

ETHICAL GUIDELINES

of the Workgroup Development
Anthropology (AGEE) e. V.

Explanations and
Practical Advice



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1 Development

We define development as the improvement of people's situations according to their own criteria and goals against the background of a common global responsibility. From our point of view, the strive for social justice and ecological sustainability is a consequence of this conception of development.

2 Respect

Fundamentally different value systems clash in development policy and development cooperation. We commit ourselves to respecting different views and life plans. Dealing with different goals of development requires empathy and willingness to understand on the personal level; on an institutional level it asks for the creation of suitable opportunities for open dialogue, and on a political level it demands readiness to negotiate and fairness. Respect in this sense does not mean acceptance of all values without criticism, but a constructive reflection.

3 Participation

Participation is not only a method for us, but an important objective of development policy. Participation includes that people formulate their development goals themselves and that they participate significantly in the realization of these goals. Hence participation frequently also connotes an empowerment of the disadvantaged and a questioning of the balance of power. In this respect, we are aware that we operate in highly complex social networks. Changing the relationship between a patron and a client, for example, is not always desired by those affected or of immediate benefit to them. Appropriately implementing the principle of participation therefore makes high demands on all parties involved; it has to be called in repeatedly from employers and other decision makers. We feel obliged to work towards the change or the discontinuation of projects, which are carried out against the will of the local population or individual groups within it.

4 Transparency

Through our work we aim at the greatest possible transparency. Prior to fieldwork, the local population and other participating actors have to be informed about the interests of the employer, of the implementing agency, or of the research institute, as well as the origin, aims and methods of the project or activity. Similarly, after finishing the work, the results should be presented in an adequate manner. The informants should have the opportunity of a final evaluation. We are requested to account for our methods and recommendations. We should also confront the public and the scientific debate in the host country as well as in our home country.

5 Holism

Work in development anthropology, too, is rooted in the holistic approach of the discipline. Consequently, it takes into account the systemic relationships between the different spheres of life of a population group. It also considers the ecological, political, economical, social and ideological circumstances of the region. As development anthropologists we try to achieve interdisciplinary cooperation; if necessary, we encourage such work. We reject working conditions that, for example, do not permit the minimum of time needed for a holistic approach.

6 Unintended Effects

If we recognize that a project which is useful for certain groups harms other parts of society to an extent that is unacceptable, we point out this danger and we work towards developing alternatives. If we are not being listened to, or if alternatives that we have proposed are rejected, we should cease to cooperate.

7 Assuring the protection of data and informants

As development anthropologists we are more obliged to the people than to knowledge as such. We take care that personal rights are not violated. This is particularly relevant for the anonymity of persons and locations. Local rules for privacy ought to be respected.

8 Limits of the requirement of confidentiality

Obvious abuse, such as the violation of human rights or destruction of the environment that we learn about while staying in a country or region should be published in an appropriate form, possibly by passing on the information to the public or a suitable organization. The requirement of confidentiality laid down in the contract should be related only to internal matters (staff and finances) of the project.

How to use these guidelines

These »Ethical Guidelines« should be made explicit to all participants. We, as development anthropologists are requested to defend them, particularly when dealing with potential employers and to refuse to cooperate in organizations, projects, and studies if the core of the principles cannot be adhered to. We support persons who face difficulties because they acted in accordance with the guidelines. We seek to cooperate with organizations which support these guidelines, and we try to sensitize further organizations as to the content of the guidelines.