

# Report of the ESRC Expert Advisory Group on International Development

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## Contributing Authors:

James Fairhead, Stefan Elbe, Katherine Homewood, Jude Howell,  
Cecile Jackson, Rhys Jenkins, Mark Pelling, Mark Robinson, Sally Thomas





## Foreword



In late 2013, the ESRC convened an Expert Advisory Group to consider its future priorities in international development research. This report is the outcome of that process. The ESRC has been actively engaged with international development research since 2005, when it developed a partnership with the Department for International Development. In the nine years since, the research portfolio has expanded to include four major ESRC/DFID bilateral programmes, as well as an additional four programmes involving DFID and other UK Research Councils. Over the years, we have committed nearly £40 million to international development research, combined with nearly £160 million from other funders.

Through our partnership with DFID, we contribute to ensuring that UK taxpayer's money invested in international development is spent wisely and effectively. Our research has had far-ranging and diverse impacts: on the research community, on policy makers and practitioners, and on the lives of poor people in some of the world's poorest countries. Its influence has stretched from improving the ways that poor children in South Africa get to school, to how governments conceptualise and measure the nature of poverty in their countries.

The scientific agenda set out in this report is far reaching, and not limited to a single discipline or research tradition. Addressing the challenges will require the full range of social science disciplines, as well as further engagement between the social, natural and physical sciences. Future research will need to deliver substantial conceptual and methodological advances, as well as practical impact. The ESRC's scope and its core values of quality, independence and impact, have an important and distinct contribution to make not only as a research funder, but also as a world leading national funder supporting training and infrastructure.

In an increasingly interconnected world, these challenges are genuinely global; events on the other side of the planet can significantly impact on life in the UK. Understanding these processes, and how we respond to them, is a core concern for social science. In the coming years, we will not only use the ideas contained within this report to inform future development research priorities, but will integrate them across the full range of strategic investments, in research, infrastructure and training. We will aim to continue our outstanding working relationship with DFID, but also seek out new partnerships and collaborations to help continue to deliver excellence with impact in international development research.

**Professor Jane Elliott**  
**Chief Executive, ESRC**

## Introduction

Very real transformations are now occurring in the nature and extent of poverty, in the processes leading to impoverishment, inequality and injustice, and in the policy space and practices that can address these. The purpose of this report is to identify for ESRC the new challenges that these unfolding realities pose for social science researchers in the field of international development. This will (a) inform emerging ESRC research strategy more broadly and (b) inform the development of joint funding arrangements between ESRC and funding partners.

The contributing authors met with preliminary ideas in December 2013 and then developed specialist reports that were brought together in a joint draft, discussed in March. A revised draft was then discussed at a 'Town Hall' meeting of 50 academic stakeholders in Manchester in April, and with DFID research managers in early May. This final version of the report reflects these various inputs.

In our increasingly interconnected world, the emerging research priorities in international development that we document inevitably dovetail closely with emergent social science agendas more generally. There is not one discipline for 'the developing world' and many for 'the developed'. Development studies research and teaching centres do bring new tools, frameworks, methods and experience to grapple with these future development pressures and problems, but all social science disciplines are expanding their boundaries to think more globally rather than territorially – and in ways that the emergence of international development studies as a field has been encouraging. ESRC, in their partnership with DFID, have enabled UK social science to lead the world in this respect.

Re-emphasising the opportunities for research in international development to draw on and feed into the wider methodological, theoretical and substantive research repertoires that ESRC supports echoes a core principle of the post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda which is to be 'integrated, holistic and universal, applying to all countries and all people' and which thus eschews specific geographical foci. It echoes, too, the proposed Sustainable Development Goals which, beyond the principles of ending extreme poverty, seek to integrate social, economic, and environmental sustainability and inclusive growth within "a common understanding of our shared humanity, based on mutual respect and mutual benefit." The 'Third World' and its euphemisms are fast becoming history. International development studies research does not secure its identity in a focus on a particular sub-set of countries or methods.

International development research is, however, characterised by a problem-focused approach which this report is built around. But whilst much research in international development studies is unashamedly impact-led and supports a 'what works' agenda that speaks directly to wider policy concerns, this report prioritises, too, increased attention to the rapid transformations in global environments, economy, societies, cultures, politics and technologies that now reshape poverty and so reshape 'what works' as well as 'for whom, when and why'. These changes are happening so fast and are so massive that for research to have maximum impact in informing the alleviation of mid-21st century poverty and inequality, it will need to be couched within new conceptualisations and new theorisations that capture these future realities.

In particular, given the rising inequalities associated with current economic growth and new geographies of poverty that do not easily fall into particular countries, 'worlds,' or points of the compass, it is our contention that 'international development' research needs not only to dwell on a broader range of countries and regions, but also to capture changing global orders producing and addressing poverty. In particular, embracing research on 'middle income countries' (MICs) is now important for understanding not only the predicament of the poor within, but also the drivers of steeply rising inequalities there which are of significance to the poor in countries with middle income aspirations. It will help, too, in understanding the nature of the multi-polar international order in which this will happen. In addition, BRICS and other MICs are sources of enormous social policy innovation that other countries stand to learn from; yet are often not well analysed.

