to drafters. Even where direct public participation is limited, ensuring transparency and maintaining accountability can be a method of acknowledging the constituent power of the People. Secondly, the process ought to afford transparency and accountability in the ways in which public participation is taken into account in the process and in substance. Notwithstanding a lack of evidence on the actual impact of public participation, it ought to be possible to ensure transparency and accountability about the extent to which drafters heed input from the public.

Dimension 4: The Transnational

The transnational dynamic is central to public participation of the Global South. This includes the transitional justice aspect, the aspect of security sector reforms and of economic development. Understanding how the transnational impacts processes at the domestic level allows us to develop a more realistic understanding of the actual dynamics at play. National boundaries do not limit public participation. It is instead

another aspect that is shaped by norms, institutions and actors with competing world views and interests operating at local, national, regional and global levels. The norms include principles of constitutionalism and the right to participation and consultation that would contrast, for instance, with ethno-nationalism. The institutions range from the United Nations to religious institutions and the military. The actors include immediate victim-survivors of the war, the diaspora, former combatants and global networks of advisors/experts.

Dimension 5: Literacy (Civic, legal, constitutional)

Public participation provides an opportunity for developing literacy and engagement. In post-war societies such as Myanmar, Nepal and Sri Lanka, one cannot overestimate the significance of these opportunities. They provide a chance to address gaps in the formation of the state, formed during the period of British rule and decolonisation. As was the case in South Africa and Nepal, direct public participation provides the political space for engaging in public debates that have previously been absent or peripheral in state-formation projects. In its current form public participation is a discreet activity limited in time and scope. For the people to participate meaningfully, they ought to have an appreciation for what can be broadly described as civic, legal and constitutional literacy. These are aspects that are generally recognised as significant. However, the actual meaning and scope of these concepts remains to be clarified.

Dimension 6: Resources and Time

Consideration of resource constraints and time ought to be central to public participation. Context specific factors such as language, geography, literacy, digital penetration etc may place distinct human and financial resources on a public participation process. In a post-war context, time might often be a luxury that ought to be utilised strategically and therefore has a compounding impact on resources. Over and beyond the implications of time in managing the actual exercise of public participation, time complicates public participation itself. How the past, present and future is interpreted and presented in public participation complicates the substantive aspects of constitution-making.

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Reframing developmental practice: Learning from deliberative practice and action research-based strategies

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Introduction

The world has set an ambitious development vision through the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals, yet how international development practice can mobilise various forms of knowledge to inform policy and problem-solving innovations to achieve these goals remains a critical challenge. Development policy and practice too often falls in the gap between research and policymakers who travel different worlds of knowledge (Brownson et al. 2006). The research community often finds itself frustrated over the continued neglect of research evidence by policymakers. At the same time, policymakers see researchers as addressing questions of curiosity, and not those of concern to policymakers (Ojha 2020).

The appreciation of research-informed policy has gained much support in recent years. However, whether and how science can improve public policy is a highly contested topic in both the scholarly domains and the world of policy and practice. Moreover, top-down and techno-bureaucratic control characterises the policy process of Nepal and many developing countries. Indeed, Nepal's policy-making process remains the primary domain of the bureaucracy and continues to demonstrate remnants of the country's feudal past. As a result, policies are rarely the government's response to problems raised by the public, but rather reflect the interests and views of those who 'rule the roost' (Rai et al. 2016). Some argue that the traditional systems of research

dissemination models that supply information to policy and decision-making processes are less effective, and advocate for interpretive, deliberative, and problem-focused policy analysis, engagement, and mediation (Li and Wagenaar 2019, Ercan et al. 2020).

Recognising the continuing democratic challenge, a number of experimental and some well-functioning practitioner initiatives have emerged in the past decade or so that seek to develop strategies and methods to improve the knowledge interface and policy learning in development contexts. These initiatives involve leadership roles taken on by local organizations and a variety of partnerships and collaborations with international development actors. They focus on knowledge politics, action-based learning, and deliberation.

Drawing on the experimentation on applying the policy lab methodology in Nepal's diverse sectors, this case synthesis paper is guided by four key questions: (1) how practical epistemologies have been conceived, embraced, and mobilized; (2) how various kinds of deliberative practices and forums have been framed, organised, and delivered; (3) what strategies have been adopted to facilitate learning processes around policy development and implementation; and (4) how researchers and practitioners have interacted with policy actors and what international development collaborations have helped in such interactions. As we will see in the sections below, the policy lab methodology embraces the notions of flexibility and adaptiveness to customise the standard forms of policy analysis and deliberations in developing country contexts and sectoral needs.

