

Havemann, Hans A.; Hubertus, Seifert

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# New Aspects of Research on DC's

by Professor Hans A. Havemann and Hubertus Seifert, Aachen \*

**T**here are essentially two reasons why it seems appropriate to discuss at this particular point in time new aspects of research into the situation of developing countries.

One of the reasons is relatively topical. We are, as is well known, in the process of proceeding from the first to the second decade of global development policy. Now it is beyond doubt that, on the whole, the first decade has disappointed many hopes and expectations. This was due partly to expectations being pitched too high but partly also due to the generally prevailing opinion that it was impossible to create more effective and more sensitive instruments for development aid and use them sensibly.

Whether or not targets which have been set up for the next ten years are to be reached would also appear to depend to an essential degree on whether, and if so in what fields, research on the problems of the developing countries is able to contribute to a solution of hitherto unsolved problems. For it can be taken for granted that the wholly unsatisfactory outcome of the first development decade has been due in part to the disappointing results achieved by the research work on developing countries.

The second reason why scientists are taking a fresh look at the developing countries has nothing to do with the actual situation. Every branch of science confronted with unsolved problems—and where do they not exist?—is bound to review its methods and the results achieved in order to have a comparatively reliable idea of the existing machinery and its likely usefulness in the future.

## **Development Policy and Research on Developing Countries**

Before dealing in detail with the new aspects opened up by research on less developed countries it is necessary to make some general observations about the relationship between this young scientific discipline and development policy:

□ Development policy and research on developing countries complement each other. The changing tasks of development policy stimulate research, just as, the other way round, develop-

ment policy is the practical test of the perception of development science.

□ Development policy and development research overlap in many respects without however covering the same ground. It is not correct to say that both are dealing with the identical problem but from two different aspects—one practical, the other scientific. Development policy must take into account the political, economic and humanitarian realities of the countries concerned in the operation, and this means donor-countries as well as those in need of aid. Research on developing countries, on the other hand, has its own criteria which are primarily determined by the scientific targets it has set itself.

□ The aims of development policy are largely economic; its main concern is to raise living standards with all the secondary economic and non-economic objectives that entails. The aim of development research, on the other hand, is—to put it briefly—to study the development process as such, in other words to examine the structure and interdependences of the relevant factors capable of helping to bring about a planned acceleration of the processes of growth and change.

When speaking of new aspects of research on less developed countries it is impossible to fix a precise date for their coming into view. In this field as in other disciplines, the beginnings of new developments are frequently discernible long before the actual breakthrough occurs, which then possibly turns the new approach into the dominant one.

If one traces this research back to its beginnings, one finds that the approach to the problems of the developing countries was initially an essentially traditional one: Either traditional research on individual countries tried to solve problems arising within their chosen regional sphere of tasks or various scientific disciplines isolated problems that concerned them, making general statements and recommendations of a "ceteris paribus" nature.

\* This subject was discussed by Professor Dr Hans A. Havemann in a lecture which he gave on October 1, at a meeting of the Study Group Nordrhein Westfalen. The article is an abbreviated and slightly revised version, which will be published by the "Westdeutsche Verlag" in the Study Group's series of papers.

It soon became evident that new methods had to be devised and fresh facts discovered before an answer could be found to outstanding questions. Once this was realised, development research in its true sense was born. Subsequently, in the course of the sixties, the science concerned with development began to make progress which is still continuing and likely to go on in the foreseeable future; it has given research on developing countries its special character. Some of its features are to be the subject of the following remarks.

The new tendencies in research on less developed countries which it is proposed to examine concern the subject matter the new discipline is studying, its methods and its objectives.

### **Change in the Subject Matter**

As far as the subject matter of this research is concerned, a decisive change has taken place affecting both scope and depth. Work began with an analysis of individual development problems in relatively isolated development areas, but recently there has been a growing realisation of the need to study the development process as a whole, taking account of the many interdependent factors involved in it, for only when this intricate interplay of forces influencing development are fully understood will it be possible to establish a firm basis on which to elaborate sound partial or global development strategies.

The set of development problems facing the investigators turned out to be of a novel and complex nature in many respects because work in each particular field of research was strictly circumscribed by growing specialisation of the disciplines concerned. Each discipline was operating within the framework of a specific set of data which precluded incursions into neighbouring fields of scientific endeavour or made such straying seem superfluous. But it was not only this strictly limited range of vision of each scientific worker that was responsible for the unsatisfactory results achieved and the somewhat unrealistic recommendations for the practical work to be done; there was also the assumption—unquestioned at first—that “the data” applying to the developing countries were essentially not much different from those in the industrial countries.