This report outlines challenges for a wide range of research, from that focused on refining specific interventions (education, health etc.) to the much broader analytical challenges that will necessitate conceptual breakthroughs and new analytical paradigms. Given the availability of more operational funding for the former, we suggest that there is a clear opportunity (and need) for ESRC to focus more (though not exclusively) on the broader questions and conceptual challenges.

There are many ways to relate the cross cutting issues that we identify. Rather than develop a matrix, we set out key challenges and opportunities for research in relation to eight key trends:

1. Increasing inequalities in a connected world
2. Massive, differentiated urbanisation
3. Climate change and pushing against planetary limits
4. Emerging sensitivity to shocks, and their securitisation
5. Increasing political multipolarity
6. Emerging challenges to nation states in delivering development: social and physical infrastructure
7. New cultural shaping of poverty
8. Digital development, Big Data and the technological revolution

We also highlight more methodological challenges:

- Levering change: learning, incentives and beyond
- Governing 'international development': measurement and beyond



## 1. Increasing inequalities in a connected world

If the dynamics of poverty could ever be understood or addressed within specific geographical or national contexts, this is inadequate now. Whether we consider global climate, global finance, globally diffused innovation and globally fragmented manufacturing, the globally interlinked food-water-energy nexus, global health and pandemics, global pornography and economy of sex and of reproduction, globalised social values and educational standards, or global migration, ours is a 'teleconnected' world. Distant economies and technologies increasingly influence local changes, circumscribing local agency. What is clear is that whilst understanding poverty and supporting effective policies still requires attention to local experience, it also requires macro framing to understand and address it. Yet the nature of these unfolding trends proves to be hugely more diverse and surprising than that anticipated in any linear 'modernisation' view of social change, or than that captured in existing grand theorising. Grounded empirical and theoretical work has never been more important.

Recent impressive economic growth driving interconnectivity has been accompanied also by deepening income and asset inequalities. Seventy per cent of the world's population live in countries where inequality of income and well-being has increased over the past three decades, and inequality is growing across countries too. Poverty is certainly not confined to low income countries (or, indeed, middle income countries). Paradoxically, economic growth in low and middle income countries also correlates with accentuated gendered inequalities (not only in income, but also in nutrition, healthcare and sex ratios) and educational inequalities. Why are such inequalities growing, and what explains political apathy (or action) in addressing them?

Questions concern, too, wider dimensions to inequality than simply income and assets. In education these range from factors shaping educational performance such as the balance of mother-tongues and global languages, to the values, priorities, structures and contexts of schooling and teacher development relevant to education. More widely, how do inequalities relate to the legacies of under-nutrition and other facets of intergenerational inequalities; to the political inequalities inscribed in patronage and political opportunity; to inequalities in civil society representation and participation; to gender and sexuality inequalities; to inequalities of environmental entitlements; and to infrastructural inequalities in electrical and internet connectivity? The potential list of questions is longer.



Since the setting of the Millennium Development Goals there has understandably been a strong focus on absolute poverty and on countries with very low GDP. Concerns with inequality between countries and the persistence and accentuation of poverty in MICs means, however, that research understanding poverty dynamics in MICs is not only of intrinsic importance, but is crucial for understanding relations between economic growth, poverty reduction and inequality – whether within states or between them. There is evidence that inequality stunts economic growth and development outcomes, but we have a very poor understanding of the processes generating and permitting such inequality, the channels through which inequality affects growth, and what policy space is available to address it. Nor do we understand sufficiently the role of political elites in pushing (or not) for policies to reduce poverty and/or inequality, and the types of policy initiatives that prove effective or not. Understanding inequality requires the study of elites and their political and economic strategies and culture. Questions therefore concern not only, for example, modes of taxation and state capacity for its implementation, but how this is undermined by global corporate and personal taxation tactics and the massively expanding use of ‘off-shore’ banking and global tax havens. Understanding inequality also requires the study of employment: securing work is fundamental to pathways out of poverty, but does the massive growth in informal employment evidence a flourishing entrepreneurialism, or exploitation of the unskilled/destitute/children, or both? These are critical questions for policy on formalisation, taxation, skills training, and employment rights. A challenge is for an economics (and political economy) of inequality that internalises and addresses the ‘externality’ costs of inequality and poverty associated with growth and policy options that transcend national borders. Are the poverty externalities of structural transformations moving labour to more productive sectors nationally and transnationally properly accounted for? Why such an economics has emerged to protect the environment but not the poor is a question worthy of reflection. Addressing inequality will necessarily be at the forefront of contemporary social science concerns which must be freed to discern and address the transnational drivers of local crises when these have their roots in the activities of corporations and the banking sector, and in new dynamics of financial speculation.

