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# International Development & Development Education organisations: *Challenging the Dominant Economic Paradigm?*

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# International Development and Development Education: Challenging the Dominant Economic Paradigm?

A research report commissioned by  
the Centre for Global Education and Financial Justice Ireland



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The report is available at:

<https://www.centreforglobaleducation.com/sites/default/files/CGE%20FJI%20Report%20August%202022%20%28Final%29.pdf>

# Why and What?

“Given development education’s radical origins and remit of addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality, the sector should be ideally positioned to consider the apparent correlation between the deregulated growth economy and inequality.” (CGE and FJI, 2022, Assignment ToR)

**What is the attention given to ‘root causes’ of poverty, inequality, injustice by the International Development and Development Education sectors?**

**Do the sectors challenge the dominant economic paradigm?**



# NGDO and DE intentions – assumptions



- In order to overcome poverty, inequality, injustice the international development sector needs to give public attention to global (economic) processes and structures
- In order for Development Education to be effective in contributing to this, it needs to incorporate economic systems perspectives in its work.



# Development Education and other Educations

‘Development Education’ is, in Ireland, a common term used to describe areas of work that also include Global Citizenship Education, Education for Sustainable Development, and related concepts.

At least in theory, if not necessarily in practice, there is fairly widespread attention to the original intentions of Development Education as:

involving an educational process of (collective) enquiry, dialogue, reflections on different perspectives, and responses to local and/or global issues, aiming to

- “enable people to **participate** in the development of their community, their nation and the world as a whole.
- “Such participation implies a **critical awareness** of local, national and international situations **based on an understanding of social, economy and political process**” [arguably ‘environmental process’ would be added to this] (FAO-JUNIC description/definition of Development Education, 1975)

# The research set-up and scope



- Primarily focussed on Ireland and based on a relatively limited range of source materials
- Selected Irish organisations:
  - ActionAid, Children in Crossfire, Christian Aid, Concern Worldwide, Dóchas (the Irish NGDO network), IDEA (the Irish DE network), Oxfam, Plan International, Trócaire, UNICEF, World Vision
- With additional information from:
  - Irish Aid, CONCORD (the European NGDO network) and European Commission/Union
- Reviews of their websites
- Review of 17 policy and practice documents where readily available:
  - from selected NGDOs and DE organisations in Ireland (incl. Irish Aid), and from CONCORD and European Union/Commission
- Reference to relevant literature relating to e.g. economic development and global economics, neoliberalism and systems thinking
- Questionnaire and workshops involving NGDO and DE sector respondents from Ireland and elsewhere in Europe

