

## EADI General Conference 2014

### Panel session: The continuing problems with development knowledge.

Chair Mike Powell of IKM Emergent introduced the session as an opportunity to think about the bigger picture of how knowledge links to development –a discussion which has taken place for at least 20-30 years. He made it clear that this was not a critique of academic knowledge production, but a consideration of how knowledge paid for by development money (for example, the World Bank research budget alone amounts to 600 million dollars) is produced and used.

For the purpose of this discussion he defined development as a process of change that takes place in individual societies, not the technical work done by experts. Knowledge has great instrumental value in the process but knowledge also requires human interaction and capacity in order to be used. It also requires the individual to have faith in their interpretive capacity to use knowledge - without actively knowing you can't be actively doing.

Mike reflected on the title of the presentation: originality is highly valued, but the problems underlying development knowledge are continuing, so the same issues are coming back. He identified a number of problems with knowledge in development (what he referred to as the development knowledge ecology) as follows:

- Exclusion of endogenous intellectual output – even where local researchers are involved in creating knowledge these partnerships most often don't extend to having input into the broader research agenda or in decisions about the approach taken
- A disconnect between research and the supposed beneficiaries of that research - the people for whom development exists are too often the subjects of rather than actors in knowledge generation. Too few researchers make any effort to present their research in a way that is appropriate for the people who participated.
- Poor awareness among researchers of local culture, values and language
- Disconnects between research, policy and practice such that the products of research are often not usable by those for whom they are designed
- A production process that is often too linear, reflects donor agendas, is risk averse and too academic

So what may be done - differently or more effectively?

#### **Presentation Sarah Cummings, IKM Emergent, The Netherlands**

*Patterns of inequality in knowledge production – academic journals in the field of development studies.*

Sarah Cummings, presented her research on patterns of inequality in knowledge production which has its origins in the IKM emergent programme and concepts of responsibility, equity and promotion of endogenous over exogenous development.

Sarah looked at the extent to which academics from developing countries are taking part in development research by examining journal data from Web of Science. She examined author affiliations for over 1800 articles in 10 prominent, English-language, development journals. She also looked at their editorial boards.

What she found was that, with some variation between journals, the published authors and co-authors were overwhelmingly located in the UK, Western Europe and the US. India was the most represented developing country. Their institutional affiliations were similarly dominated by universities in the UK. Only 5 to 20% of authors were listed as based in developing country institutions. 70% of articles didn't have any co-authors from the developing countries where they were doing the research. Explanation: lack of confidence in local academics, ignorance, neo-colonial science.

It was a similar story with the editorial boards. On average only just over 2 developing countries were represented on editorial boards compared to more than 5 developed countries. Importantly gender representation was also severely imbalanced with women making up only 26% of membership.

A social network analysis was presented, showing a small number of key institutions each with staff on the editorial boards of several journals. What is the gatekeeper function of such overlaps?

### Linking values to model of development (diagram)

So overwhelmingly development research (at least that published in these journals) appears to be the preserve of men located in Europe and the US. The question Sarah posed to the audience was "Does this matter?"

### Comments from the floor.

Participant 1: Language is an issue. All the journals studied are in English and therefore the authors are unsurprisingly from the UK or former British colonies.

Sarah. This is true - also the size of countries represented affects the results.

Participant 2: Academics are footloose but the research shows the current location of researchers rather than their origin – so representation could actually be higher.

Jon Akude – there is also the question of whether the country a researcher is from means that they necessarily "represent" that country in terms of their mode of thinking.

### **Presentation John Akude – Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik/ German Development Institute**

*Fit for the purpose? Interrogating the WB's Mode of Knowledge delivery in Africa*

*Problem statement: is the WB's mode of knowledge production appropriate for the African poor?*

Jon Akude presented a critical view of the World Bank's mode of knowledge delivery – in particular it's appropriateness to the context of Nigeria and Africa more broadly.

When, in 1998, the World Development Report introduced discussion of knowledge gaps, information problems in knowledge delivery it presented a view of development which at least focussed on "people-centred knowledge". But Jon argued that once the Bank began to act on knowledge delivery this focus on people disappeared and it became a technical discussion centred on a paradigm of northern-generated knowledge being transferred to

the south using ICT supported modes of delivery and with a strong focus on the role of civil society as implementers and agents of change.

Firstly the focus on ICTs is problematic. 57% of Africans lack access to electricity, only 7% of internet users are in Africa and internet penetration rates are low at only 15%. Clearly then access to knowledge shared in this mode is limited to a minority of the population.