## 2. Massive, differentiated urbanisation

By 2050, two thirds of our nine billion people will live urban lives, many in large or mega-cities but the majority in second and third tier cities and towns of one million or less, peri-urban areas and in urbanised rural spaces. Between 1995 and 2005 the urban population of developing countries grew by 1.2 million people a week, with new patterns and processes emerging in the ways people, goods and money move between urban and rural spaces. If correlations and causalities linking urbanisation, economic growth and income can be discerned, and if regional differences in these can be understood, then we will be a step closer to policies that would foster ‘agglomeration economies’, capturing the positives of urban living (e.g. social and physical infrastructure, internet connectivity, political action, economic initiative, education and community learning), and addressing the negatives (sanitation, insecurity, pollution, waste, epidemics, and so on).

Urban agglomerations, however, are highly stratified, concealing massive micro-geographical, social and infrastructural inequalities that are as significant as ‘rural-





urban' divides. Research and policy will need to address this differentiation and attend to the new processes that both shape such boundaries and transcend them. How does urbanisation reshape economy, society and opportunity in rural hinterlands? Urban inequalities are diverse and distinctive. Gender relations of marriage, kinship and employment, and class distinctions are very different in cities compared to villages and invite fresh theorising of the character and processes of future social inequalities, bases of exclusion, and ways to pre-empt their development.

By 2050, moreover, a full fifth of the global population (1.5 billion) will be living in cities exposed to cyclones and earthquakes, in houses appropriately built and planned (or not) between now and then. Existing and emergent epidemic diseases knock on their doors and link to globalised transport corridors for disease transmission. That the destructive power of cyclones and epidemics is altering with climate change is becoming clearer. How to disaster-proof cities in contexts of wide socio-economic disparities must galvanise a research and policy community. These challenges extend beyond major 'natural' catastrophes, to understanding how the everyday disasters associated with ill health, pollution, civil conflict, and personal insecurity might be managed.

New forms of urbanisation are associated with new modes of mobilisation, political activism, and with modes of repression, exclusion, organised crime and corruption. How do these address, shape or deepen poverty and inequalities? Do they call for new models of governance, for example those based on citizen-led basic needs provision and participation? How do they alter the operating space and strategies of the policy, development and humanitarian sectors?

### 3. Climate change and pushing against planetary limits



Since the Club of Rome published the 'Limits to Growth' in 1972, world population has near doubled and global GDP has tripled. World population is predicted to reach nine billion by 2050, and although then predicted to decline, human consumption will not, posing increasing challenges to planetary limits and global climate pertinent to international development. How planetary boundaries manifest in the economic and political orders that shape poverty, and whether the emerging orthodoxy of market-based approaches to address this can help achieve sustainability, remain core questions. Whilst some responses will focus on changing resource access, others must focus on changes in consumption.

Concerning natural resources, the world's lands are now valued not just for the food we eat, but for the biofuels that motor us to work, the ecosystem services they provide, and the offsetting of our carbon and biodiversity footprints. Land and water must deliver increased needs, increased security, and mitigate the risk of increased damage. Accordingly, global land values have risen (four-fold in the last decade). The globally 'cheap' land and water supporting some of the world's poorest populations now attract global investors and





speculators to a new global 'frontier'. Whilst this greening economy attracts investments, governing it to reduce poverty remains challenging. Thus enduring debates concerning the 'resource curse' associated with the governance of hydrocarbon and mineral extraction now extend afresh to the world's lands, waters and forests in the food-water-energy nexus. This raises broader questions concerning the drivers and enablers of green transitions to low carbon economies and beyond – including the move to renewable energy – and how they can be socially just, and address inequalities across class, gender or region. Given the significance of energy supply to all pathways in and out of poverty, social science research that addresses innovation, technology, infrastructure, and efficiency in energy for the poor remains pressing.

Concerns with drivers of consumption and of material goods, and its resource and waste implications that are critical to addressing sustainability, will endure. A downside of demographic transition is that social identities of gender (in masculinities, in marriage, and in motherhood) and class are increasingly enwrapped in consumption, not social performance. If questions of lifestyles and taste increasingly determine social placement and aspirations, what are the implications for material consumption and sustainability?

#### **4. Emerging sensitivity to shocks, and their securitisation**

Economic growth has not reduced our dependence on the natural environment, but rather has increased it. It has not made us less dependent on the global economy, global energy and global politics and their shocks, but more so. Consequently, ours has become a world of surprises with major effects; of Syrian winters, Arab springs and Ukrainian summers; of economists admitting predictive defeat faced with a poorly understood and controlled global financial sector; of unanticipated food, fuel and commodity price spikes and collapse; of novel pandemic threats, and of extreme climatic events of typhoons, hurricanes, El Nino droughts and floods, and of earthquakes and tsunami. Scoping the future has never been more challenging. Rapid changes in global society (with urbanisation and life support ever more integrated with the global economy) produce not only new vulnerabilities (e.g. when droughts in rural Asia alter food security in urban Africa) but new opportunities for resilience and response (e.g. social insurance within migrant diasporas, actual insurance, etc.).



This interconnected order demands new approaches to 'security' and its relationship to development at all scales from individual to state and beyond; to the heightened salience of old questions concerning workers' organisation to improve terms and conditions, and to new cultural/legal orders that shape mutual obligations and rights in the community and in the household. How do such mutual obligations now extend transnationally? How do new global solidarities (e.g. consumer objections to child labour; environmental destruction, unfair or illegal trade) alter resilience and security?