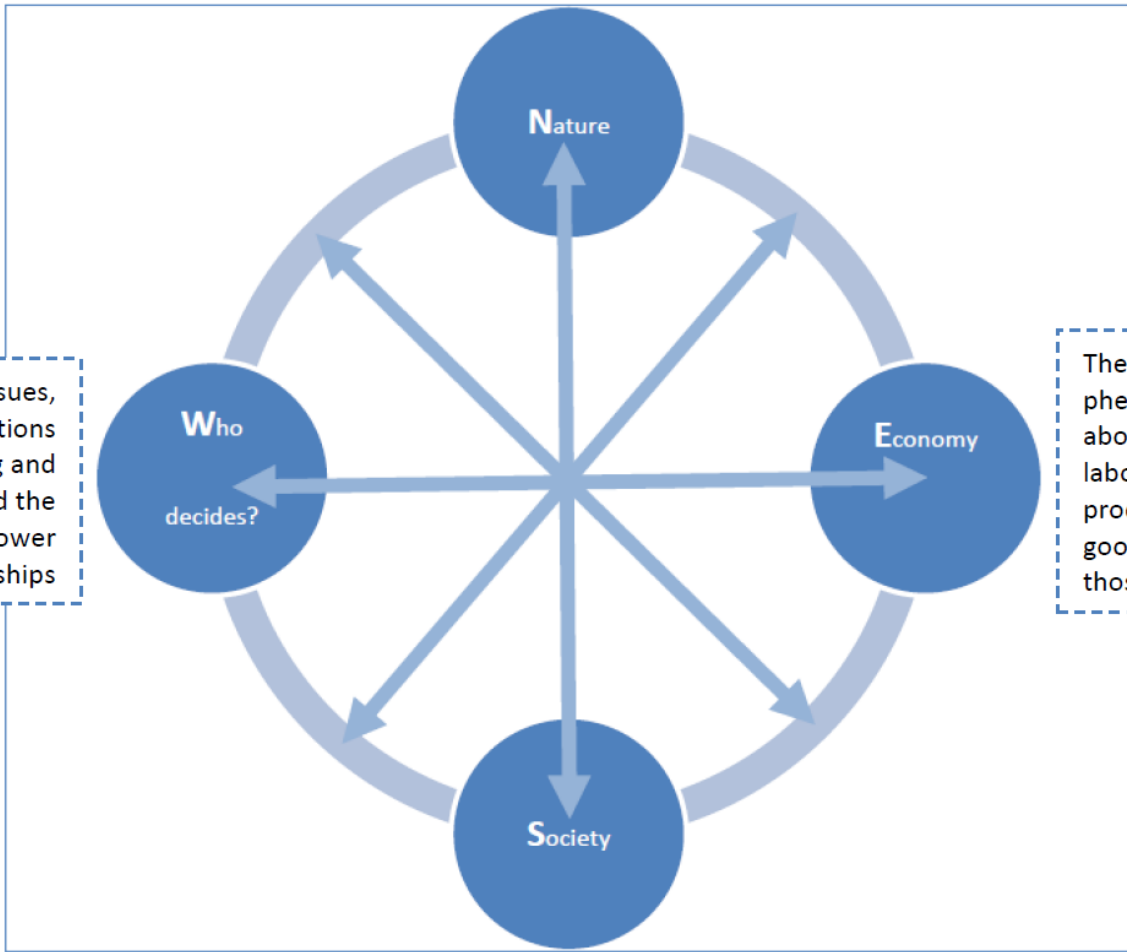


# 'Systems thinking': an approach (and skill)

- Assists in managing our understanding of the complexity of development.
- Encourages a view of the world that recognises multiple relationships, complexity and dynamism.
- Can support sustained, lasting change, including of personal relationships to and roles in the system.



These are issues, phenomena or questions about the natural environment and how they relate to each other



These are issues, phenomena or questions about decision making and political processes and the structure of power relationships

These are issues, phenomena or questions about the use of resources, labour and capital in the production and trade of goods and services and how those relate to each other

These are issues, phenomena or questions about society and culture and how they relate to each other




# The 'Development Compass Rose' as an aid to systems thinking



# Characteristics of the dominant global economic system



Including:

- priority is given to individual (personal and business) initiative without significant state direction of what that initiative should or should not be
  - state regulatory activities primarily concerned with ensuring a largely unfettered access by businesses to markets within and between countries
  - influence of collective, civil society organisation on economic affairs is limited or actively discouraged
  - 'capital' is typically the deciding factor in economic operation, e.g. in promotion of a profit model in public services: privatisation and public-private partnerships, for instance in health, transport and education
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# Economic dominance: neoliberalism/ 'free market' economics

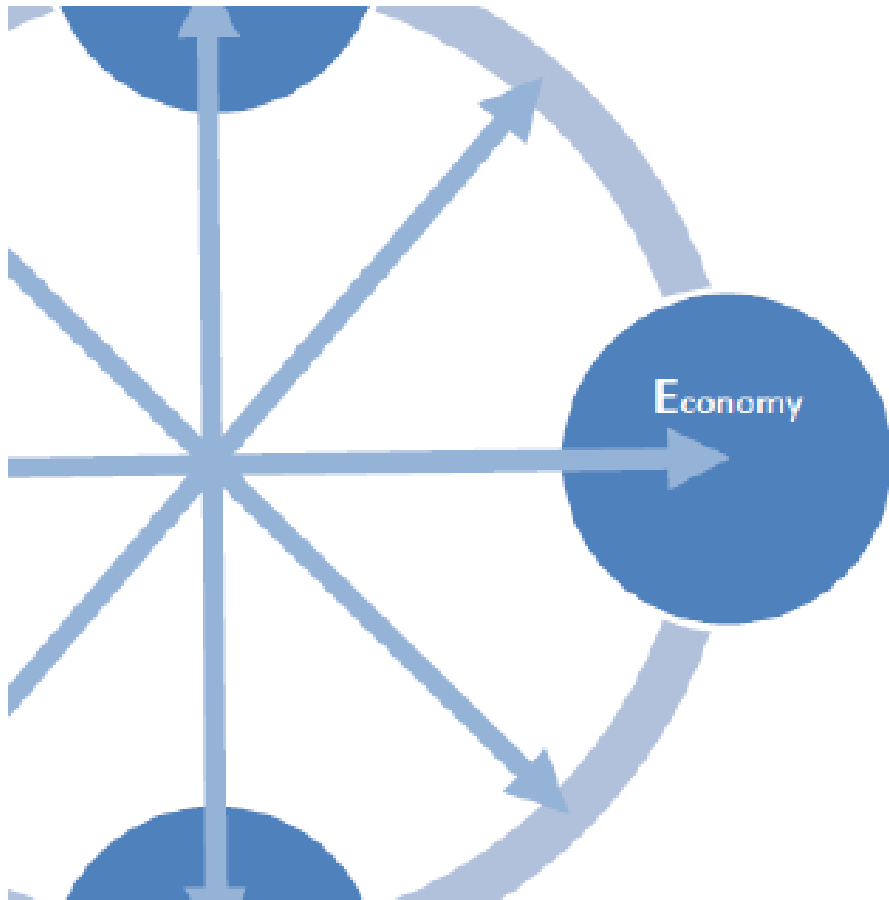
- Originating in the 1950s (Milton Friedman) as a response to the felt 'collectivist' nature of the state and its influence on economic operations
- Initial applications in Chile, UK and US (1970s-80s)
- IMF/World Bank promoted 'structural adjustment programmes' in indebted countries (1990s)
- Integrated globalisation through the operation of e.g. 'global value chains' (since late 1990s/early 2000s)



