

# DevNet

The Development Research Network on  
Nature, Poverty and Power





# DevNet CSD Uppsala.

The Development Research Network on Nature, Poverty and Power

## Report 2008-2012

Heidi Moksnes and Lars Rudebeck

Uppsala Centre for Sustainable Development

at Uppsala University and the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

2013

## Contents

|  | <i>page</i> |
|--|-------------|
| Introduction   | 1           |
| DevNet focus   | 1           |
| DevNet objectives                                    | 2           |
| DevNet secretariat and national scientific committee | 2           |
| Implementation of research network objectives        | 4           |
| DevNet impact  | 9           |
| Concluding remarks                                   | 9           |

*Appendix 1. DevNet Events 2008-2012*

*Appendix 2. Recipients of DevNet Grants, 2009-2011*

## **Introduction**

*DevNet: The Development Research Network on Nature, Poverty and Power* is a Swedish, nation-wide research network on sustainable development, based at the Uppsala Centre for Sustainable Development (CSD Uppsala) at Uppsala University and the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences. DevNet was developed with a planning grant from Sida/Sarec for 2008, and with a three-year grant for 2009-2011, the disposal of which was extended until June 30, 2012.<sup>1</sup>

## **DevNet focus**

The concept of sustainable development refers to processes of social and economic development that do not undermine natural environments or future living conditions. Addressing this field, DevNet has focused on the interrelation between the dimensions of nature, poverty and power to generate insights into the obstacles to sustainable poverty reduction and development in a world where the globalisation of environmental, economic, and political processes has contradictory effects on the lives of the marginalised and poor.

DevNet has promoted a perspective of socio-ecological systems as both historically and currently ridden with structural problems of unequal distribution of political and economic power. Present measures to tackle the global problems of climate change and unsustainable development also reflect internationally differentiated values, world-views and access to power and resources, where certain regions and societal spheres dominate the global political agenda at the expense of others. Likewise, the priorities of present generations dominate at the expense of those not yet born. Thus, the challenges of climate change and environmental degradation have fundamental social dimensions that need to be understood and addressed in order to enable a more sustainable development, regionally as well as globally.

Through this understanding of sustainable development, DevNet has stood out from other dominant academic approaches in Sweden, such as resilience theory. To promote critical analysis and discussions within the field, DevNet has provided arenas for

---

<sup>1</sup> The sum total for the three-year grant was SEK 2.250 million (750 000/year); the preceding planning grant for 2008 was SEK 300 000.

interdisciplinary exchange, inviting scholars from a wide range of scientific disciplines – social science, humanities, natural science – as well as actors outside academia.

### **DevNet objectives**

The aim of DevNet has been to strengthen Swedish research and policy on sustainable development with a focus on the concerns and interests of people living in poverty. Highlighting the interrelation between nature, poverty and power, DevNet strived to contribute to an understanding of political and social dynamics, as well as conflicts in natural resource use, in Swedish analysis of sustainable development. The network wanted to promote independent and critical research and constructive exchange with policy.

DevNet had two specific objectives:

1. Strengthen the Swedish research base on issues related to sustainable development, by
  - bringing together researchers in Sweden for exchange and analytic advancement;
  - facilitating contacts with the international research front, especially in the South;
  - supporting the recruitment of new researchers in the field.
2. Contribute to improved Swedish approaches to sustainable poverty reduction, by
  - creating arenas for exchange between researchers and actors within international development cooperation, for joint analysis and policy discussions;
  - providing tailored support for policy makers and practitioners, linking research-based knowledge to practical implementation;
  - stimulating cross-fertilization of ideas and questions for further research and policy

On a long-term basis, DevNet was expected to stimulate new, cross-disciplinary research projects and programs, increased North-South collaboration, and fortified personal and institutional connections between researchers and practitioners.

### **DevNet secretariat and national scientific committee**

DevNet has been managed by a secretariat based at CSD Uppsala. The secretariat has throughout the period consisted of programme coordinator *Heidi Moksnes*, PhD in anthropology and CSD Uppsala researcher; and associate coordinator *Lars Rudebeck*, professor emeritus of political science and CSD Uppsala researcher. The third member of the secretariat has shifted through the years (see below).

The members of the DevNet National Scientific Committee have been:

- *Seema Arora-Jonsson* Associate Professor, Department of Urban and Rural Studies, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Uppsala
- *Maj-Lis Follér*, Associate Professor and Senior Lecturer in Latin American Studies, School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg
- *Johan Hedrén*, Senior Lecturer, Unit of Water and Environmental Studies, Department of Thematic Studies, Linköping University
- *Alf Hornborg*, Professor and Chair, Human Ecology Division, Department of Human Geography, Lund University
- *Bent Jørgensen*, Researcher, Peace and Development Research, School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg
- *Lars Lindström*, Senior Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Stockholm University
- *Staffan Löfving*, Researcher, Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University.

