Ethnographic Practice and Public Aid

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Ethnographic Practice and Public Aid
Methods and Meanings in Development Cooperation
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Foreword

The arts and crafts of anthropologists in applied development practice display a spectrum of approaches, tools, attitudes and ways of working. This book shows some of these trade secrets and engages the reader in the intrinsic web of relations and practices within contemporary institutions of development cooperation. These relations and practices often set the parameters in smaller and larger development interventions and within policy formulation. They lay implicit within the Swedish Policy for Global Development (2002), expressed through the Rights perspective and Poor people’s perspectives on development.

While ethnographic knowledge and practice may add to the overall analysis and interpretation of context – the natural point of departure for all development cooperation – the practical approaches of applied anthropology are often expressed through participatory tools of inquiry, which at the same time open up anthropology to other disciplines and practices. These approaches are used methodologically and for specific purposes in development cooperation, but also exist as implicit and subtle ways to relate to development and change, thereby becoming much more associated with attitudes and behaviours of development practitioners themselves. These ‘anthropologists from within’ are well expressed in the collection of papers in this book. Some of them work in development cooperation agencies as well, including at Sida.

A great challenge facing development cooperation in current times is that aid is channelled through larger interventions such as programme and general budget support. This prompts governments and agencies such as Sida to understand and clarify the links between national resource flows and impacts on the lives of people living in poverty. Ethnographic practice and applied anthropology play an important role here; as analytical tools, for evaluation purposes, for development results, but above all as a way to handle the knowledge generation and understanding of how the local relates to the national and global and vice versa. It is this ambition and necessity that social and cultural anthropology can contribute to in contemporary development cooperation. This book, which is the outcome
of the conference on Anthropology in Practice that Sida supported in 2006, provides valuable examples of this kind.

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Acknowledgements

The first ideas for this book project date back to the mid-1990s when both of us were working together at the Development Studies Unit of the Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University. The strong sense of doing important, painstaking work for Sida and other donors also motivated a more profound reflection on how anthropologists do engage in and with development.

However, for various reasons it was not until ten years later that we were able to consider these ideas again and make a concrete proposal for funding a conference. Esse Nilsson, then socio-cultural adviser at Sida’s Department for Policy and Methodology, supported the conference idea as a way to gather anthropologists involved in development and aid. Other supportive people at Sida were Annika Lysén and Staffan Herrström. This support meant that Sida generously provided funding for the conference organisation, for which we are deeply grateful. The funding also covered a conference secretary, Ms. Mariam Persson. Mariam did a wonderful job of keeping all the strings together, making the whole organisation run smoothly in a friendly atmosphere. Thank you, Mariam!

We would also like to thank our fellow anthropologists who presented papers and debated these issues during the event. While not all the papers are published in this book, all paper presenters, discussants and chairs, as well as many in the audience, made substantial contributions to the reflection on ethnographic practice and public aid.

We also want to thank Anne Cleaves for her careful language editing. As always, our Department of Cultural Anthropology & Ethnology supported the conference as well as the editorial process. As a complement to Sida support we also received funding for publishing the book from Wilhelm Ekmans fond at Uppsala University.

Uppsala, June 2009

Sten Hagberg and Charlotta Widmark
1. Introduction
Ethnographic Practice and Public Aid

The ambition of this book is to explore the interface of anthropology and development with a particular focus on how anthropologists working in aid settings use, apply and interact with theory and method. With recent transformations of development cooperation in line with the Paris Declaration and anthropology’s decreasing influence within the development sector, it has become particularly important to describe, analyse and reflect upon anthropologists’ experiences of being practically involved in international aid. In fact, despite the dominant positions of economists and political scientists working at macro-levels, many anthropologists still work in this professional field. Hence, the careful and thick description of such experiences is central both to understanding the ways in which public aid is currently organised and to arguing for stronger and more substantial anthropological engagement in development cooperation.

The roles of anthropologists have changed in current aid discourse and practices in which ‘projects’ and ‘programmes’ have given way to ‘budget’ and ‘sector’ supports and where poverty reduction is dealt with – and sometimes almost disguised – in policies and reforms at macro-levels. In a professional world so dominated by economists and political scientists, anthropologists have difficulties finding room to manoeuvre, let alone influencing the ways in which current development cooperation is organised. And yet anthropological knowledge and perspectives continue to be critical for improved development practice. For instance, it is central in the production of anthropological knowledge to take the specific context into account and to analyse the social relations shaping this context, and then also to apprehend the situations in which the context and the social relations determine the discourse and practices of social actors. Such anthropological perspectives are pertinent to policy, because to make sense, policy must address the contexts, relations and situations in which people
living in poverty are located (see Hagberg 2001), something easily said but far more difficult to do in actual policy. Tobisson (this volume) points to the problem of perspectives on poverty being based on generalised assumptions rather than informed understanding of what matters to poor people. It is as if the harsh realities in which poor people live are dealt with ‘at a distance’, away from the dirt and dust of everyday life. Donor agencies nowadays rarely have personnel involved in daily development operations but enrol a limited number of analysts and administrators to plan, contract and monitor the poverty reduction strategy, the sector development, or democracy and human rights issues. Ideally, donors are to be strategic funders of ‘partners’ (NGOs, state organisations, networks) that in turn contract with local organisations and/or private firms to implement programmes and projects. For donors, ‘macro’ is currently the leitmotiv. Yet whether we like it or not, such ‘donor distance’ – or ‘anonymity’ (Hagberg, this volume) – in relation to harsh realities is a challenge to development cooperation and by extension to anthropologists involved in development. Ironically, at a time when poor people’s perspectives and rights-based approaches are strongly advocated, the in-house knowledge and competence of donor agencies with respect to actual living conditions of poor people and their capabilities for claiming their rights seems to be losing ground. We therefore think it is relevant – for developers and anthropologists alike – to seriously ponder new possible entries of the ethnography in public aid.\(^1\)

This brief introduction elaborates on the central concerns of the book. First, we discuss the relationship between academic anthropology and applied anthropology and highlight the importance of theory and method both in working for development agencies and in doing research, and thus bringing practical experiences from development back to academia. Second, we deepen the reflection on how to move from the gap towards the interface of anthropology and development and identify key features of how this interface is construed. Third, we focus on methods and meanings of development, as it is central to assess professional, strategic and personal methods of putting anthropology into practice. We also discuss the development industry as a pervasive global phenomenon. Finally, we conclude by arguing for the privileged and creative anthropological posi-

\(^{1}\) While ethnography previously referred to the detailed description and analysis of an apparently discrete and bounded community, today the term is expanded to include the description and analysis of social relations within any group of people: social, professional or conceptual. A key element of ethnography is the direct, first-hand observation of daily behaviour, and in contrast to surveys and questionnaires, ethnography focuses on the research subject in her/his usual environment and context.
tion of in-between inside/outside, theory/practice and observation/participation in development cooperation practice.

Theory, method and ethnography

The focus of the book is on what anthropologists involved in public aid and development cooperation do in terms of theory, method and ethnography. The purpose is to bring anthropologists’ experiences from development practice back to the discipline of anthropology itself. The problematic relationship between academia and applied anthropology has been debated for a long time (Pink 2006: 6), and the status of applied anthropology seems to vary in different national contexts (Baba and Hill 1997). Here, rather than relegating anthropologists’ work in development cooperation to the field of business and administration far away from research carried out at universities and research institutes, we argue throughout this book that the conventional division of labour between the ‘anthropology of development’ and ‘development anthropology’ is unfortunate. In Michael Cernea’s words, ‘The idea that applied research is atheoretical – either does not use theory or does not lead to theory – disempowers the discipline of anthropology’ (Cernea 1995: 348). And yet the infertile dichotomy of an ‘anthropology of development’ that aims at understanding development as a set of power principles and practices to be subjected to anthropological scrutiny on the one hand, and a ‘development anthropology’ that aims at applying theoretical and methodological concepts and tools to actively promote social change on the other, seems to prevail. To bridge the dichotomous positions, our point of departure is that a practical anthropology must be theoretically and methodologically informed if it is to make substantial contributions to social change, and that a practical anthropology must provide important insights to the theoretical and methodological thinking of anthropology as a whole. With the conviction that anthropology at the universities and research institutes can play a crucial role in facilitating and promoting an exchange of experiences that may strengthen both theory and practice, the conference Anthropology in Practice: Theory, Method and Ethnography in Swedish Development Cooperation was organised at the Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology at Uppsala University at the end of 2006. The overall purpose was to gather anthropologists and practitioners with experience working in

development cooperation and to stimulate them to reflect upon theory, method and ethnography in their work. We were particularly interested in reaching Swedish anthropologists with ample experience in development who had not previously published much about their practical work and experience. While many of them publish regularly, we were eager to have papers on ethnographic practice in development. Indeed, drafts of most chapters were first presented at this conference.

The papers that are now published in this book, aimed at an audience of academics and students as well as development practitioners and policy makers, all reflect upon anthropological practice in development contexts to explore new forms of anthropological engagement. The book Ethnographic Practice and Public Aid is, to use the phrasing of one contributor, ‘hovering on the threshold’ (Eyben, this volume), between the perspectives of outside and inside, between theory and practice, between participation and observation. By doing this, the book seeks to bridge – or perhaps better to straddle – the gap between the more academically oriented anthropology of development and the practically focused development anthropology. While there are works that embrace similar positions (Atlani-Duault and Vidal 2009; Bierschenk et al. 2000; Eyben 2000; Lavigne Delville 2007; Lewis and Mosse 2006; Mosse 2005; Olivier de Sardan 2005), few studies focus on the very ethnographic practice in international aid settings. For us the problem is less an argument about whether or not anthropologists are involved in development – many anthropologists are indeed working in public aid, that is, in what Evans-Pritchard (1946: 93) would have labelled ‘the non-scientific field of administration’ – but to have anthropological practitioners reflect upon their roles and contributions. Many reports and guidelines are produced by anthropologists working in development settings, but the methodological reflection of this professional branch is still limited, especially in European traditions of anthropology. What are the insights gained through putting anthropology into practice in the particular context of development? And how are these insights ‘brought back’ to the anthropology of the universities?


3 In a keynote speech at the conference of APAD (Euro-African Association for the Anthropology of Social Change and Development) in December 2007, Thomas Bierschenk rightly pointed out that applied anthropology in the USA has a much more established role and status (Bierschenk 2008; see also Nolan 2002).
From gap to interface

The questions of bridging the gap lead to the fundamental issue of how the interface of ethnographic practice and public aid is construed. From the anthropologists’ point of view, the conditions under which anthropologists work in development settings differ in many respects from those of more conventional academic research, not least in terms of time, space and focus. Certainly one is expected to deliver reports and recommendations in a much more rapid and accessible manner than in academic production (e.g. Olivier de Sardan, Ovesen, this volume). Yet rather than drawing a sharp and definite line between ‘research’ and ‘consultancy’, it is important to discuss the conditions for anthropological engagement in development (Brandström, Eyben, Lewis, this volume). The limited time frame, the setting of the agenda, and the orthodoxy of terms of reference are well-known constraints to such engagement (Ovesen, Widmark, this volume), along with other ways in which the consultancy process affects ethnographic work and writing (see Strathern and Stewart 2005: 9). At the same time, public aid provides a privileged entry for anthropologists to understand debates and processes that more generally shape society and culture in many low-income countries. Each and every activity in a given African country is legitimised in terms of ‘development’, as a dominant public discourse. The interface of anthropology and development concerns most aspects of social life in the Global South, because public aid finances a wide range of activities. To mention a few examples of the wide array of donor-funded activities, we may think of policy reforms, budget and sector supports, village projects, environmental sanitation in neighbourhoods, infrastructure investment, food aid, twinning between municipalities, master’s and PhD education abroad, as well as institutions and actors utterly critical to development itself. The fact that much of academic and cultural exchange – for instance between African and European countries – is funded by public aid may be lamented, but it is certainly a fact of life for many of us.

The scholars contributing to the book include people who have one foot in academic anthropology and another in development cooperation. Or perhaps better put, they have different locations from which to conceptualise and understand development, and it is precisely this navigating between different anthropological locations that makes the chapters so relevant. Several authors explore anthropologists’ different, and possible, locations and positions in relation to the work of development cooperation, from engagement to participation (e.g. Brandström, Eyben, Lewis, this volume), which was also a recurrent theme at the conference. It is
interesting to think about the conditions for anthropological engagement in development. Often, there are a limited number of contexts in which anthropologists are consulted or allowed to affect the direction of the development work. Thus, the anthropologists’ positioning is determined by practice and the room that is given to them. Most of the anthropologists contributing to this book have either been consulted on a very abstract policy level or have acted on a limited local project level, or they have been asked to show the links between national-level policies and local-level practices. Tobisson (this volume) argues for the importance of tracing policy connections between different levels and contexts. Finding ways of coherently showing the links between practices at different levels has been challenging for anthropologists (Crewe and Harrison 1998; Mosse 2005).

The methodological problems are also visible in relation to evaluation work (Widmark, this volume). Whereas anthropologists usually engage in a more unbiased social and cultural analysis, the aim of most evaluations is to assess the results of the intervention in relation to aims and objectives. The study object must therefore be limited to the specific intervention or activity at hand. There may also be discrepancies in the way the study object is conceptualised. For the donors it is seen as a project, limited in time and space, that is to be evaluated. For the anthropologist (and often the beneficiary) it is seen as a process and sometimes even as a life project (Widmark 2006). In general, the ahistorical dimension of development together with weak institutional memory pose problems for many anthropologists, as the most recent intervention or development initiative is, for social actors in the country, only the latest in a series of overlapping and contradictory operations dating at least from the 1960s and often even from colonial times. So, beyond what is intended in a new policy or intervention, social actors interpret and imbue meaning to the discourse and practices on the basis of experiences, memories and narratives of past interventions.

There is often, but not always, a difference between evaluation methods and scientific research methods. A development assessment might require rapid participatory methods or a simplified framework of social analysis, methods uncommon in the academic context. The anthropologist who tries to put her/his theoretical knowledge into practice will almost certainly have to respond to her/his colleagues in academia (e.g. Ovesen, this volume). Or perhaps more common, s/he is likely to experience silence regarding the anthropological relevance of such work. Hence, undertaking consultancies is not always well regarded, and scholars may be accused of compromising academic integrity through the use of applied
methods, and/or of adapting their research agenda to the interests of other actors like the World Bank, for instance.

The relationship between the anthropologist and the aid bureaucracy can also be challenging, as some examples show (Eyben, Lewis, Ovesen, this volume). There are several experiences of how anthropological issues that interrogate the notions of development are considered troublesome by practitioners. The academically trained anthropologist often finds that the room given for questioning important issues is far too narrow and that conceptual issues are watered down and simplified. It is not always possible to establish a mutual understanding, and the communication between the anthropologist and the practitioner remains halting.

If for anthropologists the interface of anthropology and development is extremely multilayered, from the point of view of development actors, it is to a large extent construed from a functional perspective. Basically, if anthropologists are to be enrolled or recruited, they must convince development actors that they can contribute to a better practice of development cooperation. Beyond this functional perspective, we also identify a series of prejudices and stereotypes conveyed by development actors during meetings and in corridor conversations that seem to indicate that anthropologists are often seen as troublemakers rather than contributors (Brändström, this volume). There is also a misunderstanding of what anthropologists do in development cooperation. In informal meetings of development institutions or ministries alike, one may still hear statements like ‘We can’t put an anthropologist into a village for a year before we initiate the programme.’ Throughout the chapters of the book we see that such simplified statements about anthropology are, at best, erroneous. Instead, anthropologists involved in development adjust to the conditions and contexts in which they work (e.g. Eyben, Ovesen, Zink, this volume). The fact that the interface of ethnographic practice and public aid is also construed on the basis of preconceived ideas and stereotypes is an additional reason for publishing this book. While Olivier de Sardan explores the ‘missing link’ between anthropology and development (Olivier de Sardan, this volume; see also Lavigne Delville 2007; Olivier de Sardan 2004), Le Meur questions whether anthropology and development should not be conceptualised as a joking relationship (Le Meur 2007). There is indeed a need to describe what anthropologists actually do and can do in development.

However, beyond stereotypes and received wisdom, there are also difficulties related to the very problem formulation to be addressed by anthropologists. For instance, as has been discussed (Bierschenk et al. 2000; Olivier de Sardan 2005), one problem is that not all social actors or
stakeholders are included in terms of reference and similar documents; donors, or the actors engaged by the donors, are still too often rendered invisible. In fact, donors are conspicuously absent in reports and policy papers, or vaguely lumped together and referred to as ‘Technical and Financial Partners’, and yet they are key actors indeed. As several chapters (Arvidson, Hagberg, Hedlund and Lewis, this volume) focus on the people engaged and employed to promote change, this is also an attempt to encourage the study of all actors involved, both ‘the developers’ and ‘those-to-be-developed’, to follow Mark Hobart’s provocative categories (Hobart 1993b).

Methods and meanings

The questions we have developed so far are central to the arguments on methods and meanings in development cooperation. We aim to analyse methods for anthropological involvement in development. By methods we refer not only to techniques of how anthropologists are working but also to methods as analytical and personal strategies. In a changing context of public aid, anthropological methods may be crucial for providing context to otherwise anonymous development cooperation. But we also aim to reflect upon the multiple meanings attributed to and associated with development aid. Beyond methodological challenges, this book is geared towards the cultural meanings of development as a global phenomenon, as well as the various meanings and conceptions involved in doing anthropology from within a ‘development industry’. Development today is a site of production of goods and services, policies and politics, wealth and meaning, that must be theoretically and practically scrutinised. Riall Nolan convincingly argues that international development consists of all important aspects of a closely interconnected industry: funding; exchange of personnel and career development; information and databases; and collaboration between agencies (Nolan 2002). The idea of an industry is also corroborated by many local understandings of ‘development’ and ‘developers’: regardless of organisations, declared ambitions and hidden agendas, local actors in villages and neighbourhoods tend to see these outside agencies as more or less the same. For instance, in Mande languages spoken in large parts of West Africa, the term *faama* indicates simultaneously rich, government and powerful. Powerful outsiders, including developers, are conceptualised as *faama* (Hagberg 2001; Hagberg et al. 2009). We contend that anthropology’s longstanding in-
interest in systems of meanings provides important tools for analysing development operations’ appropriation by, and meaning for, social actors.

In this book, ethnographic practice in development settings and institutions is particularly in focus. Sweden has a long history of engagement in development cooperation and anthropologists have engaged in different ways, as discussed by Brandström (this volume). Several chapters are based on experiences from working with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), a circumstance that is interesting for at least two reasons. First, it is undeniably the case that Sida is internationally considered a progressive international donor. Sweden is among those countries that maintain the 1% goal of Gross National Income allocated to international development. Historically, Swedish aid was early in bringing anthropologists into projects and programmes as well as policy work. In the 1990s anthropologists’ involvement in Swedish development cooperation saw a decrease as potential anthropological contributions to structural adjustment policies and political and legal reforms were questioned. Some chapters explicitly address these changing contexts of public aid (Hagberg, Tobisson, this volume). Secondly, as several chapters are grounded in Swedish development aid, the book contributes to contextualising and exemplifying more general processes and structures by means of the case-study method. As we contend that development is anything but a monolithic enterprise, it is central to assess the multifaceted and heterogeneous character of development institutions, as for that matter any institution that anthropologists work with. While there are merits in addressing development as a pervasive global phenomenon (Escobar 1991, 1995; Ferguson 1994), the thick description of aid requires careful attention to the specific contexts, settings and actors (Crewe and Harrison 1998; Mosse 2005). The many chapters that develop examples from Swedish development cooperation (Brandström, Hagberg, Hedlund, Tobisson, Widmark, Zink, this volume) thereby contribute to the study of one development institution (see Anders 2005; Bierschenk 2008).

The book on Ethnographic Practice and Public Aid is composed of an introduction followed by eleven chapters. The different chapters are informed by the creative combination of different forms of theoretical and practical positioning. Some authors explore historical perspectives both in terms of anthropological involvement (Brandström, this volume) and of analytical context (Lewis, this volume), while others look into the very experience of doing anthropology in development settings (Arvidsson, 4 See for instance Grillo’s (1997) critique of how Ferguson (1994), Escobar (1995) and Hobart (1993a) represent development as a monolithic enterprise.
Brandström, Eyben, Hagberg, Ovesen, Widmark, this volume). Some contributors provide case studies on specific locales of development (Arvidsson, Hedlund, Ovesen, Tobisson, this volume), and others, like Olivier de Sardan, move away from the explicit focus on development to propose an anthropology of public space. Several chapters address NGOs as an important, yet multifaceted, configuration of development (Arvidsson, Hedlund, Lewis, Zink, this volume), whereas others look into the constraints of short-term consultancy work (Ovesen, Widmark, this volume). The combination of long-term fieldwork and short-term advisory roles is analysed in some chapters (Brandström, Hagberg, Olivier de Sardan, this volume). In addition, case studies developed in the book cover Bangladesh, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Laos, Niger, Peru, Sweden, Tanzania, the United Kingdom and Zambia.

To pursue the reflexive endeavour that runs through the chapters, we would like to situate the work and experience of contributors in relation to the topic of the book. They have different ways of approaching development issues, but they share long experience of trying to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Eva Tobisson and Hans Hedlund were prominent members of the team at the Development Studies Unit (DSU) at Stockholm University where, later, Sten Hagberg and Charlotta Widmark were engaged. Over the years (mid 1970s through late 1990s), the DSU was a locus for anthropologists’ engagement in development cooperation in Sweden; at the same time, people at other anthropology departments, such as the Department of Cultural Anthropology in Uppsala, were working from their side. In Uppsala you could find Per Brandström with a long-term perspective on Swedish anthropologists’ engagement with development cooperation and his own long-term experience of having worked in development projects in Tanzania, and Jan Ovesen, who has been continuously engaged in South East Asia since the early 1990s. Also affiliated with Uppsala is Eren Zink, who has long experience working with the International Foundation for Science, a Northern-based NGO that provides research grants to young researchers in the Global South. Development anthropology has always been under development by the British, from time to time in collaboration with Sida. The contributing scholars Rosalind Eyben and David Lewis have worked within and outside development and also with Sida. David Lewis and Malin Arvidson worked together in Bangladesh as part of Sida’s Reality Check (Sida 2008, 2009). From the French-speaking world Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, at the innovative institute Laboratoire d’Etudes et de Recherche sur les Dynamiques Sociales et le Développement Local (LASDEL) in Niamey, Niger, contributes a theoretical and practical reflection on reformers from the inside.
The chapters of the book are organised to reflect the rich diversity of experiences, and still they are connected by the reflexivity of the ethnographic practice itself. Per Brandström’s chapter gives an insightful historical account, based on his personal experiences since the 1960s, of the anthropologist as troublemaker and contributor. His narrative is based on his long-term involvement in Tanzania. David Lewis argues that anthropologists of development are well positioned to restore a sense of development history that can serve usefully to anchor development practice more firmly within its wider histories. Rosalind Eyben gives a highly personal account of the possibilities for critical and reflexive ethnographic research of international aid practice. She is constantly hovering on the threshold of theory and practice and of inside and outside. Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan sets out to study practical norms in the delivery of public goods and services in Niger in a way that moves beyond development as the study object. Based on fieldwork from coastal Zanzibar, Eva Tobisson struggles with notions of poverty and wealth, as well as with the relevance of policy in relation to local perspectives and experiences. With examples from his work in Burkina Faso, Sten Hagberg pinpoints the anonymous development contexts and the difficulties for anthropologists of getting a role beyond that of being a provider of success stories and telling examples. The ethnography of NGOs is the focus of Hans Hedlund’s chapter and his narrative of the development of the Institute of Cultural Affairs. In a similar vein, albeit very different in scope and focus, Malin Arvidsson looks into NGO workers at the grassroots in Bangladesh. Research and development are closely connected and yet somewhat vaguely conceptualised in development. Eren Zink reflects on the work of a research-funding NGO, the International Foundation for Science, and ponders how it influences research in distant places. Jan Ovesen’s loneliness as a short-term consultant addresses another angle of anthropological involvement and the problematic relationship that a practising anthropologist maintains with academia. His account refers to assignments done in the field of hydropower development in Laos. The final chapter is logically about evaluation work, representing the end – and possibly – the beginning of the development cycle. Charlotta Widmark discusses the shortcuts to anthropological fieldwork in assessing development interventions in Bolivia and Peru.

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The different chapters are connected to each other in various ways, but taken together the book makes a strong argument about the different locations – e.g. advisory positions, ministerial policy work, academics in consultation assignments, field officers, programme officers at HQ – from which anthropology and anthropologists address development. The message of this book is the importance of the privileged and creative position of in-between inside/outside, theory/practice and observation/participation for anthropologists in development. Such a position of in-between is not alien to anthropologists, and that is why anthropologists seem well placed for these forms of engagement in development settings. The multi-sited and multi-positional works of anthropologists in the development context bring this kind of anthropology firmly back to the discipline itself. In other words, exploring the position of in-between described in the various chapters urges us to revisit the very foundations of the discipline and its practical relevance for social change.
References


2. The Anthropologist as Troublemaker or Contributor in Development Work
Reflections on Experiences from the Field

Someone said to Socrates that a certain man had grown no better in his travels. ‘I should think not,’ he said. ‘He took himself along with him.’
(Montaigne quoted in Clastres 1987: 29 [1977])

Views of the past

The role of anthropology and anthropologists in relation to interventions for social change has been, and still is, an issue of much debate and controversy within the anthropological community. Whether ‘true’ anthropologists should remain pure academicians who solely ponder academic issues for the sake of ‘Science’ or also should involve themselves in putting anthropological knowledge to practical use outside the walls of academia, has been a troubling question in many anthropological quarters.

Just a glance at a few overviews on the topic will show the same issues surfacing time and again in the debate (e.g. Escobar 1991; Hoben 1982; Sillitoe 2006). The story invariably finds its way back to colonial times when ‘primitive man’ and ‘primitive societies’ constituted the prime object of study of anthropology and when our predecessors, like Malinowski and Evans-Pritchard, made their statements on the practical applicability of our subject.

Bronislaw Malinowski’s articles from the early decades of the last century, ‘Practical Anthropology’ and ‘The Rationalization of Anthropology and Administration’, are often quoted (Malinowski 1929, 1930). Like Malinowski, most anthropologists of those days found themselves in the colonial situation. The ‘tribes’ they were studying were under colonial
Colonial interventions, whether liked or disliked, were the fact of the
day, so what was the position to be taken by the anthropologists? Was it
to keep themselves aloof from the political pragmatics or to put their
knowledge, acquired in the field, at the disposal of the colonial adminis-
trations in their work? Was it detachment from or engagement in practi-
cal affairs? Wendy James, in her article in *Anthropology and the Colonial
Encounter*, one of the many self-critical publications following the student
revolution of 1968, called the position taken by Malinowski that of the
‘reluctant imperialist’ (James 1973). Basically, Malinowski saw the disin-
tegration of traditional societies under colonial rule and their westernisa-
tion with regret, yet he argued that it ‘was surely an anomalous and un-
healthy state of affairs’ if a discipline which ‘ambitiously’ called itself ‘the
Science of Man’ remained ‘completely aloof from the real troubles and
difficulties which beset the management of one race by another, and their
contacts and co-operations’ (Malinowski 1930: 428). ‘Pure science’, he
reasoned, and he saw his brand of functionalist anthropology in this sense,
‘is that which is capable of application, and as such it is a most practical
instrument at the disposal of the practitioner,’ and consequently, in his
view, ‘co-operation between the administrator and the anthropologist’
was inevitable (Malinowski 1930: 429).

Grillo, in the mid-1980s, classified the stands among anthropologists
towards interventions in the name of anthropology into four different
positions, namely the ‘rejectionist’, the ‘monitorist’, the ‘activist’ and the
‘conditional reformer’ (Grillo 1985: 28–31). Escobar, in his critical as-
essment of ‘development anthropology’ (he himself largely a ‘rejection-
ist’), summarises the characteristics of Grillo’s four positions: first, that of
the “rejectionist” position, one that sees the anthropologist’s intervention
as elitist and paternalistic, as something that necessarily reinforces the
status quo; second, that of the “monitorist”, who simply diagnoses and
creates public awareness of the problems associated with development;
third, that of the “activist”, who … is actively engaged in development
work; and fourth, that of the “conditional reformer”, who recognizes that
anthropologists can contribute to the solution of Third World problems,
but who also recognizes that their work in development programs and
institutions is inherently problematic (Escobar 1991: 672).

Although all classification into ideal types is illusive, one could say that
Malinowski, the anthropologist of the 1920s, would well fit into Grillo’s
classificatory scheme designed for the anthropologists of the 1980s and
qualify as a ‘conditional reformer’. The historical conditions are of course
different. The anthropologists of the 1920s were the children of their time
and we are the children of our time. Theirs was the time of imperialism
and colonialism; ours is the time of ‘globalisation’. But there is a common basic feature among anthropologists both of the past and of the present, whether we label them ‘reluctant imperialists’ or ‘conditional reformers’, and that is the belief that anthropological knowledge could in its way contribute to reducing human suffering caused by seemingly irresistible social transformations. There is also another common feature between Malinowski of the past and many anthropologists of today, and that is a marked critical attitude towards mainstream ideas about planned social transformations and development interventions, though with one noticeable difference. The nostalgic touch evident in Malinowski’s thinking is largely gone among anthropologists of today.¹

Irrespective of whether one sides with one idea or the other about things, it can be concluded that Malinowski did not draw a sharp line between academic and practical anthropology. His explicit idea was, as he put it, ‘bridging the gap between theoretical anthropology and its practical applications’ (Malinowski 1929: 37). There were of course other considerations at play than purely the ‘disinterested search for knowledge’, which was Malinowski’s own definition of the scientific attitude (Malinowski 1948: 35). Edmund Leach, in his usual challenging manner, is quoted as having said that ‘the anthropologist really does not know whether or not his subject has any practical applications, but when anyone holds out a carrot he tends to invent them’ (Mills n.d. cited in Sillitoe 2006: 9). Likewise for Malinowski, there was indeed the urge to ‘sell’ the subject by arguing for its usefulness in practical matters. Still, one could argue that a basic idea of Malinowski’s seems to have been that the theoretical and the practical were not to be regarded as two distinct spheres to be kept strictly apart and, furthermore, that the anthropologist was no less an anthropologist when putting anthropological knowledge into practice than when he or she was doing anthropology in the course of university studies. As he argues in a later article:

Those of us who advocate ‘practical anthropology’ insist only on the study of vital, relevant, and fundamental problems. That such problems affect practical interests directly is not our fault. That a question does not become less scientific because it is vital and relevant will only be denied by one who imagines that academic pursuits begin where reality ends. (Malinowski 1939: 38)

¹ Malinowski held an explicitly pessimistic view of modernity or, as he called it, ‘progress’. As he himself declared, he felt it strongly, and ‘in the aimless drive of modern mechanization’ he saw ‘a menace to all real spiritual and artistic values’ (Malinowski 1930: 405).
Evans-Pritchard, Malinowski’s younger anthropologist contemporary, was of a different cast of mind. Malinowski’s cultural nostalgia was not shared by him, nor were his ideas about practical anthropology.

Evans-Pritchard, like Malinowski, underscored the importance of anthropological knowledge for practical social issues, but unlike Malinowski, he argued for a clear distinction between anthropology as an academic pursuit on the one hand, and anthropological knowledge applied to practical situations on the other hand. Anthropology, he reasoned, could not be applied in the same sense that, for example, medicine or engineering are said to be applied sciences, since it cannot state its findings in laws in the light of which it can predict events. … ‘Nevertheless,’ he continued, ‘social anthropology is a body of knowledge about human societies and, like all knowledge of the kind, can be used in a common-sense way to solve social problems; and there is surely no one who holds that it should not be used so’ (Evans-Pritchard 1946: 92). Evans-Pritchard, however, saw a danger in anthropologists’ involvement in practical concerns on two grounds, partly because there were few trained anthropologists in his time, and their services were needed within the universities, and partly because involvement in practical concerns would risk diverting interest from important subject-specific research issues. He made a clear distinction between ‘pure research’ and applied anthropology, between scientific and non-scientific fields. He reasoned that it might be laudable for an anthropologist to investigate practical problems, ‘but if he does so he must realize that he is no longer acting within the anthropological field but in the non-scientific field of administration’ (Evans-Pritchard 1946: 93). In giving his advice, he argued that the anthropologist ‘will not be acting as a scientist with some experience of administration but as an administrator with scientific training and knowledge of a special kind’ (Evans-Pritchard 1946: 98). He gives the example of his own experience when he worked as a Tribal Affairs Officer in the British Military Administration in Cyrenaica during the Second World War and there acted as an administrator but with anthropological knowledge.\(^2\) The dividends of the anthropological endeavour were not, in Evans-Pritchard’s view, to accrue from serving short-term practical interest but from research guided by purely scientific interests. To make his opinion clear on this point he quotes Herskovits (Herskovits 1936: 7), where he wrote that ‘the debt we owe to the society that supports us must be made in terms of long-time payments, in our fundamental contributions towards an understanding of

\(^2\) But Evans-Pritchard hides away the fact that in any event, he worked enough like a ‘true’ anthropologist to make his monograph The Sanusi of Cyrenaica possible (Evans-Pritchard 1949).
the nature and processes of culture and, through this, to the solution of some of our basic problems (Herskovits quoted in Evans-Pritchard 1946: 94).

There were, of course, many voices in the anthropological choir contributing their part in forming opinions about what a proper attitude towards the issue of theory versus the practical should amount to. But one could say that Malinowski and Evans-Pritchard carved out the basic principal positions which have been the subject of continuous discussion within the anthropological community up to this day – Malinowski more inclusive in his outlook and Evans-Pritchard more exclusive, Malinowski more emotionally involved and Evans-Pritchard more soberly detached, Malinowski more of a ‘conditional reformer’ and Evans-Pritchard more of a ‘rejectionist’ with regard to muddling the academic with the practical. In these footsteps we have all followed, making our individual preferences. We could, of course, add the moral aspect, though even this was discussed in those days. While Evans-Pritchard made a clear distinction between the scientific part of anthropology, where moral considerations were seen as methodologically irrelevant, and the non-scientific part, where moral considerations had their proper place (Evans-Pritchard 1946: 92), Malinowski, in his later writings, included the moral aspect in the comprehensive anthropological pursuit. Wendy James calls attention to Malinowski’s declarations on this issue in his posthumously published writings, edited by Phyllis Kaberry, where Malinowski straightforwardly stated: ‘There is a moral obligation to every calling, even to that of the scientific specialist … Research in order to be of use must be inspired by courage and purpose … Shall we, therefore, mix politics with science? In one way, decidedly “yes”’ (James 1973: 66; Malinowski 1945).

A glimpse of the history of ‘Practical Anthropology’ in Sweden

I have sketched the anthropological positions above as a background to the anthropological near past and present that my paper is about, because that was a time in the history of anthropology when certain chords were struck which have continued to sound throughout all the historical vicissitudes our subject has undergone.

The time of Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard and their anthropological contemporaries was the time of colonial rule. This era, still in effect in the decades subsequent to the end of the Second World War, was followed by the time of independence struggles and the formation of national gov-
ernments replacing the colonial administrations. The early post-colonial period had a strong impact on the subject of anthropology, both more generally on the subject and more specifically in the various local university environments. Practically, the change of political power relations and altered conditions for doing fieldwork in the ex-colonies put new demands on those who were planning to go afield, and ideologically and theoretically, the vehement criticism of anthropology by intellectuals in the former dependencies and by remorseful Western anthropologists shook the sense of anthropological self-sufficiency and self-confidence, particularly among those of us who were young in the subject at that time.

To view it from the narrow perspective, I was doing my second undergraduate year in social anthropology (or general and comparative ethnography, as the subject was called in Sweden until the university reform of 1969) at the University of Gothenburg in 1968, when the reverberations of the student revolution in France and Germany reached the Swedish universities. We had studied Leach, Gluckman, Fredrik Barth, Lévi-Strauss and other anthropologists contemporary with them and believed that they represented the height of anthropological theory and insight. Now everything was turned upside down. Kathleen Gough’s articles ‘Anthropology: The Child of Imperialism’ and ‘New Proposals for Anthropologists’ were copied and circulated among us students, and we felt shame, guilt and anger for our predecessors’ sins (Gough 1968a, 1968b). The times were changing, so it was felt, a new era was dawning. Marx’s words in his ‘Theses on Feuerbach’ were frequently repeated: ‘The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.’ It was indeed a very turbulent time. A small subject like anthropology was, of course, more affected by the revolutionary tide than the more established ones, and many radical students were drawn to anthropology. There were frequent ‘mass meetings’ and various protest actions, and there were fierce demands for a total democratisation of the university departments and for revisions of the reading lists to exclude ‘old stuff’ and to include the most critical voices of the time.

Karl Gustav Izikowitz was our professor in Gothenburg, doing his last years as professor before retirement. He was the culture hero of social anthropology in Sweden, the first one in our country to propagate a change of ‘old’ ethnography into ‘new’ social anthropology. Izikowitz, simultaneously with Jomo Kenyatta among others, had attended Malinowski’s seminars in London and he had a very well-developed network of scholarly connections in Britain, the U.S. and France. He was originally trained in comparative ethnography and wrote his doctoral thesis on
music and other sound instruments among South American Indians (Izikowitz 1935). Later, with his growing interest in social anthropology, he shifted his regional interest to South-East Asia, where he did extended fieldwork among the Lamet of Laos (Izikowitz 1951). He was a follower of Malinowski in his comprehensive view of the subject of anthropology and a follower of Evans-Pritchard in his interest in structural principles and explanatory models. To Izikowitz, nothing was too great or too small to be embraced by anthropology. He used to say to students who asked for a proper topic to treat, that to him any topic would do, even if they chose as a topic the Swedish bathtub, as long as they treated it anthropologically. What mattered to him was the anthropological approach to things and the analytical perspectives applied. He gave a lecture called ‘Compass for Fields Afar’, originally delivered to an audience of architects. In Izikowitz’s view, as aptly summarised by Göran Aijmer in his introduction to a collection of Izikowitz articles posthumously edited by him (Izikowitz 1985: i), the anthropological compass ‘provides us with the possibility to locate positions even in a cultural landscape of such strange appearance that we cannot grasp its main outlines’. With this compass and its cardinal points we get a sense of direction. The cardinal points of this compass are ‘the analytical perspectives, [which,] once pursued, will bring hope of order in the wilderness of unknown’ cultural worlds, whether here or there.

Those of us who had received our basic anthropological training under Izikowitz were, with his perspective on the subject, inclined rather to become contributors in development work than critical ‘rejectionists’, but with the drastic shift caused by the new revolutionary political winds most of us turned into notorious troublemakers in our academic environment by aligning ourselves with the most uncompromising critics. In this ideological perspective, ‘development’ was provided solely on terms stipulated by those in power and the old exploitative colonialism had only been replaced by an equally exploitative neo-colonialism.

This was the time of anthropological self-penitence and self-flagellation. The more the anthropological evils could be brought out in the open, the better. The human inclination to self-aggrandisement, indeed, takes vari-

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3 Though, in fact, his favourites were Leach and Lévi-Strauss; Leach above all for his work in Burma among the Kachin (Leach 1954) and for his bold declaration: ‘Instead of butterfly collecting let us have inspired guesswork’ (Leach 1961: 5), and Lévi-Strauss for his French brand of structuralism.

4 One of the critics who made a particularly strong impact on several of us was the South African anthropologist in exile, Archie Mafeje, who visited our department several times in the early 1970s. He was most uncompromising in his criticism and is one of those who has retained his critical voice throughout the years (see e.g. Mafeje 1976, 1998).
ous forms. The historical importance of our pretty small and marginal subject was enhanced to the most impressive dimensions. Eric Wolf, in his late retrospective article ‘Anthropology among the Powers’ (1999), reduces the role of the anthropological past to reasonable dimensions. ‘Contrary to what one might expect,’ he wrote, ‘anthropology as such played hardly any role in defining these [the colonial] administrative options’ (Wolf 1999: 125). Or, as Sillitoe puts it in his recent article on applied anthropology: ‘It is evident that the anthropologists failed to convince those in power that they had anything much to offer the Colonial Office (which might be seen as a blessing in disguise given the subsequent blistering criticism of the colonial era)’ (Sillitoe 2006: 3). About anthropology and colonial rule in British Africa Wolf concluded:

The installation of colonial rule in British Africa owed little to inputs from anthropology, despite anthropologists’ repeated offers to assist in the process. ... Most efforts to volunteer anthropological services were not even acknowledged by the Colonial Office, perhaps because the spokesmen for anthropology were often religious dissenters, Jews or outsiders from peripheral areas (Vincent 1990: 116). For the Colonial Office they were either ‘wild enthusiasts’ or ‘crazy ethnologists’. (Wolf 1999: 125–126)

One may also in this context remember Firth’s counter to Kathleen Gogh’s ‘anthropology, the child of imperialism’; namely, as he put it, ‘anthropology is not a bastard of colonialism but a legitimate child of Enlightenment’ (Firth 1975: 44). Wolf, on his part in his retrospective article, points to the marginality of anthropology in both the academic and the political world of power. Still, anthropology did, of course, play its part in forming the ideological templates of its time. However, any layered understanding of the role of our subject was not appreciated among us rebellious students who in the wake of the student revolution of 1968 demanded an uncompromising and radical repudiation of the past.

In those days, the 1960s, there was no established tradition among Swedish anthropologists to involve themselves in practical matters. Unlike well-established social science subjects like economics, political science and sociology with a taken-for-granted say in societal matters, anthropology was a subject in the margins. The old ethnography, with its focus on re-

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5 Sometimes the so-called government anthropologists or sociologists were in no way trained anthropologists. In Tanzania, in the area where I have worked, there was Hans Cory, titled ‘Government Sociologist’, who most diligently documented customary laws and political organisations of various peoples in the region, though he was not at all an anthropologist by training but a self-made ethnographer working for the government (Cory 1953a, 1953b, 1954; Cory and Hartnoll 1945).
cording, documenting and systematic description, and with more interest in salvage anthropology than in the study of social change, had little to offer when development assistance started to gain importance on the national political agenda in the 1960s. However, a few of Izikowitz’s students had, encouraged by him, worked in development programmes. One of them, Karl Erik Knutsson, who in 1970 became the first professor in Social Anthropology at Stockholm University, had worked for an extended period for a Sida-supported project in Ethiopia (Ethiopian Nutrition Institute) in his earlier anthropological career, and he also had experiences from other involvement in development assistance work. Izikowitz’s Malinowskian idea that scientific pursuits in no way begin only where reality ends, was even more pronounced in Knutsson. Though in no sense a political radical of the 1968 kind, he preached a socially engaged anthropology and he used his position as professor to propagate the relevance of anthropology not only within the academy but also, as much as he could, to the Swedish public. He was instrumental in establishing institutional contacts between his department and Sida, and in this way a number of young Swedish anthropologists got their first experiences from development assistance work. The author of this article was one of those. I got my earliest assignment with Sida through the mediation of Knutsson when, in 1970, I did my first anthropological fieldwork in inland Tanzania. This was only a very brief assignment consisting in documenting food habits in the area where I worked for the Tanzanian Nutrition Institute, which was being established in Dar es Salaam with financial and supervisory support from Sida. Even so, it was a most startling experience to face a universe, the world of development assistance, which was very different from what I had been prepared to face through my academic training and, as such, a valuable anthropological experience, I believe.

This is not to say that the attitude of Izikowitz and Knutsson towards the world of practice was or became a general feature in Swedish anthropology. On the contrary, most representatives of the anthropological establishment either totally scorned the involvement of anthropologists in practical affairs or tended to regard ‘applied anthropology’ as a less prestigious brand of the art. In turning away from intervention involvement, their stand was similar to that of the ‘rejectionist’ radicals. In any case, quite a number of Swedish anthropologists began to gain experience from development interventions. Most of them on a short-term basis but some

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6 As for the wider perspective, Grillo comments: ‘[W]hen, in the 1960s, colonial regimes became post-colonial, and development became the order of the day, anthropology was not in a position to offer its services or to take advantage of the opportunities that now arose’ (Grillo 1985: 16).
also on a few years’ contractual basis, though there were no permanent positions created for anthropologists. In this respect the situation pretty much resembled, and still resembles, that of the British anthropologists in the 1940s of Evans-Pritchard, when he complained about the absence of permanent positions for anthropologists outside the walls of the universities, noting that ‘[in] the past there have been government anthropologists conducting researches in a few territories. At the present time there is none’ (Evans-Pritchard 1946: 96). Today, however, quite a number of Swedish anthropologists have found employment outside the university, few, if any, as anthropologists, but because of the fact that their experiences and competence have fit the job profiles of various establishments.

Some personal experiences of interventions for social change

My personal experience of interventions for social change pre-dates my initiation into the subject of anthropology. I grew up at a mission station in inland Tanzania (then Tanganyika Territory) in the late 1940s and the 1950s and I was there when the country celebrated its independence on 9 December 1961. This was an environment with a professed ambition to bring about social changes. But I cannot remember that the word ‘development’ was in frequent use in those early days. There were government development schemes, and the missionary stations of course provided health services, basic education and often training in various skills, but this was rather perceived as part and parcel of ‘the white man’s burden’ and civilising mission than in terms of ‘development’.

In the Sukuma-Nyamwezi language which was used in daily social intercourse there was no, and is no, particular word for development. With the formation of the nationalist party, TANU (Tanganyika African National Union), in 1954 under the leadership of Julius Kambarage Nyerere, who later became the country’s first President, the Swahili word for development, maendeleo, was widely spread and adopted. The word maendeleo derives from the verb kuendelea, which means ‘to progress’, ‘to move forward’. Nyerere put some basic meaning into the concept when he made it equal to the war against poverty, ignorance and diseases. In more detail, to common peo-

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7 In ‘politically correct’ terms of time, the trusteeship, Tanganyika was administered by the British under a statute of the League of Nations Mandate ‘destined to guarantee, over an undefined period, progress and emancipation of the administered Africans’ (Chrétien 2006: 260; my emphasis).
2. The Anthropologist as Troublemaker or Contributor in Development Work

ple, it meant the provision of health services, education, water supply and other basic necessities for improved conditions of life. More generally, however, it was a word for describing the contrast between *jadi*, tradition, and *kisasa*, contemporariness or, in short, westernisation.

As with the local traditions about the establishment of the chiefdoms in the far past, where the idea was that the kings came from elsewhere (Brandström 1990; de Heusch 1991), so it was with *maendeleo*; it came from somewhere else. It was not internally induced. This was the order of things from the time of German colonisation, British colonial administration and now with the national government and, soon after independence, with the various donor agencies – bilateral, multilateral and NGOs – flooding the country. This was the contemporary world of development now being created.

Quarles van Ufford et al., in the introduction to their recent edition on moral critique of development and anthropological involvement, speak of development as ‘hope’, development as ‘administration’ and development as ‘critical understanding’ (Quarles van Ufford, Giri and Mosse 2003: 3–4). One could say that in those immediate pre- and post-independence days, ‘development’ was unequivocally perceived as hope. There was effervescence and enthusiasm among people. Great things were to happen, not in a distant future but soon. The level of participatory spirit was high. I remember, soon after independence, I took part in the making of a feeder road through the village area where we lived. Hundreds turned out and we worked with joy, shouting and singing, and the whole task was accomplished within only a few days. The same applied to other communal work tasks, whether to dig a well or erect the walls of a building for a common purpose. Decades of disenchantment that followed have changed this situation considerably. Still, the ensuing despair among many people has not, even today, eradicated all hope.

I mentioned above my first anthropological experience of development agencies when I was assigned the task to document food habits in the Sukuma-Nyamwezi area where I did fieldwork in 1970. This was an uncontroversial task. Only to observe over a limited period of time, record and systematically present the observations. I completed the task and submitted my report, though I doubt that it ever came to any practical use.

The only point of some anthropological interest I remember from this my first little attempt at doing practical anthropology was my observation of a meat distribution pattern among neighbouring families. Cattle and small stock were rarely or never slaughtered except in connection with ritual or ceremonial occasions. These occasions were characterised by commensality involving the members of the neighbourhood. Due to this fact, the frequency

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8 The only point of some anthropological interest I remember from this my first little attempt at doing practical anthropology was my observation of a meat distribution pattern among neighbouring families. Cattle and small stock were rarely or never slaughtered except in connection with ritual or ceremonial occasions. These occasions were characterised by commensality involving the members of the neighbourhood. Due to this fact, the frequency
From the free-floating position of the individual fieldworker, unconstrained by organisational limitations and allowing for a perspective from below, it is more than easy to develop a highly critical attitude towards the world of development assistance. Thus, during my first periods of fieldwork in 1970 and 1972, I was, without binding attachments to any development project, free to observe from outside various development interventions and, unconstrained by practical development duties, was also free to create in my own mind the best of all worlds. I developed a highly critical attitude towards the whole development business irrespective of level and kind – international, national, secular NGOs and Christian missions. The shortcomings seemed so apparent and the same mistakes were repeated over and over again with little or no will to consider and learn from past experience. Concepts of society, models of organisation and technologies developed in other historical, socio-cultural and economic contexts were hurriedly introduced during short project cycles and naively believed to work without special adaptations and without knowledge of existing local knowledge, perceptions and values. If I developed into neither a pure ‘rejectionist’ nor a pure ‘activist’, I did develop into an intellectual troublemaker whose only contribution was to observe and note all possible faults and shortcomings but with little of a constructive nature to say.

Karl Popper’s piecemeal tinkering may not always appear attractive to utopian minds, yet there can be situations in the real world where at least a kind of piecemeal tinkering is the only way forward, and in the development world this is, unfortunately, often the case. There is not necessarily a contradiction between awareness of globally unjust and strongly imbalanced power relationships on the one hand and, on the other, the identification of smaller-scale needs demanding to be addressed irrespective of existing power relationships.

Thinking more along these lines, I got my first thorough experience of development assistance in 1974–1976, when I was employed as ‘Development Sociologist’ in a Sida-financed multidisciplinary planning team in Mwanza Region in Tanzania. The task was integrated regional planning, which was a priority issue on the international development agenda at that time. The team was supposed to make an inventory of the various regional development sectors, analyse constraints and possibilities and, ultimately, come up with a long-term plan. We worked right in the Regional Planning Office and in close cooperation with the Tanzanian plan-
ning officers. The first part of the contract period consisted mainly in learning through participation. We assisted our Tanzanian colleagues in all the various tasks of the planning office such as assembling and ordering regional statistics, following up the trends in the different sectors by means of key indicators being used, writing progress reports and, in addition, for my part, since I was the only one on the team with fluency in Swahili, participating in numerous meetings and committees where Swahili was the sole medium of communication. During this phase of the project, Evans-Pritchard’s distinction was indeed applicable to all of us on the team, that is, we mainly worked as administrators, though informed by our respective specialist training. The second phase consisted in data collection. This was a rather time-consuming business which included among other things extensive travelling in the region, covering some 20,000 square kilometres, for gathering information and plotting on the regional map all the more than 500 new villages, established during the then recently completed ‘Operation Villagisation’.

The last phase, which we all found only too short, was set aside for analysis and drafting reports. In the project work I had got the livestock sector on my table. This was due to a certain awareness on the part of the team leader that livestock was not only an economic but also, critically, a social and cultural issue. Consequently, a team member with some anthropological training was deemed fit to deal with this sector. This suited me well because in my previous anthropological fieldworks, I had taken a special interest in pondering the links between the Sukuma-Nyamwezi world view, social organisation and agro-pastoral production system, and the conspicuous territorial expansion which had taken place over the immediate past decades. In my job description, there was provision made for setting aside some time for ‘pure’ research. This gave me the freedom to apply some, to my colleagues, ‘unconventional’ research methods; for example, not only trying to make sense out of all the quantifiable data collected but also, for enhanced understanding, staying with cattle owners and herders in the villages, participating in some of their daily activities, chatting together, cracking jokes and, in the relaxed discussions that came up, learning about the intricacies of their livestock-keeping.

This part of the work was anthropologically the most rewarding. Being a member of the Regional Planning Office, I had a freedom of movement which I never had as a free-floating individual researcher and also, within this context, the rationale of my investigations made sense to my interlocutors in the field. This context gave me an identity, namely as a person concerned about livestock development. Since livestock was also a concern to my interlocutors, my interest in learning about their views, knowledge
and problems did not seem strange to them. When you are an individual researcher, coming from a far-away country and perhaps with no other credentials but your research permit from the national research council, it is often difficult for local people to make sense of your coming there. It might not be that easy to figure out the reasons why somebody has left her or his comfortable life in the ‘developed world’ to suffer the inconveniences of rural village life in a part of the ‘underdeveloped world’.

If this part of the work was the most rewarding, I would not say that the other parts were totally unrewarding. Participant observation is an obsession among anthropologists. How can you really learn but through participation? As an anthropologist in a classic village study you take part in all kinds of activities in order to learn and understand more, in threshing, weeding, name-giving ceremonies, weddings, burials, etc. If you then happen to find yourself in a development administration, the approach is the same. Perhaps you do not weed or dance. Instead you fill in forms, order statistics, write reports, take part in the discussions and are attentive to the discourse world in which you find yourself.

But there were also, of course, less rewarding experiences, of which the most distressing was the growing insight about the repetitive character of the development business and the contrast between the skills in defining problems on the one hand, and on the other, the appalling inability to solve the problems defined.

I mentioned that I was assigned to observe the livestock sector, and in a region harbouring more than one million head of cattle and some eight hundred thousand sheep and goats, livestock and land are closely related issues.\textsuperscript{9} Perusing the regional archives, I started to wonder. In an article, ‘Do We Really Learn from Experience?’ in the mid-1980s, I summarised some of my impressions:

In various scholarly reports and government documents the extensive herding and farming practices of the Sukuma have been described as severely detrimental to the land. Sukuma cattle-keeping in particular has been associated with land degradation, soil erosion and ecological disaster. Warnings of impending disaster in terms of irreversible destruction of the environment have been sounded from the 1920s onward. … In the 1930s and the 1940s observers warned that soil exhaustion and erosion caused by overpopulation and the depredations of people and livestock threatened to make the whole area a desert. Unless fundamental changes were brought about in the land-use system, the future of Sukumaland was envisaged to be very bleak indeed (Malcolm 1953; Rounce 1949). The remedies proposed sound strikingly familiar to those of us engaged in the development debate some 40 years later. … Even the policy recommendations of earlier times remind us of the repetitive charac-

\textsuperscript{9} The human population of the region was at that time some 1.2 million.
ter of history. ‘The necessity for grafting new ideas as to organised resettlement, land tenure and agriculture on to existing customs’ is emphasized, since it is concluded that ‘innovations, however desirable, introduced without the good will and co-operation of the people may have an apparent ephemeral success’ (Malcolm 1953: 144). Even today documents on the situation in Sukumaland do not differ substantially from those of the earlier periods. The definitions of the problem as well as the proposals for remedial measures are strikingly similar. (Brandström 1985: 43–44)

I concluded by noting that fortunately, the most ominous prophecies about the future of Sukumaland had not materialised. Development measures might have contributed to alleviating some problems. Yet, with all the repeated development input over the years, no fundamental changes ever occurred regarding the issue which was considered to be the very cause of the problems, namely the Sukuma form of the extensive agro-pastoral land-use system (ibid.: 44).

We in the Mwanza Integrated Regional Planning Project, on our part, ultimately delivered our project reports in the usual format of that time containing data presentations, analyses and recommendations and, I believe, rather proud of the five volumes we had produced, filled with reasonably readable report texts plus a substantial map supplement (MIRP 1976). Sida’s support, however, was restricted only to the planning exercise itself, with no commitments as to any implementation of proposals and recommendations made in the documents. When we finished, the World Bank came in and continued the integrated regional development exercise for an additional number of years, now with some elements of implementation in the project. However, our project and the following World Bank project were both of little noticeable benefit to the rural population of the region, whose development was professedly the aim of the exercises. The Sukuma agro-pastoralists continued, as noted above, to work the land and tend their livestock in the same manner as before, with little or no productivity improvements, and they have largely continued to do so until today. When I worked in 1990–1993 for the Sida-funded HESAWA programme – a community-based health, sanitation and water programme – operating in the three lake regions of western Tanzania, I had the opportunity to reacquaint myself with Mwanza Region. The only ‘remnants’ of the work of our Sida team I could find at that time were the village maps we made in the mid-1970s still adorning the walls of some of the district offices.

Other experiences of extended involvement in development work were of a different character. In the experience described above, the task of our multidisciplinary team was to collect data, make analyses and propose
action, while the whole issue of implementation fell to other agencies. In
the HESAWA programme, I worked as Programme Advisor in close
cooperation with the national Programme Director. This task included
both planning and implementation of the plans. The main objectives of
this particular programme were highly tangible. They concerned allevia-
tion of the water problems strongly felt by the rural population and re-
duction of the incidence of water-borne and water-related diseases. Thus
the results of decisions and actions taken were easily readable in terms of
success or failure. In this kind of work, the direct link between thought
and action, plan and implementation makes for both a high degree of
personal involvement and a sense of personal responsibility for the practi-
cal outcomes. In this setting of work, to assess to what extent anthropol-
ogical knowledge, methods and approaches contribute in relation to con-
tributions of other kinds of professional knowledge and skills, is not an
easy task. At best, the experience can be described as a process of mutual
learning and, to some extent, also of testing the relevance of anthropol-
ogical knowledge in real life or, as Quarles van Ufford and Giri more
succinctly put it, a situation where academic and practical insights fuse ‘in
marvellous ways, often blurring the different backgrounds and allowing
for a space of learning’ (Quarles van Ufford and Giri 2003: xiii).

I will not bore the reader with additional empirical descriptions of per-
sonal long-term and short-term experiences of development assistance or
interventions. The illustrations given suffice as an experiential background
for ensuing ponderings.

The theoretical and/or the practical,
knowledge and/or action?

Judging from my first extended involvement in development work and
from later experiences that followed, Evans-Pritchard’s distinction be-
tween ‘pure’ and ‘applied’ could well be valid in several respects. There is
of course a marked distinction between anthropological work for aca-
demic purposes and anthropological work for practical development ends.
There is a difference between distant development theorising, with no
demand to achieve anything visible on the ground, and practical devel-
opment work, where your work is supposed to contribute to more imme-
diate and tangible practical results. The working conditions are also nor-
mally very different in the one case and the other. In the first case you are
simply in the field to do anthropological research which you are trained to
do and answerable mainly to the academic community and its scholarly demands. In the latter case you find yourself in a situation where your usual academic freedom is highly constrained by various policies, programme or project objectives, administrative frameworks and routines and often also by expectations on you to act in the environment more ‘as an administrator with scientific training and knowledge of a special kind’ than ‘as a scientist with some experience of administration’ (Evans-Pritchard 1946: 98). In this kind of context there might be little room for ‘anthropologising’, but still, one could argue, there is always some room for doing anthropology, and this is where the Malinowskian attitude becomes relevant together with his insistence on anthropology as the study of ‘vital, relevant and fundamental problems’ even when it more directly affects practical interests (Malinowski 1939: 38).

There are indeed different settings for anthropological practice. The distant, critical theorising about development-related issues without any linkage to direct practical implementation is, of course, an important task for anthropological research as an academic pursuit. One example in recent years, among many others over the last few decades, of work within this setting of practice and genre of writing, is Arturo Escobar’s study Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World (Escobar 1995). Through discourse analysis and hermeneutics of suspicion of mainstream ideas, ‘development’ as a marketplace of competing interests is problematised. This is a kind of anthropological practice energised by the primary intention of creating awareness of political and economic power relations and their global and local implications. Another setting is the theoretical study of field-level programmes. This kind of study evolves out of the anthropologist’s direct involvement in development projects or programmes. A good example of this kind of anthropological practice is provided by David Mosse in his recent book Cultivating Development: An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice (Mosse 2005). Mosse’s work is a reflection based on ten years of direct involvement in a development programme in western India. While Escobar’s view from afar on the development world lends itself to a painting in black and white, Mosse’s close personal experience of making ends meet in programme implementation, followed by a distanced reflection, provides a more nuanced and multi-layered picture of ‘development’, composed as it is, in any particular historical and actual situation, of different social and political relationships and of competing interests and understandings. Both of these types of work contribute in their various ways to an increased awareness and enhanced understanding of the intricacies of differ-
ent aspects of development, yet they remain ‘purely’ academic in the sense that they are not linked to any demand of implementation.

