
Preface

In this 15th annual volume of PRAXIS: The Fletcher Journal of Development Studies, we address one of the most pressing issues facing scholars, practitioners and beneficiaries today: Does development work? Are aid projects providing more help or harm to the people they serve? If projects are sometimes ineffective, what social and economic engines are driving growth in the developing world?

After examining the history of ninety developing countries, Michael Crosswell is sure of his answer. In “The Development Record and the Effectiveness of Foreign Aid,” he shows through cross-country studies how aid recipients have progressed over the past three decades, until some are now approaching what USAID terms “graduation.” While he does not claim that all of this growth is due to aid programs, Crosswell says there is a clear correlation between aid and development.

Crosswell’s views find both confirmation and disagreement among the Fletcher community, as we discovered in “Does Development Work? The PRAXIS Interviews.” The editorial board approached four Fletcher students with development experience to ask for their impressions of the state of the field today. Sharing with us revealing anecdotes and personal philosophy, our interviewees were alternatively optimistic and pessimistic, giving us a sense of the challenges, rewards and questions faced by practitioners.

Other than aid, what policies can lead to development? Catherine Tucker begins our section “Focus on Latin America” with an examination of a common property regime in one community in Honduras. She argues that common property has a greater potential than private property for providing the poor with equitable access to basic resources. For this to be effective, however, and to avoid “the tragedy of the commons,” development programs that can currently reduce incentives to participate in common property regimes should encourage them instead.

Elizabeth M. Addonizio sees hope in macroeconomic policy, as she demonstrates in “A Chile Wind in an Anarchic World,” her exploration of the role of capital regulation in Chile’s economic program. She argues that short-term controls on capital inflows can provide developing nations with much-needed foreign investment, as well as fiscal structure in today’s liberalized global economy.

What are the environmental effects of economic development policies? In “Pollution Intensive Industry in Mexico under NAFTA,” Kevin Gallagher analyzes

whether the North American Free Trade Agreement has led to a migration of pollution-intensive industries to the less regulated environment of Mexico. His regression analyses show that, as yet, NAFTA has not caused any significant movement of polluting industries southward, which some observers feared would be one of its chief results.

In “God, the Devil, and Development,” Anthony Pereira focuses on the political and social elements of the developing world, examining the role of the Landless Workers Movement over the past several decades in Northeast Brazil. He shows how this revolutionary group has arisen in response to massive underdevelopment and governmental neglect and abuse. Though seen as a divine force by some, and as the devil by others, the movement is in fact a natural outgrowth of popular anger and the will for a better life on behalf of the population.

Finally, in “Symptom of Crisis or Engine of Development? The Mauritanian Informal Economic Sector,” Bill Lawrence demonstrates the central role that the “underground” economy plays in Mauritania’s society. The majority of economic activity in Mauritania is technically informal. After examining the history of the scholarly formal/informal divide, Lawrence shows the deep social roots and the frequent effectiveness of the informal sector, and asks whether such unregulated vitality assists or hinders national development.

Does development work? This issue of PRAXIS provides testimony for both the effectiveness and the harmfulness of traditional development strategies. In the end, the only certainty is that this crucial discussion on the direction of international development policy will continue. PRAXIS looks forward to playing a role in that debate.

The Editors