I hope that these reviews will be of interest. Please send any comments, replies, ideas for book reviews, and information about books which may interest SPAR readers to the following address:

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Managing Development: Understanding Inter-organizational Relationships
Dorcas Robinson, Tom Hewitt, and John Harriss
2000, 352 pp., £49.00 (cloth), £16.99 (paper)
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Managing Development brings together work from a number of contributors (all of whom are well experienced) and responds to the growing awareness of issues relating to the effectiveness of development schemes (both here and especially abroad).

The text analyses the inter-organizational relationships that exist in development intervention situations in order to aid practitioners in improving results and spotting and exploiting any potential opportunities that arise. It starts by offering three modes or “ideal states” in which the authors see that inter-organizational relationships are structured. They suggest that people in organizations relate to each other through any or all of these three modes, i.e., Competition, Coordination and Cooperation. The text then goes on to emphasize the general characteristics of each of these and to suggest that each is suitable to tackle different types of development situations. It does, however, make the important points that each of these may
not necessarily tackle intervention problems on their own and may need to be used in conjunction with one or both of the others, as well as tackle the characteristics which are general and not “set in stone.”

“Managing Development” quite rightly takes into account the fast-moving and ever-changing commercial, institutional, and political agendas and environments that surround these development schemes, as well as reinforces the ever-greater need to be able to analyze and improve their effectiveness and efficiency. This text tries to clarify the whole area of development by helping the reader to not only critically analyze methods of achieving the desired outcomes but also to be constantly aware of any possible factors such as covert commercial or political agendas that may be present in any given situation. Case study examples are used effectively to highlight methods that have been used previously by development actors in a variety of situations. The actual number of case studies is limited; however, they do provide a good illustration of the points and methods that are discussed throughout the text.

The text contains a lot of up-to-date information on development issues that have come to the fore recently. The authors intended this text for usage by specialist practitioners, students, and possibly an interested section of the public. Being such a modern text, there is a good deal of information included that many of the other “recommended” texts (for courses on Development) lack. It must be stressed that this does not necessarily make it the best book available but certainly the one with the most modern material. Its bibliography is very comprehensive, including many modern papers and reports, which can be used as potential research and reference material for postgraduates especially.

“Managing Development” breaks down development into its distinct sections well, and makes it clear to the reader the ways in which development can occur through furthering inter-organizational relationships. I feel that it is appropriately structured and uses some relevant case study material to illustrate the specific issues being discussed.

On the down side, I felt that the book was edited to specifically appeal to development practitioners with both a structured development education and a background, who have a good grasp of the concepts being discussed. With this in mind, I felt it would be “over-technical” for people with a less structured background, i.e., it can tend to be a bit heavy-going in places and needs careful reading (and sometimes re-reading) to fully understand a point. I asked a colleague to read a section, but found that they needed to read it twice more to firmly grasp the message the author was trying to put across. Another minor criticism of the text was that personally I felt it lacked enough emphasis on the public sector and made too much of the private sector contribution.

In conclusion, I think Managing Development is an informative text, however, a little difficult to read in places. Below are two separate conclusions for the two main groups I perceive would use this text.