

## SPECIAL FEATURE INTRODUCTION

# CULTURE IN DEVELOPMENT: NEW PERSPECTIVES

Harmonization of development goals continues to pose problems for political scientists, economists, and policymakers alike. Successful application and implementation of development policy proves more elusive still. What works in Taiwan may not work in Argentina. South Korean policies for achieving political stability and economic growth might fail in Nigeria. How can standard models adapt to country-specific problems? In their analyses, scholars try to reconcile unique aspects of diverse countries. One central variable emerges: culture.

The notion of culture is deceptive, its definition vague. Often, theorists and policymakers disagree on the meaning of both culture and development. If no reasonable explanation for a country's economic or political difficulties can be uncovered, culture is often "blamed." Others view culture, attitudes, beliefs, and values as *the* key components in ensuring development. Still others, notably *dependencistas*, discount the legitimacy of the cultural element. Consensus is rarely reached. Cohesion of policy, therefore, is seldom realized.

Whether as residual category, independent agent, or dependent factor, serious examination of culture, having risen and declined in predominance over the past forty years, is now revisited. This issue of *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* explores the sensitive task of defining culture, determining whether or how culture changes, considering the extent to which culture is a variable in the development equation, and providing a prescription for the future. Covering the regional spectrum from Haiti to Burma, from West Africa to the Southern Cone, the authors wrestle with theory, practice, and tradition. Uncovering political culture's underpinnings from Max Weber to Clifford Geertz, they debate the importance of culture.

This fresh synthesis of approaches reignites the debate about injecting culture into development policy. The crossfire demonstrates the potent role of the human variable, which sharpens the ongoing dilemma.

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