

From aid to global justice

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Is aid in crisis? For the sake of argument, let's say that it is. Because that opens up the space for a fresh debate about the future of global development. *The Broker* would like to invite all readers to contribute new ideas, insights and experiences in the run-up to the MDG+10 conference in September 2010. We want this debate to be open and daring, critical but constructive.

Nils Boesen (page 6) believes that we are approaching 'a tipping point where development aid will enter into a deeper crisis with an unpredictable outcome'. In the Netherlands, we may have arrived at such a turning point, with the publication of a long-awaited report by the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR), *Less Pretension, More Ambition: Development Aid that Makes a Difference*, on 18 January. The report immediately prompted an intense debate, both on *The Broker* website and in the Dutch media.

The WRR report is an excellent starting point for a discussion of Dutch policies relating to development, globalization and 'global common goods'. It provides state-of-the-art overviews of many of the discussions in these fields.

However, we need more than state-of-the-art. The Council urges us to be more ambitious. We need a vision of the future and an approach that reflects changing global realities. Or, as Jeffrey Sachs, director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, puts it (page 14): 'Our institutions and ethics come from a different era and have not yet been "updated" to knit together a globally stable society'. Our notions about the global economy must change, Sachs believes, and 'economics textbooks will have to be completely rewritten, as they do not match today's realities'.

The WRR report pleads for stronger policies focused on global public goods, and emphasizing 'policy coherence for development'. What is lacking in its analysis, however, is an exploration of a particularly promising prospect: bringing together, in theoretical and practical ways, economics and ecology as an alternative to unbridled global capitalism. Sachs and Peter May, former president of the International Society for Ecological Economics (ISEE), write about 'Greening the global economy'. *The Broker* will set up a special discussion blog, hoping to integrate this debate with more explicitly development-related discussions. Economics, finance, environment and development ... it is high time to bring down the disciplinary fences.

Complementing the calls for a 'broader', more global approach, the WRR report pleads for aid that is 'country-specific'. *The Broker* underlines this need, which is one of its editorial guidelines: how to analyze the complex combination of local economic, political, social, cultural and ethnic factors, and how they are integrated, how to relate them to global trends and networks, and how to arrive at strategic decisions based on such analyses.

Other articles in this issue also emphasize the importance of local contexts. Mariano Aguirre and Chris van der Borgh relate the

latest academic insights, which tell us the international peace- and state-building efforts need to pay more attention to local political, cultural, administrative and governance traditions, rather than focus only on imposing Western forms of liberal democracy. On a more theoretical level, Jeroen de Lange elaborates on a framework for interventions based on experiences of change management in business and government organizations. We may know in general terms what should be done, but often lack the understanding of local circumstances that is needed during implementation.

These are just some of the issues that will be explored in the debate to be hosted by *The Broker* under the umbrella 'From aid to global justice'. Since the publication of the WRR report, much of this online discussion has been in Dutch, but in February international experts will be invited to respond.

It would be nonsensical to discuss the future of global development or global justice within narrow national frames. Foreign eyes can help us to look at ourselves anew, and to learn from the experiences of others. Many countries – including France, as Danielle Barrett and Henri Rouillé d'Orfeuil report (page 26) – are struggling with integrating 'the global' into their policies. If, as Nils Boesen notes, 'in virtually all governments, aid is seen as part of a more important joined-up agenda that includes climate change, security, migration, trade and finance', then the Netherlands has a lot to learn from other countries. We must combine our efforts to adapt to and shape the new global context. At the moment, Boesen laments, 'the 27 EU countries ... are all busy with their own aid systems rather than building a strong joint European institution that could compete in quality and financial muscle with institutions such as the World Bank'.

There is still a long way to go. We need to start a real international debate.

We should not let this serious crisis go to waste. ■

