

Shifts to Global Development: is this a reframing of power, agency and progress?

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Abstract: This special section on Global Development has been developed from a conference roundtable event run by the Development Geographies Research Group of the Royal Geographical Society. In this special section, we (some of the committee) introduce the four papers and their critical contributions to emerging debates. These extend early work on how the 'global' is being made, focusing on the projects of multilateral development agencies and state institutions to examine how (and whether) the rebranding of 'International Development' as 'Global Development' constitutes a shift in thinking and practice. Together, the papers draw our attention to the considerable opportunities and implications that this reframing offers, whilst highlighting that critical attention is required as to how that framing is deployed and by whom. They reveal disparity between Global Development as a much-needed reframing of power, agency and progress and Global Development as produced by mainstream development actors and interventions, necessitating more critical research into how this normative agenda is adopted and enacted in dominant policy and practice.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Despite a historic focus on particular regions of the World (the ‘third world’, the ‘developing world’ and the ‘Global South’), international development has long been interrogated by critical geographers as a project underpinned by global dynamics of power, representation, mobility and capital. The post-2015 moment, however, has seen a significant shift in how multilateral, mainstream actors are uncritically framing and re-branding International Development as ‘Global Development’. For instance, in 2015, both the United Nations (UN) and the World Bank reframed their work as ‘Global’ - evident in the UN’s Agenda 2030 and related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as the 2015 *World Bank Global Monitoring Report* . Going beyond the rise of South-South aid flows and partnerships (Mawdsley 2017), ‘Global Development’ re-frames development agendas to include the Global North and cast development challenges as shared. In this introduction to this Area special section on Global Development, we set out how our collection of papers engage with these shifts and what they contribute to emerging academic debates on the new ‘where’ of development (Horner and Hulme 2019).

2 RE-PLACING DEVELOPMENT?

Partly, shifts in the language and orientation of mainstream development respond to a shifting global landscape in which inequality, as one key example, does not sit neatly within the Global South. Rather, the inequality map is being redrawn in light of the pronounced inequalities that are present within countries of both the North and the South (Alemany 2019). These shifts also respond to the contemporary global challenge of climate change and

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push for socio-environmental change in the Global North. For the academic institutions that have rebranded themselves from International to Global Development, this renaming marks their acknowledgement that development issues, such as poverty, inequality, gender and migration, work across North and South, as well as that academic, policy and development institutions are increasingly global in their composition and outlook. In this iteration, the shift to 'Global Development' changes the implicit (and much critiqued) binary logic of International Development – that the Global North is 'developed', whilst the Global South needs to be so. In doing so, this reframing offers a chance to address the inequalities and hierarchies that the development project has entrenched between peoples, knowledges and places, as created with discourses of the 'Third World' and the need to “modernise” countries in the south (both much critiqued by critical development scholars (see Escobar 2005; Sachs 1997). In this reading, the term 'Global Development' responds to scholars who have long highlighted the continuities between colonialism and International Development (e.g. Kothari 2006). As Escobar (2004:225) has argued, “Modernity can no longer be treated as the Great Singularity, the giant attractor towards which all tendencies ineluctably gravitate, the path to be trodden by all trajectories leading to an inevitable steady state.”

Within emergent academic literatures (e.g. Horner & Hulme 2019, Horner 2020), arguments for Global Development have primarily centred on “rethinking the ‘where’ of development” (Horner and Hulme 2019:495), arguing that a shift to global development is justified by comparable metrics of poverty and inequality across North and South (warranting more attention on development in/for the Global North) and exploring “the potential of an emerging paradigm of global development as applicable to the whole world” (Horner 2020:415). More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has been cited as another reason for a paradigm shift to Global Development (Oldekop et al 2021), by highlighting “the falsity of any assumption that the Global North has all the expertise and solutions to tackle global challenges” (2021:1). In *Development & Change's* discussion forum of Horner & Hulme's proposal (2019), however, critics warned that the term 'Global Development' risks reinforcing a new generic development narrative for the twenty-first century (Büscher 2019), is too narrow in its conceptualisation, treatment and measurement of 'development' (Buscher 2019; Ziai 2019) and underplays new imbalances of power (Fischer 2019).