Through yearly committee meetings in Uppsala and e-mail correspondence throughout the period, the committee members have provided planning and evaluation of DevNet's activities in correspondence with the network objectives. Commonly, members have also taken active part in the organization of particular DevNet events.

#### **Organisation initial year, 2008**

During 2008, the National Scientific Committee, made up of twelve members (including the DevNet secretariat) from the Universities of Uppsala, Stockholm, Gothenburg, Lund, Linköping and the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences in Uppsala, was constituted at a planning conference held in Uppsala on February 29. During the same year, nine conferences and seminars organised by DevNet or with DevNet involvement were held at various universities in Sweden (see Appendix 1, DevNet Events 2008-2012). The third member of the secretariat was in 2008 *Gloria Gallardo*, associate professor of sociology and CSD Uppsala researcher.

#### **Organisation January 2009 – June 2012**

In November 2008, our application for a full three-year Sida network grant for the period 2009-2011 was approved. The programme period was later extended until June 30, 2012

to make full use of granted funds. As of 2009, the National Scientific Committee consisted of the members of the secretariat based at CSD Uppsala, Uppsala University (four at the moment of submitting the application) and seven co-applicants from the Universities of Stockholm, Gothenburg, Lund, Linköping and the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences in Uppsala, composing the National Scientific Committee. The membership of the committee remained intact through the whole period until June 2012.

During the major part of 2009, *Margarita Cuadra*, AgrD and PhD in Crop Production Science at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, held the second associate coordinator position of the secretariat. She was succeeded in 2009-2011 by *Flora Hajdu*, PhD from the Department of Water and Environmental Studies (Tema Vatten) at Linköping University. During the second half of 2011, the position was held by *Lars Löfquist*, ThD in Ethics, Uppsala University. From February 2012, Moksnes and Rudebeck were the only coordinators. It should be noted that the rapid turnover was far from being for lack of commitment to DevNet ambitions. On the contrary, part-time work (20 percent) for DevNet functioned as a valuable supplementary possibility for researchers in a precarious post-doctoral employment market, where these skilled collaborators of ours were more or less obliged to move on to more secure and less limited-in-time employment, as soon as opportunities appeared.

### **Implementation of research network objectives**

DevNet has retained its initial commitments and focus during the whole period, and has devoted significant efforts to both of the two stated DevNet objectives; 1) Strengthen the Swedish research base on issues related to sustainable development, and 2) Contribute to improved Swedish approaches to sustainable poverty reduction. The two DevNet objectives both call for an integrated approach to theory and practice, promoting exchange on issues central for researchers as well as development actors, and in close relation to the international research front. Several of our organised and co-organised events and activities have contributed simultaneously to the realisation of both objectives.

Four events had the specific aim of policy analysis and exchange between researchers and actors within international development cooperation, one also including private business representatives. These were a two-day international conference on political mobilisation and democratisation as means of combating HIV/AIDS (May 14-15,



2009), co-organized with Forum Syd and Sida;<sup>2</sup> a conference on *AIDS, Civil Society, Aid and Poverty* (April 27, 2010), co-organised with the School of Global Studies and the Gothenburg Centre of Globalization and Development at Gothenburg University; a seminar on social, environmental and economic implications of the 'out-sourcing' of ship dismantling (May 4, 2010,); and a seminar on the role of development theories in international cooperation (May 10, 2010), co-organised with Sida.

A large number of other DevNet events have addressed policy relevant issues as well, even though they have been set in the framework of academic debates. Many of these events attracted Sida and NGO participants.

All in all, our list of past events (Appendix 1) comprises forty-nine conferences, seminars and workshops. Close to half of these events can be categorised as major full-afternoon, one-day or longer conferences or workshops with broad participation and invited prominent international speakers. The remaining part have been two- or three-hour lectures with subsequent discussion, or seminars with panellists discussing between themselves and with the audience. A clear majority of speakers and lecturers have been international, many from the Global South, thus fulfilling our objective of providing contacts between Swedish researchers and international colleagues.

