

***New Directions for the Sociology of Development***

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By Jocelyn Viterna and Cassandra Robertson

## **ABSTRACT:**

At the close of World War II, “development” evolved along two distinct paths. On the first, scholars aimed to generate theoretical understandings of social change, especially at the national level (development studies). On the second, policy makers in governments and other development-focused organizations initiated actions to promote positive social change (development practice). In this article, we review the recent trajectory of development scholarship in sociology, paying close attention to the intersections between development studies and development practice. Through explicit comparisons to development scholarship in economics and political science, we demonstrate how the prominence of development sociology has varied historically in relation to its proposed policy prescriptions. We conclude by highlighting six uniquely sociological contributions that could powerfully extend contemporary interdisciplinary development conversations, and by calling for greater sociological attention to the complex ways in which a growing transnational field of development practitioners is shaping a multiplicity of development outcomes.

## **KEYWORDS:**

Development, Development field, Sociology, Institutions, Civil society, Social movements, Culture, Inequality, Evaluation, Social networks, NGOs, INGOs

# *New Directions for the Sociology of Development*

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## ***New Directions for the Sociology of Development***<sup>1</sup>

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Why are some countries poorer than others, and what can be done to raise the standard of living for everyone? At the close of World War II, scholars and policy makers alike became intently focused on answering these questions. Finding the answers, they believed, would help prevent future wars and stop the spread of communism—an ideology that was thought particularly attractive to the poorest of the world’s citizens. Identifying the determinants of national development also made good economic sense: the U.S.’s post-war technological and industrial dominance could generate larger profits if US companies could only access a growing international consumer market. As a result, the field of “development” was born.

From the beginning, “development” evolved along two distinct paths. On the first, scholars aimed to *generate theoretical understandings of social change*, especially at the national level. “Development” became a new and central subfield across most social science disciplines, as well as an integral part of many schools of public policy. On the

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second path, politicians and citizens residing outside the ivory tower began new initiatives to *promote positive social change through action*, especially by rebuilding war torn Europe and reducing human misery in developing nations. Several big players operating along this second path—intergovernmental organizations (like the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund) and massive international non-governmental development organizations (like World Vision, Oxfam, and CARE)—were founded during this same post-WWII period. “Development” thus evolved with a distinctly dual character: it is both something that academics “study,” and something that practitioners “do” (see Hart [2001] for a similar distinction, between little-d and Big-D development).

Over the following decades, theories varied in their assessments of whether and how development practitioners could shape the development process. Some scholars thought interventions were futile. Others believed interventions useful, but disagreed on which kinds of interventions should be made, and which actors should make them. Still others ignored the question altogether, and focused on describing development problems without implying or proscribing development solutions.

Meanwhile, development *practitioners*, located both in governments and in hundreds of thousands of development organizations, became their own diverse field of actors, united by common goals, shared narratives, and recently, a growing consensus about the “best practices” for effecting development gains in poor nations (on fields, see Fligstein and McAdam [2012]). Practitioners frequently design their development interventions based on scholarly theory and evidence. Over the last few decades, economics has enjoyed unparalleled influence in determining practitioner interventions, often at the expense of research in other social sciences.

In this article, we review the historical trajectory of development scholarship in sociology, drawing explicit comparisons to development studies' corresponding trajectories in economics and, to a lesser extent, political science. (Space constraints force us to narrow our scope to contemporary rather than classical contributions.) We focus our paper on how sociologists' analyses of development have intersected with the actions of development practitioners. We find that sociologists were initially central figures in the interdisciplinary field of "development," but that the relative impact of their contributions to development practice declined significantly in the 1980s, particularly in Western development institutions. By the 1990s, many sociologists were addressing development-like questions under rubrics other than "development." We suggest that this dispersion of development-like questions into other sociological sub-fields had deleterious consequences both for development studies and for sociology. Nevertheless, "development" as a topic in its own right seems to be once again gaining prominence in sociology. We conclude our review by analyzing these new directions in sociology, and summarizing six uniquely sociological contributions that will powerfully extend and strengthen current understandings of development –as both process *and* as practice—in today's world.

### **Defining "Development"**

To date, the scholarly definition of "development" has been elusive. Modernization theorists were among the most comprehensive and explicit—if ethnocentric—in defining the end goal of development; they characterized "modern" societies as those with Judeo-Christian values, capitalist economies, and "modernizing institutions" like schools, media, and parliaments. Dependency and World System scholars typically envisioned development as economic growth. More recently, economist Amartya Sen promoted a

'capabilities' definition of development (Sen 1985), arguing that an ideal society would provide individuals with both the freedom and the opportunity to choose a lifestyle they value.

In this article, we adopt Pritchett, Woolcock, and Andrews' (2013) vision of "development," as we believe it best captures the breadth of proposed social change implied by the term in both academic and policy circles. Pritchett et al. define development as a transformational vision of entire countries, where transformation is sought across the four dimensions of polity, economy, social relations, and public administration. More specifically, ideally developed societies would have political systems that represent the aggregate preferences of citizens, economic systems that grow through enhanced productivity, social relations that fairly extend rights and opportunities to all individuals, and public organizations that function according to meritocratic standards and professional norms (2013, p. 2).

Nevertheless, scholarly articles to date often choose to operationalize rather than define level of development. Nations are ranked as more or less developed according to any of several common measures, including GDP per capita, child mortality levels, average life expectancy, average educational attainment, or the UN's "human development index," among others. The unit of analysis is almost always the nation state, but especially within area studies, sub-national data are sometimes utilized. Although we know little about how well these measures reflect the on-the-ground reality of individuals, taken together, their use suggests that development scholarship is in spirit fundamentally concerned with explaining the cross-societal, and sometimes intra-societal, variation in either economic growth or human quality of life, and especially how that variation changes over time.

## **The Washington Consensus and the Dominance of Economic Theory in Development Practice Since the 1980s**

With the prominent exception of the East Asian “tigers,” most of the developing world was hit by debt crisis and market failures in the 1980s. The causes of these crises are multiple, complex, and in many ways historically specific. Nevertheless, when coupled with the rise of Reagan- and Thatcher-era politics, these crises gave credence to a conservative branch of development economics that argued that the crises occurred because mainstream development practice—based on state-protected markets—had failed. These scholars advocated the “end of development,” by which they meant putting an end to development interventions to best promote national economic growth. They defined development narrowly as economic growth, and believed that economic growth was best achieved by unleashing the free market.

The result was a so-called “Washington Consensus.” This consensus argued that national economies would grow fastest if its markets were freed from state intervention. State intervention was problematic for two reasons: developing states were often bloated, corrupt bureaucracies that siphoned off the benefits of economic investments for the benefit of the political elite, and any state intervention was thought to corrupt the market’s natural ability to exploit the comparative advantages of developing nations. If developing nations would remove restrictions on imports, eliminate trade barriers, devalue their currency and lower taxes to make themselves more attractive to foreign investors, then they would naturally attract investments of global capital and technology, investments which would cause economies to expand.



