

EXCHANGE TO CHANGE

ECHANGER POUR CHANGER

IOB NEWSLETTER / MAGAZINE DE L'IOB

N°22 - SEPTEMBER / SEPTEMBRE 2012



NETWORKING FOR AFRICA IN BELGIUM

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Developing

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I was born in a developed country. I studied at the Institute for Development Policy. I have travelled to developing countries. I have worked and lived in a developing country. Yet I still do not know what development really means or why Belgium is considered to be a developed country, while Egypt is called a developing country. It was only when I started feeling and thinking like a citizen of a developing country and obtained Egyptian nationality that I realised that there is something very odd about all this. Of course Egypt is a developing country - a country in development. It is a dynamic country which faces many challenges and many obstacles but which also offers many opportunities. But then that is also true of Belgium! So why is Belgium considered to be developed, as if it had already achieved the highest level, as if its situation was now static and as if it was the perfect example to be aspired to by less developed/ less fortunate countries. Developing means 'being in progress'. But are not all of us constantly in progress? Should we not try to come up with more apt concepts to describe the differences between certain types of countries? After all, all countries, all societies, all individuals are developing all the time. Acknowledging these dynamics may help us better to understand each other and our relations with each other. As a centre for exchange of information and critical reflection IOB tries to bring added value to North-South relations and to the understanding of development co-operation. We believe that co-operation should be based on equality and that setting examples leads to imbalanced power relations because the example (or developed country) will dominate those which have to follow (developing countries). We strongly encourage exchange so as to be able to learn from each other, to change, and yes, to develop, in a never-ending process.

Eva Vergaelen, editor 

Dear Alumni

As I sit here writing this introduction the Euro zone is teetering on the brink of financial collapse. The European Central Bank and national treasuries are throwing around huge loans and bank guarantees and the IMF has come to the rescue. All of this should sound familiar to our alumni, many of whose home countries have also had to cope with financial crises in the past decade or two. Now, as then, reputed macroeconomists are dishing up their "I-told-you-so" stories. And true enough, there were basic design flaws in the concept of European Monetary Union and economists have predicted the present crisis many times over. Anyone with a basic training in economics can point out the mistakes and tell you how these could have been avoided. This begs the question: why then did we make them? It is my conviction that, just as with economic and financial policies in your own countries, it is not really a question of capacity. There are many knowledgeable economists working at the European Commission and advising national governments in the member states, just as I have met many excellent economists in your central banks, Ministries of Finance and elsewhere during my travels in your part of the world. The real issue is of course that such decisions are mostly ultimately political. It is in the nature of politics that decisions are not spontaneously taken in the long-term best interests of the country concerned. What stands in the way will vary: it may be greed, or hubris, or a desire to fix problems in the short run at the expense of the future, or it may be that a particular course of action is not right for the economy as a whole but suits the interests of one section of society which is very influential. That is why we need appropriate institutions that force politicians to do what is best for their countries. But, again as in your countries, there are no simple answers in Europe. Democratic accountability, for instance, currently seems to be a stumbling block for many of our leading politicians and prevents them from doing what is right. Of course, this is no reason to disparage democracy,

but it illustrates the fact that democracy does not automatically ensure good sense in politicians. Again, this sounds familiar, does it not?

To link this up to your stay at IOB: we endeavour to train technocrats and researchers who are good at their trade but at the same time sensitive to the fact that appropriate technical solutions must also be sold politically.

Allow me to end on a personal note: I am reaching the age of retirement and will give up my position as chairman of IOB at the end of the current academic year. Tom De Herdt, a trusted colleague of many years, will take over in October 2012. You can read more about his plans for the future in this magazine. As for me, I plan to stick around as an emeritus professor for a while longer. Teaching and administrative duties will no longer feature high on my agenda, but I plan to be involved in some limited way in policy advisory work and field missions. Who knows, perhaps our paths will cross again in the future.

Robrecht Renard, Chairman





Networking for Africa in Belgium

What was expected to be a standard interview in which the interviewer asks questions and the interviewee replies turned out to be a pleasant exchange of ideas. “What we have just had”, Guggi Laryea says upon leaving, “is exactly what we had in mind when creating this forum: a space in which we can brainstorm about development and about our own individual roles in it; development in the very broad sense of the word.” Together with a friend, IOB alumnus Guggi Laryea, now a Communications Analyst with the World Bank, set up the Facebook group ‘Networking for Africa in Belgium’ last March. Its two main goals are to promote exchanges among Africans living in Belgium and to encourage development initiatives for Africans both in Belgium and in Africa.



Guggi Laryea

EtC: What generated the idea of creating this Facebook group?

GL: After my graduation from IOB I went home to Ghana for a short while. Fate brought me back to Belgium. While working here I began to realise more and more that the African community seems to be so scattered. From my studies at IOB and elsewhere I already knew that Africans in Belgium have a wealth of talent and skills to offer but unfortunately it all seemed so dispersed and, most importantly, neither we as individual Africans nor Belgians seemed to be fully aware of this largely untapped pool of resources in our midst. I missed connecting with other Africans mainly at the professional level and with the increasing popularity of social media the idea grew to develop a virtual platform for such connections and exchanges. After a few meetings with a friend who shared similar ideas I suggested a Facebook group since Facebook accommodates

a variety of goals. It serves as a networking tool for both social and professional purposes and it constitutes a great forum for the exchange of views and ideas. And so ‘Networking for Africa in Belgium’ was born. There are two administrators: Bwalya Mwali, who is a Zambian psychologist and business consultant, and myself. We started by inviting our friends, both African and non-African, to join the group and they invited others and in less than three months we had over 200 members from very diverse backgrounds. Some are newcomers, some are students, some are professionals working in Belgium or in Africa; we have doctors, journalists, artists, fitness trainers, and many more.

EtC: What is the common denominator between all these people?

GL: Our links with, and interest in, Africa, for a start. Most of us live in Belgium but some of us are in Africa but have links with Belgium. We are professionally or socially interested in Africa in one way or another. We all face the same challenges to some degree, whether it be in our jobs or our private lives. Africa is not always seen in the best light over here and furthermore, Africans and advocates of Africa do not often get the chance to engage in societal and political discourse. Facebook helps to give us a voice.

EtC: In which way?

GL: Firstly, we are better connected with each other and with society. We are all trying to fulfil our objectives in a country where many of us may not have natural connections. The network helps

to bring together people who would not otherwise have met, for example, a lawyer and a break-dancer who may have similar interests. Secondly, by exchanging knowledge and views the group also helps us to further develop, both as a community and individually. For instance, some of us have found more clients for our businesses and products and we may now know of more people to contact when we want to fundraise for social projects in Africa.

EtC: Isn't that a rather narrow focus, shouldn't you look at development from a broader perspective?

GL: These are just a few examples among many others, such as providing Belgian development volunteers with information on a stay in Ghana, or our discussions on the role of foreign investment in Africa, or the international criminal court, and so on. We serve as an incubator for other projects. Through our Facebook group people can connect and initiate other projects.

EtC: Has this already happened?

GL: Well, the network has only very recently been created and we can already see signs of such activities.

EtC: Actually, the fact that we are now sitting together and that this interview will reach many IOB alumni may already result in development-related action.

GL: Yes, that's right. The world has truly become a village. According to social theory there are only 6 degrees of separation between two individuals who are total strangers to each other. In the Facebook community, which is the third largest community in the world with a 'population' of almost one billion, there are only 3 degrees of separation between two users. It's amazing how people who are very different can connect through Facebook.

EtC: But can it lead to development?

GL: Facebook is a very dynamic medium – a double-edged sword that can do both harm and good. It can create 'button' activists, who just tap the 'like' or 'dislike' button or spread ignorance. But it can also mobilise people.

EtC: As happened during the Arab revolution.

GL: Yes. However, I don't want to pretend that our network is a development instrument. We are in the first place a networking tool. If we expect too much from it, we may become disillusioned and passive.

