Development dilemmas and manufactured hazards

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Development processes have conflicting aims and players, and these are a challenge for making good policy. Choosing the wrong development path could have devastating consequences. Research into development issues is key to understanding the realities about which political decisions have to be made.

**Development dilemmas** go in different directions and each one presents its own dilemmas. Contradictory perceptions and practices have various consequences for the people affected, for better or worse. Researching development is therefore crucial to deepen understanding of the risks associated with different strategies and the complexity of development paths.

Sociologist Ulrich Bech developed the concept "organised irresponsibility" to describe risk societies. In terms of this approach, one may broadly distinguish between two types of risk: external risk and manufactured risk. External risks are those that unexpectedly strike an individual or community. Historically, this could be illness or natural disasters. Manufactured risks, on the other hand, are created by the progress of human development. Chernobyl is one such example, as are the consequences of climate change for millions of people.

The global climate negotiations bear testimony to the processes of "organised irresponsibility." When increased carbon dioxide emissions in the West and the developed world afflict Africa with more floods or prolonged droughts, the polluters are to a large extent unwilling to pay and take responsibility for these consequences.

In a development perspective, risk can be seen as "a cause of poverty and its persistence." By seeing development as part of the risks societies face, as part of the "organised irresponsibility," one can better understand the importance of basic research into development issues. This also has direct implications for the policy-makers who have to confront development dilemmas.

In the 1980s, sub-Saharan Africa experienced general economic decline and political instability. The international donor community, headed by the World Bank and the IMF, began to demand structural reforms – the so-called Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) – as a condition of further funding. This approach involved less state intervention and more free market liberalism with the aim of propelling economic growth. In agriculture, the large-scale farming of cash crops for the international market was advocated. Traditional and small-scale farming were declining. Although many African countries initially opposed these changes, in many cases they were reluctantly forced to adopt them to safeguard the flow of funding and the development aid.

**In 1989, the Nordic Africa Institute** launched its largest research programme to date, which lasted until 2001. The aim of The Political and Social Context of Structural Adjustment in Sub-Saharan Africa was to study the consequences of the SAPs. The overall conclusion was that SAPs had largely failed to achieve their goals and had instead undermined the welfare and liveli-
hopes of many people. In particular, the “market failure” in agriculture was stressed. The studies went on to emphasise that small-scale farming is most suitable for providing and maximising the options of and opportunities for the majority of farmers. Today, this is also the official policy of the World Bank and IMF. One may draw several lessons from this example. First, the analyses of the research conducted came to these conclusions almost two decades before they became official policy. Although the Nordic Africa Institute was not alone in reaching these conclusions, it is safe to say it played an active role in challenging and changing the perceptions about the appropriateness of these programmes as the right development path. Thus, there will inevitably be time lags between actual research, political acceptance and policy implementation.

Second, were there “organised irresponsibility”? Many of the affected African countries have not yet fully recovered from the consequences of the “adjustments.” Rather than economic development, many of the countries experienced increased poverty.

In other words, the risks were manufactured and grew in terms of causing and prolonging poverty. With regard to responsibility for enforcing these policies in African agriculture, donors have shifted policy but not borne the consequences economically and otherwise – a price left to Africa to pay.

Third, this example also shows that there are many development paths. Forcing Africa to adopt neoliberalism in an asymmetrical and hierarchical economic world has created some successful minority elites, but has not necessarily succeeded in alleviating poverty for the many. Thus, the policy may have increased risks instead of reducing vulnerability and

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to the fundamental development dilemmas facing large parts of Africa both currently and into the future.

IN THIS ANNUAL REPORT, various development dilemmas in a range of countries are discussed from different perspectives. All the research is highly policy-relevant, but the relevance is also dependent on the aims of and ideologies behind the policies of a given country. If the aim of development research is to advise on or change policy and aid agendas to improve African futures, such research still has to acknowledge another development dilemma: different countries have different aims and policies, and this is as true of the Nordic countries as it is of their African counterparts. Thus, even in a democratic country, the actual policy relevance of research may vary depending on the policy of the government in office at a given time. From this perspective, basic research on development issues may also have value of its own by transcending short time frames, national boundaries and policies, and becoming part of global knowledge available to all.

poverty, contrary to risk management, which involves “maximising the areas over which we have some control over the outcome, while minimising those where we have absolutely no control and where the linkage between effect and cause is hidden from us.” Independent research is important in addressing these challenges and in establishing new linkages between cause and effect.

Lastly, this example echoes the theme of this annual report, Development dilemmas. In all developments, there will always be numerous and at times conflicting aims and interests. The complexities of the real world are challenging to grasp, but understanding them is fundamental to the making of good policy. By choosing wrong development paths, the many may suffer devastating consequences while the few may benefit. In this context, research addressing the broad spectrum of development issues is key to enhancing understanding of the complex realities about which political decisions are to be made.

The research at the Nordic Africa Institute is organised into four clusters addressing topics related to the fundamental development dilemmas facing large parts of Africa both currently and into the future.