

Perspectives

FUTURES ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH: AN IRISH-AFRICAN PARTNERSHIP-BASED FORESIGHT EXERCISE

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Introduction

Development theories, from modernisation through to dependency approaches, have usually posited a *telos* (from the Greek *τέλος* for ‘end’, ‘purpose’, or ‘goal’) but this has, more or less, been taken as a pre-given and not an open-ended process open to human agency. Most development theories are teleological in the sense that they have an implicit destination in mind. Modernisation theory is perhaps most explicit in seeing a desired future being achieved if certain policies are followed. Radical development theories are also often teleological in the sense that negative future outcomes are often built into its theoretical framework. More recent post-structuralist approaches to development consciously eschew a teleological bias and build in an element of undecidability. What neither the teleological nor the non-teleological development theories actually develop is a future-orientation based on actual trends and an acceptance of the radical undecidability of the future. We argue here for a Foresight/futures approach to development research based on an understanding of the dynamic web of change within which development research takes place. In the era of globalisation we need to recognise firstly the complexity of global development but also that the future is more open-ended than was the belief of earlier development theories. This futures approach also allows us to foreground human agency and its role shaping the future. The future is not pre-given but ours to construct.

It is of course, a truism to say that the future cannot be known. But we can seek to better understand what will influence our possible futures and create a framework which will be both robust and flexible to work forward on. Commercial organisations have for some time been developing tools to ‘future proof’ their strategies and become more competitive. The Shell Foresight

exercise in the 1970s which sought to future proof the company against rising oil prices is a prominent case but it is now mainstreamed in many corporations. National development strategies have also liked Foresight and in particular ‘technology Foresight’ approaches. In the higher education system Foresight is quite new but a recent Irish higher education Foresight exercise at Dublin City University shows that it is gathering strength (Reference?). We still need to make the case that Foresight approaches and techniques might be relevant for development research.

In sub-Saharan Africa the most influential Foresight exercise is still the paradigmatic Mont Fleur Scenarios: ‘What will South Africa be like in the year 2002?’ (Kahane, 1999). It brought together regime, business, civil societies and opposition thinkers in a safe non-mandated setting to envisage potential post-apartheid scenarios for the country. While the participants were clearly not going to agree politically, they were able to agree on the terms of the debate and how South Africa ‘worked’ as it were. While both the regime and opposition maximum programmes were deemed unviable in the long term, a feasible and desirable outcome did emerge. The organisers of Mont Fleur conclude that for a scenario effort to be successful the process must be credible (in terms of neutral leaders) informal and reflective (rather than prescriptive) and inclusive (to include dissenters) (Kahane, 1999: 3).

Through Foresight and its associated tools such as scenario planning and horizon scanning, we can visualise alternative futures. We examine the background to Foresight studies in sub-Saharan Africa and then some recent attempts to generate ‘Foresight for development’ or what Bezold et al. (2009) called ‘Foresight for Smart Globalisation’. That sets the scene for an account of the Foresight Exercise (see IAP Foresight) carried out by the Irish African Partnership for Research Capacity Building (IAP) which brings together the nine universities on the island of Ireland and four universities in Africa (Eduardo Mondlane, Mozambique; Makerere, Uganda; Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; and the University of Malawi). From the general and particular accounts carried out we draw some general conclusions on the possible benefits of a future orientated development research programme and also some of the challenges it would face.

What is Foresight for Development?

Futures thinking, in its various guises, could help us develop research strategies relevant for the future. Foresight embraces a wide range of participative tools and techniques designed to help organisations ‘future-proof’ themselves and to take advantage of emerging opportunities. It is not designed to be a prediction of the future nor is it an end in itself. Rather, it is designed as a framework to reduce uncertainty and risks, while increasing strategic insights and improving decision-making processes. This type of strategic thinking helps us maintain and develop a high quality and coherent forward view. The global development process – and research around it – takes place within a complex web of systemic change which we need to take into account. Though Foresight planning has been primarily used in relation to technology it has increasingly been deployed in a broader regional planning and social development context.

Futures research encompasses a number of tools and technologies that have been developed over the last few decades. Environmental scanning is widely seen as an effective data-input method (Slaughter, 2002). Much of the raw material which went into the Irish African Partnership Foresight exercise would have been gathered in this way. Moving on then to the actual analysis we have a scenario building approach which is designed to envisage future worlds which are internally consistent and externally verifiable. It really is the cornerstone of Foresight future work based on scenario logics that allow us to construct divergent future states and then consider a variety of organisational responses. These scenarios need not be likely, only plausible and consistent. The next phase is to design a path into the future which maximises risk. In a word Foresight is aiming at ‘future – proofing’ the organisation.

