



Science and Innovation for Development

by Gordon Conway and Jeff Waage



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by Gordon Conway and Jeff Waage
with Sara Delaney

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Contents

Contents	iii
Foreword	xiv
About the authors	xvi
About the publisher	xviii
Preface and acknowledgments	xix

Part One – Mobilising Science for Development

Chapter 1 – The Nature of Science and Innovation	3
1 Why is science important?	4
How does scientific innovation work?	4
2 The role of science in international development	7
The contribution of science to development challenges	7
The benefits of scientific capacity	9
Science capacity and economic growth	10
Poverty reduction in the Loess Plateau	13
3 The challenge ahead	15
Strengthening science capacity	15
Creating an enabling environment for science innovation	17
Signs of progress	18
4 Scientific success in developing countries	18
New Rices for Africa (NERICAs)	18
Insecticide treated mosquito nets	20
Common elements of success	21
5 Conclusion – Improving science for development	22
Chapter 1 references and further reading	23
Chapter 2 – Appropriate Innovation	25
1 Where does science and innovation for development come from?	26
2 Selective use of conventional technologies	28
Precision in application	28
Countering resistance	29
3 The use of traditional technologies	31
Herbal medicines	31
Agricultural systems	32
4 The development of intermediate technologies	34
Treadle pumps	34
Chinese technologies	35

5	The promise of new platform technologies	37
	Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for development	37
	Mobile phones	37
	The internet	39
	Improving access	41
	Combining technologies	42
	The potential of nanotechnology	43
	Water purification	44
	Disease diagnostics	45
	Pharmaceutical efficiency	45
	The utility of biotechnology	46
	Biotechnology in agriculture	46
	– Tissue culture	47
	– Marker-aided selection	48
	– Recombinant DNA	48
	Biotechnology in human and animal health	52
	Risk and uncertainty with new platform technologies	54
6	Conclusions	56
	Chapter 2 references and further reading	57
Chapter 3 – Building Partnerships for Innovation		61
1	Building national innovation systems	62
	Innovation networks and clusters	62
	The national context	63
	Capacity strengthening and education	64
2	Partnerships between scientists in public institutions	65
	Developing equitable partnerships	66
	The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)	67
3	Participatory research and innovation	69
	The techniques of participation	70
	Institutionalized participatory research	71
	Developing new crop varieties and production methods	71
	Technologies for health and the environment	74
4	Engaging with industry in research for development	76
	Public Private Partnerships (PPPs)	77
	Health PPPs	78
	Agricultural PPPs	80
	New platform PPPs	82
5	Conclusion	83
	Chapter 3 references and further reading	84

Part Two - Science and the Millennium Development Goals

Chapter 4 – Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals	89
1 How did the MDGs originate?	90
2 What are the goals?	91
3 Reducing hunger	94
Measures of hunger	94
Progress in China and Ghana	96
4 Progress towards the health MDGs	97
Reducing child mortality	98
Neonatal mortality	100
The causes of child mortality	100
Maternal mortality	101
The causes of maternal deaths	102
Combating HIV/AIDS	102
Campaigns against Tuberculosis (TB)	104
Tackling malaria	105
5 Progress towards the environment MDGs	107
Increasing forests	108
Conserving water resources	109
Managing fisheries	110
Reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions	110
Reducing ozone depleting substances	112
Reducing biodiversity loss	112
Improving water supply and sanitation	114
Improving the lives of slum dwellers	116
6 Conclusion	116
Chapter 4 references and further reading	117
Chapter 5 – Combating Hunger	119
1 The chronic crisis	120
The drivers of hunger and poverty	121
Hunger and technology	125
2 Past successes	127
3 The need for a Doubly Green Revolution	130
4 Breeding for yields and quality	132
Increasing yields	132
Hybridisation	133
Beyond hybridisation	135
Improving nutritional value	136
Vitamin A	136