# Analyses within the International Development sector

- Policy analyses by the international development sector:
  - Most of the c. 60 Irish NGDOs – as well as Irish Aid and the European Union - identify issues they want to address but don't give a coherent assessment of why those issues exist
- Some sampled agencies, however, do provide an analysis relating to, for example:
  - Poverty and hunger (Dóchas)
  - Inequality (Oxfam, Concord)
  - Austerity measures and its effect on public sector provision and poverty (ActionAid)
  - Industrial agriculture and its effect on poverty (Trócaire)

# Findings of the NGDO analyses include (regarding economics):

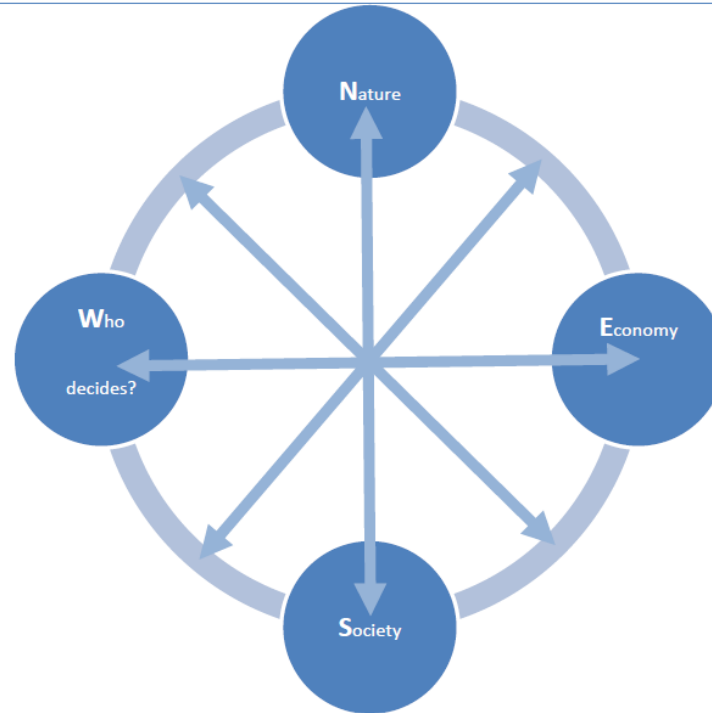


- Increasing income and wealth inequalities (between and within countries) and growing poverty
- Returns to shareholders prioritised over those of workers/the public
- Privatisation of public services reducing public access to e.g. health and education and increasing inequalities

## NGDO analyses: economic repercussions on society, environment and policy decision making

- Dogmatism of neoliberalism affecting decision making and the decisions made
- Public finance austerity reduces community and individual resilience and social protection
- Taxation systems exacerbate economic inequalities

- Access to natural resources and land restricted for poorer communities
- Climate crisis, primarily caused by richer people, affecting poorer people in particular
- Industrial agriculture affecting the natural environment



- Increasing income and wealth inequalities (between and within countries) and growing poverty
- Returns to shareholders prioritised over those of workers/the public
- Privatisation of public services reducing public access to e.g. health and education and increasing inequalities

- Threats to civil society organisation and action, and to human and workers' rights
- Migration
- Social discriminations and increased marginalisation of poorer communities and women
- Underfunded, understaffed health and other public services

# Findings from within Development Education



The development sector does give some attention to economic development.

However, in work with the public, attention to economics and economic systems, in both the development and the DE sector:

- Is of a minority interest
- Shows a lack of evidence of
  - explorations of economic processes,
  - systems thinking.

Where such evidence is present, research (2017) suggests that ‘many resources ... present simplistic analyses of issues’
- Typically involves a campaigning and not an educational approach
- Provides a short term focus on issues rather than a longer term, fundamental change approach involving educational strategies investigating ‘root causes’. I.e. attention to ‘root causes’ of poverty, inequality, injustice is largely piecemeal.




# Main finding from questionnaire and workshop responses



Respondents/participants came from the international development and the DE sectors. They tended to have similar opinions about the findings of the research.

Respondents and participants were of the opinion that both the development and the DE sector:

- Give inadequate attention to involving the public in (educational) explorations of 'root causes' and
  - Give insufficient attention to the use of education in exploring the relationships of poverty, inequality, injustice with the neoliberal economic system.
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# Main conclusions

- Amongst selected NGDOs, a minority challenges the dominant economic paradigm through analytical studies.
- In Ireland (and likely across Europe), the development sector and organisations belonging to it do very little to engage the public in exploring the systemic nature of poverty, inequality and injustice.
- In Ireland (and likely across Europe) neither the development nor the DE sector give significant attention to engaging the public in education activities that explore \* economic systems, or \* 'root causes' of poverty, inequality, injustice.



# For discussion

1. Do the findings reflect your (research) experiences and information?
2. In research into the implementation of GCE, ESD, DE, Global Learning, etc., should attention
  1. To 'root causes' (of social, economic, political, environmental phenomena),
  2. To the use of 'systems thinking' be an important consideration?



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