

## Reproducing Development's Trusteeship and Discursive Power

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### Abstract

Development aid is characterised by an inherent asymmetry between donor and recipient institution. Despite regular aid reforms and bold ambitions to change this relation, the asymmetry seems to persist. Inspired by post-development theory, and drawing on both a review of development theory and fieldwork within the World Bank, this article argues that the lopsided aid-relations are continuously being reproduced through the formation of development expert knowledge within authoritative donor communities. Here, contemporary knowledge/power formations shape and are shaped by historically embedded structures and epistemic communities that benefit the donor's need for legible and operational knowledge. Hence, top-down approaches to development planning are reproduced at the cost of participatory, bottom-up ones, as per the official rhetoric.

**Keywords:** development theory, discourse, post-development theory, World Bank

## Introduction

Power can operate in various ways. This article is about the discursive formation and power of international and institutional development. From the very inception of institutional development in the post-Second World War period, the era of development has come to manifest a seemingly hegemonic discourse shaped and spread by the West to the rest. This article draws on fieldwork from within the World Bank's headquarter in Washington DC and seeks to couple and analyse this information with the institutional development discourse that has been manifested during the last half century and in which the World Bank is seen to be the prime gatekeeper. The argument is that there is a strong notion of trusteeship inherent to institutional development, and that the underpinnings of this trusteeship are continuously being reproduced in and through established systems of institutions, knowledge, and funding. These knowledge/ power formations configure and reproduce the international development apparatus despite the formal and official rhetoric stating the opposite, as suggested by the new aid architecture's girding ideas of partnership, ownership and participation, which explicitly seeks to revamp inherent asymmetrical aid relations. The World Bank holds a gatekeeping position in international development, and just about all development actors globally relate, directly or indirectly, to World Bank policies and procedures. Hence, different, distinct and globally dispersed actors are shaped by a particular discourse emanating from one central node and operating on an abstract global level, but simultaneously reproduced by concrete transnational linkages between actors participating in the development apparatus. This article is about the conceptual elements of development and seeks to grasp *how* development works rather *whether* it works.

## Development and its Apparatus

The concept of development is understood different from an outsider's analytical perspective than from conventional practitioner perspectives. From an analytical perspective, the concept of development can be conceived of in two ways, as either reflecting immanent or intentional change (Cowen and Shenton 1996). Whereas the former directs attention to the natural change and advancement of society over time, i.e. "...the transformation that moves towards an ever more perfect form" (Esteva, 1992: 8),<sup>1</sup> the latter denotes that this transformation, or development, necessarily needs to be directed and guided by someone – who already knows this perfect form – through active interference in

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<sup>1</sup> The conception of immanent development originates from biology (cf. Esteva, 1992). This view is highly associated with Adam Smith and his notion of 'the invisible hand', i.e., that the aggregate of individuals' moral free choices would benefit society (1779).

society.<sup>2</sup> The active intervention in a society (intentional change) is illustrated by the many projects implemented by development agencies, while development as a process that unfolds over time (immanent) is illustrated by e.g. the development of capitalism. Nustad argues that “[i]t was when development in the immanent sense was seen as creating problems that could be solved by active intervention, that intentional development was created” (2004: 14) and we saw the uprising of an international development apparatus that would gradually assume the monopoly to define both the problems and solutions to development.

Intentional change through development assistance is characterised by a donor–recipient relationship that binds together geographically detached actors with uneven material and conceptual resources. While a donor agency contributes with funding, technical aid and administrative guidelines, the receiving end is to do the implementation but also supposed to devise the plans and make policy decisions on how to spend the allocated funds. The latter is however not the usual case as development assistance always comes with certain strings attached so that the policy measures reflect the politics and intention of the donor rather than those of the recipient. This reflects the everlasting development debate about conditionality vs. participation. Participation first entered the development discourse from the 1980s and draws on an idea that the recipients themselves know best their own constraints and thus are best suited to make their own policy decisions (see Chambers 1995). The girthing idea was that aid recipients’ participation in and ownership to policymaking processes would improve the appropriateness of externally funded projects and create local ownership in order to enhance local commitment and thus effectiveness. However, as private, bilateral and multilateral donor agencies are responsible to their respective constituencies, there is a need of tying aid to their own organisational values and making development assistance conditioned on their own policies. Conditionality denotes the means applied to enforce the adoption and implementation of donor’s policy. “[C]onditionality is not an aim in itself but an instrument by which other objectives are pursued” (Stokke, 1995b: 3),<sup>3</sup> thus the donor’s conditionality represents an exercise of coercion having the rationale to pursue donor’s stipulated goals regardless of the ideas of recipient participation and bottom-up

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<sup>2</sup> This view rose among positivistic scholars who asserted humans’ capability to take control over their future and development. This view is associated with the Saint-Simonians, who rejected the idea of progress as a natural non-intended process and instead proposed an idea about development as an active interference in society by its managers. August Comte enhanced these ideas in his promotion of rationality, planning and science, which have been labelled as positivism.

