Understanding international development

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Contents

Introduction

This course focuses on understanding international development. It is split into two main sections.

The first section introduces three key themes: **p**owers and **a**gency, **s**cale, and **h**istory (PASH). These themes are explored through two case study cities, Detroit and Shanghai.

The second section looks at programmes to promote livelihoods among low-income people, giving you an opportunity to critically reflect on these interventions.

This OpenLearn course is an adapted extract from the Open University course TD223 *International development: Making sense of a changing world*.

Learning outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- considering a conceptual lens for the study of international development
- considering different theories of international development
- note-taking skills (from written sources)
- how to use a conceptual framework to evaluate interventions to improve livelihoods
- how to reflect critically on information and data from the media, as well as academic articles, to appreciate the debates involved in such interventions.

1 Key themes: PASH

In this first section you are going to think about and study the three themes, referred to as PASH:

- power and agency
- scale
- history.

These themes are used in this course to help you think about international development.

During this section's activities you will contextualise these themes by reading Chapter 2 from *International Development in a Changing World* by Papaioannou and Butcher which is part of the TD223 *International development: making sense of a changing world*, and examining the case studies of Shanghai and Detroit. A breakdown of the activities is given below.

The estimated study time for this section is 13 hours and 15 minutes.

Table 1

Component	Recommended time spent
Activity 1 + Chapter 2	7 hours 45 minutes
Activity 2 + spray diagram tutorial	15 minutes
Activity 3 + Detroit audio	45 minutes
Activity 4	45 minutes
Activity 5 + articles	1.5 hours
Activity 6	45 minutes
Activity 7 + Shanghai audio	45 minutes
Activity 8	45 minutes

1.1 Framing international development

PASH is a framework for thinking critically about international development. Before discussing the value of these themes read Chapter 2 'Contesting development in theory and practice'. This provides an introduction to the three key themes although it does so without actually referring to them as PASH.

Activity 1

⏱ *7 hours 45 minutes*

Read Chapter 2 'Contesting development in theory and practice'. Take notes as you read.

Think of PASH as providing an overarching framework to help you make sense of the course as a whole. But why have we chosen these particular themes and not others? For example, we could have chosen a conventional social science discipline, such as economics, political science, sociology, geography, anthropology and cultural studies. However, international development is an interdisciplinary area of study covering all of these departments. In particular, in this course you will see an emphasis given to theories of international relations in international development, that is, that development is a process that impacts on, and is impacted by, the relations between states in the world system. Therefore, the PASH framework enables us to cut across and bring together ideas from each of these fields of study.

We can, for example, apply the PASH framework to an understanding of development as 'good change' (Chambers, 1997). Such a definition by itself carries little meaning so the word 'change' has to be unpacked. Fundamental to your study of this course, therefore, is the exploration of how and why change in all of its manifestations occurs. Taking this imperative as my starting point:

- The evidence base for how and why change occurs today is linked to how it *has* occurred in the past. In other words, a historical perspective is essential.

- People make change, both consciously and unconsciously. In this sense they exhibit agency. However, this agency is mediated by their power to effect change. Therefore, power and agency are linked inextricably in the creation of change and of who makes and benefits from it. We hope that you can also envisage a continuum where history concerns past change while power and agency concern the making of change in the present and future. As just noted, who creates change and who benefits or loses from it are tied to power and agency.

- Another cut across change is to consider it at different scales – for example, local, national and international – and how change at one scale affects change at another. This consideration of scale is particularly appropriate to a course on *international* development, where actions on an international scale impact at regional and national through to local scales – and vice versa.

1.2 Understanding PASH using case studies and spray diagrams

This course has provided a justification of PASH as overarching themes for the course. What is also interesting about these themes, however, is the way that they interact with each other (as illustrated in Figure 1).
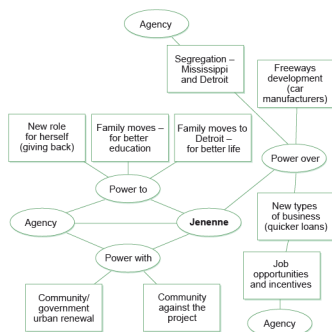