EtC: And that's exactly the opposite of your goal!

GL: Of course, the goal is to bring Africans and those interested in Africa together to share ideas, interests and knowledge that could be beneficial to all.

EtC: In a context of poverty, low education, racism and weak supportive networks, African teenagers are more at risk of falling into the trap of criminality. Unfortunately, many talented youngsters end up in jail.

GL: It's a sad fact. We should all do what we can to help. If only the media would also focus on the positive contributions of the African community, publish some success stories, give these youngsters something or someone to look up to.

EtC: You could even start a buddy system between members of the network and young African detainees.

GL: That is a possibility, if they are open to this and if we have members with the right profile. That is what I meant by development in a broad sense. Young Africans are not encouraged to pursue higher education. We can help break that image! I do believe that we can play a modest role in this. When I was studying in Antwerp a while back I asked one friend, who was actually close to Africans, what prospects African students had in finding jobs in the city. He mentioned shoe-shining and cleaning jobs. It is important to show society and our youngsters that Africans are represented at all levels, even in the town hall. Not just as cleaners, but also as politicians, doctors, NGO activists, artists, entertainers, business leaders and civil servants. This is what our network reflects.

In order to learn more about the group Networking for Africa in Belgium please contact Guggi Laryea at guggi.laryea@facebook.com.



Robrecht Renard hands over the reins as IOB chair to Tom De Herdt

Robrecht Renard is soon handing over as chairman to Tom De Herdt. Exchange to Change (EtC) met with Robrecht (RR) and Tom (TH) to reflect on IOB's achievements and challenges.



Tom De Herdt
Robrecht Renard

EtC: Robrecht, how do you feel about handing over the reins as chair?

RR: I have mixed feelings. It marks the end of an important period in my life and it makes me realise how fast time goes. It will be nice though to be able to spend more time on research and policy advisory work again. Although my retirement is near I have plans for further policy-oriented research and for publishing a book together with a number of colleagues. I am happy to entrust the duties of the chair and the bureau to a younger generation now.

EtC: You must feel flattered, Tom?

TH: Actually we are not that young! The most important difference between the former and the new bureau is that for the first time in IOB's history we shall have a female member. Natalie Holvoet will join Filip Reyntjens and myself on the bureau. Unfortunately, women are still underrepresented in the higher echelons of the academic world. I am very happy to welcome her aboard.

EtC: Robrecht, what accomplishments are you particularly proud of?

RR: When I took over the chair from Filip Reyntjens in 2007 IOB had gone through a period of rapid expansion. It was my role to consolidate those changes. Consolidation does not mean that we have been resting on our laurels over the last five years. A development institute is by nature a permanently dynamic entity, but we have not faced fundamental changes. In terms of education we have implemented small but significant changes in the curricula and teaching methods of our three master programmes, integrating our expertise in various education products and research. In terms of research we have reached the post-thematic group phase, in line with our interdisciplinary approach. I can say that we have succeeded in becoming an institute that is internationally well-known and respected for its expertise.

EtC: Do you agree, Tom?

TH: Yes, of course. We have become a visible player at the European level. We are internationally well-known for our unique expertise in the Great Lakes Region although the range of our expertise is much broader. This has enabled us, for example, to attract students and researchers from all over the world. IOB is an institute which combines expertise and focus on one particular region with interdisciplinary research on other regions and that encourages students and researchers from very different backgrounds and geographical locations to opt for us. Maintaining this balance is a constant challenge, but also constitutes our main identity and strength.

EtC: So it is this strong focus on comparative research and education methodology that characterises IOB?

TH: Yes. I would say that IOB stands for interdisciplinarity and policy relevance. Nevertheless I believe that there is still room for improvement as regards cooperation between disciplines and methodologies in order for us to become more policy-relevant. This constant effort to promote cooperation and dialogue constitutes our added value compared to other faculties and institutes.

RR: I agree with Tom. Policy-oriented development research is by definition interdisciplinary but that does not exclude specialisation. You can be specialised and profoundly scientific while using different research angles simultaneously. It is often said that in one way or another all good research is policy-relevant but here at IOB we explicitly focus on this relevance by closely following the challenges faced by the major players in the development field and we gear our research to the societal issues with which they are confronted.

TH: We work for three publics or interfaces: the first is the scientific community, the second the development actors and policy-makers, and the third the field – the people who live the reality

which we study, be they peasants or bureaucrats. It is a huge challenge to engage with all three publics and facilitate dialogue.

EtC: IOB also takes on consultancy assignments. How do you relate these to academic research?

RR: Private consultants apply existing management tools to development interventions without questioning the underlying rationale of such interventions. We are academics and therefore critically examine current practices. We are much more critical than most consultants are and can be because they make their living by selling their advice to those who pay them. We on the other hand are in a position to tell clients things they may not wish to hear although of course we must not unnecessarily shock people. We also have to understand the organisational constraints facing development actors, be they international organisations and bureaucrats in the north and in the south or international NGOs. It is crucial that we make the link with scientific research findings. Some of the current trends in development practice, for instance, are only partly supported, if at all, by rigorous scientific research. One of our tasks is to reveal this and to show how research can help develop more effective policy interventions. This kind of policy work, in which you are critical and independent, is a specific niche in the consultancy market. You have to be both a good social scientist and to be able to translate your research into sensible advice. We do accept consultancy assignments for governments and other actors, but we are not dependent on their approval. Thanks to our expertise in a wide range of domains we have a voice and they have a good reason to listen to our advice, however critical it may be. This makes us different from a 'normal' consultant.

EtC: Robrecht, a word about our alumni. Has the student population changed since IOB reviewed its Master's programmes?

RR: Not in terms of nationality. Our institute focuses on the most fragile states in the world, but

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it would be self-defeating to focus exclusively on students from these areas because it is enriching for them to mix with students from other developing countries and vice versa. We try to maintain that balance between focusing on students from countries with highly problematic political and social contexts on the one hand and at the same time broadening our programmes so as to attract students from more successful countries, including middle-income countries. Examining development from a comparative perspective is our strength and it justifies the existence of these programmes. Students at IOB learn in a variety of ways: by interacting with students from countries with very different policy practices, by acquiring both theoretical knowledge and critical analysis skills, and by living in Belgium and experiencing the reality, warts and all, of life in a developed country. It is extremely beneficial for our students to be exposed to such a very diverse environment.

TH: One of the things we aim to achieve is to increase the mix of students, with more students from middle-income countries and from Europe enrolling. The alumni community will come to play a crucial role in this. The better we communicate with our alumni the better they can promote IOB. Also, the better we select our students, the more targeted their efforts will be to encourage potential future students. We aim at increasing our quality even more. We will be more selective, not in terms of degrees or studies, but in terms of work experience and future career aspirations. Our students must have the aim of continuing to work in the development field as actors, policy-makers or academics.

EtC: *Over the last two years IOB has made great efforts to strengthen its alumni policy. Will the new bureau continue this approach?*

RR: Although I feel that we could have done more, we have indeed laid the basis for a strong alumni policy. We have reached out to our alumni much more than before, through e-seminars, meet-and-greet sessions and social media. We know much

more about their needs and aspirations and we are more than willing to respond to them. Many of our alumni are keen to engage in intellectual debate and exchange. We wish to offer them our support in this by means of refresher courses, livestream seminars and the like. This has been my dream since I became chair and we have moved in the right direction, but much more can and needs to be done.

TH: Actually the refresher courses are no longer just a dream. They are close to becoming a reality. And yes, we will definitely work on strengthening our alumni policy. We have opened a vacancy for exactly that purpose.

