



LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE IPCC

TOWARDS THE CREATION OF A PANEL OF EXPERTS ON POVERTY AND INEQUALITY ¹

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INTRODUCTION

In spring 2013, the Spanish Alliance Against Poverty addressed the United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, at that time in Madrid, to demand the creation of a panel on poverty and inequality. This panel was to work in a similar way to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), having communication and regulatory capacity on the matters it covered. Therefore, and aware of the need for a strong proposal that could be launched with the maximum support from institutions, governments and development study centers, the Alliance decided to undertake a study.

The subject of the study can be summarized as “lessons learnt from the IPCC: towards the creation of a panel of experts on poverty and inequality”.

The first part of the study is an in-depth research about the IPCC, which has become the key institution within the international climate change regime to provide and evaluate scientific information from which policy decisions are made. As recognized by most of the states and international organizations, its role on the development and evaluation of international instruments, like the Kyoto Protocol, is decisive. In this sense, it seems that the existence of a body with similar characteristics applied to studies on poverty and inequality would be very beneficial for the states and the international institutions to take clear and decisive action against poverty. With this premise in mind, the study analyses the dynamics that led to the formation of the IPCC in the 80s, the way it manages its position between policy and research, the methods used to produce knowledge and its characteristics.

The study draws a number of lessons learnt from this analysis and tries to apply them to the research on poverty and inequality. Therefore, in the second part of the study, there is a brief historical introduction on the development studies and a description of the state of affairs that will lead to the question about how policy and research are related in this area. Afterwards, a hypothesis on the formation of the panel is posed, both from a static perspective, showing the actors and the overall structure in which the

¹ This paper is a summary of a wider study developed by Plataforma 2015 y más, as an initiative of the Spanish Alliance Against Poverty, and published in the collection “Cuadernos 2015 y más”.



study of development is framed, and from a dynamic perspective, showing two current processes that will determine the future political decisions on development and in which this panel should be enclosed.

Finally, the study proposes a variety of conclusions to be worked on jointly with the Alliance in order to prepare and analyze the possibilities that exist to advocate for the achievement of this panel. In any case, this study should be understood as an introduction focused on the lessons learnt and oriented to thinking on ways of influencing this panel.

This study is based not only on the review of great part of the literature on the formation of the IPCC, but also on the official documents and resolutions about its procedures and mandates. At the same time, several interviews with key informants of the UN system have taken place via Skype and email.

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CLIMATE AND THE EIGHTIES GLOBAL AGENDA

The first part of the study is an in-depth research on the IPCC, focusing first on the conditions that enabled the transfer of existing scientific knowledge about climate and its consequences to the center of the political agendas. But, what made this move possible?

In the eighties, a number of issues arising from the scientific advances on climate and a set of policy dynamics react to the generation of evidence that link important economic actors, mainly industry and energy sectors, with the undesirable consequences on climate variations.

In this context, there are many important factors that made this move to the center of the political agenda possible, but there are at least three that should be mentioned. Enhanced capacities to collect climate data and perform time series on the behavior of climate; the generation of a transnational epistemic community of scientists; and the existence of specific international organizations and programs that promote cooperation and global analysis within the framework of the United Nations. These last two elements were essential for changing the way that climate issues were perceived, from a national to a global perspective, and realizing that they can only be solved from the perspective of international cooperation, as stated in the report published in 1986 by the Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment of the International Council for Science.



Previously, in 1985, in the Villach Conference, there was a need to change the indicators of climate and to look for new approaches on which to base the predictions, and human action was established as the core of the climate problem. Therefore, the conclusion drawn was that if certain policy actions that transformed these behavior patterns existed, it could be possible to slow down the effects on climate variations. In this way, the Final Declaration aimed to create a system to scientifically assess the state of the climate issues periodically.