The Irish African Partnership exercise adapted the scenario building method after the first two workshops. It was simply too difficult to maintain the momentum needed to comply with this method. The decision was to make the exercise more practical and attuned to the needs and experience of the health and education researchers. As it transpired we had found our own way to what the futures literature calls ‘futurescan’ deemed a middle-level exploring method. A long list of trends affecting the future is developed but these are then boiled down to a ‘top ten’. Full scenarios are not needed, only a fairly basic ‘picture’ of the future, which are tested for relevance and effectiveness. According to

Slaughter 'it is a very effective way of providing a new team with some of the tools for this kind of work' (Slaughter, 2002). Certainly as applied by the IAP this 'Foresight-lite' did help make the research teams gel around a common understanding of future options and research priorities therein.

While Foresight is often seen as a Northern paradigm, having been developed by much as part and parcel of the technology revolution of the 1960's (see Loveridge, 2009) it has also been deployed in a Southern context. South Africa in particular is found in the top-tier of countries where Foresight units contribute to their national policy development process. A range of non-governmental organisations there also use Foresight to develop strategy around peace and security and resource management in particular. There was also a Foresight study produced for East Africa (Society for International Development, 2008) which brought together a broad range of policy actors in a process of reflection on alternative futures for the region. We could not say that Foresight is as yet embedded in development (and development research) but it is probably more widely known than one would gather from the development literature.

An interesting recent project is The Rockefeller Foundation funded study *Foresight for Smart Globalization* (Bezold et al., 2009). The project is argued to be unique in bringing a pro-poor perspective to bear on Foresight and vice-versa. It argues that 'Foresight can provide an important set of silo-busting tools to provide a systematic view of the increased complexity of our globalised world' (Ibid., 2009: 7). As with the approach promoted by Paul Collier (2010) it is, we would argue, based on an unduly optimistic view of 'smart globalisation' such as the argument that 'eighty percent of the world's population lives in countries where poverty is declining' (Bezold et al., 2009: 9). There is little consideration of the contrary view that globalisation has actually increased the levels of inequality within and between nations (see Munck, 2006). The point is that Foresight is a method that can be deployed by quite diverse development approaches and for quite diverse political purposes.

While it is interesting to see a preliminary engagement between Foresight and development practitioners, there are possible limitations to this model. As a review of Paul Collier's development best-sellers, puts it in a

different context, we are dealing with a ‘rousing combination of do-gooding and can-do’ (Lawrence, 2010). There is no explicit theory of development underpinning the work but an implicit faith in the now widely discredited neo-liberal one true faith. While proclaiming its pro-poor approach, in practice it relies on an enlightened private sector and the main problem is deemed to be poor leadership in the South. The project does not offer a social or political analysis of development in the era of post-mobilised globalisation. It simply calls for ‘a durable and vigorous community of forward-looking doers and thinkers’ to work for an ill-defined ‘smarter world’ (Bezold et al., 2009: 5). We would need to ask whether Foresight in itself is particularly useful without an adequate understanding of development in the era of globalisation.

When future studies were first being mooted as a possible approach to development in an African context there was considerable emphasis on how it might be misused to ‘colonise the future’ as post-colonial futurist Zia Sardar put it (Sardar, 1994). There was flurry of activity in the mid 1990s at least in part inspired by the Mont Fleur process (see Blackman and Adesida, 1994). Many future studies were seen as part of the doomsday scenario trend common in Western agencies and commentators at the time. Olugbenga Adesida argued that: ‘the fatalistic views of Africa’s future could become a self-fulfilling prophecy’ (1994: 885). The colonial gaze was an ever-present danger and for Adesida ‘it is quite difficult today to identify the future of Africa as seen by Africans’ (Ibid.). Since then there has been much more Foresight activity in an African context not least the country studies carried out under the auspices of the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP’s) Africa Futures project. This is not the place to carry out a review of this work but we need to emphasise the need to be aware of the Western image that Foresight has to some extent in Africa as elsewhere in the global South.