Policy Lab Methodology in Nepal

Nepal's policy processes are often disconnected from both research and practice. To overcome the science-policy-practice gaps, various approaches and tools have been experimented in Nepal such as '*ban chautari*' (informal public discussion spaces) and 'policy learning groups'. These were eventually refined and reframed as the policy lab method.

Policy labs are conceptualised as deliberative forums where researchers and policy-actors including civil society representatives engage in a systematic review, observation and analysis, in pursuit of defining a policy problem and identifying an

effective solution, 'in a secluded space removed from daily hubbub and personal stresses to permit concentration and reflection' (Niti Foundation 2012). The policy labs acted as hubs for ensuring collaborative inquiry between researchers and policy actors by maintaining effective interaction between the two groups; ensuring a balance between problem analysis and solution search (Ojha et al. 2020). Since the policy labs are constitutive of action research, inquiry and practice are organized simultaneously.

We have analysed three variants of policy labs, which used the same basic premises but were adapted to the specific context:

- Research that provided research inputs or research scholarship. A less direct form of involvement in policy drafting process but a process by which research and analysis were offered to policy actors who were directly involved in the drafting of policy contents. (The EnLiFT Policy Lab on Forestry and Food Security, discussed in 3.1).
- Researchers were involved in practical problems, which required policymakers to respond to and work with local people and local governments to find a widely acceptable policy solution. (The Pani Chautari: Policy Lab on Water Governance, discussed in 3.2).
- Inputs to policy reform. Researchers took the role of policy brokering together with supporting the reform process through legal analysis and research inputs. (The Policy Lab in Energy Sector Governance, discussed in 3.3).

In the ancient history of the Indian sub-continent, the space of the '*bidwat sabha*' (the council of intellectuals) was found decorated as key for popular policies of the kingdoms and resulting noble service they offered to the public. The knowledge of the experts or legitimate knower was counted as valid and the epistemologies followed by them would be trusted as legitimate sources (Jha 2016). Sources of valid knowledge are called *Pramana*. There are six *Pramanas* that are key in eastern or Hindu epistemology: perception (*prataksha*), inference (*anuman*), comparison, postulation, verbal testimony, probability, intuition, gesture, and non-apprehension (apprehension of non-existence) or negation (Biswas 2007).

While Nepal's ancient religious texts and traditions espoused and celebrated the role of epistemic community and devised epistemological perspectives for informed policy alternatives, the tradition subsequently subsided by the autocratic regimes that ruled

the state until the 1950s. If we go back to seventy years from now, during the Rana oligarchy, it was the rulers (or *Bada Hakim*) who used their feudal power whose words became the rules. There was no space for dissenting voices or alternative opinions. Epistemologies of common people were not counted, similar to what is reported for colonized nation-states by the West (Santos 2014).

While democracy was established in Nepal in 1951, immediately after the democratically elected government was formed in 1959, a royal coup in 1961 initiated the direct rule of the King. The monarchy rule continued until 1990 with most of the public spheres constricted for raising contending perspectives. That is, neither was there any scope for science nor for any community voices. What the powerful people, who were close allies of the King, thought and said was the public policy. There was no space for policy deliberation. We observed that resistance of deliberation in public policy coming from the powerful actors.

The 1990s political change that reinstated democracy opened the civic space precipitously; civil society became stronger, community associations emerged rapidly. Consequently, over one hundred thousand NGOs have been registered throughout Nepal. Many of them advocating for greater civic space in the policy process.

Since the late 1990s, and early 2000s, the space for independent researchers, and academic institutions has expanded significantly. During this period ForestAction and other institutions emerged and engaged in alternative knowledge production. They started to undertake research as well as produce journals and other knowledge products. ForestAction's journey of engaged policy research also integrated learning from the community and meso level. The policy lab methodology applied by ForestAction and other collaborators mostly deals with national-level policy contributions in the forest sector.

During the post-1990s period, the scope for political articulation and public debate also improved. In this entire process, international development partners also remained strong players in terms of capacity building and funding support to the civil society organizations and government agencies. While Nepal remained a unitary state after the 1990s political change, the Maoist insurgency, followed by the federalism movement, resulted in the decentering of the power of the central state to 761 sub-

centres. The new context has evolved setting up more expanded space for public policy articulation, deliberation, and social learning.

