FROM GLOBAL PARADIGMS TO GROUNDED POLICIES: LOCAL SOCIO-COGNITIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

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SUMMARY

Understandings of participatory development require grounding—both in the sense that understandings of the principles must be held by local and international staff working on the ground, and also grounded in the local culture. This article provides documentation of a 10 month ethnographic study of an administrative decentralization support program in Cambodia (Seila), funded through multi-donor support, in order to examine the agency of local mid-level staff, asking: *How do multiple environments interact to create local understandings of participation in international development environments*? Five 'socio-cognitive environments' (SCE) surrounding the program environment were developed to disentangle the factors that influence how one group of local staff negotiates complex cultural and historical realities in juxtaposition to donor conceptualizations of development, providing new understanding of structural factors and other resources employed by embedded agents which promote local staff internalization of democratic governance principles. This study suggests that even in program environments with high degrees of cognitive dissonance due to macro-historical factors, and where international development mandates tend to create additional cultural and organizational blockages, micro-programmatic interactions can significantly influence the ability of local staff to surmount strong cognitive obstacles. Copyright © 2010 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

KEY WORDS — development management; embedded agency; international policy implementation; sociological institutionalism; participatory development; cognition; sensemaking; Cambodia

INTRODUCTION

From global paradigms to grounded policies: Considering international development from an embedded agency perspective

Generating new understanding of how international development frameworks such as the New Poverty Agenda, steeped in institutional frames of democratization, participation, and decentralization, can come to be aligned with grounded, localized ways of being and acting represents a critical contribution to future development management. Although significant aid dollars have been spent to make contributions to key development challenges in the world's poorest countries, balancing positive aspects of organic, indigenous organizational processes, and rational-bureaucratic/techno-managerial development models introduced by donors still represents a significant challenge (Edwards, 1998; Lewis *et al.*, 2003). However, there are significant gaps in the theoretical knowledge of management dynamics underlying international policy implementation processes.

This study examines a multi-donor funded budget-support program in the country of Cambodia, administratively coordinated by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and charged with promoting a 'good governance' agenda by supporting the Cambodian government's administrative decentralization process.

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The study considers how local managers working in international participatory development environments play a vital role in translating and transforming international mandates into locally accessible frameworks. Thus, the study contributes to understanding of sensemaking processes in international development by rendering explicit an implicit process undergirding policy implementation activities—the socio-cognitive transactions between human beings charged with their enactment. To do this, a broader construction of organizational culture is required to emphasize the micro-level, collective transactions occurring between actors embedded in complex international development management environments.

The concept of *socio-cognitive environment* (SCE) has thus been employed to deconstruct the macro-structural forces influencing emerging understandings of development, participation, and democracy in a country like Cambodia. Such framing also highlights how confusing messages emerging from such evolving structures in a post-conflict country spur individual actors to make sense and act beyond the limitations of the multiple, fragmented, and conflicting complex of institutions which make up the policy environment (Gulrajani, 2009). Thus, this meso-analysis of how individual agents embedded in a labyrinth of complex development structures collectively negotiate multiple and competing understandings of participatory development demonstrates the importance of further consideration of this influential, though often ignored, process as a vital component of successful policy implementation.

This article is structured to first provide a brief overview of the critical gaps in theoretical knowledge of the human dimension of such policy environments before elaborating the theoretical model which emerged from the empirical study. The *SCE* model represents a multi-level mapping of the historical, cultural, and political institutions, as well as program structures, that make up the broader socio-cognitive policy environment through which local program staff engage in collective micro-level sensemaking activities as they attempt to negotiate the same macro-level forces. The model thus facilitates the disentangling of macro-level understandings of participation in the Cambodian context which require filtering through collective sensemaking of individual agents charged with implementing participatory programming in order to meet broader program objectives, thus answering the study's research question: *How do multiple environments interact to create local understandings of participation in a given international program?* The article closes by considering implications emerging from this SCE model which can contribute to future structuration of large-scale development implementations in highly complex policy environments.

GAPS IN KNOWLEDGE OF THE SOCIO-COGNITIVE DIMENSIONS OF INTERNATIONAL POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Self-reflective agency derived from intrinsic, institutional, and relational sources

In donor-funded programming initiatives, mid-level actors' input is significant from a practical standpoint, but it is not enough to simply assert this importance. In fact, both local and international staff capacity and motivation to resolve cognitive dissonance in complex policy environments can be quite limited. Other obstacles include structural and organizational dynamics inherent in international development agencies and local organizations, as well as cultural orientations and historical experiences. Thus, a model is needed to demonstrate how mid-level actors' sensemaking and acting is serving as critical inputs into broader development programming, in opposition to more recent trends in development studies to downplay the significance of the agency of mid-level actors (Dahl-Østergaard *et al.*, 2005) in favor of broader political and institutional analyses. This study, like other empirical studies forming the growing 'aid-nography' literature (Ferguson, 1990; Mitchell, 2002; Lewis *et al.*, 2003; Mosse, 2005; Lewis and Mosse, 2006), attempts to counter the framing of development actors as passive receptacles of the macro-forces surrounding their work by providing empirical evidence of embedded agents transcending the limitations of the macro-structural cognitive containers in which they find themselves.