The Irish African Partnership (IAP) Foresight Exercise

The IAP brings together the nine universities on the island of Ireland with four universities in Africa in a partnership aimed at building research capacity for poverty reduction. The work of the IAP is based around 5 x five-day workshops – three in Africa and two in Ireland. Other key activities are a Foresight exercise to identify the main health and education priorities in Africa over the next 10 years around which specific partnerships could be developed and the

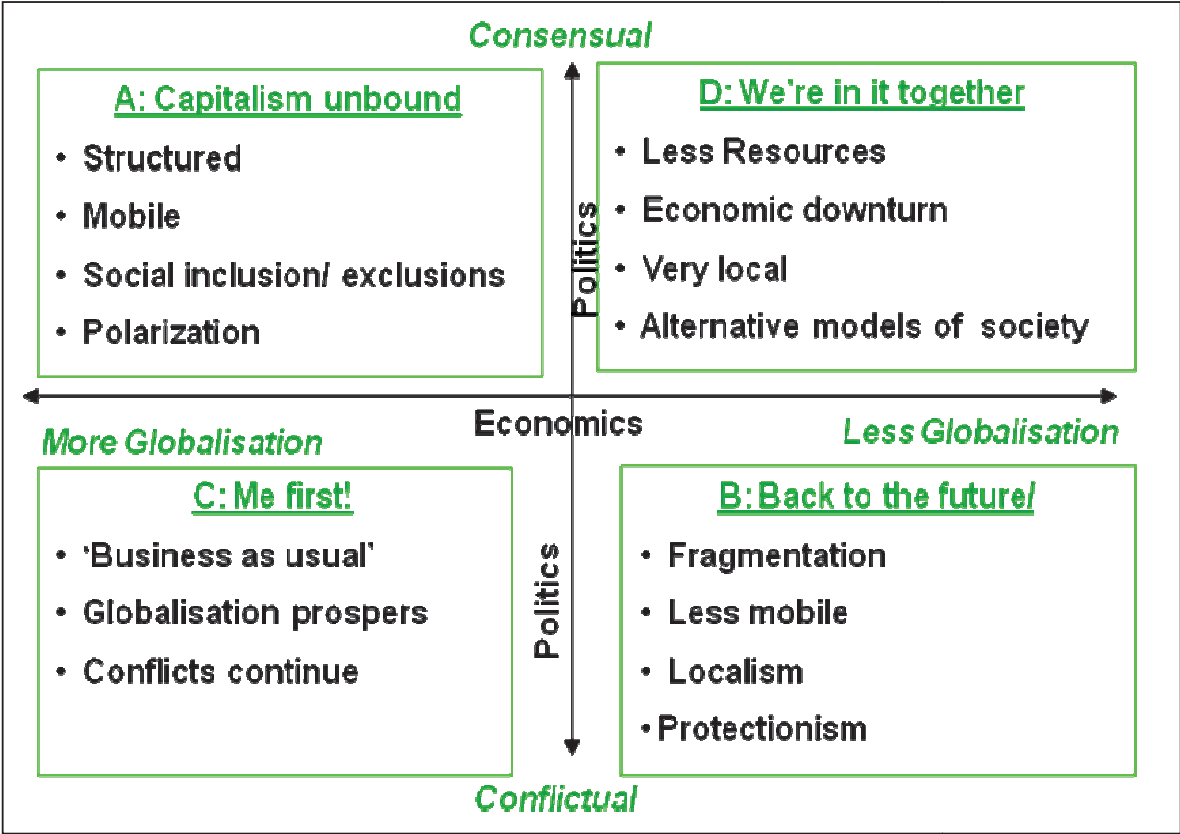
development of a set of quantitative and qualitative metrics to measure and develop research capacity in the partner institutions.

Foresight, in the IAP project, has been implemented mainly through scenario development, but also drawing on a wide range of resources including regular and ongoing trend analysis and horizon scanning work. Scenario development is an important strategic tool, and a practical and applied process. Future scenarios must build on what is changing today, be relevant to the topic at hand, but reflect very different views of the future. There are four main 'components' to the building blocks:

- The critical uncertainties – those areas of change which are most significant in terms of how they will affect the future of research and whose development could go in different directions – i.e. are uncertain. The polarities of two axes based on these changes are used to create a matrix of different futures. These emerge from the long list of trends and changes.
- Givens/areas of change – are those aspects of change and issues that are relevant to the topic at hand – i.e. capacity building but do not define its development to the same extent. These areas of change are then set within the framework characterised by the critical uncertainties, and are likely to develop in different ways under different circumstances, i.e. in different scenarios.
- Actors/key players – are those organisations and individuals whose decisions and actions are likely to affect development research and which are likely to be different in different circumstances – i.e. in the different scenarios.
- Factors – are those areas and aspects of the issues over which the organisations in question, i.e. the 13 universities involved in the IAP – have some influence and control.

