International Development Studies

Theories and Methods in Research and Practice

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Andy Sumner

Fellow, Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, UK.

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Michael Tribe

Honorary Visiting Senior Research Fellow, Bradford Centre for International Development, University of Bradford, and Teaching Assistant, Department of Economics, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow

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List of acronyms

BCE	Before the Common Era (equivalent to BC – Before Christ)
BRICET	Brazil, Russia, India, China, Eastern Europe and Turkey
CDF	Comprehensive Development Framework
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CPIA	Country Policy and Institutional Assessment
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DARG	Developing Areas Research Group (of the UK Royal Geographical Society)
DFID (or DfID)	Department for International Development (UK)
DS	Development Studies
DSA	Development Studies Association (UK and Ireland)
EADI	European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
G77	Group of 77
GDI	Gender Development Index
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEM	Gender Empowerment Measure
GIC	Ghana Investments Centre
GTZ	German Technical Assistance (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH
HDI	Human Development Index
HDR	Human Development Report
HPI	Human Poverty Index (HPI-1 for developing/low income countries and HPI-2 for industrialized countries)
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Country
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired ImmunoDeficiency Syndrome
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (the World Bank)
IDTs	International Development Targets (see MDGs)

IFI	International Financial Institutions (mainly the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund)
ILO	International Labour Office (or Organization)
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRDP	Integrated Rural Development Project
LDC	Less Developed Country
LIC	Low Income Country
LICUS	Low Income Country Under Stress
LLDC	Land-Locked Developing Country
LMC	Lower Middle Income Country
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MIC	Middle Income Country
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NIC	Newly Industrializing Country
NIEO	New International Economic Order
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
ODI	Overseas Development Institute (London)
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OED	Operations Evaluation Department (of the World Bank)
OXFAM	Oxford Committee for Famine Relief
PPA	Participatory Poverty Assessment
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PRSPs	Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
PSA	Public Service Agreement (UK HM Government)
PSIA	Policy and Social Impact Analysis
RAB	Resource Accounts Budgeting (UK HM Government)
RBM	Results Based Management
RCPLAN	Resource Centres for Participatory Learning and Action Network
ROAMEF	Rationale, Objectives, Appraisal, Monitoring, Evaluation, Feedback (UK HM Treasury Green Book)
RRA	Rapid Rural Appraisal
SAPs	Structural Adjustment Programmes
SIGMA	Support for Improvement in Governance and Management (Joint programme of the OECD and EU)
SWAP	Sector Wide Approach
TNCs	Transnational Corporations
UK	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
UMC	Upper Middle Income Country
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
UNU – WIDER	United Nations University – World Institute for Development Economics Research

USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WDR	World Development Report
WTO	World Trade Organization

INTRODUCTION

Development Studies is an unusual enterprise (Corbridge, 2005: 1).

I.1. WHAT IS THIS BOOK ABOUT?

This book is about research and knowledge in 'development studies' (DS) or 'international development'.[1] Over the last 10–15 years there has been an expansion of interest in the subject and there are now significantly more taught courses focused on DS in schools and universities at various levels. However, over the same period, DS has faced a series of sustained critiques about its essential nature and its research quality and rigour. This has led to soul-searching within DS and in this book we are searching for answers to two overriding questions:

i. What is development studies? (i.e. what is its focus, aim and approach?)
ii. What constitutes rigorous research in development studies? (i.e. what are the characteristics of 'high quality' development research?)

The overall aim of this book is to address these two questions. The first question is about the distinctive features of DS as a field of study and of enquiry. The second question is about the range of analytical tools and approaches available at each stage of the research process, and how to 'build' credible or defensible research with which to inform policy and practice. However, this is not a book that attempts 'closure' (by which we mean *final* answers). Rather the opposite applies: we aim to contribute to ongoing discussion which we hope and expect will continue. We will seek to identify central questions and to provide possible pathways which will aim to provide further illumination.

One of the problems which we have faced in writing this book is that of how to refer to the parts of the world which are the main subject of DS. In many respects, as we argue in Chapter 1, DS is about 'development' (understood to a large extent as 'change') in the poorer countries of the world, but the concepts and approaches to the study of change in these countries are also relevant to higher- and middle-income countries. For consistency in this book we refer to 'developing countries' when relating to the 'poorer' countries and to 'industrialized countries' when relating to higher-income countries. This is not because we are happy with these particular terms

(we discuss this in more detail in Chapter 1) but rather because we find other terms to be less satisfactory. In the contemporary world of the early twenty-first century there are many other terms which could be used to describe specific groups of countries with common basic characteristics, but we have tried to err in the direction of simplicity.