Jon then began to analyse the role of civil society as the agent through which knowledge is translated into delivery of development outcomes. His suggestion is that the Bank's approach is based on a flawed notion of civil society in the African context.

Jon proposed a view of African civil society based on 3 dualities:

- Two publics - civic and primordial.
- Dual origins. - colonial and indigenous
- Dual characteristics- amoral and moral

His argument is that civic civil society (based on the post-colonial notion of the State and Western morality) is not in a position to function effectively as a knowledge intermediary in the way that the Bank expects. This is because it is disconnected from the 'primordial' society which has a different more historic set of values with an alternate view of morality and no allegiance (or moral obligation) to the State (in its sovereign national sense). This problem is most clearly expressed through corruption and negligence of civic duties and results in a "portfolio" civil society whose only real connection is to the external structures that support it and no real access or connection to the people it is supposed to serve. Jon's suggestion is that knowledge needs to connect more to the primordial side of African society and that for this to happen required greater engagement with the idea that the process of knowing, or gaining knowledge is defined by the local context and history of the individual or society.

### **Presentation Kemly Camacho – Sula Batsu, Costa Rica**

*Collective memories – local knowledge(s) and development research*

Our final speaker, Kemly Camacho, picked up on this idea in her presentation of her work in Costa Rica looking at local knowledges and development research.

Kemly began by defining local knowledge as being not just indigenous; not just "of the poor" but heterogeneous in nature and complex. It is often hidden with its visibility linked to power and the extent to which society undervalues history.

#### **Slide linking complexity with situation**

Kemly proposed 5 principles for an Emergent paradigm. These were:

- Actions transform reality and vice versa
- Reality emerges and is not predictable
- Design for future steps emerges from past practice
- Theory emerges from questioning your own beliefs
- Emergent is not an emergency

Kemly noted that local resources, spaces and knowledge (tacit and oral) are increasingly being recognised as potential sources of answers to global problems. But researchers must recognise that by exposing local knowledge they might introduce vulnerabilities. To guard against these vulnerabilities the ownership of local knowledge and local history is of paramount importance and this can only be achieved with real participation of local groups who are able to act collectively and can establish local knowledge as a local commons. If there is no condition for ownership of local knowledge, it becomes dangerous to spread it. One process for achieving this is by mapping local knowledge using a participatory method facilitated by researchers.

So is this happening? Kemly undertook a series of 10 case studies of research looking at researcher ethics, financial conditions, participatory process, policy and regulation of institutions and intellectual property rights. Her conclusion from this is that research design must go beyond current concepts of informed consent to include a more detailed framework of agreements between researchers and local communities covering the initial scoping, the development of the research, the nature and ownership of knowledge products and plans for knowledge dissemination.

## **General Discussion**

**Participant 1.** Questioned Jon's concept of primordial vs civic civil society suggesting that the distinction between the two societies is not clear cut in reality and suggesting that, thinking in sociological terms, corruption is more a factor of a reconstructed or reinvented form of knowledge from the colonial era interfacing with more traditional forms.

Jon. The level of expectation from African civil society cannot be same as western expectations because of different moral understanding. Modern society and state are not part of this (the primordial?) and don't really connect.

Mike. There is a finely nuanced interaction between context and how people conceive of ideas and understand things, which includes a moral basis. This is not thought about enough in the development context when sharing information.

**Participant 2** All the presentations and perhaps IKM Emergent as a whole are constructed around a proposed dichotomy - between north and south, academic and local, but perhaps this is over simplifying.

Sarah. We need to use this dichotomy as a device to break down and present the problems in a way that is possible to analyse but, yes, it is in all likelihood a simplification.

Jon. Most times we see that knowledge gets developed in a university and is not connected to society. Knowledge is based in the society it is produced and if you transfer that to a different context much knowledge is lost. So demarcation is necessary.

Kemly. The emergent paradigm focused on the territory as a space for knowledge dialogues. The key thing is that the dialogues and the agreements are in place between the researcher and the local knowledge intermediaries. Ownership by the actors is the key thing to create the conditions for knowledge as a common good.

Mike. We're not saying either or. It's a problem of relationship. If you don't take the trouble to find out what you're doing then it's shoddy research. If local context is not represented then results will be poor. Current norms are inadequate.

Jon. Dialogue is the key

**Participant 3:** From an education perspective perhaps we need to start from how formal education structures embed these practices.

Jon. Yes certainly in Nigeria. The legacy of colonialism in education is that we don't value what we have.

Kemly. Local knowledge is not integrated in the formal education system this is why it is often called hidden knowledge. It is a challenge that can be addressed using arts type education.