Jean-Pierre Oliver de Sardan, in his book *Anthropology and Development: Understanding Contemporary Social Change* (Olivier de Sardan 2005), presents another arena of anthropological practice which is close to the practicalities of development though not dealing directly with practical implementation. He draws from ten years of experience of development-related research in West Africa, a research ‘into themes with direct bearing on the institutions of development; the role of development projects in local contexts; the difficulties of childbearing in the rural environment; how village water pump management committees operate; corruption in the administration of justice, transport, health and customs; local authorities and future decentralisation; interactions between health professionals and users; conflicts over credits; and so on’ (Olivier de Sardan 2005: 212). However, this kind of anthropological research described by Olivier de Sardan, though closely linked to issues of immediate development concern, is not, like the previous kinds of development research described, directly linked to application of the research findings. The anthropologists do their part, which is research, and the development professionals do theirs, which is development intervention. Oliver de Sardan discusses the issue of knowledge versus action and he asks the question: ‘What are we to do with our results? How can we turn them into reforms (reforms in both the mode of intervention and the social milieu concerned? ’ (Olivier de Sardan 2005: 213). He reasons that the anthropologists do their job and the development professionals theirs, but there is noise in the communication between the two sides, there is a ‘missing link’, as he puts it: ‘Neither we – some researchers – or our interlocutors – certain development professionals – know how to draw operational conclusions from the results’ (Olivier de Sardan 2005: 214). Thus, the task at hand, he argues, is to forge this missing link, ‘in the daily practice of serious reform initiatives rather than in comfortable rhetorical formulas’ (Olivier de Sardan 2005: 215; italics in original).

The three settings of anthropological practice described above all have in common that they fall within the precincts of conventional academic research. There might be different opinions among anthropological proponents about ‘development’; yet the common issue in all the instances is the production of knowledge and not the practical application of acquired knowledge, though in the last example, the question is asked of how to forge a link between knowledge and action. But there are other settings where the anthropologist is supposed to translate knowledge into action. These are when the anthropologist is engaged as a consultant in various
fields of development activities, as a development administrator or as a development worker in different project or programme contexts. In these situations the very task of the anthropologist is to transform knowledge into action. As consultant the anthropologist is required, on the basis of data collection and analyses, to make recommendations and give advice, and as anthropologist cum administrator she or he is there to take part and share responsibilities in the implementation of development activities.

Olivier de Sardan reasons that as social scientists ‘we derive our legitimacy from a competence in empirical research’, and ‘we have no particular skill in terms of institutional arrangements, organisational capacities, the formulation of practical policies, strategies for communication, and proposals for reform’ (Olivier de Sardan 2005: 214). This is certainly true. As anthropologists we are normally not trained in development administration. Yet one could argue that our anthropological training and experience of fieldwork would provide us with a certain preparedness to adapt to unfamiliar milieus. Whatever the field is, whether the village of classical anthropology in the past or the development organisation of today, customs and habits must be considered in order to behave adequately in the exotic milieu, and local languages have to be learnt in order to be able to communicate. However, this is not to argue against Olivier de Sardan’s call for considerations of the complex professional relationships in the field of development and the need for systematic work to improve inter-professional communication. Those of us who once, as anthropologists, were more or less thrown into development work certainly have experiences both of the pros and cons of this encounter and the often arduous itinerary from initial naivety with all its mistakes and misunderstandings to a gradual learning through daily practice. But the road of trial and error is a time-consuming one and often has to be walked at high personal costs. It is thus a serious reminder both to the anthropologists and to the development professionals when Olivier de Sardan, on the need for improving inter-professional communication, writes: ‘The task is almost entirely still to be done, and demands as a preliminary condition a real professionalism on both sides, rather than good intentions and commonplace populist illusions’ (Olivier de Sardan 2005: 215). Melissa Leach and Robin Mearns, while broadening the scope for improved communication, reason along lines similar to Olivier de Sardan’s. Following Roe in his critical writing (Roe 1991), they set their hopes on innovative institutional arrangements for improved communication and ‘learning better through experience’. They write: ‘If scientists, policy-makers and local inhabitants are genuinely to comprehend each other’s perspectives and exchange viewpoints, then innovative institutional arrangements will be
needed. If research which reveals a plurality of perspectives is to be useful in the policy process, the policy process and its institutions have simultaneously to change’ (Leach and Mearns 1996: 33).

Many anthropologists, following in the footsteps of Evans-Pritchard, continue to draw a line between academic and practical anthropology, some on theoretical grounds and others on ideological. In relation to development a distinction is made based on the separation of study and application, between ‘anthropology of development’ and ‘development anthropology’ (Grillo 1985: 29). While Evans-Pritchard in any case saw a value in putting anthropological knowledge into practice, though he called this kind of practice ‘administration’, some of his followers today take a stronger stand and even disavow the whole collectivity of ‘development anthropologists’ and their work. Escobar, for example, a strong proponent of this view, bluntly states that in sum, ‘development anthropology, for all its claim to relevance to local problems, to cultural sensitivity, and to accesses to interpretive holistic methods, has done no more than recycle, and dressed in more localized fabrics, the discourse of modernization and development’ (Escobar 1991: 677). Others, more in the spirit of Malinowski, refuse such dichotomisation as simplistic and thus untenable. Elizabeth Harrison, in this train of thought, argues that this ‘neat distinction between development anthropology and anthropology of development is, like all other simple dichotomies, both problematic and illustrative of a wish among those who use it to take a moral high ground. In particular, self-conscious identification with the anthropology of development implies a detachment from the morally compromised object of inquiry. Such detachment is both theoretically and empirically implausible’ (Harrison 2003: 115). Tony Barnett emphasises the tension within the discipline between theory and practical engagement even more strongly. He argues that the anthropological self-criticism in the wake of the decolonisation of the 1960s and before, turned us away from anthropology’s practical engagement and took ‘a whole generation into the wilderness of guilt-ridden navel-gazing from which, by and large, they have yet to emerge’ (Barnett 2004: 2).

As reflected in anthropological literature and in personal experiences from the field, anthropology and development has always been an uneasy marriage and it may unavoidably continue to be so. The tension between ‘guilt-ridden navel-gazing’ and engagement in the world out there, between ‘interior obsession and exterior involvement’ (Barnett 2004: 2), and between knowledge and action can perhaps never be resolved. However, what can be avoided is to go too far in any direction.
Troublemaker or contributor?

We live in a world of continuities and changes. Anthropology does not constitute an exception to this fact. The experiences I have described in the foregoing belong to the past in certain respects and to the present in others. The reverberations of the past in the present are unavoidable. Attitudes well forged within the discipline as far back as the times of our anthropological ancestors like Malinowski and Evans-Prichard continue to carry weight. The ‘unhelpful split between applied and academic anthropology’, as Sillitoe phrases it (Sillitoe 2006: 15), with its roots in the past continues to haunt us until today. Simultaneously, new approaches develop, overcoming such dichotomisation as that between ‘anthropology of development’ and ‘development anthropology’. In the arena of development aid, policies change continuously. What was a common approach yesterday is not a common approach today. Still, there are also continuities in this arena, some of them tracing back to colonial times.

Grillo’s classification of the anthropologists’ stands towards development and development interventions – ‘rejectionist’, ‘monitorist’, ‘activist’ and ‘conditional reformer’ – can perhaps be reduced to basically only two, namely that of the ‘rejectionist’, the distanced critic who shuns the mundane practicalities of development for more elevated causes, and that of the ‘conditional reformer’, who takes the world for what it is and is prepared, though critically and with moral responsibility, to apply her or his knowledge in this world. The anthropological method of participant observation, or ‘participant reflection’ as some anthropologists prefer to say (Århem 1994), provides, if the anthropologist does her or his job well, a perspective from within that can be matched against perspectives from the outside, an ‘experience near’ against ‘experience far’. In addition, the anthropologist has access to the ‘ethnographic archive’, the cross-cultural comparative perspective. This vantage point often fosters a critical attitude towards the various modes of development intervention and a common tendency to side with ‘the weak’ against ‘the strong’. When our anthropology stops at criticism of development intervention or only at observations and reminders, which is as far as many anthropologists have the conscience to go, we are likely to be perceived by developers and development agencies only as a nuisance and, because of our often highly critical attitude towards ‘the development culture’, as troublemakers. This is, I believe, the experience of many anthropologists from involvement in development interventions. As anthropologists, we are, as Wolf notes, ‘more likely to be critics than architects of grand theory’, and this ‘often assigns
us the unwelcome yet vitally needed role of questioning the certainties of others, both social scientists and policy makers’ (Wolf 1999: 132).

But to question the certainties of others is not necessarily only to be a nuisance to those prone to immediate positive action. If we, as anthropologists, do not share the excessive optimism of others about governability and the possibilities of social engineering, and anthropologists rarely do, this is not to say that we necessarily have to take a position of non-involvement and denial of practical and moral responsibilities (Quarles van Ufford and Roth 2003: 77–78).

This is, one could say, a return to the Malinowskian credo, that our academic pursuits should not begin only where reality ends (Malinowski 1939: 38). In these terms, the anthropologist turns from troublemaker into contributor, or rather into critic cum contributor, encompassing development both as theory and practice, knowledge and action, as well as hope, administration and critical reflection.

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I used as an epigraph for this paper Pierre Clastre’s quotation of Montaigne:

> Someone said to Socrates that a certain man had grown no better in his travels. ‘I should think not,’ he said. ‘He took himself along with him.’

We will always unavoidably take ourselves along with us in our travels. The hope is that our encounter with others, who are not exactly like us, will cause us to return at least a bit wiser.
References


Introduction

I begin with an anecdote. I had been thinking about trying to write a paper on this theme for some time, but it was a recent visit to the Sida (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) office in Stockholm that prompted me to try to organise some thoughts on the page in relation to the topic of anthropology, history and development. My visit, which was to present a piece of research on the local power structure in Bangladesh, took place a few days after Sida had moved to its new offices. There were boxes of documents piled everywhere, and the place was in an understandable state of disarray as this massive and complex logistical task was being completed. People I met there were full of stories about the move and the difficulties it had entailed, but one comment in particular struck me as interesting: faced with the enormous task of clearing through the years of papers and documents in their offices, people had been advised that they could discard anything that was more than two years old, and only needed to keep the rest. While I am sure that this was not a case of Sida simply jettisoning decades of institutional memory and learning about development (I assume that a centralised library keeps track of all such material somewhere), it did strike me as symptomatic of a wider tendency within many development agencies to live in the ‘perpetual present’ – one that is characterised by frequently changing language and buzzwords, by discussion of new approaches that promise better chances of success than those previously in
Ethnographic Practice and Public Aid

My main purpose in this paper is to explore the argument that anthropologists of development are well-positioned to restore a sense of development history – in relation to constantly changing ideas, knowledge and practices – that can serve usefully to anchor development practice more firmly within its wider histories. It has been argued that one of the key elements of neo-liberal policy orthodoxy that has increasingly come to dominate thinking about development – as it has many other aspects of social and economic life – is a tendency to insist on at best a limited sense of historical perspective and at worst an attempt to diminish or suppress historical depth and distance. This idea is central, for instance, to Scott’s (1998: 95) analysis of ‘high modernism’:

The past is an impediment, a history that must be transcended; the present is the platform for launching plans for a better future.

Within the development field, these ahistorical tendencies can be seen to operate in a variety of levels – from that of the origins of the ideas and concepts that are used within development policy, the broader contexts into which interventions such as projects are introduced, and at a more micro-level, the factors that help determine people’s room for manoeuvre within the trajectories of their own individual life histories and the implications of this for development practice.

There has of course long been work by anthropologists that seeks to contextualise projects within history and politics, drawing attention to the ways project documents may over-focus on the present at the expense of wider context, politics and history. For example, a classic study of this kind was Barnett’s (1977) analysis of the Gezira land-leasing scheme in Sudan introduced by the British in the 1920s, which aimed to control local labour and secure cotton exports, but which took a top-down approach that failed to engage with historical factors that helped determine

1 Thanks to Dennis Rodgers, Deborah James and Hakan Seckinelgin for their very helpful ideas and suggestions on this chapter. A different version of this text was published as “International development and the ‘perpetual present’: Anthropological approaches to the rehistoricization of policy” in the European Journal of Development Research (2009) 21, 32–46.

2 At the same time, it is also important recognise that anthropologists themselves have from time to time come under heavy criticism for their lack of a sufficiently historical approach. For example, during anthropology’s period of post-modern critical reflection in the 1980s Marcus and Fischer (1986) questioned the tendency of anthropologists to focus on an ahistorical or exotic ‘other’ and instead argued for work on the ideas and institutions of anthropologists’ own contexts, emphasising the need to study power and history locally and globally.
the incentives of producers. More recently, Wrangham (2004: 100) shows how a DFID rural development project document in Mozambique contained just seventeen references to ‘a non-project related past’ in over 132 detailed pages. This, she argues, reflected a project design that paid insufficient attention to three important sets of historical factors: the significance of the still-recent civil war, the ways in which local communities were likely to perceive outsiders given their earlier encounters, and finally the ‘long-standing diversity of rural livelihoods’. The result was that

ignoring history led to the agricultural component of ZADP being designed with inappropriate aims and objectives, and with an apolitical grasp of the reasons for rural poverty … (Wrangham 2004: 124)

Drawing on the work of Isaacman (1997) on the production of ‘historical amnesia’, Wrangham’s work shows the ways in which dominant project staff became overly focused on imagined views of the future which then served to obscure important historical and political continuities with the past.³

Critical post-structuralist anthropological work has also taken a historical approach to the analysis of development discourses in recent years. For example, Escobar’s (1995) focus was on the ways in which Western interests constructed the idea of the third world as something to be known and acted upon, while Hobart’s (1993) work focused on the histories of different kinds of knowledge. Cowen and Shenton (1995) in an influential paper traced the Enlightenment roots of the concept of development. Ferguson (1990) wrote of the ways in which the livestock project in Lesotho constructed a version of agrarian relations that downplayed and distorted important elements of the past. While this general approach has been influential and useful, it has nevertheless attracted criticism for taking a somewhat monolithic view of a single dominant history of development. As Grillo (1997: 20) pointed out in his critique of what he calls ‘the myth of development’ and its unitary ‘all-powerful’ character (along with that of the state), such accounts have nevertheless been somewhat limited in their historical vision: ‘Like most myths it is based on poor or partial history, betraying a lack of knowledge of both colonialism and decolonization […] Ill-informed about the history of government …’ (Grillo 1997: 20–21).

While acknowledging the value of approaches such as Escobar’s and Ferguson’s, my argument in this chapter is more general and open-ended.

³ This is not to say that such historical perspectives were not available to the project or argued for by certain project staff, but that they were in practice given low priority.
Furthermore, being in touch with the past does not imply that for those working in development looking back is more important than looking forward, or that ‘there is nothing new under the sun’. Nor should we adopt a naïve view of the idea that we can simply learn from history in a straightforward way (Macmillan 2009). Instead, the point is that a stronger engagement with historical perspectives can provide a clearer view of the political field in which development thinking is situated, and the constraints that this implies. What follows from this contextualisation is the possibility of providing the development practitioner with a firmer grasp of what is and is not possible, and the importance of longer-term thinking in relation to policy. This of course has two distinct but interrelated dimensions: firstly, the need to locate development activities more fully within historical and political contexts and argue forcefully for the reflection of such a perspective in the design of activities and policies; and secondly, the need for development practitioners to operate with as clear as possible an awareness of the histories of the ideas, concepts and experiences that they themselves are engaged in deploying through their work.

Why is it that history may increasingly be downplayed or ignored with development agencies? Aside from the general factors we have briefly considered, certain distinctive organisational characteristics of development agencies may also contribute. For example, the use of expatriate staff often involves relatively short time frames based on two- or three-year postings, such that individual knowledge and experience is difficult to document, contain or distil. At the same time, the bureaucratic logic of an office or department may require the new appointee to a position to demonstrate their effectiveness by deliberately down-playing what went before in order to demonstrate their own ‘added value’. This can also involve the sometimes needless development of new initiatives, terms and approaches in a process that can contribute to the playing down of past activities and inhibit learning. Such practices are part of the wider infusion of ideologies of managerialism into the organised worlds of development (Roberts et al. 2005). One outcome of this is a tendency to play down the very idea of history through a relentless emphasis on novelty and change.\(^4\)

In so doing, the world of development practice becomes further decontextualised, as Cornwall and Brock (2005: 13) show in their analysis of the ways in which development ‘buzzwords’ such as empowerment, participa-

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\(^4\) In his book on public management and cultural theory, Hood (1996) points out that the 1990s practice of ‘hot desking’ that was common among private-sector companies such as Xerox and presented as the latest in up-to-date management thinking were not so dissimilar to ideas that had been advocated by Jeremy Bentham to improve the performance of public officials two centuries earlier.
tion and poverty reduction each function to help maintain what they term ‘the imagined, decontextualised world of the consensus narrative’.

Anthropology’s engagement with development

Before moving on to the main argument about history and development, it is first useful to review briefly the current state of the relationship between anthropology and the ideas and practices of development.

The relationship itself dates from the earliest days of the discipline of anthropology in the colonial period and has taken various forms since then up to the present. It became common in the 1980s to make a distinction between the ‘development anthropologists’ who worked broadly within the agendas of the development agencies in their applied research or advocacy of particular policies, and those ‘anthropologists of development’ who set themselves the challenges of analysing the meanings and effects of the ideas and practices of development itself, often taking up a highly critical stance that questioned its impacts, values and purposes (Grillo and Rew 1985). Through this dual approach, anthropologists generally adopted either a position of sympathetic involvement with development practice or the more disengaged stance of critique of or hostility to development.

Unpacking these positions further, Lewis (2005) suggested that these stances can be more accurately characterised as three distinct roles: anthropologists as ‘engaged activists’, as ‘reluctant participants’, or as ‘antagonistic observers’. For ‘engaged activists’, the role of an applied anthropology of development – as with an applied anthropology of other fields such as business or media – is relatively unproblematic. There have long been anthropologists interested in using their knowledge for practical purposes. The field of applied anthropology, defined as the use of anthropological methods and ideas in practical or policy contexts, has involved collaboration with activists, policy makers and professionals. For example, in the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the United States anthropologists have contributed their research findings to policy makers on many issues such as local customs, dispute settlement and land rights. The gradual professionalisation of the development industry from the 1970s onwards led to a growth of opportunities for anthropologists to work within development agencies as staff or consultants, just as anthropologists also took up jobs within fields as diverse as community work and corporate personnel departments. In this role, anthropologists often worked to interpret local realities for administrators and planners.
Anthropology also came to be seen as a tool which potentially provided the means to understand, and therefore to some extent control, people’s behaviour, either as beneficiaries, employees or customers. The second group, the ‘reluctant participants’, sometimes overlapped with the first, but resulted more from the expansion of contract opportunities and the contraction of academic resources in places such as the UK, which drew in anthropologists as a condition of their employment. Finally, there has been a high-profile group of ‘antagonistic observers’. At one level, such work has flowed seamlessly from many anthropologists’ long-standing concerns with the social and cultural effects of economic change in less developed areas. More recently there are anthropologists, such as Ferguson, who have selected the ideas, processes and institutions of development as their field of study, but have taken a critical approach that has not normally attempted to engage with development agencies themselves. In a later paper, Mosse and Lewis (2005: 2) unpack further the motivations of different forms of anthropological engagement: those who engage with development instrumentally, seeking to play a normative role from a range of different positions within development agencies, those who engage with it ideologically through forms of participation that stress localism or populism, such as Robert Chambers, and those whose motivation has, as in the case of Escobar and Ferguson’s work, been primarily critical and deconstructive.

While it may be useful to consider these three positions and the lessons that emerge from them, it is now perhaps more important to dissolve and move beyond such distinctions for the future. The intermingling of the three stances outlined here, and the illusory nature of the belief that one can separate anthropological work ‘on’ and ‘in’ development, requires us to move beyond the dualism of distinguishing between applied and non-applied categories. As Crewe and Harrison (1998) suggest, boundaries between development anthropologists and anthropologists of development no longer hold firm under criticism of their artificiality. Such binary thinking obscures the positioning of all anthropological work within a dominant organising idea of development: what Ferguson (1990) terms the dominant ‘interpretive grid’ of development discourse. The 1990s brought a revival of interest in development by anthropologists, and today signs are we are moving into forms of engagement that move beyond simple applied-theoretical distinctions to reveal more of the organisations and agencies of development, and a deeper analysis of the ways in which ideas about development have come to play a central role in our lives. As such boundaries break down, new and perhaps more nuanced perspectives on development are emerging. For example, Olivier de Sardan’s (2005)
work draws attention to the ways in which the study of increasingly de-
centralised and localised practices by development actors reflect their
broader roles within national and international political economy. A simi-
lar perspective is taken by Mosse and Lewis’s (2005) work on aid that
seeks to show the ways in which the ethnography of micro-level processes
of brokerage illuminate the construction of development meanings and
representations alongside functional roles.

Engaging more fully with development histories

Anthropological understandings of development can produce new in-
sights and analyses within the shifting landscapes of development ideas,
stitutions and activities. Quarles van Ufford et al. (2003) argue that
development has been variously characterised as ‘hope’ in that it carries
ideas about shaping a better future, as ‘administration’ in that it has since
the 1950s amassed a range of agencies and technologies designed to pro-
duce it, and as ‘critical understanding’ since it constitutes a site of knowl-
edge about the world. They argue however that in spite of these multiple
contributions, the idea of development has been gradually narrowed, that
development is increasingly defined simply as a management problem,
and that

[t]he new creed of market and result-orientation has emptied itself of the earlier his-
torical awareness of development as an initiative in global responsibility first ex-
pressed in the agenda of global development which emerged towards the end of the
Second World War. (Quarles van Ufford et al. 2003: 8)

Central to the argument of the authors is the idea that development agen-
cies have increasingly replaced the wider, more open-ended goals and
aspirations of development with a stronger focus on results and ‘manage-
ability’. This is one of the areas of ‘disjuncture’ identified by Lewis and
Mosse (2006a) that forms part of a growing set of tensions and contradic-
tions around development ideas and aims, and development practices.

A more explicitly historical perspective can challenge this increasingly
constricted view of development as a site of knowledge about the world.
This perspective is important at two levels: not only in relation to the
histories and contexts in which development interventions are con-
structed, but also in relation to the historical trajectories of development
ideas, organisations and people. In the first section, I will look at the way
in which an understanding of the history of rapidly shifting development
knowledge and ideas is important, using the example of ideas about NGOs and civil society. In the second, I consider development history in the context of people and practices, with a brief discussion of some ongoing research of my own on the life-work histories of managers and activists who cross between civil society and state during their careers.

Knowledge and ideas: NGOs and civil society

The rapid and largely non-reflexive growth of interest in ‘civil society’ and ‘non-governmental organisations’ (NGOs) among development agencies during the 1990s is one illustration of the rapidly changing fashions within development thinking (Lewis 2005). Although civil society is a concept several centuries old, and various types of NGOs have been active for a similar time-scale in many parts of the world, neither subject had a profile within development policy or development studies during the 1980s and earlier.\(^5\) In their different ways, both of these ideas then quickly found their way into development discourse without much reflection on history and background. The speed with which this took place subsequently in no way diminishes their importance or relevance, but it is instructive to explore whether an appreciation of the historical context of the rise to prominence of these ideas can bring a more nuanced understanding to the role of each.

NGOs were the first of these two ideas to make a rapid entry into mainstream development policy and research. As Sogge (1996: 1) has put it, ‘After decades of quiet and respectable middle-class existences, private development agencies have come up in the world.’ At the World Bank, Paul (1989: 1) expressed the common view at the time – and a view that was clearly ideological in intent – that ‘NGOs have been heralded as new agents with the capacity and commitment to make up for the shortcomings of the state and the market in reducing poverty’. They were seen as offering elements of ‘comparative advantage’ in relation to government and business that included cost effectiveness, administrative flexibility and an ability to work close to the poor. NGOs became central to the emergence of the ‘good governance’ agenda, and their roles also underpinned new thinking in relation to promoting the flexible delivery of services by private non-state actors (Lewis 2005).

Yet NGOs were at this time presented largely as – to take a cue from Eric Wolf (1982) – organisations ‘without a history’, and entered (and to

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\(^5\) Studying postgraduate development studies in the mid-1980s, neither topic was mentioned as far as I recall, nor does a consultation of the index of key texts used during that period yield any references.
some extent have also recently also exited) the dominant development policy discourse as such. Yet a long history to the NGO phenomenon predates their rise to prominence within the development studies discourse. While NGOs had been present on a small scale for many years, they had rarely troubled the landscape of development researchers or policy makers. In an extensive review article entitled ‘Two Centuries of Participation’, Charnovitz (1997: 185) has summarised a long history of NGO activity at the international level, much of which has remained largely hidden both within development studies and development practice, and he is critical of the ahistoricity of both NGO researchers and supporters:

Although some observers seem to perceive NGO involvement as a late-twentieth-century phenomenon, in fact it has occurred for over 200 years. Advocates of a more extensive role for NGOs weaken their cause by neglecting this history because it shows a long time custom of governmental interaction with NGOs in the making of international policy. (Charnovitz 1997: 185)

Charnovitz traces NGO ‘emergence’ from the late eighteenth century up to the period before the First World War, through to a phase of ‘empowerment’ in the period after the 1992 United Nations Rio conference. National-level issue-based organisations in the eighteenth century focused on such issues as the abolition of the slave trade and various movements for peace building, and Charnovitz charts the ways NGOs had built associations by the early twentieth century to promote their identities at national and international levels, working on issues as varied as transportation, intellectual property rights, narcotics control, public health, agriculture and environmental protection. In the period after the Second World War, the United Nations Charter provided for NGO involvement in UN activities. By the 1970s there was an increased ‘intensification’ of NGO roles such as a growing presence at the UN Stockholm Environment Conference in 1972 and the World Population Conference in Bucharest in 1974. NGOs played a key role in the drafting of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and since 1992, NGO influence continued to grow as evidenced by the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) which saw NGOs active both in its preparation and within the conference itself. 6 Rather than the sudden emergence implied above by Paul (1989), there was already a long history attributable to NGOs.

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6 A diverse set of NGO-related histories are also recoverable from around the world: in Latin America, the growth of ‘liberation theology’ in the 1960s, the political ideas of radical Brazilian educator Paolo Freire, from peasant movements seeking improved rights to land
The relatively sudden appearance of the NGO agenda within development policy circles from the late 1980s onwards needs to be understood within the context of the privatising imperatives of ascendant neoliberalism, both at the intellectual level of ideological recruitment and at the practical level of creating more opportunities for applied researchers to focus on NGOs (Lewis 2005). There was a convergence of priorities among donors, activists and researchers that served to contribute to the elevation of these ideas into a position of development orthodoxy. Policies of privatisation, market liberalisation and administrative reform came to represent the dominant solutions to development problems (Schech and Haggis 2000). All of this led to greater levels of funding for NGOs, particularly those engaged in service delivery. The crisis of development theory in the 1980s had contributed to the loss of confidence that development could be produced by the state, and coincided with the rise to prominence of neo-liberal analysis, which had long argued that state intervention was the problem rather than the solution. Neo-liberals came to dominate in the international financial institutions, in many governments, and in significant sections of the development industry.

Today NGOs are less favoured within development circles than they were in the 1990s, as fashions have shifted towards a broader focus on working with governments more directly through budget support, and with a broader notion of ‘civil society’ actors engaged in governance and services. As Comaroff and Comaroff (1999) argue, the resurgence of interest in the concept of civil society across the late-twentieth-century West can be seen as an ideological act of ‘re-remembering’ – or perhaps differently remembering – rather than as an engagement with an idea that was qualitatively new. The rise of the ‘good governance’ agenda in the 1990s tempered more extreme approaches towards privatisation in favour of a more balanced view of potential synergies between state, market and the non-governmental sector. It led to the funding of NGO activities beyond service delivery to include advocacy. It also subsequently led donors to move away from favouring NGOs as they did in the early to mid-1990s to, in many cases, a rejection of NGOs in favour of a new discourse of ‘civil society’. While there are differences among donors in the ways this is defined, it generally refers to the idea that NGOs are out of favour and that grassroots membership organisations, business associations, ‘faith-based groups’ and sometimes even trade unions are considered to be ‘in’.

and against authoritarianism, from the influence of Christian missionaries, the reformist middle classes and Gandhian ideas in India.
But the concept of civil society, as gradually became clear to development agencies, was one with a long and complex genealogy that created problems for those who have seized too unreflectively upon its promised role in development. This became clear, for example, in debates about whether or not the concept's essentially Western origins allowed for its useful application to non-Western contexts (Lewis 2002). At the same time, a diversity of often non-compatible strands of thinking about civil society often made it difficult for development agencies, government policy makers and activists to communicate easily with each other. Gramsci argued that civil society was an arena, separate from state and market, in which ideological hegemony is contested, implying that civil society contains a wide range of different organisations and ideologies which both challenge and uphold the existing order (see Gramsci 1971). These ideas were influential in the context of the analysis and enactment of resistance to totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe and Latin America from the 1970s onwards. Gramscian ideas about civil society can also be linked to the research on ‘social movements’ which seeks to challenge and transform structures and identities (Escobar and Alvarez 1992; Howell and Pearce 2001). However, it was a version of civil society that was derived from the work of Alexis de Tocqueville that found most fertile ground in development agencies interested in ‘good governance’. This was used to support arguments ‘in favour of’ civil society. De Tocqueville’s account of nineteenth-century associationalism in the United States (de Tocqueville 1835/1994) stressed characteristics of volunteerism and associational life as protection against the domination of society by the state, and as a counterweight that could help keep government accountable and effective.

A more historically informed view of both NGOs and civil society can therefore serve to clarify concepts, assess more realistically their potential value to development practice and draw attention to the importance of embedding concepts more fully within contextual analysis.

**People and practices**

This approach also has value if it is applied at the level of individual histories experienced within development agencies and processes. It becomes possible to understand the ways in which these experiences both contribute to, and are embedded within, wider patterns of change and transformation. Individuals are constituted into knowledge communities in ways that cannot simply be analysed in terms of ideological hegemony, but need also to take account of agency and contingency at the level of individual actors and their everyday practices.
An ongoing research project uses the ‘life history’ method in order to try to document the experiences of individuals who cross between the civil society or ‘third sector’ and the government or public sector during their lives as activists and managers (Lewis 2008). Interviews have been conducted with people in three countries in order to document and compare experiences. The work seeks to examine the reasons for these boundary shifts in relation to concepts of power and innovation, the experiences of those involved, and some of the implications of such ‘boundary crossing’ for better understanding the boundaries, both conceptual and tangible, that separate government and third sector in different institutional contexts. The three-sector model of state, market and civil society is one that has remained central to development models and agendas that underpin the idea of ‘good governance’. The aim of the research is to generate insights into the unstable boundary that exists between government and civil society that researchers and policy makers often assume unproblematically.\(^7\)

While policy makers and academics may find it analytically convenient to separate these sectors, the research is informed by the assumption that the realities are more complex. NGOs and states are linked in potentially important (though often far from visible) ways via personal relationships, resource flows and transactions. In some countries, there have been individuals who have crossed over between the government and third sector. For example, in the Philippines, many NGO leaders joined the post-Marcos democratic government in 1986 to pursue rural development. The changing institutional trajectories of such people have so far received little attention from researchers.

Emerging findings point to two sets of issues relevant to our argument here. First, they suggest a range of ‘hidden’ linkages between the two sectors, such as informal political, patron-client or kin relationships between key players. For example, an elite family may advance its interests by having representatives within government, business and third-sector

\(^7\) The research is funded by the UK Economic Social Science Research Council (ESRC) as part of its Non-Governmental Public Action (NGPA) Programme (Grant RES-155-25-0064). Twenty detailed life history interviews have been collected in each of three contrasting country contexts: the Philippines, where many NGO activists have crossed into successive post-Marcos democratic governments to work on agrarian reform, social welfare and other issues; Bangladesh, where there is little movement from civil society into government, but considerable movement in the other direction and extensive informal linkages among key individuals between NGOs and government; and UK, where there has been an intensification of movement between the two sectors in the past decade as a result of both purposeful exchange in the form of secondments, and increased flexibility and mobility in the labour market.
organisations. Second, the findings highlight the importance of comparative historical analysis in understanding the considerable differences between state and civil-society relationships in different contexts.

The boundary between state and third sector is shown to be problematic and complex, since it exists at different levels. At one level it is a conceptual boundary, an idea that helps to map out the complex landscape of organisational life and the shifting institutional relationships of neo-liberal policy terrains. As such, it is highly artificial, since in the real world of organisations people constantly carry ideas, relationships and practices with them as they travel across from one side to the other, as they change jobs, develop alliances or operate simultaneously in both sectors. As an ‘ideal type’, the three-sector model is at odds with the messy realities of political, personal and organisational life, where such a neat division across the boundary is impossible, and where context and history creates very different sets of structures and incentives from place to place, not just between North and South, but also within regions.

But at the same time, and at another level, these life histories show the ways in which the boundary can be (perhaps paradoxically) experienced as a very real one. The third-sector model operates at the level of policy locally and internationally to influence the allocation of resources and decision making within the policy process itself. Furthermore, the ‘rules of the game’ – in terms of cultures and norms – are often different within the third-sector organisation and the public sector. For those individuals who cross between third sector and government, there is normally an expectation that life and work will be different across this borderline – in terms of access to power, to more interesting work, or to a more appropriate level of remuneration. Some may find that this is indeed the case, encountering a very different organisational reality on the other side of the sector. Some find the difference satisfying and empowering, while others discover that the change is not to their taste – that, for example in government, they become overwhelmed by bureaucracy, constrained by realpolitik, or disillusioned by short-termism or lack of impact. An ‘NGO person’ in government may find that they simply become an NGO person ‘out of place’, or they may discover that their identity becomes firmer or more fixed once they move into a different and unfamiliar context. For those who make the change happily, there is also the possibility of innovation, since they may bring new and different approaches from one context to another and unleash new ideas and creativity.

One inspiration for the study was the life and work of A.H. Khan, an innovative public servant who in the 1960s was responsible for the internationally recognised Comilla farmer cooperative model in East Pakistan (later Bangladesh) but who later moved from the public sector.
of professional identity, such that a person looks back on their old sector home differently, and perhaps more critically. It is here that forms of creativity – arising from the generation of a new and different perspective by a change of position, or from deploying old capacities and skills in new contexts – can come into play.

At the level of structure, the ways such cross-over takes place in each of the three contexts reflect broader changes in resource incentives and political opportunities more widely – such as shifts in policy priorities among governments and international agencies. For example, it may be the case that more ‘flexible’ organisational structures and blurred sector boundaries are increasingly favoured under neo-liberal economic and social policy frameworks. The new public management which seeks to combine elements of markets and public administration in its model of the mixed economy of welfare and the purchaser-provider split in service delivery is one such example. The third sector and its boundaries are in a constant state of being constructed and unmade, as individuals make purposeful shifts as leaders, organisers, activists and managers between the different sectors. At the level of individual agency, such shifts constitute individual choices being made about moving to a more favoured operating environment, based on a calculation about political opportunity, material benefit and job satisfaction (or a combination of all three) within specific historical junctures. Within the three contexts studied, there are therefore both similarities and differences in relation to the experiences of boundary crossers and the meanings we can attribute to boundary crossing. Whatever the motivations, such shifts suggest the need to analyse the importance of the roles and experiences of these ‘sector brokers’ (see Lewis and Mosse 2006b) in relation to changing configurations of power within governmental and non-governmental activities.

In more practical terms, life history data on boundary crossing raises issues that perhaps call for both pessimism and optimism about the health of third sector–government relationships. The pessimism comes from the observation that in all three contexts, it seems to be the case that both government and third sector operate with a fairly low level of knowledge and understanding of each other (sometimes verging on caricature); and it may be that an ‘othering’ process is an important part of maintaining sector to establish the equally influential Oranji Pilot Project upgrading slum areas in Karachi, this time as an NGO leader. This led me to examine whether creativity may be an outcome or a driver of such boundary crossing and ‘hybridity’.

9 For example, the rise of ‘audit culture’ has been analysed in neo-Foucauldian terms as part of a shift to neo-liberal forms of governance which depends in large part on the role of individual agency in which ‘individuals, as active agents, are co-opted into regimes of power’ (Shore and Wright 2001: 760).
separate identities. Another area of pessimism arises from the discovery by some NGO cross-overs that the realities of policy change when seen from the government side simply highlight the inadequacy inherent in civil-society advocacy models, indicating that the policy process may be very difficult to influence from a third-sector position. Grounds for optimism, however, may follow from the opportunities for creative thinking and action that may follow from ‘successful’ boundary crossing, in which new ideas and fresh opportunities are sometimes created, as Khan’s case perhaps illustrates. It is possible that further policy experiments with secondment arrangements both ways across the third sector and government boundaries could help to build further on this finding. Such work may also tell us more about how inter-sectoral relationships operate and are perceived in practice, and this can further inform and strengthen the complex practices of partnership that are often found to under-perform in various ways (see Lewis 1998).

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to draw attention to the importance of history to development agencies. In this aim it perhaps also fits with the recent case made by Eyben (2006) to pay more attention to the ‘relational’ aspects of development work – within and between organisations and individuals working in development. A historical perspective is one that recognises and contributes to the potential for developing ways of working which are sensitive to issues of power, politics and learning that such a relationships perspective requires. The tendency of development thinking to be characterised by a perpetual present of changing buzzwords and fashions does, of course, imply a relationship with the past – but it is a past that is only invoked in a superficial way to justify the present, and only rarely to challenge it.

In this paper we have not considered in any detail the different types of historical approach that might prove most valuable or relevant to development work. The work of Norman Long (2001: 62) is useful in clarifying the value of history in terms of the interplay between agency and structure, drawing as he does on Kosik’s development of the idea of ‘praxis’:

History never relates in a unilinear or uniform way to the present and the future … their relation is essentially dialectical, both elements of the possible and the real. That is, history always contains more than one possibility, where the present is the
realisation of only one of these; and the same holds for the interrelations between the present and the future. (Long 2001: 62)

In this way, a historical perspective can sensitise us to alternative states of being and ways of acting and thereby challenge the ‘one best way’ type of thinking that is common to managerialism with its predominant emphasis on the very recent past. An important part of this value-added is that it helps us to look for what Hood (1998: 14) terms ‘broader patterns of recurrence beneath apparent novelty’:

Limiting discussion to the very recent past and neglecting the major historical traditions of thought in public management can narrow debate and criticism, by implying there is no alternative to whatever modernity is held to mean […] Historical knowledge is a good antidote to naïve acceptance of novelty claims and history in this sense is potentially subversive. (Hood 1998: 17)

Changing fashions work against relationship building and furthermore, as Wrangham (2004: 264) points out, ‘fads and fashions at the international level have a real effect on poor people’.

These ideas, still at an early stage of thinking, are intended as a contribution to anthropological approaches that moves beyond the traditional ‘critical versus applied’ tensions in their engagement with development. The argument seeks to bring a historical perspective that is both critical and constructive, that seeks to combine theoretical insight with practical application. It also aims to help with the ongoing struggle to create anthropological work which can provide more nuanced insights into the ‘black box’ of development intervention, and which challenges the ways in which the ideology of managerialism has often obscured the history and politics of development.
References


Introduction

When I sat down to write this paper, and not knowing how to start, I glanced in idle distraction into my email in-box. The following had arrived:

I left a message on your phone. It’s about the terms of reference attached. Not all of them are up your street, and I did read a few weeks ago your bulletin article on RBM September 05 so I think we know what to expect! You might like to do theme 1 on leadership and accountability and theme 4 on mutual accountability for instance.

I was being invited by a former colleague in the UK Department for International Development (DFID) to contribute some think pieces for a forthcoming international aid conference on Managing for Development Results. That, as the accompanying terms of reference made clear, is understood as an integral component of the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

My first reaction was to refuse. Why get involved? What would happen if they didn’t like what I wrote and wanted me to change it? Wasn’t it just more fun (and easier) to write critical essays in academic journals, like the one on Results-Based Management to which my correspondent was referring in his email (Eyben 2005)? Yet, on re-reading the message, it seemed I was being encouraged to be critical, that there was a readiness to engage
with the ideas that I had been exploring since leaving full-time employment with DFID some years previously. It was important to check and reflect on my location. Was I still on the threshold and did I still want to be there? What did these questions mean to me and what had I learnt in answering these questions that was worth sharing with others?

I am writing this paper for those anthropologists, and others from sister disciplines, who want not only to interpret the world but also to change it. I am proposing a method of constructive yet critical engagement with development co-operation agencies such as Sida and DFID. It is a method based on a state of mind that I call ‘hovering on the threshold’ – or, in anthropological terms, ‘a condition of permanent liminality’.

I believe that without learning to critically engage with and respond reflexively to the dilemmas of power and knowledge that shape the aid system, international aid organisations cannot be effective in achieving their goals of poverty reduction and greater social justice. As organisations they must be able to acknowledge and respond to the centrality of ambiguity and paradox in what they seek to do. To help generate this response, the critically constructive anthropologist is best positioned as neither insider nor outsider, retaining the empathy for the insider’s position while sufficiently distant to cultivate a critical faculty. Sustained liminality and the accompanying identity confusion make life complicated and full of quandaries. It also offers surprises, intellectual excitement and the possibility of discovering unexpected pathways of personal and organisational change, discoveries that can help aid organisations such as Sida and DFID achieve their aspirations.

This paper is structured as follows. In the next section I briefly discuss the history of relations between anthropology and international aid as a context to exploring some of the current dilemmas in the relationship. I use Mosse’s experience of publishing *Cultivating Development* as a case study (2005). In the following section I propose an approach to researching aid – a reflexive practice for organisational learning that can address some of these dilemmas. I consider the epistemology and methods associated with reflexive practice and identify some of the challenges and opportunities for both researcher and development co-operation organisation when the anthropologist hovers on the threshold. This includes the scope and limitations in shaping the organisational conditions for reflexive practice. In conclusion, I suggest that the wider spread of a sense of permanent liminality within aid agencies would enable them to lose that invidi-
ous feeling of being in control of the world that is so injurious to their efforts to make it a better world.1

Anthropology and international aid

Insiders and outsiders

Anthropology and international aid go back a long way. Colonial regimes did ‘development’ with the help of anthropologists who advised them on native cultures and beliefs. I started studying anthropology in the 1960s, the decade when colonies were achieving independence. Progressive schools of anthropology, such as Manchester where I became a postgraduate student, believed the discipline could make a practical and useful contribution to supporting social change in the newly independent countries. However, the potential utility of this contribution was less obvious to those drawing up development plans for the countries concerned. Anthropology became an insignificant discipline for those giving and receiving development aid. Their interest was in technical assistance for building bridges and power stations and in modernising farming practice. It was only when these interventions were failing that an anthropologist might be commissioned to find out what was wrong, not with the intervention but with the ‘target population’. This is how I first became involved in working for international aid organisations.

By the 1980s anthropologists were also being hired to evaluate the impact of large infrastructure projects, particularly dams, when forced resettlement and loss of livelihoods was causing considerable suffering in the name of development. It was then that there developed a movement to put people at the centre of development (Cernea 1991). Anthropologists working for aid agencies sought to have projects designed to fit people, rather than the other way round. As, towards the end of the 1980s, aid

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1 Some elements of this paper were included in a presentation I gave at a workshop, ‘Ethnographies of aid and development’, organised by the University of Helsinki and held in Dubrovnik 25-29 April 2005. I am grateful to participants for their comments at that time, particularly to Jeremy Gould for challenging my position that action research with staff of aid organisations is a feasible and worthwhile venture. I am also grateful for comments received from participants at the conference in Uppsala in 2006 at which an earlier version of the present paper was given. Thanks also to Sten Hagberg and Charlotta Widmark for helpful feedback; and especially to David Mosse for his reflective commentary on my interpretation of the Cultivating Development case and for raising some broader issues about organisational learning and the learning organisation.
agencies’ attention switched to the social costs of structural adjustment, some anthropologists also shifted their sights in the 1990s from project design to policy matters. This led to an interest in how policy is constructed and to researching the relationship between macroeconomic decisions and the effect on people’s lives (Booth 1993; Moser 1996).

Throughout that period I saw my task, working as ‘expert’, short-term consultant or long-term employee of aid agencies, as that of social analysis in relation to the design, implementation and evaluation of projects and programmes funded by these agencies. My focus was on what the organisation could and should do in its external interventions. It was neither expected nor desired that I and other contracted anthropologists turn our analytical eye inwards to make the connection between organisational history, politics and culture on the one hand and its effect on those it was seeking to help on the other hand. Of course, we anthropologists working inside the agency might have quietly studied the organisation employing us so as to better influence its agenda, but normally any such analysis would not have been written down, let alone published. Only during my last years at DFID have I come to realise that until we confronted how aid organisations behaved, there would be no guarantee that our efforts to make projects and programmes have a positive social impact would bear any fruit.

Meanwhile, insider status brought clear benefits. Weber noted that every bureaucracy will conceal its knowledge and operation unless it is forced to disclose them, invoking ‘hostile interests’ if need be to justify the secrecy (Bendix 1959: 452). In the case of aid organisations, those alleged threats are the potential cuts to their budget, purportedly putting at risk the lives of the many hundreds of millions of people still living in poverty and who are claimed to be dependent on support from taxpayers in rich countries. Thus, aid agencies can protect themselves by morally blackmailing those wishing to research them. They can also guard their secrecy because the taxpayers who fund them do not receive their services and so cannot judge their quality, as they do with the health and education services they receive from the public sector. Taxpayers have little choice but to believe what they are told by those with a partisan interest in the matter – government and non-government aid agencies, including development studies institutes like the one I work for.

Because there are few external incentives for transformative learning, aid organisations rarely welcome outsider efforts to study them with that objective in mind. Thus in these organisations the inside researcher has a significant advantage, not only with regard to prior knowledge of the organisation (although this may also make one biased), but also in terms
of access. Compared with studying other public sector organisations, access may be especially important in aid organisations because typically they are multi-sited with offices all over the world.

The difficulty of access has largely caused those looking to study such organisations to provide fundamental critiques from outside. Over the last twenty years or so international aid has been the subject of post-structural critical analysis. This is sometimes based on consultancy assignments, but more often on the deconstruction of published texts. Many researchers have had very little choice but to study policy documents because of lack of access. Meanwhile, many with an anthropology background working inside aid organisations – particularly those who undertook their studies before the 1990s – may have little knowledge of this body of research, nor of its major propositions, for example ‘development’ as a hegemonic construct, or foreign aid as a Foucauldian discipline. Ferguson’s Anti-Politics Machine (1994) was a discovery for me when I first joined the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in 2002. Thus these critical researchers and those who are practitioners within aid organisations follow different trajectories. Encounters are relatively rare and may be of little benefit.

Thus emerged the distinction between ‘development anthropology’ – what anthropologists working for aid agencies practised – and the ‘anthropology of development’ (Crewe and Harrison 1998, citing Grillo and Rew 1985). During the 1990s both streams of anthropology flourished. Development anthropology achieved a more authoritative and established voice within agencies, including DFID and the World Bank, while

\[2\] See Verlot’s review of Shore’s study of the European Commission, which he criticises for looking too much at the policies and not sufficiently at the daily practices of the policy makers. Verlot argues that there is no substitute for participant observation.

\[3\] One such encounter I experienced was with David Lewis and Katy Gardner when I reviewed for DFID’s social development advisers’ newsletter their book on post-modernism and the anthropology of development (Gardner and Lewis 1996). I agreed with their proposition that those working within development and those studying development discourse may have a lot to say to each other, but commented in my review that all the people in their book – fishermen, farmers, and others caught up in development projects – were treated as ethnographic subjects with agency, except for people working inside aid organisations. In response, they warmly invited me to contribute my point of view to a special issue of Critique of Anthropology (Eyben 2000). However, this revealed for me further problems of communication when, too late, I realised I was expected to write an academic article, although as a hard-pressed bureaucrat, I lacked the time and context to do so. As I wrote to the editor of the special issue: ‘I now realise that I did not sufficiently emphasise [in my draft article] that I was writing a brief paper because I was genuinely concerned and interested in a dialogue between practice and the academy. I do feel it is not a genuine dialogue if I am corralled into producing a paper “fit” for publication in an academic journal. I also feel very strongly that should the paper be revised in the way you suggest, it would lose its ethnographic authenticity. At best it would be a sad derivative piece and a second-rate academic article. Rather, think of my paper as a piece of “naive art”.’
through discourse analysis and post-colonial studies the anthropology of development became increasingly rich and illuminating.

**Ethnographies of aid and development**

Mosse describes the distinction between development anthropology and the (discourse analysis) anthropology of development as that between instrumental and critical views of aid. He proposes that a third approach is now establishing itself, a ‘more insightful ethnography of development capable of opening up the implementation black box so as to address the relationship between policy and practice’ (Mosse 2005: 5). Ethnographies of aid – increasingly referred to as ‘aidnographies’ (Gould and Marcussen 2004) – create the possibility for multi-positioned fieldwork, researching and writing from inside as well as outside the aid agency, turning a self-critical lens onto the anthropologist who, in his own case, became ‘more interested in locating pragmatic rules of project behaviour than arguing over normative ones’ (Mosse 2005: 13).

Writing from inside and outside at the same time is what Mosse tried to do in his own book, *Cultivating Development*. The product of that process became the subject not only of a detailed analysis by the author himself but also led to a lively debate in *Anthropology Today* about the ethics and politics of this multi-positionality (Sridhar 2005; Stirrat 2005; Mosse 2006a). For nine years Mosse had worked as part of a team implementing a rural development project in India; he then did independent research on the project to eventually analyse the whole from an academic perspective, an analysis endorsed by some of his former colleagues but challenged by others who objected to it and insisted on seeing him totally as an insider, albeit one who had betrayed them. When he sent them the draft book they sought to block its publication (Mosse 2006b).

In the early 1990s, as a DFID social development adviser, I had been instrumental in the identification and appraisal of that project and consequently was known to all parties in the dispute. Thus I agreed to moderate a meeting that took place in London in April 2004. The next section draws on notes I took at the time.

4 There are of course ethical issues in my publishing this account because the notes I took at the time were in my capacity as ‘moderator’, not ‘researcher’. However, the matter is already in the public domain and I have drawn on my notes primarily to explore sympathetically the perspective of those challenging the publication; David Mosse has seen this account and has confirmed he has no objections. The present paper is itself therefore an example of the dilemmas of insider/outsider research. See also the discussion on the website of the Association of Social Anthropologists http://www.theasa.org/ethics.htm.
The challenge of an insider moving to the threshold

When working for DFID, I have often heard the phrase that ‘everyone should be in the same boat and pulling in the same direction’. That this could only happen if there were a consensus view on the direction was the crux of the position of those objecting to Mosse’s book.

Ironically, his erstwhile colleagues’ objections confirmed one of the key arguments of the book, namely that the construction of a consensus view – of truth – is a political process. The objectors had a different perspective on the purpose of the text. They had the right to propose textual changes because they saw the book in the same light as the project reports which they were all accustomed to write, namely a consensus document. They felt it particularly important to ensure the book represented the truth as they understood it, because it was describing the whole experience of the project. They believed readers would understand the book in the same way they did, as a document that would establish once and for all what the project was about. They regarded the book as an evaluation document that defined the truth.

Development projects and programmes are conventionally evaluated by persons selected for their independence from and lack of prior involvement with the project. Project staff often experience an evaluation as a very stressful process. The higher their commitment to the project’s goals and the greater the effort they have made, the more they feel affected and the more likely they are to resist an evaluation’s conclusions when these do not coincide with their own view of the project. Thus the evaluation process normally includes some kind of effort at conflict resolution between evaluator and project staff (Taut and Brauns 2004). This is what the objectors had supposed would happen in the case of Cultivating Development. When it did not, they became angry. The text did not portray the project as the success that they had understood it to be:

Twelve years of the prime of my life I gave to this. It’s passion that speaks.... When people read the book, they will say ‘Oh this project! What a shame’.  

A heated point in the discussion concerned the author’s sources. The objectors were unhappy that he was drawing on information provided to him by other project staff who, they said, gave negative views because they were malcontents, or marginal to the project, or because ‘when people talk informally things they say will be confusing and improper’. These informants had been speaking on a personal basis and thus each would

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5 A project manager speaking at the meeting.
have had a separate opinion. These opinions were not ‘the corporate view’ and the author should have acknowledged that. The author responded that while those objecting to the book had said it was not telling the truth, others who had worked in the project had read the manuscript and sent him messages saying that it had captured their experience.

When organisation-researchers want to publish, they confront the challenge of negotiating their text with people who are highly experienced in this art as an integral part of their bureaucratic practice. The researcher’s own code of ethics can be used as an instrument against him by an experienced negotiator to change the text or suppress publication. Colleagues can view the text as betrayal of friendships, particularly if they think the writer is making unnecessarily negative comments on a well-intentioned project. People have feelings and do not like to see their work disparaged. They are aggrieved when they perceive the researcher as being ‘clever’ about something very difficult and challenging to which they have devoted considerable effort and commitment. The academic’s commitment to publication can be seen as an act of selfishness related to her own career advancement.

At this particular meeting, the objectors always referred to the author by his first name and criticised him, rather than the text. ‘It’s like a family talking here’, commented one observer. A sense of betrayal was made explicit in people’s comments at the meeting: ‘[The author] is a friend. I hope he still is.’ ‘It’s [the author]. I know him. We’ve had a few beers together.’ Objectors spoke of their faith in the author and their affection for him. He would still be forgiven and brought back into the family should he only agree he had been mistaken.

Thus, in writing about this experience, Mosse suggests that while outsiders face problems of entry, insiders face problems of exit at the moment they write for publication:

> Of course, those reading about themselves may be intrigued, amused or pleased; but turning relationships into data and placing interpretations in public can also disturb, and break relationships of fieldwork. It may be ‘anti-social’. Those interlocutors — neighbours, friends, colleagues or co-professionals — who directly experience ethnographic objectifications now surround the anthropologist at her desk; they raise objections, make new demands to negotiate public and published interpretations. (Mosse 2006b: 937)

By refusing to negotiate his text, the author manages finally to make his exit. Mosse notes that this process of exit was an outcome of a long period when he was working for the organisation as a positivist within a means-end managerial rationality, yet increasingly trying to wrest his thinking
free from this paradigm to achieve critical insight (Mosse 2005). In the end, it appeared, his former colleagues could not cope with the ambiguity of him being simultaneously instrumental and critical, and he was moved firmly to the outside. The controversy meant he could not linger on the threshold, at least in this particular element of the wider organisation.

Another way?

Some inside DFID did not disagree with Mosse’s findings; they were stimulated and constructively challenged by his conclusions. Thus, in reflecting on this case, I asked myself how one could optimally engage with those insiders who want their organisations to learn to change. What does this case tell us about the purpose of evaluation and impact studies in terms of learning and accountability? How could anthropological research help strengthen the weak accountability of international aid organisations to citizens at both ends of the aid chain? Finally, what are the risks in publication? Can it be counter-productive to learning?

These questions were personally important to me. Some anthropologists became insiders through force of circumstances, pushed into the world of public policy and practice (including aid organisations) because of the funding squeeze in the 1980s that limited the availability of academic jobs (Mosse 2006b). I was of an earlier generation. I had studied anthropology with no academic ambitions at that time. I saw it as a useful and interesting discipline for development. Correspondingly, even as my critical perspective developed, my long-term career choice had made exit less of an option. Later, even had I wished it by the time I was a DFID staff member, it was too late to start an academic career in an anthropology department. I was thus motivated to find another way. Locating myself in a policy research institute made this possible. I brought inside knowledge of the organisations that the institute seeks to influence and on which it is largely dependent for financing, and I was given the intellectual support and encouragement to teach, research and publish.

I saw the challenge as managing the dilemma of continuing to be involved in the work of international aid and to support its goals while developing an increasing theoretical capability and interest to interrogate many of my hitherto-unquestioned assumptions. It led to an interest in cultivating a personal and organisational capacity for reflexive practice through action research; I found a group of colleagues at IDS already engaged in such an approach and willing to help me. It has meant that I remain indefinitely on the organisational threshold, neither inside nor outside and looking both ways. I arrived at my present position more by
good luck than planning. Nevertheless, it has led me to enquire whether my threshold location is a potentially interesting and useful one for other anthropologists to deliberately seek, should they want to influence the world of public policy and practice. In the next section I argue that one element in accomplishing this is to consciously cultivate a reflexive practice.

Reflexive practice:
An alternative approach for anthropologists

Reflexivity

Reflexivity in anthropological research is now a well-established tradition. Compared with when I was a graduate doctoral student, it is rare these days for anthropologists not to acknowledge their own positionality, ‘paying heed to the whys and wherefores of its production’ (Whitaker 1996: 472). Constructivist or interpretative epistemology, in the mainstream of current anthropology, understands knowledge as being constructed by social actors, rather than being some objective fact ‘out there’, detached from the person or institution undertaking the research. It is an approach that recognises there are different ways of understanding and knowing the social world and that these are contingent on one’s position in that world. This approach, when married to a desire not only to interpret the world but also to change it, alerts one to power and deepens an understanding of one’s personal, professional and organisational identity in relation to what one is trying to achieve.

Ethnographic research is also ‘relational’: what I learn, and what I am unable or choose not to learn, is shaped and informed not only by who I am but also by those whose lives I am researching. In her discussion of anthropological knowledge as ‘relational’, Hastrup makes the distinction between ‘knowing’ and ‘sensing’ and comments that in the field you think and live at the same time (2004). There is a school of reflexive research outside anthropology that takes this distinction further, proposing the existence of four different ways of knowing. These are *propositional* (what Hastrup calls ‘thinking’); *experiential* – knowing through empathy and face-to-face iteration (what Hastrup might mean by ‘sensing’); *presentational* – that is, grounded in experiential knowing and represented through art, poetry, drama and so on; and finally *practical* – that is, know-
ing how to do something, as a skill or a competence. This last one is the sum of the three other forms of knowing (Heron and Reason 1997).

This last form of knowing implies action; it becomes reflexive action when we seek to be aware of the origins of these different ways of knowing and can consider their influences on our action. Reflexivity in relation to these different ways of knowing helps us become alert to the possibly different epistemologies of those we are studying or working with. It helps to engage with them in a dialogic construction of a shared understanding of truth. From this perspective, reflexivity is not just how the researcher goes about and represents her work; it is also about encouraging a similar learning process among those being researched, converting them into co-learners or co-researchers.

One of the complaints made against Mosse was that he had critiqued certain practices that he himself had been involved in developing and that the book itself does not explicitly mention this involvement. In fact, in his introduction he stresses that when employed as a consultant, one of the author’s subject positions was that of optimistic positivist, performing the classic role of the social analyst in a development project. Thereafter, in several places the book draws attention to his own biases. Nevertheless, he does not make his reflexive self central to the narrative. One reason for not doing so is because he wished to avoid describing actions and views of any particular individual, including himself. In the meeting with his objectors he stressed how he wished to avoid ‘personalising’ the analysis, looking rather at institutions, structures and incentives. He had done this deliberately because of his concern for the sensitivities of those he was writing about. Indeed, I have found from my own experience that it is very difficult to turn a critical reflexive eye on one’s own actions without referring to the personal and particular relationships that shaped the context of these actions.