Third world nations' situation of deepening debt gave international development organizations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) unprecedented power to enact their preferred global economic policies. In particular, the IMF and the World Bank required developing nations to adopt various "structural adjustment programs" prior to receiving new loans or as pre-conditions to getting their current loans re-structured. Although adjustment agreements varied by nation, most were designed with the goal of disciplining developing nations' fiscal policy, reducing public spending (often by eliminating subsidies for the purchase of food staples or for local industrial development), broadening the tax base, devaluing currency to improve foreign exchange rates, privatizing state-run enterprises, and opening the economy to foreign trade and capital investments (on the emergence of this consensus, see Babb [2005] and Toyé [1993]. The dominance of the Washington Consensus as the agreed upon development paradigm in policy circles and economics departments during the 1980s was irrefutable. Indeed, according to one economist:

The superior economic performance of countries that establish and maintain outward-oriented market economies subject to macro-economic discipline is essentially a positive question. The proof may not be quite as conclusive as the proof that the Earth is not flat, but it is sufficiently well established as to give sensible people better things to do with their time than to challenge its veracity (Williamson 1993 p. 1330, as quoted in Gore 2000).

The Washington Consensus marked a sharp transformation from earlier development scholarship in at least three ways. First, prior to the 1980s, most

development theory, from modernization through dependency to World Systems, saw states as important actors in the pursuit of national development (Babb 2005). In contrast, the Washington Consensus reflected a common core of wisdom that states' only role in development should be to ensure the free reign of the market. Second, prior to the 1980s, all development theory had emphasized the role of history in shaping national development paths. The Washington Consensus, in contrast, was strikingly ahistorical, measuring a nation's contemporary economic performance as an outcome of its contemporary economic policies and practices (Gore 2000). Third, prior to the 1980s, development theory often had been characterized by interdisciplinary discussions. In contrast, the Washington Consensus was dominated almost exclusively by economists (Woolcock and Kim 2000), although some political scientists, like Bates (1981), were key to establishing how bloated state bureaucracies and political corruption prevented developing economies from growing.

### **The Decline of the Washington Consensus**

By the end of the 1980s, market fundamentalism was already coming under attack from at least three fronts. The most prominent challenge arose from practitioners working with major development organizations like the United Nations. They documented how the quality of life of the poorest populations in developing nations had worsened significantly since the introduction of economic liberalization and structural adjustment, and they called for a new "sustainable human development" (Cornia et al 1987). Coupled with Sen's (1985) "capabilities" approach, Sustainable Human Development proponents argued that the ultimate test of any development policy should be that it improved people's lives. Although careful to never suggest a causal link between restructuring and increasing poverty,

Sustainable Human Development advocates rejected top-down policies focused *exclusively* on improving macro-level economic growth, and argued for the addition of bottom-up development practices, developed in partnership with poor nations, that paid primary attention to poverty alleviation. Of note, most mainstream economists didn't see the Sustainable Human Development approach as a rejection of structural adjustment, but rather as a call for modifying a programmatic shortcoming (Hart 2001). By 1999, even the World Bank stated that good macro-economic policies needed to also protect the "worst off" populations in developing nations (World Bank Report 1999).

A second and related challenge came from activists, sociologists, and an interdisciplinary group of feminist scholars. This group advocated a direct causal linkage between structural adjustment programs and the worsening quality of life in developing nations, typically identifying worsening labor conditions as the primary linking mechanism. Whereas ISI-era policies had increased employment and improved living standards, the restructuring and liberalization of the 1980s reversed these gains by worsening unemployment levels, decreasing jobs in both the industrial and the public sector, lowering minimum wages, and curtailing any historical political power of labor unions and parties (Oliveira and Roberts 1994; Tardanico 1997; Roberts 2002; Portes and Hoffman 2003). Moreover, states were arguably incentivized to continually lower minimum wages and eliminate any fair labor practices in order to increase their attractiveness to multinational corporations searching a global market for the cheapest, most docile labor forces, launching what many activists have dubbed a "race to the bottom."

These changing labor conditions were thought particularly detrimental to women. Increasing poverty forced many more women into the paid labor market, typically into the

poor quality, poorly paid jobs of the informal sector or export manufacturing factories (Roberts 1995; Ward and Pyle 1995; Tardanico 1997; Hite and Viterna 2005). Women's historically low cultural status coupled with their increasing vulnerability to poverty under structural adjustment to powerfully limit women's possibilities for organizing on behalf of better wages or fair working conditions. As a result, women became a cheap and easily controlled labor force for export-oriented factories (Fernandez-Kelly 1994; Moghadam 1999). Women's rapidly increasing labor force participation (both in the formal and informal economies) was further accompanied by women's increasing labor in the home. Women became "shock absorbers" for poor households, making up for state reductions in public services by stretching food, taking over health care provision, increasing time spent on childcare, and often increasing the number of dependents in the home, new tasks that feminist scholars have sometimes referred to as a "third shift" required of working women in developing nations (Collier 1989; Afshar and Dennis 1992; Benería and Feldman 1992, Blumberg et al 1995).

A third critique against the Washington Consensus was launched when economist Alice Amsden's 1989 book demonstrated how the South Korean government had systematically violated neoliberal orthodoxy to achieve its impressive developmental gains, thus casting serious doubt on neo-liberal economists' regular use of south east Asian success stories as "proof" that market-led development was infinitely superior to state-led actions. Amsden's claims were quickly reinforced and extended by Evans (1995), Robert Wade (1990), Kim (1997) and others, but were initially resisted by World Bank policymakers (Hart 2001). Nevertheless, the 1997 crash of the Asian "tigers," in conjunction with continuing calls from scholars in the global south to prioritize "strategic

state integration” (ECLAC 1990; ESCAP 1990), resulted in most neoliberal economists’ increasing willingness to accept the state as a necessary player in economic development by the end of the decade (Evans 1997; Evans and Rauch 1999).

### **Development Sociology in the 1990s**

Sociological studies of development in the 1970s and 1980s were dominated by Dependency and World System scholars who argued that a global capitalist system maintained a “core” of wealthy nations at the expense of poorer nations (see Chase-Dunn and Grimes 1995 for a review) . Although World System *theory* actually accounted well for the economic crises of the 1980s and the ensuing rise of the Washington Consensus (Portes 1997), World System’s implied policy prescriptions—advocating political intervention to limit foreign direct investment and protect domestic industry in developing nations—were overwhelmingly rejected by the 1980s dominance of the neoliberal paradigm. This policy-directed attack was only heightened in 1992 when Firebaugh, a sociologist, argued that the measure of “foreign direct investment” commonly used by World System theorists had been wrongly interpreted (Firebaugh 1992); FDI actually led to increased, not decreased, economic growth in developing nations.

