

In and Out

Reflections on Engaged Scholarship in Development Cooperation

PAUL HOEBINK

In often-cited publications on engaged scholarship, Ernest L. Boyer (1990, 1996) indicated not only that it is important to lower the walls between departments at universities and between academia and society, but also that “faculty who do spend time with so-called applied projects frequently jeopardize their careers”. On the other hand, scholars who do spend time on ‘applied projects’ for policies and advice for European institutions, national governments or NGOs will have to accept that the conclusions of their research are often not followed at all or at best only partly by the organizations involved. Being ‘out’ in both situations can thus be a normal situation for an ‘engaged scholar’.

Although in the USA, ‘engaged scholarship’ is mostly seen as doing ‘community service’ (Beaulieu et al. 2018) (later also in health sciences), this chapter sums up and tries to categorize more than 40 years of experience doing (non-) commissioned research, teaching and engagement in public debates on European and Dutch development cooperation. A first observation might be that in teaching, taking part in seminars and attending public meetings it is usually easier to be ‘in’, than by doing critical research for different types of development organizations.

During more than 40 years, always at the same university, I have been involved in engaged scholarship around development cooperation in a broad sense. My activities gained much momentum after the publication of my dissertation *Geven is nemen: De Nederlandse ontwikkelingshulp aan Tanzania en Sri Lanka* [‘Giving is Taking: Dutch Development Assistance to Tanzania and Sri Lanka’], which received wide media attention. I was appointed to the National Advisory Council for Development Cooperation (NAR), became a member of the Steering Group which led the evaluation of the Dutch Co-financing Programme and, following that, of the Project Commission of Oxfam-Novib. The Minister for Development Cooperation, Jan Pronk, asked me to write a report on the effectiveness of aid and to participate in discussions around the preparation of his major white paper *Een*

wereld van verschil ['A World of Difference']. For the NAR, I wrote the advice on the reverification of Dutch development cooperation policy and several papers on European development policy and the Treaty of Maastricht. Later, the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) commissioned me for articles and a special about Dutch development cooperation. For the European Commission, I was asked to do evaluations, in particular on policy coherence. In terms of memberships and invitations you could call me 'in'; I was an active participant in policy debates (also on invitation of the Dutch Parliament), an engaged scholar in international development cooperation.

Being 'Out'

An engaged scholar can be 'out' in several ways. In their attempt to bridge the gap between knowledge and application, most of their research is rather practical, trying to offer steps to arrive at better results. It is then important to really 'hear' and 'understand' the questions of the stakeholders. This means not so much literally 'hearing' the questions – they will be in most cases translated in the research itself – but to understand what is behind the questions, what the scope of change might be, how 'deep' possible changes could go. Political structures, policies and compromises, however, might place an 'engaged scholar' also in an 'out' position. The adoption of specific policies, often as a difficult compromise between political parties, make that these are carved in marble, not amenable for change, even longer than the coalition of political parties is held together.

For Oxfam-Novib, I did an evaluation of their evaluations of the year 2000 (Hoebink 2001). The conclusion was that these evaluations were quite heterogeneous in quality. Those from Latin America contained many words and few empirical data, those from India were sobering and those from Eastern Europe by external consultants of very low quality. What was amazing is that even if there was, according to the Terms of Reference (ToR), ample time for field research, it was rarely used. A serious improvement to the evaluations was necessary; this was the conclusion. It was recommended, among other measures, to install an evaluation committee with external experts, which would come together a few times a year not only to discuss evaluations but also the ToRs. Most probably it was because the organization was amidst several organizational changes that none of the recommendations was implemented.

