INTRODUCTION

What does a development researcher – or, at least, someone researching development – do? Popular representation might suggest they are lone anthropologists 'discovering' the secrets of an Amazon basin community or public health specialists conducting a health needs analysis survey of a refugee camp. Such perceptions often draw on romanticized and stereotypical representations of poverty, development and the 'exotic other'. In reality, development research encompasses a vast array of methods, approaches, contexts and activities. This book reflects this variety of experiences and draws on the range of our own engagements with the ideas behind and practices of development research. Our hope is that the reflections and discussions presented here will provide you with a guide to navigating these processes and practices. While reading this book, it is important to remember that development research is not only about 'boots-on-the-ground' practices and experiences, but a much more holistic understanding of what development is, what research is and how development research can be – and is – conducted in many different ways and places. In short, this book will not provide you with *the* way to do development research but will provide you with an awareness and understanding of a range of debates, approaches and strategies that you can draw on as you develop your research topic, questions and methods.

Underpinning this book is our recognition that development studies – and associated disciplines including geography, anthropology, politics and economics – is grounded in research and fieldwork. From undergraduate dissertations and fieldclasses through postgraduate research degrees to academic books and journal articles, research is paramount. Such research findings not only provide the basis for the advancement of academic theory and knowledge but can – and should – inform the evolution of development planning, policy and practice. This book is intended to help you understand the processes of designing, conducting and presenting rigorous, reliable and credible research to a range of audiences wherever your 'field' may be. For some, the most obvious manifestation of their fieldsite may be a remote Tibetan village or a vibrant urban market in Kampala, for others, it may be a museum or library archive, the corridors of government and civil society offices, the pages of a census or a demographic and health survey or the online chatrooms and social media presence of community organizations and hometown associations.

Regardless of where this 'fieldsite' is located, the 'field' for development research begins at home, encompassing the literature that frames your engagement with research,

the classroom teaching that inspires interest – and your own sense of curiosity. This departure point is the first component of the research process: research is a journey during which you will encounter logistical, ethical, linguistic and other challenges. This text is designed to assist along this journey, helping you plan and prepare for research, to understand the links between theory and methods, to develop an appropriate research design, to cope with and navigate the inevitable pitfalls and challenges of fieldwork and to engage with the processes of analysis, writing and dissemination. Our intention is to help you be well prepared – organized yet flexible, rigorous but sensitive – for the research experience.

Development and development research

In preparing to carry out development research, it is important to reflect on what is meant by 'development', 'international development' in particular, and the differences between doing development and doing development research. Chapter 2 (about contested terrain) provides an overview of evolving understandings and paradigms of development, highlighting various controversies in these shifting approaches and their implications for changing practices of development research. For the purposes of this introductory chapter, it is sufficient to observe that development, while understood in varied and ideologically framed ways, is concerned with combating poverty (broadly defined) and that understanding local, national and international contexts, experiences, priorities, challenges and opportunities is vital for efforts to reach developmental goals (for an introduction to this term and debates, see Black 2007).

From this starting point, we can say that development research is concerned with finding out about the causes, consequences and ways of tackling poverty. From this assumption, we can then begin to unpack the values, politics, histories and techniques that inform and are manifest in development research. We can also recognize the diverse drivers that motivate us to conduct development research and how these influence how we select and design research topics. Our own motivations for conducting research projects are multiple and, at times, contested. They include a desire to help others and an intellectual curiosity to understand more about the world around us. How about you? What are your motivations for doing development research? Is your interest based on a desire to help others? A means to alleviate guilt? An ideologically framed commitment to save the world? A means to develop a career? Intellectual curiosity? It may be you are driven by several interests and there is no 'right' or 'wrong' answer.

In this section, we reflect on the importance of these drivers and of understanding the differences between development practice and development research and the importance of development research for effective and sustainable development practice. This differentiation may seem self-explanatory – one is about 'doing' or implementation, the other is about 'understanding' or finding out. The division between the two is not always clear cut but understanding the differences between development practice and development research is crucial.

To illustrate this, we can reflect on Dan's experiences of convening and leading international development geography fieldclass trips to Kenya, South Africa and Morocco.

