

The European Report on Development

An arena for ideas

The European Report on Development (ERD) is intended to improve the visibility of the EU at the global level and help it shape the international development agenda. Little of the research done at European institutes reaches international policy discussions. The 'mobilizing European research for development policies' initiative is intended to bridge the gap between European researchers and policymakers.



Concrete cows in Milton Keynes, UK

For many years, academics and researchers have complained that the European Union (EU) and the European Commission – in particular Directorate General for Development – seriously underestimate the value of development research. At the 2005 General Conference of the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI) in Bonn, Commissioner Louis Michel acknowledged this criticism for the first time. In 2006, a task force was established to address the problem. The Commission, together with five member states, launched the 'mobilizing European research for development policies' initiative. Françoise Moreau and Simon Maxwell, along with Dirk Messner and Laurence Tubiana, drafted a proposal for the ERD. At the initial workshop in March 2007, some 60 researchers discussed its storyline. A year of silence followed as negotiations on procedures and funding took place backstage in Brussels. Now the tender is out: European researchers have until mid June to put their names down for the €1.96 million (the

maximum budget) allotted to produce the first European Report on Development. As this special report will show, some academics and researchers are sceptical of the initiative, while others are applauding it.

A new perspective

The 'mobilizing European research for development policies' initiative aims to bring together prominent researchers and fresh ideas to enhance a European perspective on development issues. The ERD will be the most important and tangible product of this initiative.

The current approach to development endorsed by the Commission and most member states – i.e. equating development assistance to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – does not reflect the complexity of current global issues. The ERD proposal states that 'development issues now range beyond aid and beyond poverty reduction ... shifts in global politics imply big challenges for us all, be it donors, partners or powers ...

EDC 2020

On 2 June 2008 in Brussels, the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI) launched its new project 'European Development Cooperation to 2020'. This project – a follow-up to EDC 2010 – aims at improving the understanding of EU policy makers about the emerging challenges facing EU development policy and external action. The EDC 2020 project will work in close cooperation with reputable research institutes (such as IDS, ODI, DIE and FRIDE), while the Society for International Development (SID) will help with communication towards policymakers and practitioners.

EDC 2020 is funded by the EU's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7), and will be organized around three key emerging issues:

- the role of new actors (India, China, Brazil) in international development;
- Europe's approach to energy security, democracy and political development; and
- the links between European development policy and climate change.

For more information visit www.eadi-online.org.

linkages to non-aid development issues like security and management of the global commons ... challenge aid agencies to rethink their roles and their competencies'. The initiators of the ERD want to see a more ambitious international development agenda. Not just to eliminate poverty, but to achieve equitable and sustainable prosperity for all. In this light, a storyline was chosen for the coming European Reports: 'Reconciling the MDGs with new global challenges – the EU's approach'. There have been proposals for promoting a new leading notion: global social inclusion. It is unclear as yet whether this proposal will make it to the actual first report.

Out of the box

The ERD will be produced by a team of at least four researchers of international reputation. This winning team, the tender stipulates, must be multinational and multidisciplinary. The report must be innovative. It should 'take risks, think out of the box and be bold to show that Europe can think on its own'. But is this feasible, given that the first draft must be ready by January 2009, and that the final version must be presented the following June? That is only a year from now. Even if there is no further bureaucratic delay in selecting researchers and getting started, the potential teams are, as we speak, still busy writing the proposal. And another question: Which top researcher will be able to put all his engagements on hold, suddenly, for a full year?

Southern views

The steering committee for the ERD consists of representatives of the Commission and the contributing member states, which are Finland, Luxemburg, Spain, Sweden and the UK. This steering committee will choose

the themes, review the quality of the output, monitor the work of the research team and ensure that it is relevant for EU policy. The tender is also open to researchers from member states not represented in the steering committee. However, Ondřej Horký says, 'The current process supervised by the Commission and a handful of member states seems exclusive. I am afraid that the ERD cannot pretend to have a joint European perspective'. According to Horký, the EU should try to distinguish itself by being more participatory than the WDR and the HDR, and it 'must take into account the concerns of the South'.

Lars Engberg-Pedersen is also sceptical: 'The big lacuna is not European ideas and vision, but those of developing countries. Another report promoting the views of outsiders on how impoverished societies should develop is old news. It is moreover counterproductive to building ownership'. He would rather see a report based on African and European perspectives. 'This would provide space for views rarely expressed or heard. This would develop genuinely new insights'. The good news is that the ERD contract provides for a two-day regional workshop in Africa.

Quality and impact

According to Stephan Klasen, Europe shows so little intellectual leadership on development policy because



Contributors

The Broker wishes to thank the following individuals for their contributions to this special report:

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Francisco Granell: Professor of international economic organization at the University of Barcelona.

Sven Grimm: Political scientist at the German Development Institute (DIE).

Björn Hettne: Emeritus professor, School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Ondřej Horký: Research fellow at the Institute of International Relations, Prague.