The need for development research to venture into virgin territory became evident when it was realised that it was impossible to solve the problems arising in the course of research into the varying socio-economic, political and cultural structures and levels of development as long as the various scientific disciplines continued to apply their

mutually exclusive methods, isolated due to differing theoretical approaches.

### **Capital and Technical Aid**

The first phase of research work on the development process was characterised by a continuous accumulation of knowledge of the structural elements playing a part in that process. In the initial stages, the opinion prevailed that the development process in the developing countries might take a course similar to that of war-torn Germany and Japan. This led to the conclusion that development aid was essentially a matter of making capital available to the countries in need, in other words, capital aid along the lines of the Marshall Plan.

Later it became clear, however, that the success and the “pump-priming” effect of such investments were extremely doubtful, if the ground for the use of the funds was insufficiently prepared. The need for investment advice became increasingly apparent—advice which began with a choice of a project, continued with its testing for suitability and ended up with its completion. The erstwhile concept of development policy was subsequently extended still further to include the provision of technical and economic know-how, i.e. technical aid in its broadest sense.

But even this extension soon turned out to be inadequate when it was realised that the two component parts of development aid, capital on the one hand and technical and economic know-how on the other, were not comprehensive enough and did not sufficiently stimulate the development process. It is well known that new forms of development aid were added later, such as help for infrastructure, education, social measures, agriculture, trade and science. These additions reflected growing awareness on the part of scientists as they recognised these areas one by one as integral parts of the development process. Today, the phase during which science looked upon the development process from the angle of its quantitative and structural diversity is nearly at an end; it has to some extent been succeeded by a tendency to regard the development process as a complex of qualitatively functional interrelationships, and it is these interrelationships which are now being scientifically investigated. A characteristic example of this kind of research is the study of the complex concerned with the “élite and other” representative groups.

In the present context “representative-groups” are persons and/or groups of persons who can be expected to take an active lead in initiating innovations at the many levels of the decision-

making process which determines to a large extent the social and economic development of a country or a region. Typical for this phase of research on developing countries is the clear prominence given to the study of the quality and function of man as the most important development and growth factor.

The characteristic function of the representative or carrier groups is to deliberately take a leading part in the transformation of their country from a traditional society to a modern nation possessing an industrial economy. It is obvious that these groups must possess special qualifications enabling them to exercise that function. Generally speaking, this means that the people concerned must be willing to introduce innovations and must have a clear idea of what innovations are about (innovation-conscious); not only that, their position, function or status must be such as to enable them to aspire after an innovation model which at the stage of development reached by their countries is a suitable one to follow.

The models for a modern society may differ widely from one another; they may be of the West-European-North American or of the Japanese type. Whatever basic model is chosen, research into the representative groups must in each case be conducted with that model in view. The group's innovating function may be directed towards individual spheres of human activity or material objects or embrace all aspects.

### **Trend Towards Greater Differentiation**

Another feature of the more recent research on less developed countries is the trend away from the schematised to the particularised project or, in other words, away from the study of a standardised pattern of developing countries towards greater differentiation between specific development processes. Nowadays, generalised statements about developing countries have to a large extent disappeared from scientific discussion and are even less frequently heard when development policy is debated by a wider public. The reason for this is the growing awareness of the fact that differences in the social, technical, economic and cultural structures and variations in the levels of development preclude the same treatment of these problems in terms of development strategy.

This fresh insight and the absence of a comprehensive development theory, which should throw light on the development process in all its manifold aspects, may have prompted the attempt to prepare the ground for a better development theory and a more effective development policy by dividing developing countries into

special types. An examination of the numerous typologies which have been elaborated in the past twenty years also reveals the trend away from general classification to groupings of a more specific character. Thus the early typologies for developing countries used to take the income per head of population as their sole criterion whereas later a multitude of criteria was formulated, for it was hoped that it would be possible to arrive at a meaningful grouping of the developing countries by establishing a complex of quantitative and qualitative features for each group.

A further example is to be found in the various tentative efforts at research on a regional level. The theory of typology retained the developing country within its political frontiers; regional development research, on the other hand, laid emphasis on the region which may embrace individual parts of a national economy but may also extend to cover portions of several neighbouring economies. Such simplifying features as identical climatic conditions or the same language may be used in drawing up the geographical limits of the area to be studied. On the other hand, the features selected may also be complex as for instance in the case of areas functioning as a unit. Here range and intensity of economic interrelationships may be chosen as the deciding factor.