After the 1990s political change, many researchers from Nepal also had opportunities to study in Western universities on policy and governance and were motivated to undertake engaged research. These researchers began to work in various sectors in experimental ways. Despite these expanding civic spaces, we subscribe from Jasanoff and others, and maintain that institutionalized expert knowledge is politically mobilized often to serve their interests and advocates for coproduction of knowledge for its greater relevance and legitimacy, which she defines as civic epistemologies (Jasanoff 2013). Knowledge and power become embroiled in the process of co-production at the societal level (Jasanoff 2004). The existing science in Himalaya has largely failed to engage with problems, deliberate with policy, and interact with communities (Ojha, 2020). We need a new approach in Himalayan science, disengaged science. To overcome the science-policy-practice gaps, various approaches and tools have been experimented in Nepal Himalayas, such as the policy lab method.

Over last one decade, experimentation on establishing links between science and policy and promoting the deliberative links between policy and practices have taken place in various sectors in Nepal, viz. forestry, water, security and energy. These experimentations form the synthesis of this case study report. We here include an examination of:

- Forest sector policymaking: While practice element is also substantially integrated in recent research, this policy lab mostly deals with national-level policy contributions in the forest sector;
- Water governance at the local government level;
- Energy security at the national level.

These experiments used pragmatic approaches to managing the science-policy-practice interface. Developing countries are characterized by the lack of accessible information in the policy process, asymmetries of information, and low appreciation of 'scientific' knowledge in making policies. In this situation, policies are often the result of the interest negotiations and managing stakeholder interests, power, and other expectations rather than the genuine normative logic for informed policymaking. Therefore, a certain level of adaptation was expected while steering deliberative

practice and experimentation of policy lab methodology in Nepal. These cases also recognize that much of the groundwork in policymaking in Nepal is accomplished within informal settings than in the institutionalised 'empowered spaces'. Therefore, an attempt to make a meaningful contribution should engage in non-formal spaces as much as with the formally recognized policy-making authorities. Similarly, these cases also assume that Nepal's bureaucratic organisational roles and political system do not match the Western one in terms of seeking for research and analysis and accepting inputs from other actors. The role of information in policymaking is skewed; political and bureaucratic alliances and non-formal engagements have higher value in shaping policy agenda and alternatives; and often personal relationships override the structured deliberations.

Summary of Three Sectoral Policy Labs Experiments in Nepal

Case Study 1: EnLiFT Policy Lab – Forestry and Food Security

Introduction

With the advent of reinstatement of democracy in 1990s and flourishing civil society space thereafter, researchers joined hands and established ForestAction in 2000 to develop alternative knowledge system and feed into the policy and practices around forest governance in Nepal. ForestAction worked on governance reform at the community level, facilitated learning platforms at national and sub-national level and experimented a range of approaches and methods in democratising knowledge and integrating science with policy and practices. Some notable approaches used by ForestAction, which became the building blocks of policy lab include Adaptive Collaborative Management (ACM), Nepal Policy Learning Group, Nepal Policy Research Network (NPRN), Reducing Poverty through Innovations System in Forestry, Ban Chautari, and Participatory Prospective Analysis. These methods attempted to developing a culture of horizontal relationship among participants, openness to learning, more focused review and analysis by sub-groups to inform the whole group, design and finalise themes and questions for action research, joint observation of action-research practice, and reflection events.

Deliberation and policy uptake

The policy lab culminated with more structured engagement of policy actors and devises processes in order to bringing ‘research process closer to the policy’, ‘recognizes the role of brokering in translating research into policy’, ‘embraces ideas of critical action research as applied in the context of Nepal's forest governance’, integrated series of dialogical events and engaged ‘stakeholders in the process of collaborative inquiry’ (Ojha et al. 2020, p. 4). The policy lab aimed at addressing the pressing policy problems:

Forest Action accumulated, documented, synthesized and communicated local practices and knowledge to policy actors in the series of dialogical events organized around the policy issue. The problems within the field were reported at the policy labs largely comprised of national level government bureaucrats, donors, academics and CSOs. Policy lab participants discussed the problems, assessed the information and analysis, and arrived at some decisions regarding appropriate policy change. The result of these policy labs culminated into policy changes in many cases.

The labs were also run on contested national issues such as ‘scientific forest management’ and ‘community rights under federal governance’ (Ojha et al. 2020). The team of researchers during this period collected and synthesized different studies, cases, findings and results about how community forestry is and can be handy for Nepal and also published materials reviewing of the existing Bill on forest management. The contribution of the policy lab to the preparation of the Federal Forest Act and supporting a quick policy response during earthquake 2015 was notable contributions with such labs. To feed into the public sphere the findings were presented to media, other actors of the society, even to the parliamentary committee through different forums. At times in addition to these research and deliberations, the researchers also involved in lobbying with key stakeholders.

