

WHERE CULTURE MEETS DEVELOPMENT: PERSPECTIVES OF  
DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS IN THE  
PARTICIPATORY ERA

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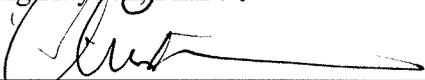
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ABSTRACT

Conventional development practices, designed to promote modernization and economic integration, gave way to ideologies of participatory development in the 1990s. While participatory development, in theory, privileges the desires, and strategies of communities in the global South, and reflects local cultural practices, its success is limited. This thesis considers the perspectives of development professionals, and addresses the following questions: Given lessons learned from the failures of structural adjustment and other conventional practices, what barriers prevent development professionals from working with communities effectively in the participatory era? How do development professionals find meaning in their work, in spite of conflict and failure? Findings suggest that the interests of donors and employers, and a “professional culture” constrains practitioners, to the point that it is not possible for project beneficiaries to participate significantly. Fully aware of the problems of structure and agency pervading the field, practitioners adapt or leave, implying that there is little space for innovation in development institutions and organizations.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Since the inception of international development and assistance policies in the United States and Europe, the international development field has grown into a large and constantly shifting network of organizations, communities, and individuals responsible for implementing projects and programs, and engaging in development practices. International development practitioners channel and articulate the complexities of working in development, and mediate between many different parties with various perspectives on a regular basis. While the practice of development has evolved over time, the myriad of priorities and motives with which actors must negotiate are perpetual features. These motives are tied not only to contemporary funding streams from project donors and the political relationships between countries involved, but also to larger geopolitical, historical, institutional, and cultural contexts.

The field of international development emerged from a distinct historical context of engagement between the global North and global South. In the post-colonial era following World War II and Europe's reconstruction, development offered possibilities of a different way forward in terms of North/South relations. However, the advent of international development in the 1960s perpetuated the asymmetries of power characteristic of imperialism, including the advancement of uniform modernization paradigms. The view that poorer nations should attempt to be more like the United States

and newly-civilized Europe pervaded the official discourse and shaped policies towards newly independent nations with limited social, political, and economic resources.<sup>1</sup>

Similar views extended into the academic literature on economics and sociology, arguing that Southern cultures should attempt to emulate Northern ones in order for societies to progress, and sought to explain poverty as a side effect of cultural traits, rather than as a complex, evolving circumstance rooted in history and context.<sup>2</sup>

Lessons practitioners learned in the field on the community level, as well as larger political and social incidents heralded the failure of structural adjustment and other modernization projects imposed from above.<sup>3</sup> The failure of structural adjustment largely influenced major paradigmatic shifts in development theory and discourse towards grassroots priority setting and participation in the 1990s, but these shifts are uneven in development practice. Currently, rhetoric within field of development privileges culturally relevant, participatory interventions, which should amount to the implementation of participatory development projects.

However, while participatory development, in theory, privileges the desires, and strategies of communities in the global South, and reflects local cultural practices, its

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1. Richard Peet, *Theories of Development* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1999), 83.

2. See, for example: Everett Hagen, *On the Theory of Social Change* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1962); Bert Hoselitz, *Sociological Aspects of Economic Growth* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1960); David C. McClelland and David G. Winter, *Motivating Economic Achievement* (New York: Free Press, 1971).

3. From the 1970s through the 1990s, The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund required all nations borrowing money for development initiatives to implement a package of economic policies known as “structural adjustment,” including devaluing currency, raising taxes, and cutting public services. While focused on improving a country’s balance of trade, these policies increased and entrenched poverty rates and are credited with causing much social and political unrest, including coups, in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. For more on structural adjustment, see: Richard Peet, *Theories of Development* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1999), 53-57.

success in implementation is limited. This thesis considers the perspectives of development professionals, and addresses the following questions: Given lessons learned from the failures of structural adjustment and other conventional practices, what barriers prevent development professionals from working with communities effectively in the participatory era? How do development professionals make sense of, and respond, to conflict and failure?

In order to address the gap between the rhetoric and reality of participatory development, it is important to understand why practitioners have limited success in engaging in participatory work in the field. Through identifying and understanding the barriers practitioners face, it is possible to identify and discuss the limits to participatory development, and how those limits can be addressed. If the goal of development is to raise the standards of living for the world's poor, and increase life chances and access to opportunities, then removing barriers to sustainable and successful development processes should be the foremost goal of international development institutions. This thesis particularly considers the "cultural" barriers to participatory practice embedded at the institutional level, and does not address physical barriers to development, such as the allocation of resources, logistical challenges, and issues of access.

Practitioners are uniquely positioned to identify and address the causes of such "cultural" barriers, which are broadly tied to contemporary economic and geopolitical systems. The demands of donors to projects, large institutions and organizations, and the professional norms of development both sustain the field and constrain possibilities for innovations therein. Development professionals continue to attempt the more participatory approach the epistemic community demands. However, according to

practitioners themselves, the realities of current project implementation strategies are not indicative of desired movement in that direction.

Analyzing the impressions development professionals have of their own work can help to explain why participatory projects do not necessarily foster community empowerment, and how development professionals, as a group, engage with others. With this knowledge, it is possible to advocate for new directions in international development that meet mandates for community empowerment. Simultaneously, giving voice to the personal meanings practitioners have towards the field as a whole helps to identify needed changes from the perspective of the professional. Understanding what motivates practitioners, and how this evolves over time, speaks to the personal motives, rather than the institutional or political motives, for engaging in development work.

A study of international development professionals and the implications of their perspectives for the field of development as a whole is significant, especially given the striking lack of the voices of development professionals in the academic literature. In order to address this gap, this thesis aims to privilege the voices of practitioners with experience at headquarters and in the field with the belief that given the opportunity to act with fewer restraints, development practitioners have the tools to conceive of operational strategies and find new ways forward that actually put project beneficiaries first. I analyze the consistencies and differences between interviews with development professionals, after using a theoretical framework that explains constraints to action for individuals in institutional settings. These interviews offer a rich text to draw upon that presents new insights into the successes and failures of development as a whole, and has implications for the future of the field.

With many barriers to community participation in place, development professionals face much frustration and have to negotiate relationships between the many stakeholders in any specific development context, from large donors and governments to individuals in beneficiary communities. The ability of practitioners to circumvent barriers and negotiate relationships often depends on whether or not they are able to find work for organizations pursuing missions in alignment with their personal values. Otherwise, development professionals tend to adapt, or leave the field of development altogether. Both scenarios do not bode well for the possibilities of innovation and change within international development institutions, implying that barriers to participatory development practice are unlikely to be addressed.

The first chapter identifies and introduces the problem this thesis considers, and discusses the significance for considering the perspectives of international development professionals in the participatory era. The second chapter, through a review of the international development and organizational literatures, establishes the context defining the field in which international development practitioners work, and offers some definitions. The third chapter presents a triangulated theoretical framework, providing the theory-based justifications for considering the interview data in the analysis. The fourth chapter briefly expands upon the methodology employed in the thesis. The fifth chapter presents findings which address the barriers international development professionals face in participatory endeavors, and illuminate their personal views regarding the field as a whole. Additionally, a discussion connects the theoretical framework with the findings, and considers how development professionals engage in sense making behavior to construct meaning of the work they pursue. The final chapter discusses the implications

of the finding and of the discussion, and considers alternative directions for the field of international development and for the people who work within it.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review works to establish the part of the present context with which development practitioners grapple in an era of participatory discourse through presenting theories and case studies. A focus on the existing scholarship on development, and participatory and culturally sensitive development in particular makes it possible to discuss the relationships of the development practitioner to the field itself in the analysis. While little in the literature directly addresses the dilemmas development professionals face at headquarters and in the field, the participatory development literature takes into account the interactions between development professionals and project beneficiaries. I will also briefly address literature from organizational and critical organizational studies, which through its look at the relationships between individuals and institutions, can help to explain how my analysis adds to existing knowledge in the field of international development. Finally, I will address a gap in the literature. While there is significant scholarship on international development and organizational management, and the tools development practitioners use, I found little that takes the perspectives of development professionals into account and leverages their knowledge and experience in the service of the broader development context.

### International Development: Establishing the Historical Context

In many ways, participatory development practices which take into account the cultural norms of project beneficiaries on the micropolitical level are a response to the development policies of the United States towards Europe and its former colonies in the aftermath of World War II. Some scholars, such as Green,<sup>4</sup> Mayo,<sup>5</sup> and Stokes<sup>6</sup> conceive of participatory development as a set of revolutionary ideas that have begun to seep into mainstream political and economic policies and practices. Others argue that it is “hardly a revolution, but the acceleration of a gradual process that has been going on since at least the 1950s.”<sup>7</sup> This section of the literature review focuses on scholarship regarding those historical, conventional development practices that have provided the foundation for development, and the situations with which development professionals contend, in the participatory era.

Green,<sup>8</sup> Mellor,<sup>9</sup> and Peet<sup>10</sup> argue that the field of international development emerged between 1948 and 1952 due to the success of the United States’ Marshall Plan

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4. Duncan Green, *From Poverty to Power* (Boston: Oxfam International, 2008).

5. Marjorie Mayo, *Cultures, Communities, Identities: Cultural Strategies for Participation and Empowerment* (New York: Palgrave, 2000).

6. Bruce Stokes, *Helping Ourselves: Local Solutions to Local Problems* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981).

7. Paul Sillitoe, “The Development of Indigenous Knowledge: A New Applied Anthropology,” *Current Anthropology*, 19, no. 2 (1998): 236.

8. Maia Green, “Participatory Development and the Appropriation of Agency in Southern Tanzania,” *Critique of Anthropology*, 20, no. 1 (2000): 67-89.

and its surrounding economic policies towards Europe in rebuilding infrastructure, building democratic institutions, and fostering diplomatic relationships in the aftermath of World War II. Evans<sup>11</sup> notes that this success sparked the first serious academic interest in the role of the intervention of developed nations, through state and non-governmental organizations, in furthering social and economic development around the world. The consolidation of modernization theory, and reactions against it, began to emerge in the academic literature at this time.

Modernization theory continues to be the foundation for conventional development practice. Even those advocates of critical development theory who wholeheartedly reject modernization theory and bemoan the failures and harm of the projects engaging with modernization paradigms, such as Escobar,<sup>12</sup> Harvey,<sup>13</sup> and Peet,<sup>14</sup> acknowledge the continued idealization of modernization within the field of development. Focused on increasing efficiency and volume in economic production, modernization theorists argue for the reign of *laissez faire* economics and minimal state

9. John W. Mellor, "Foreign Aid and Agriculture-Led Development," in *International Agricultural Development*, eds. Carl K. Eicher and John M. Staatz (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 55-66.

10. Richard Peet, *Theories of Development* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999).

11. Peter Evans, "The State As Problem and Solution: Predation, Embedded Autonomy, and Structural Change," in *The Politics of Economic Adjustment* eds. Stephen Haggard and Robert R. Kaufman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 139-181.

12. Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

13. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1990).

14. Richard Peet, *Theories of Development* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999).

intervention. Based in the idea that all societies must naturally progress from a primal to an advanced state, scholars such as Higgins and Savoie,<sup>15</sup> So,<sup>16</sup> and many others note that modernists conceive of this progress as universal, inevitable, irreversible, and unavoidable, and that paradigms of international development should strive to promote modernization. Not surprisingly, modernization theorists such as Myrdal,<sup>17</sup> Rostow,<sup>18</sup> and Tachau<sup>19</sup> offer their own confirmations of the interpretations of the aspects of modernization theory.

In contrast to the non-interventionist approach for which modernization theorists argue, Keynesian economists return to John Keynes'<sup>20</sup> premise that there is an essential and necessary role for the state in economic activities. For international development, this means that developed countries should intervene to assist developing countries, and also that state institutions in developing countries should have some control over economic development in order to maximize political stability and ensure that resources are in fact

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15. Benjamin H. Higgins and Donald J. Savoie, *Regional Development Theories and Their Application* (London: Transaction, 1995).

16. Alvin Y. So, *Social Change and Development: Modernization, Dependency, and World Systems Theory* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990).

17. Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama: An Inquiry Into the Poverty of Nations* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1968).

18. W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1960).

19. Frank Tachau, *The Developing Nations: What Path to Modernization?* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1972).

20. John M. Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1936).

distributed equitably across society. Following Keynes, economists Lawrence and Litan argue that “intervention will actually improve economic performance” and serve to address the social and environmental costs of industrialization and economic growth.<sup>21</sup>

Criticism of modernization theory is not concerned with its treatment of economic processes alone, but is part of the struggle to define what the development enterprise should and should not be concerned with. On one end of the spectrum, some scholars, such as Brohman,<sup>22</sup> Lal,<sup>23</sup> and Prebisch<sup>24</sup> are singular in their approach to development, suggesting it is concerned with economic growth and production alone. On the other, development is conceived of as a holistic process that should increase access to many different types of resources and enable the fulfillment of all human needs. Scholars differ in their approach to how this fulfillment is actualized, but agree that it is not through economic modernization. Korten and Carner,<sup>25</sup> Holdgate,<sup>26</sup> and Melkote and Steeves<sup>27</sup>

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21. Robert Z. Lawrence and Robert E. Litan, *Saving Free Trade: A Pragmatic Approach* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1986).

22. John Brohman, *Popular Development: Rethinking the Theory and Practice of Development* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1996).

23. Deepak Lal, *The Poverty of Development Economics* (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1983).

24. Raul Prebisch, *International Economics and Development* (New York: Academic Press, 1972).

25. David Korten and George Carner, “Planning Frameworks for People-Centered Development,” in *People Centered Development: Contributions Toward Theory and Planning Frameworks*, eds. David Korten and Rudi Klaus (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1984) 201-209.

26. Martin Holdgate, *From Care to Action: Making a Sustainable World* (Washington, DC: Taylor and Francis, 1996).

27. Srinivas R. Melkote and H. Leslie Steeves, *Communication for Development in the Third World: Theory and Practice for Empowerment* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001).

argue that development constitutes an increase in overall quality of life, while Eade,<sup>28</sup> Rahman,<sup>29</sup> and Rist<sup>30</sup> view development primarily as the actualization of human potential. Development exists in the continuum between these two strains of thought: whether or not development is concerned primarily with the creation of economic or social opportunities, and whether or not the goals of development are practical or emancipatory. On the ground, development professionals negotiate with the conflicts that arise as a result of these tensions in the theory of how and why development should be pursued.