Following these critiques, sociological studies of development seemed to lose prominence during the 1990s. Fewer development articles appeared in mainstream sociology journals or handbooks, and with the exception of “gender and development” specialists, the absence of sociologists from advisory positions in governmental or intergovernmental development institutions became especially acute (Woolcock and Kim 2000). Yet we are careful to label this a decline, and not a disappearance, as several important lines of development research continued during this decade. As noted above,

sociologists were central players in building a critique of the Washington Consensus. McMichael (1992), for example, outlined the negative effects on food systems when global policies encouraged states to pursue national competitiveness in the economy rather than national coherence in the agricultural sector. Scott (1999) powerfully critiqued both the modernization and the neo-liberal development project by demonstrating how state-led efforts to “rationalize” both societies and markets lose local-level knowledge and power, resulting in disasters of social engineering. Sociologists documented the declining labor conditions of developing nations under neoliberal policies (e.g., Roberts 1995; Oliveira and Roberts 1994; Ward and Pyle 1995; Tardanico 1997; Itzigsohn 2000). Meanwhile, Kentor (1998) helped resolve the continuing debate about the effects of foreign direct investment (FDI) penetration on national economic growth; he demonstrated that although the FDI effect is initially positive for economic growth, the effect becomes negative over the long term.

The 1990s also saw the birth of one of the most important new themes in development sociology: an analysis of how variations in states and state institutions shape national development outcomes. In a highly influential book, Peter Evans (1995) argued that states’ actions *always* play a role in economic transformations. As a result, scholars should not ask *how much* states intervene, but rather *what kinds of interventions* generate the desired outcomes. Moreover, Evans demonstrated that the kinds of actions states can take, and more importantly, the kinds of roles that states can enact, are limited by the historically-produced institutions already in place. By comparing carefully selected cases of “predatory” and “developmental” states, Evans concluded that states have the best development outcomes when they balance autonomy (the ability of states to pursue

national goals independently of private interests) and embeddedness (states' maintenance of social ties with constituent groups). He further argued that achieving a successful balance between embeddedness and autonomy is a dynamic process. When states succeed in producing a change, like successful industrialization, they also produce new constituent groups with new interests, new identities, and new claims against the state. Developmental states must therefore develop embedded ties with these new constituent groups as well in order to continually reinvent themselves as developmental states. In contrast, stagnant states are much less likely to produce new mobilizations, and much more likely to stay embedded through personal ties with historical elites aimed only at pursuing their own goals.

Finally, although still largely ignored by "mainstream" development scholars, questions of gender and development continued to grow and thrive among 1990s sociologists. Previously, scholars had written with the specific intention of bringing first women (WID, e.g. Boserup 1970), then gender (GAD, e.g., Moser 1989) into the theorizing, design and implementation of development projects, and into the policies and institutional arrangements of states and development organizations (see Jaquette and Staudt 2006 for review). Perhaps not surprisingly given its feminist roots, gender and development scholarship has throughout its evolution remained both highly interdisciplinary, and highly engaged with development "practice." It has also been especially sensitive to how variations in local cultural and political contexts shape women's possibilities for social advancement (Moghadam (2013 (1993); 1998), as opposed to making global prognostications based on an assumption that gender processes are the same everywhere. Feminist development scholars have powerfully demonstrated how factors outside the

economy, like patriarchy and religious fundamentalism, can critically block the development of individual capabilities as well as economic growth (Feldman 2001; Moghadam 2013 (1993),1998). And feminist scholars demonstrated how women's new civil society organizing provided a powerful counterforce to neoliberal and state practices, especially as the more traditionally-masculine labor parties and unions declined in power (Safa 1990, Seidman 1999, Hite and Viterna 2005), making them among the first to document the importance of social mobilization in resisting globalization processes.

In part because women were found to contribute a higher proportion of their income to family subsistence, and in part because of the growing attention that scholars had brought to the feminization of poverty and the increasing levels of female headed households (Chant 1995) women became the favored recipients of many development projects in the 1990s, like micro-finance lending, child nutrition programs, or vocational trainings (Jaquette and Staudt 2006). Given their prolific analyses and their emphasis on producing positive transformations, it is perhaps unsurprising that sociological scholars of gender and development have gained deep inroads into major development institutions today (Fallon and Viterna forthcoming). Nevertheless, gender remains remarkably absent from so-called "mainstream" theories of development, despite compelling arguments for why integrating gender analyses would clarify and strengthen arguments scholarly arguments about the world system (Ward 1993), institutional arrangements (Goetz 1997), and changing class structures (Hite and Viterna 2005).

### **The Dispersal of Development Sociology**

Despite an apparent decline in the prominence of development sociology in the 1990s, development-like questions about the form, causes, and consequences of cross-



national political and economic inequality nevertheless continued to be addressed under alternative rubrics. For example, political sociologists frequently included development as a causal factor in their analyses of changing political regimes and states institutions, both in Latin America (Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992; Mahoney 2001), and in Asia (Walder 1994). Meanwhile, economic sociologists continued to study economies of the poor, often focusing on the movement of labor, the growth of the informal economy, and the broader relationship between development and inequality (Portes, Itzigsohn and Dore 1994; Nielson and Alderson 1995).

Yet most development scholarship seemed to transform into analyses of “globalization” or “transnationalism.” Globalization’s rise in popularity among sociologists was in many ways a natural outgrowth of development scholars’ insistence on a World System of capitalist production (see Brady et al. 2007 for a recent review of the globalization literature). And indeed, many of the questions asked by global and transnational scholars overlapped with questions asked by development scholars. Gereffi (1996), for example, argued that global commodity chains had become the key organizers of the global economy. By analyzing the spatial diffusion of production, scholars can better understand why some states (but not others) gain the right to manufacture some specific products (but not others) within a single commodity chain. Similarly, Alderson and Beckfield (2004) anticipate that connections between “world cities” are shaping the distribution processes of the increasingly global economy.

Globalization studies in political sociology also touched on development concerns. For example, scholars identified a new “World Polity,” comprised largely of an expanding and interconnected population of intergovernmental (or “multilateral”) organizations.

These organizations distribute “policy scripts” and rights discourses to their member states, resulting in the diffusion of a new system of global norms and the emergence of an increasingly accepted global culture (Meyer, Boli, Thomas and Ramirez 1997). World polity scholars conclude that major development institutions are powerful drivers of the diffusion of transnational norms, such as human rights and environmental protection, into developing nations.

Development scholars’ interests in mapping and understanding the distribution of power and resources across increasingly global political and economic systems continued to be addressed, albeit tangentially and under alternate headings, in the 1990s and beyond. Nevertheless, questions of national development per se—how national systems can be transformed to improve the capabilities of those living within them—faltered. We suggest that this dispersion of development-related questions into the subfields of globalization, economic sociology, and political sociology (among others) was problematic for two reasons. First, because sociologists seldom framed themselves as “development scholars,” they became relatively marginalized from development policy discussions, and practitioners lost a particularly valuable lens for understanding and addressing development problems. Second, because development questions dispersed into other subfields, sociology lacked the intellectual space required for development scholars to come together and investigate how multiple social institutions and processes—including politics, markets, states, migration, population, poverty, globalization, and the massive development sector itself—operate in conjunction with each other to shape the direction and intensity of social change, both within and across nations.