<sup>3</sup> Stokke also states that conditionality is “...basically a means to obtain a variety of objectives” (1995b: 3), and that the “...key element is the use of pressure by the donor, in terms of threatening to terminate aid, or actually terminating or reducing it, if conditions are not met by the recipient” (ibid.: 11-12). Emphasis is put on the donor’s coercive aspects, “...to promote what the donor perceives to be in its own interests” (ibid.: 3).

planning. The conditionality–participation nexus thus represents a seeming paradox within the formal configuration of development assistance and reveals an intention on the donor’s side of establishing governance mechanisms to ensure its recipient follows the donor-established policies. This nexus thus merges the theory and rhetoric of participation with practices of conditionality, demonstrating how established discursive practices override new strategies, practices and ambitions.

### **A Post-Structural Approach to Development**

When entering the 1990s ‘development’ laid with broken back. The end of The Cold War disbanded institutional development’s geopolitical aspects as development in many instances had been used to counter the spread of communism. Secondly, various studies pointed out that over four decades with development still hadn’t produced the desired results – there were almost a total lack of success stories. The continuous failure of development projects also triggered debates on development’s role and the vast spending of taxpayers’ money around the world. Development, which stood as *the* idea with the US as the ‘beacon on the hill’ (Sachs 1992) guiding post-colonial and emerging nations now started to lose its popular founding. This scepticism got reflected in academic writing, and coupled with emergent post-modern thoughts a group of authors started to analyse development from a post-structural perspective.<sup>4</sup> This perspective – which were to become known as post-development theory – started to analyse development as a powerful discourse, and the analytical focus shifted “[t]o the way in which discourses of development help shape the reality they pertain to address, and how alternative conceptions of the problem have been marked off as irrelevant” (Nustad 2004: 13). To get to grips with development practice and its mindset, post-development scholars usually trace the genealogy of development and give emphasis to its initiation after the Second World War.<sup>5</sup> By depicting development’s genealogy post-developers illustrate how development constitutes a discourse where social meaning is produced and maintained, while diverging and contesting knowledge largely is ignored and thus has small pragmatic influence. Post-development scholars argue that development agents, institutions and policy-makers have legitimised, constituted and reproduced the development discourse rather than considering the critique frequently directed against it. Hence, development practice reproduces existing knowledge and the discursive formation of development.

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<sup>4</sup> See for example Ferguson 1994; Escobar 1991, 1995; Cowen and Shenton 1996; Hobart 1993; Sachs 1992.

<sup>5</sup> Some trace the origin of the concept of development, and in particular intentional development, to the Era of Enlightenment and the school of positivism, the St. Simonians and August Comte (see Lie 2004).

Seeing development as a discourse came because development studies were in a crisis, and some intellectual circles declared the concept of development dead when entering the age of post-modernity. Pieterse argues that “[p]ost-development overlaps with Western critique of modernity and techno-scientific progress” (2000: 176). As post-modernity is a cultural and intellectual rejection of modernity, post-development is a rejection of development (Gardner & Lewis, 1996). Scholars who adhere to the post-structural development critique take advantage in analysing development as a discourse in which development actors operate within and thus reproduce in practical development. Thus post-development theory position itself with an analytical distance outside the constraining structures of development. In doing this post-development theory does not seek to present a solution to the problem of failed development and underdevelopment – which also is the main critique directed against this approach from practitioners working within the development apparatus. The strength of post-development’s discursive approach is that it allows one to distinguish between the moral aspects of development issues and the theoretical apparatus that has monopolised development discussions, solutions and interventions (Lie 2008; 2015a). As such, post-development perspectives aim not to provide policy suggestions, but to understand the social dimensions and knowledge/power formations of the system that do so.

### **The Development Discourse**

Authors writing from a post-structural perspective tend to trace the origin of the development discourse as manifested in the current international development apparatus back to US President Truman’s inauguration speech January 20 1949, where he proclaimed that:

“We must embark on a bold new programme for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas. ... For the first time in history, humanity possesses the knowledge and the skill to relieve the suffering of these people. ... The old imperialism – exploitation for foreign profit – has no place in our plans ... Greater production is the key to prosperity and peace. And the key to greater production is a wider and more vigorous application of modern scientific knowledge” (cited in Porter, 1995: 66–67).

According to Truman, development needed the modern technical and scientific knowledge the already developed nations possessed and who therefore had to share this with the

underdeveloped countries. The implementation and institutionalisation of Truman's project became rooted in the Bretton Woods institutions, i.e. the World Bank and the International Monetary Funds (IMF) which were the results of the United Nations' Bretton Woods meeting in 1944 on how to counter the elements that were seen as the Second World War's triggers. Hence, the newly established multilateral institutions' mandate "were to safeguard liberal capitalist global policies" (Preston 1996: 168).