Where the literature does articulate the perspectives and contributions of development professionals, it is clear that practitioners found fault with the initial iterations of the modernization enterprise, and fought for the participation of project beneficiaries from the outset. According to Botchway,<sup>31</sup> development practitioners in the 1950s advocated for participatory development practices, and decried the policies modernization theories inspired. With the knowledge of the diverse realities in the field that required customized solutions and the inclusion of local stakeholders, development professionals knew that modernization was only a reflection of what had occurred during

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28. Deborah Eade, *Capacity-Building: An Approach to People-Centered Development* (Boston: Oxfam International, 1997).

29. Anisur Rahman, "People's Self Development," in *Real-Life Economics: Understanding Wealth Creation*, eds. Paul Ekins and Manfred A. Max-Neef (London: Routledge, 1992) 167-180.

30. Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith* (New York: Zed Books, 1997).

31. Karl Botchway, "Paradox of Empowerment: Reflections on a Case Study from Northern Ghana," *World Development*, 29, no. 1 (2000: 135-153).

the industrial revolution in the developed world, and was ill-equipped to actually provide solutions to the problems of acute poverty elsewhere. This perspective did not appear in the literature for decades, as evinced by the work of Antholt,<sup>32</sup> Jaffee,<sup>33</sup> and Kay,<sup>34</sup> among others. Despite the work of many practitioners and scholars to distance development from modernization, from the 1950s to the present, Tarrow<sup>35</sup> suggests that most still equate development with modernization.

Scholars credit the advancement of dependency theory, which treats the enterprise of development as a way for wealthy countries to further exploit and subordinate poor nations, in the developing world to the widespread dissatisfaction with and rejection of development policies and institutions from the 1970s to the present.<sup>36</sup> Simultaneously, this dissatisfaction provided the catalyst for actors in the developed world to begin formulating participatory development models with some seriousness. Accepting that modernization theories provide the foundation for the field with which development professionals engage, the second part of this literature review will focus on the advent of

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32. Charles H. Antholt, "Agricultural Extension in the Twenty-First Century," in *International Agricultural Development* eds. Carl K. Eicher and John M. Staatz (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 354-369.

33. David Jaffee, *Levels of Socioeconomic Development Theory* (New York: Praeger, 1990).

34. Cristóbal Kay, *Latin American Theories of Development and Underdevelopment* (London: Routledge, 1989).

35. Sidney Tarrow, "From Lumping to Splitting: Specializing Globalization and Resistance," in *Globalization and Resistance: Transnational Dimensions of Social Movements*, eds. Jackie Smith and Hank Johnston (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 229-249.

36. Jan Knippers Black, *Development in Theory and Practice: Paradigms and Paradoxes*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999) 28.; Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

participatory development, how it is defined, the tools available to professionals within the field, and the implications for their personal perspectives.

### International Development: Development As Participatory

The literature on the participatory turn in development couches participation as a response to the inadequacies of modernization. Through proposing alternate models for development, these scholars insist upon the focus on cultural considerations and micropolitical needs in the development enterprise. Lemco<sup>37</sup> and Servaes,<sup>38</sup> for example, argue that since there is no universal path to development, any model or theory, such as modernization, that offers a universal solution, is inherently flawed. Uvin<sup>39</sup> and Stevens<sup>40</sup> add that for development to be helpful instead of harmful, it must focus on building and galvanizing formal and informal civil society institutions and associations which encourage the equitable participation of all members of society. Miles<sup>41</sup> adds that beneficiaries of development projects must be stakeholders of the projects, in order to

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37. Jonathan Lemco, "Economic and Political Development in Modernizing States," in *State and Development*, eds. Cal Clark and Jonathan Lemco (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1988), 9-21.

38. Jan Servaes, *Communication for Development: One World, Multiple Cultures* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1999).

39. Peter Uvin, "Scaling Up the Grassroots and Scaling Down the Summit: The Relations Between Third World Nongovernmental Organizations and the United Nations," *Third World Quarterly*, 16, no. 3(1995): 495-512.

40. Jan Stevens, *The Economics of Collective Choice* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993).

41. William F. S. Miles, "The Rabbi's Well: A Case Study in the Micropolitics of Foreign Aid in Muslim West Africa," *African Studies Review*, 51, no. 1 (2008): 41-57.

ensure real needs, internal to the community are being met, instead of needs outsiders perceive or invent.

If participation is vital to the success of development projects in the field, then it is crucial to define what participation means. The definitions of participation are as diverse as the amount of literature on participatory development. Here, I will address the range of existing knowledge on what participation in development means, and how development professionals facilitate, or do not facilitate, such participation.

According to Rondinelli,<sup>42</sup> the United States Agency for International Development first attempted to define what “participation” meant in development in 1977, due to a desire to standardize organizational practices. Norman Uphoff defines participation in development as “the involvement of a significant number of persons in situations or actions which enhance their well-being, e.g., their income, security, and/or self-esteem.”<sup>43</sup> At this time, scholars<sup>44</sup> overwhelmingly agree that the concept of participation in development began to be present in most aspects of the development discourse. Concurrently and afterwards, scholars such as Wang and Dissanayake began to elaborate on definitions of participatory development, defining it as:

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42. Dennis A. Rondinelli, *Development Administration and U.S. Foreign Aid Policy* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1987).

43. Norman Uphoff, et al. “Feasibility and Application of Rural Development Participation: A State-of-the-Art Paper,” no. 3 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Center for International Studies, 1977).

44. For examples, see: Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari, eds. *Participation: The New Tyranny?* (London: Zed Books, 2001).; Jill Chopyak, “Citizen Participation and Democracy: Examples in Science and Technology,” *National Civic Review*, 90, no. 4 (2001: 375-83); Maia Green, “Participatory Development and the Appropriation of Agency in Southern Tanzania,” *Critique of Anthropology*, 20, no. 1 (2000: 67-89).

... a process of social change which has as its goal the improvement in the quality of life of all or the majority of people without doing violence to the natural and cultural environment in which they exist, and which seeks to involve the majority of the people as closely as possible in this enterprise, making them the masters of their own destiny.<sup>45</sup>

Within the field itself, and for practitioners, the participatory turn became a way of rethinking not only the failures of development, but also the power dynamics between the developed world and the developing world. Nelson and Wright note that when participatory development emerged, its purpose was to “...enable categories of people traditionally objectified and silenced to be recognized as legitimate ‘knowers’: to define themselves, increase their understanding of their circumstances, and act upon that knowledge.”<sup>46</sup>

Robert Chambers credits the spread of participatory discourse with the fact that “...it was seen to supply a demand for participation, met a need felt by practitioners, and was promoted by networks of enthusiasts.”<sup>47</sup> Cornwall and Pratt,<sup>48</sup> among others, note that while development agencies considered participation to be innovative through the 1990s, it is now widespread and central to the majority of development projects and the

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45. In Srinivas R. Melkote and H. Leslie Steeves, *Communication for Development in the Third World: Theory and Practice* (London: Sage, 1991), 193.

46. Nici Nelson and Susan Wright, *Power and Participatory Development: Theory and Practice* (Exeter, UK: SRP, 1995), 11.

47. Robert Chambers, *Participatory Workshops* (London: Earthscan, 2002), 124-125.

48. Andrea Cornwall and Garrett Pratt, eds. *Pathways to Participation: Reflections on PRA* (London: ITDG, 2003).

operational procedures of most institutions. Mohan and Stokke<sup>49</sup> argue that since the premise of participatory development is that development should be locally determined, it constitutes a set of universally applicable practices. In contrast, scholars such as Nakano<sup>50</sup> caution against this view, noting that claims of universality are always dangerous and counter to the very purpose of paradigms of participation.

While the universality of participatory development discourse is a point of contention in the literature, it is widely accepted that the theory, tools, and practices of participatory development continue to evolve, and are multi-disciplinary. Kumar notes that participatory development “...draws heavily from various disciplines, methods, and approaches,” and that the possibilities the field presents encourages diverse individuals to engage in development practice.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, Cary,<sup>52</sup> and Jacobson,<sup>53</sup> among others, consider participatory development to be interdisciplinary, which may explain its appeal to a variety of practitioners and institutions. Since participatory development is rooted in

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49. Giles Mohan and Kristian Stokke, “Participatory Development and Empowerment: The Dangers of Localism,” *Third World Quarterly*, 21, no. 2 (2000): 247-268.

50. Yoshihiro Nakano, “Singularity and Ethics in Post-Development Thought: Interpreting Serge Latouche’s *L’autre Afrique: Entre Don et Marche*,” *Journal of International Development*, 12, no.1/2 (2009): 31-57.

51. Somesh Kumar, *Methods for Community Participation* (London: ITDG, 2002), 320.

52. Lee J. Cary, ed. *Community Development as a Process* (Columbia, MI: University of Missouri Press, 1970).

53. Tom Jacobson, “Conclusion: Prospects for Theoretical Development,” in *Participatory Communication for Social Change*, eds. Jan Servaes, Tom Jacobson, and Shirley A. White (London: Sage, 1996), 266-277.

many fields, not simply modernization theory or economics alone, it provides many sites of connection for practitioners and project recipients alike, at least in theory.

Melkote and Steeves<sup>54</sup> identify education, political science, psychology, social work, sociology, and women's studies as the "disciplinary origins" of participatory development. Other scholars add to and expand upon this premise. For example, literature from social anthropology informs participatory development theory and practice. Nelson and Wright<sup>55</sup> argue that the focus on the local, and the interest in fieldwork, are paramount to participatory development practice. Similarly, Costa<sup>56</sup> believes that anthropologists have a vital role in development, and can ensure that projects are culturally relevant and tailored to specific settings. From the field of communications, participatory development, according to Melkote and Steeves,<sup>57</sup> focuses on relationship building and empowerment through knowledge. Bessette adds that development communication is only successful when it operates through respect for individual cultural identity, and promotes positive interaction between cultural groups.<sup>58</sup>

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54. Srinivas Melkote and H. Leslie Steeves, *Communication for Development in the Third World: Theory and Practice for Empowerment* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), 41.

55. Nici Nelson and Susan Wright, *Power and Participatory Development: Theory and Practice* (Exeter, UK: SRP, 1995).

56. Alberto C. G. Costa, Conrad P. Kottak, and Rosane M. Prado, "The Sociopolitical Context of Participatory Development in Northeastern Brazil," *Human Organization*, 56, no 2, (1997): 138-146.

57. Srinivas Melkote and H. Leslie Steeves, *Communication for Development in the Third World: Theory and Practice for Empowerment* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001).

58. Guy Bessette, *Involving the Community: A Guide to Participatory Development Communication* (Ontario: International Development Research Centre, 2004).

Campbell and Vainio-Matilla,<sup>59</sup> Laverack,<sup>60</sup> and Morris<sup>61</sup> argue that insights from the field of education are vital to participatory development, particularly the work of Paulo Freire,<sup>62</sup> who advocated for the liberation of the oppressed through putting the illiterate in control of their own education.

The rhetoric of liberation, empowerment, and freedom informs much of the participatory development literature, drawing in individuals who would become agents of social change through engaging in development work. Amartya Sen writes that at its best, development empowers the most vulnerable and isolated with tools that encourage civic engagement along with economic growth, increasing life chances and granting freedoms.<sup>63</sup> Nelson and Wright,<sup>64</sup> similarly argue that participatory development has the power to engage the knowledge of underserved interest groups to benefit whole societies. Brohman<sup>65</sup> adds that this empowerment is not just conceptual, but that participatory development can, and should, result in the formation of official policies that incorporate

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59. Lisa M. Campbell and Arja Vainio-Matilla, "Participatory Development and Community-Based Conservation: Opportunities Missed for Lessons Learned?," *Human Ecology*, 31, no. 3 (2003): 417-438.

60. Glenn Laverack, "An Identification and Interpretation of the Organizational Aspects of Community Empowerment," *Community Development Journal*, 36, no. 2 (2001): 40-52.

61. Nancy Morris, "A Comparative Analysis of the Diffusion and Participatory Models in Development Communication," *Communication Theory*, 13, no. 2 (2003): 225-238.

62. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Maya Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum Publishing Group, 2000).

63. Amartya Sen, *Development As Freedom* (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1999).

64. Nici Nelson and Susan Wright, *Power and Participatory Development: Theory and Practice* (Exeter, UK: SRP, 1995).

65. John Brohman, *Popular Development: Rethinking the Theory and Practice of Development* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1996).

the ideas of development project beneficiaries. A focus in the literature on participatory development practices that yield measurable results,<sup>66</sup> such as increased capacity for economic growth, is in conflict with literature that privileges the long-term process of human empowerment for self-determination and social inclusion, rather than quantifiable results.<sup>67</sup>

Whether or not participatory development should be focused on the same measurable economic results as conventional development practices, or if participatory development is about something much more, regardless of the inability to measure “empowerment” scientifically and define how it is attained,<sup>68</sup> remains a point of debate in the literature. However, it is clear that participatory development processes require tools of engagement and standardized instruments of monitoring and evaluation, if only to

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66. Pranab Bardhan, “Globalization and Rural Poverty,” *World Development*, 34, no. 8 (2006): 1393-1404.; Antonio Estache, Andres Gomez-Lobo, and Danny Leipziger, “Utilities Privatization and the Poor: Lessons and Evidence from Latin America,” *World Development*, 29, no. 7 (2001): 1179-1198.; Naila Kaber, “Conflicts Over Credit: Re-Evaluating the Empowerment Potential of Loans to Women in Rural Bangladesh,” *World Development*, 29, no. 1 (2001): 63-84.

67. Frances Cleaver, “Institutions, Agency, and the Limitations of Participatory Approaches to Development,” in *Participation: The New Tyranny?*, eds. Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari (London: Zed Books, 2001), 36-55.; Uma Kothari, “Power, Knowledge, and Social Control in Participatory Development,” in *Participation: The New Tyranny?*, eds. Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari (London: Zed Books, 2001), 139-152.; Paul R. Lachapelle, Stephen F. McCool, and Patrick D. Smith, “Access to Power or Genuine Empowerment?: An Analysis of Three Community Forest Groups in Nepal,” *Human Ecology Review*, 11, no. 1 (2004): 1-11.; Glyn Williams, “Evaluating Participatory Development: Tyranny, Power, and (Re)Politicization,” *Third World Quarterly*, 25, no. 3 (2004): 557-578.