These courses involve a series of pre-trip lectures and then a ten-day fieldtrip during which students conduct small group research projects either with local guides (in Kenya or Morocco) or host non-profit organizations tackling urban development challenges (in South Africa). Lectures address contextual background materials, including historic and contemporary socio-political and socio-economic conditions and their importance to current development challenges, as well as specialized research design and methods training. Time is spent discussing students' understandings of development, of the nature and purpose of the fieldclass and what they expect from the trip. These conversations include discussion of the colonial gaze (see Clifford and Marcus 1986; Pratt 1992), of the danger of fieldtrips becoming 'safaris of the poor' and reiteration that the fieldclass is a development research training module.

This emphasis is intended to remind students that the fieldclass is not a practical, hands-on development project with immediate, concrete benefits and deliverables to the host community. Every year, however, some students comment that they do not feel that development research is contributing anything useful to the lives of the poor and would prefer to be doing a practical development project aimed at immediate poverty alleviation.

Box I.1 Reflecting on the purpose of development fieldclasses

Do you think a development fieldclass should only be concerned with developing research skills and knowledge?

What are some of the issues arising from 'wealthy Westerners' doing development research?

As a student on a development research fieldclass, you are faced with the dilemma outlined above – a number of your fellow students are complaining that they feel the research focus of the fieldclass is inappropriate and are asking to do something practical to aid local development. What are your views on this?

This moment of discomfort, of challenge to the pedagogic principles of a fieldclass, is a profoundly powerful moment for teaching and learning. It allows questions regarding the power of the colonial gaze and of the potentially extractive and exploitative nature of research to emerge. It also provides an opportunity to explore the importance of development research to good development practice.

The scenario in Box I.2, inspired by fieldclass conversations, underlines the role of development research in understanding the complexities of development practice. Implicit within the request (made in Box I.2) to move from research to practice is an awareness of the burdens (of time, energy, money) placed on participants and hosts by researchers and, therefore, the need to ensure research is well designed, effective and efficient (see Chapters 4 and 5). The course leader's questions raise another set of issues. First, that development research is vital to inform appropriate and sustainable development policies and practice. Without a solid understanding of the local context and local need, as well

Box I.2 Reflecting on the role of research in development

You are a student on a ten-day international development fieldclass to rural Kenya. The fieldsite is in a marginal, arid region, with very limited physical infrastructure, basic schooling and health care provision, low levels of literacy, limited provision of safe drinking water and sanitation services, high levels of absolute poverty and the majority of the community is reliant on the informal economy and subsistence livelihoods.

At the end of the fourth day you ask the course leader if the focus of the trip can be moved 'from just asking questions and looking at things' to 'actually doing something that will help the local community'. The course leader seems sympathetic, but asks you a question in return:

- What is it you want to do, what project?

They then proceed to ask you some follow-up questions:

- On what basis (why) have you decided to do this?
- How have you identified the needs and priorities?
- Who has helped determine these priorities? Who have you spoken to and who haven't you spoken to?
- Who designed the questions to ask about these priorities?
- What might be some of the (un)expected outcomes of the project?
- Who will benefit from this project and who might be excluded or suffer?
- How do you know this project is appropriate?
- When will the project be started and finished, how will it be financed and how will it be maintained?

What are your responses to these questions? Do these questions change your perspective?

as of broader (national, international, state, civil society) pressures and influences, development interventions often fail to deliver intended outcomes and can exacerbate existing challenges. Second, when conducting research and making recommendations you need to ensure reliability, fairness and credibility. Linked to this concern is a need to be aware of power dynamics: of your power as the researcher in framing a discussion and agenda – a key concern of post-colonial approaches to development – and of power relations and hierarchies among participants (who speaks and for whom and with what (personal) agenda) (see Chapters 2 (about contested terrain) and 3 ('Power, identity and the dynamics of research')).

