

NPLD564: Social Impact and International Development

School of Social Policy and Practice

University of Pennsylvania

Fall 2025

Meeting times: Thursday nights 5:15pm – 6:45pm August - October

Meeting days: Aug 26, Sep 2, 16, 23, 30.

Skip Sep 9 to work on prospectus.

Final Paper Deadline: October 12

Meeting Location: Zoom

Instructor: Ariel Schwartz (arielsch@upenn.edu)

Office Hours: Tuesdays 4-5pm (before class) by appointment on [Zoom](#).

Other times available. Please email or text to confirm.

Informal Meet-up: Thursdays 5:00-5:15pm (before class) on [Zoom](#)

Teaching Assistant: Jian Bland. Please see Canvas for details.

Course description

This half-credit class will offer students a grounding in and overview of the field of international development and practice. We will explore the evolution of goals, models, and assessment of development across history. We will explore the key debates in economic, political, and human development, the challenges of responsible intervention. Students will be challenged to explore impact creation in resource-constrained settings, especially outside of one's home community. We will study ways to adapt solutions as a way of generating ideas and social entrepreneurship as a development model including challenges of participation, deliverability and distribution, revenue generation, uncertainty, and risk.

Students will produce written and verbal reflections on the tensions of working in a developing context; insider-outsider identities and tradeoffs; and ethics, tensions, and opportunities of working in and out of one's home community.

Determination of Grade

Attendance & Class Participation	10%
System / Challenge / SDG	10%
3 Short reflections	30%
Paper Prospectus	20%
<u>Final Paper</u>	<u>30%</u>
TOTAL	100%

All assignments must be **submitted electronically on Canvas** on the date and time listed in the syllabus, unless otherwise noted in Canvas. Please see weekly modules, and individual assignments, in Canvas for notes about opportunities for flexibility on deadlines.

Attendance

Students are required to attend all class sessions and participate in the discussion. Attendance means being present in our class Zoom room with functioning audio and video camera on, during the entirety of each class session. Please ensure that you are in a space where you can give class your full attention and participate actively in class. Laptops, tablets, and mobile phones can often distract, but this class depends

on their use. Therefore, please ensure that all devices, notifications, instant messages, sounds, and other applications unrelated to our class are disabled during our class period.

Reflections and Feedback

Three times throughout the semester, develop a written reflection (1-page maximum) essay reflecting on a theoretical, philosophical, or practical tension in the readings or lecture that has captured your interest. It could be able to prior or the current week's materials. Post these on a Canvas discussion board for exploration and conversation among the class. Please read at least five of your classmates' reflections before class each week. By the end of the class, the group will have collectively explored a great many of the tensions and challenges apparent in the history, evolution, and implementation of international development work.

Reflections and Participation

All university classes depend on meaningful, positive, constructive student participation. Active, constructive engagement is particularly important in an international development class. A key learning outcome is demonstrating the practice of collaboratively developing social value, navigating a setting laden with stated and implicit and power dynamics, and working alongside many stakeholders in a way that shares power and decision-making.

Minimal readiness for discussion participation and written reflection includes completing and reflecting on the readings in preparation for our class time, completing the lecture quizzes, and showing respect for everyone in the class. Excellent or exceptional (A level) participation and reflection features consistent and substantive engagement with class material. This includes synthesis, insights, or successful attempts to rigorously apply required material to development contexts, concepts, or challenges that interest you. Arguments, agreements, and disagreements are well-substantiated, persuasive, and constructive. A-level contributors raise the quality of the discussion, and the class would be worse-off in their absence.

Because we have a large class, and to encourage informed, substantive on-topic participation rather than speaking to improve a participation grade, you can demonstrate the minimal level of readiness for classroom discussion asynchronously, before class, by completing a quiz on each recorded lecture. You can rewatch the lecture as many times as you like and can retake the quiz as many times as you like, so I hope this will be an opportunity to start the week off on a great start for everyone.

As you reflect on how to constructively engage in in-class participation, I encourage you to take the advice of one of my own treasured professors, Dr. Kate Weaver at UT Austin: many students in the class will have traveled, lived, or work in one or more developing countries or worked in a development organization. You are invited to draw from your experience in the moments that benefit the course discussion. "However, the objective of this course is to attain a breadth of knowledge about the theories, policies, and practices of global development. I therefore would strongly encourage you to challenge yourselves in discussion and assignments by drawing examples from outside your own life experiences."