This study also responds more broadly to calls for increased attention to: (a) micro-level decision-making activities (Long, 2001), (b) the role of individual agency in meeting implementation outcomes (Cooke and Kothari, 2001), and (c) the consideration of the capacity of national program staff and government officials to implement

development programs (Bhatnagar and Williams, 1992). Blackburn and Holland (1998) have questioned how juxtapositions in organizational form (e.g., bureaucratic) and structure (e.g., non-participatory hierarchies) influence the nature of development programs. Other theorists have proposed that the usefulness of participation as a policy tool relies heavily on the interpretation of the actors participating (Korten, 1980; Sachs, 1992; Thompson, 1995), calling for a closer examination of the overall participatory programming cycles of large aid agencies. To do this, the complexities of the international policy cycle require an expanded lens to include consideration of how:

- The involvement of a broad array of external and multi-cultural program stakeholders; including donors, international NGOs, and local civil society, influence program dynamics;
- Historical and cultural realities of staff and beneficiaries influence implementation processes;
- The intermingling of multiple realities influences the nature of program operations;
- Community member participation plays a role in program activities (Cooke and Kothari, 2001: 16–17);
- Managers play a crucial communication role between headquarter executives (e.g., delivering program specifications) and beneficiaries (e.g. delivering inputs from the community).

New institutionalists, re-examining the role of cognition in institutional environments (Scott, 2001), have given primacy to the institutional influence of rules, norms, symbol systems, and moral templates on individual agent's sensemaking and action (Hall and Taylor, 1996). At the same time, aid-nographers influenced by new institutionalists are documenting cognitive processes in empirical settings. However, neither camp has adequately disentangled the influence of overlapping macro-SCEs on policy implementers' micro-level sensemaking nor identified how collective micro-level sensemaking and action can mitigate macro-level influences. Attention to the agency of actors to respond to, and even influence, the macro-forces making up the environment surrounding their day-to-day work is thus needed.

Defining agency as an institutionally embedded process of engagement where self-reflexive actors seek and achieve transformative leverage over their local relational environments (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 973) allows for theoretical framing as well as empirical examination of how local agents operate within, and influence, the policy environments in which they are embedded. Gulrajani (2009: 10) further proposes that such framing broadens the sources from which individual actors can be seen to derive agency: intrinsic, institutional, and relational. Thus, an *embedded agent* perspective further allows examination of how actual administrative practices of development programs influence localized social constructions of international mandates. As a result, several theoretical gaps which have left the development management field in a state of theoretical disjuncture are closed, such as ongoing framing debates between the techno-managerial (Edwards, 1998), socio-political (Freire, 2000; Brock and McGee, 2002), and critical camps (Escobar, 1995, Cooke and Kothari, 2001). The model presented below also fills this gap, blending normative views of institutionalism into a sociological institutional framework (Hall and Taylor, 1996), locating individual agents' cognitive processing within both the institutional setting in which their sensemaking is happening as well as the macro-political, historical, and cultural contexts influencing those institutional environments.

The cognitive challenges of implementing participatory development

This study also provides empirical evidence of how transforming abstract and idealized participatory principles into practice is particularly formidable because participatory development is typically experienced as an alien, externally driven idea (Chambers, 1995) in post-conflict societies. The reasons for this are twofold. One, oftentimes citizens have only experienced authoritarian, patrimonial social-hierarchical structures. Two, in early post-conflict interventions, external actors do not have enough experience of local understandings to frame policy directives in locally appropriate ways. In these cases, local sensemaking can be particularly far removed from the assumptions undergirding the mandate. Resulting misunderstandings can undermine poverty reduction, good governance, and participatory development programming—foundational conditions necessary to promote accountability, empowerment, and ownership of development activities by program beneficiaries.

Further, such international participatory development environments require the implementation of mandates through multi-cultural partnerships composed of international and local participants. In the case of Cambodia, a

broader budget-support driven environment made up of a multitude of bilateral and multi-lateral donors further adds to the complexity of sensemaking of agents simultaneously embedded in several institutions charged with meeting development indicators (*see* Godfrey *et al*., 2002 and Batley, 2006 *for further explanation of the structuration of such budget-support processes*). Local staff must thus decipher complex ideas related to democracy building, public administration reform, and decentralization efforts to program beneficiaries, coming from a multitude of sources.

Traditional examinations of policy implementations

Traditional policy literature, much emerging from studies of US-located implementations, might appear to be another source for analyzing the socio-cognitive dimension of international policy implementation processes. However, this literature is limited on several counts. For one, the most influential macro-level studies have typically focused on the most obvious systemic political, economic, and socio-cultural contexts in which public policies are enacted (Palumbo and Harder, 1981; Grindle and Thomas, 1991; Kingdon, 1995; Parsons, 1995) or only documented the most measurable streams of organizational activities and program outcomes. Most US studies have engaged a traditional policy stage heuristic to examine policymaking. However, this broad bracketing, grounded in the rational paradigm, has not facilitated an in-depth exploration of the micro-level dynamics that make policy mandates a reality, masking the menagerie of organizational systems, cultures, people, and layers of bureaucracy involved in implementation, particularly when multiple stakeholders are involved.