5	Improving the productivity and quality of livestock	138
	Developing breeding programmes	138
6	Improving the fertility of soil and its utilisation	140
	Precision nutrients	141
	Cropping systems	142
	Breeding for nutrient uptake	144
7	Optimizing water use	145
	Challenges to water management in rain fed systems	146
8	Better pest, disease and weed control	148
	Control of major diseases of livestock	154
9	Improved agricultural systems	159
	Organic agriculture	160
10	Conclusion	164
	Chapter 5 references and further reading	165
Chapter 6 – Improving Health		173
1	Improving health by improving diets	174
	Proteins and other micronutrients	175
	Improving dietary intakes	176
2	Improving child and maternal health	178
	Child mortality	178
	Childhood treatment of diarrhoea	178
	Maternal mortality	180
3	Preventing and treating infectious diseases	181
	The nature of infectious diseases	181
4	Environmental and behavioural modification for infectious diseases	182
	Preventing diarrhoea	182
	Improving hand washing	183
	The polio environment	184
	Controlling mosquitoes	184
	Indoor residual spraying (IRS)	185
	Insecticide treated nets (ITNs)	185
	Modifying mosquito behaviour	186
	Changing human sexual behaviour	186
	Male circumcision	188
5	The quest for vaccines for infectious diseases	188
	Smallpox eradication	191
	Childhood vaccines	192
	Polio not yet eradicated	194
	Resurgences and re-emergence	195
	Vaccine derived polio	196
	Vaccines against TB	196
	No HIV vaccines yet available	197
	A malaria vaccine in sight?	199

6	The role of treatment for infectious diseases	201
	Advancing the treatment of TB	201
	Resurgence and the adoption of DOTS	202
	Remaining challenges	202
	Future – new drugs	203
	Antiretrovirals (ARV) against HIV	204
	Preventing Mother to Child Transmission (pMTCT)	205
	The search for a microbicide	206
	Artemisinin combination therapy against malaria	208
7	Emerging infectious diseases	209
	Influenza	210
	The 1918-19 Spanish flu	211
	The 2009 Swine Flu Pandemic	211
	Avian Flu	212
	Influenza prevention and treatment	213
8	Non-communicable diseases	214
9	Conclusion	215
	Chapter 6 references and further reading	216
Chapter 7 – Achieving Environmental Sustainability		221
1	Millennium Development Goal 7	222
2	The role of science in environmental policy	223
3	Reversing the loss of natural resources	226
	The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA)	227
	Recent scientific advances in natural resource management	229
	Measuring and monitoring changes in natural resources	229
	Modelling natural resources dynamics	235
	Putting a value on natural resources	238
	Synthesis – new platforms for policy development	239
	Reducing biodiversity loss – a development issue?	240
	Biodiversity as a source of future innovation	241
	Threats to biodiversity	243
4	Climate change mitigation	245
	Harnessing the sun’s energy	247
	Concentrating solar thermal systems	247
	Photovoltaics	248
	Energy from the wind	250
	Using biomass for fuel	253
	Household use of biomass	254
	Biomass for energy production	255
5	Water supply and sanitation	258
	Supply of clean water	259
	Sanitation	261
6	Conclusion	264
	Chapter 7 references and further reading	265

Part Three - The Challenge of Climate Change

Chapter 8 – The Science of Climate Change	271
1 What do we know about the global impacts?	272
Alternative explanations	273
The importance of feedback loops	274
Tipping points	275
Global and regional consequences	278
2 What are the global drivers?	279
Tropical convection	280
The monsoons	281
The El Niño-Southern Oscillation	283
How is climate change affecting these drivers?	285
Tropical cyclones	286
3 The regional changes	287
The need for better information	287
What are going to be the effects on Asia?	288
China	289
South Asia	290
Bangladesh	291
What are going to be the changes in Africa?	292
4 Conclusion	295
Chapter 8 references and further reading	296
Chapter 9 – Adapting to Climate Change	301
1 Vulnerability	302
The economic costs	303
Assessing vulnerability	305
2 Adaptation and resilience	306
Coping strategies	306
The concept of resilience	309
Anticipation	310
Prevention and tolerance	311
Learning	313
3 Anticipated sea-level rise	314
Coastal defences	317
4 Water resources	319
Glacier melting	319
Adapting to glacial melt	321
River basins	321
River basin management	324
Floods and droughts	327
Adapting to floods and droughts	328

5	Agriculture and natural resources	330
	Crop production	330
	Carbon fertilisation	333
	Livestock and pasture production	333
	Fisheries	334
	Pests, diseases and weeds	334
	Agricultural adaptation	334
6	Ecosystems and biodiversity	338
	Corals	338
	Ocean acidification	339
	Forests	340
	Biodiversity adaptation	340
7	People and health	341
	Direct effects	342
	Indirect effects	342
	Adaptations in health care	345
8	Conclusion	347
	Chapter 9 references and further reading	348