EtC: *Tom, what do you think being the chair will mean in practice?*

TH: It is interesting to listen to Robrecht and I have been taking lots of notes! The chairman is a mediator between the institute and the university. Universities are bureaucratic bodies. Sometimes you want things to move faster, but as a chairman you need a lot of patience and maneuvering skills. I think Robrecht has been successful in dealing with these challenges while preserving our own identity. As for me, I will try to continue working along the same lines. There is a new policy plan that has to be implemented, but this does not involve major changes. Actually, I don't think that we need major changes; we need to build on what we already have. On a personal level, I will have far less time to devote to my own research. I see this as an investment in the interest of the public good that IOB is. A chair becomes a manager. I was not appointed to do this; it was not one of the duties specified in the vacancy I applied for, even though I did acquire some experience within and outside of IOB. So it will be a learning process for me as well. The good thing about our rotating chair system is that we all understand the difficulties that a chair faces. I am happy to feel supported by the bureau and the IOB staff and I am confident that IOB will continue to strengthen its position in the international development field.



Gatekeeping and the struggle over development in the Nicaraguan Segovias



On June 25th Rene Mendoza Vidaurre successfully defended his PhD dissertation entitled 'Gatekeeping and the struggle over development in the Nicaraguan Segovias'. IOB professor Johan Bastiaensen was his supervisor. Rene Mendoza Vidaurre is a Bolivian of indigenous origin and has been a researcher-activist since 1986.



Rene Mendoza Vidaurre

How have global and local forces intertwined at different levels in particular regions and within the particular localities of a given country? How have local dynamics questioned and contested international forces with regard to the formation of social structures and the processes and practices of authoritarian and inequitable development? This thesis examines these questions from one perspective, namely, from that of gatekeepers, specifically the structures, institutions, processes and practices of gatekeepers in the interstices of the Nicaraguan Segovias and the global economy. In short, this thesis attempts to call into question the conventional wisdom which naturalises the erosion of patron-client relations as a result of neo-liberal policies by highlighting the continuities and connections between globalised processes of development, patron-client practices, and the ongoing dispossession of land, forests, and cultural livelihoods.

The monograph includes a detailed historico-political analysis of recent socio-economic development in Nueva Segovia, the cradle of the revolt of General

Augusto Cesar Sandino and until today the prime region of rebellion and resistance against the ruling elites in Nicaragua. The ethnographic analysis in this study shows that in this at first sight revolutionary region, local gatekeepers interacting with old and new Nicaraguan elites as well as international interests, succeed in excluding the large majority of farmers and indigenous inhabitants from promising growth opportunities, often with the support and assistance of the authorities and international donors in the name of social development and poverty reduction. The study describes how the practices of these gatekeepers throughout a number of historical phases - including the revolutionary Sandinista period - reinvent and innovate the fundamental structures of inequality and exclusion, which ultimately leads to a loss of land, forests and even the indigenous artisan tradition of the poor majority. These processes are explored in a detailed analysis of the value chains (fair trade and others) of coffee, wood and forest protection, and so-called indigenous crafts.

It is argued in the thesis that ongoing processes of "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey: 2003, 2004) for the benefit of a small group of entrepreneurs actually proceed in two phases. The first phase is a preparatory one during which growth opportunities are created in "new commons", paradoxically as conditions for dispossession, and often subsidised by donors as part of attempts to build social capital, reduce poverty, enhance indigenous rights and ensure environmental sustainability. The second phase entails the privatisation of the "new commons" followed by extra-economic dispossession (of land, forests and other means of production) as a consequence of gatekeepers at nodes of the local and global "constellations" once again excluding and expropriating the indigenous farmers. Thus the very programmes and processes designed to protect the livelihoods of the rural poor sow the seeds of ongoing dispossession.





Rwanda from below



From left to right:
Claudine Vidal,
Frederick Golooba-Mutebi,
Marijke Verpoorten

In June IOB organised and hosted the conference 'Rwanda from below'. While research on Rwanda often adopted a macro approach in the past, increasing numbers of (predominantly younger) scholars have started examining the country from a grassroots, bottom-up perspective. This type of research is very demanding and often takes place in a dangerous, difficult and destabilising environment, but it has yielded crucial new insights into local dynamics of power, justice, ethnicity, land, and poverty. Unfortunately much of this research is scattered, which is why the conference aimed to link up some of these efforts. Both methodological and ethical questions on how to conduct research in such environments and substantive findings on crucial issues were highlighted. The conference focused on five topics: 1) modernisation, local level impact of engineering, 2) people and the state: truth and resistance, 3) 'decentralisation' and local politics, 4) justice and reconciliation and 5) local level research and action in an oppressive environment.

Exchange to Change is happy to share one of the papers presented during the conference:

'Modernising the marshes', written by An Ansoms and Jude Murison. An is a Professor in Development Studies at the Université Catholique de Louvain and an IOB alumna, whereas Jude is an IOB researcher in the thematic group Governance and Development.

**'MODERNISING THE MARSHES':
LARGE-SCALE CULTIVATION AND LOCAL
DESPERATION IN RURAL RWANDA
BY
AN ANSOMS AND JUDE MURISON**

This paper examines the local impact of the nation-wide government policy to modernise agricultural production in the marshes. Rwandan swampland has for a long time been an important natural resource for local peasant communities. In all it covers about 10 % of Rwandan territory. The Rwandan government has worked out a swampland 'valorisation' policy inspired by the objective to maximise agricultural output while using land more efficiently and more productively. The organisational approach adopted for the swamplands is essentially different from that



Left: Peter Monstrey
Right: Johan Pottier

applied in the hills where authorities aim to register all land through individual property titles. Article 29 of the land law states that “swampland belongs to the state. It shall not definitively be allocated to individuals and no person can use the reason that he or she has spent a long time with it to justify the definitive takeover of the land”. As no definitive rights to swamp plots can be allocated to individuals, the government assumes the role of principal swampland developer.

This approach may take two forms. In some locations the government makes swampland concessions available to private investors. In others the national government mandates local authorities to allocate marshland plots to farmer cooperatives that use collective cultivation systems. Furthermore, national policymakers impose a uniform technical solution (monocropping) upon all locations. They consider this method to be more productive than the traditional system, which combines several food crops. They have also introduced specific regulations that impose the cultivation of very particular crop types (market-oriented ‘high-value’ crops such as rice, sugar

cane, maize, etc.). In a sense the current cultivation practices used in the marshlands are a pilot project with regard to agrarian commercialisation policies which the Rwandan authorities want to implement in the hills. In fact they constitute a broader pilot project for the ambitions of national and international development actors concerning Africa’s agrarian land as such: introducing commercially-oriented production techniques in an efficiently organised production system.

The first part of this paper analyses Rwanda’s agricultural policy, its marshland policy in particular, from a historical perspective and shows how the Rwandan state has always tried to exercise control over local production systems. We also place the current policy rhetoric in a broader context by relating it to the debate on the necessity of a Green Revolution for Sub-Saharan Africa (as stated in the World Development Report 2008). We illustrate how the rhetoric regarding the concept of the Green Revolution allows policymakers to ‘sell’ far-reaching measures aimed at agricultural modernisation as food-securing and poverty-reducing initiatives.





From left to right:
 Filip Reyntjens,
 Stef Vandeginste,
 Bert Ingelaere

The second part of the paper analyses in-depth case study material to show how this modernisation policy impacts upon farming systems at the local level. The paper draws upon qualitative field research carried out in 2007 and 2011 in six different rural locations in the vicinity of a marshland in the Southern Province of Rwanda. In each location the authors conducted over 15 focus group interviews (in both years) with diverse socio-economic farmer groups with a view to investigating their local livelihoods and the impact of rural policies. In particular our research has examined the ways in which diverse types of farmers are affected by the swampland modernisation policy.

On the basis of our case study material we outline 1) how the reorganisation allows local elites to make use of national policy priorities to gain control over a vast area of land; 2) how the technical and organisational changes made to the swamplands add additional bottlenecks to local farming systems, which is at odds with the logic of the risk-minimising behaviour of small-scale farmers.

