

# Building Mutual Understanding for Effective Development

In recent years a number of countries, referred to collectively as the rising powers, have achieved rapid economic growth and increased political influence. In many cases their experience challenges received wisdom on inclusive development. Research funded by traditional development donors has tended to focus on their own aid recipients. Policy analysts in the rising powers have faced several challenges in generating systematic learning from their countries' rapidly changing development experiences. This has created a knowledge-sharing gap. The IDS Rising Powers in International Development programme invited highly experienced policymakers and analysts to review important development experiences from their countries, as Senior International Associates, creating new opportunities for mutual learning.

As the rising powers (including Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, or BRICS) gain greater political and economic influence on the global stage, they, along with low-income countries and traditional donor countries, are looking for ways to collaborate in achieving shared development goals. Effective collaboration needs to be based on a mutual understanding of what factors contribute to sustainable development. However, building this kind of mutual understanding is a big challenge for people from countries with different languages, administrative cultures, and historical legacies.

The IDS Rising Powers in International Development (RPID) programme established a sub-programme for Senior International Associates from the rising powers as one way to address these challenges. This policy briefing presents an overview of the programme's experience and identifies lessons for building mutual understanding for effective development. The focus is on the health and social sectors as there is already a broad international consensus on the contribution that access to safe,

effective and affordable basic health and social services can make to inclusive development.

## Rising powers share similar characteristics and development experiences

The rising powers share several characteristics in terms of their size, the rapidity of interconnected economic and demographic changes, and the persistence of social and inter-regional inequalities. Their governments are under pressure to ensure that all social groups benefit, to some extent, from growth and development. Several have invested heavily in regional development and/or social sector reform. For example, China's investment in its western provinces was the largest global development effort during the late 1990s and early 2000s. These countries have also become important sources of global innovation in technologies and also in the organisation of their social sector. However, lessons from these innovations have not yet been fully systematised or integrated into global understanding of strategies for effective development.

**“Effective collaboration needs to be based on a mutual understanding of what factors contribute to sustainable development.”**

The existence of competing narratives of good development practice is a major constraint to effective collaboration. Policymakers and analysts in the rising powers are strongly influenced by their own experience of managing complex and rapid change. They tend to view the development challenges of other countries through the lens of their own countries' experiences, rather than through international frameworks that they regard as reflecting the understanding and interests of traditional donors. However, these experiences have not yet had a major influence on mainstream development thinking, except in the case of specific programmes such as conditional cash transfers. This reflects several factors: the major funders of development research have preferred to support studies in the countries that have relied on development assistance; at the same time, researchers and policy analysts from the rising powers have given priority to supporting their governments' implementation of major development efforts, often at the expense of engaging in global policy spaces.

### **IDS Senior International Associates programme – creating space and opportunity for mutual learning**

Development analysts from the rising powers face several challenges in generating systematic learning from their countries' development

experiences. These include the speed and complexity of the changes underway, and the lack of agreed frameworks for analysing these changes. In addition, most of them have not previously given high priority to studies aimed at generating lessons for their counterparts in other countries.

With this in mind, the Senior International Associates programme was designed to facilitate such lesson-learning. The model was to identify and invite highly experienced people from the rising powers, with a background in research and policy, and provide them with opportunities to exchange ideas with colleagues at IDS. The first two Senior International Associates were: Rômulo Paes de Sousa, a highly experienced policy analyst and former Deputy Minister of Social Development in Brazil; and Zhang Xiulan, the Director of the School of Social Development and Public Policy at Beijing Normal University, and policy advisor to the Chinese government. They agreed to review Brazil's social policy reforms and China's management of rapid rural health reform, producing policy briefings and participating in international events to share their findings. The studies included a review of documents and interviews with key policy actors. The policy briefings focus on practical approaches to policy development and implementation, rather than on the details of programme design.

**“Analysts... face several challenges in generating systematic learning from their countries' development experiences... [including] the speed and complexity of change.”**

## **Box 1 Similarities in Brazilian and Chinese policy processes**

- Large countries with major inter-regional/sub-national differences, making it necessary to adapt policy implementation to local realities.
- Highly decentralised government system in which local governments, particularly in poor localities, face challenges in terms of management capacity and governance.
- Rapid implementation of policy reforms and wide variation in the quality of services provided.
- High popular expectations and substantial political pressure on government to meet these expectations within short time frames.
- Rising levels of government expenditure on social services and pressure for further increases.
- Policies, and their implementation, need to adapt constantly to rapid and interconnected changes.
- Heavy reliance on testing new approaches locally and diffusing lessons from successful experiments to other contexts as a way to scale up local programmes to the national scale.

One unexpected finding was that Brazilian and Chinese social sector policy processes share a number of similarities, despite the differences in their government and political systems (see Box 1). This became clear at a meeting for senior health policy analysts from both countries, organised by the Senior International Associates programme and held at the offices of the UK Department for International Development (DFID) in Beijing in November 2012. Participants concluded that there were important potential areas for mutual learning between policy analysts in Brazil and China. However, the limited links between governments and research and training institutes in the two countries were seen to be a major constraint to this kind of exchange. They agreed that an important first step should be the development of collaborative research on problems and issues the two countries share. CEBRAP, a Brazilian research institute, is leading the development of a comparative study of primary health care initiatives. A meeting of managers of government TB and HIV/AIDS programmes in the BRICS countries reached a similar

conclusion about the potential value of mutual learning (see Box 2).