Derived from these observations, you should see how research is integral to development policy and practice and good research is vital for best practice. Research is used throughout the development process, from baseline or feasibility studies and pilot projects, through ethnographic studies of communities or contexts to inform understanding

and policy, to monitoring and evaluation strategies to ensure the effectiveness of development policies and practices. For postgraduate students development research may form the basis of a dissertation or thesis, involving a period of fieldwork of a few weeks through to a year or more. Undergraduate students are more likely to encounter development research on a smaller scale, either through group or individual research under the auspices of a fieldclass or a few weeks of research for a dissertation (cf. Fuller et al. 2006). Further development research opportunities may arise through working as a research assistant for an academic or development-related organization on a broader research project. However you experience development research, this book offers guidance to the designing, doing and writing up of development research and supports the development of transferable skills that can improve your employability.

The skills you develop will allow you to engage with development research across multiple scales, from cross-national comparative studies through national case studies to specific local challenges. These projects may entail the study of local, national or colonial archives, participatory methods with local community members, interviews with publics and elites, the completion of surveys to gather baseline data or to evaluate the outcomes of development projects and numerous other methods. At times, you may find yourself conducting such work as a lone and independent researcher, at others you may be part of – or even leading – a team of researchers. The heterogeneity of development research projects means there is no single approach or method to be adopted and the approach you adopt will be informed by -ologies (ontology, epistemology and methodology).

Discussion of -ologies (see Box I.3) can often be confusing, abstract and seemingly irrelevant to the practical aspects of research. They are, however, vital to determining how you understand and design research (a useful and accessible discussion of these concepts can be found in Chapter 4 of Grix (2004)). Understanding how we approach knowledge and meaning are integral to the ways in which we conceptualize research topics and questions, the types of data we want to collect and analyze and the methods we employ.

Box I.3 -ologies

Ontology – theory of being = what we assume exists

Epistemology – theory of knowledge = what we can know about what exists and how we know what we know. For instance, objectivism is the belief that meaning exists apart from consciousness. Subjectivism is the belief that meaning is created and imported from elsewhere and is produced free from ties with a specific object. Constructivism is the belief that all meanings are produced through specific interactions and that there is no objective truth.

Methodology – theory of method = suitability of methods used in empirical research

Method – how data are collected

Awareness and understanding of your personal view of the world, of what exists and what we can know about this (ontology and epistemology) are integral to the research design process. These understandings provide a frame for the questions asked, based on what we believe does/should exist and therefore what we can know about it and how to find this out. They dictate what kinds of question are asked, what types of data are sought and which methods are used to gather these data. Acknowledging your ontological and epistemological position will also help you to address concerns with how knowledge is produced.

The production of knowledge is a critical concern to development researchers. On a practical level, we are concerned that an inappropriate method or analytic tool or a poorly designed research project will produce a partial and inaccurate account of the matter being researched: in development work this can have long-lasting and costly consequences. At the same time, we are concerned with the positionalities implicated in knowledge production and how these affect our findings and recommendations.

In the field of development research, these concerns are bound up in historical and contemporary experiences of (neo)colonialism, imperialism, power and inequality. If we reflect on historical travelogues and other writings from explorers, missionaries and others involved (to greater or lesser extents) in efforts to 'develop', 'civilize' or otherwise 'uplift' peoples and cultures to European ideals, then specific representations and narratives of the 'savage and barbaric other' are readily apparent. These discourses (see Box I.4) firmly located the non-European as inferior and backwards, in need of civilization and upliftment that could only be realized with the support and assistance of Europeans. In this discourse, the development of non-Europeans was labelled as 'the white man's burden'. This

Box I.4 Discourse

Discourse refers to a way of communicating thoughts on a topic that influences and frames understanding. Discourses are powerful tools, shaping popular and policy approaches to the subject matter. For instance, think about this famous expression: 'One person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter' and the ways in which the African National Congress and Nelson Mandela were viewed during the 1980s. To the South African government of the time, as well as other governments and many people around the world, the ANC and Mandela were terrorists. To others, they were an illegitimately banned political organization and an imprisoned political freedom fighter.

We continue to see the power of discourse in the production of popular and political understandings of topics including immigration, development and the global south. If you pick up a range of newspapers and read their coverage of the same topic or story you can quickly see the various discourses used to frame the same issue in very different ways. The discursive power of the press to shape opinion is tremendous and has significant influence on development policy and practice (see Smith 2006; Noxolo 2012; Hammett 2013).

historical pretext of development, rooted in paternalism, Eurocentrism and racism has remained influential, both in popular and policy approaches to international development in the West and as a legacy informing recipient's attitudes towards Western (development) interventions.