Part Four

	Chapter 10 – Conclusion	357
1	Science and innovation in the MDGs	358
2	Beyond the MDGs	359
	Breaking down MDG silos	359
	Convergent future challenges	361
	Preparing for shocks	362
3	Conclusions	363
	Chapter 10 references and further reading	366

	Index	367
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Box titles

Chapter 1

Box 1.1	What do we mean by science, technology and innovation?	4
Box 1.2	Inventors past and present	5
Box 1.3	Designations of developed and developing countries	8
Box 1.4	The importance of strengthening national scientific capacity	9
Box 1.5	Helping scientists provide the evidence	11
Box 1.6	Science and innovation on the Loess Plateau watershed in China	13

Chapter 2

Box 2.1	Sources of technology	27
Box 2.2	The high cost of fertilisers in inland Sub-Saharan Africa (2002 figures)	28
Box 2.3	Mitigating the risk of mosquito resistance to insecticides	29
Box 2.4	Strategies to reduce drug resistance in TB	30
Box 2.5	What is traditional medicine?	31
Box 2.6	Artemisinin – a frontline drug against malaria	32
Box 2.7	Home gardens as a valuable resource	33
Box 2.8	Making irrigation possible with treadle pumps	34
Box 2.9	Intermediate technologies on the Loess Plateau, China	35
Box 2.10	Putting mobile phones to use	38
Box 2.11	The internet as a development tool	40
Box 2.12	ICT for all	41
Box 2.13	Creating ICT hybrids	43
Box 2.14	Biotechnologies that can help developing countries meet the MDGs	46
Box 2.15	Healthy bananas through tissue culture	47
Box 2.16	Marker-aided selection delivers resistance to Maize Streak Virus	48
Box 2.17	Transforming a crop	49
Box 2.18	The benefits of Bt cotton for developing countries	51
Box 2.19	Making recombinant DNA insulin	53
Box 2.20	Issues in regulating nanoparticles	54

Chapter 3

Box 3.1	African Development Bank supports science and technology institutions	65
Box 3.2	A complementary partnership between CIMMYT and KARI	69
Box 3.3	Participatory learning, analysis and action	70
Box 3.4	Farmers call the crosses	72
Box 3.5	Participatory olive tree cultivation research in Syria	73
Box 3.6	Community-Led Total Sanitation	74
Box 3.7	Quotation from Jean-Pierre Garnier, former CEO of GlaxoSmithKline	76
Box 3.8	Examples of PPPs for health and veterinary products funded by DFID	78
Box 3.9	The International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI)	80
Box 3.10	The African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF)	81
Box 3.11	German partnership brings the power of ‘micro-grids’ to rural communities	82

Chapter 4

Box 4.1	The so-called ‘Killer Diseases’	97
Box 4.2	Lack of attainment of targets for malaria interventions in Africa – the WHO goal is 80% coverage	107

Chapter 5

Box 5.1	A one hectare farm in Kenya	126
Box 5.2	The innovators of the Green Revolution	127
Box 5.3	Agricultural growth in India has slowed over the past 20 years	129
Box 5.4	The nature of sustainable agriculture	131
Box 5.5	The steps in producing hybrid maize	133
Box 5.6	Breeding for vitamin A	136
Box 5.7	Conservation of sheep breeds in Ethiopia	139
Box 5.8	Micro-dosing: using Coca-Cola bottle caps to apply fertiliser	141
Box 5.9	MBILI intercropping	143
Box 5.10	Getting more from nitrogen	144
Box 5.11	Creating nitrogen fixing cereals	145
Box 5.12	The <i>Zai</i> system	146
Box 5.13	Some recent pest outbreaks in Africa	148
Box 5.14	IPM and the rice brown planthopper: science and farmer empowerment	149
Box 5.15	The control of <i>Striga</i>	151
Box 5.16	The hunt for resistance to wheat stem rust	152
Box 5.17	Developing GM crops for Diamondback moth	153
Box 5.18	Selective control of tsetse fly in Africa	154
Box 5.19	The successful eradication of cattle plague	155
Box 5.20	Integrated control of pork tapeworm	158
Box 5.21	Examples of contemporary innovative farming systems	159
Box 5.22	The pros and cons of organic farming	162