In 1997, together with Fons van der Velden, on behalf of the Directorate General for International Cooperation (DGIS) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the

technical assistance organisations Stichting Nederlandse Vrijwilligers (SNV) and Personele Samenwerking Ontwikkelingslanden (PSO), I wrote two reports on the evaluation of technical assistance. One of the conclusions was that ‘gap filling’, sending experts to places where there was an absolute shortage of expertise, received a strong legitimacy in international cooperation (Hoebink and Van der Velden 1997a and b). Around three years later, Labour Minister Eveline Herfkens, then Minister for Development Cooperation, came back from a field visit in Mozambique, complaining that Dutch doctors were running hospitals with big salaries and living in luxurious staff houses with swimming pools. This caricature (as Dutch doctors in reality work for local salaries and live in local, simple staff houses) caused a big stir and the minister had to come to parliament, make excuses, explain twice what her policy was and send our report to parliament.¹ It did not hinder the minister in calling an end to the technical assistance programme (although private aid organisations could still send out experts with a subsidy from the Ministry).

But the story doesn’t end here. In 2020 the “long time partner in life and work” of Eveline Herfkens, Constantine Michalopoulos, published a book on the short lived alliance of four Ministers for Development Cooperation under the label the ‘Utstein Four’, named after the abbey in Norway where they came together for the first time. Here Herfkens came back as a heroine having ended “technical cooperation that hitherto provided expensive employment for Dutch doctors in Africa”, thus ending ‘tied aid’ (aid that is tied to purchase of good and services in the donor country) (Michalopoulos 2020: 152). Michalopoulos did not only present the wrong example here, but Dutch aid was already largely untied when Eveline Herfkens arrived in power (Hoebink 2020).

Thus, it is always more than logical that engaged scholarship is embedded in political compromises and structures. Liliane Ploumen arrived at the Ministry in November 2012 as part of a Liberals-Labour Cabinet, directly confronted with a budget cut of €1.4 billion and a new proposal for a Dutch Good Growth Fund (DGGF). The name of the fund sounds, of course, very ‘Dunglish’ [Dutch-English], but the minister directly declared this DGGF to be an investment fund for small and medium enterprises from developing countries as well as from the Netherlands. That being said, she was directly called back to Cabinet, where the Minister of Economic Affairs also wanted to use the DGGF for export promotion. Apart from

1 Interdepartementaal beleidsonderzoek: uitzending personeel ontwikkelingssamenwerking. Brief van de minister voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking. Tweede Kamer, vergaderjaar 2000–2001, 26 958, No. 3, 9 oktober 2000.

the budget cuts, the Ministry was able to spend €700 million plus €70 million on technical assistance in this revolving fund. In a parliamentary hearing, I directly warned (Hoebink 2013; Tweede Kamer 2013) that this fund would not be a success. Minister Ploumen, however, promised thousands (130,000) of new jobs and a big reduction of illegal migration. My hesitation came not so much from the fact that this fund had to be administered by three different agencies, but because over the past fifty years Dutch companies, being small and medium enterprises, never showed any great interest in this type of fund promoting Dutch investments in developing countries. An evaluation seven years later (ITAD 2020) showed that I was right: of the €700 million only 56% was used, of which €65 million was for export financing; only around 10,000 jobs were created (maybe even crowding out other jobs), migrants were not stopped, and the expansion of production capacity was limited. There was no synergy between the three elements of the fund. The limited use of the DGGF also makes it very expensive, with high overheads for the administrators. It might then be amazing that after such a negative evaluation the DGGF is still seen as an important cornerstone in the aid and trade agenda of the newly appointed Minister for Development Cooperation, Liesje Schreinemacher, according to her new white paper published recently (Hoebink 2022).²

Being 'In'

Evaluating with Barbara Adams of the UN NGO-liaison office the organisation NGO-Net, we had a small clash at the end of the second day with Roberto Bissio, director of the Centro del Tercer Mundo in Montevideo, which founded and hosted NGO-Net. It was the beginning of the internet-revolution and NGO-Net tried to prepare for international conferences to send around disks with documents in Latin America. We had asked all kinds of questions on the number of disks sent around, which organisations were involved, etc.. Bissio then, slightly angry, asked why we needed all these figures, because being with an influential person in an office at the right time, he might have more influence than being in touch with

2 In 1990, I had been in a similar position when the employers federation wanted a financial guarantee instrument for Private Development and Participation Societies (Particuliere Ontwikkelings en Participatie Maatschappij, POPM) and the NAR was asked for an advice on it. I had to come with a minority advice arguing that Dutch companies would not use it. Pronk still instituted this POPM-scheme. Only one firm ever applied for it, although it stood for years in the development cooperation budget.

so-and-so many organisations. I riposted that building on his relations with NGOs he might have gained the reputation that brought him in that office.

