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Explaining Success and Failure in Development

An Inaugural Lecture by Adam Szirmai to mark his appointment as Professor of Governance, Policy Analysis and Development Economics in the Faculty of Humanities and Sciences, Maastricht University

Why do some developing countries experience spectacular growth and catch up, while others continue to lag behind?

This will be the subject of Prof. Szirmai's inaugural lecture at Maastricht University on 15th February. The lecture takes place at the Aula, Minderbroedersberg 4-6 at 16.30.

The lecture is based on Prof. Szirmai's own work spanning nearly three decades and will attempt to distil some key conclusions that we can draw from a systematic study of long term patterns of growth and development.

"I am driven by a need to study development in a non-ideological and empirical manner, focusing on what we can learn through a systematic analysis of the long term processes of growth and development, and not shying away from unpopular debates."

Prof. Szirmai notes that every developed country has been a developing country at some time in its history and so we can learn a lot from the experiences of other countries if we take a long term scope of 50-100 years.

There is no Chinese miracle

Prof. Szirmai will argue that China's spectacular success fits the normal pattern of accelerated growth once the binding constraints that hold an economy from developing are addressed and a country starts profiting from internationally available technological knowledge.

This is evident when one examines the growth rates of countries that developed rapidly after 1950, including Japan, West Germany and the Asian Tigers, but also of later developers such as India, Malaysia, Ireland, Indonesia and Vietnam, he notes.

"Taken in this context, one can only conclude that attempts at quick fixes such as the Millennium Development Goals are doomed to fail. Doubling aid to Africa will not work if the bottlenecks that stop economies from growing and exacerbate poverty are not addressed."

Instead, what each country needs to do is to identify and prioritize the most important development challenges that it faces and to put in place firm policies to address them and create the required conditions for growth and development.

Nevertheless, Prof. Szirmai believes that we are witnessing a window of opportunity for the least developed countries.

“The exciting thing is that African countries are experiencing very rapid growth and massive foreign investment – also in productive sectors,” he says, citing encouraging progress in countries like Mozambique and Tanzania. Growth buys time for further reform.

Developing countries that are able to absorb and utilize international technology can achieve very rapid growth and catch up. Those that fail to do so, are in danger of becoming marginalized. The lecture will pay attention to the ability of developing countries to tap into global technology flows in order to expand their manufacturing capacity – a key factor in sustained economic development.

Professor Szirmai holds a joint appointment as professor at the Maastricht Graduate School of Governance and professorial fellow at UNU-MERIT, at Maastricht University.

The printed text of the paper will be available after the lecture and will be posted afterwards on the UNU-MERIT website.

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About UNU-MERIT

[UNU-MERIT](#) is the United Nations University – Maastricht Economic and social Research and training Centre on Innovation and Technology. Located in Maastricht, The Netherlands, UNU-MERIT is a joint research and training centre of United Nations University - based in Tokyo, Japan, and Maastricht University. UNU-MERIT provides insights into the social, political and economic contexts within which innovation and technological change is created, adapted, selected, diffused, and improved upon. The Institute's research and training programmes address a broad range of relevant policy questions dealing with the national and international governance of innovation, intellectual property protection, and knowledge creation and diffusion.

About MGSoG

The Maastricht Graduate School of Governance, [MGSoG](#) seeks to train experts who become a pivotal element in national social governance focused on making national social protection systems economically, financially and socially more sustainable. The main objective of the School is to create a critical mass of researchers, specialized in social protection and public policy, that are able to provide necessary practical advice based on sound research. The School believes that the combination of knowledge and skills is essential for communicating research results and is therefore integrated in its Master's, PhD and training programmes.