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Donor Playground Cambodia?

What a look at aid and development in Cambodia confirms and what it may imply

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Introduction

This paper is confrontational and challenges many deep assumptions in mainstream development. It argues that from the early 1990s in many ways Cambodia became a 'donor playground', a term that some may find troubling, if not actually offensive. It supports this argument by reference to various arguments in development studies, to a specific case study of intervention in Cambodia, and to an examination of important parts of the relevant donor 'knowledge production'. For us, these show that this term is, indeed, suitable and we will make various practical recommendations as to how things may progress in the future.

Further, we argue that the situation in Cambodia is not at all surprising to those familiar with such issues. This allows us to say something about the main questions of this Conference as we understand them:

1. What can be said about the efforts of development policy to regain its credibility – also known as the aid effectiveness debate?
2. What role – if any – can development policy play in effectively addressing the challenges of interlinked global crises such as the climate, food and poverty crises?
3. And finally, to what extent is policy coherence a reality in the political practices of donor and partner countries?

For us it is neither useful nor particularly illuminating to argue that case studies provide too narrow an understanding to draw any conclusions from them. Furthermore, we are not going to tell the reader what works in development and what doesn't. This is not because we do not think that these points are important, but because we think that the state of knowledge in matters of development shows that answers to them, unless properly understood, are not likely to be useful. The basic reason for this is that, so far as we can see, change processes in human societies do not exhibit robust regularities in terms of the standard terminology used to speak or write about them. This is an *empirical*, not a theoretical, point. For us, the most persuasive reason for this is that 'the world' is simply far more varied than our languages suggest that it is. 'Democracy', 'GDP', 'participation' and so on vary too much from place to place, and from time to time, for us to ignore what this means for how the three questions above may be understood, and answers to them given. Central to the meaning of this is that 'global' evidence, in that it assumes that we 'sample from a single population', tends to produce spurious results, into which 'centric' perspectives may read what they like. Before we come to a discussion of what this seems to have meant for Cambodia, we present the main ideas of the paper. We then move on to a wider discussion, then the case studies, and then some tentative conclusions and recommendations.

What are the main ideas of this paper?

Exploring those questions, we would like to introduce three main ideas.

The first revolves around the notions of expertise and predictability, which as we all know are closely bound up with assumptions of the validity, and so the authority, of evidence-based knowledge about 'what will happen if'. We argue that the characteristic expression of the change rationality associated with development – 'development policy' - has not only lost credibility due to aid efforts being organised around classic intervention logics that have consistently failed to deliver the expected outcomes, but – more importantly - that

knowledges expressed in such 'globally framed' and allegedly known cause-effect terms actually get in the way of effective engagement, most strikingly and disturbingly by excluding the voices of many of those affected by development interventions.

Secondly, we challenge the idea, which is also very familiar, of the neutrality of the state and the assumption that development interventions are taking place in a socio-politically and socio-culturally neutral environment that not only allows technical approaches to dominate the development debate but also re-affirms the power of the development "experts". And of course this expertise is assumed to apply across different contexts, to that 'what works there, will work here'.

Unaware or reluctant to accept the responsibilities that development agencies hold in light of the power vested in them due to asymmetries in information and access to resources, development cooperation is often guided by reference to "best practice" examples which of course, for them to be applicable, have to entail the assumptions already mentioned: that an expert on 'X' is a *global* expert, bound to assume that there is enough commonality between 'there' and here' for their expertise to matter. As we will argue, there is little evidence that there is any sound empirically-based reason to believe that things are sufficiently the same, globally, for this assumption to be worth making. What we find, as we are all very well aware, is in consequence a tendency to avoid an adaptive *specific* understanding of the *specific* socio-political environment of the partner context.

These are not just academic points. We argue that these tensions arise as part of a strong, and very familiar, avoidance of the view that assessment of development results and decisions on strategies of engagement are inherently political processes that need to be discussed and negotiated in the public domain. Obviously, if 'we know what works', then we think we can avoid this; complaints that 'politics inhibits good policy' are all too common. So we argue, like many others, that a process of inclusive public discussions tends to avoid an ebb and flow of interest, ideas and other very human factors present among development actors and stop these from having a greater impact on development practice than the official or intended development agendas of donor and recipient countries.

This observation takes us to our third point. It seems obvious, and again familiar, that such ideas – of expertise and global knowledge – accompany a situation where aid interventions may to be assumed de-linked from interactions with the key stakeholder groups, which we see as the voting populations in donor countries and those they look towards, the key target populations of partner countries. In an increasingly inter-connected world the rising awareness of the potential dangers of a widening development gap between the so-called global south and global north has replaced primarily humanitarian motivations for development aid with a growing acceptance that development constitutes a right. Obviously, this view, which entails the idea that citizens are owed something by their and other societies and states, is contested. However, this view is of growing power and influence, manifest in international frameworks that oblige countries, through their states and through other mechanisms, to support the promotion of human rights *beyond* their national boundaries.

As is familiar from a host of examples, there may be a large gap between rights written down on paper and reality. To constituents in countries receiving development aid such rights may mean little without effective accountability mechanisms and associated processes that work. As the case study on Cambodia will demonstrate, political oversight is sketchy at best and needs to be supported by a complaint mechanism that allows target populations in partner countries to claim their rights vis-à-vis development actors.

We do not assert that what we are doing is novel. Whilst the human rights discussion remains still in its infancy, a strong case for accountability has also been made in the aid effectiveness debate that culminated in the Paris Declaration in 2005. References to mutual accountability assume that the local state exists, is adequately legitimate, and so on. This is risky if not reckless, and far from a good guide to action, in a country where political accountability does not function, as is the case in Cambodia and many other countries with flawed processes for political competition and little social accountability.

But these worries also exist on the donor side. Here we have similar issues for, as our 'land' case study shows, the political process is only partly working, and mostly when things are getting too heated to be overlooked. Social accountability tends to be left to civil society organisations. However, this is not a valid alternative since local and international CSOs cannot be assumed to legitimately articulate accountability demands – neither in partner nor in donor countries. Their lines of accountability are only weakly transparent and involve a range of different constituencies that influence agendas of CSOs which in turn do not necessarily reflect the interest of the poor and marginalised as they like to claim. Our fundamental point here, to which we will return, is that the dominant trends in the aid effectiveness debate continue to reply upon familiar assumptions about how to 'do development', so that problems of human rights and power asymmetries are reduced to how to better deliver ('more effectively') what are asserted to be known solutions to clearly identified problems. As the 'land' case study shows, this leads to all sorts of problems. The roots of these problems, we argue, are to be found in the basic ideas embodied in mainstream development and how this is used to organise it.

What do we base those propositions on and where do we stand in development debates?

The above propositions are mainly informed by our experiences as practitioners. As such, both our knowledges tend to be contingent, local and textural. It is from this basis that we engage with theory.

AF's views stemmed originally from both practice and the experience of watching arguments developed in a particular context (Vietnam) engaging with standard global comparative knowledges. These views were then confirmed by work on empirics,[1] especially that of development economics [Fforde 2005] and also wider exploration of how development policies are compared [Fforde 2009]. But for both of us the main driver is practice, which, in empirical and theoretical terms, may be said to involve complex, contextualised and often emergent knowledges that occupy a space that is one of diverse authority and multiple in its motivations and understandings.