Does this make it impossible to be a reflexive practitioner? I think not. However, if we wish to engage those we are studying, as well as oneself, in this exercise, we may have to remind them at fairly frequent intervals of what we are about. In other words, the reflexive ‘I’ must be present throughout the text from the beginning to the end, while avoiding casting a critical eye on those others. Critical ethnographic research of the kind represented by Mosse may be understood as a ‘precondition for learning and insight’ (Mosse 2005: xiii). It is possible that such learning can happen through propositional knowledge without any further trigger. However, the more the author is present in the text through the privileging of experiential knowledge, the more chance there may be of triggering a process of similar critical reflection among the other actors involved in the
narrative – either through dialogue at the moment of enquiry, or afterwards while reading the text. It is an approach that may also encourage other readers who may have been in comparable situations to review their own experience afresh. Yet, as has been pointed out, whether this happens may depend on whether the anthropologist can help create a supportive organisational environment as part of the reflexive practice methodology.

While I am most certainly not suggesting that all critical research should be of this kind, I do argue that there is an intellectually interesting and practically useful space for what I am describing as the learning approach, one that very explicitly seeks to combine the criticality of the ethnographic approach with the instrumentality of those wanting to improve organisational and/or system-wide practice.

The learning approach

The particularity of the learning approach is that it draws on the organisational learning literature and an action research paradigm that emphasises reflexive practice, a participatory world view and a shared construction of meaning (Reason and Bradbury 2001: 1). Based on the pioneering work of Robert Chambers, the Participation Group at the Institute of Development Studies has been exploring international aid from this perspective (Groves and Hinton 2004; Eyben 2006). While an ethnographic study might include recommendations for the organisation concerned, only when it is combined with a learning organisation approach does the ethnographer directly engage with people in the organisation as co-learners – as distinct from doing the research and only then seeking feedback.

Thus to the three approaches noted by Mosse (2005: 13) I propose to add a fourth as illustrated in the figure below, in which the dotted lines of the two most recent approaches show how they inter-connect with the two longer-established and quite separate perspectives:
I suggest it is possible to be constructively critical through *double-loop* as distinct from *single-loop questioning* (Argyris and Schon 1978). Typical instrumentalist research generates *single-loop learning questions* in relation to more immediately observable processes and structures – e.g. within the framework of the Paris Declaration on Effective Aid, how can greater country ownership be generated – whilst holding as constant the organisational values and knowledge frameworks that shape the landscape of power within the aid system? Single-loop research of this kind can contribute to system adaptation, but only within the existing organisational framework for action. In contrast, *double-loop questioning* requires practitioners to interrogate the framing and learning systems which underlie the international aid system’s actual goals, attitudes and ways of knowing the world, without putting at risk their commitment to using that learning for improving their practice.

This is far from easy. There is a horrible temptation for anthropologists to show off their cleverness. Recently a former colleague of mine still working in DFID commented on a paper I had written that she found it very stimulating but ‘depressing’. It left her with the feeling that things were pretty hopeless for aid agencies. Although in the paper in question I had tried to propose some practical ways forward, with hindsight I realise that the better-written and livelier parts of the paper – and therefore those
the reader remembers – were where I was having fun with what I saw as donors’ bad behaviour.

Reflexive practice requires respect for and empathy with others. It includes cultivating the art of ‘negative capability’, the ability to hold two or more contradictory ideas in one’s head at the same time and value both of them. It means understanding that the ideas one might have as a representative of a donor organisation may be quite different from those of a representative of a recipient Ministry of Finance or a local NGO. And that all these ideas are valid and relevant to the problem.

In short, while the reflexive approach has much in common with critical ethnographic research of aid, an important difference lies in engaging with international aid staff and encouraging them to scrutinise constructively their ways of knowing and acting. In the next section I shall describe methods of co-operative enquiry. However, also worth emphasising is the potential role of the anthropologist in supporting critical reflection and learning through activities designated as ‘learning’ but that are equally spaces for action research.

**Learning activities: Reading weeks and workshops**

Reading weeks are designed to encourage co-learning in which current anthropological and sociological texts relevant to international aid practice are individually studied and collectively discussed through a structured and facilitated process. Participants are encouraged to make use of these readings to explore their current professional and organisational practice in relation to issues such as power, gender relations, inequality, civil society, exclusion and poverty. In a recent week organised for Sida staff, participants’ reflections included recognising for the first time issues of power and knowledge in their organisational practice and relations, as well as what one participant called ‘thinking about thinking’. At a reading week for DFID staff I gained consent, on the basis of anonymity, to include some of their critical comments and reflections in my own research concerning the practice of aid.

As distinct from a reading week for no more than ten people, a learning workshop can accommodate fifty or more, such as one I was asked to facilitate in 2006 to explore with recipient and government staff from four countries in the region how gender equality was being integrated into the implementation of the Paris Declaration on Effective Aid. Prior to the workshop four country studies were commissioned, in which I supported regional consultants to develop case studies of an aid-funded initiative, chosen by the donors, in each of the countries concerned. They and the
steering committee were persuaded that these case studies should not be researched and presented as ‘best practice’. Rather, local stakeholders were interviewed for their possibly diverse views on the successes and challenges of each initiative. The consultants were asked not to synthesise these views nor produce any recommendations, as these would have framed what was permissible to discuss at the workshop itself. Instead, they were asked to write brief reports presenting the variety of stakeholder perspectives as the basis for subsequent discussion among workshop participants.

Just as the case studies sought to capture and articulate different perspectives without providing any ready-made solutions, so the workshop itself was designed to ensure an inclusive yet challenging process. The design explicitly addressed issues of power in the room with the aim of all participants equally voicing their experience and ideas as well as benefiting personally from the critical learning taking place. The process sought to demonstrate how aid relations could be done differently. One workshop participant remarked that if government-donor consultation meetings they attended were designed in the manner of this workshop, there would be much greater potential for gender equality issues to be understood and addressed in policy dialogue.

This kind of methodology, combining anthropological theory and knowledge with a supportive learning environment, requires constantly observing and critiquing one’s own behaviour. This is easier by deliberately locating oneself on the threshold. There are as many dilemmas and challenges as opportunities, as I now discuss.

On the threshold: Challenges and opportunities

What do I mean by being on the threshold and how does the world of aid appear from that location? I start by exploring what it means to be liminal.

A permanent state of liminality

Associated with rites of passage when one moves from one state in life to another, a quintessential element of liminality is ambiguity since one is neither one kind of person nor another. In classic anthropology liminal situations and roles are associated with magico-religious powers that can make the person on the threshold polluting and dangerous (Turner 1969). It is not a comfortable place to be because everyone, including oneself, may be confused as to who one is.
Turner saw liminality as a necessary disruption that helped sustain structure. From that perspective, being on the threshold is little different from the joker at the royal court whose foolishness serves only to reinforce the status quo. On the other hand, these same magico-religious qualities can be also empowering, not only for people on the threshold but also for those involved as witnesses, potentially enabling them to perceive their world in a new light and to challenge the unquestioned and unvocalised way of how things are done.

Turner’s structural-functionalist understanding of the ambiguity of liminality is related to it being a temporary state. I, on the other hand, understand being on the threshold as a location for double-loop learning and reflexive practice, embracing ambiguity and negative capability as a constant state, a life-long project. In studying international aid, it means hovering on the threshold of aid agencies, neither inside nor outside. I now turn to explore some of the dilemmas and opportunities arising from liminality. These relate to locating the threshold, time frames for change, identity confusion, subversion, opportunism, methods for different ways of knowing and what to do about publishing.

What is ‘inside’?

Aid organisations are not homogeneous entities and critical ethnography such as *Cultivating Development*, while threatening to some in the organisation, may be useful to others seeking to change how things are done (Stirrat 2006). The heterogeneity reveals the organisation as a social construct; those who are officially its members may find it relatively insignificant as a shaper of values, knowledge and agency. An alternative view of organisations as partially bounded networks makes the concept of threshold fuzzier. In relation to Sida, for example, Arora-Jonsson and Cornwall (2006) describe the interaction between intra-organisational formal ‘blue’ and informal ‘red’ networks. They explore the potential of the latter, if encouraged, to engage in reflective practice for changing the former.

‘Inside’ is also problematised when inter-organisational coalitions and networks of relationships may be more significant for agency than are the formal organisations to which these actors belong (Hewitt and Robinson 2000). In such circumstances, hovering on the threshold requires considerable agility to work out who and what is on the inside and the outside in any particular time and context. This is a contrary perspective to the old Sunday school song my father used to sing that has been playing in my mind while writing this paper:
There’s one door and only one
I’m on the inside, which side are you?

Imagining shifting thresholds can straightaway help identify more opportunities for supporting double-loop learning and reflective practice, extending to research within the international aid system as a whole and beyond it to networks engaging in other themes and issues. My colleague John Gaventa, for example, is currently working with a network of practitioners in two government departments, DFID and the Department of Local Government and Communities, to explore how elected representatives can support direct citizen engagement in decision making.

Researching for long-term change or immediate action?

IDS has for many years now been exploring approaches to participatory action research in development (Gaventa and Cornwall 2006). Participatory action research is research that ‘challenges the claims of a positivistic view of knowledge and unjust and democratic economic, social and political systems and practices’ (Brydon-Miller et al. 2003: 11). One such exploration relates to co-inquiry where the subjects of the research are researching themselves, involving mutual questioning and investigation leading to reflection and changed behaviour by those participating (Heron and Reason 2001). As such, it differs from ‘third-person inquiry’ where the researcher is sole in control of the investigation, reporting back to others once the research has been completed. In reality, the border between second- and third-person inquiry can be fuzzy, depending on the extent to which the researcher is engaging with and responding to the concerns of those being studied.

Co-operative inquiry is the most developed form of co-inquiry and is designed to encourage a process that allows participants to recognise that change is possible (Heron and Reason 2001). Participants inquire into taken-for-granted practices and investigate their implications in relation to their values and organisational goals. This method was used with a group of Sida staff (Arora-Jonsson and Cornwall 2006). Two colleagues and I attempted to introduce it in a more ambitious multi-country and multi-agency study (Eyben et al. 2007). Since then it has been used with varying success by students on IDS’s MA in Participation, Power and Social Change. In one case, a country office of a large international NGO in which the student was working made significant changes to the way it worked with local communities, as well as influenced policy and practice in the organisation’s head office.
A cycle of action research – with an expectation of transformative learning leading to change which can itself then be further studied – requires a hospitable organisational environment. In its absence, the anthropologist’s effort to encourage others to be equally reflexive may discourage the whole process of discovery, as in the case of the reflexive insider researcher-practitioner whose email I quote below:

I also felt that I would have been more relaxed if I perceived myself as just a researcher and not a change agent. It is further complicated and difficult when I think of myself as an employee at the center and part of the system and have to deliver the assignment as I am asked to and the way my managers want…… I never thought that my situation is going to be easy but I also did not imagine the tremendous change in the place when people working there were replaced by others. Sometimes I think that if I give up my perception of myself as a change agent it would be easier, but I would be left with my other frustrating position as an employed researcher at the center doing things I see against my values – or putting it less dramatically, against what I have learnt as to how research should be done.’ (Email to author from an insider reflexive researcher 24 September 2006)

In this case, the discoveries she was making about the responses of recipient government officials to the demands of the Paris Declaration were so illuminating and exciting that they led the researcher to conclude that abandoning co-inquiry and practising more conventional ethnography was justified because of the potential contribution the research findings could make in the longer term to changing aspects of the international aid system. However, she is continuing her own reflexive first-person inquiry. The font in her field journal is in three colours: black for observation (propositional knowledge), red for her feelings about the observation (experiential knowledge) and blue for inquiring into the historical, political and cultural origins of her feelings. It is this rigorous first-person inquiry that allows her to hover on the threshold.

Confused identity

Recently I was invited to a small dinner party hosted by a senior official in an international aid organisation, to which were invited guests from two other such organisations. I had known most of the other guests from the time when I myself had been a senior official in an aid organisation. Although they all knew that I was now an academic researcher, I saw that they soon forgot it and began to exchange inside news and gossip of the kind that they would not have done in the presence of an outsider. For a participant observer this was a splendid opportunity, but as the evening wore on, I felt perplexed about my own status. A conversation about a
forthcoming World Bank seminar allowed me to make a double-loop learning comment that sought to encourage reflection about power and the nature of evidence. However, this seemed to make little impact and I noticed my fellow guests were more comfortable with who I used to be – harking back to former shared exploits – rather than with who I now was.

On another occasion, at a workshop for a group of international aid practitioners to which I had been given observer status on the basis of my former insider position, I felt severely tempted to intervene with ideas for improving a strategic approach that I felt was running into difficulties. However, being the ethnographer, I stayed silent. My emotions at this time were anxiety, grief and frustration about the ineffectiveness of my position, combined with the researcher’s amazement, curiosity and excitement about what I was privileged to witness.

That same confusion was allowing me to both observe and participate in a way that neither an insider nor an outsider could. In both instances just described, my confused identity appeared to be more challenging for me than for those I was with. Yet I have also experienced the contrary. Soon after joining IDS I undertook some research in a DFID office in Asia, to develop further questions that I had been working on while still a staff member in Bolivia. I used some initial findings from my time in that country to start a series of reflective workshops on how DFID staff relate with recipient organisations. While the opportunity was apparently much appreciated by those participating in the workshops, head office was much less enthusiastic about this process. While I remained an insider colleague to those in country offices, to my head office contacts I had become an unhelpfully critical researcher.

There are ethical (or rather moral) issues related to the possibility of wearing two hats, that of a critical anthropologist and that of a paid consultant or commissioned researcher. On the one hand, the consultancy may be undertaken in bad faith, simply as a means of access to ethnographic data without any commitment to the employer. On the other hand, if the anthropologist undertakes the commission in good faith, seriously seeking to improve the organisation’s practice, then her academic peers may judge the ethnographic analysis as constrained by the researcher’s instrumental engagement. As doctoral students at IDS have discovered, even participant observers working as unpaid volunteers or interns are likely to be confronted with these same dilemmas. If they try to be useful they may get sucked into the world view of those they are researching, leading to subsequent difficulties when disengaging and resuming a critical stance. One might call this the ‘Patty Hearst syndrome’ of participant observation, in which the ethnographer as hostage develops
a solidarity with her captors that can sometimes become a real complicity, with the hostage actually helping the captors to do things which previously she might have found objectionable. A constant watch, through journaling and feedback from academic colleagues, can help reduce the risk of co-optation. Yet successful liminality runs into its own problems.

**Loss of credibility**

When working years ago in Sudan, I travelled round the country with male members of our project team. We were often invited to supper in the locality we had been visiting. My colleagues would sit at the front of the house chatting with their host and his neighbours; the hostess and women visitors stayed in the kitchen at the back of the house stirring the cooking pots and conversing merrily. Because I was a European, I decided I was free to move to and fro between the two genders – some time with the women and then back to the men. I saw myself as very privileged, the only person there who knew the topics of conversations in the two groups. Until one evening, with mocking laughter, the women sprinkled me with the perfume a wife traditionally uses when she wants her husband to sleep with her. ‘Now go and join the men,’ they said. Back on the front porch, I found myself the butt of sexual jokes and retreated, humiliated.

I had been insensitive to local customs. My transgression had been an irritant and I was taught a lesson. Neither side wanted me. A frank discussion of these identity confusions with people in both groups, in academia and the aid bureaucracies, can help secure their support – it may be useful to have someone to carry messages between the two groups – and can be a useful entry to their own reflexive inquiry about the often-ambiguous role of development co-operation. This brings me to the topic of subversion.

**Subversive learning**

As already noted, liminality can be dangerous and polluting – it is thus potentially subversive. I am developing the notion of subversive participatory action research. This would mean engaging with some insiders who are seeking radical changes to better achieve the organisation’s stated goals and then seeing how far a research project can go before it is stopped.

By analysing why and how it gets stopped, the anthropologist and her insider co-researchers gain an understanding of the organisation’s control-
ling processes and disciplinary mechanisms. It also throws light on the positional and personal characteristics of those who want the research to take place and on those of the objectors who manage to stop or disrupt the research. It is sociological discovery through observing anticipated objection (Latour 2000). A recent study commissioned by an innovative element of DFID on the conditions in which high impact could be achieved at low financial cost, and that sought to engage the interest of some other bilateral aid agencies so as to strengthen a heterodox and minority view, was prevented from moving to its second phase because of declared ‘other priorities’ by the various agencies concerned. I had already anticipated the likelihood of objection once the news of the project reached higher echelons, because of the countervailing nature of the research in an environment where spending more money is seen as an intrinsically good thing.

The most interesting discovery from this aborted research was how much the views of one agency affected those of another. When senior management stopped the project in one organisation, its champions in the other organisations immediately got cold feet. It illustrates the challenges to the international aid system in cultivating alternative ways of thinking and doing in response to the complex problems the system’s actors are seeking to tackle. Yet, over a longer period of time, without any further intervention on my part, it appears that the ideas – if not the possibility of the research – are trickling into conversations within the aid system. So, I am learning something about subversive pathways of change.

**Opportunism**

A location on the threshold looks in several directions at the same time and thus enables an opportunistic approach to research. Methods in support of such opportunism include being responsive as well as pro-active, for example by accepting invitations to mentor busy practitioners and to organise reading weeks where staff are explicitly encouraged to relate what they read to their own practice. As already mentioned, other methods include organising or participating in practitioner conferences and workshops where issues of power and relationships are placed on the agenda, discussion encouraged and reflections recorded.

Similarly, rather than designing large participatory action research programmes with the specific purpose of critical reflection, as I had attempted on first joining IDS, opportunities can be found through including such a perspective in a research that ostensibly has another objective. For example, the Institute of Development Studies has recently won a
tender from DFID to explore issues of women’s empowerment. Through engaging staff in international aid organisations from the start in the design of case studies of women’s empowerment – and in some instances actually involving them as co-researchers – the research design encourages policy actors’ reflective learning.

These methods may be more accessible and appropriate for someone who has been a former senior insider. My erstwhile status makes me an attractive ally to insider practitioners looking for change. But there are also disadvantages. My seniority makes me potentially more of a threat to those wishing to keep aid practice secret, making it very difficult to gain full re-entry wearing a researcher’s hat. Younger researchers who are not known to the organisation may find entry easier, although some prior acquaintance would probably be useful.

*Exploring different ways of knowing*

The different ways of knowing, discussed earlier, offer exciting possibilities for anthropologists to explore ambiguity and shifting identities with those they are studying. Arora-Jonsson and Cornwall (2006) provide a fascinating insight into the process and effect of presentational knowing in their account of the occasion in the Sida office when the staff involved in the participatory learning group decided to go public. They note that what appear to be chaotic forms of learning can catalyse change.

In work with various organisations, I have used the medium of *drawings* to draw out staff and to let colleagues share their understandings and aspirations about their organisation. A workshop on rights and power for an international aid agency staff explored feelings and experiences of power through *drama* and mime (Wheeler et al. 2005). At a workshop with Oxfam Great Britain on theories of change, participants were asked to bring their own pictures and *poems* to illuminate their concepts of change. In China, when discussing with government officials their thoughts and feelings about DFID as an aid partner, I asked them to look at the *traditional pictures* associated with the twelve Chinese year characters – monkey, rat, pig, etc. – and identify which character most closely represented their views on DFID.

For reasons not entirely clear to me, these alternative methods appear easier to use in processes of collective second-person inquiry when I am feeling very ignorant of what is happening and unclear as to how I should position myself. Nor do they always work. At a recent informal workshop for Commonwealth Ministers for Women’s Affairs, where I asked participants to draw pictures of a day in their life as Minister, one of them an-
grily informed me that she did not intend to waste her day by pretending to be back at kindergarten.

**When and whether to publish?**

While the promise not to publish may make powerful organisations more prepared to let anthropologists play a critically constructive role, the cost is very high. It could be argued that one of the constraints to organisational change is the secrecy in which powerful organisations enshroud themselves. With respect to the practice of development organisations, a common complaint of citizens in the South is aid organisations’ inaccessibility and lack of transparency. How could we justify research that would not only fail to contribute to the democratisation of knowledge but, precisely because its findings were not made public, might not even achieve its desired aim of organisational change?

In either case, the researchers may be more or less transparent as to their intentions. Certain ethical dilemmas come in the wake of transparency or lack thereof. Can the ‘greater public good’ be used to justify lack of complete honesty as to one’s methods and purpose in circumstances where a powerful organisation may seek to limit access or constrain publication?

Research into large hierarchical organisations poses challenges, associated with how people in the organisation understand the role and purpose of ‘knowledge’ and the organisational politics that block learning by senior management and make research evidence controversial. An experience of trying to publish a paper based on my action research on aid relationships has led me to enquire whether learning is easier at lower echelons, where senior staff is less interested in the **substance** of the research and its implications for change.

In considering Weber’s comments on secretive bureaucracies, discussed earlier, development organisations may be particularly competent at exercising the privileges of power (as compared, for example, with the private sector) because of their quasi-religious function whereby power is legitimised by reference to ‘the poor’ for whose sake the organisation exists. Staff commitment to this supreme objective of reducing poverty – the equivalent of ‘saving souls’ – can be used to suppress the efforts of those within the organisation to support research that inquires into failure as well as success.

If there has been a prior process of dialogic inquiry the matter of publication should be easier, particularly if within the organisation the researcher is supported by a strong champion. However, championship and
engagement from one part of the organisation may be counterbalanced by resistance from elsewhere, as in the case of the relationships study mentioned earlier. There is clearly no easy solution to the publishing dilemma, even leaving on one side all the other pressures on the liminal academic to publish or perish.

Conclusion: On the threshold

Because of their politically driven agendas, high moral goals and weak lines of accountability, it is extraordinarily difficult for aid organisations to achieve individual and organisational self-knowledge and the capacity to learn and change. ‘New Public Management’ approaches only help to reinforce a sense of being in control. The exercise of power constrains investing in relationships that would privilege different perspectives and provide new answers to managing the turbulent global political and social environment of which donors are part and which they contribute to creating.

Contributing to global poverty reduction is probably the most challenging task any organisation can set itself. There will never be any ready-made solutions. Aid practitioners are collectively engaged in something never done before in human history. They cannot know the way because they have never travelled it before. This means that asking questions and challenging assumptions is more necessary than finding quick-fix solutions. Encouraging the questioning of certainty and fostering among development researchers and aid practitioners a movement towards greater innovation and exploration is vital. Learning to be comfortable with ambiguity and paradox is an important part of such a process.

The origins of my liminal status lie in my personal history. My current employment in a policy research institute provides the locus to maintain that status. The whole institute hovers on the threshold between academia and the world of development co-operation. It is worth encouraging academia and governments to recognise the advantages of such institutional arrangements.

It is a moot question whether cultivated and sustained liminality is feasible for anthropologists working on the one hand in a mainstream university environment or on the other as employees of an aid agency. While some of the attributes and actions I have been describing may be out of reach from such locations, much of this paper has dealt with states of mind that with practice can be developed irrespective of local context.
That ‘change happens at the edges’ is an increasingly popular wisdom in support of the advantages of staying on the threshold, in other words developing the critical capacity of an outsider while maintaining an insider’s empathy. Through ethnographic participant observation and principles of co-inquiry with those in the organisation who are seeking to change it, even those who start their research as outsiders should be able to develop a threshold status and perspective, while those who started as insiders can opt not to exit. In so doing, the liminal researcher can play a role in supporting critical learning and reflection by aid agency staff, helping them also to be inside and outside at the same time.

Being on the threshold provides opportunities for seeing the world differently, thus expanding horizons to imagine and possibly act upon new possibilities. A book I used to read with my daughter when she was small concerned the adventures of a small bear that has an unexpected ride in a box on a truck and returns home to tell his mother of all that he has discovered:

Mama, mama, I’ve been to town,
Inside, outside, upside down.\(^6\)

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\(^6\) From Stan and Jan Baranstein, *Inside, Outside, Upside Down*, Bright and Easy Board Books.
References


4. Hovering on the Threshold


Development institutions, development projects and development interventions could be seen as a particular way, a way that is more common in Africa than everywhere else, to provide public services. From this point of view, development anthropology could be enlarged to all the other modes of delivering public goods to become part of a more general anthropology of public space (Olivier de Sardan 2005a), or an anthropology of governance. The scope of study of this anthropology would include the State and its administration, public services, local councils, associations and NGOs, and even the private sector.

A word of caution is needed for describing a general anthropology of governance. We do not use the term ‘governance’ in the normative or prescriptive meaning of, for instance, the World Bank (e.g. World Bank 1992), nor in the general sense of political regimes, governments, or even governmentality, but in a strict descriptive meaning. The term ‘governance’ is here used to include the different modes – liberal or bureaucratic, clientelist or despotic, market oriented or state oriented, efficient or not – by which public goods are delivered to users at all the levels of the society, but we particularly use the term to focus on the local interfaces between people who deliver these goods (for example, public servants or development agents) and people who use them (ordinary citizens, or ‘target’ populations).

A very specific feature of current African modes of governance is the importance of the gap between official norms (laws, regulations, procedures, organisational charts, public discourses, development institutions’ discourses) and practical norms governing the daily practices of local ac-
tors. There is of course always and everywhere such a gap, but it varies according to societies, states and political regimes. In post-colonial Africa, the gap is particularly important. The reasons for this should be looked for not in the pre-colonial past, which was very diverse and heterogeneous, but in the colonial past (which was very much the same for almost all African countries) and the post-colonial past (with very similar behaviour by post-independence elites and development actors and institutions) (Olivier de Sardan 2004, 2009). The importance of daily corruption, and how it is embedded in ordinary administrative practices, is one significant illustration of this gap.

So, in order to reform governance, that is, to improve the delivery of public/collective goods/services, one has to know what the practical norms are in the first place. This is a task for development anthropology and anthropology of public spaces. Seen from this perspective, we can question whether or not development institutions are well equipped for promoting such reforms. Yet before developing these points further, I would like to suggest a few clarifications concerning what is usually called development anthropology.

Anthropologies of development

Development anthropology (or ‘anthropology of development’) is an umbrella term covering various theoretical and ideological positions and practices. I have proposed elsewhere a typology comprising three ‘theoretical’ approaches in how anthropology has engaged with the phenomenon of development:²

– The ‘discourse of development approach’ is a very ideological approach that aims to ‘deconstruct’ development.

– The ‘populist approach’ is an approach that is ideologically questionable, but methodologically interesting.

¹ The search for a cultural (pre-colonial) explanation of the ‘essence’ of the State in Africa is particularly explicit in Chabal and Daloz (1998) but is not limited to them.
² See Olivier de Sardan (2005b: chapter 1). In this chapter I am using ‘anthropology’ as a synonym of ‘socio-anthropology’, as situated at the interface between two important methodological traditions: the (sociological) method of the Chicago School (and of American qualitative sociology); and the (anthropological) method of classic ethnology (of the Manchester School in particular).
The ‘entangled social logics approach’ is a non-ideological approach that, to my mind, is the most productive.

This typology is based on theoretical positions or epistemological attitudes. However, we may propose another typology, focused on different registers of practical relations between the anthropology of development, on the one hand, and the ‘development universe’ (or the ‘developmentalist configuration’\(^3\)), that is, about the practice of development, on the other.

- The first register of practices concerns an anthropology of development outside of the developmentalist configuration, and hostile to the developmentalist configuration (e.g. Escobar 1995; Hobart 1993).

- The second register consists of an anthropology of development outside of the developmentalist configuration, but not hostile to the developmentalist configuration (e.g. Long 1989, 2001; Olivier de Sardan 2005b).

- The third register of practices is the anthropology of development within the developmentalist configuration (e.g. Cernea 1996).

Of course there are some ‘selective affinities’ between different practical registers and theoretical positions. For instance, the first register, which I have depicted as hostile to development, is preferentially connected with the deconstructionist approach. But there is no determinism in such affinities.

Our research team at LASDEL in Niamey is clearly part of the second register, while many anthropologists appointed by development agencies are in the third register of anthropology within development. There are, however, diverse variations within each group. For example, certain researchers belonging to the second register (like Norman Long and his disciples) seem more interested in dialogue with the first register. We could therefore chart them as register No. 2a. Others (like the APAD\(^4\) network to which I belong), are also part of register No. 2, but are more

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3 I will give the name “developmentalist configuration” to this essentially cosmopolitan world of experts, bureaucrats, NGO personnel, researchers, technicians, project chiefs and field agents, who make a living, so to speak, out of developing other people, and who mobilize and manage, to this end, a considerable amount of material and symbolic resources’ (Olivier de Sardan 2005b: 25).

interested in dialoguing with those of the third register, and could be put down as register No. 2b. Similarly, in register 3 we find researchers who work directly within development institutions, while others work as part-time contracted consultants. Hence, there exist numerous spaces of dialogue between these registers, and, in addition, people may move from one register to another (and back) according to circumstances.\(^5\)

We need to promote a positive dialogue between register 2 and register 3, or, in other terms, between an academic anthropology of development and a developmentalist (or applied) anthropology of development. The specific traits of each of these two registers could be defined more precisely in the following terms: both produce knowledge on the concrete processes of development and both have an interest in action (or reforms). But register 2 is mainly driven by the production of knowledge (anthropologists are part of the academic world), while register 3 is mainly driven by action (anthropologists are part of the developmentalist configuration). Register 2 hopes that the knowledge it produces might be helpful for action, while register 3 produces knowledge for action and on demand from action.

Obviously, as far as I am concerned, this has nothing to do with any epistemological or institutional pre-eminence of one group over the other. It is simply a question of epistemological embeddedness and different institutional frameworks, resources and constraints.

The main problem is, on both sides: what type of knowledge, and for what type of action, in the context of Africa? In this chapter I will reflect on knowledge and action around governance by using the example of research programmes carried out by our social science institute LASDEL in Niamey.\(^6\)

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**Development, the State and governance**

Our research centre clearly works within what I call register 2b. It is not only concerned with local development projects, but it also works on themes such as decentralisation, local arenas, public health services, justice, education, petty corruption in administrations. In other words, we are both anthropologists of development and anthropologists of the eve-

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\(^5\) For instance, David Mosse (2005a) left register 3 to join 2, but this move led to troubles with his former colleagues among the development workers (Mosse 2005b).

\(^6\) LASDEL is the acronym for Laboratoire d’Etudes et de Recherche sur les Dynamiques Sociales et le Développement Local (‘Laboratory for Study and Research on Social Dynamics and Local Development’), BP 12 901, Niamey, Niger: http://www.lasdel.net/
Development, Governance and Reforms

By-passing the State

Development funding, which initially was credited directly to the State, and transited through policies, took on multiple forms in the 1980s. A particular form was that of ‘development projects’. Such projects often came to take over the functions of the State in a non-State guise, accomplishing, at a formal or informal level, a series of ‘collective’ tasks, that is, delivering public goods or services which were, officially and formally, the responsibility of the State. They took the form of para-state, extra-territorial agencies, related to another mode of governance, directly controlled by donors. In this mode of governance, donors either assist or
replace the State, or keep it going thanks to sector support, which is handled at least partly outside the State. In Africa, this mode of governance can be called the ‘development project mode of governance’.

This diversification was a product of three converging historical processes. First, there was a search for an alternative to the public mode of governance to deliver development aid. Development institutions bypassed the local State by installing direct aid channels to the populations, managed by donors. The development project mode of governance was supposed to be more efficient than the public mode of governance in delivering public goods. Second, there were structural adjustment policies implemented from the end of the 1980s onwards. Their objective was to limit the influence of the State and to massively reduce the number of its agents. Third, there were also attempts to reinforce civil society. This new tendency within the development universe implied an increasing reliance on local NGOs to manage the new course set by ‘participatory development’ and ‘empowerment’. Everywhere in Africa, aid agencies implemented specific local institutions – as *comités de gestion*, *groupements féminins*, development associations, community committees, producers’ organisations – to promote participation. So a third mode of governance has emerged, mainly at the local level, the associative mode of governance, supported and funded by development agencies, but going its own way due to local actors and local leaders.

These influxes of development aid, some of which sought to avoid the State, have generated new internal stakes in African societies, especially at the levels which have something to gain from such funding or orientations. Many civil servants have turned their hands to seeking ‘rent’ on ‘development projects’. Others have been recruited by these projects, and thus left the public service for the oases that privileged projects represent. Multiple intermediaries come between development institutions and the populations who are supposedly the beneficiaries, giving rise to a new function of ‘development brokerage’ (Bierschenk, Chauveau and Olivier de Sardan 2000).

It is clear that the crisis of post-colonial States and of their policies (during the Cold War, with one-party regimes and then military dictatorships), and, at a deeper level, the neo-patrimonialism and despotism of African elites since the 1960s (which represented no breach with the colonial mode of governance), are the main factors that justify these new orientations. But as a result, the crisis of the State has worsened, completing the vicious circle.

Now, policies are changing. Bilateral and multilateral development agencies are more and more conscious of the risks induced by bypassing
the State, and the State is back again (Evans et al. 1985). Sector-wide approaches are promoted instead of development projects. The pendulum has swung again to the other side, with the Paris Declaration. The new development orientation is to fund sectorial programmes negotiated multilaterally with African States under macroeconomic conditionalities, in order to improve and reform the public mode of governance, and its ability to deliver public goods.

But the development interventions, whether in the form of development projects or in the form of development programmes, are confronted by the same dilemma: how is it possible for development agencies to improve the delivery of public goods and public services in a context of a clientelist and ‘affairist’ State, more and more characterised by an ‘internal informal privatisation’ (combined with external formal privatisation) (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2006)? Or to put it differently: how could ‘reformers from the outside’ be in a position to promote more efficient, more legitimate, and more equitable modes of governance in sovereign States where the current public mode of governance is non-efficient, non-legitimate and non-equitable?

Corruption is a case in point. The corruption of public authorities was the cause of bypassing the State by development institutions in the 1980s. However, the project system has in turn contributed to increasing corruption in the public sector. Projects have produced a peculiar universe associated with numerous material and symbolic advantages, four-wheel-drive vehicles, luxury and high wages, in cruel contrast to the deterioration of public administrations and the derisory salaries civil servants receive, intensifying the temptation to take cuts, commissions, ‘taxes’ and bribes… And the recent sector-wide approaches, in turn, seem to be more able to fuel corruption than to stop it (see recent scandals in ministries of education in Niger and Burkina Faso).

Corruption embedded in governance

LASDEL and the research network to which we are connected focusing on Francophone West Africa has carried out a number of empirical inquiries in the last few years, especially on two important multi-site fields: (a) the relations between publics and users of public health services in five African capitals (Dakar, Abidjan, Bamako, Conakry, Niamey); (b) petty corruption in three countries, concerning customs agents, the police, and the judicial system (Senegal, Benin, Niger) (see Jaffré and Olivier de Sardan 2003; Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2006). These studies have
shown, first, that there is a marked convergence between the situations observed, regardless of the country or sector in question; and, second, that there is a degree of embeddedness of corruption in the day-to-day functioning of the civil service that makes it difficult to distinguish between corrupted practices and daily forms of governance.

Hence, we have pinpointed, on the basis of socio-anthropological long-term field inquiries, how corruption is part of a common public mode of governance, at the level of ‘street bureaucracies’ (Lipsky 1980) as well as at higher levels. We will summarise some main empirical findings to highlight common features. For instance, clientelism, unproductiveness, the importance of intermediaries and of brokerage, the plurality of norms, or the partial criminalisation of administrative structures, all these features have already been largely studied, so we do not develop them here, although they are part of the public mode of governance.7 We also do not answer here the question of how far these characteristics prevail in the two other modes of governance we have mentioned (the development mode and the associative mode).

The formal and the real

The organisational charts, official texts, charts and maps, listings and plannings, are indeed far from lacking in African countries, and draw the contours of a reassuring and functional bureaucratic world. Yet reality is very different, very far from this smooth image. First, the tasks that are carried out are not the ones that were planned. Second, the agents do other things than those for which they are officially recruited and paid. Third, voluntary and other informal back-up agents, not on the payroll, perform a considerable part of the regular tasks. Fourth, budgets are purely fictional. Fifth, posted instructions are never respected. In other words, the real, everyday functioning of any administrative service in the studied countries cannot be deduced from the written texts governing it. Only meticulous observation makes it possible to acknowledge the extent to which the practice is different from the texts. Some of the tasks are achieved by an informal sector, to some extent internal or peripheral to the public services.

To illustrate the gap between the formal and the real let us consider the health sector. In health centres, agents very often achieve tasks which have nothing to do with their official competencies or training. Keepers dress wounds, labourers perform in-

7 I analysed these examples, along with some that are developed here, in the first part of Olivier de Sardan (2009).
jections, ward orderlies deliver babies, nurses issue prescriptions, doctors only carry out bureaucratic tasks. Moreover, up to a third of the staff can be ‘voluntary’ staff, off any register and unknown to the administration: housewives seeking an occupation, ‘first-aid agents’ trained by the Red Cross, unemployed parents of an agent, and new graduates from the medical schools without assignments.

‘Each-one-for-oneself-ism’

In spite of clichés and stereotypes praising community solidarity, the African continent is indeed, at least with regard to the public sector (but undoubtedly also beyond it), the kingdom of ‘each-one-for-oneself-ism’ (chacun-pour-soi-isme). In the administrative services, the team game is more or less unknown, and no one interferes in a colleague’s work. A meeting involving a collective discussion aimed at improving quality or labour productivity is extremely rare. Each one carries out his or her tasks in a kind of ‘bubble’ (two or three people can, of course, professionally live together in the same bubble), where no one penetrates and which does nothing but cross or knock into other bubbles. Everyone applies the proverb ‘If you go through a village of one-eyed people, close an eye and walk!’ (quoted by Souley 2003).

In the law courts of Niamey, Cotonou or Dakar, the judges ‘rub shoulders’ without consulting each other, the clerks work on their own, the heads of department are pleased as long as there is no problem (or sometimes receive a rent on the illicit intrigues of their subordinates), and there is no real control of the quality (and sometimes of the reality) of the services of the agents. Even the labourers are not really controlled and are largely left to themselves (all the more since they are well aware of each other’s small tricks).

Each one tries to preserve their field of action as a personal property. At the hospital, ‘When you tell a colleague that he does not do his work or that he’s done it badly, he will tell you: mind your own business!’ says a voluntary worker. (Moumouni, in Moumouni and Souley 2004)

Rooms of suspicion

Any form of collective action immediately gives rise to considerable suspicion, to rumours and to accusations, from the inside as well as from the outside. In the rural area, there is no co-operative, grouping, association or management board that has not been overtly or covertly the object of accusations of misappropriation. The world of the political parties is perceived by everybody and anybody as a world of intrigues, of ceaseless inversions of alliances, of arm wrestling and blows ‘below the belt’, betrayals and cases of ‘political nomadism’. And the politico-administrative
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apparatuses do not escape this law of suspicion. There is hardly a head of department who is not potentially corrupted, partial, or partisan in the eyes of his collaborators and subordinates; in the same way, any decision by a judge is automatically suspected of being taken to please X, or because Y gave a bribe-containing ‘envelope’.

We cannot say anything about the reality of all these accusations, and some are probably unfounded or slanderous. What remains attested to, however, is the extent and the pregnancy of these ‘rooms of suspicion’ in the administrative services as anywhere else, which mortgage the construction of minimal relations of confidence or safety necessary to the satisfactory delivery of public or collective services.

In Niger, the Zarma term baabize-tarey (meaning being the children of the same father) connotes jealousy and competition, in everyday as well as in political life. The election of a chief for life, against other candidates who are also his brothers or his cousins (his baabizey) and who will consequently remain his opponents for life, symbolises this. The frequent consultations with soothsayers, magicians and other marabouts ready to denounce a relative, a friend or a collaborator in the circle close to the patient who would be responsible for his past, present or future sorrows, therefore maintain this climate of overall mistrust.

‘Privilegism’

Any position in the public services is assessed first and foremost according to the access to privileges that it permits. Insofar as the wages almost everywhere are derisory and never increase, and as the investment in work itself is weak, the privileges – whether they are formal or informal, licit or illicit – make the difference. The goal of the game is, to some extent, to extend these privileges to the utmost, as far as possible, sometimes immoderately, either because of the material interest, the resources, or the prestige they provide. The ‘advantages of one’s position’ are thus genuine ‘markers’ of a status and operate as signs of ‘distinction’ (in the sense of Bourdieu) in relation to the colleagues, the subordinates and the users.

The privileges range from the reserved and private use of a telephone line to the service car ‘appropriated’ by the civil servant, from obtaining remunerative ‘assignments’ to the villa that goes with the position, from mobilising subaltern employees for one’s own shopping to the unlimited use of air-conditioning, the use of gas coupons of the service as a means of gratification or as a self-granted bonus, the appropriation in fact of the professional buildings to do some business or to receive one’s friends, etc. The comparatively luxurious world of the ‘projects’ (with its four-wheel-drive vehicles, its splits and its functional offices) appears as an ideal of privileges to which everyone aspires; and to be the ‘focal point’ (the correspondent) of a project supporting whatever department in the public service is a very desired position, be-
cause of the access that it grants to some advantages, even minor, particular to this magic world of projects.

Contempt for anonymous users

Whatever the public service, cadastral survey, post station, registry office, police station or medical centre, the anonymous user will make a bad start in a hostile field. S/he has to go round an assault course and nobody will help her/him – quite the contrary. The civil servants regard her/him as an intruder and a troublemaker, even as prey, and intend to be as little disturbed by her/him as possible. Her/his ignorance of procedures does not invite help, but rather reprimand. Whereas the external social world privileges the values of propriety, hospitality and respect, the bureaucratic universe, on the contrary, seems to be based on contempt for the user, and for her/his time, in particular.

During the interviews, the users of the health services kept saying, ‘One does not even look at us.’ It expresses well their feelings of not being respected, of being non-existent and humiliated.

He does not look at you, he only speaks, you do not understand, and then he gives a prescription... I told him that my daughter’s body is overheated, he did not even look at her. (Fanta, 24 years old, Abidjan; quoted by Koné 2003)

I was trying with a ward orderly to encourage a parturient to push. She was very tired and moaned a lot. This irritated the midwife, who told me, ‘Tear her, they are all like that, ready to go with men, enjoying to come but unable to control themselves when faced with pain. How shameful are these children nowadays.’ (...) I was about to do it, I had told the ward orderly to give me a blade, but I still wanted to wait for a while. Then, with a sudden jump, the parturient pushed and the expulsion started. Afterwards, everything went all right. I was relieved. The midwife told the parturient, ‘You are lucky, because if I had to make you give birth, I would have torn you from the beginning.’ (FL, trainee student, second year at the midwife school, ENSP, Niamey; quoted by Souley 2003)

The generalised exchange of favours

The contempt for anonymous users nonetheless stops where the recommendations start. On the contrary, any person directly or indirectly recommended is rather well served besides, often at the expense of waiting anonymous users. For a PAC (‘relative, friend or acquaintance’: in French parent, ami ou connaissance), the civil servant improves politeness and will ease the access to the required service, readily leaving his place to guide his guest. The ‘recommendations networks’ are multiple: members of the
extended family, neighbours, people originating in the same region, colleagues, former schoolmates, leisure mates or party comrades, etc. The favour rendered will not necessarily be equally returned by the ‘debtor’, but by other services rendered by other acquaintances: this is why we can talk of a ‘generalised exchange’, to paraphrase the formula of Lévi-Strauss on kinship.

You have to know somebody, or know somebody who knows somebody, in order to survive in an administrative territory. Faced with an administrative problem that needs to be solved, one does not try to know about the procedure to be followed, but whom to see, who could pull the strings for you.

Favours for colleagues or their children are normal. They do not, for example, have to respect any precedence or I can even give them drugs if I have some. The agent can even leave his working place to go with his friend’s child to another better-equipped health centre. However, one cannot generalise for people whom one hardly knows. One cannot do favours for everyone one knows. Thus one should not exaggerate. (EM, nurse in charge of a CSI, Niamey)

When they come in consultation, ‘the passes’ (recommended people) of some of us do not even stop to pay the bill. They go directly to see the hospital staff. If I was deciding to oppose the ‘passes’ system, we would not get along any more. (BI, tax collector in a hospital, Niamey) (Quotations from Souley 2000, 2003)

**Systemic corruption**

Another solution for the user who does not know anybody but who has money, is the recourse to corruption, now systemic, omnipresent and quite visible. However, corruption also unites people in continuous business relationships, or structures itself according to organised and even reciprocal networks (the police officer must give ‘his share’ to the sergeant, who gives his to the police chief, etc.). This systemic corruption has multiple forms: commissions for illicit services, gratifications, string-pulling, undue remuneration for public services, tributes, sidelines, misappropriation... It can be punctual, dyadic, and regular. It leads to a kind of ‘informal privatisation’ of the State, insofar as the government official does not do his work, or any work, unless he gets a direct remuneration from the user or the colleague.

Popular semiology conveys very well the multiple dimensions of corruption and its daily omnipresence: ‘The goat grazes where it is tied.’ ‘The one who pounds always keeps a mouthful for himself.’ One has to give ‘the money for the ingredients of the sauce’, ‘to put a stone on a file, so that it does not fly away’, ‘to lubricate the mouth’.
‘It needs two hands to be able to wash one another.’ ‘One should not come with empty hands.’ ‘The ropes of those drawing from the same well always mix up.’

**The ‘culture of impunity’**

The absence of real sanctioning of serious professional misconduct (such as diversion or corruption) is attested to everywhere. The worst that can generally happen is reassignment, i.e. a change of workplace. Many heads of department told us they were unable to sanction an incompetent, negligent or venal subordinate, insofar as any sanction immediately raises a flood of protestations and interventions in favour of the sanctioned agent, in the name indeed of solidarity or pity, but also in accordance with power struggles based on patronage or clienteles, whether or not bound to political parties. If one adds to this the fact that indelicacies of the offenders are well known to the others and that vertically or horizontally ‘everybody has a hold over everybody else’, one understands why such ‘a culture of impunity’ prevails nowadays.

A midwife caught several times swindling the parturients or the people accompanying them at the maternity hospital of Niamey was finally ‘punished’ and had to leave the service: her head of department had to threaten to resign in order to have her leave the service. She violently set on him and promised to return soon. Three months later, she was reassigned to the maternity hospital!

Agents of health services in Niamey report (see Souley, in Moumouni and Souley 2004): ‘One never sanctions, this is why it does not work.’ ‘There are untouchable people.’ ‘There is an incredible carelessness on such a level, some indelicate agents are protected by the persons in charge.’ ‘The whole system does not permit any sanction!’ ‘There are so many relations’ cliques, that sanctions cannot be taken.’

**A double language**

The shift between a formal and a real organisational chart, like the generalisation of illicit practices, the ‘informal privatisation of the State’, or the discreet partisan patronage, results in a kind of structural schizophrenia or institutional personality split among the government officials. There is, on the one hand, an official language for outside and for the national political rites: that of a Sovereign state, founded on the basis of a legal model and a Western bureaucratic ideal-type. On the other hand, there is a daily language, that of ‘arrangements’ (ajara in Hausa), that of tricks and favours,

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8 For a detailed analysis of this popular semiology, in particular in Wolof and in Zarma, see Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2006 (chapter 4).
intrigues and negotiations. In the same vein, there are public norms, those of the constitutional and legal apparatus, of the proclaimed modern citizenship, of the administrative and countable procedures; and there are the practical norms, established uses, informal codes and local professional cultures.9

With regard to the donors, the international institutions, but also in official and public circumstances, one uses an organised semantic universe, that of the standardised and euphemised language of the universal modern State, or that of development, omnipresent in Africa. This universe is thus made of two intricate stereotyped languages, where phrases such as ‘democracy’, ‘transparency’, ‘civil society’, ‘free elections’, ‘sustainable development’, ‘human rights’, ‘promotion of women’, ‘participation of the populations’, ‘freedom of the press’, ‘sense of responsibility’, ‘fight against poverty’, and many others coexist harmoniously.

In the daily interactions, there is a quite different semantic universe in use, that of everyday expressions, of derision, familiarity, complicity, and competition... Moreover, the first semantic universe is French; it is the one enjoyed by the northern institutions. The second one is especially in the national languages (or sometimes in this rather particular local French), and this is the one the local actors enjoy speaking. These two semantic universes coexist peacefully but remain relatively separated: situations and interlocutors belong to each one.

For example, the workshops, seminars and other training courses largely dispensed by the projects and the donors, which value the expression of official norms, have been for a long time ‘taken over’ and ‘diverted’ by the existing practical norms, as additional resources to gain (per diem, missions, corruption), or as possible means to be recruited by the projects and to leave the public service. On the other hand, their effect on the professional practices of the agents once they are back in their working place is extremely weak, if not non-existent. Hence, the practical norms go on.

In the context of development, skilful use of this double language is an important resource, especially for ‘development brokers’ and association leaders (Bierschenk, Chauveau and Olivier de Sardan 2000).

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This leads to a vicious circle. Each of these elements is connected to the others, and they mutually reinforce one another. As every civil servant and

9 See Olivier de Sardan (2001) for an analysis of the practical norms and the local professional cultures in the field of health.
every user knows that this system exists, each is led (willingly or unwillingly) to act in conformity with the system, in order to reduce the degree of uncertainty that already exists. But in so doing, everybody contributes to its expansion and reproduction. This vicious circle is particularly visible in the case of corruption: if you think the civil servants you are dealing with are corrupt and respond only in venal terms, you react accordingly by taking the initiative in corrupt transactions...

The actors in this system of governance (and everyone is an actor to some degree) have ambivalent and ambiguous reactions to corruption, as our enquiries demonstrate. Everyone disapproves of it, in some contexts, but everyone lends legitimacy to it, in other contexts.10

Obviously, we need a multi-causal explanation of how this system came about. Beyond the ‘poverty argument’ (lack of material means) often invoked, there are also other factors that intervene. Some of these point a finger at specific institutions or social groups: the responsibility of the national political elites seems clear, the same goes for the negative role played by ‘the developmentalist configuration’ in many instances, via the policies of huge bilateral collaborations and of the IMF, and because of the perverse effects of development aid. But other structural and more diffuse factors exist. They concern both the history of African bureaucracies and the behaviour of State personnel. Practical ‘work ethics’ and practical norms which in fact regulate the actions of civil servants do not usually allow for a clear distinction between public interest and private interests, between procedural logics and social logics, between public property and links of solidarity at close quarters, between State services and personal networks. Concerning logics of action and practical norms, pluralism, code switching and straddling are the rule.11

And yet the State does function to some degree. It has not collapsed (as in Somalia, Sierra Leone, Congo or Liberia), as far as the majority of Francophone countries in West Africa are concerned. Certain minimal services are still delivered, and the public space is not entirely informal. The relations between State services and ‘development projects’ are to be explored to understand how and why these minimal services are delivered. State services are sometimes at a standstill, or diminished, while, alongside them, ‘projects’ thrive. ‘Projects’ sometimes assure the survival of State services, either directly or indirectly. ‘Projects’ sometimes rob the State of

10 On legitimising corruption, see Blundo and Olivier de Sardan (2006), and on the ‘moral economy of corruption’, see Olivier de Sardan (1999).
11 See Ekeh (1975); Moore (1978); Bayart (1989); Berry (1993); Lund (1998); Chauveau, Le Pape and Olivier de Sardan (2001).
its agents. And finally, certain vestiges of State services continue to function without the help of any type of ‘project’ whatsoever…

Reformers from the inside

The preceding analysis leads to two conclusions. Both concern the academic socio-anthropology of development and the developmentalist anthropology of development.

First, the socio-anthropology of development cannot continue to limit its scope to the development universe alone, nor to the interactions between development institutions and the local populations that they target. It must also take into consideration the diversity of socio-political contexts, the relationship between the State, local authorities and the developmentalist configuration, and, in general, all of the institutions involved in one way or another in the delivery of public services and goods. Hence, it progressively evolves into a socio-anthropology of public spaces in Africa, which includes the anthropology of development (Olivier de Sardan 2005a).

Second, now, what about the practice of development? Development practices are by nature composed of reformatory interventions, promoted from the outside. From the point of view of action, to consider development as a reformatory enterprise, or even to combine ‘development’ and ‘reform’, could be a fresh perspective, avoiding the numerous ideological stereotypes so connected to the words ‘development’ and ‘aid’. Development agencies are not only aid donors but also ‘reformers from the outside’, so to speak. But they work in the context of sovereign national States, whose attitudes and forms of internal actions are decisive for the success or failure of these reformatory interventions, and their sustainability. But these States are simultaneously a big part of the solution and a big part of the problem. In other words, there is not only doubt about their ability to bring about reform, or to support reformatory interventions, but there is also the fact that these States should themselves be the target of actions aimed at reform.

The current mode of public governance, though allowing a certain survival of the States, is not at all satisfactory, not only for ‘outsiders’ but first and foremost for ‘insiders’, be they rank and file citizens or State agents. Not once in the course of our enquiries did we ever find a happy civil servant or a happy user. The need to reform the State is not simply a demand made by donors but also and above all a deep internal demand of African countries.
But how do we go about it? It is my opinion that ‘top down’ reforms under the injunctions of donors, as well the massive injection of funds, have proved their inefficacy. For instance, successive regimes in West African countries all displayed in the beginning, in order to justify their coming to power, a programme of fighting corruption. Nonetheless, there is a general increase in corruption, not a decrease. Given this framework – and past experience – external macroeconomic conditions, purportedly conducive to ‘good governance’, are unlikely to have any real impact on day-to-day governance. A reform cannot succeed unless it is the product of a dynamic originating inside the societies and States under consideration. Reforms from the outside have no chance without reformers from the inside.

But how can such a dynamic come about and how can it develop? A question like this cannot be answered by sweeping assertions, pat affirmations or magical formulae. But our enquiries indicate that there may be a ray of hope. Our field enquiries consistently revealed the existence of ‘admirable exceptions’ among agents of the State who resist, if only partly, the current public mode of governance and who strive to respect certain public service ethics, users of the public service and the public good in general. It is true that these ‘reformers from the inside’ were often bitter or isolated, but they continued nevertheless to behave in their corner in accordance with a mode of governance in contradiction to the dominant mode, despite the high social cost it incurred (the disapproval of their entourage, the hostility of their colleagues, family pressure, political and economic marginalisation, and so on). Consequently, they provide positive potential models, centres of initiative, and possible points of support for ‘reform from the inside’. The question is how to get them out of isolation, how to get them to meet, to form networks, to coordinate their actions and to be in a position to promote reforms.

Paradoxically, another ray of hope takes the form of the general disgust of civil servants and users alike! Isn’t it possible to mobilise this general annoyance, to harness its power with a view to change, to support social movements by users set on asserting their rights against contempt and rackets, and to shake up the public service itself, helping civil servants to rediscover (lost) pride in their work? This may well be seen as not really being a job for researchers but one for citizens, or activists. And, yet, researchers are also citizens!

One way in which anthropological studies could help promote reforms is to describe some of the practical norms that regulate de facto, informally, the behaviour of people delivering public goods, be they civil ser-
vants, bureaucrats, development projects agents, community councillors, etc.

**Practical norms**

The gap between official norms and the real functioning of the State and of State agents is especially wide in Africa, and in development interventions. People act very differently from what they say, or from what rules, laws and public discourse prescribe. Daily real public governance is very different from official and formal public governance.

According to a prevalent linear outline, the gaps existing between norms and behaviour are due essentially to an inappropriate application of norms, or to an insufficient comprehension of the former (the ‘message’ contains parasites).

Then the solution would be to examine the application of norms (supervision), and to guarantee that actors have a better command of norms (training). But for years development agencies have implemented supervision models and have funded training seminars, with very little success.

We prefer a more complex schema, one in which a level of ‘practical norms’ appears in between real behaviour and official norms. Real behaviour is not merely a question of deviation from official norms, but involves alternative, unspoken, latent norms that could be referred to as practical norms. In other words, a behaviour that deviates from official norms...
norms is not simply erratic, nonconformist, but is regulated by other norms, which the anthropologist must ‘discover’. However, this discovery is not enhanced by the fact that these practical norms are not necessarily and always conscious, explicit or recognised as such by the actors involved.

Our working hypothesis is that in post-colonial Africa these practical norms among civil servants have two major components. We propose to refer to them as ‘the common bureaucratic culture’ and ‘the specific professional cultures’ respectively (Olivier de Sardan 2001). The common bureaucratic culture concerns all public administrations and public services. It is in part a legacy of the colonial administration, which produces a very special bureaucratic culture. The professional cultures are specific to each administration or to each service, and are piled up on the common bureaucratic culture, thus inserting the latter into the specific social universe of a profession. Each profession has its technical competencies and its official professional norms. A specific system of training (professional training course, including the initial training and continuous on-the-job training) is usually responsible for inculcating these norms. But each profession is practised on the local level in a manner which differs very much from the official norm. Some elements of the official norms are combined with other habits, routines and ‘tricks of the trade’. They constitute a specific ‘know-how’ linked to adjustment to the work environment, to the specific mode of functioning of a given structure, to the local system of management, to the type of hierarchy that exists at the workplace, to rela-
tionships between colleagues, to practical constraints on the job, to material and financial constraints, to social pressures, etc. These elements taken as a whole comprise what we refer to as ‘the local professional culture’.

The term ‘culture’ is being used here almost as a synonym for ‘practical norms’. Our intention is to emphasise the importance of exploring the logics that underpin the behaviour patterns observed among civil servants, that is, the representations, practical norms and strategies which they more or less have in common in their everyday life and which they use in the ordinary course of their job. The concept of ‘culture’ as employed here is focused and refers to these shared practical norms, in very specific contexts, and, as a matter of fact, is totally opposed to a culturalist viewpoint. Consequently, it is neither traditionalist, deterministic, nor homogenous. These bureaucratic and professional cultures are not inherited from the pre-colonial past, but are modern constructs. They are not structural and formal patterns which produce practices, but syncretic, changing

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12 Culturalism could be seen today as a scientific ideology, naturalising a conceptual and hypothetical construct as a catch-all explicatory entity. Here I do not enter into the immense debate on culture.
and informal logics. They do not define national nor ethnic collective identities, but they vary according to settings and actors’ strategies.

Most of the features we have listed above around corruption (privilegism, etc.) are drawn from empirical findings on the type of practical norms. They are part of the current common bureaucratic culture and of the public mode of governance.

Understanding these practical norms seems to be a fundamental precondition for reform. It is the only way of answering the following question: which of these norms can be modified and under what conditions? Otherwise, we will continue to focus on official norms, in an effort to ingrain them, over and over again, in the minds of administrative actors, with the help of development projects and development funds, through training sessions, seminars, supervisions, logical frameworks and the like. The problem is that trainings, seminars, supervisions, logical frameworks and so on have long since been ‘taken over’ and ‘deviated’ from their initial objectives by existing practical norms. They have become a means of gaining wage supplements, and have served to hone an overall competence in the use of a ‘double language’.

Any improvement in the delivery of public goods and services, either by the State or by development interventions, requires a modification of the practical norms followed by the local actors in ordinary settings and should be the result of a debate between these actors, acting as ‘reformers from the inside’ and reformers of themselves. One of the more interesting ways for anthropological knowledge to contribute to action (development and reforms) is to put on the table these practical norms which are usually under the carpet (at least for development agencies).
References


6. Notions of Poverty and Wealth in Coastal Zanzibar
The Policy Relevance of Local Perspectives

Introduction

This paper draws on empirical data from anthropological fieldwork in Jambiani – a coastal community on the main island (Unguja) of Zanzibar, Tanzania. It illustrates the complex notions and manifestations of poverty and relative wealth from the perspectives of women who are engaged in seaweed farming. The paper also briefly discusses the perceptual frameworks and assumptions regarding poverty and measures to improve the livelihoods of poor people that form the basis for Zanzibar’s National Poverty Reduction Vision and Plan. Furthermore, it reflects on one of the two guiding perspectives in Sweden’s Policy for Global Development, i.e. that the situations, needs and priorities of poor women, men and children must guide and inform all efforts to pursue the overarching policy goal (to contribute to equitable and sustainable global development), as well as the specific goal for Swedish development cooperation (to contribute to an environment supportive of poor people’s own efforts to improve their quality of life).