There were other examples too, such as after the 2015 earthquake, communities wanted to have more access to the fuel woods and timber which is not permitted because many of their management plans were overdue or had expired. Forest Action Nepal took the initiative and took the policy lab participants particularly the senior government officials and Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal (FECOFUN) leaders to the field in order to observe the field situation and listen to the plight of local people. After the series of dialogues within policy lab and lobbying beyond it, the

Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation issued a directive that allowed the communities to use timber to rebuild their houses devastated by the earthquake despite of their overdue plans.

Case Study 2: Pani Chautari: Policy Lab on Water Governance

Introduction

Southasia Institute of Advanced Studies (SIAS) used the Policy Lab approach in water governance at municipal level. SIAS largely works at the interface of science, policy and practice on a wide range of areas such as climate change, democracy and governance, water governance, disaster risk management, and urban resilience. Much of its work employs action research methodologies. At the national level, SIAS has been actively involved in policy deliberations through its Himalayan Policy Lab, and its 'Himalayan Climate Change and Development' seminar series.

SIAS has been investigating solutions to water supply related issues amidst increasing water scarcity in cities across Nepal. They worked in action research mode and adopted key principles and steps of policy lab in Dhulikhel municipality of central Nepal.

Prior to policy lab formation, a series of discussion on need of knowledge sharing and discussion platform was conducted with local stakeholders. Representatives of water related institutions and other stakeholders recognised the Paani Chautari (Water Forum), a forum established by SIAS, as a deliberative space to help understand perspectives of different stakeholders and develop and test institutional modalities and incentive mechanisms for effective water governance in Dulikhel.

Policy lab intervention

While facilitating policy lab methodology, they took evolutionary approach rather than following a rigid structure. The idea behind Paani Chautari is actually derived from the traditional practice of the people coming together and then discussing on the different social issues and trying to find out the solution. In Water Forum, the researchers in consultation with local people, elected representatives of the municipality and concerned government authorities undertook a diagnostic study, which was shared at a series of Paani Chautari or Water Forums organised within the municipality.

Water Forum is recognized and respected as a policy lab, where upstream (people living in the place where the water source is located) and downstream water users were brought together and deliberated on various aspect of water governance such as abundance, demand, tariffs and management approaches. The stakeholders identified for the Paani Chautari comprised of local government, civil society, water committees, ward chairs, university representatives and private sectors.

The role of the researchers is very important in the diagnostic studies that would unpack the technical and governance aspects of water resource management in Dulikhel Municipality, as well as draw from experiences from other places and countries. For example, in the latest Paani Chautari series, the upstream and downstream relationship was discussed and the researchers presented the findings from previous research and they also shared about the international practices of payment for ecosystem services so that was very helpful for the stakeholders to think about whether that is replicable or what could be the best solution in the local context.

Outcomes of policy lab

One of the important positive outcomes in policy and practice is that the role of the research and evidence is recognized by Dhulikhel Municipality and it has broadened evidence-based policymaking. Likewise, Dhulikhel Municipality has also begun spending resources on water conservation and improving water supply systems. Focused and continuing dialogues among municipal authorities, researchers, and all prominent water actors are found vital to explore, inform, and develop measures to ensure sustained and equitable supplies of water.

Experience of Paani Chautari in Dhulikhel suggests that informal relations and post-event engagement is critical to push for the uptake of policy. The professional relationship developed with the Mayor during the engagement process led to municipal ownership of the process and outcomes of policy lab and consequently ensuring the integration of the results in municipal policies and programs. Keeping the municipal authorities on the front line and delegating responsibilities to them increased the ownership of initiation.

Similarly, retrospective reflection and review of the documents of the Water Forums is necessary. The Paani Chautari case has demonstrated that researchers should be

good facilitators, good communicators, having qualities such as lobbyist, and could maintain strong stakeholder relations. Fostering horizontal learning among stakeholders is a necessity in the contemporary public policymaking process. For wider acceptance and better implementation of water policies and programs, engagement and ownership of stakeholders and authorities must be increased.

Case Study 3: Policy Lab in Energy Sector Governance

Introduction

Niti Foundation has the mandate of policy analysis and linking research with policy. They offer deliberative space so that all concerned stakeholders could share their ideas and perspectives on a range of issues such as security, energy and forest.

