

Development 3.0:

Development practice in transition

Following over a half-century of “technology transfer” and “participation”, the paradigm of agricultural modernisation appears to have reached a limit. Directly related to growing concerns over the world’s food systems, there is a sense of welcomed change taking place. At the centre lays a commonly neglected resource: the creativity embedded in peoples’ daily practices and self-organisation.

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Despite growing appreciation for the importance of locally-led change processes, the development “outsider” – be it the technical expert or the externally funded intervention, private industry, or simply “the system” – continues to lay at the centre of policies. Institutions have become self-referential and entrenched in certain problematic ways of thinking and doing. Fortunately, as shown in recent critical reviews, such as the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), rural development is undergoing increasing scrutiny and change. Where is it going?

Agricultural modernisation Since the 1950s, the evolution of planned interventions on behalf of the poor and disparaged has followed two general pathways. With the support of private foundations like Rockefeller and Ford, pioneers, such as the plant breeder Norman Borlaug, convinced governments to invest in industrial-era technologies (biotechnology, fertilizers and pesticides), bringing forth an

external input, technology-centred model emphasising “technology-transfer” (or Development 1.0). About the same time, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) spearheaded post-World War II relief and re-construction efforts; while churches and religious groups became involved in “capacity-building” tied to the independence movements in Africa and Asia and agrarian reform in Latin America. Over time, NGOs established a school of thought emphasising people- and process-centred approaches, all of which can be described as “participatory development” (or Development 2.0).

Such development discourses are the product of influential socio-technical regimes, in their collective efforts to set agendas and policy. For example, social networks organised around competing interests are generating the on-going debates over the nature of hunger and poverty as a “lack” of production or efficiencies, thereby justifying a call for better technology, such as genetically modified crops or “market chain” innovation. Development 1.0 led to the creation of the national agricultural research and extension centres, as well as of the international agricultural research system. Development 2.0 grew with the rise of rural development



It's harvest time for a farm family in Carchi, Ecuador. Photo: Myriam Paredes

NGOs. These two traditions did not emerge in a social vacuum and, in fact, they continually influence one another. Despite disparate origins, over time they arguably have become part of a common ideology of “agricultural modernisation”: market-based production, the intermediation of relationships through money and financial systems, and reliance on exogenous knowledge and technology. While each owns its own ideals of environment and public good, in practice, both Development 1.0 and 2.0 emphasize universal notions of “best practice”, rationality, and profit.

While it is difficult to generalise about their short- and intermediate-term effects, people largely agree that Development 1.0 and 2.0 have fundamentally altered the course of global agriculture and food, leading to new forms of land tenure and planting schemes, management of soils, water and seeds, exchange, social relationships and aspirations of rural people and their families. Meanwhile, there is little doubt that agricultural modernisation also has contributed to unwanted outcomes. People across the planet are dealing with associated problems – deforestation, degradation of soils and water systems, erosion of on-farm biodiversity, proliferation of pests, exclusion from markets and rising climate variability – that fundamentally undermine their food systems and well-being.

Development 3.0: Self-organisation

Though the future may seem bleak, we find reason for hope. Despite the tremendous institutional influence of Development 1.0 and 2.0, we do not find pure forms of agricultural modernisation in farmers’ fields, homes or communities. Short of romanticising local practice, we see that people, their families and social networks largely work outside the formalised institutional environment of development. As such, peoples’ practices

continue to be richly nuanced and diverse, where one can find both highly worrisome trends as well as promising opportunities.

In the coming editions of *Farming Matters* we will share experiences from a highly prominent, though commonly neglected third pathway in development: family- and community-level innovation embedded in peoples’ daily interactions and practices (Development 3.0). We will present our studies on how people, operating in families and social networks, have managed to creatively forge relatively sustainable and healthy food practices in the face of the seeming hegemony of agricultural modernisation. The crux of Development 3.0 is to approach rural development as something that ultimately emerges from locally distributed and resolved social processes, however tricky and messy, rather than as something that can be fixed. Then, one subsequent institutional challenge becomes the re-thinking of science, policy and

professionalised development vis-à-vis the undeniable self-organisation of continuities and change.

While we, as researchers and development practitioners, still struggle to step outside of our own institutional biases and constraints, faced with the pressing challenges of modern social and environmental decline, we agree with others that a fresh perspective on development is urgently called for. Like its predecessors, Development 3.0 is filled with contradictions and challenges, but there is strong evidence that development practice is already undergoing change in the hands of emerging networks of development actors, in particular families and food counter-movements.

Drawing on on-going work in Latin America, our colleagues and we will contribute a series of articles on the richness of peoples’ daily practices and show why this social heterogeneity is so central to the past, present and future of agriculture, food and environmental management. Through grounded experiences in families, communities and other collectives, we will explore how, through sheer grit, creativity and flair, people go about their daily living and being. In particular, we will shed light on “positive deviance”: those cases where families have generated promising alternatives to the norms of practice in soil and water management, agrobiodiversity, family nutrition, the circulation and sale of products as well as in the shaping of public opinion and policy. The focus on positive deviance is meant to provide a central reference point for understanding how change evolves and spreads through peoples’ day-to-day practices and self-organisation.

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