Another definitional question which requires clarification is 'what is meant by rigorous (or systematic) research (or study)'? We expand on this issue at some length in Chapter 5, but because we have used the words 'rigorous' and 'systematic' quite liberally it is appropriate to attempt definitions in this Introduction. In essence, the two words are used interchangeably to a large extent, and the meaning we take is closely related to two particular dimensions.[2] The first relates to approaching research, investigation or study using a number of discrete stages which follow a logical sequence – although a process of iteration may involve moving back and forth between stages as the research progresses. This 'process' has been placed in the context of a 'research cycle' and is discussed in Section 5.2a of Chapter 5, and the first essential stage is the clarification or definition of the 'research problem'. The second dimension consists of the utilization of appropriate methodology, methods and techniques, and data/information (including 'transparent' sources) within the research process. If the research, investigation or study is undertaken systematically the conclusions, results or outcomes will follow logically.

One of our major concerns in this book is to emphasize that 'research' (which we take to include not only academic research but also policy-related research, investigation and evaluation) and research methods are extremely relevant to development practice and to development practitioners. While some of the discussion about the nature of 'scientific' enquiry might initially appear remote from practical policy concerns, the overall approach of the book has attempted to focus on 'practice' as well as on more 'academic' activity.

Finally, there is an issue over the extent to which DS works mainly within the Social Sciences. One recurring question throughout this book is about the degree to which undertaking academic and policy-related research, investigation and studies in DS involves issues distinct from those associated with social science research, both generally and in industrialized country settings. We have attempted to address this question, but in places there is an obvious significant overlap between developing country and industrialized country method and practice. Another recurring question is about the extent to which the cross-disciplinarity of DS extends beyond the social sciences – the answer to this question must be 'quite a long way'. Understanding of agricultural, environmental and health-related research topics – to name but three – clearly involves the need for inputs from researchers with technical knowledge, a judgement which applies in both developing and industrialized countries. This means that the cross-disciplinary nature of DS must extend beyond the social sciences, and more detailed discussion may be found in Sections 3.3 and 3.4 of Chapter 3.

I.2. WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?

This book is primarily intended for researchers (in both academic and practical contexts) and postgraduate students of DS. This is intended to include practitioners within 'international development' such as policy makers, those working in non-governmental organizations (NGOs), donor agencies and consultants who should find the book informative for the design, commissioning and review of research which are to inform decision-making.

One of the important features of the 'development community' is the inclusion of non-academic practitioners. Although it would be convenient if it was possible to make a clear distinction between those in the more academic/intellectual camp and those in a more practice-based camp (see Table I.1); in fact the borders between the two camps are actually highly 'porous'.[3] There is much crossing of the 'border' between the camps in both directions within any particular time period and over individuals' career paths (Bernstein, 2005). In fact, Woolcock (2007: 57) speaks of the DS community as composed of 'practical thinkers' and 'reflective doers' and argues students need to acquire three core competencies that arise from this which are the academic and non-academic skills of,

> 'detectives' (data collection, analysis and interpretation), 'translators' (reframing given ideas for diverse groups) and 'diplomats' (negotiation, conflict mediation, deal making) (ibid., 55).

The inclusion of non-academicians is a sign of the strength of the 'development community' in terms of 'getting research into practice'. However, the lack of a clear

Table I.1   A Stylized Depiction of the 'Development Community'

Academic/research-based group	Practice/policy-based group

• Researchers in universities, institutes and think tanks in the 'South' and 'North';
 • Research staff of Civil Society Organizations in the 'South' and 'North' such as trade unions, NGOs, voluntary bodies, church/religious groups, other pressure groups/campaigning bodies and the private sector including international business;
 • Researchers in governments and other public bodies in the 'South' and 'North' at various levels including bi-lateral donor agencies such as DfID, DANIDA, GTZ and USAID.
 • Research staff of supra-national agencies:
   - Multi-lateral agencies such as the IMF, World Bank and its subsidiaries; UNDP, UNICEF, FAO, ILO, UNCTAD and WTO.
	• Operational staff of Civil Society Organizations in the 'South' and 'North' such as trade unions, NGOs, voluntary bodies, church/religious groups, other pressure groups/campaigning bodies and the private sector including international business;
	 • Those working in the Media – in the 'South' and 'North';
	 • Politicians *and* bureaucrats in governments and other public bodies in the 'South' and 'North' at various levels including bi-lateral donor agencies such as DfID, DANIDA, GTZ and USAID.
	 • Operational staff of supra-national agencies:
	   - Multi-lateral agencies such as the IMF, World Bank and its subsidiaries; UNDP, UNICEF, FAO, ILO, UNCTAD and WTO.

distinction between research and practice has been one of the factors leading to a questioning of the 'rigour' of DS research. As Molteberg and Bergstrøm observe, 'the inclusion of non-academicians in the discourse renders the scientific status of Development Studies as ambiguous in the eyes of many academicians' (2000: 8). Also, the applied nature of much research in DS has led to a questioning of 'rigour' in DS due in part to the normative nature of any research that seeks to 'make a difference'. Central themes of this book are therefore the nature of DS, of 'rigorous' research and of the link between research and practice. The book reflects the elements of DS with a practical point of departure: the aim to use knowledge as a basis for societal change. This point of departure raises numerous ethical questions including whose knowledge 'counts', how to deal with conflicting claims to 'knowledge', recognition of bias and how values and assumptions shape what we think we 'know'. In short, the contested nature of 'knowledge' and of 'development' themselves.