1 I am grateful to Sida/SAREC for the support granted to my research in Zanzibar. I am also indebted to the Institute of Marine Sciences (IMS), University of Dar es Salaam, and to the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Organisation (WIOMSA), both of them located in Zanzibar, for providing a welcoming, supportive and stimulating environment for my research. I am particularly grateful for the support and encouragement provided throughout by Dr Narriman Jiddawi (IMS) and Dr Julius Francis (WIOMSA).
2 Ministry for Foreign Affairs (2003); see also Ministry for Foreign Affairs (2008).
A common feature of all three ‘levels’ (i.e. the individual who is experiencing poverty, the national policy in a developing country and the development policy in a donor country), is that poverty is conceptualised as a multidimensional problem. People who experience poverty, like the seaweed-cultivating women in our case below, are perfectly able to describe what poverty is all about and what is required for them to be able to improve their livelihoods. They refer to the interconnections between different dimensions of poverty, in terms of problems and constraints as well as opportunities to improve their lives. They provide meaning to the policy notion of poverty as ‘multidimensional’. Poor people are rarely found to be passive ‘victims’. They put the limited resources at their disposal to use in strategic ways, calculating the pros and cons of various options. Women and men who are poor and who explain what poverty is all about provide meaning to the policy notion of poverty as ‘multidimensional’. The policy discourse on poverty and poverty reduction is different. The policy-making process is remote, and hence the tendency to objectify people: as ‘poor’, ‘excluded’, ‘discriminated against’, ‘to be empowered’ and so forth. In a policy setting, poverty is conceptualised as multidimensional in rather abstract, static and generic terms. Even if the current policy discourse of ‘multidimensional poverty’ represents a welcome and highly significant move from a conventional, narrow conceptualisation of ‘the poor’ in strict economic terms (e.g. income poverty), it is predominantly based on generalised assumptions rather than on an informed understanding of what matters to poor individuals and groups and of the relative importance of and connections between the different dimensions.

The argument underpinning this paper is that development policy and practice that seeks to improve the livelihoods of individuals who are poor must be based on a firm understanding of the basic characteristics of poverty, i.e. it is complex, context-specific, relative and dynamic (see e.g. Sida 2002). Complexity means that poverty comprises a wide range of aspects and circumstances. Also, the precise features of poverty are context-specific, i.e. they are derived from the particular environmental, socio-cultural, economic and political characteristics of the situations in which poverty is produced and prevails. Poverty is relative in the sense that it is defined by those concerned in relation to their notions of what is judged to be a decent life. Moreover, the manifestations of poverty will change over time. Individuals and groups may move in and out of poverty depending on local circumstances and on the interplay between local and
external forces and factors.\(^3\) The recognition of poverty as complex, context-specific, relative and dynamic constitutes a viable point of departure for more comprehensive inquiry into specific reasons for and manifestations of poverty (including interaction with and integration into wider socio-political and economic systems), local perceptions of poverty and development, and coping strategies applied and aspirations for a better life held by women and men who are poor. The insights and knowledge thus obtained should form the basis for policy formulation and for translating policy into appropriate strategies for action and concrete interventions that can support poor people’s efforts to improve their lives.

In concord with the principles of partnership and national ownership of the development process, which is the cornerstone of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005), governments like ours in Sweden and donor agencies like the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) are nowadays only to a limited extent in direct contact with poor people or their representative organisations in partner countries. Support for field-based projects and programmes is rapidly giving way to budget and sector support, and hence the potential is diminishing for donors to obtain first-hand information on local livelihoods from project-based expatriate staff and visiting consultants. Thus, government agencies in a developing country are, relatively speaking, much better positioned than donors to formulate policies, strategies and plans based on poor people’s own problem definitions and suggestions for action. Hence, it is the partner country governments, institutions and organisations that carry the major responsibility for establishing and maintaining a dialogue with poor individuals and their legitimate representatives, and for rightly interpreting, assessing, analysing and bringing forward the problems, needs and interests of different categories of citizens who experience poverty. The results of such endeavours should form the basis not only for the government’s own efforts to reduce poverty and promote development, but also for directing external actors. The latter include development co-

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\(^3\) Deepa Narayan, a Senior Adviser on poverty analysis in the World Bank, has coordinated a global study (fifteen countries) on how and why individuals have been able to move more permanently out of poverty. She emphasises the importance of presenting a ‘moving picture of poverty’, compared with the ‘single snapshots’ of conventional poverty analysis. The study, which has obtained partial funding from Sweden (Ministry for Foreign Affairs), was completed in 2009. A first volume brings together background papers reflecting multidisciplinary perspectives on poor people’s mobility (see Narayan and Petesh 2007). The second volume presents the findings and policy implications of the global study, based on narratives and responses from more than 60,000 women and men who have either been able to move out of poverty, or have fallen into poverty (see Narayan, Pritchett and Kapoor 2009).
operation agencies, but also other areas of policy and political decision making, such as international trade and private sector development.

This brings us to the role of anthropology and anthropologists in the context of development cooperation, which is the common theme of the papers presented in this volume.\(^4\) By sharing some of my experience from working within a development policy environment, I hope that I will provide convincing arguments to show that applied and academic anthropology can be mutually supportive, for the individual anthropologist who is involved in both and also for the institutional environment in which we work.

**Practicing anthropology**

The research in Zanzibar is my second major research undertaking in Tanzania. There are fundamental differences between the two. The first field research was carried out continuously over eighteen months (1976–77) in an agropastoral community at 1,700 metres above sea level in Tarime District east of Lake Victoria. My current research in Jambiani village on the south-eastern coast of Zanzibar’s main island, Unguja, is based on short periods of field research (2–5 weeks) undertaken once or twice per year since 1998. A principal reason for the recurrent, brief visits is that other work has not permitted longer periods of fieldwork. However, for a research project dealing with coping strategies of poor women, men and families in the context of a changing macroeconomic, social and political environment, the possibility to make repeated visits over an extended time period has obvious advantages.

Another difference owes to my own professional development and the positions from which I have been able to apply my anthropological experiences and knowledge. To put it briefly, I have moved from a position as a university-based social anthropologist struggling to combine development consultancies with academic studies for a Ph.D. and subsequently for postgraduate research, to a fulltime employee as Senior Policy Adviser in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs determined to keep a foot in research by using odd weeks of overtime compensation and holidays to complete a

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\(^4\) Although the focus here is on the role of anthropologists and anthropology, researchers and consultants from related social science disciplines, such as human geography and sociology, often fulfil the role of the ‘anthropologist’ in developing countries. Not only are there relatively few trained anthropologists in most developing countries, but the training of e.g. sociologists often includes anthropological theory and methods and hence the differences between the disciplines is often less marked than in Sweden and other northern countries.
research project that was commenced years before joining the ministry. I wrote my thesis while working fulltime as Director of the Development Studies Unit of the Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University. The unit was managing the department’s collaboration agreement with Sida, through which anthropologists from all over Sweden and also from abroad were recruited for short-term assignments in Sweden or in partner countries. This was a time when the dualism of distinguishing between ‘development anthropology’ and ‘anthropology of development’ literally divided our departments into the ‘pure academic’ and ‘applied’ anthropologists. It was not only an unfair and unproductive divide but also artificial, because many of us were engaged in both elements, one way or the other, often to mutual benefit. Although my thesis was the kind of solid academic piece of anthropological work that resulted in a monograph on a broad range of aspects of community life and livelihoods, it was also very much stimulated by the experiences gained from consultancies for Sida and other agencies, including working in multidisciplinary teams. I carried out many assignments in close collaboration with agronomists, foresters, nutritionists and other natural scientists, and hence natural resource management and the complex social and economic factors behind child malnutrition are themes dealt with in the thesis.

My current research project in Zanzibar is also much inspired by collaboration with natural scientists, in a Sida/SAREC-funded regional multidisciplinary research and capacity-building programme, ‘Eastern Africa Coastal and Marine Science Programme’. The programme was coordinated by the Institute of Marine Sciences (IMS) and later on by the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA), both of them operating from Zanzibar. As part of the programme, my colleague Prudence Woodford-Berger (anthropologist, also working in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs) and I coordinated a sub-programme specifically directed towards sociologists, anthropologists and geographers in the region. The core substance of capacity building for students from these disciplines was training courses and supplementary funding through Sida/SAREC to enable the students to carry out longer periods of fieldwork in coastal settings.

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5 There is an immense body of literature dealing with these different, but also complementary, streams in anthropology. The critiques of ‘applied’ anthropology in relation to development assistance include Escobar (1991) and Ferguson (1997). A good overview and contribution to bridging the gap is provided in Gardner and Lewis (1996) and in Crewe and Harrison (1998).

6 When the sub-programme was established, there was hardly any social science research undertaken in coastal communities by national researchers and the interest and motivation to focus on coastal themes and populations was very limited. Two circumstances contributed to
Techniques for data collection, ranging from participant observation to some of the ‘rapid’ participatory techniques developed and promoted at the time by Robert Chambers and his colleagues at the Institute of Development Studies in Sussex.\textsuperscript{7}

The social science research agenda was largely developed in response to the research themes and findings in oceanography, marine geology and coastal and marine botany, the reason being that the social science component (including also environmental economics) came in rather late in the programme when science problems and themes had already been identified. The consequent ‘reactive’ approach to research themes was far from disadvantageous, however. In addition to fostering a welcoming, friendly attitude among the natural scientists, who felt that they had something to offer to the social scientists, it also helped the social science students and researchers to identify relevant and timely research topics, to a large extent emanating from the natural science agenda but requiring a social science approach and social science investigative methods.\textsuperscript{8}

It was in the process of promoting an interest in coastal livelihoods among East African social science researchers and students that I began to consider Zanzibar as a possible new area for my own research. I submitted an application to Sida/SAREC and received funding. While I learned a lot about coastal and marine ecosystems and environmental challenges

\textsuperscript{7} The first generation of such techniques were Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA). These were later made more participatory and renamed Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). They were also partly inspired by anthropological approaches and methods. The philosophy and techniques are summarised in Chambers (1992 and 1997).

\textsuperscript{8} Examples of social science research projects include the role of traditional authority in the management of marine resources (Bazaruto Island, Mozambique), gender relations in the use and management of coastal resources (Zanzibar), the impact of changing coastal livelihoods on social and economic power relations (Saadani, Tanzania) and indigenous knowledge and management of mangrove forests (Kwale, Kenya). All of them addressed specific coastal and marine environmental issues and problems (e.g. the rapid deforestation of mangrove forests in Kenya), as part of the more general social science themes.
from science colleagues, I was also struck by the apparent lack of awareness of and insights into the livelihoods, skills and wisdom of the people who lived in the communities where the scientists conducted their field trials.\(^9\) When the matter was discussed, my impression was that the scientists often did not think it was worthwhile to consult local men and women to hear their views about e.g. resources available, seasonal variations, ecosystem changes, and so forth.\(^10\) They did not expect local people to possess knowledge and experience of significance to the research. From an anthropological point of view, it is obvious that the inhabitants of tropical coastal settlements possess a wealth of detailed and accurate knowledge about the ecological systems that form the very basis for their livelihoods. It is also obvious that although they construct and explain the environmental realities in emic rather than in scientific terms, their knowledge is not therefore less accurate and precise. What most of the scientists did not appreciate was that such experience-based knowledge can provide important clues and explanations to the science questions, i.e. local women and men can be worthy partners in a dialogue on how and why the ecosystems have deteriorated. They can and should also be partners in decisions and efforts made with the aim to improve the management of natural resources in ways that are sustainable. Examples of the latter include the management of marine reserves, mangrove forests and coral reefs; and the introduction of closure periods to sustain fish populations.

I joined the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (Department for Global Development) in mid-2002. This was the time when Sweden's Policy for Global Development was formulated (the Government presented the Bill to Parliament in May 2003). The policy is based on a whole-of-government approach to poverty reduction and development and firmly founded on a common goal (to contribute to equitable and sustainable development) and two guiding perspectives (a rights perspective and the perspectives of poor people on their own situations, needs and capabilities) that would be shared by all government departments. The responsibility for formulating the policy was vested in our department. My par-

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\(^9\) Two notable exceptions to a more general lack of awareness are Dr Narriman Jiddawi (IMS), who holds a Ph.D. in Fisheries, and the late Professor Adeleida Semesi (Department of Botany, University of Dar es Salaam), who gained international repute as a specialist in mangroves. Both of them have published articles and reports on gender aspects of coastal livelihoods and production, indigenous knowledge of coastal and marine natural resources and experiences of involving local communities in coastal zone management.

\(^10\) The different views on the accuracy of local knowledge about natural resources stimulated a group of social and natural scientists to write a joint article in which we describe and analyse some coastal and marine ‘science’ features from the perspectives of local inhabitants (see Tobisson et al. 1998).
Ethnographic Practice and Public Aid

ticipation in this challenging work therefore became the entry point to a new professional life as an anthropologist, now in the Government Offices and participating in the formulation of development policy. It was obvious from the employment interview that my anthropological experience from research (including the current research in Zanzibar) as well as development consultancies was decisive for obtaining the position, which formed part of an interdisciplinary set-up of posts covering various areas of development policy (in my case: ‘social development’).

In 2005, the Department for Global Development was split into three independent departments, the principal reason being that it had grown to a rather unmanageable size (78 staff members). The policy group to which I belonged formed the nucleus of a new Department for Development Policy. In addition to responsibility for the development and monitoring of Swedish development cooperation policies, both generally and with regard to specific policy areas, our mandate includes analytical work and promoting the coherent contributions of different political and policy areas of the government to the common goal and the two analytical perspectives of the policy for global development. The policy areas include, among others, trade and business investment, economy and finance, security and defence, migration and the environment.

One of the principal areas of responsibility assigned to me and my colleague (a human rights specialist) in the new department was to be the ‘guardians’ of the two guiding perspectives. This included helping to ensure that decisions and measures taken in various areas of the Government Offices were informed by, or could be expected to promote, the situations and interests of poor individuals and groups of poor people in developing countries, and that a rights perspective was applied. The task posed huge challenges, if we were not simply to transfer an opportunistic policy language but also to make sure that colleagues in other departments had understood the meaning of it and were able to assess the implications of various political decisions in the context of the new policy framework.\footnote{Raymond Apthorpe refers to the power of policy language, which he describes as a language ‘to please and persuade rather than inform and describe’. Apthorpe’s article is part of a now classic volume on anthropological approaches to policy: Shore and Wright (1997).}

I shall come back to the policy notion of ‘the perspectives of poor people on development’ and to my experience of the work to promote it within the Government Offices. What I would like to mention here is that my anthropological experience from research as well as development consultancies has been immensely valuable in this work. It helps me to recall real situations of poverty that I have encountered over the years – as a

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steady reminder that poverty situations and measures to cope with poverty are indeed complex and varied.

Jambiani – Inhabitants and livelihoods

My current research is in Jambiani village on the south-eastern coast of the main island, Unguja, in the Zanzibar archipelago. The approximately 4,000 inhabitants dwell on a narrow strip of land on the waterfront, only a few hundred metres wide and extending for some five kilometres. The settlements are concentrated on both sides of a dirt road connecting Jambiani and the neighbouring Paje village to the north. Before the beginning of 2007, the road came to an end in Jambiani. Makunduchi village to the south could only be reached by foot or bicycle, and by the odd driver who, at the risk of having the tyres cut by the sharp coral stones, ventured to drive through the bush. Beyond the village is the vast and inhospitable coral rag. It is covered by thick thorn, and it is here that the villagers, using swidden technique, grow cassava, sweet potatoes, papaya, some maize and a few varieties of pulses that can manage almost without topsoil and with very limited rainfall. The villagers also use the coral rag to browse the few cattle and goats, and as the source of fuel-wood and coral stone for lime making.

The Jambiani villagers’ ethnic identity is waShirazi, a section of the complexly organized waSwahili (‘people of the coast’) who for centuries have blended in settlements along the coast between southern Somalia and northern Mozambique. The different Swahili groups all adhere to Islam and they speak dialects of kiSwahili. Ties of kinship in combination with territorial belonging are highly significant for group identity and solidarity in Swahili communities. Although the importance attached to patrilineality is increasing, particularly when natural resources become scarce, individuals are concerned about their descent on both the maternal and paternal line. The character of wider, usually dispersed kin groups (ukoo andumbo) is bilateral (‘kindred’), whereas the members of a group (mlango) who reside, manage property and work together centre around a cluster of men related by common grandparental origin and their wives and children. The continued importance of the bilateral kin group is made manifest in situations of divorce, when women commonly return to and are provided shelter by brothers or mothers’ brothers.

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12 A comprehensive overview of the waSwahili is provided in Middleton (1992).
Access to land for cultivation in the vast coral rag area beyond the village is based on descent from a common ancestor who, according to legends, was the first to settle in the area and thereby secured the user-rights of descendants. Although coral rag land is not scarce, the rights to specific plots (*konde*) surrounded by stone walls (*bigili*) are firmly regulated by customary tenure rules. It is the stone wall rather than the land itself as a productive asset (productivity is very low) that represents a value worth keeping and passing on through inheritance. The rules regulating the individual ownership, transfer and inheritance of coconut palms are complex and nowadays subject to continued reinterpretation and reconstruction. The reason for this is the steadily increasing economic value of land close to the beach. The ownership of coconut palms marks the ownership of the land on which they grow. The palm trees can be sold to entrepreneurs in the tourism business, or to people from the major town on the island (Stonetown) or from abroad who build private villas along the beach. Apart from inheritance, the mode of transferring rights to land in the settlement area close to the beach is thus by selling and purchasing coconut palms growing on the land in question.  

The Swahili saying *Kaskazi mja naswi, kusi mja na mtama* (‘The north-east wind comes with the fish, the south-west wind comes with sorghum’) points to a regular cycle of natural events which, to a large extent, determines the coastal activities on a seasonal as well as daily basis. The monsoons not only dictate the direction of the ocean trade in which the Swahili have a long and proud history, but they also bring the rain that is vital for agricultural production and they determine the availability of species and hence the options for fishing and collecting in the shallow waters and on the reef. Most daily activities follow the rhythm of monsoons and tides. As is typical for coastal populations in rural eastern Africa, the inhabitants of Jambiani combine elements of terrestrial and marine resources for their subsistence. The principal features include fishing, collecting in shallow waters, farming, coconut palms, livestock, handicraft, petty-trade and, since the early 1990s, seaweed farming.

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13 It is not possible here to provide details on the extremely interesting and important topic of land transactions. Even so, a general remark can be made that although sales of palm trees has made some villagers rather wealthy, the villagers are nearly always on the losing side in negotiations with outsiders. The transfers made in recent years demonstrate very clearly the disconnect between formal legislation on the one hand, and local perceptions of ownership as a bundle of rights and responsibilities on the other. The notion of ‘bundle of rights’ was first introduced in Bruce (1988). It refers to the several rights constituting a tenure or, alternatively, all rights belonging to various persons or groups in a piece of property.

14 See e.g. Prins (1965); Sheriff (1987).
Seaweed farming was introduced on a larger scale in Zanzibar in the late 1980s, in response to a government initiative to encourage foreign investments. The two multinational companies that started the business have remained in control of the sector since then. Although seaweed farming has spread to other areas in Zanzibar, the south-east coast where Jambiani is located and where the vast intertidal flat area provides exceptionally good opportunities and space for everyone, has remained a focus area for the industry. The shore and the intertidal waters are looked upon as an extension of terrestrial lands, and in this respect they form part of the common property of the kin group. Like the terrestrial farms, the individual seaweed plots are referred to as *konde*, and the terminology used for agricultural tasks (e.g. planting, weeding and harvesting) applies to the seaweed tasks as well.

**Women seaweed farmers in Jambiani**

The scene is a seaweed farming area on the vast intertidal flat outside the village. Some hundred women are working efficiently in the shallow water to make the most of the approximately three hours they are able to spend in their individual farms before the tide turns. This is the first day of the spring tide and hence many women have a crop to harvest. The crop has been left to mature during the neap tide, when the farms are not accessible. If the seaweed is not harvested promptly at the beginning of the spring tide, the risks are high that the now heavy bunches of twigs are torn off the ropes by the strong tidal currents. Harvesting is swiftly done – the bunches of twigs are simply ripped off the ropes, each of the ropes tied to sticks that the women have anchored in the seabed, and stuffed into discarded rice bags. A seaweed farm (*konde*) is measured by the number of ropes it contains, usually between forty and fifty. A woman who depends primarily on seaweed farming for her livelihood needs is usually handling three or four such farms. Each farm has its own cycle of growth and maturity, implying that all farm activities (planting, ‘weeding’ and harvesting) can be carried out simultaneously.

Planting is much more time consuming than harvesting. Small bunches of seaweed (*mbegu*, seeds) taken from the harvested crop are carefully tied onto ropes using plastic thread (tie-tie) that are either provided by one of the two multinational seaweed companies operating in Jambiani, or purchased in village shops. The spots now empty due to harvesting have to

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15 The two major species are *Eucheuma spinosum* and *Eucheuma cottonii*. The principal uses of the produce are in the food industry and in the bio-chemical industry.
be replanted as quickly as possible to commence a new growing cycle. The crop will mature in about five to six weeks’ time, which means that a new harvest is normally reaped during the third consecutive spring tide.

The women whose farms are located close to the channel between the coral reef and the intertidal flat are the first to notice that the water is coming back. They yell out a warning to their fellow-women: ‘Get ready! The water wants to go home [to reach the shore]. Look how the small crabs are waving’ [the crabs that hide in the seaweed raise their claws at the first contact with the water]. The women have already stuffed the seaweed in bags, each bag containing approximately 25 kilos wet weight of the crop. A typical harvest amounts to five to seven bags. The bags are tied to a thick rope. ‘Getting ready’ means that a woman ties the rope around her waist and makes herself ready to haul (burura) her bags along to the shore at the pace of the incoming tide. Since none of the women can swim, this can be a risky venture. A woman has to walk in water deep enough to enable the bags to float so as to relieve the weight (seven bags amounting to ca. 175 kilos), but not so deep that she risks losing contact with the sand and coral beneath her feet. Even if the women try to move forward together in small groups, there is always the risk of falling behind because of an excessive load, or getting oneself entangled in the ropes.

Local perceptions of relative poverty and wealth

Bi Moni, a divorced woman aged sixty plus, laments that she is no longer able to haul more than six bags. When I try to encourage her by pointing out that the dry weight of her six bags is worth some 5,000 shillings (ca. 5 US dollars; the 25-kilo contents of a bag are reduced to 7 to 8 kilos after it has been cleaned and dried in the sun for some three days), she yells that this is not good enough! ‘Nakula usiku! Nataka kula mapema!’ – ‘I eat late in the evening! I want to eat early!’

Bi Moni and her friend Bi Aisha both nod in the direction of a woman at some distance in the seaweed farming area, telling me that ‘Bi Halima is eating early’ (anakula mapema). Bi Halima is also getting ready for the return of the water, but she will not be hauling the bags. While the vast majority of women are struggling to tie their bags to the waist rope and place them in position not to get intertwined when the water comes, Bi Halima has climbed up on the top of her heap containing some fifteen bags. She is waving to a man who makes a timely arrival in his outrigger canoe (ghalawa) to bring her bags to the shore for money.

Like a steadily growing number of women in Jambiani, Bi Moni is now depending solely on seaweed farming for her livelihood needs. She
knows that she has put herself in a vulnerable position by abandoning her agricultural farm in the coral rag area, but she feels that the strength and time at her disposal are not enough to keep up both elements. Being single and fostering three small children of relatives, she has come to the conclusion that a small but steady and fairly predictable cash income puts her in a safer position than would be the case if she divided her time and effort between the seaweed and the agricultural farm. She knows that she will not be able to resume agricultural farming on the plot she abandoned more than a year ago, unless she is prepared to make a huge labour input. In the coral rag area, leaving a farm idle even for a single season means that it is near to impossible to cultivate the same plot again. Wild boar invade farms that are not visited more or less daily by people. The boar break through the stone wall surrounding each individual farm and destroy everything in their way in search of tubers. Not only does the thin layer of soil between the coral rocks vanish, but it also takes a lot of work to rebuild the walls strongly enough to stand up to an attack – the wild boar will continue to strike at the weak passages, make their way through and continue searching for food until they have turned every stone. Bi Moni has not taken the ultimate step of selling the coral stones that make up the wall to buyers from Zanzibar town who deal with building material. The wall is her ‘bank’, she claims, a last resort in case of an emergency.

Bi Halima – the woman who hires a man to bring her seaweed to the shore – is ‘eating early’. This is not because she is earning a higher income from seaweed farming than her fellow-women, but because she is married to a senior government official. He is paid a monthly wage of a size that very few men in the village are able to earn from fishing or petty-business, and so there is money to pay for the transportation of bags and also, if need be, for domestic tasks such as collecting firewood. Bi Moni ‘eats late’ because of long working hours and limited cash. Coming back from the seaweed farm, she often has to walk far into the coral rag area to collect firewood and she will also need to spend time collecting water from one of the village wells. If time allows, she will bring the foster children for a long walk on the beach and in the shallow waters to collect seaweed that has broken adrift from the ropes or bags and that can now be picked by anyone. Then, eventually, she can start looking for food to prepare a meal that will be ready later in the evening. If the seabed is dry, she may try to fill a small bowl with shellfish and small fish that have been trapped in shallow ponds. Together with cassava or sweet potatoes, this will make up an evening meal. Women in Bi Moni’s situation usually have to wait until the fishermen have sold whatever they can at higher prices and are pre-
pared to serve customers who can pay very little, or when the leftover tubers and vegetables are available at a reduced price at the close of business.

The possibility to draw on kin, neighbours and friends to make ends meet is an extremely important asset for women who are poor in Jambiani. If a woman fails to secure food to prepare an evening meal, or if sickness prevents her from tending to the seaweed farm, she will be assisted by female kin and neighbours. A requirement is that she is known to be hard working and that she herself obeys to the spirit of reciprocity, i.e. that she shares widely and generously when there is anything to share. Social capital also includes the maintenance of trustful relationships between resource-poor villagers and villagers who are wealthier. Poor women remain loyal customers in village shops where they know that they can obtain credit, even if other shops may offer a better price on specific items. The importance of maintaining and building social capital is manifested at the time of late evening meals, when the children of households who have managed to secure leftover food swiftly run around to deliver small bowls to less fortunate kin and neighbours and to elderly relatives. Elderly people and people with disabilities are never left without an evening meal, but they are expected to do what they can to provide for themselves. It is not uncommon for elderly women to tend their own, small seaweed farm as a source of petty cash (*kununua sabuni*, enough ‘to buy soap’).

The notions of ‘eating late’ and ‘eating early’ thus capture several interconnected dimensions of poverty and relative wealth. The economic dimension is central (i.e. long working hours because of a need for cash to buy food, to pay for labour, etc.). In Bi Moni’s case, ‘eating late’ also signifies being elderly and managing the household without the support of a husband, and hence the need to prioritise among elements that together could make for a more secure and sustainable livelihood. Bi Aisha, who is younger, married and has four children, is also ‘eating late’. In addition to the drudgery she shares with most of her fellow-women in Jambiani, her husband is occasionally joining a friend on fishing expeditions, but the catches are diminishing and the owner of the canoe is eager to bring the fish to Zanzibar town to get a higher price, leaving only small portions to be shared by the fishing team. The employment opportunities in Jambiani are very limited. The tourist business was promising in the 1990s, but it has decreased dramatically for several reasons. Many tourists have been frightened off by the political unrest accompanying the past two national elections. Zanzibar has also not been able to compete successfully with other tropical tourist destinations, as far as airfares, cost of living and
environmental standard are concerned. There has been a shift in the government’s tourism policy, towards aiming for so-called ‘high-spending’ visitors at the expense of backpackers. The latter spend less per person, but the impact on economic opportunities in the coastal villages was considerable in the 1990s when they visited the islands in vast numbers. Very few villagers are nowadays able to rely solely on tourism-related jobs in guesthouses and small restaurants. Moreover, a job in a guesthouse commonly means that one is on compulsory ‘leave’ (*likizu*) without pay for at least half the year when very few tourists visit the island.

While these and other circumstances, including a constant shortage of time to make ends meet, are captured in the expression ‘eating late’, the villagers also associate poverty with other manifestations of deprivation or, in Amartya Sen’s terms, lack of freedoms (Sen 2001). Being poor means that you are not treated with respect by government officials, teachers, hospital staff, etc.

These people don’t know what it is like to be poor. Even if medical treatment in the village hospital is free, we have to pay for medicine. And since medicine is not available in the hospital or in Jambiani shops, we must pay for the transport to go to town to buy the medicine.

Also, people who are poor invariably fight a losing battle when they try to negotiate compensation for land and trees.

We are approached by investors who have already obtained a permit from Government authorities to build a guesthouse, and this is why our compensation can be nothing but low.

Poor clothing and poor housing are also signs of destitution. People try their very best not to demonstrate their poverty. For the celebration of the major Muslim feasts (such as Id il-Fitr at the close of Ramadan), or of important events in the family and kin group (such as weddings), even the poorest families in Jambiani do everything they can to dress up their children in new clothes.

Jambiani villagers often speak of the entire village settlement as poor, the principal reason being the bad road that up to early 2007 used to be the only means of entry to the village.16 ‘Look at the road,’ said Ali while

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16 In the beginning of 2007, the government, using World Bank funds, embarked on a major infrastructure project to extend the tarmac road from Paje, through the coral rag area to Makunduchi. Jambiani is now accessible through three feeder roads. The villagers are extremely proud of the new road and have great hopes that it will ‘bring development’ to their village.
kicking a coral stone sharp as a knife. ‘The only good thing it brings is that thieves and thugs do not trouble the village. You can’t leave the village quick enough on a bicycle.’ The poor state of the road was evident. While there were frequent daily buses between town and Paje, only a few ventured to make their way to Jambiani. The coral path between Paje (where the tarmac ended before the road was extended) and Jambiani, which stretches beautifully along the ocean, has been an unforgettable scenic memory for the odd tourist, but it did not attract business of a kind that could create employment for the villagers, including tourism. The minibuses bringing tourists from town to the east coast to find places to stay do their best to make the visitors settle for guesthouses in Paje or Bwejuu to the north, and hence Jambiani gets relatively few. Also, the relative inaccessibility of Jambiani means that visits by extension staff from various government departments (e.g. agriculture, water/sanitation and fisheries) are less common.

Livelihood strategies and tactics

Being poor in Jambiani does not mean being without assets and options. Everyone can make livelihood choices even if the resources are limited. Labour availability and capacity together with social capital are the most important assets in the possession of individuals and families who are poor. Individuals who are able to work try hard to support themselves and their families, while also supporting others who for various reasons, permanently or temporarily, are unable to work. The possibility to draw on bonding social capital\(^{17}\) is dependent on your own readiness to work and to assist others – anyone who is able to work must do so in order to be entitled to support in times of need.

Women, men and families in Jambiani apply elaborated diversification tactics and strategies in their efforts to secure their livelihoods. They are sensitive to external socio-political, economic and ecological factors and processes of change and they will make every effort to comply with changing circumstances. Their choices are based on thorough calculations of risks and opportunities at a particular point in time and they are perfectly able to justify and stand up for the decisions made. Although individuals

\(^{17}\) A distinction is made between ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ social capital; the former refers to close ties and high levels of trust with others like themselves, and the latter to a situation when poor people’s groups establish ties and alliances in order to access new resources managed by other groups. ‘Bonding’ social capital has to be accompanied by ‘bridging’ social capital in order to generate social movements that can bring about structural change. These concepts are further elaborated in Narayan (2005).
and families who experience poverty are generally more concerned about minimizing risks than maximizing profit (see e.g. Dasgupta 1995), it is clear that Jambiani villagers who are poor consider very carefully if and how they can make use of opportunities to increase their small assets. Whether or not we label those considerations and choices ‘strategies’ or ‘tactics’, depends on the options available and the expected outcome. Let us take the example of two women who are abandoning their agricultural farms in the coral rag to resort to seaweed farming. Both women know that they will not be able to resume farming once the farms have been left idle, the reason being the irreversible damage caused by wild boar when the women are not there to guard the plots. One of the women calculates strategically that she will use the higher income from seaweed farming to buy the food she needs. She may also sell the stone wall surrounding the farm as material for house building. This woman abandons her farm for proactive reasons (aiming for a higher cash return for labour). The other woman’s decision to desert her farm is reactive and defensive. Her health is poor and she is lacking strength. She is not able to keep up two production activities in different locations far apart, but she is likely to retain the stone wall as a security should her situation deteriorate further. Her tactic is to opt for seaweed farming and the anticipated outcome is her hope that she will stand a better chance of coping with her situation of limited resources and vulnerability. She is likely to stay poor because she is poor (i.e. a poverty trap); her ambition is simply to get by. From a women’s empowerment point of view, to use the terminology of Kabeer (2001), the first woman has the ability and power to make (strategic) choices between alternative options, while the second woman is acting in the absence of real power to choose. She is making a reactive move to comply with a deteriorating livelihood situation.

Accompanying the growing need for cash income, seaweed farming has been instrumental for the women’s livelihood options. The seaweed farming technique was initially introduced to small groups of male villagers, but very soon it became a female occupation. The explanation given

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18 De Certeau defines strategy as a conscious, deliberate series of plans or actions which are calculated in terms of a clear vision of the potential outcomes, while tactics are more defensive and reactive practices to find a way of making do (de Certeau 1984).

19 The difference between a ‘poverty trap’ and an ‘inequality trap’ is elaborated in Bebbington, Dani, de Haan and Walton (2007). The poverty trap implies that a person or household lacks a minimum level of human or physical capital so that it barely produces enough for subsistence. An inequality trap involves persistence in ranking, i.e. assets may be accumulated by poor people but then also by wealthier people, maintaining status quo.

20 The notion of power or ‘ability to make choices’ is central to Naila Kabeer’s conceptualisation of women’s empowerment.
by men is that in those days most of them were involved in other cash-generating activities, such as fishing and petty-trade, and they were also less keen to involve themselves in seaweed farming because of the limited cash returns for a high labour input. Some men also recall that they did not feel comfortable spending long hours on the intertidal flat together with a steadily growing number of female seaweed farmers. Today, only a handful of men cultivate seaweed. Those who do are typically elderly men from families that stand out as having an exceptional collaborative spirit (i.e. where the wife, husband and youngsters share most of the work without bothering much about a gender- or age-specific division of responsibilities), or young men who have left school but not yet married and who see this as an opportunity to earn some money. Women, on the other hand, had few other options to earn cash income. Seaweed farming was therefore looked upon as an attractive business, in spite of the hard work and low return for labour.

A primary reason why seaweed has remained and increased in popularity among the women is that the outcome is fairly predictable. A woman managing one or several seaweed farms can count on a regular, albeit small, cash income throughout the year. The regularity is based on the five- to six-week growing cycle of the crop, meaning that there is usually something to harvest at the beginning of each spring tide (twice per month) that can be sold for cash after three days of drying in the sun. If a woman is in desperate need of cash, she can decide to harvest early, or she may opt for leaving the crop to grow to the next cycle to get a better harvest (but always calculating on the risk of losing part of the crop due to excessive weight). The predictability of a cash income also means that the women stand a greater chance of purchasing on credit in the village shops – the shop owners know that the debt will be paid. In spite of a very limited cash income per kilo of dried seaweed sold (the price has been more or less constant at 100–120 Tanzania shillings, approximately 1/10 of a US-dollar), women make every effort to save money. The community-based saving societies (all members are obliged to contribute a specific sum every week or fortnight; the accumulated funds can be used by each member in turn) and the recently introduced mobile bank that visits the village every Saturday are very popular, particularly among the women. Small savings are spent on clothes for the children and a feast at the close of Ramadan. More long-term investments include better housing and children’s continued education. Such investments appear to be the concern of women rather than men.

The women speak proudly of their seaweed farming and it is evident that the business has empowered many to make their own livelihood
6. Notions of Poverty and Wealth in Coastal Zanzibar

choices and shape their lives, including the decision to divorce a husband who they judge to be ‘eating – but not working’ (‘anakula tu – hafanye kazi’). Even if it entails hard work and although they constantly complain about the poor remuneration, they value the cash income, including the importance of predictability of income. In most cases a woman can make her own decisions as to how to use the money. However, the women in Jambiani share the plight of most women who live under similar circumstances, i.e. when they begin to earn a cash income they also become solely responsible for children’s clothing, etc., and for purchasing most of the basic consumer goods needed.

In spite of its popularity, the women are very much aware of the risks accompanying specialisation in seaweed farming at the expense of maintaining more diversified livelihood options. They fear a diminishing commitment from the companies purchasing the seaweed and they make their own interpretations of signals in this direction. It happens now and then that the local seaweed offices have not been supplied with sufficient cash to pay the growers and this provides grounds for rumours that the companies are about to abandon the village. When cash is not available, the farmers get a receipt upon delivery of the crop and are asked to return after a couple of days or even a week to get their money.

The women also worry about the possible invasion of pest and disease that may terminate the production of seaweed in Zanzibar altogether.

The ideal is to keep up agriculture while also doing seaweed farming. Agricultural farming is mainly concentrated in the two periods of neap tide per month when the seaweed is left to grow. Yet, depending on the general situations experienced by the women, they may have to opt for concentrating on other things than farming between the spring tides. An increasing number of women are struggling hard to keep up both activities with very limited means, and they also supplement the cash income and food produce by engaging themselves in petty-business (rope-making, sewing male headdresses, baking cakes and offering dinner in a home.

21 On one occasion when rumours spread that the women were not going to be paid for the crop until several weeks later, many women took a joint decision to keep the dried seaweed until they were assured that they would be paid upon delivery. They made it clear that they were prepared to stay with the seaweed for weeks if necessary. This venture demonstrated that protesting was worthwhile – the seaweed officers in Jambiani found out about the women’s plan and the cash was available the next morning.

22 The two varieties of seaweed grown were originally brought from the Philippines and hence they are not part of the natural flora of the western Indian Ocean. They are grown extensively in the Philippines, using a much more labour-saving technique that cannot be applied in the shallow waters along the East African Coast. The labour-intensive technique used in Zanzibar, in combination with a low remuneration to the growers, is likely to be the principal reason why Zanzibar is still of interest to the multinational companies.
environment to tourists), octopus fishing on the reef, etc. The women who maintain their agricultural farms often speak of fellow-women who do not, as ‘stupid’ (*wajinga*) and ‘lazy’ (*wavivu*), although they are well aware of the fact that there is a fine line between the ideal of diversifying livelihood activities (to minimise risks and maximise outcomes) and the predicament of not being able to do so. Anybody can end up in a situation where the only reasonable alternative is to opt for fewer livelihood activities and hence the vulnerability increases. In addition to ageing, the reasons for specialisation may be health problems, being left alone with small children due to divorce or widowhood, or caring for sick or elderly family members.

The policy environment of poverty reduction

The seaweed-growing women in our case above give clear voice to a multidimensional perception of poverty and relative wealth. Having or not having cash to get by is vital – but poverty is reflecting a much broader state of deprivation. The same applies to what they perceive as improvements in their lives – real improvements necessitate changes in several dimensions. They demonstrate clearly that they do everything they can to secure their livelihoods, using strategies and tactics to avoid risks and to make use of the opportunities available.

Policy makers and planners have increasingly become alert to the multidimensional nature of poverty and hence the need for broad-based measures that include, but go beyond, the economic dimension. There is also a growing recognition of the importance of consulting and involving poor people in the analysis of reasons behind poverty and in identifying supportive measures that can help them to improve their lives. In spite of increased awareness, however, there is a long way to go before the women, men and children who are the intended beneficiaries of national poverty reduction strategies and plans, and of donor country policies, also become the real participants in and beneficiaries of such ventures. The awareness of the multidimensional nature of poverty and of the importance of participatory approaches is too often limited to one-time-only consultations and to putting catchwords into documents and policy speeches, whereas more comprehensive and inclusive approaches to poor people’s participation in analyses and decisions affecting their lives are required for real empowerment. Such approaches were applied quite effectively in individual project settings, using the participatory and ‘rapid’ approaches and techniques pioneered by Robert Chambers and others in
the 1990s, but they were not widely accepted either by agencies and institutions in developing countries or by donors.

So what are the options for development policy to become more responsive to poor people’s own perspectives on poverty and to what is required for them to improve their livelihoods? In the following we shall look briefly into Zanzibar’s policy framework for poverty reduction, and also into the meaning and practicability of ‘poor people’s perspectives on development’ as a guiding principle in Sweden’s Policy for Global Development. I will share some of my experience of working to promote this guiding principle in the Government Offices. I shall then wind up by reflecting briefly on the value of anthropology and anthropologists in the current development cooperation and development policy setting.

Zanzibar’s Poverty Reduction Policy

In January 2002, the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar, with the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), issued its Development Vision 2020 and the first Zanzibar Poverty Reduction Plan (ZPRP). The stated, overall objective of the Vision is to eradicate absolute poverty, through ‘increasing the ability of the people to obtain the basic necessities, namely food, better shelter/housing, adequate and decent clothing, improving democracy and social security’. The Vision declares that poverty eradication should be synonymous with increasing access to employment opportunities, essential services and income-generating activities, and through providing social safety nets for the most vulnerable. According to the Vision, this entails empowering and creating opportunities for the people, increasing production and household income, improving living conditions through better access to basic physical and social services and establishing a social security system that protects the poor, disabled, the elderly and other vulnerable groups. The ZPRP

23 It is noteworthy that the Government of Tanzania Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper does not include Zanzibar. This exclusion manifests the polarisation between the mainland and the semi-autonomous islands. It is also worth noting that the government of Zanzibar was assisted by the UNDP in the collection of data and actual formulation of the Vision and Plan. Zanzibar is not, however, an exception in this regard. Most, if not all, first generation national poverty reduction strategy papers have been compiled with varying degrees of involvement of external agencies, usually the World Bank or the UNDP. This is a principal factor accounting for the common use of a globally accepted development discourse (e.g. ‘multidimensional poverty’ and ‘participation’) in such documents – a language that speaks to potential donors. Also, we must assume that the high degree of external involvement, often leadership, has implications for the extent to which a government is in practice willing and able to assume responsibility for the approach outlined, for implementing the measures drawn up in the strategy and plan and for monitoring the effects.
echoes the Vision. It is said to be based on a ‘broadly participative and consultative process’, through ‘Grassroots Consultation Meetings’ organised on a single day in December 2000. The objective of the consultations was to find out how a cross section of society in Unguja and Pemba [i.e. the two main islands of the Zanzibar archipelago] perceived poverty and what they thought should be done to reduce it. The consultations covered ‘a range of issues based on a standardised listing with a variety of community groups, including from those recognised as poor within their own communities’.24

Both the Vision and the ZPRP reflect a multidimensional view of poverty and development, by referring to ‘income’ and ‘non-income’ poverty and by focusing on a range of ‘basic necessities’. Although this broad outlook is positive, it should be noted that the documents are referring to formal employment only, thereby overlooking the informal sector of the economy where most of the poor women and men who have a job earn a living. When the women in Jambiani speak about the need for job opportunities for their sons and daughters, they do not primarily visualise employment in the formal sector (this is beyond reach of most people in the rural areas), but in informal enterprises which may be accessible through the networks of kin, neighbours and friends.25 The Plan proposes a broad spectrum of strategic interventions. The main focus is on increasing employment opportunities, but the plan also echoes the concerns expressed during the grassroots consultation, i.e. for improved education, health, water, agriculture and infrastructure.

Although the broad, multidimensional outlook of the vision and plan is commendable, there is a fundamental difference between the policy recognition of poverty as multidimensional, and the holistic and integrated notions and experiences of poverty expressed by individuals when they describe their problems and also the prospects to improve their lives. For the women and men in Jambiani who experience poverty in its manifold dimensions, better health is an aim in itself, but they also see a need to link better health to increased opportunities for education and jobs. Improved water services must go hand in hand with access to health and

24 It is unfortunate that more detailed information is not available on how the consultations were made and who participated.
25 The concepts of formality and informality have been subject to debate in development research and practice for a long time. There is a general agreement that more research is needed on the relationships of the informal sector to the rest of the economy, that ‘informal’ labour arrangements can be ever so formal and structured in their own terms and that policies introduced to ‘formalise’ informal employment arrangements may have counterproductive consequences. A collection of papers dealing with the interrelationships between the formal and informal economy is available in Guha-Khasnobis, Kanbur and Ostrom (2006).
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sanitation facilities. A rise in production and consumption necessitates better transport facilities and a market that is sensitive to the needs and opportunities of women and men who have limited resources. And so forth. From the viewpoint of policy makers and planners, the outlook may well be holistic, but the measures are proposed and implemented sectorwise through specialised government agencies and NGOs (usually without much coordination) and the prioritisations between different areas, villages, etc. are bound to vary (for political reasons, among others). Thus, agricultural productivity may be improved in one location through the provision of chemical fertilisers and advice from extension staff, but unless there is a passable road and means of transportation (which may well be the focus of development interventions in another area) the crop will not reach the market and hence farmers will not obtain the much-needed cash income.

Although there is no straightforward solution to the problem of a government delivering piecemeal development, two reflections can be made with the case of Zanzibar in mind. First, government agencies ought to establish structures and routines to enable a continuation of the initial dialogue with local communities that took place as part of e.g. the preparation of a national poverty reduction strategy or plan. This would not only improve the credibility of the government in the eyes of the citizens, but would also increase the options for a more flexible approach that can accommodate local initiatives using local, government and donor resources. Secondly, the agency of the individual as a participant in social, economic and political development is often underestimated. A poor person can bring about change on her own accord in a legislative and institutional environment that is enabling and supportive. Government agencies, using government or donor resources, can sustain and enhance the capabilities of poor individuals and groups and in this way support the expansion of the freedoms of the individual.

**Sweden’s Policy for Global Development**

Sweden’s Policy for Global Development is firmly based on the position that poverty is multidimensional, situation-specific and dynamic, and that poverty, and chances of escaping poverty, are strongly influenced by fac-

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26 The significance of a supportive legislative environment for poor peoples’ prospects to move and stay out of poverty was the central theme for the international Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor. The Commission completed its work in 2008 and the findings and recommendations are available in the report of the Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor (2008).
tors such as sex, age, ethnic or other cultural origin, and where and how people earn a living. This position is the foundation for one of the two guiding principles underpinning the policy, i.e. that the situations, needs, conditions and priorities of poor women, men and children must guide and inform all efforts in all relevant areas of policy and political decision making (not only in development cooperation) aimed at reducing poverty or having an impact on developing countries and on the poor and marginalised citizens of those countries. The guiding principle is referred to as ‘poor people’s perspectives on development’. The other guiding and complementary principle is a rights perspective on development. It is based primarily on international human rights conventions, other international agreements and on the principles of democracy. While the rights perspective, which is shared by most donors today, is relatively straightforward, ‘poor people’s perspectives on development’ is more open for interpretation and difficult to pursue. It calls for a radically different way of thinking about what poverty is all about, for whom and how best to support poverty reduction. Taking ‘poor people’s perspectives on poverty’ as a point of departure implies that individuals are seen as subjects and actors – not as objects or passive recipients of external assistance. Hence, this is a far more comprehensive approach to poverty reduction than the approach underlying e.g. the Millennium Development Goals in which poor people are implicitly seen as objects of measures.

The Department for Development Policy where I work is in charge of the coordination of Sweden’s Policy for Global Development. A colleague and I have a first-hand responsibility for each of the two guiding principles, in relation both to development cooperation and to all other relevant policy areas where decisions one way or the other can be expected to impact on the situations in developing countries. As principal ‘guardians’, we try to make use of every opportunity to further the recognition, understanding and application of the perspectives. A concrete example is the written instructions to Sida for the compilation of Country Strategies for bilateral development cooperation. Our mission is to make sure that Sida is instructed to critically assess the national poverty reduction strategy or plans (typically PRSPs – Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers) and the results accomplished during the previous phase of bilateral cooperation with Sweden, in recognition of a rights perspective and the situations, needs, circumstances and priorities of citizens who are poor.

The analysis and assessment of national poverty reduction strategies and other documents is of the utmost importance in view of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005). In line with the Declaration, it is partner country governments that carry the major responsibility for inter-
interpreting, assessing and bringing forward the problems, needs and interests of different categories of poor citizens, as a basis for national development efforts and also for directing external actors. In accordance with this division of responsibilities, donors are increasingly opting for budget and sector support. This improves the opportunities for partner countries to manage the development process based on their own priorities, structures, institutions and routines. But it also reduces to a minimum the options available for donors to obtain first-hand information on poverty situations and outcomes (e.g. through field-based poverty analysis) and on that basis to direct support to specific groups and locations (e.g. rural development projects, targeting poor and vulnerable individuals and groups). The current division of responsibilities is welcome, necessary and fair; but it also entails difficulties in pursuing the kind of policy objectives that put ‘poor people’s perspectives on development’ in the forefront. The experiences to date of the extent to and ways in which partner country governments, as part of the preparations of national poverty reduction strategies and plans, are willing and have the capacity to involve the civil society (poor people and their legitimate representatives in particular) in problem identification and in the identification of measures to counteract poverty are not very positive. Hence, it is very important for Sida to bring up the rights perspective and ‘poor people’s perspectives on development’ in the ongoing dialogue with partner country governments, agencies and institutions concerning the orientation and quality of our development cooperation.

Sida’s policy department has come a long way in clarifying the meaning of the two perspectives in relation to development cooperation (e.g. Sida 2005; see also Sida 2006). Yet there is still a widespread conception that since poverty reduction has been the goal of Swedish development cooperation from the early 1960s, the new guiding principle does not require a change in approach or practice. It is also quite common to take the mere existence of a national poverty reduction strategy or plan as a sign of the partner government’s recognition of problems and needs experienced by poor people. Furthermore, there is a tendency to associate ‘poor people’s perspectives on development’ with the kind of small-scale, local and ‘participatory’ projects that nowadays are becoming increasingly rare (e.g. household water supply and sanitation projects based on community participation). It is often taken for granted that such projects, because they address fundamental livelihood needs and usually contain elements of local participation, are based on the priorities and meet the felt needs of poor women, men and children. In actual fact, such projects may contribute to promoting and cementing inequalities between differ-
ent interest and user groups in the community, in the case of e.g. privatisation of water sources that could previously be accessed by anybody.

While the understanding and recognition of the two guiding perspectives is relatively advanced in Sida, there is still a lot work to be done to firmly integrate them into the daily work of the Government Offices, and that includes other departments in our own ministry. Time is our worst enemy when we try to make use of all opportunities available to boost their recognition, understanding and application. The work includes scrutinising and commenting on numerous draft documents (e.g. Government Bills, Communications, Reports, etc.), instructions and positions that have been formulated in other policy areas, such as migration, trade and employment. In addition to forwarding our comments and suggestions, we also need to communicate with the colleagues concerned to make sure that we have reached a common understanding. The mere inclusion of a few sentences to highlight e.g. ‘poor people’s perspectives on development’, or a rights perspective, is not enough – it is merely a transmission of policy language. The real impact of our efforts is usually beyond our power and capacity to influence. In spite of the fact that Sweden’s Policy for Global Development is a policy for a holistic and coherent approach to poverty reduction and development, individual areas of policy and political decision making tend to look upon their own goals as of primary significance, even when they may counteract the overarching policy goal of contributing to equitable and sustainable global development.

There are at least three common misconceptions of ‘poor people’s perspectives on development’ in the Government Offices that have proved exceedingly difficult to put right. The first is that this guiding principle has relevance only for development cooperation (‘projects for the poor’), and hence ministries and departments dealing with the environment, migration, peace and security, trade, social policy, etc. may feel that this is not their concern. The second misconception is that this principle is synonymous with ‘poverty reduction’ in the more conventional meaning of the term (i.e. ‘doing things for the poor’). The third, and related, mistaken belief is that anything that is held to be beneficial for a developing country at the national level will automatically benefit its poor and vulnerable citizens. We have used the latter misconception as a starting point in our efforts to make colleagues in other policy areas aware of the need to ask questions about the possible implications beyond the national level. In the worst scenario, national growth (often taken as synonymous with development) can take place at the expense of the chances of poor and marginalised women, men and young people to improve their situations.
The increased participation of a developing country in international trade can benefit poor people if the goods and crops exported and imported are of concern to them and within their reach. If national growth depends on the export of goods and crops that put poor people at risk (e.g. mining under dangerous, poorly paid and discriminatory working conditions, or crops requiring chemical treatment that may cause health hazards to farmers who cannot afford to protect themselves), the growth can make the situation worse for people who are already poor and vulnerable.

The level of ambition in advocating the two perspectives has to be reasonable and realistic. There is obviously no way that an employee in the Government Offices, or in Sida for that matter, can have an informed knowledge of how different categories of poor people in different concrete situations experience poverty and are likely to be affected by various decisions. For Sida – and under current forms of development cooperation – this is the kind of knowledge that we must expect to be available in partner country institutions and agencies, to be used in assessments of the poverty situation in the country and as a basis for national development planning. For staff in the Government Offices, with the exception of the geographical departments of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, direct encounters with developing countries are almost non-existent. Taking ‘poor people’s perspectives on development’ into account must therefore in practice in the context of the Swedish policy be understood metaphorically, as an attitude and approach to assessing the implications of decisions and to entering into dialogue with partner governments and institutions regarding what is needed to improve the lives of poor people as they themselves see it, based on their own analysis of the problems and taking into account the resources at their disposal.

Our strategy is therefore to promote a more reflective attitude based on the two perspectives. Thus, we want colleagues in other areas of the Government Offices, such as trade and the environment, instead of merely assuming that a decision is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ from a poverty reduction and human rights point of view, to reflect on the possible short- and long-term implications of decisions and measures proposed or taken, for different categories of individuals and groups that are poor and marginalised, under different circumstances and in different environments. Our aim is to encourage them to pose at least two questions as a matter of routine. First, to what extent has a specific decision or measure been informed by a rights perspective and by the situations, needs, conditions and priorities experienced by poor women, men and children? Secondly, can the decision or measure taken be expected to promote the two perspectives? A response to the first question may be that the decision to facilitate interna-
tional trade of specific agricultural products has been based on fact-finding and assessment of the specific implications for female farmers. The second question may be answered in terms of the expected impact of a decision in the area of stability and peace, on the respect for human rights and principles of democracy. Even when there are no straightforward answers to these and other questions, the fact that they are raised helps to increase the awareness about the need to consider the complexity of poverty and vulnerability, including the need to improve the knowledge base through making use of research findings.

Concluding remarks

In this paper I have provided a concrete example to show how poverty is perceived and dealt with by people who experience poverty – in this case a group of seaweed-growing women in Zanzibar. I have used this example of genuine, multidimensional perceptions and experiences of poverty as a point of reference for reflecting on the underlying assumptions and understanding of the meaning of ‘poverty’ and of ‘poor people’s perspectives on development’ in the policy context of the governments of Zanzibar and Sweden. This is similar to the approach of Shore and Wright (1997), who point to the significance of grasping the connections, interactions and disjunctions between different levels in the policy process. It is regrettable that my material does not allow for an inquiry into more genuine policy connections between the different levels in the policy context, i.e. the everyday life and approaches to poverty situations in Jambiani on the one hand, and the policies for poverty reduction formulated and pursued by the governments of Zanzibar and Sweden on the other. Sweden is a peripheral actor in Zanzibar and hence the Swedish policy has not been put to a test here. Also, I have not inquired specifically into the participation of Jambiani villagers in the consultations in the preparation of the national poverty reduction plan, nor have I looked into the national government’s interventions to help reduce poverty in Jambiani. However, in spite of these shortcomings I hope that the material presented here can help to further the understanding of the importance of tracing policy connections between different levels and contexts.

This paper is also a personal account of experiences of working with development policy in the Swedish government. I have briefly outlined the main trails in my professional development in which I have combined research with applied anthropology of various kinds and orientations, from short-term consultancies for Sida and other development coopera-
tion agencies and focusing on field-based projects and programmes as well as the development of methods for participatory development, to global development policy in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Although my responsibilities as well as concrete tasks have varied a lot over the years, and even if ‘anthropologist’ and ‘anthropology’ have only exceptionally been key words in my assignments, I have throughout maintained my professional identity as an anthropologist and I regard my anthropological experiences from fieldwork, analysis of field material and literature studies as the fundamental basis for my current competence.

In this connection, I would like to stress that the opportunity I have had for the past seven years, i.e. to continue with the research in Zanzibar while working with development policy in the Swedish government, has been immensely rewarding. My responsibility to make intelligible and promote the rather abstract notion of ‘poor people’s perspectives on development’ in relation to various ministries and departments within the Government Offices bears no direct connection to the research in Zanzibar or to my previous research undertakings and consultancies in East Africa. Yet the experiences gained from research and consultancies amount to an invaluable source of inspiration and a constant reminder of the multiple meanings and complex manifestations of poverty and development. These experiences serve as a point of reference – a kind of sounding-board – against which the abstract notions of development policy, such as ‘empowerment’, ‘participation’, ‘equity’ and ‘social inclusion’, can be assessed and endowed with meaning. My experiences constitute a platform from which I feel I am able to speak and act with confidence. I would also like to stress here that my research in Zanzibar has benefited from my responsibilities in the ministry. For the past four years I have been responsible for ‘migration and development’ as a policy area of significance both to development cooperation and to the goal of policy coherence, which is a shared responsibility of the government as a whole. Hence, I work closely with colleagues in the Ministry for Justice and Legal Affairs in which Sweden’s migration policy is formulated and implemented. My responsibility is to provide advice and support with regard to the development dimension of international migration. My involvement in migration and development policy at home has also served as an eye-opener for migration-related issues and processes in Jambiani that I had not been sensitive to before I got into the ‘technicalities’ of migration. One example is remittances. Although international migration is so far not a marked feature of life in rural Zanzibar, it is prominent in the minds of many young people, young men in particular, who dream of a better future than what the islands can offer. In the policy language, remittances
are invariably held to promote development in the migrants’ countries of origin. My experience from Zanzibar shows that the contrary might in fact also be true, i.e. remittances can serve to hold back development. I have met several young men in Jambiani and in other parts of Zanzibar who choose not to complete schooling or to try to find a job. For the time being, they manage to get by on money sent home by relatives who live abroad.

Based on more than thirty years of experience of research and development consultancies in East Africa, twenty years of which were also devoted to promoting the involvement of anthropologists in Swedish development cooperation through a university-based agreement of collaboration with Sida, I can provide many examples to show that the involvement of anthropologists in development cooperation has made a significant difference. This was obvious at the time when anthropologists contributed their experiences and knowledge to field projects located in areas where they had been or were engaged in research. It was less obvious during the gradual shift away from field projects towards a preoccupation with policy and management aspects of development cooperation. Quite a number of anthropologists lost their interest in development cooperation when the shift became apparent. Others tried but proved less able to take a step forward from the kind of more extensive, field-oriented consultancies where their contribution would be writing ethnography, to participating in multidisciplinary teams that would take on more technical and managerial tasks, such as monitoring and evaluation, and would also work within tight time frames. Anthropologists who had been met with interest and appreciation when they contributed their ethnographic expertise to field-based projects were sometimes shocked to find that social scientists were in a minority in multidisciplinary teams, and many experienced that they fought a losing battle in pursuing their perspectives. Yet other anthropologists accepted the challenge and developed both the interest and skills needed to deal with new tasks in the field of policy, in formulating indicators to measure and monitor social and economic change, in using ‘rapid appraisal’ techniques and in compiling ‘how to’ manuals, check-lists, etc. that could be used as short-cuts by project staff and development planners to assess problems and progress in bilateral development cooperation. In fact, these new tasks did not call for another sort of basic anthropological competence – the informed understanding of the kind of realities experienced by individuals and groups who were poor was still primary. However, the new tasks required that the anthropologists familiarised themselves with the management aspects of development cooperation, with the policy environment and with teamwork under time
constraints. Also, the fact that anthropologists who worked in or close to donor-country aid agencies in the north only had limited contacts with field-based projects and programmes, made it increasingly important for them to join forces and form alliances with anthropologists and other social scientists in the south, in order to have an impact.

