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SANTA CRUZ

**SEEING LIKE A STAKEHOLDER:  
MEASURES OF INTERNATIONAL NGO ACCOUNTABILITY**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
in  
SOCIOLOGY

by  
**Shannon Adair Williams**

December 2012

The Dissertation of Shannon Adair Williams is  
approved:

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Tyrus Miller  
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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### **List of Abbreviations**

DAC	Development Assistance Committee of the OECD
DfiD	UK Department for International Development
DIV	Development Innovation Ventures
HDI	Human Development Index
HDR	Human Development Report
MDGs	The Millennium Development Goals
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NPM	New Public Management
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RBA	Rights Based Approach
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

## **Abstract**

### **Shannon Adair Williams Seeing Like a Stakeholder: Measures of INGO Accountability**

International development nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) are a particularly good example of how transnational accountability commitments present challenges to producing credible accounts to diverse and at times competing stakeholder groups. This dissertation examines accountability at the intersections of power and knowledge production. I argue that the concept is necessarily a political and epistemic practice regulating human action through demands for its representation. Three assumptions support this treatment of accountability: the concept of accountability is applicable exclusively to human action; it assumes an agent has the freedom to choose and to self-regulate; and that an agent can produce an account that serves as credible evidence in verifying his actions are appropriate. The legibility and credibility criteria of accounts are examined through two distinct approaches to development. The “Modern Development Enterprise” is shaping upwards accountability expectations through funders’ emphasis on aid effectiveness and the ability to demonstrate measurable “results”. Funders are not only interested in verifying the effectiveness of past development interventions, they are also looking to secure development models which can assure their future investments will continue to maximize results for their money. “People-Centered Approaches” to development place an emphasis on the participation and empowerment of poor people, which has implications for knowledge-based accounts and claims of “downward accountability” by development agencies and INGOs. This focus on human agency, as both the

means and the ends for development, drives specific methodological requirements for producing knowledge about poor-peoples' experiences and measuring people-centered interventions. Finally, the measurement practices of two INGOs are examined to demonstrate how they must negotiate multidirectional accountability to their stakeholders through methodological pluralism. Examples are drawn from the same food-security program in Bangladesh to illustrate how these specific and varied methodological requirements for measuring the work of development activities plays out in the INGOs' monitoring and evaluation practices. The preliminary evidence suggests that calls for multidirectional accountability may in fact ultimately take INGOs further from the sources of their credibility as development actors—their contribution as unique, value-based organizations and the ability to be responsive and accountable to those stakeholders who are the least powerful.

accountability, agency, development, evaluation, knowledge production, measurement, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)



## Acknowledgements

Strictly speaking it is incorrect to say that the single individual thinks. Rather it is more correct to insist that he participates in thinking further what other men [and women] have thought before him.

- Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*

A dissertation is a significant milestone in one's scholarly journey yet it is impossible to reflect the totality of other's contributions in terms of insight, assistance, and human kindness. My deepest gratitude goes to my dissertation committee who has provided inspiration and guidance throughout this project. As the committee chair, Jonathan Fox offered incisive input regarding issues of accountability, civil society, and transnational organizations; his level of understanding of and participation in the active debates around these issues is an achievement that I continue to aspire to. Conversations and seminars with Ben Crow about the nature of development are central to my conceptualization of measuring poverty; his support and steady encouragement have been vital in completing this project. Jenny Reardon's expertise in knowledge and governance has encouraged me to explore measurement through the Science and Technology Studies literature. I am especially appreciative of her role in fostering the dynamic intellectual community of the Science and Justice Working Group. Other faculty that have notably shaped my intellectual journey include Melanie DuPuis, Herman Gray, Andy Szasz, and Paul Lubeck. However, this list is inevitably incomplete.

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## CHAPTER I

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### Introduction: Seeing Like a Stakeholder

During the rainy season in Bangladesh the rural roadways are transformed into a space for all types of household activities. Jute reeds, harvested rice, and leaves used for cooking fuel are spread across the pavement and along the shoulders of the road for drying. I watched these activities as I traveled by car across hundreds of miles traveling through the Rangpur District to visit rural villages participating in a development project. My guide was Mr. Salam, a Bangladeshi field staff who worked for an American international non-governmental organization as a monitoring and evaluation specialist. After driving for several hours it struck me that despite the miles of jute and other materials we had passed on the road, there were only a handful of people actually attending to the materials laid out to dry. After passing through a particularly long stretch of road lined with jute but without a person or a village in sight, I asked Mr. Salam how people figured out whose jute was whose since the jute bunches placed up and down the road were virtually identical. Mr. Salam looked a bit perplexed and said, “People know whose jute is whose – they were the ones who put it there.” Even though his explanation was embarrassingly obvious, I was dissatisfied with his answer. I convinced myself that I had not presented the question clearly enough and that the social dynamics of leaving jute on the road must certainly be more complex than his response. I wondered, for example, what happens if someone

forgets where they put their jute bundles or if there is a dispute over where the jute was placed?

