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Charles Piot (Ed.) *Doing Development in West Africa: A reader by and for undergraduates*. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2016. 232 pp. Cloth: \$84.95 ISBN 978-0-8223-6176-3 and Paperback: \$23.95 ISBN 978-0-8223-6192-3

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This is a very timely book written at the wake of a heightened globalization that facilitates sees the world in binary forms of developed and developing countries. The heightened sense of globalization sensitizes universities in the United States to globally engage, and it encourages students to participate in studying foreign languages and be part of study abroad programs that widen their scope in understanding issues facing global contemporary cultures from many disciplinary positions. Some engage in the actual implantation of small programs as the one the author highlights in this book. As an example that is cited in this book, “Duke alone has ten or more group projects in African every summer” (p.2). This shift, the editor argues, emanates from students’ increased awareness to make positive changes in the world. This is evidenced by the increase in the number of students who want to venture into helping with development projects within developing countries.

The editor states that in West Africa “students volunteer in rural health clinics; set up micro-lending initiatives; build schools and dig wells; organize the local textiles to markets of the global North-and the list goes on” (p.1). The author argues that these students, like many development agencies, no matter how prepared they may be linguistically and theoretically in class, may lack the cultural competency skills required for the effective implantation of projects in developing countries. These projects, most of the time, then do not take-off and sometimes backfire for lack of alignment with people’s local understandings and realities. The cultural immersion of these students in these setting facilitate the development of skills and understandings in cultural competencies that can only be articulated outside classroom contexts, and found in fieldwork and among people. One of the students in these projects, Stephen Rotolo, having taken classes and prepared widely before traveling to West Africa indicates that “there were some things I simply could not have anticipated” (p.19).

The book is unique because it is written “by and for undergraduates” as the title and content attest. These students represent first-hand experiences in cultures of West Africa. Though they are all from Duke University, they are also from a cohort of students that have diverse

majors and who come from different national backgrounds as reflected in most American schools. This book, when viewed as a case study, can be representative and applicable to most if not all undergraduate college students and enhance their experiences with their development projects or study abroad programs in developing countries.

The book begins with an editor's introduction in which he discusses the status of the US' heightened consciousness regarding those studying abroad. It contextualizes the book by focusing on the students at Duke University as an example, and it elaborates on the kind of projects students engage in; in other words, it refers to their challenges, their successes, and their resiliencies as they confront real cultural situations. The author then ventures into the historicity of "development in West Africa" (p.5). He sets the stage by discussing the shift from mega national development projects at the turn of independence that focused more on infrastructure and that was managed predominantly by the state and at a national level to micro-level forms. This change at the local level is characterized by loosening of state control of development projects, to a focus on the daily needs of people such as health, female education and poverty reduction.

This shift has also opened doors for international NGOs and other stakeholders interested in assisting to improve lives in developing countries. The author explains the shift within the neoliberalism debate by stating that "the new liberal era is characterized by state pullback, decentralization, democratization, "NGO-ization," the privatization, and marketization of almost everything, and the emergence of the consumer citizen, and class consolidation and growing inequality..." (p. 6). The author argues that though there are many causes for failure of development projects in the global south, he emphasized that the failure is "also due to the development apparatus failure to appreciate-understand, take account of, spend time studying, articulate projects with local realities" (p7). Tapping into these dynamics, the students engage in projects that are individually initiated and in accord with the local realities.

The rest of the book is mainly occupied by students' fieldwork reflections and their research articles. By including students in writing their own experiences and publishing with their mentor who in this case is the author, students are able to practically engage with their academic world, fieldwork, and cultural competencies, and in the process become agents of change; in other words, it assists them to disseminate their findings to a wider audience. In sum, this book can serve as a model to follow by both undergraduate professors needing to engage students in their research, undergraduates requiring to get involved in projects in developing countries, and cooperate with development agencies that need to be enlightened with the practicalities of development projects at the local levels.

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