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1 Meaning, Measurement, and Morality in International Development

Jessica Schafer, Paul A. Haslam, and Pierre Beaudet

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To understand the commonality and diversity among developing countries.
- To differentiate among the meaning of various labels used to describe the developing world.
- To understand the relationship between national wealth, distribution of income, and poverty.
- To consider development as a multi-dimensional phenomenon and to identify the major scholars associated with this approach.
- To reflect upon the ethical dilemmas associated with foreign aid and development practice.

▲ **African schoolchildren playing with a globe in Vale Shingwedzi, Mozambique, where residents of areas within the newly created Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park have been resettled.** | Source: Photo by Ute Grabowsky/Photothek via Getty Images

WHAT IS THE DEVELOPING WORLD?

The 1968 photo of "Earthrise" taken by the Apollo 8 astronauts as they orbited the moon was the first image of our world as a whole, hanging in the blackness of space. For many, it made it possible to think of the common fate of humanity, without nations or borders, and regardless of wealth or poverty, making it an icon of the emerging **globalization**. Almost 45 years later, NASA released "Earth at Night," a composite image of the Earth taken by satellites, which showed the planet illuminated by millions of points of light originating from cities, towns, and villages. As David Hulme notes, these points of light can be used as indicators of urbanization, infrastructure, and development, and their absence, as a lack of development (Hulme, 2013: 17). In this regard, NASA's "Earth at Night" gives us an image of our world simultaneously unified and divided, rich and poor.

If you were to descend from the satellite-eye's view and traverse the many regions of the world, you would immediately notice the rich diversity of human experience and social organization. You would observe strikingly different landscapes; hear up to 7,300 different languages (SIL International, 2009); see the wide range of activities that people perform to earn a living; experience home life in many different forms, from nuclear families in suburbia to multi-generational households, families led by patriarchs with several wives, single-parent families, and groups of families in nomadic communities; and encounter a wide variety of political organizations from liberal democracies, to kingdoms, duchies, and principalities, Islamic and people's republics, and dictatorships.

At the same time, you could not fail to notice that certain areas—towns, cities, countries, and regions—exhibit signs of material wealth: sumptuously decorated

NASA

PHOTO 1.1 | NASA's "Earth at Night."

buildings; abundant consumer goods; energy-intensive activities; a highly developed infrastructure of roads, telecommunications, hospitals, and schools. By contrast, other regions and locales are devastatingly poor: human dwellings do not protect inhabitants from the elements; infrastructure is lacking for the movement of people, goods, and information; and the poorest have insufficient food and health care for survival. Many of these are the black areas in NASA's "Earth at Night."

Similarly, you would begin to realize that some human beings enjoy a wide range of opportunities and choices with respect to the way they live their lives, while others struggle to survive in conditions over which they exercise little control. And yet, you would see that there is no simple pattern to these opportunities. While there are richer and poorer countries, you would still see great wealth and great poverty existing side-by-side within both. And, even in these poor areas, few people are truly isolated from the global economy, as they are linked in to some degree by cheap consumer goods, cell phones, mass media, and migration flows.

The study of international development aims to explain both the diversity evident in the world in relation to human well-being and the common patterns that emerge when comparing people, social groups, nations, economic and political systems, and regions of the world. Some explanations are based on historical evidence, finding the causes of today's poverty in the actions (and injustices) of past societies (see Chapter 2). Other explanations for worldwide patterns of wealth and poverty focus on the results of economic "laws" and their functioning through individual rational action in impersonal market transactions. Still other theories of development hold that the economic logic of capitalism requires that some countries remain poor while others profit (see Chapter 3). And some theorists reject the concept of development altogether, heralding an era of "post-development" (see Chapter 4).

But before we get to the theories put forward to explain global development, poverty, wealth, and human well-being, we need to understand some concepts that are central to international development. The next section considers the words and labels that scholars, practitioners, and the popular media use in talking about development. Following that, we introduce different concepts of poverty and measurements of human development. The final two sections address global ethics and ethical issues for development researchers and practitioners.

IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

BOX 1.1 | President Truman's Point 4*

We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas. More than half of the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate, they are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and more prosperous areas. For the first time in history, humanity possesses the knowledge and the skill to relieve the suffering of these people . . . our imponderable resources in technical knowledge are constantly growing and are inexhaustible. . . . The old imperialism—exploitation for foreign profit—has no place in our plans.

*This was the fourth foreign policy goal that President Truman outlined in his Inaugural Address and, therefore, has become known as his "Point 4."

Source: Inaugural Address, President Harry S. Truman, 20 January 1949, in *Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents of the United States* (1989), cited by Esteva (2010: 1).

LABELLING IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The terms used to describe people, places, and processes within international development reflect the evolution of thinking about poverty, wealth, and the relationship among nations. Critical theorists have pointed out that labelling plays at least two important roles: labels make existing practices appear legitimate, and they also shape future policy-making (Sachs, 2010; Wood, 1985). Understanding the history of labelling within the field of international development therefore helps to track the progression of important concepts and approaches.

The modern concept of "development" is often traced back to US President Harry Truman's 1949 Inaugural Address (Box 1.1), when he spoke of "underdeveloped areas," a term still in common usage today. If we unpack the term "underdeveloped areas," the concept implies a universal measurement of development and that nations can be assessed against this standard. Those that meet the standards are considered "developed," while those that do not are considered "underdeveloped." In his speech, Truman suggested several criteria for measuring development: on the side of underdevelopment, he mentioned inadequate food, disease, primitive economic life, and poverty; on the side of development he placed scientific advancement and industrial progress, as well as skill and technical knowledge. The use of the word "imperialism" also suggests the areas to which Truman was referring: the large number of countries in Africa and Asia still at that time under political rule by European powers, and the countries of Asia and Latin America that had emerged from European colonial rule over the course of the previous 150 years.

Truman's use of the term "underdeveloped areas" implied a single, overarching scale on which to compare nations' success or progress in relation to each other. It also suggested the need for outside intervention by those who deemed themselves to have achieved progress or development success on behalf of those who have not yet done so or who do not possess the necessary conditions to do so. Indeed, this notion of "trusteeship" (acting for others) is considered by many to be a key element of the modern idea of "development," and has a long history that dates back at least as far as the colonial period (see Cowen and Shenton, 1996; Chapter 2).

In 1952, the French demographer Alfred Sauvy used the term "*tiers monde*" ("Third World") to refer to countries outside the two major power blocs of the West and the Soviet Union (Fry and Martin, 1991). His intent was to draw a parallel with the *tiers état* (Third Estate) in pre-revolutionary France, which referred to the bottom layer of the social pyramid, beneath the clergy and the nobility. The Third Estate had a very diverse membership, from peasants virtually enslaved under feudal lords to bourgeois merchants with great wealth, who had little in common apart from exclusion from the nobility and clergy. Similarly, the Third World to which Sauvy referred in the 1950s included countries with diverse economic, social, and political histories, which were following widely varied trajectories of development. Gradually, though, the term "Third World" took on connotations primarily related to poverty at the national level.