Together we combine years of work in developing countries with governmental and non-governmental organisations, bi- and multilateral donor agencies, and actors on both sides of the fence. This experience has certainly made us sceptics of development but not development cynics. We have met with plenty of what AF would call "troubled but effective practitioners" that use the given institutional space for constructive engagements, leading to

[1] By 'empirics' is meant here sets of 'facts' that are linked, implicitly or explicitly, to theories and especially 'observation theories' that give those facts meanings to particular groups of people [Fforde 2009]. This is inter alia a Lakatosian position. It does not assert any 'objective' existence to 'facts', despite often read as such by various academics eager to assert that 'facts do not exist'.

desirable outcomes for target populations. In order to shape our arguments for the purposes of this paper, we have further chosen the recent history of development interventions in the Cambodian land sector as a case study and arena for observation. Using such specific focus for the discussion on development policy has all the useful limitations that a specific and non-comparative case study approach entails. While we welcome the fact that it does not allow us to generalise and develop universal statements on the effectiveness and coherence of development policies, as already argued we have reasons to believe that there is anyway very little value in general statements on what works and what doesn't work in the field of development. The case study which was informed by seven years of engagement by KS in the Cambodian land reform debate, an extensive literature review and interviews with stakeholders from government, bi- and multilateral donor organisations, as well as local and international NGOs provides an interesting glimpse into the complexity of development practice against the background of the wider global debate on the effectiveness of development policy. From this various readers and stakeholders may take different meanings and lessons, suited to their own perspectives and contexts.

How is this paper organised?

This paper is organised so as to address the main concerns of this conference, stated above. After a brief introduction to the Cambodian case study, we will then address these - referring to the Cambodian situation where appropriate – while at the same time elaborating on the ideas we just put forward for discussion.

The Cambodian story

Looking at development efforts in Cambodia is enlightening in many ways. Emerging from thirty years of civil war, Cambodia has been the focus for interventions by the full spectrum of international development actors since the early 1990s (and before then by the Soviet-Vietnamese variants in the 1980s). Almost twenty years later, more than half of the country's national budget is still funded through development assistance, placing Cambodia among the most internationally intervened countries in the world. What is further remarkable about Cambodia are the different accounts given on the impact of this development aid and the general confusion about the country's development trajectory. And what is notable about these tensions is that these high levels of resource mobilisation into development interventions continue.

This is obviously a vast topic. Crucial aspects of it that are worth deeper study are related to the ideas above, and the concrete expression of them in ways that explain the Western engagement in Cambodia since the early 1990s. To put this another way, if, as often appears, Cambodia became a field for experimental donor interventions, what explains the ways that those interventions were conceptualised? What are the characteristics of the institutional environment in which such donor agencies are operating? What can be found in the associated knowledge production that throws light on this? What can be found in a case study of donor intervention?

As we will argue below, since the emergence of rapid economic change in late 1990s, there appears no consistent explanation on the donor side as to either what has happened, or why, and indeed the standard explanations of what is necessary for development that run in terms of governance, legal framework etc imply that the major changes since the end of the 1990s are 'impossible'.

Conceptualising this case study, KS developed a set of questions that summarised discussions among development practitioners in Cambodia. It might be useful to quote them verbatim since they reflect how practitioners grapple with a developmental situation:

1. “When it comes to aid and development in Cambodia everyone will tell a different story. Human rights groups point to forced evictions that are the result of an almost unrestricted elite capture of the country’s natural resources. Development banks and bilateral development agencies on the other hand stress the double digit economic growth of the country (before the world economic crisis) and the fact that poverty has been reduced on a one percent rate per year - an achievement that might very well be lost due to the recent crisis. Furthermore, the GINI coefficient shows that inequality has risen. And only a few seem to benefit from the progress of the past decade. Has aid helped or failed the Cambodian people? And how would we know?
2. Half of Cambodia's national budget is funded by aid money but donors seem to have little influence on the political development of the country. Is this so? And why would donors continue their funding if they seem to get little in return?
3. Almost all donors to Cambodia have signed on to DAC and are seemingly committed to the agreed principles. However, donor coordination beyond formal institutions is still weak and does not seem to be supported by either side. What are the reasons behind the hesitation to align and harmonize aid in Cambodia? And who would benefit from harmonized aid efforts?
4. "New donors" to Cambodia such as China, South Korea, India, Vietnam and even Thailand are accused of undermining the power that aid holds to push for democratic reforms in Cambodia. Established DAC donors often excuse their non-critical stance on human rights issues by pointing towards alternative sources of support delivered by new donors. On the other hand, most of Cambodia's infrastructure is built with aid money from China and Korea and the Prime Minister does not miss a chance to express his happiness with the efficient and non-interfering support the country is getting from its Asian neighbours. Does aid money from non-DAC donors slow down democratic development in Cambodia?
5. Cambodia has been identified as one of the most vulnerable countries in Southeast Asia with regards to climate change. Its vulnerability is due to the lack of adaptive capacity. With a third of the population living under the poverty line, this comes as no surprise. As a least developed country, Cambodia is high up on the priority list of donor countries. Cambodia also claims that 50 percent of its land area is covered in forest, which makes it a prime target for projects under REDD plus. In other words, there are high expectations of billions of Dollars flowing into the country under the climate change label. Money - that's what is hoped - with no strings attached. What will be the impact of such funding flows? How will projects funded by conventional aid money compete with climate change projects?
6. Land is without a doubt the most important and most contested resource in Cambodia at present. According to some sources, one third of the arable land area has been granted as economic land concessions to foreign and domestic investors. Less than 10 percent of the concessions are actually in operation. At the same time, donors such as the BMZ through GTZ support the registration of individual claims to land and social land concessions for the land-less and land-poor. However, private land titles are not available for disputed areas, particularly the urban poor. The total land area for social land concessions is less than the size of one average economic land concession. And indigenous groups that are granted the right to collective land ownership have so far not received any title. Civil society groups have therefore accused such projects of

> actually failing poor and vulnerable groups. What is the responsibility of donors to ensure that their projects are reaching the most marginalized? Are there alternative approaches that can ensure that they do?" [Email KT to AF 11/6/2010]

What is first of all clear from this honest description is that this is a long way from the 'policy science' paradigm. It stresses –

(1.) The multiplicity of views, none of them evidently correct;

(2.) The focus upon something called 'political development' and the sense that this is felt to be disconnected from donor interventions (we discuss this further below when we argue that the mainstream development literature 'does not get' underlying change processes in Cambodia);

(3.) The ongoing failure of donors to align, suggesting that something prevents this – this can be linked to the use of instability of knowledge to organise interventions, which means that which beliefs are used reflects, not the common issue of 'Cambodia', but the very different issue of donors' own characteristics, such as bilateral agency interests of the moment etc (in other words, if you want to know what the development agency of country X does in country Y look at country X rather than country Y);

Without appreciating these issues it is impossible to understand the apparent freedoms felt by the designers of development interventions. This is the prerequisite. But other factors come into play as we will show in the Case Studies below. One of them relates to the drive towards outputs that create a situation where complexity is reduced in the knowledge production required for the design of development interventions, in order to define achievable arenas for intervention – so donor projects follow the apparent and superficial logic of what is thought to be the institutional environment.