This Conference established the road map for the creation of the IPCC. The wide range of scientific conclusions and the lack of agreement on the likely consequences of climate variations –from catastrophic to very conservative positions– motivated the creation of the IPCC. This was also shared by the activism of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Secretary General, Mostafa Tolba. This, together with the creation of regimes like the Prevention of the Ozone Layer materialized in the Vienna Convention, emphasized that ecological issues, amongst which climate falls, should be increasingly on the agenda.

Conforming climate change was gaining presence within the international agenda, the role of the U.S. gained relevance as the main emitter of greenhouse gases and during the successive Republican Governments that were openly close to the business lobbies who were clearly opposed to any agreement on emission reductions as they would be the hardest hit. The opposition of these sectors would limit the final scope of the global decision to just a commitment decision: to continue the research. This decision would materialize in the creation of the IPCC.

It is in this context that the IPCC is born. A context where there is scientific agreement on climate variations being a global problem caused by the increasing greenhouse emissions provoked by human action. This implied the need to establish and design a political intervention that, just as the scientific community had highlighted, had to be transnational.

HOW DOES THE IPCC WORK?

As there was a previous agreement with the governments on the products of the IPCC, the political interests had much more influence in the consolidation of scientific knowledge than they had had in the Vienna Convention on the Prevention of the Ozone Layer. This is to say that the creation of the IPCC had also to meet certain criteria of the political community and its interests such as legitimacy, utility, and acceptability. This can be seen in the organizational structure of the IPCC and in its capacity to produce evaluation reports.



Regarding the structure of the IPCC, there has been a significant evolution from its origins to the present day, which is reflected in the growing weight of the contributions coming from the social sciences and the relatively greater number of scientists that come from developing countries. In its beginnings the evidence from natural sciences prevailed, but with the finding of human and social behaviors being the core of climatic variations, this has gradually been balanced. On the other hand, the fact that the scientific community doesn't only come from research centers located in countries with greater responsibilities on emissions, but also from countries which suffer the greatest consequences, is also considered a more than reasonable evolution.

The role of the IPCC is to synthesize the information for political decision makers so that the negotiations that take place with them when developing and drafting the reports are fundamental to understand its subsequent influence. In regard to the IPCC's processes on report elaboration, there is a growing political effort to make them broader. In this way, a process open to a multitude of experts that includes several stages of review and consultation has been designed.

LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE IPCC FOR THE CREATION OF A PANEL ON POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

When discussing the creation of a panel on poverty and inequality, some of the elements of the formation and the way of working of the IPCC have to be taken into account:

1. There is a need to represent all the interests involved, even those that, like in the case of the IPCC, may be more interested in controlling than in developing the knowledge on poverty and inequality.
2. There also has to be enough agreement on the existing knowledge about poverty and inequality, as well as on the assessment of its causes and the implications for the challenges that development is facing. The scientific knowledge on development issues is more likely to be determined by political positions and perspectives than by the knowledge about climate change and, therefore, naive parallelisms with the weight that the scientific knowledge about climate had in the negotiation processes leading to the IPCC creation cannot be made.
3. However, if we try to find out a consensus that could be used as a starting point for the implementation of this panel, we could think about the clear signs of exhaustion that some dominant approaches in development intervention policies are showing, i.e. the reduction



of poverty and inequality phenomena (and the concept of development itself) to monetized values, like the GDP. In this line, would it be possible to build a consensus about these premises being insufficient, and that gave place to new and alternative approaches to the multiple dimensions that characterize development?

4. The production of knowledge in the areas of poverty and inequality has a greater diversity of sources and therefore approaches and nuances will be analyzed and synthesized in the second part of the study. There are also, as in the case of the IPCC, some relevant opportunities coming from the ability to articulate and to share the diversity that the United Nations system has in a context that can be considered particularly suitable or appropriate, like the debates on setting the new post-2015 development agenda.

THE STATE OF THE ART IN THE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT DEVELOPMENT

POVERTY AND INEQUALITY IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Though development begins to be analyzed as a specific area in the times of the Second World War, giving place to the so called studies on development, the treatment of poverty and inequality as problems hasn't been very consistent in these studies.