## **Developments in Economics and Political Science**

The 1990s challenges to Washington Consensus orthodoxy expanded development economics in several new directions by the early 2000s. At the macro-level, “big debates” about the merits of aid, the impact of globalization, the importance of trade, the appropriate way to measure a nation’s “development,” and the primary causes of poverty continued, with both “supply-side” (e.g., the state should provide institutions, like schools, needed for development) and “demand-side” (e.g., such institutions should arise from private actors who demand their interests be met) adherents giving ground. We first highlight three research agendas emerging from these macro-level debates that we believe have pushed macro-level development economics decidedly closer development sociology. We then discuss the growing field of development microeconomics.

First, and most centrally, a “new institutional economics” has expanded earlier writings to demonstrate how all economic activity is enacted through systems of social and legal norms, or institutions. (Furubotn and Richter 2005 (1997)). Analyzing the institutional roots and trajectories of development in poor nations has become a vibrant area of analysis that has straddled both economics and political science. Robinson and Acemoglu have been particularly influential in this field, arguing that economic development requires inclusive political institutions that protect individual rights, secure property, and encourage entrepreneurship, thus promoting growth (Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson 2001, 2002). They contrast these inclusive states with those historically governed by extractive institutions, which only put power in the hands of a few. For example, some of the underdevelopment of Africa can be attributed to the effects of elite capture and undemocratic institutions (Baum and Lake 2003; Stasavage 2005). Acemoglu

et al., among others, conclude that institutional quality is embedded in the history and geography of a region. In the colonial period, climate, topography, labor and most importantly local resources determine whether exploitative or inclusive institutions would evolve (Easterly and Levine 1997; Sachs and Warner 1999; Engerman and Sokoloff 2002; Isham, Woolcock, Pritchett and Busby 2005).

A second line of macro-level research, primarily in political science, examines how extractive states often develop out of particular societal divisions. This scholarship is deeply influenced by Bates (1981), who argued that many African governments pursued economic policies that depleted the farm sector to cater to the interests of inefficient urban elites. Scholars find that racial groups often act as unique interest groups, with a distinct advantage in influencing policy and determining the allocation of public goods along racial lines (Alesina, Baqir and Easterly 1999; Miguel and Gugerty 2005; Habyarimana, Humphreys, Posner, and Weinstein 2007). This complicates opportunities for collective action, and increases rationale for ethnic conflict. However, in a compelling recent work, Singh (2011) finds that ethnic polarization only occurs when groups lack common engagement in the social contract – Kerala, her case study, is extremely diverse, yet due to local buy-in, no one interest group asserts their interests over the majority.

Third, “new growth theory” has recently gained renewed attention among macro-economic theories of development. Economists have long agreed that economic growth can be achieved by the addition of more capital, more labor, and more production, but this type of growth will always have diminishing returns. New growth theorists argue that smarter growth requires investments in the ideas, innovations, and abilities of the workers—their human capital—to most efficiently increase formal economic output. Moreover, these

investments in individuals' abilities further allow them to complement formal wages with other innovative forms of subsistence production (Ruttan 1998; Helpman 2004; Evans 2010). Because institutions are the main determinants of innovation and accumulation of human capital, new growth theorists conclude that understanding growth also requires understanding the evolution of institutions (Helpman 2004), and the promotion of economic growth requires the engagement of institutional actors.

Despite these advances in macro development theory, the most innovative approaches to recent development research are perhaps those of the microeconomists (Rodrik 2008). Development microeconomics as a field has exploded with the activities of organizations like the Poverty Action Lab and Innovations for Poverty Action, which are composed of researchers who run randomized controlled trials to answer development and poverty related questions. These scholars often blur the line between practitioner and researcher, partnering with local organizations and working in the field. Banarjee and Duflo (2011), the standard bearers of the empiricist movement, argue that instead of wrestling with the big questions of macroeconomics, scholars should focus on a set of concrete problems that can be solved, one at a time. For example, development microeconomists might investigate how to fight diarrhea or dengue, how best to get students into schools, or how to ensure farmers get the fertilizer they need. By understanding the specific barriers that lead to specific problems, they argue, development can be tackled intelligently and economically, one intervention at a time.

Random Control Trials, or RCTs, have become the gold standard in development microeconomics; the only valid method of proving a causal effect. In general, a random control trial requires researchers to choose an intervention, an intervention site, and a

control site that is similar to the former but receives no intervention, and then compare the two sites both before and after the intervention. For example, scholars may seek to measure the health effects of supplying mosquito nets free of charge, or the educational effects of improving teacher accountability in one school. Once an intervention is deemed effective through testing, it is then “scaled up” to other communities. One striking theoretical outcome of the largely atheoretical RCT approach is that its results have increasingly called into question much economic research modeled on a rational actor. For example, farmers who say they have no money to buy fertilizer might nevertheless buy fertilizer if it is brought to their homes (Duflo, Kremer, Robinson 2009). Similarly the picture on a pamphlet has a huge impact on whether or not people decide to take out a short-term loan (Bertrand, Karlan, Mullainathan, Shafir, and Zinman 2005).

Development microeconomists and their RCTs are not without critics. Scholars have raised concerns about the lack of external validity, as well as the problems associated with providing a “one size fits all” solution to vastly different situations (Deaton 2010; Shaffer 2011). Mookherjee (2005) argues that RCTs do not test theoretical but empirical hypotheses, resulting in a development economics that produces little more than effective policy manuals. The most central concern about RCTs from the practitioner perspective is that the politics of evaluation come into play when selecting development programs. Small, local interventions, as opposed to large infrastructure projects, are far easier to evaluate, despite the fact that local needs might call for the second. The question becomes “what can we test” as opposed to “what can we change,” and interventions are chosen or designed to fit certain preferred evaluation methods as opposed to addressing wider social problems (Ravaillon 2009, Picciotto 2012).

## **Sociology's Position in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Development Studies**

As others have noted (e.g., Evans 2010), modern development theory appears to be converging once again. This time, however, the new interdisciplinary consensus is built not on a “grand theory,” but rather on a few key factors that scholars overwhelmingly agree are necessary for promoting development. Specifically, macro-level scholars in politics and economics now generally concur that institutions, social divisions, and the expansion of human capital are all centrally implicated in whether and how nations can transform.

This new interdisciplinary consensus in development scholarship places sociologists in a privileged position from which to contribute to development theory. Sociologists have historically been the most influential in development studies when we have used our uniquely sociological perspective to broaden mainstream theories and practices, making clear how states, markets, and practitioners are always embedded in, and shaped by, complex systems of social relations. In this section, we highlight how sociologists' rich tradition of analyzing institutions, organizations, social mobilizations, culture, social networks, evaluation, and multiple forms of inequality (race, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender as well as class) leave sociologists primed to push development studies forward in powerful new directions.