Thus, as we show below in the 'land' case study, expert ideas can be seen in play, supporting arguments that certain activities are justified in that they will lead to certain outcomes, in various ways. These ways, as we point out, are easily mapped by any development studies student into familiar blocks of knowledge, such as economics, modernisation theory and so on. These seek to (and may there succeed) problematise development in Cambodia in ways that make sense within these blocks of knowledge, purport to have predictive power, and are only weakly linked to Cambodian specificities. What is interesting about the 'land' case study, though, is not this, but the way these practices, usually rather free to operate in isolation from local key stakeholders, failed to preserve their independence, leading to severe problems.

(4.) Frustration with the inability to feel that development engagement is associated with either coherent (as desired) or democratic change, despite the apparent innate power of that engagement. Whilst few would deny that there has been change, the nature of this change is contested. At this level the discussion becomes very thin, mainly because it is not located in any detailed historical and textured analysis of what democratic change (change towards what?) could mean in Cambodia. This question also relates to the issue of policy coherence. What are the trade-offs and are they trade-offs? Do we want to see Cambodia to turn into a responsible state with a strong poverty reduction agenda or do we compromise on our calls for good governance in order to maintain influence in the region by making sure the Chinese and others do not grow too strong? Such conflicting goals do not only weaken development approaches but also lead to a loss of credibility. As they lack firm foundations in Cambodian realities, they soon start to read as remote and 'floating' above discussions and debates amongst Cambodians.

(5.) Identification of a major issue for discussion – relationships between interventions (gauged in terms of money) and matters to do with climate change. There are several reasons to raise the issue of climate change but these not be detailed here. What is important is that the climate change debate turns the development debate around: the polluter pays principle means that countries such as Cambodia have rights vis-à-vis industrialised nations. This poses, of course, the question as to how this is to be organised and managed.

And finally (6.) an issue that is leading to tensions between different donor agencies and approaches, linked to various (and often inconsistent) ideas of cause and effect – land, land registration support projects etc. What we find in the relevant literatures is a plethora of statements about cause and effect that are inconsistent and ignore each other. In this sense it is not the question of cause and effect but much more that of the authority of ideas that serves donors since it simplifies their task and serves the interests of the Cambodian government since it legitimises it while at the same time does not threaten its neo-patrimonial power arrangements. And it offers them freedom of action whilst distancing them from Cambodian realities and important stakeholders, as the 'land' case study shows. To anybody experienced with aid practice this list is quite normal and expected. We need to think just why this is the case

We later had the opportunity to discuss some of these initial thoughts and questions in a series of interviews with development practitioners and government officials involved in the land sector in Cambodia. The overall picture to emerge from these interviews was as follows:

- Government officials appreciated the support of development partners but seemed to have little understanding of the various agendas and ways of operation of donor agencies. They felt cut off from information related to donor strategies and criticized approaches that would attach unreasonable conditions to development assistance.
- Donors in the land sector (our case study) felt that they had little understanding of the interests of the Cambodian government beyond officially stated government policies and neither the mandate nor the power to counter elite interests in what they perceived as a fragmented "divide and rule" environment
- International NGOs accused donors involved in the land sector of complacency in the face of obvious injustices and human rights abuses, failing to fulfil their obligations to use their powers to work across government agencies to push for an equitable and transparent land reform process

These happily contradictory statements and expectations are part of a familiar discussion that has contributed to global debates on the effectiveness of development cooperation and development policies in general. To better understand them in the context of Cambodia it is worth looking into the history of development interventions as they took roots with the establishment of the UN Transitional Authority in 1992. Never before had a UN intervention had such profound impact on the situation of a country, and this sets the stage for many of today's confusions and struggles.

Riding on the wave of democratisation efforts that had often replaced the cold war model of war aid policies, Cambodia was assumed by many to be a clean sheet on which to build democratic institutions, starting with UN-sponsored elections. The view here was that the natural power asymmetries believed associated with development had, in Cambodia, created good conditions for donors to secure outcomes that they wanted.

This stance is quite familiar. With development portrayed as the implementation of known solutions (backed by donors) the issue of "capacity or its lack" can be seen placed in the foreground (as Hughes (2009:5) describes). Part of the post-conflict narrative is thus the familiar claim that a society starts from scratch and its people first and foremost lack capacity that justifies the "post-nationalist order of international supervision and assistance". The central issue is then said to be the creation of the capacity to implement, rather than alternatives, such as the support of local processes that move the country forward in ways acceptable to key stakeholders. A central issue here is how this stance assumes a considerable power asymmetry, so that training and other capacity-raising, combined with belief that what will then be implemented 'will work' is believed sufficient to 'do development'. Clearly, the situation shows that this 'does not work'.

Much has been written on the results of this attempted democratic institution building (see for example Hughes 2009, Heder 2005, Peou Sorphong 2000) and an assessment is of course well beyond the scope of this paper. We would like to focus on two things that ultimately lead us to the observations described above about the dynamics of the relationship between Cambodia's so-called development partners and the Cambodian government and the attempts of donors to harmonise and align their efforts also known as aid effectiveness agenda.

In order to do that, we will first look at literature on environment and development to discuss how much or how little is understood about change processes in Cambodia. Second, we will turn to the example of development interventions in Cambodia's land sector as it reflects a lot of the controversial debate that surrounds development cooperation in Cambodia in general.

The literature on environment and development reviewed

A review of the literature on environment and development in Cambodia shows very clearly the nature of the 'available knowledge'. For a study of the effects of foreign trade on the environment by AF in the cases of rice, cassava and fish, all relevant materials were collected, adding up to perhaps 2,500 pages. This is the 'canon' that any new study should refer to. It includes consultants' reports, academic studies, and work occupying a middle ground between the two. It is consistent with the notion of 'expertise', that knowledge of 'what will work' should drive development as something that is done. It also shows the weaknesses of this approach. These are as follows:

1. The literature is not internally referential – it does not debate with alternatives; rather, each 'expert' asserts their own position. Crucial issues are often ignored if they conflict with that position (thus, the environment is often ignored)
2. The literature is often deeply inconsistent, arguing that 'without' causes x, y or z change is impossible, noting the presence of change, and then asserting that without 'x, y or z' that change cannot continue
3. When contrasts are made between the majority 'global' assertions and the minority who assert Cambodian specificities, the latter are usually ignored by the former.
4. There is a tendency to look for causes 'external' to Cambodia, consistent with a rather technical "best practice approach"

Thus, when looking at the recent rapid changes in agriculture (such as the doubling of rice output in less than a decade), we find tensions between observations of rapid change and the apparent absence of asserted conditions for it. Again and again observations are made that suggest that rapid change cannot continue without appropriate policy, and there is no explanation given as to why, if this is the case, we are seeing such rapid change. In a nutshell,

the literature 'does not get it'. This is reflected often in a familiar search for *external* causes, for if the situation in Cambodia should prevent positive change, then logically the origins of explanations have to be sought outside the country. This is a logical mess.

A good example is a 2010 USDA report [USDA 2010].