At the state level, the proliferation of insecurities has attracted increased securitisation of the environment, of global health, of food supply, of aid and development policy, and so on. But how do the policy, aid and humanitarian worlds intersect with this securitisation, militarisation and 'global policing', including an increased role for the private sector? How does it shape inequalities and injustices? How does it affect the development of civil society? Larger questions arise concerning the relationship between crises and economic growth and their effects too on asset and income inequalities; of gender and education inequalities. What is the relationship between 'crisis', capital accumulation and inequality?

Several 'shocks' endure. Wars in Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, South Sudan are measured in decades, as were those in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Sri Lanka, and re-occur in deadly cycles following periods of peace. The dynamics enabling long-term conflict and the associated absolute impoverishment deserve more sustained attention, as does the leakage of weapons and violence into every sphere of action. These dynamics need to be understood not only in relation to their local



and geopolitical/economic drivers, but also to the effects of different aid responses and the role of militaries and humanitarians within them - effects that histories of conflicts would do well to discern. Research could reflect too on the consequences on poverty and inequality of governing in and through a continual state of 'crisis'.

The legacies of such shocks remain very unclear. Their social and economic legacies need not always be only negative. History reveals shocks engendering economic and technological revival and new policy and political space for women and for workers. But how can interventions in mainstream development, in disaster risk reduction and post-disaster refugee policy, humanitarian relief, human rights support etc., enhance such effects? Are some modes of crisis reduction and response antithetical to this, creating longer-term modes of dependency and inequality? Or can the learning opportunities in crisis be used to build resilience? What trade-offs exist between competing risks and how can science better support decision-making for those at risk and for those governing risk management. Can the policy spaces of risk management and climate change adaptation actually leverage broader development gains? Risk management need not only build resilience in the status quo: how can it also transform development paths towards sustainability?

Shocks endure in economies and in people too – in systemic economic effects, in mental health and emotion, in health and nutrition, and in religious and political disposition. Whilst there is plenty of evidence that insecurity brings on further insecurity, there is very poor understanding of the intersecting legacies of shock, the long-term and generational impacts of experiences of violence, trauma and famine, and how this is given expression in and interacts with culture, economics and social change.

The impacts of shocks on existing migration between increasingly unequal places, at a range of scales, is driving political and cultural change across our interconnected world and generating intense political and policy dilemmas. But despite migration attracting heightened political attention, arguably questions of immobility are more crucial to poverty. 'Immobility poverty' is faced by carers for the elderly who are unable to travel, work or migrate, and is an urban as well as a rural phenomenon. Immobility poverty is faced by those whose mobility is restricted politically too. The infamous 'pass laws' of apartheid have modern equivalents. 'Immobility poverty' also captures the experience of now large populations of long-term, politically marginal people who have been displaced through combinations of conflicts and economic and environmental forces. Alongside refugees from conflict, those evicted from major development projects, land grabs or enclosures, as well as formerly mobile peoples (e.g. migrant fishers, transhumant pastoralists, forest peoples, travellers) all become 'transient' or 'displaced' populations who are forcibly emplaced – often concentrated in camps for many years (and decades). Those living with such immobility live highly vulnerable lives, deprived of customary livelihoods. How do they balance the constraints of legality and claims on human rights? Assistance to those facing these predicaments with education, health, human rights poses specific dilemmas, whether in encountering political opposition and tensions with 'host' communities, for example, or in unwittingly facilitating the processes that generate the very emplacement problems that are being addressed.

## 5. Increasing political multipolarity

New economic forces now pluralise global political (and cultural) polarities. The emergence of BRICS, MINTS and others bring not only new patterns of trade, foreign investment and capital flows, but, associated with these, bring variegated models for development and social values (on gender, 'race', rights, respect, and so on). These bring new perspectives on aid, and have complex effects on the national governments and civil societies of trade and aid partners. What do these changes imply for poorer countries as their markets and sources of finance shift to emerging economies? Will these geo-political changes be reflected in the major institutions of global governance, and what effects will this have, especially on the landscape of global institutions concerned with poverty reduction?

The economic successes of emerging economies raise new questions, too, concerning the ethical and political conditions necessary to reduce poverty and inequality - and the role of the state, political elites and civil society actors, and global institutions. Are orthodoxies that liberal democracies can rein in the inequality excesses and predation of authoritarian regimes uncontested? Is it that authoritarian regimes (perhaps with added safeguards of transparency and accountability) can keep the deprivations of liberal markets in check? Is the reality of multi-polar geopolitics itself altering how these questions are asked and answered? What lessons can be drawn from different types of state formation?

These tensions associated with multipolarity also raise particular questions concerning the place of civil society (including transnational civil society) and its relationship with state and local government, and with business. Whilst civil society was once understood as a counterpoint to 'the state' and separate from the profit sector, it has become increasingly integral to both, blurring easy distinctions between them. How is state





contractualisation of NGOs, the emergence of corporate-NGO partnerships, and the delivery of state development and aid by corporations altering such distinctions? How has civil society's engagement with states and markets changed their ability to represent their constituencies, and how are multipolar tensions playing into this? How does this alter social movements and modes of resistance, protest, and (de)politicisation?

