

## Making Services Work for Poor People“<sup>1</sup> A Scholar’s Perspective

Wolf-Dieter Eberwein

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to share some of my thoughts on “Making Services Work for Poor People“<sup>2</sup> A Scholar’s Perspective with you tonight. The international system today is faced with numerous problems today. I will address a few ones and raise the issue what scholars can contribute to their solution. From the developmental perspective two urgent issues, the ones you are concerned with, are poverty and inequality. Given my international relations and security studies background my primary concerns relate to collective violence and instability. We definitely know that underdevelopment and collective violence are interdependent. But do we really know how greater equality and wealth can be achieved by simultaneously preventing collective violence to break out? I fear that the answer at this point is no.

Success in achieving these goals implies two conditions on the political side: the capacity as well as the willingness to act. I will leave out the issue of the political

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<sup>1</sup> In Preparation of the World Development Report 2003, Berlin, July 8, 2002, Berlin, Grand Hyatt Hotel

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will to implement specific policies, even though a lot could be said about this particular issue.

As far as the capacity to act is concerned, research does have an important role to play in that it contributes to a better understanding of the complex processes which inhibit or favour greater wealth and stability. This link can be clarified by answering four interrelated questions:

**what do we know?**

**Do we know the right things?**

**Do we need to know more?**

**And: could we know more?**

Answers to each of these four questions are from my point of view implied in the statement by the president of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn, when he suggested that the World Development Reports should be seen not as the capstone of a one-off research program, but as part of a continuing program of research and a springboard of action.

Some if not all of you will remember the path breaking study by Forrester and his associates published in 1972: *The Limits to Growth*. This was the first generation global model, a simple system dynamics computer simulation model, followed by a whole series of global models to be developed in the years to follow. Forrester concluded that in the long run the break down of the world system was inevitable unless drastic changes were implemented (less pollution, less economic

growth, less population growth). Twenty years later, the replication study reinforced the initial results as evidenced in the title of the study “*Growth beyond the Limits*”.

Amilcar Herrera, the director of the Bariloche model, challenged the basic philosophy of the Forrester type *models of doom*. His model addressed the – normative – question under what conditions the satisfaction of basic needs could be achieved and how many years this would take? He stated the rationale for his research strategy as follows: whenever there are problems, there always is a solution. Herera’s statement is of direct relevance to my remarks relating to the link between research and action in that it acknowledges the fact that policies and politics make a difference.

To make my point let me briefly take another look back. The 1960’s were the great days of behaviorism in the social sciences. One consequence was the recognition that in order to achieve any substantial progress the social sciences at large need valid and reliable data about politics and society. This led to the large aggregate data movement which gained initial prominence with the Yale Political Data Program, which later materialized in the World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators. One of the champions of this philosophy was Karl Deutsch, Professor of Government at Harvard and also former director at the Berlin Science Center for Social Research. He believed, and I think rightly so, that quantification,

statistical and mathematical models are fundamental if any substantial progress in social research is to be achieved.

Having said this, let me come to my four points.

First: What do we know? The answer is trivial, the consequences are not. Naturally empirically grounded research has contributed to enlarge considerably our insights about poverty, inequality, collective violence and the linkages between these phenomena. But: are these insights directly relevant to the policy-making community, the practitioners? The answers to the next three questions will hopefully contribute to clarify what I mean.

Second: Do we know the right things? I will not even try to give a judgement on this broad issue area. My guess simply is that some of the research is probably not that useful from the perspective of practice. Among others a number of the concepts, the indicators and the aggregation procedures used are too distant from reality. To give but one example: the concept of expected utility that is often used in some research on international violent conflict is highly abstract and complex. The same could also be said for the concept of relative deprivation. It is hard to see how such concepts can be directly translated, if at all, into a particular policy program.

Third: do we need to know more? The answer is yes. We do need to know more if we look at poverty and inequality for example. We need to know in what political and social context these phenomena occur and evolve. This implies that a number

of insights are not contextualized properly. To illustrate this point let me briefly give you some data about the Sub-Saharan region where many low income countries are located. The data suggest that a considerable number of the 48 countries in that region have more or less continuously been exposed with domestic violence and natural disasters. Between 1950 and 2000 there have more than 1100 natural disasters with more than 1.6 million people killed. 575 occurred alone in the 1990's. In the same period (1950-2000) there were 204 years of major armed conflicts, of which 158 were war years. In the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century we had 81 major armed conflict years of which 48 were war years. A number of states is both plagued by internal violence as well as natural disasters (Chad, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Somalia, Sudan).

With reference to the Millenium Development Goals on poverty reduction in particular in low-income countries Shantayanan Devarajan and Ritva Reinikka in their outline for the next World Development report state that obviously growth is not enough nor are public expenditures. If poverty reduction is a longer term goal, I would argue that one has to explicitly take into account in any developmental strategy the risks of violence as well as natural disasters. Both events have direct consequences for the overall developmental process. Part of this process relates to the risks and opportunities of strengthening respectively the re-building of political, social and economic institutions.

Fourth: Could we know more? Naturally, the answer is yes. I will only raise one simple issue which I want to denominate as the data disaggregation issue. The disaggregation of the map of Burundi reveals that genocide took predominantly place in those districts where the judicial system had broken down. What does this imply? First, most of our empirical knowledge is based on aggregate data of the nation/year type. But, as the Burundi example illustrates, the state is not a homogenous spatial entity. By analogy, poverty reduction strategies in conjunction with violence and natural disaster prevention need to take into account the spatial risk distribution in a given country. That means we need spatially disaggregated data. And second, it makes a difference when an event takes place. We have, among others, several time series on domestic violence and political regime break downs and transitions. Based on annual data, we do not know what comes first, regime transition or violence. Both relations are possible but each of them has different policy implications.

Thus, for poverty reduction strategies combined with disaster and violence prevention we need disaggregated data as far as space and time is concerned. Irrespective of the impressive data collections at our disposal, we do not have the finer grained information required which would make our scientific knowledge much more useable for practitioners and policy making purposes.

What conclusions can we draw? I will limit myself to two simple observations.

First, we need systematic empirical insights but empirical research is not per se directly useful to bridge the gap between research and practice. For that purpose our research should be based on concepts that come much closer to those factors that can be manipulated by policy-makers.

Second, to bridge this gap between the abstract and the concrete we also need to better understand the dynamics of the ongoing processes. For that purpose we need systematic time series, disaggregated in time and space. The nation/year is not sufficient. One possible effect could be to narrow the gap between structural prevention and operative prevention. The first is long term and of your concern: reduce violence and instability by reducing poverty and inequality. The second is short-term and falls within the responsibility of the foreign security policy decision-makers.

As I have argued some years ago, the conceptual world of scholars does not necessarily match the world of practitioners. We have to narrow this gap in the interest of both communities – not to forget the beneficiaries. Even though, and I would say fortunately so, scholars do not have to make hard political and policy choices, they nevertheless can contribute to increase the overall capacity to act.

Thank you for your attention.