Second, for those theorists who have focused on human behavior, they have tended to focus on the political dimensions of program administration and its susceptibility to political and bureaucratic capture. Socio-cognitive processing as an influential variable in its own right has not been considered, beyond Stone (1997) and Yanow (1996), who have both adopted interpretive lenses to consider how the motivations and activities of individuals within the implementation process influence policy outcomes. Beyond these two ground-breaking empirical studies, the systematic analysis of the complexity of human interactions driving policymaking, or considerations of how macro- and micro-level forces interact to influence actors' sensemaking in such environments, have been neglected.

Third, policy implementation models developed in single country contexts have not been able to account for the complexities of the international development context (Mosse *et al*., 1998). Even though national policy agencies might have relatively far-flung field offices, value and cultural similarity leads to a certain degree of alignment of interpretation and action amongst staff. In contrast, in international contexts, the great geographical and cultural distance between the introduction of an idea at the headquarters level and the actions taken by staff in the field can vary greatly, resulting in numerous clashes of perceptions around the policy implementation process.

Fourth, micro-level policy studies have explored individual-level problems, typically aimed at identifying micro-level technical solutions. Such works include examinations of bureaucracies (Wilson, 1989), policymaker's interpretations (Marshall *et al*., 1985), front-line workers (Lipsky, 1980; Goetz, 1996; Tendler, 1997; Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003), and beneficiaries' understandings of the policy process (Thomas, 1985; Robb, 1999; Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith, 2002). However, limited efforts have been made to examine the interactive effect of such environments on mid-level managers' sensemaking.

The human dimension of international policy implementations

International policy studies have tended to focus on macro-level implementation challenges and the impact on beneficiary communities (Finsterbusch and Van Wicklin, 1987; Bamberger, 1988; Rietbergen-McCracken, 1997), while neglecting the mid-level actors and program operations which are most active in enacting development objectives. There is also an expanding literature examining institutional dynamics operating in service to local level implementations within international aid agencies (Blackburn and Holland, 1998; Brock and McGee, 2002), studies identifying the cultural and organizational diversity of the transnational environment (Mohan and Stokke, 2000; Lindenberg and Bryant, 2001), studies considering the implications of Western-driven development agendas on poor beneficiaries (Korten, 1980), and broader calls for increased participation by civil society and project beneficiaries to enhance decision-making capacity (Holland and Blackburn, 1998). More promisingly, in recent

years, more specific calls are emerging for increased attention to: (a) micro-level decision-making activities (Long, 2001), (b) the role of individual agency in meeting implementation outcomes (Cooke and Kothari, 2001), and (c) the consideration of the capacity of national program staff and government officials to implement development programs (Bhatnagar and Williams, 1992).

The role of mid-level managers' sensemaking as an important variable in large-scale, complex multi-lateral budget-support programs is also a growing area of interest as more donor programming shifts to such modalities in efforts to upscale, harmonize, and broaden the impact of donor interventions. Batley (2006) highlights the importance of understanding how multiple-donor-shaped programming engages with the multiplicity of non-state providers who have been charged with delivering services traditionally provided by the State. Most importantly, better understandings of the human dynamics underlying such budget-support programs is expected to enhance donors' fundamental capacity to reach the poor, since such modalities and their contributions to scaling-up of basic services are essential to meeting broader development goals.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND STUDY METHODOLOGY

Contextual overview

The Seila program was chosen as the organizational context for the 2004–2005 study since the program employs Cambodian advisors at the provincial level (known as Senior Provincial Program Advisors or 'SPPAs') who play an important role in mid-level program operations and implementation activities. The Seila program,[1] which translates as 'foundation stone' in the Khmer language, was instituted in late 2000, formalizing the original Carere experimental project model (1993–1997)[2] into a national multi-lateral donor-funded program which was eventually subsumed under a massive budget-support program supported by a range of bilateral and multi-lateral donors. The Seila program has been articulated in program documents as a concept, a set of principles, and operational activities, less so than as a formal mandate, which was created to support the development efforts of the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC). The following excerpt illustrates this framing:

> **A concept** embracing a set of principles that aim to: change people's attitudes and perceptions of their role in development, decentralize planning and development to the level of province and commune, empower local government and communities to assume responsibility for development, facilitate broad participation in decision making, and promote transparency and accountability in all steps of the process. These principles are embodied in **a system** of methods and techniques for decentralized planning and development which cover: planning and budgeting, bidding and contracting, monitoring and evaluation, financial administration, and management of the whole process. Seila is also **a programme** which builds capacity of government line departments, local communities and others engaged in decentralized planning and development; establishes an integrated management structure linking actors at all levels—including the national government, the province, district and commune; provides funding for development projects; and delivers infrastructure and services to local communities (Leiper and Robertson, 2001, 20–22).

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[1]In contrast to community-based projects, programs are composed of larger administrative units made up of a group of smaller community-level 'projects' that are designed to achieve a program's mandate.

[2]The long-term objective of Carere 1 was 'To assist the Government and the people of Cambodia to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate effective, efficient, and sustainable development programmes that are relevant to Government policies and local needs and that involve men and women in all aspects of the process and that raise the social and economic standard of living' (UNDP/CARERE, n.d.). Thus, projects were 'designed to introduce decentralized, participatory planning procedures, creating opportunities for intensive consultation, and joint action by local community groups and agencies' (UNDP/Carere, n.d., 6). The primary focus lay in 'institution-building to strengthen the capacity of the public sector agencies to design and implement projects in a participatory manner' (Project of the Royal Government of Cambodia, 1996). The Carere Phase 2 program mandate was extended to be framed as 'an experiment in decentralized planning and financing of participatory rural development, which places its primary focus on alleviating rural poverty through a process of bottom up planning and implementation, with intensive capacity building, to shift the development paradigm in these five provinces from a donor (supply) driven external process to a participatory, people-centered (demand) driven internal process of change' (Project of the Royal Government of Cambodia, 1996: 3).