In 2000, I was voted the most influential development cooperation scientist by a panel of development researchers. In the more general classification of the most influential and powerful people in Dutch development cooperation, by a panel of people in key-positions in development cooperation organizations in the Netherlands, I came in at second place in 1998, dropping to the fourth in 2004 and to the 10th place in 2008, remaining in that position through to 2011. This might have been the right position, because as one of the publications put it, I had no budget, little formal influence, but only a little bit of fame and strong, well-founded opinions. In Radboud University's Fons Duynstee contest for members of staff who appeared most in the national media (radio, television, newspapers) in a year, I arrived in the first two years (2004 and 2005) at the third and second place, later overrun by economists and cyberspecialists, but always in the top ten. Political scientists will tell you that the 'reputation method' is not the best instrument to measure political influence and power. At least it should be combined with the 'position method', looking at most influential organisations in a specific field and positions held by people in it.

In March 2008, I was in a similar situation to that which Roberto Bissio described. It happened on a Friday afternoon, being invited by the Minister for Development Cooperation, Bert Koenders, to discuss recent developments around his portfolio. At the end he asked me to have a look at the new co-financing scheme for private aid organisations. It was to be published within the next week and he had to respond to the proposal after the weekend. I spent half the weekend reading and commenting on it. Around that time, I was looking at complaints procedures within private aid agencies, which would later culminate in a report on an ombudsman for development cooperation for the minister (Hoebink and Schrijver 2009). Among other outcomes, it resulted in stronger complaints procedures. Most probably this was the moment in my career of 40 years that I had most direct influence.

My work on and for the EU and on poverty reduction with the Overseas Development Institute in London led to an invitation to be the external expert in the commission for the EC-Poverty Reduction Effectiveness Programme, a research programme for British researchers funded by the Department for International Development (DFID). The commission had also money to fund its own projects and I was asked to formulate a research project on policy coherence, which I did with an emphasis on country's views on incoherent European policies. I landed in a researcher's paradise, because my visits to Morocco and Senegal were organised by the European Delegation, with the former director of the EU's evaluation unit,

for which I worked earlier, as head of the Delegation. In the Ministries and other agencies the heads of the departments were ready to welcome me and be interviewed, intelligent men and women with a vision, of which many were *énarque*, having received their diplomas from the École Nationale d'Administration. In the very complex ways in which European institutions and policies are structured it is not very clear where our conclusions and few recommendation finally landed, after comments from Commission staff (Hoebink 2005, 2008).

Reflection

When a journal editor is “wondering whether journal publishing adds up to anything more than lots of words” and continues by asking “how much of what we publish would be missed by citizens, policymakers or practitioners?” (Campbell 2012: 249), the “publish or perish” paradigm that still seems to rule in academia is seriously questioned (again). She continues: “Because, a narrow conception of scholarship severely constraints the intellectual tools available to tackle society’s grand challenges” – I would add especially in the social sciences. In their overview of 20 years of engaged scholarship, Beaulieu et al. (2018) found 484 articles on ‘engaged scholarship’, nearly all from the US, not one of them in the field of international relations or development studies. More important is that the value of social justice and principles of high quality scholarship and boundary-crossing (multi-inter-transdisciplinary) approaches were seen as important in nearly all the articles found. The engaged-scholarship discussion comes primarily from the US, as also Rawls’ ‘social justice’ transformed to ‘global social justice’ with its roots mainly in the US, in particular in the works of Thomas Pogge. In Europe, we would define it most probably more in terms of ‘solidarity’ or ‘international solidarity’, with longer historical roots, at least going back to the 1960s.