To do that, I encourage you to attempt to contextualize your own experiences in the context of broader International Development research, writing, and practice.

At the end of the syllabus and on Canvas, I have included a list of resources -- academic journals, news and analysis sites, and development organizations' resource pages from which you can seek out additional knowledge about the topics you're interested in.

Paper Prospectus

A working title for your final paper as well as short descriptions of: your purpose or research question; the literature, scholarship, or other evidence you will draw on; your method or approach; and the significance of this work. This can be 2-3 pages maximum and feature many headings and bullets or short paragraphs.

Final Paper

Write a 10-15 page paper exploring in depth an issue of your choice in international development. You may choose among suggested paper topics, or one that you identify. The approach could be theoretical, empirical, or a proposed implementation document. See Canvas for further guidance.

Policy on Scholastic Dishonesty.

Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information, please visit Penn's Code of Academic Integrity website at <http://www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity/>

Academic Freedom Statement. The policies of the University of Pennsylvania protect academic freedom, as defined in the [AAUP's 1940 Statement of Principles](#). This statement has been endorsed by over 250 scholarly and educational organizations in the United States, and its principles are written into faculty handbooks nationwide, including [Penn's](#). The principles of academic freedom were established to protect the integrity of research and teaching from interference by donors, trustees, politicians, and others who might seek to make universities serve private and political interests. They are founded on the idea that a university's purpose is to generate new knowledge that can serve the common good in a democratic society, and that generating new knowledge requires free and open inquiry. To safeguard the university's public mission, academic freedom entails the following rights for all faculty members—whether tenure-track or non-tenure track, and including graduate research and teaching assistants—and for students:

- The right of faculty members to full freedom in research, teaching, extramural speech (public speech on issues of general concern) and intramural speech (speech about the university itself, including criticism of it).
- The right of students to freedom in learning, which includes freedom of association and expression and freedom of inquiry in the classroom.

Academic freedom is only as strong as the institutions, procedures, and professional norms that faculty members established over the last century to protect it: institutions of faculty governance such as Faculty Senates and unions; the institution of tenure; and due process procedures that protect both tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty against unjust discipline or dismissal. For further information about academic freedom, see the [AAUP-Penn website](#).

Additional Recommended Readings and Resources.

All required readings will be available via links or downloadable on Canvas. I reserve the right to add or subtract readings from the required list during the semester. In addition to assigned readings, these books may also spark your interest. Please see Canvas for the most updated weekly reading lists. Please also see two pages on the "General Resources" module:

- Supplemental Readings and Resources in International Development ([link](#))

- Supplemental Readings and Resources for 2025 (below)

CLASS 1. August 26.

Historical Perspective and Opportunities

Introductions. Purpose. Colonialism. Power.

Required Readings.

- "Four futures for a Global development cooperation system in flux: policy at the intersection of geopolitics, norm contestation and institutional shift" by Stephan Klingebiel and Andy Sumner (Policy Brief 11/2025) for German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS)
- How Europe Underdeveloped Africa. by Walter Rodney. First published in 1972. For context of why this old book is still relevant today, check out the 2018 edition, with a forward by Angela Davis. For class, read What is Development? and What is Underdevelopment? p2-25.
- "The Co-Evolution of the Washington Consensus and the Economic Development Discourse," Ravi Kanbur. 2009. *Macalester International*: Vol. 24, Article 8. p33-53.
- "Learning from national policies supporting MDG implementation. World Economic and Social Survey 2014/2015" United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. 2016. For class, read the Executive summary (pvii-xvii).
- *Kicking Away the Ladder: Development Strategy in Historical Perspective*. Ha Joon Chang. 2005. Anthem Press. London. Sections. For class, read the Introduction, p1-12.

Recommended Readings.