I tried thinking of a new approach. The rural countryside gradually changed until we could only see a few raised hamlets with the rest of the land consisting of rice fields covered in water. A few people could be seen in the distance working in the fields but over the thousands of acres we passed, the fields seemed to be attended only arbitrarily with no discernable boundaries. I queried Mr. Salam a second time, “How is the land marked between different owners? How do people know whose lands is whose?” I thought to myself, how do they know what rice fields belong to whom since they are all covered in water as far as the eye can see? I was confident that my questions would warrant a more nuanced response. Mr. Salam let out a short burst of laughter conveying that he was growing slightly irritated with my line of questioning. “People know whose land is whose” he said. “They have lived on this land their entire lives and know it very well. The people who live here can even tell you which tree belongs to each family.” I tried pressing further, hoping to demonstrate my questions had some merit and asked what happened in the case of land disputes, exchanges, and title transfers. Mr. Salam repeated definitively that “people know whose land is whose” and he turned away to look out his side window, ending our discussion. Again, I was dissatisfied with his answer but I also knew that my questions were quickly exhausting Mr. Salam’s patience. I looked back out over the countryside to try and identify some type of order across the flooded rice fields.

Then I saw the goats. Some of the more fortunate households in Bangladesh raise one or two goats and they are left to graze unfettered along the shoulder of the road. The goats seemed guaranteed to present a more complicated situation than either land or jute. I soon convinced myself that goats were a much better example of what I was trying to understand; certainly, I thought to myself, itinerant goats are difficult for anyone to sort out. I impulsively asked “Mr. Salam, how about the goats? How do people know whose goats are whose?” He turned to me, this time not trying to hide his irritation and said, “They’re their goats! People know which goats are theirs!” I was ashamed at how utterly ignorant my question sounded – of course people know their own goats. I realized that asking Mr. Salam how people know whose goats belong to whom, is similar to me asking a parent how they can identify their own child amongst a crowded playground. The question was ridiculous.

I later recognized what I had been trying to understand was not how the people of Bangladesh know how to make sense of their jute, land, or goats. Rather, what I was trying to ask Mr. Salam was how I could make sense of Bangladeshi countryside – that is, how could *I know* whose goats are whose? As an outsider, the implicit boundaries and orderings in the daily life of the Bangladeshi roadway were anything but obvious to me. And as a sociologist, I was looking for an answer that explained the underlying dynamics of what appeared to me as a puzzling and chaotic mix of household economic activities. I wanted to understand how these behaviors were socially organized and structured within the public space of a Bangladeshi roadway.

What I was seeking from Mr. Salam was an account that would allow me to make sense of what I was seeing in my own terms. In essence, I was asking Mr. Salam to make the roadway activity visible to me. Mr. Salam's explanations of the roadway dynamics, although undeniably correct, were meaningless because they were non-transparent from my perspective. The people who have an everyday and intimate experience of the Bangladeshi countryside are obviously well aware of how their activities and possessions are ordered. Regardless, the fact that the Bangladeshis had their own direct understanding of the roadway activities was not a useful account to an outsider like me with a very different explanatory framework.

Mr. Salam had no obligation to provide me with any further clarification other than what he had given me. I was in fact indebted to Mr. Salam and his organization for facilitating the long trip to visit the project sites. However, one could imagine if I were a representative of an organization who funded a goat husbandry project Mr. Salam's explanations would have been markedly different. "People know whose goats are whose," would not be an acceptable account to give to a donor whose funds had paid for the goats in question. Providing a transparent and meaningful account becomes complicated by the distance of the relationships and the nature of the account required. Mr. Salam's job as an INGO monitoring and evaluation specialist is to construct formal accounts and explanations about similar types of questions that funders and others are interested in, such as: How many households in the village own project-funded goats? What percent of the families in the area are considered poor? How has the nutritional status of families changed after participating in the

funded program? Does raising goats increase a woman's ability to make decisions in her household? In most cases, these questions are accounted for in a way that is transparent and comprehensible to people living outside of Bangladesh and who have very little contact with either the INGOs or the program participants.

The humorous exchange between Mr. Salam and myself illustrates one of the main arguments of this dissertation, namely the nature and appropriateness of an explanation or account is necessarily shaped by the relationship between the account giver and the account receiver. The recent and pervasive calls for accountability within international aid and development make the relational nature of explanations a significant factor in the ability to hold identities and individuals to account. Producing an account is therefore not simply about presenting a correct explanation; accounts need to be appropriate and customized to particular relationships. As a result, this dissertation examines accountability in development through the intersections of knowledge and power. Specifically, how do power relationships shape what is considered appropriate knowledge for an account? And conversely, how do accounts either reproduce or challenge existing asymmetries of power?

### **Seeing Like a Stakeholder**

James Scott's seminal book, "Seeing Like a State" (1998) treats "legibility" as a central problem to statecraft. States have historically used simplified representations of their subjects and territories in order to make them more legible and therefore manageable for planning and governance. In particular, he illustrates disasters



resulting from authoritarian states setting out to make improvements based upon administrative orderings and measurements exclusively focused on their own interests. This requirement for legibility is becoming progressively complex within the field of development, where multiple actors who are invested in the work and outcomes of development projects (i.e., stakeholders) are making divergent and at times conflicting claims for accounts and accountability. Specifically, the relative nature of account giving has implications for transnational organizations and global entities which are increasingly required to demonstrate their accountability commitments to very different types of stakeholders. These organizations are operationally complex in that they involve many actors (e.g., “partners”, public supporters, government bodies, local populations, constituents, private sector actors, etc.) who are all vital elements in the successful execution of their work. These entities are equally politically complex because the legitimacy as both local and global actors is predicated on demonstrating a level of commitment to democratic principles such as consensus and participation which are quite difficult to account for within the organizations’ multi-faceted nature. International development nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) are a particularly good example of how transnational accountability commitments present challenges in producing credible accounts to diverse and at times competing stakeholder groups. INGOs’ organizational legitimacy is explicitly linked to their global civil society status and their ability to act as intermediaries between these divergent groups – from the very poor in the south to wealthy donors in the north. Accordingly, INGOs in development

have a heightened duty to publically demonstrate their multiple accountability commitments in order to secure their legitimacy as important actors in civil society.