In the Third World Centre, founded in 1973 after students’ actions (in which I took part), this international solidarity was present from the beginning. Naturally it changed over time, presenting several faces during the last decades, but the deep inner motivation remained largely unchanged. With the foundation of the Third World Centre my personal engagement in university itself started. It began with solidarity actions around Southern Africa, informing and collecting money, and information campaigns around Third World problems. It later evolved into my work on development cooperation and for development organisations. To be sincere, I am really not able to measure success or failure of all these activities, be it informing the public in op-eds, columns, blogs or in fora or and public lectures,

be it in making reports for all kinds of organisations, be it by publishing articles and books. The conclusion might be that, having evaluated many projects and programmes, it is rather difficult to evaluate my own actions and activities.

References

- Beaulieu, Marianne, Mylene Breton, and Astrid Brousselle. 2018. "Conceptualizing 20 Years of Engaged Scholarship: A Scoping Review." *PLoS ONE* 13 (2): 1–17.
- Boyer, Ernest L. 1990. *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. Princeton: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- , 1996. "The Scholarship of Engagement." *Journal of Public Service and Outreach* 1 (1): 11–20.
- Campbell, Heather. 2012. "Lots of Words But Do Any of Them Matter: The Challenge of Engaged Scholarship." *Planning Theory and Practice* 13 (3): 349–353.
- Hoebink, Paul. 2000. *Evaluaties geëvalueerd: Onderzoek naar de NOVIB-evaluaties uit 2000*. Den Haag: NOVIB.
- , 2005. *Coherence of EU Policies: Perspectives from the North and the South*. With collaboration of Marleen Deuss, Hein de Haas and Gertrud Wagemans. Brussels: European Union.
- , 2008. "A Tale of Two Countries; Perspectives from the South on the Coherence of EU Policies." In *Tales of Development: People, Power and Space*, edited by P. Hebinck, S. Slootweg and L. Smith, 187–204. Assen: Van Gorcum.
- , 2013. "Enkele kanttekeningen bij het Dutch Good Growth Fund". Hoorzitting Tweede Kamer, 22 april 2013.
- , 2020a. "De erfenis van vier bevlogen vrouwelijke ministers," weblog. *Vice Versa*, online. <https://viceversaonline.nl/2020/07/07/de-erfenis-van-vier-bevlogen-vrouwelijke-ministers/>. Online, 7 July.
- , 2020b. "Het einde van een Ploumen creatie: Hoe een vernietigende evaluatie het Dutch Good Growth Fund richting graf stuurt," weblog. *Vice Versa*, online. <https://viceversaonline.nl/2020/12/16/het-einde-van-een-ploumen-creatie-hoe-een-vernietigende-evaluatie-het-dutch-good-growth-fund-richting-graf-stuurt/>. Online, 16 December.
- , 2022. "Nieuwe nota." *Vice Versa*, online. <https://viceversaonline.nl/2022/03/23/column-paul-hoebink-nieuwe-nota/>. Online, 23 March.
- Hoebink, Paul, and Nico Schrijver. 2009. *Een Ombudsman voor Ontwikkelings-samenwerking: een Verkenning*. Den Haag: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken.

- Hoebink, Paul, and Fons van der Velden. 1997a. *Leren uit geleerd: Lessen uit evaluaties van uitzendende organisaties*, Deelrapport 1: *Probleeminventarisaties en evaluatierapporten*. Nijmegen: Derde Wereld Centrum.
- . 1997b. *Leren uit geleerd: Lessen uit evaluaties van uitzendende organisaties*, Deelrapport 2: *Ervaringen bij een aantal uitzendende organisaties*. Nijmegen: Derde Wereld Centrum.
- Hulp, handel en investeringen; Verslag van een hoorzitting in de Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal. 2013. Achived as 33 625, No. 4 (22 april 2013, vastgesteld 21 mei 2013).
- ITAD. 2020. *Evaluation of the Dutch Good Growth Fund*, final report. Washington: ITAD.
- Michalopoulos, Constantine. 2020. *Ending Global Poverty: Four Women's Noble Conspiracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken. 2022. *Wat de wereld verdient: Een nieuwe agenda voor hulp, handel en investeringen*. Den Haag: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken.
- Toptien van de meest invloedrijke OS-wetenschappers. 2004. *Vice-Versa* 34 (1).