Anthropologists have a combination of skills that make them very useful in applied development as well as in policy work. First, the experiences from fieldwork, preferably long-term, in different locations and focusing on different aspects of social, economic and political life (including interconnections between local and external factors and processes of change), constitute the very basis for our competence. Although the ethnographic experience and evidence is specific, the anthropologist who has experienced the richness and diversity of human existence, including the variety and dynamics of local situations and processes of change, is able to draw on this experience to shed light on the interconnectedness of social, economic and political life in other situations. Anthropologists tend to focus on features that are basic in social life, such as formal and informal power relations and differential access to resources, and the findings and insights therefore have relevance far beyond specific locations. While in the conventional development rhetoric, poor people are depicted as victims who need assistance, anthropologists are able to show that women and men, even if they have very limited resources, have agency and should be seen as subjects and actors who are able to shape their own development.

Gardner and Lewis declare that ‘anthropologists are trained to see beyond the immediate formal relationships that might exist [and] they often probe beyond what is immediately apparent’ (Gardner and Lewis 1996: 159). This brings me to a second, related, skill of the anthropologist, i.e. to pose relevant and crucial questions. Anthropologists who have carried out extensive periods of fieldwork, preferably in different contexts, and who follow the literature and debates on features of development in specific countries and regions, are well equipped to ask informed and pertinent questions about the nature of poverty, and they can assess the likely consequences of various decisions and measures for individuals and groups who experience poverty. Through raising issues and posing questions (without necessarily having or providing the answers), anthropologists can contribute to making individuals and groups who experience poverty more ‘visible’. This in turn can help policy makers and planners as well as researchers from other disciplines to move from generalised assumptions and preconceived ideas about e.g. poverty-related cause and effect relationships, towards a more reflective approach and an improved
understanding of the complexity and dynamics of poverty, and hence a better basis for informed decisions and actions.

A word on the importance of a supportive environment for the anthropologist involved in practical development cooperation and in development policy: Anthropologists who work for or inside development cooperation agencies and government departments dealing with development policy need to form alliances with other professionals who would share the fundamentals of the anthropologists’ perspectives and concerns. As anthropologists, we can help in creating such an environment in places where we work, through using the opportunities at hand to promote an attitude and an outlook that encourages others to consider alternative points of view and move beyond what is immediately apparent. Our work in the Government Offices, to make our colleagues sensitive to the complexity of poverty and to the multiple ‘perspectives’ that people who experience poverty might have on their situations and opportunities, is an example of this. As anthropologists seeking to pursue our perspectives and objectives, we can also obtain vital support from agency staff who have experienced direct encounters with poor and marginalised individuals and groups in local situations in developing countries, however brief and superficial these visits might have been. These so called ‘immersions’ are nowadays organised by several bilateral and multilateral donor agencies (e.g. the World Bank and Sida), for professionals who are committed to poverty reduction and injustice, but who lack opportunities for direct learning about the lives and conditions experienced by people who are poor.27 The mere exposure to the situations and problems of poor people and communities has proved to be a valuable basis for reflecting and for posing more relevant questions in relation to the daily work and hence the possibility that the anthropologists can gain new allies.

Finally, anthropologists and policy makers have to find ways of interacting and sharing perspectives, information and experience, such as the conference that formed the basis of this publication. The dialogue presupposes that policy makers are prepared to engage with and listen to the anthropologists. It also presupposes that the anthropologists are familiar with the policy environment and language so that their observations and findings can be presented and communicated in ways that policy makers find relevant and useful.

27 A comprehensive description of ‘immersions’ as a form of experimental learning is available in Irvine et al. (2004).
References


Current trends in development cooperation suggest that recipients of development aid are equal partners that should be given complete political agency to direct and to decide upon money transferred through bilateral and multilateral conventions. They are conceptualised as ‘owners’ of their own development and full-fledged partners in the celebrated partnership between donors and recipients. Such partnership should, it is argued, form the basis for any development activity to be supported (Crewe and Harrison 1998; Dahl 2001; Mosse 2005). Public aid from a multitude of donors is consequently put in a ‘basket’, and the funding is channelled by the State’s administrative accountancy system in such a way as to promote good governance (The Paris Declaration 2005; see also Anders 2005). Yet while it is hard to argue against attempts to counterbalance asymmetrical power relations between donors and recipients, throughout this chapter I would like to argue that by ascribing complete political agency to governments, municipalities, organisations and other actors in countries receiving aid, donors and recipients are mimicking relations of equality in a sort of shadow theatre. An important condition for this mimicry is the dynamics of anonymity and familiarity in how public aid is designed, perceived and practised.

In the chapter I will empirically draw upon my dire and painstaking experiences as consultant, adviser and researcher in Swedish Development Cooperation Practice in Burkina Faso in order to demonstrate how current trends make development efforts more anonymous and less linked to bilateral interests. Governments and organisations in recipient countries

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1 Since 1988 I have conducted anthropological fieldwork in Burkina Faso for a total of six years. I have mostly worked in Western parts of the country and to a lesser extent in the
are to be the ‘owners’ of aid in the form of budget and sector support for state administration, and institutional support for what is seen as ‘good NGOs’, that is, various organisations of the civil society. In line with the Paris Declaration of 2 March 2005 on harmonisation, alignment and managing aid for results with a set of monitorable actions and indicators (The Paris Declaration 2005), funding put in a common basket – *le panier commun* – makes it difficult to pinpoint exactly what activity or intervention that has been funded by a given donor. While this is the principal argument for such support from the donor community’s point of view, it has led to increasing anonymity of donors in the sense that agencies, at least rhetorically, efface their official role at the forefront of development operations. Consequently, donors are held less accountable. However, along with these trends of anonymity, public aid simultaneously needs familiarity with specific organisations and activities. Public opinion in donor countries must be assured that money reaches ‘the poor’, and for this reason, the success story has long been celebrated by aid officials and donor representatives. It is important for donors to exemplify what public aid has done in terms of poverty reduction. In the era of budget support and sector support, familiarity has become a sine qua non for any donor. The telling example, the instructive narrative and, at best, the success story play an important role in otherwise anonymous contexts of development cooperation.

The dynamics of anonymity and familiarity are not merely a question of harmonising donors and reporting back to taxpayers; I would argue that such a dynamic is instrumental in enabling donors to be involved in profoundly political issues. The most obvious example is the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers* (PRSP), which is the backbone of multilateral and bilateral aid to many countries. While the PRSP is fundamental for resource allocation and socio-economic prioritisation, it is not subject to political scrutiny in democratic elections. According to aid rhetoric, donors are supporting only democratic governments and cannot be held accountable. Yet this pretended neutrality of development – development

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2 For a discussion on civil society in Africa, see Comaroff and Comaroff (1999) and in Burkina Faso see Hagberg (2004).

3 In French-speaking countries this plan is labeled *Cadre Stratégique de Lutte contre la Pauvreté* (CSP).
Anonymity and Familiarity is conceptualised as technical and managerial rather than political – requires a skilful combination of anonymity and familiarity. Too distant or too close are untenable positions.

My argument about anonymity and familiarity is also informed by the fact that the dynamic interplay between these positions has come to fundamentally change the predicament of long-term anthropological practice in development aid. By anonymity I mean that despite the fact that donors are present in a given country, the public aid is ‘without a name’, to refer to the Greek origin of the word. Hence, anonymity does not indicate absence but namelessness. Anonymity is here rather expressed by the fact that donors are nowadays working jointly to monitor the recipient country’s PRSP; they are collectively labelled ‘PTFs’ (Partenaires Techniques et Financiers) as an umbrella term despite that the PTFs in a given country may be Swedish, Dutch, German or French Development Cooperation Agencies. By familiarity I refer to a considerable acquaintance with something, in this case a specific development operation or project activity. As development agencies are not involved in specific development operation, following the Paris Declaration, there seems to be ever more important to be familiar with specific activities and daily realities.

Here I will reflect particularly upon the dynamics of anonymity and familiarity in Swedish development cooperation practice in Burkina Faso from the perspective of my own anthropological involvement. First, I will look at the study of poverty that I was commissioned to carry out by Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) in 2000, and will reflect upon how my findings were taken up by Sida’s policy and programme planning in the country. Second, I will analyse my anthropological contribution as a resource person in the elaboration of a West Africa strategy for Swedish development cooperation. These two examples seek to explore how development cooperation practice is oddly reproducing actors in recipient countries as ‘the Other’, despite the partnership rhetoric. In an aid context in which public aid is channelled either through budget support and sector support or through international and national NGOs, narratives of grassroots organisations and individual examples provide aid officials with concrete illustrations of development action. So parallel to the growing anonymity of Swedish development aid – materialised by budget support, sector support and other easily manageable aid forms (from the donors’ point of view) – there is a need for familiarity, expressed by the success story and the telling case.

Throughout this chapter I will argue that the dynamics of anonymity and familiarity emerge as central analytical tools for understanding current development cooperation practice. Partners are trusted to carry out develop-
opment operations without outside involvement and, still, the telling case is used repeatedly to justify the non-involvement. Although anthropological field research plays a pertinent role in conveying an in-depth understanding of the local contexts where poor people live, anthropologists can do more than provide telling cases and insightful comments, and move on to challenge fundamental assumptions of programme, sector and/or budget support. An anthropologically informed and sociologically pertinent analysis should therefore include not only ‘target groups’, ‘stakeholders’ and ‘bureaucrats’ but also ‘donor organisations’ and ‘aid officials’ in order to understand how the dynamics of anonymity and familiarity shape current development cooperation practice.

The anthropologist in/of development

The literature on anthropology and development has abounded in recent decades, but the ambiguous relationship seems to persist. One strand of research emphasises the importance of maintaining anthropology as a critical science studying social and cultural processes. This is the anthropological analysis of development, which is purported to be in the same vein as anthropological studies of marriage, law and religion. Accordingly, anthropological observation of the development process should not be fundamentally different from any anthropological research. Another strand focuses on the necessity and moral obligation of anthropology to contribute to improved living conditions and life prospects of the often poor and marginalised people with whom anthropologists work. These different strands lead some theorists to argue that there is a fundamental difference between an ‘anthropology of development’ that aims at understanding development as a set of power principles and practices to be subjected to anthropological scrutiny, on the one hand, and a ‘development anthropology’ that aims at applying theoretical and methodological concepts and tools in order to actively promote social change, on the other. Yet such a fundamental and often impermeable division of labour between anthropology of development and development anthropology disempowers the discipline of anthropology (see also Cernea 1995).

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4 Authors studying development as process include Arturo Escobar, James Ferguson and Mark Hobart; those working in the field of applied development anthropology are, for example, Michael Horowitz, David Brokensha and Michael Cernea. For a more sophisticated typology, see Olivier de Sardan (this volume). An important network that seeks to bridge the gap is the APAD – the Euro-African Association for the Anthropology of Social Change and Development.
Firstly, a practical anthropology must be theoretically and methodologically informed if it is to make substantial contributions to social change. Secondly, a practical anthropology must provide important insights to the theoretical and methodological thinking of anthropology as a whole.

Here my analysis is based on my participation in development cooperation in the role of consultant and resource person, and my observation in the role of researcher. The combination of these roles makes it particularly fruitful to conduct not only a multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995) but also an ethnography of multiple roles. In a sense, the method used is participant observation, involving ‘establishing rapport in a new community; learning to act so that people go about their business as usual when you show up; and removing yourself every day from cultural immersion so that you can intellectualise what you’ve learned, put it into perspective, and write about it convincingly’ (Bernard 1988: 148). I have thus, over the years, combined involvement and detachment in a way that is not so different from participant observation. The possible difference from conventional participant observation is that I have been working in institutional contexts of development, and that I have also been expected to influence the milieus in which the study was conducted. Methodologically, I also draw inspiration from recent works on anthropological practice in development settings (Lewis and Mosse 2006; Mosse 2005). As development cooperation is a fact of life in our time, and constitutes a powerful socio-political and economic configuration, it is important to understand, in the words of David Mosse (2005: 2), how development works rather than discussing whether it works or not. It is, I would argue, on the basis of such an understanding that a practice of development cooperation more grounded in anthropology becomes meaningful. A common feature of development organisations is their shallow institutional memory. It is as if each development operation is gaining legitimacy from its newness and its fresh ideas. Although older colleagues may grumble over a new policy, a recent approach or a fresh way to conceptualise old problems, the dominant discourse in development agencies is that of brand-new approaches. Few look into the contemporary history of development aid; historical analysis of development operations is rarely considered (see Lewis, this volume). Any critique of past practice, then, is dismissed as irrelevant: “We no longer work that way” (Vi jobbar inte längre så) is a statement often heard from Sida officials. Old approaches and past thinking should give way, it is assumed, to new ways of doing development. Yet the consequence of the lack of institutional memory is a neglect of the resilient structures within which development aid is implemented (Dahl 2001).
Another salient feature is the apolitical dimension of development – or even development as the anti-politics machine (Ferguson 1994; see also Hobart 1993). Development is conceptualised by aid officials and government representatives alike as a technical and managerial issue, thereby overshadowing the profoundly political nature of development. While it is indeed important for donors to focus on development goals – poverty reduction, education for all, and so on – power relations are not easily dealt with. For example, traditional chiefs may be instrumental in development operations as representing tradition and culture (Buur and Kyed 2007; Hagberg 2004, 2007b). Another reason for not considering the political dimension of aid is that international development agencies urgently need to emphasise the non-political nature of their intervention. The ideological maintenance of a non-political sphere of social change is crucial in the era of good governance and budget support. In his study of Bretton Woods institutions, Gerhard Anders remarks that ‘good Governance and ownership are not presented as superior ideological concepts or desirable goals, but as inevitable solutions or tools to address problems that are of a technical nature’ (Anders 2005:55). It is in this context that anonymity and familiarity are construed to overcome the contradiction of politics and development. The reason is that ‘development has joined religion as an ideological force of global significance’ (Croll and Parkin 1992: 8).

This leads us to a third feature of development aid, that is, the need for the success story (Crewe and Harrison 1998; Mosse 2004). This observation may appear trivial in the sense that any planned intervention is dependent on good reporting from ‘the field’ to ‘the office’ and ultimately to ‘the taxpayers’, and that the success story has been a constituent part of development cooperation for a long time. In recent years, however, when projects and programmes give way to sector and budget support, the success story is conspicuously needed to justify intervention and support. Today the success story is linked less to ‘the Project’ supported by Sida or any other donor than to showing how the trends and conditions in the partner country are taking shape. Anthropologists seem to be particularly suited to providing telling cases and ethnographic insights, but with strikingly little impact on development policy. Throughout this chapter I will argue that anonymity and familiarity shape current development cooperation practice. But I will also argue that constructing anonymity and familiarity represents a new way in which ‘the Other’ is reproduced in development discourse. When corruption and clientelism increase in a country, the recipient government may be held accountable, whereas donors may continue with business as usual since they only support partners in
the recipient country. However, in analysing the dynamics of anonymity and familiarity in development cooperation practice, the profoundly political nature of public aid is placed in the foreground. Ethnographic accounts of development cooperation practices are particularly important in this regard, both for understanding these practices as contemporary phenomena and for providing means of changing them.

**Swedish development cooperation practice in Burkina Faso**

In this section I review the recent history of Swedish aid to Burkina Faso in order to contextualise the ethnography of development practice. The shallow institutional memory of Sida makes it all the more important to historicise present-day bilateral cooperation.

Swedish development cooperation in Burkina Faso dates back to the so-called Sahel Programme. It was initiated in the early 1980s with four community forestry projects in Niger, Burkina Faso and Senegal. The promotion of tree planting and improved wood stoves was the main focus. Tree planting of exotic species, such as Eucalyptus, was initially seen as the solution to environmental degradation, and little attention was paid to local knowledge and farming systems. These projects soon reoriented their approach towards more integrated community forestry projects in line with the more general focus on natural resource management. All these projects of the Sahel Programme were implemented through the UN system (UNDP, FAO and UNSO) and hosted by the respective ministry of environment. They also included support to build Swedish competence by means of recruiting young Swedish professionals. In Burkina Faso the community forestry project *Bois Collectifs et Familiaux* supported the forestry offices in Boulkiémédé and Sanguié provinces and aimed to stabilise ecological systems and to improve the living conditions of rural producers. The improved stove project (*Foyers Améliorés*) supported the offices in the provinces of Kadiogo, Oubritenga, Houet, Bougouriba and Poni, and sought to decrease fuel-wood consumption, thereby reducing pressure on woodlands. A Sida-supported pilot project on participatory forest management of the Toumousséni forest reserve was also implemented in the late 1980s.

Despite the programme’s many achievements, Sida decided to phase out the Sahel Programme in 1994. In 1997 the programme was evaluated
on a generally positive note.\textsuperscript{5} Meanwhile, Sida continued to finance projects through the Swedish NGO Diakonia, which since the late 1980s has had a regional office in Ouagadougou. There was also a research programme focusing on dry forests which involved Swedish and Burkinabe researchers. During the 1990s there were discussions between the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Sida concerning future work in West Africa. Whereas the ministry gave priority to French-speaking West African Sahel, Sida was reluctant to work in those countries, not least due to the limited French language skills within the organisation. In May 1998, however, the Swedish parliament adopted the new policy for Africa in which increased support to Burkina Faso and Mali was particularly mentioned (\textit{Regeringens skrivelse} 1997/98: 122). The coming years saw an increase in development cooperation, and in 2000 a Sida office was established. In the beginning, the office was hosted by UNDP, but in 2004 it moved to a building next to the Prime Ministry.

In this newly established context of Swedish development cooperation there was a felt need for Sida to know more about Burkina Faso. For this reason several baseline studies were financed. One such study was the poverty profile that Sida commissioned me to do in March–April 2000 (Hagberg 2000), paralleled by a study on poverty in Mali (Toulmin et al. 2000). Other studies concerned macroeconomics (Bourdet 2004; Bourdet and Persson 2001), gender (Helmfrid 2004) and vulnerability (Simonsson 2005). In sum, many studies were initiated with a view to gaining a better understanding of social, political, environmental and economic dimensions of poverty in Burkina Faso. A West Africa strategy was elaborated, beginning in 2002, and was adopted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2004 (UD 2004). Parallel to this, several forms of support were started, including budget support, support for the education sector, for research capacity building, and for democracy and human rights.

Ethnography of multiple roles

Since 1988, when I started to work in Burkina Faso, I have always been contracted as an anthropologist, albeit in different roles and contexts. I have worked as a Junior Professional Officer, as a researcher, as a consultant, as a PhD supervisor and, finally, more generally as a resource person

\textsuperscript{5} In 1998, the project \textit{Bois Collectifs et Familiaux} received an award as one of the most successful community forestry projects of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
for Swedish development cooperation. Over the years I have come to be an active member of the Burkina Faso-Sweden Friendship Association (ASSAMBUS). Finally, and to end this autobiographical note, I am related to the country through my wife, who originates from Burkina Faso’s second city, Bobo-Dioulasso.

It is on the basis of this long-term involvement in Burkina Faso that I have witnessed the policy changes from project and programme involvement fully integrated in state administration (‘the Sahel Programme’) via NGO support to so-called grassroots development (‘Diakonia’) towards sector support (‘education’), budget support (as part of Cadre Stratégique de Lutte contre la Pauvreté) and towards involvement of NGOs in supporting organisations (the Anti-Corruption Network, REN-LAC and the Human Rights Movement, MBDHP). In all these activities my anthropological expertise has regularly been asked for, and yet, curiously, I have the sense of having been unable to influence actual policy. The ambiguity of being commissioned and at the same time not having an impact on aid practice is certainly not a unique situation. Yet I do think that it has something to do with the kind of anthropological knowledge that is asked for and what anthropology may provide. In this section I develop two cases of my anthropological involvement in development cooperation practice.

Profiles of poverty

Poverty has been a key concept in development discourse for a long time, and international aid has been concerned for decades with providing support to poor countries. It is with the declared aim of reducing poverty that efforts are justified and external interventions legitimised. For donors and governments alike, poverty reduction has become a central and explicit aim for development cooperation, not least in the aftermath of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) elaborated by the World Bank and the IMF. While many anthropologists have touched on the poverty of the people they have studied, few anthropological works have been carried out with a specific focus on poverty and poverty alleviation.6

When the Swedish parliament decided to increase cooperation with West Africa, particularly to establish bilateral development cooperation with Mali and Burkina Faso, issues of poverty and poverty reduction were the overarching and stated goals. Sida needed more knowledge about these new countries in order to facilitate growing volumes of aid and

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6 Some anthropological exceptions in this regard include Anderson and Broch-Due (1999), Booth and Leach (1999), Broch-Due (1995), and Broch-Due and Schroeder (2000).
increased bilateral cooperation. It is against this background that I was contracted to establish a poverty profile for Burkina Faso in March–April 2000. The consultancy assignment was commissioned by Sida’s Africa Department and the terms of reference were elaborated in dialogue with key persons, including a social science adviser (‘Jenny’) in Sida’s policy division. The basic idea behind the study was, as I understood it, to increase Sida’s knowledge about poverty in Burkina Faso. It was also important for the policy division to get poverty profiles that could influence conceptual thinking and policy work at Sida and thus be useful to Sida’s work beyond the specific country. The terms of reference soon became something of a wish-list, to which it would have been impossible to respond completely within the two-month assignment (five weeks of fieldwork and three weeks of report writing). This meant that I had a certain amount of freedom to outline the study in a way that I saw as sound. Yet at the same time, the issues to be covered ranged from a poverty profile to economic and political reform, environmental degradation, national poverty programs, public expenditure and human rights (Hagberg 2000: 53–56).

Methodologically, I sought to bring context to the abstraction of facts and figures that had so far prevailed in poverty assessments in the country (e.g. INSD 1996). With the basic assumption that poverty is contextual, situational and relational, the focus was to represent the contexts, situations and relations within which poor people live. The scope of such a study, however, would require long-term involvement to identify and analyse the key issues, and I had only five weeks at my disposal! So, in order to solve this impossible dilemma, the methodology relied on a combination of three kinds of sources of data. First, the study was based on anthropological fieldwork conducted in four selected sites in Burkina Faso. These field sites were: (1) the Comoé Province, where I had conducted several years of fieldwork; (2) the villages surrounding the forest reserves of Tiogo and Laba in the Sanguié Province, where I conducted fieldwork one month per year 1995–1999; (3) the area of Dori, where a specific one-week fieldwork was conducted in a multiethnic village in March 2000; and (4) a peri-urban neighbourhood of the capital Ouagadougou, where fieldwork was carried out during one week in March 2000. Second, I undertook a critical reading of studies on poverty and the living conditions of people, who are more or less poor. This sharpened my analysis of different methodological choices and their implications for the specific poverty profile (INSD 1996). Third, policy documents, project descriptions and, above all, interviews with staff involved in development activities aimed at combating poverty provided another source of
data. I gathered basic information on institutions and organisations, notably those of the government and various NGOs that present themselves as combating poverty.

In the report I wanted to represent poor people’s perceptions and idioms of what it means to be poor and, by extension, how poverty might be combated. I also wanted to highlight how other actors perceive poverty and conceptualise being poor. But beyond different actors’ representations of poverty the report sought to describe the harsh realities of poverty in terms of drought, hunger, illness and powerlessness. The poverty profile was printed as a Sida report entitled Profiles of Poverty (Hagberg 2000), and later I published an extended and modified version of the report as a book called Poverty in Burkina Faso: Representations and Realities (Hagberg 2001b). At the end of the report I also listed key issues for Sida to consider in the further planning process, including the use of broader definitions of poverty, and how to ensure poor people’s participation. I highlighted the importance of mobility and migration for poor people’s combat against poverty. I recommended that Sida plan specific activities directed towards poor people, such as the funding of micro-projects, in order to reinforce the capacity of people to rely on their own forces, following local notions which hold that the poor are ‘those without force’ (Hagberg 2000, 2001b).

By and large my report received a very positive response at Sida and among development organisations more generally. Some said, ‘We have never seen such a report,’ alluding to its originality. I was also invited to present the study at different events organised by Sida. I had a very strong sense that I had done something that would influence Swedish development cooperation practice in Burkina Faso. I had highlighted the flaws and drawbacks of using a poverty concept that proceeds only from material aspects of life and had also demonstrated that poverty should be related to lack of agency, and to the ability to perform socially admirable actions. Poor people remain unable to act to change their situation.

Yet despite that sense of having influenced policy, with hindsight I am more inclined to question the effects of the report I wrote. Although the only criticism I have ever heard of the report was that there was too little material on economic parameters, the core problem lies not in whether or

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7 When this paper was presented at the conference Anthropology in Practice, one Sida official who had been involved in the poverty study declared that my study had had an impact on policy development at Sida and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in elaborating the poverty reduction strategy. Although this is gratifying for me personally, it confirms that my findings have had only limited impact on current development cooperation practice in Burkina Faso.
not the report was original but in the difficulty of integrating anthropological knowledge into policy practice.

Resource person in West Africa Strategy

During the years that followed I became a resource person at Sida, as there are not so many professionals in Sweden who have long-term involvement in Burkina Faso. Whether it is on the basis of consultancy or not, I am often invited to meetings and seminars as a speaker or observer. This was the case, for example, in June 2002 when I lectured at the kick-off seminar for Sweden’s West Africa strategy.

The following year saw intense activity at Sida’s Africa Desk, with several studies commissioned to consultants to support the Desk’s work with the West Africa strategy. It was the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs that had commissioned the strategy, and Sida’s Africa Desk was in charge of its elaboration. Yet in contrast to previous years, at this stage Sida officers did not seem eager to get comments from the outside. The strategy, it was argued, should be developed in-house by Sida staff, as a process ‘owned’ by Sida. This is understandable, on the one hand, as the use of consultants sometimes replaces officers’ own conceptual work. On the other hand, Sida did not really have the capacity to carry out this important task without input from actors and institutions outside the organisation.

For the purpose of supporting this work and in collaboration with colleagues and friends outside Sida, we tried to get drafts of the strategy. On several occasions I informed the Africa Desk that I would volunteer to comment on the strategy without any financial compensation whatsoever. The closest we came to such a dialogue was when the two Sida professionals (let us call them ‘Lena’ and ‘Ulrika’) who were doing the actual writing called in actors outside Sida (NGOs, consultancy firms, transnational companies, voluntary associations, and academics) to ‘a stakeholders’ meeting’ in Stockholm to present a draft. No written document was presented, and some twenty-five people listened to the Sida representatives without any serious possibility to influence the actual text. Lena and Ulrika wanted our comments to be used as ‘inputs’ to the process of elaborating ‘the West Africa strategy’. A major concern that I ventured at that meeting was the mixture of conditionality and laissez-passer. Sida was proposing to provide substantial budget support to Burkina Faso but was also insisting that women’s and girls’ living conditions were a priority for Sida’s budget support. Hence, while Sida representatives, in the name of partnership discourse, made an argument in support of Burkinabe part-
ners’ decision making, they simultaneously stated that Swedish aid should be used to strengthen the conditions of girls and women. My concern was waived by Lena and Ulrika with the argument that Sida’s presence would mean that women’s and girls’ conditions and rights would be brought up in policy dialogue with the Burkinabe partners, as ‘dialogue issues’, dialogfrågor (UD 2004). As Sida was to provide budget support, they argued, the organisation would be in a privileged position in dialogue issues, thereby orienting Burkinabe investments in the direction of women’s and girls’ conditions and rights.8

To my mind, the basic problem is that, as stated in the Parliamentary Commission on Swedish Policy for Global Development, budget support should require that recipient governments have a policy aiming at poverty reduction, democracy and gender equality, and the respect of human rights (SOU 2001). Yet if these countries really fulfilled all these conditions it is questionable whether they would need aid in the first place! And when the contradictions are revealed they are to be brought up as “dialogue issues” in the partnership. This is justified by the fact that donors should not be operationally involved in project management.

Yet in the midst of this focus on budget support and sector agreements one finds a growing necessity to elaborate on telling cases and success stories. The anonymity of current aid where donors and aid organisations are distant from daily operations creates a need for familiarity. Let me give an example of an education officer at Sida (‘Lotta’). In several discussions Lotta stressed the importance of giving sector support to the country, as a major support for primary education. At the same time, she exemplified by referring to a specific, modestly funded Burkinabe NGO that had been successful in promoting bilingual education. The funding reserved for this organisation was rather modest compared to the education sector support, but Lotta often used this NGO as an example. The point is that Lotta and, by extension, the organisation needed this NGO in order to justify the much more anonymous sector support for primary education.

The dynamics of anonymity and familiarity are indeed shaping the development context, and anthropology is having difficulties finding its place. Despite the fact that my advice has been asked for during these years I do not have a sense of having influenced policy in any significant manner, apart from my accounts of the telling case at meetings, work-

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8 Sida’s Africa Desk also organised stakeholders’ meetings in Ouagadougou (as well as in Bamako) in order to get input from partners in the region. In particular, the commissioned studies were presented at these occasions, e.g. anthropologist Sigrun Helmfried presented the findings of her gender study in Burkina Faso (Helmfrid 2004).
shops and talks. This frustration is not merely that of a misunderstood academic; many academics do influence policy, and in recent years the most dominant cohort comprises economists, political scientists and jurists. These professionals talk the right language, but anthropologists remain awkwardly displaced and odd.

The issue of not being able to have an influence is certainly shared by many actors involved in development aid, and points towards a much more general phenomenon. Public aid has become anonymous in that ‘the Project’ no longer has other national colours than those of the host country. Building on partnership principles, the recipient should ‘own’ the development operation. The Burkinabe government is the ‘owner’ of development in this case, and Swedish taxpayers’ money contributes to the country’s development goals, which in turn are the outcome of negotiations with donors. While there may be good arguments about proceeding in this manner, it has led to less direct field projects and less concrete and tangible results. Concrete knowledge of actual development operations is losing importance, and macroeconomic analyses and institutional policy making have become central when public aid is channelled either to the Ministry of Finances and other government agencies or to supporting national or international non-governmental organisations.

In these changing contexts of development aid, anthropologists and other people with specialist competences and skills are necessary for creating a sense of familiarity. The interest in the telling case and the significant example is used to make more general claims. In September 2004 I was in Ouagadougou to meet with a delegation of the then Swedish Minister of Development Cooperation. During a lunch the members of the delegation were interested to hear more about my work, and I told about a recent field visit in Bougnounou district. I told them that this rural town was in the midst of political struggles where traditional and ritual powers were intertwined with a forest management project. I mentioned that the town had been described by a French anthropologist, Maurice Duval, as governed by a regime of *Totalitarisme sans État* (Duval 1985). This was exceptional, I argued, but it illustrated how traditional and modern authorities cannot be understood separately from each other. My account of this example was met with great interest by some officials. I did not pay much more attention to this until about one month later, when I received the travel report from one of the Sida officials (let us call her ‘Eva’) in which she emphasised that some traditional chiefs seem to rule their subjects uncontested, with the help of fetishes! On the one hand, I was happy to have made the point, but on the other hand, I felt uneasy, as
Bougnounou is not representative of Burkinabe rural towns. This example was drawn out of context and separate from any nuanced statement on Burkinabe political culture, and turned into a general statement on political developments. I may have been naïve not to foresee the consequences of my anecdote, and the damage was certainly not very significant. Still, I had unconsciously contributed to a representation of village life in which people fear customary rule and abuse by chiefs, and where ordinary people do not have any political agency. The point I want to make has bearing on much more than this example. So-called ‘resource persons’ are often quoted out of context and out of place in order to create a sense of familiarity in otherwise anonymous reports. The flavour of the field is ingeniously used to give life to facts and figures.

Beyond these different examples, I would like to stress that the dynamics of anonymity and familiarity are instrumental in the latest political and institutional involvements in recipient countries. By constituting recipient governments and organisations alike as partners with full political agency, donors may continue to pose conditions under cover of partnership. But when the effects of budget support are to be assessed, these donors will not be held accountable. Instead, images of ‘the Other’ are likely to be oddly reproduced when, in the future, current trends of budget and sector support are outdated and replaced by yet another new and fresh approach en vogue. It is not a question of if budget support will be abandoned but of when, and the backlash may well be termed in culturalist explanations. As ‘partners’ and ‘owners’ of development operations, ‘the Other’ – be it governments, organisations or associations – could then be blamed for all sorts of shortcomings, abuses and corruptive practices without donors being held accountable.

Discussion
My analysis of the dynamics of anonymity and familiarity in Swedish development cooperation practice in Burkina Faso is not primarily aimed at showing the wrongdoings of actual policy, even though I remain utterly sceptical towards current budget support and wide-ranging sector support. The main reason is that contrary to the stated goals, these forms

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9 In Bougnounou, a village chief controls the population in an unusually hegemonic manner (Zougouri 2008).
10 In my own research I have demonstrated that there is a kind of political inventiveness in Burkinabe actors, not least in rural towns and villages far away from Ouagadougou (see Hagberg 1998, 2001, 2004, 2006a, 2006b, 2007).
of aid may well nurture ‘bad governance’, ‘corruption’ and ‘clientelism’, and once again, ‘the Other’ may be blamed for bad practice. In this chapter, however, my primary aim is to argue for anthropological accounts of development cooperation practice. The time is past when anthropological contributions were merely ‘to make a baseline study of the target population’, ‘to promote people’s participation’ or ‘to evaluate social impacts of a given operation’. Today many anthropologists work as social analysts, gender advisers and policy officials within aid organisations. Yet the growing anonymity of development aid necessitates a careful analysis of current practice, and we therefore need to develop ethnographies of development cooperation.

As everything is justified in terms of development, the ethnography of aid is needed for understanding the particular kind of social change that these countries are undergoing. For instance, it is important to include the role played by donors and state agencies in the production of poverty in Burkina Faso. There are ‘sectors of poverty’ that are shaped by development discourse, and poverty may be used to justify external interventions in one setting, and to excuse bad practice in another. In other words, there is a bureaucratic logic and a big business that frame the ways in which poverty is understood and, by extension, combated (Hagberg 2001b: 67–85). Theoretical propositions along this line of thinking have been developed over the last years (Crewe and Harrison 1998; Gardner and Lewis 1996; Gould and Marcussen 2004; Laurent 1998; Lewis and Mosse 2006; Mosse 2005; Mosse and Lewis 2005; Olivier de Sardan 2005). Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan defines development as ‘a sum of the social processes induced by voluntarist acts aimed at transforming a social milieu, instigated by institutions or actors who do not belong to the milieu in question, but who seek to mobilise the milieu, and who rely on the milieu in their attempt at grafting resources and/or techniques and/or knowledge’ (Olivier de Sardan 2005:24–25). The gist of the argument is a non-normative position whereby development becomes a topic for long-term anthropological research.

As a reaction to the extreme visibility of development projects in the 1960s, with donor’s flags on each and every vehicle and administrative building supported by ‘the Project’, the striving for anonymity and silent support is easy to understand. Few would really argue for a return to the time when, for instance, ‘the Swedes’ dominated one province and ‘the Italians’ the neighbouring one, and each donor had its respective accountancy and reporting system. Yet the anonymity of public aid does not imply that donors have less power but that they are acting ‘without a name’. The striving to establish a *Cadre Stratégique de Lutte contre la*
Pauvreté (CSLP) with ‘a basket’ into which donors put their money and accept the administrative accountancy system of the State constitutes a legitimising discourse for current development cooperation practice. But it renders development aid anonymous and difficult to monitor, and when things go wrong the conditions have been those defined by the recipient government in line with the famous ownership.

The attempt of donors to make aid anonymous is contrasted by familiarity at another level. Once aid is transferred through state administration, there is more scope for decision makers and political players on the recipient side to use investments to strengthen patrimonial networks. The selection of regions and communities to be funded by state investments has become a truly political stake. The classification of certain regions as extremely poor by the poverty profile in 1994 (INSD 1996) soon came to orient public aid (UN system, bilateral donors and NGOs alike) (Hagberg 2001b). Similarly, decision makers and politicians emerge as ‘big men’ whose political networks are keys for understanding the ways in which contemporary development aid is politicised. The big man originating from a specific region may demonstrate his capacity to bring ‘development’ to the locality. The last ten years have seen so many dispensaries, schools and other infrastructure investments that are funded by donors, but for local people these are seen as the action of a specific big man (Hagberg 2004; Laurent 2001; Nygaard 2006). For instance, an important health centre in an area where I have done fieldwork was constructed only seven kilometres outside the regional capital which in turn hosts the regional hospital. According to local perceptions, it was a minister who originates from that village who had built the health centre in his own village! Funding was provided through the Ministry of Health, which in turn was supported by donor money. At the same time, neighbouring districts far away from the regional capital and much more significantly populated, suffered seriously from a lack of basic health facilities. The minister in question thus used aid money to strengthen his political basis.

Budget support is the most recent instance where James Ferguson’s thesis of development as an anti-politics machine has bearing (Ferguson 1994). By supporting the Ministry of Finances, Swedish development cooperation practice is turned into a fully political and politicised endeavour. In the name of development, a strongly politicised development cooperation practice emerges. But officially, public aid is not to be involved in politics, and this would be utterly rejected by official discourse. The conceptual dilemma of doing politics in the name of development is solved by the dynamics of anonymity and familiarity. By being a tacit partner of the Burkinabe state, Swedish development cooperation, along
with other donors collectively referred to as ‘PTFs’ (Partenaires Techniques et Financiers), influences domestic politics in a fundamental manner. But when things go wrong – and for certain they will – ‘the Other’ may conveniently be blamed for all kinds of shortcomings. They are, after all, full-fledged ‘partners’ and thus ‘owners’ of their own development! That is why the dynamics of anonymity and familiarity analysed in this chapter highlight the need to move towards ethnographies of development cooperation practice that seek to integrate discourses, practices and popular perceptions of different stakeholders in the different arenas of public aid. By using participant observation, with its particular combination of involvement and detachment, such ethnographies of development cooperation have the potential to simultaneously offer insightful analyses of current practices and provide tools for changing those same practices.
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The dominant development paradigms of the 1950s, 1960s, and even the 1970s were mostly based on the evolutionary belief that ‘economic growth’ was the antidote to backwardness. The overall approach was technocratic and generally contemptuous of local resources and know-how. The 1980s were marked by search for alternative strategies, a search that was led by a number of development agencies, by social movements and small groups of researchers and practitioners as well as people in different international organisations. The buzzwords of development in the 1980s became sustainable development, facilitation, grassroots development, gender equality, community participation and participatory rapid appraisal, as well as gender mainstreaming, women in development (WID) later to become Gender and Development (GAD), civil society, etc.

This was the time of a global ‘associational revolution’ (Fisher 1997), the intensification of transnational collective actions and the intensification of globalisation of capitalism and the decline of the state. The number of national and international organisations was growing at a tremendous rate. These groups were loosely identified as Non-Government Organisations (first used at the formation of United Nations in 1949) (Karim 2001). These local and transnational development NGOs have undertaken a varied range of activities including grassroots development work, human rights and social justice promotion, environmental protection. Later on, newly formed or already existing NGOs added on a number of other activities ignored by the government agencies, like micro-credit, empowerment, refugee aid, aid to natural disaster victims, etc. Some observers pointed out that the Third World in particular was being swept by non-governmental associations or a ‘quiet’ revolution (Smillie 1995). This revolution continues today. For instance, in Kenya alone,
some 240 new NGOs are registered every year (*The Economist* 2000). Even in the most remote rural areas, traditionally the field of the anthropologist, one is likely to meet representatives from one or more NGOs.

Support for this process has united some unlikely enthusiasts. Development economists and political scientists praise NGOs for their efficiency in poverty alleviation programmes and their role in facilitating democratic governance, modernisation and civil society (Fisher 1997). At the same time, development critics celebrate the same organisations and their abilities to empower people, broaden popular participation and disseminate alternative ideas of development (Escobar 1991). Other groups of scholars have taken a more sceptical approach. Some observers regard the infusion of capital into the NGO sector today as a deliberate attempt to undermine class struggles for solidarity by privileging alternative forms of identity, thus undermining the authority of the state and producing a new form of imperialism (Prashad 1999). Other scholars, like Smillie, have simply linked the growth in the number of NGOs to the increasing grant aid now accessible (Smillie 1995), representing considerable potential job and business opportunities.

Fisher (1997) drew attention to the fact that NGOs have generated a large new interdisciplinary literature. Anthropologists, however, have to date made limited contributions to this literature. Fisher observed that there were relatively few detailed studies of specific organisations, particularly studies and analysis of the discourses taking place within the NGOs and how these have influenced knowledge and defined practices among various kinds of associations and agencies. Much of the development anthropology, where most of the NGO discussions have taken place in anthropology, has instead provided us with some rather generalised and normative critique of NGOs (Crewe and Harrison 1998; Grillo and Stirrat 1997).

This essay focuses on the Institute of Cultural Affairs, a Non-Government Organisation that I have been in contact with and sometimes worked with during a period of almost twenty years. Self-reflexivity regarding one’s own work and influences has not been a prominent feature in development anthropology. In this essay, however, I have tried to position my own work as much as possible. This is thus a very personal ethnographic narrative of an NGO and its route from a small faith-based community to a professional organisation and global network of professional facilitators.

By using an ethnographic approach to one specific organisation, as Pottier once advocated for regarding appraisals of specific development projects (Pottier 1997), I hope to demonstrate the considerable complex-
ity that may be encountered in documenting and analysing a Non-Government Organisation (NGO). All organisations experience changes. The changes come about as results of a number of social and economic forces. These changes are created both by those who are involved in the work of the organisations and the different and sometimes contradictory contexts that surround the organisations. Each and every organisation is unique. However, they also share a number of commonalities. The Institute of Cultural Affairs is no exception to this rule. But only by providing a detailed ethnographic description of the organisation are we able to detect what is unique to it and what is common to the very heterogeneous category of organisations labelled non-government organisations.

In this essay I focus on continuity and change, on how individuals and groups within the organisation produce and reproduce meaning and knowledge, and how they change their perspectives, their work and transactions. I hope this narrative of the Institute of Cultural Affairs will demonstrate that the ethnography of an organisation of this nature is grossly inadequate if we do not include the various social and economic contexts that determine much of the resources and opportunities for the very existence of NGOs. All NGOs, like any other organisation, are of course part of and dependent on external transactions and networks. The ethnography of the Institute provides an illustration of the complex and changing networks that a non-governmental organisation may be part of, whether they consist of other non-government organisations, commercial companies, government departments, bilateral development agencies, etc. But people and organisations relate in different ways to new events. The Institute of Cultural Affairs illustrates the multitude of realities that may be experienced by different members in an organisation and how these realities can be expressed and realised both in the internal discourses and in the various images that members present to different people and institutions outside the organisation.

The Institute of Cultural Affairs

In 1952, a few faculty teachers and students at the University of Texas formed a group called the ‘Christian Faith and Life Community’ in order to initiate an experiment with what they called life-style research and to create a curriculum of social and religious studies. Joseph Wesley Mathews, a professor of theology, soon emerged as the dynamic leader of this community. In 1954, a second General Assembly of the World Council of Churches met in Evanston, Illinois, where a decision was taken
to create a layman-training centre for North America. Two years later, the Institute of Ecumenical Studies was formed in Evanston. Members of the growing Ecumenical Institute formed a network called ‘The Order’. In 1963, the Institute and its seven members moved into the Fifth City, an impoverished neighbourhood on the west side of Chicago. Members of the Institute settled in this area and started to work with different communities and groups. By 1967, an estimated 14,000 people had participated in community development activities initiated by the Institute in the Fifth City (Srivastva et al. 1989).

In 1970, the Ecumenical Institute initiated a ‘Local Church Experiment’, which was an effort to replicate the experiences gained from the Fifth City community development work. By 1972, some 30 experimental communities working with 180 congregations had been started in the U.S. and Canada. Most members of these experimental communities were also members of The Order, the network of Ecumenical Institute members. The activities of the Ecumenical Institute soon expanded beyond conventional church work. Members were exploring opportunities to initiate community development work in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and a number of members felt that a more secular organisation ‘based on a secular philosophy’ was needed to implement these ambitions. Thus, in 1973, the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) was formed in Chicago. The ICA consisted to a large extent of members of The Order, with the aim to ‘develop and test methods of individual, community and organization development’. By the mid-1970s, the ICA organisation had expanded from its base in Chicago to some one hundred offices in thirty countries (Srivastava and Cooperrider 1989). In 2007, there were some thirty national ICA organisations located in Western Europe, North and Latin America, Asia and Africa.

ICA in Kenya

The Swedish Cooperative Centre (SCC)/Utan Gränser is a Swedish NGO owned by major Swedish cooperative federations and is working with cooperative development aid. In the early 1980s the then head of the SCC came across the ICA organisation and its work in Kenya. He became fascinated by the work of the organisation and thought that its community development approach might be applied to and perhaps vitalise the sometimes rather passive cooperative organisations that the SCC was supporting at that time.
The Swedish Cooperative Centre decided to send a team, or a mission, in the development jargon, to Kenya to study the ICA work. This first SCC mission was sent out in 1982, consisting of the head of the Swedish Cooperative Centre and myself, then working as a junior lecturer at Lund University. The SCC had allocated small amounts of money to the ‘Location Cluster Projects Replication Scheme’, the ICA organisation’s project in Eastern Province and Central Province of Kenya, and our task was to study the results of the ICA work and provide recommendations on whether some of the ICA methods and approaches could be transferred to the cooperative development work of SCC.

The mission was confronted with a rather hopeless name (the ICA acronym was often confused with CIA, particularly by those involved in the development industry). The ‘Location Cluster Projects Replication Scheme’, which was the name given to the main ICA community development work, seemed like an equally impossible project with more than two hundred Kenyan staff members spread over some twenty districts assigned to more than twenty-five very vaguely defined and documented ‘human development projects’, to use the ICA language. When we asked for specific documentation on the different human development projects, little could be provided by the organisation. We were told that plans and schedules were normally kept only in the particular villages where the ICA was working, rather contrary to conventional development projects, where project documents would rarely leave the confines of the head office.

The mission did not know then that Joseph Matthews, the founding father of the ICA, had died a few years before. As I came to understand later on, the death of Joseph Matthews had devastated the American ICA members, both in Kenya and in other places, and had created a policy vacuum as to the direction of the ICA organisation between members who were more oriented towards missionary work and theology, and members favouring a more practical development approach. The ‘Location Cluster Projects Replication Scheme’, with its rather unrealistic ambitions compared to the kind of resources that were available to the ICA, was probably the result of a mixture of these two approaches, pursued largely by one dynamic individual, a senior American ICA member, said to have been close to the founding father.

The American ICA members working in Kenya numbered more than twenty during this period. All the members we had a chance to talk to were really keen and interested in discussing the ICA approach and village work. However, we soon came to realise that there was little interest among the members in discussing the ICA relations and linkages to the
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Ecumenical Institute or The Order, the rather loose network of individuals and groups attached to the Ecumenical Institute. This was a question that was considered a private and personal arrangement and not to be shared with potentially critical development consultants.

In Kenya there were rumours, particularly among those working in the more established organisations of the development industry, that the American ICA members were initiating some form of strange religious sect. One element behind this rumour was people’s image of the volunteers, living off meagre economic resources with their families above a beer bar in one of the poorest suburbs in Nairobi, a slum area that expatriates avoided. Rumours were further accentuated by the fact that most of the American ICA staff were white middle-class Protestants, many originating from the Bible belt. Most of the members had some form of theological training background and had been active in the Ecumenical Institute, working with different parishes and churches in the United States.

Most of the American ICA members residing in Kenya had lived in the Fifth City, the Chicago slum neighbourhood, and had worked there with community development projects. The work in the Fifth City had cemented their view that society had to be changed away from exploitation, classes, dependency and poverty. Changing a poor and marginalised society could be done only through local democracy, community participation and self-sufficiency, consciousness of local constraints and opportunities, and a focus on strengthened spiritual and cultural life opposing a simplistic and materialistic mode of living. The ICA members declared that they were not imposing cultural or religious standards on people; in fact, they regarded their work as politically neutral. Inspired by Paulo Freire and his The Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire 1972), they tried to encourage local communities and groups to determine their own directions themselves. The American ICA staff regarded themselves and their work only as catalysts for community mobilisation by ‘facilitating’ a process towards equal opportunities and social and economic well-being.

The expatriate ICA Americans showed a strong missionary zeal. They worked exceptionally hard. They stayed for long periods in the rural areas under difficult conditions and were convinced that their approach was the right way to accomplish independent and morally strong communities where people would cooperate and work together to achieve ‘meaningful’ lives. Every evening and morning they planned their work thoroughly, and together with the Kenyan staff they reflected on different moral and philosophical issues. These topics often originated from various ICA booklets providing collections of various philosophical or theological
quotations. Reflecting on the work of the ICA, texts like ‘we are transmitters of Life’ and ‘Mystery of Life’ were being used for discussions on the need for hard work, ethics, morality, etc. Some texts originated from American theologians, some from Marx, others from philosophers like Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, etc. or novelists like Nikos Kazantzakis, whose novel *Saviours of God* had become a central text for reflection among the American ICA members. Some texts were dealing with journeys to ‘the other world’, ‘the land of mystery’ and other existential issues. At the time of the mission, both Kenyans and Americans were discussing the newly published novel *The Healers*, written by a West African author. The novel describes the rise and fall of the Ashanti state, and one of the main arguments of the novel is that the fall of the great African states was caused not only by the destructive influence of Europe but was indeed the result of Africa’s disunity, the division between societies and the division within each society, between aristocrats, commoners and slaves (Armah 1978).

This was a thesis that fitted the ICA ideology, which argued for the need for ‘the ordinary people’ to free themselves of their ties to old customs and habits and to enable themselves, through discussions and dialogue, to come to a better understanding of their opportunities to improve their own and their society’s existence and to remove the mental blockages that hindered this process.

The ICA had established a training centre in Kenya. It was called the Human Development Centre and was located in Kamweleni, a small village in Eastern Province. The training centre consisted of a small cluster of buildings surrounding the central brick building that served as a dormitory for the Kenyan staff. The eight-week intensive training of all new Kenyan recruits to the ICA took place at the Human Development Centre. The training followed a structure that much resembled a classical rite de passage with a rebirth into a new life and a new community, new symbols, and a new way of living. The expatriate staff provided intensive training in the ICA methodology and work. They promoted a strong sense of being exclusive and in the forefront of development work. Besides discussions on morality and culture, most of the training focused on participatory approaches to community development, village workshops and how to facilitate efforts of village members to identify their difficulties and opportunities to change and to make concrete and realistic plans to implement these proposals. A number of manuals had been produced by the ICA organisation on facilitation techniques, community development approaches and workshop design as well as pamphlets of a more philosophical nature. The feeling of belonging to a ‘global movement’, the connections to the United States and the American expatriate staff, and the
possibility to advance in the organisation and receive training abroad all contributed to inspire the Kenyans with a high degree of confidence.

The Kenyan staff, however, was very heterogeneous. The majority had been recruited from a modest village life, while a small group came from more urbanised areas. Only a few had obtained a secondary school education. The work that the staff was expected to carry out was strenuous, even though most of them considered their lives and work with the ICA much easier than living in a village and toiling as a village farmer. All the members were provided with a rather ‘typical’ village diet consisting of maize porridge, cabbage, spinach and beans. Meat was considered a real luxury by Kenyans and expatriates alike. However, many of the Kenyans expected something different from their lives with the ICA. Many expected that a ‘foreign’ organisation like the ICA obviously should have considerable resources at its disposal and be able to offer them something different and more materially rewarding than the ICA did. For many Kenyan auxiliaries, the hard work required was too much to cope with. Travelling to the villages, often by foot, facilitating the long and sometimes difficult village workshops, the rigid way of community living, and the small and highly irregular ‘stipends’ that were paid to the staff made many of the less determined members leave the organisation. The organisation consequently experienced a considerable turnover of Kenyan staff.

Those who remained, however, showed exceptional pride and dedication in their work. Most of the work consisted of regular visits and workshops with village groups, either to plan for future activities or to discuss the progress of village plans, always written down on a flipchart that was kept by the group leader. New plans that were proposed by the participants were added to the chart, and plans that had been implemented were crossed over with a green marker. Each piece of work implemented was a victory, and each victory was celebrated with singing and applause. Members were encouraged to discuss the events that had taken place during the implementation and what lessons they had learned. Many village participants expressed their admiration for the work of the auxiliaries during these workshops. The female village participants were particularly positive, often expressing strong feelings that these workshops had provided them with their first real opportunity to participate and influence ‘development’ work that was important for their own well-being.

We, the mission, felt that the results of the ICA work were quite impressive in a number of ways. The first communities we came into close contact with were rather impoverished villages. Several of them had experienced years of drought, crop failures and a constant out-migration of young people to the nearby urban areas. Despite this gloomy environ-
ment, many of the residents expressed a remarkable faith in the future, and they often referred to a ‘feeling of strength’ gained by the village communities as a result of the ICA seminars and planning workshops. A number of small community projects had been initiated and completed relying only on their own meagre resources: village school buildings had been repaired, new small village roads had been cleared, tree nurseries had been created and maintained by small groups, terraces and contours had been dug as part of a revival of a dormant government project, several households had constructed new water cisterns, and a considerable number of latrines had been dug. Small groups of women from the villages had been trained to teach preventive health and hygiene in the communities. We were told that one of the more significant changes was the newly erected village signposts, each showing the name of the village together with the village slogan. The Kamweleni village signpost proudly declared ‘Kamweleni Village – Place of Plenty’.

All the many villagers we interviewed emphatically claimed that this was the first time they had been provided with real possibilities to participate in village affairs, plan for their own future and feel pride in their village. The mission visited a large number of villages where the ICA staff had been working for longer and shorter periods. In most villages the results were similar to those we had first experienced. Village groups had started and completed a number of small community and individual activities. Some of the individual household achievements were indeed minute, like constructing a dish-rack in order to keep eating utensils clean and protected from chicken and goats. Others had established composts, cleared small village roads, dug pit latrines, started to sell handicrafts in nearby towns, established credit and savings societies for women, created tree nurseries and begun tree planting, etc. However, the lasting impression was the extraordinary levels of pride and confidence repeatedly expressed by most of the groups and individuals, particularly by the female participants. Many had even acquired the language used by the ICA and presented the activities in terms of self-sufficiency, independence, community participation, etc. (Genberg and Hedlund 1982).

Acquiring funds for ICA activities was a recurring problem, despite the fact that the American ICA members were only paid a small stipend of some US$15 a month and the Kenyan auxiliaries even less. The origins of the incomes for the organisation appeared to be very diverse. Some of the funds emanated from different church organisations, some came from bilateral donors and some originated from the Ford Foundation, an organisation that for some time had supported the ICA. Parts of the ICA budget in Kenya came from donations made to the North American ICA
in Chicago. Decision making within the ICA organisation was highly centralised. Every fourth year a Global ICA Assembly met in the U.S. to discuss and decide on policy and allocations of funds. The local ICA organisations, like the one in Kenya, were in fact reporting to the ICA Board in Chicago on finances and budget issues. The Global Assembly was rather mysterious for many of the Kenyan ICA staff. Yet it provided them with a strong feeling of belonging to a large global movement, of almost mythical proportions.

Some funding for the Kenyan ICA came from more commercially oriented activities. These consisted mainly of different workshops that some of the American staff conducted for large commercial companies in Kenya, like Esso, Dunlop, etc. All these workshops were conducted to improve company communication and efficiency, using an adjusted version of the village leadership workshops. They turned out to be highly appreciated by the company management. For the ICA organisation in Kenya these workshops had two important purposes. One was to provide much-needed funding to the organisation and the other was to improve the legitimacy and position of the organisation among the commercial and political leadership in Kenya by demonstrating the organisation’s interest in national economic development.

The ‘All African Conference of Churches’ had invited the ICA to Kenya in 1972. Between 1972 and the beginning of the 1980s the organisation conducted training in group work and planning for a number of member parishes and churches in the ‘Native Council of Churches in Kenya’. The close relations established by the ICA with a number of church communities in Kenya provided the organisation with considerable legitimacy among those involved in the church establishment. This included a good number of prominent individuals in both public and private organisations. But among the established bilateral aid organisations and many of the larger NGOs, on the other hand, the ICA organisation was regarded with considerable scepticism. The image of the ICA as a religious movement or sect, coupled with the lack of a conventional technical and economic development focus, made communications difficult between the ICA and the more ‘conventional’ development organisations. The mission met a good number of expatriate development staff who were highly critical of the ICA and refused to have anything to do with it. During the time of the mission, large-scale government-implemented Integrated Rural Development Programmes (IRDP) were still in fashion. The Kenyan government had long been implementing one of the largest of these IRDPs. Only a small number of researchers and ‘practitioners’ were voicing criticism of these large government develop-
ment approaches. One of them was Göran Hydén, who was a representative of the Ford Foundation in Kenya and a strong supporter of the ICA and who was just about to publish his book *No Shortcuts to Progress* (Hydén 1983). Another was Robert Chambers, who was soon to start his own movement for community participation in development work against centralised large-scale government development projects (Chambers 1983).

The meeting

It is Show Time in Nairobi and the year is 1983. These are the final days of the new and second SCC mission sent to Kenya to provide further information on the ICA. This time the mission consists of five people. Three of us, the core team, are consultants sent out by the Swedish Cooperative Centre. I represent the continuity and the bridge to the first mission. The other two are Swedish old-time co-operative development workers, long attached to the SCC. There are two Kenyans on the team, both representatives from the Kenya National Federation of Cooperatives. The purpose of the mission is to find out more about the ICA facilitation work and make recommendations as to what part of the methodology could be promoted by the SCC and those organisations that receive development assistance from the SCC. The Kenya National Federation of Co-operatives (KNFC), the apex organisation for the cooperative movement in Kenya, has been receiving support from the SCC for a long period of time. But the KNFC is badly tarnished because of its inability to provide adequate services and training to its members. The organisation is running at a financial loss and is facing serious difficulties in motivating its member co-operatives to continue as members and to pay their contributions to the apex organisation. The KNFC as well as the SCC are also looking for a profile that may counter the dominant position of the Ministry of Co-operatives. An increasingly difficult economic and political environment is facing many of the co-operative organisations in Kenya. However, it seems that the three Swedish SCC consultants are much more excited and have much greater expectations about the outcome of this ‘demonstration’ than the KNFC representatives. Despite the difficulties faced by their organisation they show a rather visible lack of interest in this whole exercise.

We are gathered in a conference room of one of the larger hotels in the centre of Nairobi. A two-day meeting is scheduled to take place here, and the Institute of Cultural Affairs has promised to give us a demonstration
of the participatory methodology it has developed. It has already been pointed out to us by the ICA representatives that very similar methodologies are used by the organisation regardless of whether the participants come from a village, a group of prominent leaders, or the board of a commercial company. These two days are expected to give us a deeper understanding of the ICA work and may eventually result in discussions about whether other institutions can apply or benefit from the ICA approach and methodology.

Ten members of the board of a Nairobi-based consumer co-operative form a second group of key actors in this meeting. The board members have been invited by the KNFC. None of the Swedish consultants knows why this particular co-operative has been invited, but it is rumoured that it has been selected because the co-operative shop has been running at a deficit for quite some time and the board has not been capable of changing this negative trend. Members are leaving the co-operative and its shop in great numbers. The ten board members are smartly dressed in their best clothes and they are all highly excited. None of them knows what this meeting is all about, but as they had been invited by the KNFC they certainly expect some form of ‘reward’ for their participation.