Chapter II begins with a theoretical examination of accountability as a modern concept, linking accountability claims to both the affirmation and the regulation of human agency. I argue that accountability is necessarily a political and epistemic practice governing human action through the demands for its representation.

Accountability is defined broadly as the ability of an agent to provide evidence to a principal that credibly demonstrates the principal's interests are being served. I argue that the current use of accountability involves three main assumptions: it is applicable exclusively to human action; it assumes the agent has the freedom to choose and to self-regulate; and the agent can produce an account that serves as credible evidence in verifying his actions are appropriate. The notion that accountability is ultimately about instrumentalizing one party's actions to achieve the interests of another's is introduced and three versions of accountability are discussed based upon the types of relationships between the principal and the agent. The chapter ends discussing how these different types of accountability are often applicable to the same actor, and illustrates this dynamic through looking at INGOs and their multi-directional accountability requirements.

Chapter III and IV focus on two distinct approaches to development currently providing a specific logic to development problems and interventions. These approaches illustrate how specific vertical configurations of accountability are informing what is seen as legitimate measurement and accounts. Chapter III argues

the “Modern Development Enterprise” is an emerging approach which is being promoted through the current discussions of aid effectiveness and development reform. This approach outlines a particular mode of social change that consists of a push towards standardization and good business practices across the sector, including identifying and aligning objectives to be achieved, rationalizing intervention programs, and conceptualizing desired change in the form of ‘results’. Development as seen through the enterprise lens, is structuring the focus of funder interests, the types of knowledge needed to demonstrate these interests, and ultimately the upwards accountability relationships with those who receive funding and implement development interventions. Chapter IV, “People-Centered Approaches” examines how the current emphasis on human agency in development, as promoted by the people-centered commitments to participation and empowerment of the poor, has implications for knowledge-based accounts and claims of “downward accountability” by development agencies and INGOs. This focus on human agency, as both the means and the ends for development, drives specific methodological requirements for producing knowledge about poor-peoples’ experiences and measuring people-centered interventions. I argue that the measurement practices and the resulting representations of people-centered interventions function to both constitute and validate the transformation of poor people into modern agents of development.

Chapter V, “Intersections of Accountability” examines how two INGOs are negotiating their diverse accountability requirements from multiple types of stakeholders. The examples are drawn from the same food-security program in

Bangladesh and examine how these specific and varied methodological requirements for measuring the work of development activities plays out in the INGOs' monitoring and evaluation practices. I argue that account-making is not a neutral technical practice, but ties the interests of stakeholders to particular methods of knowledge production in order to create credible accounts. Transparency for accountability is therefore not simply a matter of access to information. It is about producing knowledge that is compatible with the stakeholders' interests and modes of understanding.

### **Methodology**

This dissertation is based upon key informant interviews and field work in Bangladesh conducted with two US international development non-governmental organizations in the summer of 2009. Key informant interviews included INGO staff from the central office, development evaluation practitioners (including consultants), and all levels of staff working in the country offices. The majority of the interviews were semi-structured to allow for unanticipated issues to emerge and for follow-up on relevant issues encountered during the field visits. Twenty-seven of the informant interviews were recorded and transcribed; about twice as many informal interviews and discussions were also conducted and notations recorded along with field notes. I was also able to collect project and organizational information from the field and home offices. The food-security programs and other projects were observed on two field visits outside of Dhaka in the Barisol and Rangpur Districts. All of the INGO

staff I spoke to were functional in English; when interviewing those informants who did not speak English, INGO staff interpreted. The findings from the recorded interviews and field notes were coded and sorted by themes.

## CHAPTER II

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### Accountability as Political and Epistemological Practice

[T]he problem of generating and protecting knowledge is a problem in politics, and, conversely ... the problem of political order always involves solutions to the problem of knowledge (Shapin and Schaffer 1985:21).

In short... accountability is the central issue of our time (Lindenberg and Bryant 2001:209).

Accountability has become a 21<sup>st</sup> century catchphrase evoking the modern tenets of good governance: transparent decision-making, responsible action, efficient use of resources, and tangible progress. Demands for more accountability now traverse every sector of society with the near-universal expectation that governments, corporations, public agencies, and non-profit organizations could work more efficiently and effectively by producing better and more accurate accounts. But similar to other fashionable terms which have become one-word solutions to organizing complex human relations (e.g., leadership, participation, empowerment, entrepreneurship, innovation, etc.) what exactly accountability entails varies profoundly among the many contexts in which the concept is found. Before moving on to detail how expectations for accountability and particular types of accounts are currently manifesting within development, this chapter examines the use of accountability as a form of governance and as a “concept in its site” in order to illuminate the social and political assumptions underlying what it means for modern

actors like INGOs to be held accountable. I want to first “*understand how we think and why we seem obliged to think in certain ways*” about the concept accountability (Somers 1995:113 – original emphasis). This chapter identifies the implicit assumptions contained within the concept of accountability to outline how this form of modern governance organizes relationships, regulation, and human agency through an internal and often embedded logic. I argue that this logic is seen both in the ways the concept of accountability is evoked to organize political/relational obligations and in the methods and forms in which human agency is represented through knowledge-based accounts. In other words, this chapter seeks to illuminate how accountability is necessarily a political and epistemic practice governing human action through the demands for its representation. This discussion approaches accountability broadly using the terms of the classic principal–agent relationship (Eisenhardt 1989) *as the ability of an agent to provide evidence to a principal that credibly demonstrates that the principal’s interests are being served*. As a result, accountability is characterized as intrinsically relational, interest driven, and knowledge-based. The argument is made that the concept of accountability (and especially in the case of INGOs and other development actors) is universally embraced because it addresses the perennial liberal paradox between the necessity for order and control in human relationships without denying the freedom and agency of modern actors.

