Doing Development Differently in the Global South – *Workshop Report*

December 2018

1. The Nairobi workshop

On 4 December 2018 CARE International and the British Council convened a workshop in Nairobi with the title "Doing Development Differently in the Global South" to consider how the Doing Development Differently global community can better incorporate Southern voices, and how the principles of DDD – its approach to development practice and its aspiration to deliver better results – can be best actioned in the South. The workshop built upon several ongoing discussions across INGOs and the broader development community: primarily, what it would take to realize DDD when working with civil society[1]; additionally, whether DDD and related agendas like Thinking and Working Politically have sufficiently incorporated Southern voices and may even need to be decolonised[2].

The workshop brought together participants from a wide array of backgrounds: Kenyan civil society, INGOs, implementing firms, donor agencies, academia, students and youth leaders from East Africa. There was a healthy combination of insiders and outsiders to development debates like DDD, individuals from the Global North and the Global South, men and women. The workshop plan was designed to elicit lively debate and empower all in the room to make meaningful contributions. To

that end, participants were briefly introduced to the history of the DDD agenda before engaging in a group exercise of problem-oriented, politically-smart design using tools from the PDIA Toolkit[3]. The exercise created a shared practical experience that then was the basis for a collective debate on the merits and limitations of DDD, and the challenges of localising, institutionalising, and fostering this kind of work.

This report provides an overview of the workshop themes, including critical questions raised by participants on the intersection of DDD principles and Southern practice. It concludes with three practical recommendations for DDD champions going forward.

2. DDD four years later

It has been over four years since the foundational Doing Development Differently meeting was held at Harvard Square in Boston, USA, on 22-23 October 2014. The gathering included several dozen practitioners and academics who shared a frustration with the underlying theory of change of development practice and the lack of impact of past efforts to incorporate greater attention to context and complexity, particularly in the work of donor agencies. Instead of an alternative technical blueprint, the group signed a Doing Development Differently Manifesto (*see box 1*) and set out to launch an advocacy campaign – perhaps even a movement – that would reach into as many development organisations as possible. The Manifesto was a hit with frustrated practitioners, with hundreds adding their names to the initial list and later attending DDD conferences in Manila (April 2015), London (November 2016) and Jakarta (March 2017). Pablo Yanguas who facilitated the 4 December 2018 Doing Development Differently workshop in Nairobi, was amongst the academics involved at the foundational meeting in 2014.

BOX 1: THE DDD MANIFESTO

"[G]enuine development progress is **complex**: solutions are not simple or obvious, those who would benefit most lack power, those who can make a difference are disengaged and political barriers are too often overlooked. Many development initiatives fail to address this complexity, promoting irrelevant interventions that will have little impact."

"As an emerging community of development practitioners and observers, we believe that development initiatives can – and must – have **greater impact**."

Principles:

- Local problem-solving
- Locally owned in reality
- Local conveners and coalitions
- Merged design and implementation
- Managing risk through 'small bets'
- Results that build trust, empower people, promote sustainability

Full manifesto: https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/events-documents/5149.pdf.

The DDD manifesto and foundational movement represented a confluence of pre-existing agendas. Harvard's Building State Capability Program had earlier developed its problem-driven iterative adaptation (PDIA) approach – a public policy philosophy and toolset that rejected the blind diffusion of template solutions and instead called for tackling problems more locally and creatively[4]. In the UK, meanwhile, a burgeoning epistemic community on political-economy analysis had spent years persuading donors to take local context and leadership seriously[5]. DDD drew upon these efforts and imbued them with a new energy and public discourse. The result, more than a proper DDD approach as such, was the refinement and proliferation of ideas about adaptation, collaboration, learning, and working politically[6].

3. Does DDD have a Northern bias?

The DDD Manifesto was never intended to be a Northern agenda – attention to and respect for local context and experiences were an explicit component of DDD, and one of the movement's early champions was Jaime Faustino, a Philippino practitioner from the Asia Foundation. However, many of the intellectual proponents of DDD and related agendas were based in Northern institutions like Harvard and ODI, and their principles were first disseminated to donor agencies like DFID and USAID, and through them to INGOs and implementers. Is this yet another Western agenda that donors were bringing to "poor Africa"?