Chapter 6

Box 6.1	The consequences of micronutrient deficiency	175
Box 6.2	The effectiveness of Oral Rehydration Therapy (ORT)	179
Box 6.3	Hand washing with soap is the most effective intervention against diarrhoea	182
Box 6.4	Making hand washing easy and effective	183
Box 6.5	Ghaziabad is one of the last strongholds for poliovirus	184
Box 6.6	Adopting safer sexual behaviour in Eastern Zimbabwe appears to be reducing HIV transmission	187
Box 6.7	Male circumcision for the prevention of HIV transmission	188
Box 6.8	Key elements of the human immune system exploited by vaccines	189
Box 6.9	The main forms of vaccine	190
Box 6.10	Milestones in the long journey to smallpox eradication	191
Box 6.11	Vaccines against childhood infections	193
Box 6.12	The poliovirus and its vaccines	194
Box 6.13	The HIV structure and replication	198
Box 6.14	The cycle of targets for a malaria vaccine	200
Box 6.15	Antiretroviral drugs	205
Box 6.16	WHO guidelines for pMTCT drug regimens in resource-limited settings	206
Box 6.17	The great diversity of potential microbicides against HIV	207
Box 6.18	Influenza viruses	210

Chapter 7

Box 7.1	Policy and science in sustainable forest management	225
Box 7.2	Categories of ecosystem services	227
Box 7.3	The LIDAR – Light Detection and Ranging System	230
Box 7.4	Monitoring global trends in irrigation	232
Box 7.5	Mapping land degradation in Africa	233
Box 7.6	Harvesting non-timber forest products	236
Box 7.7	Valuing ecosystem services for forestry and fisheries	238
Box 7.8	‘Valuing the Arc’ – ecosystem service management in Tanzania	239
Box 7.9	The ecologist, Paul Ehrlich, described the phenomenon of species redundancy in ecosystems in 1981 with a now famous analogy	241
Box 7.10	The Global Crop Biodiversity Trust	242
Box 7.11	New ways of concentrating the sun’s energy	247
Box 7.12	Thin-film solar cells	249
Box 7.13	Bringing the solar business to the poor	250
Box 7.14	Small-scale wind power in developing countries	252
Box 7.15	Improved stove designs	255
Box 7.16	Jatropha powered rural electrification in Mali	256
Box 7.17	The Gulper – filling a gap in urban sanitation	263

Chapter 8

Box 8.1	Why some of the most plausible alternative explanations of recent global warming are inadequate	273
Box 8.2	Possible climate tipping points	276
Box 8.3	The nature of tropical cyclones	286
Box 8.4	The impacts of climate change on Bangladesh	291

Chapter 9

Box 9.1	Why developing countries are so vulnerable to climate change	302
Box 9.2	An Indian vulnerability assessment	305
Box 9.3	There are a wide range of coping strategies for climate hazards	307
Box 9.4	The role of infrastructure	307
Box 9.5	The evolution of the concept of resilience	309
Box 9.6	Inundation of Small Island Developing States (SIDS)	314
Box 9.7	The inundation of the Nile Delta	315
Box 9.8	Physical consequences of significant sea level rise in Ghana	316
Box 9.9	Making desalination cheaper	325
Box 9.10	The African floods of 2007	327
Box 9.11	Drought coping mechanisms in Kenya	329
Box 9.12	Conservation farming in Zimbabwe	334
Box 9.13	Water Efficient Maize for Africa (WEMA)	336
Box 9.14	Mother-baby trials for stress breeding	336
Box 9.15	Pastoralist adaptation strategies practised in recent years in Northern Kenya and Southern Ethiopia	337
Box 9.16	Increasing coral bleaching	338
Box 9.17	Ocean acidification	339
Box 9.18	Improving malaria epidemic prediction in Botswana	346

Chapter 10

Box 10.1	Agriculture, health and environment – inter-linked development goals?	360
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List of tables

Table 2.1	The economic and environmental benefits of Bt cotton in developing countries	51
Table 5.1	Yield potentials of major cereals have plateaued at about the following levels	133
Table 5.2	Extract from ranking table for Ethiopian sheep breeds	139
Table 7.1	Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability	223
Table 7.2	Harvest method recommendations for tree species with different characteristics	237
Table 7.3	Strip harvesting recommendations for various tree conditions	237
Table 9.1	Criteria for climate change option appraisals	312
Table 9.2	Examples of supply – and demand-side water adaptations	324

Foreword

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Science and Innovation for Development is a path-breaking book that reconnects development practice with the fundamental, technical processes of development outlined more than 50 years ago. It is a refreshing reminder that development is a knowledge-intensive activity that cannot be imposed from the outside. It is consistent with leading theories that define development as an expression of the endogenous capabilities of people.