### **Major DevNet conferences**

An ambition formulated in our 2008 programme was to establish a principal joint arena for the network in the form of annual conferences and other major events, dedicated to developing and problematizing central issues within the network focus in interaction with internationally leading researchers and policy makers. DevNet organised during 2009-2012 a series of conferences meeting this ambition, which attracted both nationwide and international participants (see Appendix 1 for details, including the names of principal lecturers)

In 2009, two conferences fulfilled the national conference function. The first was the already mentioned two-day international conference in Uppsala on May 14-15, *HIV and AIDS, Political Mobilisation and Democracy*. The focus was how HIV and AIDS, out of sheer necessity, can compel people to build elements of substantial democracy. Speakers from Brazil, South Africa and Malaysia described how the disease has promoted civil society

---

<sup>2</sup> A report on the 2009 HIV/AIDS conference is available at: [www.csduppsala.uu.se/old/dokument/Briefs,\\_HIV-conference.pdf](http://www.csduppsala.uu.se/old/dokument/Briefs,_HIV-conference.pdf)

mobilisation to force the development of alternatives to expensive antiretroviral drugs, confront social stigma, empower marginalised communities, or provide mutual support systems for alternative caregivers. As a result, and while grappling with various difficulties, citizen participation and civil rights have been promoted in societies in transition to democratic processes.

A second conference in 2009 was held on October 14 in Uppsala with the title *Climate Change, Power and Poverty*, and had about one hundred and ten participants. The program included keynote presentations by speakers from China, South Africa and the U.K., and paper presentations by researchers based in Sweden with experiences from different countries. The conference was held two months prior to the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, and the conference discussions addressed issues on how to find better approaches than those dominating today to the multiple dimensions of climate change. Special focus included the current configurations of globally asymmetrical social power relationships, and the questionable effectiveness of market mechanisms, such as carbon trade.<sup>3</sup>

In 2010, DevNet's largest and most ambitious international conference took place on November 25-26 at CSD Uppsala, *Nature, Poverty and Power: Assessing Challenges to Sustainable Development*, fully booked with over one hundred and forty registered participants. The members of the DevNet National Scientific Committee had been active in planning the conference, and six of them served as chairs of the parallel sessions, many together with international colleagues. In keynote lectures by international specialists from India, Holland and the US, plenary discussions and eight parallel sessions with in total twenty-six paper presentations, the participants spent two days developing and problematizing central issues within the network focus in interaction with internationally leading researchers and policy makers. These issues involved the conflicts of interests and power concerning the distribution of, access to, and use of natural resources, conflicts that were pointed out as intrinsic obstacles to globally sustainable development, including poverty reduction. The participants discussed how these asymmetries affect people living in poverty; the ways people in such circumstances strive to ensure

---

<sup>3</sup> Find the conference report at [www.cemus.uu.se/cefo/dokument/Climate\\_Change\\_Conference\\_Report.pdf](http://www.cemus.uu.se/cefo/dokument/Climate_Change_Conference_Report.pdf)

livelihood security and access to natural resources, and the different institutional options available to them for political participation and impact.

Plans to produce a book entitled *Bare Necessity: Environment and Power in Global Peripheries*, on the basis of carefully selected and edited conference contributions went far ahead but in the end did not materialise, not least because of financial limitations. In a final letter of thanks to our would-have-been authors, the hope was expressed instead for "rings on the water," which is in a sense what the whole network idea is all about.

In 2011, October 21, an international full-day workshop on *Land Grabbing in Africa. National Resource Scarcity and Competition for Survival* was organised in Uppsala with keynote talks by experts from universities in South Africa, USA and Sweden, as well as open plenary discussions. The event was attended by over sixty researchers, practitioners and students representing a broad spectrum of competences and viewpoints. Central issues in the workshop were the growing importance of protecting land rights of subsistence farmers and indigenous populations, facing the demand for land by richer countries and international corporations; and the negative effects on climate change, pointing to the need for long-term food and environmental security for all, including local producers.<sup>4</sup>

In 2012, three major events addressed different aspects of the network theme. One was a two-day international symposium in Uppsala on March 9-10, *Emergent Cities: Conflicting Claims and the Politics of Informality*, organised in cooperation with the Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology at Uppsala University, within the framework of an *URBANITY WEEK* together with the Nordic Africa Institute. The symposium, aided by three keynote speakers from the US and South Africa, addressed processes through which marginalised people create space for themselves in the city, thus challenging existing hierarchies and claiming new forms for urban and national development. The first day with open lectures was followed by a full-day workshop with around 20 scholars, who in response to an open invitation presented papers on the symposium theme, the international keynote lecturers serving as discussants.<sup>5</sup>

The next event was a half-day debate including plenary discussion, held in Uppsala on April 27 under the heading *Grasping Sustainability: A Debate on Resilience Theory*

---

<sup>4</sup> Find the workshop report at [www.csduppsala.uu.se/devnet/workshops,%20seminars/DevNet,%20Land%20Grabbing.%20Workshop%20Report.pdf](http://www.csduppsala.uu.se/devnet/workshops,%20seminars/DevNet,%20Land%20Grabbing.%20Workshop%20Report.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Find YouTube videos of the symposium keynote lectures at [www.csduppsala.uu.se/2012/emergent-cities-conflicting-claims-and-the-politics-of-informality](http://www.csduppsala.uu.se/2012/emergent-cities-conflicting-claims-and-the-politics-of-informality)