- "Bottlenecks to Development in Africa," by Wangari Maathai. Lecture to the 4th UN World Women's Conference, Beijing, China. August 30, 1995. Available via the Greenbelt Movement <https://www.greenbeltmovement.org/wangari-maathai/key-speeches-and-articles/bottlenecks-to-development-in-africa> .
- "Global Public Goods and Global Finance: Does Global Governance Ensure that the Global Public Interest is Served?" 2006. Joseph E. Stiglitz. In *Advancing Public Goods*, Jean-Philippe Touffut, ed. p149-163.
- "Governance and Anticorruption: from Rhetoric to Reality?" in Catherine Weaver, *Hypocrisy Trap: The World Bank and the Poverty of Reform*. Princeton, NJ. 2008.
- Development policy: An introduction for students." Tony Addison. 2004. WIDER Discussion Paper, No. 2004/09, ISBN 9291906549, The United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER), Helsinki.
- Provocative opinion piece: "We Were Making Headway on Global Poverty. What's About to Change?" Bill Gates and Melinda Gates. The New York Times. September 22, 2018.
- Provocative article: "A Low-Cost Fix for Africa's Silent Killer.Toxic Smoke Is Africa's Quiet Killer. An Entrepreneur Says His Fix Can Make a Fortune" Peter S. Goodman. New York Times. December 12, 2018.

Lecture Quiz 1. Due Tuesday August 26, 4:30pm

Assignment: Short Reflection 1. Due Monday, September 1, 2025, 11:59pm

CLASS 2. September 2.

Institutions for Economic & Political development

Institutions. Development Strategies. Aid and social entrepreneurship as development tools. Revenue and developing a unit of transaction. Market v. Government; Individual v. Collective action. Macro→ micro.

Required Readings.

- *Decolonizing Humanitarian Aid | The Future of Humanitarian Action Conversation Series.* Devex. September 17, 2020.
- “The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations.” Michael N. Barnett and Martha Finnemore. 1999. *International Organization* 53(4), Autumn 1999, p p. 699-732. ([link](#))
- “Where Does the Money Go? Best and Worst Practices in Foreign Aid.” William Easterly and Tobias Pfutze. 2008. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*. 22(2). ([link](#))
- “The Principal-Agent Problem in Development Assistance and its Negative Impact on Local Entrepreneurship in Africa: Time for New Approaches.” 2003. Philipp Aerni. *African Development Forum Journal*. 3(2). p27-33. ([link](#))
- Video lectures by Jim Thompson

Recommended Readings.

- UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-2021 <https://undocs.org/DP/2017/38>
- One World Development Report (World Bank) from the last 10 years. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr/wdr-archive>
- “A Decade of Measuring the Quality of Governance: Governance Matters 2007” World Bank, Washington DC, 2007.

Lecture Quiz 2. Due Tuesday September 2, 4:30pm

Assignment: System / SDG / Challenge. Due Thursday, September 4, 11:59pm

No Class: September 9

Assignment: Short Reflection 2. Due Monday, September 15, 2025, 11:59pm

CLASS 3. September 16.

Human Development

Dignity and Capabilities. Careful Stakeholder segmentation. Examples: Education, Health.

Required Readings.

- “Introduction: Development as Freedom,” (p3-11); “Chapter 1: The Perspective of Freedom” (p13-34); “Chapter 4: Poverty as Capability Deprivation” (p87-110); and “Chapter 8: Women’s Agency and Social Change” (p189-203) in *Development as Freedom*. Amartya Sen
- “Measuring Acute Poverty in the Developing World: Robustness and Scope of the Multidimensional Poverty Index” Sabina Alkire Maria and Emma Santos. *World Development*. Volume 59, July 2014, p251-274. ([link](#))
- “Chapter 9: Reluctant Entrepreneurs.” (p205-234). in *Poor Economics*. Abhijit Bannerjee and Esther Duflo. 2011. Public Affairs. New York. (**local entrepreneurship**)

Recommended Readings

- "Multidimensional Poverty Analysis: Conceptual Issues, Empirical Illustrations, and Policy Implications". *World Development*. 2008. 36(6).
- One Human Development Report (UNDP) from the last 10 years.
<http://www.hdr.undp.org/en/global-reports>

Lecture Quiz 3. Due Tuesday September 16, 4:30pm

Assignment: Paper Prospectus. Due Sunday September 21, 11:59pm

CLASS 4. September 23.