The deepening hostilities of the Cold War during the 1950s meant increasing political tensions and rivalries between the ideologically opposed First and Second Worlds (respectively, the nations of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and those of the Warsaw Pact or Soviet bloc). The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) brought some political unity to the group of countries outside the two superpower blocs following a conference in 1955 in Bandung, Indonesia, and the first official Non-Aligned Movement summit in 1961 in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. In this context, the term "Third World," like the NAM, suggested a political bloc that provided an alternative to the ideological power groupings (see Chapters 3 and 10). Although the First World and Second World designations became irrelevant with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the Non-Aligned Movement declined in influence, the term "Third World" remains as a kind of catch-all category in international development circles. However, it is difficult to identify any enduring similarities among the countries that have been referred to under this category over the past 50-plus years, and numerous questions have been raised about its value.

Is it a sufficiently clear and useful term, given that there are no precise criteria to identify whether a given country falls within the category or not?

Does the label have negative connotations? Recent public discussions about which countries should be considered part of the Third World suggest that many people feel it is a pejorative, patronizing term and therefore prefer their own country not to be included within the category.

Is it ever possible for a country to move out of the Third World category, or is it a historically determined and static denotation? Some Eastern European countries with low scores on the Human Development Index (discussed below) are not commonly considered part of the Third World, whereas countries of South America may be automatically included even though some of them, such as Argentina and Chile, have achieved high human development scores.

Finally, many are unhappy with the way the term "Third World" seems to imply a world hierarchy and a single path to development success, just as the term "underdeveloped areas" did.

In the 1970s, a new term emerged as a result of economic transformation among a number of countries formerly considered part of the "developing world": the Newly Industrialized Countries (NICs). These countries included Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan. More recently, the term "emerging" has become more commonly used, and Thailand, India, Mexico, Brazil, China, South Africa, Turkey, and Malaysia have been included. The term "emerging markets" suggests they are perceived by the leaders of global capitalist enterprises as potential markets to target for profit but also that once they have embraced the rules of market economics, they may be admitted into the coveted circle of successful developed countries. In this regard, "emerging markets" and "emerging economies" imply an optimism for the future that is not captured by the terms "underdeveloped" or "Third World."

The most commonly used term for countries that have not yet reached the level of economic success necessary to be considered "developed" or "rich" is "developing countries." A country's gross domestic product (GDP) was the standard measure used in the past to classify countries as developed or developing, but this classification produced anomalies. GDP is a measure of the value of goods and services produced in a national economy and can be high as a result of natural resource wealth, even when other sectors of its economy and social well-being may not show signs of development such as industrialization, increased life expectancy, or higher levels of education. For example, Equatorial Guinea, an African country that saw its GDP shoot up in the mid-1990s with the discovery of oil reserves, could have been included in the "developed" category simply on the basis of per capita GDP. Yet other key indicators of human well-being in the country, such as life expectancy and literacy, remain very low. These problems with economic measurement are developed further in the next section.

The World Bank has established its own system of classification, partitioning countries into low-, middle-, and high-income groups as a basis for determining the loan programs for which a country is eligible to apply. It uses a measure of gross national income (GNI), calculated according to its own formula but basically similar to GDP or GNP (gross national product).[1] The wide range of national income levels across the globe is illustrated by Figure 1.1. The World Bank has further subdivided the categories to include lower-middle-income and upper-middle-income groups. There is also a second category of high-income countries: those belonging to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In World Bank reports, the term "developing economies" is used to refer to low- and middle-income economies, but it officially recognizes that this terminology should not be taken to imply that these economies are making "progress" towards development or that those that do not fall into the two groups have already achieved "development." (See the World Bank website for more detail.)

The term "**Fourth World**" has come into usage more recently, although it is not yet common or central in the international development lexicon. It has been used in two quite distinct ways. One is to denote the poorest of the poor countries, often the "failed states" of recent parlance, which have experienced serious setbacks in human well-being and political governance, typically in connection with armed conflict, such as Somalia and Afghanistan (see Chapters 21 and 28). The other and earlier use of "Fourth World," derived

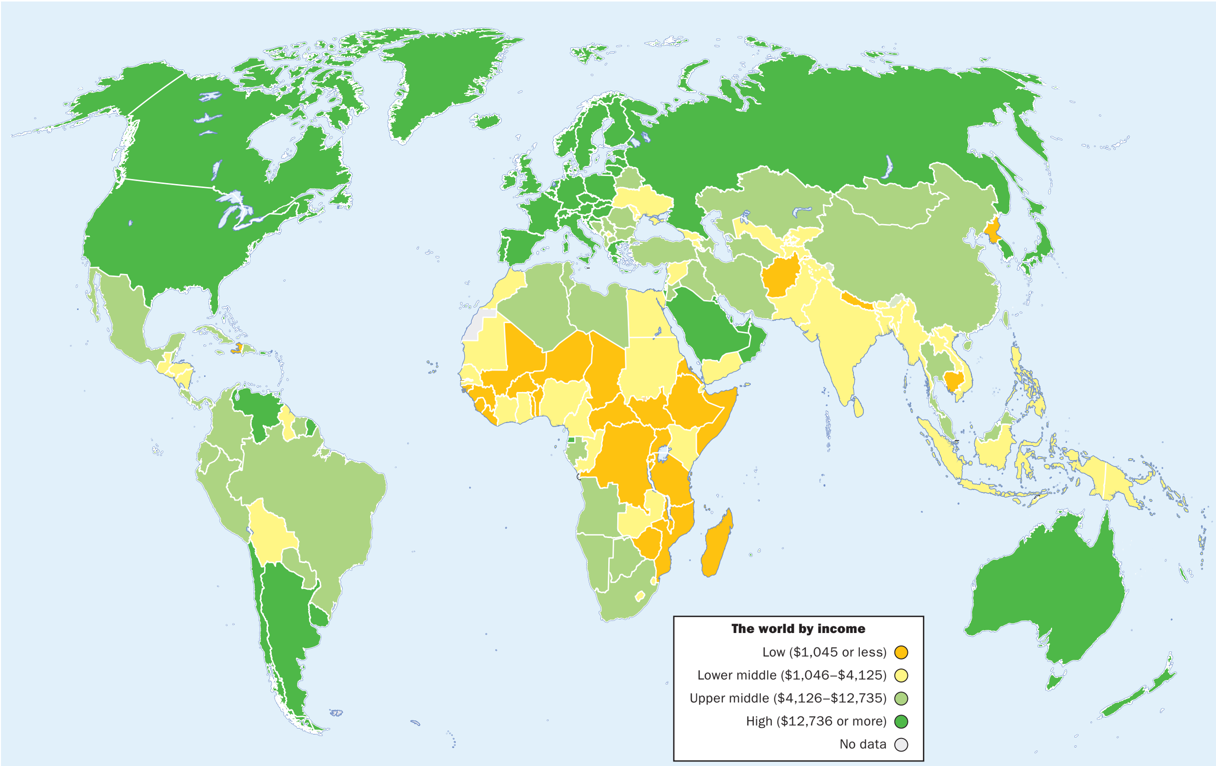

FIGURE 1.1 | Gross National Income Per Capita, 2014

Source: Based on World Bank estimates of 2014 GNI per capita.

from the work in the 1970s of the Canadian Aboriginal leader and writer George Manuel, is in reference to the internal colonization of Aboriginal peoples, whose status and citizenship rights vary considerably globally but who have frequently suffered dispossession and abrogation of political, economic, social, and cultural rights within countries where the dominant settler group has acted as a colonizer.