The report explores rather deeply the rapid growth in rice production. Highlighting a 9 percent annual growth rate over the past 10-12 years. Reasons given include repatriation of seed varieties lost during the war period, as well as the introduction of highyielding short season varieties, allowed for a wet season double cropping greatly explaining the steady increase in rice production. There is thus a tendency to look for *external causes* – forces that come from 'outside' Cambodian agriculture, which can then be treated as 'passive':

> *... steps at revitalizing the genetic rice stock in the country and rapidly increasing rice production potential in the main summer growing season put Cambodia back on the path toward rice selfsufficiency.* [p.5]

The view painted tells us nothing about farmers' decisions, changes in their organisational abilities (for example, changes in social capital as they learn to organise), informal support through channels outside the state system (and so largely invisible), and so on.

Thus:

> *The severe shortage of agricultural credit in Cambodia is crippling rice producers {sic} capacity to continue to increase productivity and output, due to their inability to adequately finance purchases of improved higher-yielding seed, fertilizer, pesticides, farm machinery, and grain storage equipment*. [p.3]

A puzzle here is that if credit shortages will cripple future change, why have they not crippled change in the recent past? The report does give considerable credit to improvements in irrigation, in part the result of government efforts. But its stance is clear – it cannot properly explain recent changes in terms of change processes within Cambodia. *What is missing from this confident analysis is any significant account of Cambodian farmers' changing behaviour and capacity to accumulate at farm level.* This, of course, requires a big step away from the globalised discourse and towards engagement with local conditions.

If we now turn to look at literature on rice in particular, we find that *rice* poses interesting problems. Much of the literature frequently assumes that Cambodian agriculture is 'dominated' by rice. This is not so robust a view, as rice is well below half of agricultural GDP. But the rice focus is associated with views in many studies surveyed that rice exports are a 'good idea', and that use of chemical fertiliser is also, as can be seen from recent announcements by the Cambodian government that have a strong focus upon increasing rice exports further (Phnom Penh Post 19 October 2010)

Here there are implicit but not explicit debates in the literature, and we concluded from our literature survey that adoption of high-yield high-chemical input rice-farming techniques may be seen by farmers as problematic. But there is no clear debate within the literature about this. Whilst increasing crude yields a lot, farmers' net incomes do not appear reliably to rise by anything like so much. In a nutshell, chemical inputs may be rather expensive. We therefore need to investigate what farmers make of this situation, and how they problematise it. In a nutshell, there are powerful arguments in the literature suggesting that *targets of increasing*

rice output and land yields may not sit well with farmers' desires to increase their net incomes, both now and, probably more importantly, over the long-term [2]

As the country moves away from the terrible events of the 1970s, it would not be surprising if Cambodian farmers increasingly reflected in greater depth upon the long-term value, in their own terms, of rice land and their way of life. Again, this 'cultural-historical' perspective suggests that farmers' subjective views may be important. They are usually left out of the relevant mainstream literature, although there is some very limited academic discussion of issues such as popular perceptions of patron-client relations.

General observations on opinions on Cambodian change processes

Our most basic observation on Cambodian change processes is that they are, if we gauge by the available literature and accounts, not well understood. Experienced practitioners have a certain familiarity with context, processes and behaviour, but the rapid economic and social change of the past few years are not well understood either.

The logic is quite clear: *without* correct policies, positive change cannot happen: so, *what has caused the positive changes to date?* This is a common problem in the literature. Take a recent World Bank study. Whilst the positive changes since the middle of the first decade of the 2000s are acknowledged [World Bank 2007: 135], they were not expected. This is the same position taken by the USDA report – an assertion that there are certain necessary policy requirements for growth, so that without them growth cannot happen.

Consider also an academic study [Sjoberg & Sjoholm 2006]. They were far from expecting what was to happen (this was despite real growth in agriculture GDP of 12% in 2003 and 17% in 2005 [p.498][3]:

> *Cambodia is facing the familiar problem of achieving sustained rates of economic growth that could help it alleviate widespread poverty. …. Given that the major success story of the past decade – the garment and textile industry – is under threat, we conclude that Cambodia is yet to achieve an economic take-off.*

We conclude that the nature of change in Cambodia is often a big mystery. This fundamental problem means that the platform upon which detailed research must be constructed is weak and unreliable. Fundamental research is needed to generate views within which the rapid pace of change in Cambodia can be understood '*despite*' the policy issues such studies identify. And there are signs that this fundamental research is rather hard for Cambodian scholars to gain support for.

As has been argued in another context [Fforde 2009], this leads to familiar tensions.

As we saw above, we find many studies that report change and in effect argue that this is impossible, because the prescribed measures that are stated as necessary to change (often 'continued change') are absent.

This then suggests that Cambodia be treated as perhaps 'anomalous' or an example of 'success without intention', or in some other way dealt with as a case study. What often happens here is that explanations of change in the particular instance (here 'Cambodia')

[2] Minor fieldwork carried out suggested that there was a significant argument that farmers were very well aware that their increased in rice output were secured by use of chemical fertiliser that in effect 'mined' the soil in ways that pushed costs into the future.

[3] This view was supported by Cambodian analysts, such as [Visal 2006].

become heterodox in order not to challenges the classic policy assumption, which is that knowledges may be predictive and robust across different contexts, when so far the facts (of these knowledges) suggest that they are not.

Conclusions from the literature

The literature on development and environment is striking. The reader should recall that this is what is available to donors wishing to form a view. It demonstrates that very little is 'known', yet much money was spent, leading to large discretionary powers vested in development actors With development asserted to be something that is done and knowable, experts are not treated as researchers seeking robust predictive power, but as people there to develop positions that can be integrated into interventions that embody these assumptions.

It is obvious that this position is troubled ; if there is no consensus, then if one 'buys in' to a particular view of what will work, and uses this as a basis for intervening, then is there any good reason for thinking that things will turn out as expected? The common sense answer is that acting on such a basis is very risky. The effective costs or benefits of such risks are then something to think about. In these situations purported but spurious predictive power starts to become a problem rather than an opportunity.

Land, land reform and recent experience with German cooperation in this area in Cambodia

The German-Cambodian cooperation in the land sector has recently gone through a period of turbulence that illustrates some of the points we want to make. The discussion here has been contested and our account reflects this.

German interventions in the land reform sector in Cambodia: Whose idea was it?

Since the mid 1990s, the Asian Development Bank under its Agricultural Sector Program had pushed the Cambodian government to promulgate a new land law. In fact, ADB had made this a condition for the release of a second loan tranche worth $US 30 million. The land law of 1992 only recognised possession rights (limited to a maximum of 5 ha of farm land per family) but a country 'opening its doors to the market economy' was, following many standard views, expected to safeguard individual land ownership rights, whatever these were actually to mean in the Cambodian concept.[4] The goal was repeatedly stated in ADB's country operational strategies as "*improve access to productive land under a secure title [...] for the rural poor as well as for commercial development in urban areas"*.

Already in 1995, a Land Management Pilot Project had commenced in a few provinces initiated by the German Technical Cooperation implemented through the Deutsche

[4] Perhaps annoying if not academic questions that would be raised here are many: was the historical rural experience one of individual land tenure, or one based upon family or what? How, in a rice-growing area with parallel use of forests, had Cambodians dealt with issues of joint production (water management, forest exploitation)? What relationships existed between elite perceptions of land allocation rights, enforcement of these, village rights and so on? All these are well documented, often in ways that show their complexity, regional variation and so on, in historical studies such (to mention a readily available example), Chandler's summary history (Chandler 2008). Anybody who stood up in an academic seminar and discussed land issues in terms of individual property and no more would be taking a grave risk.

Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ). Two years later the government of Finland through a consulting company FINNMAP started to implement yet another approach to land registration with its Cambodian Cadastral Project. After some negotiations both approaches were linked together in the Land Management and Administration Program (LMAP) as support to the land reform program of the Ministry of Land Management Urban Planning and Construction. With the help of World Bank funding of nearly $ 34 million for the first five years, LMAP officially started in 2002.

Prior to the 1990s, German Development Cooperation was not involved in any kind of land policy project. Between 2000 and 2005 it supported four African, six Asian and seven Eastern European countries in their land reform efforts (Herre 2009). From the mid 1990s, GTZ started to invest heavily in studies on land policy, driven by the assumption that rural development projects – which used to be a main area for German development assistance up to the 1990s – could not be successfully implemented if land tenure was not secured. Germany's growing interest in land reform processes can be traced to a wider discussion linked to the so-called Washington Consensus that saw the inexpensive provision of secure property rights as a precondition to foster economic growth, particularly in the informal sector – many will remember the work of Hernando de Soto. The development thinking here was thus clearly linked to one of the available global options. The emphasis on property rights, understood in this particular way, then survived the harsh criticism that led to the Post-Washington Census as the new development paradigm and has influenced the dominant thinking in development policy for the past two decades. Without going into this doctrinal shift in detail, it appears most likely that this survival was related to the very economic focus of the post-Washington Consensus. While budgets for German technical assistance in the rural development sector decreased in the 1990s investments in "governance and democracy" boomed, including support to land policy reforms. This is consistent with interpretations of the Post-Washington Consensus as a justification for certain limited roles for the state in matters of market development and market failure, so that 'land' interventions in Cambodia faced further risks as the development thinking embodied in them was thus very distant from political, sociological and other aspects of 'Cambodian realities'.

With the majority of its population engaged in smallholder agriculture it thus seemed that securing land ownership for Cambodian farming families would be an appropriate intervention. Another argument often made by donors supporting the land reform process is the fact that the Khmer Rouge destroyed all land registration records. While this is true, Cambodia never had a country-wide land registration system. Although the French had introduced formal private property rights in the late nineteen hundreds only a few densely populated rice growing areas were included in some kind of registration system prior to the civil war. There is evidence that practice and formal systems diverged as often land rights were established and maintained simply by clearing and farming. Historical evidence suggests that elites viewed land as something to be granted to them by the most powerful in return for loyalty, payments and so on (Chandler 2008).

While land tenure security had indeed become a political issue for Cambodia in the late 1990s this related mostly to cases where groups of poor people were pitted against powerful political or military figures with close ties to the business community. In such cases of collective grievance strategies focused on patrimonial rather than legal-administrative solutions (Centre for Advanced Study 2006). Land of individual farmers was rather secure and stayed secure (Adler at al. 2006) and landlessness was shown not to be connected to land

tenure insecurities (Biddulph) but rather a result of poverty. Or as Biddulph (2010: 86) puts it:

> *Poor Cambodians could have been blessed with the most secure private property rights in the world, but those households who had never had land, and those who had needed to well would nevertheless have become landless.*

In contrast we may examine the objectives of the multi-donor land reform project LMAP: to reduce poverty, promote social stability, and stimulate economic development by improving land tenure security, and promote the development of efficient land markets.

Two aspects of this situation seem quite obvious to us. First, for any donor this was a risky area, and it became more risky as time passed and land use conflicts mounted; second, the ideas driving these interventions were both asserted to be predictive (yet not reliably so) *and* easily mapped into the evolving global discourse on 'how to do development' (the Washington Consensus and the Post-Washington Consensus), which led to predictable patterns of engagement that astute recipients could easily become familiar with.

A detailed study would then examine the question of whose interests were driving the design of the Land Management and Administration Project (LMAP) that focused 70 percent of its resources on a land titling program and the development of a modern land registration system. Whilst this is not entirely clear, it is clear that no mechanisms existed to confirm whether or not poor farmers actually supported these design decisions. Therefore, and naturally enough, the above history shows that it was particular "expertise" that informed the process. This expertise was made authoritative by its links to the exclusive knowledge of global development theory (one may note that the economics behind both the WC and the PWC requires technical expertise well beyond the reach of many). But, as is clear from what was to follow as the 'playground' was invaded by forces beyond the control of the existing players, the apparent power asymmetry was an illusion: the hopes for change based upon these ideas came to nought in the politics of development. What was thought to be adequate power and knowledge came to appear as delusion and recklessness, which, of course, was very unfair.

Nature of strategisation and lack of coherence

LMAP has delivered on its ambitious goal to produce 1 million titles. Initially focusing on three main areas: land titling, cadastral commission and social land concession as a mechanism for land distribution the project has been most successful in delivering titles. In its Cambodian Poverty Assessment 2006, the World Bank went to considerable pains to prove the existence of a statistically significant relation between registered land ownership and increased productivity of land with a regression analysis that proved easy to question as the authority behind its position eroded. Case studies on the other hand showed that households that had received ownership title benefited from higher land prices but were not selling land to invest in productive pursuits but sold land to deal with shocks and pay for health care (McAndrew 2007). Even more interesting – and alarming to donors investing in a what they thought was good, as a 'modern land registration system' – land transactions appeared actually to be taking place within informal systems and were not being processed through the land registry, calling into question the value and suitability (at that time and place) of such a system. Worse, in the light of gathering evidence for land registrations that benefited large land owners and leaving poor land title holders extremely vulnerable to the exigencies of the evolving land market – particularly in the absence of affordable health care – the same study questioned whether LMAP's aim to promote the development of efficient land markets did not actually conflict with its aim to reduce poverty. And of course since the 1980s the World

Bank has placed poverty reduction as a central corporate objective, which is shared nowadays by most major donors:

> *The reduction of poverty is an overarching concern of German development cooperation. All measures supported by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development contribute – directly or indirectly – towards achieving this objective.* [BMZ website, Nov 2010]

While registration continued on an ever increasing speed little progress was made in other areas of the land reform. Land distribution to land-poor and landless households via so-called land concessions was limited to two areas where, in 2008, seven hundred families were in the process of receiving a total of 5,000 ha of land – a fraction of the estimated over 60 percent of landless and land poor rural households in Cambodia (Grimsditch at al. 2009)
Reports mounted, available to those who wanted to read them, that land dispute resolution met with resistance while land conflicts had increased dramatically since the mid 1990s, peaking in 2008, with the large majority of cases unresolved (Land Information Centre 2010).

Land conflicts and violent evictions thus are at the core of national and international criticism on LMAP even if donors involved in the project would defend themselves by pointing out that there are no direct links between activities under LMAP and forced evictions. In fact, the LMAP design explicitly stated that the project will not title "land areas where disputes are likely" (World Bank 2009). While this was defended as creating the space for "learning" and the testing and development of institutional structures it could also be seen as avoiding areas where elite interests would be in the way of effective project implementation. Donor agencies thus, as expected, could be seen tending to adjust to local institutions of power in order to maintain activities – to 'get the job done'.

