Introduction by Ton Dietz
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Three worlds of knowledge, and two inter-layers.

The South African philosopher of science Prof. Johan Mouton is one of the key people in the Research Capacity Initiative in the South-African Netherlands Programme on Alternatives in Development, SANPAD, funded by DGIS. Each year about twenty five South African social scientists are being trained to start PhD research dealing with development problems in their country. Many of these early mid-career people come from what are nowadays called historically disadvantaged communities in South Africa. Most have gone through rough primary and secondary education in a period of turmoil and chaos; many have worked in all types of odd jobs to finance their studies; many have done their Bachelors and Masters studies at so-called historically disadvantaged universities or Technikons, and many have experience in what is called the political struggle, in labour unions, in NGOs, and in community mobilisation. Johann Mouton’s approach to knowledge in their first week of training immediately plunges them in a debate about the politics of knowledge creation and dissemination that proves to be very thought-provoking and is very relevant for us during this symposium today as well.

Mouton’s point of departure is that traditionally there are three layers of knowledge. The first layer he calls every-day knowledge, based on every-day life, and formed as a hybrid mixture of so-called indigenous transfer of culture, canonised education in schools, and practical experiences. The second layer he calls academic or scientific knowledge, canonised knowledge by national and international scholars, organised in mostly disciplinary organisations, some in inter-disciplinary or trans-disciplinary organisations, in academic journals, and in peer-review networks. The third layer he calls meta-science: the reflection about knowledge creation, organisation and dissemination, traditionally defined as the philosophy of science.

He then applies the meta-scientific approach to the process of knowledge creation as a whole in the current era, and observes a number of changes, causing major disturbances in this established three-world concept. First there is a very rapid growth of professional bodies all over the world, outside the inner world of academia, although often working with people who have been trained in academia. It is an inter-layer between academic knowledge and every-day knowledge, that has become the driving force of policy decisions in many fields, of business ventures, and of planned or guided social transformation and so-called development initiatives. There has been a multiplication of professional agencies with their own codes of knowledge creation, and knowledge dissemination and often they have meagre ties with canonised science. It is a world of memos, reports, monitoring and evaluation results, internet exchanges, inter-vision workshops, petitions, and on-line collective writing. It also is a world
of creative, and flexible think-tanks, institutionalised in UN-organisations, but also in organisations like ISNAR, or the Royal Tropical Institute, or ETC-International, or Oxfam. It is often shunned by established academia.

The second major change is the mobilisation of every-day knowledge by many of these professional agencies, through community mobilisation, rapid appraisals, participatory evaluations, and all types of training centres. Robert Chambers can be credited for being a pioneer in this field, and for giving it at least a bit of academic credibility. But in practice it is often an inter-layer between meta-science and every-day knowledge, just bypassing established academia. And some think-tank consultancy agencies currently do more pioneering academic work than people in academia. In the Netherlands we can mention ILEIA and COMPAS.

In South Africa the large majority of the new generation of development-oriented social scientists works from a perspective of these two inter-layers, and they have to fight an up-hill battle with established academia, which, in South Africa, is even more canonised than in current-day Europe or the United States.

**Scatterlings**

Let us take the meta-science perspective and look at knowledge creation among development-oriented academics and practitioners in the Netherlands. The first observation is that within academia people who study development issues and/or who study problems in the tropics and sub-tropics can best be called *scatterlings*, using a word from a song by the South-African singer Johnny Clegg. They are scattered all over the Dutch academic scene, and almost everywhere they are in a minority position. The only exception is the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague. Most of these scatterlings in the broadly defined social sciences have joined a clever move in 1993: they have formed one national research school for development studies, CERES. Currently it is the biggest research school in the social sciences in the Netherlands, with more than 200 senior members, more than 250 PhD students and already more than 200 PhD alumni. Thanks to a variety of funds from DGIS, and other funding agencies, earmarked for researchers from the so-called South, the majority of its PhD candidates nowadays comes from Africa, Asia and Latin America. However, of all the PhD students from developing countries in the Netherlands, in all fields, CERES probably has between one-third and half. In the Arts and Languages sector a number of Southern students can be found in CNWS, based at Leyden University. The others are indeed scattered over a variety of other research schools, which are often disciplinary, and with a major focus on research in the Netherlands, and with an American-English outlook. The most important ones for tropical research are ASSR in Amsterdam, the Tinbergen research school in Rotterdam and Amsterdam and in Wageningen the Mansholt Institute and the Research School for Production Ecology and Resource conservation, and finally the National research school for Biodiversity and Functional Ecology.

**Fighting for academic credibility: academia first**

The second observation is that the scatterlings in the development and tropical academic fields in the Netherlands have very successfully improved their academic performance during the last five years, partly thanks to the research schools and their emphasis on internationalisation, and improvement of the quality of publications. Compared to twenty years ago the Dutch
The world of development researchers has become much more international and much more academic, and many of the networks have become international and are no longer Dutch.