### **Accountability as a Modern Concept**

The term accountability is commonly defined as: “The quality of being accountable; liability to give account of, and answer for, discharge of duties or conduct;

responsibility, amenableness.” Accountability scholars summed up the concept in relation to governance as a “process for holding actors responsible for their actions” (Fox 2007:28). At its conceptual core, accountability is made up of notions of responsible action and providing a record explaining that action. As an “unsaturated concept” it does not readily designate specific actions that are considered accountable outside of a specific relationship (Lord and Pollak 2010). Yet even as an abstract concept, evoking accountability initiates an embedded relational structure that contains within in it several interlinking assumptions about the nature of modern actors.

First, the concept of accountability is fundamentally about taking responsibility for *human action*. This action can be by individuals or other actors (i.e., organizations, governments, corporations) but in all cases the action is human-originated. In contrast, animals are not held accountable for their actions, natural elements such as the ocean and the rain are not asked to account for natural disasters, nor are there demands that inanimate substances such as oxygen atoms become more accountable for their tendency to oxidize other elements. These counter examples (i.e., animals, environment, and chemical reactions) are often discussed in the context of accountability, although never as the initiators of action, but rather as the outcomes or effects of human action which can be accounted for (e.g., species extinction, global warming, and nuclear disasters). Accountable action is exclusive to humans, and only those humans considered free and rational actors with the capacity to be responsible. For example, in most cases young children are not liable for their actions nor are



those who are unable to answer for their behavior because they are intellectually or emotionally challenged. Consequently, deploying the concept of accountability decidedly signals that the actions of concern are a result of human agency. For the purposes of this discussion, agency is defined as the power to realize one's own interests and actions in a way that achieves some change or impact on the world. That is, human agents are also causal agents who have the ability to translate their interests and desires into strategic activities which in turn can impact themselves, other actors, and their environments. Thus the concept of accountability is made necessary by the ability of human actors to affect change, including facilitating or frustrating the agency of other actors. The interface between multiple human actors as causal agents is the crux of the accountability concept. Said another way, without the presumption of human agency, holding actors responsible for their actions is meaningless.

A second root assumption embedded within the concept of accountability is essentially the expectation that human agents can and will *self-regulate* their own actions. This type of governance is qualitatively different than other forms of control and discipline in that it is an alternative to the direct subordination of actors to external authorities (Foucault 1997; Rose 1999). Calling for accountability signifies that actors are capable of rational and purposeful behavior, and that actors can decide whether “acting responsibly” is their own decision. In other words, by calling actors to account, their agency is unavoidably and unquestionably recognized. Likewise, an actor who is labeled unaccountable is assumed to be *choosing* not to provide an account, in contradistinction to an innate or immutable characteristic of the actor

(through direct refusal or passive omission). The concept infers that *the ability to account is essentially possible* through appeals to, and the execution of, human agency. As a result, the notion of accountability contains within it a modern dialectic – holding actors accountable explicitly affirms their free agency while at the same time regulating their agency.

Lastly, while the term is often used interchangeably with holding someone responsible (e.g., holding a person accountable for their crimes) the concept of accountability goes beyond simply acting responsibly; it is also about the ability to verify the agent behaved appropriately through some form of *representation* (i.e., an account). Accountability is a “second-order” responsibility that obligates actors to act *and* to produce credible evidence their actions were appropriate. Accounts are used to explain and/or demonstrate human action which in most cases, is not directly witnessed, experienced, or comprehensible. The ability to create an account becomes increasingly more relevant as the experiential distance between accountor (actor giving the account) and accountee (actor receiving the account) grows. Thus, the concept of accountability suggests a relationship where direct observation and verification of human action is either not possible or feasible.

These embedded conceptual principles configure modern actors’ accountability relationships into a specific logical framework that allows for both control and the freedom to exercise human agency. The ability to account becomes indispensable within complex relationships formed independently of external authority, compulsion, or tradition. Associations characterized by direct and personal

contact do not require the same type of verification of actions and demonstrated responsibility in order to establish trust among actors. The classic *Gemeinschaft* associations (e.g., families, clans) have little need for formal accounting practices and explanation of action through representation – in most cases these types of relationships share similar goals and their actions are apparent and visible within their daily experience. (The village life in the Bangladeshi countryside discussed in the introduction is an example of these types of associations). Alternatively, the modern move towards associations formed to achieve specific instrumental purposes, often taking place over wide distances and within complex chains of action, heavily rely on the notion of accountability to secure the terms of relationships and regulate actors who have divergent interests in relation to those purposes. Thus, the instrumental goals of the accountability relationships become the regulating parameters of the actors in order to reduce the risk of shirking or abuse. As a result, the concept of accountability provides flexibility in negotiating relationships between human actors that come from remote contexts with few (or no) shared experiences – either physical space, experiential, identity, needs, etc.