Appropriate Action & Responsible Development

Adapting solutions to generate ideas. Challenges of deliverability and distribution. Examples: Digital divide, user-centered design, and appropriate technology

Required Readings

- "Locally-led development in a time of disruption." by George Ingram and Anthony F. Pipa for Brookings Institution. July 2025.
- "What Strategies are Viable for Developing Countries Today? The World Trade Organization and the Shrinking of 'Development Space'," Robert Hunter Wade. 2003. *Review of International Political Economy*, 10(4). P621-644. ([link](#))
- "Escaping Capability Traps Through Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA)" Matt Andrews, Lant Pritchett, and Michael Woolcock. *World Development*. Volume 51, November 2013, p234-244. ([link](#))
- "Scientific Background: Understanding development and poverty alleviation." 2019. NobelPrize.org. Nobel Media AB 2019. ([link](#))

Recommended Readings

- "Want to end Poverty? Focus on One Thing." Guest Essay by Rajiv Shah, President of the Rockefeller Foundation and former administrator for USAID. *The New York Times*. September 22, 2024.
- "Want Vaccines Fast? Suspend Intellectual Property Rights." By Achal Prabhala, Arjun Jayadev and Dean Baker. *The New York Times*. Dec. 7, 2020. Goes perfectly with Robert Wade's paper.
- "World Economic And Social Survey 2018: Frontier Technologies For Sustainable Development" ([link](#))

Lecture Quiz 4. Due Tuesday September 23, 4:30pm

Assignment: Short Reflection 3. Due Monday September 29, 2025, 11:59pm

CLASS 5. September 30.

Management, Measurement & Assessment

National and local. Identifying and reducing uncertainty and risk.

Required Readings.

- **"From crisis to sustainable impact at scale: Rethinking global development"** by Richard Carey, Li Xiaoyun, Poonam Muttreja, and Jean-Michel Severino for Brookings. May 2025. On transformational scaling— "rooting solutions in local leadership, systems change, and long-term collaboration."
- "Learning from national policies supporting MDG implementation. World Economic and Social Survey 2014/2015" United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. 2016. Chapter 1 (p1-18). ([link](#))
- "Chapter 6: Barefoot Hedge-fund Managers" (p134-155) (**risk**) and "Chapter 7: The Men from Kabul and the Eunuchs of India: the (Not So) Simple Economics of Lending to the Poor." (p156-181). in *Poor Economics*. Abhijit Bannerjee and Esther Duflo. 2011. Public Affairs. New York. (**credit**)
- "Using a principal agent model to explain user-centered design challenges for mother tongue reading in Kenya" Ariel Schwartz, Eva Kaplan, Evviva Weinraub Lajoie, Trey Terrell, and Esther Ajambo. 2015. *Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on Information and Communication Technologies and Development, ICTD*.

Recommended Readings

- *Development Fieldwork: A Practical Guide*. Regina Scheyvens and Donovan Storey, eds. 2003. Sage Publications. London
- *The Field Study Handbook*. Jan Chipchase. 2017. Field Institute. San Francisco.
- "The Influence of Randomized Controlled Trials on Development Economics Research and on Development Policy. 2016. Abhijit Vinayak Banerjee, Esther Duflo, and Michael Kremer. Paper prepared for "The State of Economics, The State of the World" ([link](#))
- "Understanding and Misunderstanding Randomized Controlled Trials" Angus Deaton and Nancy Cartwright. NBER Working Paper No. 22595. Issued in September 2016, Revised in October 2017 ([link](#))

Lecture Quiz 5. Due Tuesday September 30, 4:30pm

Assignment: Final Paper. Due October 12, 11:59pm

Supplemental Readings + Resources for 2025

There is a lot happening in the international development space! This is a huge topic and news moves quickly. Here is a brief selection of key areas to follow in 2025.

United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)

[September 2025](#). "The 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly – under the theme Better together: 80 years and more for peace, development and human rights – comes at a pivotal moment to renew global commitment to multilateralism, solidarity and shared action for people and planet. This year's high-level week highlights the urgency of delivering on the promise of the Sustainable Development Goals and reinvigorating global cooperation." Events and topics include 80th Anniversary of the United

Nations general debate, Climate Summit, info on progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the 30th Anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Summit for a Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient Global Economy, 30th Anniversary of the World Programme of Action for Youth, Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health and Well-being, International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, and Situation of Rohingya Muslims and Other Minorities in Myanmar. UNGA also connects with Climate Week!

