



The Locals Know Best

A month into my fieldwork in South Africa, a manager from the provincial Department of Social Development asked me, “Do we take off our development coats when we get home from work? Are we wearing development or is it inside us?” As the field of international development becomes increasingly professionalized, questions like these remind aspiring practitioners, like me, that development ought not be treated like a typical 9:00–5:00 job. To submit to the common practice of treating development as a hobby or simply a career would be to trivialize the realities and identities of those development projects I seek to help.

Just as development practice should not be treated like an ordinary day job, my experience in South Africa in summer 2007 taught me that there is nothing *international* about development. Rather, what I term community development is an organic process of positive change that emerges from within local communities. Even

though challenges such as unemployment and infectious disease are global problems, solutions to these common problems are frequently unique and specific to local cultures and histories. The central challenge confronting practitioners seems to be balancing the need for participation in the professionalized international development arena, while still being committed to local approaches and non-hierarchical relationships.

“Few, if any, of the Lord’s instructions are stated more often, or given more emphasis in the scriptures than is the commandment that we members of His church [take care of the poor.](#)”

Marion G. Romney, “Caring for the Poor—A Covenantal Obligation,” *Ensign*, Nov 1978, p. 87

No Events