### **Instrumentalizing Human Agency**

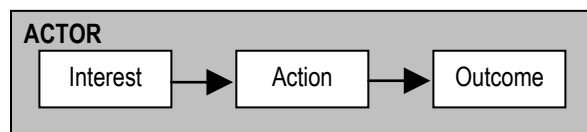
An accountability relationship is a relationship where one party... delegates a task to another party...for the achievement of some desirable ends... In delegating this task, the first party (the principal) is now dependent on the second party (the agent) to achieve the desired results (Benjamin 2008b:324).

The relational nature of accountability not only negotiates and configures human interactions; it also organizes the composition of multiple actors with in a particular

plane of activity (Bourdieu 1977). An accountability relationship essentially frames the action of one party within the interests of another. The concept of accountability is consequently about instrumentalizing one party's action to achieve another's agency. Again, because accountable action is necessarily agential action, it theoretically inserts the accountant's agency within the execution of the accountee's agency. Agency consists of the power to generate one's interests into a desired change or impact on the world – in many cases, the agency of an actor is dependent upon the action of others to achieve this desired change.

The ways in which this instrumentalization manifests is best illustrated when agency is thought of in terms of a simple causal process between the interests, actions, and results of human actors (again, an actor can be an individual or a human organization). Clearly, all human action is not rational nor does it necessarily occur in a linear sequence (Weber 1978). But based on the principle accountability is only relevant to rational and responsible actors, a heuristic model of agency can be used to illustrate the ways in which human agencies intersect within accountability relationships. The notion of accountability frames human agency as a causal process that presumes actors have the ability to form independent interests, the freedom to take action according to those interests, and that their actions have the power to transform (See Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Causal Nature of Agency**



Treating agency as a sequence of these three moments – interests, actions, and outcomes – helps illuminate exactly how accountability relates to multiple types of human actors. An accountability relationship is one that frames one actor’s actions (commonly referred to as the “agent”) in terms of another’s interests (the “principal”), or put another way, accountability configures the interaction of agencies so that the agent’s actions are instrumental to achieving the principal’s interests. Thus, the principal’s agency (the ability to bring about conditions in the world according to her interests) is made possible by the actions of the agent. Again, the basic principles within the concept of accountability assume that the agent is making the choice to act in a way that is, or is not, aligned to the principal’s interests. While an agent’s power to transform the world (i.e., agency) is being instrumentalized, it is not the same as saying the agent is being forced to submit to the interests of the principal or that his actions are being extracted from his agency in order to be instrumentalized. This would mean that the principal is coercing the agent, and thus the claim to accountability would be moot. Consequently, accountability is about regulating the agency of agents in order to execute the principal’s interests. Likewise, the demand to hold human agents accountable implicitly refutes the implication that they are also being subjugated.

This instrumentalization of human agency through appeals to accountability is seen in the ways in which the concept has been used and how different forms of accountability emphasize particular moments within this causal chain of human

agency. The term accountability originally appeared in reference to financial transactions and contracts, especially in the context of parties without established relationships or “face to face” interactions that could serve as a basis of trust. These relationships began to use formal contracts to delineate responsibilities in terms of particular purposes. In contrast to ascribed relationships, the focus of these transactional relationships was on parties’ responsibilities in terms of the contract, i.e., the purpose of the relationship. The practice and profession of accounting, from which the concept of accountability is derived, allowed for objective and expert parties to verify that the specific conditions of contracts were met and that transactions were fair and honest. Thus the creation of formal accounts—knowledge-based evidence that measured the parties’ actions and performance— served as a governing mechanism between parties that were not otherwise obligated to each other through embedded social relationships.

Accordingly, the concept of accountability within the private sector is most often formulated through the designation of a principal (e.g., business owner, stakeholder) and an agent (e.g., employee, CEO) so that the agent can demonstrate that they have acted in the interests of the principal. Securing these types of principal-agent relationships is one of the key issues within the discipline of economics and is often referred to as “the problem of agency.” Much effort has gone into formulating remedies for those contracts where the agents’ interests do not align directly with those of the principals’ or in cases where agents and principals have different attitudes towards risk (Eisenhardt 1989). Accounting systems are intended to address

the inability of the principal to continuously observe and evaluate the agent's actions and the resulting asymmetry of information between the parties. It is assumed that agents will always give their own self-interests priority within any transaction and, consequently, the goal of accountability is to not remove self-interests, but rather to provide incentives for agents to choose to align their actions to the principal's interests (i.e., act responsibly). However, there are always costs associated with agent surveillance, verification, and the production of accounts (information is considered a commodity in this view) and therefore the principal needs to balance the cost of accountability mechanisms with the risk of agent self-interest and opportunism. The focus is on regulating agents' actions through their ability to make the choice to act responsibly and not by direct force.

The concept of accountability is also associated with public life, most specifically in relation to institutions and "those charged with the public trust and the citizenry" (Fox 2007:28). A democratic government gains its sovereignty and legitimacy through the support of its citizenry and its ability to represent and realize the public's interests. However, most citizens do not have a personal relationship with their individual representatives nor can they directly monitor the actions of the state throughout their extensive and complex public agencies. Citizens also do not have the time or the expertise to follow the actions of state representatives and structures, and generally trust that elected representatives and public servants will be acting responsibly because they share the same interests of those that they represent. That is, the traditional view of political representatives was seen as a literal proxy for the

public who stood in place of those they represented. Public representatives and officials were accountable (and electable) based upon their perceived alignment with the interests of the public. For example, even today elected representatives are required to come from a particular region, district, or state, and the US president must be born in the country with the intention that identity will be some guarantee particular set of interests will be represented/pursued. Citizens are free to pursue the details of their own lives because public officials and agencies work in a fiduciary capacity towards their *shared* best interests.

