

Research on Development Administration and the Challenges of International Development

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ABSTRACT

The article addresses in greater depth some of the central issues of the contemporary international development discourse. The focus of my article is the perspective of 'development administration', a research area in administrative science¹. The central issues of the article include the conceptual issues concerning development administration in administrative science and the challenges developing countries are facing in: (a.) coping with modernisation and economic globalisation; (b.) promoting good governance by ensuring administrative decentralisation and local development; and (c.) ensuring the sustainability of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO)-led development initiatives. The article argues that there exists very little scientific research, neither conceptual nor empirical, on development administration in Finland. Therefore, academic study on issues related to 'development administration' and 'international development' has vital importance for the current development discourse in Finland and abroad.

Key words: development administration, development assistance, economic globalisation, social capital, good governance, NGOs

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Since the 1950s, the study of 'development administration' has been viewed as part of the study of public administration. (Siffin 1991, 7) Development administration refers to the administration of development programmes; to the methods used by large-scale organisations,

notably governments, to implement policies; and plans designed to meet their development objectives. A second meaning associated with the term 'development administration' also involves the strengthening of administrative capabilities. (Riggs 1977, 6) Thus the term 'development administration' refers to organised efforts to carry out programmes or projects thought by those involved to serve developmental objectives. (Riggs 1977B, 73)

Siffin seems escapist about development administration, as in his view it focuses on matters outside the boundaries of conventional public administration. (Siffin 1991, 11-12) He comments on the problem of development administration (1991, 8), arguing that there really isn't much of a problem, inasmuch as there isn't much of a field. Development administration is a term that implies a question: How can the ideas and mechanisms of public administration be used as instruments of social and economic development? Riggs states: 'how does the study of development administration differ from the study of public administration in general, or even from the study of comparative administration? No clear answer to this question can be given...' (1977, 3).

Jreisat (1991, 19-20) is more optimistic about the concept than Siffin. He claims that comparative and development administration offers a rich heritage of scholarly contributions that include studies of numerous countries, cultures, organisations, and groups. Katz has, rather, identified the borders between development administration and public administration (1977, 120-121). In his opinion, development administration differs from traditional public administration in its objectives, scope, and complexity. According to him,

¹ The terms 'administrative science' and 'public administration' have been used interchangeably in this article.

'development administration is innovative, since it is concerned with the societal changes involved in achieving developmental objectives. In its quest for change, the government becomes concerned with a wide scope of activities. No longer is it limited to the maintenance of law and order, the provision of some limited public services, and the collection of taxes; rather, it is specifically involved in the mobilization of resources and their application to a great variety of development activities on a massive scale.' (Katz 1977, 120)

Despite all these analyses and arguments, it is obvious that the context and scope of development administration is very central to administrative science, the subject widely known as public administration. The concept emerged in the post World War II era of nation-building and administrative reforms in post-colonial states in the developing world. The concept often refers to 'the two fields of public administration and development, which can be combined under the heading of "development administration" or administrative aspects of development.' (Riggs 1978, 1, italics added) Since its inception, the concept of development administration has mainly been employed in studying 'administration' and 'development' in developing countries. Development administration is most often treated as a facet of comparative public administration. In his most widely used book 'Public Administration: A Comparative Perspective' Ferrel Heady (1966) focused on public bureaucracy as it exists within different types of political systems. He sketched five general features of public administration in developing countries, and carefully examined the interplay of bureaucracy and politics. (Siffin 1991, 8)

Riggs (1977, 3) provides the insight that the Comparative Administration Group (CAG) of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) played a significant role in the emergence of the concept of development administration in the 1960s. Administrative problems in the developing countries were a significant concern of their comparative study of public administration. Riggs and his CAG were supported by the Ford Foundation (Handerson 1971, 234). Thus, under the auspices of comparative studies of national public administration, development administration became more prominent as an independent concept in public administration studies in developing countries. One significant change in

the 1967 version of US Agency for International Development (USAID) administrative doctrine, as embodied in the agency manual, is the emphasis on 'development administration', curiously without once using that popular term at all. (Abueva 1969, 554) Despite its growth as an independent area in public administration since the 1950s, academic studies in development administration was losing its momentum throughout the 1980s in the industrialised countries (See e.g. Hossain 2001, 37) and again started to regain in the turn of the century (See e.g. Collins 2000, 3).

