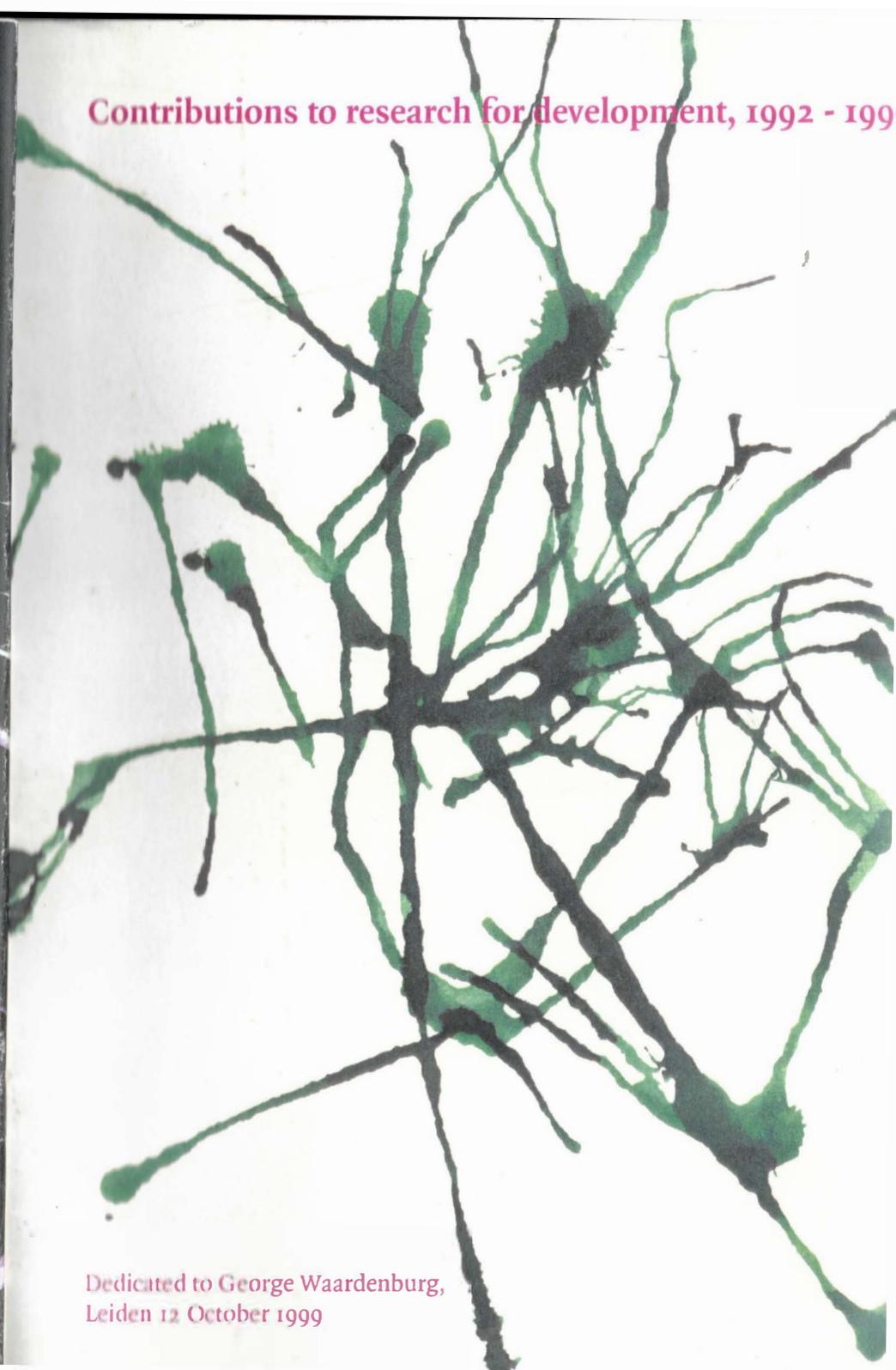


Contributions to research for development, 1992 - 1999



Dedicated to George Waardenburg,
Leiden 12 October 1999

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Leiden, 12 October 1999

Foreword

Dear George,

We know each other since about thirty five years. We were students of Jan Tinbergen, who taught us the art of development programming. It was a bit top-down, but in a very modest way.

