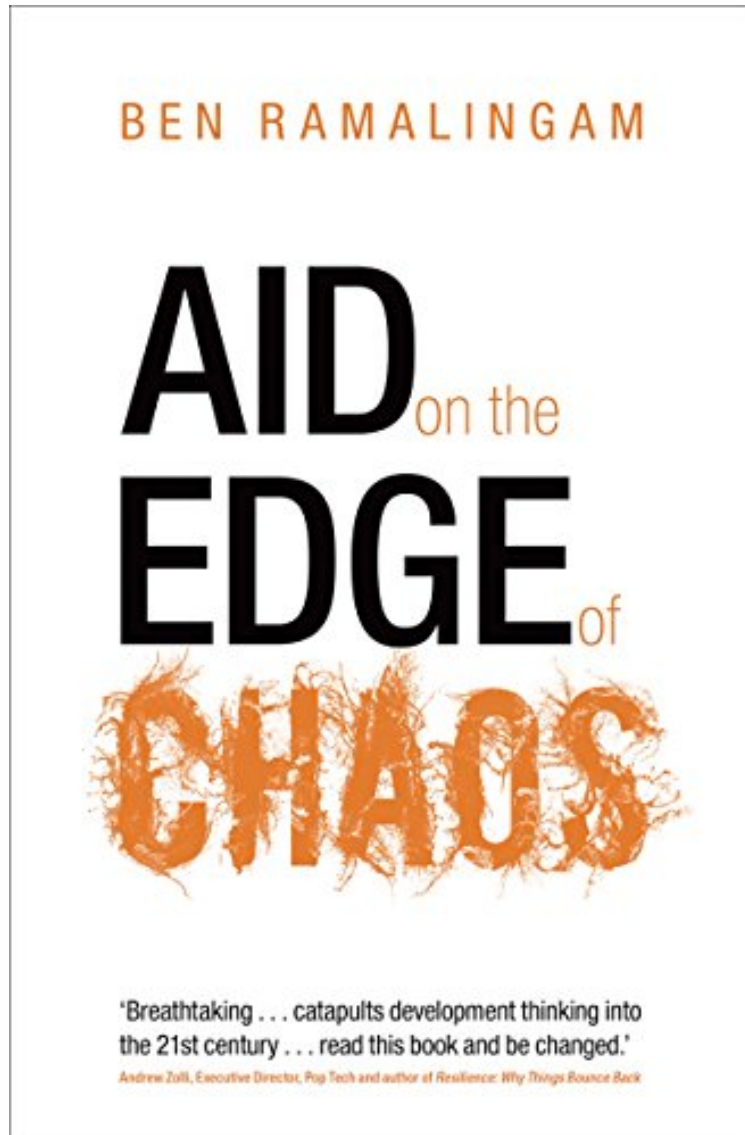


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# Aid on the Edge of Chaos: Rethinking International Cooperation in a Complex World

*Ben Ramalingam*

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Many agree that the foreign aid system - which today involves virtually every nation on earth - needs drastic change. But there is much conflict as to what should be done. In *Aid on the Edge of Chaos*, Ben Ramalingam argues that what is most needed is the creative and innovative transformation of how aid works. Foreign aid today is dominated by linear, mechanistic ideas that emerged from early twentieth century industry, and are ill-suited to the world we face today. The problems and systems aid agencies deal with on a daily basis have more in common with ecosystems than machines: they are interconnected, diverse, and dynamic; they cannot be just simply re-engineered or fixed. Outside of aid, social scientists, economists, business leaders, and policy makers have started applying innovative and scientific approaches to such problems, informed by ideas from the 'new science' of complex adaptive systems. Inspired by these efforts, aid practitioners and researchers have started experimenting with such approaches in their own work. This book showcases the experiences, insights, and often remarkable results of innovative thinkers and practitioners who are working to bring these approaches into the mainstream of aid. From transforming child malnutrition to rethinking economic growth, from building peace to reversing desertification, from rural Vietnam to urban Kenya, the ideas of complex systems thinking are starting to be used to make foreign aid more relevant, more appropriate, and more catalytic. *Aid on the Edge of Chaos* argues that such ideas and approaches should play a vital part of the transformation of aid. Aid should move from being an imperfect post-World War II global resource transfer system, to a new form of global cooperation that is truly fit for the twenty-first century.

"The examples presented in this work should prompt a reconsideration of how one thinks of foreign aid." --S. Paul, *Choice*"An exhaustive tour of the complex systems research landscape, including how it is used to understand phenomena as diverse as climate change, food price rises, ethnic segregation and the Arab spring ... Important and relevant for the aid world." --Amy Kazmin, *Financial Times*"The most interesting part of Mr Ramalingam's book is his discussion of how some agencies are beginning to learn from the way poor people can successfully do difficult things... [and that] experimenting repeatedly and quickly has much to offer the world of aid." --*The Economist*"Sets a new milestone in the aid debate... an impressive interdisciplinary tour" --*The Guardian Global Development Professionals Network*"This book explains an important global activity few outsiders understand, and important scientific ideas that might yet turn it around." --Debra MacKenzie, *New Scientist*"Masterful. An important step towards changing our institutions and organizations Ramalingam skilfully draws upon a diverse body of ideas and research to deliver a vital message for aid and beyond." --Philip Ball, author of *Critical Mass*, Winner of the *Aventis Royal Society Book of the Year*"*Aid on the Edge of Chaos* will change the way you think... One of the most important books you will read about development." --Owen Barder, Senior Fellow, Center for Global Development"The accolades on the cover are well-founded; this is a great read, engagingly written, and full of vivid examples, poignantly-funny cartoons and a reflective humility that suits its subject matter." --Melissa Leach, *Knowledge, Technology and Society*"Many see international development aid as in thrall to linear, mechanized thinking, and champion approaches in which local people solve their own challenges with intelligently tailored backing. Ben Ramalingam offers a scientific model for that path... and fosters a new aid paradigm: an openinnovation network, catalysing and leveraging change in countries around the world." --*Nature*"Breathtaking . . . catapults development thinking into the 21st century . . . read this book and be changed." --Andrew Zolli, Executive Director, *Pop Tech* and author of *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back*About the AuthorBen Ramalingam, Independent consultant and writerBen Ramalingam is an independent researcher, consultant and writer specialising on international development and humanitarian issues. He has worked with and advised leading development and humanitarian organisations including UN bodies, NGOs, the Red Cross movement, and government agencies. He holds honorary positions at the London School of Economics, the Overseas Development Institute, and the Institute of Development Studies at Sussex University.