Figure 1 A representation of PASH and how it fits with international development

To take a simple example, a conventional version of history is in terms of rulers, explorers, generals and other great or bad people. Naked power and agency is taken for granted in this version of history as battles are fought and territory conquered (or lost). The exploits of these great or bad people are felt near, far and wide, that is to say at different scales. We can easily find illustrations of the inter-connections of the PASH themes in the example of British history. For example, the commoditisation of land in late 17th and early 18th century England turned what had traditionally been common access land into 'parcels', where full property rights of the owners prevailed, and from which peasants where forcibly evicted. Known as the 'enclosures', the evicted peasants did not allow this to happen without a struggle and contested the power of local authorities and landowners. Ultimately these changes, among others, that transformed rural life in England at the local, village level, also impacted on the wider, national scale, as peasants became a class of landless labourers that eventually swelled England's cities and became the working class of the industrial revolution.

The usefulness of the PASH framework is that it provides a lens through which to look at development debates. For example, history provides a contextual basis on which to view the present and make decisions about the future. Power, agency and scale provide a backdrop to debates on different ways of thinking about development theory and practice, such as neoliberalism versus people centred models of development that you would have come across in the chapter. PASH also enables us to connect development theory with applied practice.

1.2.1 How to draw a spray diagram

Now that you have an understanding of PASH, consider each theme in a little more depth, using the two cities of Detroit and Shanghai as case studies. One way of organising your thoughts might be to use spray diagrams. During this section, you will be asked to draw spray diagrams on paper as part of your written notes. Activity 2 provides a tutorial on spray diagrams and how to draw them; we recommend you do this activity now before attempting the following activities.

Activity 2

🕐 *15 minutes*

Watch the following, and make notes if you feel it would be helpful, on what are spray diagrams and how to draw spray diagrams.

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 1 What are spray diagrams

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 2 Drawing spray diagrams

1.2.2 Issues of power and agency

Now you have completed Activity 2, let's start considering each aspect of PASH using case studies and spray diagrams to help us; starting with power and agency.

Chapter 2 outlines how the dominance of different views on development is determined by the power and influence that a person or group of people hold. This in turn is linked to access to knowledge and the degree to which people can gain or acquire knowledge equally. The chapter focuses very much on power and agency at a macro scale, that is, within and between groups at a national or international level. While it introduces the notion of power and agency at individual or community level it doesn't go into this in any depth. Therefore, we'd like you to think about power and agency at this micro level in the next activity. But before doing so, let's just clarify in more detail what we mean by these terms.

Power

Power has more than one meaning so it is helpful to consider three forms of power which some scholars refer to:

1. Power over – control over other people through, for example, direct political control or control over resources. 'Power over' does not necessarily have to be overt, as when people internalise as 'natural' their power relations with others.
2. Power to – having the capacities and capabilities to make choices and engage in actions; in other words the ability to change the conditions of one's existence. It often embodies resistance to power over.
3. Power with – refers to the ability to achieve control through joint action with others.

Agency

This is defined as 'the degree to which agents are free to make their own decisions and follow their chosen path of action'.

Activity 3

⏱ *45 minutes*

Listen to the audio below on the conflicted and contested nature of development and how it has shaped one individual's life in Detroit.

Take notes as you listen particularly around the following issues:

- examples of power over
- examples of power to
- examples of power with
- examples of agency in action.

Audio content is not available in this format.

🎧

Audio 1 Detroit audio (16 minutes)

Provide your answer...

. . . .

Comment

I made my notes on these examples in the form of a spray diagram (Figure 2). You may have picked up similar or different examples because, as I shall discuss in a moment, power is dynamic and different in various contexts.

Figure 2 Spray diagram of power and agency in Detroit

I don't want to discuss my examples in any depth, however, I do want us to consider the idea that the Heidelberg Project is an example of 'power with' and agency in action. Some of you might contest this because of its origins as a project of just one man. But it is also a project that has increasingly involved the community and provided an opportunity for the community to consider their own futures more actively. In fact, Jenenne talks of the project as having its own ideology (she calls it Heidelbergology – listen to audio below) which highlights how they visualise their project as community driven agency (see Figure 3).

Audio content is not available in this format.