Later on we worked together at Tinbergen's Institute in Rotterdam. We were asked to teach, which made us understand how difficult the art of planning is. Both of us carried out research on the question what could be considered an optimal regime, within which policy making could have the best results. It was a theoretical framework, a yardstick, but reality turned out to be a world apart. We tried to bridge the gap by introducing more non-economic factors in the models we used, but we only changed the theory, not the reality. I turned to politics, you carried on your scientific work. I was advised to strengthen the analytical basis of policy making. So, I asked you whether you would be willing to accept a position as the coordinator of research mandated by the Ministry. You agreed and we renewed our cooperation.

You have done an invaluable job. In the beginning it was just coordination and feed-back. But then we changed our research policy. It should no longer be top down, nor supply driven. We turned it upside down: demand driven research, bottom up. It turned out to be a revolution.

There was resistance everywhere, in particular from those institutes which had carried out research so far, and feared that their interests would be jeopardized. There was scepticism in developing countries: did we really mean it? We did, and we were able to convince the stakeholders in the partner countries that they could take all the decisions themselves and would not be frustrated by donor preferences.

When I say "we", I mean "you". You did the job, convincing everybody that this really would be the way to go, the best way, the only way. You were tireless, loyal, friendly, modest and very effective. That is how Tinbergen used to argue.

The participatory bottom up approach in policy making concerning research is result oriented. There are results, it's being acknowledged widely. Thanks to you!

Jan Pronk
October 1999

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Preface

Putting this volume together was an enjoyable experience. The idea of compiling some kind of "liber amicorum" for George Waardenburg was first raised during the second coordinators' meeting in Oegstgeest in 1998, but it was not before early summer 1999 that we elaborated the idea more detail. All of the people we approached for a contribution responded very positively. We limited the contributors to those who have been most closely involved in the preparation, implementation and execution of the Multi-annual, Multidisciplinary Research Programmes for development, programmes in which we tried to make research useful for the process of change in the "South". Contributions were received from all the MMRPs, and from a number of close outsiders. One contribution was compiled by the staff of the Research Division of the Ministry. Together, they describe several different aspects of the programmes, explain why they had decided to spend so much time on these particular research programmes, and comment on George's role. Many of the contributors also reflect on their dreams for the future of the MMRPs.

This volume could not have been produced without the capable work of DVL in formatting and arranging the layout of the text, and organizing the printing. Valerie Jones corrected the English style and grammar.

Piet de Lange
Tjarda Muller
Hans Slot

The impossible lightness of being: the role of a 'Northern' consultant in development research

Marc P. Lammerink

Development research usually does not take into account demands of local people, let alone their knowledge. Most researchers don't even know how to translate such demands into research questions. According to Edwards (quoted by Huizer, 1989²) "research has become part of the problems of underdevelopment rather than being part of the solution to these problems".

Realizing this dramatic situation, it has become a great challenge for me to work on research programmes that allow for different directions. Asking the question "whose knowledge and reality counts?" has made me aware of the need for new approaches and methods for interacting, learning and knowing. Yet I believe that these approaches still have to be further developed and tested. Social development should not be led from the top, but should be built on the capacities of ordinary people. I believe that knowledge which is based on analysis of local, complex and diverse realities, and which gets its meaning in a specific cultural setting, is still an important source for social transformation, even more so in a world dominated by the processes of globalization. Enhancing such local knowledge and initiatives has been a challenge for me for many years. Research can be a tool to bring this knowledge to the fore, but it calls for a different way of dealing with research. I know that this view is not commonly accepted.

The challenge also calls for a different way of dealing with development. For me, it emphasizes the need for a participatory model of development in which local people are not only involved in the identification, implementation and evaluation of development directions, but also where their knowledge and skills are the building blocks for development initiatives.

Why it is still so difficult to deal with such initiatives? I consider individual researchers, extension workers, planners and administrators to be receptive and well-intentioned. Apart from the clear political dimension, maybe the major obstacles to implementing new approaches are located both in organizational structures and technical parameters, and these drive research and development solutions away from local people. This brings me to the challenges in capacity building. Capacity building should give researchers confidence to apply a different way of designing and implementing research programmes. It also issues a challenge to the same researchers. In order to avoid later despair, administrative structures and technical parameters need substantial reform so that local people and professionals can take the opportunity to work in new directions. The challenge is thus both confidence and institution building, and not merely a change in research approach.