Discontent with "Third World" and "developing" or "underdeveloped," for many of the reasons mentioned, has prompted people to adopt alternative words to refer to the subjects of international development, such as "two-thirds world" and "majority world." These terms highlight the fact that the overwhelming majority of the world's population are the targets, subjects, or objects of development. The idea of strength in numbers underlies the hopefulness of these terms.

The label "South" seems to provide a neutral way of referring to countries because it emphasizes geographical location over other characteristics. Yet using "South" to refer to countries that qualify as the targets for development does imply characteristics beyond simply location in the southern hemisphere, since Australia and New Zealand, for example, are donor rather than recipient countries in international development, while some countries in the northern hemisphere receive aid and exhibit socio-economic characteristics similar to countries of the "South."

The term "Global South" has gained favour in the development community more recently and appears better able to incorporate the centrality of historical and contemporary patterns of wealth and power into a loosely geographically defined concept. The phrase may take better account of the fact that poverty and social conditions formerly identified with the Third World are to be found throughout the world (including in otherwise "rich" countries) and not simply in one geographical region.

Examining language and discourses of development helps to illuminate the deeper ideas and beliefs underlying development practice and policies. We need to be aware that how we talk about development shapes and is shaped by our culturally informed assumptions and historical position, as well as by existing relations of power and knowledge. Words or labels, which appear to be non-political, natural, or instinctively rational, should be examined for the ways they may mask practices of control, regulation, and reproduction of particular power configurations or policy processes (Crush, 1995: 15). In addition, by superimposing new labels on existing practices, we run the risk of creating the illusion of reform while leaving power relations underlying the labels unchanged (Adams, 1995). Yet, at the same time, we should recognize the possibility for creativity in discursive practice and search for ways in which language can be a force for transformation (Wood, 1985). We should not assume that concepts or practices of "development" are fully determined by those who believe themselves to be their architects. Instead, we need to recognize the agency exercised by those who have responded to, reacted to, and resisted being the objects of development (Crush, 1995: 8).

GROWTH, INEQUALITY, POVERTY, AND DEVELOPMENT

Although vast diversity exists in the standards of living between, among, and within developing countries—and even within the developed world—it remains difficult to define concisely what "development" is and how exactly to measure it. Different approaches to defining "development" reveal different aspects of the problem: the need to distinguish between levels of industrialization, the need to consider different segments of the population, the need to look specifically at poverty, and the need to consider development as an "ideal" or aspiration for betterment.

Growth

Development has most frequently been equated with growth of the economy over a prolonged period of time. This approach was most common during the 1950s and 1960s under the influence of theories such as Walt Rostow's *Stages of Economic Growth* (see Chapter 3), but remains prevalent today. When the World Bank compares the level of development of different countries, it typically ranks them by their average income per inhabitant—or **GDP per capita**—although the Bank prefers the term "gross national income." GDP per capita figures also are adjusted by **purchasing power parities** (PPPs), which take into account the different buying power of a dollar in different economies. This gives an average income per person that allows us to compare the annual incomes of, for example, an average American who earns $52,947 to the average Tanzanian who earns $1,654. This kind of comparison reveals that the United States is the world's ninth richest country and Tanzania is one of the world's poorest—159th out of 187 (see Table 1.2).

GDP per capita is an extremely useful way of comparing levels of development. It also gives us the most widely used measure of how countries are improving (or deteriorating) in their level of development. GDP growth rates (the percentage change in national income between any two years) are like the Academy Awards of the developing world, clearly indicating which economies have been performing (in terms of adding wealth) and which have not. The top-performing economies in the developing world may have growth rates exceeding 10 per cent per annum—such as China in the early 2000s—but others may post negative rates, as was the case for much of sub-Saharan Africa during the 1980s and early 1990s. However, growth rates in developing countries, where the economy might be based on a few exported products or resources, are very volatile and may be high one year and low the next. In contrast, developed countries generally have slower GDP growth rates, usually between 2 and 3.5 per cent, but these rates are more stable over time. One of the world's most prominent development economists, Jeffrey Sachs, has argued that the current gulf in wealth between the developed and developing countries is almost entirely caused by small differences in growth rates over the period since 1820. In 1820, he argues, the difference in GDP per capita between developed and developing countries was relatively small (only 4:1), but two centuries of differential growth rates have led to a twenty-fold gap (Sachs, 2005: 29–31).

Rapid growth in GDP is usually caused by rapid increases in productivity in agriculture, natural resource extraction, or industrialization. When GDP per capita reaches the level of a middle-income developing country, it usually means that a certain level of industrialization has been reached, including the production of manufactured goods such as textiles and consumer durables (refrigerators, cars) and of some intermediate goods such as steel and petrochemicals. It was generally assumed that growth of national wealth (as measured by GDP per capita) would "trickle down" to the poorest segments of society in such a way that most people would benefit. In other words, development, viewed through the prism of increasing GDP per capita, was about copying the industrialization experience of the West.

But it should not be forgotten that GDP per capita is a measure of the *average* income in a country. There are numerous problems with GDP per capita, including that it is an estimate that depends on the quality of information collected by government statistical agencies and that it fails to count the "value" of non-market subsistence activities, which may be quite important in less developed rural areas (for a trenchant critique, see Seers, 1979: 14–17). Although a good indicator of the degree of industrialization, GDP tells us relatively little about the extent of poverty—specifically, what proportion of the population is extremely poor—or whether growth is in fact "trickling down" to the poor. It is possible for countries to grow rapidly in GDP per capita but for only the richest segments of society to benefit. In this respect, development *cannot* be as simple as GDP growth, because growth does not necessarily reduce poverty.

Inequality

In order to know how many poor people there are in a given country and whether they are benefiting from the overall growth of the economy, we need to include another concept: the distribution of income. The **distribution of income** (also known as income inequality) is a measure of how the wealth of a country is distributed among its population: what share of that wealth is owned by the rich, and how much the poorest earn in comparison to the wealthiest. Indeed, income inequality is the direct link between GDP per capita and the number of people living in poverty.

Income inequality can be measured in two ways: a comparison of the income earned by different strata of the population and the Gini coefficient (see Chapter 26). Income inequality is often evaluated by dividing the population into five or ten equally populous strata, known respectively as "quintiles" or "deciles," and comparing the average incomes of these different strata to each other. A standard comparison is between the earnings of the wealthiest 20 per cent of the population and the poorest 40 per cent (the ninth and tenth deciles compared to the first to fourth deciles). However, the Gini coefficient is the most commonly used measure of income inequality. It is a number between 0 and 1, with relatively equal societies such as the Scandinavian countries scoring around 0.25 while very unequal societies like Brazil score around 0.6.[2]

Income inequality is important in part because it forces us to confront the injustice in most developing societies: that a privileged minority lead luxurious lives while the vast majority of their own countrymen and women struggle in abject poverty. But income inequality is also an important constraint on development. It means that growth often comes from the richer segment of the economy and is less likely to translate into poverty reduction by "trickling down" to the poor. Poverty is always eliminated more quickly when GDP growth is combined with improvements (greater equality) in the distribution of income.