The way in which local elites take control of the reorganisation of swampland areas can be described as 'land grabbing'. The term usually refers to 'large-scale, cross-border land deals or transactions that are carried out by transnational corporations or initiated by foreign governments'. Interestingly enough, however, land grabs also occur at the local level, with well-connected local actors as protagonists. Such mechanisms are of course not new, but today elite networks make use of the opportunities provided by the new discourse on agriculture as a motor for development to secure control. The latter has also been the case in several of our own case study locations.

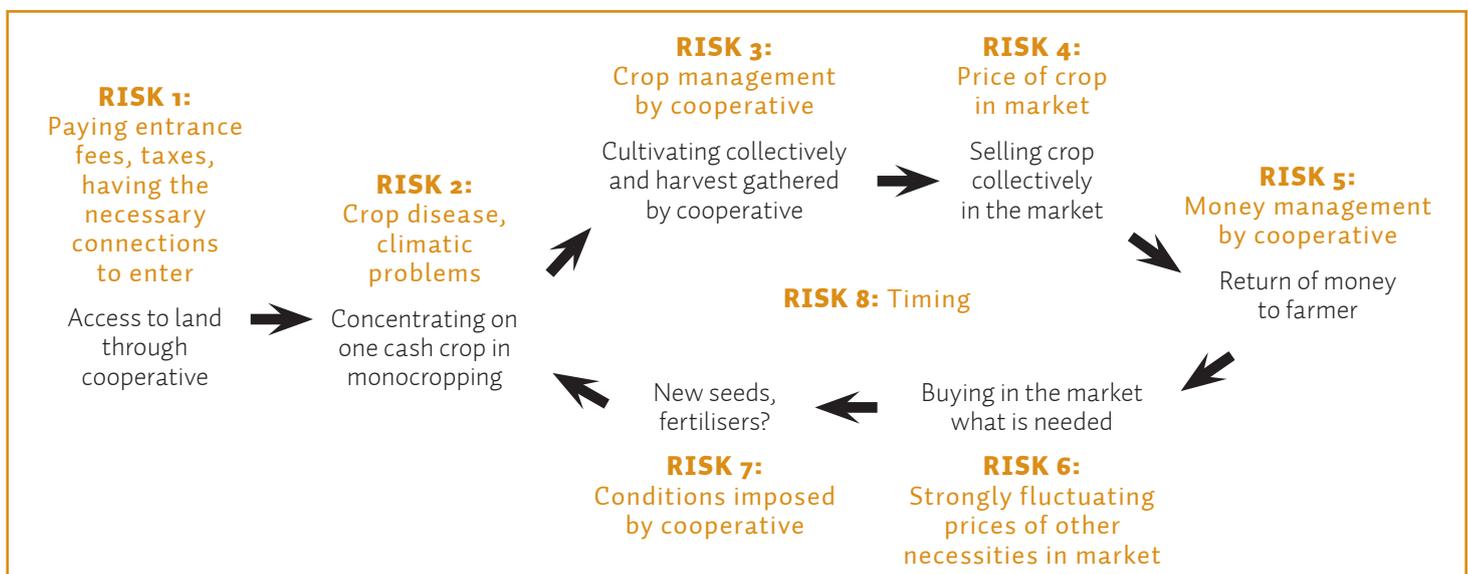
Furthermore, the technical and organisational aspects of the reorganisation of the swamplands change the stakes in local farming systems. Additional bottlenecks are:

- 1) securing access to land via membership in the cooperative, which implies having to find the necessary means to pay the entrance fees and taxes and having the necessary connections to secure access;

- 2) the obligation to concentrate one's production on one cash crop in a monocropping system , which implies high risk in case of crop disease or climatic problems;
- 3) the obligation to cultivate collectively, with the harvest being gathered in by the cooperative. The question which arises here is what happens in case of famine and whether crop storage by the cooperative is efficiently organised;
- 4) the provision that the cooperative sells the crop collectively in the marketplace (risk of price fluctuations in the market and the cooperative being an inefficient negotiator);
- 5) the assumption that the money flows back from the cooperative to the farmers (many cases of corruption, non-transparent management of resources);
- 6) the fact that the farmer is dependent upon the market for a lot of his needs and is expected to pay for them with the income generated via his sale of commercially-oriented products (problem: how to deal with strongly fluctuating food prices in local markets);
- 7) the fact that the farmer has to take into account the cooperative's logic in terms of the provision of seed and fertilizer (problem: what conditions are imposed?);
- 8) The fact that this whole cycle takes a lot of time whereas farmers are often confronted with immediate needs.

As an alternative the paper proposes the implementation of diversified marshland cultivation systems in which purely subsistence-based and commercially-oriented schemes are allowed to coexist rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all logic. It proposes that policies should allow individual farmer households to make their own choices from a *scale of options*, with the bottom rung allowing pure subsistence farming; the second providing subsidised technical inputs such as seed and fertilizer; the third improving farmers' physical access to markets; the fourth promoting locally-owned (!) collective strategies to increase bargaining power in markets; and the fifth encouraging value-adding activities such as storage and processing.

In the conclusion the paper calls into question the fundamental options which underpin Rwanda's current agricultural policy. It shows how the current 'maximal-growth' strategy results in a highly skewed developmental path with limited trickle-down potential. As an alternative the paper argues in favour of exploring the potential of a broadly-based inclusive growth model which builds upon the knowledge of rural small-scale farmers and enhances their capacities.. Striving towards a more inclusive form of growth is likely to be a crucial component in any effort to achieve not only poverty reduction but also long-term stability and peace in Rwanda.





Corruption in Cyclone Preparedness and Relief Efforts in Coastal Bangladesh:

Lessons for Climate Adaptation?

By Tanvir Mahmud* and Martin Prowse**



Left: Tanvir Mahmud
Right: Martin Prowse



BACKGROUND

Bangladesh is very vulnerable to climate change. Projected impacts include greater scarcity of fresh water in the dry season, greater drainage congestion, greater river bank erosion, more frequent and severe floods and cyclones, and greater soil salinity in the coastal zone. In particular, such hydrological changes threaten low-lying coastal areas where citizens live in flood and cyclone-prone locations. Whilst the Bangladeshi government is committed to adaptation the success of programmes depends partly on the level of fiduciary risk, in other words, on whether adaptation funds are used for the intended purposes. In this respect there is good reason to be concerned. Bangladesh was ranked at the bottom of Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for five consecutive years between 2001 and 2005. Whilst this ranking has recently improved the 2010 CPI still ranked Bangladesh 134th out of 178 countries.

CYCLONE AILA

To try to draw useful lessons for climate adaptation the present authors have investigated the nature and extent of corruption in cyclone preparedness and

relief efforts in coastal Bangladesh. They focused on interventions before and after Cyclone Aila, which struck South-West Bangladesh and the coast of West Bengal, India, on 25th May, 2009. Aila killed 190 people and affected over 3.9 million (with 243,000 houses and 77,000 acres of farmland destroyed or badly damaged). Even fourteen months later, when the primary research for this article was conducted, embankments in four upazillas (sub-district administrative units) in Khulna and Satkhira districts had not been repaired and over 47,000 families were still homeless.

FIELDWORK

Fieldwork was carried out in collaboration with the Coastal Research Foundation in June/July 2010. A household survey, focus group discussions and key informant interviews were conducted. The survey was organised in one upazilla in Khulna in view of the severe impact of Aila in that part of the coastal belt. The study aimed to sample 300 households but during data cleaning 22 questionnaires were excluded as the veracity of the responses was questionable. Eight experienced assistants were recruited and

trained for conducting the survey. Survey data was triangulated with three focus group discussions conducted with three community groups: women, the social elite (schoolteachers, religious leaders, public officers and businesspeople), and farmers/day labourers (averaging ten participants). Seven key-informant interviews were also conducted during and after the survey.

RESEARCH AIM

A key aim of the research was to investigate how the experience of corruption varied across wealth groups. To enable us to compare the levels of corruption across wealth categories we utilised an asset index. Whilst asset indices are not perfect proxies for income/expenditure they provide a good indicator of long-term living standards. Using this index we created four equally-sized wealth quartiles: the ultra-poor, the poor, a middle group, and the wealthy.