The book is written in a clear and accessible way and will go a long way in demystifying the view that science and technology is irrelevant to development. It elegantly demonstrates that even the most basic of daily activities of local communities are based on science and

innovation. Even the most stubborn critics of the role of science and innovation in development can hardly miss the glaring power of the core message and the sparkling examples.

But to appreciate the importance of this book one has to revisit history. The late 1950s were a turning point in the history of economic thought. In the process of mapping out the economic future of emerging nations, many industrialised countries have recognised the role that science and innovation have played in their own development. For example, in a seminal paper published in 1957, Nobel laureate Robert Solow showed that over the previous 40 years technical change had contributed more than 87% of gross output per person while the increase in capital investment explained only about 12%.¹

But as such studies laid the foundation for our current understanding of the role of science and innovation in economic growth, new organisations, guided by the experiences of post-World War II relief efforts in Europe, were charting out strategies for extending their work to emerging developing nations. The 1960s saw a clear divergence where industrialized countries increasingly adopted innovation-oriented policies while development cooperation programmes focused on relief efforts.

One of the most damaging legacies of this divergence was the consistent downplaying of technological innovation as a force in economic development. In fact, many development agencies exhibited outright hostility towards proposals that sought to integrate innovation in development cooperation strategies. *Science and Innovation for Development* is not just an effort to add a new dimension to development cooperation activities. It is a challenge to the international community to jettison traditional development approaches that focus on financial flows without attention to the role of science and innovation in economic transformation.

There have been many exhortations of the importance of science and innovation in development. But this book differs from previous studies in at least four fundamental ways. First, it uses clear and practical examples to illustrate the importance of science and innovation in development. Second, the examples provided in the book are not just compelling, but they are inspirational and demonstrate the practical utility of putting science and innovation to the service of development. Third, unlike other studies on “appropriate technology”, the book takes into account the important role that institutional innovation plays in economic growth. Finally, the book recognizes emerging critical challenges such as climate change. Concern over global warming has moved from the level of scientific debate to a challenge of epochal proportions and addressing its consequences will require equally extraordinary efforts to deploy the most relevant scientific and technical knowledge available in the shortest time possible. This opens the door for a more pragmatic view of the role of engineering in development, a field that has so far received little attention in development cooperation activities.²

But above all, the importance of this book lies in its timing. The traditional relief-based model of development assistance no longer works except in emergency situations. But even here the pressure to move from emergency to sustainable economic recovery calls for greater investment in science and innovation. Recent challenges, such as rising food prices, are focusing international attention on the importance of increasing investment in science and innovation. But more importantly, the entry of new role models such as China, India, Brazil and Israel are helping to underscore the importance of innovation in development. Indeed, developing countries are increasingly seeking to place science and innovation at the centre of their development strategies.

The recent financial crisis has forced a large number of industrialized countries to introduce stimulus packages which include emphasis on infrastructure, technical training, business incubation and international trade. These priorities are similar to the technology-led policies that are increasingly being pursued by developing countries. In effect, economic growth policies in industrialized and developing countries are converging around the idea of science and innovation. This book will therefore provide guideposts for international cooperation in the application of science and innovation and help support ongoing efforts to incorporate science and innovation in the activities of international development programmes.³

The book will play a key role in helping the development community relate their work more closely to the pioneering concepts laid out by Robert Solow and others 50 years ago. It is only by doing so that the community can bring reasoned practicality to their otherwise worthy efforts. *Science and Innovation for Development* is the most important book on development since Fritz Schumacher’s 1973 classic book, *Small is Beautiful*. It will silence the critics of the role of technology in development and embolden its champions.

- 1 Solow, R., (1957) “Technical Change and the Aggregate Production Function,” *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, **39**, 3, 312-320.
- 2 Juma, C., (2006) *Redesigning African Economies: The Role of Engineering in International Development*. Hinton Lecture, Royal Academy of Engineering, London.
- 3 House of Commons Science and Technology Committee. (2004) *The Use of Science in UK International Development Policy*, Vol. 1, Stationery Office Limited, London; National Research Council. (2006). *The Fundamental Role of Science and Technology in International Development: An Imperative for the US Agency for International Development*, National Academies Press, Washington, DC.