Societies in developing countries tend to be much more unequal than societies in developed countries. Latin America, although an upper-middle-income area of the developing world, is also the region with the most unequal distribution of income. This means that the super-rich and the super-poor coexist in the same countries. Mexico, for example, has the second richest man on the list of the world's richest people, China has six people on the list, and India has five, while citizens of the developing world as a whole occupy 23 of the top 100 places (*Forbes*, 2015). Brazil, one of the most unequal countries in the world, has three billionaires on the Forbes list, European-trained elites, and a world-class aeronautics industry—but also *favelas* (Portuguese for "slums") surrounding its major modern and cosmopolitan cities such as São Paulo. The share of national income appropriated by the richest 20 per cent and that appropriated by the poorest 20 per cent hardly changed over the 1981–2001 period, despite significant growth that resulted in the doubling of per capita income (see Table 1.1). In 2001 the top quintile took home almost 62 per cent of the national income while the bottom quintile pocketed only 2.5 per cent. The degree of inequality between the top 10 per cent and the bottom 10 per cent is even more pronounced: 42 per cent and 1 per cent of the national income in 2013, respectively. Yet, there is also reason for hope. In the 2002–12 period (the latest date for which there are figures), the Brazilian government made a concerted attempt to channel resources to the poorest sectors of society, resulting in some improvement in the distribution of income.

The realization that income inequality makes the task of raising people out of poverty even more difficult has led to the current focus of international organizations and research on "growth with equity," which seeks to combine the goal of GDP growth with the goal of distributing the benefits of that growth to the poor. Growth remains important because it "grows the pie," but it is not enough in itself. Furthermore, some evidence suggests that countries that grow faster do not always improve the situation of the poorest (such as Brazil), while countries with low growth rates and GDP per capita may succeed relatively well in reducing the vulnerability of the poorest segments in society (such as Cuba or the Indian state of Kerala). This means that high GDP growth is not strictly necessary for poverty reduction, although it may make it easier. It is also worth underlining that the poorest and those who are least likely to benefit from the "trickle down" of growth are usually those who belong to disadvantaged ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups. In Latin America, for example, this frequently means Indigenous peoples and people of African descent.

Although inequality undermines the opportunities for material advancement of the poor, it also has broader cultural effects on the rich. Dudley Seers writes, "The social barriers and inhibitions of an unequal society distort the personalities of those with high incomes no less than those who are poor" (1972: 23). When inequality becomes part of a national culture, it undermines the broad and diffuse social trust, what Robert Putnam, among others, has called **social capital** (Fukuyama, 1995; Putnam, 1993). Social capital refers to the extent to which individuals are willing to co-operate in the pursuit of shared goals and is usually thought to be essential to the development of a civic and democratic culture (see Chapters 12 and 16). Public opinion polling in highly unequal societies such as Latin America demonstrates that people are less trusting of strangers than is the case in the developed world. Gated communities and barred windows are commonplace. Furthermore, one may well ask if the traditional conservatism of elites in the developing world and their unwillingness to tolerate reformist groups or extend the rights of social citizenship to the poor comes from fear of loosening their grip on the masses, who know very well who benefits from the status quo and who does not.

Although inequality is a common feature of most developing countries, it is very difficult to explain why.

TABLE 1.1 | The Distribution of Income in Brazil by Quintiles, 1981–2012 (% share of national income)

Quintile	1981	1990	2001	2007	2012
1 (poorest)	2.89	2.36	2.45	3.02	4
2	6.01	5.27	5.84	6.85	8
3	10.59	9.72	10.79	11.78	12
4	18.84	18.19	18.94	19.62	19
5 (richest)	61.67	64.46	61.98	58.73	57
GNI/capita*	$1,850	$2,540	$3,310	$6,140	$12,390

*Atlas method, US$.

Source: World Bank 2014, World databank, at: databank.worldbank.org/ddp/home.do.

There are many possible reasons, some of which are discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters. At least three explanations seem plausible. First, the impact of colonial rule or neo-colonial economic relations may have forged or consolidated unequal social relations based on slavery, feudalism, and landownership patterns that continue to influence the present (see Chapters 2 and 3). Second, the characteristics of late industrialization—that is, the use of inappropriate capital-intensive technology—reduce the employment potential of GDP growth (see Chapters 7 and 22). Third, inadequate or non-existent social safety nets and regressive taxation systems prevent the redistribution of national income towards the poor and middle classes, as occurred in the developed economies after the Great Depression. The good news is that although income inequality makes development more difficult, it is not impossible to overcome. The recent expansion of targeted poverty reduction (see Chapters 24 and 25) and broad-based social programs (see Chapter 26) in much of the developing world has contributed to a significant reduction in the incidence of poverty and slight reductions in inequality.

Defining Poverty and Development

Income inequality leads us to the direct question of the proportion of poor people in a given country. (For a more detailed discussion of poverty and exclusion, see Chapters 24 and 25.) Poverty, however, is a difficult concept to define. It is usually defined as an extremely low level of income. For example, the World Bank distinguishes between absolute and moderate poverty in much of its work. **Absolute poverty** refers to being below the minimum level of income required for physical survival. The World Bank defines this level as US$1.25 per day measured in 2005 dollars at international purchasing power parity—that is, adjusted for the buying power of a US dollar in the local market. The definition of the absolute poverty line was revised in 2008 from the commonly cited US$1 a day level (in 1993 dollars). **Moderate poverty** is typically considered to be an income of US$2 per day, a level at which basic needs are barely met but survival is not actually threatened. According to these new measures, the World Bank reported that 1.2 billion people were below the absolute poverty line in 2013, more than had been estimated previously but approximately 700 million less than in 1980 (Olinto et al., 2013).

In the 1960s, however, American sociologists such as Talcott Parsons and Kenneth Clark, addressing poverty and in particular the status of African Americans in US society, began to develop the concepts of **relative poverty** and social exclusion. Relative poverty refers to a kind of poverty that does not threaten daily survival but in which an individual may not have the income necessary to fully participate in his or her society (Thomas, 2000: 13, citing Townsend). One may well imagine how an individual without computer access and knowledge would be seriously hampered in terms of his or her ability to access important information and even do basic tasks such as looking for employment. The poverty we refer to in developed countries is almost exclusively, even for the very poorest, an issue of relative rather than absolute or even moderate poverty. A related concept is "social exclusion" or social citizenship, which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 26.

Nonetheless, the concept of relative poverty reveals that poverty is not just about income levels; it also has social, political, psychological, and moral elements—and this is true in both the developing *and* the developed world. In other words, although GDP per capita is a good indicator of poverty as income deprivation, it does not tell the whole story. Consequently, alleviating poverty or *doing development* also must be much more complicated than simply spurring economic growth or even reducing poverty. Three thinkers in particular have been fundamental in redefining how poverty, and therefore development, should be understood.