***INSTITUTIONS:*** One of the most influential lines of sociological research on development continues to be an examination of states and institutions. From the beginning, sociologists have eschewed any institutional approach that suggests one particular kind of institution, or one particular institutional practice, can explain most development outcomes over time and across space. Instead, sociologists have prioritized analyses of the complex, context-specific paths by which institutional developments occur.

Mahoney (2010), for example, agrees with many institutional scholars that colonialism had a powerful effect on what kinds of state institutions could develop in any particular country, thus affecting long-term development possibilities. However, his careful analysis of Latin American nations makes clear that post-colonial institutional outcomes vary in large part according to how local institutions (i.e., those established by indigenous populations like the Incas) interacted with a particular colonizer's institutions (i.e., Spain or Portugal). Chibber (2003) provides a compelling account of how even a relatively prosperous state like India, whose institutions are populated by politicians and technocrats specifically committed to the promotion of industrial development, can fail to industrialize when challenged by powerful class interests. More recently, development sociologists have also investigated how the historical evolution of state institutions can shape more specific development outcomes. For example, Lee and Schrank (2010) find that the historical development of state policies on innovation intersected with the importation of a particular cultural model of science to generate growing rates of scientific misconduct in Southeast Asian states, while Lange (2012) finds that increasing a state's capacity to distribute public education may counterintuitively increase ethnic violence, especially when state institutions are weak.

Development sociologists' prioritization of contextual specificity should not prohibit them from searching for processes or mechanisms that might regularly operate across multiple and diverse institutional settings (e.g., McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001). Indeed, one remarkable consistency across most research on developmental states is the importance of successfully negotiating the tension between states' embeddedness and autonomy (Heller and Evans, forthcoming). Developmental states are the most successful



when they gain the necessary support of powerful private actors, but simultaneously remain sufficiently autonomous from any one social group so as to avoid cooptation or corruption (Evans 1995; Chibber 2003; Lange and Rueschemeyer 2005). How these tensions are negotiated of course depends on the historical and cultural development of state institutions, and the political and cultural environment in which they are operating, but looking for how this tension is consistently negotiated across different situations provides opportunities for theorizing across cases.

New sociological work has proposed at least two ways that states effectively deal with this tension. On the one hand, Sam Cohn's (2012) research in Brazil shows how states can implement highly successful development strategies that are relatively cheap, remarkably uncontroversial, and require almost no institutional transformation or basic administrative capacity, yet are highly successful in reducing social inequality and relieving poverty. For example, when states invest in low-cost vocational training for trades that require little initial capital investment or educational expertise, like hair dressing, then trained individuals can make a go of it largely by relying on their social networks—friends and relatives loan new barbers space for their nascent businesses, and offer themselves as the initial client base. As these new small entrepreneurs grow their business, they often train and employ others in their communities, thus magnifying the opportunities created by the initial investment. Cohn argues that such projects are only successful if states build infrastructure and provide social services. But, he argues, the important lesson is that small investments in people may be much more effective means of job creation than alternative propositions, like tax cuts or big investments in a particular industrial base.

More commonly, scholars propose that states can best negotiate the tension between embeddedness and autonomy by strengthening a nation's opportunities for widespread deliberative democracy (Evans 2005). As Chibber's work shows, even the best-laid development plans of state actors will fail if they cannot overcome the resistance of powerful economic elites (Chibber 2003). Giving more decision-making power to broader swaths of the population is theorized to promote development by providing countervailing political pressure against elite interests, thus guarding against corruption and cooptation. Deliberative democracy is also thought to provide the best development solutions because, as Sen (1985) initially contended, grassroots actors are likely to provide the most clarity on what are the most pressing development needs, while their participation will encourage broad-based buy-in to attempted development solutions.

We suggest that sociology's rich history of theorizing institutions and organizational change provides important tools for determining additional mechanisms by which states can most effectively balance embeddedness and autonomy, despite changing contexts, resources, and global connections. Beginning with John Meyer and his co-authors (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Meyer and Scott 1983), neo-institutionalists in sociology have demonstrated how organizational structures are shaped by the social, political, and cultural environment in which they are embedded. By incorporating norms and rules from the outside culture, an organization insures its ability to operate within that environment, even if its resulting form is not the most efficient or useful for achieving its proscribed goals, nor the most consonant with its technical demands or resource flows. Over the years, scholars broadened these initial understandings into theories of institutional change, documenting how historical roles, competition with other institutions, new technologies, or changing

social contexts can result in either institutional isomorphism or, occasionally, creative transformation (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Scott 2001; Campbell 2004; Portes and Smith 2012).

In short, the current interdisciplinary consensus that institutions matter for development has yet to be accompanied by a parallel consensus for theorizing how institutions are defined, created, and situated in particular political, social, and historical contexts. In the hands of development practitioners, this broad-brush institutional approach has too often resulted in the exporting of organizational blueprints from north to global south, without sufficient rationale for why what works in one location might also work in another (Evans 2004; Portes 2006). Given that institutions are by definition slow to change, especially when change requires successful political negotiations and cultural transformations, then understanding states' development requires that development sociologists continue their theorizing about whether there are consistent mechanisms linking a state's organizational form to its political and cultural environments, and whether these mechanisms might give new insight into how policies and practices can be transformed in ways that maintain states' internal coherence and external legitimacy with societal actors.

***CIVIL SOCIETY/SOCIAL MOVEMENTS:*** Institutional scholars in development sociology largely agree that political power, more so than the projects of hired technocrats, determine state's development capacities (Chibber 2003; Evans 2005; Heller and Evans 2010). Unlike technocrats, politically powerful groups can hold states accountable, guard against corruption, and successfully push for the implementation of their preferred policies. Spreading political power across wider swaths of the population, through

participatory democracy projects or social mobilizations, is therefore anticipated to be one of the most effective ways of setting development priorities that will work in given local contexts.

A number of new studies provide evidence for these claims. Huber and Stephens (2012) find that deepening democratic participation in Latin America has resulted in the election of more left-leaning political parties, who in turn have implemented more equitable state distribution programs. Lee (2007) highlights how labor based organizations improve good governance cross-nationally. Baoicchi, Heller and Silva (2011) investigate how participatory budgeting projects in Brazil, when successfully implemented, have improved development outcomes and generated unprecedented community participation among area citizens. Wolford (2010) analyzes how a large grassroots movement fighting for land redistribution in Brazil gained significant influence over the policies and practices of the federal agency in charge of land reform, while Agarwala (2013) finds that women's informal worker movements in India, through leveraging local and transnational partnerships, have won new rights to state-provided social welfare. Yet these scholars also warn that deepening political participation is not always a panacea for creating more horizontal distributions of power. In the process of mediating between multiple and diverse local level demands, social mobilizations often create stratification systems of their own, often reinforcing rather than ameliorating local level power inequalities (Wolford 2010, Baiocchi et al. 2011, Viterna 2013).