There are several interesting elements in Truman's speech, which are reflected and sustained in later development practice and rhetoric. First, the speech represents the first time the term 'underdeveloped' was used in a formal setting, thus defining certain nations in a negative relation to the developed ones, having the effect of dichotomising 'us' and 'them'. Second, it explicitly outlines what constitutes a developed society. Third, it stipulates how underdeveloped societies can become developed. Fourth, it says who to ascribe this task of developing the underdeveloped. Lastly, the speech defines what is 'expert' knowledge and the importance of disseminating it. Närman argues that "[w]hen Truman institutionalised development assistance, he could hardly have imagined that it would still exist in basically the same form fifty years later" (1999: 149). A weighty reason to this was because Truman's ideas later got manifested and theorised in the American economist Walt Rostow's "The Stages of Economic Growth. A Non-communist Manifesto" from 1960. Rostow's theory was later to be labelled the modernisation theory, which proved to have long-lasting impact on development thinking and practice.

### **Development as Modernisation**

Basic to Rostow and the modernisation school is that modernisation is an inevitable process and that Western modernity is the objective to be achieved on a global level. The thoughts of the modernisation theory draw on Adam Smith who two centuries earlier argued that economic growth and the wealth of nations are based on economic growth and a free-market economy (cf. immanent development). Hence, the process of industrialisation came to play a key role in national modernist projects, and to Rostow an "...expanding industrial sector was the prime vehicle behind the stages of growth – the ultimate development process" (Närman 1999: 151). The basic assumption of Rostow's theory is that all nations inevitably develop in the same directions, following the same path having the same objective; i.e. a stage of mass-production and consumption, but that some nations lag behind on his five-stage

universal and evolutionary scheme.<sup>6</sup> This is because the immanent process of progress has been obscured and thus he makes a call for active intervention by intentional development projects to assist and improve the progress of the failed immanent development.

The modernisation theory is portrayed as an inevitable path unfolding over time in which all societies are passing through with different velocity. Societies are placed long a universal and linear continuum with the US as the model, or ‘the beacon on the hill’, and it is the responsibility of those at the end of the scale to help others achieve the same level, because poverty was explained by nations’ lack of integration into the world market, which to the modern project is the litmus test of a society’s development. Development was thus seen as a uniform process supposed to be the same everywhere, thus neglecting contextual variations.

The modernisation approach added one effect in addition to reproduce those already produced by Truman, viz. what Fabien (1983) calls ‘temporal segregation’. Temporal segregation denotes the phenomenon when contemporary political linkages between societies are cut off because a society’s poverty is explained with reference to it lagging behind on the evolutionary scale and not as a matter of relations between actors. Poverty is explained as a matter of historical development and that societies coexist isolated from each other. This non-relational conception of poverty was to be countered by the other paradigmatic development theory that has influenced global development thinking.

### **Underdevelopment as Dependency**

The modernisation theory got its counter reaction in the 1970s in what was to become known as the dependency or underdevelopment theory. Dependency theory counters the modernisation theory by explaining poverty as due to unequal structural and economic possibilities and relations between the North and the South. Hence it was relational and it did not only give an explanation to why some societies are poor, but also why some are rich. Inequality was due to structures established during the colonial era, which were sustained after

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<sup>6</sup> In ‘The Stages of Economic Growth: a non-communist manifesto’ (1960), Walt Rostow stipulates five stages or phases the process of development consists of on the way to contemporary, western modernity: The first stage is the traditional society, or pre-Newtonian stage as Rostow calls it. Secondly is the ‘transitional stage’ where the conditions for “take-off” are developed. Thirdly and most crucial is the “take-off- stage”. This stage is short in time (about two decades) and is compared to the English revolution; characterised by rapid growth and expansion, being a period in which modernism is victorious over traditionalism. Stage four is ‘drive to maturity’ which no longer has industrialisation as a goal, but administrative and technological potential to produce everything they choose and want to produce. Fifth is the ‘stage of mass-consumption’, which, according to Rostow, had its break-through in the US in 1913–14 with Fordism. This stage was reached in Europe and Japan after WW2, through the Marshall help initiative.

decolonisation. Whereas modernisation theory was apolitical and explained poverty in terms of (lack of) immanent historical progress, dependency theory was highly political. The theory rose from the works of Andre Gunder Frank (1967), who draws on Lenin's theory of imperialism and Marx' analysis of capitalist societies (cf. Gardner and Lewis 1996). The theory was initially embraced by people normally associated with the political left, and was ascribed academic credentials when Frank later was joined by Emmanuel Wallerstein (1974) who analysed the structural inequalities between North and South as a relationship between *metropolis* and *satellites*. The theory insisted on the coherence between underdevelopment, exploitation and political structures, describing underdevelopment as a political active process and not due to a partition in time. Where the modernisation school saw poverty as due to poor nations' lack of integration in the world economy, the dependency theory saw it opposite around: that rich and poor countries are highly interconnected and that underdevelopment was caused by the poor nations' factual integration in the world marked on unequal premises when compared to the wealthy nations. As a consequence, the dependency theoreticians argued that until these structural inequalities are altered, development would essentially remain an unequalising process: the rich nations get richer and the rest gets inevitably poorer.