The idea that development involved much more than economic growth or an increase in income per capita began to gain ground in the late 1960s, promoted by development theorists and practitioners such as Dudley Seers and Denis Goulet. The arguments of these scholars have led to an understanding of poverty and development as *multi-dimensional*. Seers rephrased the question of how to develop by asking, "What are the necessary conditions for a universally acceptable aim, the realization of the potential of human personality?" (Seers, 1979: 10). He concluded that six conditions were necessary: adequate income to cover the needs of basic survival; employment (including any non-paid social role that contributes to self-respect and development of the personality); improvement in the distribution of income; an education, particularly literacy; political participation; and national autonomy (belonging to a politically and economically independent nation). Denis Goulet, writing at about the same time, asserted that development should promote "life-sustenance" (the basic requirements for survival—food, clothing, health, and shelter), self-esteem (or dignity and identity of the individual), and freedom (an expanded range of choice and freedom from "servitudes") (Goulet, 1971: 87–97; Seers, 1979: 10–13; Todaro, 1989).

It is evident that those closely involved in development were beginning to see growth as an inadequate measure of development and even entertained the possibility that rising incomes, although they improved the ability of individuals to meet basic physical needs, might not contribute to "development" in its more sophisticated and multi-dimensional aspects. These ideas were further developed in the work of Nobel Prize–winning economist Amartya Sen, who argues that development should not be seen simply as rising income levels but rather as an increase in individuals' substantive freedoms. His approach is often called "development as freedom," after the title of his popular 1999 book, or the **capability approach**. As Sen puts it, the real value of wealth and income is that "they are admirable general-purpose means for having more freedom to lead the kind of lives we have reason to value" (Sen, 1999: 14). In this respect, Sen sees poverty primarily as kinds of "unfreedom," or deprivation of freedoms, that limit the ability of individuals to improve their lives. Such unfreedoms may include a lack of access to health and welfare services, gender or ethnic **discrimination**, and limits on basic political, civic, and economic rights. According to Sen, lack of freedom can be the result of either processes (denial of rights normally considered "procedural," like political, civic, and human rights) or the opportunities that people do not have (inability to feed themselves, receive

Paul Haslam

PHOTO 1.2 | Inequality: hillside slums and the beachfront, Rio de Janeiro.

an education, access health services, avoid premature morbidity) (Sen, 1999: 14–17). It is worth underlining that these deprivations are absolute, not relative, as *all* people need a certain level of capabilities in order to function as fully human (live a good human life). Some of Sen's followers, such as Martha Nussbaum, have produced lists of these minimum but universal requirements (Nussbaum, 1995: 84–5).

The key to Sen's argument, therefore, is the way in which the expansion of people's capabilities—that is, their ability to lay claim to or access various resources (such as civil and political rights and government services)—can improve their ability to make choices that they value. At the same time, an increased ability to make choices feeds back to build their "capabilities." One can imagine, for example, how the right to vote and participate in politics could lead to governmental decisions that increase local educational opportunities, which in turn could expand the choices of those who participated in the political process by voting. Sen writes, "Greater freedom enhances the ability of people to help themselves and also to influence the world, and these matters are central to the process of development" (Sen, 1999: 18). Sen makes it clear, therefore, that level of income does not relate directly to "development" and that poverty is better seen as the deprivation of basic capabilities or freedoms.

Sen points to a number of compelling examples to illustrate his argument, including the fact that, using data from 1993, African Americans (on average) had a lower probability of reaching old age than citizens of China, Sri Lanka, or Costa Rica, despite having much higher incomes. Furthermore, male African Americans from Harlem were even worse off than the average, being less likely to reach the age of 40 than men in Bangladesh (Sen, 1999: 21–3). In this example, Sen shows that African-American men suffered from restrictions on their "capabilities" despite having incomes much higher than people in the other countries cited. It is important to underline that, for Sen, although freedom (including free markets) has intrinsic value and does not have to be justified in terms of outcomes, a significant part of the expansion of capabilities (ability to access freedoms) comes through access to government services. Therefore, Sen sees the ability to access education, health care, and unemployment insurance as central elements that expand people's capabilities. The inverse of this observation is that sometimes low income does not reflect the opportunities people have. This should be intrinsically clear to students in a university or college setting, where their income (measured by summer earnings or part-time jobs) would put them below the national poverty line. In no way does this income level reflect the real capabilities and freedoms commanded by students or the opportunities before them.

Sen's work has been instrumental (together with that of Seers and Goulet) in opening the door to more multi-dimensional measures of development that go beyond the ubiquitous GDP per capita. In defence of GDP per capita, it is easily measured, and levels of absolute and moderate poverty can be clearly established according to certain income cut-off points. Even one of its most ardent detractors, Dudley Seers, referred to GDP per capita as a "very convenient indicator" (Seers, 1979: 9). However, is it possible to measure a multi-dimensional concept like Sen's "development as freedom"? Some authors have criticized such an approach as being impossible to quantify (Rist, 1997: 10). Nonetheless, efforts have been made to construct measures that better capture the multi-dimensional aspects of development. The best known is the Human Development Index, or HDI, of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), constructed with input from Amartya Sen (Table 1.2).

The annual *Human Development Report*, which ranks the countries of the world by their HDI score, is the UNDP's flagship publication and was developed in 1990 as an alternative and more multi-dimensional measure of development than GDP per capita. Many people see it as an intellectual and philosophical challenge to the World Bank's annual publication, the *World Development Report*, which continues to use GNI per capita as a measure of development. The Human Development Index is a composite measure of three equally weighted factors: a long and healthy life, knowledge, and standard of living. A long and healthy life is measured by life expectancy at birth; knowledge is a composite of the adult literacy rate and the combined gross enrolment ratio for primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools; and standard of living is measured by GDP per capita. In this respect, the index recognizes that income levels are important but that other factors also are significant in human development. One may view the education and longevity measures as proxies that

TABLE 1.2 | Countries Ranked by HDI and GNI Per Capita, 2014

HDI Ranking 2014	Country (according to World Bank category)	HDI Score	GNI Per Capita (PPP US$)	GNI Per Capita Ranking
Very high human development				
1	Norway	0.944	64,992	6 ↑
8	United States	0.915	52,947	11 ↑
9	Canada	0.913	42,155	20 ↑
9	New Zealand	0.913	32,689	32 ↑
11	Singapore	0.912	76,628	4 ↓
14	United Kingdom	0.907	39,267	23 ↑
20	Japan	0.891	36,927	27 ↑
39	Saudi Arabia	0.837	52,821	12 ↓
42	Chile	0.832	21,290	53 ↑
High human development				
50	Russian Federation	0.798	22,352	49 ↓
72	Turkey	0.761	18,677	60 ↓
73	Sri Lanka	0.757	9,779	102 ↑
75	Brazil	0.755	15,175	74 ↓
90	China	0.727	12,547	83 ↓
Medium human development				
106	Botswana	0.698	16,646	65 ↓
110	Indonesia	0.684	9,778	101 ↓
115	Philippines	0.668	7,915	108 ↓
129	Tajikistan	0.624	2,517	156 ↑
130	India	0.609	5,497	126 ↓
142	Bangladesh	0.570	3,191	147 ↑
Low human development				
150	Swaziland	0.531	5,542	125 ↓
151	Tanzania	0.521	2,411	159 ↑
152	Nigeria	0.514	5,341	128 ↓
154	Madagascar	0.510	1,328	178 ↑
181	Sierra Leone	0.413	1,780	165 ↓
185	Chad	0.392	2,085	163 ↓
188	Niger	0.348	908	183 ↓

↑ Indicates country whose HDI ranking is higher than its GDP per capita ranking.