68. Angela P. Cheater, ed. *The Anthropology of Power: Empowerment and Disempowerment in Changing Structures* (London: Routledge, 1999).

ensure that development professionals are not doing more harm to the communities they work within, than good.<sup>69</sup>

Participatory development borrows its tools of monitoring and evaluation, and measuring other outcomes, from the field of sociology. Chambers<sup>70</sup> notes that qualitative and quantitative instruments provide a point of entry into understanding the field of development, since they are not unique to any particular academic discipline or interest, but are used across the disciplines. While Servaes<sup>71</sup> and Allen,<sup>72</sup> among others, argue that the tools of participatory development are primary qualitative because participatory development itself is more concerned with "...attitudes, feelings, intentions and perceptions rather than statistical data," Chambers argues that the monitoring and evaluation tools of participatory development do in fact produce numerical and measurable results, albeit not on a large scale, which would be antithetical to the enterprise of participatory development. Mikkelsen<sup>73</sup> notes that the tools of participatory development, such as the World Bank's Social Capital Assessment Tool, use and

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69. Peter Uvin, *Aiding Violence: The Development Enterprise in Rwanda* (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian, 1998).

70. Robert Chambers, *Whose Reality Counts?: Putting the First Last* (London: ITDG, 1997).

71. Jan Servaes, *Communication for Development: One World, Multiple Cultures* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1999).

72. Kristina Allen, Robert Bachelder, Richard Ford, Joanne Foster, Barbara Haller, Francis Lelo, Kathia Manzi, Lisa Quintana, Laurie Ross, Barbara Thomas-Slayter, and Evelyn Valentin, *Neighborhoods Taking Action: Linking Community Action and Local Participation in Kenya and Massachusetts* (Worcester, MA: Clark University, 1999), 3.

73. Britha Helene Mikkelsen, *Methods for Development Work and Research: A New Guide for Practitioners* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005).

integrate quantitative and qualitative data. Additional tools, manuals, and guidelines for participatory development practice, such as the Stakeholder Analysis Module,<sup>74</sup> reflect institutional standards in development.

While providing useful points of entry for the development practitioner, such guides can constrain innovation in the field by forcing the familiar problem of universal applicability on communities. Hirschmann argues that "...the possibilities of incorporating the ideas of participatory and inclusive development processes within the unpromising confines of the two- or three-week assignment"<sup>75</sup> are grim, and privilege institutional priorities over the needs of development aid beneficiaries. Francis echoes this concern, noting that "it seems naïve to assume that, simply by wishing themselves into a 'participatory stance', investigators will be able to lead the community in transcending historically and culturally rooted differences and conflicts...within a few hours or days."<sup>76</sup> Organizations continue to place constraints upon development professionals, who are expected to promote participation while adhering to the confines of institutional practices and procedures.

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74. Deepa Narayan and Jennifer Rietbergen-McCracken, *Stakeholder Analysis Module 2* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 1997).

75. David Hirschmann, "Keeping 'the last' in Mind: Incorporating Chambers in Consulting," *Development in Practice*, 13, no. 5 (2003): 487-500, 487.

76. Paul Francis, "Participatory Development at the World Bank: The Primacy of Process," in *Participation: The New Tyranny?*, eds. Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari (London: Zed Books, 2001), 79.

### Institutional Constraints Upon The Professional

A primary assumption within the field of international development is that with the arrival of participation, something fundamental has changed in the way organizations approach the mandate of development. Literature from the field of critical management studies informs ideas regarding change, and how the structures management upholds effects the relationships between development professionals and the institutions they work within. While organizations are active entities that perpetuate their own legitimacy through the strategic processes management pursues,<sup>77</sup> DeCock and Böhm<sup>78</sup> argue that evidence proving organizational stasis outpaces evidence of change. Spicer, Alvesson, and Kärreman<sup>79</sup> add that change is not as actual as it is performed. DiMaggio and Powell note that while incremental institutional changes may occur, “once a set of organizations emerges as a field, a paradox arises: rational actors make their organizations increasingly similar as they try to change them.”<sup>80</sup> With institutional change unlikely to occur, development professionals have to adapt to the cultural climates of organizations, and are left asking whether or not participatory development is actually possible. Nelson and

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77. Keith W. Hoskin and Richard H. Macve, “The Genesis of Accountability: The West Point Connection,” *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 13 (1988): 37-73.

78. Christian DeCock and Steffen Böhm, “Liberalist Fantasies: Zizek and the Impossibility of Open Society,” *Organization*, 14, no. 6 (2007): 815-836.

79. Andre Spicer, Mats Alvesson, and Dan Kärreman, “Critical Performativity: The Unfinished Business of Critical Management Studies,” *Human Relations*, 62, no. 4 (2009): 537-560.

80. Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, “The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields,” *American Sociological Review*, 48, no. 2 (1983): 147.

Wright<sup>81</sup> “...draw attention to the irony of organizations that profess to empower communities but have no equivalent mechanisms for empowering their own staff.”<sup>82</sup>

Individuals often have contentious relationships with organizations and are forced to shift personal priorities to meet the needs of management. Barker<sup>83</sup> and Hardy<sup>84</sup> argue that organizations control employee behavior through restrictions and guidelines that apply both inside and outside of the workplace, constraining possibilities for social action. Taylor<sup>85</sup> directly addresses the plight of development professionals, noting that they are as weak and dependent on the institutions of international development as aid recipients, if not more so. Organizations create this weakness and dependence through defining what constitutes acceptable professional practice through controlling discourse,<sup>86</sup> employing surveillance and supervision practices,<sup>87</sup> and enforcing

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81.Nici Nelson and Susan Wright, *Power and Participatory Development: Theory and Practice* (Exeter, UK: SRP, 1995).

82.Harry Taylor, “Insights Into Participation from Critical Management and Labour Process Perspectives,” in *Participation: The New Tyranny?*, eds. Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari (London: Zed Books, 2001), 126.

83.James R. Barker, “Tightening the Iron Cage: Concertive Control in Self-Managing Teams,” *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 38, no. 3 (1993): 408-437.

84.Cynthia Hardy, “Researching Organizational Discourse,” *International Studies of Management and Organization*, 31, no. 3 (2001): 25-47.

85.Harry Taylor, “Insights Into Participation from Critical Management and Labour Process Perspectives,” in *Participation: The New Tyranny?*, eds. Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari (London: Zed Books, 2001), 123-138.

86.Graham Sewell and Berry Wilkinson, “Someone to Watch Over Me: Surveillance, Discipline and the JIT Labor Process,” *Sociology*, 26, no. 2 (1992): 271-289.

87.Harry Braverman, *Labour and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974).

appropriate behavior with codes of conduct and the threat of disciplinary action.<sup>88</sup> In contrast, Cleaver<sup>89</sup> argues that development professionals show a clear preference for working within institutions, and partnering with other organizations to execute development projects. However, the literature presenting theories of critical organizational management, as well as case studies of employee relationships to the organizations they work for, illustrates the lack of choice for individuals in any institutional setting.

### The Gap In The Literature

The above literature review sets the stage for my analysis of the perspectives of development professionals in the participatory era in two ways. Primarily, the literature review addresses the significant scholarship about and within the field of international development. Through looking at the literature in terms of the historical progression of the field of international development, as well as tracing some of the disciplinary origins of theory and practice, I have presented the context development professionals perpetually contend with. Since development practitioners are highly educated, trained, and technically specialized, they are not unfamiliar with the history of development or the literature on the subject. As the analysis will indicate, they often situate themselves in relationship to arguments dominating the scholarly literature on development and debates

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88. Donald Winiecki, *Discipline, Governmentality, Work: Making the Subject and Subjectivity in Modern Tertiary Labor* (London: Free Press Association Books, 2006).

89. Frances Cleaver, "Institutions, Agency and the Limitations of Participatory Approaches to Development," in *Participation: The New Tyranny?*, eds. Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari (London: Zed Books, 2001), 36-55.

on best practices at headquarters and in the field, with the hope that their actions will yield further models of practice, and inform theory regardless of structural barriers to action and the successful fostering of community participation. Secondly, the literature review addresses literature from critical management studies, which helps to explain the behaviors of development professionals, how they express satisfaction and discontent with the organizations they work for and with the field of development as a whole, and how they construct personal meaning.

My study fills a significant gap in the international development literature through interpreting how development professionals experience their own work, and engage in sense making behavior. The literature on international development discusses the field as a whole, and specific case studies, and often problematizes the position of development aid recipients and project beneficiaries, but rarely accounts for development professionals from their own perspectives. This study also adds to the canon of organizational case studies that have implications for critical management theory.

While development professionals are mentioned occasionally in academic scholarship, they are almost never allowed to speak for themselves. Development manuals, handbooks, and field guides communicate information in a unidirectional manner, telling professionals who they should be and how they should operate within institutional parameters. The following theoretical framework seeks to explain these constraints in terms of power, structure, and agency, and uses performance theory to consider the expected actions and behaviors of development professionals given structural constraints.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### The Purpose of Theory to the Study

The purpose of theory to this study is to provide a context that frames the diverse perspectives of development professionals presented and interpreted in the analysis. This theoretical framework provides a foundation for understanding the connections between individuals and institutions, and presents an architecture of knowledge through which the practices of international development work can be explained.

Additionally, the theories I choose to triangulate<sup>90</sup> for the purpose of leveraging my analysis only represent one possible contextualization, or basis for the interpretation of the data at hand. In acknowledging the potential for multiple interpretations through various means, I recognize and rearticulate Todd Sanders' following point:

...the Euro-American metaphors and analytic fictions that underpin the scientific enterprise are not 'true' knowledge-of-the-world; which is to say, they are not *themselves* the world, but rather attempts to represent and explain it. Insofar as we mistake our models of the world for the world itself, we fail adequately to entertain alternative ways of knowing and hence explaining.<sup>91</sup>

Each development professional I interviewed espoused both consonant and

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90. For information on theory triangulation, see Valerie J. Janesick, "The Dance of Qualitative Research Design: Metaphor, Methodology, and Meaning," in *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1998), 35-55.

91. Todd Sanders, *Beyond Bodies: Rainmaking and Sense Making in Tanzania* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 200.

dissonant ways of understanding the work they do, or have done, at headquarters and in the field, and the meaning of development work itself. While agreement between development professionals may appear to have greater implications for the validity of extant theories, or attempts at explaining the world we live in, disagreement, both within and between individual narratives, is equally telling. Such disagreements are not representative of mainstream or marginal confirmations of or challenges to theory. Instead, they serve as a reminder that any understanding of an object of inquiry must acknowledge, on an equitable basis, the presence of multiple explanations for similar experiences: in this case, the experiences of individuals working in international development at the height of participatory and culturally sensitive discourses in development theory and practice.

This study accepts, claims, and offers evidence towards the position that “truth is enacted.”<sup>92</sup> The work of international development, at its best, raises the quality of life of the world’s most vulnerable and poor. At its worst, international development programs further marginalize the most destitute, undervalued, and underserved members of society. The institutions engaging in that work, and the people who work within the constraints of development institutions, define and articulate the social, political, and economic meanings of the pursuit of development work, between the borders of its possibilities. Simultaneously, these actors also define what it means, on the macro and micro levels, to receive development aid, even in the contemporary discourse, which privileges the

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92. Anselm Strauss and Julia Corbin, “Grounded Theory Methodology: An Overview,” in *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1998), 171; see also Kathryn Pyne Addelson, “Why Philosophers Should Become Sociologists (and Vice Versa),” in *Symbolic Interaction and Cultural Studies*, ed. Howard S. Becker and Michal M. McCall (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 119-147.

cultural norms of aid recipients and calls for the micropolitical participation of such recipients within the formulation and execution of development projects. This process of definition and articulation has resulted in the construction of a global architecture in which the historic and current normative actions, or the enacted truths, of development take place.

For the purpose of this study, the application of theory illuminates two perspectives. Firstly, that the field of international development and the institutions and individuals perpetuating its existence are not indicative of an objective reality, but of subjective processes through which individuals are "...inducted into participation in the societal dialectic,"<sup>93</sup> in this case, the dialectic of development. The institutions of development, and, more broadly, the hierarchies of knowledge and power shrouding the international system, are the foundation for these subjective processes. Secondly, theory acts to help "...ground our engagement with what newly confronts us and to let that engagement provide the ground for retheorizing."<sup>94</sup> The analysis of the perspectives of development professionals towards the field of development in an era of participation and cultural sensitivity offers a new lens through which to consider the familiar problems of power, structure, and agency.

The theories presented here represent a coherent set of arguments that help to explain the relationships between institutions, practitioners, and communities. The

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93. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 129.

94. Jennifer Daryl Slack, "The Theory and Method of Articulation in Cultural Studies," in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), 113.

dialectic between institutions and individuals emergent in the analysis offers insights into the role of institutions in creating development subjects, and the barriers to participatory development work that develop as a result. Social theory, theories from critical management studies, and theories of performance studies offer insights into how these relationships are sustained, and why they are significant in a broader context.

### Social Theory

International development professionals have specific and dynamic relationships with the institutions and organizations they work for, which impact how development professionals view themselves, the communities they work in, and the members of those communities. Social theories help to explain the types of relationships occurring between stakeholders in international development, and how those relationships sustain barriers to participatory development and define the sense making practices of development professionals. The processes through which such relationships are constituted and generate normative sets of actions and beliefs within epistemic communities specific to the field of international development amount to discourse formation in the Foucauldian sense. Michel Foucault developed seminal theories on the nature of discourse, and its relationship to power and the control of knowledge in human relations. He notes that “...to speak is to do something—something other than to express what one thinks...to add a statement to a pre-existing series of statements is to perform a complicated and costly gesture.”<sup>95</sup> Discourse is not just about speech, but includes the gestures, signs, and symbols that underpin the actions of human behavior. The discourse of development does

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95. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1972), 209.

not exist objectively, but is the cumulative result of subjective processes and patterns over time that constrain the possibilities for development itself.

The importance of discourse to knowledge and power emerges through considering the relationships development professionals have to language and institutions. Defining discourse as “...statements with validation procedures made within communities of experts”<sup>96</sup> highlights the presence of some agency in its formation. Development professionals are most often “experts” with certain knowledge: highly specialized educational backgrounds, affiliations, career experience, and social and political connections.<sup>97</sup> The conflation of these characteristics affords development professionals the power, within institutional parameters, to establish, build upon, and refine vocabularies that dictate what development can and cannot be, who is involved, and who is excluded. Following the Foucauldian dialectic, discourse is construed as knowledge, and knowledge as enacted truth.