As the Seila program spread across communities nationwide, Cambodian staff were gradually promoted into positions with more responsibility, with the SPPA role emerging formally in 2001. SPPAs are strategically positioned within the organization to play a vital role in the policy transmission and oversight process, imbued with a degree of authority, autonomy, and responsibility uncommon in the Cambodian context. SPPAs' primary role is to serve as a counterpart to the provincial governor and his staff. As part of their monitoring role, it is common for SPPAs to accompany government counterparts on field visits, attend Commune Council meetings to observe process, and visit sites of complaints. Other work activities include providing technical advice, management support, and capacity building to the members of the Provincial Rural Development Committee (PRDC) and Executive Committee (ExCom). SPPAs are also expected to promote partnerships between Seila staff, donor agencies, and NGOs; encourage dialogue between the RGC and local and international civil society actors; and maintain contact with other organizations in the provinces, thus sharing policy lessons learned with a broad range of program stakeholders.

As a result, local staff working within the program have become some of the first Cambodians to be explicitly exposed to the democratic principles underlying the participatory and decentralization components of the program mandate and have thus been required to be some of the first Cambodians to test their own historical experiences of authoritarian and genocidal regimes against notions of equality, participation, and democracy. Important to the objectives of this study, SPPAs' structural location and their assigned roles require them to proactively and repeatedly engage with the content of the mandate in order to interpret it to other Cambodians. Their role and location thus require an ongoing cycle of sensemaking, testing, making mistakes, reframing, and reenacting of understandings of their work. Understanding how these individuals took an abstract and foreign notion of participation in a post-conflict society with almost no experience of democratic development, and collectively negotiated the cognitive dissonance experienced with its introduction, provides insight into the social construction (Gergen, 1994) of national development mandates in local organizational contexts.

Sample

Field data were collected for this ethnographic qualitative research study (Cassell and Symon, 1994) through 18 in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Spradley, 1979; King, 1994; Rubin and Rubin, 1995) with mid-level program staff; a program and historical document analysis of 52 documents (Caulley, 1983; Cassell and Symon, 1994; Rigg, 2006); 10 months of formal intermittent participant observation; and 2 years of extended informal observation (Angrosino and Mays de Pérez, 1994; Waddington, 1994).

The interview sample was composed of 18 current or former SPPAs, 8 international staff, 5 Seila staff, 3 donor staff, and 5 NGO representatives. SPPAs were sampled for geographic and tenure diversity. International staff were selected on similar characteristics but selection was also dependent on whether they also held a similar position to SPPAs during an earlier phase of the program, before Cambodian nationals took over the position. Seila staff working within government ministries, as well as international and local staff working in NGOs, were selected to serve as a counter-sample to in-program interviewee perspectives.

Initial document collection focused on items identified by interviewees as holding participation-related content (e.g., a snowball document sample) and primary program documents such as formal program documents, logframes, and workplans. International donor policy documents most closely linked to the content of the program mandate (e.g., policy documents from primary program donors such as SIDA, DFID, UNCDF, and UNDP and major multi-lateral donors located in Cambodia such as the World Bank, OECD, etc.) and research findings emanating from local Cambodian programs/projects engaged in participatory development were also included. Formal observation involved a pre-study of United Nations Capital Development Fund headquarter operations, informal field observation opportunities, and time spent working in other organizational settings in Cambodia in later stages of the fieldwork.

Methodological underpinnings

This study fits into the tradition of interpretivist, naturalistic (Hammersley 1992; Emerson *et al*., 1995; Ellis and Bochner, 1996; Calás and Smircich, 1997) organizational qualitative research embedded in the emerging social

constructionist (SC) (Gergen, 1994, 2000) epistemological orientations of recent decades. Data collection and analysis methodologies were chosen to support an interpretivist and continually evolving understanding of the substance of the research. Combining interview, document, and observation data permitted the creation of tri-dimensional snapshots of the content of the study's proposed five SCEs.

The methodologies, as well as philosophies, at the core of Strauss and Corbin's grounded theory (GT) (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1997, 1998) and Clandinin and Connelly's narrative inquiry (NI) (2000) approaches were intertwined to promote, as well as balance, the somewhat conflicting objectives of maintaining both sensitivity, rigor, and objectivity (Dodge *et al.*, 2005) when engaged in highly relational research. The research process can thus best be described as a continued interweaving of deductive and inductive analysis. The study was structured deductively but the qualitative methods allowed freedom to think narratively and work inductively while also ensuring research rigor, accomplishing the following goals:

- Ensure the primacy of research participants' voices;
- Study research participants in their natural organizational settings as much as possible;
- Create conditions which allow Cambodian research participants to feel as comfortable as possible in exploring their own sensemaking processes;
- Engage in dialogue as much as possible to encourage an active, inductive interplay with the data and research participants (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, 6);
- Permit SC epistemological assumptions to hold, a key assumption embedded in the study's theoretical approach which allows social interaction to serve as a proxy for studying the internal sensemaking processes of individual managers;
- Elicit descriptions of individual and collective schemas (Bartunek and Moch, 1987; Bartunek 1988);
- Create a consistent, deep, respectful, and high quality engagement with research participants and the material in order to ensure reliability and trustworthiness.