🎧

Audio 2 Detroit (3 minutes)

Figure 3 Heidelbergology

Your answers to Activity 3 on power and agency might also have alerted you to the dynamic nature of power. It is not fixed, although undoubtedly some forms of power appear durable. 'Power to' can embody resistance, and the very notion of 'power with' implies some negotiation of the power relations between those who wish to act 'with' each other in order to enable and enact a greater power. It is important to challenge, therefore, the notion that power can be absolute. The apparently weak are able to resist, and there are many sources of power. The power of holding material wealth is obviously very important, but so too is forming alliances between people and groups. For others, a source of power lies in their expertise and knowledge.

It is probably more appropriate to think of power as relational, meaning that it exists and is negotiated in the relationships between individuals and groups, from local to national to international scales. Useful here is the concept of interdependence, which again is pertinent at the full range of scales. In international studies, the world system of nation states is often characterised as both anarchy and interdependence. Similarly, the integration of the world economy under the banner of globalisation implies interdependence. Shanghai and Detroit work as cities because of the interdependence of their many and varied elements. For example, the rich and poor of cities are often interdependent, with the latter providing essential domestic services for the former. Interdependence does not imply an absence of power relations, but put simply this power is never absolute nor zero in any one party to the relationship.

Activity 4

⏱ *45 minutes*

Now review all your notes that you have made so far and draw a spray diagram that helps collate your notes around the issues of power and agency.

1.2.3 Issues of scale

Detroit and Shanghai are becoming increasingly linked as a result of globalisation of the automobile industry. By globalisation we mean increasing connectivity and interaction across national boundaries. In fact, this process is breaking down traditional boundaries and barriers geographically, socially and economically, leading to:

- new threats – for example, global pandemic flu outbreaks

- new agents of development – for example, global protest movements such as Jubilee 2000 or the ONE campaign that followed
- new power struggles – for example, the battle for economic dominance between the USA and China
- new opportunities – for example, new markets for business, greater opportunities for cultural exchange and perhaps the most obvious, wider communication and connectivity through IT infrastructure.

Development activities and the impacts of globalisation are equally important, if not more so, at a range of other scales too, including, as noted in Chapter 2, the local community or household, subnational, regional and national scales. At all levels, scale is important for thinking about the definition of development goals and in understanding the unplanned and intentional routes towards them.

Activity 5

🕐 *1.5 hours*

Read the three short articles below and then answer the following questions. In answering these questions you will interrogate how urban farming impacts, and is impacted by, events and individuals at a variety of different scales.

1. When and where was Urban Farming created? How did it then expand?
2. Does Peaches and Green differ from Urban Farming in its organisational set up?
3. How are individuals involved in the work of these two organisations?

Note: if you hold ctrl while clicking on the links a new window or tab will open.

- Urban Farming Mission Statement
- Peaches & Greens
- Grocery truck caters to underserved market

Provide your answer...

....

Comment

Urban Farming is one of the largest urban farming organisations in Detroit. Created in 2005, it has since expanded to over 30 cities around the world. This is an example of a not-for-profit organisation that has expanded beyond its original boundaries and moved from focusing on one particular community to an international focus. On the other hand, Peaches and Green, is very much a community specific initiative, run by the Central Detroit Christian Community Development Corporation, another not-for-profit organisation. However, whereas the food produced by the Urban Farming organisation is given for free, Peaches and Green has been set up with the potential to become self-sustaining operating a shop and a mobile sales van. In the second article – a blog posting – we see that people volunteer their time to assist the work of Peaches and Green. What we don't know is whether their shop staff are also volunteers or are paid staff. With regards to using pictures as evidence, you can never guarantee that you can get all the information or understand the full situation from a single source. Similarly, it is important to think about the context around

which the piece of evidence that you are reading has been framed within. So in this case we would perhaps want to find out more about who wrote the piece we've just read and think a bit about why they might have written it; what were they trying to tell us by writing the description of events in the way that they did?

