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CHANGING LIVES
IMPROVING LIFE

MONIQUE DEVEAUX

Ethics and Global Social Change

A NOVEL APPROACH

Moral philosophy is combined with practical
development to reshape how we tackle poverty



Here's a new way to look at global justice

The research community agrees it's time to change the way global justice is approached. As the world becomes more globalized, problems are emerging – such as income inequality, chronic poverty and climate change – that transcend borders and pose new ethical challenges.

This will require novel ideas and solutions...such as those being explored by Canada Research Chair in Ethics and Global Social Change and University of Guelph Moral Philosophy Prof. Monique Deveaux. She's connecting broader philosophical themes with more practical fields such as development, economics and sociology that look at specific trends and patterns.

"Philosophy needs to catch up with the best work done in these other fields, many of which recognize the world needs a more inclusive ethics of global justice," says Deveaux. "Philosophy is complementary, helping us to think about the complex moral and political issues that surround poverty, as well as questions of moral responsibility and obligation."

Local people need to be directly consulted and involved

With this approach, she's seeking to debunk global poverty myths and explore better ways to think about poverty reduction. A crucial challenge for foreign aid donors, says Deveaux, is to realize disadvantaged people living in developing countries are not passive victims, but rather, moral agents who have the ability to organize initiatives and pursue development goals.

That's a bottom-up approach. But currently, much development aid – which in theory is meant to target those living in poverty – goes through top-down channels.

In some cases, the most vulnerable groups feel excluded from the very projects that were originally meant to assist them. And top-down development can overlook important cultural factors that prevent people from accepting a new technology, or growing a new crop, says Deveaux.

"Local people need to be directly consulted and involved," she says.

To this end, one such organization Deveaux supports is Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing. It works internationally, supporting and strengthening networks that the working poor can use to increase their voice in policymaking. The organization is also helping to legitimize informal employment – such as unregistered or household workers – that are usually impoverished but ignored by many state policies meant to help.

"By giving the most vulnerable groups outlets to be heard, they're able to shape the world around them for the better," says Deveaux. "That's why I'm arguing for a reversal in development and philosophical thinking – to empower those who need to be heard the most."

To fuel the debate about moral and political understandings of global poverty, Deveaux coordinated two international workshops in 2012, involving experts from Canada, the USA, UK, Australia, Germany, Denmark, Italy and Switzerland. The first, *Critical perspectives on global justice: thinking beyond distribution*, focused on a wide variety of contemporary issues, including humanitarianism, post-colonialism, gender inequality, natural resources and trade. The second workshop, *Rethinking inequality: philosophical reflections on recent empirical research*, provided researchers with the chance to share their knowledge on the economic, health and social inequalities arising from development.

"These workshops are helping facilitate the debate on global justice and as well as bringing up questions about how inequality and poverty problems are framed," says Deveaux.

The proceedings from *Critical perspectives on global justice* will appear in the *Journal of Global Ethics* and those from *Rethinking inequality* will be published in *Philosophical Topics*.

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By Samantha Beattie



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