

One World Repaying the debt of



Globalisation is a word that we read and hear often now. But it's not just trade links that have grown ever more connected in the 21st century, it's ideas too. The University's research is part of this: many of our research centres have international links and some of our research looks has the world as its focus.

Two examples are given here: our research into how effective aid to developing countries has been is highly relevant – globalisation has not stopped famine, drought or floods from afflicting the planet, and monitoring the way the West responds is vital. Understanding the EU and its role on the world stage is vital, and our research is the first to analyse it in three areas of international policy: security, economy and human rights.

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Not all friendships are quite as they seem. Research into the daily struggles of some of the poorest households in the world reveal that while social relationships are important for the quality of people's lives, some of these can also be part of a poverty trap.

Studies into wellbeing, debt and social relationships in households in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Peru and Thailand confirm that relationships with family, neighbours and friends are fundamental for a sense of wellbeing but that they are often also important for more instrumental reasons. In particular, in poor communities they may represent a vital means of gaining access to loans.

For many households, and particularly for the poorest, loans can provide a lifeline in bridging the gap between

expenditure and income. However the burden of repayments means that these debts can often play an important role in keeping families in poverty.

“The research has shown a link not just between wellbeing and social relationships but between social relationships and debt,” said Dr Allister McGregor, Director of the Wellbeing in Developing Countries research group.

“For example, in Thailand households engage in community-based organisations with fellow villagers not only because they generate community solidarity but also because these organisations have become an increasingly important way of gaining access to government-financed loans.”

“In Bangladesh people invest in relationships as a necessary part of social life but also because this group constitutes the major source of small loans for most households.”

“People build relationships because they help them feel connected and good about themselves but some of these relationships also give them better access to loans.

“The paradox lies in that while social relationships contribute to wellbeing, the resulting pressures from indebtedness may also detract from wellbeing and may keep families in poverty. With the results of this research we will be able to look at alternative ways of helping people out of poverty traps.”

The Wellbeing in Developing Countries research group is part of the Department of Economics & International Development. Funded by the Economic & Social Research Council, it works in close collaboration with local institutions in each of the four study countries: Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Peru and Thailand.

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The shifting borders of a united front

Has the European Union (EU) become an ineffective and irrelevant player in the global politics of the 21st century? Do the individual political agendas of its member states result in an organisation that is a 'union' in name only?

Research in the Department of European Studies & Modern Languages has been looking at the successes and failures of the EU and identifying what its role might be in the future.

The EU was conceived in the aftermath of the Second World War with the aim of preventing history repeating itself. Its membership has grown from six to 25 countries, with Romania and Bulgaria set to join in January 2007, and today it represents 450 million people.

Professor Richard Whitman, pictured right, who has been leading the research, says: "The size of the EU's economy, the internationalism of its currency - the euro - and its role as a provider of foreign aid should make it an organisation able to shape international relations.

"But the individual foreign policies of its member states, and the increasing influence of rising powers such as China and India, and the USA superpower, have made the EU's future in global politics increasingly unclear.

"This is the first research being done to analyse the role of the EU in three areas of international policy: security, economy and human rights. It aims to understand the functions that the EU performs in international relations, the objectives that it seeks to pursue, and ultimately to identify ways in which it might play a more effective role."

Professor Whitman, who works closely with Chatham House (the Royal Institute of International Affairs), has organised a series of seminars on the role and future of the EU. His research is funded by the James Madison Trust.

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Additional research projects in this area include: research into Europeanisation, conflict and change, trade and security, governance and migration; plus welfare, work and wellbeing and the changing role of women in Europe.

Work on democracy and political parties including consultancy and advisory work for the British Parliament and the Home Office; on-going research on the extreme right, and projects on the German Green Party.

Research is looking at identifying ways to improve education in the Third World through new initiatives and policies; the treatment and representation of minorities within multinational states, using China and India as case studies; and the piracy that makes Somalian waters the most dangerous in the world.

Other research includes a major project on wine culture and consumption, and an online history of French opera.