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it lacks serious research departments at the ministries and official agencies. Sven Grimm believes it is a problem of size: ‘Only a couple of bigger development research institutes can afford to reserve some of their capacity “to work on Europe”’. This is not to belittle the intellectual manpower of individual units, who at times do brilliant work. However, without sizable manpower, their impact on debate will remain limited’. Grimm asks, rhetorically, ‘What can even the biggest European think-tank on development do that could equal World Bank research?’ Yet he sees Europe’s diversity as its strength. ‘We don’t need centralization. What we need is a focal point for discussion, a project to get a team around, in order to bundle European intellectual capacity’.

But some see the bundling that is to happen for the ERD as slightly artificial. ‘This process is not driven from the bottom up’, says Marco Zupi. He congratulates the Commission on its ambition, but thinks it is misleading to suggest that the ERD will soon be as valuable as the WDR

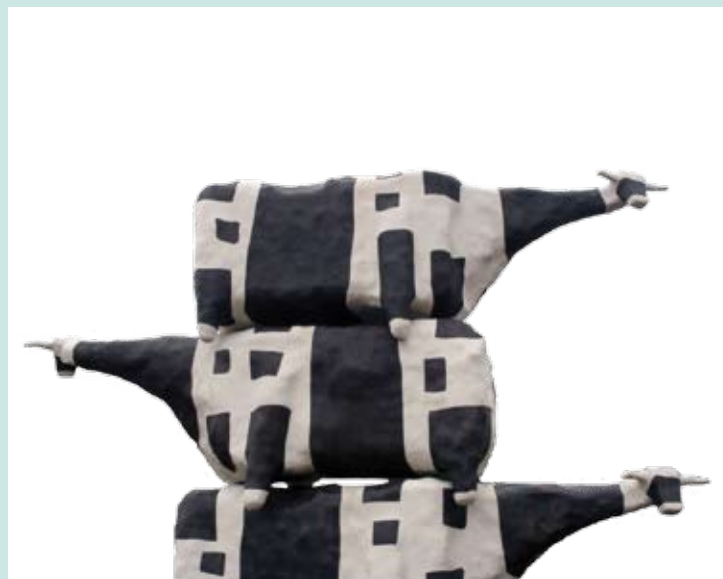
The ERD: topics to address

All of the academics whom *The Broker* approached welcome widening the focus of development assistance beyond the MDGs. Some have concrete proposals for subjects that should be included in the ERD. Francisco Granell (Spain) argues that the ERD should assess how development concepts must adapt in order to address the impact of the predicted global population increase. ‘In 2050, developing countries will represent 86% of the world’s population. Thirty years from now, their urban populations – now around 2 billion – will have doubled. Their needs are different from those of a rural population’. Granell adds that the impact of technology on development and globalization should also be a subject for the ERD.

Torbjörn Becker (Sweden) suggests that the ERD should contain two sections: one looking at a topical issue – e.g. the food crisis – from a European perspective, the other focusing on a long-term issue – e.g. a study on how international aid is organized on the donor side. ‘How does the EU spend its development aid, through which channels is it distributed, what is the historical track-record of European aid versus aid from other donors? These vital questions are under-researched’, says Becker.

Stephan Klasen (Germany) agrees that ‘what the EU lacks is a culture of seriously evaluating the successes and failures of Europe’s development programmes’. And Ondřej Horký (Czech) adds, ‘If the ERD is to make a difference, its policy recommendations must draw on evidence. Therefore, naming and shaming is unavoidable. Win-win situations are rare and reflect policymakers’ wishful thinking rather than reality’.

Allister McGregor (UK) adds that the ERD should focus on issues of governance: global governance, nation state governance and grass-roots governance. ‘It should seek to bolster the MDGs, but explore ideas about what conditions in societies make it more or less possible to achieve the targets.’



Concrete cows at Glastonbury festival, UK, 2005

and the HDR. ‘It is not by imposing from the top – as a political decision, even if well funded – the creation of a cultural pool of excellence that novel ideas and concrete leadership are born’. However, Björn Hettne has high hopes that the ERD will distinguish itself from other such reports. ‘Development as an academic field is more or less confined to a few countries in Europe, but it represents a rich body of interdisciplinary understanding of underdevelopment. Judging from the recent flood of new books, this field moreover shows signs of revival. This is the right basis for a strong and innovative ERD with a global scope’.

Straitjacket

No one seems to doubt that Europe has great academic capacity for development and globalization issues, even if it is scattered across universities and research institutes in different member states. Most respondents see in the ERD an interesting opportunity to promote European thinking and to help European research networks become more visible. Yet some have questions about how linking up with Brussels will affect the independence and originality of their work. Recommendations that seriously challenge current policies will almost certainly be too controversial for the report, says Torbjörn Becker. And Lars Engberg-Pedersen adds: ‘The ERD is bound to be determined by policy concerns and European ambitions in global power struggles. Therefore, being forced into the straitjacket of the ERD is not the way to bring the insights of European research institutes to global policy debates’. Hopefully, creating safeguards for the independence of the ERD will be at the heart of this new initiative. ■