Some might ask a thornier question still: does multipolarity really pull in many ways or just one way? Is aid and development assistance in all its multi-polar forms less a variety of altruisms than a practice undergirding the increasingly competitive logic of contemporary capitalism and the poverty and inequality 'externalities' that can be associated with it? How much 'policy space' is there really in our globalised economy?

Changes are taking place too, linked to multipolarity, in the institutional infrastructure financing international development and its balance with the private sector; investment banks, sovereign wealth funds and hedge funds that now increasingly 'do development'. Distinctions between gift 'remittances' and for profit 'foreign direct investment' are now less easy to make too. This is not simply a question of the balance of 'trade' and 'aid', but includes the increasing role of 'for profit' business and investment banks in areas of work once dominated by NGOs and the international development finance institutions. Similarly, micro-finance and charitable giving that used to be NGO-based is also shifting to become simultaneously globalised and personalised as it moves to internet platforms through massively expanding organisations like Kiva.com. How is the nature of charity, philanthropy, and corporate social responsibility changing, and with what effect on mid 21st century poverty? What is the role of 'hybrid microfinance', merging delivery of finance with social value (better health, a cleaner environment, education, etc.)? Is poverty and inequality addressed by 'financial inclusion'? Half the world's adult population do not have a bank account, whether lacking access, desire – the trust and self-disciplinary 'culture' – or simply the wherewithal. Can poverty be addressed through financial inclusion? How do banking modes of risk management (savings products and credit) and their diversification into insurance interplay with existing modes and social practices that perform similar functions?



Old questions concerning how to raise the domestic tax base, its progressive balance and distribution across income, corporation, VAT tax, and links between taxation and political process are reanimated by new questions concerning the mobility and political power of international finance capital and how this alters the policy space - how it alters, for example, methods to encourage reinvestment as opposed to 'off-shoring', and how taxation impacts on this.

New market-based approaches to sustainable development have also brought into being major markets in carbon, watersheds, and ecotourism that are set to expand massively, and with it their financialisation. As aid and sustainability become business in new ways, this brings new (and multipolar) marketing to the popular representation of poverty, aid and 'what to do about it'. How does this impact on changing attitudes and modes of charity, and on the changing global political commitments to 'international development'?

Other transformations are reshaping macroeconomic opportunities. International development research has long explored demographic transitions (how economic growth affects demography), but the inverse - how demographic change affects economic growth or politics and resultant policy options - becomes increasingly pressing. Can one foster a 'demographic dividend' from a growing share of the population of working age and from increased savings in anticipation of retirement? Is there commensurate investment in education and lifelong learning (and human capital)?



## 6. Emerging challenges to nation states in delivering development: social and physical infrastructure

Much of development practice involves improvements in public systems; of national educational systems, of national health systems, of national legal systems that deliver rights and security, and of the national taxation and insurance systems that fund all these. Equally important are physical infrastructural systems (roads, energy, water). There is always a need for research to refine these systems (e.g. in education, in systems of education effectiveness, in health systems research); however, there is also a broader need for research on social and economic process that undermine and challenge (even outperform) these systems.

First, all systems of national social and physical infrastructure face competition from a wide range of 'private' deliverers, most obviously in health and education sectors, but even in pluralistic (or illegal/de facto) systems of justice, security, and taxation. Second, new technologies also compete with infrastructural systems: individual poo bags, not sewers; water purifiers, not piped clean water; solar or generator energy, not electricity grids, 4x4s and motorbikes, not good roads and buses; on-line education and MOOCs, not schools and universities. Given such challenges to 'national systems', does research focused on refining each system risk 'fiddling whilst Rome burns'? Are these alternative pathways more 'cost effective'? Do they contribute to inequality? Do they undermine experience of/respect for the state? Or can the problem be that they are all three? What challenges do 'off grid' opportunities pose to social cohesion, state regulation and even state sovereignty? How can policy best engage with these rapidly emerging, pluralising forces, whether in attempts at regulation, or in discerning and supporting synergistic pathways and technologies?





Third, these national systems are increasingly internationalised and couched within global support systems and globally researched modes of best practice and global public-private partnerships. This is particularly the case for health (e.g. GAVI, pandemic monitoring etc.), and law (legislation for rights-based approaches), but also for education (e.g. OECD PISA). Whilst offering huge benefits, internationalisation raises difficult questions: firstly whether national systems respond to local culture and citizenship ideals in, for example, education or local health traditions. How do internationalised educational, legal and health policy prescriptions travel and play out locally? How, for example, are 'rights-based' approaches understood, reworked and experienced locally? And are they subverted by their critics? How can local and national educational objectives instilling moral values and specific citizenships be retained within increasing internationalisation in the standardisation of the delivery, measurement and monitoring of educational quality and outcomes? In addition, internationalisation also reveals structural inequalities – not all those participating in global pandemic flu monitoring, for example, acquire timely access to its health benefits, or its commercial profits. IPR legislation has skewed effects. So how to avoid the cultural and geopolitical sensitivities and the economic and educational inequalities that accompany internationalisation? How to avoid the counterproductive cleavages in a multi-polar geopolitical world?