In the workshop, participants welcomed the broad elements of the DDD manifesto as directly relevant to Southern actors – the concepts and challenges can be easily adapted to various local contexts. The emphasis on the inherent complexity of certain development problems has a universal appeal, as does the critique of solution-based public policy failures around the world. In that sense, DDD travels well. However, participants were also sceptical about certain aspects of DDD-type thinking that, whilst not necessarily designed to privilege Northern perspectives, can nevertheless still be reflective of them.

The lack of experiential diversity in DDD is manifest in three key challenges for the agenda that workshop participants identified:

- A view of politics that tends to align with dominant politics;
- Lack of representation of different experiences and outlooks; and
- Skewed power relations and incentives in the aid infrastructure that hamper DDD.

4. Politically smart, locally led… by whom?

A key question invoked by Southern participants at the workshop resulted from DDD's emphasis on solving problems: whose problems are tackled? Whilst the DDD Manifesto is clear on the centrality of local agency, ownership is not a new idea in international development – indeed, it has been a lynchpin of the Aid Effectiveness agenda since the Paris Declaration of 2005. However, the trend of calling for greater local ownership has never fully explained what to do in contexts where ownership is contested[7]. "Working with the grain" involves a broad spectrum ranging from use of country systems to revolutionary advocacy[8], but in its explicit rejection of "good governance" DDD runs the risk of focusing exclusively on what's doable, to the detriment of what's morally desirable.

Whilst problems may be local, development interactions are still mediated – in one way or another – by government relations. Northern governments often provide funding and assistance, and mix developmental and non-developmental objectives. Southern governments are often the recipients of financial transfers, or the authorizers of developmental activity with foreign support (for example by allowing INGOs to register and operate locally). Moreover, global development is still seen as a national endeavour, all too often focusing on "developmental states", industrial policy, and "good" leaders[9].

Like other development agendas, DDD runs the risk of contributing to the perpetuation of dominant politics, either by romanticising local leadership or by improving the effectiveness of systems and processes that serve elite priorities. It can be hard for external actors to properly gauge the underlying power relations at a local level, and thus to discriminate between self-serving power brokers and conveners who are rooted in local legitimacy. For a long time, donors have tended to rely on firms and NGOs that know who to talk to them, and there is little incentive for working with local actors and organisations who may not be familiar with the development industry[10]. Meaningful Southern leadership has to shape strategy, not just implementation. But that requires a certain humility on the part of donors that has been missing thus far.

5. The value of including diverse voices

The challenges of nuanced local agency and ownership could be pre-empted somewhat through the inclusion of more Southern voices in the conversation. Unfortunately, the "global DDD community" – by accident, affinity or availability – is overwhelmingly donor-centric and Anglophone. There are relatively few DDD "champions" who are African, Asian, Latin American, or even from continental Europe. This raises the issue of "localisation" of DDD, and what it means in practice.

Whilst the framing of the workshop was explicit in the invocation of the "Global South", participants discussed whether the "Southern" epithet risks becoming yet another empty category. Would it make more sense to speak of an "African DDD", or even a "Kenyan DDD"? The general, more universal principles of DDD provide a useful foundation, but localised DDD needs to bring in local communities of practice that can connect the general and the particular, and in so doing adjust adaptive development to local practices. Workshop participants brought up a number of DDD parallels from Kenyan activists and local development champions who have never received donor funding nor been aware of these global debates. It behoves DDD practitioners and champions to invite these outsiders to the table, not to teach them about adaptive development, but to learn from their own idiosyncratic approaches to problem solving.

A related issue is the need of the global DDD community to pay more attention to values, not just toolkits. There is a value structure at the global level of development (enshrined in the SDGs), and another one at the local level where problem-solving occurs – it is important for brokers and enablers of adaptive development to problematize the intermediate value structure, which is still too reliant on the assumptions and goals of intergovernmental aid relationships. Some participants worried that DDD would privilege development results over values and virtues, focusing on "small bets" to the detriment of transformational goals. Others wondered what the space was for more forceful critiques of the agenda, for instance through a feminist lens. To some Southern observers, DDD does not appear as such a radical departure from developmentalism, which lessens its potential appeal.

One of the lessons that was taken from the practical exercise (*see box 2*) is that DDD is most powerful when diverse voices – especially those directly affected by a problem – sit at the table. It is the triangulation between unique outlooks and experiences that makes unlocking problems not only possible, but indeed more productive than conventional programming approaches.