### **Some Comments on the Two Development Paradigms**

Modernisation and dependency theory have to a large extent been seen as poles apart in development discourse, but it is difficult to pinpoint what really distinguishes them in defining the central objectives of development (Närman 1999). The important dividing line is that while modernisation theory sees poverty as a historical problem caused by a slow immanent development process and thus makes a call for active intervention, dependency theory explains underdevelopment in terms of unequal structural and political relations between North and South. While "...modernisation seems to neglect inequality and conflicting agendas in the development process, these are crucial in dependency thinking" (ibid.: 157). However, dependency theory did not give a direct pragmatic solution on what to do except making a call for a total restructuring of the world economic order, which was seen as a too far-fetched and unlikely solution.

Dependency theory was celebrated in representing input from the South (Frank is Mexican) to the South's problems. Yet, the dependency theory did contribute to reproduce the schism between expert and local knowledge as the theory was just as alien to the poor rural farmers as the modernisation theory was.



Dependency theoreticians never managed to create a viable alternative to development practice and their theoretical predecessors. While dependency theory mainly got its resonance among political leftism and people engaged in research, modernisation theory continued to prevail among development practitioners. This was probably not based on a deliberate choice. Those engaged in the development sector are usually equated with radical mindsets and thus on the rhetorical level reproduce the mentalities of the dependency theory, most notably by adopting the term ‘underdevelopment’ which has the effect of dividing the world into two separate entities. Development practice on the other hand reflects notions of a paternalistic approach that reflect the structures of the modernisation theory. Despite new and continuously changing development rhetoric and policies, post-development scholars’ analysis illustrates that development practice to a large extent reproduces the basic notions and effects of the modernisation theory (Lie 2015b). Already in 1962 René Dumont argued that the change in rhetoric from the paternalistic concepts of ‘help’ and ‘aid’ to ‘co-operation’ is mere hypocrisy (referred in Närman 1999). The language of development rhetoric changes fast and development practice will always lag behind its rhetorical representations. Thus, some words lapse into oblivion while others persist and prevail whatever happens to the field’s reality and development practice. According to Chambers (1995), participation, which got its renaissance in the 1990s, is among those words: “So widespread is its use that some talk about a paradigm shift to participatory development” (ibid.: 30). Participation implies that the intended recipients of aid are supposed to do the planning and make the decisions. This paradigm shift was never reflected on the practical level of development – turning development upside down is too an ambitious alteration of the development apparatus, illustrating that development language does not necessarily reflect development practice. The conceptual development apparatus consists of lots of words that are widely used among development agents; still these conceptual representations are merely on the linguistic level and should not be taken as descriptive terms of development practice, which always lag behind the conceptual apparatus.

Using the language of participation does not in itself constitute a transferal of power, nor any significant shifts in discursive practice. In referring to Porter (1995) Nustad argues that “...development since Truman has been the domain of technocrats, and with the construction of a technocratic discourse followed a denial of human agency” (2004: 21). The denial of human agency and the technocratic and discursive formation of development have contributed to establish an

apparatus highly reluctant to change with the effect of reproducing itself while also neglecting alternative knowledge and solutions. This kind of expert knowledge monopolises knowledge formations and thus generates ignorance towards other systems of knowledge (cf. Hobart 1993). Another aspect, thus, is how particular forms of knowledge – often introduced as ‘concepts’ – are not only shaping, but also shaped in and by their practical articulation in the nexus of culture, practice and policy (Lie and de Carvalho 2010; de Carvalho and Lie 2011). This reflects Foucault’s point about knowledge/power formations as discourses, in which post-developers draw. There is a parallel between Foucault’s writings about the court and the post-structural reading of development: “In the same way that the form of the court was the expression of a certain conception of justice, so the apparatus of development is ... built on an idea of trusteeship ... development therefore implies an idea of trusteeship: that someone who has the necessary vantage point guides the process of development... For this reason, proposals for reform look more like recapitulations of old efforts than true attempts at reform” (Nustad 2004: 21).

It is difficult to implement a total reform of development practice. It is highly rooted in embedded mindset and structures evolving from over 50 years of development practice, which has contributed to reproduce the original existing system. Already from its inception, development was based on an understanding of an elite-driven process where some know and others do not. As *the* most important and influential development actor, while also being one of the few actors that have existed during the whole era of development, the World Bank provides a good empirical point to study how current notions of and discourses surrounding development are articulated and reproduced at the headquarters level in DC.

