

Panel 25: The Politics of Policy Research in Developing Countries

This panel discusses the difficulties and dilemmas of conducting research in resource strapped countries where the scarcity of researchers and research funding determine topics for research as well as the slants of research. The purpose is to highlight the thorny questions of research on what, for whom, in whose interests. The panel will specifically address three issues: a) an overview of constraints and opportunities for researchers working in difficult settings; b) the dilemmas of qualitative research and issues of representation, especially regarding women, who are generally assumed to be passive subjects, and whose heterogeneity is submerged into a uni-dimensional identity focusing upon them as victims of Islamic cultures; and c) questioning the construction of binaries in relation with tradition and modernity and the propensity of different actors to authenticate different (negative) traditions through development policy research. Such research often presents women in developing countries as oppressed due to culture and tradition rather than social development policies. The panel will thus initiate debate around the politics that underlie any kind of research and the manner in which it can manipulate policy through the creation of stereotypes. It is important to place such questioning at the heart of research funding in order to free developing countries, especially their women, from the burden of presenting themselves as perpetual victims of predetermined fate.

Panel Organizers:

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