This “enacted truth” is most readily identified as the paradigms of modernization theory and praxis which informed the relations of the United States and Europe to the rest of the world, and was foundational to conventional development practices from the end of World War II through the Cold War. Without tangentially delving into the history of international development – the drive to universally implement Keynesian economic

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96. Richard Peet, *Theories of Development* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1999), 130; see also Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 45-47.

97. For discussions on the status and identity of development professionals, see Robert Chambers, *Whose Reality Counts?: Putting the First Last* (London: ITDG Publishing, 1997).

principles in the 1940s;<sup>98</sup> the World Bank's blind pursuit of structural adjustment policies from the 1970s through the 1990s in spite of significant and dire human costs;<sup>99</sup> and the continued popularity of Rostow's ahistoric, unidirectional model of economic progress, complete with propaganda on the virtues of capitalism and the innate superiority of Western societies<sup>100</sup> – are reminders that an over-indulgence in professional “truths” has historically resulted in development practitioners doing great harm.

The majority of the development professionals I interviewed engage with a different type of “truth” – one that extols the virtues of participatory development, cultural sensitivity, and the empowerment of the beneficiaries with whom they work. Indeed, the advent of participatory development theory and practice in the 1990s offered notable opportunities for practitioners to act as facilitators, and provide necessary resources for community-designed projects. However, pursuits of international development remain closely tied to geopolitical strategies and the manifold government-funded institutions engaged. With and without specific institutional constraints, the relationships between power, knowledge, and discourse are strong.

Participatory development discourse, like conventional development discourse, remains the purview of experts. Even though “...there is little evidence of the long-term effectiveness of participation in materially improving the conditions of the most

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98. Hans W. Singer, “Lessons of Post-War Development Experience: 1945-1988,” in *Development Policy*, ed. Shalenda D. Sharma (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 35-80.

99. Richard Peet, *Theories of Development* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1999), 53-64.

100. W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1960).

vulnerable people or as a strategy for social change,”<sup>101</sup> practitioners are largely convinced of the legitimacy of this relatively new lexicon, which has so much in common with the claims of conventional development discourse. Even practitioners and scholars, critical of the participatory turn in development, and the enterprise of development as a whole, are trapped within its discourse, which forces them “...to phrase their critiques in developmental terms.”<sup>102</sup>

Foucault’s major theoretical texts, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *The Order of Things* assert that “...discourses operate in arbitrary ways to classify the world and shape knowledge formation.”<sup>103</sup> Discourse, when conflated with knowledge and power, constrains innovation and possibility. In the field of international development, as my analysis will demonstrate, professionals are simultaneously both captive to discourse, and critical to its formation.

In addition to Foucault’s theories of discourse, knowledge, and power, aspects of Anthony Giddens’ sociological theory provide the foundation for my analysis. While Foucault theorizes about the nature of knowledge and power in formal and informal interactions, Giddens is concerned with the recursive nature of social systems and structures, the impact of the foreseen and unforeseen consequences of human action, and

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101.Frances Cleaver, “Institutions, Agency and the Limitations of Participatory Approaches to Development,” in *Participation: The New Tyranny?*, eds. Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari (London: Zed Books, 2001), 36.

102.Richard Peet, *Theories of Development* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1999), 145. Arturo Escobar, Ivan Illich, and Majid Rahnema, among other scholars, are known for bemoaning the constraints the discourse of development places upon its critics. A similar theme emerged in several of my interviews with development professionals.

103.Jeffrey Alexander and Philip Smith, “The Strong Program in Cultural Theory: Elements of a Structural Hermeneutics,” in *Handbook of Sociological Theory*, ed. Jonathan H. Turner (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum, 2002), 141.

the relationship individuals have to their own behaviors. I will consider the applicability of two aspects of Giddens' structuration theory: the duality of structure, and the relationship between structure and agency. The use of Giddens complements Foucault, because Giddens addresses the consequences of action for social systems and structures, and the relationship between structure and agency, while Foucault is less concerned with the ability of the human subject to act. International development practices interface with power, knowledge, and truth, but are about decisive action and institutional settings.

In order to discuss the relevance of Giddens' "duality of structure", it is important to address his definition of structure itself. While Giddens' definition of structure has evolved over time, structures are most usefully defined as "rules and resources, organized as properties of social systems."<sup>104</sup> Rules and resources can be thought of as implied assumptions, accepted norms, and mutual knowledge. These schemata then govern human actions and interactions within particular contexts, and become imbedded within recurring practices over time to form social systems and institutions.<sup>105</sup>

The notion of the "duality of structure" emerges when taking the relationship of individuals to the development of social practices into account. While structures shape formal and informal actions and interactions, these practices also constitute and reproduce structures. This results in the standardization of human action, and the perpetuation of institutionalized practices is the consequence of such standardization. However, structure must not be seen only as constraining, but also as enabling, due to the

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104. Anthony Giddens, "Agency, Structure," in *Contemporary Sociological Theory*, 2nd ed. ed. Craig Calhoun et al. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 236.

105. Ibid.

ability of actors to act otherwise at any point in time, and that all actions necessarily have foreseen and unforeseen consequences.<sup>106</sup> In this way, structure provides a platform for both for continuous action and radical or divergent action. Structure, therefore, is a dynamic process that can be as empowering as it is constraining.

In regards to the case at hand, Giddens allows for individual choices and the decision making power of international development professionals in a way that Foucault is not specific about. The fact that institutions, as a product of structure, are the result of human agency leaves space for the ability of individuals to then transform them. As the analysis will demonstrate, the degree to which international development professionals are interested in transforming its institutions, or at least in transforming their personal relationships to its institutions, depends greatly on how they conceive of accountability. Whether or not international development professionals consider themselves to be more accountable to the institutions they work for, or to aid recipients on the ground, impacts individual choices made, actions pursued, and awareness of the constraining and enabling properties of structure.

Giddens identifies accountability to self and society as a defining factor of action, noting that “the rationalization of action is closely bound up with the moral evaluations of ‘responsibility’ which actors make of each other’s conduct.”<sup>107</sup> While every development professional I interviewed professed feeling a moral imperative to engage in development work, perspectives varied widely as to whom they were responsible. For many, these

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106. Anthony Giddens, “Some New Rules of Sociological Method,” in *Contemporary Sociological Theory*, 2nd ed. ed. Craig Calhoun et al. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 225-230.

107. Anthony Giddens, “Some New Rules of Sociological Method,” in *Contemporary Sociological Theory*, 2nd ed. ed. Craig Calhoun et al. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 226.

various interpretations of responsibility dictate actions and desired actions, and impact personal satisfaction with the work and institutions of development.

Even though some evidence may support Giddens' conceptualization of structure as empowering of action, the weight of bureaucratic imperatives and processes overwhelmingly frame development work, dictate the rate at which innovation and change can occur, and determine the degree to which the actualization of culturally relevant, participatory development work is possible.

### Critical Management Studies

For the purposes of this study, theories from critical management studies, within the broader field of organizational studies, compliment social theory in two primary ways. First, theories from critical management studies ground the self-reflexive processes development professionals undergo in order to construct and reflect upon personal and professional identity, and analyze relationships between colleagues and recipients of development aid within organizational parameters. Secondly, theories from critical management studies provide a context for discussing the relationships development professionals have to the organizations they work within, and also their feelings about those relationships.

Max Weber is widely credited as the originator of organizational studies, which is evinced by the fact so much in the critical management literature responds to or addresses

his theories of bureaucracy.<sup>108</sup> Weber's work on bureaucracy focuses on explaining the proliferation of bureaucratic organizations or institutions in human life. He argues:

The decisive reason for the advance of bureaucratic organization has always been its purely technical superiority over any other form of organization... Precision, speed, unambiguity, knowledge of the files, continuity, discretion, unity, strict subordination, redirection of friction and of material and personal costs – these are raised to the optimum point in the strictly bureaucratic administration.<sup>109</sup>

Bureaucratic organizations dominate the field of international development.

Behemoth institutions, such as The World Bank, The International Monetary Fund, The Inter-American Development Bank, The United States Agency for International Development, and the many other development institutions of governments around the world, define policies, processes, and procedures for non-profit development agencies and local development organizations. While this is in large part due to rules and regulations governing the funding streams from large, government organizations to the smallest of institutions and associations in developing countries, it is also due to the general acceptance of the status quo in conducting business. Even institutions claiming innovations in the field, such as for profit development organizations and participatory, human rights oriented non-profits, are privy to the prioritization of efficiency and engrained procedures over meeting the needs of the world's most poor. Ironically, the overwhelming focus on institutional efficiency and policies in the field of international development often means that the deliverance of development aid is quite inefficient.

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108. For examples, see: David Knights, "Power At Work in Organizations," in *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Management Studies*, eds. Mats Alvesson, Todd Bridgman, and Hugh Willmott (New York: Oxford, 2009), 144-165., and Mike Savage and Anne Witz, "The Gender of Organizations," in *Gender and Bureaucracy*, eds. Mike Savage and Anne Witz (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 3-62.

109. Max Weber, "Bureaucracy," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge, 1967), 214.

While Weber discusses the nature of bureaucratic institutions, he does not take into account the impact of bureaucracy on the people who work within such systems, other than to say that bureaucracies remove as much of the personal as is possible. Critical management theorists respond to Weber through arguing that it is impossible to remove the personal from institutional life. This is very much so the case in international development, where development professionals constantly evaluate the meaning of the work, and how development work reflects upon and constructs understandings of self and other.

The tension between the role of the individual and the role of institutions in defining and producing personal identities endures in critical management studies.<sup>110</sup> Ola Bergström and David Knights theorize that "...identity can be understood as the outcome of the interaction between discourse and human agency."<sup>111</sup> In the case of development professionals, who often identify themselves as internationally engaged human rights advocates and social justice activists, conflicts arise in the need to reconcile senses of self with the organizational discourses defining development practice in the field. This tension is not resolvable, but permeates work, relationships to colleagues and recipients of development aid, and life in the professional sphere and beyond. In every instance, this dialectic between self and institutions takes the form of ongoing power struggles. Often,

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110. Paul Thompson and David McHugh, *Work Organisations*, 3rd ed. (Houndsmills, UK: Palgrave, 2002).

111. Robyn Thomas, "Critical Management Studies on Identity: Mapping the Terrain," *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Management Studies*, eds. Mats Alvesson, Todd Bridgman, and Hugh Willmott (New York: Oxford, 2009), 170.

organizational constraints win out, forcing development professionals to adapt or pursue other avenues to actualize personal goals.

The organizations development professionals work within define possibilities for action, since the attention to bureaucratic procedure is totalizing. Harry Taylor argues that the relationships of employees to development organizations is parallel to the relationships of development project beneficiaries, in that the organization always holds absolute power and imposes an authority on which professionals and aid recipients are similarly dependent. Development organizations provide livelihoods and opportunities for both groups, and “...both the employee and the beneficiary are both weak and dependent partners in the relationship...subject to the ultimate sanction of withdrawal of capital.”<sup>112</sup> In this respect, institutions constrain possibilities both for professional innovation and the articulation of self for all individuals involved in the international development field. The development professionals I interviewed universally felt subject to this dependence, supporting Taylor’s argument and perhaps elevating it to a theoretical perspective on the nature of power in the relationships of professionals to institutions, particularly in the international development field.

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112. Harry Taylor, “Insights Into Participation from Critical Management and Labour Process Perspectives,” in *Participation: The New Tyranny?*, eds. Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari (London: Zed Books, 2001), 124.

### Performance Studies

The work of international development institutions, like the work of all bureaucracies, is performed: “not only must it be done, it must be seen to be done.”<sup>113</sup> Even though the theories above primarily explain the various constraints placed upon development professionals, theories of performance return some agency to the professional as individual actor. Performance theory is offered here to account for the agency practitioners expressed in the interviews I conducted. The deliberate control of the perceptions of others is paramount to the work of development practitioners, in that it informs and actualizes the accepted professional culture of the field. According to Erving Goffman, “in their capacity as performers, individuals will be concerned with maintaining the impression that they are living up to the many standards by which they and their products are judged.”<sup>114</sup> This is undoubtedly the case with development professionals, whose responses and behaviors in interviews seemed to be couched in the need to be seen as infallible, over-scheduled bureaucrats, or as discontent, intellectual activists working to change the status quo. These performances were not unique to the research process. Similarly, participatory development practice relies upon the carefully articulated performances of practitioners and aid recipients in scenarios reinforcing the notion of the development professional as bearer of needed expertise.<sup>115</sup> How well

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113.Elaine Baldwin et al., *Introducing Cultural Studies*, rev. ed. (Essex, UK: Pearson Education Ltd., 2004), 245.

114.Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), 251.

115.Uma Kothari, “Power, Knowledge and Social Control in Participatory Development,” in *Participation: The New Tyranny?*, eds. Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari (London: Zed Books, 2001), 139-152.

development professionals play their roles depends on a variety of factors, including their level of agreement with institutional priorities and procedures, and personal priorities of either transforming or sustaining the business of international development and the work of the practitioner.

It is not lost on the individuals I interviewed that they are actively engaged in constructing the new image of international development as participatory and adaptable to various cultural, social, and political environments. Hence, a performative perspective on the relations between discourse, structure, and institutions, as previously discussed, is necessary. Personal motivations and specific organizational contexts dictate the extent to which practitioners pursue and perform development work willingly or begrudgingly, and the degree to which they resent organizational parameters.

### Synthesis

The above theoretical perspectives offer a strong framework from which to discuss the perspectives of development professionals in the participatory era, and their insights into projects and situations at headquarters and on the ground. These theory driven perspectives are most appropriate for understanding questions regarding the barriers to participatory development and the sense making practices of development professionals when faced with conflict and failure. Through considering the social linkages between individual practitioners, institutions, and the overarching discursive formation shaping the practice of development, sites of tension in these relationships emerge. How development professionals construct meaning and engage in sense making activities of the work they do has implications not only for theory, but also for the

practice of development and its institutions. Taking into account the perspectives of development professionals through the lens of established theoretical traditions has the potential to transform priorities in the field.

It is important to note here that the choice not to address theories of international development may be glaring in the above theoretical framework. However, theories of development, often derived from social and economic theories, rarely directly address the position of those working in the field. While some scholars have conducted acute studies of the development professional, these discussions are always descriptive or reflective<sup>116</sup>, and may inform theories, but cannot be said to constitute theories. Additionally, such discussions do not seem to engage with a comprehensive research process that engages with development professionals themselves, but are rather based in the personal experiences of the researcher as development practitioner.