## **World Bank Stories**

In the aula of the World Bank’s headquarters in Washington DC there is a statue of a young boy leading an old, blind man (see Lie 2015b; chapter three). The boy is holding the front end of a stick and the old man holds the back of the same stick. The statue was donated by a private pharmaceutical company (Merck Pharmaceutical Company) after Jimmy Carter got the medical company, various governments and the World Bank together at a WHO-conference where it was decided that the medical company should produce a medicine to counter river-blindness to be distributed by the various governments. World Bank was to cover the costs both in developing the medicine as well as producing it. Intentionally the statue was to symbolise the disease’s cruelty while also representing the helplessness and hopelessness of human conditions as the boy at the end of the stick knows that he one day will be at the other

end of the stick. Alongside the one in the World Bank's lobby, there exist three similar statues where one is placed in WHO's Geneva office, another at the Carter Centre and at the third at the pharmaceutical company. As the collaboration between the various actors on developing the medicine and curing the disease were successful, the statue has today become the symbol of cooperation founded on strong leadership.

In late January 2005, three editorials – in The Washington Post (January 23), Financial Times (January 24) and The Guardian (January 25) – which all addressed the issue of whom to succeed James Wolfensohn as the president of the World Bank after his resignation taking effect June 1 2005. The Washington Post wrote that:

[i]t matters who takes over the World Bank, because the institution is both powerful and fragile. It is powerful because it pumps out around \$20 billion in commercial loans, subsidized credits and grants each year and because its *10,000-strong staff represents the strongest concentration of development expertise anywhere*. This combination of financial and technical muscles has given the bank a lead role in many ventures that affect American interests, from reconstruction in the Balkans and Afghanistan to the campaign against AIDS to the *refining of development theory* (emphasis added).

January 26 James Wolfensohn held a speech to his staff in one of the larger conference halls in the World Bank. The objective of the meeting was to thank his staff for their efforts in collecting money for the 2004 Tsunami-victims and that it was good to see that the staff stood together in this hard period which affected many people working in the Bank. Also, as he was to travel extensively the coming months, he also took a temporary farewell with his staff as he soon was to retire. In celebrating his staff, Wolfensohn quoted The Washington Post-editorial, giving emphasis to the part where his staff's development expertise is highlighted. Furthermore, Wolfensohn said that among his main achievements during his decade-long tenure, was that he and his 'development experts' had changed the mode of doing development and that he had put up front and in the centre the idea that the Bank should "listen to our clients – not as policemen or professors – but as partners". So, how does a partnership work when one side of the partner comprising a donor–recipient relationship is addressed as clients – a term that indicates a patron and thus a partnership between a patron and client? What does it say about 'partnership' with the world's leading development agency?

Wolfensohn had at least three paramount contributions to the rearrangement of the international development apparatus through ‘reinventing’ the Bank, known as the Strategic Compact (Weaver and Leiteritz 2005). First was his ‘Corruption as the Cancer of Development’- speech which enabled the bank and its staff to work more explicitly on corruption than ‘rent seeking’ – which was the previous and more apolitical term for the same phenomenon. As a previous investment banker, Wolfensohn saw corruption to be among the worst impediment to growth and progress, and by opening up the space for the Bank to work with issues related to corruption, there was a major shift in Bank mentality turning into a more political agency. According to its mandate, the Bank is not supposed to be political – a mandate that was seen to hamper the Bank’s other dedicated role of alleviating poverty. Hence, Wolfensohn enabled the Bank to become more political in its activities, if not directly so at least indirectly by reconfiguring the methods applied of giving aid.<sup>7</sup> This interlinks with his other major contribution, namely his launch of the Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF) – being a framework for development concerned less about *what* countries should invest their aid in, but rather *how* aid should be spent. This might be accounted for due to the policies of CDF, which includes an extensive list that in practice might legitimise all possible choices. The CDF was in 1999 manifested when the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) was introduced by the World Bank as the guiding principle for aid partnership and giving development loans or credits. A PRSP is supposed to be devised by the recipient government and approved by the Bank and IMF in order for the country at stake to receive funds and to qualify to debt-relief. Via the PRSPs, governments were supposed to take control over their own development under the rationale that this generates ‘ownership’ and thus enhance the effectiveness of doing development. PRSPs were supposed to represent a shift from the top-down approach of the prevailing structural adjustment lending (SAP) method – where the Bank attached strict conditions to its aid – to a situation where recipients are to define their own agendas, thus shifting the responsibility of Bank-programmes from the Bank itself to its recipients. Coupled, addressing corruption more explicitly and emphasising how development aid should be spent represented a critical break with the Bank’s apolitical traditions and its apolitical mandate. Third and also interlinked was Wolfensohn’s statement that the World Bank is to become a *knowledge bank*, i.e. that it is supposed to produce knowledge

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<sup>7</sup> Despite here described as indirect, it was still an intention on the Bank’s side to become more political. Knowing that the mandate is apolitical – a mandate which is printed on posters that hang in many of the Bank’s offices – it needed to become political in a subtle and indirect way. Hence, the indirectness is not the same as to say the Bank has political *effects*. As post-development scholars argue, development assistance has always had and will always have political *effects*.

to the betterment of recipient so that 'they can make their decisions based on unbiased and scientific knowledge' (see Pincus and Winters 2002). The Bank was just supposed to be a facilitator and helper of the recipient when they were to devise their CDF by providing knowledge. However, as knowledge might take various forms and there is several power aspects attached to knowledge formation, it is not irrelevant what kind of knowledge that is produced within the Bank and thus shapes the institution's external representation and activities.