The future is of course uncertain and unpredictable but we can project existing trends and make educated forecasts of the main parameters of change. In other words we need to see what the main influences on the development process are. At the second IAP workshop in Makerere, we came up with the following matrix (Figure 1) trying precisely to do this.

Figure 1: Makerere Matrix



What we see here is a horizontal axis we called Economics which could move towards greater internationalisation or globalisation, or it could move in the opposite direction and the world could become more closed and inward looking. Current debates on how to deal with the global recession are precisely around those issues and they talk about the dangers of protectionism if the powerful economies begin to 'look after themselves' more.

The vertical axis we called Politics and it was counterposing a more open/democratic politics at one end of the spectrum and a more closed/undemocratic polity at the other end. Clearly then we could have

different development scenarios depending on which type of politics prevailed. What was interesting was when we combined the economic and the political axis and had a very engaged discussion of the type of worlds emerging. We started off trying to discern two worlds only but the workshop decided to fill in the four possible worlds in the 2 x 2 matrix. We gave these names to make them easily identifiable and some basic characteristics.

The key driving forces for the Foresight matrix were seen as the global political economy on the one hand and the national social and political order on the other hand. At the level of the global political economy the process of globalisation may continue to promote integration of the developing world or conditions may become more protectionist following an economic crisis. Globalisation would be stalled, as it is more or less at the current moment, and the big power blocks could turn towards securing their own futures to the detriment of the majority world. From an African perspective neither option was seen as terribly appealing and third options such as much more engagement with China which promises a different development model might come to the fore. Be that as it may, for now we simply take the global political economy as the main horizontal axis with an 'open' and a 'closed' tension at either end.

The vertical axis is focused around the national political level. In other words at a national level in Africa countries may achieve greater social cohesion and political stability or they may suffer from social dislocation and political conflict. This is related to the global political economy which may create more or less favourable conditions for development. But there is also a national (and regional) level of politics which is relatively autonomous from global politics and which has its own dynamic. Different countries may respond in different ways to the same global circumstances.

At the next workshop we worked on combining the global political economy horizontal axis with the national social and political cohesion/consensus vertical axis giving us four possible scenarios as outlined in the Foresight matrix below (Figure 2):

Figure 2: Foresight Matrix

- World A we called ‘Capitalism Unbound’ because it was one in which globalisation takes off and accelerates and at the same time national politics remain fairly stable. It is a highly structured and regulated world which creates great dynamic growth but also more inequalities.
- World B was given the title ‘Back to the Future’ because the world has turned protectionist and political cohesion is at a very low level. There is less mobility of people, capital and ideas. Inevitably communities are torn apart as political vision is in short supply.

At first we focused on these two worlds as polar opposites in a way. But the participants at the Makerere workshop decided to make the grid complete and thus we built up the four scenarios in the 2 x 2 grid.

- World C we called ‘Me First’ insofar as globalisation has once again taken off but in the context of few rules, a sort of survival of the fittest. The level of political consensus and social cohesion is low. Multilateralism is a thing of the past and regulation never took off.
- World D became known as ‘We’re in it Together’ because while globalisation and internationalisation are still sluggish there is, at least in Africa, a return to some kind of greater political vision. Communities are knitted together by adversity and while austerity is a fact of life it is implemented fairly.

The two most opposed worlds are A (Capitalism Unbound) and B (Back to the Future) which set up a strong tension for our thinking about future education and health needs. In the more globalised yet more consensual World A we would expect more private provision of health and education services as internationalisation deepens. There are likely to be two quite distinct health and education systems for the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’. In World B, which is both less globalised and less cohesive, we would expect a greater importance for local provision of health and education services and a general ‘return to basics’. Interestingly we can expect our chosen health and education priorities such as

maternal/child health and teacher education to be important in both worlds even if for different reasons. Likewise our cross cutting themes such as gender equality and ICT and climate change will be hugely relevant in both scenarios.