Development researchers are increasingly engaging with post-colonial theory, leading to the emergence of post-colonial approaches to development research. Integral to these practices have been critical reflections on the ways in which the global south has been imagined and constructed in Western thought and how associated racialized knowledges have perpetuated a sense of paternalism or trusteeship manifest in development approaches and interventions to 'help' those in the global south (see Mercer et al. 2003). These engagements have sought not only to recognize but to mitigate and invert the continued power relations within development, such as the continued construction and design of development priorities and research questions within the West.

Consequently, development researchers have begun to involve the 'researched' in the design and conduct of the research (see Chapter 2). These efforts attempt to shift, at least partially, control and power over the production of knowledge away from Westerners and into a more shared, co-production process led by those being researched. While such an approach is often unfeasible for student research projects, it is important to understand how our attitudes towards knowledge, towards those with whom we conduct our research and the power relations implicit in the design and conducting of research influence the processes and outcomes of our work.

Developing research and using this book

Research is a process, one that begins before the first data are collected and finishes long after the final data are logged. This process involves personal interests and beliefs (ontologies and epistemologies) and entails literature reviews, design of research questions and selection of appropriate methods, the completion of ethics and risk assessment procedures, the conducting of fieldwork, the analysis of data and presentation of findings. This book is designed to provide you with guidance throughout this process – from conceptualization to presentation. It is intended to act as a continual companion and guide throughout the research journey, but also as a resource that can be dipped in and out of as necessary at any point.

Each individual chapter links theoretical and conceptual concerns to the practicalities of research and fieldwork and draws on both the authors' and guest contributors' experiences of development fieldwork to provide examples of the links between theory and method as well as understanding why different methods are used in the field. While we cannot hope to cover every aspect of the fieldwork experience, the examples included here demonstrate the unexpected and unanticipated events that characterize development research. These encounters can be challenging and complex but often serve to remind us of the humanity of development research, of the often emotionally draining nature of this work but also the uplifting and invigorating moments.

The opening chapters of the book address a series of concerns that need to be addressed and considered while designing and developing a research project, broadly characterized

as 'planning research'. The first chapter provides guidance and support to the initial stages of research design and associated skills, acknowledging the influence broader intellectual, political and economic factors have in framing the development of research projects. The second chapter, on the contested terrain of development fieldwork, critically locates development research within broader debates surrounding international development. These engagements should remind you that the field of international development, the priorities therein, and questions addressed are continually evolving. The third chapter proceeds to address a number of imperatives in the practical preparation of development fieldwork, discussing issues relating to the selection of fieldwork sites, working alone or in groups, and engaging with the practicalities of conducting research as part of a fieldclass. Chapter 4 then develops another set of concerns to be considered as integral to research and fieldwork, namely the importance of understanding power, identity and positionality within fieldwork.

Chapter 5 then addresses ethics in fieldwork. This chapter considers the core questions and practices relating to the ethical conduct of fieldwork and the legislative frameworks surrounding these and then reflects on wider ethical and moral components such as payment and reciprocity for participation and negotiating relations with field assistants. Chapter 6 then turns to address questions of risk and fieldwork, again engaging with the legislative concerns before addressing broader concerns relating to risk in everyday fieldwork practices, including mitigating risks to participants and minimizing risks of data loss or breaching of confidentiality.

The second part of the book, 'Collecting and analyzing data', addresses a series of methods and their use within development research. While this section cannot cover all possible methods that may be used in development research, we offer reflections on both 'traditional' social science methods and a number of emergent methodologies that are increasingly of interest to development researchers. The first chapter in this section, Chapter 7, explores verbal data, namely interviews and focus groups. In this chapter, consideration is given to different forms of interview, how to conceptualize and design interview and focus group questions and schedules, the different ways in which interviews can be completed and the importance of identifying and recording contextual and non-verbal information. Chapter 8 then focuses on ethnography and participant observation, considering the historical development of these approaches, a number of specific methods within this approach, how these can be utilized usefully in development research.