Public Administration and Development Administration: The theoretical gap of the 1980s

Despite the above discussion, throughout the 1980s the mission of public administration in developed countries reached a different stage. During the 1970s, administrative reform in developing countries was an influential catchword (Siffin 1991, 9) - which was usually understood as a subject matter of development administration. However Hussain (1994, 11) argues that developing the capacity of bureaucracy did not help much. Training imparted to bureaucracy did not correspond to the needs of the developing countries because training techniques and contents remained Western or American. A reflection of Hussain's view also could be found in the recent American literature on public administration. After several decades of scholarly contribution to the field of comparative and development administration, Professor Fred W. Riggs in his recent (2001, 1) writing concluded that American public administration is truly exceptional and has limited relevance to the solution of administrative problems in other countries. Nevertheless, it is so widely imitated and viewed as a model that anyone studying Public Administration needs to understand why the American system is exceptional and why its practices are so often irrelevant in other countries. Such an understanding requires a comparative analysis of different regimes based on the same constitutional principles -- i.e. the separation of executive, legislative and judicial powers -- and the identification of the peculiarly American structure of a hybrid bureaucracy.

In the 1980s 'privatisation' got labelled as the subject matter of public administration (Siffin

1991, 9) - which covers a limited sphere of the organisational landscape in developing countries, as compared to the developed world. The best-known forums of public administration like the Minnowbrook I (in 1968) and II (in 1988) concentrated their theoretical focus on US administration and suggested reforms in that system. The 1968 theoretical discussion was mainly on 'ethics, social equality, human relations, reconciling public administration and democracy, and concern for the state of the field. However, several 1988 themes were not as prominent in 1968, notably leadership, constitutional and legal perspectives, technology, policy, and economic perspectives.' (Frederickson 1989, 100) Thus the discussion in both of the Minnowbrook forums naturally was far from the central concerns of public administration in developing countries. Due to the widening gap between the economies of rich and poor countries, over the decades the operational landscape of organisations had become complex internationally. As a result, 'development administration' was left behind on the journey of public administration sometime in the 1980s - although the subject matter of development administration is not a separate discipline from public administration.

However, like Paul Collins (2000, 3), many scholars in public administration feel that the turn of the century is an appropriate time to reflect on the impact of public administration on development and, in turn, the impact of facets of development on administration. The issues confronting us are serious, and include the failure of existing systems to cope with growing gaps between rich and poor within and between countries, with environmental degradation, with frequent conflict between and within states, and growing distrust of government generally.

THE ABSENCE OF DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION IN DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

Much has already been said about development administration and its relevance to public administration studies. World Bank has found that some 51 per cent of its rural development area projects during the period 1965 to 1985 failed to achieve the Bank's minimum acceptable rate of return of 10 percent (Turner and Hulme

1997, 140). Samuel Paul (1986, 1) argued that administration or management has always been identified as a neglected factor in development project activities. Even in recent days, in practice, theories of development administration has very little been used or applied in planning and implementation of development projects and programmes in developing and transitional countries. Therefore, there is a general concern that most of the failed development programmes could not reach their developmental goals only because the stakeholders focused too little attention on the administration of development programmes. Scholars (Turner and Hulme 1997, 141-144) also claim that the challenges of development, particularly in rural areas, are not 'well structured' problems, as project planning methodologies assume, but are 'ill structured' or simply 'a mess'. Orthodox project planning methodologies demand large amounts of reliable data. In most developing countries such data is not available and so planners have to make assumptions. Another feature of project management in developing countries is uncertainty and instability. Separation of planning from management causes serious problems - belatedly, in the 1980s, project planners have begun to recognise the problems of implementation. The lack of beneficiary participation also causes serious problems. All these factors make the development projects vulnerable to the long political processes in which aid agencies, political parties, local élites, politicians, bureaucrats, and other interest-groups act. As a result, the extent of rural poverty has not been reduced - or may have worsened in recent years. (Quibria 1994, Hossain 2001)

Theoretically, the study of development from the administrative science perspective has been weakening since the 1980s - because public administration in developed democracies, i.e., in the richer parts of the world, has dealt with some other aspects relevant to their everyday business. Therefore, advancing scientific studies on development administration has vital importance for fostering better understanding both academically in higher educational institutions and practically in the field, where development programmes are basically carried out. In order to address these issues, there is a great need to advance academic understanding regarding the existing theories

(stated above) in the field and try to advance conceptual understanding of development administration so that the challenges of present day's development assistance programmes and international development could be tackled.

DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH AGENDAS

Theoretically the research on development administration should be carried out with a broader perspective with the intention to make conceptual contribution to the study of administrative science. Scholarly research should try to bridge the theoretical gap between development administration and public administration studies - which has developed during the 1980s and 1990s between developing and industrialised countries. (Hossain 2001, 37) Due to its strong roots in development studies, development administration itself is a multi-disciplinary area of study. Therefore, with any single research approach, not all areas of development and their administration could be focused on in a limited time-span. That is why the research agenda should be thematically very in-depth and designed to cover the very central issues of the contemporary international development discourse. (See also e.g. Collins 2000, 3-14) Multi-disciplinary orientation of development studies should no way be lost in the study of development administration. However the aim should be to make theoretical contribution in the area of administrative science and practical contribution in the area of development management. For example, scholarly work on the following thematic issues has vital importance in the contemporary development administration and international development discourse:

- 1 Development aid in the context of modernisation: the harmony and/or tension between social capital and economic globalisation
- 2 Challenges in good governance: administrative decentralisation and local development in the South
- 3 Donors, NGOs, and the states in the developing world: the sustainability of NGO-led development programmes

Each of the above topics is very large in scope and requires deep understanding of these issues and themes reflected in each of the topics. Thus, careful selections of theoretical approaches in addressing these research topics are of vital importance in carrying out any study on the above topics. The thematic discussion of the above topics is further discussed below with theoretical references.

Economic globalisation and social capital

Economic globalisation has mostly been studied specially by the scholars in development economics, history, sociology and anthropology. Despite the economic advances (World Bank 2000) in many parts of the developing world, David Korten (1996, 127) argues that globalisation has rendered many of the political roles of government obsolete as well. Companies with globalised operations routinely and effortlessly sidestep governmental restrictions based on old assumptions about national economies and foreign policy. 'Renato Ruggerio, ex-Director of the World Trade Organisation stated: "We are creating a single global economy". Embedded within this new single global economy is a set of liberal European epistemologies which define human beings as economic units and the free market as a rationally operating framework within which perfect competition exists, which has its roots in the mercantilism of the earliest forms of imperialism, and which is deeply flawed ideologically. Economic liberalism and free trade are the linchpins [sic] of the new economic order designed to carry humankind on a wave of economic triumph into the new millennium.' (Harawira 1999) The recent protests against economic globalisation in many parts of the world make us re-think its dynamics and drawbacks. However, the study of economic globalisation is largely lacking in the public administration literature.

'Social capital' refers to stocks of cultural elements such as social trust, norms, and values that people can draw upon to solve common problems for mutual benefits. (Li 2001, 130) Analogous to notions of physical capital and human capital--tools and training that enhance individual productivity--social capital refers to features of social organization such as networks,

norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. (Putnam 1995, 67) Studies on social capital have been addressed by the scholars of administrative science (e.g., Harisalo and Miettinen 1997, Putnam 2000). Putnam's study reveals a competing scenario between social capital and modernisation in the US and reveals America's declining social capital over the last three decades or so.

Economic globalisation and modernisation contribute each other in order to survive. Development aid promotes modernisation in the developing world. The mission of most of the development projects is to modernise traditional societies through a process called 'transition'; such societies are also referred to as 'prismatic societies' by Riggs (1978). Professor Dor Bahadur Bista (1994) has empirically presented the consequences of modernisation and development aid and his study on fatalism and development bears commenting on at some length in this regard.

A well planned research agenda addresses the findings presented by Korten (1996) on economic globalisation and Putnam (2000) on social capital could contribute an in-depth theoretical contribution to the study of international development by examining the inter-linkages between these two influential concepts in social science.

Good governance and decentralisation

The notion of 'good governance' was introduced to international development co-operation in the late 1980's following discussions in mainly World Bank circles on the results of structural adjustment policies. It developed into a somewhat confusing and controversial term. (Kruiter 1996) Theoretically the scope of governance is wide and covers larger issues such as administrative reform, national development policies, democratisation, decentralisation, corruption, partnerships between the public, private and the third sector, and other areas of public affairs (see, e.g., Turner and Hulme 1997). Among the above, research on administrative decentralisation has got a tradition and direct relevance to the study of comparative and development administration. Including

administrative decentralisation, the other issues of good governance mentioned above (Turner and Hulme 1997) have also got a growing importance in the contemporary international development discourse and covers the central aspects of development administration.

A major obstacle to the effective performance of public bureaucracies in most developing countries is the excessive concentration of decision-making and authority within central government. Decentralisation within the state involves a transfer of authority to perform some service to the public from an individual or an agency in central government to some other individual or agency which is closer to the public to be served. However, in practice, the challenges of good governance through decentralisation are many. In most developing countries, there has been a tendency for independent governments to prefer delegating power within the public service rather than to locally elected authorities. There has been much rhetoric about participation and local autonomy, but central governments have jealously guarded their power. (See, e.g., Turner and Hulme 1997, 151-174; Seppälä 2000, 48-57) Thus, in practice, governance has remained far from being able to be called 'good'.