Narrative *analysis* facilitated a response to the study's research question through (a) the construction of five SCEs, (b) provision of evidence of the content of Cambodian advisors' participatory schemas and their role as cognitive bridges, (c) documentation of the process by which such schemas were developed, (d) contrast of the SPPAs' understanding of participatory development to general Cambodian participatory schemas and international understandings of participatory development, and (e) consideration of the implications of how multiple environments' interactions have shaped local understandings of participation.

Limitations in the field emerged in four areas: (a) access to data due to the gatekeeping nature of international donor staff, (b) my status as a foreign researcher and inability to access Khmer cultural orientations adequately, (c) language barriers which limited interview interactions and quality of interviewee responses at times, and (d) Cambodian socio-cultural orientations meant some individuals were distrustful of the interview process since I was an 'outsider'.

SOCIO-COGNITIVE ENVIRONMENTS: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR STUDYING HUMAN INTERPRETATION AND ACTION

The lack of attention to the social experiences surrounding policy implementation is surprising, especially since thinking, acting human beings are the primary conduit through which policy ideas transform into action. This neglect is most likely due to the subjective nature of human interaction and interpretation and the difficulty of measuring these experiences. However, *managerial sensemaking* and *schema formation* provide documented constructs emerging from studies of *organizational cognition* which allow for more systematic examination of collective sensemaking processes embedded in international policy environments.

One field of organizational scholars has started to explore the influence of organizational environments as cognitive entities in and of themselves, as *enacted environments* (Weick, 1995), as catalysts of the socio-cognitive experiences of human beings residing in such contexts (Daft and Weick, 1984; Gray *et al.*, 1985; Walsh, 1995). This study thus draws from these traditions by assuming a view of the organizational world as an enacted environment of 'socially

constructed systems of shared meaning' (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Pfeffer, 1981; Weick, 1979 *as cited in* Smircich and Stubbart, 1985; Ospina *et al.*, 2007; Foldy *et al.*, 2008). In this view, organizations offer multiple, converging realities which result in continually new understandings about the world for their members (Weick, 1995).

Schemas, the organizing frameworks which result from sensemaking (Weick, 1995), guide, and give meaning to behavior (Moch and Bartunek, 1990: 5), defining the actions the managers take to implement policy mandates (Starbuck, 1982; Weick, 1995). Schemas can be held individually or collectively, and are 'the process by which people reconstruct a story to fit in with expectations based on prior knowledge and expectations. The original story undergoes processes of rationalization, deletion, elaboration, and distortion which. . .are shaped and guided by pre-existing schemata' (Bartlett, 1932: 316). They are one analytic tool for entering the subjective world of human social interaction and interpretation supporting policy implementation. Such intermingling schema are the foundational base of SCEs.

This research was designed to identify how SCEs surrounding participatory policies influence local staff sensemaking related to the implementation of development mandates in developing country program environments. The following analytic framework incorporates the constructs of sensemaking, schema, and SCEs in order to document a range of socio-cognitive processes underlying policy implementations in a complex, multi-cultural development policy environment.

SCEs are the cognitive spaces where social interactions and collective and individual schemas transpire which determine how managers make sense of their work and generate meaning around policy mandates. Importantly, the SCE label transcends the more limited organizational culture label to include managerial interactions with external actors and ideas outside of the multitude of organizational boundaries which exist in multi-donor funded program environments, to include external stakeholders, program beneficiaries, government staff, and international and local non-governmental organization workers. As such, the conceptual framework encompasses the entirety of socio-cognitive processes related to policy implementation, allowing consideration of a variety of experiences influencing local sensemaking of participatory development—international and local, cultural and historical, as well as organizational.

Figure 1 shows the five SCEs surrounding the Seila program environment in the country of Cambodia which were formulated to emulate the multiple, overlapping sensemaking environments influencing SPPAs' collective sensemaking. The model includes three macro-level environments: Cambodian historical events, broader Cambodian cultural understandings, and international constructions of participatory development, all of which shaped SPPA sensemaking of participatory development. The other two SCEs include the intermediate policy environment surrounding the program, and the micro-programmatic environment composed of the program's internal operations and organizational culture.
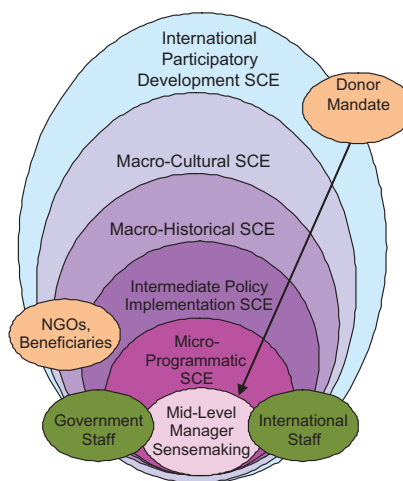

Figure 1. The multiple socio-cognitive environments influencing SPPAs in Cambodia.