Potential Scenarios

Scenario A: Capitalism unbound (Globalisation High/National Cohesion High)

The global economy is thriving and *new global rules are adhered to*. The 2008-09 economic downturn has been overcome and a new era of growth based on renewable energy is having a considerable impact. Conflict in the Middle East has been resolved by the Obama administration. The combination of the global economic and financial crisis which brought a change of emphasis and more multilateral approach plus the shared threat of climate change which was seen as an opportunity for recovery from the recession provided a much needed impetus for change and renewal. In Africa, a *more consensual approach to politics* has emerged for a number of reasons: minority governments in some places make it a necessity; a genuine desire to try to move away from confrontation and conflict to inclusion and consensus; a recognition of the scale of the problems faced and the need to work for the benefit of all; an emerging 'African' identity and sense of self creating a wider context. However, sadly, the reality on the ground often falls long short of the hopes at the strategic levels. The results are often weakened decision making; lengthy discussions and deliberations for even quite minor decisions resulting in bureaucratic procedures; and a less effective counter-balance to the fast moving force that is the global market and the multinational companies. Companies tend to rule, because they get things done.

Scenario B: Back to the future (Less Globalisation/National Social Cohesion and Political Consensus Low)

The *conflict between the haves and have nots* has greatly increased at the global level as the United States (US) and European Union (EU) take up a fiercely protectionist stance. The economic depression at the global level continues to exert an influence. There is far less mobility in terms of people, investment and ideas. The return to localism, once seen as an antidote to excessive globalisation, is now an enforced reality. This is an inward looking, less mobile

world where globalisation has gone into retreat and protectionism and nationalism are rising to take its place. At the international, as well as a more local level, tolerance and cooperation are declining. Pressures on the environment and on communities are increasing. The world is shutting down.

***Scenario C: Me first!* (More Globalisation/Low levels of political consensus and social cohesion)**

While the economic depression of 2008-09 has been successfully overcome through energetic interventions by the World Bank and IMF, *political consensus has been irredeemably damaged*. Multilateralism now prevails: after the decline in prices for raw material during the recession, the return to growth brought a return of high prices and a continued land grab. While Africa is the focus of a great deal of development, improved agricultural production and the like, much of it is foreign owned and funded with the benefits going back to the country or company of origin. However, the benefit is infrastructure development and investment to create more security of supply for foreign investors primarily. High resource and energy prices have also led to increased investment in clean technologies, with solar farms now widespread for both local production needs but also to export. As globalisation regains its stride so does its effect of creating *great wealth and great inequality at the same time*. The rich ignore social fragmentation and the state is so weakened by globalisation it is powerless to contain it.

***Scenario D: We're in it together* (Less Globalisation/More political consensus and social cohesion)**

The global recession stretched out to 2015 and effected a total transformation of the advanced industrial societies. There was a dramatic decrease in the availability of resources and inevitably *local responses to austerity emerged*. The globalist/Africanist conflict of the early 2000s has been replaced by a new regionalism. Traditional social and cultural norms come to the fore giving peace and security at least a chance. The economic austerity imposed by global economic conditions gives rise to alternative models of society which come to power in a number of countries. The state is re-energised and seeks to encourage sustainable development once again. The recognition in the wake of the long economic downturn is that we are all 'in it together'; with both economic and environmental issues getting joint and collaborative attention.

Developing the above scenarios was useful in its own right to frame our discussion of emerging health and education priorities but also as a way of building a common understanding of unfolding futures across the partnership. Building these scenarios allowed us to creatively imagine alternative visions of the future. We can now use these scenarios to boost our research capacity building strategy against these potential developments. Scenarios are designed to identify problems and discontinuity for our strategy going into the future. They are designed to provide a context for ongoing debate, for example around emerging areas of critical importance in development research on health and education issues. These scenarios are plausible stories of how the future will unfold and clearly and directly affect our research capacity building strategies and our priorities as higher education institutions.

Towards a Research Priorities Matrix

During the project’s stakeholder consultation, which took place between Workshops 1 and 2, a range of emerging health and education research priorities was identified. These were summarised (Table 1 below) as part of the presentations by the project team at Workshop 2.