PRE-DISASTER INTERVENTIONS

Three pre-disaster interventions were investigated: cyclone warning systems; disaster-preparedness training; access to cyclone shelters. The survey found that only 38% of households had received a warning message before Aila struck. As regards wealth quartiles, a higher proportion of wealthy households had received a message (55%) compared to poorer households (significant at the 99% level). 93% of ultra-poor households through to 72% of wealthy households considered the messages as 'inappropriate' (significant at the 99% level). The survey revealed that only 14% of households had attended a disaster-preparedness training programme before Aila struck, which is a surprisingly low figure for such a hazard-prone location. Again, as regards wealth quartiles, 22% of wealthy households made up the largest proportion. The survey also enquired about the types of shelter used by households during Aila: 58% took shelter on an embankment or at home and 32% in a concrete building. What is significant is that only 10% accessed a cyclone shelter, varying from 4.3% of ultra-poor households to 13% of wealthy households. Thirty-one percent were refused access to cyclone shelters, with the largest proportions coming from middle and poor households.

POST-DISASTER AND REHABILITATION INTERVENTIONS

The survey also assessed five post-disaster and rehabilitation interventions. These included three types of government recovery schemes: emergency recovery relief (where households received a one-off payment); medium-term relief (where households received 20kg of rice each month); and, thirdly, a longer-term social protection measure which provided households with cash/food in return for participating in public works. We also briefly discuss one rehabilitation intervention, namely embankment reconstruction, and one NGO intervention.

After Aila the government stated that it would provide US\$ 43-72 to all affected households so as to enable them to meet immediate basic needs, with the amount depending on the damage inflicted on housing stock). Almost all households received this relief payment, with little variation across wealth quartiles. However, a higher proportion of wealthy households (19.4%) received more than the stipulated single card (significant at the 99% level). This was because household size was the main criterion for allocating cards - with households with six or more members receiving two and households with twelve or more members receiving three - and the average size of households increases across wealth quartiles (from 4.33 to 5.09). However, more ultra-poor households (8%) were forced to pay bribes compared to other wealth categories (significant at the 90% level) and paid larger bribes than other categories (again significant at the 90% level). Thus, the survey data suggests that the programme was affected by a low level of corruption.

Following the immediate payment of cash transfers to households the government provided 20kg of rice per month for each household affected by Aila. Again, almost all households received this type of recovery relief. The survey data significantly reveals that 99% of households received less rice than they were entitled to, with an average loss of 9% (similar across wealth categories). Households were asked which actor was involved in this form of corruption. Survey data shows that 74% of households affected by this corrupt practice reported that union parishad



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members were responsible, followed by 20% citing union parishad chairmen and 6% naming middlemen.

We now turn to the last post-disaster recovery intervention: a public works programme. As a lot of land was flooded with saline water, reduced labour demand forced many mobile residents to migrate to find work. To tackle this situation the government launched a cash/food-for-work scheme. Overall, 80% of households participated in the scheme at some stage, with a larger proportion of poor and middle households taking part than ultra-poor and wealthy ones (significant at the 99% level). However, the scheme was plagued by discrepancies. Overall, 68% of respondents reported irregularities, particularly with wages being stolen and payments delayed.

We also investigated one major rehabilitation programme: embankment reconstruction. In July 2009 the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management allocated US\$ 16.4 million to the Water Development Board for the repair of vital embankments damaged or destroyed by Aila. The first point to be mentioned is that the Water Development Board failed to commence embankment reconstruction promptly and on 7th April 2010 the Prime Minister criticised officials for this failure. The Prime Minister's dissatisfaction is reflected in survey respondents' perceptions: 82% did not feel that the necessary measures to reconstruct embankments had been taken after Aila and almost 60% were totally dissatisfied with the government's response. The survey data shows that 94% of respondents reported irregularities in the reconstruction process, including the misuse of resources, the low quality of work done and corrupt tendering. However, as this survey data is not based on first-hand experience but on hearsay we need to be cautious about these findings.

We now turn to the final post-disaster intervention: NGO programmes. The survey found that 98% of households received some kind of relief (in cash or in kind) from NGOs (ranging from 100% of ultra-poor households to 94.2% of wealthy households, significant at the 95% level). Overall, 64% mentioned irregularities in NGO operations with wealthy households (80%) reporting the greatest incidence of corrupt practices (significant at the 99% level).

CONCLUSION

Almost every household surveyed reported losses as a result of corrupt practices before or after Aila. Overall, whilst poorer households were affected to a greater extent by corruption in pre-disaster interventions, the incidence of corruption under these schemes was lower than in post-disaster operations, especially food aid distributions and public works. It is significant that wealthy households were to a greater extent affected by corruption after Aila, especially as regards public works and non-governmental interventions. These findings may have some relevance for agencies involved in adaptation. Bangladesh is frequently applauded for efforts to mainstream adaptation into policy, for example by integrating climate concerns into the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and create the funding mechanisms necessary to be able to absorb extensive climate resource flows (such as the National Climate Change Trust Fund and the Climate Resilience Fund). Vibrant civil society organisations in Bangladesh have supported autonomous adaptation initiatives such as community-based adaptation. However, our findings suggest that without increased integrity hard-won funding will not increase the resilience of poor households and communities to the extent that it might. This is because many pilot adaptation projects in Bangladesh mirror the interventions assessed by this research. It may well be the case that experimenting with specific anti-corruption measures in Bangladesh could highlight effective remedies. Whilst this would only constitute a first step, such an analysis might assist development actors in formulating a range of innovative measures in the course of implementing much-needed adaptation programmes in this low-lying and highly vulnerable location.

**Tanvir Mahmud is an IOB alumnus and works for Transparency International Bangladesh.*

The views in this article represent those of the author and not necessarily those of TIB.

***Martin Prowse is an IOB researcher within the Globalisation and Development thematic group. Martin's research focuses on climate change, value chains and mixed methods.*





Joy Karemesi, Kenya,
Governance and Development

JOY KAREMESI, KENYA

“I studied sociology at Moi University, after which I did an internship within the framework of an urban poverty eradication programme in Nairobi. The following year I obtained a postgraduate diploma in leadership and management of the civil society sector, a programme offered as part of the young development scheme of the Aga Khan Foundation, where I also got a job. I developed training modules and coordinated a programme which provided training to deal with HIV and AIDS for nurses from Kenya, Tanzania and Ethiopia. After one year I moved to the Africa Youth Trust, a legislative agency whose main aim is to make young people’s voice heard in parliamentary debates on proposed laws and policies. To this end we prepared a memorandum for the Members of Parliament prior to the discussion of the bills. We worked on three specific areas that are important to our young people, namely employment, access to justice and local government. We also lobbied for amendments to existing laws. We formed three parliamentary working groups, each of which focused on one particular area. The eight youth representatives in each of the groups came from the eight national provinces and were selected during

their local town hall meetings. Since each province knows its own specific context and faces its own challenges these differences were reflected in the youth parliamentary groups. Many discussions followed and we often came up with several potential solutions. The Members of Parliament were open to our suggestions and they often used our documents and our research findings to propose changes. Of course this pleased us, but at the same time it revealed a weakness in our political system. In Kenya, but also in many other African countries, there is a lack of proper research into policy-related issues. Too often our politicians’ main aim is to stay in power and so they focus more on their political campaigns than on bringing about true development. It is thanks to my experience in the Africa Youth Trust that I first became very interested in Development and Government.