The third group of actors is the American ICA staff who will be conducting the workshop and demonstrating the ICA approach. They have already organised the conference room as a classroom with four tables and a podium. There is also a small side table with a typewriter. On each table we find paper, pencils, markers and small cardboard cards in different colours. The podium is covered with a blue cloth and an intricate ‘Makonde’ carving is placed there. The carving shows a number of people lingering together and later it is explained to us that the carving symbolises people working together. A large board covered in green cloth is placed upright behind the podium. On the wall there is a drawing of a circle divided into halves and a ‘wedge blade’ penetrating the two halves. We are told at the start of the seminar that this is an important ICA symbol. It symbolises the philosophy of the organisation. In order to change, all societies need to be moved by a third force, a force that may harmonise the relations between the people and the state and bring about cultural and material prosperity.

The four ICA members assigned to the seminar are already waiting for us. It is discreetly pointed out to us that time-keeping is a key issue. A bit later in the seminar we are actually told that ‘we, the participants in the seminar, are development leaders and are expected to provide good examples of work ethics if we are going to manage to change the society to a better place to live in’. The ICA members are all Midwestern Americans
dressed in blue shirts and jeans. They are very serious and state at the very outset of the seminar that this is a very important occasion for them, too. When they tell us that they all live in Kawangwari, a shantytown on the outskirts of Nairobi, the Kenyan participants are highly surprised. One of them whispers to me that it is only missionaries who stay in such areas; white development workers normally live in very different parts of the city. Are these people perhaps missionaries? That we, the Swedes, were development consultants seemed obvious.

The most senior representative of the KNFC opens the workshop and all participants introduce themselves. The ICA ‘facilitators’ continue by stating that the purpose of the workshop is to plan for the successful future of the co-operative. All the participants are asked to focus on a process of self-reliance for the co-operative and to propose activities that can be carried out by the members of the co-operative themselves without having to rely on external support. When one of the facilitators suggests that external support often creates dependency and even apathy among the members of a group, a wind of whispers sweeps among all the participants and the atmosphere among the board members is becoming less accommodating. The same facilitator tries to explain that this view has long since been proven and is a cornerstone of the ICA work; with hard work and positive attitudes there is no limit to what a group may achieve. The members of the board are now looking increasingly doubtful and rather uneasy, and so do the representatives from the KNFC.

The enthusiastic and extremely active ICA seminar leaders are guiding us through the five different steps of the workshop. The first, the Vision, starts by encouraging the participants to identify their vision for the future and what roles the co-operative may play in the future. The ideas are written down by each of the three groups that the board members have been divided into. Each idea is written down on a cardboard card by the group’s elected spokesperson, and the cards are organised on the board by the ICA staff. All ideas are accepted regardless of their basis in reality. All of the proposals are organised according to three headings already written on the board: economic, social and human development. In the beginning of the workshop the discussion is low and slow among the members in each of the groups, but very soon spirits are rising. When all the ideas are written down on the different cards and organised on the board the board members are really enthusiastic. Participants are making small impromptu speeches, praising the methodology and claiming that they have never experienced anything so exciting.

After the morning session the board members are asked to write a short story on the performance of the co-operative: how it used to be,
how it is working now and what they anticipate for it in the future. The board members are also working hard to compile a list that is displayed on the board, a list of all the good reasons for and advantages of being a member of their co-operative society.

The second step of the workshop this day consists of ‘Contradictions’, or the obstacles we may meet on our way to achieving the visions we have just identified. The board members are discussing economic problems, members’ lack of commitment, the poor information and training available for the board members, competition from private shops, lack of support from the KNFC, and the excessive control and ‘interference’ exercised by politicians and the Ministry of Co-operatives. The members of the KNFC are getting less enthusiastic, while the board members are now seriously engaged in the discussions. Though the two KNFC participants are supposed to be observers, they cannot refrain from participating in this discussion, sometimes violently questioning some of the obstacles being mentioned. The ICA facilitators are constantly ordering the cards on the board so that the obstacles identified are matched with the visions. This marks the end of the first day. Before we leave the room each one of us is asked to identify what we think has been the most important issue discussed during the workshop. Some of us are giving praise to the hard-working ICA facilitators. Others say they are impressed with the workshop as such, while some feel that the discussions of contradictions have been the most rewarding part of the day.

The second day starts with a recapitulation of the most important issues discussed the day before. All of us are asked to contribute. Some of the participants are making small speeches praising the interesting experiences they had been privileged to participate in. When the speeches are made the participants are encouraged by the ICA facilitators, who are equally as enthusiastic as they were the day before, to think about and write down proposals for change and improvements of their co-operative. The spokesperson for each group reads each proposal to all the participants and hands them over to the facilitators, who put them on the board. The facilitators work hard to create some form of consensus for the various proposals and the participants engage in serious discussions. Finally the participants agree to all the proposals presented and start to rank the proposals according to their respective importance. The ranking exercise is a delicate task for facilitators, as well as for participants/the board members. Most participants are rather convinced that their own contributions are by far the most important. It takes a long time to finalise the ranking.

The next session consists of identifying specific ‘tactics’: concrete and realistic ideas to implement the more general proposals. Finally the par-
ticipants have compiled an implementation plan. The plan is structured as a one-year overall plan for different activities, a detailed plan for the next quarter, and an activity schedule for the coming month. The plan is based on the list of proposals and the ‘tactics’ already identified. The plan also identifies who is going to carry out these activities, when they are supposed to be done and the expected results of each particular activity. The co-operative board members also create a symbol as well as a slogan for their co-operative society. The first tactic decided on is to call a meeting with all the members of the co-operative. During this meeting the board will explain what took place during the workshop, they will present the different development plans for the co-operative, and the new slogan and symbol will be displayed in the co-operative shop.

After each session every individual is asked to provide his or her personal reflection on what has been discussed and what he or she has learned from this particular session. This is occasionally causing great laughter when some participants have a problem expressing themselves. However, the facilitators constantly remind us that every contribution is of great importance and should be treated seriously. The facilitators are at the same time providing encouraging statements to make participation a bit easier for those who may feel too shy to speak up. After each part of the workshop we are all encouraged to ‘celebrate our victory’ by clapping hands, to confirm our work and the good results we have produced.

The most enthusiastic participant, probably, is the only female member of the co-operative’s board and the only woman at the seminar. In the beginning she is very quiet, but towards the end of the seminar she is repeatedly reminding us that this is the first time that she, as a woman, has had the opportunity to participate in ‘real planning’ and make her voice heard. She also expresses new confidence in her future work with the board and she emphasises the fact that a ‘new democratic process has now started in our co-operative society’.

Just after the final discussions and after the reflections on the plan for improving the co-operative, when we all think that the workshop has ended, the ICA facilitators ceremoniously hand over to each one of us a nicely typed and stencilled pack of papers. It is a copy of the co-operative’s development plan, the brief history of the co-operative and the newly designed logo and motto of the co-operative. None of the participants, me included, have ever experienced anything like this. For the board members and for the rest of us, all having experienced the inefficient bureaucracy and slow government administration in Kenya and elsewhere, it appears almost like a supernatural event, the total contrast to the environment we are used to. We are all overwhelmed by this efficiency.
The completion of the workshop is celebrated by speeches and a nice dinner and all leave the dinner in high spirits and with an enthusiastic feeling that this facilitation model could be the start of something new, new and fresh approaches for vitalising the co-operative movement and creating a new profile not only for the KNFC but perhaps also for co-operative organisations in other countries. Spirits are high and so are the expectations.

A project is established

The next day the three Swedish SCC staff met to discuss the implications of the workshop. Prior to the ICA seminar, the mission had been visiting different ICA locations and activities for two weeks and my two Swedish colleagues had repeatedly been expressing serious doubts about the ICA, mainly echoing the criticism put forward by other expatriate workers in the Kenyan development industry. However, now after the ICA seminar, they were full of enthusiasm for the ICA approach. They visualised new and staggering opportunities for this kind of work in all the cooperative organisations that the Swedish Cooperative Centre was actively supporting. To my surprise, I found myself in a situation where I was the one trying to reduce their enthusiasm, pointing out potential difficulties in using the very demanding workshop structure demonstrated by the ICA as a blueprint approach to cooperative change.

My colleagues had little interest in the ICA as an organisation. Their primary interest was the concrete methodology of facilitation as it had been demonstrated during the two-day workshop. It soon became obvious that they regarded the facilitation process as an opportunity to activate dormant co-operative societies and their members. A new and dynamic approach – facilitation – to co-operative development might also improve SCC legitimacy among its supporters in the co-operative sector in Sweden, expand its activities, and possibly also generate additional funding from Sida, the main financial contributor to the SCC.

The American ICA representatives were delighted when they were informed about these discussions. In their view the workshop had gone well, and they felt that they had successfully managed to adjust their language and symbols to the expectations and norms of the consultants. They realised that the consultants were intrigued by the methodology. The American ICA members had been discussing possible options for the future and had decided to work with the SCC if the opportunity were to arise. It was taken for granted that the Kenyan staff members would be
delighted, as this new opportunity would mean more funds for the ICA and perhaps also regular payments of their meagre ‘stipends’. I was told later on that the announcement of these new events did indeed intrigue the Kenyan auxiliaries, who saw this as a possibility to ask for better conditions and to be paid not in the form of stipends but with proper salaries. The implication being that in the near future, they expected positions as regular employees and not as ICA ‘auxiliaries’, which was increasingly regarded as an unsatisfactory low-status volunteer position by many of the Kenyan staff members.

A few of the American members were less positive towards this potential relationship with the SCC and to development work of this nature. They felt that the social and philosophical context of the ICA movement and the facilitation methodology would be compromised. The majority appear to have viewed the Swedish connection as a means to improving the position of the ICA and confirming the ICA as an organisation of increased importance. The Swedish aid industry had at that time developed a good reputation in Kenya and in other East African countries, and cooperation with the Swedes might therefore generate a higher rank in the international NGO hierarchy in Kenya. NGOs like Save the Children and the Red Cross and different wildlife associations had the highest rank because of their global connections and very clear and concrete objectives (to save children or to save wildlife), contrary to the rather unclear image of the ICA. The Swedish relationship could also be used in the ICA’s global network, providing legitimacy and status for the organisation in its work in other development countries.

The immediate result of the workshop was that the SCC agreed to finance the continuation of the pilot work on co-operative seminars implemented by the ICA and the KNFC. Five co-operative societies were selected in the Nairobi area. A senior American ICA member assisted by Kenyan ICA facilitators conducted planning workshops. Out of this first group of five urban co-operatives, a small group of four volunteers, all of them board members in the different co-operatives, received training in the ICA methodology. In this capacity they participated in a number of co-operative workshops. This group even introduced its own planning seminars for a few more affluent savings and credit co-operatives. The co-operatives actually paid a small fee to the group that organised and implemented the workshops. With this kind of success, the stage was now set for an expansion of the adjusted ICA facilitation approach.
Towards a profession

In 1984, a further agreement was reached between the KNFC and the SCC to expand the pilot approach to the mobilisation of co-operative members. The KNFC was now keen to accept the programme as the educational department of the KNFC had virtually ceased to exist, one reason being that external finances had been heavily reduced during this period. In 1987, an agreement was reached between Sida and the SCC to expand the pilot activities into a formal development project called the Cooperative Members’ Participation Programme (CMPP). This programme was an ambitious way of expanding the ICA facilitation methodology within the co-operative sector in Kenya, Tanzania, and Zambia.

The CMPP became one of several development programmes carried out by government development agencies or international NGOs that drew on the participatory work designed by the ICA. Like most of these other programmes, the CMPP was a technical programme in the sense that only the technical methodology for running seminars and follow-up meetings was applied by the project. All the symbols, signs and meanings developed originally by the ICA organisation were left out. The CMPP was designed as a ‘traditional’ development programme. It contained all the development paraphernalia required: a project document that described objectives, activities and expected results, stakeholders, a budget, a defined project period, and a system for monitoring and evaluation. A project office was established in Lusaka and the CMPP was formally attached to the Zambian Cooperative Federation.

The CMPP was intended to encourage ordinary members of co-operative societies to identify their constraints and opportunities and to plan future development based on their own resources. A two-day workshop would be conducted for each selected co-operative society where the CMPP facilitators would lead the groups in their discussions. A development plan for male and female members was to be facilitated, followed by a number of follow-up meetings.

The responses from the different co-operative apex organisations were those of reluctant tolerance because external donor funding financed the programme. Many co-operative administrators in government positions, both locals and expatriates, were sceptical towards the programme. It did not provide any direct material benefits to the administration, nor did it provide training in more traditionally oriented subjects that dominated conventional government co-operative training, that is, accounting, co-operative laws and regulations, etc.
I was the project team leader and Dean became the technical expert for the programme. Dean was an American senior ICA member who had been assigned by the ICA for this work. From the beginning it was clear that the CMPP would draw on the technical knowledge of the ICA but keep a clear distance from the organisation as such. Many of the SCC staff in Zambia as well as many in the government co-operative administration still regarded the ICA as a rather dubious organisation. Both Dean and I thought it necessary for the programme to distance itself from the ICA as an organisation because few people from outside the group showed any interest in or appreciation of the ICA lifestyle and symbolic paraphernalia. In fact, most people from the development industry who came into contact with the organisation felt alienated by the living conditions and images projected by the ICA members.

In Kenya and Zambia, the ICA had long been established and registered as a national NGO. American ICA members had been training both the Kenyan and Zambian members of the organisation in the ICA methodology and cultural values for some time. In both Kenya and Zambia, most incomes emanated from American and European church organisations. One difference was that the scale of operations and the financial resources were rather modest in Zambia compared to those in Kenya, even though the ICA in Kenya had been drastically reduced since the demise of the ‘Location Cluster Projects Replication Scheme’ and the departure of many of the American staff in the mid-1980s. Many of the ‘auxiliaries’ had left or been forced to leave, and the organisation was facing acute financial difficulties.

In Zambia, grants from the ICA organisation had allowed the Zambian organisation to construct a dormitory for all the members and their families. It had also built a training facility where members of adjacent communities were trained in sewing, basic carpentry, improved nutrition, and other rather conventional community development activities. The American ICA members who had been instrumental in establishing the organisation in Zambia had left, and the organisation and its members were now facing considerable economic hardship. Funds and incomes were meagre, and among the remaining Zambian members enthusiasm for the work was declining with the living conditions.

The CMPP soon became an important provider of additional resources for both ICA organisations and their members. During its first two years, the programme generated a large number of consultancy days for the ICA communities, and the incomes were shared among the members. But as only a few members were regularly contracted for programme work the
system of sharing the incomes became increasingly difficult to accept for those few who actually earned the money.

Both organisations tried to take advantage of their close relationship to the CMPP. The contacts could be used for strengthening their ties with other donor organisations that might generate more contracts and more job opportunities as well as negotiating their status in the local NGO hierarchy. The more entrepreneurial-minded ICA members were eager to learn the development jargon. They were also eager to learn how to compile and present a credible project proposal to an aid organisation, how to design an acceptable budget for a proposal and, perhaps most important, to listen to different aid organisations with a view to what development activities their organisation might gain access to. The Cooperative Members’ Participation Programme provided some of that knowledge.

Dean, the American ICA member who had implemented much of the initial co-operative work in Kenya, had been a member of the ICA for all his working life. He and his wife had worked within the organisation both in the Fifth City in Chicago and in Japan. They had settled in Lusaka, Zambia, where the CMPP head office was established. Dean consciously downplayed his close ties with the ICA, fearing that his affiliation with the organisation might cause sceptics to question his professional status or the entire CMPP programme. However, he maintained close contacts with his American ICA colleagues. Most of them were long-time members of The Order and they shared the experiences of the ICA work in the Fifth City. The Order had by now developed into a rather loosely organised network of old American ICA members who communicated with each other on philosophical and private issues.

Dean contributed large parts of his CMPP income to supporting particularly the Kenyan ICA organisation, which was facing serious economic difficulties. And the Kenyan ICA was not the only ICA organisation experiencing financial difficulties. During this period many of the ‘southern’ ICA organisations faced considerable economic constraints. A decision had recently been made by the ICA board in the U.S. to make the local ICA organisations financially independent of the global ICA structure. This decision had resulted in increasing financial instability among the ‘southern’ ICA organisations, like those in Kenya and Zambia, as they experienced increasing difficulties in gaining access to organisations interested in supporting the newly independent national organisations.

As the CMPP programme work progressed, Dean became increasingly involved in the development industry outside the ICA. He became familiar with the dominant language and work of the major donor organisa-
tions, and he was encouraged to write an extensive guideline on facilitation techniques. Together with an increasing number of his North American colleagues, he came to realise a growing demand for professional experience in facilitation methods. These varied from conducting planning workshops for local government institutions to village community participation. The skills of Dean and many of his colleagues were increasingly sought after by companies, government and non-governmental organisations. Encouraged by these demands, a number of North American ICA members established their own consultancy companies. Dean and his colleagues now realised that all those years they had lived and worked with the ICA organisation had left them with virtually no social security or retirement funds. This fact was an important incitement for them to further expand their work in the development industry.

While Dean downplayed his relations to the ICA, his wife, as part of their family strategy, was energetically supporting the ICA organisation in Zambia. She worked hard to assist the members in managing the organisation, scouting for other projects, and investing the incomes that the members were now managing to earn. She felt strongly about the ICA as a social movement and regarded development project approaches, like that of the CMPP, with a good deal of scepticism. The need to comply with all the requirements of a development project implied restrictions on the ICA ideology of a movement, living and working with poor communities, generating a process of increased consciousness of opportunities, etc. Projects like the CMPP were considered to represent a rather superficial approach to community development. The limited time spent with the communities, the short duration of workshops with the co-operative members, the fact that the main programme focus was on material changes, all made the programme a rather shallow copy of what some senior members later came to call the ‘authentic’ facilitation work of the ICA movement.

Like all development projects assisted by external donors, the CMPP came to an end. The project was phased out in the early 1990s. As in many other development projects, personal preferences played a major role in its destiny. Growing irritations between me and some of the SCC staff contributed to my resignation from the project. Dean carried on with the project work for some time, but the changing macro environment made a continuation of the CMPP difficult. The co-operative organisations had started to crumble because of the privatisation process initiated by the World Bank. Increased competition from private companies, obvious mismanagement of many of the co-operative societies, and a drastic decrease in legitimacy on the part of the co-operative ministries and apex
organisations, all contributed to terminating the programme. Sida funding became increasingly difficult to access for the Swedish Cooperative Centre when many of the co-operative organisations in Africa were dissolved or fell into disrepute.

**Negotiating new discourses: A network of professionals**

Parallel to the programme and similar development projects, most ICA organisations went through a number of dramatic changes. New identities and positions were being negotiated and established. Few members maintained the perspective of the ICA as a social movement. An increasing number of North American ICA members left the organisation for other NGOs or their own consultancy companies. Members of the southern ICA organisations began to regard their organisation as a means to achieve a career in professional facilitation in the development industry. A number of factors influenced these changes.

First was the obvious failure of many of the large-scale government-implemented development projects to produce expected results. The development industry, with the World Bank and a number of bilateral aid agencies leading the way, was looking for alternative development approaches. Many of the agencies regarded the NGOs as alternatives to government intervention. NGOs were thought to be closer to the grassroots, more democratic in dealing with the local communities, and more able to listen to the needs of the poor. These processes coincided largely with the worldwide diffusion of concepts of local participation, participatory rapid appraisals (PRA), putting the farmer first, handing over the stick, etc., crusaded by Robert Chambers and his followers. This process was in itself close to a spiritual movement (Henkel and Stirrat 2001) but provided technical and ‘operational’ means that gained an overwhelming response in the development industry. Consequently, many government agencies decided to finance NGOs or to engage NGOs for development work. Considerable funds were redirected to NGOs, and project opportunities materialised rapidly.

Secondly, more funds for facilitation work and PRAs gave rise to an increasing number of national and international NGOs as well as consulting companies dealing with facilitation work. Competition increased dramatically between consultants and NGOs, all proclaiming expertise in facilitation, community participation and PRA approaches. Many of the
NGOs competing for project inputs expanded their activities to ‘civil society support’, responding to new fashions in the development industry. Many ICA members realised that only NGOs capable of compiling project proposals and carrying out project management, that is, those able to follow the established mode of development work, would stand a chance in an increasingly competitive market for development work.

Thirdly, many members of both southern and northern ICA organisations were becoming alienated from the old habits, myths, symbols and ways of living practiced during the early years of the ICA. It became increasingly difficult to maintain the early self-images of the ICA as a movement of voluntary disciples and the ICA members as a heroic group of people who were going to change the world. For the majority of local members it was difficult to cope with the small stipends, the low status and the communal living arrangements. A large number of members of the ‘southern’ ICA organisations left or were asked to leave. In Kenya, the ICA was reduced from some two hundred to only twenty members within a short period of time when funding collapsed. Members who remained in the various ICA organisations were increasingly concerned with adapting their positions to the new conditions by professionalising their work, improving their management and networking with other development organisations in order to improve job opportunities and finances.

The external and internal changes that the ICA organisations had been experiencing since the late 1980s developed into a complex network of organisations and individuals. The original organisation that started as an ecumenical institute in Chicago emerged as a global network of ICA organisations, consultants and commercial companies that differs dramatically from the original intentions of the ICA. Today the ICA organisational network consists of relatively small numbers of full-time members. Some individuals maintain contacts with the institution in specific domains; others have started their own careers, different from the ICA work, but maintain sporadic contact with the organisation.

The umbrella organisation for all the national ICA organisations is the Institute for Cultural Affairs International (ICAI). The office is located in Brussels. Each of the thirty-five national ICA member organisations is expected to provide a modest annual contribution to the ICAI. During my fieldwork in 2002, funds were also received from a number of NGOs like CARITAS, the Ford Foundation, Misereor, etc. The ICAI had managed to achieve a formal ‘consultative status’ with a number of United Nations organisations like UNICEF, FAO and the United Nations Economic and Social Council.
The ICA International constituted a crucial link between the different national ICA organisations. A senior member of the Brussels office regularly visited the national ICA organisations, particularly the ‘southern’ ones, to encourage the members and to give advice on management, project opportunities, potential partners, etc. The Brussels staffs were also exploring opportunities to initiate new ICA organisations, particularly in the southern hemisphere. One of the latest national ICA organisations was started in Uganda.

The ICAI provided regular training and conferences both for members of the national ICA organisations and, on a commercial basis, for organisations and individuals interested in facilitation methods. Participants were also trained in the art of writing project proposals and the use of Logical Framework Analysis, a rather rigid planning technique that is required by most development agencies, an approach in sharp contrast to the original ICA focus on cultural change and long-term community work. The training in Brussels for the national ICA organisations has declined dramatically, however, as many of the members of the southern ICA organisations find it almost impossible to visit countries in the European Union because of its stringent visa requirements.

The ‘southern’ ICA organisations vary considerably in terms of membership and activities. Many of them rely on external donations, but a growing number are economically ‘self sufficient’ in the sense that incomes generated by facilitation work and development activities cover costs and salaries. Most of them have established elaborate networks with other international NGOs, UN or bilateral development agencies. The Zambian ICA organisation, for example, was participating at the turn of the century in a number of projects implemented by organisations like the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The organisation was also working with a number of large international NGOs like Oxfam, Harvest Help, Cordaid, Christian Aid, etc. Its project activities varied from micro-finance and savings and credit associations, to seed multiplication, sanitation and AIDS prevention.

The ICA network has played a vital role in building and maintaining an important self-image among the members of the Zambian ICA organisation. The network offered membership in a global organisation that provided them with a sense of security and pride. This belonging made many members realise that the opportunities for an individual career outside the ICA organisation and network were relatively limited. Given that project contracts have been awarded almost exclusively not to individuals but to the organisation as such, job opportunities in other organisations
are difficult to find and potentially very risky for an individual. Most members were close friends and family and they tended to guard the boundaries of their organisation, increasingly concerned with preserving the membership rather than expanding the number of members. The ICA network contributed strongly to producing and reproducing these boundaries as it provided, or was anticipated to provide, members with access to resources that most other Zambian institutions were unable to offer. Zambia experienced a long period of economic recession and increasing unemployment and despair. The only hope for a better life for a number of Zambians was to leave the country and find jobs elsewhere. The ICA network provided the ICA members with opportunities to live a relatively good social and economic life in Zambia. It is not surprising that boundaries were established to protect the old members and to minimise the recruitment of further members who might aspire to sharing the benefits and goodwill that the organisation had acquired.

The Zambian ICA developed into an organisation in which the members largely identified themselves as a group of professional facilitators in development work. The members learned much of the necessary language and mode of socialising that is needed to communicate with the more ‘established’ development organisations. While many of the dozen or so full-time members continued to live with their families in the community dormitory outside Lusaka, an office was established in Lusaka city centre. This establishment further strengthened the necessary image of an organisation proper, having a manager, computer, pamphlets that presented the organisation, hence all the paraphernalia normally associated with a reputable organisation.

But it was not only the external appearance of the organisation that was being adjusted to fit the requirements of the potential clients. The actual facilitation work was also adjusted for the clients. The time allocated by donors and the administrators of development projects for community consultations was and still is very limited. Many project administrators tend to expect that community facilitation exercises should result in community activity plans that are in line with the overall project objectives, which are often defined before the actual facilitation work has been carried out. The actual practice of the ICA facilitation work became instrumental, justifying preconceived project objectives rather than being a goal in itself. Facilitation became increasingly regarded by ICA members and project administrators alike as a technical input, much like any other project input, a consensus approach for identifying technical activities for local communities within projects already identified.
The North American ICA organisation and its members evolved into a highly complex structure. The ICA organisation had four established offices in the United States in 2003, but the total number of full-time staff has been considerably reduced over the last ten years. Today, the U.S. organisation organises training programmes in facilitation and workshop techniques, and conferences on topics related to facilitation and participation, local democracy and civil society. A number of training events in planning and local democracy are organised for community leaders and youth leadership. Training is also conducted for individuals who either regard facilitation as a career opportunity or are representatives from communities or commercial organisations that regard facilitation skills as a potential means for improving internal communication and work performance.

One branch of the U.S. organisation was arranging journeys in the ‘wilderness’ for individuals and groups as a form of rite de passage. This is one of the more intriguing features of the domestic activities. These journeys are expected to provide ‘a chance to reflect on our lives and mark accomplishments through acknowledgement and celebration’ (ICA Journeys 2002). The rites are intended for young boys and girls (‘coming of age’) as well as for elderly people. For the latter, the journeys are intended to provide opportunities for reflection. One example of such reflection is ‘How does one retain a feeling of self-worth in a culture that dismisses its elders?’ (ICA Journeys 2002).

Together with other branches of the ICA network, the U.S. Institute of Cultural Affairs has been involved in expanding its activities into other fields that may provide new opportunities. The ICA, like a number of other western international NGOs, realised that Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics have become an important arena for expanding NGO activities; so too for the ICA. In 2000, Mercy Corps, a large U.S.-based NGO, contracted the ICA to provide group facilitation training in Tajikistan. This work was directed towards the leadership of two recently established ‘local’ NGOs (the Association for Business Women and the Association of People with Disabilities) in order to improve their communication with members and member communities. This exercise appears to have been very satisfactory, and in 2001, a new ICA national organisation was established and registered in Tajikistan as an NGO under the name of ICA: EHIO, ‘ehio’ meaning ‘renaissance’ in Tajik (The ICAI Network Exchange January 2002).

This essay has focused on the ICA as an organisation that has experienced considerable changes. The organisation started as a social movement and developed into a network that consists of a large number of
organisations and individuals who have increasingly come to regard facilitation work as a profession, leaving much of the image of a movement behind. In 1994 a small group of mainly North American ICA members formed an association outside the social and cultural traditions of the ICA. They created a formal network open to those interested in creating a professional career as a facilitator, whether a former ICA member or not. Most of the founders had been working, often on an individual basis, for various consultancy companies or NGOs in development work. The ambition in forming a more formal organisation was both to improve the quality of facilitation work and to provide better job opportunities. Some 70 individuals came together and formed The International Association of Facilitators. In 2007, the association had some 1,500 paying members in more than twenty countries (IAF 2007). The objective of the association is to ‘promote, support and advance the art and practice of professional facilitation through methods exchange, professional growth, practical research, collegial networking and support services’. The association provides training in facilitation and organises facilitation seminars and workshops. It publishes documents on facilitation approaches and job opportunities on its website as well as providing certified tests on facilitation skills.

Conclusions

Each and every non-government organisation is unique. This uniqueness relates not only to the actual formation of the organisation, of course, but also to its members and to the social and cultural practices that develop among the members of the organisation. This brief narrative of the Institute of Cultural Affairs demonstrated the complexity that we may encounter when studying or working with this heterogeneous group of organisations labelled NGOs. The ethnography for the essay derives largely from my work with many of the members over long periods of time. Some of the members have become very close friends of mine and I have come to share many of their concerns. There is of course a risk that I tend to exaggerate my own and their exclusiveness for the development of the ICA. But my narrative of the ICA illustrates, I hope, the advantage of applying an ethnographic approach in order to understand the complex and often contradictory social and economic processes that may determine the work of the organisation and its members.

The ICA is probably a good example of the multitude of voices and meanings that may be produced and reproduced among the members of
an NGO. The ICA organisation started as social and religious group where members actively participated in the construction of a ‘communitas’, with its own language, symbols and mode of working (Turner 1969). This homogeneous structure changed when its members expanded their activities from their original focus in Chicago to other locations. With the incorporation of a large number of new staff members with different ambitions and backgrounds, the ICA ambition to create a global movement of members sacrificing material well-being for hard work to improve the world was increasingly irrelevant for many of the new members. This was particularly true for those who already came from poor economic environments, like many of those who joined the organisations in Kenya and Zambia.

The expansion of the ICA to new geographical fields and the recruitment of a large number of new members created both a multitude of new voices and new economic constraints. Financial support for the expanding activities was increasingly difficult to find. Outside funding was mostly directed to specific work for various development projects. Insufficient funds to support the movement and limited material and social rewards made many members leave the ICA, particularly members of the ‘southern’ ICA organisations, where the membership dropped drastically. The dependency on funding from international donor agencies, both government agencies or larger international NGOs, made it necessary for the ICA members to adapt to the language and mode of work required by these organisations. This process forced the original ideology of the ICA into the background of the new images that were projected by the different ICA organisations. Most major actors in the development industry could tolerate the ICA work with facilitation and community participation. But in order to secure jobs and incomes, the organisation(s) had to work and approach development projects within the confines and format of conventional development work as designed by the development industry.

However, important changes in the mainstream development discourse were being introduced, particularly by Robert Chambers and his followers. The inclusion of community participation and facilitation methods in the mainstream development discourse resulted in more jobs and income opportunities for many of the ICA members. But these changes also meant that the ICA members, in order to gain access to these new opportunities, had to adjust their facilitation work and language in line with the requirements for more homogeneous participatory approaches favoured by the clients. Facilitation and participation became instrumental instead...
of a goal in themselves, much in line with the demand of project cultures and the development industry.

An increasing number of ICA members wanted to establish themselves as facilitation professionals. The ICA experiences in facilitation became more valuable. Many members, particularly in the southern ICA organisations, wanted to protect their exclusive experiences, and some national organisations managed to establish themselves as groups of successful facilitators. The process of specialisation and professionalism reached its logical conclusion when a professional association of facilitators was formed by a number of North American ICA members in the early 1990s. This was a first step towards establishing a transnational organisation and a global marketplace for professional facilitators, a process radically different from that anticipated by the members who started the movement that was to become the Institute of Cultural Affairs.
References


_Internet resources_
International Association of Facilitators: http://www.iaf-world.org
The Institute of Cultural Affairs in the USA: http://www.ica-usa.org
Development NGOs in Bangladesh and elsewhere promote themselves by emphasising normative values such as solidarity, democracy and altruism, with staff who are professional and committed and have a caring and understanding personality. This normative image has fitted well with development policy trends in the 1990s that emphasised participation, democracy, human rights and good governance (Steifel and Wolfe 1994; World Bank 1991). Consequently, NGOs have been endorsed as actors with qualities essential for ascertaining human development processes with successful outcomes (World Bank 2003), resulting in wide economic and moral support from the donor community and western aid lobbies. But since the end of the 1990s concern has been growing regarding unfulfilled promises and unintended consequences of donor support (Stiles 2002; Wallace et al. 2006). Ambiguous practices and identities of NGOs have become a source of increasing concern for all involved in development intervention.

Analyses of NGOs are becoming more insightful (e.g. Gauri and Galef 2005; Hilhorst 2003; Wallace et al. 2006), and some critique revolves around identifying what Bryant (2002) calls ‘false prophets’ and ‘mutant’ NGOs. But while there is much scepticism regarding the normative

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1 The author thanks Richard Palmer-Jones, Sten Hagberg and Charlotta Widmark for helpful comments. The findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed in this paper are those of the author. A substantially different version of this paper has been published in the *Journal of South Asian Development* (Arvidsson 2008).

2 For local examples see Arvidson 2003; Bryant 2002; Fisher 1997; Fyvie and Ager 1999. See also self-presentation of international NGOs such as Oxfam (www.oxfam.org) and Action Aid (www.actionaid.org). This claim is also substantiated by presentations in numerous reports published by NGOs (see Halder 1998; Ikin 1996).
framework of ‘doing good’ as NGOs use the term, there is little understanding of how processes of development work challenge the very core values claimed by these organisations. As Bryant points out, ‘The task of distinguishing between ‘mutant’ and ‘genuine’ NGOs is not straightforward’ (Bryant 2002: 630); the world of NGOs is ‘characterized by shifting identities and ambiguous practices’ (2002: 635).

In this study, the ambiguous practices of NGO development workers are characterised by altruistic work motivation and self-image, mixed with authoritarian manners, bossy attitudes towards clients and hierarchical thinking that go counter to what are claimed as essential characteristics for doing successful development work. The study argues that these ambiguous practices should be interpreted not as signs of deceitful minds, but as signs of a deep-seated conflict between a rhetoric based on an ideal-type development NGO worker and a complex reality consisting of organisational structure and individual needs, motivations and shortcomings, that challenge this rhetoric. The study shows that as a result of facing contradictions and experiencing confusion in relation to organisational rhetoric, many NGO workers end up taking short-cuts in their work, leaving behind the participatory ideology so strongly argued for.

The ambivalent behaviour of staff is here interpreted as a basis for exploring the dilemmas of altruism and how individuals try to resolve the moral anxiety that comes as a result of contradictions and confusion that are to a large extent inherent in development work. While the empirical material on local Bangladeshi NGOs recounts situations that are in a sense well known, the analysis presents new perspectives from which to interpret this reality. The conceptual framework used draws on organisational theory, particularly Lipsky’s work on street-level bureaucrats (1980) and Allahyari’s study of volunteer workers in the United States (2000). Lipsky highlights the specific challenges of social work that takes place in a context characterised by normative rhetoric and contradictory goals, where workers experience demanding roles wrapped up in values that are hard to practice. Allahyari draws on the concept of moral selving, which in her study involves the attempt to develop a spiritually and morally enlightened identity through the practice of volunteer work, and which points to the various meanings and implications of altruistic work and the close relationship between altruism and self-interest. The study suggests that the process of moral selving is linked to ‘ready-made narratives of the good-provider role’ as presented in organisational rhetoric, but also reflects a more general and cultural interpretation of caring for others. The resulting analysis will shed light on the specific context of staff working in the local Bangladeshi NGOs studied, as well as contributing to a line of
research as set out by Mosse and Lewis, who argue that ‘ethnographic research can provide policymakers and aid managers with valuable reflective insights’ (Mosse and Lewis 2006: 1), that changes focus from formal policies and goals to development in practice and the social, economic and political realities that surround actors in development intervention.

The article is structured as follows. After a presentation of the methodology and the NGOs involved in the study, the concept of altruism is examined. The concept represents a core value both claimed by and ascribed to NGOs, and an initial discussion of its meaning is required. Following this, the focus shifts to NGO rhetoric, the context in which it has developed, and, in particular, the role it plays for building staff identity. Next, the text uses the empirical material drawn from the NGO case studies to illustrate how development work at the grassroots presents staff with a reality that contradicts organisational rhetoric and generates confusion for staff in their roles as professional development workers. The empirical findings are subsequently analysed with the aim to explore staff experience and how moral dilemmas related to development work are resolved.

Methodology

The basis of this study is empirical material gathered over several years of research in Bangladesh from the late 1990s. Over a period of three years I closely followed three local NGOs implementing projects for improved access to safe water and sanitation, which were using participation and empowerment as core concepts in their work. The study involved informal discussions, in-depth interviews, and observation of NGO project activities at the village level. The research was a donor-independent, academic project, and not part of a project evaluation. This is important to point out, since as discussions with NGO staff evolved over time, it became clear that some of the reflections and hesitations they had concerning their job were not easily shared with an outsider. Based on this material, an interview guide was developed and used for in-depth interviews with twelve local NGOs (all familiar with me after a couple of years’ intermittent presence during their work) on the dilemmas involved in practicing development at the grassroots. Another set of interviews and meet-

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3 Fieldwork has been undertaken by the author intermittently during the period 1998-2006, in the districts of Comilla, Rajshahi, Dhaka, and Faridpur. The research has been undertaken with support from Swedish Sida/SAREC.

4 For a full report see Arvidson 2003.
ings were conducted in subsequent years with staff and directors from another seven NGOs, with particular focus on the presentations of the NGOs and their work, and dilemmas, as described by them, encountered in practice. The material presented here is also based on numerous informal discussions held with other local (and some national and international) NGOs over a period of ten years during which I have worked and at times lived in Bangladesh. The material consists of field notes taken during these years, substantiated by revisits and by continuous and systematic review of changing context and relevant literature.

Empirical background

The local NGOs referred to here are all Bangladeshi. They vary in size, with some housed in small one-room offices with only a handful of staff, and others established in larger quarters in town with small field offices in rural areas engaging more than 100 employees. Although varying in size, there are some strong common denominators. Their staff are referred to as ‘professional volunteers’ and they get salaries on a more or less regular basis, through outside funding and from incomes obtained with microcredit programmes. The NGOs share an analytical perspective, identifying oppressive structures and attitudes among the ruling classes as the reason behind widespread poverty (see e.g. BRAC 1983). They aim at emancipating the poor through awareness training and support for self-help achieved through a bottom-up participatory development approach. In reality, though, many of the NGOs are more in the way of service providers, implementing welfare projects on behalf of outside initiators, rather than advocacy groups for local priorities; they have become expert implementers of projects that put people’s participation and empowerment in focus.

Many NGO workers showed good theoretical understanding of the participation and empowerment ideology. For these ‘professional volunteer’ staff, participation is not viewed merely as a tool used for implementation of development projects, but more as an ideology which requires them to hold certain values and attitudes if participation is to lead to people’s empowerment and sustainable processes of social and economic change. However, the staff demonstrated an ambiguous position in relation to this ideology during their quotidian practices. Following project implementation and observing staff interacting with villagers over some time allowed discrepancies between rhetoric and practice to became clear. These discrepancies and ambiguities opened up opportunities for more in-
depth discussions with staff that revealed feelings of confusion, frustration and disillusion in relation to their roles as development workers.

Altruistic ideals and the dual personality of the worker

Although it is a core concept capturing the essence of what NGOs claim to represent, altruism is seldom discussed. Brett (1993) provides a rare example, examining altruism as basis for the motivation of NGOs, and by analysing the concept in action provides a more nuanced understanding than that provided by a static, ideal image. Altruism of the purest kind – simply a willingness to do good for others without expectation of reward – cannot be sustained over time, since a chain of altruistic actions contributes to building relations and expectations that ‘I give in order that you may give’ (Brett 1993: 283). Brett argues that altruism and its antonym self-interest, having your own well-being in mind, can merge; ‘altruism can be a form of far-sighted self-interest’ (1993: 283).

Widening the theoretical framework to include institutional economics, political philosophy, and organisational theory, we find further enlightening discussions of altruism and self-interest. Economist Mancur Olson (1997) argues that collectiveness can stem from normative beliefs (altruism, social solidarity), but it can also be a result of collective understanding of the best way of promoting self-interest. Olson emphasises that we should allow self-interest more than one interpretation and accept that it can have different outcomes. He points to differences between a self-interest that is narrow and one that is encompassing, and this in turn also affects the way we understand altruistic actions. Continuing on the same theme and elaborating on the close relationship between these concepts, political philosopher Keith Graham points out that conceptualising altruism and self-interest as polarised concepts ‘does not adequately reflect an important aspect of human relations. It does not reflect the fact that we individual agents are often constituents in plural subjects, rather than simply being individual agents’ (Graham 2004: 61). The essence of these arguments is that simply using altruism and self-interest as each other’s antonyms does not provide us with a satisfactory framework for understanding human behaviour.

Bringing altruism into an organisational context, Jaffé (2001) argues that we must first consider how we view the employee and the individual. The employee must be seen as someone more than a disengaged com-
 commody employed by the organisation to reach its goals, but as an actor who is socially embedded. The individual should be seen as comprising, at least, a dual identity, who is driven on the one hand by ‘internal, personal and subjective’ (self-interest) factors and on the other by the non-personal, i.e. ‘external, impersonal and objective’ (altruistic) factors (Jaffee 2001: 75). In an organisational context, the challenge consequently lies in finding a balance between controlling the employee through supervision and incentives, and allowing for the individual discretion of the employee, i.e. building on autonomy and trust as the basis for good work performance.\footnote{See e.g. Clegg (1990) on Etzioni’s inverted symbiosis: the paradoxical relationship between organisational control and employee integration.}

Although brief, these introductory thoughts on altruism and self-interest as bases for motivation give us an important starting point for the rest of this paper. Idealised assumptions of altruism must be challenged by an understanding of the individual as socially embedded (Granovetter 1985) and having a multitude of motivations and obligations, even when acting in an organisational context (Scott 1992). In practice this means that actions cannot be seen only as motivated by a specific ideology, however well it may be formulated by an organisation and embodied by its staff. Failure to comply with an altruistic behavioural ideal is a sign of the complex reality behind motives and behaviour, rather than a lack of commitment to the ideal (Clague 1997).

However, the formal rhetoric used by NGOs does build on a polarised view of actors involved in development as motivated either by altruism or by self-interest. This is also emphasised in the ideal image of development workers described by NGO staff themselves (especially contrasting NGO welfare workers with those employed by government agencies – see below). It is important to see where this idealised image comes from, and how it is being maintained by the NGOs and their staff. The following text starts by providing us with a description of NGO rhetoric and self-presentation. It goes on to show how this image is challenged by conflicts and confusion caused by ambiguous project goals.

Building a rhetoric, establishing relations

The rhetoric used by the Bangladeshi NGOs builds on a normative language using oppositions to describe what they are (committed, honest) and what they are not (not-government, not-for-profit). In order to un-
derstand the meaning of this, it is important to put the organisation in a
wider context (Scott 1992) in which the building of this rhetoric is struc-
tured by relations with surrounding actors.

The initiative of NGO work in Bangladesh originates in the hardship
faced by Bangladeshi people in the aftermath of independence, gained in
1971 after civil war with Pakistan. Informal organisations focused on
giving relief in a situation of crisis, when ‘self-interest was set aside for
national reconstruction’ (Fruttero and Gauri 2005). During this period
NGOs were seen as charity organisations working alongside a govern-
ment facing tremendous challenges that were not of its own making. The
work of NGOs has since moved from relief to development and more
long-term strategies, and with this they have developed ideologically
based identities. Simultaneously, the shortcomings of a succession of gov-
ernments and state organisations have made the state sector and govern-
ment officials rhetorical targets of the NGO sector.

Today, over 90 per cent of all NGOs in Bangladesh are heavily in-
volved with micro-credit programmes, which provide an important source
of income for the organisations (Gauri and Galef 2005). Most NGOs also
receive funding from outside: from other NGOs (national and interna-
tional), government funding, and directly from foreign donors.6 NGOs
today rely on income that often involves outside funding, to pay for their
activities, including the cost of salaried staff, and organisational survival
has come to be an important incentive for their activities (Gauri and Galef
2005). Furthermore, the organisations have become deeply involved with
the international development arena, where agendas are to a great extent
set by foreign donors. While initially initiatives for action were taken with
local people as obvious counterparts, the rhetoric of the local Bangladeshi
NGOs is presently developed in a context in which two other actors play
important roles: the Bangladeshi state, and foreign donors. This context is
the political and economic reality of development NGOs.

The relationship between NGOs and the state sector is strongly charac-
terised by resentment within the latter of the recognition and resources
granted to the NGO sector today, and by fear of the political unrest and
structural transformation induced through some NGO activities
(Hashemi 1998). At times there have been open conflicts between the
NGOs and the state, but conflicts between the two sectors are more an
ever-present tension felt during meetings, and distrust is obvious in con-
tinual comments made by each about the other party. NGOs refer to their

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6 It is hard to say to what extent they rely on assistance from foreign donors. The original
source of funding behind e.g. government project money is not always clear.
own work as crucial for development successes that have been achieved in the country over the last decades. Discussions about achievements of NGOs vis-à-vis the state sector and favourable comments regarding attitudes and behaviour within the NGO sector are common among directors and staff alike. Being non-governmental is a source of frequent discussion, as the following examples from my fieldwork show:

The government is doing ‘total literacy programme’ conducted by bureaucrats speaking very high talk, but really... they are not working well, wasting money ... ‘total-money-waste-programme’ we call it. On the other hand the NGOs are doing very good work in the non-formal schools.7

We can mix with the locals easily, but the government people cannot do this. They have a bossy attitude... a bossy tendency and NGOs don’t have that, they are corrupted and NGO people are not, NGO people are working hard, government people are not, NGO people have a human side but the government people have not, they are not that type.8

NGOs are continuously making efforts to broadcast themselves as non-governmental, i.e. having characteristics such as commitment, honesty and transparency, and as having hard-working staff, all of which is portrayed as opposite to the characteristics attached to government officials. The language used is clearly influenced by an international development agenda, but the rhetoric of participation and empowerment, and the use of polarising concepts, appears to have become very much their own, incorporated into their identity, as repeated in discussions and interviews with staff concerning their role and characteristics as development workers. Nevertheless, the circumstances under which the NGOs operate have most certainly influenced the way the rhetoric has evolved. Encouraged by the need for organisational survival, it is important that the rhetoric fits a vocabulary used by the international donor community, and, spurred by struggle for prestige, recognition and scarce (development) resources in competition with the state and other NGOs, the oppositional language has been sharpened.

The role of this rhetoric can be seen as twofold. Firstly, it is used as a marketing tool, positioning the organisations in relation to other actors. The organisations are building on a rhetorical myth based on visions and values of what ought to be, rather than reflecting reality (Jaffee 2001). Such presentation is important; the NGOs need to project “a magic image” of superiority to the public sector’ (Townsend and Townsend 2004:

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7 Field notes, interview NGO director, Comilla, 2000.
8 Field notes, interview NGO director, Rajshahi, 2000.
to defend their position as crucial partners in development and to gain funding. In this sense they consciously take part in constructing and maintaining their relationships with surrounding actors, including civil servants and foreign donors. It is also important to broadcast this image to villagers, to ‘encourage clients to believe that workers hold the key to their well-being’ (Lipsky 1980: 15) and to strengthen their position as representatives of the grassroots.

Secondly, the rhetoric also serves as a slogan for the staff, boosting team spirit and morale. Here, however, the rhetoric takes the form of a more informal language. It provides the staff with an ideal image of the altruistic welfare worker, an identity that they are striving to fulfil.

Team spirit and staff identity

Organisational values and goals come to serve as ‘a source of identification and motivation’ for the employees (Scott 1992: 285). Staff identity is moulded around a normative rhetoric which emphasises people’s participation and empowerment and values such as commitment and sincerity, which continuously provides comparisons between the good NGO and the bad civil servants and less sincere NGOs.

The issue of organisational control over staff is widely discussed within organisational theories (see Clegg 1990; Jaffee 2001; Scott 1992). Control systems are motivated by a need to make the organisation more efficient in its strivings to reach its goals. In a paper by Alvesson and Willmott (2001) the authors use the concept of ‘identity regulation’ as an ‘analytical device intended to bring some degree of clarity to complex and pervasive processes of organisational control’ (Alvesson and Willmott 2001: 24). The paper presents an analytical framework useful for our understanding of how formal rhetoric and informal language within the organisation steers the staff towards an identity that is compatible with its norms and goals.

Organisational rhetoric, Alvesson and Willmott argue, contributes to moulding the identity of the employee in implicit and explicit ways, e.g. through defining the staff and by defining others. In this case, we find direct references to the NGO staff themselves, while ‘the other’ is represented by civil servants, other NGOs, and foreign donors and consultants, all criticised for faulty attitudes and motivations, and for having a flawed understanding of and weak links with reality, i.e. the life of poor villagers. The NGO staff are generally described as being of ‘the right human quality’. Their mentality is that of a friend, as opposed to that of government
staff, who are more ‘like some kind of a master’. The personal qualities (friendly, responsible, close to the community people, non-authoritarian) of the NGO staff were emphasised in particular by the NGO directors interviewed. For normatively based organisations in general, such personal qualities are linked not only to certain skills that can be acquired through formal education and training, but to a type of personality, which is limitless and extends beyond the boundaries of the job (Clarke 1997).

The staff refer to themselves as ‘professional volunteers’. ‘Professional’ signals that the staff have certain skills as well as a work ethic. They know the procedures of writing reports, keeping time limits, providing financial auditing; they are professional and reliable partners. The label ‘volunteer’ signals a type of commitment that is special for this workforce, which incorporates solidarity with the poor and personal moral standing. They are ready to offer something for free (or for less than what they could get in other jobs) for the benefit of others, putting their own personal interest aside. Choosing to work for an NGO is like a vocation, a call, a commitment, to put the welfare of many before personal comfort and security. Simultaneously, ‘the other’, i.e. government bureaucrats and some other NGOs, is defined as insincere, careless, selfish and bossy.

Alvesson and Willmott explain how provision of a specific vocabulary of motives serves as a point of reference for the employees. The NGO staff repeat ‘the empowerment of the poor’ as a mantra, demarcating the job as being about contributing something to less fortunate people’s lives, and not about making profits. In the process of defining the staff and defining others, and in the specific vocabulary used by the NGOs, certain morals and values are emphasised – solidarity, commitment, honesty – which continuously guide the employee towards an ideal that involves both personal values and professional behaviour.

The framework provided by Alvesson and Willmott is useful for exploring how organisational rhetoric, informal as well as formal, affects the employee. However, a staff identity does not constitute the whole person; any employee carries multiple identities that relate to the social and cultural context she or he comes from. It was previously argued that the rhetoric of participation and empowerment, as well as the image of the NGO worker as a professional altruist, has become integrated into the identity and daily language of the NGOs and their staff. The fact that these concepts – participation, empowerment, altruism – are generally used with reference to a western interpretation must, however, be recognised. A general understanding of Bangladeshi culture suggests that it is characterised by authoritarian manners and hierarchical structures (Bertocci 2001; Greenough 1983). It is reasonable to assume that staff atti-
tudes not only reflect values claimed by the organisations but also mirror social structures and attitudes in the surrounding cultural context. Although the study at hand cannot provide material to fully engage in a discussion of cultural aspects related to interpretations of altruism, participation and empowerment, some suggestions can be made here as to what a cultural dimension may bring to our understanding. A local culture that promotes authoritarian and patronising behaviour, and that is highly hierarchical, can also endorse actions of charity and a generous spirit towards the poor. The interpretation given here to authoritarian behaviour of staff in the context of NGO practice sees it as a sign of a weakened or confused altruistic spirit. However, authoritarian manners may also be interpreted as a different, locally embedded, form of doing good. The staff use a vocabulary linked to a universal discourse of ‘putting the last first’ and ‘people’s participation’, but there may be different ways of interpreting and practising this, reflecting the social and cultural resources of the staff. The workers are operating in a context with a mixture of normative prescriptions, and their interpretations of concepts as well as their actions reflect this mixture. Nevertheless, the rhetoric presented by the NGOs portrays problematic cultural traits as something found outside the organisation, and which they are aiming to change. The grassroots staff themselves do not reflect on their own identity as embedded in conventional Bangladeshi culture and social structure.

Ideal images and dilemmas in action

Organisational rhetoric puts forward a strong image of NGO staff as possessing outstanding personal and professional qualities. But while staff have consciously internalised this image (to the extent that it becomes their reflexive vocabulary), the practical work of implementing development projects provides them with serious challenges to their attempts to live up to this ideal. The everyday practice of development causes confusion, frustration and disillusion among the staff in relation to the ideology that they have internalised and so strongly proclaim.

Lipsky (1980) uses the concept of altruism to describe the motivation of street-level bureaucrats: they want to do well for society and they have entered their position with a belief that the welfare system is an appropriate model for doing so. While accepting their initial altruism, Lipsky goes

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9 This is also confirmed in other studies on NGOs in Bangladesh (Ahmad 2002; Goetz 2001).
on to explain what a fragile basis for motivation this is. The structure of work compromises altruism and causes workers to lose their devotion to being advocates for their clients. This process is called alienation and refers to how street-level bureaucrats ‘are not able to express or need to suppress their creative and human impulses through work activity’ (Lipsky 1980: 80). Lipsky offers a sympathetic way of understanding change in workers’ motivation. He shows how street-level staff are presented with inherent goal ambiguities and competing goals, resulting in confusion and frustration. **Client-centred goals** emphasise flexibility in approach, and the characters of the imagined clients are heterogeneous. These goals conflict with **social engineering goals**, which are based on a homogeneous, ideal-type image of the client, and hence have a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to problem solving. Furthermore, client-centred goals conflict with **organisation-centred goals** aiming at organisational efficiency and rationality.

As with the street-level bureaucrats of Lipsky’s study, the NGO field-workers find themselves in a context filled with contradictory and confusing messages, which forces them to negotiate, bargain and compromise with their altruistic motivation. Although detailed in visions with carefully planned activities, many development projects harbour internal conflicts due to incompatible goals (or incompatibility between goals, mechanisms and resources). Making local knowledge count, and the idea of practising participation in order to allow villagers to define their own problems, priorities and solutions (i.e. client-centred goals), are goals and mechanisms which conflict with the fixed framework of the project that expresses preferences for certain analyses and solutions (the social engineering goals). The NGOs are moreover under great pressure to follow goals of organisational efficiency and rationality, i.e. keeping time frames and budgets, and recording activities according to the fixed agenda set by project funders. On a daily basis staff have to decide on whether to prioritise project goals or to build up rapport with their clients, to focus on people’s preferences or on an agenda of activities pre-defined by the project framework. Confusion is caused by the resulting conflicts between ambiguous goals and is enhanced by contradictory directions given to staff during different training and assessment sessions.

The problems with goal ambiguity and contradictory messages were clear in many cases observed during the study. One group of staff, which faced particular difficulties in conducting their work, illustrates this.\(^{10}\) Due to political turmoil linked to religious fundamentalism, it turned out to be

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\(^{10}\) Field notes, participant observation during staff training and appraisal, 1999, 2000.
very difficult to build up good relationships with villagers. The staff described how after a long introductory period they felt they had achieved crucial acceptance by the villagers. They had to be careful not to proceed too fast with project plans without due agreement among villagers or they would risk losing the hard-earned trust that is the basis for cooperation.

During one training session, appropriate staff attitudes conducive to participation and empowerment strategies were being advocated by management staff. The manager in charge boosted team morale through emphasizing the special qualities and strengths of his staff. The problems faced by this group were recognized and seen as a good example of a situation where the personal and professional skills of the NGO workers, including flexibility, ability to listen to the clients and creativity, were crucial.

The fact that this preparatory phase had taken up so much time, however, caused problems in relation to project output. During another meeting aimed at reviewing performance, emphasis was put on following an agenda of themed activities leading to villagers purchasing sanitary latrines and tube wells, all according to a pre-fixed time-bound agenda. Rather than encouraging a general atmosphere of sharing reflections and experience based on their fieldwork, the meeting was framed so that one group of staff was compared to another, using project statistics as measures of achievement. This presented the group of staff just mentioned, who had been working according to the ethics and ideology of people’s participation and had therefore achieved less from a quantitative statistical point of view, with an uncomfortable and discouraging experience of being scolded and told off as lazy and incompetent by supervisors during official meetings. This caused confusion and anger among this group of NGO staff members, and it also created some discord within the larger community of staff involved as to whether the group in question had been working in the right way.

Evaluation, remuneration and work motivation

Conflicting and ambiguous goals, combined with confusing guidance by managers, set in motion processes in which altruistic motivations are challenged. In projects that contain normative goals, procedures of evaluation present yet other challenges. In general, evaluation procedures are viewed as important control or support mechanisms since staff tend to drift towards compatibility with evaluations (Jaffee 2001; Lipsky 1980). As is evident from the case above, this can be problematic, since what is em-
phasised in evaluations may conflict with organisational ideology. Since normative goals, e.g. empowerment, are hard to evaluate, projects often come to rely on numbers: number of meetings, numbers of participants, numbers of tube wells installed. However, there is not necessarily a link between numbers and impacts, and evaluations often confuse process with substance; emphasis is put on following procedures and not on assessing whether these procedures are appropriate for the original goals (O’Neill 2002: Scott 1992). Due to requirements for reporting and keeping time frames, the focus on organisational efficiency and rationality in relation to project plans – i.e. activities that can be reported as outputs – is often given priority over ideological emphasis on learning processes and bottom-up procedures – impacts that are more elusive and do not lend themselves to quantitative reporting in the form of tables and graphs.

The group of staff referred to above appeared disillusioned and let down by being reprimanded and misunderstood in front of their colleagues. The general message to the other NGO workers was clear: don’t let flexibility and focus on participation overtake pre-defined plans and goals of the project. Such bias towards quantitatively measurable goals has not only an instrumental impact on staff behaviour in that staff simply choose to prioritise some activities over others. Referring to Jaffee’s idea of the ‘dual personality of the employee’ discussed earlier, it may also have an emotional, alienating effect on the altruistic personality of the employee. Although the projects that the NGOs were working for recognise on the whole the importance of finding a balance between numbers and assessing normative impacts of participatory activities, the way the local staff are involved in formal evaluating procedures implies a clear bias towards numbers, rewarded by donors. The walls of NGO offices are often covered with tables representing achievements, and pictures of project activities, of cordial meetings between NGO staff and villagers. The narratives told to me by staff referring to these illustrations show in-depth knowledge of people’s history and culture, of local social and political relations, and among the staff themselves the normative impact of their work is discussed frequently. But when it comes to officially reporting judgements about empowerment impacts, this task is given to outsiders. From the field staff’s point of view, they are trusted to report numbers but not to make qualitative judgements regarding villagers’ empowerment. Being given the limited task of reporting numbers, without including judgements about the more elusive, normative impact of the project, risks reducing the staff’s ‘feeling of competence and self-determination’ (Kreps 1990: 157) in relation to the qualities linked to their status as key actors in development work. Staff feel they are not trusted, leading to a
rift between grassroots workers and project leaders, and, more importantly, to a disbelief in both the importance and the possibility of working according to the norms and values they initially believed in.