### *Comprehensiveness and Politics*

The Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF) gives emphasis to governance issues. A clean government, that is one without corruption and where administrative and bureaucratic routines follow stipulated guidelines, is seen as the main vehicle for development. Alongside this, the CDF prioritises an effective justice system as essential for fighting corruption, and a good, healthy and properly supervised financial system. These elements are all essential to the new approach to states and governments as recipients of development assistance and credits from the multilateral financial institutions. Comprised, these new elements make up what is labelled as 'good governance', which is a cluster of policies representing the latest paradigmatic shift in post-Second World War development discourse (cf. Orlandini, 2003). The sudden rise of good governance policies and how this policy package is disseminated and circulated in the development apparatus' conceptual toolbox, illustrates World Bank's rather hegemonic role in defining obstacles to development while at the same time delivering policies and solutions to these development problems. From the World Bank, a weak government was seen as a major obstacle to development; hence good governance became the major means to and objective of development (see Kapur 2002).

Whereas the era of structural adjustment, particularly the 1980s and early 1990s, was characterised by a significant top-down approach from the World Bank in its relation to its lenders, the CDF and PRSP intended to turn this relationship upside-down. Recipient governments were now supposed to be in charge of devising their own poverty reduction plan based on own priorities and needs as opposed to previously when development grants came with strong strings attached so that the policies pursued reflected the interests of the donor-institutions more than the receiving governments' needs. Instead of being subjected to strict conditionalities through structural adjustment programmes, the governments were now themselves to decide how to spend their loans. This transition

indicates a change in the modality of how aid is given and how aid is expected to work. ‘Empowering’, ‘emancipating’ and enabling the recipients to themselves be in charge of the process had the objective of bringing the decision-making process closer to those it affected and were based on the rationale of stimulating ‘participation’ and ‘ownership’ in order to make development assistance more effective – as efficiency and effectiveness have always been among the prime motors of reshaping development policies and systems. Instead of the donors dictating what the money should be spent on by claiming their knowledge of the correct path of progress, it was now supposed to be in the hands of national authorities to come up with their own plan – which had to be approved by the donors. These elements illustrate a seeming shift in the general disbursement tactics, giving aid recipients greater freedom and control. But as development assistance always comes with certain strings attached, this shift represented more a rhetorical than a practical shift regarding both the policy content and the way of organising development. Instead of “you get the money if they are invested in this and that (i.e. structural adjustment policies)” it is now “you get the money if you have done this and that”. Funding was now to be given on previous achievements and results, and the funding was to cover further strengthening of these processes when there exist commitment from the national authorities’ side. Precisely because the governments need approval for the PRSPs from the donor-institutions, there is an asymmetric power-relation implicit in this mode of organising the partnership. Those in IMF and World Bank responsible for accepting the PRSPs know what they want, and those producing a particular PRSP know what the donors desire.

### *The Knowledge Bank: a Battlefield of Knowledge*

From the 1970s, the Bank sought to redefine its identity from being an international financial institution to become a global development agency. From the late 1990s, it started to think of itself as a knowledge bank, and production and dissemination of Bank-knowledge increased rapidly. This is also reflected in the reorganisation of the Bank’s internal structures – also among Wolfensohn’s achievements during his tenure. The agency was reorganised for knowledge management creating ‘knowledge-based communities’ and thematic networks (King and McGrath 2004). The restructuring of the Bank revolved around producing a matrix where different sectoral divisions produce knowledge about its own thematic area which they are supposed to transfer into the various regional defined operational units who ultimately brings this knowledge into Bank projects. “The knowledge bank would no

longer enforce policy change through conditionality but would instead teach poor countries how to transform themselves, encourage participation in the process of change through partnerships, and encourage commitment and ‘ownership’ through the vehicle of CDF” (Pincus and Winters 2002: 12). The Bank produces knowledge it desire to disseminate to its lending countries so that these eventually will incorporate the Bank knowledge and later make decisions based on it. This also illustrates the transferral of responsibility: instead of the Bank telling recipients what to do, recipients are supposed to know what to do themselves and thus secure local ownership to the processes. However, ownership is not an easy thing to grapple with as the recipient institutions need to state themselves what the donor wishes to hear. As a donor-informant put it: “ownership exist when they do what we want them to do but they do so voluntarily” (Randel, German and Ewing 2002: 8). Making ‘them’ do as ‘we’ want is dependent on knowledge transferal, and consequently it matters *what* kind of knowledge that is disseminated.