² Edwards, M. The irrelevance of development studies. *The World Quarterly*, 11. 1989; 7, quoted by: G. Huizer, *Action Research and People's Participation*. Occasional Paper no. 19, Nijmegen, 1989: 1.

Although not explicitly stated, the MMRPs allow work on such endeavours. That was also the attraction I saw in becoming involved in the process: its main emphasis on location-specific knowledge and firm attention to the demand side of research.

The approach of the MMRPs provides the opportunity to develop jointly alternative institutional frameworks that, based on societal needs, allow alternative research and knowledge methodologies to be tested. Within such frameworks, the clarity of the mission finds consistency with the activities and programmes undertaken. At the same time, the MMRPs need to strike a balance between research that can be of local use, and which challenges the technical standards and parameters of "proper" research.

The process around the MMRPs gave me the opportunity to encounter old and new friends and co-travellers both in the South and in the Netherlands, which has been another motivation for my involvement. Writing a reader on participatory research approaches (together with Ivan Wolfers) that could be used in all the programmes, has been a good experience. However, for me the major challenge was the possibility to be involved in the programme in Nicaragua, a country with which I have a special relationship. In the past, this country has had very little experience and few opportunities to develop a research capacity around its own needs and questions for development. Being part of such a big learning experience has indeed been a great challenge for me.

The intensive process of setting up a demand-driven research programme in Las Segovias, Nicaragua, started in 1993. Jointly we faced many dilemmas, paradoxes and opportunities. Together with Hans Slot, I have accompanied this process for almost five years – in the first years quite intensively, later more at a distance. I have been present during some of the important moments that have shaped the strategic direction and focus of the programme. However, on close examination, the steering has been minimal.

In my accompanying role it was important to foster trust, to invest in local networks and people, to allow time and space for consultation, to enhance dialogue, openness and transparency, but also to foster inclusive thinking, demystification of research, learning and unlearning; and last, but not least, critical solidarity, friendship and a lot of attention to the process. The amount of joy and despair we went through working together with a group of non-researchers in a research programme has been enormous.

Combining those roles is not an easy task. However, on top of that I have to admit that I sometimes felt from the part of George Waardenburg and DCO/OZ that as a suspicious "Northern" consultant I had to behave as if I did not exist ... and that has often given me quite an *impossible lightness of being*. Now ADESO "Las Segovias" has grounded and has become a renowned institution in the northern region of Nicaragua in terms of its knowledge about the

area or decisions on what directions to take in development. Providing support to municipalities and local government makes those in charge more confident in the actions and priorities of development in the region.

After Hurricane Mitch the usefulness of a multidisciplinary research programme was demonstrated by the answers that were generated when the despair diminished a little. It showed that research can be an important base for finding strategic answers even during and in the aftermath of a disaster. Who would have ever thought of this when we first visited the area to discuss possibilities for setting up a locally oriented development programme? But there is still a lot to hope for in the future.

Growth to maturity

In the next 20 years I hope to see the MMRPs evolve and change, while maintaining their actual spirit and with sufficient intellectual strength to become learning organizations. They could develop into autonomous democratic, participatory and pluralist organizations that will be capable of shaping the identity of a Southern perspective on research and development. The MMRPs, together with similar institutions and initiatives, might grow into a Southern research movement, developing a common people's knowledge. Hopefully, through such a common science the false divisions between the academic sciences would diminish. True interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research would become possible.

All of us know that important social problems like poverty, hunger, exploitation, exclusion, habitat destruction and violence require solutions and explanations that surpass the frontiers of scientific disciplines. Such institutions could foster linkages between individual and collective learning and processes of empowerment. Interventions based on this knowledge could help to build groups, organizations and development policies. They could help to strengthen democratic, transparent and accountable ways of collective functioning.

Experiences related to empowerment, participation, knowledge for social transformation, participatory research, and organizational development could also be studied and utilized by professional practitioners, academic institutions and local government agencies alike in the respective countries.

Capacity building from the research programmes could strengthen the intellectual, material and institutional bases of a variety of actors. I hope these programmes can contribute to further equality in access to knowledge and to the tools of knowledge production. At the same time, I realize that every single movement is now going in the opposite direction.

Finally, I hope that these institutions will be able to enhance social diversity and plurality which still exists in human societies, and which provides the fundamentals for survival and rejuvenation, instead of promoting the homogenization of cultures, lifestyles and value systems.