Many low- and middle-income countries have similar experiences, including rapid change, complex patterns of social and economic inequality, and the pressure on government to ensure that the benefits of development are shared more equitably. However, these countries differ from the rising powers in terms of their size, state capacity, and administrative cultures.

The next phase of work of the RPID programme will look at the challenge of adapting lessons from the rising powers to these different contexts, and senior development analysts from low-income countries will be invited to contribute. Work has already begun, with a review (undertaken by José Luiz Telles, another Senior International Associate from Brazil) of the experiences of the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz) in making lessons from Brazil's health sector available to several African countries. The programme is also beginning to explore how the UK and other OECD countries can learn from social sector innovations in the rising powers.

## Box 2 The BRICS countries and mutual learning about the response to TB and HIV/AIDS

IDS's Rising Powers in International Development (RPID) programme shared its conclusions about the potential benefits of mutual learning between the BRICS countries with South Africa's Department of Health, which was planning a meeting of the BRICS health ministers to be held in November 2013.

The Department decided to convene a consultation between managers of national tuberculosis (TB) and HIV/AIDS programmes in BRICS countries to explore possible areas for mutual learning. UNAIDS and the Stop TB Partnership helped organise the meeting, with inputs from members of the RPID programme team.

Participants identified the following common problems:

- rapid social change and persistent social exclusion;
- a need for innovative arrangements to manage large national programmes, problems with drug resistance, and the need for technological innovation.

They concluded that a substantial proportion of the global population with TB and HIV/AIDS live in the BRICS countries, and that these countries need to create mechanisms to support mutual learning and strengthen their respective national responses. This should involve research and training organisations as well as government. They submitted these recommendations to the meeting of the BRICS health ministers, who have since adopted them.

## Policy recommendations

Lessons from the recent development experiences of the rising powers need to be systematised and made widely available as soon as possible in order to build mutual understanding between development actors from the rising powers, as well as those from low-income countries and traditional donors. This is especially important in a context of rapid change and the pressure on policymakers in many countries to adapt quickly to meet rising popular expectations.

- The contribution of the rising powers to policy research aimed at contributing to global knowledge needs to be accelerated to ensure more rapid diffusion of these lessons. A programme such as the Senior International Associates enables senior policy actors and analysts to share useful lessons through a combination of personal reflection and systematic collection of data on policy processes, using a shared framework for analysing issues associated with a rapidly changing and complex context. These rapid analyses then need to be supplemented by further research studies.
- Mechanisms need to be created for building mutual learning between BRICS countries on practical approaches for addressing the similar development challenges they face. These mechanisms will need to combine high-quality research with opportunities for policymakers to exchange information on how they have addressed similar problems.
- Policymakers and development analysts from other low- and middle-income countries that face similar development challenges will need to adapt the lessons from the rising powers to their different contexts. They will also need to create strategies for building mutual learning.
- In order to formulate policies and practices that can accelerate development and poverty reduction on a global scale, development analysts from rising powers, low-income countries, and traditional donors will need to collaborate to create a new common understanding of development that combines lessons learned by the rising powers and those emerging from the experiences of low-income countries.



IDS Policy Briefings are published by the Institute of Development Studies and aim to provide high quality analysis and practical recommendations for policymakers on important development issues.

To subscribe: [www.ids.ac.uk/idspolicybriefings](http://www.ids.ac.uk/idspolicybriefings)

Institute of Development Studies, Brighton BN1 9RE UK  
T +44 (0) 1273 606261 F + 44 (0) 1273 621202 E [ids@ids.ac.uk](mailto:ids@ids.ac.uk) W [www.ids.ac.uk](http://www.ids.ac.uk)  
[twitter.com/IDS\\_UK](https://twitter.com/IDS_UK) #idspolicy [facebook.com/idsuk](https://facebook.com/idsuk)



## Further reading

Bloom, G.; Liu, Y. and Qiao, J. (2009) *A Partnership for Health in China: Reflections on the Partnership Between the Government of China, the World Bank and DFID in the China Basic Health Services Project*, IDS Practice Paper 2, Brighton: IDS

Crisp, N. (2014) 'Mutual Learning and Reverse Innovation – Where Next?' *Globalization and Health* 10:14, [www.globalizationandhealth.com/content/10/1/14](http://www.globalizationandhealth.com/content/10/1/14) (accessed 12 May 2014)

De Sousa, R. (2013) 'Evaluating Social Protection Policies: Lessons from Brazil', *IDS Policy Briefing* 34, Brighton: IDS

Zhang, X. (2013) 'Evaluating Experimental Policymaking: Lessons from China's Rural Health Reforms', *IDS Policy Briefing* 46, Brighton: IDS

## Credits

This *IDS Policy Briefing* was written by **Gerald Bloom**, IDS Fellow and convenor of the Senior International Associates programme, with contributions from: **Rômulo Paes de Sousa**, Senior International Associate and former Deputy Minister of Social Development and the Fight Against Hunger in Brazil; **Yogan Pillay**, Deputy Director General of the National Department of Health of South Africa; **Zhang Xiulan**, Senior International Associate and Director of the Institute of Social Development and Public Policy, Beijing Normal University, China; and **Jennifer Constantine**, organiser of mutual learning for the IDS Rising Powers in International Development (RPID) programme. The briefing was produced as part of the RPID programme, supported with UK Aid from the UK Department for International Development.

The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of IDS or the UK government's official policies.

Readers are encouraged to quote and reproduce material from the *IDS Policy Briefing* series. In return, IDS requests due acknowledgement and quotes referenced as above.

AG Level 2 Output ID: 181

© Institute of Development Studies, 2014  
ISSN 1479-974X