Weak ties

The third observation is that the necessity to comply with canonisation rules in international academia has meant that the ties with development practice and policy in the Netherlands have become rather weak. Many Dutch development or tropical academics stand with their back to DGIS, NOVIB, SNV, Cordaid, ICCO, Arcadis, ETC, and all the many other interlayer professional organisations that are fully or partly dealing with development and tropical issues. When Context organised a round of debates about non-governmental development agencies, in 2001, ten scientists had been invited. I was almost the only one from academia who attended. The major gap between Dutch academia and development practitioners was of course also a result of attitudes within these development agencies. DGIS’s policy to stimulate Southern ownership of research has gone at the expense of existing partnerships with Dutch partners. DGIS’s lack of consistency towards capacity and institution building partnerships under the umbrella of NUFFIC’s MHO programme has created a breach of trust between DGIS and many Dutch academics who were sticking out their neck in their own academic environments to become involved in activities that were often frowned upon by their academic environments. Evaluations by DGIS’s own inspection group IOB, by the recent Steering Committee to evaluate the activities of Dutch co-financing agencies, and within NOVIB confirmed a widely-felt feeling that the quality of many evaluations as learning tools was simply not good enough, and that there was and is no forum to use those tools in a learning environment. But there is also psychology involved. In an infamous confrontation between former Minister Herfkens and members of CERES, during one of our summerschools, she made it rather explicit that she or her staff did not need any Dutch academic, because she could as well buy the necessary knowledge at the World Bank, and DGIS was not meant to butter the bread of Dutch academia. You only need a few of those confrontations to look for your butter elsewhere.

Lack of a learning community

A fourth observation is that the extremely scattered world of Dutch development practitioners and policy makers has not created a good learning environment. This is true in each of the organisations, and it is even more true for the Dutch development network as a whole. The sheer number of people working in this sector, the many years of experience, the very widespread network of contacts would make one expect a thriving community of practitioners, and intensive professional contacts between them and with academia. It is my unfortunate conclusion that it does not exist, unlike for instance among our British colleagues.

Reasons for change

A point has been reached in which many academics and practitioners active in the Netherlands, both Dutch and foreign, lament the existing situation. The openings, which the new Minister has created and is creating, also encourages new attempts to bridge existing gaps. Let me start with two defensive reasons and add three offensive reasons to unite and create a better learning environment.

Two defensive reasons
The first defensive reason can be found in Dutch academia: as a result of changes in research and teaching evaluation practices in the Dutch academic setting there is a strong and rather sudden move away from the national research schools and towards local graduate schools, basically organised by faculties and with a strong premium on disciplinary and parochial frameworks of organisation. This is threatening the problem-oriented, multi-disciplinary research schools, with a national outlook, and it is threatening the remaining scatterlings outside those Schools even more. There is a strong need to further strengthen the network of development-oriented scientists. The second defensive reason can be found among consultants working in the development arena. There is a gradual, but serious erosion of their competitive edge, for the simple reason that the salary levels in the Netherlands are too high, to compete with the global development business. Where colleagues who work for Ministries like VROM or Economic Affairs can demand day wages beyond 1,000 euros, in the development industry in the Netherlands it is difficult to go beyond 600 euros, and in international competition the World Bank daily tariff of 200 dollars for Southern experts sets the norm. Many colleagues from India, Kenya or Bolivia are willing to do the job for even less. The development sector can be regarded as a run-away service sector, comparable to the textile sector thirty years ago. Survival is only possible if consultants in the Netherlands become involved in global firms, where most of the work is being done by much cheaper southern partners, and where the Dutch partners maintain a competitive edge, based on knowledge networking, and co-ordination. Or where they make use of secluded niche-markets, often on a more European level of scale, or by applying development-based knowledge to European problems of multiculturality, governance issues, international defence, or the so-called informal sector.

Three offensive reasons

Let me now turn to the three offensive reasons. It is unavoidable, and a good trend, I think, that the development sector will become more European. In academia, there is a strong urge now to expand the research networks to become truly European, and to make use of European funding. In development practice, both within governmental organisations, in non-governmental organisations and in development business I see the same trends. There is a vast pool of expertise in the Netherlands, which could play a major role in the expanding European market for development scientists and practitioners. A more united, and better informed community of scholars and practitioners could well make a difference. Our British colleagues have understood that quite some time ago.

The second offensive reason is the strong urge in the Dutch Ministry of Education and beyond to facilitate a better knowledge society. In many fields the fragmentation, and organisational anarchy among knowledge workers, and the rather severe under-funding of research and technology in the Netherlands, threaten the competitive position of the Dutch economy. As an important economic player in the global arena the Netherlands should strengthen its knowledge base and its practical experiences abroad, that is: beyond Europe. The Netherlands agencies dealing with development, in academia and in development practice, can make a much more productive use of the very many alumni and the very many contacts of Dutch institutions all over the world.

The third offensive reason is that the global social problem is becoming more severe, and more threatening to the rich in the world. The so-called millennium development goals will
never be reached if there is not a much more serious attempt to learn more and better from past experiences.