I then moved on to education policy. Kenya has free primary education so as to enable all children to go to school, but often the urban poor miss out. This is because they live in so-called “informal” or “illegal” settlements where the government does not offer basic public services. It was my role to lobby for education in these areas. As a campaign manager I



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was involved in the policy part of the programme, working with both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance. That is when I started feeling the need to enhance my understanding of policy-making. Via the website fundsforngos I learned about IOB and it really seemed to meet my needs. IOB not only focuses on theories; it has a more holistic approach to learning, using a very interactive teaching method. We are urged to think critically, to analyse and to connect ideas. We are encouraged to express our views, both to professors and fellow students. I am also learning a lot just by socialising with other students. We all like making our point by giving examples and these exchanges really enrich us. This is the first time that I have worked and lived in such an international environment and I learn every day. Back home I often worked with expats, but they tended to tell us what we had to do. Here we are all equals. We are all representatives of our home countries in a way, but at the same time our views on our own backgrounds have changed because of our interaction with others.

I love being exposed to a wide range of ideas, views, challenges and people. After graduation I would like to work as a programme manager in Kenya and to help to implement the new constitution in the new reality of a devolved system. This involves a variety of areas and techniques. All existing laws have to be amended so as to be in line with the new 2010 constitution. I am expecting a lot from these political changes since they may be able to deal with corruption. The president will become more of a ceremonial figure with less say in the distribution of power and services. This is important because in the past our presidents favoured their own ethnic region over others, which fuelled poverty, corruption and ethnic division. This historical ethnic injustice has to be addressed before we can tackle poverty and other development issues. I am optimistic; I do believe that Kenya will be able to overcome its problems. It will take some time and also courage but Kenyans are definitely courageous people.”



JEAN CLAUDE KAYINGA

“I studied agricultural economics and agro business at the National University of Rwanda. After my graduation I worked as a consultant for FAO and was involved in a project aimed at building an agricultural value chain for agricultural commodities with a high potential to increase income for small farmers. After one year I started my current career, first as a monitoring and evaluation officer. My first job concerned a project called PPMER, which was run by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The project objective was the promotion of small and medium-sized enterprises in rural areas. About 80 percent of Rwanda’s population is involved in agriculture; the aim was therefore to encourage off-farm activities for rural people so as to enable them to generate more income and become less dependent on agriculture. We developed their skills and helped them to set up their own businesses and deal with financial issues. We also trained members of cooperatives in entrepreneurship so as to provide them with some business sense in their daily activities. In addition, the people who had been trained started training others. The project turned out to be a great help for many people in rural areas. In my second job I worked for the Ministry of Finance and Economics, where I was the monitoring and evaluation expert for the agricultural sector, one of the key sectors within the EDPRS (Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy). I had to deal with a lot of stakeholders all over the country and monitor agricultural performance. Even though I was in charge of agricultural issues and my office was in the Ministry of Agriculture, I was accountable to the Ministry of Finance and Economics because the latter is the leading ministry for all sectors in EDPRS.

Through a friend I got to know about IOB. I felt that the courses would be relevant to the work that I do and provide me with more expertise in my chosen career. My profile fulfilled the criteria and I was given a scholarship by BTC. The programme has more than met my expectations. In Rwanda, as in many African countries, we lack experienced research staff in government institutions at the levels at which policies are made. Being at IOB has broadened my mind: I now take a more global view and can critically analyse many policies in developing countries. Being part of a multinational environment has made me more aware



Jean Claude Kayinga,
Rwanda, Development
Evaluation and Management

of the unique characteristics of Rwanda, but also of the similarities with other countries. Before I came here I did not have many opportunities to make comparisons, but now I understand better why some policies work in certain contexts whereas others fail. I find it very enriching to be able to compare differing ideas on development held by a wide range of authors and also by fellow students. As a result I have been able to fine-tune my own views on the development needs of my own country.

For me this opportunity to exchange ideas is the most enriching aspect of my studies at IOB. Professors present a wide range of views and perspectives, without imposing 'the truth' upon us. We discuss these views in class in a critical and research-based way and we also learn how to deal with criticism. After all, there is more than one way of looking at a problem. There is no exhaustive list of steps to be followed in order to achieve development. For example, in the courses of Professors Molenaers and Verpoorten, we questioned the Western assumption that democracy ultimately leads to economic growth. This view has been proven wrong, although I personally do think that the two should go hand in hand.

In Rwanda we have made huge economic progress, but we still need to do a lot of work as regards freedom of speech. Some policies simply do not work because they are imposed upon people without input on their part. Civil society is not sufficiently empowered and organised to be able to challenge government

policies which are incompatible with the people's best interests. Our neighbouring countries Uganda, Tanzania and Burundi are doing better than we are. The reason for our weak civil society is to be found in our recent history: the Genocide has made the country very sensitive to any kind of disturbance at the level of ordinary people and civil society.

One problem that is common to many African governments is the lack of proper research on which to base policies. They tend to follow a blueprint, often under pressure of the WB or IMF or other donors, without taking the particular country's reality into account. Their only worry is how to stay in power and consequently there is neither time nor money for proper research. Actually, IOB opened my eyes to the importance of research and I am contemplating pursuing an academic career. However, researchers need freedom in order to collect evidence, think critically and publish their findings without risking their jobs. So far I have truly enjoyed the research work that I have undertaken in the course of this academic year for my 'end of module papers'. My dissertation will be on agricultural policy in Rwanda. I shall assess why farmers perceive the mono-cropping policy as one which compromises their interests. The government imposes mono-cropping and regional specialisation upon farmers based on the idea that as a result productivity will increase. But is this really the case? I shall compare Rwanda's competitiveness regarding such selected crops with that of neighbouring countries. After all, we can all learn from each other."



IOB Student Committee 2011/2012: Main Activities



It was to the elegant medieval city of Bruges in early October 2011 that we, the IOB Master Class of 2011/2012, travelled for the 'kick-off weekend' and where we elected our representatives on the student committee. Since then the committee has organised various activities which have enabled students of the three Master programmes to meet and get to know each other and also to travel and learn together.

Despite the demanding nature of the academic courses IOB students have always enthusiastically attended and actively participated in all the activities that the committee has organised. It has always been a great pleasure to see everyone working together to make every new event a success.

Here are the main activities organised by the committee this year:



THE COLOGNE CHRISTMAS MARKET TRIP:

Our first major activity was the Cologne Christmas Market trip. During this one-day trip students visited the traditional Christmas market, walked around the city and learned more about a European country that many had always wanted to know more about. For most students Cologne was the first European city outside Belgium that they had visited since enrolling at IOB.

THE BIRTHDAY PARTIES:

The committee has so far organised five of the six planned student birthday parties. All of these were held at the International Student House (ITBS). The parties were roughly scheduled every two

months and they were mostly supported by student contributions. As was the case for most activities student volunteers worked together with members of the committee, which ensured that each party was different. As from the end of Module I the birthday parties became joint activities and as such they offered students from all three Master programmes the opportunity to meet each other.



THE MULTICULTURAL DINNER:

This year IOB students celebrated the end of the third Module with a special event. They represented their countries and regions by preparing traditional dishes from their own cultures and sharing them with the other students, who were very eager to learn more



about all the wonderful delicacies they had tasted. The event truly reflected the rich cultural diversity which characterises IOB.



Students attended the colloquium, visited the city and enjoyed the nearby beach.



CINEMA MUNDUS:

Cinema Mundus was an initiative of members of the student committee and a number of other IOB students who together organised monthly projections of alternative and independent political documentaries and films for IOB and non-IOB students at the University of Antwerp.

Cinema Mundus acted as a local branch of Cinema Politica (CP), the largest volunteer-run, community and campus-based documentary-screening network in the world.

THE WEEKLY FOOTBALL MATCH:

The student committee along with student volunteers organised a weekly IOB football match at the University of Antwerp. In the spring semester this popular activity took place in the open air.



TRIP TO THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL STUDIES IN THE HAGUE:

Members of the student committee also organised a one-day trip to The Hague, where the International Institute of Social Studies hosted the Critical Agrarian Studies Colloquium on "Global Land Grabbing".

IOB AND EDUCATION BOARD MEETINGS:

The two members of the student committee who were also the student representatives on the IOB and Education Boards actively participated in the Board meetings. The student representatives regularly reported back to other members of the student committee and to the student body in general on any important student-related issues. During the meetings the representatives also voted on the various issues discussed. IOB students were also invited to raise any issues concerning their needs and demands with their representatives, who subsequently had the opportunity to bring these issues to the table in the course of the IOB and Education Board meetings.