Parallel to these narratives can be found others, which argue, for example, that in a neo-patrimonial system that is created when bureaucracies are ruled by patron-client relationships as is the case in Cambodia, government agencies are subject to personalized control by individuals. The exclusive control over a resource or domain is a source of power and defines ones position in a vast and fluent patronage network. This could be linked to historical patterns, and so said to be part of the 'political culture' (e.g. Chandler 2008). Effective cooperation across government agencies, if this analysis is accepted, is hence almost impossible. Development actors in Cambodia may then be seen to have not only adjusted themselves by taking sector specific approaches that often ignore wider social and political framework conditions but also use mechanisms of interpersonal obligations to work effectively within the government system. For LMAP donors to address land related issues such as the allocation of large agricultural concessions or evictions of urban poor settlements that were beyond the influence of the Ministry of Land Management Urban Planning and Construction proved to be increasingly difficult if relationships with the Cambodian partner were to be maintained. At the same time it made LMAP donors vulnerable to rising criticism.

Such tensions between different approaches, with plausible alternative accounts to standard narratives appearing to support arguments from NGOs and others that interventions are damaging the interests of the poor, are to be expected. If so, as already mentioned, this was a particularly high risk area for German development cooperation. As such, it is striking how these risks were either ignored or not planned-for, so that the eventual adjustment too the form of conflict and tensions that had to be managed without a strategic context for them.

Coordination efforts: Why has this gained so little momentum?

Fragmentation is a well understood phenomenon in development cooperation that has been at the centre of aid effectiveness efforts. As already mentioned, we think that this way of putting it assumes that the central issue is, like that of 'capacity', that of securing conditions for the *delivery* of known solutions.

One way to address challenges of aid fragmentation is to set up coordination bodies that are supposed to align donor projects with each other and particularly with the development agenda of the recipient country. Due to its multitude of development actors, working groups and a donor-government coordination forum were set up in Cambodia in the mid 1990s – pre-dating the Paris Agenda. In 2003, Cambodia was eventually chosen as one of the pilot countries under the harmonisation initiative of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Seven years into the process the 2010 Cambodian Aid Effectiveness Report notes:

> *The initiatives reviewed and the results recorded suggest that there has been change at a technical, manifested in the energies that have been expended on policy formulation, institution building and capacity development. But the more profound changes in aid management and delivery practices have proven to be more elusive. The idiosyncrasies of Cambodia's own aid dynamics – long-term aid dependency, institutional weaknesses, competitive development partner behaviour, and the culture of both Cambodia and the aid business - cannot be discounted.* [p. 31]

Let us illustrate this observation by looking at aid effectiveness efforts in the land sector. Among the many institutions set up to provide a platform for aid harmonisation and alignment is the Technical Working Group on Land – one of 18 such sectoral Technical Working Groups (TWG). Due to its major stake in the land reform area, Germany has long chaired and currently co-chairs the TWG-Land. Despite a membership that includes all relevant line ministries the TWG-Land has been of little use in trying to address cross-sectoral aspects of the land reform process. Too junior are the representatives of other ministries that join the TWG-Land with little or no decision-making authority since there are no incentives to work across sectors due to reasons we have already explained. What is even more remarkable is that despite the relatively small number of donor agencies involved in the land sector, coordination of development interventions has been everything but easy. As one of the mechanisms outlined in the Paris Declaration to strengthen ownership and integrate resources in a comprehensive medium-term strategy, so-called programme based approaches have been promoted in Cambodia. The Technical Working Group Land embarked on the process of developing an enhanced programme based approach (PBA) in 2006. As a result, three sub-sector programs that either have been designed or are still under development relate to land administration, land management and land distribution, effectively dividing up areas of donor intervention – not least as a response to disagreements between donor agencies on the approach to be taken in working on land issues in Cambodia. The Danish International Development Agency has since decided to pull out of the land sector. One of the rationales for this decision has been a lacking willingness of other donors to cooperate, effectively acting as gate keepers within the Ministry of Land Management Urban Planning and Construction. But an even more surprising decision has re-shuffled the donor landscape in the land sector. In September 2009, the Cambodian government decided to terminate World Bank financing of LMAP. What had led to this rather drastic decision? A full answer would require an understanding of political processes at peak level that is beyond us. However, we note a 'divide and rule' strategy on the Cambodian side that is quite rational. This fits with the particular ways in which donors problematise and justify interventions in ways that push

them into relationships with particular elements of the Cambodian state (so that 'land' is justified in terms of such issues as poverty reduction, but 'done' in a project based at the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction, in a situation where, for example, it is clear that the ruling Cambodian Peoples Party is channelling large flows of funds through its own organisation to address political issues, that include poverty, at local level.

To change the registry of our presentation, as we are now discussing these issues in a non-developmental language, this means at least two things: first, coordination across ministries and sectors is almost impossible and hence this is seen as getting in the way of effective ('rational') project implementation and, second, relationships between donors and their "counterparts" at the ministries are personalised to the degree that they would be jeopardised if shared with/exposed to others. Thus the 'real world' is experienced as in deep contradiction to the assumptions to be found in project design. Only support 'from the top' can guarantee the success of a project. And there are only limited seats on the journey to the top.

Second, there is persuasive evidence that HQs of local bilateral donor offices were not very supportive of the process. In practice, donor harmonisation competes with ideas of the importance of individual donor visibility and attributable development success (which itself platforms on knowledge production that asserts that 'this' knowably caused 'that').

On the part of the government, keeping donor agencies uncoordinated and at odds with each other might help government agencies to repeatedly benefit from the state's role as gatekeepers and assert itself in the light of potential donor dominance if indeed aligned with each other. Donors and the resources they provide are often privatised by individuals within government agencies. So there is not much interest to push for transparency and coordination. In this 'real world', studied by anthropologists and others interested in aid practice, the cause-effect rationalities of project documents appear as parts of ongoing contestations and negotiated arrangements, crucially lacking predictive power.

Having set the scene, we now describe what happened when new forces pushed their way into the playground. These were, in outline, a combination of various groups of poor people who had experienced loss of land with various other groups capable of giving them voice in various ways. As expected, this led to great pressure for change; unexpectedly, this led to actual change, in part because, due to the World Bank's inspection panel system, staff there felt that without actual change their own interests would suffer damage. As we were told, this was seen as potentially a 'career issue'.

Overt conflict and how it all blew up

Pressure started to build up on both World Bank and GTZ staff from 2009. In the case of the World Bank it was the threat of an inspection panel claim that triggered a reaction: first an enhanced review report that called for a stop to urban evictions in July 2009. The call was accompanied by the threat on the part of the Bank to suspend funding. The Bank had done this before in 2006 after irregularities in procurement were discovered. Back then this created little more than bad blood but this time the government of Cambodia just turned around and said that they would terminate the funding before the Bank could suspend it. What this shows is that the inspection panel is a useful tool for getting Bank staff to act significantly. However, it also creates a situation where project activities are usually stopped and local solutions therefore difficult to negotiate. It is a crisis measure, not integrated into strategic thinking.

In the case of GTZ, there were early indications that the project was increasingly criticised. In 2007, the Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker had written a letter to the BMZ accusing German development cooperation to violate indigenous land rights in Cambodia. Apart from a rather defensive reaction there was little communication on the part of GTZ or LMAP – even missing the opportunity to engage with the special rapporteur on indigenous issues during an unofficial visit to Cambodia in 2007. LMAP proved equally resistant to the results of the study already quoted that showed that first time land registration was not only failing to contribute towards poverty reduction it was also not followed by subsequent registration and so effectively failing to create a valid central land registry that would avoid being rapidly outdated. Further, they did not acknowledge findings that women were disadvantaged by the idea of a joint land title. The final tipping point in this saga, however, was the evictions.