There are two fundamental issues that frame the early studies on development since they were established in the fifties. On one hand, there is a preeminence of what's monetizable, and therefore what can be measured, especially by the economists. This reaches its best expression in the progression of economic growth as measured by GDP per capita. On the other hand, the strong national character of the possible development strategies that are based on the widely shared assumption that people's development is a byproduct of the development of the countries in which they live. These two variables are the ones that gave place to classification of countries in developed, underdeveloped or developing countries.

But only a few decades later, probably due to the failure of the national development strategies in the underdeveloped countries and for other reasons, there was a need to better the scientific approach to development. Other development dimensions, forgotten in the first studies, start to be addressed, such as: equality between women and men, environmental sustainability, the limits of growth, GDP as being inefficient to describe different realities and the relation between rights and freedoms and the development achievements.



Despite progress in the introduction of new approaches and dimensions to address the issue of development, the policy interventions during the 80's were clearly guided by the conservative fundamentalism that gives the market the main role in reassigning resources and considers trade liberalization as the only strategy. From the development perspective, the social costs of implementing these political strategies was so high that the institutions responsible for them were the ones who spent all the 90s trying to balance the focus on the macroeconomic perspective, paying some more attention to the social and environmental problems as well. Even now, there is little consensus on the basic development matters. This can be seen in the different approaches with which the economists and other specialists want to address the global financial crisis. Nevertheless, and even if the political interventions say the opposite, the human development approach based on the expansion of capabilities developed by Amartya Sen and promoted by many study centers throughout the world could be used to start building a theoretical basis to address the move of development to the center of the policy interventions.

TOWARDS A BETTER CHARACTERIZATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

A growing double preoccupation can be seen in the evolution of the development studies. On one hand, the need to characterize welfare and poverty more adequately by providing measurements that are different to the ones of income that have predominated in the characterization of these dimensions until now. In this way, the constant evolution of the indexes related with human development, gender inequality and multidimensional poverty, have finally to be adjusted by inequality, trying to place at the center of the investigations a more complex reality composed by several interrelated dimensions. On the other hand, inequality is imposed on the political agenda in the light of the difficulties that it adds to the strategies designed and implemented in the fight against poverty. Therefore, the links between poverty and inequality, although not direct or easily simplified, have to be addressed.

Indeed, the progress of studies on income inequality, as well as the claims arising from the evidence that shows that the same income situations affect in very different ways the capacities of different groups, highlight the need to face development problems addressing both vertical and horizontal inequalities. According to increasing voices, growing inequality seriously undermines public policies, questions the democratic legitimacy and poses significant risks to social and political stability. Inequality also limits severely the possibilities for economic growth and yields in the fight against poverty.



FROM KNOWLEDGE TO POLITICS

One of the most important research institutes in the world, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), conducted an inquiry² last decade about the links between knowledge and politics in the field of development studies, highlighting the different elements that affect the permeability between these two areas.

In the first place, the idea that investigation takes place in spaces that are different and separated from the ones where political decisions are made, has to be abandoned, and a more continuous process of frequent interaction characterized by the bi-directionality between agents has to be conceived.

Therefore, there are various spaces where development politics and knowledge about it interact, and this must be seen as a starting point for the creation of this panel. As we learnt from the IPCC, contingency is a key element to configure a panel on poverty and inequality, just as the IPCC was product of the negotiations between the interests and the actors of knowledge. Unlike what happened in the years before the creation of the IPCC, when the states remained relatively untouched by scientific advances, in the case of inequality, poverty and development there is plenty of doctrine, rules and established practices from which the panel could be built.

The ODI enquiry notes three other variables that have to be taken into account: the political context, the qualities of scientific research and the informal links between the people who undertake the research and who work at the political level. Out of these three variables, the study carried out by the ODI shows that it's the political context the one which ultimately determines the capacity to influence policy. For this reason, in order to discover the possibilities of the creation of the panel, the political context in which it would take place has to be analyzed.