The following methodology explains the strategies employed in the analysis, which presents the findings of my interviews, and then draws upon the theoretical framework in the discussion to consider the relevance of the barriers international development professionals face as they attempt to engage in participatory work. The analysis also offers an opportunity for the practitioners I interviewed to articulate their understandings of the field, and sheds light on personal intentions and desires for the future of international development practice.

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116. For examples, see: Jan Knippers Black, *Development in Theory and Practice: Paradigms and Paradoxes*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999).; Robert Chambers, *Whose Reality Counts?: Putting the First Last* (London: ITDG Publishing, 1997).; Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).; Leonard Frank, "The Development Game," in *The Post-Development Reader*, eds. Victoria Bawtree and Majid Rahmena (London: Zed Books, 1997), 263-273.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODOLOGY

Over the period from a year and a half, from the end of 2008 through 2010, I interviewed 25 individuals working in international development. These semi-structured, qualitative interviews lasted between one and two hours each, and were based on an interview protocol of six questions (see Appendix A). The questions sought to address and expose the attitudes of development professionals towards the field of international development, its evolution over time, and the personal values brought towards engaging in development work. Additionally, the questions sought to assess what barriers prevent development professionals from working effectively, with particular attention to mandates from development institutions and organizations, and how these mandates shape possibilities for action and innovation within particular work-related contexts.

For the purposes of this study, I define a “development professional” or “practitioner” as someone who intends, or had at some point intended, to pursue a career in international development, and was, at the time of the interview, in possession of a salaried, full time position at an international development organization. I interviewed three freelance development project consultants who were an exception to the latter part of the above definition, but who were getting paid to work on specific projects for multiple international development organizations on what amounted to full time, salaried, career driven work. I also required interviewees to have experience working on

development projects “in the field,” and experience working in the “home office” or at the “headquarters” of the organization for which they worked. Therefore, volunteers, such as interns, members of the Peace Corps, or American Red Cross volunteers, were excluded from this study. I also did not consider individuals working in humanitarian assistance, which while is closely tied to international development, is its own distinct field of international engagement.

I did not place any restrictions upon the type of organization or agency a development professional could work for, nor did I place any restrictions upon current area of focus. Therefore, I was able to interview a wide variety of people working for different types of institutions, from small, community-based organizations with few staff based in the United States, to large non-profit organizations, such as Oxfam and Ashoka, and government agencies and regional or international development banks, such as the United States Agency for International Development, The World Bank, The International Finance Corporation, and The Inter-American Development Bank. Similarly, the development professionals I interviewed were engaged in a broad variety of work, and ranged from documenters to project evaluators, from anthropologists to economists, and from senior-level project managers to entry-level program assistants. Due to my own restrictions, the individuals I interviewed had to currently be based in or around the Washington, DC area. However, this restriction was not significant due to the many development organizations and professionals either located in Washington, DC, or coming through the city on a regular basis. Individuals self-selected for this study, and I asked participants to recommend friends or colleagues who might be willing to be interviewed. While using a “snowball” sampling method to select participants may risk

significant biases in the selection process, the field of international development, like any highly specialized area of work, is quite insular. The best way to find development professionals is to ask other people who work in the same field.

Additionally, many of the questions I asked either covered or brought up sensitive material, which outside of a stringent confidentiality process regarding the specifics of what participants covered in interviews, could have placed participants in professional danger. A personal request from one colleague to another to participate in this researcher's study indirectly helped to build trust between myself and interviewees. Simultaneously, I promised all participants that no names would appear in the study, and no individual would be linked, either directly or indirectly, to any development organization. Specific examples and illustrations of projects interviewees offered are similarly not tied to any person or organization, with one exception. In that case, the individual interviewed has since retired from the organization mentioned, and gave her expressed permission to include the example as is.

In order to analyze the findings from the interviews, over which practitioners were primarily in agreement regarding barriers to engaging in participatory work effectively, I employ a theoretical framework that incorporates social theories to provide an overarching context of the roles of structure, agency, knowledge, and power for the development professional. I draw upon theories from organizational studies to focus attention on the expressed relations between development professionals and the organizations they work for, and how those relationships impact the interactions with project beneficiaries.

My approach is based in critical ethnography, in that it takes specific stories and makes connections to broader, yet contextual, social and political meanings. My analysis of the barriers to participatory development work implies that potential alternatives exist, which would minimize these barriers. These alternatives were expressed both directly and indirectly in the interviews, and have the potential to offer organizations new ways forward in participatory development practice. Additionally, the critical ethnographic deployed here assumes that the operations of structure and power require certain performances of the individuals beholden to its demands, and need to be brought to light in order to promote greater equity.<sup>117</sup> This is particularly relevant for an analysis of development professionals in the participatory era. Since the espoused motives of participatory approaches are to empower the world's most vulnerable and poor, and address inequalities, a methodological approach with similar principles is uniquely well suited to address overarching contexts which impose limits on those who would work towards activating social change on the grassroots level.

Findings suggest that the interests of donors and employers, and a “professional culture” constrain practitioners, to the point that it is not possible for project beneficiaries to participate significantly. The analysis works to reveal the conflicting demands placed upon development professionals, ties these conflicting demands back to issues of structure and agency, and illustrates how the structures of international development constrain possibilities for innovation and demand certain expected performances from

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117. For more on critical ethnography, see: D. Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011); Phil Francis Carspecken, *Critical Ethnography in Education Research: A Theoretical and Practical Guide* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Jim Thomas, *Doing Critical Ethnography* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1993).

development professionals that have little to do with the purported clients of development projects. Secondly, the analysis looks at how development professionals find meaning in their work, and negotiate with the constraints they face. Fully aware of the problems of structure and agency pervading the field, practitioners tend to adapt to institutional norms, or leave the field of development to pursue other types of work and alternative methods of engaging internationally, implying that there is little space for innovation in development institutions and organizations.

After identifying the findings of the interviews, I use a discussion section to expand upon the relevance of the theoretical framework and its utility in explaining the relationships between development professionals and institutions. I then consider the roles of personal agency and action for development practitioners, as they struggle with professional norms and evaluate their attitudes towards organizations, and their personal relationships with project beneficiaries.

## CHAPTER 5

### ANALYSIS

Development work is rather like shoveling smoke. No mandates are unambiguous or irreversible; no precise boundaries can be drawn; no projects are ever concluded; no results are definitive; and no assessments are entirely reliable.<sup>118</sup>

— Jan Knippers Black, *Development in Theory and Practice*

Over the course of a year and a half, I interviewed 25 individuals working in the field of international development. Throughout each interview, development professionals espoused a strong moral need to pursue development and humanitarian work that promotes social change for the better in the poorest and most isolated communities in the world. The desire to empower others to become active participants in the global economic system, and take ownership of their own futures, often guides development practitioners. However, the harsh realities of working in development erodes that hope, due to a variety of factors – from having to negotiate the complex spaces between governments and civil society organizations, to the lack of time and funding, to not being able to communicate effectively with donors or with the supposed beneficiaries of development projects.

Throughout the interviews, practitioners bemoaned the state of things in the field, and admitted to the persistent questioning of their own roles within it, while

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118. Interview of an American development worker in Latin America by Jan Knippers Black, in Jan Knippers Black, *Development in Theory and Practice: Paradigms and Paradoxes*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 212.

simultaneously noting that the pursuit of development work had at least become marginally more noble since the founding of the Bretton Woods institutions after World War II, the establishing of the Peace Corps and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in the 1960s, and other multilateral economic and policy institutions around the world. Consistent themes regarding how views on development have changed over time, and how the identities and behavior of professionals are constructed within institutional contexts and beneficiary communities quickly emerged in the interviews, and are explored in detail, in this chapter. Additionally, practitioners were eager to share feelings on what it means to work in development on a personal level.

The findings included in this chapter define the barriers to working in a participatory manner, according to some of the international development professionals responsible for pursuing participatory work in the field, and creating the political environments for such work to be pursued at headquarters. While the historical background of development, as practitioners understand it, acts as the mandate for participatory and culturally sensitive revisions to mainstream practices, overarching institutional contexts present significant obstacles. While ideas for how development should work have evolved, in part informed by best practices in the field, the discourse of development has not really changed since the inception of the field after World War II.

As defined in the theoretical framework, discourse and practice are intrinsically linked, particularly in international development. Structure and agency inform one another, and the findings offer evidence which prove the relevance of the theories employed in the third chapter of this thesis. The discussion which follows the

presentation of findings makes more explicit the connections between the theoretical framework and the findings, which addresses not only what the barriers to participatory development practice are, but why they exist. From here, it is possible to address the agency of the development professional, and why their personal impressions of the field as a whole are relevant.

### Development As It Was

In order to provide a context for their own work in the field, practitioners were eager to identify how the institutional approaches to international development had evolved over time. Early career development professionals saw themselves as harbingers of a new era in international development – one that was culturally sensitive and appropriate, promoted community-led initiatives, and was accountable, first and foremost, to project beneficiaries. Even though the majority of interviewees denounced this idealized view of development as naïve and simplistic, it was always in mind as something to work towards, in spite of institutional barriers, funding and time constraints, and political priorities. At least, development work is “better than it was,” or was being pursued in a more “thoughtful and self-reflexive manner,” than it had been in the past, even if the realities of project implementation continue to be “short-sighted,” “inappropriate and disrespectful,” and “imperialistic.”

The view that development has changed is not only a construct that newer practitioners use to justify their engagement with communities in the developing world, and to make sense of the larger policy and institutional architecture of development. Mid to late career professionals discussed real changes in the field through giving examples

for the ways projects and programs were conducted in the 1960s. One veteran of USAID, who had been with the organization for 40 years before leaving to start her own consulting firm, discussed a housing project she had worked on in Jamaica in 1968, before preliminary research and initial community engagement was normative in development practice:

When I was visiting Jamaica as a member of the USAID site team, we visited a site where we had built brand new homes – we had dismantled the shanties – the homes were not accepted by the residents. They did not like the shiny floors, or the brand new appliances. In addition to that, no one had completed the site visit to the point of determining the land that the houses were being built on. It turned out that we had built the houses on a cemetery. Total destruction. So when we arrived, there were persons chanting, standing outside, just so angry at us. So this was an indication of us wanting to do good, but not having done the appropriate in country research that should have been done to make sure that it was an appropriately designed project, but first of all that it was needed, recommended, or even desired by the persons who lived there.

In this, and other similar cases, the failures of development practice in the past are clear. Despite the best of intentions, the potential to do irreversible harm with long lasting consequences was actualized in many early development projects. Veteran practitioners have internalized the lessons of these failures, not only changing the logistics and operations of development, but also changing their own attitudes and perspectives on what development means. The transformation of personal attitudes and behaviors was a prevalent theme in interviews. Another development professional, who was among the first Peace Corps volunteers, and now holds a senior position at a small social entrepreneurship organization, admits to initially thinking that “we in the West had so much to teach developing countries, and that we were the holders of the information, and the systems, and the strategies, and that they were the dependent recipients.” Over time and with the benefit of experience, her personal thinking on issues of international

development evolved with the field, to the point where she pursues work which closely aligns with her new belief in effective development as community generated.

From a more economic perspective, another senior development practitioner – a high level official at one of the Bretton Woods institutions, notes:

I think in my younger and more vulnerable days, I was only concerned with the financial rate of return of a project and how quickly I booked the rate of return of an asset. Now, over time I've come to understand the impact of a project in terms of the water use, the carbon emissions, on employment, on social – on land resettlement, all of these are extremely important issues. That you cannot afford to ignore it, if you do so it is at your peril.

While development practice has changed, it is difficult to identify why some institutions have reformed top-down practices. For example, while The World Bank imposes many rules and regulations on national governments borrowing funds for development projects, they take multiple stakeholders into account and engage in negotiation processes, rather than requiring the implementation of the structural adjustment policies that were popular prior to the 1990s.<sup>119</sup> The change in requests for proposals from USAID to development contractors is also striking.<sup>120</sup> Instead of unilaterally steering funds towards projects with geopolitical goals, they conduct comprehensive preliminary research programs on the need for projects and the possibilities for local participation before issuing requests.

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<sup>119</sup>I interviewed several individuals with long term careers at The World Bank, who attested to this change. For an example of its recent impact, see: "World Bank Changes Strategy to Arrest Poverty," *Times of Zambia*, May 12, 2011.

<sup>120</sup>In particular, one of my interviewees, who is an employee at a for-profit organization that contracts for USAID almost exclusively, noted the background research that goes into USAID requests for proposals (RFPs) and the requirements for potential contractors to prove they will conduct projects in a sustainable and participatory manner. For examples of USAID RFPs see: <https://www.fbo.gov>.

Perhaps for government agencies, development work has had to involve more preliminary research because missteps can potentially have negative diplomatic consequences. For multilateral economic institutions, investing in a project that is socially or environmentally irresponsible results in a loss of funds, and a damaged public image. Without support from the local community, large infrastructure projects, such as hydroelectric dam or coal and mineral mining projects, cannot proceed without creating serious, often violent, conflicts. For individuals working on the ground, witnessing how social change happens and learning about the cultures, customs, and ideas of local communities has the power to transform personal views on the place for international development in the world, and what it should be like. Regardless of the motives, the perspectives and behaviors of veteran development practitioners have changed over the course of their work in the field and as a result of their experiences on projects within specific institutions. Simultaneously, entry level development professionals are keenly aware of development's past, and to the extent they are interested in pursuing long-term careers in the development field, aspire to work towards reframing its future.

#### Development As It Is

Contemporary development practice can be conceptualized as operating on three primary levels. First and foremost, development practitioners think of their work with respect to their individual relationships with the communities they work within on particular projects, and the stakeholders in those communities with whom they have direct contact. Secondly, development practitioners have complex relationships to the organizations they work within, and are often engaged in struggles – both internal,

emotional struggles and professional struggles involving colleagues and other institutional actors – regarding how they feel development work should be done and how it is actually done. Thirdly, the individuals I interviewed recognize that their organizations and institutions play certain roles within the larger geopolitical system, and that, as much as they would like to put project beneficiaries first in their work, it simply is not possible because of the power dynamics between the developed world and the developing world, and the prioritization of attaining strategic diplomatic goals over bridging inequalities and increasing the life chances of those with the least access to resources, economic opportunity, civic participation, health care, and education. In spite of these difficulties, the development professionals I interviewed are universally dedicated to redefining a field that is strictly limited in its possibilities for reframing the ways business is conceived of and conducted, due to external pressures and the inherent complexity of engaging in international development work. Development “as it is” is markedly different than development “as it was,” if only in that development practitioners, to the extent they are able, operate as a countervailing force against geopolitical interests promoting inequalities and asymmetries of power.