Table 1: Research Priorities in Health and Education

Health	Education
Food Security/Food Studies/Nutrition	Inclusive Education and Gender
Climate Change/Environment	Education for Community Development
Public Health	ICT and Education
Water	HIV/AIDS Education
Biodiversity/Biosafety/Conservation	Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
HIV/AIDS	Curriculum Development and Reform

Infectious Medicine	Diversity in Education
Malaria	Education in Disadvantaged Communities
Maternal Health	Improving Education Delivery (Adult & Child Literacy, Science & Maths, Special Needs Education)
Gender and Health	Education for Sustainable Development/Life Skills Education

These research priorities were revisited in the second workshop as part of the scenario discussions to examine which would be priorities within the different futures. Two groups each focused on one topic – two on health and two on education with issues, options and priorities relating to ICT and gender integral to those discussions.

Table 2 below sets out the priorities within each scenario. Participants not only prioritised specific areas, but also considered how those priorities might change within the different futures. The research priorities identified in each of the scenarios showed considerable overlap and consistency, although the wider context of food and climate change was only seen as a potential priority in Scenario A.

Table 2: Opportunities and priorities in each scenario

Priorities in Health and Education			
HEALTH		EDUCATION	
Scenario A:	Scenario B: Back to the future	Scenario A:	Scenario B: Back to the future
Capitalism unbound		Capitalism unbound	Back to the future
Infectious diseases - HIV/	HIV	Initial teacher education -	Curriculum Development

AIDS		Continuous Professional Development	and Reform
Maternal health	Gender and health	ICT in education	Diversity in education
Food security	Maternal health	Education for sustainable development	Education in disadvantaged communities
Climate change	Infectious medicines/diseases	Education in disadvantaged communities	Improving education delivery

Key Points Arising

HIV and Infectious diseases were top priority in both scenarios. Vaccines were not seen as having arrived yet for HIV but prevention may be improving. Public health responses e.g. in the form of access to condoms, was likely to be significantly reduced in Scenario B.

Other infectious diseases and malaria were also top priorities. Drug resistance was seen as a growing issue and epidemics could be on the increase. Work on vaccines was less likely in Scenario B, but in the absence of such development alternative local approaches to prevention such as draining of swamps would increase as a lower cost and local solution.

Women and health was a significant priority – maternal health might well improve, especially in Scenario A, with fewer deaths at birth and also fewer unwanted pregnancies. In Scenario B, women’s health in general and maternal health in particular could be more precarious and less of a priority because of the danger of increased conflict.

Food security and climate change were both priorities in Scenario A because of the wider impacts and knock on effects on health. Increased food production as a result of more widespread use of GM and more commercialised

rather than subsistence farming could both result in reduced malnutrition and overall improvement in basic health. While not mentioned in Scenario B discussions, the potential impacts from climate change and the effect on health and nutrition are likely to make it a priority.

Teacher development and Continuing Professional Development – these were the mainstay, without them other priorities were impossible to achieve.

Developing and implementing ICT in education was a priority in both. Its potential to bring education and learning to remote rural areas, to enhance women’s access to education, reduce exclusion among disadvantaged communities and those with special needs was part of the longer term development. Blended learning and lifelong learning were also seen as enabled by greater use of ICT.

Education for sustainable development was a key priority in Scenario A and curriculum reform in Scenario B. Both had a local focus but in B change and development were vulnerable.

Validating our Health and Education Priorities

Having elicited health and education research priorities from workshop participants, the next stage in the Foresight process was to compare and contrast these priorities with those identified by broader analysts and actors. To achieve this, in the period between the second and third workshop further research was carried out. This involved mapping existing literature and research (at international and regional levels as well as relevant national plans and strategies) and conducting elite interviews with a range of health and education specialists, both internationally and nationally within the four IAP partner countries. A number of further possible research priorities emerged from this work.

The expanded priorities (twenty for health and twenty for education), were scored firstly by individuals and secondly by group consensus at the third workshop in Maputo. Results from this exercise indicated that a number of topics scored highly across the groups. In health; the highly scored priorities were infectious diseases; maternal health; HIV/AIDS; food security and gender

and health. The importance of engendering research projects was repeated throughout the four day workshop and the health group felt strongly that any project proposals should be gender sensitive. It was also deemed critical that the impact of climate change be considered. Additionally, taking a health systems approach to research and advocating for equity in health were thought of as crucial in emerging research proposals. It was therefore agreed that gender, climate change and health systems/equity were to be treated as cross cutting themes within the three thematic areas.