About the authors

Professor Sir Gordon Conway

Gordon Conway is Professor of International Development at Imperial College. He trained in agricultural ecology, attending the universities of Bangor, Cambridge, West Indies (Trinidad) and California (Davis).



In the 1960's he was a pioneer of sustainable agriculture, developing integrated pest management programmes for the State of Sabah in Malaysia. He joined Imperial College in 1970 setting up the Centre for Environmental Technology in 1976. In the 1970s and 1980s he lived and worked extensively in Asia and the Middle East, for the Ford Foundation, the World Bank and USAID. He directed the Sustainable Agriculture Programme at IIED and then became representative of the Ford Foundation in New Delhi. Subsequently he became Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sussex and Chair of the Institute of Development Studies.

From 1998-2004 he was President of the Rockefeller Foundation and from 2004-2009 Chief Scientific Adviser to DFID and President of the Royal Geographical Society. Between 2006 and 2009 he was Chairman of the UK Collaborative on Development Sciences (UKCDS) and is now currently heading the Gates funded project 'Africa and Europe: Partnerships in Food and Farming.'

He is a KCMG, Deputy Lieutenant of East Sussex, Hon Fell RAEng and FRS. He holds five honorary degrees and fellowships. He is the author of *'The Doubly Green Revolution: Food for all in the 21st Century'*, published by Penguin and Cornell.

Professor Jeff Waage

Jeff Waage is the Director of the London International Development Centre (LIDC), a Professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London and a Visiting Professor at Imperial College London, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) and the Royal Veterinary College (RVC).



He trained in entomology, and taught ecology at Imperial College London before joining CABI in 1986 where he headed the International Institute of Biological Control and later CABI Bioscience. At Imperial and CABI he contributed to ecological theory in integrated pest management, helped the spread of farmer field schools in Asia and Africa, and led the successful development of a biological pesticide for the desert locust.

He has been President of the International Organisation of Biological Control and Chair of the Global Invasive Species Programme. Jeff returned as Director of Imperial College at Wye in 2001, contributing to UK agricultural research through advisory roles with BBSRC and Defra, and joined

LIDC as its first Director in 2007. Today his passion is stimulating inter-disciplinary and inter-sectoral research to address complex development issues, including the integration of health and agricultural research sectors.

Sara Delaney

Sara Delaney joined Imperial College in July 2009 to work on the Gates Foundation funded project 'Africa and Europe: Partnerships in Food and Farming.' She studied biological and environmental engineering at Cornell University and 'Science, Society and Development' at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS).

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Preface and acknowledgments

We have written this book to help people understand how science can contribute to international development. People interested in international development often have very different views about the value of science. At one extreme, some see science and technology providing the principle means for reducing poverty, eliminating disease and improving well being. At another extreme, science is seen as part of an imposed, external regime, associated with industrial exploitation and suppression of indigenous knowledge.

Fluctuations over recent decades in perspectives on development create a similar diversity of roles for science. When development theory and practice have focused on generating economic growth, as in the days of the Washington Consensus, we have seen support for programmes that extend technological advances to poor countries which would make a workforce more efficient, raise GDP and improve incomes. When, instead, theory and practice swing towards the view that development is being prevented largely by social and political forces, e.g. education, social exclusion, poor governance and corruption, we see the agronomists, engineers and health specialists vacate their development advisor's offices, to be replaced by social scientists. Development policy makers seem to listen to social scientists or natural scientists, but rarely both.

Today the issue of the role of science could not be more alive, as we sit between cycles of development thinking. Having pursued a welfare-oriented agenda in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), we now face a global economic crisis which is focusing attention again on economic growth. Foundations, businesses and civil society organisations are becoming more important development players, and we are seeing them take very different views on the role of science. One needs only to look at recent dialogue on genetically modified (GM) crops to see how polarized communities have become, in both rich and poor countries, about the value of science and innovation in a development context.

We hope that this book will give anyone who is interested in international development a clearer picture of the role that science and innovation can play. We firmly believe that science is only one of many factors which can contribute to development, but we want that factor to be well understood, particularly as science is often presented in a way which is not easily accessible to the non-specialist. We have used the MDGs as a framework for our exploration, because they address a wide range of development issues where science is particularly active: agriculture, health, and the environment.

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