

## Anthropology and Development

In recent decades international development has grown into a world-shaping industry. But how do aid agencies work and what do they achieve? How does aid appear to the adults and children who receive it? And why has there been so little improvement in the position of the poor? Viewing aid and development from anthropological perspectives gives illuminating answers to questions such as these. This essential textbook reveals anthropologists' often surprising findings and details ethnographic case studies on the cultures of development. The authors use a fertile literature to examine the socio-political organisation of aid communities, agencies and networks, as well as the judgements they make about each other. The everyday practice of development work is about negotiating power and culture, but in vastly different ways in different contexts and for different social groups. Exploring the spaces between policy and practice, success and failure, the future and the past, this book provides a rounded understanding of development work that suggests new moral and political possibilities for an increasingly globalised world.

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Culture, Morality and Politics in a Globalised World  
Emma Crewe , Richard Axelby  
Frontmatter  
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## Culture, Morality and Politics in a Globalised World

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EMMA CREWE  
RICHARD AXELBY



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## Acronyms

ATO	Alternative trade organisation
BRIC	Brazil, Russia, India and China
CBO	Community-based organisation
CHADET	Organization for Child Development and Transformation
CSO	Civil society organisation
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
DFID	Department for International Development
EZLN	Zapatista Army of National Liberation
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FBO	Faith-based organisation
HTS	Human terrain system
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	Gross domestic product
IC	Improved cookstove
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
MDG	Millennium development goals
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NIC	Newly industrialised country
NSA	Non-state actor
ODA	Overseas Development Administration
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PRA	Participatory rural appraisal
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
QUANGO	Quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SL	Sustainable livelihoods
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WTO	World Trade Organization

## Preface and acknowledgements

Welcome to ‘Development World’. The pursuit of development has become a global concern and no one is unaffected. Aspiring to manage change in economic, political, social and cultural arenas, development is a world-shaping project.

The world of development is neither simple nor self-contained. Its cultures, moralities, languages, rituals and symbolic practices relate to what is already there. And, like any political world, it is subject to considerable tensions as differences emerge in the interests and attitudes of its diverse peoples. As geo-political realities shift and understandings of poverty and progress take on new meanings, the old geographical and social divisions – such as developing and developed – can no longer be sustained.

Defining development globally allows us to consider development from a wide range of different perspectives. Moving from the global to the local, from policy-makers to farmers, it is a subject well suited to anthropological investigation. This book offers an anthropological guide to Development World. In it we explore anthropology’s varied engagement with and understandings of institutions and social groups. It explains the complex relationships linking donors to government officials and development professionals to project beneficiaries. Anthropological perspectives offer ways of understanding the value judgements, social realities and social practices that make up the world of aid and development.

The idea of a guide emerged out of our own experiences of teaching, researching and practising international development. In the practice of development – working as a ‘social development’ expert, consultant or manager of an international non-governmental organisation (INGO) – Emma Crewe has increasingly found that practitioners reduce the process of social change to frameworks, tools and formulae. To give an example: consider this story. As part of a due diligence exercise commissioned by the UK’s Department for International Development in 2011, an auditing firm visited all charities that were due to receive government funding and conducted a two-day assessment. Armed with a 54-page questionnaire on finance, risk management, strategy, governance, systems, monitoring and evaluation, environmental policy and human resources, the auditor asked the Executive Director (Emma):

**AUDITOR:** What are your organisational objectives and Key Performance Indicators [KPIs]?

**DIRECTOR:** We have targets in fundraising for income against each stream so the indicators relate to success in achieving these targets. In other

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areas – such as getting feedback from the partner organisations we work with – KPIs don't really help.

AUDITOR: But even if they are qualitative, what are they and what is your baseline?

DIRECTOR: I need to explain about our approach to evaluation. But before I do that it would be useful to know that I am an anthropologist – it accounts for where I am coming from to some extent.

AUDITOR: You mean a socialist?

DIRECTOR: No, no! I mean anthropologist, you know, similar to a sociologist.

AUDITOR: Is that the same as anti-capitalist?

Of course anthropology – the comparative study of cultural ideas and social relations – is not a political theory. But anthropologists do take a keen interest in politics and power. Applied to the study of development, anthropological perspectives help to unravel the complex rituals, moralities and politics that shape our changing world.

This book is designed to appeal to two main audiences (in addition to the auditor above). First, we are writing for students of anthropology and of international development. Secondly, we are writing for the development professionals who may find an anthropological approach interesting. Rather than closing problems down anthropology seeks to open them up; it asks questions where others might try to force answers onto ill-fitting and diverse realities. This book seeks to make anthropology simpler and development more complex. Our aim is to allow students to engage critically with development and, at the same time, to suggest alternative perspectives and practices that may discourage development practitioners from taking lazy shortcuts.

We are grateful to Cambridge University Press, and especially Andrew Winnard, for commissioning this book and to Andrew McConnell for his photograph on the cover. We would like to thank Cambridge University Press's anonymous reviewer for comments and pointing out some important gaps.

The foundations of this book sit on an earlier work that Emma Crewe wrote with Elizabeth Harrison (*Whose Development?*, 1989); we would like to extend our thanks to her. We would also like to thank John Campbell and Johan Pottier with whom we taught a Social Anthropology of Development MA course at the School of Oriental and African Studies. They have provided support and encouragement and, in sharing their knowledge of Development World, have helped to shape ours. We have a debt of gratitude to David Mosse, without whom this book would not have been written. Other colleagues at SOAS who have helped us with their perceptive and insightful comments on earlier drafts include David Marsden, Dina Matar, Toni Baum and especially Raymond Apthorpe.

Working at ChildHope (2005–11) was Emma Crewe's most recent fieldwork. She would like to thank all the staff, trustees and partner NGOs in Africa, Asia and South America for the collective demonstration that it is possible to do development with a little more respect, reflection and humility than is customary. Our

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Over the past four years our students on the Anthropology and Development course at SOAS have been a constant source of inspiration, encouragement and superb questions. This book is dedicated to them.