BOX 2: DDD EXERCISE ON THE LACK OF WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN KENYA

In order to ensure that workshop participants had a modicum of common ground for debate, they were invited to take part in a practical DDD exercise. Specifically, they were asked to work in groups to fulfil four tasks taken from the PDIA toolkit:

1. Constructing a problem
2. Deconstructing the problem ("5 why" technique)
3. Looking for entry points ("triple-A" change space analysis)
4. Designing the first iteration

The specific issue they had to tackle was the challenge of promoting more women to take up leadership roles in Kenya. The problem was selected from among a series of suggestions made by participants themselves, which provided both immediacy to Kenyans in the room and a "reality check" by those with experience in gender empowerment.

In a two-hour working session, each group used the prompts of each tool to move from a broad problem statement, to smaller, more manageable entry points, to a discussion of the change space and a tentative outline for a first iteration. Faced with an intractable problem rooted in patriarchal social norms and resource discrimination, the different groups came up with three measurable, short-term activities that targeted key potential allies such as religious leaders or media figures, to build a counter-narrative that could broaden the space for more young women to envision themselves as leaders.

PDIA toolkit: https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/events-documents/5149.pdf.

6. Enabling and fostering DDD

Doing Development Differently – like Harvard's PDIA before it – was never intended to be a donor agenda, but an approach to developmental change everywhere. However, just like some of the early adopters worked for donors or with donor funding, the application of DDD principles in Southern contexts is still heavily conditioned by the foreign aid infrastructure. Impact goals, contractual rules, funding modalities and reporting requirements are set by Northern development organisations. Therefore the skewed power relations between donors, implementers and local partners remain a key constraint for DDD-inspired work.

When posed the question of what needs to be done to enable DDD in the Global South, participants at the Nairobi workshop gravitated towards the challenge of incentives. Adaptive development work requires time and resources, and the kinds of contracts issued by funding partners do not always allow for the latitude or overheads inherent to DDD. Some participants raised the question of whether donors themselves should be the targets of advocacy for more flexible and context-sensitive programmes. In general, to the extent that they are dealing with reluctant funders, implementers and local partners need a better political-economy analysis of donors.

The job of DDD champions is to influence the understanding about what kind of change is possible, and find allies in the right places. However, this leads to the challenge of how best to frame DDD so

as to prevent pushback: adaptive work cannot be sold as the best or even the main way of doing development, or "what's left" after everything else fails. Few veteran practitioners will be swayed by telling them that "it's OK to fail". And it cannot become yet another recipe that is applied in a formulaic and "boring" way. Instead, adaptive approaches should be framed as a different modality for tackling particular problem areas[11].

Even if aid agencies could be persuaded to enable providers and NGOs to do more adaptive work, however, there is still a dearth of capacity-building for DDD principles to be upheld in practice. Beyond individual champions, the institutionalisation of DDD processes in development organisations requires a change of culture, with potential repercussions in hiring, training and career advancement. This is a tall order when the manifesto, tools, or learning modules are seeing as distant products of a Northern agenda. Bringing DDD to the Global South may require localising not just the ideas, but also the communities themselves, so as to pool resources and gather momentum in local operating environments. Country- or region-focused platforms for training, discussion and learning would be more directly relevant than purely global resources.

7. What's next for DDD in the South?

In the four years since the DDD Manifesto was drafted, adaptive approaches to development appear to have become the new norm. However, appearances can be deceiving: the agenda has very vocal proponents in a few key donor agencies, and is shaping expectation through a new wave of programme design, but by and large this remains a mostly aspirational, mostly Northern exercise. Beyond the boundaries of the "global" DDD community (like the Google Group #adaptdev) lie myriad Southern organisations and practitioners that are not plugged into global debates, despite the clear parallels between their own problem solving and the principles of DDD, and despite what they could offer DDD in terms of values, lessons or local coalitions.