How practitioners define the term “development,” and situate themselves with respect to its definitions, shows that many individuals in the field of international development see themselves as working for social justice, and in some ways against the interests of the developed world, even as they work within its institutions and broader systems. One practitioner defined development as “coming up with policies and programs here that we expect others to implement, or sending experts from here to other countries to implement these programs and projects that may or may not benefit communities but

are politically prudent,” and expressed discomfort with the business of development, in general. The view that development continues to be a unidirectional identifying of the needs of poor communities, as conceptualized in the United States and Europe, is prominent among practitioners. However, individuals working within development see themselves as able to do good and create change in a way that privileges the voices of marginalized project recipients on the micro level. Another practitioner noted that this is done through “recognizing that all around the world there are problems, and where there are problems there are also people solving those problems.” The focus on proceeding in the field with reflexivity and consciousness about the work of development, and the overall context in which that work takes place – on the community, national, regional, and international levels, seems to be a normative quality for effectiveness.

Through engaging in work in a conscientious manner, development practitioners are working to redefine what it means for a project to be “successful.” New definitions of success may not replace the results oriented nature of many development projects and the needs to show metrics such as the number of people effected by a project, the amount income in a local community was increased, by what percentage the enrollment of girls in school increased, among other quantitative measures of success, for the satisfaction of donors. However, practitioners agree that rethinking the purpose of development, and changing the definition of development from “imposing potential solutions on communities” to “working together to finding the solutions to help to a level where everyone is able to have basic human needs, like food, shelter, water, and human rights and opportunities” is vital for programs to be able to meet their long term goals, and for sustainability after practitioners leave communities with the hope the results of the

project will continue onwards under the stewardship of individuals in the local population.

Even though they are often under mandates to deliver quantitative impact assessments, project success, in contemporary development practice, has to be defined on the community level. Taking into account the perspectives of the community regarding what success means is representative of a paradigm shift in development. One development professional, reflecting on projects he had worked on in Senegal and Madagascar, expressed significant frustrations with this shift in practice, saying that when communities define success, it “changes in every single instance. So in one place you could create an institution and have a community running completely differently, for the better. In another, you could literally to put up flags and mark off a nature preserve. That is considered a success, and all you’ve done is put up flags.” With the ground of what success means in development constantly shifting, it is difficult to know what the lasting impact actually is, in spite of comprehensive monitoring and evaluation practices. However, practitioners believe that it is still important to privilege the needs of the community, encourage participation, and redefine what development means, even if they deride the process. Otherwise, practitioners agree, the work of development cannot be done, and becomes “simply a waste of money and time.”

#### “Buzzwords”

While development professionals believe that the work of development needs to be redefined in terms of cultural relevance, participation, and local ownership, and that the field has truly evolved to at least begin to address these needs, the discourse of

development is universally problematic for the practitioners I interviewed. Many find the terminology of development to have no utility, and admit to using terminology without really knowing what it means, in the service of getting work done. Others understand the need for a common language that provides a framework for international engagement, but bemoan the value judgments inherent within it. The language of development may provide a context for operating in the field, and give clarity to donors looking for projects to fund, but is simultaneously strikingly meaningless, while yet establishing certain relationships between development professionals and project beneficiaries.

A program director for a small, community development organization that works exclusively in sub-Saharan Africa pondered the uses of the term “development”:

I came into development, from the business world. So I didn't understand that word initially, it seemed kind of nebulous to me. And actually, in other sectors, people use the word development to mean other things, like the physical development of buildings. But then, I came to understand that development is a word that people hang everything on. So it's aid, it's charity work, it means so much, and in meaning so many things, it says nothing about the approach of what you're doing. Still, that word frames things, and to do work in certain environments, you have to use it to get support for programs. And people hang on that term because it is the lingua franca, it is the, sort of agreed upon term. I think for me, the term has remained flat. It's a very functional word that we use to describe an industry and grouping of people. I think to some extent I've become aware that when you say the word development, you're implying that there is a group of people you think need to be developed. And that invokes a very strong paradigm. I'm trying to do development, I guess, because I work in that world, I want to do it humbly.

The practitioner above has a contentious relationship to the word “development,” which was echoed throughout the interviews I conducted. Most interviewees had never been exposed to development terminology prior to working in the field or receiving specialized training. Individuals educated in international affairs and other similar fields,

even at the post graduate level, felt that they were ill prepared to engage in the professional arena because of the specificity of language around work tasks, such as assessments, conducting participatory workshops, implementing projects, and writing proposals, reports and evaluations. This terminology has become so institutionalized, that it is impossible to talk about “development,” or do international work in lower resource communities, without using the word “development” itself, in spite of its problematic aspects. In fact, when attempting to reflect upon the word, most of the people I interviewed could not keep themselves from using the word “development” or “develop” in its definitions. While some terms, such as “development,” are universal among professionals in the field, many are specific to institutions, and act as the signs and symbols by which these same professionals identify one another and self-segregate according to institutional assignments or personal preferences. For example, whether or not one talks about communities or stakeholders, or calls civil society institutions citizen-led versus non-profit or non-governmental, or focuses on the processes of executing an infrastructure program in a rural area or the results, is indicative of the vast differences in personal and organizational political preferences for approaches to development.

Just as the word “development” is problematic for practitioners, so is the word “participatory.” Unlike the word “development,” practitioners were unconvinced on the universality of the concept of participation and the term “participatory development,” even though it appears throughout the vast body of contemporary academic, policy, and practitioner oriented literature in international development and other related disciplines.

One person I interviewed at a large organization that primarily deals with financing and investments in businesses at the meso-economic level in the developing

world asked if I was talking about “multistakeholderism” when I asked for her personal impressions of the participatory turn in development, because that was the term her organization uses. Another individual noted that at her for-profit development agency, the management says, “let’s go taste and smell.” These two cases in particular offer several insights into how the concept of participation is invoked within institutional concepts. While the idea of participation may be present, the motives and means vary across and within organizations. A focus on “multistakeholderism” implies a primary orientation towards profits and financial rates of return on investments. For practitioners to conceive of assessments in the field prior to project implementation and participatory practices, such as community workshops and meetings, as an opportunity to “taste and smell” constructs potential project beneficiaries as passive and environments as easy to assess. How people talk about participation reveals personal and institutional priorities, and also exposes the complexities of working in a participatory manner in development.

To think of development and participation outside of the prescriptive confines the terms themselves invoke is difficult for those who become indoctrinated in the language of the field. Even the practitioners I spoke with who expressed contempt with the enterprise of conventional development and the way business is done, have been persuaded that it is necessary to use its language. Cycles of self-perpetuation within the field of international development define what constitutes appropriate discourse and constrains the possibilities not only for lexical innovation, but also for meaningfully engaging with communities in practice.

### Gradients of Participation

Among practitioners, there is a deep understanding that making programs participatory – working with communities in the developing world to organically identify their desires and needs, and then supporting those communities in achieving their own development goals in a sustainable way – is rarely pursued with any kind of seriousness. When fostering local community ownership is prioritized in project implementation, it is always complex and messy. No matter who participates in development processes in communities, some group, individual, or perspective is excluded. Questions of who gets to participate are perhaps more important than how participatory a project is. In order for business to move forward and donor-imposed deadlines to be met, some voices are always excluded in the service of professionals and organizations proving impact and showing results. Many interviewees adamantly noted that there are significant problems with any type of development project or process, but that the politics of participation are particularly difficult to navigate and involve strategically negotiating the tensions between donor priorities, organizational priorities, and the priorities and real needs of beneficiaries. Significantly, there is much self-awareness within the field that the participation of project beneficiaries is more often an “afterthought,” a “public relations ploy for organizations and for donors,” or “a way of suppressing resistance to projects that are actually more harmful than helpful on the micropolitical level, before that resistance has a chance to start.”

If participation in development more often manifests as rhetorical rather than actual, and the existence of so many variables, from negotiating political interests and cultural contexts, to working with limited time and resources, to unexpected situations on

the ground makes the pursuit of participatory development overwhelmingly complex and highly subjective and situational, then participation itself cannot have a consistent meaning within the context of international development. A development professional working for a small organization that focuses on youth in Latin America agreed that “participation can mean anything.” Meanings of participation are highly subjective, and are more often defined in official and institutional settings than they are in local communities or with the support of practitioners as facilitators. To the extent that all interaction in the social and natural world is participatory on some level, the architecture of specific projects constructs individuals as passive or active participants, and as engaged in specific one-time activities or in defining the structures of overall endeavors.

Most international development professionals addressed the gradient of what participation can mean, and what it looks like in the field. One of the significant barriers for practitioners to engage in participatory work is that it is rarely clear what participation entails, and how it is measured, in situational contexts.<sup>121</sup> A practitioner with many years of experience working on participatory projects for several community based organizations, and with significant monitoring and evaluation training, addressed this ambiguity, saying:

Participation can mean you get final approval of something in a very superficial way on a project. Real, in depth participatory development includes buy in and adaptation to fit local needs, and that includes their voice. Participation in development can mean, I can come to a talk – that’s participatory. You can check a box that says a certain number of people there, but actually including people – that’s hard to quantify. How do you measure the depth of participation? I don’t know of any way to get it right.

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121. Neill McKee, *Social Mobilization and Social Marketing in Developing Communities: Lessons for Communicators* (Penang: Southbound, 1999).

Without a way to get participation right, it is challenging to reconcile the necessity of participatory development with its shortcomings and failures. However, there was no disagreement among any of the practitioners I interviewed that participation in development is absolutely crucial. In order to avoid culturally inappropriate project designs at best, and grievous mistakes that cause conflict and further entrench inequalities at worst, community ownership must be a primary feature in all projects and programs. How effectively organizations and individuals translate the view of participation as essential into action and address complex micropolitical issues such as who gets to participate, how, and why, in spite of any contradictory interests or priorities is a more meaningful measure than which organizations have a participatory ethos in their mission statements or which practitioners talk about it the most.

#### Where Culture Meets Development

Barriers to engaging in participatory work include shifting definitions of what “participation” means, and the constraints development discourse imposes upon innovation in practice, as discussed above. Since participatory development as a concept is concerned with the cultural relevance of proposed projects in specific contexts, practitioners interface with local cultural norms as a way of assessing the relevance and sustainability of programs and projects. How practitioners view the cultures of others, and account for their own biases, is significant because it helps to explain the current status of participatory development and has implications for its future. The culture of development professionals, defined for the purposes of this analysis as a collective work culture reified through institutional patterns and expressed in the performance of

professional identities, also impacts the relationships between practitioners and beneficiaries. The tensions that can develop throughout interactions between practitioners and beneficiaries may also present barriers to engaging in participatory work effectively, depending on the context.

### Defining Culture

Most development professionals have an acute understanding of the roles culture plays in their relationships with each other and with project beneficiaries. Since development projects and programs often interact directly with cultural systems, it is impossible for those who work in the field to ignore its value and impact. Even when the cultural norms of project beneficiaries are marginalized at headquarters because of the tendency of officials to attempt to replicate projects that were successful in one context to another very different environment, practitioners on the ground know that immersing themselves in the local culture, and understanding it to the extent they are able, sets the foundation for community participation in any development process. A mid-career development professional who has led many project teams throughout the Caribbean noted, “culture and participation are very closely linked. If you want participation from the local people, that is them being able to impart their cultural ideals or their norms into a project, and with that, you can have successful development.” The majority of interviewees echoed this refrain, making statements that ranged from similar to almost identical.

The definitions of culture practitioners discussed were various and rarely academic or theoretical in nature, but always nuanced. Many practitioners apologized for

not having an academic definition of what culture means, and could only discuss culture through their personal experiences. But perhaps these experiences, which show that culture is specific to particular groups of people on the micro-level, and can never be effectively explained through models and binary constructions, should really be what defines how scholars consider and theorize culture.

While development professionals are quite capable in articulating definitions of culture that are grounded in their own experiences, they approach such definitions with cynicism. One practitioner said, culture is “any of the core characteristics that help to define a group or an individual within a group, but I’m more of the broad definition of culture is anything anyone wants to label it as.” In other words, culture is often a misused category, and acts as the way outsiders to certain communities define behaviors they do not understand. An official for a government development agency in the United States defined culture as “the totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts and beliefs, and institutions, and all other products of human work and thought, characteristic of a community or population,” but then went on to say that “community” or “population” could mean anything, like the workplace, like the neighborhood in which you live, and that viewing culture in terms of gender relations, race and ethnicity, age, language, religion, social class, and geographic region, or other traditional measures of culture, are limited at best. How culture is defined in the field is instrumental, and can tend to divide individuals while the participatory process is meant to bring them together. Thinking about culture is only useful from the perspective of the outsider, but offers a point of entry for practitioners to engage.

While thinking about and understanding culture can be useful, the way professionals talk about the cultures of project beneficiaries can build barriers between self and other in the field, making culture “code for difference, or otherness, or African – a way of ignoring the fact that we all come from cultures and societies. As if we don’t, and they do.” These barriers are an example of how discourse can bind action, and define the expected performances of practitioners and project beneficiaries with respect to the implementation of projects and the articulation of personal relationships.

### The Practitioner-Beneficiary Relationship

However they define culture, the practitioners I spoke with universally agreed that understanding the cultures of the communities they work in is crucial to facilitating participatory development processes. However, taking culture into account in development, and engaging in participatory development are unique behaviors that do not necessarily overlap. Sustainable environments for development projects with significant and long lasting impacts can only occur when there is overlap. Successful participatory development programs rely upon practitioners acquiring and applying an intimate knowledge of local cultural contexts before implementing projects. In some cases, procedures for developing and leveraging this knowledge are codified within organizational strategies and mandates, and in others, the personal prerogatives of particular development professionals in the field to account for culture can conflict with results oriented organizational priorities.

