



## Introduction

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This Special Issue of *Revue Éthique et Économique / Ethics and Economics* features articles presented at the Ninth International IDEA Conference (International Development Ethics Association) on "Gender, Justice and Development: Local and Global", held in June 2001 at Bryn Mawr College. The papers presented at the Conference reflected diverse perspectives from research areas including philosophy and the humanities, social sciences, policy studies, development studies, as well as local and global organizations. Consistent with IDEA's goal of promoting North-South exchange, the objective of this special issue of *E&E* is meant to exhibit this diversity of perspectives and research in a small group of articles with a broad range of issues, approaches and regions, concerning development ethics in general and gender justice in particular. The authors hail from four continents: Africa, Asia, North America and South America. Their topics range from theoretical approaches to development ethics and abstract questions of basic goods, global justice, and exploitation to the more practical matters of economic development, land ownership, and lending schemes.

The first article, Jay Drydyk's *Presidential address*, focuses on questions of how to approach the very idea of development and development ethics. Drydyk locates seven ethical values at the core of the theory and practice of development ethics: equality, empowerment, environmental sustainability, human rights, inclusion and freedom. These values, he argues, have underpinned the distinctions between worthwhile development and maldevelopment that have been drawn and debated by development theorists, advisors, practitioners, and advocates for the past six decades. Much of this thinking, especially about the value of equity and empowerment, arose from concerns about gender justice. He goes on to argue that thinking about these values and thinking about gender justice in particular should continue to be mutually reinforcing.

Mario Solís's article addresses the issues of development ethics by examining the elemental concepts of *justice* and *basic goods*. The author departs from the suspicion that we are still in need of a better theoretical answer to the question as to what is the *elemental justifiability* of a *social minimum* (he calls it a sufficiency threshold) and how that relates to theories of justice. Solís argues that some plausible answers to these two issues have to take on board the division of labour between the question as to why we should look at a social minimum as a matter of justice and the question as to whether this minimum is too restrictive or too

demanding as a matter of justice. (Some theorists – libertarians for the most part – would even reject the very idea of a *social minimum* from the start, independent from how demanding the social minimum may be. Others theorists—strict egalitarians for the most part—would think that the idea of a social minimum is, at best, too little to ask for). Drawing on two contemporary influential moral and political philosophers, *i.e.* David Miller and John Rawls, the author examines the following claim: access to basic goods should be understood as a matter of justice *and* as that which entails global justice as such. This article contributes to the theorization in development ethics by trying to call attention to one contentious point: if global justice is to be meaningful, it must robustly account for the rationale of justice as embedded in the quest for (universal) access to basic goods—it should at least illuminate the fundamentally just demand for securing basic goods, calling upon the satisfaction of basic needs as a matter of justice. Albeit indirectly, this article captures two of the values at the core of development ethics mentioned above: equity and human rights.

More concretely, Michael Barnes takes on the issue of sweatshop labour and argues against the claim that consensual-beneficial exploitation of sweatshop workers cannot be seriously wrong. The author delivers a sustained critique of the basic assumption from those who reject that sweatshop labour is exploitative, namely, that such type of labour has to be seen as another path to development. Through some instructive thought experiments and some fine lines of reasoning, Barnes's paper makes it clear that a critique of sweatshop labour requires a good understanding of the notion of exploitation and a fine reading of the context where such type of labour takes place. His main point—a fundamental one for the theory and practice of development ethics—is that even if one takes sweatshop labour itself as morally permissible, there is still a moral failure in ignoring or dismissing the unjust background conditions that make it possible—and a moral failure in overlooking the duties and responsibilities to address such conditions. Development ethics cannot be agnostic on such debates, and it is the virtue of Barnes's article to bring all of this to the fore.

The fourth article is another good example of sophisticated development ethics analysis applied to a particular issue. Eric Palmer's article examines the two main lending schemes, microcredit and microfinance, that are commonly thought to be a source of women's inclusion and empowerment. Palmer's critique of these lending schemes in India is very instructive and far-reaching. Dependency on micro-loans has led to dependency as new loans are taken out to service older loans; far from empowering, the result is highly disempowering. In a stunning comparison, Palmer likens this cyclical micro-borrowing to payday-loan schemes in the United States. He then frames the issue of the lenders' more basic moral responsibility by invoking the notion of *vulnerability*. Drawing on Denis Goulet's conceptualization of vulnerability (1971), he reflects on the moral duties and the special conditions of lenders and borrowers in relation to a particular condition, that is, the condition of sensitivity to shock and the inability to rally in the face of setbacks. The article also captures a central concern (and value) in development ethics: care for the other's well-being.

Shalini Iyengar addresses the issue of gender within the context of Multilateral Development Bank (MDB) projects to strengthen rule of law in developing countries. Iyengar notes that the MDBs have acknowledged the importance of human development and gender equity, but she questions whether the structure and functioning of MDBs does not hinder rather than promote gender equity within MDB projects. It is problematic, she argues, that gender is

conceptualized not as a sector of MDB activity but as a theme. While in policy this approach is meant to mainstream gender issues more evenly among sectors, the number of projects in which gender is a concern, and the extent of that concern (and funding to back it) are not adequate, she argues. She proposes a wide range of measures that might be undertaken to give greater attention to gender, including conditionality, greater attention in the legal sphere to family courts and informal justice institutions, and greater democracy and inclusion of stakeholders in project/program decision-making.

The final article of this collection takes on the main issues of the conference (development, justice and gender), now in relation to a fundamental problem of women's land ownership in the political and cultural context of anglophone Cameroon. The article, mostly an empirical study, deals with the crucial relationship between women's tenure rights, the political and cultural aspect of land ownership (in this case, the particularly challenging context of Cameroon), and the institutional determinants of women's empowerment. The authors make it clear that empowering women in socio-economical terms does require real and fair access to land ownership, and that a country like Cameroon, with a cultural tradition that neglects such tenure rights for women, has a moral and political responsibility to lead its laws and institutions onto the road of gender recognition.

If worthwhile development is indeed defined by a small number of values, these articles touch on many of those values. And this is appropriate. The broad values identified by Drydyk flag topics for further research, for while people may agree, given their experience with maldevelopment, on broad values such as well-being, equity, and empowerment as necessary conditions for good development, still, the meaning of 'well-being', 'equity', 'empowerment' and the rest needs to be filled in by means of research on specific issues in particular contexts. Mario Solís contributes to our understanding of equity in development with by showing how a social minimum is required by theories of justice that disagree on many other points. The article on exploitation, by Michael Barnes, instructively develops our understanding, in terms of equity, of what is wrong with sweatshop exploitation. Eric Palmer presents striking evidence that micro-lending, which is commonly regarded to be a major means of empowerment, can actually be quite disempowering, in rich countries and poor countries alike.

The remaining two articles demonstrate the importance of understanding the values of development ethics *in relation to each other*. Shalini Iyengar reveals the inadequacy of some programs to reinforce the rule of law (and hence human rights) in relation to the value of equity, specifically gender equity. Finally Fombe *et al.* enrich our understanding of gender equity by showing the importance of changing land tenure practices, which in turn requires reconsideration of traditional norms: in this light, their message is that cultural freedom needs to be exercised so as to be more supportive of gender equity

Together, the authors illustrate the rich diversity of approaches that can be taken to development ethics.