The NGO staff struggled to make sense of official messages promoting them as the key to successful development work, and other more hidden messages that contradicted this. This is reflected in their discussion of remuneration. The staff had concerns about the low payment they receive:

We get frustrated when we find that we are working hard for a low salary. And this is a temporary project. If it would be longer than this short period we could enjoy it. Now we have just started it but in no time it will be finished.\textsuperscript{11}

Whenever we think that the price of our labour is too low, then it makes us sad and maybe it would be good if we could get higher salary. We could survive better, enjoy our lives better if we could get more...\textsuperscript{12}

It was clear during discussions and interviews with staff that such concerns were not willingly expressed, since it cast doubt on their work motivation. The hesitation related to an inner moral conflict and also revealed suspicions regarding official policies of keeping their remuneration low in order to secure maximum benefits going to intended recipients. Being part of an international context, the grassroots staff are well aware that others involved in the same business are getting considerably higher salaries. This naturally affects the way the staff perceived the relationship between commitment and remuneration. Putting monetary reward and other types of compensation aside is an important part of their image, since they portray themselves as different from government officials, to whom, NGOs say, reward, compensation and employment security is all, manifest in corruption within the government sector with government and donor funds, as well as extortion of money or services from clients. But in a context where NGO fieldworkers see themselves as the key group for successful implementation of projects, and where other staff related to NGOs get higher salaries, they cannot but wonder why their status is nevertheless so low. As a result, the workers struggled to keep their moral mission in focus, and they could not help but feel disappointment and resentment about their low salaries.

\textsuperscript{11} Field notes, interview with local NGO staff, 2000.
\textsuperscript{12} Field notes, interview with local NGO staff, 2000.
‘What is our benefit?’

Apart from struggling with the difficulties of finding room to act as the ideal development worker within the framework of projects and an increasingly bureaucratised organisation, the staff are also challenged by their clients. This is partly caused by an inherent problem in the relationship between supply and demand in social welfare projects that emphasise local needs and people’s participation; good performance does not lead to satisfaction but rather to more demands, making the supply side always lag behind demand (Lipsky 1980). Any project must set up limits as to what needs and choices it can respond to. The NGO staff interacting directly with the grassroots are faced with complex realities of people and communities that are likely to have more needs, and other priorities, than the ones they, as project implementers, have a mandate to respond to. In the study it was clear that this caused frustration followed by feelings of inadequacy among staff, as well as anger directed towards clients. Grassroots workers were often met by comments from villagers such as ‘What is our benefit?’ when first introducing them to project ideas. Their task was then to convince villagers of the benefit of the project and having done so, they were often faced by villagers’ own ideas about how the project money should be spent instead. The staff complained that villagers do not understand what the NGOs are trying to achieve, that they are ungrateful. While the resisting villager was sometimes taken as a challenge and an essential part of the job, at other times the attitude of villagers was seen as an obstacle to the work of implementing projects, and villagers were referred to as lazy and incompetent. The staff clearly had problems with finding a balance between being facilitators and inspiring people, and giving orders, as the quote below illustrates:

We have to inspire them (the villagers)... still it is compulsory for you to set up a hygienic latrine and you have to use it, we tell them. Sometimes the villagers sit in a tea stall and I see them and I call ‘Hey, do you have a latrine? By tomorrow you have to go and buy one otherwise you will not be allowed to live in this village,’ I say. This kind of strict order we make... in this kind of meetings the Village Development Committee (set up by the project) plays the main role because I won’t be able to solve this problem on my own... and in this village the villagers are always cooperating with me. All of a sudden when I want to visit the village I say to the president that I want to visit today and instantly he gathers the members.\(^13\)

While the intention to do good is not being questioned, there seem to be clear flaws in the work approach in relation to the ideal development

\(^{13}\) Field notes, discussion with local NGO staff, 2001.
worker here; flexibility, patience and understanding is traded for a bossy (and instrumental) attitude, with little room for negotiation. There was often a feeling of resentment towards villagers over their never-ending needs and requests, over a lack of reciprocity in mutual respect between NGO staff and villagers, with NGO staff feeling villagers had little understanding for their position and identity as grassroots workers. Although still convinced of the importance of their work, the staff became anxious about their role as grassroots workers.

Reflections on the moral discord

The analysis so far has taken us through two aspects related to the discrepancy between the ideal and the real in the context of NGO practice. Firstly, it is argued that a basic assumption of altruism, a concept capturing the essence of NGO rhetoric and the image of the ideal NGO worker, must be reviewed. It is a complex and fragile basis for work motivation. It is also argued that any individual entering an organisation must be understood as being socially embedded, and that an understanding of staff motivation and performance must take this into account; the individual carries identities other than that provided within the organisation, and the individual enters the organisation with experiences, motivation and goals that lie outside those promoted by the organisation. Secondly, Lipsky’s description of alienation as deeply inscribed in the nature of social work captures the ways altruism is being challenged during the work process. Alienation is triggered by inherent goal ambiguities and competing and contradictory demands on the street-level worker. A third and final analytical point refers to a moral discord experienced on a personal level by the staff, to which I now turn.

In her interesting study of volunteer organisations in the United States, Allahyari (1996, 2000) highlights what an emotional process it is for the individual to experience personal shortcomings in relation to an ideal image of a volunteer worker. Allahyari does not so much focus on the volunteer work per se and its results (e.g. on the well-being of recipients) as on what it means in terms of the personal experience and learning of volunteer workers. She describes how volunteer workers ‘through action and reflection’ attempt to create themselves as ‘more virtuous, and often more spiritual person(s)’ (1996: 3). Allahyari calls this process ‘moral selving’, during which the workers ‘learn and refine moral rhetoric’ (Allahyari 1996: 3) and where they see the work as a means towards personal development and fulfilment. The volunteer work is part of a conscious
process of internal reflection, leading to personal satisfaction based on spirituality and acts of ‘doing good’. The process of moral selving is an attempt to form a new identity, where references are made to a previous identity (less morally and spiritually enlightened) and to outside actors, such as the state, colleagues and clients, with a continuous comparison between the less spiritual and worthy and those who have gained an enlightened position, according to the code of volunteer workers.

The process of moral selving is characterised by emotional and moral struggles, and volunteer workers have to make a distinctive effort in their striving to reach an identity that matches their idealised image. Allahyari illustrates how the volunteer work makes the staff confront their own prejudices and limitations that clash with, in this case, the more liberal moral ethos of the organisation. The workers were faced by ‘discordance between individual and organisational definition of the worthy’ (Allahyari 1996: 43). They reflect on their own feelings and abilities in relation to this, and observe how other volunteer workers deal with the job. Allahyari recounts how Lori feels admiration for the tolerance shown by other staff towards some difficult clients, and how she ‘worked to shape her moral self in accordance with this practice, even when her political assessment of some of the guests contradicted such an acceptance’ (1996: 44). Through picturing the ideal volunteer worker, she questioned her own capabilities, feelings, prejudices. The encounter with reality can be very emotional. Face-to-face interaction with clients can suddenly reveal personal shortcomings including judgemental attitudes and a lack of skills in interaction. While Lori (above) takes on this challenge as part of the process of moral selving, Allahyari also describes how, being faced with such a challenge, others distance themselves from situations that cause moral anxiety and discomfort.

The outcome of moral discord consequent to encounters with reality is unpredictable. While it depends to some extent on the personality of the staff involved, it also depends on ‘how the situationally available rhetorics of charitable action allow the volunteer to experience and talk about volunteer work as a moral practice’ (Allahyari 2000: 107). The volunteer organisations in Allahyari’s study provide an ideology of moral principles, and also encourages emotional reflection; the emotions were ‘an outcome of site-specific moral rhetorics’ (2000: 7), and the volunteers are described by Allahyari as ‘emotionally laden’ (2000: 8). This points at an important and complex relationship between the inherent moral dilemmas of social work, organisational rhetoric and setting, and the ways individuals cope with or resolve the discomfort caused by moral dissonance. It redirects us to the character and setting of the rhetoric of the Bangladeshi NGOs,
where the organisations have taken on an antagonistic position based on a rhetoric which is unforgiving and judgemental towards ‘the other’, i.e. government officials, and NGOs or other development actors that do not appear to be sincere in their work. This rhetorical environment does not recognise moral dilemmas, with the effect that it provides little room for staff to reflect upon ambiguous feelings and moral discord encountered during their practice as development workers. While the rhetoric implicitly encourages a process of moral selving, it holds little understanding for personal moral dissonance and the anxiety and discomfort this may cause. This study suggests that this results in evasive or even defensive behaviour when critical questions are asked by outsiders, and in authoritarian behaviour towards clients, i.e. villagers. As suggested in Allahyari’s study, authoritarian manners can be the consequence of failure to cope with the moral dissonance that the encounter with reality entails. Developing and displaying an ethos of authority is a way of fending off critical encounters.

Widening the analytical framework

The analysis presented here invites us to take a closer look at underlying assumptions regarding altruism. Our insights into NGO practice can be enriched by academic discussions of altruism and self-interest, since the insights question the normative framework usually associated with the self-presentation and self-analyses of NGOs, and those of their patrons in the aid community. Putting the concept of altruism in an organisational context contributes further to our analysis, since it provides us with a framework for understanding the dynamic relationship between staff motivation, organisational structure, management, goals, incentives and controls. Allahyari’s study refers to a context and a group of workers that are different from the NGO development workers. The volunteer workers in her study have enrolled themselves with the ambition of contributing to the common good, but also with the explicit purpose of becoming better persons. The NGO staff, however, are dependent on the income their development work brings. Hence, we can assume that the motivations involved are somewhat different for these two groups. Despite slightly different frameworks, Allahyari’s analysis presents some important points. She illustrates the close relationship between altruism and self-interest; the striving for self-betterment is linked to actions of doing good (altruism), i.e. improving the lives of others, but volunteer workers are also seeking ‘personal satisfaction’ from doing moral work (i.e. self-interest). Self-enlightenment is seen as part of the driving force behind altruism, which
nicely illustrates the need for a nuanced understanding of both altruism and self-interest as called for by Brett, Olson and Graham in the works cited earlier. Allahyari’s analysis deepens our understanding of altruism and encourages us to question the assumption that authoritarian behaviour is contradictory to altruism. As an unintended consequence, authoritarian attitudes may be part and parcel of the construction of an altruistic self, which builds on an image of being not just different from ‘the other’ but also somewhat above others less spiritually enlightened. Furthermore, Allahyari raises questions about how individuals resolve the moral discord experienced, and she points to the importance of the framing of the rhetoric used, in understanding how individuals reflect upon and use the feelings of confusion and disillusion. Her study also emphasises relationships and processes related to doing volunteer work, which highlight the fragile nature of altruism (as also pointed out by Brett and Lipsky). Similar to doing development work, volunteer work involves building up relations within the organisation as well as with clients of different types. These relationships usually involve expectations of some sort of reciprocity – if not in terms of remuneration then in prestige, gratitude, or recognition. When this reciprocity is not met, as in ungrateful villagers failing to recognise the work of NGOs, or in appropriate salary as a token that staff is appreciated, or reprimands for not achieving quantitative organisational goals, the altruistic spirit is threatened.

The street-level bureaucrats of Lipsky’s analysis are civil servants in western liberal-democratic states, which provides them with a context that we assume is different from that of the Bangladeshi development NGOs; for example, the funding, management and size of organisations is different. However, the setting ecology of these NGO development workers and Lipsky’s street-level workers has some remarkable similarities. The difficulties related to goal ambiguities identified by Lipsky are shared by both groups, which are involved in delivery of public services aimed at large groups of people and characterised by limitation of resources. Furthermore, Lipsky describes how the general public and government organisations behind the street-level bureaucrats both assume and rely on the altruism of workers; these characteristics of the street-level staff are essential in order for services to be provided in a fair and just way. Both groups of staff also hold a rather ambiguous position in relation to accountability and transparency in their work. On the one hand, they are constantly scrutinised both by the general public and by clients. On the other, they also hold a position that gives them some autonomy, since their work both requires and entails their having a degree of discretion relative to organisational supervision. While they are vulnerable to criti-
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cism from the public (who can see them in action), they also have power over what information they want to share concerning their practices.

The similarities between the street-level worker and the NGO staff make Lipsky’s insightful and rich analysis very useful in trying to understand underlying reasons for and consequences of discrepancies between NGO rhetoric and practice. Although Lipsky’s account opens up ways to alter organisational structures in order to limit alienation from altruism, he maintains that a managerial approach neglects the actual nature of the problem, i.e. the inherent dilemmas of altruism. This is an important point that encourages further understanding of the realities faced by development workers.

As mentioned earlier, the basis for motivation appears to be different for the volunteer workers depicted in Allahyari’s work and the NGO development workers presented here. With different motivations for their respective engagement in social issues, we can also assume that although the experiences of the dilemmas of altruism may be shared by the volunteer workers and the NGO staff, the two groups interpret and reflect on these experiences in different ways. For Allahyari’s volunteer workers, probing into moral dilemmas is in a sense at least part of what they are after. The job is educational, and a moral discord is expected since it will contribute to the moral selving that volunteer work involves. The NGO development workers, however, have a different outlook on what they are trying to achieve. They look for results in terms of reduced poverty, and they also have an interest in contributing to the success of their NGO, since their own livelihood relies on organisational survival. While the NGO staff recognise that there are serious difficulties involved in trying to follow their altruistic mission, these difficulties are identified as organisational, and as due to a lack of understanding between project funders (ultimately foreign donors) and grassroots staff on what is required for the staff to be able to work according to the norms set by funders. They do not, however, appear to reflect on a personal moral discord. As for the ‘ideal type’ of street-level worker, the staff have ‘a need to think of themselves in a reasonably favourable light’ (Lipsky 1980: 81). They recognise that there are constraints on what they can do, but maintain that they are doing an honest job under existing circumstances. The NGO staff, like the street-level bureaucrats, rely on their job both for professional identity and as a main source of income, and hence cope with the moral dilemmas they are facing without questioning the very essence of their job and their professional identity.
Concluding remarks

Over the past thirty years the NGOs in Bangladesh have become significant service providers and recognised as important partners in development. There is little doubt that NGOs have contributed to some important achievements in relation to poverty alleviation in the country. But there are also serious concerns over how these organisations operate, and to what extent they have fulfilled expectations and claims (Fruttero and Gauri 2005; Stiles 2002). This paper has argued that the determinants of the performance of NGOs do not lie in lack of commitment to an altruistic ideal, but rather in a complex set of processes set in motion during their work and in dilemmas inherent to development work per se.

The NGOs present a rhetoric based on an altruistic ideal that has been developed over time and informed by outside expectations regarding who and what they should be, combined with a more indigenous analysis of how governments and power relations have consistently failed the country’s poor. The organisations are themselves actively forming both an ideal image and a real context in which the NGO worker operates. Their rhetoric builds to a great extent on an antagonistic position towards the state sector and government officials and, implicitly, towards profit-making organisations, and while this has helped NGOs in gaining recognition by international donors, and thereby access to considerable support, the oppositional rhetoric is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain. The circumstances under which many Bangladeshi NGOs operate today means that they have become state-like in their organisational structures and mandate (Gauri and Galef 2005). Disregarding organisational size, the pressure to perform according to certain formula of accountability has made them bureaucratic, leaving less room for flexibility and innovativeness, and less room for staff to practice according to an altruistic ideal and participatory ideology.

The position of the NGO staff is characterised by a precarious interplay in which staff negotiate among villagers, project administrators, ambiguous and contradictory goals, and priorities related to their own personal lives. There is an array of formal and informal guidelines, and several sources of incentives and demands, which makes it easy to see how a degree of confusion constantly infuses their work. There are structural arrangements surrounding the work of the grassroots staff that cause them to compromise their ambitions to be professional altruists. But the problems related to ambiguous practices of development workers cannot be fully resolved through a change in structure and work management. The problems are an illustration of the paradoxical relationship between
planned and unintended consequences of development work and development intervention. While these dilemmas are without any real solution, they can be the basis for reflection and learning that enhances capacities of individual staff as well as development organisations. However, without an environment, constituted by local as well as international actors and institutions, that allows for and encourages such a reflection, a serious engagement in our understanding of the relationship between development policy and development in practice, as called for in recent development literature (Lewis and Mosse 2006; Mosse 2005; Quarles van Ufford and Giri 2003; Wallace 2006), cannot be achieved. As it is now, the environment that is both created by and presented to NGOs in Bangladesh does not provide a platform for this to take place.
References


‘Science’ and ‘science capacity building’ are gaining greater importance as areas for intervention by international development cooperation agencies in their efforts to reach development and poverty elimination goals, as well as those of environmental conservation. And, while actors in international development hope that strengthened national science capacity will contribute to meeting their goals, experts worry that science in developing countries is in a state of crisis (Gaillard et al. 2005; Ramphele 2004; Task Force for Higher Education and Society 2000). Fragile science infrastructures, low national investment in science education and research, infrequent recruitment of new scientists to research institutions, poor salaries, and losses in scientific capacity due to the Brain Drain are just a few factors that pose challenges for the sustainability of the science and technology communities in many developing countries.

The mission of the International Foundation for Science (IFS) rests on the belief that national scientific research capacity is a prerequisite for countries to achieve their development goals (Ståhl 2004; Ståhl and Hall 2003). In this context, the role of IFS is to support high-quality science and scientists in developing countries. The IFS granting programme is highly regarded for its documented successes. Both internal impact assessments (Russell et al. 2007; Zink and Gaillard 2006; Gaillard and Zink 2003; Gaillard et al. 2002; Gaillard et al. 2001; Gaillard and Furó Tullberg 2001) and external evaluations (Thulstrup et al. 2001) confirm that IFS has had a significant impact on science in developing countries, especially given the modest resources that it has at hand.

The purpose of this paper, however, is neither to evaluate the merits of the IFS programme nor to posit causal links between science capacity and development. Rather, this paper sets out to analyse the relationships of
power that connect a scientific research capacity-building programme and social scientists in developing countries. In particular, I ask if and how an international science capacity-building organisation might influence the production of social science knowledge.

The arguments and conclusions found in this paper result from an analysis of IFS documentation as well as reflections on my own experiences as a member of the IFS staff. Since the year 2000 I have been employed by IFS in several different capacities, one being the original coordinator and primary architect of the programme of support for social science research. In my various roles, I have been able to participate in and contribute to the development of the IFS programme in general, and have been responsible for many aspects of the social sciences granting programme that are analysed in these pages.¹

Empowering connections

Scientific capacity building is a normative project that seeks to enrol developing country researchers into a mode of knowledge production that can be recognised and understood internationally. It turns researchers into internationally recognisable scientists who can participate in and contribute to what one might collectively call the international field of science (Bourdieu 2004). As individuals, developing country scientists are researchers who can together with others produce scientific facts that are globally understandable, stable and mobile (Latour 2005; Lowe 2004).

In order to build science capacity in developing countries, researchers must voluntarily subscribe to ways of thinking and communicating that are recognised as scientific by other scientists. To subject oneself to scientific capacity building is to enter into the kind of voluntary and coercive relationships that have been described in other situations by Rose (1996), Cruikshank (1999), and Triantafillou and Nielsen (2001). The rewards

¹ I am grateful for both the supportive and critical comments by Sten Hagberg, Charlotta Widmark, participants in the Anthropology and Practice Conference, and many of my colleagues at IFS, including Michael Ståhl, Maria Dutarte, Ingrid Leemans, Richard Hall, and Daniel Hedlund. I would especially like to thank the Scientific Advisory Committee for the Social Sciences at IFS for their dedicated, tireless and voluntary work for IFS, and for the endless learning opportunities that participation in their meetings has afforded to me. I am grateful to Sten Hagberg and Henrik Secher Marcussen for their encouragement and sharing of ideas. I thank the many social scientists who have sent and continue to send their research proposals to IFS and entrusted me to read them. The views and opinions, and not least the mistakes, expressed in this document are my own, and are not necessarily shared by IFS. This paper was prepared in late 2006 for the Anthropology in Practice Conference at Uppsala University, and for me it was a welcome opportunity to reflect critically on the work of IFS.
that entice researchers to strengthen their scientific capacity through the successful mastering of modern technologies (both mental and mechanical) of scientific knowledge production are many. They include an expansion of possibilities for building scientific, economic and personal networks, as well as accumulation of symbolic and economic capital. In short, successful capacity building empowers new connections.

This explanation of the powers at work in science capacity building is not meant to be cynical. As easily as coercive relationships can be destructive, a coercive relationship can also be one that is productive and does ‘good’ (Cruikshank 1999). Similarly, the fact that power is at work in science capacity building, and that persons are motivated by more than only idealist goals to create knowledge for the betterment of humanity, disparages neither the ability of scientific knowledge to convincingly explain the world nor the moral standing of organisations and persons that promote science as a solution to real world problems.

This paper does not seek to judge the moral correctness of scientific capacity building, and from my perspective such a purpose would not make sense. Rather, this paper seeks to understand what kinds of relationships underpin the building of scientific capacity building and the subsequent production of scientific knowledge. In this instance, this is accomplished by using a case study that is also a personal reflection on my involvement with an organisation promoting scientific research capacity in developing countries.

In the following pages I will seek to understand the role of IFS as a thread in the actor-networks of social science knowledge producers in developing countries. The idea of an actor-network is borrowed from Bruno Latour (2005, 1987). If an IFS grantee is a central node in an actor-network that produces scientific knowledge, then the threads of connection to other agents that influence her production are innumerable and of widely varying importance. While individual scientists are key figures in these actor-networks, they do not produce knowledge on their own. Their production is to varying degrees a result of relationships with other scientists through membership in research teams, in institutions, and in academic departments. It is also influenced by the work of students, funding agencies, and bureaucrats, not to mention the availability of scientific equipment, documents that outline national research priorities, and even the objects of research themselves.

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2 Hereinafter I refer to social science knowledge producers simply as knowledge producers, and social science knowledge production as knowledge production.
Given the possibility for expansive actor-networks, the researcher’s connection to IFS may be of more or less importance in shaping the form of her knowledge production. IFS staff themselves recognise this, and talk about capacity strengthening rather than capacity building. This is a way of marking that IFS itself is only one agent in a world full of agents. Nevertheless, one can investigate this connection for how IFS might weigh in as a political actor in the production of knowledge, and from this we may glean an idea of how other threads in the network produce influence.

If we are to take Latour seriously, then we cannot talk about IFS as only one strand in the actor-network. In fact, the threads are multiple. The agencies exerted by IFS on a researcher include those of the IFS Board of Trustees, IFS donor organisations, Secretariat staff, and members of the Scientific Advisory Committee who decide the fate of a research proposal. Whether or not one agrees with Latour (2005) regarding the agency of objects (for alternatives to Latour see Traweek 1988; or Bourdieu 2004), we must also recognise that things such as the application form, IFS documents, and the grant money itself play a role in determining the actions of the scientist.

Having established some of the threads that influence scientific knowledge production, it is worthwhile to consider for a moment how these threads exert influence on the production of knowledge. In the case of IFS, for example, how might the capacity-building organisation exert power over the production of knowledge? Can this power be said to be exerted through a relationship that is voluntarily entered into by the developing country researcher, and at the same time has coercive elements that work on the subjectivity of the researcher? These kinds of power relationships have been written extensively about recently (Rose 1996; Cruikshank 1999; Triantafillou and Nielsen 2001; Wahlberg 2007), but not in terms of scientific capacity building. Nevertheless, I believe it is an apt description of the workings of power in this situation, and will in the following pages try to convince the reader of the same.

The building of scientific capacity is a project to convince researchers to see the world and to practice knowledge production in a way that can be recognised, understood, and used in the international arenas of science. Science capacity is the ability of researchers to govern their own production of knowledge, so that it is produced in a form that can be used and accepted by scientists internationally. In the contemporary lingo, capacity building inculcates a scientific subjectivity in the researcher. The power wielded by an organisation such as IFS is what Foucault called bio-power and Cruikshank describes as
power that promotes rather than represses subjectivity, power that produces and relies upon active subjects rather than absolute subjugation. Instead of excluding participation or repressing subjectivity, bio-power operates to invest the citizen with a set of goals and self understandings, and gives the citizen subject an investment in participating voluntarily in programs, projects, and institutions set up to ‘help’ them. (Cruikshank 1999: 41)

In this space I have sketched a theoretical framework in which persons become capable of producing knowledge that is recognisable as scientific by accepting a scientific subjectivity that governs their actions and whereby knowledge is produced by actor-networks with the scientist(s) at the centre. Furthermore, the impulse to adopt and cultivate a scientific subjectivity is found in the constellation of relationships in the actor-network. It is with this theoretical framework as a foundation that I organise my reflections on the subjectivity-building work of IFS.

In the following sections, I also pay close attention to the idea of development that is communicated by IFS to researchers participating in ‘scientific research capacity strengthening’. Given that the IFS mission is framed within the context of development, and IFS is funded by development cooperation agencies to contribute to the achievement of development goals, it would be strange if ideas about development were not interwoven with ideas about science. Having said this, I must be careful to point out that I do not claim that IFS funds development projects.

I will describe how various actors within IFS conceive of development and science (both together and separately), and the implications this has for how social scientists formulate their research projects. Instead of analysing the importance of science for development, or development for science, I examine the power of ideas about science and development to influence the subjectivities of researchers. In this paper, one can think of development as a marker for the transfer of ideas from IFS to the researcher.

Beginnings to ends: A short history of IFS

In order to account for the agencies exerted by IFS on knowledge production, we must start with the organisation’s history. The International Foundation for Science (IFS) was first conceptualised during the Pug-
wash conferences held during the mid and late 1960s.\(^3\) A number of leading scientists, among them physicists Robert Marshak and Abdus Salam (who would later become the 1979 Nobel Laureate in Physics), oceanographer Roger Revelle, and astrophysicist Pierre Auger, were concerned by the perceived threat that the Brain Drain posed to developing countries. In the relatively new science communities in Africa, Asia and Latin America, the best young scientists were leaving their home countries to take up well-paid positions in much better equipped research institutions in Europe and North America.

It was in this context that the idea for IFS was discussed. It was felt that a mechanism was needed that would provide individualised support to young researchers in developing countries to help them to get established as scientists in their home country, while at the same time linking them to the international science community. While science-funding organisations such as Sida-SAREC, IDRC and others recognised that such a mechanism could be important, they felt it would be too difficult and costly for organisations that specialise in funding large programmes to efficiently run a small-grants programme for individuals.

When this idea was later discussed at a meeting of the UN Advisory Committee on Science and Technology, the project gained momentum and Sven Brohult, then President of the Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences, became its leading promoter. A meeting was convened in 1970 that brought together fifty scientists from twenty countries to discuss the formal structure that a new organisation to support individual young scientists should have. In 1972, IFS was established as a non-governmental organisation with a secretariat in Stockholm, Sweden.

Despite the breadth of the new organisation’s name, the scope of its scientific programme was narrow. Two factors were particularly important for identifying the scope of the activities of the new organisation: a desire to use science to support rural development, and the availability of modest resources. Firstly, the scientists should be working in fields that were relevant to development problems and priorities. Specifically, scientists’ results should lead to increased food production and improvements in the quality of rural life. Secondly, funding for the fledgling organisation was modest and the research grants it would award would be small. Hence, it was important that the scientific scope of the programme should include fields of science where small grants (at that time a maximum of USD 10,000, but usually much less) would be sufficient for car-

\(^3\) See www.pugwash.org for more information about this Nobel Peace Prize-winning (1995) series of conferences that brings together leading scientists who are concerned to reduce risks of armed conflict.
rying out research projects that could make a meaningful contribution of
new knowledge to a scientific field.

Following upon these factors, six research areas were selected for inclu-
sion in the IFS research grants programme. These were aquaculture, ani-
mal production, vegetable production, mycorrhiza and afforestation, food
fermentation, and natural substances. Thus, already at its origins, IFS
defined its scientific programme based upon explicit assumptions about
the relationship between scientific research and development.

During the ensuing thirty-five years IFS has gone through a number of
changes, but the overall mission and the conceptualisation of the granting
programme for young scientists has remained largely the same. As fund-
ing has grown, together with the accumulating number of grants to be
administered, the Secretariat in Stockholm has also grown in size from a
handful of persons to around twenty. The focus of the granting pro-
gramme has remained on individuals, though in recent years there have
been a few forays to support groups of researchers working collabora-
tively.

Importantly, the fields of eligible research have expanded over the years
to include any scientific research that addresses issues relevant for the
sustainable management, use, and/or conservation of biological and water
resources. Nevertheless, within these parameters projects are eligible only
if they are deemed to be relevant for reaching conservation and develop-
ment goals. In fact, I would suggest that ‘relevancy’ is the criterion that
continues to tie the IFS research agenda closely to ideas of development.
Basic physics and chemistry, for example, are generally not considered to
be sufficiently related to the human use or management of biological and
water resources to merit support.

IFS as an organisation brings together diverse groups of individuals
and institutions from both science and development. Scientists gave birth
to IFS and have actively guided it through its history. Meanwhile, devel-
opment aid agencies have been the most important funders of the IFS.
This dynamic makes the work of IFS interesting and exciting, both in
terms of the research it supports, and the kinds of actor-networks and
subjectivities it encourages.
The IFS Granting Programme

Each year IFS receives more than 1,000 research grant applications from young researchers in developing countries around the world. In 2006, the number of applications was closer to 1,500. Historically, IFS has awarded approximately one-third of its grants to researchers in Asia, one-third to researchers in Africa, and one-third to researchers in Latin America. During recent years, closer to 40 per cent of grants have been awarded to Africa with slight decreases in the numbers awarded to Asia and Latin America. The target group for grants is under forty years of age and has at least a master’s degree or the equivalent.

Applications for support are reviewed in three stages, first by IFS Secretariat staff, then by independent researchers (IFS Advisers), and finally by a Scientific Advisory Committee. The latter consists of a small group of independent scientists from a range of institutions who meet to discuss the merits and demerits of each application. Normally, a research grant application will have been read and commented on by six to ten senior researchers with experience in the applicant’s field. Reviewers are asked to make their recommendations based upon the scientific quality of the proposal, its relevance, and the background of the applicant. Applicants with projects that are recommended for support by the committees are generally funded by IFS, except when there is a shortfall in funding.

Scientific Programme Coordinators at IFS are directly responsible for decisions regarding the grant applications at the first stage (i.e. pre-screening). They are not responsible for making decisions regarding the applications at the second and third stage. However, they do have considerable influence to the extent that they choose the reviewers who will review each individual application.

As of late 2007, the IFS research grant had a maximum value of USD 12,000 and could be used to buy equipment and arrange fieldwork for a project lasting between one and three years. The grant cannot be used to cover the costs of grantee salaries, and as a result all grantees must have a

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4 The review instructions to external Advisers (i.e. reviewers not sitting on a Scientific Advisory Committee) were changed in early 2007 to exclude relevance and to focus on scientific quality. However, it is still expected that Scientific Advisory Committees will consider the issue of relevance. As I understood the discussions at the meeting where this discussion took place (a meeting of Secretariat staff and members of various Scientific Advisory Committees), the general consensus is that this change is not meant to result in discounting the importance of relevance, but rather to facilitate the evaluation of relevance and quality separately.

5 This is my title at IFS. However, as of July 2007 I am no longer responsible for the social sciences research grants programme. I am currently on leave of absence while enrolled in the PhD programme at the Department of Anthropology and Ethnology at Uppsala University.
livelihood from an institution that supports them to carry out research. Usually this is a national research institution or university, but also increasingly it is from NGOs. In addition to the grant, IFS can provide travel support to attend conferences and workshops, as well as scientific mentorship and support in the purchase of scientific equipment. Each year between 200 and 250 research grants are awarded.

**IFS and the social sciences**

Already in the early 1990s there was discussion about adding social scientists to the group of researchers eligible for IFS grants, and an external evaluation in 1993 urged the Secretariat to consider adding social sciences to the programme. However, when I joined IFS in 2000 this discussion was dead. It was not until 2001 that a new IFS Director revived the discussion, and the suggestion gained momentum within the IFS Secretariat and was brought to the IFS Board of Trustees.

Initially there was some hesitancy within the Board of Trustees about expanding the programme to include social sciences. The reasons for this seemed to vary from person to person, but two general factors, certainly, were that no social scientist sat on the Board, and that there was a concern that opening the programme to the social sciences would result in an overwhelming flood of grant applications that the limited funds available would not be able to absorb. While one or two individuals might have questioned the fundamental value of the social sciences, the general disposition of the Board towards the social sciences was rather positive.

Having sat in on many of the meetings where the issue was debated, I understood that the primary arguments for including the social sciences were twofold. On the one hand, by expanding the programme it might be possible to convince donor agencies to contribute additional funds to IFS, and this would have a positive effect on the entire programme. On the other hand, Board members foresaw that funding social science research would contribute towards the uptake of new technologies for development. It was felt that social scientists were important brokers between the natural scientists whose research led to new technologies, and the populations and markets for those technologies. It was common at the time to hear both Secretariat staff and Board of Trustees members lament that much useful work in the natural sciences remained on the shelves of laboratories and libraries and never saw large-scale use by people in developing countries. The feeling was that perhaps by supporting social science
research, and communication between social scientists and natural scientists, some of these problems could be ameliorated.

The strategy document for what was then called the IFS Social Sciences Initiative was adopted by the Board of Trustees in October 2002. This document, of which I was the primary author among many contributors, was both a strategy for implementing a new granting programme and an argument intended to persuade the Board and IFS Donors to support inclusion of the social sciences. The document incorporated reasons in favour of supporting the social sciences that had already been voiced among Board members and at the Secretariat. These include that the overall goal in supporting social science projects is to strengthen ‘capacity for sustainable development in developing countries’ (IFS 2002). Furthermore, the strategy document continues, ‘IFS recognizes that multidisciplinary research and communication is a key to the production of knowledge leading to creative solutions to problems of sustainable development.’ Thus, the formal reasons for including the social sciences in the overall IFS programme were very close to the same reasons used in 1972 to justify the choice of the first eligible research fields, namely the contribution that science could make to development.

The Board of Trustees was initially undecided on the need for the Secretariat to establish a new Scientific Advisory Committee to review research grant applications in social science fields. While some of this uncertainty was probably due to the cost of such a committee, another aspect was the degree to which the social sciences at IFS should be a freestanding research area versus one that was integrated into and in some sense subordinate to the already existing natural science research areas. The existence of a social science committee would result in greater influence by social scientists on the activities and policies of IFS.

After some discussion and debate, a social sciences committee was constituted in 2003 that included anthropologists, geographers, rural sociologists, and economists. Since this time, the social sciences at IFS have enjoyed strong support from Secretariat staff, IFS Donors, and not least the Board of Trustees, and have in fact been seen as a fountain of new ideas and opportunities for the further development of the IFS programme in general.

The establishment of a Scientific Advisory Committee for the social sciences at IFS is of importance for understanding the nature of the social science research that IFS supports. The existence of a committee has allowed the social sciences at IFS to develop beyond the role of broker for the natural sciences. In my experience as observer and organiser of the group, the committee favours projects according to the degree that they
are innovative and go beyond inventorying knowledge, brokering change, or designing management plans. The committee also favours projects by social scientists, as opposed to projects by researchers with training in the natural sciences that would employ social science methods (though these projects also find support when they are deemed to be of high quality).

This section, as well as the previous two sections, has reviewed the history and structure of IFS. This retrospective lifts actors and events to light that directly influence the production of knowledge in developing countries. The members of the IFS Board of Trustees as well as the members of the IFS Scientific Advisory Committee are tied to the production of new social science knowledge through their decisions to provide funding to a particular kind of knowledge production, and through the selection of specific individuals to carry out the work. This is the beginning of our map of actor-networks in the capacity-building project.

In the following sections I will further narrow the focus to capture some specific relationships and technologies in the actor-network that contribute to the creation of scientific subjectivities. These include research grant application forms, Scientific Advisory Committee decisions, and IFS promotional documents. In our analysis we will find that IFS is not a container for a homogenous bundle of actor-network threads, rather we will see that there is some diversity of both means and ends within the bundle.

Mixing signals: The application form

All applications to IFS, regardless of discipline, are made on a common thirteen-page application form that is preceded by six pages of written guidelines and instructions. This form requires researchers to elaborate a specific context of partners in science and development, available and requested equipment, literature citations (case studies and theory), methodological techniques, and institutions that supports their ambition to test a particular hypothesis or answer a research question. The various sections of the form require the applicant to document the scientific, institutional, and infrastructural support for the project. These supports both argue for the possibility of doing the proposed work and chart the influences that enable the researcher to ask her particular research question. In effect, a well-formulated application form maps an actor-network consisting of people, institutions, machines, and documents that promises to produce new scientific knowledge.
In addition to being a physical representation of an actor-network, the application form demands that a researcher organise her ideas and arguments in a particular way. The form itself is a technology that promotes a scientific subjectivity (for a discussion of technologies of governance, see Cruikshank 1999). The more convincingly the researcher can demonstrate her own scientific subjectivity, the more likely it is that a project will be supported. In the IFS application form this is done by constructing scientific hypotheses, a review of scientific literature that supports a research question, a list of scientific partners relevant to the proposed work, a budget and equipment list that links directly to a scientific research methodology, and a plan for analysing data that lends itself to publication of the research results in a scientific forum.

Given that the IFS programme in developing countries is closely associated with development goals, it is not surprising to find this reflected in the application form, where ideas of science are mixed with those of development. The application form is an instrument that encourages researchers to adopt a stance towards their own knowledge production that assimilates particular notions regarding a relationship between the project of science and the project of development.

Evidence for this claim is found in the application form itself as well as in its guidelines for applicants. It encourages researchers to frame their work in terms of ‘sustainability’, ‘development’, and ‘environment’. Throughout the application guidelines and form (available at www.ifl.se) a message is repeatedly conveyed to the researchers that they must draw some explicit links between the research question and hypotheses that they pose, and the context of development, environment and sustainability. The first sentence of the guidelines demands that proposed research ‘be relevant to the renewable utilization of the biological resource base’. In the section on eligibility it is stated that the project ‘must be relevant to the needs of the country or region’. In the description of the granting process, applicants are reminded that reviewers will consider the ‘relevance of the expected results’ of the project. The description of the IFS research areas emphasises that regardless of discipline, projects must be ‘important in the conservation, production and renewable utilization of the biological resource base’. In addition, ‘applicants should explain the relevance of their proposed research in relation to environmental and socio-economic conditions in the country/region.’ Each of these instructions is found on the first page of the guidelines for completing the application form. Later, in the specific guidelines for particular sections of the application form, there are three sections (9.1, 9.7, and 9.11) where the applicant is specifically requested to discuss the proposed research in terms of local stake-
holders, national economic and environmental priorities, local and national socio-economic and environmental conditions.

While the total space allocated in the application form to specifically raise issues of relevance, renewable utilisation, socio-economic conditions and priorities, etc. is limited, the preponderance of references in the guidelines to these issues sends a clear message to applicants that they must frame their work in terms of ‘sustainability’, ‘development’, and ‘environment’. The interweaving of statements about development and environment with guidelines for eligibility, scientific quality, and evaluation strongly encourages applicants to integrate these concepts into their strategy for carrying out research and producing new scientific knowledge.

My understanding is that the intention of IFS in using this type of discourse is to encourage research projects that can generate new knowledge having a positive impact for human well-being in poor countries. And, in fact, there is substantial evidence that IFS grantees have had significant success in this respect (Schiøler 2002). Nevertheless, among social scientists, another result appears to be that IFS encourages project proposals that reiterate conventional wisdom about relationships between environment, development and science. Rather than reflecting upon and advancing beyond these conventional wisdoms, researchers often request funding to apply them to pre-defined development problems.

Take, for example, the project proposal submitted to IFS entitled ‘Decisions in sustainable environment of pastoralists in Western [X]’. This proposal by an agricultural economist in an African country identifies a problem that is conceived in linear evolutionary terms. Increased population pressure and climate variability have led pastoralists to give up nomadic pastoralism in favour of sedentary agricultural production. However, this change in livelihoods is leading to environmental degradation, and ultimately undermining food security. The applicant posits that the solution to the problem is the adoption of an agro-pastoral livelihood. As a result, the objective of the research is to analyse the economic factors influencing the pastoralists to choose a sedentary agricultural livelihood, and to propose a package of policies and incentives to lead them to the alternative livelihood system that will lead to ‘more productive, sustainable and poverty-reducing land management’. This project proposed to gather information as a means to achieving a pre-determined development

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6 The research proposals discussed in the paper are real proposals submitted to IFS. To protect the anonymity of the authors of these proposals, they are not named and geographical and other details that might reveal the author are removed.
goal. It is unlikely to achieve a new understanding of development or environmental degradation in this context.

Another example is a project entitled ‘Institutional arrangements for improving the contribution of community-based forest management to the livelihood security of the poor in [Y]’. Here, a researcher with a degree in development studies would like to carry out a project to ‘identify the key institutional arrangements that will significantly influence the contribution community-based forest management has to improving the livelihood security of the poor’. In this proposal the direct and progressive links between poor people, effective community-based forest management, and poverty alleviation are assumed. The research is intended as an instrument to tweak the institutional arrangements of forestry management, resulting in the development outcome that poverty is eradicated (or at least alleviated). From the perspective of a social scientist, the problem with this kind of research is that terms such as poverty, community and livelihood security are not deconstructed to discover the relationships of power that they conceal. A proposal that did more than reaffirm conventional wisdoms about poverty and forests might instead begin by questioning if there are in fact important links between poverty and forest management, and how those links actually work. This kind of research might lead to new approaches to alleviating poverty, rather than simply reconfirming without testing old assumptions.

In my experience, these examples illustrate the kind of instrumental approaches to doing research that the application form encourages. The research is designed to produce facts and evidence that support a foregone conclusion. Whether the form is actively changing how researchers conceive of their projects, or if it only reaffirms a subjective understanding of the purpose of research already held by the researcher, is an open question that could be further studied through interviews and sampling of IFS applicants.

In sum, the application form offers the opportunity for a young researcher to access a considerable amount of funding. However, in order to do so she must map her network of support. Not only this, the structure of the form encourages her to draw a map that demonstrates that she has internalised a subjective understanding of how scientific knowledge is produced that combines internationally accepted ideas about empirical scientific research, as well as a perspective on this knowledge production that is closely tied to ideas of sustainable development.

The reason for mixing messages about science and development is that the form itself is enmeshed in a complicated network of competing interests and subjectivities. For example, there are bureaucratic and technical
reasons why it is preferable to have one unchanged version of the application form. A single form must be useful to all applicants to IFS, including chemists, veterinarians and cultural anthropologists. It may be that the messages identified here have a different effect in natural science disciplines. In addition, the messages being communicated to applicants about development and science simultaneously result from and are intended for IFS Donors. These are primarily development cooperation agencies.

As we will see in the following section, the subjectivity elicited by the form is not wholly aligned with how scientific quality is conceived in the Scientific Advisory Committee that evaluates proposals.

Picking winners and making losers: The review process

In general, the IFS granting programme is a highly competitive one, and the granting programme for the social sciences is even more so. The number of research grant applications submitted to IFS that are evaluated within the social sciences research area of the IFS programme is between 100 and 150 per year, and most proposals are received from researchers working in Africa. The average rate of success for applicants from the social sciences was 12 per cent for the period of 2002–2006.⁷

The success of a social science application usually depends on the technical strength of the research design. In other words, it depends on the perceived likelihood of the research design to generate data that can be used to answer the research question, test the hypotheses, and reach the stated objectives of the project. Success is also dependent upon the degree to which a project is innovative and likely to create new knowledge that deepens our understanding of the research topic. This perspective is in line with the idea of a scientific subjectivity, but it conflicts with the application form’s conflation of science and development.

Most applications that are not successful fail because the research design is technically weak. These projects usually suffer from several of the following characteristics: they do not contain a testable hypothesis; they are not informed by current scientific literature in the field; the proposed methods for carrying out the work are not well described and/or relevant to the research questions posed; the budget of the project is not closely

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⁷ By way of comparison, for the same time period, the overall rate of success of applications to the IFS programme was 17 per cent (IFS 2006; IFS 2005).
related to the work proposed; the applicant’s background and training is not relevant to the proposed work.

Here I would like to provide just a few examples of project titles and the reasoning of the Scientific Advisory Committee in not recommending proposals.\(^8\) ‘Information and communication technology usage in research-extension-farmer linkage system for agricultural development’ was not supported because key concepts were not defined, ‘the research methodology is not well explained’, and ‘the budget is unacceptable’. The project ‘Ethnobotany among the [Z] people’ was not supported, despite that the committee felt it was an interesting topic, because recent theoretical and case study literature was not cited and used, ‘little information is provided about the [Z] people and their current social, economic, and political situation’, and the researcher needed to broaden her network of scientific contacts. Another project, ‘The role of women in riparian fisheries productivity’, is unsuccessful because while it claims to focus on decision-making processes, ‘the formulation of the research problem and objectives is not focused on the decision-making’. Furthermore, ‘the hypotheses are not testable’ and ‘the bibliography review is weak, and the literature on gender studies is missing’.

In these cases, the researcher was not able to closely tie her own proposed research to the norms and standards for quality research in her field. The network of actors, equipment, and scientific literature that the researcher constructs to support her proposed work (Latour 1987) is easily unravelled by the peer review process that IFS uses to evaluate applications. This is the most common reason for failure.

Another reason for failure of applications is that the project that the researcher has assembled is primarily designed for achieving a particular development outcome. These are projects that will reiterate and reconfirm what is already conventional wisdom in the fields of development and environment, but they will not contribute to a better understanding of the underlying social, cultural and economic relationships that explain how and why humans relate to and use their natural resources. Two examples of such projects were discussed earlier in the section on application forms. In both cases, the Scientific Advisory Committee did not recommend supporting the projects and instead provided advice to the researchers on how they might improve the design of their projects.

The application form for an IFS grant clearly articulates that the design of research proposals must be technically strong, and the reviewers evalu-\(^8\) The quotations that follow are from letters written by me to the applicants, in which I relayed the reasons stated by the Scientific Advisory Committee for not supporting an application.
ate the degree to which the applicant has succeeded in constructing such a proposal. However, the assumptions about relationships between science and development that were made in and elicited by the application form and guidelines are not necessarily shared by the reviewers. These mixed messages may be one reason for the high rate of failure of social science applications in the IFS review committee.

Applications that succeed (see www.ifs.se for a list of titles) are able to map a convincing actor-network that can be mobilised to produce knowledge. Furthermore, the applications are recognisable as evidence of an author who governs her own actions according to the expectations of scientists.

The decision by IFS to grant research money to a researcher is also the point when scientific capacity building becomes a coercive project. By accepting the money, the researcher enters into a contract with IFS that binds her to carry out a project in the manner that is explained by her application form. Withdrawal from this contract is discouraged by including the researcher’s supervisor and institution as a signatory to the contract, and also by making public announcements in the scientific community regarding the researcher’s new status as IFS grantee. Failure to meet the terms of the agreement gives IFS the right to reclaim the grant money, and also to withhold other forms of capacity-enhancing support.

Brochures and booklets: Technologies of representation

As was mentioned earlier, IFS champions the idea that there are strong links between scientific research capacity and sustainable development. However, like many other well-respected actors in the field of capacity building (Juma and Yee-Cheong 2005; Sagasti 2004; Ramphele 2004), IFS has difficulty making explicit how it understands this relationship to work. A solution to this problem is to use brochures and booklets containing ‘grantee stories’ that can convince other actors of the link between science and development without resorting to specific causal relationships. I call these texts technologies because their purpose is to work on the subjective understandings of an array of actors within the field of science capacity building.

To make an argument that the IFS programme is important for sustainable development, IFS provides examples of grantees that embody a desirable relationship between science and environmental and develop-
ment goals. These grantee stories are produced for multiple audiences, and they are told and retold through reports, pamphlets, PowerPoint presentations, and word of mouth. An excellent example produced by IFS, with a title that itself supports the arguments made here, is the booklet *Developing Science, Science for Development – IFS 30 Years* (Schiøler 2002). As an active participant in the production of these stories, I have found that they are important for justifying the importance of the IFS programme to myself, not to mention potential applicants, other employees, scientific advisers, and funding agencies.

The examples that IFS uses are often impressive success stories, and they document how a young scientist with IFS funds was able to generate research findings that had an important impact for sustainable development or the improvement of human livelihoods. One example is the story of the work of IFS grantee Dr. Keto Mshigeni, entitled ‘Research on potential sources of the industrial phycocolloids agar, carrageenan and algin in Tanzania’. The results from this work fostered a multimillion-dollar seaweed export industry in East Africa (Gaillard et al. 2002; Schiøler 2002). Another example is Professor José María Gutierrez of Costa Rica, who with his IFS-sponsored project entitled ‘Studies on the production and neutralizing capacity of an antivenin for treatment of snake bites grantees in Costa Rica’ was a key factor leading to the production of low-cost snake antivenins for use in Central America and Africa (Schiøler 2002). While these stories tell how IFS grantees can have a positive impact on the lives of people in developing countries, they do not show how science leads to development or environmental sustainability.

These technologies convey an argument for the relationship between science and development. They also work to marshal more resources and people to the normative project of scientific capacity building. Though they may be relatively minor in overall importance, these stories are yet another thread in the actor-network that contributes to the realisation of a particular understanding of the purpose and form of scientific knowledge production.
Conclusions

In this paper I have made an attempt to empower Latourian connections, and thereby reach a clearer understanding of the relationship between development organisations, science capacity-building organisations, and the producers of scientific knowledge in developing countries. Specifically, I make a personal reflection on my own work at IFS in the granting programme for social sciences, and try to identify actors and objects that are ‘threads’ in the actor-network. By borrowing from Foucault-inspired theoretical work on empowerment, governance and subjectivity, I try to show how science capacity builders work to convince developing country researchers to produce particular kinds of knowledge.

In my experience, scientific capacity building is generally treated as a value-neutral and non-coercive project. And, without moralising, I demonstrate in this paper that it is power relationships themselves that make science capacity building possible. An organisation that does not exert power over researchers in developing countries does not have the possibility to create change.

In the case of IFS, we see that histories, individuals, groups and technologies work to create particular understandings of scientific knowledge production. These multiple strands of influence are heterogeneous in the meanings that they convey. The application form and documents work on scientific subjectivities differently than do Scientific Advisory Committees. That it is no simple task to put one in line with the other is explained by the fact that these technologies and actors have their own particular array of constituencies and audiences. Nevertheless, one result of this heterogeneity is that the success rate for social science research grant applications is much lower (approximately 30 per cent less) than for applications from the natural sciences.⁹

Throughout the paper, I am cautious not to overstate the power of IFS in its various forms. Obviously, the filling-in of a form or the reading of a document does not program developing country researchers to produce new knowledge according to the terms of that technology. Nor does it brainwash them with a particular scientific subjectivity. If this were the case we could not call researchers and scientists agents. However, subjecting one’s plans and thoughts to these technologies and actions is likely to have some effects, and the examples drawn from applications to IFS provide some evidence of what those effects may be. To further substantiate this, one could build upon the reflections made in this paper, re-centring

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⁹ This was the case at the time that the paper was written (2006).
the focus of investigation on the developing country researcher and including a discussion of research outcomes. Such a study would make an analysis of scientific knowledge production from the researcher’s position in her institution. As a result of this focus, one would not only consider influences that originate internationally, but also local cultures, histories and economies.
References


In this paper I will reflect on the conditions for doing a certain kind of anthropology in practice, namely short-term consultancies for social impact assessment of infrastructural development projects. Much of my own work in this field has been for hydropower development in Laos. I have been hired, mostly, by independent environmental consultants under contract to the engineering companies or consortiums that have conducted the technical and environmental feasibility studies prior to actual construction. Hydropower development in the Third World tends to be perceived as controversial, mainly because the major infrastructural undertakings that a hydropower plant entails are bound to have significant impacts on the natural environment, and to varying degrees on the lives of local populations as well. I will not go into a discussion of hydropower on a global scale, but limit my remarks to the context of Laos, of which I have first-hand experience, an experience that among other things has entailed a certain sense of loneliness, hence my choice of title.  

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1 The heading for this paper is a paraphrase of the title of British writer Alan Sillitoe’s short novel *The Loneliness of the Long-distance Runner*, published in 1958. Sillitoe belonged to a group of writers who became known as ‘The Angry Young Men’ and he wrote critically about various aspects of British post-war class society. I myself can hardly qualify as an angry young man, at best, perhaps, as a querulous old man.
Case example

As a specific example I will take the study I did for the Theun-Hinboun hydropower scheme in central Laos in 1993. I was hired as a member of the environmental and social impact assessment ‘team’ recruited by the Norwegian company Norconsult, which in its turn was contracted by the Norwegian development agency (NORAD). The study was a fairly early instance of a social impact assessment in connection with hydropower planning in Laos, and the Theun-Hinboun scheme generated some public debate that will illustrate some of the issues I want to discuss. Before I go into these issues, I will give a brief account of the natural, technical and social setting of the project area, and of the conclusions and recommendations of my study.

Nam Theun (nam means river) is a major tributary to the Mekong. In the project area it traverses a mountainous, forested plateau. On this plateau a dam was planned to divert part of the river’s water down an escarpment through an underground tunnel to the Nam Hai plain about 200 metres below, where the power station would be built. After powering the turbines at the power house, the water would be discharged into the Nam Hai, a small river that empties into the Nam Hinboun, another major tributary to the Mekong. The water reservoir created by the dam would be contained within the natural confines of the river bed; the water level of the Nam Theun would be permanently raised, over a distance of about 30 kilometres upstream from the dam, to the level usually reached during the rainy season, but none of the surrounding land would be inundated. This so-called run-of-the-river concept implied that none of the built-up areas along the river would have to be evacuated because of flooding. The population of the about a dozen villages along the Nam Theun derived their agricultural subsistence from swidden cultivation. These settlements provided a localised illustration of the general gradual migration of the Tai peoples down the rivers from the Yunnan massif, a process that has taken place over many centuries and has resulted in the present ethnic dominance of these peoples in Thailand and Laos (as well as their presence in northern Burma and northern Vietnam). Along the Nam Theun the hilly terrain does not allow the establishment of paddy fields, and at the time of my study swidden cultivation had long been unsustainable given the population pressure. This was partly because immediately downstream from the dam site, the Nam Theun enters into a steep, ten-kilometre-long gorge which makes the downstream area inaccessible, by boat or by foot, and precludes further expansion of swidden fields. During the decade prior to my study, the population along the
Nam Theun had decreased by 6 per cent due to out-migration. Many of the villagers still living there expressed their wish to move away from the area if only they could find better conditions elsewhere, and they hoped the hydropower project would make it possible for them to move down to the Nam Hai plain. On that plain, agricultural subsistence was a mixture of paddy and swidden cultivation, and swidden fields were gradually being converted into rain-fed paddy land. Even though the population on the plain had increased by almost 70 per cent over the recent ten-year period, the population density was still only about thirty persons per square kilometre, and there was thus scope for further in-migration, particularly if the development of paddy land were intensified.

On the basis of these findings I recommended, most importantly, that free transportation of disassembled houses and other belongings should be provided for those villagers who wanted to move from the Nam Theun to the Nam Hai plain; that the villages along the Nam Hai and Nam Hinboun be supplied with electricity; that electrical pumps and water pipes be supplied for irrigation of existing and newly developed paddy fields; and that agricultural advisers be appointed to teach the people paddy cultivation and irrigation (since these are not skills one is born with, even in rice-growing societies in Southeast Asia). I concluded that if these recommendations were followed, my opinion as an anthropologist was that the project would have overwhelmingly beneficial effects on the society and culture of the local population (Ovesen 1993: 72–74). Having submitted my draft report, I decided to supply it with a brief introduction and publish it, primarily because my eventual positive attitude to the hydropower project had come rather as a surprise to myself and I would therefore welcome further discussion among colleagues.²

The practical project context:
A study in powerlessness

My experience as a short-term consultant, from Theun-Hinboun onwards, has mostly been of working alone with one or two local research assistants/interpreters. Also in that sense consultancy work is not so different from fieldwork in academic research. Although an environmental and social impact assessment is most often offered as a package by the envi-

² I was innocently unaware at the time that one is not normally supposed to publish consultancy reports without the permission of one’s employer, but I do not think I ever signed a written contract for the study – at least I do not recall ever having received a copy myself.
Enological sub-consultant, this package is composed of a number of specialised short-term studies that are not necessarily, for logistic and other practical reasons, carried out simultaneously or otherwise internally calibrated. Apart from the distinctly biological-environmental studies (forestry, fishery, agriculture, wild-life), the social studies will usually comprise a social anthropological/socio-economic one, but also for example studies of health and nutrition, gender, and cultural heritage. When each such specialised study is carried out by different short-term consultants at different times, coordination and integration of them is often difficult in practice. Only very rarely have I had the opportunity, while actively carrying out one of my own studies, to confer with other consultants within the social studies component. Furthermore, because of the nature of short-term consultancy, once the contract period is over, one is no longer formally part of the project planning, and it is left to the sub-consultant ‘team-leader’ to decide which parts of one’s conclusions and recommendations will find their way into the final project document which is binding for the consultant and the client. To plan a strategy for the subsequent fate of one’s report in this process will thus have to be done during the contract period, but this is difficult in practical terms, because during that very narrow time frame one is totally focused on the fieldwork and getting the report written. In other words, the short-term consultant has in practice very little influence over how and to what extent his or her recommendations are taken into account in the actual execution of the project. So when a critic, for example, described my Theun-Hinboun report as ‘yet another example of the power wielded by the experts’ (Usher 1997: 98; see further below), this was wide off the mark.

The assumption that consultancy reports will or should have a practical impact on project design and implementation is perhaps naïve. J.L. Stirrat has suggested that

there is an acceptance that they do not and that they are not expected to. While explicitly short-term consultants are hired to deal with specific empirically defined problems, implicitly the situation is rather different. Frequently it appears that they are hired to tell their clients what the clients want to hear, and even more frequently their advice or their findings are ignored. (Stirrat 2000: 41)

I would like, however, to retain a certain ‘strategic naivety’ and insist that what we do as anthropological consultants should and can have effects on the real world. ‘In general,’ Stirrat concedes, ‘consultants are highly committed to what they are doing’ (ibid.: 35). I would suggest, therefore, that rather than telling the clients what they want to hear, most consultants tend to tell their clients what the consultants want their clients to hear,
and that the problem from the consultant’s point of view lies in getting the message across. This is why, contrary to popular misconceptions, the short-term consultant wields so little power.

Stirrat argues that a ‘consultancy culture’ has emerged within the development industry, and that it is the ability of the consultant to act as a member of that culture rather than making a difference in the real world of project planning and implementation that defines him as a proper consultant. Apart from the implicit understanding that consultants are not supposed to make any practical difference, Stirrat suggests that consultancy work is supposed to conform to certain aesthetic standards. Some of them are set by the formulation of the Terms of Reference for the given study, which, Stirrat suggests, are governed by

the assumption that there is an objectively knowable world which is understandable through the application of rational thought […] Thus there is no room for interpretation because this world consists of empirically verifiable facts (e.g. how many people are ‘poor’; what are the salient ethnic identities; what is the gender division of labour). Terms which others might find problematic or questionable such as the ‘household’ or the ‘family’ or the ‘nation’ are all reified into objectivized categories.

(Stirrat 2000: 36)

This may be so, but I would argue that in order to participate, more or less temporarily, in this ‘consultancy culture’, one is by no means obliged to let oneself become enculturated in all essentials. This is perhaps most significant for someone who considers himself well-established in the academic ‘culture’ and only occasionally engages in consultancy work. For my own part, I have in my reports discussed the meanings and implications of for example ‘ethnicity’, ‘minority’ or ‘indigenous’ whenever these concepts have figured in my terms of reference or have had a bearing on a particular case. On the other hand, I have also accepted that there are certain ‘empirically verifiable facts’, such as demographic factors and socio-economic variables, which are not only required by the terms of reference but which are also useful to know as part of a basic ethnographic study (and which are occasionally given less emphasis than they deserve in academic research).