Among various sectors of policy procedures, Niti Foundation picked up hydropower and security fields with the mindset of working on the most challenging issues when there was up to 18 hours of load shedding every day across the country. Complex bureaucratic norms, lack of appropriate linkage between hydropower supply and economic sector, and the unwillingness of the pertinent investors were the most significant challenges at that time. The gap was further created due to newly institutionalized federalism in Nepal which added provincial level government with less clear roles and legal frameworks for effective policy making and programmatic implementation. The stakes were high and diverse among various stakeholders. Therefore, the first and the most important aspect of the policy lab was to identify the hidden interest of the actors that would cause the mal or no implementation of the policies. For it the researchers had to study the background of the actors minutely, which was more challenging in case of the province level actors.

Policy lab intervention

Before the policy lab started, the authorities lacked needed knowledge of and motivation in addressing the daring problems of energy crisis and mismanagement. Most of the policies were formulated by the concerned authority without any genuine attempt to align with the needs and aspirations at the ground level. A lack of transparency remained a huge issue as the public did not know when and where the development works were taking place. Implementation of ongoing projects was

terribly slow. Consumers, who were suffering from load shedding of up to 18 hours or more, had little interest or capacity in energy sector development programs. In this context, Niti Foundation through its policy lab aimed at the awakening of various stakeholders including the consumers about the policies and empower them to contribute meaningfully in policy reforms.

Niti Foundation took an approach slightly different from that of ForestAction Nepal and SIAS, as it sought to draw on the existing experts' and administrative authorities' knowledge in digging out the problems and exploring for potential reform agenda. They identified the senior bureaucrats or retired higher-level bureaucrats, highly reputed public who got the benefits from the program, and the senior representatives of various organizations. They were provided with ample opportunity to bring information and analysis to the table with a focus on the possible solutions, which eventually formed the basis for picking up the best possible solution for the problems. Niti Foundation offered space for all participants in order to seek solutions from the ground reality. The prime concern of making them participate was to make them responsible, ensure the participation of the directly responsible people and safeguard the democratic norms and values. The findings of the research helped to formulate and implement the policy in the line of removing darkness from the country.

As the nature of lab work, the researchers would dig out the most challenging voice where the policy blockages lie and the reasons behind them. The main crux in this process required highly skillful and reputed researchers as facilitators, who could spontaneously draw information from the highly experienced participants and offer information and nuances in consolidating the perspectives offered and trenches developed for pragmatic policy solutions. The facilitator would analyse and present common perspectives being generated among the participants, information gaps requiring further inquiry, and dictating roles of various stakeholders in devising policies or implementation of the existing ones. The policy lab was designed to uncover the reasons behind the policy failure at the stage of policy formation, implementation, and accountability. As a collaborative action research, the process continued until the complete application of the policies would work in favor of establishing the surest norms.

Insights from Policy Lab Methodology in Nepal

Policy labs are conceptualised as deliberative forums where researchers and policy-actors including civil society representatives engage in a systematic review, observation and analysis, in pursuit of defining a policy-problem and identifying an effective solution, 'in a secluded space removed from daily hubbub and personal stresses to permit concentration and reflection' (Niti Foundation 2012). The policy labs acted as hubs for ensuring collaborative inquiry between researchers and policy actors by maintaining effective interaction between the two groups; ensuring a balance between problem analysis and solution search (Ojha et al. 2020). Since the policy labs are constitutive of action research, inquiry and practice are organized simultaneously.

The main thrust of applying policy lab methodology in Nepal has been to challenge the settled wisdom around development practice, and to integrate deliberative dimension so that the development practices don't miss the merits of contextual and value-based engagement in development. Even during the disrupted political landscape of Nepal for last fifteen years, we have been able to keep public interest upfront by allowing contextual and value dimensions in our approach to science-policy-practice.

While concepts such as deliberative democracy and discursive policymaking provide the conceptual basis, the cases are analysed with reference to the analytical lenses of:

- *Inclusion*: who participates, why and with what inputs?
- *Deliberation*: design variables such as forums, processes, diagnostics of problems and outcomes.
- *Multi-level linkages*: between community-local governments-province-federal.
- *Public discourse and debates*: how the wider discursive context influenced the deliberative process within the respective policy domains.
- *Social learning*: reflection, understanding others' viewpoints, changing institutions and practices.
- *Integration of research/analysis*: throughout different stages of the policy labs (problem definition, observation, analysis and potential solutions).

The following table provides the synopsis of the elements mention above in three cases taken for this synthesis.

