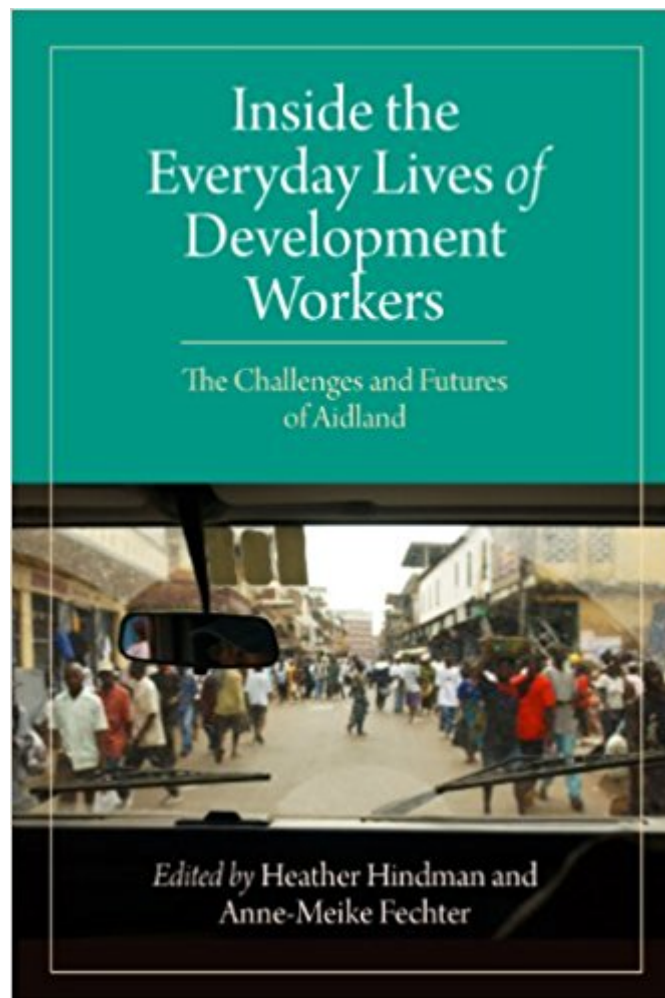




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# **Inside The Everyday Lives Of Development Workers: The Challenges And Futures Of Aidland**



## Synopsis

\* Explores the social and cultural worlds shaping aid workers and their development practices\* Shows how aid workers in the "field" negotiate a variety of often conflicting and contradictory imperatives of the development system Much and warranted attention is paid to the lives of aid recipients and their household lives, saving habits, gender relations, etc. It is held that a key to measuring the effectiveness of aid is contained in such details. Rarely, however, is the lens turned on the lives of aid workers themselves. Yet the seemingly impersonal network of agencies and donors that formulate and implement policy are composed of real people with complex motivations and experiences that might also provide important lessons about development's failures and successes. Hindman and Fechter break new ground by illuminating the social and cultural world of the aid agency, a world that is neglected in most discussions of aid policy. They examine how aid workers' moral beliefs interlink and conflict with their initial motivations, how they relate to aid beneficiaries, their local NGO counterparts, and other aid workers, their views on race and sexuality, the effect of transient lifestyles and insider language, and the security and family issues that come with choosing such a career. Ultimately, they arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of development processes that acknowledges a rich web of relationships at all levels of the system.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"This collection directs us to think about the labor of aid work and the study of aid work from a fresh

perspective. The issues raised are crucial for courses that deal with development anthropology, intercultural dynamics of international conflict management, management of nonprofits, organization studies, political anthropology, anthropology of work, and even introductory cultural anthropology courses. I imagine that people in aidemia, like Peace Corps volunteers and NGO workers, as well as readers within academia, would find it useful, if not also eye opening." "Rich with insight into the daily lives and entanglements, the dilemmas and reflections, of the people who work on the front lines of development in a period when roles such as altruistic hero, or technical expert, or even professional or employee are fragile, and the entire enterprise of development invites cynicism and critique. By opening the black box on development work, the authors offer glimpses of soul-searching and pragmatism in equal measure, as workers struggle to find meaning in their work, or simply to get their work done. It is an overdue topic, subjected here to searching analysis." "The international aid industry is now a significant sector employing a vast array of specialized professionals, administrators, field workers and volunteers. Understanding the work that is undertaken by the people who live and work within this increasingly powerful yet diverse world has long been neglected in the study of international aid. Drawing on up-to-date ethnographic work by leading academic researchers, this timely book provides a fascinating set of insights into their public and private lives." "This is a superb book, and should be read by a wide range of people, not least those thinking of working in the field." "Inside the Everyday Lives of Development Workers: The Challenges and Futures of Aidland, edited by Anne-Meike Fechter and Heather Hindman and published by Kumarian Press, is an ethnographic exploration of the people who make up Aidland. Any book that helps us aid workers and do-gooders cultivate the sophistication needed to find our way among the great responsibility, privilege and burden of Aidland is welcome."