As for the literary genre of consultancy report writing, Stirrat sees it as ‘ideally’ conforming to standards of objectivity, rationality and legitimation of authority. Reports should be written in a way that leaves no loose ends, the world described in the report should have no inconsistencies or contradictions; authority is asserted by an absence of the specific author as a person and by resort to the passive voice (‘It is recommended that…’ rather than ‘I find it reasonable to propose…’). Words like ‘perhaps’ and
‘uncertain’ are absent in reports, Stirrat claims. ‘Doubt is not allowed, nor is opinion’ (ibid.: 42). Again I beg to differ slightly. Not only have I frequently pointed to uncertainties and given personal opinions in the active voice, I have even been asked to do so in terms of reference that I had not even written myself; I quote from one such set of ToR:

The study will provide insights into how existing social practices might impact upon, and be impacted by, the proposed project [...]. Describe social practices that in the consultant’s opinion will most impact or be impacted upon the project. Discuss how these practices might [...] change [...] project likely social change [...] and speculate on whether local society is capable of sustaining such change. (emphasis mine)

My point here is that even if there exists an objectifying ‘consultancy culture’ of going through the motions and adhering to aesthetic standards of depersonalised writing, this ‘culture’ is partly of our own making. As anthropologists we are not only capable of describing and analysing it, we should also make an effort to change it from within if we believe, as I do, that both anthropology and the companies and organisations we work for are better served in the long run by our doing so. I think it is important that we maintain that a consultancy study is a legitimate opportunity to do anthropologically worthwhile work and write anthropologically about it; and I think we owe it to our clients to insist on telling them that human social life is not amenable to description and analysis in terms of objectifiable categories and certainties. Whether this will increase our influence over practical project decisions is another matter; at least it can hardly become less than it is.

In 1999 I had the occasion to briefly visit Theun-Hinboun, six years after my original study and two years after the power plant had become operational. The most conspicuous feature, apart from the power station itself, was the splendour of the ‘operators’ village’, a group of modern bungalows set in park-like surroundings amidst well-tended lawns and flowering bushes, with a tennis court to one side and a golf course further afield. The whole compound was enclosed by a high wire fence, and outside the fence the locals carried on as before: There was no household electricity in the nearby villages, no planned development of paddy fields and no irrigation on the Nam Hai plain; and there had been no assisted voluntary resettlement of people from the Nam Theun. In other words, none of my recommendations had been followed. Nevertheless, the village closest to the power plant had at least tripled in size, primarily through in-migration from other areas; there was a school building (donated by the company) and a health clinic. The increase of the village population is a measure of the attractiveness of the place; ‘spontaneous’ migrations are
common in Laos, but for the families that move, the decision is far from spontaneous but the result of realistic assessments of the relative advantages a new place has to offer. So, to many people the Theun-Hinboun area now obviously offered better living conditions than before the power plant. It made me sad, however, to reflect that the local population had deserved still better, and that this might have been accomplished with a minimum of extra cost and effort. The powerlessness of the short-term consultant was abundantly illustrated.

Partisan objections:
Whatever you do you can’t win

Hydropower development has consistently been opposed by environmental and to some extent indigenous peoples’ organisations and movements. The bottom line for the anti-hydropower lobby seems to be that hydropower inevitably destroys the natural environment, as well as the livelihoods of the local populations, and that any person who participates in its planning, construction or operation contributes to such destruction for the sake of personal power and/or economic gain. The following quote from an editorial of the journal *Cultural Survival* is indicative of the tone:

Dams higher than fifteen meters [...] wreak havoc on riverine ecosystems and in many instances [destroy] the people's livelihoods and prospects for the future [...] Northern [hydropower] companies who can no longer sell their knowledge and wares in the north busily export their destructive technology south of the equator. (McIntosh 1999: 7)

The most vocal opponent to the Theun-Hinboun hydropower scheme was the environmental journalist Ann Danaiya Usher, who at the time worked for the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (and whose writings seem to have inspired McIntosh’s formulations above – except for the latter’s apparent problem of where to draw the line of the equator). In a series of (largely repetitive) writings she applied the lobby’s general reasoning to the Theun-Hinboun case. Without ever having set foot in the Theun-Hinboun area, she began by declaring that ‘the rural villagers whose subsistence is derived from a combination of rain-fed agriculture, hunting, fishing and gathering from the forests’ would be directly affected by the hydropower ‘by inundating their fields and homes, wiping out their fish stocks, blocking river transport routes, and destroying their
forests; in short undermining their primary sources of food, medicine and income’ (Usher 1996a: 126). On the basis of such partially counterfactual statements, Usher went on to castigate just about every government, organisation, company and individual involved with Theun-Hinboun and other hydropower schemes in Laos. The consultants, she believed, play an important role, but the decision-making process

hides the consultants from public view; it renders them invisible. Their assessments are at the heart of the issue, yet they – the experts – remain hidden behind the commercial nature of their contracts with the aid agencies, the anonymity of their reports, and the neutrality of their expertise. (ibid.: 142)

The second instalment of Usher’s attack, which appeared in the journal *The Ecologist*, began with another counterfactual claim, namely that the Theun-Hinboun project would cause about 5,000 people in the area to lose their lands and fisheries and force them to move (Usher 1996b: 85). For this version, Usher had apparently done some more homework (though she had still not visited the area), at least she had discovered my report which was far from anonymous and which I had deliberately exposed to public view. Within the 25 lines she devoted to criticising my work (ibid.: 89), she managed to include one totally false quote, one grave misreading, and one partial quote which distorted the meaning that the full sentence was meant to convey.

In a letter to the editor of *The Ecologist*, I pointed to a number of factual errors and omissions and objected to Usher’s misleading account of my work (Ovesen 1996). But in the third version of her attack virtually no corrections had been made. This version was published as a couple of chapters in a book edited by Ann Usher herself (*Dams as Aid*, Usher 1997) which dealt with Nordic (Norwegian and Swedish) involvement with hydropower development generally; the book was commissioned by the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation. In that book, as also in the *Ecologist* article, Usher argued that the environmental studies for Theun-Hinboun, including the anthropological one, were defective and that, due to environmentalist pressure, the major donor, NORAD, had been obliged to commission supplementary studies by another consultant. These, however, allegedly came too late to have any practical effects (Usher 1996b: 91).

What Usher did not mention was that the conclusions of the subsequent anthropological study, conducted by Stephen Sparkes of Oslo University, were in most essentials similar to mine. Sparkes emphasised that the foremost priority of the population in the area was securing a sufficient annual rice crop; ‘everything else is secondary’ (Sparkes 1995: n.p.).
He argued, as I had, that swidden was no longer a sustainable proposition and furthermore that it ‘limits the chances for economic advancement and diversity’ (Sparkes 1995: n.p.). His recommendations, like mine, included the development of paddy land, the appointment of agricultural advisers, installation of electric pumps and establishment of irrigation schemes, and electrification of the villages on the Nam Hai plain. While hardly surprising for an anthropologist with first-hand experience of the area, Sparkes’s conclusions were nevertheless gratifying; his supplementary study, which at least implicitly was meant to challenge mine, turned out corroborating it.

But by withholding such information from her readers, Usher could persist in her claim that my study had been subject to ‘unanimous criticism’. Without bothering to discuss the substance of my recommendations (or those of Stephen Sparkes), she lamented that I could not be sued for malpractice.

As for ‘field of expertise’, I had, during a year prior to undertaking the study, spent two months visiting rural communities in Laos and familiarised myself with most of the historical and social science literature (in French and English) on the country. As for ‘unreasonable conclusions’, Usher has not in her writings considered in any detail the conclusions I had reached or the recommendations I had given, let alone argued in what way they might be unreasonable. I was not (and still am not) a professional consultant; I draw a modest but steady monthly salary from Uppsala University as an academic anthropologist and have therefore never had an ‘overwhelming dependence on the donors for future contracts’ that might induce me into ‘only telling the clients what they wanted to hear’ (ibid.). What I told the client was guided by my terms of reference, which I appended to the published report so that anyone might form an opinion of how well they were fulfilled. As for evaluating my work on professional (anthropological) grounds, this was one of the reasons I published my report, and I am happy to note that, apart from being vindicated by Sparkes’s study, the few reviews I have seen in professional journals have been appreciative. As Ms Usher has no anthropological training and no first-hand knowledge of the area, she is clearly not in a position to pronounce on my anthropological competence, and her own challenge is
obviously on ideological rather than professional grounds. My ‘crime’, apparently, was that I did not follow the party line of the anti-hydropower lobby represented, in this case, by the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation.

Lest we underestimate the influence of that lobby, it should be noted that Usher’s book was reviewed in the leading Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter.* In his sycophantic review, well-known Swedish writer Lasse Berg touched on my Theun-Hinboun study and moved the ‘debate’ from slander to caricature:

> On the basis of all his knowledge of exotic peoples a consultant anthropologist from Uppsala University stated, after a two-week visit, that in this ethnographically unknown area there was nothing worth preserving. The primitive livelihood of the people was doomed in any case. (Berg 1997; my translation)

The academic establishment: The low-caste experience

The practice of anthropology (or any other social science) may aim either at the production of academic (theoretical and/or empirical) local knowledge, or at producing changes in people’s real life conditions. The distinction was dichotomised in British social anthropology during the colonial era as that between ‘theoretical’ and ‘applied’ anthropology, and it came to imply a marked difference of status within the academy between practitioners of the former and the latter. Applied anthropology was assumed to be less intellectually demanding and therefore conferred little or no academic prestige on its practitioners. In the post-colonial development context, the distinction has been reiterated as one between ‘the anthropology of development’ and ‘development anthropology’. In this version, the distinction has retained its status, not to say caste, connotations between ‘pure’ academic research, and development (‘impure’, ‘dirty’) work. Ralph Grillo finds the distinction useful to contrast

> two kinds of anthropological practice, one engaged directly in application (for example, evaluating a project or offering policy advice), the other primarily concerned with the socio-scientific analysis of development as a cultural, economic and political process. (Grillo 1997: 2)

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3 At that time it was uncommon for the paper to review foreign-language non-fiction.

4 I wrote to the paper offering a rejoinder along the lines of my letter to *The Ecologist.* The editor refused, with the curious motivation that ‘we refrain from a debate on the basis of Lasse Berg’s article’ – as if it was his reputation rather than mine that was at stake.
However, most of us occasionally ‘engaged directly in application’ would like to claim that we are simultaneously doing social science analysis, and it is not uncommon, for example, that anthropologists use data gathered in the course of a consultancy to form the ethnographic basis for scholarly analyses (e.g. Ovesen 2003, 2004a, 2004b). I agree with Strathern and Stewart when they argue that a rigid compartmentalization of the work of anthropological consultancy within the discipline as a whole is unrealistic. Theory, analysis, description, and practice need to be related to one another, and the pragmatic problems, the ethical questions, and the imponderabilities of making appropriate theoretical analyses which face the anthropologist as a consultant also face the anthropologist as a general ethnographer. (Strathern and Stewart 2005: 8)

Paul Sillitoe goes even further and finds that the pure/applied distinction is not only unhelpful, it also ‘distorts anthropology’s dynamism as a discipline and as a profession’ (Sillitoe 2007: 161). Moreover, given that the data-collecting part of anthropological research (i.e. ethnography) is per academic tradition conducted by some version of ‘participant observation’, it seems to me that by distancing themselves from practical development (field)work, ‘anthropologists of development’ implicitly but deliberately exclude themselves from being participants in the development process, and restrict their role to that of observers (from a safe distance). I can think of no other field of anthropology where practitioners would in that way unnecessarily limit their research options.

However, having retreated to observation posts in ivory towers, ‘pure’ academic anthropologists (of development) can fortify their positions in the caste hierarchy by dismissing the work of their ‘development anthropologist’ colleagues as per definition inferior scholarship or ethically suspect. One example: A few years ago I wrote a paper, the ethnographic basis of which was material collected during a consultancy for a mining project in Laos, while the anthropological argument I pursued was only tangentially related to my practical work for that particular project (Ovesen 2003). One of the anonymous reviewers for the journal to which I submitted the paper observed that the author was ‘primarily a development anthropologist’ (‘L’auteur est en effet d’abord un anthropologue du développement’) and should therefore give details about the circumstances under which the ethnographic data were gathered. Fair enough, perhaps, but there is a strong hint of double standards of evaluation here. Similar demands are hardly ever made of purely academic data collection, although few of us can have a clear idea what happens when an academic or
a doctoral student is let loose in the bush for an extended period of time with no strings attached.

A second example: The book *Dams as Aid* by Ann Usher was reviewed not only in a Swedish newspaper but also in the academic journal *Social Anthropology*; the reviewer, Gudrun Dahl, is professor of the anthropology of development at Stockholm University. One might perhaps have expected a professional colleague writing for an academic journal to exercise a bit more critical judgement than a writer for a daily newspaper, but not so in this case. Professor Dahl noted that the book was not really a work of anthropological or social science scholarship, but rather a journalistic political statement. Nevertheless she ended her brief review with the following note:

> Of empirical interest to the anthropologist are some observations made about the close network of interest between the ‘experts’ and ‘the dam industry’. Some empirical comments on quick-and-dirty anthropological consultancies may also offer food for professional reflection. (Dahl 1999: 204)

Since I am the only anthropological consultant named in the whole book, there can be no mistaking the address, so perhaps I am entitled to a professional reflection of my own. ‘Empirical’ seems to be one of Dahl’s favourite words; it is one of my favourites, too, and I wonder by what anthropological standards polemic allegations in a ‘political pamphlet’ may count as ‘empirical comments’. Both my original Theun-Hinboun report and my objections to Usher’s dishonest representation of it were on public record (a copy of the published report had even been sent to the anthropology department at Stockholm), but such empirical evidence was apparently of less consequence for Professor Dahl than the ideologically driven opinions of a journalist, because the latter gave her the opportunity to underscore the inferior position of consultant ‘development anthropologists’ in the academic caste hierarchy.

**Ethics and hydropower**

The divide that emerged in anthropology between ‘development anthropology’ and ‘the anthropology of development’ in the early 1990s coincided with a conceptual transformation, among practitioners of the latter, of ‘development’ itself from being a technological, economic and political process to becoming a ‘discourse’. (The publication of an article by Arturo Escobar (1991) is commonly seen as indicative of that transformation.)
This meant, among other things, that anthropologists could study such ‘discourse’ in their comfortable office environments and pronounce on the shortcomings and questionable ethics of those low-caste colleagues who were still under the illusion that development was about material and social processes in the real world and that it was worthwhile to engage anthropologically with such processes.

Somewhat paradoxically, the transformation, within academic anthropology, of ‘development’ from material and social processes to ‘discourse’ paralleled a transformation within the development industry itself. By the end of the 1980s, the very notion of development as a project of political engagement and responsibility [was] increasingly seen as anachronistic. Confidence came to be placed in the market as a harbinger of development, and in the role of free enterprise and free trade in the quest for development [...]. Government departments, NGOs and private organisations active in the domains of development are [nowadays] required to operate as if they were businesses. (Quarles van Ufford et al. 2003: 5)

Although development-financing countries still routinely refer to themselves as ‘donors’, they no longer see their brief as spending taxpayers’ money to provide aid to underdeveloped countries, but to engage in partnerships in the development business. This state of affairs has long been particularly evident with respect to infrastructure development projects (such as hydropower schemes, for instance); these need considerable engineering and entrepreneurial skills and machinery, and the companies that supply those are not run as charities.

An interesting question is whether and to what extent the contemporary ‘businesscape’ of development has or should have ethical implications for practicing ‘development anthropologists’. More specifically, is it unethical for an anthropologist to do a consultancy for a commercial company? And, does it depend on whether or not he or she approves of the project that the company is planning? My own position is that even if one is not convinced that a hydropower or a mining project is the best that can happen to a local population, most of us will realise that there is very little chance that an anthropology consultant will be able to stop it. Under such circumstances I agree with Colin Filer that

it normally makes more sense for anthropologists to act as ‘honest brokers’ in mediating between different stakeholders (including the multi-national companies) than it does to act as the partisans or the advocates of local communities in their struggle against the ‘world capitalist system’. (Filer, quoted by Brutti 2005: 106)
It may even happen that an anthropologist approves of an infrastructure project being planned by a commercial company (without necessarily applauding the world capitalist system, or neoliberalism). I am not sure whether this would make consultancy work less or more dirty in the eyes of the Pure. As for myself, I happen to believe that hydropower development in Laos is a good thing. The Lao national economy is not in very good shape. Having no industry to speak of, and almost no surplus agricultural production for export, the country depends for foreign exchange mainly on its natural resources. These include timber, hydropower, minerals (mainly copper and gold, possibly gemstones) and, in recent years, tourism. In the early 1990s, hydropower emerged as a realistic measure to diminish the excessive logging and consequent environmental damage – in terms of soil erosion and lowered groundwater level – that was threatening to become irreversible. With the promise of hydropower income the government could afford to restrict logging concessions (to both foreign companies and its own army) and take a more serious attitude to illegal logging. As a source of energy, hydropower is ecologically preferable to fossil fuels (or at least more ‘sustainable’), and presents less of a security risk in a poor country than nuclear energy. Most of the electricity generated by hydropower in Laos is produced for export to neighbouring Thailand. Given that the energy needs of Thailand are unlikely to diminish in a foreseeable future, a stable income for the Lao state may be envisaged. Against this background I have seen my task as an anthropologist to do what I can to ensure that the local population in a hydropower development area will get the best possible deal.

Another aspect of the ethics question concerns the possible demand of the client for confidentiality of the results of a consultancy study. The issue was recently addressed in the AAA newsletter by Hugh Gusterson, who had had the ‘startling experience’ at an applied anthropology meeting of a female ‘practicing anthropologist’ who ‘refused to tell me who, or what, she studies’ (Gusterson 2006: 26). The incident ‘set off alarm bells’ in Gusterson’s mind and he drew parallels to the field of medicine where researchers hired by pharmaceutical companies had been prevented from publishing findings indicating harmful effects of the companies’ products. The same may happen in anthropology, Gusterson suggests. ‘What recourse is there for an anthropologist under contract of confidentiality who decides they have [sic!] an obligation to make public what their sponsor wants to keep quiet (say, information about indigenous opposition to a dam) […] The rise of neoliberal applied anthropology is a scandal waiting to happen,’ declares Gusterson ominously (ibid.). I am not so sure. In contrast to medical tests on individual patients that may be performed
confidentially in the clinic, anthropological studies in the field are per
definition social, and word (about, say, sustained opposition to a dam)
will inevitably get around, even from remote places in far-away countries,
whether or not the anthropologist is permitted the opportunity eventually
to reach a large worldwide audience (?) through publishing in a peer-
reviewed academic journal. Then there is always the risk that an anthro-
pologist may decide to go public, irrespective of possible confidentiality
clause, correctly guessing that the company would not be bothered to sue
him because it does not really make any difference; the dam (or mine, or
road, or pipeline, or railway) is going to be built anyway. This, again, is
unlike medical cases where research, if made public, may cause a product
to be taken off the market and thereby cause considerable economic dam-
age to the company. Finally, nowadays most hydropower companies (to
stick to that example) realise that an attempted insistence on secrecy is not
only futile; it is not even in their own (neoliberal) interest. Thus, for the
Nam Theun 2 hydropower project in Laos, which is currently under con-
struction and which involves resettlement of a number of villages, the
planning involves continual public consultations where information is
shared, opposition may be vented and discussed, and suggestions or
wishes may be expressed. The anthropologist in charge of the consulta-
tions programme acts as broker between the company, the district au-
thorities and the local population, and reports on the consultations (e.g.
Chamberlain 2005) are published on the internet. So when Gusterson
asks, ‘Is it acceptable to study people not in order to advocate for them or
to interpret them in the open literature, but for the purpose of providing
privileged information to sponsors who want to control them?’ (2006:
26) there are more nuanced answers than the massive ‘No!’ implied by his
rhetorical question. As already mentioned, brokerage is most often a more
constructive option for the anthropologist than advocacy, and as for the
companies, they are in it for the money; a desire for controlling people is
in itself rarely part of their business concept.

As a prophylactic remedy for the impending neoliberal scandal, Gustes-
terson proposes ‘clear rules of the road to give guidance to applied anthro-
pology colleagues,’ presumably as an addition to the already very elabo-
rate AAA code of ethics (www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethics.htm).
In my opinion, however, no formal code of ethics can prevent unfortunate
or unintended consequences of social science research, or ensure beneficial
ones, for that matter. With social impact analyses, this is still more the
case, since such analyses are also assessments that imply recommendations
for specific active measures to be taken, ideally in a dialogue with local
populations. As Goldman and Baum have pointed out, ‘much of what is
included in a SIA [social impact assessment] incorporates elements of crystal-ball gazing. Responsible SIA research is no guarantee of perfect results or sustained community benefit’ (Goldman and Baum 2000: 18), also because ‘SIAs are not conducted in a political vacuum [and] their intervention within a development situation will inevitably carry risks no matter what cautions are issued or checks exercised’ (ibid.).

Goldman and Baum are therefore sceptical of the uniform applicability of general ethical rules, as laid down in the codes of ethics of the AAA and comparable organisations. They are not of the opinion that appealing to a professional community for [making decisions on ethics] is a viable, judicious or even desirable course of action. The factors to be weighed are multiple and require ‘situation sensitive’ judgement that in part reposes on professional conduct criteria and in part on the value frameworks which etch the researcher as a human being. (ibid.: 17)

For my own part, my value framework includes the conviction that basic food security, access to education, health care and transportation, as well as clean water, sanitation and household electricity – in sum, measures for poverty reduction – are worthwhile and ethically acceptable goals for anthropologists to pursue for any group among whom we conduct practical anthropology. In the Theun-Hinboun case, I found that particularly the population along the Nam Theun suffered severe shortcomings on these scores. Their reliance on swidden cultivation confined them to settlements in an area without access to health, education and transport facilities. Population pressure had made swidden cultivation ecologically unsustainable (fallow periods had by necessity been shortened and primary forest was occasionally cut down to make new fields), and basic food security was consequently threatened. Even if swidden cultivation may in some sense be said to represent ‘an indigenous way of life’, this does not imply that it is per definition humanely preferable and should be preserved at all costs. Those who argue for such ‘cultural preservation’ are not the ones who will bear the economic, nutritional and social costs of it. The costs will be borne by the local population and their children. I find such a preservationist stance not only misguided but in this case downright unethical.

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5 We should remind ourselves that also codes of ethics themselves are not produced in a political vacuum. The one adopted by the AAA came into existence as a direct result of, and in reaction to, anthropological involvement in the American war in Indochina (see Jorgensen 1971).
Hydropower development a decade on

In some ways, my Theun-Hinboun study is now water under the bridge (or rather, through the turbines). Since then, environmental and social impact studies have become considerably more thorough and comprehensive. Environmental and social impacts are now commonly monitored continually so that mitigation measures may be decided as an integrated part of the planning process. The Nam Theun 2 scheme that is currently under construction may serve as an example. As already mentioned, this project involves continual public consultations, directed by an independent anthropologist. An environmental management team has been appointed and has background support from an international advisory group. Anthropologists have long argued that a component of local rural development for the project areas should be part of hydropower planning and that such development should receive funding from the power companies that utilise the areas. In the Nam Theun 2 case, the households that are being resettled to make room for the reservoir are being provided with pumped water supply, school facilities and a health programme, as well as temporary food supplies. The power company also contributes substantially to the management of the nearby Nakai-Nam Theun Nature Conservation Area.

These developments within hydropower development planning have not taken place because the companies have suddenly become altruistic. The changes have occurred mainly because of policy decisions of the major financing bodies, primarily the World Bank. After a period of some years in the mid-1990s when the World Bank enacted a moratorium on its involvement in ‘large dams’ hydropower development, the Bank has again become a major player, and even when it is not directly involved as a financing agency in a given infrastructure project, its various directives (influenced by anthropological as well as environmental concerns) are usually adhered to, since investors see such adherence as a sort of guarantee of the social and environmental soundness of the project.

In 1995 Sida withdrew from engagement with hydropower development in Laos, about the same time as the temporary reluctance of the World Bank. Among the reasons for the Swedish decision was, presumably, the concern for the Lao national economy. In a report to Sida in 1994, development economist Stefan de Vylder expressed
fear that the massive inflow of foreign capital that would be required to finance the planned hydropower development may jeopardise the Lao [government's] chances of maintaining a minimum of national control over basic natural resources and, indeed, over the general economic development of the country. (quoted by Usher 1997: 89)

That was then. Nowadays most economic observers have a somewhat more jaded view of the management of the country’s national economy. In a 2006 report, a group of economic analysts at the Australian National University pointed out that despite international efforts to support national capacity building and encouraging national ownership of economic assets, ‘the [Lao] state’s ability to channel national revenue to poverty alleviation’ is highly questionable. State-owned enterprises, primarily of timber production, have not so far contributed substantially to poverty decline. The group concluded that ‘foreign investment in large hydropower and mining projects that incorporate development activities has the potential to contribute to poverty alleviation in areas where state governance is currently limited’ (Asean Focus Group 2006).

The one thing that has not changed over the past two decades is the attitude and the rhetoric of the environmentalist anti-hydropower lobby. We are still told, by the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation for instance, that Nam Theun 2 will destroy the livelihoods of the local population, that the locals have never given their consent to the project, that opposition to it is prohibited, and that the public consultations are just propaganda for the project and serve to cajole people into acquiescence (www.snf.se, September 2006). It is also remarkable that the lobby has still not revealed any thoughts on what sources of electricity production might be preferable in the region. In 1997, Ann Usher declared that her book was not about energy politics and did not compare hydropower with nuclear or fossil fuels. ‘Nor does it suggest what forms of energy might be less harmful to people or to nature’ (Usher 1997: 10). Already then, this stance was debatable; today I find it totally untenable. Nevertheless, the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation proudly announces that it is one of the about 150 environmental NGOs that have demanded that the World Bank withdraw its support to Nam Theun 2 and that the project be terminated. This demand is not only totally unrealistic but, given the analysis by the Asean Focus Group, it is also highly irresponsi-

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6 That is of course true, in the sense that there has not been a referendum in which the local population has been given the opportunity to vote ‘yes’ or ‘no’; this would certainly be an interesting experiment, but I am not aware that it has ever been tried, even by more democratic regimes than that of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic.
ble to the local population (to say nothing of the nature conservation area that depends on the project for funds).

I do not claim that all negative impacts of hydropower development will from now on be satisfactorily and adequately mitigated. ‘There are still great weaknesses in the scoping of social and cultural impacts of large dams in the Mekong region,’ Philip Hirsch (1999: 38) pointed out several years ago, and it is still the case today, because of the complexity of the geography of costs and benefits, and because of the contemporary commercial nature of hydropower production which is largely driven by investors’ demands for revenue.

The culture of impact studies is still dominated by [...] the drive to find a way to make a dam acceptable to financial backers, the public, governments and at least superficially to affected peoples. Questions of preferred livelihood futures for those directly or indirectly impacted by the dam [...] receive little consideration outside what can be accommodated within the financing of the project. (Hirsch 1999: 39)

This was clearly illustrated in the Theun-Hinboun case, and despite the subsequent increased attention to social impact assessments and the World Bank’s various directives, the massive private sector involvement in hydropower development is not necessarily conducive to sustained rural development efforts. Despite the laudable efforts, for example, of public consultations, an environmental management team and an international advisory group in connection with the Nam Theun 2 scheme, such monitoring is still paid for and directed by the commercial Nam Theun Power Company. In a situation like this, the refusal of bilateral aid organisations (such as Sida) to engage in hydropower development and to link it to comprehensive rural development schemes is regrettable.

Conclusion

If my own early experience with the Theun-Hinboun study is anything to go by, it looks like the short-term anthropological consultant is likely to be largely ignored by clients, denounced by activists as contributing to environmental destruction, and spurned by academic colleagues as a dirty neoliberal collaborator. In that case one may well ask, is it really worth it? My unreserved Yes to that question rests on the following reflections. Firstly, there is always a chance that one’s studies may after all have some impact on project implementation for the benefit of the local population. Secondly, consultancy work implies opportunities to broaden one’s ethnographic experience. The fact that such studies are carried out within a
quite narrow time frame has sometimes disqualified them in the eyes of academic colleagues (as if an anthropologist can only have something worthwhile to say about a local society after having spent a year or more in the field). While I do not by any means question the fundamental importance for anthropology of long-term intensive fieldwork, this is not necessarily the only legitimate way of gaining ethnographic data. The kind of data demanded for a social impact analysis usually concern rather mundane issues—such as land tenure, agricultural techniques, marketing and employment opportunities, demographic variables, local and regional migration patterns—that are not always given prominence in academic studies but that figure importantly in the daily lives of rural populations.

Thirdly, the challenges of focused ethnographic data collection and of meeting an ungenerous deadline for the submission of a consultancy report have in themselves proved useful. The genre conventions of report writing differ significantly from those of academic text production, but we should insist that both kinds of writing are legitimate anthropological endeavours and that their quality should be assessed on the basis of their merits in the relevant contexts.

The need for social impact analyses and related anthropological consultancy work is not diminishing, but the employment landscape has changed. Western government development agencies have in practice taken leave of their former moral-political obligations to provide direct assistance to rural populations in the Third World, even though the needs of these populations in terms of health care, education, transportation facilities, agricultural and veterinary services have hardly diminished. Instead, ‘Northern’ states are now trying to teach their ‘Southern’ counterparts how to run an efficient bureaucracy through administrative capacity building, good governance (free from corruption), and budgetary and fiscal assistance. The notions of integrated rural development, and its short-lived successor, ‘sustainable livelihoods’, are hardly ever talked about by our government agencies. Even some ‘development anthropologists’ nowadays find it more attractive (or even pertinent) to concentrate their studies on development organisations rather than on the populations for whose ostensible benefit development efforts are undertaken. The demand for social impact analyses instead comes mainly from commercial companies, of whose intentions academic anthropologists have hitherto tended to be wary, if not suspicious, and have therefore rarely tried to cultivate the skills necessary to meet their demands. Those comparatively few of us who practice both academic and practical anthropology will ‘have encountered steep self-leaning curves’ (Goldman and Baum 2000: 3) with respect to the latter, but if we are to make an anthropological education meaning-
ful for more than a small number of future academic researchers, we should make room for our autodidactively acquired skills in the university curriculum. It would be helpful, of course, if our elitist colleagues in the ‘anthropology of development’ could be a bit more broad-minded in their vision of our discipline. As practitioners of a vital academic discipline, we also have an obligation to younger colleagues to try and ensure that they get anthropological recognition even when working outside the academy. And even within the academy, more, and more diverse, experiences of practical work can only contribute to the dynamics of theoretical and methodological debates.
References


Introduction

Considering the wave of result-based management within development cooperation and the usual reliance on quantitative results and analysis grounded in political science, we have every reason to safeguard the areas in which qualitative methods are asked for and to endeavour to explain why there is need for the knowledge anthropologists can produce. One of the problems with the so common LFA (Logical Framework Approach) assessment is that the programme assessed could have produced very limited qualitative results and still be a success story in terms of outputs (i.e. short-term results). This is a known fact, and one of the reasons why the Evaluation Unit of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) recently commissioned two studies involving anthropologists that were aimed at focusing on intermediate results (outcomes), at the level of the beneficiaries (Löfving et al. 2008; Powell et al. 2008). Anthropological experience and knowledge can be very important for development cooperation because they provide empirical findings, for example, on how programmes and reforms are perceived and interpreted by people on the ground and why things work or do not work as planned. From the perspective of development cooperation, there are several problems connected with obtaining and making use of anthropological knowledge. Those problems stem from the fact that anthropological fieldwork is time consuming, expensive and difficult to generalise from. Several at-
tempts at finding ways of extracting the kind of data that is usually collected through anthropological methods in a shorter time have been made with varying results, for example, through different kinds of ‘rapid’ appraisals (see Chambers 1992, 1997). To be able to use anthropological methods in evaluations and assessments there is a need to develop shortcuts to anthropological fieldwork. Managing time is crucial in short-term assessments.

In this essay I will discuss two different kinds of approaches used in assessments commissioned by Sida in which anthropological methods have been used. An assessment designed as a team-based study combining expert interviews, deskwork and rapid interactive fieldwork will be compared with experiences from an evaluation in which the methodology was inspired by the IDRC\(^1\) model called ‘Outcome Mapping’, described as a methodology capable of assessing outcomes over time rather than evaluating results at specific moments in time. Both of the assessments inquire into whether and in what ways the processes of democratisation are deepening in Latin America, more precisely in regard to the developments in Bolivia and Peru. The assessments have different aims which explain the use of different methodologies. In this essay I will not discuss the appropriateness of the methodologies applied in each case. I will focus on the use of anthropological tools in evaluation as a way to assess qualitative results, the anthropological contributions, the question of methodology, and what is gained and what is lost, from the anthropological point of view, when we apply shortcuts to ethnographic fieldwork. The time constraint is a structural problem in these kinds of work, and the responsibility to manage it rests with both the commissioning agency and the implementing anthropologist(s). I will focus on how the problem of ‘lack of time for fieldwork’ is handled and how the ‘lack of time’ affects the results.\(^2\)

My reason for writing this essay is that I believe there is a great need for qualitative evaluations. To be able to take responsibility for the products of their actions, donors need to be informed of how development interventions are received and what their effects are. I argue that the use of anthropological methods in evaluation is crucial for the purpose of obtaining qualitative knowledge about results beyond the output level, and that it is useful for understanding such issues as the local interpretations of the development processes and the unintended effects of the interventions. Nevertheless, there is a need for an ongoing discussion about

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1 Canadian International Development Research Centre
2 I want to thank Sten Hagberg for his well-grounded comments on this paper.
the conceptual and methodological difficulties involved in the application of shortcuts to anthropological fieldwork and in how to interpret and understand the results.

The assessments and their methodological approaches

On two occasions I have been involved in comprehensive assessments commissioned by Sida concerning democratisation processes, in which anthropological methods were asked for. A major difference between the studies I will compare was that the Popular Participation study was termed an ‘assessment’ while the Diakonia study was an ‘evaluation’, even so, I will argue that the way the studies were presented to us as researchers did not differ very much. In both cases, Sida turned to anthropologists and sociologists at universities because it wanted their specific knowledge as well as a more scientific product than was the case in other evaluations. The assessments were focused not on the production of recommendations but on understanding the effects of the programmes/reforms. When I talk about the two studies together I will refer to them as ‘assessments’.

Empowering the poor through institutional reform?

The first piece of work was an assessment in 1996/97 of the Bolivian decentralisation reform called the ‘Law of Popular Participation’. The reform was aimed at extending democratic rights, through municipal reform, to formerly excluded groups such as women in general and indigenous groups in the rural areas. The assessment was commissioned by Sida’s (then) Department for Policy and Legal Analysis and the Regional Department for Latin America, and the aim was to provide an initial appraisal of the process of democratisation in Bolivia.

Methodologically, the study was divided into three phases. An initial desk study combined with interviews with experts and key persons in Bolivia resulted in a separate report (Booth et al. 1996). In the second phase, fieldwork lasting two weeks was carried out in four municipalities by mixed teams of three or four people. The entire crew consisted of seventeen participants, fourteen Bolivians and three Europeans. The team leader, David Booth, had already led two methodologically similar studies in Tanzania and Zambia (Booth et al. 1993; Booth et al. 1995; Booth 1995). The European participants were two sociologists and one anthro-
Ethnographic Practice and Public Aid

The national evaluators were chosen from among Bolivian anthropologists and sociologists with experience in the different areas under study. Evaluation seminars with all of the involved evaluators were conducted at the beginning and end of the assessment, with one of Bolivia’s most experienced anthropologists, Xavier Albó, invited to take part in both of them. The third phase consisted of a programme of consultative meetings held in La Paz and Cochabamba to obtain critical feedback and suggestions on the draft report. The final report was published in 1997 (Booth et al. 1997).

The result of the assessment was an initial appraisal of a decentralisation reform that was to be studied and assessed from different angles for many years (e.g. Grindle 2000; Medeiros 2001; Postero 2007). The assessment outlined different future scenarios (optimistic and pessimistic) and showed that important regional differences could be expected in the response, implementation and effects of the reform for some time.

The outcome-oriented evaluation of Diakonia’s Latin America Programme

More recently, a qualitative evaluation of Diakonia’s programme for Latin America was commissioned by Sida’s Secretariat for Evaluation and Internal Audit and the Department for Latin America and was carried out from February 2006 through September 2007. Sida’s Secretariat for Evaluation and Internal Audit (UTV) was interested in focusing on efforts in training and capacity building, since such components are central to most programmes in the area. Thus there was a close affinity to the interest of Sida’s Department for Latin America (RELA) in evaluating Diakonia’s Latin American programme. Diakonia was seen by Sida as ‘a prominent actor within the field, with good local contacts and a devotion to the theme of capacity-building initiatives’ (Löfving et al. 2008: 202).

The main focus of earlier evaluations of Diakonia had been on organisational factors and methods for guaranteeing transparency and quality within Diakonia and/or its partners. The aim of the outcome-oriented evaluation was to look beyond such aspects in order to enquire about the actual results of Diakonia’s projects. The focus was on the extent to which

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3 Diakonia is a Christian development organisation working with local partners for sustainable change for the most vulnerable people of the world. Diakonia is a global network of people, organisations and churches. It supports four hundred partners in about thirty countries.
12. Shortcuts to Anthropological Fieldwork in Sida-Commissioned Assessments

The evaluation focused on a selection of eight interventions supported by Diakonia in four countries: Bolivia, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Peru. The evaluators were divided into two teams, one for Guatemala and Nicaragua and one for Bolivia and Peru. Each team consisted of three people, a Swedish anthropologist and two local researchers/consultants. The evaluation was divided into three phases which included three visits to each of the selected projects between March 2006 and September 2007. A first visit of two to three days at each site allowed the consultants to make an initial assessment of the projects and the context in which they were operating. On this first visit, ten to twenty individual interviews were conducted at each project with the beneficiaries, as they were called, of the project activities. The same teams made a second and third visit to the selected projects, each lasting two to three days. On these occasions, the consultants also assessed how people close to but external to the intervention in question perceived it and the results it had achieved. An evaluation seminar with all of the researchers/consultants was conducted at the beginning and end of the evaluation (Löfving et al. 2008: 12-13).

The main task was to provide Sida with information regarding the outcome of interventions and activities supported by Diakonia through its Latin American programme. The term ‘outcome’ referred here to ‘changes in the behaviour, relationships, activities and actions of the primary target group’ (Earl et al. 2001: 1) made by the target group of each intervention. According to the Terms of Reference, ‘...the main task of the consultants will be to, through repetitive visits to the participants in each project, try and gauge the extent to which their behaviour and social relations undergo transformation and change as a result of the activities supported by Diakonia’ (Löfving et al. 2008: 205).

The evaluation showed that there were a number of outcomes at the level of beneficiaries and indicated, among other things, that the Diakonia-funded training of local leaders resulted in an improvement in the levels of knowledge among individuals regarding their citizenship rights and the way such rights can be exercised and legally defended. The report concluded that the studied programmes in Latin America do what Diakonia says they do and that they are successful in relation to stated aims. As expected, however, the results gave rise to a number of issues that could be discussed in relation to the long-term expectations of the programmes.

Both of the assessments focused on the effects of the interventions on the democratisation processes in the respective countries: in the case of
Popular Participation, whether people would participate and take advantage of the possibilities offered by the reform, and in the case of Diakonia, whether training and capacity development would change the participants’ behaviour and social relations in favour of a democratic culture.

Both of the assessments involved a certain amount of interest in the development of qualitative methods of evaluation. The Popular Participation study was interested in the development of methodologies for investigating the ‘micro’ implications of ‘macro’ policy shifts in developing countries. In this sense, it built on a series of previous investigations that had produced comparable studies of macro-economic and political liberalisation in Tanzania (Booth et al. 1993) and cost-recovery measures in Zambia (Booth et al. 1995). The Diakonia study focused on the possibility of evaluating outcomes at the intermediary level, at the level of beneficiaries. At the time of the evaluation, Sida’s Secretariat for Evaluation was exploring different alternative approaches to employ in the area of support for democracy and human rights. One of these alternatives consisted of applying the method of ‘outcome mapping’, which has also been used in a study in Bosnia (Powell et al. 2008).

Diverging expectations

Critical issues could be raised in relation to the assumptions guiding the terms of reference of the assessments. In this paper my inquiries will circle mainly around the question of what is gained and what is lost, from the anthropological point of view, when we apply shortcuts to ethnographic fieldwork. First, however, I will reflect briefly upon the fact that there were diverging expectations at times on what questions were to be answered by the assessments, and on the production of quantitatively vs. qualitatively based results, between Sida staff and the evaluation staff as well as within the evaluation teams, which made the work more difficult. In the case of these two assessments, from the commissioning agency’s point of view, they were to focus on whether democratisation was widening and deepening, and on measuring whether certain interventions (political reform and capacity development) rendered the desired results. There is a certain tension here between these expectations and what anthropological methods are best aimed to answer. Anthropology does not focus mainly on questions about how much, but, as indicated in the Diakonia study (Löfving et al. 2008: 39), on questions about in what way, to whom, why and when the measures lead to democratisation. These ques-
tions could even be seen as coming before the more quantitatively directed question of whether democratisation is advancing.

Another problem concerns the degree of openness that is to be allowed in the evaluation design, and/or whether the inductive perspective is useful. Evaluation is a matter of assessing the relationship between objectives and results, often by using indicators that will be used to follow up the results. In these studies, use of the anthropological method involved identifying the elements to follow up in the assessment process, and these elements were used as indicators of positive or negative results from the participants’ point of view, independent of original aims and objectives. I will illustrate this with an explanation of how we worked with the interviews in the Diakonia case. In the original version of ‘outcome mapping’ as designed by the IRDC, qualitative indicators were to be identified in relation to the project’s aims and objectives. In the Diakonia evaluation there were no indicators; instead, the first round of interviews had more of an exploratory character. We were interested in understanding the perspectives of individuals in the target group: how they viewed and interpreted the programme; what actions they had taken in relation to the programme; and what social changes had been produced, if any (Löfving et al. 2008: 43). Instead of following up indicators (as there were none), we identified different themes in the interviews (different themes with different persons) that were followed up in the subsequent interviews. The different themes referred, for example, to gender relations, participation, and leadership.

Our inductive point of departure involved our bringing themes from one conversation to another – turning the answers in one interview into questions in the next. As is usually done in anthropological research, we also tried to explore and verify facts that were mentioned by the interviewees, for example, by triangulation and by asking other people why a meeting took place, who took part, and what happened during the meeting, and so on. The second and third rounds of interviews were less open ended and were used to test hypotheses and to validate our data (ibid.). There are advantages and disadvantages with different methods. Evaluation methods guided solely by aims and objectives may be precise and quantitatively measurable but may also miss important outcomes. The advantage of the anthropological method is that it will deepen our knowledge about the results and will also show unintended effects, positive or

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4 Furthermore, the IRDC method of outcome mapping is designed for use as a participatory tool to follow up project progress and development. In the Diakonia evaluation, perceiving Sida’s wish to produce an evaluation with a more objectivist approach, we used no participatory methods.
negative. In the case of the Popular Participation study, unintended effects were, for example, a few instances in which traditional indigenous organisations were divided between municipalities with context-specific consequences such that the reform, at that moment, weakened rather than strengthened indigenous people’s possibility to claim their citizenship rights as a group. In the Diakonia study there were examples of work on gender awareness, aimed at strengthening women in the political sphere, which seemed to have found its strongest expressions at the individual, private level, where the gender order had been questioned in relation to boyfriends and family members with varying results, in the short-term perspective sometimes with conflicts as a result. More complex unintended effects related, for example, to a paradox found at times in the Diakonia study, where the transformation of perceptions and the increasing knowledge among trained leaders threatened to work against their legitimacy and authority in the local sphere.

In the cases I refer to, the issues of choosing a quantitative vs. qualitative, or inductive vs. deductive, approach concern, on the one hand, representativeness and the possibility of making comparisons, and on the other, quality and an understanding of the contexts. I believe that democratisation processes are context specific, and the anthropological method is able to contribute context-specific data that help explain why a project was successful in one area and not in another. In both of the assessments I discuss here, there were important context-dependent differences concerning the ways democracy promotion was received which would not have been equally visible had other methods been used. In the Popular Participation study, the response to the decentralisation reform and whether people took advantage of new possibilities to influence politics varied across the country depending on the social, cultural, political and economic context. For example, in the region of Chapare, the peasants who grew coca leaf and who were already actively organised in unions rapidly took advantage of the new possibility to be represented in the newly established local governments, while the Aymara peasants on the high plateau, in spite of their strong traditional organisations, opposed the reform in the beginning for cultural and political reasons. On the high plateau, the economic decline and process of depopulation also contributed to weakening response to new possibilities. In the Diakonia study, training and capacity development had very different implementation processes and effects in different areas. In the area of Ayacucho, strongly affected by the Peruvian civil war and drug-related activities, the weakening of the local traditional organisations and the lack of trust in the state affected the process of organisation and leadership development. The presence of a
mayor deeply engaged in the participation of the inhabitants in the district we studied contributed to the good results of the training. In the lowland area of the Chiquitania in Bolivia, the hierarchic economic structure involving large landowners and impoverished indigenous communities restrained the possibilities of making use of the training.

Counteracting the lack of time

The framework of this discussion is based on lack of time, the most evident problem for the anthropological consultant. In its classic form, fieldwork consists of the anthropologist’s spending a long time (about a year) living with and participating in the everyday life of the people he/she wants to study in order to understand social relations and cultural meanings in a particular context (see e.g. Aull Davies 1999: 67). Even with the methodological developments in multi-sited anthropology (Marcus 1995; Hannerz 2001), ethnography on-line (Aull Davies 2007), and multi-researcher work, time spent in ‘the field’ is usually more extended than what is possible in the course of a Sida-commissioned study. The problem of not having enough time for fieldwork is not a problem that could be solved if only the commissioners of the studies could provide more resources for fieldwork; in the cases I am considering, Sida representatives commissioning both studies were open to the idea of assigning more time for fieldwork. Rather, it is a structural problem in these kinds of assessments, and the way the studies will be designed is usually a matter of balancing the representativeness and replicability of the evaluations with costs and researchers’ availability. Researchers involved in short-term assignments are either employed by universities and have other obligations such as teaching, or take on different assignments in succession.

Time management

Both of the assessments offered only short-term fieldwork totalling one to two weeks in each study site. The task for the evaluator is to manage the time available in such a way as to get access to the required information, which usually requires establishing some kind of relations of trust with the interviewees and involves information that covers a time span longer than the precise moment at which the field visit and interviews are taking place. Questions to be asked concern: Who does the interview? Who will be interviewed? How many persons will be interviewed? How often? What kind of interviews will be done?
In both assessments discussed here, the lack of time was counteracted by the composition of the research teams and the choice of national consultants. In both assessments the European anthropologists involved had previous experiences in the areas. In the case of the Popular Participation assessment, for each team, whenever possible, Bolivian researchers were selected who had previously worked in the area, based on the assumption that it would be impossible to establish relations in such a short time and very difficult to get reliable information unless contacts had already been established beforehand. Previous knowledge of Bolivian contexts would also enhance the capacity to assess results, and in a longer time perspective. The Popular Participation study targeted four municipalities, which meant looking for researchers who had already worked in these areas. In the case of the Diakonia evaluation, researchers were chosen who had a broad knowledge of national democratisation processes. Because we were looking at a regional programme, what geographical areas the consultants should have previous experience in was not as apparent. As it turned out, the people recruited had deeper knowledge of some of the project areas and less of others. In both studies, triangulation was important in order to compare fieldwork findings with other studies and research reports; thus consultants with expertise in political science and sociology were included.

It is considered important in anthropological fieldwork to be able to ‘tune in’ to the social and cultural context by making contacts with different kinds of people, in order to understand what issues are at stake for the people living there and to be able to select informants who can contribute to a deeper understanding of the object of study. Choosing informants is of critical importance for the ethnographic researcher (see e.g. Aull Davies 1999: 78-83). Due to the time limit in the assessments, the selection of informants had to be done using existing networks. In the Popular Participation assessment, the selection of informants was highly influenced by the team members chosen, because they were already involved in the area. As I have already mentioned, in designing the study we proceeded from the assumption that, given the time limit, in order to make reliable interviews possible it was necessary to compose teams that included people with existing networks of their own. Hence, the character of existing social relations between evaluator and interviewees would of course influence how they act and what they say. This is common knowledge among anthropologists, who reflect on this and bring this knowledge into their analysis. This problem also connects to the possibilities of creating non-violent communication, which I will discuss below.
In the Diakonia study, due to the time limit and the distances involved for evaluators and informants alike, we had to depend to a certain extent on the organisations in their choice of people for us to interview. Just as Diakonia had the possibility to influence the choice of organisations to evaluate, so the organisations had the possibility to influence the choice of informants. In my experience, the proposed persons were mostly enthusiastic and loyal to the project and the cause. While we looked for people with alternative perspectives to interview to counteract this tendency, as we mention in the report, this fact was most certainly influential in the ‘positive’ results we ultimately obtained (Löfving et al. 2008: 45). In the Popular Participation assessment, ‘the project’, i.e. the reform, was initiated by the government and implemented by the state, perceived as more distant than the partner organisations of Diakonia. At that time, popular organisations were not loyal to the government (which was neoliberal), as may be the case today in Bolivia with a government sprung out of social organisations.

In the Popular Participation assessment, the design of the study involved conducting a certain number of interviews and other restrictions in order to make comparison possible between the municipalities under study. In the Diakonia study, one of the issues discussed concerned the number of beneficiaries to be interviewed in the first round and followed up in the second and third. It was agreed in discussions with Sida staff that at each project site, eighteen to twenty individuals should be interviewed in order to get a representative selection. In ethnographic fieldwork, informants are normally chosen for their competence rather than just for their representativeness (Bernard 1994: 165). Trying to fulfil Sida’s quantitative expectations was sometimes perceived as an obstacle by the evaluators; due to the limited time, the possibility of obtaining more reliable qualitative results by following a beneficiary outside the interview was circumscribed by the need to follow up all interviews in order to fulfil quantitative expectations.

Other ways of using the time constraints as effectively as possible were accomplished through the choice of interview techniques. In the Popular Participation assessment it was decided that in order to get as full a picture as possible participatory and interactive methods would be used in the fieldwork. These methods were also very much in vogue at the time (influenced by e.g. Chambers 1992, 1997). Interviews with beneficiaries were conducted in groups in combination with workshops and exercises such as institutional mapping, the construction of matrices of local political action, and wealth ranking. There were limited possibilities to observe behaviour outside the workshop rooms or to compare participants’ narra-
tives with alternative stories. The fact that the municipalities were studied only at one moment was counteracted by the composition of the team and also by the interviews of experts and the study of literature that provided deeper insight into each area through a broader time perspective. The contacts established in the first phase (interviewing experts and others) allowed us to maintain a more or less up-to-date perspective on the rapidly changing political developments. In initial discussions of the assignment with Sida’s Department for Latin America, the study was intended to provide a base line that could be followed up after a certain interval. The study never was followed up, perhaps because Sida decided not to provide support for the reform work of Popular Participation.

In the case of the Diakonia evaluation, the main technique consisted of individual interviews. Ideally, the same persons were interviewed on three occasions, which allowed the teams to follow their individual development and change over a period of time. As we recorded and transcribed their statements, we were able to see if and how their perceptions and narratives, as well as their accounts of activities and actions, changed over time. In the end, following the individuals over one and a half years turned out to be too short a period to record observable and significant changes among the target group members. In spite of this, being able to interview the same person on three occasions turned out to be the most fruitful part of the methodology, not only because of the time span encompassed, but also because we were allowed to follow and deepen our understanding of individual people’s lives. In some cases, what we perceived as real outcomes or lack of outcomes would not have been detected had we interviewed those persons only once. For example, most of the leaders interviewed had changed their view of leadership and democracy. Whether these new insights seemed actually to have led to actions in the local community varied. Some of the leaders could describe the process of their actions throughout the three phases of interviews. In other cases, the same discourse came up in all three interviews about ‘intended’ actions that had not yet been realised. Factors like ‘having to devote oneself to making a living’ instead of social and political activities were mentioned, or the fact that resistance and obstacles in the context which they were trying to change were overwhelming (Löfving et al. 2008: 98).

The vulnerable part of this methodology was that due to the time constraints in combination with severe problems of access, in this case mainly physical/geographical, there were some persons who were not available for the second and third rounds of interviews. In addition, as I have already mentioned, prioritising a fairly large number of individual inter-
views limited the time available for going beyond the interviews to participate and observe people’s actions and statements in other contexts.

Comparing the two interview techniques, participatory and interactive interviews and individual interviews on three occasions, I found the individual interview technique more rewarding precisely because we got a variety of perspectives and were able to deepen our understanding of the lives of the people we interviewed. This shows, in my view, that it is not necessary to adapt our research techniques (e.g. into more rapid, participatory techniques) in order to participate in development assessments. Usually it is best to use the techniques we are most familiar with. A problem found in group interviews is that a few people tend to dominate the conversation so that in the end only a limited number of more ‘official’ perspectives will be given on a topic. A related problem was also found with the Diakonia methodology. As it turned out, we had to rely almost exclusively on interviews, which meant that we had little possibility to check more ‘official’ statements from the interviews against ‘informal’ statements in other contexts.

Creating relationships of trust

The main tool for the anthropologist is the qualitative interview which gives the researcher access to people’s opinions and points of view as expressed by themselves, an insight into people’s perception of their own constraints and possibilities. This form of interviewing is in fact more of a conversation in which the researcher makes efforts to create an atmosphere of trust. The aim is to collect empirical data (Kvale 1997).

In the Popular Participation assessment, the evaluators remained in the area for one to two weeks and the interviews with community members were usually conducted in groups or by persons previously known to the informants. In that assessment, individual trajectories were not followed over time, while that was the main objective in the Diakonia evaluation. In the Diakonia evaluation, the researchers came and stayed for a much shorter time on each visit, the interviews were individual and thus more personal. With the time limit it is difficult to set up an interview situation in which the above-mentioned atmosphere of trust may evolve. The issue of how to counteract the sense of obligation and imposition in the interview situations can be important, and it is highlighted by the presence of the tape recorder. The main way of counteracting this problem was the fact that we were coming back on three occasions, which permitted a little trust to evolve.
Comparing the two assessments and the way the interviews were done, I feel that in the Diakonia evaluation the interviews were more interesting, but at the same time more violent in the sense that there was no time to ‘tune in’ to informants’ realities and establish a more equal relationship. The relationship between the researcher and his or her informants is full of connotations, and, as noted by Bourdieu (1999: 607-12), it remains a social relationship. As such it can have an effect on the results obtained; different parameters may influence the relationship to varying degrees. The intention on the researcher’s part must be to reduce any symbolic violence that could affect responses. Symbolic violence refers to the tacit, almost unconscious modes of cultural/social domination that occur in everyday life (e.g. gender dominance, racism). Symbolic violence maintains its effect when power relations are not recognised within a given field. Symbolic violence can also be seen as the imposition of categories of thought and perception upon dominated social agents and the incorporation of unconscious structures that maintain dominance (see also Bourdieu 1977). A first step towards ‘non-violent’ communication, as Bourdieu calls it, must be based on reflexivity as a method. Reflexivity refers to the ‘ways in which the products of research are affected by the personnel and process of doing research’ (Aull Davies 1999: 4), i.e. recognising under what conditions the communication is taking place and reflecting on it.

According to Bourdieu (1999), social proximity and familiarity provide two of the conditions of ‘non-violent’ communication. In the Popular Participation assessment, setting up teams with people who were already engaged with the study’s municipalities was a way of looking for faster access and making communication possible. The choice of national consultants for the Diakonia evaluation was guided by the idea of who would be able to communicate. Looking for social proximity and familiarity is not unproblematic, however, because people coming from the same society may have subtle differences and ways of expressing hierarchy which also may produce violence in the communication. Sometimes a stranger, like ourselves, with a good mastery of the language and knowledge of the local context may be perceived as more neutral.

How shortcuts affect results

Are these kinds of engagements worthwhile? Both of these assessments are instances of anthropological work in development-assessment scenarios, and their differences and commonalities illuminate certain issues, in
order to enrich the discussion of ‘shortcuts’ in this sort of context. In both studies there were challenging methodological problems due to the time constraints. Our understandings of the local contexts were affected by the fact that we mostly got ‘official’ versions of how things are, which is what you get when you meet people in meetings or conduct an interview without having the possibility to follow up in more informal settings. There were limited possibilities to ‘tune in’ to the local people, to understand what was really at stake in their lives and to counteract and reduce symbolic violence in the interviews. It was also impossible to gain a holistic perspective, another hallmark of the anthropological method. Even though our understanding of the local context was partial and did not reach a level as deep as that in other fieldwork contexts, it was good enough. Comparing the experiences of the two shortcuts to the ethnographic fieldwork, I can still conclude that both of them were effective in terms of collecting interesting and useful data for development cooperation.

What can we, as anthropologists, learn from participating in these kinds of studies? Participating in studies carried out by interdisciplinary teams has a lot to offer anthropologists through being forced to think about new issues and research possibilities. As a matter of fact, what could be learned from these exercises fits well with discussions within academic anthropology about adapting ethnography as practices of fieldwork and writing to new conditions of work (Marcus 1998). So I would argue that, in spite of challenging methodological problems due to the time constraint, the studies also produced knowledge interesting to anthropologists.

The assumptions driving the methodological efforts behind the work of the Popular Participation assessment were that innovative combinations of desk studies and ‘rapid’ interactive fieldwork in selected communities could have much to offer donor agencies, governments and even academic audiences needing timely assessment of the implications of major policy changes (Booth 1995). The study we undertook was one of the first studies of the Popular Participation reform process, a timely assessment which was followed by a whole range of studies in Bolivia and elsewhere. Taking part in the Popular Participation assessment awakened my interest in the links between national reforms and people’s interpretations.

Although this methodological approach was developed mainly by David Booth, then at the University of Hull, the work was initiated and made possible through a fruitful collaboration between the Development Studies Unit in the Department of Social Anthropology at Stockholm University (Eva Tobisson) and Sida’s Department for Policy and Legal Affairs (Kristina Bohman).
of them, which is what I still focus on in my research. Of the work I have done, the reports from the Popular Participation assessments (Booth et al. 1996, 1997) are by far the most cited and have led to a lot of feedback from investigators and students from different disciplines. Reflecting on the Diakonia evaluation, I find it worthwhile because the processes to be studied reflected important national political developments in both countries that I was involved in (Bolivia and Peru). We studied not only the democratisation processes on the ground but also the involvement of the development agencies, even though this topic was not given much room within the framework of the assessments themselves.

When I have participated at meetings with people involved in development cooperation I have often heard comments about the need to quantify qualitative results, to find ways of designing qualitative indicators. This may be a realistic way of handling the problem, considering the working conditions of development cooperation. But it is probably not a task for researching anthropologists. What is important with anthropological knowledge, apart from actual qualitative results, is what we can learn about the way the results were obtained, what unexpected effects the intervention had, how it was interpreted and who was reached by the support. These are important issues that will inform the donor not only about the results but will provide information the organisation needs in order to take some responsibility also for the effects the project or programme has on the local social context irrespective of the original aims and objectives. I am mostly concerned about the ways donor-supported interventions may reinforce or alter local power relations in terms of class, gender and ethnicity, and how it may create spheres of social or political agents with little relationship to the bases they are said to represent. If poverty alleviation is going to be taken seriously, there is a need within development cooperation for the information that can be obtained through ethnographic field techniques at the level of the beneficiaries.

A problem exists concerning anthropologists’ involvement in development cooperation which has to do with the management of time. This problem needs to be addressed and counteracted from both ends. On the one hand, representatives of development cooperation need to understand more about the anthropological contribution and the kind of knowledge it produces; anthropological consultants need more time for fieldwork and the development of qualitative knowledge in their assessments in order to present well-informed cases. On the other hand, to make anthropologists want to spend more time in development assessments, representatives of academic anthropology should take advantage of these kinds of
experiences, elevate the status of consultancy work and turn its issues into the focus of research.
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