Chapter 9 considers the use of participatory methods in development research, linking these approaches back to the post-colonial turn in development and exploring why you might use such methods and when this would be an appropriate approach. We then identify a number of specific methods and explore how these can be utilized across a range of scales and topics. Chapter 10 addresses a range of methods for collecting and analyzing archival, documentary and visual data as a means to unpacking both historic narratives relating to development challenges and as a means of interrogating contemporary development challenges, policies and practices.

Chapter 11 shifts the focus to survey data and methods, considering how quantitative methods can be used within development research. In this chapter, we explore ways of using both existing, secondary datasets for development research, as well as how you might go about designing and conducting survey research to develop a new dataset,

including questions of sampling and coding. Chapter 12 then explores how big data and social media research are increasingly important to development research, providing guidance on how these data can be collected and analyzed. Chapter 13 then explores how locational and spatial data can be used in development research and fieldwork to address a range of topics and concerns. The final chapter in this section, Chapter 14, addresses how you might think about integrating methods and analysis in the design of research and fieldwork can ensure robust and reliable data collection in the field. Key issues here include recognizing research as an iterative process with varying potential for triangulation of methods, data and analysis. We explore approaches to coding data as well as key tools for analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data.

The final part of the book, 'Presenting and writing up research', considers some of the challenges faced in the post-fieldwork phase of a research project. Chapter 15 begins by addressing some of the ways in which data – notably big data, social media and locational/spatial data – can be presented through visual means and the importance of such techniques for engaging both academic and non-academic audiences, while Chapter 16 engages with the complexities of writing up research for different audiences, from academic writing for dissertations and articles through to research reports, policy briefing notes and press releases. Here we also reflect on broader considerations of knowledge exchange and transferable skills developed through development research. A final chapter recaps the core messages presented throughout this book, reminding you that while the process of doing development research can be challenging it is also inspiring.

By ordering the text in this way, we do not suggest that the research process follows a regimented and linear path. While most research projects do begin with a design phase, leading into a data collection (or fieldwork) period and finish with a period of analysis and writing up, there are overlaps and circulation between phases in an iterative process. Indeed, we recognize that development research is complex and messy, involving unexpected developments, challenges and opportunities. In order to convey a sense of these complexities, we draw extensively on our own research experiences to provide examples, anecdotes and questions throughout the chapters. For the same reason, we have included short reflections from other researchers and students in which they reflect on their experiences of conducting research. The first of these reflections, from Nina Laurie and Andrea Wilkinson (Box I.5), gives you a sense of the multiple and dynamic concerns involved in planning and carrying out development research for both staff and students.

While the overall structure of the book replicates an 'ideal' research flow, each chapter is designed to stand alone so that readers can engage with and revisit them as appropriate during the research process. Cumulatively, this content should reassure you that development research can be challenging but immensely rewarding, emotionally draining but also uplifting, exhausting but stimulating. Overall, the book emphasizes that in the same way that efficient and effective development is founded on careful and considered research, effective research is rooted in strong research design and preparation. In emphasizing the importance of careful research design, we recognize that the best laid research plans are often thwarted by the realities of fieldwork and understand that – and have experience of how – research plans change rapidly in the field. However, a strong training and understanding of the research process will help you overcome such challenges and enhance your adaptability and innovation in conducting fieldwork.

Box I.5 Personal reflections

Supervisor Nina Laurie: Four days prior to departure to Peru for field-based supervision

I did my risk assessment form last night. I thought it would be a quick job: find the one I did last time and give it a swift update – 'staying with the same people going to the same places, not that difficult – a good task for an evening in front of the TV'. Not to be of course . . . no hard copy to hand and the electronic file 'risk assessment Peru 09' accidently overwritten by UK fieldwork interviewing volunteers returning from South America – well, at least the continent was sort of right. I turned the TV off: it was going to be a long night.