Sociologists rich tradition of social movement research can help development scholars and practitioners alike understand why people mobilize, under what conditions, and how individual identities and cultural narratives are transformed through their

participation—insights which could encourage the expansion and increased effectiveness of deliberative democratic processes or social mobilizations in developing nations. More generally, incorporating research on social movements and civil society would provide a more bottom-up view of development processes and projects, rounding out our analyses by demonstrating how local communities are *always* dynamically engaged with determining their own development directions, even within the constraints of being resource poor and having to work within the existing logic of the development sector, and even in the absence of formal deliberative democracy opportunities (Bob 2005). Indeed, social movement scholars in the North have concluded that social movement actors do not always target states, but also regularly target cultural ideals, transnational movements, media, or firms—an insight that would usefully expand scholarly insights about the multifaceted ways in which local populations in developing countries might actively solicit development opportunities not just from states, but also from development projects, visiting foreigners, or transnational advocacy networks.

Finally, incorporating insights from social movement research can help development scholars understand when civil society actions might retrench, rather than extend, the political, social, or economic rights of citizens. Because social movements often mobilize around narratives of “who we are” (Polletta 2006, Viterna 2013), their actions may reinforce traditional hierarchies of rights, such as the recent mobilization of Latin American religious groups to successfully remove women’s reproductive choices (Viterna 2012). Such reinforcements of existing inequalities are sometimes blatant, as when indigenous group mobilizations claim cultural rights to maintain women’s subordinate social position. Yet the reinforcement of existing inequalities is often much more subtle; for

example, a deliberative democracy program that prioritizes women's voices and so-called "women's interests" may ironically serve to reinforce traditional cultural notions of women as caretakers of homes and families. Civil society groups also compete with each other—for cultural influence, material resources, and political power. These competitions could strengthen the existing social divisions found detrimental to development processes by political scientists. In short, understanding how civil society groups deliberate, define "us," and mobilize, will improve scholarly knowledge about whose interests are met under particular development initiatives, and what can be done to ensure that multiple identity groups agree to a broader "social contract" (Singh 2011).

**CULTURE:** In many economic models, ends and means are predetermined (Bardhan 2013). Recently, economists have been increasingly willing to acknowledge non-rational actions, especially in microeconomics. Such insights have pushed many development economics scholars toward psychology to better understand the determinants of individual-level economic actions.

The research above makes clear that scholars would also do well to look to cultural studies to better understand the motivations of social behavior. Local populations are active agents, embedded in identity-shaping communities and social networks, who collectively shape the transformation of their own political, economic and social systems. Their actions—in elections, rallies, migrations, the labor force, etc,—constrain what policies states can attempt, determine whether states maintain legitimacy, and shape the political decisions made both by states and development agencies about where development projects should go and what they aspire to. And the meanings they assign to their identities in turn determines the how social groups are constructed (by race,

ethnicity, class, and so on), as well as the strength of the boundaries constructed between those groups (Lamont 1992)

In sociology, a rich history of cultural analyses has documented how social norms, rules, and identities evolve through interaction, and how this cultural fabric is consequential for the evolution, action, and resilience of institutions. These studies have recently been increasingly applied to studies of development. For example, Swidler (2013) has documented the cultural sources of institutional resilience maintaining Chieftancies in Malawi. Cultural analyses have also generated compelling insights into whether and how markets are created (Bandelj and Wherry 2011); how aspects of individuals' cultural lives, including social networks and local power hierarchies, affect their health outcomes (Hall and Lamont 2009); whether and which "world culture" diffuses beyond the elite networks of large scale IGOs and INGOs to thrive in local villages (Hannan, n.d.); how educational aspirations are built not by rational calculations but rather through identity transformations (Frye 2012); and even how meanings surrounding condom usage affect efforts at stemming the spread of HIV-AIDS (Tavory and Swidler 2009).

In short, if there is indeed a new consensus among development scholars in which historical context matters, institutions matter, social divisions matter, and collective action matters, then there also must be a consensus that culture matters. Institutions, contexts, social groupings, and collective action all are built on and maintained by the shared meanings in a society. Understanding how these shared meanings evolve and are consequential for patterning all sorts of social relations—in institutions, communities, and transnational space—is thus central for understanding all facets of development.

**INEQUALITY:** A long standing debate in economics and economic sociology is whether there is an equality-growth trade-off. Do policies that improve equitable distribution of economic resources by default slow economic growth? (See Kenworthy 2007 for excellent review). Recently, even the World Bank has acknowledged that inequality is detrimental to development, particularly through its negative effects on good governance (World Bank 2006). Likewise, institutional studies have increasingly highlighted the positive effects of policies and practices that guarantee widespread rights and opportunities, while political scientists are examining how social group divisions can sabotage development gains. Sociologists' long history of examining multiple forms of inequality (race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, etc), their intersections, and the broad sets of institutional factors that shape inequality patterns, should therefore be central to broadening this historically narrow debate about inequality and growth. For example, recent work on political inequality, like analyses connecting felon disenfranchisement, deportation, and labor market participation (Western 2006; King, Massoglia, and Uggen 2012) or studies investigating the human consequences of statelessness (Somers 2008), highlight the many unanswered questions that remain about how unequal distributions of political power and cultural status, as well as economic opportunities, especially in a growing transnational world, affect development outcomes.

**SOCIAL NETWORKS:** Social network analysis has become a prominent paradigm in sociology. Its proponents argue that the social world is best understood and analyzed as systems of overlapping, dynamic relations more so than as groupings of static factors or independent structures (Emirbayer 1997). Its theoretical insights and empirical findings have already expanded knowledge about all of the factors discussed above: networks



structure institutions, have causal effects on civil society mobilizations, shape boundaries and identities in a society's "culture," and structure those social groupings in unequal hierarchies. Networks are also the basis of social capital, a topic that has regularly underscored development debates on capabilities and human capital (Woolcock 1998).

Greater attention to network theories and analyses would forward development studies in important directions. Network analyses could help mediate the existing macro-micro debates, as they allow us to understand how individuals and their actions link together into the durable social patterns that comprise institutions, communities, and even nations (Cook and Emerson 1978, Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994, Pescosolido and Rubin 2000, Pachucki and Breiger 2010). Outside of development studies, sociologists have used network theory to investigate the causal effects of social capital (Mouw 2006), the relational spaces from which innovations arise (Burt 2005), and the limitations placed on movements for revolutionary change (Viterna 2013). Recently, some network scholars have applied these insights to development studies, demonstrating the importance of local and transnational networks for institutional innovations and entrepreneurship in rapidly developing nations like China and India (Nee and Opper 2012; Saxenian 2007), or the development projects in developing nations that are conceptualized and funded by the "hometown associations" comprised of immigrants living in the Global North (Levitt 2001; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011).