The 'positionality' of this book also requires some explanation. Its origins lie, to a considerable extent, in two conference papers written in 2004 (Sumner and Tribe, 2004; Tribe and Sumner, 2004) which focus on the nature of DS and on issues associated with methodology and rigour in DS. We felt that although a considerable literature on research methodology, methods and techniques already existed, there was a gap relating to the precise clarification of what the subject DS consists of, and of distinctive features of academic and policy-related research in DS. The publishers of this book have themselves contributed significantly to the literature on research methods (Sage, 2007), and a recent book edited by Desai and Potter (2006) reviews – in a number of comparatively brief chapters – a range of specific issues associated with DS research. However, our aim in writing this book has been to provide both a broad overview of research and practice in DS and a more detailed discussion of methodological and epistemological issues linking DS to what we have termed 'constituent disciplines'.

I.3. WHO ARE THE AUTHORS?

One issue for development researchers to consider individually and collectively is that of 'positionality' or 'situationality'. By this we mean individual and group backgrounds or 'identities' (our race, gender, age, nationality, social and economic status, and other characteristics) which directly and indirectly influence our experiences, values, preconceptions, ideology, interpretations and research. For example, Haddad explains that:

> As an economist I have a taught tendency to the technocratic and to avoid messy reality, so look out for occasional apolitical and ahistorical perspectives. Concerns with social justice run deep in my psyche — so watch out for any downplaying of growth and efficiency (2006: 2).

'Positionality' goes to the heart of many of the criticisms of DS: it has often been suggested that DS imposes its – principally western or local elite – ideas on 'the Other'

(the poor and marginalized). The 'positionality' or 'situationality' of the authors of this book is affected by their backgrounds in Economics (like Haddad) but both have a strong interest in cross-disciplinary research. It is widely argued that DS is, or should be, cross-disciplinary, and this book takes this position. Additionally, both of the authors are British, work within UK institutions and are influenced, as much of DS is, by the context of a post-colonial world. We are both male so that our understanding of one fundamental dimension of inequality – gender – is influenced by that. In sum, it can be made clear that we recognize that our backgrounds and experiences inevitably shape our writing. Perhaps the most important issue is that our writing should be reflective, open, with explicit recognition of our limitations.[4]

I.4. HOW IS THE BOOK STRUCTURED?

This book has seven substantive chapters following this Introduction. Each chapter begins with an introductory discussion of key themes and questions drawn from illustrative opening quotations. The structure of the book utilizes and adapts Bevan's (2006: 7–12) 'Foundations of Knowledge Framework' (see Table I.2). This is a 'roadmap' for the book and provides a useful 'check-list' for thinking about 'knowledge' and its generation.

Chapter 1 discusses the focus of DS – the contested nature of 'development' itself. Chapter 2 addresses the purpose of DS – the normative point of departure and issues it raises. Chapter 3 is concerned with the question of what can we 'know' and how we can 'know' it in DS and we discuss differing perspectives on what constitutes legitimate academic goals, practices and claims to 'knowledge'. Chapter 4 looks at the 'big picture' in DS, in terms of theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Chapter 5 is about rigour, methodology and methods in DS, exploring the extent to which it is possible to answer the question what is 'really' happening? Chapter 6 is concerned with the link between research and practice in DS. Finally, Chapter 7 provides some conclusions and looks to the future.

Table I.2   Bevan's 'Foundations of Knowledge Framework'

1. The focus, domain, or problematic of study: what exactly are we interested in?	See Chapter 1
2. Values/standpoints/ideology: why are we interested?	See Chapter 2
3. Ontology and epistemology: what is the world assumed to be like? How can the world be known about?	See Chapter 3
4. Theories/conceptual frameworks and models: how can we explain and understand our object of study?	See Chapter 4
5. Research strategies, methodologies, research instruments, modes of analysis and empirical conclusions: how can we establish what is 'really' happening? What (kinds of) conclusions can we draw from our research?	See Chapter 5
6. Rhetoric and praxis: how are methods and techniques used and adapted within DS practice? How are DS research approaches relevant for DS practitioners?	See Chapter 6

Source: Adapted from Bevan (2005: 7–12).