Amnesty International issued a report that triggered a minor interpellation by the German Greens in August 2008. But again the chance was missed to engage in discussions on an adaptive reference frame. The answer was rather lukewarm and along the lines of "we have everything under control". 2009 was thus a crisis year with a peak in forced evictions in Phnom Penh: Dey Krahom, Group 78, and the filling of Boeung Kak. It became increasingly hard for donors and diplomats to look the other way. Embassies – for the first time – issued a joint statement to stop forced evictions with little effect. The report on LMAP by BABSEA and others (2009) brought the World Bank to its knees and when the loan was cancelled that also changed the situation for GTZ. Land was not immediately included in the bi-lateral agreements in October 2009 but milestones were defined that the project had to reach before a decision on its continuation could be made. Even though the milestones where not reached it was still decided to go ahead with a new project design that incorporated a human rights approach. The process was actively followed by German NGOs that would not allow GTZ to get away too easily, and with the recent inclusion of these issues in the submission to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as response to the 5th Periodic Report of the Federal Republic of Germany, GTZ's involvement in land had come under extreme pressure.

Observations

This of course is only a summary of a complex process. We conclude, though, that this is a very revealing case study. If we step back from the fray, certain issues stand out.

Opportunities, very revealingly, were missed to engage stakeholders in a constructive dialog. This shows how the basic stance of the intervention, with the knowledge-based assumption that such dialog was not necessary, and so not 'built-in', worked. Thus donors found themselves hiding behind questionable arguments of declining power that their project intervention were either not linked to the "land crisis" or had no influence on it – which is probably true but, as critics found, could be said to miss the point: once donors had made the claim that they would and could 'reform the land sector' it was hard to back-track. Current systems that favour output oriented project delivery with clear visibility for donor agencies that are thus often in the way of coordination and harmonisation. Two factors that could not be ignored could trigger a reaction to mounting criticism: the inspection panel claim and targeted lobby work by international NGOs and NGOs in Germany. But when it came to this point, many options to create better solutions were no longer available. This should points us to two of our central conclusions (see below) – that attempting to organise interventions upon the assumption of known cause-effect relations also reduces options of engagement. Potential allies are seen as antagonists; important potential areas of support are made mute; activities are diverted to short-term fire-fighting by important actors; and potential links to other

activity areas are made invisible. *This suggests that classic assumptions about policy make it far harder to manoeuvre effectively, to coordinate across sectors: in other words to link various tactical activities better together.*

Before we step back to look further at the broader context within this all happened, and then offer recommendations, it seems quite clear that this case study is marked by two key failures. If we ask what is missing, we find that there is no system change, and no 'learning'. The process is essentially one of conflict and readjustment, and at no point did anybody 'bang the table' and ask the fundamental question of what this all meant for the strategic questions of what German and international engagement was thought to be doing in Cambodia. Rather, it was situation where the donor playground was set up, and then violated by the invasion of it by various forces that for various reasons could not be ignored. We now start to bring the arguments together. To do so, we need to take a quick look at the basic ideas behind development – what is the 'problem of development'?

The problem of development reviewed

Let us return to the basic Conference question of the loss of development policy credibility, for we can learn much from this. In our opinion the familiarity of the issues thrown up in Cambodia suggests that there are common problems. We argue that these are at root to do with the tensions created by the belief that development is both a known product of interventions guided by predictive knowledge, and the sense that, really, the future is unknowable. This tension is usually resolved by assuming that to know how to do development one should rely upon expertise - authoritative knowledge. It is the pervasive presence of this assumption that explains much about the case studies: the particular problems with the literature surveyed, the lack of strategic oversight and reliance upon certain expertise in the case of land, and so on. We repeat that for us as practitioners these are quite familiar and what was unusual about the land case study was the opportunity for excluded stakeholders to 'enter the playground', with, as we have seen, major impact.

We are not aid cynics. It is in our opinion quite legitimate for German taxpayers to wish to see their governments engage with poor countries. A recent poll is striking (GCAP 2008). It shows that a strong majority (70%) of those polled think that development spending by the German government should be increased. About half think that the German population should know more about development issues, whether through teaching in schools, About half think that 'they can make a difference' and nearly ¾ think that their vote is influenced by a Party's position on development assistant. They thus tend to trust their educators, and think that through study they can learn useful things about poor countries. The question is whether this knowledge does, or does not, imply that experts know how to 'do development' in a predictive sense – that 'this will cause that'.

Naturally, we do not expect to agree with all of the reasons why people like to see their government engage in development cooperation, but in a democracy these are the relevant concerns. These motivations clearly occur for a variety of reasons, they are usually contested and valued in different ways, and are probably often inconsistent: they include humanitarian motivations (sympathy for the plight of those worse off than them), pragmatism and self-interest (concern over global security, desire to secure economic gains through improvement of markets etc), vicarious (securing support for belief that their own ways are good as others mimic them); and so on. This reflects both the diversity of opinion and the tendency to assert expert knowledge (including one should say amongst the authors of this paper) as somehow 'better'. Various surveys exist to expand on this discussion. Some of these issues may attract

bipartisan support from political parties, some may not. But the central issue in a democracy remains the political one of how these motivations may be expressed through government and non-government actions. Issues here are familiar and many: the obvious asymmetries in power between 'rich' and 'poor', naïve and confused predispositions to think that 'our ways are best'; tendencies to think that counterpart resources brought by recipients to engagements are relatively unimportant (leading to the classic bafflement of experts when farmers fail to turn up to training courses, neglect to implement 'obviously better' techniques and so on). These are very familiar.

It is probably acceptable to most people with some knowledge of development practice that a basic assumption underlying such structures is not just the notion of expertise, but specific notions of typically evidence-based knowledge about 'what will happen if' (now often abandoned). But perusal of many statements about development by relevant agencies shows this approach. For example:

> Because labour is the main asset of the poor, making it more productive is the best way to reduce poverty. [World Bank 2007: 2]

This *assumes* that 'the poor' are sufficiently homogeneous, as are states of poverty, labour and assets, for this statement to be meaningful. If this were the case, the evidence would support this – it does not (see below). One accompaniment of this logic is that those who 'do development', such as aid agencies, can and should be organised around it. An important party of their professional knowledge is based upon judgements about 'what will happen' in consequence of certain interventions.

There are many issues with this belief set.

First, there is little empirical evidence to support it. For example, the seminal study by Levine and Zervos 1993 argued, with reference to a very large multi-country database, that there were *no* robust relations between the policy and outcome variables that they used, globally. This outcome, not surprisingly, was ignored in most subsequent references to the article [Fforde 2005]. In this sense, there is no empirical basis to support familiar views, such as that 'participation is good for securing better outcomes', that 'export-oriented policies lead to better economic development', or that 'democracies develop better'. A probable reason why there are a plethora of contradictory views about 'what works' globally is that the world is far more varied than the language suggests, so that results are spurious.

Second, it is challenged by many lines of contemporary debate, which share the view that human societies are, for different reason adopted by different positions in such debates, such that application of theories and concepts should *not* be expected to lead to relations between 'theory and facts' that come down to predictability. People are not machines.