That is, shared identity between the principal and agent serves as a proxy indicator of mutual interests. Fiduciary responsibility is consequently assigned to agents with similar identities with the intention that agents will share similar goals and objectives with their principals and therefore act in their best interests. The accountability relationship remains instrumental between the principals (public) and the agents (elected officials), but the focus of this relationship is on the agent's first moment of agency—the alignment of interests. This notion of aligned interests made distinctions between the public and private sectors mandatory in order that public officials would not be corrupted by conflicting interests.

The focus of public accountability shifted in the 1980s as Western democratic states began to embrace the principles of what is known as New Public Management (NPM). The older mode of administration used hierarchical systems of bureaucracy to ensure responsible action and to limit the malfeasance and opportunism of public servants. This new model of management promised more organizational autonomy



and flexibility by demanding that public entities be accountable to their actions rather than through formal regulatory mechanisms found in top-down management structures. NPM focused on standardized levels of performance and individual unit accountability, emulating the configuration of accountability in the private sector. That is, the emphasis on NPM shifted from directly aligning interests of public agents to the degree in which their actions fit within clearly articulated and measurable goals.

This shift from interests to actions within the public sector served as a go-around for two problems confronting classic democratic governance. First, verifying the interests of agents is extremely difficult and using identity and association to confirm accountability is often unreliable. For example, a congressman may be highly motivated to secure benefits for the constituents in his district, but this does not exclude the possibility that he may also be using his position to secure financial benefits for himself. As a result, actions are much more observable, representable, and an overall more reliable indicator of responsible action. Second, the shift from representing identity to actions avoided the need to negotiate between competing interests within a pluralistic public. As such, agencies can be held accountable to rational action tied to explicit, technical goals rather than tasked with identifying what exactly are the public interests that should be represented, and how the agent relates to these interests. In complex modern societies there is rarely a simple consensus on what constitutes the “public good” and as such, focusing on actions as rational means to achieve technical ends, avoids the political problem of representing principals with

conflicting interests. Similar to the private sector, NPM provides a rationale to basically dismiss the identity or interests of public servants based upon the focus on actors' ability to perform the prescribed tasks. NPM realigned public fiduciary accountability into one that represented transactional accountabilities concern with actions, rather than interests or identity. Consequently, the new importance placed on transactional accountability within NPM provided the justification for challenging the need for a clear separation between the public and private sectors. It no longer mattered who operated as public agents, the real question was which agents could operate the most effectively and efficiently. Through a shift to transactional accountability, the identity and interests of the public agents have lost much of their significance and the "work" of the public sector as seen as can be easily taken over by the private agents who can be more easily held accountable to their actions (i.e., through competition).

To review, the most common configurations of accountability found in the private and the public sectors generally focus on the first two moments of human agency. Fiduciary accountability traditionally seen in the public sector relies on the identity of the agent as an indicator to his alignment with the interest of the principal (i.e., the public). Trust within these relationships comes from the assumption that if the agent and principal share similar identities, their interests will be represented and appropriate actions and outcomes will follow. The second configuration, transactional accountability, is most notably found in the private sector but now is increasingly found within the public and nonprofit sectors, and concentrates on the actions or

performance of the agents. Trust is established in transactional accountability relationships through explicit performance expectations that are strategically tied to the principal's interests and objectives. The agents' actions become proscribed and measured through targets, while the identity and interests of the agents become increasingly irrelevant. However, in both of these versions of accountability, the outcomes of the agents' actions—the results of the principal/agent relationship—still remain conceptually tied to the agent.

The most recent trend in accountability is a shift in focus from the second to the third moment of human agency—from the specific actions of agents, to the change or effects that their actions accomplish. In other words, “effect” accountability is concerned about the degree and quality of change produced in the world through an agent's actions. Increasingly, accountability is not about who agents are, nor their interests or what they do, but about the degree of “impact” they can make. This emphasis placed on the change agents produce maximizes the flexibility and freedom of both the agents and the principals. Principals in effect-accountability relationships do not have to be as diligent in monitoring agent activities as it is the responsibility of the agents to optimize their actions to produce the greatest results. That is, the actions of the agents become less relevant to the accountability commitments than do the final results, meaning that instead of the continuous oversight and regulation of agents' actions, the principal can pick one or several points in time to hold the agent accountable through measuring the change resulting from their actions. As a result, effect accountability reduces the principal's costs for holding agents accountable.

Likewise, without the constant oversight of prescribed actions, agents are free to experiment and create the best strategies to achieve the greatest results. Agents are no longer tied to designated activities and to continuously demonstrating their accountability, but can instead focus their energy and resources in providing the “greatest bang for the buck.” Regulation is often cast as the enemy of innovation, and both the principal and the agents are freed in effect-accountability relationships to pursue the greatest impact.