Intermediaries between North and South – such as INGOs – could work towards bridging this divide. In practice, this means tackling three challenges identified in the Nairobi workshop:

- ***Localising political analysis***: To fully overcome the potential biases of the "working with the grain" and "local ownership" discourse, political-economy analysis has to be taken out of aid agencies and into local context, working with local voices that may not fit the usual PEA consultant profile. This involves capacity-building, knowledge exchanges, and greater collaboration with local academics and community leaders.
- ***Adapting tools to local needs***: PDIA and Thinking and Working Politically tools and frameworks should be disseminated for testing and refinement by Southern partners, making them active users instead of passive recipients of adaptive development principles. Simply put, the localisation of DDD necessitates localisation of DDD tools. This also requires advocating for funding modalities that create a clear incentive for using such tools.
- ***Building Southern communities of practice***: Participants at the 2014 Harvard Square meeting that produced the DDD Manifesto operated on the premise that a coalition of like-minded practitioners would be stronger than individual efforts in single organisations. In the same spirit, the institutionalisation of DDD in Southern contexts depends on the ability of local champions to come together for mutual support and shared learning.

At the end of the day, it cannot be assumed that Southern practitioners will eventually find and join groups like #adaptdev, as if by some sort of irresistible gravitational pull. Southern DDD will have to

be championed, elaborated, and nurtured, just like the original wave of DDD was. The result of this process may end up looking nothing like the original Doing Development Differently movement, perhaps even losing the label in the process. But that is what DDD is supposed to be about: finding local solutions to local problems by building local coalitions for change. The same logic will have to be applied to the localisation of the agenda.

For further information contact:
Gilbert Muyumbu, CARE International Muyumbu@careinternational.org
Jake Allen, British Council Jake.Allen@britishcouncil.org

Acknowledgements
A special thanks to Dr Pablo Yanguas, author of this report and facilitator at the Doing Development Differently in the Global South Workshop held in Nairobi on 4 December 2018.

---

[1] For instance, see *How International Non-Government Organisations are Doing Development Differently*, a discussion paper by World Vision, CARE, International Rescue Committee, Mercy Corps and Oxfam, available at: https://www.wvi.org/development/publication/how-international-non-government-organisations-are-doing-development. See also this blog post: https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/development-blog/four-suggestions-on-how-doing-development-differently-can-better-listen-to-and-engage-southern-civil-society.
[2] On the questions raised by a Southern perspective on DDD/TWP: https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/development-blog/the-ddd-agenda-questions-from-a-development-practitioner-from-the-south.
[3] Developed by Harvard University's Building State Capability Program, and available at: https://bsc.cid.harvard.edu/PDIAtoolkit.
[4] Matt Andrews, *The Limits of Institutional Reform* (Oxford University Press, 2013). David Booth and Sue Unsworth, *Politically smart, locally led development* (ODI, 2014), available at: https://www.odi.org/publications/8800-politically-smart-locally-led.
[5] Pablo Yanguas and David Hulme, *Can aid bureaucracies think politically? The administrative challenges of political economy analysis (PEA) in DFID and the World Bank* (ESID Working Paper No. 33, 2014), available at: http://www.effective-states.org/wp-content/uploads/working_papers/final-pdfs/esid_wp_33_yanguas_hulme.pdf
[6] Leni Wild et al., *Adapting Development* (ODI, 2015), available at: https://www.odi.org/publications/8125-adapting-development-improving-services-poor. Matt Andrews et al., *Building State Capability: Evidence, Analysis, Action* (Oxford University Press, 2017), available at: https://bsc.cid.harvard.edu/building-state-capability-evidence-analysis-action. See also the Thinking and Working Politically Community: https://twpcommunity.org/. And USAID Learning Lab: https://usaidlearninglab.org/.
[7] See, for instance, Pablo Yanguas, *Why We Lie About Aid: Development and the Messy Politics of Change* (Zed Books, 2018).
[8] See Brian Levy, *Working with the Grain: Integrating Governance and Growth in Development Strategies* (Oxford University Press, 2014).
[9] Tim Kelsall, "Is developmental patrimonialism a dead end?" Available at: http://www.dlprog.org/opinions/is-developmental-patrimonialism-a-dead-end.php.
[10] Kendra Dupuy et al., "Foreign aid to local NGOs: good intentions, bad policy". Available at: https://www.opendemocracy.net/kendra-dupuy-james-ron-aseem-prakash/foreign-aid-to-local-ngos-good-intentions-bad-policy.
[11] These would be areas in which the context is hard to predict and impact hard to verify, as argued by Dan Honig in *Navigation by Judgment: When and Why Top Down Management of Foreign Aid Doesn't Work* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

Front cover photo: Farmers in Malawi © Amanda Gawne / CARE 2018