Internal to the Bank there is a great multitude of knowledge. This was quite prevalent during my fieldwork within the Bank in January and February 2005. It is difficult to grasp the vast and complex field of an institution containing around 10.000 employees, but some trends are more significant than other. Despite having the possibility to meet a variety of staff, I was primarily connected to the social development branch of the Bank, which is located in the larger Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development (ESSD). This department has the key role of being an anchor’ of the Bank’s work on social development and seeks to disseminate its knowledge about social issues and social capital into the Bank’s operational branches. Many employees expressed difficulties doing this, because they felt they were not taken as that important when addressing the ‘operations’. On the operational side they were more stressed by those seeking to infer in their work, and “particularly are those from the social development at times very busy in our corridors. It is somewhat annoying. I know they are doing their job, but let us do ours. We know what is important and what’s not”, as one informant working in operations put it. On the sector side, an informant said: “Well, we are supposed to be an anchor, and be available with resources whenever the operations need us. But they never consult us. We therefore need to address them directly. If not because social development issues are important, so at least because we need to make ourselves relevant to secure further funding of our department”.

Despite being two isolated quotations from a long fieldwork, these do nevertheless reflect the major trends of the ‘battlefield of knowledge’ (Long and Long 1992; Lie 2012)

internal to the Bank. The Bank as a knowledge battlefield is most prevalent in its operational branches and in ‘the field’, i.e. at its country offices located in the various recipient countries. I conducted eight months fieldwork in Uganda (in addition to the two in the World Bank), focusing on the government–donors–nexus of the policy process – a fieldwork which also reflects how people in operations are under constant press from various interest groups or Bank-sectors seeking to have their voice heard and their issues reflected in the final policy documents. For instance, within the Bank those working for the various thematic networks spearheading new development thinking talked about their ideas and policies in market terms, i.e. that they had to ‘sell’ their ideas to the operational side of the Bank to become relevant and make a difference. In such processes, converting ideas and policies to please and fit the existing operational demands also meant subverting the original intent of these ideas. Those pioneering new policies and initiatives thus usually turned into pragmatic aid practitioners when seeking to influence operational activities. Similar ‘knowledge battlefields’ occurs also in the interface between donor and recipient institution, between the Bank and its clients, where existing practice and operational demands tend to trump new and alternative perspectives regardless if these emerge from the recipients themselves or from within the Bank (Lie 2015b).

However, even though operational activities are the central node to understand the knowledge encounters of development, these encounters are not solely between operations and the social development family. The great divide goes between various systems of knowledge internal to the Bank. On the one hand there is the knowledge reflected in the social development family, which could be classified as complex, qualitative, local and contextual, fragmented, irrational, and empirical. On the other hand is the knowledge that spans around the Poverty Reduction and Economic Management (PREM) network. This is probably the most influential sector of the Bank and close to all PREM-staff are economists. This sector’s knowledge could be characterised as legible, rational, straight lines, quantitative, causal and theoretical. Whereas the former system of knowledge is dedicated to long-term thinking, the latter predicts short-term thinking and results. This finding is also reflected in David Mosse’s work, who also, as an anthropologist, conducted fieldwork within the Bank:

“The Bank is an organisation dominated by economists and economist paradigms. The framing goals, the definition and the measurement of development success all derive from economic frameworks, and the discipline is privileged in the Bank’s career structure and in its streams of promotion” (Mosse 2004: 2).



*Legible Planning*

Despite just about all Bank-staff emphasis the importance of the social aspects of development knowledge, people engaged in this sector express difficulties of achieving any substantial influence whereas those working in PREM acknowledge that the Bank is “mainly concerned with growth and economic management” – as an economist at the Bank’s Uganda country office expressed it. The problem of making social development aspects relevant to the Bank’s planning, policies and operations is precisely due to the means and methods applied in planning: there is a great need for straight lines, legible knowledge and causality. It would be difficult for the Executive Directors at the Bank to plan and make decisions on a knowledge that is not portrayed as universal and causal, and that lacks two straight lines under the stipulated objectives in the end of a project document. Development planning is essentially about producing causality between input and expected output, and intervention becomes a question of straight lines and transparency, hence what is local and complex are simplified and standardised. “Planning relies on simplifications and the production of legible units. The larger and more ambitious the plan is, the more reductionistic and simplistic planning becomes, and the more of the ethnographic particularism it tries to grasp is missed in its representations” (Lie 2004: 140–141). It would not be possible for World Bank staff to deliver a project proposal to its Board of Directors that states that the world is complex which needs to be taken into account when planning without giving any guarantees of short-term success. As Scott (1998) shows, planning and intervention always tend to neglect the social and complex local knowledge, or *metis* which is the practical knowledge only acquirable through lived life, and experience and impossible to codify.