## 7. New cultural shaping of poverty

Not only is the demographic, economic and political world changing fast, but so also are social practices and values; cultures. Cultural transformations are implicated in new modes of poverty and rising inequalities. Research conceptualising these will be needed to address a very different mid-21st century poverty. It will help discern, for example, why material resources, puzzlingly, do not always translate into greater wellbeing.

Demographers, for example, have revealed that the worst sex ratio declines linked to sex selective female abortion have been in Indian states which have seen most economic growth, education and urbanisation. Why has the grip of son-preference and sex-selection tightened with modernity? What can be done? Political scientists show that, despite improvements in economic indicators, women's political representation has declined. Does this reflect new cultural exclusions from political representation, the secondary nature of gender identities to other identities (class, ethnicity, caste) in political mobilisation, or the co-optation of gendered inequality within patriarchy and intimacy? Does formal political presence even ensure that gendered



inequality is addressed? Nutritionists reveal how economic growth is not translating into better nutrition. Do the reasons lie, as some hypothesise, with the changing status of women? If new patterns of tobacco, drug, and alcohol abuse are shaped by 'crises of masculinity', then what is driving this must inform what is to be done.

Answers to these questions, crucial for directing policy priorities, will lie in part with culture. Rigorous ethnographic work is thus necessary to discern the changing subjectivities that now shape modern poverty, and to theorise the conditions that form them. Why is it that some cultures value formal education as a key route out of poverty, but not others? How are inequalities in education and economy driving divergent ideas of progress and development itself, and their relation with science, with religion, and with nation?

Social opportunity, whether reflecting on gender or class, has also become unequal in new ways. For many children, accessing schooling is now less significant than accessing quality schooling and the academic, vocational, and attitudinal outcomes that follow. Getting a job can be less significant than receiving a living wage and gaining equal pay and career opportunities. Being an entrepreneur is less significant than having the conditions to scale up. These are acute poverty (not 'post poverty') problems, and development policy foci will need to adapt to these new realities. How? Cultural and social changes similarly alter the terrain addressed by social safety nets: global declines in marriage and rises in divorce now generate new vulnerabilities (with increased divorce-based poverty) and new responsibilities (greater women's child custody and their single parenting). Development policy enters new domains. Changes in domestic arrangements pose new challenges for parenting and the reproduction (or not) of resilience down the generations. They pose new challenges too, for care for the increasingly significant elderly poor – and for the disabled – in balancing the costs with health providers to meet the growing needs of chronic, lifelong diseases and diseases of the elderly.

Social mobility for women is also now less dependent on marriage, but do women depend increasingly on education, enterprise, and employment? Or are other cultural factors also significant? Are new modes and meanings of consumption implicated? Emergent appreciation of 'cultures of consumption' reveals questions of fashion, aesthetics and desire to be integral, not add-ons, in understanding poverty and inequality – and not only in respect of gender. Shaping cultures of consumption is critical to address local and global environmental change. The question of what is sustainable consumption and what is 'developmental' consumption becomes more open and pertinent.

## **8. Digital development, Big Data and the technological revolution**

International development research is playing catch-up where it should be leading in the staggering social media and information revolution which has yet to fully reveal its transformative possibilities. Smartphones only hit the market in 2006 and they are now owned by 22% of the global population (of all ages). Tablets were only launched in 2010 and are growing at a faster rate still.

Combined with a new effusion of digital data (such as administrative data sets in national examination records, teacher records, health records) and the ability to link data sets, to analyse them by new machine-reading techniques, and to unravel complex inter-relations through ever more potent statistical analyses, the opportunities for 'knowing poverty' will be unsurpassed. In ways unimaginable only ten years ago, it becomes possible to harness ICT capacity not only in revolutionising educational opportunities for the poor, but also in community-based monitoring of environments; of ecosystems service use and misuse, of rights, of disasters, of markets, of harassment, of corruption etc. etc. ICT offers inclusive opportunities for 'citizen science' and 'citizen social science' (massively enhanced, too, by open access publishing). It also offers improved forecasting, enabling more 'anticipatory' approaches – essential, not least, to help prepare for 4°C of global warming. It radically enables the post-2015 agenda in which "People demand to play a role in shaping and changing their world", and provides opportunities for qualitative - even quantitative - 'mass participation archives' (contra the UK's





'mass observation archive'). However, questions of who it is that becomes radically enabled by these changes, and how they choose to deploy their enablement, are open and important issues. How exactly might we harness the use of ICT and social media in delivering education (inside and outside classrooms on mass online platforms, adult and child), health (in remote diagnostics, patient support), and government?

The very opportunities of the digital revolution 'for development' carry downsides, and not only concerning unequal access. First, the commercial value of big data to read and predict markets gives seemingly 'unprofitable' monopolistic digital companies enormous value. The extent to which the digital revolution enables global monopolistic practices and transfers profits from manufacturing to pre- and post-production is an emerging concern in economic growth strategies in less/least developed countries and advanced economies alike. Where within globally fragmented production networks will the gains be concentrated? What are the opportunities for both economic and social upgrading within global value chains? How is it changing the conditions in which economic growth translates into higher wages and better working conditions? ICTs also carry vices (global pornography and gambling) to the remotest regions, as well as new social values and risks.