*versus Political Ecology*. Each of the two respective approaches was presented by a leading representative, from Swedish universities, delineating the differences and similarities of these approaches in addressing the connection between environmental and societal conditions, and the implications for policy and practice. The debate drew a large audience and became quite intensive,<sup>6</sup>

The last DevNet event was a major international full-day symposium under the heading *Democracy and Development: A Disputable Pair*, with invited keynote speakers from India and Switzerland/Sierra Leone and Swedish commentators, taking place in Uppsala on May 31. The theme of the symposium had been elaborated in a background paper by Lars Rudebeck.<sup>7</sup> It addressed the meanings and realities of democracy and development and their linkages to globalisation and power. The invited speakers and commentators were experienced and concerned scholars of various generations and backgrounds. All in all, some forty researchers, students and development practitioners participated. The symposium marked the end of DevNet activities under the 2009-2012 programme but opened up for continued work on the issues under debate.

#### **Propelling nationwide activities: DevNet cooperation and grants**

DevNet has had its organisational home at Uppsala University, but its scope and extension have been consistently national. Our ambition has been to propel activities throughout the country, addressing issues within the thematic focus. Close to half of our events have been organised in cooperation with university departments in other parts of the country, as well as, of course, in Uppsala. Collaboration outside Uppsala has normally been accomplished through members of our National Scientific Committee, who have organised both large-scale conferences and smaller events in cooperation with DevNet.

Furthermore, DevNet has provided small grants of 10-20 000 SEK, for events organised in accordance with DevNet's objectives. The grants have been open for yearly application by researchers and PhD students at any Swedish university. In total eight grants have been distributed to applicants (see Appendix 2). The applications have been judged by a selection committee, consisting of three members of the National Scientific

---

<sup>6</sup> See [www.csuppsala.uu.se/2012/video-and-slides-from-grasping-sustainability](http://www.csuppsala.uu.se/2012/video-and-slides-from-grasping-sustainability)

<sup>7</sup> Lars Rudebeck, *Democracy, Development, Globalisation, Power - on concepts, meanings, realities, and their linkages*, DevNet, CSD Uppsala, 2012 (in publication), revisions inspired by May 31, 2012 symposium included. Available for downloading at [www.csuppsala.uu.se/assets/DDGP-April-2013.pdf](http://www.csuppsala.uu.se/assets/DDGP-April-2013.pdf)

Committee, the task rotated each year between the committee members. Although inexpensive, this grant system has resulted in numerous activities at universities in Gothenburg, Lund, Stockholm, Linköping, and in Uppsala, besides Uppsala University, at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences and the Nordic Africa Institute.

### **DevNet impact on understanding sustainable development**

During its existence, DevNet has clearly become an arena of national importance, providing knowledge exchange, reflection and discussions on dimensions of sustainable development not commonly addressed by other major actors in Sweden. By consistently bringing in questions of power relations and consequences for people in poverty, DevNet has showed how issues of climate change, environmental deterioration and natural resource use have broad and frequently unequal ramifications for societies. Similarly, analytic discussions promoted by DevNet have shown that more sustainable development cannot be achieved without addressing such power relations and material and social inequalities.

An event organised by “DevNet” has come to mark a focus and quality that has been highly appreciated by scholars, PhD students and regular students throughout the country, as well as professionals from outside the universities. For scholars, DevNet events have provided arenas for collegial exchange and development of concerns that are not frequently addressed in the dominant discussions on sustainable development. PhD students working on issues with focus related to the DevNet theme have, through our grant system, received direct support to organise events and invite international lecturers of central interest to their doctoral research, which we hope and believe have strengthened their dissertational work as well as their own academic networks. For professionals within international development cooperation, we believe DevNet has provided knowledge and exchange that link policy concerns on sustainable poverty reduction to front-line international research.

### **Concluding remarks**

The cost-efficient DevNet programme is now coming to a halt in its present form, in the midst of promising work. When receiving our three-year grant in November 2008, we were implicitly given to understand that chances for a second three-year period would be good in case our activities turned out as planned. This was how Sida research network

grants were intended to function at the time. It was also the assumption upon which DevNet worked. However, when beginning to prepare an application for the 2012-2014 period, we were simply informed that Sida policies in regard to research networks had changed. This form of research support would simply cease. As no substitute funding was available – in spite of considerable efforts on our part to investigate the supply – DevNet activities unfortunately came to a formal stop on June 30, 2012.

We hope, nevertheless, that our concept of networking by "propelling rings on the water" will serve as an encouraging example for future attempts in the same vein, and that others will continue to further the discussions on sustainable development in the direction set out by DevNet.

Uppsala, June 28, 2013

Heidi Moksnes

Lars Rudebeck