This emphasis on the last moment of human agency helps to address the modern problem in demonstrating causation in complex accountability chains. While a principal may rely on an agent to carry out her interests, it is not to say that those interests exclusively come from a single accountability relationship. That is, actors frequently have multiple accountability relationships and may use agents to fulfill their own obligations to other principals (e.g., sub-contracting). For example, the national aid agencies function as principals when they use INGOs and contractors to implement their program agendas. Yet these aid agencies are also accountable to the publics in which their funding is generated, which mean they are also simultaneously operating as agents. The problem arises to how these organizations can be accountable to their publics for the complicated array of activities conducted through their agents. By focusing on the results of actions, the funders can take the aggregate activity of agents and present it as the meta-results of their *own* agency. That is, principals often need to be accountable to their own set or principals, and must also demonstrate that they have successfully fulfilled their own obligations. Conversely,

the focus on impacts also allows for actors to be held accountable for unintended impacts resulting from their actions which impact others in negative and harmful ways (e.g., dam construction). In these cases, both actors and principals can be held responsible for the change that they have created through their agency, despite the fact it may have been unintentional.

Thus, accountability configures the intersections of agencies through a causal process; however, different types of accountability relationships emphasize different aspects of this causal chain for which agents are held accountable.

### **Reducing Dependency and Risk**

If actors had no ability to influence one another, or if they could achieve all their interests independently, there would be no need for accountability. Without the possibility of one actor harming or helping another, the concept of accountability is irrelevant. The need to regulate through accountability relationships arises because the principal's well-being and ability to execute their own agency is dependent upon the agency of others. Or put another way, the principal is unable to fulfill her agency without agents acting in her interests. This dependency and reliance between actors as a precondition of executing individual agency is often submerged under the rhetoric of responsibility and risk. Again, this intersection of agency is often treated as a linear causal process in which principals and agents enter into a relationship freely, intentionally, and rationally. Calling for accountability is one way in which principals can reduce the risk of non-cooperative agents by ensuring they demonstrate

responsible action. The principal's dependency on an agent and the overall risk can be further diminished as the focus of accountability is pushed farther down the causal chain. For example, in fiduciary accountability the principal must locate agents who share the same identity (i.e., interests) in order to execute their agency. A principal can hypothetically dismiss an agent that is not accountable, but she must choose another agent from a similar pool of candidates whose interests may also remain unverifiable. In transactional accountability, the principal has the ability to compare agents on the basis of their performance which allows the principal to choose the best agent and reduce the risk of agent shirking. The identity of the agents is comparably irrelevant which allows for the principal to more easily replace unaccountable agents. The ability to compare performance similarly brings in the element of competition between agents, so that agents are not only motivated to be accountable to the principals' interests, but also to out-perform their potential replacements. As a result, transactional accountability still involves a general reliance upon agents, but does not tie principals to particular relationships or groups of agents upon which they must depend. In the case of effect accountability, the agent himself is almost insignificant to the principal; rather it is the nature of the produced effects which are given the most importance. In shifting the focus of what agents are held accountable for, principals open up the possibilities for all types of configurations of causality/agency, reduce risk, and maximize the likelihood that their agency will successfully be executed.

The ability to hold agents accountable farther down the causal chain in essence increases the degree of fungibility in the principal's ability to instrumentalize the agent's agency. Principals still must use agents to achieve their desired goals and impacts, yet configuring accountability in way that stresses the later points of agency/causality, principals gain the maximum ability to reduce their dependency from any particular agent and they increase assurances that they will successfully make their desired changes in the world (i.e., execute their own agency). While this point is rarely acknowledged directly, its importance is illustrated when considering why the concepts of effectiveness, efficiency, and impact almost always accompany the concept of accountability in its current usages in modern governance. In short, these three concepts are only relevant to accountability in the context of alternatives; alternatives or choices manifest in terms of the principal-agent relationship in two ways. First, these concepts assume an agent can alter his behavior in ways that can influence his results; or put another way, there is a range of possible actions that an *agent can choose* that can lead to a variety of results. Second, these concepts can infer that a *principal can choose* from a range of agents, which can in turn also lead to a variety of results. If the same agents always produced the same actions or all possible agents produced equal effects, the issue of accountability (as well as effectiveness and impact) would be moot. Thus, uncertainty, variability, and ultimately risk are at the root of human agency and are the conditions that make accountability relevant to relationships. Said another way, evoking the concept of accountability refutes the possibility of deterministic action as well as a stable causal sequence because the

instrumentalization of human agency must always allow for the possibility of alternatives, i.e., choice. Likewise, discussing efficiency, effectiveness, and impact is applicable to accountability only because there is an assumption that there is the ability to intervene and make choices at different moments in human actions, or agency. A counter-example of this would be a controlled chemical reaction whereby a causal relationship between elements is predictable and the results of the reaction are replicable. In this context, accountability is not appropriate because there are no choices involved within the causal sequence— human agency is not involved in producing the results (aside from the construction of the experimental conditions). It follows that concepts of impact and effectiveness are almost synonymous with the evaluation of alternatives as there needs to be a possibility of replaceable and interchangeable moments of human agency in order for competition to exist.

## **Directionalities of Power and Dependency**

Accountability is about the conduct and performance of an individual, a group, or an organization, and how they are assessed. Accountability then is about power, authority, and ownership — and defines the relationship between actors through identifying who can call whom to account, and who owes a duty of explanation and rectification by defining the lines and directions of accountability the distribution of power is also defined (Kilby 2006:953).

Up to this point, accountability has been discussed as a concept in its site that configures the interaction of human agency in specific ways. Agency has been treated as a series of moments in a causal sequence and different types of accountability have been identified which stress different points in this process (i.e., fiduciary,



transactional, and effect). As noted above, accountability relationships are highly relational, formed among actors who are already deeply embedded within multiple associations and existing power structures. Although discussing accountability in terms of principals and agents can illustrate how the concept broadly signals that one human actor is using another to fulfill or to protect their interests, it does not address how these actors are situated in their experiential worlds.