Culture and participation will always intersect, but the level of conscious attention practitioners and beneficiaries pay to this intersection is a pivotal driver of the success or

failure of projects. Additionally, the extent to which development professionals work with, and not against, local cultural practices affects their abilities to build trust and relationships, and can dictate project success and sustainability. One interviewee, a director of programs in sub-Saharan Africa for a large development non-governmental organization based in the United States emphasized that most of the challenges or failures he has witnessed could have been addressed through using approaches that are more iterative and more participatory. These approaches can only be generated through concerted efforts to ensure projects are culturally applicable and “make sense for individuals and communities more than they benefit investors, governments, and diplomatic or political agendas.” Similarly, other interviewees espoused that people who work in international development should consider themselves to be equal participants in programs and projects, who cannot participate in development without honoring local cultural norms to the extent cultural practices do not impinge on humanitarian principles.

#### The Culture and Participation of Development Professionals

Through defining what development means, how success is measured, and the social, political, and economic spaces in which development and participation can occur, development institutions act as repositories for the professional norms of development practitioners, which can be construed as a culture. Indeed, this culture is something development professionals find themselves quite aware of, but is rarely discussed outside of private circles, and perhaps in some practitioner manuals. Regardless of the personal desires of practitioners and their need to build positive relationships with the communities they work in, the pressures of institutions and donors, and their own cultural

frames of reference, are a countervailing force against privileging local culture and encouraging participation in development projects through including local stakeholders as decision makers and project implementers.

This professional culture is not easily defined, but can be explained through a look at the characteristics development professionals share, and several examples of what can happen when this professional culture grates against local community norms. While not all of the development professionals I interviewed are from the United States, all of them had been educated in the United States, and all of them have completed advanced degree programs, at the Master's level or above at the most elite schools in the country. Almost all of them know each other personally or professionally, or at least move in similar social circles and speak the same highly technical language. More strikingly, all of the development professionals I spoke with oriented themselves and their work towards the agendas of the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the United States Agency for International Development. The power these four organizations wield over others, from other multilateral institutions, to enormous for profit and non-profit organizations, to community-based associations so small they operate outside of the purview of larger donor agencies, is totalizing. Constraints to achieving participation in its deepest sense in development processes are embedded within the norms of institutions of development. This plays a role in defining some of the cultural characteristics development practitioners share: results oriented, entrepreneurial, profit driven, and collaborative, but only to a point. Development practitioners have a great deal of self-awareness regarding their cultural behaviors and the ways local communities

perceive them, which can either result in a drive towards adaptation and communication, or in unilateral decision making in spite of espoused participatory values and mandates.

A senior level employee at an international social entrepreneurship organization based in the United States discussed an ongoing problem with his organization's business model:

I am aware that the organization is based in the U.S., and its CEO and President are from the U.S., I think culturally as an organization, and even the whole concept of social entrepreneurship, and the focus on the individual and their role in social change, that in itself is more of a Western idea. In spite of the fact that I think this is a great model for social change, we've had people from around the world say, hey, you know what, this is more of a collective culture. Individuals don't sort of take the credit for what they've done – they see it as part of a larger community effort. There is an ongoing conversation inside of the organization to realize that even though social entrepreneurship can be one of the more responsible ways to promote community development, there is a strong U.S. bias in there.

In this case, the cultural bias towards promoting entrepreneurship and market based innovations are imbedded both within the organization and its operational practices, and the personalities of the people who work there. However, there is an awareness regarding the issue at hand, and a focus on adapting the concept of social entrepreneurship so that it has more applicability in collective contexts. This drive towards adaptation stems from the desire to allow for more input from local communities and individuals on their terms, implying an equality in relationships between the management of the organization and the social entrepreneurs who receive funding for their development projects.

An example on the opposite end of the spectrum illustrates another way the cultures of development professionals and institutions can manifest to work against local cultures rather than with them. A project leader for a profit development institution that

works in 120 countries around the world revealed that the pressures donors and contractors put on the organization to achieve rapid results, albeit with questionable sustainability, results in conflict when institutional demands place development professionals in difficult positions between the cultures of project beneficiaries and the culture of market capitalism:

I think you could say we're getting the communities involved and we're participating with them, but we want this project to be effective, and that may not always be culturally sensitive. You can't unfortunately, perhaps it's the idea of the global economy – you can't always be culturally sensitive. When there's a lot of pressure on a project to hit targets, we're not always being culturally sensitive when life gets in the way and people are saying "I need to do this," but we have a contract with them to complete a project on a specific timeline, and I have to say, "I don't care if there is a funeral for seven days."

Here, the project leader offers an example of one of the primary struggles practitioners face in their attempts to pursue development work on a participatory basis. The pressures on the development professional to perform a certain role for donor institutions and contractors often wins out, primarily because these organizations exercise power over development professionals and project beneficiaries alike, and secondarily because development practitioners are more likely to be invested in the cultural norms of the profession and the relationships they have to maintain at headquarters.

The concept of participation, and tools to foster it, such as culturally specific approaches, are constantly shifting and evolving. In the midst of this evolution, development professionals – at least those committed to participatory practices and working for development organizations more oriented towards social justice and humanitarianism than profits and opening new markets – find themselves in difficult positions as they negotiate with the principles of free market capitalism, and mediate

between powerful donors and governments, and communities traditionally marginalized in the international geopolitical system.

### The Demands of the Market

The enterprise of international development was historically concerned with increasing economic opportunities in the developing world and opening markets for trade. Evidence from the fieldwork of development practitioners supports the more radical position that conventional development was primarily concerned with creating supply chains that would allow inexpensive raw materials and other goods to flow from the developing world to the developed world, and with creating markets for exports from the developed world. Veteran development professionals noted above that over the past ten years, development has truly become more holistic and participatory, and is now as much about health and education, civic participation and empowerment as it is about economics. However, the demands of free market capitalism remain prescient and constrain the work in the field international development professionals can pursue.

Some of the larger financial institutions engaging in development work, such as international investment firms, do have greater flexibility in the work they pursue since they do not rely on other donors for funds. These organizations have autonomy precisely because of their control over capital flows. As investment banks, they have two strands of work: making equity investments in emerging markets in order to make profits, and using those profits to invest in development projects with limited and less rapid rates of financial return. While there are ongoing struggles between the two sides of such organizations regarding whether or not the financial rates of return on large scale

infrastructure projects or other measures of impact, such as increased employment in a particular region, are more valuable, no project is considered successful if the bank does not profit eventually. According to a senior advisor at such an investment firm, “the development world appreciates profits, and you get your bit of independence as an institution if you generate profits. We then have the autonomy to decide where we put our money.” There is no question that financial independence for development organizations is a luxury that allows more flexibility for program managers to take initiative. However, the fact that all projects must yield profits for investment firms places a different type of structural constraint on the types of programs these firms can pursue. There is little space for community participation in development when the concerns of investors to make profits for themselves, and not for the communities they are investing in, come first.

One practitioner admitted that “culture, the possibilities for participation, and the need to be locally relevant are drowned out by the demands of the market, and that is happening more and more.” Another noted that the role of for profit business in development is increasing, and that it causes a lot of “weirdness” and has significant shortcomings. An executive at a large, multilateral organization said, “it is not surprising that development has never actually been about altruism. I think we all got into it because we wanted to do good. But it turns out most of us are no better than venture capitalists. But how do you get out of an economic system that dictates everything? And as economic crises prevail, we can see that this system doesn’t work, but what is the legitimate alternative?”

Since development is concerned with economic growth as the vehicle for building infrastructure and providing services to meet the needs of communities, it does not seem

possible to raise the standard of living for the world's most poor outside of capitalist growth models. While alternative economic systems may exist, the international community does not consider them to be legitimate. In order to participate in the global economy, all communities must buy-in to the free market system. Encouraging this buy-in through workshops and programs is a primary piece of the work of development practitioners, but since capitalism is inherently based on inequality and competition, this work contradicts what "the spirit of development should be." In participating in global economic processes, the meaning of participatory development can be lost. In the words of one former employee of one of the Bretton Woods institutions, "does it really matter how you get there if the goal is for all communities to look the same, from the economic perspective?" The discourse of free market capitalism, and its institutions, override the ability for participation in development to be dynamic and meaningful.

#### The Demands of Governments, Large Donors, and Development Organizations

The confines of the global marketplace are a significant obstacle with which development professionals must contend. Simultaneously, donors, governments, and institutions apply additional pressures to development professionals, forcing them to operate in certain ways which are specific to every project. Often, the political motives and prerogatives of such institutions contradict the needs of communities on the ground, and have a strong hold on practitioners. Development professionals are reliant on these institutions for their own livelihoods, a reality that overshadows all of the work that occurs in the field and at the headquarters of smaller, particularly non-profit,

organizations. Once again, imposed discourses and structures define the possibilities for action.

Practitioners really serve three different clients, and negotiate the relationships between these clients. The interests of donors supplying funding for development projects are often tied to geopolitical strategies, and the interests of development organizations are often bounded by mission statements, logistics, and capacity for project implementation. In negotiating between donors and organizations, the voices of communities – the clients the practitioners I spoke with universally want to privilege – are regularly lost amidst the many mandate imposed from above.

While the requests of major donors dictate the projects smaller development institutions are able to propose, more powerful political pressures control the choices of donor institutions. A practitioner working for a regional development bank spoke about a covert practice at his institution called “yes or yes.” This term applies to the regular informal policy of appeasing member countries of the regional bank through accepting their requests to fund specific types of development projects – infrastructure and civic participation projects in particular – that are unnecessary, repetitive, or potentially harmful in communities the leadership of those countries consider to be of geopolitical importance. Even against the advice of everyone from entry level administrators and practitioners to senior bank officials, these projects must be pursued due to their political value on the elite level, and their role in larger international geopolitical strategies. These requests from the regional bank at hand, and other similar institutions, trickle down from governments through donor institutions to smaller development organizations seeking funds. By the time such projects reach the community level, practitioners implement

cursory participatory processes, such as holding workshops and meetings with local stakeholders. However, decisions regarding the utility of the project have already been made, and the project proceeds regardless of community level interests and priorities. This exercise of power at the highest level implies that political elites, uninterested or unaware of the needs of the most poor communities, set the agenda for development.

According to practitioners, “geopolitical aid is inappropriate” because they feel that international development practices should speak to the real needs of communities, and minimize the motives of governments and institutions in order to address asymmetries of power and inequality around the world. However, due to funding streams, most aid is geopolitical, and is tied to the political priorities of actors far above project beneficiaries, practitioners, development organizations, and even donor institutions themselves.

Donors, other powerful institutions in the international arena, and the relatively smaller development organizations responsible for implementing development projects do not only set the agenda for what development projects can be like, but also for what outcomes of such projects are measures of success. Monitoring and evaluation is of paramount import in international development and in all social change pursuits, because it ensures that projects change certain situations in communities for the better, in a sustainable way. Without monitoring and evaluation protocols, it is not possible to tell whether or not projects are not doing anything, or are doing more harm than good. Monitoring and evaluation enables development practitioners to learn from mistakes, and identify paths towards improvement in project design and implementation.

However, development organizations with expertise in certain areas rarely set monitoring and evaluation protocols – large donors do. Without any input from communities, practitioners, or implementing organizations, donors often design protocols based around what they consider to be universal measures of success. Far removed from realities in communities and without an understanding of what is culturally appropriate, donors can indirectly prevent projects and programs from reaching the people who need them the most. This often occurs when donors require implementing organizations to ask questions in the pursuit of program evaluation that inappropriately address certain topics. A development practitioner working for a small youth development organization reliant on large donors provided one of the most illustrative examples:

One of our funders pushed for an all girls program, in a *favela* in Rio de Janeiro, which hasn't caused any conflict there – the community thinks it is important to have an all female youth project, but where it is causing conflict...is with the monitoring and evaluation benchmarks the funder is requiring. They are forcing us to ask the girls questions about sexuality that, in that society, are just deemed very inappropriate for us to be asking. We're asking about sexual experience, orientation, and their experience with abuse. And these questions have caused most of the girls to drop out of the program. And the donor knows this. But if we don't ask these questions, the donor won't fund us. We want to create change and effect lives, but we also have to be able to afford to do that somehow. It's a challenge – in this case, there is no way for us to appease both sides. So all we can do is hope some girls stay in the program, and be thankful that we can cover some of our operational costs.

With donors making unreasonable demands, and without a responsive feedback cycle between implementing institutions and donors in place, the work of development can be halted if it conflicts with the values of communities. In these cases, there is no space for practitioners to make adjustments and respond to the needs of communities due to the constraints donors impose. Therefore, there is no room for the participation of communities to have an impact on development priorities and project cycles.

For small development organizations that rely upon the funds of donors facing their own constraints, negotiating between donors and project beneficiaries is a constant struggle. Even large institutions that invest in development projects, such as regional banks and multilateral organizations, are beholden to the whims of government officials and the vicissitudes of economic markets. Caught in between the structures of institutions and the needs of communities, development practitioners agree that they face pressures from all sides except for the one that matters. Even if beneficiaries protest irrelevant, inappropriate, or harmful projects and effectively halt them, development professionals are accountable to investors and donors first. Development professionals work hard to improve lives, and many are passionate about creating social change that bridges inequalities to empower the world's most poor. However, they also rely upon investors and donors to sustain the organizations they work for and meet their own needs. In each context, development professionals play a different role, and are conscious and willing performers as they attempt to meet the demands donors, organizations, and communities place upon them.

### Performing Development

Development practitioners quite literally have to perform different roles depending on the relationship they are negotiating and the interest group they are interacting with. From “feeling like a chameleon most of the time,” to “being expected to be prepared to go to the most dangerous and isolated areas one week, to a series of lush hotels and offices the next,” practitioners have to transform themselves on a regular basis. The expectations they face, to adhere to best practices and policies and simultaneously

meet the needs of beneficiaries, may contradict each other. However, practitioners still must strive to meet all of these expectations, if because doing so is the only way to serve communities in need.

One practitioner noted that the real work of development is bridging the gap between the real needs of communities and the expectations and priorities of donors. In order to do so, he has to play different roles to donors and community leaders, often located across the world from each other, with the hope that one day he will be able to bring everyone together and play the same role for all interest groups. Another practitioner revealed her desire to encourage investors to be philanthropic because it is the right thing to do, but instead finds herself appealing to them based upon rates of return on investments. The aspiration to be recognized as the individuals they are, including their personal talents and their professional training, regardless of the situation, is secondary to the demands interest groups place upon practitioners to perform differently depending on the context, and pander in different ways to the various concerns of all parties working in, investing in, or impacted by international development pursuits. Simultaneously, development professionals are able to set themselves apart from the operations of the field itself, and construct personal meaning through the types of work they pursue, which the below section demonstrates. The requisite performances expected of practitioners in institutional contexts may enable practitioners to set themselves apart. However, the act of performing as expected, despite personal beliefs and priorities, can reinforce the structures constraining innovation in international development and preventing participation.