FUTURE ACTIVITIES:

Two more major activities have been scheduled for this academic year. The first is another trip to The Hague and the second is the post-graduation ceremony party, which will also provide an opportunity to welcome the new students who will attend IOB in the academic year 2012/2013.

SUPPORT FROM IOB:

On behalf of the student committee and all IOB students I should like to thank all IOB staff and professors for their support. Our very special thanks must go to Mrs. Greet Annaert, who was always there to offer much-appreciated advice and encouragement when we were organising our activities.

Khalil Bitar, *President of the Student Committee*
July 2012



Building research capacity in the South

Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan was invited by IOB and VLIRUOS to give a talk on the challenges faced by social researchers in Africa at an e-seminar. The seminar 'Building Research Capacity in the South: Challenges and Experiences' was held on May 29th. Olivier de Sardan is a professor at the 'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales' in France and a researcher at LASDEL in Niger.

CHALLENGES TO RESEARCH PERFORMANCE

Professor Olivier de Sardan raised the question as to why the quality of social science research in many African countries is often rather poor and why only very few African scholars in social studies are able to publish in high-ranking academic publications. He then went on to explain how social science research in developing countries suffers from a number of shortcomings, not least the ubiquitous presence of consultancies which are financed by development agencies and tend to monopolise researchers. Before elaborating on the negative impact of consultancies on social sciences in Africa, Professor Olivier de Sardan gave a brief overview of further six reasons for this poor academic performance:

Firstly, there is a severe lack of resources to promote research in terms of finance, technology and assistance. Secondly, there is no strong research policy, either at the political or the academic level. Thirdly, North-South academic cooperation is often based on an unequal relationship in which African scholars are sometimes given the task of 'harvesting' data, without really having a say in the research process itself. Fourthly, there has been a dramatic decrease in the number of research scholarships available to African students in the North. Fifthly, the quality of the overall educational system in many African countries has been declining. Sixthly, there are the negative effects of the internal brain drain, whereby scholars easily leave their academic positions for jobs as consultants or politicians.

NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF CONSULTANCY ON RESEARCH

As already mentioned, Professor Olivier de Sardan focuses mainly on the negative effects of consultancy on the quality of social research in Africa. On the other hand, he does recognise the positive effects

of consultancy, such as the tremendous increase in income for scholars working as consultants (though local African consultants are paid less than their foreign counterparts) and the recognition of the importance of social studies. However, the drawbacks of consultancy are much higher. Professor Olivier de Sardan gives a number of negative effects of consultancy on social sciences, such as 1) a decrease in the quality of social sciences education, 2) less time devoted by scholars to updating their knowledge, thus contributing to a lack of experts, 3) less academic cooperation since colleagues can suddenly become competitors in the consultancy market, and 4) a dramatic loss of research quality.

The last of these reasons, namely the loss of research quality, can be explained by the fact that consultants lose their academic independence and freedom since the rules governing research are subject to the rules of the consultancy market. The funder determines the research topic as well as the methodology and deadline, which almost always results in too little fieldwork time and thus a severe lack of research data. Moreover, unlike academic research papers, consultancy reports do not respect citation norms, nor do they acknowledge the importance of bibliographical research. Since these reports are assessed by the funding institution and not by peers, consultants tend to feel under pressure to self-censor their findings. As a result, many African researchers start to cut corners, which affects their work quality. Research becomes perceived as a commodity.

HOW CAN THE DANGERS OF CONSULTANCY BE AVOIDED AND ACADEMIC CAPACITY BE STRENGTHENED?

As shown above, the rules of the game in consultancy are quite different from those in research, but the distinction is often blurred in practice. The rise

of consultancies has occurred at the expense of proper research, which has increasingly diverged from international standards. Good consultancy work is of course needed, but there is also a need for better social science academics because weaker researchers result in weaker consultants.

Professor Olivier de Sardan refers to LASDEL (www.lasdel.ne) as an example of an African initiative to promote local social research and enhance the quality of local researchers. LASDEL was created in 2001 in Niamey and is based in both Niger and Benin. It is a cooperative network of social science scholars, currently involving 26 researchers, and is funded by national and international development institutions. It is horizontally structured and has an international research board. It focuses on fundamental scientific research in social studies and anthropology and focuses on a range of research topics such as health, local power, justice, decentralisation, food aid, corruption, real estate, and so on. LASDEL also offers short courses, such as the Summer University, which has already attracted 130 African PhD students from all over the continent.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM LASDEL

Although Professor Olivier de Sardan stresses the fact that LASDEL is just an example and should not be taken as the one and only model possible, he does emphasise a number of principles that have made this project possible. Firstly, the LASDEL researchers share their knowledge and experience with each other; several researchers work together on particular topics. Secondly, LASDEL is not dependent on one financial source, but is funded by several development and research entities. By diversifying funding LASDEL tries to avoid 'traditional' patron-client relations. Thirdly, LASDEL values confidence and transparency, also with regard to research budgets. Fourthly, LASDEL, which does not pay its researchers a salary, nevertheless offers them opportunities to obtain fees via the research programmes they work on, and they have access to assistants and technological support. Fifthly, LASDEL recruits its researchers on the basis of competence, not networking contacts. Sixthly, its research topics are both scientifically and societally

relevant thus triggering both academic and public debate. All the topics covered are socially and politically important and the knowledge produced should help to bring about changes and reforms, but the topics are always examined in a research mode. This means that the researchers always try to understand, without judging or consulting. An example is a recent research project on everyday corruption, a highly relevant issue in many African societies. LASDEL researchers tried to understand from an anthropological point of view why civil servants act in a corrupt way, without expressing judgment. As a result, LASDEL was even asked to present its research to official bodies in Nigeria, thus having an impact at both the academic and the societal levels.

Professor Olivier de Sardan stresses the importance of academic freedom. By having access to multiple financial resources and promoting academic cooperation based on equality, LASDEL is able to choose its own research topics and methodologies. LASDEL aims to have long-term contracts (minimum 3 years), which obviously enhances research quality; it also provides PhD grants. As a result of its independence, LASDEL is not at the beck and call of its financial sponsors, but is accountable to external audits and to the scientific board, which again helps to ensure critical and independent research.

Professor Olivier de Sardan also acknowledges the challenges faced by LASDEL, such as the fact that there is no permanent funding, that its researchers are often late in submitting their reports and, what is more serious, that most of its senior researchers leave at some point for high-ranking jobs in politics. The latter is the main challenge all over Africa. Although he hopes that initiatives such as LASDEL can provide added value for social science research in Africa, he also wonders how Africa will be able to increase its level of qualitative social science research in a permanent way in a context in which its senior researchers all too frequently leave the academic scene.



Interview with Quang Ngoc Nguyen, winner of the 2012 IOB alumni seminar



Quang Ngoc Nguyen

ETC: Quang, what is your professional background?

I have almost 15 years of experience in community development, with a focus on promoting sustainable resource management. I have worked in this field as a project manager, a consultant and a researcher. At the moment I am doing my PhD research on community participation in protected area management at the University of Leuven.

ETC: Why did you choose to do research into this topic?

I have worked for almost fifteen years in the field of natural resource management and I have witnessed a considerable difference between what is said in the participatory projects/programmes and what is actually implemented in the field. The question that I always ask myself is whether participatory projects can really help reduce poverty since poverty is still prevalent despite the huge investment in so many projects and programmes. When I started studying in Antwerp and later in Leuven the discussions on the rhetoric and reality of participation were eye-opening. Participation is constrained by power relations. Many of the empirical discussions were relevant to my own research area, which is the Vietnamese Ngoc Son – Ngo Luong Nature

Reserve. I therefore decided to focus on this topic – participation and power relations in natural resource management.