Heather Hindman started her academic career as a scholar of Nepal. Early work on elite ethnic organizations in Kathmandu elided into an interest in the foreign diplomats and aid workers with whom they often socialized. In a forthcoming book, Hindman explicates the social world of expatriates in Nepal as an example of the hidden actors of globalization. In addition, she has published on the influence of U.S. foreign policy on aid priorities, the training of expatriate personnel, the essentialization of culture and the hidden labor of elite transnational women. She frequently presents on her current research on the outsourcing of specialized services and the transformation of risk onto global laborers. In addition, she is active in refugee support, the Transnationalism Project at the University of Chicago and the Graduate Consortium on

Women's Studies. Anne-Meike Fechter's early work focused on Euro-American corporate expatriates in South East Asia. The resulting monograph, entitled *Transnational Lives: Expatriates in Indonesia* (Routledge 2007), analyzes Euro-Americans working in Jakarta within the context of transnationalism and globalisation. More recently, she has begun a research project on aid workers as mobile professionals with particular regard to Cambodia, which follows their careers, life courses and experiences of place while on an overseas posting. She is also editor, with Anne Coles, of the volume *Gender and Family among Transnational Professionals* (Routledge 2007), and with Katie Walsh, of a recent special issue of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (2010) which presents studies in the framework of *Post/colonial Encounters: Expatriates in Comparative Perspective*.

Inside the everyday lives of development workers - the challenges and futures of Aidland This is a superb book, and should be read by a wide range of people, not least those thinking of working in the field. Largely put together as an edited collection of contributions by anthropologists, it marshals a range of views of the diverse and varied people who do the work required to turn tax-payers money, and NGO donations, into development interventions. In doing so, it raises some crucial questions: just what is the distinction between altruistic and selfish motives that so many think important? The evidence presented suggests that this distinction is important but usually muddled, as why people do what they do cannot easily be thought of in such dichotomous terms. A nice story is that of the person hiring people to work with the heavily disempowered, who had come to the conclusion that those who were in part selfishly motivated were better, as they gave the disempowered something with which to negotiate. Other chapters raise the issue of the value of personal relations to Ghanaians working, often in clearly useful ways: it is wrong for them to use such particular contacts? This starts to develop what is a powerful underlying theme in the book - the meaning of current trends to rationalise aid work, often treating personnel as sources of identifiable expertise, to be plugged in to particular tasks identified by senior levels in Aidland's hierarchies. There are useful discussions of the texture of aid work in Madagascar, or Mennonites and others, focussing, not on 'development', but on how development work is done, how it is involved with the normal aspects of work and life, and how power asymmetries are apparently inherent in such relationships. An interesting discussion of the effects of contemporary Managerialism in Nepal shows how the 'old hands' of the industry, used to linking community and expertise, have been pushed aside by contract workers, often better paid, and clearly far less aware of the contextual and 'local' issues that other chapters report on, in all their tensions and confusions.

Underpinning this, of course, and this could have been dealt with a greater length, is the dysfunctional element of these increasingly abstract ways of dealing with local realities, which, many chapters show, have their own dynamics to which development workers have responded in various ways. As would be expected of anthropologists, and this book is part of a growing and very useful literature, we learn much about local meanings, the variety of development workers, how they live, their perceptions and concerns, and how these interact with context. The book is highly suitable as part of any development studies course. It is the sort of thing students should be told to read before the start of Semester 1. It poses major questions for the senior management of aid and other development organisations, for the evidence in it points squarely to the conclusion that use of current management doctrine that assumes much certainty and so use of 'plug and play' expertise is very risky. It suggests that powerful conclusions from earlier studies are still valid: that realities vary too much for it to be wise to assume that development workers can be treated like engineers. Indeed, much of the 'old expertise' removed from the stage by modern management methods can be understood, and the case studies show this, as an attempt to adapt to such variation.

Development studies students, of course, now treat this as mainstream and strongly attack tendencies to 'one size fits all' approaches. The sheer diversity and richness of the realities the book describe show how such assumptions will, at the end of the day, prove reckless.

Adam Fforde[...]Asia Institute, University of Melbourne [...] (Principal Fellow - honorary)Centre for Strategic Economic Studies, Victoria University [...] (Professorial Fellow, part-time - economics)School of Social Sciences, La Trobe University, [...] (Professor of International Development - part-time)

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