In this special section, we extend early work on how the 'global' is being made. As has been illustrated by the editors of this journal, and before the major GCRF funding cuts announced

in 2021, “academics in the Minority Global North are, increasingly, entering into partnerships with those in the Majority Global South, particularly around development research and capacity- building activities” (Kraftl et al. 2018, 436). GCRF funding has been examined as a key driver of these partnerships (continued in this special section by Deirdre McKay). In 2017, Pat Noxolo argued that the announcement of the £1.5 billion research fund led to a “scramble to set up projects in the Global South” (2017:343), and that while many of these partnerships did good things, the UK government took a colonialist approach in its ‘tackling of challenges’ for the benefit of the UK while de-centering those in the global South. Clive Barnett (2016) likewise raised concerns of the politics of GCRF funding particularly in regard to the “refocusing of aid policy around concerns with security, crisis, and emergency” (n.p.). Whilst for Eichorn (2020, 207), the problem was with the GCRF position statement, which framed the UK as the place that “has the answers to an impoverished developing world” (REF?) (in direct contradiction to arguments for a shift to Global Development). In early 2021, the huge cuts to this funding stream (that halted projects midway, undermined long-established partnerships with colleagues in the Global South, and left Southern partners without projects or employment) revealed the continuing and unequal power dynamics that underpin research-funding-as-aid.

As a starting point for our engagement with Global Development, existing and emergent academic work reveals support for Global Development as a much needed reframing of power, agency and progress but it also highlights critical concerns about how the Global is being enacted by mainstream development actors and interventions - as examined closely in this special section. Against this background, the focus of this special section is on the projects of multilateral development agencies and state institutions, to examine how (and whether) this reframing of development constitutes a shift in thinking and practice. The four papers in this special section critically question the epistemological and ethical commitments that are at stake in the rebranding of ‘International Development’ as ‘Global Development’. They draw our attention to the considerable opportunities and implications that this reframing offers, whilst highlighting that critical attention is required as to how that framing is deployed and by whom. In this way, this special section contributes to discussions about the shifting geographies of development and what they mean for the spatial nomenclature and reference of development. The first three papers identify core agendas and spatialities of Global Development, namely rebranding, financialisation and sustainability, to analyse the ways in which these shift (or further entrench) hegemonic forms of development discourse and

practice (see Horner, Banks & Overton, and Hope). The final paper questions the mechanisms that constitute and enact 'Global Development' by scrutinising the ethics, politics and funding of research practices within UK-based geography (see McKay).

Rory Horner's paper, *Beyond rebranding from international to global? Lessons from geographies of global health for global development*, identifies a range of similarities between past shifts to Global Health and the current reorientation to Global Development. He argues that the ways that the global has been materialised and operationalised within shifts to global health gives us a sense of how global development could emerge, namely through modest shifts and in partial ways. Arguing that a global state system is an outdated model for global development, Horner suggests a spectrum of ways through which the critical potential of the term global development can be harnessed to refer to both the 'scale' and 'scope' of development agendas. Ultimately offering a hopeful outlook that shifts to global development will involve a re-examination of the geographical imaginaries that determine the flow of knowledge and money within development initiatives.

Second, Banks and Overton offer a review of financialisation in global development, as a critical mode of contemporary development. They develop three key themes within this increasingly significant mode of development - contestation over what financialisation entails, how it is reworking key categories of development (for example, between intentional and immanent, or 'big D' and 'little d', development) and how financialisation reveals more complex understandings and analyses of risk. They argue that "the increasing influence of a financial logic in daily lives and the operation of domestic and international economies has been profound" but that "there is nothing inherently emancipatory or inclusive in the new technologies of financialisation" (this issue p6). Rather, financialisation is enhancing capitalist expansion and capitalist forms of development.

Third, Hope shifts attention to the early take up of the SDGs, pitched as a flagship project of Global Development. In response to calls for northern geographers to better attend to new forms of coloniality and knowledge production, she foregrounds long-running indigenous agendas for development, land, and sovereignty in Bolivia in her critique of Agenda 2030. She argues that the SDG's focus on consensus building between states, the private sector, and civil society, has disconnected development infrastructure from anti- extractive indigenous territorial politics, weakening both indigenous struggles for territorial sovereignty and the environmental remit of the SDGs. In doing so, Hope's paper questions how Global

Development, as constructed by the SDGs, treats and impacts claims for land and environmental justice in the Global South.