Socio-cognitive environment 1: macro-historical influences

The construction of the macro-historical SCE within which Cambodian schemas of participatory development have formed provides a snapshot of Cambodian history as it relates to Cambodians' collective understandings of citizen participation, offering evidence of the historical conditions which have led to obstacles to participatory development. For instance, since 1950, the Cambodian people have lived through two monarchies; a series of military struggles for control of the national government; a secret bombing campaign by the United States; genocide and mass starvation at the hands of the Khmer Rouge; Communist Vietnamese occupation; a protracted civil war; displacement of hundreds of thousands of Cambodians (both abroad and internally); the destruction and rebuilding of the nation's physical, social, educational, and political foundations; and in the past decade, a transition to a democratic system of governance. Elaboration of such historical events provides insight into the reasons why Cambodians experience a high degree of cognitive dissonance as they have come in contact with the idealistic notions embedded in donor programming.

Socio-cognitive environment 2: macro-cultural associations

The second SCE documented is the Cambodian macro-cultural SCE, which includes cultural orientations towards democratic development held by individual Cambodians, as well as the traditional organizational structures and dynamics which support individual orientations. The patrimonial nature of traditional organizational environments, a prevalent focus on resource extraction embedded within neo-patrimonial administrative arrangements coupled with low civil salaries, a tradition of absolutist rule and fear-based respect for authority, and structural violence between government and society, influence individual Cambodian understandings of democratic development.

These historical and cultural associations result in the following most-frequently documented collective schema found in the interview data, showing how these first two SCEs have influenced how participatory development has been conceptualized and operationalized by Cambodian interviewees:

- Trusting anyone outside of your immediate family nucleus is dangerous.
- Acting out in public is dangerous.
- There is safety in silence.
- Losing face publicly is untenable.
- Saving face is a top priority above all else in social settings.
- Participation is being present and listening respectfully to community leaders.
- It is not proper for women to speak out in meetings.
- Leaders are all knowledgeable and not to be questioned.
- People at the top of the vertical hierarchy are privileged because of their karmic past and thus deserve to be leaders and are therefore inherently better than me.
- Dependency on the top of social and organizational hierarchies ensures my financial and social status.

Socio-cognitive environment 3: (international) constructions of participatory development

The third SCE constructed for the study was the international participatory development SCE, which documents the multiple layers of international development community understandings, experiences, and program operations that interact to influence local programming efforts in any country. The international SCE is composed of not only international-level thinking and development program agendas, but also locally constructed policy manifestations at the country level as it passes through local donor agents on the ground. The international SCE also includes the organizational structures and cultures that enter local contexts concurrent to program mandates.

Several of the most influential international participatory schemas embedded within this SCE include the notion that the poor's participation in decisions affecting their livelihoods will result in more contextually appropriate program outputs which are more readily accepted by communities (Narayan, 2002). Secondly, participatory theory and rhetoric responds to a desire among donors and their constituents to feel like beneficiaries are authentically engaged in the development process, not just passive recipients of externally imposed development program ideas (Holcombe, 1993; Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Even more influential is theorists' linking of participatory

development activities to the attainment of increasing degrees of self-governance (UNDP, 1993; World Bank, 2003). In recent years, development paradigms related to governance programming (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; UNDP, 2001a; 2002, 2003; World Bank, 2002a) have been increasingly geared towards creating fundamental sea changes in populations' understanding of, and relationship to, their governments. The development of this SCE illuminates how donors' rhetoric exists in stark contrast to the realities of Cambodian cultural understandings, Cambodian traditional organizational environments, and even in contrast to international donor agency dynamics supporting participatory initiatives.

Socio-cognitive environment 4: micro-programmatic orientations

The fourth SCE, the micro-programmatic SCE, is defined as the activities and relationships occurring within the Seila program culture. It includes formal and informal organizational practices prevalent in both program documents and interview texts. SPPAs' structural positioning within the program environment and their mandated roles place them at the confluence of a multitude of sensemaking environments surrounding the program which influence local understandings of participation in two ways. For one, the mandate is the local operationalization of abstract ideas that exist at the international SCE level. Secondly, the mandate content (focused predominately on engaging community self-help schemes, establishing local development committee hierarchies, formalizing the planning experiment into a national decentralization model, and building partnerships between a variety of stakeholders) significantly shapes SPPA sensemaking of participatory development. The content provides SPPAs with a broad programmatic vision and proffers a specific roadmap for engaging in participatory activities. As well, SPPA interview texts emphasize a set of principles and activities introduced by international advisors which, in the SPPAs' own words, significantly shapes their perceptions of the program as a supportive, learning-oriented environment. These include the invoking of a sense of team and partnership through the use of a set of four 'Seila Principles' (i.e., 'Dialogue, Clarity, Agreement, and Respect') and several informal practices which work as mediating forces, namely the role of the international staff in creating a sense of trust, safety, and support.

Socio-cognitive environment 5: (intermediate) development activities

The fifth and final SCE constructed for the study more specifically models the immediate socio-cognitive dynamics surrounding the Seila program environment, encompassing all activities related to international development efforts in Cambodia. This includes historical and present-day activities of donor agencies and government staff which influence the micro-programmatic environment and SPPAs' understanding of their work.[3] The intermediate SCE also includes SPPAs' interactions with program beneficiaries and government staff as counterparts. The program mandate itself can be perceived to be a result of the confluence of the international SCE and local SCEs within the intermediate SCE, as a variety of donor, government, civil society, and local staff were involved in its conceptualization.