↓ Indicates country whose HDI ranking is lower than its GDP per capita ranking.

Source: UNDP, *Human Development Report 2015*, at: http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics.

take account of the various government services that Seers, Goulet, and Sen see as crucial to expanding the range of individual choice. Indeed, the first *Human Development Report* (1990) was explicit about this link, noting that "Human development is a process of enlarging people's choices" (UNDP, 1990: 10).

For the UNDP, countries with a HDI score of 0.8 or more are considered highly developed, while those with a score of 0.5 or less are considered to have low development. In the 2015 *Human Development Report*, classifications are given for 188 countries in the following categories: very high human development (49), high human development (55), medium human development (38), and low human development (43), with HDI values ranging on a scale between 0 and 1. The HDI shows that many countries rank much higher in "human development" than average per capita income would predict. Even Norway, holding the number-one spot on the HDI (five spots higher than its GNI ranking), does not do as well in converting GNI per capita to human development as New Zealand, which is ninth in the HDI but thirty-secondth in GNI. New Zealand has almost half the per capita income of Norway but a very similar HDI outcome. Results can be even more divergent in developing countries: at almost the same GNI per capita of just over $9,000, we find both high-HDI Sri Lanka (#73) and medium-HDI Indonesia (#110). This shows that some countries do much better than others in converting income level into human development.

Perhaps most importantly, the HDI has embedded the idea of poverty and development as a multi-dimensional phenomenon in the modern approach to development. The UNDP has also developed a number of other multi-dimensional measures inspired by the HDI, in order to focus on other aspects of poverty, exclusion, and development. For example, the Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index combines the HDI with a measure of inequality; the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) assesses how multiple "deprivations" affect people's quality of life; the Gender Inequality Index (GII) assesses the discrimination faced by women and girls; and the Gender Development Index (GDI) uses the same approach as the HDI, but tuned to the gap between male and female outcomes. Even the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the comprehensive framework developed to focus the activities of all bilateral and multilateral aid agencies between 2002 and 2015, and their successor, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), can be viewed as operationalizing a multi-dimensional approach to development.

Recently, the multi-dimensional approach to understanding development has been twinned with a human-rights-based approach. The idea of development as a human right has been debated within the UN system since the early 1970s, but it was not until it was linked with Sen's capability approach that the human rights approach entered the mainstream (Uvin, 2010: 164–8). Proponents immediately saw the similarities between actions needed to increase people's capabilities on multiple dimensions and the various human rights treaties that governments had signed committing to improve access to food, education, health care, adequate housing, security, justice, and civil and political rights. Identifying development as a human right was supposed to put political pressure on governments to fulfill their existing obligations to improve the capabilities of their populations. In other words, activists wanted to use international law as a kind of "stick" to push recalcitrant countries forward. It was also hoped that international law would provide an opening for citizens to claim their rights from their own governments (Uvin, 2010: 170–4). The human-rights-based approach to development was officially launched with the publication of a framework linking development and human rights by the UN High Commission for Human Rights in 2006 (UNHCHR, 2006). Since that time, human rights considerations have become an increasingly important part of the debate over how to advance development goals.

GLOBAL ETHICS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Wherever you live, you are reading this book because you have an interest in international development and, by extension, in the global distribution of wealth and power, well-being, and poverty. It may seem obvious, therefore, that the negative consequences of poverty for human health and well-being are on the whole a bad thing, both within your own country and in other countries throughout the world. You probably also believe that it follows logically from this that we should take

CRITICAL ISSUES

BOX 1.2 | What Is Development?

"Development" is a contested term. There are debates surrounding the meaning of development, contestation over the best approach to achieve development, and even questions about whether it is worth pursuing at all (see Chapters 3 and 4). Today's dominant usage of "development," in which it is understood as virtually synonymous with economic growth and modernity, emerged in the post–World War II period. However, ideas about human progress that undergird this vision of development are rooted in the European Enlightenment.

With the rise of industrial capitalism in the eighteenth century, many philosophers began to see history as linear, as having an ultimate destination, a "progression to the better," as German philosopher Georg Hegel saw it (Leys, 1996: 4). At the same time, capitalism's transformation of society gave rise to new social ills, such as dispossession, unemployment, and poverty, and many saw the need for an antidote to these problems. Ideas of economic progress and social transformation were taken up and expressed through the European colonial enterprise, in complex ways and diverse forms. In particular, it has been suggested that the idea of development was based on the Eurocentric idea of "trusteeship"—those who were already "developed" could act on behalf of those individuals and societies that were yet to realize their potential (Cowen and Shenton, 1995).

Some thinkers, such as Arturo Escobar (1992), argue that the colonial roots of the concept and practice of development call into question the validity of the contemporary development enterprise. They emphasize the destructive and disciplinary power of development in its interventions in and transformations of non-Western societies (see Chapter 4). Development can be seen to have changed societies for the worse, rather than improving people's lives, as development discourse would have us believe (Watts, 1995: 45). Gilbert Rist (1997, 2007) refers to development as a "toxic word" because it necessarily entails the destruction of both the environment and social bonds in the process of transforming natural and human resources into economic commodities. In fact, Rist sees "development" as a discourse that legitimates the global expansion of capitalism while simultaneously obfuscating its negative effects on people.

However, development is not a homogeneous project. Development, "for all its power to speak and to control the terms of speaking, has never been impervious to challenge and resistance, nor, in response, to reformulation and change" (Crush, 1995: 8). Just as a body of scholarship has uncovered the interactions and mutual shaping that took place during the colonial encounter between (multiple) colonizers and (multiple) colonized peoples (see Chapter 2), research is also emerging that explores the ways people who are the "objects" of development policy subvert and in turn transform the people, ideas, projects, agencies, and societies that are held up as the paradigm of the developed world (Scott, 1990).

action to avoid, mitigate, or reverse poverty wherever possible—and not just within our own country.

However, while few people would argue that poverty is not a bad thing, the further belief that we should take action to address poverty is not universally shared. In addition, even among those who do accept that action should be taken to address global poverty, there are intense intellectual and political debates over how we can justify action on global poverty and what actions are justified. Several influential approaches to global poverty have had an impact on these debates within the field of international development and on policy action. We provide a brief overview of these approaches in this section, and then we explore dilemmas that you, as a student of international development, might face when assessing your options for action or when taking part in international development policy-making or practice.

Central to the international development arena is a simple question: Do our moral duties extend beyond our families, neighbours, and fellow citizens?

Over the course of the twentieth century, most Western societies developed systems of social support to ensure that no citizen would be left to die or suffer severe deprivation as a result of poverty. These systems became known as "welfare states."

However, while the welfare state in various forms became ubiquitous among European and North American nations, a global institution equivalent to national welfare state agencies has not emerged to take responsibility for guaranteeing security and meeting the basic needs of all people through similar forms of wealth redistribution and universal public service provisions. Nonetheless, many people believe that the principles of basic human rights and security should apply to all humans, regardless of where they happen to live in the world. Thus, we have moved from a time when most discussions about justice were concerned primarily with distribution within states to a time when many are considering arguments surrounding distributive justice globally, or what has become known as **global ethics**.

