



World in transition: Managing Resources

Studying international development

My name is Helen Yanacopulos. I'm a Senior Lecturer in International Politics and Development at The Open University. I was a course team member for the production of the course U213, and worked on the technology and knowledge theme as well as the displacements theme of the course.

I used to work in industry, in banking, and I did that for about ten years and it occurred to me that I was volunteering in the evenings for development organisations, and my interest was no longer to do what I was doing in banking, but to actually make this my full time job, and I think that the main reason for me is that there's a lot of poverty and inequality in the world, and what are the processes of trying to make a change within that. I think the key thing in teaching, both at postgraduate and undergraduate level, are critical thinking skills and to be able to, something as basic as being able to read a newspaper and read about something that's happening in the world that is affecting a large number of people, and critically looking at that and being able to unpack what that means, and what one's actions are, I think is key, and that is one of the things that I think we are very good at at the OU is trying to get those critical thinking skills well ingrained through our course materials, and through the teaching process.

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. We have Robert Chambers talking about problems in approaching development, and Robert Chambers more or less provided a rethinking of how a development intervention takes place, and he challenges the hierarchies within development. Now what that means is a development agency from abroad, from the north, as an example going to a country and deciding that a community centre needs to be built, and not consulting the community. There are countless examples of this and one doesn't have to go very far back to find them. What Robert Chambers suggests is that we consult the people who are affected by the actions that are taken in the name of development, and there are whole systems of analyses of how to involve people in the processes of

development, and there have been critiques of this approach as well, which we also include in the course.

In the video, *Bugs and Boiled Water*, which we filmed in Tanzania for U213, we use that video in the Technology and Knowledge theme of the course, so in that video Tanzanian children are taught about the benefits of boiling water as a health precaution, and they then go back to their families to pass on that knowledge and that learning to their families. Students are then told to take the information and knowledge that they've obtained through the video to do online searches to look at potential schemes for this type of learning. What students get from this video is the idea of knowledge transfer within this one project.

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 its 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.