**Needed: a more self-evident learning community**

The fragmentation, parallel structures, and the burden of personal and institutional animosities can only be overcome in a gradual way, by organising more self-evident learning exchanges. There is no need to start from scratch. We can learn from examples elsewhere, for instance in Britain, and we can use the rich and dense institutional framework existing in the Netherlands. CERES has been asked to play a role in organising this better learning community. Headed by CERES Board member Rob van den Berg, and by CERES researcher Paul Hoebink discussions have started how to do that and I would like to give you a number of ideas, which have been suggested recently.

**Annual regional meetings**

First: we need self-evident get-togethers of people who are interested in the same regions or countries. If researchers, PhD students from the Netherlands and from those regions, but graduating in the Netherlands, plus development practitioners, journalists, embassy people, business people, members of the diaspora from these regions in the Netherlands, and others interested in particular world regions would come together to discuss each others work in progress, opinions, and products say once a year, and do that consistently every year a lot more information will be shared, and more productive networks formed. For regions in Africa the African Studies Centre could play a major role here; for regions in Latin America and the Caribbean both CEDLA and the Royal Institute for Languages, Arts and Culture (KITLV) could do that, for the Middle East and Asia the International Institute for Asian Studies could do it, and the International Institute for the Study of the Muslim World. For European areas outside the enlarged European Union the Institute for East-European Studies might play a role. A practical question of course is: at what level of regional scale should it be organised, and how can we guarantee continuity.

**Annual topical meetings**

Second: we need a more self-evident get-together for people interested in the same topics, issues or sectors. Within the academic community CERES has had these get-togethers on livelihood, governance, globalisation, identity, migration and transnationality, and knowledge construction, and we will probably soon start new topics around conflict and violence, and around the management of cultural pluralism. Other topics can easily be added: poverty and PRSPs, the choice between sector- or area-wide approaches, aid channels and chains, best practices in partnerships, the coherence of policies, education and development, health and development, religion and development, etc. Also here we need to solve the practical problem of organisational continuity, and scale.

**Continuation of the Research for Policy Series**

Third, we need a tool to present scientific findings to a broader community of development practitioners, and policy makers. An existing, but rather marginal tool, can easily be adjusted to that goal. Between the early 1990s and this year, DGIS funded the Netherlands-Israel development Research Programme, or NIRP, facilitating development-oriented research of
teams of Israeli, Palestinian and Dutch scholars, and teams of African, Israeli and Dutch scholars. All scientific reports have been transformed by a science journalist to small booklets called Research for Policy Series, published by the Royal Tropical Institute. NIRP is gone now, and that is very understandable, given the current political climate in Israel. However, if the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would decide to continue funding this series, it could be a self-evident attempt to translate relevant scientific work for policymakers, and practitioners, both in the Netherlands, and in the research countries. Priority should be given to work by Southern scholars, who have graduated in the Netherlands, and whose work could have more impact if the reception of it would be better organised.

**Development Policy Review Network**

Fourth, we need a more self-evident debate about the programmes and projects funded by or through Dutch development agencies, or with Dutch public and private funds. CERES wants to start a Development Policy Review Network, in which the most important evaluation reports of IOB, SNV, the Dutch co-financing agencies and others can be discussed in an independent atmosphere, and in which methodological debates can be fed between scientists, consultants and policy makers responsible for evaluations about approaches for impact assessment. It would also be good to have a more intensive written debate involving scientists, consultants, and other practitioners and policy makers. The Dutch-language journal *Derde Wereld* has once played such a role, but it died a few years ago. I understand that the journal *Vice Versa* wants to play a role there. The problem of course is the Dutch language, excluding many foreigners in the Netherlands, who would be interested in these debates.

**Plan of Action**

The Platform OS Beleid, organising this conference has never wanted to become a permanent institution. It has seen itself as a catalyst for better communication. It would be good to commit ourselves after this symposium to a continuation of the efforts to improve the learning environment. I propose a start in 2004 with a number of these activities as mentioned before, and to establish a continuity for three years. In 2006 or 2007 we need another symposium to evaluate the progress made. Within CERES there is a commitment to contribute to the organisation of this challenging adventure. The CERES Board, chaired by ISS Rector Prof. Hans Opschoor, has recently accepted a change of rules in which CERES changes from a membership organisation to a membership and network organisation. Next to the full senior and PhD members, we now welcome affiliated researchers and affiliated practitioners, working in the Netherlands. I expect that we will soon also include researchers and practitioners from Flanders. And I hope that by 2005 CERES will be the Dutch and maybe even Dutch-Flemish branch of a European-wide research school and network for social transformation and development studies, connected to EADI, the European Association of Development Institutes, currently chaired by Prof. Louk de la Rive Box.

**Bridging gaps**

It is time to bridge gaps between the three worlds of development knowledge and its interlayers, between specialists focused on particular disciplines and regions, between scholars and practitioners, between commercial and non-commercial development workers, between Dutch and foreign development experts working in the Netherlands, and between those in the Netherlands and colleagues in Europe working in comparable fields.