Cosmopolitan Arguments for Global Redistribution

Those who argue that principles of justice imply a moral obligation to address the needs of the poor not only within national boundaries but beyond these borders largely fall within the philosophical category referred to as **cosmopolitanism**. According to cosmopolitanism, justice is owed to all people regardless of where they happen to live or where they happen to have been born, and regardless of their race or gender, class or citizenship (O'Neill, 2000: 45). National boundaries are therefore of little or no moral importance in considerations of justice.

Within cosmopolitan thinking, Charles Jones (1999) identifies three main types of justification for global redistributive justice: a *consequentialist ethic* (as exemplified in the works of Peter Singer); a *contractarian ethic* (as in the works of Charles Beitz and Thomas Pogge); and a *rights-based ethic* (Jones's own position and that of Henry Shue). These three views are outlined in Box 1.3.

Peter Singer's argument is that if we can take action to prevent people from dying of starvation without compromising anything else of equal moral value, an impartial view of justice would clearly say that we are morally bound to take that action. Box 1.4 presents an example that he offers readers to persuade them of the moral correctness of this consequentialist position.

If Singer's position is correct, we can draw the conclusion that we should be giving away all of the "surplus" income we have as long as it does not cause us to give up something of *greater* moral value than the lives of people facing starvation anywhere in the world. One might characterize this as the "Mother Teresa" approach (Doyle, 2006) or radical sacrifice (Gasper, 1986: 141), since it seems to require that we give up

IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

BOX 1.3 | How to Judge Right and Wrong: Three Philosophical Approaches to Morality

Consequentialist philosophy assesses whether an action is morally just on the basis of the goodness or value of the outcomes it produces.

Contractarian philosophy holds that moral norms are justified according to the idea of a contract or mutual agreement (as in the political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and, most recently, John Rawls).

Rights-based philosophy justifies moral claims on the basis of fundamental entitlements to act or be treated in specific ways. Justifications for rights-based morality are complex, but they include the idea that we have rights because we have interests or because of our status.

IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

BOX 1.4 | The Drowning Child Analogy

Peter Singer (2002) suggests that the following situation illustrates why justice requires us to act to prevent needless and extreme suffering regardless of national boundaries. Imagine you are walking to work and see a small child fall into a pond. She is in danger of drowning. You could easily walk into the pond and save her without endangering your own safety, but you would get your clothing and shoes muddy. You would have to go home and change, causing you to be late for work, and your shoes might be ruined. Our moral intuition tells us that you should clearly put aside those minor inconveniences in order to save the child's life—and that if you ignored her and continued on your way, you would have done something seriously morally wrong. Furthermore, it should make no moral difference whether this little girl is your own child, your neighbour's child, or someone you don't know at all. But, Singer argues, are we not in the same position, morally speaking, when we choose to spend money on frivolous or luxurious items that are no more important than the muddy shoes in the example, rather than use that money to prevent someone from dying of starvation (for example, through donation to humanitarian agencies that have proven competence in delivering aid to the starving and needy)? And, he argues, this is clearly true even if that starvation is occurring in another part of the world that we may never visit. Is that thousand-dollar bottle of champagne, that gold-encrusted tuna steak, that Tiffany diamond ring really more important, morally speaking, than a human life (or many of them)?

everything we have until we are in a similar position of poverty and have nothing left to give that would prevent another person from dying of starvation.

Thomas Pogge (2002, 2005) argues for the moral duty to address world poverty using different justifications. He suggests that one of the main reasons we have a moral duty to alleviate global poverty is because we are causally responsible for the current situation as a result of the colonial destruction of local economies and societies. Similar premises underlie the argument by Walter Rodney (1972), an influential Guyanese writer, that international development and assistance are simply a way to give back what had been taken from the Global South.

Another argument Pogge provides takes a contractarian approach (see Box 1.3). He holds that an economic order should be considered morally unjust if it causes massive and severe human rights deficits that could be avoided under a different and practically possible institutional arrangement. He argues that this is clearly the case with the current global economic order, which preserves the advantages of the wealthy and allows serious and avoidable deprivation among the poor, despite there being a "feasible institutional alternative under which such severe and extensive poverty would not persist" (Pogge, 2005: 4). Thus, according to Pogge, our obligation to address world poverty is based at least in part on our duty *not to harm* others.

Rights-based approaches to global justice and the problem of poverty take the idea of human rights as implying duties for individuals, states, and other institutions to protect and aid those whose basic needs are not being met through contemporary global market economies (see Chapter 24).

Charles Jones argues that the right to subsistence (principally food, shelter, and a level of health required for basic human functioning) is based on the recognition that these are universally shared human needs and, therefore, are morally important. They are the most basic interests we have, because "without food, shelter, and a reasonable level of health maintenance, human lives are simply not possible" (Jones, 1999: 58).

Not all states, however, are currently in a position to ensure the right to subsistence for all of their citizens, because some lack sufficient resources. This means that states with more than they need to ensure the fulfillment of the right to subsistence should redistribute wealth and resources to states unable either to provide subsistence rights to their citizens or to protect those rights (Jones, 1999: 70). Hence, a rights-based approach to justice also can provide moral justification for global redistribution of wealth in order to protect and aid all peoples in achieving the right to subsistence.

Arguments against Global Redistributive Justice

The two main ethical positions opposed to cosmopolitan approaches to redistributive global justice are communitarianism and libertarianism. **Communitarianism** takes issue with the cosmopolitan assumption that national borders have no moral importance. Instead, communitarians believe that political and social community is morally relevant. Thus, some communitarians hold that we are justified in giving (moral) preference to the needs of our fellow citizens, because membership in the nation creates special bonds, a kind of extended version of kinship.

Libertarian philosophy is best exemplified in the work of Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (1974). It has been influential among a number of development theorists (for example, Deepak Lal and Peter Bauer) in the formulation of what is now known as **neoliberalism** (see Gasper, 1986; see also Chapter 3). Nozick argues that individual rights to freedom and non-interference are the central moral good, and he places particular value on the right of individuals to acquire and retain private property. Therefore, libertarians oppose any form of obligatory redistribution of wealth, whether within one country or among countries.

Another aspect of Nozick's argument on justice is that the simple existence of (even extreme) inequality of wealth and poverty does not indicate injustice (Gasper, 1986: 143). As long as the wealth was obtained by legitimate means, the situation should be deemed just. Individuals should be free to give donations to poorer people if they choose to, but there is no moral obligation to do so, and there should be no corresponding demand on the part of a state or other body.

If we look at statements by actors and institutions operating in international development, many suggest a widespread belief in universal human rights and transnational duties to protect and assist people regardless of where they live in the world. Common values and human rights were an important justification for the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals in 2002 and the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 (UN General Assembly, 2005). The G8 has posited that "fighting poverty is both a moral imperative and a necessity for a stable world" (G8, 2000). The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has promoted a "right to development" (UNHCHR, 2006). "Rights talk" is fashionable, and it would be virtually unthinkable for a political leader to deny the principle underlying universal human rights—*that all human life is of equal worth*. And yet, much of the actual practice of Western aid allocation seems to imply a far less consistent view of the moral obligation to address global poverty, with aid often seen as non-obligatory charitable donations, serving the national interest, or rewarding allies (see Chapter 8). As you read this book, you should reflect on the moral principles that remain highly relevant to international development, and ask yourself what might be needed to bring our beliefs about justice in line with our actions in the global sphere (see Chapter 29).

ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR AND THE DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONER

Development ethics also addresses the issue of how each of us should behave as development practitioners and researchers working in the developing world. As Des Gasper (1999: 6) puts it, those who work on the front line "need ethical frames by which they can better understand their situation, structure their choices, avoid debilitating degrees of doubt and guilt, and move forward." Gasper's contribution in Chapter 29 provides more detailed tools to assist in analysis and reflection about our ethical responsibilities as researchers, development practitioners, and students participating in internships and exchanges. Here, we introduce some key ideas that you should keep in mind as you are thinking about your role in the future of international development.

Although there are differences between the ethical responsibilities of researchers and those of practitioners, important commonalities between them are required for work in developing countries. Researchers tend to be principally concerned with the issues of informed consent and respect for the privacy and confidentiality of those who participate in their studies, the implications of relationships of reciprocity with key local informants (what researchers owe them, if anything), and the benefits of the research for the community (including how to share the findings with them) (Marchall, 1992: 1–3). An overriding injunction at all times is to "do no harm"—to ensure that the vulnerable are not put at risk as a result of their participation in the research or project (Adams and Megaw, 1997; Jacobsen and Landau, 2003: 193). These ethical responsibilities are salient for practitioners as well, although informed consent usually translates to ensuring that participation is willing and voluntary in the development project at hand.

Above all, being ethical as a development worker or researcher suggests a kind of permanent, ongoing self-critique and evaluation of one's actions and their effects, taking care to identify, privilege, and respect the rights of others over one's more narrow professional objectives (Adams and Megaw, 1997). In other words, development ethics subordinates the goals (what we want to do) to the means of development (how we do it).

We are always aware when we do not have the power in a relationship, but well-meaning people—such as the typical development worker or student—are not always aware when they do!

This situation is captured by the idea of **positionality**, which suggests that researchers or development

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PHOTO 1.3 | A man with polio makes sandals in a UNDP-funded employment project in Makeni, Sierra Leone.

IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

BOX 1.5 | Ethics of Participatory Rural Appraisal

Robert Chambers's injunctions for participatory rural appraisal may be viewed as good ethical guidelines for the development practitioner: "ask them; be nice to people; don't rush; embrace error; facilitate; hand over the stick; have fun; relax; they can do it (i.e., have confidence that people are capable)" (Chambers, 1997: 1748).

practitioners must be aware of and reflect upon the social and power relationships in which they are embedded, particularly their position relative to the local people with whom they interact (Binns, 2006: 19). However, the development practitioner's positionality is not always easy to assess; as the representatives of donor agencies, they are often seen by locals as having power and authority. Choices made by researchers and practitioners—such as the social and political background of principal assistants and translators, the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) they work with, and the political "gatekeepers" who help them—all contribute to how local people interpret who they are and whose interests they represent. Resources distributed by practitioners create "relationships of 'help', 'trust', and 'friendship'" as they intersect with "people's strategies for earning money" (Pink, 1998: 9–10); at the same time, this distribution of resources also can create conflict among locals who struggle to capture benefits (Pouligny, 2001). Taking positionality seriously, therefore, means that the development practitioner needs to reflect on the implications of his or her power position on others.

Lifestyle, dress, and behaviour abroad are important to local perceptions. In general, development workers are expected to live modestly with the people they are supposed to assist. Professionalism and advanced technical capacity should go hand in hand with high moral and ethical standards based on transparency and democratic accountability. Most development experts see hiring and buying locally as an ethical obligation to spread the wealth. Likewise, participating in local cultural events, observing local standards of dress and modesty, and learning the local language are essential elements in building a healthy relationship with local partners (Apentiik and Parpart, 2006: 39–40; Binns, 2006: 20). Nonetheless, some development practitioners earn the derisory moniker "**development tourists**" as they jet in and out of poor countries dispensing advice with little understanding of local conditions (Adams and Megaw, 1997, citing Chambers, 1997). There are too many examples of development mission staff lecturing politicians from the Global South "like schoolboys" in a (deliberate?) attempt to leave them powerless (Klitgaard, 1991, cited in Gasper, 1999: 24).

Today, anyone who wishes to be involved in international development cannot but experience a great sense of modesty as compared to the kind of intellectual arrogance that was prevalent in the past. Modesty can mean many things, including a sense that the "Western" way is *not* the only way, that the achievements of richer countries are not necessarily replicable or even desirable in poor countries, that Western science and techniques are not always value-neutral, and that there are other narratives to explain reality and to change it in a pro-people way. Development agencies and practitioners should not assume they can solve local problems from the outside when solutions exist at the local level, which is frequently the case. Above all, development workers need to do more listening and less talking. This growing self-critical attitude among contemporary researchers and practitioners in what we may term the *post-naive* era of development represents a welcome break from the simplistic interpretations of the past.

In lieu of conclusion, we may ask future development practitioners and researchers to reflect upon the words of Mahatma Ghandi: "Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to *Swaraj* [self-rule] for the hungry and spiritually starving millions?" (Kerala, 2003: 12).

SUMMARY

In this chapter we have considered important concepts and ideas in the study of international development. We began by discussing the birth, evolution, and implications of the term "development" and related nomenclature—such as "developing countries," "Third World," and "Global South"—used by academics, practitioners, and international organizations. We then turned to a critical examination of growth, inequality, and absolute and moderate poverty. This led to discussion of "development" as a contested concept. Multi-dimensional approaches to development were considered in detail, particularly Amartya Sen's capability approach and its translation into the Human Development Index. We also explored the ethics and morality of international development and looked at various arguments for and against global redistributive justice by asking whether development assistance should be considered a moral obligation for rich countries and their citizens, or little more than an individual choice akin to a charitable donation. The chapter concluded by introducing the personal ethical dilemmas experienced by development practitioners and researchers, including the need to be attentive to power and positionality, as well as local norms of ethical and culturally sensitive behaviour.

QUESTIONS FOR CRITICAL THOUGHT

1. Why is the concept of "development" a subject of debate? What concept of development do you think is most appropriate, and why?
2. Why is inequality the crucial link between GDP per capita and the number of people living in poverty in a given country?
3. Why is GDP an inadequate measure of development?
4. What is a "multi-dimensional" approach to development?
5. What dilemmas might people working in development agencies face? How should they address these ethical dilemmas?

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NOTES

1. Gross domestic product is a measure of the market value, in monetary terms, of all goods and services produced within a country over a specific time period (usually a year, hence, annual GDP). Gross national product and gross national income are measures that include GDP plus net income from abroad, such as investments. Thus, GDP is a better measure of the activity of a national economy, that is, of domestic production, than is GNP/GNI, which better reflects national wealth.
2. The Gini coefficient is based on the Lorenz curve, which plots the proportion of national income accruing to each segment of the population. The Gini coefficient is a ratio of the area between the curve and a line representing total equality to the total area under the line of equality.

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