



World in transition: Migration and Trade

Studying international development

My name is Helen Yanacopulos. I'm a Senior Lecturer in International Politics and Development at The Open University.

For the course U213, which is International Development: Challenges for a World in Transition, we have two primary aims on that course. The first is to look at the meanings of international development, and the challenges at global levels to local levels to national levels, and to interrogate the idea of what development is. The second aim we have on that course is to explore key issues in development. One is transitions; sustainability, is development sustainable, and also ties in to environmental issues around development; technology and knowledge, which is a theme that is taught completely online, and looks at ideas of how actions are taken, how different perspectives within biotechnology are worked through, so it's a very broad theme looking at technology and knowledge. The fourth theme is poverty and inequality. We interrogate ways of measuring poverty, different levels of inequality, and the fifth theme is a theme we call displacement, which is very much around movement, issues of migration, issues of networks, so the course is broken up into two parts, and students can choose three themes in the latter part, the themes that interest them the most.

It is very important to take a multidisciplinary approach to development, primarily because development is not uni-dimensional. In the past there have been economically driven approaches and that's still the case. However, it's not the only element of development. The world isn't broken up into disciplines, and reality isn't broken up into disciplines, therefore to have different approaches to a development problem, and a development issue is much more holistic and, I think, rich for students to learn but also in practice it's essential, particularly within a field like development.

In the audio and video for this course we cover a wide range of countries as examples and illustrations of the concepts that we're teaching within the course.

For example, we are looking at micro credit in this course, and we use the example of a Glaswegian micro credit scheme, and it was important for us to show development taking place in the north, in northern countries, and the reason for this is because typically when people talk about international development, it's done over there it's in another place, and development is a process that happens everywhere, so we are part of development, and development is happening here as well, just as poverty and inequality exist in the UK, in the United States, in northern countries all through Europe, it's important for us to actually not segregate development as happening in southern countries.

In the Argentinian video, which is about the currency crisis in Argentina in the early 2000's, what we see is the creation of an alternative currency system, and this is because the currency system had broken down within Argentina, one of the many financial crises that we've seen, this was very much on a local scale. However it was fuelled by global processes, so this is one of the things that we're trying to teach within the course - how the local, and the national, and the global link together, so the Argentinian example serves a number of functions. It not only illustrates a particular case of Argentina and how, at this particular time during this particular crisis, social currency and alternative forms of currency arose, there are lessons we can take out of that case, and learning that can come out of that for students to be able to apply it to contemporary situations, and the point is that students don't just learn about Argentina, they learn about the processes of development, and the processes of empowerment through a particular example. They can be applied to other situations as well.

I think the most challenging element of U213 is the displacement theme, but I think it's also one of the most rewarding, and the reasons for that are because we are looking at a number of key issues under the umbrella of displacement. We're looking at migration, and that includes rural-urban migration and cross-country migration, we're looking at refugees. The term displacement has negative connotations, however what we're saying is displacement is about flows through space and time, and that is challenging, I think, for students because what it means is that it's not necessarily negative, that elements of displacement are actually quite positive. So an example of what we term displacement, and probably the most obvious example would be something like an illustration in U213 of people moving from rural Southern India to Mumbai, and the effect that that's actually having on a city that is overpopulated to start off with, and what that actually means for development. Does this mean that people are worse off or better off, and why are they moving in the first place to cities? Is it the lure of making a better living or is it, in fact, that the rural livelihoods are challenged? So these are very complicated themes that run through the course, but are particularly highlighted in the displacement theme.

When students finish U213 we would expect them to have an understanding and an ability to interpret and implement the term development, and understand the way that it's used in a broader context. Students will gain an understanding of the different dimensions of development, whether they be political, or social, or economic, anthropological, technological through this course.

The other key component of this course is the idea of social justice, and a lot of students will probably take this course, and have taken this course, for the reason of interest and concern about what's going on in the world, and what actions to take.