Finally, McKay's paper turns attention to the ways that global development is being located and made through academic research funding, specifically the UK's GCRF funding scheme. In analysing data on GCRF funding McKay reveals the gaps and inequalities hidden in this new global. At the time of publication, the UK government had slashed their funding from the £422 million allocated last year cut to £125 million this year (THE 2021). This meant cutting projects that were midway through and devastating hard built relationships across North and South, as well as undermining a range of development and environment objectives. The speed and severity of these cuts further demonstrate the relevance of these streams to the creation of global development and remind us how dependent such schemes are on the historical, uneven and unequal relationships within development aid.

3 COLLECTIVE CONTRIBUTIONS

There are three key conceptual contributions we are putting forward in this special section: a critique of the 'Global', a consideration of ethical and power relations in development work, and analyses of epistemologies in development. First, we ask how the 'Global' is being operationalised in development focused initiatives, as crucial for uncovering and challenging the power-knowledge geometries of this paradigm shift. Horner illustrates the complexity of the term 'Global' through showing the lack of a commonly agreed definition in both Global Health and Global Development. As he suggests, it is the ambiguity of the term that contributes to its attractiveness and power. Banks and Overton trace the geographical creep of financialization to reach technologically-facilitated global markets and processes. As they show, financialization has appropriated 'development' in search of new global markets, with impacts for everyday lives in the Global South, as well as for how Global Development is being enacted. Hope questions what is being globalised by the SDGs, specifically how they impact decolonising agendas and work to minimise the sites of conflict that are instructive for the meaning and direction of sustainable development. Finally, McKay's analysis of geographers who have been awarded GCRF funding further attends to the production of the 'Global'. She demonstrates that few projects engage in multi-country 'Global' research design, though geographers are well-located to use their in-depth context-specific understandings of sub-national settings in ways that can challenge the thin homogeneity of 'the Global' paradigm.

The second contribution concerns the ongoing structural imbalances of power and ethics in development work. Horner again offers some optimism as he considers the potential for Global Development to lead to more relational approaches whereby contemporary challenges are approached in a more holistic, multidirectional way that could rework the outdated North-South model of International Development. Less positively however, Banks and Overton explore who bears the risk, as financialization is rolled out across the Global South. The financial logic that has been exported around the world is underpinned power imbalance. Their analysis raises questions about the ethics of ‘financialising’ poor farmers through insurance schemes with high premiums. Similarly, Hope identifies an entrenchment of unequal power relations between capital, states and civil society within the SDGs, drawing out the negative consequences for those challenging extractive capitalism (and its environmental effects). The papers by Banks and Overton and Hope both chime with recent work to uncover the intensifying overlaps between development and capitalism (see Alami et al 2021; Mawdsley and Taggart *forthcoming*), drawing out implications for both everyday lives in the Global South and environmental sustainability. McKay raises concerns about the ethics and coloniality of GCRF funding, whereby academic and non-academic colleagues outside of the UK have felt like optional add-ons with few opportunities to influence the research design. As these papers show, the question of power imbalances stubbornly remains unchallenged in this shift to the term ‘Global’. Even with its focus on ‘co-production’, ‘partnerships’, ‘solidarity’ and ‘resilience’ the notion of Global Development does little to address the stark inequalities inherent in the agendas and funding regimes of development work which are predominantly directed by neoliberal governments in the Global North.

Third and finally, this special section is contributing to debates around the continuation and entrenchment of dominant development epistemologies into ‘Global Development’. Horner’s work assesses how the terminology change from ‘International’ to ‘Global’ can be a rebranding exercise that does not signify an epistemic shift in development research. Banks and Overton highlight the ways in which the discourse of development has been appropriated to push financial products on to people in the Global South, thereby repurposing forms of knowledge to further the structures and reach of capitalist enterprise. Hope alerts us to the new modes of consensus between capital, states and civil society in the making of sustainable development, whilst McKay illustrates how the GCRF scheme entrenched asymmetries of knowledge production that centre the Global North. She raises concerns about the loss of accumulated knowledge with the defunding of the British Academy Learned Societies and

stresses the need for UK funded research to encourage a global knowledge ecology that is more inclusive, impactful, and equitable.

Taken together, these papers reveal current disparity between Global Development as a much-needed reframing of power, agency and progress and Global Development as being produced by mainstream development actors and interventions. The papers in this special section demonstrate that in materialising in “modest shifts and in partial ways” (Horner this issue), the ‘Global’ of Global Development is partly being enacted by agendas and actors that do not significantly rework power dynamics across North and South. A shift in language may be crucial to enact long term changes in how development is understood and where it is placed but it also necessitates critical research to interrogate how this normative agenda is adopted and enacted in dominant policy and practice.

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