Table 1: Policy labs from different analytical elements

Analytical Variables	Forest Policy	Water Governance	Energy Policy
Inclusion	• Researchers, policy-level government officials, network representatives	• Elected representatives and bureaucrats from municipalities, researchers, local communities	• Ex-senior security officials, legal scholars, civil society activities, public administration experts, researchers, province-level parliamentarians, seating security officials
Policy Lab: Deliberation (design variables: forums, processes, diagnostics)	• Formal forums: policy and practice labs, parliamentary committee • Process: researchers involved in joint inquiry with policy actors, share the research findings into the closed deliberation of 8-15 participants for informed deliberation and policy options	• Forum: local level water forum; deliberation at national level	• Forum: working team; policy roundtables; focus groups; parliamentary committee
Multi-level Linkages	• Researchers presenting research results; joint observation by policy actors and researchers;	• Local water forum feeding back to municipality level policies	• Bringing data and analysis from province as inputs for parliamentary deliberation
Epistemic Quality	• Researchers presenting analysis; policy actors' observation of	• Researchers conducted diagnostic study and shared with stakeholders	• Reviewing practices in other countries and sharing at the table; scenario analysis

	action research and reflection		

We have analysed three variants of policy labs, which used basic premises but adapted to the specific context. In the policy lab on forest policy, the researchers provided research inputs or research scholarship and facilitated multi-stakeholder deliberations. Their direct involvement in the policy drafting process was limited, and instead offered research and analysis to policy actors, who were directly involved in the drafting of policy contents.

By contrast, in the municipal water governance policy lab, the researchers were involved in practical problems, which required policies to respond to and working with local people and local governments in finding out a widely accepted policy solution. The researchers had to work on the research and analysis front as well as engaged in local processes of making the change happened. They constantly worked with and provided the research generated insights and analysis to local people and municipal government.

Similarly, Niti Foundation's engagement in energy sector policies was targeted to policy brokering. That is, the researchers took the role of policy brokering together with supporting reform process through review of global practices, legal analysis, and scenario analysis. The brokering process was largely steered through the ex-officials of the sector who could better understand the system and mediate the policy drafting process.

The role of epistemic communities in policy labs is diverse yet immense, which differed across policy labs. While they differed in different sectors or stages of policy labs, the roles include:

- *Engaging* with diverse stakeholders (all policy labs), and in some cases stakeholders involved were from multiple jurisdictions (forest policy lab).
- *Co-producing*: co-define policy questions (all policy labs) and jointly design action research strategies with policy actors (forest policy and water governance labs).
- *Alliance-building* from a broad coalition of stakeholders (all policy labs).

- *Brokering*: researchers become policy champions and involve directly in policy reform through brokering than in empirical research (energy lab)
- *Informing*: providing research findings and analysis to policymakers or policy brokers (all policy labs)
- *Advocating*: researchers take a particular side and engaged in lobbying or social movements

Finally, we also explored attributional parts of our policy labs in terms of procedures and substantive policy outcomes. Procedural outcomes of deliberation highlighted include mutual understanding, reflexivity, consensus building. Similarly, substantive outcomes include some level of contribution in policy by generating wider debate for policy formulation and contributing to pro-people policies (forest lab), and changes in policy and practices in governance and management (water lab) at the municipal level. Key insights from the experimentation across forestry, water, and security sectors include:

Integration of a deliberative dimension (inclusion, democratisation, reciprocity, and reflective inquiry) in policy process through policy lab methodology contributed in devising policies and programs keeping public interest upfront.

Key messages coming from these methodological experimentation include: (1) genuine deliberative practice has been missing in developmentalism at large, and with a certain level of localisation (informed and engaged with local context and vocabulary), and (2) local commitment and leadership, there is plenty of space for reframing of research, which has evolved in the western culture and traditions and has remained problematic for understanding and framing development practice in the east because it became extractive in the name of objectification. As discussed in this report, the policy lab approach applied in different sectors in Nepal was customised based on the context and provided opportunity for bottom-up and organic evolution and adaptation of the process itself.

Reshaping/redefining development has become urgent – we have lost contact with context and the way that we have promoted discourses and practices is all west-based or to do with the old paradigm which is based on the notion of rebuilding after disfunction.

The way researchers engaged in Nepal for over two decades in making research-grounded/contextualised and engaged with socio-ecological systems at various scales is not about adaptive Western notion of science, it is rather about discovering something useful through dialectics of various forces and experimented by local leadership cognizant of local political processes and often been the part of the local socio-political systems and contestations.

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