There are two ways of carrying out this analysis. On one hand, focusing on the institutional structure of the political context and, on the other hand, concentrating on the processes taking place in the present.

WHICH IS THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT OF THE DEVELOPMENT WORLD?

For the hypothetical panel, we should take into account what kind of actors and which interests and perceptions about development issues they maintain. Upon this structure and these perceptions lie the possibilities of the creation of the panel and its final shape. For this study, we point out three types of actors (states, public global space; private global space) that can be recognized in the international system and the role that each one could perform in the future establishment of the panel.

² For the full study <http://www.odi.org.uk/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/180.pdf>.



1. The states, as a group, have a role that will be crucial in the creation of a panel. Obviously, it's not easy to see the states as a group as far as they maintain different positions and strategies within the development field. In fact, there have already been favorable proposals that, however, have been launched by groups of states with less relative power. Such is the case of what in 2009 was called the G192, when the Stiglitz Commission was created to analyze the situation after the financial crisis exploded. Nevertheless, the opposition of countries like USA and UK put a halt to the possibility of taking the broader group of countries as a representative space for making strategic and policy decisions.
2. Regarding the global public space formed by global institutions which are mainly intergovernmental, ECOSOC stands in the pole position of the UN system in terms of representation and relations with centers of knowledge production. Nevertheless, it's essential to also count on institutions such as WB and IMF that, even though representing somewhat reductionist views of the multidimensional approach to development, have departments, initiatives, and sometimes people with thrust to be considered instrumental in the establishment of a panel. Other initiatives that have to be highlighted are the Global Development Network or the initiatives led by Milanovic on the analysis of income inequality. At the same time, it's also desirable to have explicit support from several programs and departments from the UN system, amongst which FAO, ILO, ECLAC, or UNWOMEN should be prioritized for their constant production of knowledge and contribution to the development debate.
3. The global private space is also essential; both as research and knowledge production centers are concerned and as foundations and corporate lobbies. Either through direct funding of programs and research, or through direct participation in the negotiation spaces as new development actors, the later are playing a decisive role in shaping the agendas, often trying to represent the limits and the potential scope of the proposals.

ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM: THE ECOSOC AS A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

Since 2012, the United Nations have started simultaneous processes to try to configure a wide consensus that sets the new international agenda for development which should be used as common orientation and commitment once the period established for the MDGs comes to an end in 2015.

Despite the contradictions, the lack of rationality in the design of the processes set in motion and the uncertainties about the new agenda finally



assuming consensus with enough capacity to respond to the challenges of development today, the truth is that these processes are being accompanied by a massive effort of mobilizing contributions and debates from different actors. The research centers on development are being especially active and have published numerous proposals. Furthermore, the involvement of other actors from the organized civil society and especially from vulnerable groups enhances the chances of developing agreements that guide policy interventions in the field of development.

As well as these processes, there are efforts currently taking place to reform the ECOSOC, a UN organism dedicated to economic and social affairs. While it's an organism that has a structural weakness stemming from its origin and way of working, it seems that there are expectations that it will be reformed to make it more agile and give it a greater role. Amongst these reform projects, one of the explicit goals is to endow it with the capacity to coordinate and establish it as a leader in the international economic thought.

CONCLUSIONS

The formation of the IPCC shows that if the creation of an epistemic community with clear consensus is important, so is the participation of the political actors in generating that knowledge. In short, a frontier institution in which political actors are part of the generation of knowledge has to be created. In the case of the IPCC, a specific mechanism was developed. This implies that knowledge is more linked to its direct application and that its product, in a way, reflects the unequal power between actors. In the case of development, this implies that, if a panel of experts on poverty and inequality with real capacity to influence the development policies is wanted, it will have to be created from structures and processes that already exist within the global system of development.

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LAS PERSONAS
LA POLÍTICA
EL MUNDO