Similar issues arise in other forms of technology development: the genetic and genomic therapies and medical devices in health; genetic modification in agriculture; solar nanotechnology in energy; geoengineering to address climate change etc. etc. The question is not only how the massive opportunities that science and technological development offer can be directed towards the 'needs' of the poor; but how the economic modalities of the technology development can be prevented from deepening poverty itself. Is technology development increasingly private and monopolistic, and how is it implicated in increasing inequalities? Do new forms of globally dispersed production address this? Do ICTs promote standardised forms of knowledge, learning and educational policy and practices at the expense of cultural diversity, creativity and innovation, and the opportunities for poorer societies to contribute?

The digital revolution raises new challenges of governance both nationally and cross-nationally. Are national security and commercial interests of wealthy nations producing inequalities of transparency and privacy? And how does this influence wider forms of inequality and political process?



## 9. Levering change: learning, incentives and policy

Implicitly or explicitly, policy interventions draw on models of behavioural change: whether more materialist (as in responses to financial incentives); idealist (in responses to education, media and information); subliminal or 'practice based' (in responses to 'nudging'); political (in responses to mobilisation within communities and organised participation); or enforced (in responses to policed regulation). Basic research on the workings of norms and on 'decision making' is needed to answer questions about the choices people make, as assumptions about incentives require a much better understanding of motivations than that imagined in much behavioural research. Whilst policies usually draw on a mix of approaches, questions arise concerning the shape of the mix and its effectiveness. In environmental policy, for example, one end of the scale adopts militarisation and violent enforcement (e.g. use of drones to enforce international anti-poaching policies of dubious local legitimacy) while the other moves the mix somewhat experimentally towards financial mechanisms (carbon offset markets, biodiversity markets, REDD+ etc.). Evaluations of the consequences of each have hardly begun. Comparable shifts in the mix can be seen in social and economic support and health financing and within micro-finance, micro-insurance and social protection. How are financial mechanisms performing? What are the unintended effects? How can these be moderated? Significantly, how are new technologies for payment or for monitoring altering the appropriateness of the mix by facilitating, for example, a myriad of small financial payments through mobile phone banking, or in facilitating local environmental/pollution monitoring through phones?

The question of how policy and other incentives actually influence intention and action, and how to improve this influence is, of course, of much wider significance than in international development, but just how cultural specificity and being poor; or at the wrong end of massive inequality, alters policy effectiveness remain urgent empirical questions. These need to be asked especially in international development in face of prevailing and universalising assumptions and stereotypes about 'human nature', 'what makes us tick,' and the culturally and socially diverse meanings of money – given the dominant reliance now placed on financial incentives. Similar questions arise in education: how far are advances in educational policy and practice (e.g. in teaching and learning) valid regionally and globally, or are they context specific? Do educational theories, concepts and 'best practices' travel? Under what conditions?



## 10. Governing ‘international development’ – measurement and beyond

The governance of international development continues to change, not least linked to multi-polarity, but also to changing governance possibilities and practices in metropolises. The Sustainable Development Goals envisage a focus on concrete measurables but that “measurement of progress needs to be improved”. Yet exactly what measures ‘progress’ is increasingly contested. Should one expand from economic, mortality and physical metrics to a more ‘inclusive wealth’ metric and those that acknowledge psychological and physical health, ecological and community sustainability, and so on? The post-2015 agenda also envisages that “a data revolution will support an accountability revolution.” The question again arises: how to ensure data can achieve this? As development data become a ‘technology of governance’, and quantitative methods spread from economics to other social sciences, the choice of data and the relations of its production become increasingly significant. Overall there is a need to improve the quality, breadth and sensitivity of measures for specific country contexts, as well as the fitness for purpose of international comparative indicators and metrics. If inequality is to be addressed, then how can transparency be improved to enable its monitoring? In education, for example, how can the quality, effectiveness and equity improvement of institutions and systems be measured if the assessment systems in place lack local validity and reliability? This is especially where the quality and resourcing of student assessment systems is low. How can the broader goals of schooling (not just examination results) such as fostering citizenship, sustainability etc. be reflected in such measurements? Are there unintended/negative consequences of employing different definitions and measures of equity, poverty, and social, economic, education outcomes? What is the political economy of data production and its leveraging by different interests?

Evidence based policy has come to privilege hugely expensive modes of evaluation - in particular, randomised control trials or matched control studies where random allocation of treatment is not possible. An academic industry has grown around these, but do they rely on false premises of replicability? Do they make policy judgement calls better, or just easier? And do they reveal more (or less) than qualitative, but more participatory, modes of evaluation? Are they more or less empowering and for whom? Is the complexity of observed phenomena suitably analysed? The question of how to evaluate effectively remains crucial, but the need for research evaluating evaluation has never been stronger, as increasing reliance is placed on a particular (costly) paradigm. Knowledge cultures within development studies – in academia as well as in development agencies – have only recently begun to be researched to understand paradigm and policy shifts, institutional cultures and disciplinary power and politics. Researching the character and cultures of development institutions as the context for policy formation, and dominant ideas such as evidence-based policy, is an important element of a reflexive development studies, better connected to the realities of policy processes.