Finally, before we move away from thinking about scale, it is necessary for us to place the urban farming example within its wider context. What do we mean by wider context? It is important to think about urban farming from the context of these two organisations and the people who volunteer within them, but also to consider how their work is impacting on the communities in which they work and how these communities are impacting on them. Some of these are mentioned in the articles you have just read (improving diets; creating a sense of community through working collectively, making parts of the city look beautiful). We can also broaden the discussion out further to ask what impact do the efforts of Detroit's urban farmers have on other urban farmers around the world and vice versa. We can widen our question out further still to its impact on larger debates within Detroit, in Michigan State, nationally within the US or even internationally. Lastly, to be able to make a full assessment of the issues of scale involved, we also need to ask what factors might impact on urban farming in Detroit that are found beyond the level of the community (so at city, state, national and international levels). What might these be? There isn't time to go into these in detail here, so here are a few examples of scale issues that you might have thought of:

1. Detroit's urban farmers are an exemplar for others (some urban farming organisations in Detroit are linked to local colleges with the aim of teaching 'the next generation' while, on an international level, Detroit based urban farmers have gone to countries such as South Africa to share urban farming techniques).
2. Detroit's urban farms fitted within Detroit's regeneration efforts (in 2010 a proposal was being considered by the mayor of Detroit to move the few people remaining out of the abandoned neighbourhoods into other areas and turn large parts of the city into open farm land).
3. Detroit's urban farms are impacted by everything from changing global weather patterns to international agricultural market price fluctuations to municipal rules on land use.

Activity 6

⏱ *45 minutes*

Now review all your notes that you have made so far and draw a spray diagram that helps collate your notes around the issue of scale.

1.2.4 Issues of history

The dominant approaches to development noted in Chapter 2 each became prominent at particular points in history, i.e. as a result of a particular set of social, economic and political contexts. The importance of historical context explains why it is argued at the

beginning of the chapter that studying development is, to some extent, about asking Eric Hobsbawn's 'key historical question':

> how did humanity get from caveman to space-traveller, from a time when we were scared by sabre-toothed tigers to a time when we are scared of nuclear explosions?

> (Hobsbawn, 1997)

There is value in taking a historical perspective as it provides us with evidence of what has occurred before enabling us to consider how things might happen in the future.

Now I'd like you to reflect a little more on the usefulness of a historical perspective and the place of individual's within historical processes and thus development activities.

Activity 7

⏱ *45 minutes*

Watch the clip below, which discusses how an individual's life in Shanghai has shaped and has been shaped by events around them throughout their life.

Take notes as you listen particularly around the following issues:

- What are the key historical events that have shaped Madame Yao's and Ms Fu's lives?
- What are the historical events that they have helped shape?

> Video content is not available in this format.
>
> **Video 3** Shanghai

> *Provide your answer...*

. . . .

Comment

There are a number of historical events that you could have noted down after watching this film that introduces us further to Madame Yao and her daughter, Ms Fu. Some of these are momentous events that are well-known such as the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s or China's economic transformation from the 1980s. The former impacted Ms Fu's education and the way she could dress and express her personality while the transition of China to a market economy provided Ms Fu with greater job opportunities and security at a time when her friends were losing their jobs. Other historical events are perhaps less well known such as the famine of 1958–1962 known by Madame Yao as the 'Natural Catastrophe'. Indeed, this example highlights the differences that are evident throughout history which means some people are cushioned more from natural disasters than others. Madame Yao and her family where not sheltered from the worst of the famine because of their monetary wealth but because her husband was in the army and therefore she benefited from additional support. However, as Madame Yao alludes to in the film, while the army provided a safety net for her and

her family, it meant she had other problems to contend with related to the fact that she was often having to look after her children and the family home on her own while her husband was away in the army or at sea.

The second question might feel like a trick question; there is no obvious answer that presents itself when watching the film. However, if we interrogate the information we are given it is possible to see how one individual is part of a greater whole. For example, Madame Yao has helped shape her daughter's life as much as any parent does; Ms Fu's participation in criticising her teachers during the Cultural Revolution may have impacted others around her; and the business decisions Ms Fu takes in her position as a sales manager of a major sports retailer will have implications on the way her company operates (the customers it has, the number of orders it receives) which in turn impacts other workers in the company in terms of their work load and job security. History doesn't just take place on a large scale and in terms of major events. We can think of history at a range of scales (personal, family, community, national as well as international) and one's place within history as being influenced by the degree of power and agency a person has.

Activity 8

🕐 *45 minutes*

Now review all your notes that you have made so far and draw a spray diagram that helps collate your notes around the issue of history.