The Bank’s need to establish causality between intentions, plans, input and expected output minimises the influence of the social development knowledge because a particular knowledge’s complexity is reduced in symmetrical relation to the higher up in the Bank hierarchy knowledge is disseminated and circulated. The closer knowledge moves from researchers to decision-makers, the more the economic rationality seem to prevail over more complex and illegible knowledge. This is not to say that some kind of anthropological knowledge – or other kinds of knowledge deriving from the social sciences – is ‘better’ in terms of policymaking and development on a normative standard. The above argument is merely to illustrate how planning works, why it is plausible to argue on the Bank’s knowledge-heterogeneity and as a battlefield of knowledge on the inside. Externally, the Bank

appears homogenous, which is a direct result on the means, methods and knowledge applied in planning. The result is that one observes a highly monolithic and standardised development apparatus being quite reluctant to change. As Green argues, with reference to Arce (2000) and Ferguson (1994):

“...while the standardization of development globally is partly a function of the standardization of development problems and solutions, ...it is also a consequence of the kinds of practices used to plan and implement development as a process of transforming policy visions into *manageable* realities through the social constitution of ‘projects’ subject to specific techniques of audit, organization and control” (2003: 123–4).

### *Turning Development Cooperation Upside-Down?*

Despite good intentions of letting the recipient participate more in the process of devising development plans concerning themselves, this never really materialised. CDF and the introduction of PRSPs as the guiding policy instrument did not enhance recipient actors’ ownership and participation over the process – at least not regarding the final outcome. Recipients were to devise their own PRSP documents and the Knowledge Bank was intentionally only supposed to help facilitate the process. As argued above, knowledge is never an unbiased objective entity – it is always positioned and shaped by its purpose. Staff in the operational units of the Bank argued that it would be better if the Bank still had been in full control over the process of devising poverty reduction plans as it would be much more effective and time-saving, “after all, we are to approve the documents, and surely we won’t approve anything that deviates from our interests”, as a Bank-staff put it. Several at the Bank argued that it would be better if the Bank made the plans itself, as it is “too much dialogue and negotiations” in letting the recipient produce the papers. On the Uganda-side, a senior official at the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development stated: “surely there’s an imbalance in our relationship with the Bank. We are acutely aware that we need to produce what the Bank likes and what we think the Bank will approve. ... Basically, it is because we need the money”. Despite recipients and lending government are to produce the mandatory papers to release World Bank funding, this has not altered the relationship in any substantial way. The Bank still defines, though more indirectly, the desired knowledge and policies.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Formally, the changes in the international development apparatus deriving from the World Bank had the intention of

altering the paternalistic legacy of previous means and methods of doing development by turning it upside down. The intention was to 'put the recipient agency in the driver's seat'. The shift from the top-down approach of structural adjustment leading to a seemingly more bottom-up and inclusive process of the Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF), with its Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) as the guiding documents, has not managed to alter development practice in any significant way. The World Bank is still the leading, gatekeeping agency for both development policy and procedures, despite its self-imposed reorganisation giving aid recipients the freedom and responsibility to devise their own policy. The recipient's freedom is, however, truncated by mechanisms implied by the reorganisation itself. First, the aid recipient knows it has to align with the Bank's knowledge regime when devising its own policy in order to have it accepted. Second, and related, the Bank seeks to make its own policies those of the recipient as a way to limit knowledge discrepancies between the Bank and its counterpart. This illustrates a new power formation at play, organising and reproducing development practice. The seemingly consignment of power has only had the effect of making the recipient responsible for the Bank's policies. Current development practice still reflect the patrimonial legacy of the modernisation theory, but now in a more subtle manner: it is no longer stated explicitly that the donor knows what is best or not – recipients are those who are supposed to do and plan development initiatives. As these initiatives need Bank-approval, the Bank and its knowledge system still prevail in international development discourse reproducing the effects deriving from Truman's 1949 speech, i.e. the schism between 'us' and 'them' and between expert and local knowledge, as well as the faith in an active, intentional interference in society to guide and improve what is seen as unilinear and immanent processes.

The World Bank plays a key gatekeeping role in international and institutional development. Through its central node in Washington DC, and supported by various detached nodes, i.e. country offices, around the world in addition to the fact that just about all development agencies worldwide relate to the Bank's paradigmatic input to the global development discourse, the Bank as an actor and development as a discourse represent "...as a bureaucratic force with *global reach* and an explicitly pro-capitalist agenda, operating as a tool of regimes that seek to perpetuate relations of inequality and dependence between the West and the rest and, through their representation, to perpetuate the construction of others as post-colonial subjects" (Green, 2003: 124, emphasis added).

It seems difficult to escape business as usual – culture eats strategy for breakfast. Development is highly embedded in

its own discourse and development practice only seems to reproduce the very same discourse despite intentions on the donor-side of altering systemic aspect of development cooperation. That development practice seems to reproduce itself is thus due to both the discursive power of development and the technocratic operations of bureaucracies. Both are contingent on the combination of a particular set of knowledge, that together contribute in maintaining a form of asymmetrical trusteeship that the development apparatus formally seeks to escape.

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