## Conclusion: ESRC funding in the landscape of international development

This report discerns a shifting geography of international development research, envisaging research in middle income countries and among elites. It does not, however, turn its back on research addressing the predicaments of the poorest countries of the world. The inverse is the case. It is to address their predicaments that we take this wider frame.

Many of the issues raised concerning inequality and injustice inevitably draw on ‘critical’ social science and may challenge some powerful constituencies so they necessitate all the independence, excellence and rigor associated with ESRC. They will also require the full disciplinary mix in the social sciences. Questions implicating culture, for example, are increasingly interesting in economics, demography and international relations, yet reaching beyond the ‘what’ towards understanding the ‘why’ of cultural difference will require the full analytical and methodological repertoire of social science disciplines.

There is also a need for longitudinal research, whether to discern changing inequalities and their causalities, or the long term effects of disasters and disaster response, the lifetime effects of early deprivation, or the

life-course changes in gendered political mobilisation and so on. Possibilities for analysis are perhaps made easier by the emerging new sources of digitised longitudinal data (e.g. in educational attainments, health etc.). Yet many of the countries most central to researching poverty are those most lacking such data (often having experienced political upheavals and conflict). A major challenge is to develop innovative longitudinal techniques, which can involve relocating and reusing data sets (and other methods) and other retrospective historical studies (including those of past policy successes and failures) within longer time scales and with the benefits of hindsight. Opportunities emerge for stronger creative links between modern economic, political and social history and development studies.

The agendas here also offer major opportunities for links with the wider natural sciences – most obviously with the health and environmental sciences, but also with emerging developments in informatics in data, space technology, and others. All are disciplines that can generate or address poverty and inequality.

Many of the questions identified here may be significant to UK government departments, opening interesting scope for partnerships. Yet it would be appropriate, too, in developing this research agenda further for ESRC to establish other joint funding research partnerships, including those within the EU, with foundations, and potentially with newly emerging economies. All collaborations would have ambitions too, to 'co-produce' research drawing on and networked with user constituencies. Partnerships will need to seize opportunities to include the civil society and business sectors that are driving and experiencing many of these changes, and that generate data and have research expertise. New media technology provides opportunities to frame research, peer review it, conduct it and disseminate it within more 'citizen science' modes.

International collaboration is essential to delivering this research agenda, but collaborative and co-produced research with colleagues and organisations is challenging. In particular, capacity building has been an important dimension to addressing this, but this is a concept fraught with problems. Are research partners in poorly funded institutions unable or unwilling to devote time and resources into developing proposals when the transaction costs of bidding for large grants or managing large international grants are so much greater in universities without well supported institutional infrastructures? If so, improving capacity may involve acquiring those resources more than training. Are theoretical and methodological agendas driving academic priorities in UK universities those driving partners? If not, capacity building can be a euphemism for manipulation. Aspirations concerning 'capacity building' within particular funding programmes need to be couched within a broader framing of capacity, and without becoming an ad hoc add-on to research programs.

There is a place for highly visible centres of excellence that can provide sustainable platforms to articulate UK research with policy nationally and globally, but also a place for large numbers of smaller grants drawing on the aptitude of scholars from around the UK (and the world) to address these crucial issues. This can appear as (and be experienced as) 'fragmented', so strategies to develop and build on sustainable research networks (e.g. in programme modes) are to be favoured. Given the pace of social change and the emerging significance of unpredictable shocks, funding must be attentive to basic grounded research that can discern the nature of such changes, and to nimble funding modalities adapted to the likely need for rapid-response formats.

The agenda outlined here highlights the importance of macro-framing and of mixed methods, but one in which qualitative methods and related theory, and development research ethics, play more than a service role and complement quantitative approaches and methods. The centrality of questions of culture and changing subjectivities, and the pressing need for answers to deeper questions of why and how, call for more empirical qualitative studies and mixed methods approaches. 'Evidence based' policy cannot be a euphemism for quantitative research alone, and how to strengthen the rigour of evidence in qualitative studies should receive more attention. ■

### Expert Advisory Group on International Development Membership

- Professor James Fairhead, Department of Anthropology, University of Sussex
- Professor Stefan Elbe, Department of International Relations, University of Sussex
- Professor Katherine Homewood, Department of Anthropology, University College London
- Professor Jude Howell, Department of International Development, London School of Economics and Political Science
- Professor Cecile Jackson, School of International Development, University of East Anglia
- Professor Rhys Jenkins, School of International Development, University of East Anglia
- Professor Mark Pelling, Department of Geography, Kings College London
- Mark Robinson, Global Director of World Resources Institute, Washington DC
- Professor Sally Thomas, Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol









Polaris House  
North Star Avenue  
Swindon SN2 1UJ  
Web: [www.esrc.ac.uk/data](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/data)  
Email: [comms@esrc.ac.uk](mailto:comms@esrc.ac.uk)  
Twitter: @esrc