Network analyses could answer important questions about development. At the transnational level, network analyses could investigate where most exchanges of money and information take place; which actors are most influential in shaping which development projects or policies are prioritized, and where projects are located; where

development priorities are set (national governments, intergovernmental agencies, etc), and how these priorities are understood and perhaps transformed by interactions with the aid recipients. At the local level, network analyses could investigate whether development innovations re-shape or re-enforce local power distributions. For example, Sanyal (2009), finds that the most salient outcome of micro-enterprise projects in India is not economic gains, but rather the increased power women experienced in their communities when they were allowed to foster their social ties with each other. Network analyses might also help us better understand why development projects often seem to cluster in certain communities, by documenting how those communities effectively use linkages with government officials, transnational movements, or various development organizations to bring new opportunities to their villages (Bob 2005; Stewart 2012).

***EVALUATION:*** Programmatic evaluation has never been a focus of sociologists, but it is increasingly the gold standard among development practitioners. Indeed, policy makers now increasingly call for development interventions and policy decisions to be based on evidence (see, e.g., White House 2013), and to be submitted to “monitoring and evaluation” during and after their implementation (World Bank 2004). As a result, practitioners are frequently partnering with scholars, especially in microeconomics, policy, or business programs, to determine the best methods of evaluation. The goal is to ensure that interventions achieve their desired goal, in part to guarantee to funders that their investments are making a difference. Proponents argue that careful evaluations, ideally based on random control trials comparing a treatment community with a control community, are the best ways to ensure that real change is achieved. We further appreciate that RCT projects are highly transparent about why one community, but not

another, was chosen for a development intervention—a welcome change from the opaqueness that has historically surrounded decisions of where to locate development projects. Yet, as noted above, scholars have raised concerns that the politics of evaluation may come into play when selecting development programs, such that “what can we test” determines interventions more so than “what can we change” (Ravaillon 2009; Picciotto 2012).

Sociological insights into evaluation raise additional questions (Lamont 2012). Sociologists have long understood that measurement is a fundamentally social process (Duncan 1984). Societies choose to measure what they already value, and the kind of measures they develop determine how much value an object or a process is given in relation to others. Evaluation always requires categorization, a process that can itself create or reinforce boundaries between groups, ideas, or practices. Evaluations also imply valuations, and can thus create, change or reinforce hierarchies. Studies show that how objects are valued varies by cultural context (Fourcade-Gourinchas 2011), and institutional practices and pressures (Kalev, Dobbin and Kelly 2006). Certainly, as scholars who regularly have our own work evaluated by others, we appreciate that evaluation is influenced by the taste and the disciplinary worldview of the reviewers (Lamont 2009). Similar processes of evaluation must occur in development studies: scholars and practitioners must assign more value to some kinds of development outcomes than others, and the measurements they choose largely determine which policies and interventions are deemed successful, and which populations or problems are deemed especially worthy of interventions. All of these decisions are predicated on the worldview of the assessor, and are consequential for the implementation and analysis of development policies and

practices within states, intergovernmental organizations, and nongovernmental organizations.

Evaluations of development programs typically study intended consequences, but have little incentive to look at unintended consequences. Funding and political pressures create incentives for creating “successful” projects. Nevertheless, “success” for a majority might imply negative consequences for a minority. Whether such complex outcomes are captured and understood will fundamentally affect our understanding of development theory and development practice, but depends largely on the evaluation design.

Evaluations are also consequential for development by how they choose to measure and value outcomes in the first place. What are the consequences of measuring an intervention against a non-intervention, rather than against some sort of external criteria? Whose evaluations are given priority? And what new policies or programs do evaluations inspire?

Increasing attention to how “development” is evaluated would improve scholarly understandings of how state institutions, civil society mobilizations, and targeted development projects affect social outcomes. Sociological work in this area will help development scholars make visible and explicit the preferred criteria of evaluation, the consequences of the evaluation process itself, and how evaluation is shaped by what data are available in the first place. Sociologists can also highlight possibilities for how evaluations can create more horizontal categories, and lessen power differentials more generally.

### **The Missing “Development” in Development Studies**

For decades, development scholars have debated the best targets for development interventions. Should development practitioners aim at reforming *states*, opening *markets*,

strengthening *civil society*, or some combination of the three? We conclude our review by arguing that these approaches have insufficiently investigated a fourth actor: the development sector itself.

The development sector is a huge, growing, transnational, field comprised of a highly diverse set of actors. Development practitioners work in local, state and national governments; in massive intergovernmental or international non-governmental organizations; in small, community-based development organizations; and even in transnational “do-it-yourself” development initiatives (Swindle 2013, personal communication). Despite this diversity of actors and resources, the field appears united by several shared sets of “best practices” narratives and relatively consistent tactical repertoires. At minimum, this field is comprised of hundreds of thousands of organizations, often linked transnationally, and it spends more than \$250 billion dollars annually with the specific goal of influencing development outcomes. At the local level, development actors are often a major source of employment, as well as an important provider of education, food, resources, and political capital in impoverished communities around the world.

Yet the implications of the development field for local communities has yet to be systematically evaluated. At a more macro-level, numerous scholars have argued that development aid overwhelmingly fails to reduce poverty or address the underlying power inequalities it targets (Ferguson 1990, Jackson 2005, Easterly 2006, Li 2007). Indeed, as the above review makes clear, the successful development stories from recent decades have almost exclusively been attributed to governments’ enacting policies that largely deviated from the recommendations of the mainstream development policy directives dictated by the Global North (Evans 1998), or they have been tied to much deeper

historical processes of institution building (Chibber 2003, Mahoney 2010). But even conceding that official development aid has done little to promote national economic growth, we suggest that the development field's extensive, transnational expansion into local communities is consequential for the transformation of developing nations' cultures, power relationships, and hierarchies of inequality.

To begin, we argue that Development as a field is not captured in current analyses of states, markets, or civil society. Scholars often refer to the NGO actors within the Development field as "civil society," a term which generally seems to connote organizations that represent local communities and carry their demands to the state. Yet the term "civil society" poorly captures the complexity of NGO actions. As frequent builders of roads, designers of schools' curriculums, and distributors of health services, we suggest that development NGOs are in essence providing what Marshall (1950) might consider "the social rights of citizenship." Development NGOs are therefore often powerholders in impoverished communities, and as such become the *target* of civil society demands, more so than the *vehicle* carrying those demands to the state. Indeed, one important new trend in the development field (an emerging "best practice") is an increasing expectation that development projects be carried out through partnerships with government institutions, further blurring the line between development organizations and government institutions (Brautigam and Segarra 2007). For example, states might contract with NGOs to run their health care centers (Kamat 2003).

Yet to suggest that development actors are state-like is also problematic. Although some development organizations reside inside state institutions, most have no constitutional obligation to provide service to a particular developing country or

community, no formal political position from which to exercise power, and no requirement to stay engaged with the community it is serving any longer than its organizational needs deem necessary, or its funding priorities allow (Watkins, Swidler and Hannan 2012).