It is true that academic research in public administration and international development covers the central issues cutting across traditional subfields of international relations, political science and public administration. However, research on good governance and administrative decentralisation is more central to public administration than any other fields in social sciences. Therefore, there are scopes for scholars in administrative science to make scholarly contribution in the areas of the challenges in good governance and search for a possibility for local capacity building in developing countries.

NGOs and the sustainability of NGO-led development projects

The role of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in managing development initiatives in developing countries has been very central in contemporary development aid discourse. Development projects run by NGOs are assumed to be flexible, innovative, participatory, cost-

effective, and directed to the poor. Several social, economic, political and cultural arguments exist to justify the advantages of NGOs (for details see e.g., Hulme 1994, Tvedt 1995 and 1998b, Vartola et al 2000, Hossain 2001, and others). 'Market failure' and 'government failure' are considered the leading reasons for the growth of NGOs. (Anheier and Seibel 1990, 1) Scholars argue that this growth of NGOs is a reflection of dissatisfaction with both the state and the market. On the other hand, the use of NGOs has been consistent with both the New Right aid policies of governments in the USA and UK and the 'alternative' aid policies of the donor community in the Nordic countries and the Netherlands. (Hulme 1994, 251 and 265) The restructuring policies of the World Bank and other influential donor institutions (e.g., in OECD countries) led to a planned reduction of the role of the state in developing countries and increased space for development NGOs. (Tvedt 1998a, 62)

However, the sustainability of NGO-led development initiatives is questioned in the social science literature from different angles. A development programme is considered sustainable when it is able to deliver an appropriate level of benefits for an extended period of time after major financial, managerial, and technical assistance from an external donor is terminated. (OECD 1989, 7) Among others, a recent study (Hossain 2001, 11) argues that despite the said comparative advantages of NGOs, their development projects remain unsustainable in many developing countries. Research also suggests, the idea, for example, that NGOs have the comparative advantage that they are generally assumed to have in the literature on NGOs in development, has been falsified. (Tvedt 1997, 1) Despite these arguments, since the 1970s NGOs have rapidly been growing over the OECD and developing countries. Due to the lack of reliable data the number of development NGOs, their total aid volume, and the number of beneficiaries can not exactly be stated (see, e.g., Tvedt 1998b, 10) -- It is also difficult to estimate because the distinction between the traditional welfare organisations and the modern development NGOs, connected to international aid system is not clear. However, it is estimated that about 4,000 development NGOs in OECD member countries, dispersing billions of dollars a year, were working with about

10,000 to 20,000 'Southern' NGOs (based in developing countries) who assisted, it has been estimated, between 100 and 250 million people (Tvedt 1998b, 1).

Therefore, in-depth and thematic empirical studies on the topic should examine the sustainability and the comparative advantage of NGOs in developing countries. Such studies on the topic definitely will enrich the literature of development administration and will bring valuable insight to the actors involved in international development in carrying out their development assistance to developing countries.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Theoretically, it is not easy to solve all the challenges development administration is facing today as a sub-field of public administration. Development aid in the development process of the least developed countries has been playing an important role in recent decades. Bilateral, multilateral and other international donors are also facing new challenges in their development efforts in developing countries. It is misleading to generalise the merits of development aid. Generalising the drawbacks of development aid and efforts could also be misleading. Compared to other European Union and Nordic countries, development administration has been less studied in Finland in general, and in Finnish administrative science studies in particular. There exists very little scientific research, neither conceptual nor empirical, on development administration in Finland.

Research on social capital, modernisation and economic globalisation can bring valuable insight and can make significant contribution to the administrative challenges of development management and international development. The socio-economic development of developing countries directly depends on how these countries are governed. Therefore, by ignoring the present day's challenges of good governance and administrative decentralisation, no development initiatives will be able to ensure a sustainable progress in developing countries. Since the 1970s, the performance of development NGOs as alternative development organisations has been generally appreciated by the aid donors - despite

the fact that most of their development initiatives are heavily dependent on foreign aid and the projects are not sustainable. Sustainability of NGO-led development projects can be ensured by improving the managerial capacity of the NGOs. The above topics are very central to the contemporary international development discourse and needs to be researched.

Therefore academic study on the above issues related to 'development administration' and 'international development' has vital importance for the current development discourse in Finland and abroad. In addition to the academic community, the main user group of the information produced by academic research on these topics could definitely be the stakeholders (e.g., authorities, political decision-makers) involved in international development both in the South and in the North. Theoretically, identifying the dynamics and drawbacks of development administration and, practically, searching for better ways to carry out international development effectively, largely depends on the future interest and ability of academics and practitioners to study the subject properly.

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