In education, consistent with priorities that emerged from the Foresight research scenarios in Workshop 2 in Makerere, and with future research needs, Teacher Education and Education for Sustainable Development, with ICT and Gender as cross-cutting themes ranked highly. The focus on Teacher Education was not surprising as the quality of the teaching force is a major driver for the global education agenda. The recent *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* (UNESCO, 2007) underscores the need for more teachers globally if the goal of Education for All is to be fully attained by 2015.

How the Selected Health and Education Thematic Areas Relate to Scenarios A and B

Scenario A entitled 'capitalism unbound' is characterised by accelerated globalisation, stable politics and dynamic growth. This situation is very dependent on political leadership. If accompanied by a prosperous economic situation, it may be easier to retain health workers and researchers. A higher level of resources and an increased health workforce would produce a positive effect on maternal and child health and the ability of the country to deal with infectious disease. In an alternative situation in which greater inequalities exist, the poor may become marginalised with mass migration from rural to urban areas. This would place great pressure on resources and bring problems of access to clean water, sewage and waste disposal. Increased poverty would also lead to an increase in infectious disease such as diarrhoea and a subsequent decline in maternal and child health. It is possible that agriculture may become commercialised and mechanised to increase land productivity and food production. This might lead to urbanisation or alternatively, it might result in increased food for local people. However, if the latter situation prevails, the

burden imposed by malnutrition may increase as a result of processed and westernised food.

Research in education, particularly teacher education, plays a major role in Scenario A. With the increased mobility and brain drain, there is need to beef up teacher training and pedagogical research in order to increase both the quantity and quality of teacher. To achieve this, alternative approaches to research and teacher education such as the use of ICT would need to be embraced. ICT in education would also be useful for its potential to bring education and learning to remote rural areas, enhance women's access to education, and reduce exclusion among disadvantaged communities and those with special needs. In addition, the free-liberalised market economy and the internal and external pressure on natural resources, calls for the need for education for sustainable development to mitigate the resultant impact of climate change. Teacher Education research and curriculum would also need to be reformed so as to integrate the principles, values and practices of sustainable development.

Scenario B entitled 'back to the future' is characterised by a protectionist environment, economic depression and decreased mobility. Decreased mobility (localism) might help to reduce brain drain and attrition of workers from the health system, thus creating a more favourable situation in terms of maternal and child health and infectious disease. Transmission of disease between countries would also decrease with decreasing mobility. Similar to Scenario A, a potential consequence of Scenario B is political conflict. This would lead to an increase in infectious disease and a decline in maternal and child health especially if the population is displaced. A potential result of a protectionist environment is a high demand for food and energy supplies leading to both land grab and environmental degradation. Food security will be a major threat in this situation.

Due to the deepening economic depression within Scenario B, Education for All is at threat, because it has become unaffordable for the poor. Because of decreased mobility, there is massive pressure and dependence on the meagre natural resources, resulting in environmental degradation and climate change. As is the case in Scenario A, Teacher Education and education for

sustainable development would play a major role in redressing the society. The two education strands would be crucial to explore the conditions and factors that would impact on changes in behaviour that will create a more sustainable future in terms of environmental sustainability, economic viability and a just society for present and future generations.

It is worth noting that the scoring and ranking to prioritise the long list of possible research areas was based on the following five criteria which were developed at the Maputo workshop in quite heated discussions:

1. Contribution to poverty reduction

- To what extent does the problem contribute to poverty?
- How severe is the problem?
- To what extent will the research contribute to poverty reduction?

2. Contribution to community empowerment

- To what extent does the problem reflect measurable community priorities?
- To what extent will the community be actively involved in the research process?
- To what extent does the project enhance community capabilities?

3. Relevance to policy and practice

- Has research from this area been translated in policy?

- Will the project have the support of local/national authorities/policy-makers?
- Is it likely that the results of the study will be implemented?

4. Contribution to the empowerment of women

- Does the problem place a particular burden on women?
- Is research in this area likely to contribute to empowering women?
- Will the project meet basic engendering of development criteria?

5. Criticality/feasibility

- How urgently are results needed for developing interventions?
- Is further research needed?
- Are there sources of funding available for this project?