Development actors are therefore local powerholders that are on one hand not easily held accountable to the people they serve, and on the other hand, are largely freed from the political power plays that occupy states. At present, scholars have theoretical tools to help them understand how communities mobilize to leverage demands against states, and we have theoretical tools to help us understand when and how states might respond.

However, we have yet to theorize whether and how communities mobilize to target Development actors (including NGOs) with their requests, nor do we understand the factors that might determine which communities are most successful in “winning” projects or opportunities from Development actors, and why.

Despite a significant dearth of data on the actors and actions in this field, recent scholarship provides evidence that the field is consequential for a wide variety of complex development outcomes, even if it does not stimulate national economic growth or mitigate national poverty levels. For example, Babb (2001) demonstrates how intergovernmental finance institutions in the development field were directly responsible for re-shaping national economic practices and institutional structures in Mexico. Meanwhile, a new generation of world polity scholars have shown that the increasingly dense, transnational network ties between states and INGOs are associated with significant national-level changes in development outcomes, like educational attainment, environmental outcomes, and scientific developments (Schofer 2003; Schofer and Hironaka 2005; Schofer and Meyer 2005). As states are increasingly willing to partner with NGOs to develop their social

service institutions, operate their social service programs (Clough 2013), and develop systems of participatory budgeting (Gibson 2012), it is logical to conclude that development field actors' influence in shaping the policies and practices of institutions continues, albeit in a more diverse form. Indeed, Robinson (2012) finds that whether government institutions in the Global South accept, reject, or modify the development prescriptions constantly arriving from Development actors in the global North depends upon negotiations between key national-level actors like politicians, technocrats, and civil society organizations.

In addition to affecting institutional structures and policies in developing nations, the transnational development field has proven consequential for various development outcomes in a number of different situations. Robinson finds that the organizational landscape of a nation, including the presence of INGOs in the reproductive health field, is consequential for how well that nation is able to stem the spread of HIV (Robinson 2011). Barron, Diprose and Woolcock (2011) review cases where development projects both increased local-level conflict and violence, and stemmed such violence, with their programming. Levien (2013) investigates how the state-led appropriation of land for industrial development projects in India creates mobilizations unique to the dispossessed. In Tanzania, Dill (2013) found that development projects aimed at increasing local people's power (through the best practice of "community driven development,") had the unexpected outcome of increasing the states' power and authority over local communities. And organizations like the Poverty Action Lab (<http://www.povertyactionlab.org/policy-lessons>) provide scores of evidence demonstrating how a particular project has increased



student learning, improved agricultural outputs, or reduced child mortality in the particular communities they serve.

Scholars have also increasingly demonstrated how Development actors are re-shaping micro-level social patterns in both intended and unintended ways—as well as how local cultural patterns can complicate the best-laid development plans. In the former, scholarship has found that the development field can transform individuals' identities and aspirations (Frye 2012), social capital (Sanyal 2009), and entrepreneurial ideals (Swidler and Watkins 2009). In the latter, scholars have documented how narratives from the Development field often clash with local cultural meanings to complicate whether individuals will use condoms (Tavory and Swidler 2009), engage in transactional sex (Swidler and Watkins 2007), or what they expect to gain from development “trainings” (Watkins and Swidler 2013). Watkins and Swidler conclude that whether international efforts support or impede existing local efforts at HIV prevention has more to do with how the conflicting interests and world view of the various actors (donors, brokers, villagers) get resolved, more so than with what “works” for HIV-AIDS prevention (Watkins and Swidler 2012).

These studies are only beginning to unpack the complexities of how the growing transnational development field is shaping a multiplicity of development outcomes in both positive and negative directions. We encourage the expansion of this scholarship in two directions. First, analyses of the intended and unintended consequences of local development interventions must extend beyond culture to also examine the effects of the development field on other social patterns, including local level inequality, social mobilization practices, and questions of state legitimacy and capacity, among others. To

illustrate, we know very little about how local development interventions may re-shape local patterns of inequality. Development organizations commonly report that they “built 80 schools” or “established 50 village councils,” but they seldom report on how they chose where to build schools or establish village councils. Meanwhile, scholars and practitioners alike typically study the consequences of those schools or village councils at the point of their delivery, but fail to examine the potential consequences to those who failed to “win” the development project. If one village’s children are recipients of a new educational program, how does that affect the employment, migration, or life chances of children in a neighboring village, who suddenly find that their relative education has declined in the local region’s labor market?

Second, we believe that development scholarship would benefit from data collection efforts aimed at mapping the development field more generally to better understand its consistencies and contradictions. How are the actors distributed across space, both geographical (Africa or Latin America?) and institutional (in states, INGOs, or local NGOs)? How do development actors make decisions about which projects to implement (health or gender?) and where to implement them (Haiti or Mozambique)? How much overlap in tactics, goals, and outcomes exists between “counterhegemonic” organizations and more mainstream development organizations that also prioritize the political mobilization of local citizenry? How do the logics or “best practices” of the field emerge, and how consistent, or competitive, are these narratives across organizations? What are the organizational factors (i.e., religious vs secular missions) that might account for variations in projects and resources? Where does funding initiate, and through which organizations does it travel? What coalitions are formed, both horizontally and vertically, and how might

these affect transnational development agendas? Research on local-level consequences will only be strengthened if we understand how those consequences might be distributed across space, sectors, ideologies, and network ties.

Development scholarship has yet to incorporate a systematic evaluation of the development field into its analysis. Given that the development field intersects with, and impacts, states, civil societies, and markets, we see this as a significant shortcoming. Sociologists of culture have led the investigations into this field to date. We suggest that sociologists are primed for expanding these studies further, building on our theoretical strengths in organizations, networks, inequality, mobilization, and evaluation.

## **Conclusion**

Sociologists were central figures in the evolution of development studies, and sociological insights have regularly pushed the development field to view traditional problems from new directions. It is unfortunate, then, that sociologists became somewhat marginalized in recent debates about the best way to ‘do’ development. In this review, we have argued that the new interdisciplinary consensus in development theory— a consensus that capabilities and economic growth both matter, that states can and should be agents for development, and that community-driven, context specific development is necessary to balance out top-down approaches —puts sociologists in a privileged place for contributing to the conversation. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that sociological research on social change has begun to once again consolidate around the idea of “development.” A new “Section on the Sociology of Development” is at this writing the fastest growing section in the American Sociological Association; the University of California is launching a new “Sociology of Development” journal; and a new generation of scholars are increasingly identifying

themselves as “development” specialists, while the torchbearers of the earlier decades are increasingly returning to development questions. As sociological insights about institutions, organizations, networks, power, agency and culture are increasingly brought to the analyses of development process *and* development practice, the result will be a fuller understanding of the complexity of development transformations, as well as a more integrated, coherent explanation of key sociological issues like poverty, inequality and power at local, national, and transnational levels.

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