I used not to take risk assessment forms very seriously. For goodness sake, all those questions about my 'control measures to reduce the risk identified': it's hot, it's sunny so put on high-factor sun cream, how hard is that? I hate the whole colonial imaginary that these forms feed into: the re-inscribing of the global south as 'exotic' and 'dangerous' just boils my blood. The risk level coming into my office in Newcastle is probably higher – the so-called 'pedestrian crossing' in front of the university is lethal. Twenty years of experience in this job, seeing all sorts of situations, has taught me not to be glib. In case I needed reminding, Andrea's 'weekend news' email three weeks ago pushed the message home: 'Just a short email to let you know that Ben and I were in a car accident yesterday! It's been quite a week, two infections, an earthquake and a car crash!!! . . . I'll keep you updated, but nothing to worry about.' Nothing to worry about? Is she mad? . . . I did worry, I do worry, I will continue to worry. That is part of the relationship bit of the job.

For me, the student–supervisor relationship is always two way. It is not only about imparting field expertise: in fact, quite often the reverse, I learn more than I teach. The experiences of my students frequently challenge my thinking about and approach to fieldwork. In Andrea's case, her policy background, prior to the PhD, working with fair trade NGOs (non-governmental organizations) in different countries in Africa, has made me think more carefully about what constitutes participatory methods in different contexts and for what ends they are adopted. In her NGO days, she workshopped specific goals collectively in order to own an outcome that would improve coffee production and financing for the group. For her, participatory methods are never just forms of 'data collection'. Last night Andrea's influence on my learning was very practical – it focused my mind properly on my risk assessment form. I reflected on the possibility of taxi crashes, earthquakes and stomach infections and so took more time over the form's requirements regarding my 'emergency plan'.

Thinking in terms of an 'emergency plan' is also a good way to approach the shifting nature of 'the field' during fieldwork, which changes because of things that happen in specific locations and at particular moments. Through the changing relationship with our field and those with whom we share it, fieldwork has to become an iterative process.

Doctoral Researcher Andrea Wilkinson: Looking at the effects of climate change on coffee farmers in Peru – four months in the field (seven to go!)

I have been conducting fieldwork for over ten years in completely different circumstances to which I find myself currently. My background as a manager of an international development charity has taken me to a range of different countries from India to Costa Rica, Ethiopia to Swaziland looking at diverse issues. What has not changed during this time is the reason why I gathered these data and the scope I've had to do so. It was vital for me to collect high-quality baseline data in order to secure funds to run long-term projects, to involve local communities and coffee cooperatives in developing and owning project outcomes and thus determining the impact of the interventions.

What is vital for me is that my doctoral research should have value on a practical level. I want to work alongside NGOs and policy makers, cooperatives and coffee farmers to ensure that there is dialogue throughout the entire process, from development to dissemination. This has resulted in my current research taking on a whole new meaning for me. I am collaborating directly with a fair trade coffee company, Twin, based in the UK, which imports Peruvian coffee. Twin is a pioneer in the field and has the power to use my research to make a real and lasting difference to the lives of coffee farmers and, as importantly, their families and community.

Becoming a doctoral researcher has resulted in my questioning the validity of my past research. Previously, research was not my sole aim but only a small part of my job. I used to fly in somewhere to spend a few weeks in the field, conduct back-to-back interviews, focus groups and questionnaires and then fly back out again to analyze the mass of data I had just collected. This time I am taking a different approach. I have spent the last four months learning a new language in the country in which I will conduct my fieldwork. Instead of using translators, I am slowly immersing myself into my research fieldsite. My learning is organic and is growing naturally. I have learnt a huge amount from everyday conversations, which I have discovered give you completely different answers to those you hear when sitting with a pen, paper, Dictaphone and a tight time schedule.

I am about to embark on the pilot phase of my fieldwork, where I will live and work on a coffee farm, seeing first hand the impacts of climate change as opposed to hearing what people want me to hear. The farmers and cooperatives, as well as my collaborative partner, will help shape the direction of my research, which I am beginning to understand is fluid and not merely about baseline data from which I can justify funding for various projects. It is about providing a more holistic reflection of the reality of the issues facing coffee farmers, cooperatives, importers and businesses posed by climate change. It concerns what people are willing to do to support long-lasting beneficial change for coffee farmers, their families and of course the natural environment.