ETC: Have your studies at IOB helped you to pursue further research? If so, how?

Yes, they have really helped me. I was very much inspired by the courses of Professors Bastiaensen, de Herdt, Holvoet and Molenaers. In their courses the discussions on institutions really attracted my attention. Professor Bastiaensen was the first to help me understand the concept of ‘tragedy of the commons’ and he also encouraged me to examine this topic in greater depth in my Master’s thesis. I can safely say that the empirical part was based on my own experience and observation, but the theoretical framework was solidly grounded in what I had learned at IOB.

ETC: How do you expect your research to be societally relevant?

The first challenge I faced when I decided to pursue my PhD was how (partially) to leave aside my role as an activist and focus more on my role as a researcher. I am currently still trying to find a way to cope with this ‘tragedy’. However, all the issues and topics which I discuss in my research are drawn from the field, more specifically the Ngoc Son – Ngo Luong Nature Reserve. I lived there for almost 13 years and I was adopted as the son of one of the Muong ethnic households. Every issue I deal with in my research reflects the many discussions I took part in within the Nature Reserve.

Vietnam is one of the countries that will be most affected by climate change, which is why so much effort goes into preparing to cope with its effects. Moreover, the Vietnamese Government is also promoting decentralisation via greater involvement of civil society in decision-making. All of this explains why the discussion of participation and power relation is a key topic at various national and international meetings that are being held, including the 9th Donor Consultative meeting in Da Nang

province in Vietnam and the UNDP and the Ministry of Agricultural Development meeting in March 2012.

EtC: You are combining a PhD with consultancy work. How does it feel to combine the two? What are the differences between them?

First, I must say it is a difficult combination. I used to think - and I believe many PhD students do - that PhD work requires full-time concentration on the research topic. I tried to achieve this when I embarked on my PhD, but to little avail. Through my consultancy work I can be an activist and my research can result in more practical outcomes. Since I want to continue being an activist in the future I am afraid that too much theorising will drain my energy and cut me off from my contacts, from the everyday reality in the field, and even weaken my special interest in community development. I therefore decided to combine part-time PhD research, which is mainly theoretical, with part-time consultancy work, which is much more practical.

I am not trying to argue in favour of doing consultancy work while also being involved in PhD research. This kind of combination should be case-specific and is not possible for everyone. I accept consultancy work that is relevant to my PhD research and my PhD research helps me to make suggestions and recommendations in my consultancy work. I would call this a practical application of my PhD research.

EtC: What are your future professional aspirations?

I see myself continuing to be an activist in community development, focused on sustainable resource management in the future. But instead of being involved in implementation as before, I want to be able to make direct use of the power of knowledge (as Michel Foucault said: "Power is Knowledge") in order to help increase both the individual and the institutional capacity of local actors so as to enable these groups to fight poverty in a sustainable way.

I would like to broaden my experience by expanding my work to include all of the South East Asia region.

EtC: You also have experience in ecotourism. Do you think ecotourism can play a role in local development and in protecting local resources? If so, how?

These days ecotourism is no longer a minor sector within the tourism industry. Tourists now demand more 'green and indigenous elements'. A simple search via Google shows that ecotourism has become a buzzword over the past five years. Ecotourism now generates huge financial resources. Theoretically, local people will benefit from ecotourism since they provide the accommodation, food, human resources and services. Also, nature and culture in the host countries will be protected in order to attract more tourists in a sustainable way. However, as is often the case, actual practice is very different from the rhetoric. Although they are the main actors in the ecotourism value chain local people have limited participation in and understanding of this value chain. Tour operators have the advantage of access to information and consequently they tend to dominate the value chain by extending their services, for example, by taking their own food to the local community, lowering the prices of local services, receiving commissions on local services and so on. In the end the benefits for the local community are actually very limited. As a result they are no longer interested in re-investing so as to keep services up to standard or to protect nature.

A lot of issues should be addressed in order to make ecotourism really beneficial to the poor. On the one hand, the soft skills (such as awareness-raising and capacity-building) of local communities need to be enhanced so as to make them more competitive. They should, for example, be able to establish direct contact with tourists instead of working via tour operators. On the other hand, macro policy needs to address the importance of inter-disciplinary management and cooperation between the tourism sector and the forest management sector. Some of the resources generated by ecotourism must be invested in protecting nature because only then can sustainable protection of our natural resources be guaranteed.





MEET AND GREET

Meet-and-greet sessions are organised when an IOB staff member is visiting a country where many IOB alumni reside. The meet-and-greet session is hosted by an IOB professor and is open to all IOB alumni living or working in the area. IOB will cover the costs of the gathering (drinks) and will bring some promotion/information material. Unfortunately it is not possible to reimburse transportation costs to and from the meet-and-greet session.

Two more meet-and-greet sessions were organized a few months ago. On April 11th Professor Marijke Verpoorten hosted a session in Cotonou, Benin and on April 19th Professor Danny Cassimon hosted one in Nairobi, Kenya.



LOOKING FOR SOMEONE?

IOB recently launched its own IOB alumni community. The Alumni Community is the online meeting place for the over 800 IOB alumni and IOB staff. The community's site is secured with a password. Only IOB alumni and staff are granted access.

What is in it for you?

- You can update your own personal information.
- You can contact other IOB alumni (name, nationality and email address are made public)
- You can request to receive the IOB newsletter or Exchange to Change
- You can use the alumni community site to access e-learning opportunities

If you would like to register simply surf to <http://alumniob.ua.ac.be> or send an e-mail to alumni_iob@ua.ac.be

E-LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

IOB students have a particular profile. Most of them come from other continents and have already been professionally active when they come to IOB to study. Because of the considerable physical

distance between IOB and its candidates/alumni and the latter's busy schedules time has to be spent very rationally, which is why e-learning and blended learning have such great potential. IOB will therefore offer e-learning services to supplement, reinforce and follow-up on the learning process here at IOB by means of:

pre-courses

(for selected candidates before they arrive in Antwerp to study at IOB)



e-seminars

(for IOB students and alumni to tune in to interesting seminars organised at IOB)

follow-up courses

(for IOB alumni wanting to refresh what they previously studied at IOB)

As we have only just started to experiment with e-learning, we would really value your opinion with regard to the improvement of our initiatives or the development of potential complementary activities. We very much hope that you will participate in the evaluations!

PROMOTING IOB'S EDUCATIONAL OFFER

Our alumni are indispensable in helping us to make our educational programmes better known to potential applicants in their own countries or fields of expertise! A promotion package (flyers, brochures & gadgets) is available to be sent to you if you would like to distribute information about IOB in your universities, at international conferences, and so on.

If you would like to have a promotion package sent to you please contact alumni_iob@ua.ac.be.

FACILITATING IOB STUDENTS' FIELDWORK

Many IOB students undertake fieldwork while preparing their Master's thesis. Some students could, however, do with a little help with, for example, conducting research in a country that is not their own or setting up a comparative study involving with which they themselves are not all that familiar.

If you feel like facilitating this kind of research please contact alumni_iob@ua.ac.be.

FEELING INSPIRED?

Would you like to share an experience, your research findings or happy news with other alumni? If so, why not consider contributing to the Exchange to Change alumni newsletter?

Please contact eva.vergaelen@hotmail.com.

Or perhaps you have a suggestion for an alumni activity? Just let us know at alumni_iob@ua.ac.be.



IOB

Institute of
Development Policy and
Management
University of Antwerp

Postal address:

Prinsstraat 13
B-2000 Antwerpen
Belgium

Visiting address:

Lange Sint Annastraat 7
B-2000 Antwerpen
Belgium

Tel: +32 (0)3 265 57 70

Fax: +32 (0)3 265 57 71

E-mail: dev@ua.ac.be

Website:

<http://www.ua.ac.be/iob>

Editor: Eva Vergaelen,
eva_vergaelen@hotmail.com

Publisher: Robrecht Renard

Layout: An Degryse



INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPMENT
POLICY AND MANAGEMENT