2 Interventions to promote livelihoods

This section focuses on the different kinds of intervention and initiatives that aim to address various dimensions of poverty and to enhance livelihoods. Chapter 11 from *International Development in a Changing World* by Papaioannou and Butcher, which is part of the TD223 *International development: making sense of a changing world*, sets up a framework for you to evaluate six case studies of intervention in terms of the social relations involved, and the role of power and agency. The online activities in turn enable you to go into a bit more depth on particular issues involved in micro-credit and in recent proposals for cash transfers to poor people.

The estimated study time for this section is 12.5 hours.

The table below outlines the main activities for this course and the recommended time to be spent studying them.

Table 2

Component	Recommended time spent
Activity 9 + Chapter 11	10 hours
Activity 10 + podcast + extract	1.5 hours
Activity 11 + extract	1 hour

2.1 Interventions to promote livelihoods

In this section you will be considering some of the issues involved in intervening to promote livelihoods and will then be using a conceptual framework to evaluate six short case studies. It is suggested that you read through the chapter once and then decide if there are particular case studies that you wish to focus on to carry out the in-text evaluative exercise. The case studies focus on:

- the conditions of garment workers in Bangladesh
- global health initiatives such as the exploration for an HIV/AIDS vaccine
- the use of genetically-modified crops to meet income needs in India and South Africa
- using micro-credit to promote enterprise in the USA
- education projects for low income families in Bangladesh
- food processing technologies for poor potato farmers in Bolivia.

The case studies are at different scales and involve different types of agency and power.

Activity 9

⏱ *10 hours*

Read Chapter 11 'Interventions to promote livelihoods'. Take notes as you read.

2.2 Micro-credit

In Chapter 11 'Interventions to promote livelihoods', Case Study 4 considered how micro-credit can be used to promote livelihoods amongst low income women in the USA. Micro-credit has been regarded as a successful mechanism for income generation and poverty alleviation, particularly for women. However, there is also much debate about it and its supposed success has come under some criticism.

In Activity 10, you can listen to a podcast of a programme, originally broadcast on the BBC World Service in 2011, which discussed some of the downsides of micro-credit schemes. Search for recent information about micro-credit on the internet and to compare what you find with that podcast.

Activity 10

🕐 *1.5 hours*

Question 1

Listen to the podcast on micro-credit. While listening to the podcast make notes on the arguments for and against micro-credit.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Audio 3 Micro-credit (19 minutes)

Provide your answer...

Comment

The podcast paints a rather critical picture of micro-credit or micro-finance (the former tends to refer to loans while the latter may also include services such as insurance; but the terms are often used interchangeably).

On the plus side, the idea of micro-credit is to enable low income people to have money to invest in productive activity. This has worked in many cases (which have been documented by the World Micro-credit Summits that have taken place over many years).

On the down side, the podcast suggests that micro-credit is subject to the same phenomenon as sub-prime mortgages: borrowers are persuaded to take out too many loans by predatory lenders and subsequently fall into debt, unable to repay their loans. In this case, debt can have life-ending consequences.

The story is of course more complex. Poor people have little to withstand shocks in their lives and as soon as one happens through natural or human causes, they fall back on any resources they have to pay for food, clothing, education, etc. Available resources will of course include loans they have received. In addition, it is quite well known from other forms of credit provided to low income people, that credit is used for consumption as well as investment because people have so little to start with. This is the case as much in developed countries as in developing ones.

So the conclusion of the podcast is that micro-credit can contribute to poverty reduction and livelihood promotion but is not the panacea originally espoused. One of the studies cited in the podcast suggests that micro-credit does not lead to women's empowerment, improved child health or more education in the household. However, other studies have shown how micro-credit has enabled women to form solidary groups, i.e. the benefit for some has not so much been in business but in the reduction of women's isolation.

Thinking about micro-credit institutionally, the challenge of running such schemes on a not-for-profit basis comes through in the podcast, and is one of the reasons that the for-profit private sector has become involved. The latter is likely to make the terms and conditions of lending more stringent – in principle (although the sub-prime crisis of 2008 is not strong evidence for this!)

Question 2

When you have listened to the podcast, read 'Indian budget projects economic growth', from the BBC website. What are your observations about this statement from the Finance Minister in the light of the podcast you have listened to?

> *Provide your answer...*

....