The above sections identify barriers practitioners face in the pursuit of conducting development work with the participation and investment of local beneficiaries. These barriers are: the conflicts that emerge between community beliefs, norms, and practices, and the professional culture of development; the need of development projects will reinforce free market principles and generate profits to sustain the field itself; the motive driven demands of large donors and multilateral organizations; and the performances employers expect of development professionals in various contexts. The following section addresses the attitudes of development professionals towards the field, and why their personal feelings towards development work have implications for international development's future.

#### The Attitudes of Practitioners Towards International Development

There is a wide range of feelings and attitudes about development among the people I interviewed. However, all responses point towards the idea that international development professionals tend to set themselves apart from the system they work within. This separation seems to allow practitioners to continue their pursuit of participatory development work, in spite of the many barriers they face, and any personal conflicts they have regarding the geopolitical role of development. Simultaneously, responses indicate that practitioners tend to adapt to the structural realities of development work, or eventually leave the field. Here, the agency of the international development professional as an individual emerges. The separation of self from work discussed above is both the reason practitioners can tolerate the contradictions and

conflicting demands of international development work, and also the practice that allows them the choice to adapt or exit.

One practitioner in particular was adamant about removing her sense of self from her work, saying, “This is not who I am. At the end of the day, this is just a job. It is a job unlike any other, but I still have to take care of myself, and I can always walk away.” This statement indicates a separation, not only of self from work, but also the need for this interviewee to grant herself permission to make different choices. Another individual admitted, “Development hasn’t been sold on me yet.” Working in development does not require a consonance between personal beliefs and values and job descriptions, and the beliefs of practitioners towards the field are fluid and based in the specificity of experience. Practitioners see themselves as separate from the institution of development itself, and as change agents who either adapt or leave the field, based upon their abilities to pursue work for organizations whose values align with their own, find personal satisfaction in development work, or live in the discomfort barriers to participation creates.

While some are adamant about creating this separation, others leverage their experience and limited power within development institutions to fight for social change, focusing not on what development is, but on what development could be. While institutional structures may confine innovation for the development professional and preclude community participation, some individuals are yet optimistic about what development can do. This optimism is usually coupled with a strong humanitarian imperative to engage in development work, and a holistic and historical view of international interdependence and engagement. Additionally, the practitioners who

expressed the greatest satisfaction with development work were those who had started their own organizations, freelance, or work for smaller, social justice oriented community organizations. A practitioner with experience working in microenterprise in Latin America shared his views on the institution of development as a whole:

We engage in development work because we can't not do it. For a variety of different reasons, if we look at the disparities of wealth – yes, any type of intervention is problematic, but I think it would be even more morally irresponsible if we didn't do anything – if we were to say to others, good luck with your HIV/AIDS, good luck with your corrupt government, your food and water shortage...and I think even if we didn't do development work, there's so much international connection – between politics and economics, and migration back and forth as it is, it would be foolish to say we're not going to participate in development because it's problematic – that doesn't translate into non-interventionism. There are so many problems around the world, that even if the West isn't responsible for it, we are implicated in a lot of it – it's not entirely coincidental given conflict and poverty around the world there is a historical legacy that needs to be rectified. The problems are still going to be there – and you can take this stance that people have been working on this stuff for hundreds and hundreds of years, and you can say we haven't solved poverty, we haven't solved human rights abuses, we haven't solved environmental degradation. There is a litany of failures and maybe a couple of small successes in there, but you need all of that effort to keep pace with the things that are pushing in the opposite direction, that are causing inequality, increasing oppression, and robbing the world's most vulnerable of potential life chances. What are those opportunities, and those points that when pressed hard enough, will create systemic change that will radiate throughout societies? I think that's the question that we're really trying to answer with development work, and with social justice work overall.

The above interviewee identifies several primary justifications for engaging in development work in spite of its difficulties. These justifications are representative of an adaptation – a shift in focus from serving communities through development to making development work better. First, he discusses his personal view that development work is at least better than the alternative – not offering assistance to communities in the developing world at all. Secondly, his belief that development work is part of a countervailing force against other interests that increase divisions and promote inequality.

Thirdly, he equates development work with social justice work. While development work can take many forms, his point of entry to it brings a sense of personal meaning to the projects he works on, allowing him to remain optimistic and stay engaged in the field as he considers possibilities for reframing development and moving forward. Of the development professionals I interviewed, only four espoused similar views.

A more common adaptation, particularly among those practitioners with longer term careers in development relative to the overall group of interviewees, is the modification of expectations regarding what development is capable of over time. The phrase “I used to be more idealistic, but now I am realistic,” was a consistent refrain among twelve of the practitioners I interviewed, who tended to have established careers in international development, without any intentions of leaving the field or changing organizations. Some indicated a similar view through comparing how they had been “naive” at the beginning of their careers, but are now “experienced,” and that with wisdom comes a greater understanding of how to be more effective in negotiating the tensions between different interest groups and circumventing or accepting barriers to engaging communities in development projects. Requiring patience and will, these practitioners either find it personally fulfilling and necessary to work in development, or are affiliated with organizations and institutions that compliment their personal values.

Individuals who are unable or unwilling to adapt to the demands and barriers identified earlier in this chapter either use jobs in development as instrumental to other ends, or eventually leave the field of international development to engage in other pursuits. Nine of the practitioners I interviewed admitted to seriously considering leaving the international development field in order to pursue other avenues of social change, or

to embark on other types of work entirely. This group tended to be younger, entry level professionals, many of whom had recently finished graduate work in international development. Disillusioned by the barriers to engaging with communities in a participatory manner as previously identified, several considered going back to school, or pursuing other interests they had had before entering into the international development arena. One interviewee was starting to establish herself as a jewelry designer, and was at the beginning of making strides to turn that interest into full time work. Another was in the process of going to school part time to become a paramedic, with the aspiration of engaging in international disaster relief and emergency management. Yet another had just given notice at a large development non-profit, and had no immediate plans, but was content to fall back on previous experience as a bartender. Overwhelmed with the constraints faced, and unable to see a path to engaging in the social change work they had originally considered valuable, these individuals chose to reject international development work entirely, because of barriers they considered to be unforgivable and anathema to their personal interests and professional satisfaction. An individual who had just completed work on a project for an agency focusing on sustainability and the conservation of natural environments said, "I believe that as a practice, international development should just be stopped. The way people go about it is completely senseless, and has nothing to do with the people I want to be helping. I'm done with it." Such discontent with the practices of international development, and the institutions that sustain those practices among the individuals working in the field has serious implications for the future of international development, especially when those voices are

not taken into account. These implications are addressed in the discussion below, which explicitly ties the findings to the theoretical framework of this thesis.

### Discussion

The barriers to engaging in participatory work can be explained by institutional resistance to change in the international development system. While organizations set participatory agendas and donors call for proposals that focus on local community engagement, many of the structures in place since the beginnings of development pursuits after World War II remain unchanged. Large institutions and donors continue to set the agendas and priorities for development, which include ensuring financial profitability and meeting benchmarks in ways that may be untenable on the micro level. These actors have a monopoly on discursive practices, and consolidate power and knowledge in ways that individuals – especially development practitioners and the communities they serve – do not have the power to address. The enacted truth of development, therefore, remains the purview of experts acting at the highest level, who themselves lack the power to implement structural change.

As a result, practices in the field reinforce existing structures, which in turn reinforce current practices. Here, ties to Foucault and to Giddens' duality of structure become apparent. However, following Giddens, development professionals do have some ability to make alternate or radical choices – that is, they can choose to start their own organizations, find and work for organizations or on specific projects that match personal leanings, or leave the field of development altogether. Of course, having the power to

make such choices requires a certain privilege, and assumes that other options are available.

Taylor's labor process theory, introduced in the theoretical framework, claims that practitioners and beneficiaries hold the same amount of status in the international development field to the extent that they are both contingent upon the institutions of development for their respective livelihoods. The need to make a living is a very real one, and practitioners are conscious that any action outside of prescribed institutional mandates can lead to censure. Risking such censure can be a dangerous prospect, and as such, practitioners are incentivized to maintain the status quo.

In order to negotiate between institutions, donors, communities, personal motives and feelings, and other conflicting interests, practitioners must play different roles in different contexts. These performances are the thrust of action in development work, and the extent to which individuals are willing to, or capable of offering deft performances can dictate success not only with projects, but also with maintaining and increasing professional status. An increasingly self-reflexive realization of this performative aspect of development practice eventually leads professionals to adapt accordingly, or to decide to pursue different types of work.

The tendencies of practitioners to adapt or leave the field have implications for the future of international development as a whole. These tendencies constrain innovation, implying that there is little space for change in the international development field. This resistance to real transformations, in spite of the rhetoric of participation, and even projects and initiatives that claim to herald a participatory era, is indicative of a stasis in international development. While agency technically exists in the self-reflexivity of

performance discussed above, this has not translated into enduring institutional or structural change. As such, it appears that the priorities of development are the same as they have always been – to build alliances and consolidate political will, and to bring emerging markets into the global economy for the benefit of the developed world.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I attempted to address the barriers international development professionals face in the pursuit of participatory work in development. These barriers are diverse and many. Throughout the interviews I conducted, several specific barriers emerged. The demands of working in a global marketplace that privileges profits and economic interdependence presents a significant barrier to practitioners desiring to build significant relationships with local communities to identify non-economic needs. Secondly, the demands of macro level donors and institutions hampers work on the micro level. Results-based project designs with short timelines and intensive monitoring and evaluation protocols, which are normative in international development, do not often address the needs of project beneficiaries. Rather, such projects meet the needs of large institutions. Development professionals are primarily accountable to such institutions, rather than to the communities in which they work, constraining the possibilities for meaningful local engagement.

The barriers that arise are not just organizational and logistical, but also cultural. The professional culture of development is strong, and is oriented towards expert knowledge and unilateral decision making, which makes the collaborative decision making process inherent to participatory development difficult. Often, the need of professionals to get work done quickly and show results clashes with the cultural norms

and values of communities in the developing world.

Additionally, I investigated the personal feelings and impressions practitioners have towards development. Interviewees responded in three distinct ways. Firstly, practitioners with extensive experience noted transitions from being idealistic to being realistic, or from being naive to being wiser about the possibilities for the potential of development generally, and for the utility of participatory development specifically. Secondly, practitioners with more autonomy, such as freelancers or those who had started their own organizations or found organizations whose values aligned with their own, articulated the potential for what development could be, and recognized its place in the world as an attempt to counter inequality and poverty. Thirdly, early-career practitioners bemoaned the state of development, claiming that development in practice had little utility or caused more harm than good, and shared plans to leave the field. These findings lead to the conclusion that given the structural and “cultural” barriers international development professionals face in the pursuit of participatory work, individuals in the field either adapt or leave the field, to the extent their personal priorities and ability to choose career alternatives allow.

The difficulties of working in international development in the participatory era are tied to a larger theoretical framework that provides context for the study. Foucault’s notion of discourse helps to explain the persistent and insular characteristics of knowledge production within the international development system, where the conflation of power and knowledge result in institutional truths development professionals must enact. Giddens further explicates constraints to change and participatory engagement in international development work through his theory of structuration. The development

field is self-sustaining due to recursive practices that reinforce institutional structures, which then promote similar practices. Following Taylor's labor process theory, development professionals are incentivized to maintain the status quo due to the fear of censure and their dependence on organizations for their livelihoods. This severely constrains innovation in international development.

To understand the possibilities of agency, or, the capacity of development workers to bring about change within the international development system, it is important to recognize that organizational work is often as performative as it is functional. Practitioners must perform in different ways for the various stakeholders in the development arena. The ability and willingness of practitioners to carry out performances, change roles, and use their performances to bring stakeholders together dictates the degree to which they are successful in the field. These performances may impose limitations, but are also the site where development professionals can exercise personal agency and make clear choices about whether or not they will continue to work in development, and how they will do so.

With potential innovators either modifying their expectations, adapting, or choosing to leave the field, there seems to be few possibilities for choosing a new way forward in development. Even though institutions have widely accepted the ethos of participatory development, the way institutions function, and the economic and geopolitical motives for development, do not foster environments that encourage participatory development processes on the micro level. The barriers practitioners face in attempts to work in local communities on culturally relevant terms can be insurmountable, as the feelings of practitioners towards development suggest.

Participatory development practice is much less real than it is imagined, in spite of the proliferation of institutional rhetoric on the importance of participation, and its theoretical underpinnings.

The limitations of this study are significant, considering its relatively small sample and qualitative methodology. While I was able to speak in depth with 25 development professionals, and the strength of the theoretical framework offers some robustness, this study cannot be generalized. However, its implications are significant and require further research to determine how widespread consonant views of practitioners are regarding barriers to participatory development, and discontent with the operations of the field as a whole.

At the very least, this study acts as an interpretive instrument of theory to comprehend the themes emergent in the stories and experiences of those working in the development field, and can recommend that development institutions should focus more efforts on reflexive processes that allow practitioners avenues to provide feedback on policies and practices. Through learning from the experience of individuals working on participatory development projects, and encouraging and accepting their recommendations, development institutions can innovate and truly reframe the pursuit of development work towards the needs of project beneficiaries in specific contexts. Simultaneously, these institutions will have to be prepared to seriously consider their own motives for engaging in development work, and answer questions regarding whether or not political and economic gains for the developed world are the primary drivers, or if they are invested in the humanitarian imperative of working towards a more equitable world. If the discourse of development does not change, neither can its practice.

APPENDIX A  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. How have the following terms changed for you, for the organization you work for, and for the development community, over time?

- a. Development
- b. Culture
- c. Participation

Do you see a difference between taking culture into account in development, and participatory development?

2. Do you think it is important to do development work in a culturally sensitive, and participatory manner? Why or why not?

3. Do you think the field of international development changed over time? How, and why?

4. Where do you think development strategies and goals come from? How are they perpetuated and evaluated?

5. Do you have conflicting demands placed upon you by the organization you work for, and the communities you work in? Do you feel pressure to play different roles or behave in different ways depending on the context? If so, how, and why?

6. Is there anything else you would like me to know?

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