Financing for Development

- **Trends in International Development Cooperation**, January 2025. Prepared by UN ECOSOC in preparation for the 4th conference on FFD from SDG Knowledge Hub).
- **Results of the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development (FFD)**, June 2025. ([link](#)) and ([news](#).) and ([link](#)). from UN.org)
- **"What's next for global development funding in 2025."** by Raquel Alcega for DevEx. April 2025. ([link](#))
- **"How Much, How Well: Development Finance Performance 2025,"** by Sam Hughes , Ian Mitchell and Edward Wickstead for Center for Global Development. June 2025.

New topics: AI, Elimination of US Foreign Aid, Global Trade Barriers, and Repercussions for International Development

Noticing that some global news creates new waves for the sector, while recurring meetings (UNGA, COP, FFD, etc) create ongoing structures that create opportunities for the global community to absorb, respond, and plan. This list is just a brief selection, intended to give you a sense of the current debates and also where to find up-to-the-minute thoughtful conversation about current events.

- **"Evaluating the impact of two decades of USAID interventions and projecting the effects of defunding on mortality up to 2030: a retrospective impact evaluation and forecasting analysis"** Daniella Medeiros Cavalcanti, Lucas de Oliveira Ferreira de Sales, Andrea Ferreira da Silva, Elisa Landin Basterra, Daiana Pena, Caterina Monti, Gonzalo Barreix, Natanael J Silva, Paula Vaz, Francisco Saute, Gonzalo Fanjul, Quique Bassat, Denise Naniche, James Macinko, Davide Rasella. The Lancet. July 2025. ([PDF](#))
- **"The Future of Official Development Assistance: Incremental Improvements or Radical Reform?"** by Masood Ahmed , Rachael Calleja and Pierre Jacquet for the Center for Global Development. January, 2025.)
- **"Navigating the Tipping Point: Four futures for a Global development cooperation system in flux: policy at the intersection of geopolitics, norm contestation and institutional shift"** by Stephan Klingebiel and Andy Sumner (Policy Brief 11/2025) for German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS) (assigned in week 1)
- **"UN warns of \$4 trillion shortfall threatening global development goals"** by Vibhu Mishra for *UN News*. April 2025.
- **"How AI is Shaping the Future of Global Development: Key Insights from CID's Global Empowerment Meeting."** by Mary Mei for Harvard Center for International Development. May 2025.
- **"Locally-led development in a time of disruption."** by George Ingram and Anthony F. Pipa for Brookings Institution. July 2025. (assigned in week 4)
- **"In 2025, global development's new era begins"** by Raj Kumar for DevEx. January 2025
- **"With the move to freeze foreign aid, the international development sector stands at a crossroads"** by members at Harvard Kennedy School, including Fatema Sumar on "USAID's history should matter to its future"; Celestin Monga on "A deficit of leadership," Zoe Marks on "The game

plays on," Akash Deep on "The development finance outlook," Asim Khwaja on: The sector stands at a crossroads," Juan Jimenez: "A new global context." February 2025.

- **"The End of Development Cooperation?"** a speech by Masood Ahmed for the Opening Address at 2025 Annual Bank Conference on Development Economics, "Development in the Age of Populism" at the Center for Global Development. July 2025.
- New book! ***The Apostles of Development: Six Economists and the World They Made.*** David Engerman. Oxford University Press. 2025.
- **"5 futures for aid in a divided world."** by Robert Muggah and Jago Salmon for World Economic Forum. April 2025.
- **"From crisis to sustainable impact at scale: Rethinking global development"** by Richard Carey, Li Xiaoyun, Poonam Muttreja, and Jean-Michel Severino for Brookings. May 2025.
- On transformational scaling, "rooting solutions in local leadership, systems change, and long-term collaboration." (assigned in week 5)
- "OECD Development Assistance Committee Guidance on **Scaling Development Outcomes**" OECD. December 2024.
- "Vol. 31 (2025): **Unseen Powerhouses: The Rise of Indigenous Enterprise**" *Social Innovations Journal*. July 2025. This body of work is organized "into three thematic windows: Regenerative Farming and Indigenous Agri-Enterprises — where traditional farming wisdom converges with climate solutions to support biodiversity, food sovereignty, and livelihoods; Forest Economies and Circular Enterprises — exploring ethical wild harvesting, sustainable value chains, and creative economies rooted in forest ecosystems; and Healing, Justice, and Cultural Revival — spotlighting intergenerational trauma healing, cultural renewal, and well-being as foundations of community-led development."