Comment

Comparing your reflections on the micro-credit podcast with 'Indian budget projects economic growth' will also put them in the wider setting of the Indian national economy. India, like China, has been dubbed a 'rising power', with a rapidly growing economy. However, it still has many challenges in terms of reducing poverty which is not declining as fast in China (which accounted for most of the world decline in poverty in 2011). From your reading, you can pick up the contrasts and contradictions of economic growth and attempts to promote livelihoods through micro-credit (which the Finance Minister was planning to bail out).

2.3 Cash transfers

Consider an alternative view for financing poor people out of poverty and into better livelihoods: cash transfers. The case below documents an Oxfam cash transfer project in Vietnam.

Activity 11

🕐 *1 hour*

Read the extract from 'Oxfam's unconditional cash transfer project in central Viet Nam' (Chaudhry, 2010)

Make notes on the pros and cons of cash transfers and the conditions needed to make them successful. In particular, make notes on the issues of social relations,

power and agency raised by this project, and which you have considered in Chapter 11.

What arguments would you make for supporting micro-credit over cash transfers or vice versa?

Provide your answer...

....

Comment

I was intrigued by this example for the following reasons:

1. The idea of unconditional cash transfers assumes that the recipients know best what to do with the money – i.e. they do not necessarily have to use it for investment in a business but can use it to act on other dimensions of their lives which will improve their living standards (e.g. mending the roof). It's important to note that such expenditure is not simply a luxury or of a secondary nature to investment, but may well be important for the health of the household so that they are able to work.

2. The villagers did, however, spend a high proportion of the money in productive investment, while second came investment in household assets (such as repairing the roof), third were for such things as paying back debts and addressing food shortages, health and education needs, and finally came a tiny amount of savings.

3. However, the issue that really grabbed my attention was the village dynamics. Many 'customs' were brought into play by different interests in the villages to extract a social contribution from cash transfer recipients (one of the reasons savings were so low and why the cash transferred was spent so quickly). It is suggested by this account that elites in the villages prevailed over the relatively voiceless poor and that the poor only gained confidence through negotiations with the elites over the use of the funds by their advocate, Oxfam. This aspect of the story raises a number of other issues:

   ○ The importance of understanding the cultural and institutional setting in any intervention to improve livelihoods..

     By that I mean the current rules, norms and values that people live their lives by, even if there are differences between people about them. Such rules, norms and values might in turn have stories that people construct about them ('we always do things this way'), which may or may not be true and which may or may not support particular societal interests.

   ○ As a corollary, the importance of understanding power relations in any intervention to improve livelihoods.

     Such understandings need to take into account powerful interests in any social setting, as well as the social relations of gender – both as they are manifested in the social setting and within households. Note that this account, as extracted, did not address the gender dimensions of how decisions were made to use the cash transfers by men and women in the households.

   ○ Finally, if not organised, the poor often need an advocate (which can have positive effects on their own confidence and voice in the longer term). (There are other examples of this in Chapter 11 – make a note of what they are if you haven't already.) I wonder what you thought about the advocacy role in this case?

So what conclusion did you come to about the relative merits of micro-credit and cash transfers for improving livelihoods? It seems that both have potentially positive and negative sides to them.

To my mind, the bullets above are as important in thinking through the administration and management of a micro-credit scheme as for cash transfers, if households are to avoid predatory lending and indebtedness. You can probably also see that the issues in the bullets are dimensions of the questions in the evaluative grid in Chapter 11 (Table 11.1), and from the accounts of these two types of initiative, you can see why such questions need to be asked.

Conclusion

In the first section you've studied different materials (Chapter 2, video clips, articles, extracts from a blog) and been asked to draw out particular information from all of them. You were also reminded earlier on to think about the context within which a piece of evidence is framed. This section also introduced PASH as a lens which this course uses to study international development.

In the second section you examined different kinds of intervention to promote livelihoods and used a conceptual framework to evaluate them. You also explored further the pros and cons of micro-credit and cash transfers. In doing do, you have been sharpening your critical reflection skills. You might also want to engage in some critical reflection, that is, to think about how your own values and beliefs impact on your understanding and attitude towards these interventions. Given that development theory and policy has often been generated in 'Western' contexts, how do you think your own cultural context impacts on your understanding of development and what implications might this have on attempts to intervene in the livelihoods of others? Jot down your own thoughts on the different kinds of intervention, their potential and their challenges. Are there any interventions that you have been involved in directly? How do they compare?

Acknowledgements

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