In addition to the structural decisions elaborated above (program mandate, principles, and informal practices of international staff), there additional elements present within the program which create what can be seen as a 'counter-culture dynamic', which further enhance the collective nature of the program's sensemaking environment. In particular, a number of tangible collective SPPA schema[4] support the characterization of their participatory schema as uniquely different than that of other Cambodians operating outside the program boundaries. Examples include documented collective understandings emerging repeatedly in interview data, such as 'This program accomplishes things', 'it is better to be active than passive', 'you can accomplish something together', 'responsibility is an empowering, not frightening experience', and 'international advisors in this program respect and support me and my culture'. Further data analysis showed how as a result of these experiences and emerging schema, SPPAs were

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[3]SPPAs' historical activities in other development-related organizations before entry into the Carere/Seila program would also fall under this category.
[4]I define collective SPPA practices as such due to the prevalence of cited activities that are related to these three types of cognitive processes.

documented to engage in five additional, yet individual practices,[5] which further enhanced their immediate micro-SCE. Figure 2 models these elements of the counter-culture dynamic present within the program, which include Cambodian staff engaging in the following cognitive mapping experiences:

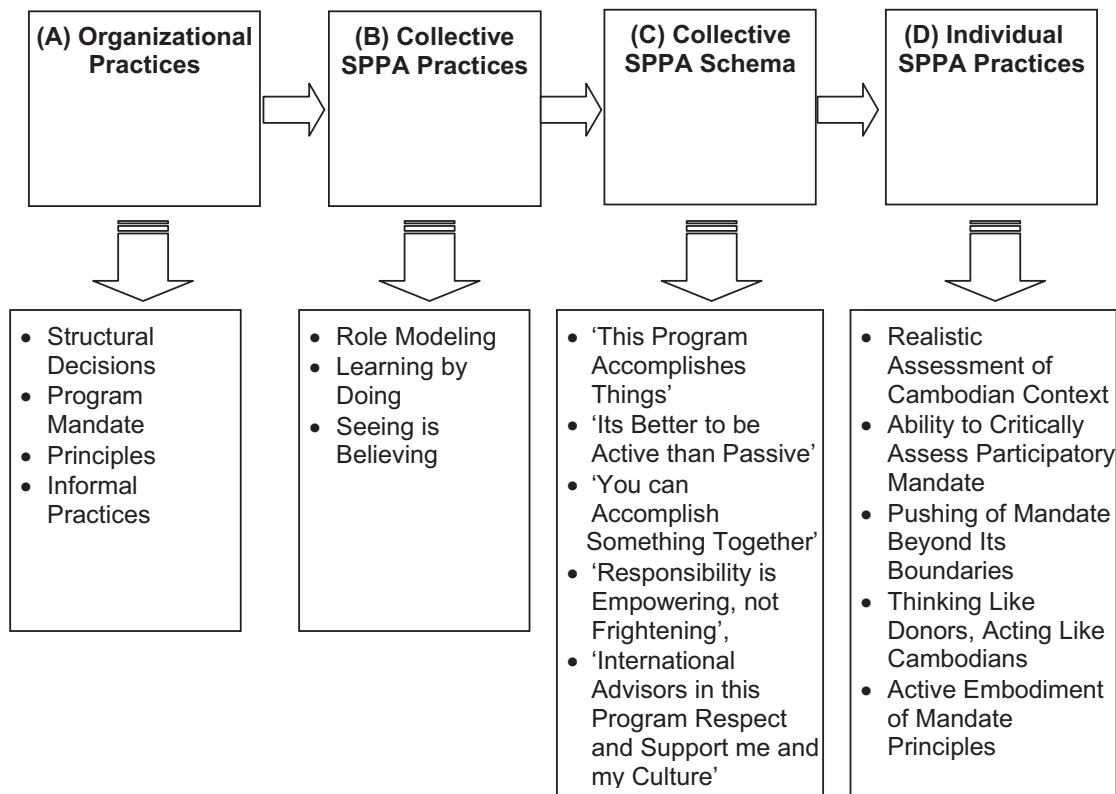| (A) Organizational Practices	(B) Collective SPPA Practices	(C) Collective SPPA Schema	(D) Individual SPPA Practices
• Structural Decisions • Program Mandate • Principles • Informal Practices	• Role Modeling • Learning by Doing • Seeing is Believing	• 'This Program Accomplishes Things' • 'Its Better to be Active than Passive' • 'You can Accomplish Something Together' • 'Responsibility is Empowering, not Frightening', • 'International Advisors in this Program Respect and Support me and my Culture'	• Realistic Assessment of Cambodian Context • Ability to Critically Assess Participatory Mandate • Pushing of Mandate Beyond Its Boundaries • Thinking Like Donors, Acting Like Cambodians • Active Embodiment of Mandate Principles

Figure 2. Counter-cultural practices serving as mediating forces, diverging from donor and government environments.

- A realistic assessment of the Cambodian context.
- An ability to critically assess the participatory mandate.
- The pushing of the participatory mandate beyond its boundaries.
- Thinking like donors while acting like Cambodians.
- Active embodiment of the mandate principles.