Third, it can be confronted with the idea that assuming that human societies change in such ways is ethically unacceptable, as it denies agency, free will, or some other notion that treats behaviour based upon such 'instrumental rationality' as unacceptable. An example could be the way in which much 'third wave' feminism denies the applicability of apparent truths derived from particular contexts to 'women in general'. Others could easily be cited. As we have seen, such ideas can be blamed for excluding important stakeholders from dialogue and discussion. People should not be treated like machines, and it is unwise to do so.

Finally, it is very likely that many of the informal beliefs of many aid practitioners deny the value of such approaches. The frequent tensions between local practices (those in a particular country, region or situation) and those from 'head office' show this. Arguments that 'participation works here in the following way', confront views based upon centrally-based

expertise that 'the correct way to do participation, globally', is 'as follows …' Good practitioners do not treat people like machines.

We tend to agree with these views. They show that the problems found in development interventions in Cambodia are familiar and normal because they stem from common assumptions amongst donors about how to 'do development'.

This agreement leads us to consider that many of the dissatisfactions associated with development, can be attributed to the unsuitability of the basic classic assumption of 'knowability'. For us, the proposal for strategic management that uses an 'adaptive reference frame' is guided by this. In that practitioners we believe are often well aware of these issues (even if only informally), such a frame would not only be a better and more coherent link between the various wishes of donor populations (inconsistent and tangled may these be) and what is done in their name by development agencies. It would also be better suited to the tactical issues that are often confused by the unfounded belief, expressed in formal systems of targets and inputs, that there are known cause-effect relationships. Indeed, given that as humans we structure many of our activities and relationships in ways that reflect ignorance and uncertainty, this shift in thinking is probably far easier than it appears. Modern techniques of 'management by results', for example, may be taken to suggest that whilst cause-effect metaphors may be useful in organising activities, their 'truth' is far less important than the acceptability of 'results' to the relevant stakeholders.

It may be asked how the adaptive reference frame is different from a country strategy. Our answer is that it differs in that it avoids the belief that development is a known process, to be 'done' through projects whose outcomes are linked to inputs through known processes, and so far more easily involves a wider and diverse group of stakeholders who are not placed in a hierarchy based upon their expertise. It may thus also be an instrument for inclusiveness by ensuring participation in its development and adaptation as it allows donors to better manage diversity of beliefs and motivations. As such it could also be an instrument for policy coherence in that other sectors and political interests would more easily be integrated and respected. Put this way, one can see what may come from an abandonment of the idea, associated with delusions of power, which comes from organising interventions based upon the false belief in knowable outcomes.

These arguments offer an explanation as to why aid policy has lost its credibility and why it is meaningless to assume a neutral state: there is no point to this if there is no predictive rationality that may be platformed upon it. We therefore return to the third of our starting points – the idea that aid interventions can be delinked from important stakeholders. This is now clearly false. It follows interventions need to be seen as political processes within which the interests of constituents of partner countries have real presence. It is only possible to ignore this if, as standard cause-effect rationality promises, their welfare can be known to be increased without their participation. Once this is shown to be an illusion, and multiple truths accepted, then these are the required changes. And an obvious element of this should be ways that such groups may, with due process, have mechanisms that allow them to complain about development projects that affect them. And this is the way in which the 'land' case study shows how the standard assumptions of development operate to allow such interests to be ignored, up to a point. The literature on the 'donor knowledge' surveyed pushes home the point that it is quite reckless to believe that donors 'know' enough to take confident positions.

Conclusions and recommendations

The Cambodian Case Study shows many of the expected issues and tensions that arise from the 'problem of development'. That is, that the absence of predictive power in the knowledges that are used to organise development activities, combined with their use being premised upon the assumption that such knowledge is predictive, supports the de-linking of aid interventions from the key stakeholder groups – voting populations in rich countries and key populations of poor countries. Reinventing ways of linking these interests requires a rethinking of the politics of engagement so that it better suits both the interests that should drive the involvement and what empirics may tell us if we care to want to know it.

Consider the two poles of this relationship in turn.

It would be better if the beneficiaries of development interventions had rights of some sort to hold to account donor agencies tasked to support them. This would allow for mutual accountability, which is already one of the demands of the aid effectiveness debate, and requires something that can hold donor agencies to account. This would also develop the notion of ownership, and site it better with regard to key stakeholders.

This can be already found in operations of the Inspection Panel of the World Bank. It is conceivable that some formal body with binding or perhaps non-binding jurisdiction be established, empowered to respond to such groups, to require that evidence be given by relevant parties (including, as part of agreements, by people in recipient countries), and to issue reports that should be delivered to the relevant donor authorities.

This process would respond to trends in the evolution of human rights discourses across jurisdictions. It would give voice to stakeholders, sometimes vulnerable, who engage with tax-payer funded development activities.

It may be asked why such a structure does not already exist. The persuasive answers are perhaps obvious.

On the other hand, consider the implications of establishment of a 'country cooperation commission', whose members are selected for a reasonably long period (for example, 7 years), to advise Parliament on likely long-term trends and issues in the cooperation. Such a commission would clearly have to consider whether it could feasibly operate on a bipartisan basis. If not, political Parties could set up their own such commissions.

Such bodies would need to establish some 'reference frame' to guide their considerations of the position of development activities within the overall context.

Given what we have been arguing, such frames should be adaptive and agnostic.

Such formal processes associated with the organisation of development cooperation should *downplay* the importance of 'getting it right before we start', and *increase the value (in terms of organisational logic and assessments)* of regular revisions of the given 'view'. In standard development parlance, this means treating project intervention mechanisms such as the log-frame as an expression of 'where opinions were' at a given point in time, neither 'right nor wrong', and so rather easy to revise as opinions shift. The implications of this would include such features as: positive rather than negative evaluation of those who have supported the overall 'mission' but have perhaps violated the classic assumptions of predictability embodied in formal documents. These would then be judged within the 'reference frame'.

This would also assist a shift of resources *from* discussion of cause-effect relations and *towards* discussion of the acceptability of situations from various stakeholder perspectives. In standard development parlance, this means far greater resourcing of:

1. Keeping informed about different opinions and expectations, treating these as multiple and complementary, rather than contestations about who is right and who is wrong
2. Articulation of stakeholders' changing views of how they value what they expect outcomes to be, or think they have been.

It is likely that the operations of such commissions would assist in the coordination of what are currently often very singular and discrete activities, de-linked from poor country stakeholders and donor country voter interests. We would anticipate that they would, through this dialogue, make it easier to coordinate activities by using the reference frame.

To finish, we see 'three horses'.

The first encourages us to be aware of this situation as we describe it. These practices rely upon belief and authority, and many people (especially the young, taught there are many truths, and that truth is relative) are pushing for development policy and practices to seek ways of regaining or gaining *credibility*. This is the tragedy facing many development practitioners – their beliefs in 'what is known to work' increasingly fail to command respect amongst an informed and educated public.

The second pushes such contemporary ideas into structures and institutions by requiring political oversight, based upon the belief that these are inherently *political* processes. To place these into a context, we recommend the adaptive reference frame as a basis for country cooperation group that links constituencies, not through 'knowing what works', but through political engagement and discussion.

The third, by developing an enforceable right of aid recipients through a complaint mechanism, rebalances the relationship and exploits the power asymmetry in a far better way.

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