As regards method, attention may be drawn to two further aspects of research on developing countries: the one concerns evaluation and the other is the method of proceeding along interdisciplinary lines.

### **Evaluation**

Evaluation is known to be the process by which the value of a development project or programme is assessed. Evaluation always aims at a specific objective inasmuch as its purpose is to reveal whether or to what extent a given objective is attainable and whether or to what extent it would still be reasonable to persist in pursuing a certain objective in changed circumstances.

Evaluation as a principle is not new. If it is mentioned in this connexion it is because the attempts to apply it are of relatively more recent date. Experiences as to its applicability have been made in agriculture and with technical and vocational-training schemes. But here, too, the process of learning has by no means been completed.

As to the practical application of the evaluation principle, there is room only to mention a few of the problems that arise in this connexion. There is first of all the difficulty of recognising and of taking into account as far as possible all

relevant influential factors, for without it the effectiveness of a measure must remain more or less a matter for conjecture. Apart from recognising all the relevant factors, there is another problem—that of formulating the criteria by which to judge the success of the measures taken. These criteria must be in accord with the conception of the measures and at the same time be defined in operational terms. It stands to reason that this is generally easier to achieve in the case of industrial enterprises than when it is a question of projects which aim at influencing or accelerating social and cultural change.

Evaluation as a comprehensive system to ascertain and judge the interaction of causes and effects, if it is possible to include in it human attitudes and decisions, will be of outstanding importance not only for research on developing countries. In the industrial countries, too, the so-called developed countries, this complex interplay of causes and effects has not yet been fully explored.

#### **Cooperation between Disciplines**

There is a second methodological aspect—interdisciplinary cooperation—which must be mentioned briefly: the development process is the result of the interaction of numerous factors, of a complicated interplay of causes and effects, a web that can be disentangled only by a joint effort of all the disciplines concerned. Parts of the development process may be clarified by one discipline or by several branches of science together. But the value of the interdisciplinary research method lies in the realisation that the addition of partial insights does not necessarily lead to an understanding of the whole complex of questions, in other words a complete over-all picture of the intricate development process is not necessarily obtained by merely adding together the findings of a single branch of science or even a group of them.

There is complete agreement on the necessity of interdisciplinary procedures in research on less developed nations. But here, too, just as with evaluation, principle and target have been known and recognised already for years. A successful and practical application is, however, in its first stages only. Regarding multidisciplinary cooperation the disciplines involved have one research object in common. In the case of interdisciplinary cooperation beyond that all branches of science involved require clear-cut research criteria and methods.

In further refining and perfecting interdisciplinary research on developing countries emphasis must be laid on elaborating and testing working meth-

ods which are at the same time labour saving and effective, and this means methods that facilitate communication between the disciplines concerned. In view of the fact that an interdisciplinary strategy always presupposes interdisciplinary team work on a personal level, it will be increasingly necessary to study also the realities of human relationships and the possibilities of influencing them.

#### **Aspects of the Research Objectives**

Research on developing countries, being a relatively young science, has certain responsibilities, particularly in regard to theoretical penetration and confirmation by experiment. It would for instance be possible to decide in advance for theoretical reasons on measures which are based on an analysis of as many relevant factors as possible of a certain development situation with a view to initiating a development process and bringing it to a successful conclusion. If this can be achieved, then research on developing countries, proceeding from a universally applicable theory, should be able to devise the machinery capable of putting into effect a truly scientific aid programme.

In the present state of our knowledge, it is perhaps already possible to conceive the objectives of research within a wider framework. A first step towards widening the scope may be to derive a practical development policy from the scientific knowledge gained so far. Then the next step can be taken: the present concept of research on less developed countries could be extended still further to embrace—as a global objective—the present industrialised donor countries as well as the developing countries as integrated partners.

These aims of research into developing countries are governed by the sobering thought that whatever science discovers must be tested against harsh realities. One only has to think of the population explosion and the world-wide problem of nutrition to appreciate the acuteness and urgency of the need of giving research on developing countries an over-all objective.

Reflections like these inevitably lead one to ask whether it would not be better to define first of all what is to be understood by "development science". Such a definition would throw into fresh relief the universality of the subject matter to be studied, the methods to be used and the objective to be reached. Thus, as a crowning achievement, research on developing countries and development policy in the widest sense of these terms would ultimately both be integrated in the general concept of "development science".