These criteria were the subject of intense discussion with some, for example the one on community empowerment, dividing the more traditional researchers from those more imbued with a development ethic. Interestingly the debate was not polarised by the national make up of groups but rather according to the different interpretations of the politics of development. How to deploy this grid sensitively and with due cognisance of political criteria was also carefully discussed. The point about this grid is that it is qualitative and thus allows for a politically grounded tempering of the Foresight process. If we were conducting the exercise on behalf of a national health ministry our calculations and priorities would no doubt be different and here the priority setting methodologies of Commission on Health Research for Development (see COHRED, 2010) would be a more appropriate management tool.

Matters Arising

Drawing a balance sheet on the Irish African Partnership Foresight Exercise is not easy as opinions within the partnership were quite divided. A survey conducted as part of the usual project evaluation concluded that 70 percent of participants found it to be ‘effective’ or ‘very effective’ in terms of setting a research agenda, 15 percent considered it was ‘ineffective’ and another 15 percent were uncertain. We may start by acknowledging that quite a few of the more experienced development researchers (especially on the Irish side) were quite resistant to the approach, bordering on hostility at times. It would be our reading that the rather lengthy and seemingly abstract nature of the Foresight Exercise (especially in the early phases) clashed with the often ‘can do’ pragmatic approach of many development researchers. Be that as it may, Foresight is far from being an obvious approach to many development researchers. However we can argue that the exercise was worthwhile for the participants and not only based on the satisfaction survey cited above.

Capacity building or capacity development can, for the sake of convenience, be separated into its individual, organisational and inter-institutional or systemic components. The Foresight exercise we engaged in undoubtedly contributed to individual capacity building. Inter-disciplinary and inter-national dialogue was strengthened. A common understanding of development and development research only emerged as a result of the (sometimes uncomfortable) Foresight process. Of course, most usually development researchers are ‘on the same page’ but in large transnational and trans-disciplinary teams this might not be the case. While organisational capacity building was something which would occur (or not) in the individual institutions, the inter-institutional capacity building was enhanced by the Foresight process. The degree of trust and common purpose was greatly enhanced as testified by a number of partnership initiatives taken after completion of the Foresight exercise.

We would argue that the Foresight approach and methodology can make a useful contribution to development research. If it is genuinely partnership based it can go some way to developing participation in rolling out a pro-active research agenda. Trans-disciplinary development research lends itself perfectly to the Foresight approach with its open problem-solving

orientation. Foresight can encourage dialogue across disciplines but also helps bridge the researcher/practitioner/policy makers divide by providing a 'safe place' for thinking on a long-term horizon. The participatory nature of the Foresight approach is also highly valued by participants and, indeed, this feature could be extended to other communities of interest.

It would be important to recognise that a futures orientation for development research is not a panacea for development. It is only a tool and we would have to be sceptical about its ability to overcome structural forms of inequality in and of itself. It is not a technical fix. Indeed, it is possible for the Foresight methodology to create a false impression of accuracy and 'scientificity'. Its value is rather, in our view, in creating a shared mindset focused in creative solutions to development problems and in forging a more collectivist or partnership-based approach. There is also a potential pitfall in that it can become a 'top-down' approach with mainly the experts empowered to talk. Foresight can only too easily become another in a long list of Northern 'solutions' to development issues based on superior knowledge.

Foresight is simply a method and can be deployed for very different purposes. Why Shell Ltd. might wish to use it is different from why the ANC and PAC agreed to engage in the Mont Fleur scenario building; it is not about predicting the future but about enabling preferred futures. While the future is not predictable it is also not predetermined and is influenced by our choices. Unlike weather forecasting, strategic Foresight is dealing with social systems in the broad sense. While complex these systems are not unknowable. Foresight can help us reduce the unknowable and increase order and clarity. Above all, we would conclude on the basis of our own limited experience, that Foresight can, through the free-thinking interactions it promotes, create new knowledge and a better understanding of what previously might have been out of sight and out of mind. If Foresight can promote creativity in development research it should be given a chance.

From our own experience with the IAP and the growing interest in 'Foresight for Development' we would draw some general conclusions. A futures orientation to development research planning can be a valuable tool if undertaken in a partnership modality. Foresight and its associated methodology

can be a valuable development tool but we must guard against ‘scientificity’ and ‘top down’ approaches. Given the complexity of global development challenges any research programme needs to acknowledge that there is no ‘quick fix’. The challenge of creating a ‘pro-poor’ development strategy will not be met by Foresight alone. The approach may, however, empower Southern-driven research agendas and help harness global development resources and agency within academic and other research bodies.

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