By employing the SCE construct, a complex picture has emerged of how local mid-level managers, working to implement the program's participatory mandate, influenced by their positioning at the confluence of these five SCEs. This theoretical construct thus helps to disentangle the factors that influence how this one group of local staff negotiate complex cultural and historical realities in juxtaposition to donor conceptualizations of development,

[5]SPPA individual practices are differentiated by the strength they appear to hold to influence others' understanding of participatory development. Although it is unclear the degree to which these differentially enacted activities exist in aggregate, examples are provided later in the article to consider how they might represent deeper internalization of participatory principles.

providing new understanding of the forces which promote local staff's internalization of democratic governance principles.

CONCLUSION: POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR ENHANCING MODELS OF DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

Sustainable development requires grounding—both in the sense that understandings of the principles underlying participatory development must be held by local and international staff working on the ground, but also grounded in the local culture. If not, development agendas remain externally driven and sustainable development remains an elusive goal. As this study has illustrated, a complex web of sensemaking environments surrounds such implementation processes, creating the potential for a high degree of cognitive dissonance by local staff if such interactions are not understood and mediated by micro-programmatic efforts. The gap in knowledge of what best mediates such complexity remains vast, requiring greater attention to the human dimension of complex, multi-cultural program environments.

Participatory programming objectives rarely lead to sustainable development. Might this be because measuring and supporting common participatory activities such as *promoting a sense of value in villagers' opinions and knowledge, ensuring active participation in decision-making, promoting responsibility, publicizing people's needs and desires, putting forward solutions*, and *mobilizing resources* is far from straightforward? Or is it more the case that regardless of the formal organizational structures and policies introduced to stimulate perfunctory action on development agendas, policy visions are not wholly actualized unless they are internalized by those charged with their implementation?

The data collected for this study proposes that the answer is fourfold. Sustainable development inherently requires local ownership, which necessitates local buy-in to the principles underlying the development mandate. Achieving local buy-in requires delivering external mandates in locally accessible formats, tailored to address the complexities of local development contexts. Yet, implementation complexity resides in the manner in which multiple and complex forces meet as programs attempt to harness the power of global development trends at the same time they ensure democratic values are appropriately contextualized. Thus, empowering local agents to be able to own participatory principles while simultaneously negotiating macro-level cognitive complexities is an important effort to be included in future training of development staff. To accomplish this, the principal–agent relationship must be reframed so that more attention is paid to envisioning local stakeholders as valuable and active agents capable of implementing participatory programming, even when proposed ways forward do not necessarily fit other external actors' conceptualization of programming.

The following key findings offer a first approximation of answers to the research question through the juxtaposition of the macro-level forces, which created cognitive dissonance, against components of the micro-programmatic environments, which facilitated cognitive alignment.

Key Finding 1: Cognitive dissonance may result from the collision of multiple sensemaking environments in the implementation of international participatory mandates, particularly in post-conflict countries where citizens have historically experienced a high degree of trauma. This represents a key human factor to be considered in the theorizing and management of policy implementation in such contexts.

Key Finding 2: At the country level, contradictions between traditional organizational cultures, mandate principles, and locally-based donor environments that operationalize the mandate may further enhance the cognitive dissonance of local staff.

Key Finding 3: The Seila organizational model can be viewed as a hybrid program environment which significantly departs from traditional Cambodian government and donor program environments. The mandate and operating principles blend traditional Cambodian cultural orientations with international

donor structures and processes. This creates an alternative 'counter-culture' supporting cognitive alignment between international and local sensemaking of participatory development in unique and productive ways.

The findings of this study are particularly significant as international development efforts increasingly focus on delivering democratic principles alongside more tangible infrastructure-oriented efforts. As democratic development initiatives expand, development will be measured less by the delivery of tangible outputs and moreso by the degree to which local stakeholders have understood, bought into, owned, and embodied democratic principles in their personal relationships and daily activities. As a result, programming initiatives will increasingly demand attention to the human dimension of development.

Study findings also suggest that even in program environments with high degrees of cognitive dissonance due to macro-historical factors, and where international development mandates tend to create additional cultural and organizational blockages, micro-programmatic interactions can significantly influence the ability of local staff to surmount strong cognitive obstacles. This unveiled knowledge offers a number of lessons for theorizing about the human dimension of policy implementation and for structuring future policy interventions, particularly regarding strategies for appropriately engaging local staff in ways that could make the mandate more accessible to local beneficiaries, and thus more sustainable.

Focusing on one international development program site provides an opportunity to unpack the complex interaction of macro- and micro-level forces which have shaped local understandings of international participatory development. Although little from this study is generalizable to the broader development portfolio without additional empirical testing of the theoretical constructs emerging from this study, these initial findings do make an important contribution to broader, global policy debates. Particularly since, despite claims to the contrary, large-scale development programs continue to silence and marginalize the poor. Although there are familiar Weberian reasons why large-scale development programs will struggle to incorporate local knowledge (Guggenheim, 1998 *as cited in* Pritchett and Woolcock, 2004), programs like Seila show that 'big' and 'context specific' can go together. Thus, documentation of the Seila program's socio-cognitive dynamics speaks compellingly to the debates occurring around how to scale-up programming in order to serve a larger swath of the planet's poor, while at the same time grounding such efforts in locally accessible frames (Ferguson, 1990; Escobar, 1995; Fine, 2001; Harriss, 2000; Mitchell, 2002; Mosse, 2005; Lewis and Mosse, 2006; Li, 2007).

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