



International Development: microcredit and migration

Studying international development

My name is Helen Yanacopulos. I'm a Senior Lecturer in International Politics and Development, and I was a course team member for the production of TU871, and I have also been course team Chair on and off for TU871 for the last eight years. 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, 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.

TU871, International Development Context and Practice, aims to do two things. The first is to explore the meanings and challenges of contemporary international development through local, national and global levels, and development is a contested issue so, as an example someone might think that development is good change, and Robert Chambers defined development in that way. Others might see development as an extension of colonial structures, others might see development as an economic mission, or as a social mission. So what we do in this postgraduate course, is untangle that and try to make explicit to students the different perspectives that come into development. The second aim of TU871 is to examine action in development, and how action arises, how it is carried out, and by whom, and here we're looking at action specifically as either public policy, or public action, or governance, and this last half of the course is specifically dedicated to the politics of development, and how policy is designed, how policy is implemented, how it's influenced, how it's steered.

Governance is a very used term in development, meaning a number of different things to different people, so what we try and do is untangle those meanings, and governance is a contested idea. When we speak of governance we speak of the ways that different development actors try and find solutions and different approaches to problems, so one way of looking at governance would be to look at the ways that NGO's in particular try to influence processes of policy. A good example of this would be the way that debt cancellation campaigns, such as Jubilee 2000 and NGO's such as Oxfam have tried in the past to influence the way that debt cancellation took place. One illustration of this was the relationship that was formed between Oxfam and the Ugandan government during the late 1990's where Oxfam was lobbying and advocating for debt cancellation, and worked with the Ugandan government to put forward an ad in the Financial Times by the Ugandan government, saying that all the interest from the debt that was going to be cancelled would be going to primary health education, and this was a way that Uganda put forth their primary 'education for all' programme. So what we see is trans-national organisations of NGO's like Oxfam, which is made up of a number of different national NGO's, working together to make a change and steer policy of international actors like the World Bank, and the IMF, and the G8, so governance is very much about steering, decision-making Well I think one of the key things that we want students to take away from this is that public policy is a process, and that it isn't just a government making a decision, it is actually complicated with other influences and other actors steering the processes that result in public policy.

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 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 Argentinean 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 cannot be applied to other situations as well.

We recommend students in the development management masters programme take TU871 as their first course. The reason for this is because it's a good grounding for the development management programme. It's also a good general course to take if people are taking a one-off course, if people haven't worked in development and want to have a just a general overview of what development is, and the processes of development, it's very good for that, and development professionals take this course as well as people wanting to get into development, and a number of people who are in the process of career change are very keen to take this course, and subsequently this programme, the MSc in Development Management.

The main learning outcomes for TU871 involve for students to be able to examine conflicting interpretations of development and development action, and to look at the different contexts that development takes place in the local, national and global levels, to explore key issues in international development, and the making of contemporary development and development practice through public action. And finally, to critically evaluate discourses of development, and frameworks that development takes place in.