It is easiest to see how power shapes accountability relationships by looking at how it manifests in a concrete context. For example, INGO accountability almost exclusively treats INGOs as agents to their multiple stakeholders. That is, INGO stakeholders are almost always principals who have the right to hold the INGO accountable. The nature of these relationships varies considerably depending upon the size of the organization, the countries in which it works, the focus and sector of its activities, its funding structures, and so on. The INGO Accountability Charter for example, identifies ten disparate stakeholder groups ranging from “future generations” to the “ecosystem” to “the general public” (CIVICUS 2005). Nevertheless, if INGO accountability relationships are looked at from the standpoint that they are shaped by different configurations of power (Weisband and Ebrahim 2007), there are three basic power directionalities that emerge within the accountability discourse. First, INGOs are upwardly accountable to those stakeholders upon whom they are to some degree dependent — typically funders, states, and binding regulatory bodies. Second, INGOs are also expected to demonstrate downward accountability to those stakeholders who rely on the services

and work of the INGO to meet their needs and improve their lives. Relationships with local “partner” NGOs, communities, and individuals are all shaped by notions of downward accountability. In addition to operating among these vertical power configurations, INGO must establish horizontal accountability towards stakeholders who share the same organizational vision. The primary horizontal relationships are within the INGO itself, its staff and volunteers (i.e., internal stakeholders), but may also include other international and national NGOs and the broader community of development practitioners and scholars (i.e., external stakeholders).

In theory, all of these accountability relationships are characterized by the stakeholders’ dependency upon the INGOs as agents to carry out and protect their interests—as noted above, the instrumentalization of agency is what makes the concept of accountability relevant. However, in looking at how power is actually distributed between these different stakeholders, it is evident that they are characterized by directionalities of power which are inversely proportional to the degree of dependency between the principals (stakeholders) and agents (INGOs). *Said another way, the party most dependent upon the accountability relationship has the least amount of power within it.* For example, while development funders rely on INGOs to carry out their strategic missions in health, education, and economic development, INGOs rely upon funders’ resources to operate their organizations. INGOs in the main are non-profit and do not have independent sources of income so they must continually court funders in order to achieve their own missions. That is, a funder can much more easily replace INGOs than an INGO can turn down a funder.

Accordingly, funders often demand formal accounts from INGOs as a precondition of their support. Thus, when principals use actors to execute their agency in upward accountability relationships they are not dependent upon any specific actor, and therefore have the ability to enforce sanctions or terminate the accountability relationship with comparably little harm to their interests. Conversely, in downwards accountability relationships the principals (local communities) are doubly dependent upon their agents because they not only rely on the work of the INGO, they also have little ability to impose sanctions or terminate the relationships. Families and individuals in developing countries, for example, rarely have the ability to refuse the services of INGOs because in most cases there is no other NGO or organization that has the ability to replace them (regardless if they are effective, equitable, or efficient). As a result, downwards stakeholders, while technically the principals in the accountability relationship, have little power to demand accounts or compliance due to their high level of dependency.

Horizontal accountability relationships are less characterized by imbalances of power and dependency and more distinguished by the formation of identities and the expected performance of an agent's agency. External horizontal accountability relationships are often between professional or other identity-based coalitions which seek to recognize and self-regulate what is considered appropriate behavior and ethics for similar types of organizations. InterAction and Civicus are example of these types of organizations which form horizontal accountability relationships among their members; they are not so much interested in accomplishing tasks but in achieving and

maintaining a type of identity through their actions. Internal accountability (i.e., between employees and an organization's mission) is also primarily about identity through expected performance. Of course in both of these cases, the principals articulate an identity while the agents are necessarily literally embodying these missions and interests. Thus, there is not a notable difference between the principals and agents as the power and dependencies are more or less equally distributed.

### **Transparency of Accounts**

As mentioned above, central to the concept of accountability is the potential to provide an account which verifies that the principal's interests are being served. That is, the ability to represent an agent's interests, actions, or outcomes is central to holding an agent accountable. Account-making is not a uniform practice in content or method—the criteria for what constitutes a credible, legible, and ultimately transparent account are largely determined by the nature of the accountability relationship and its directionality of power. Transparency, like accountability, is particularly relevant in those relationships in which an agent's behavior is not directly experienced, or whose actions are difficult to comprehend given their scope or complexity. Transparency has a much different implication for intimates or relationships which have little experiential distance between them. As a result, what may be an understandable, logical, or credible account to one principal may not necessarily be transparent to other parties or even the agent himself. That is, in order for an account to be transparent for accountability purposes, it must explain, verify, or

represent an agent in relation to a particular principal's interests. An account is necessarily framed by the principal's interests and specific responsibilities of the agent within that relationship. As a result, an account becomes a narrow representation of an agent's actions shaped through the interests, instrumental logic, and perspectives of the principal.

Likewise, the types of explanations and methods used in account-making are usually determined by the nature of the accountability relationship and how it is configured through the distribution of power. While this connection between knowledge and power has been foregrounded by many scholars (e.g., Foucault 1980; Jasanoff 1998; Rose 1999), Charles Tilly illustrates the relative nature of account-making most directly in his argument that the acceptability of explanations "depends on their match with the social relations that prevail between the giver and the receiver" (2006:26). That is, the measurements, methods, and other knowledge-generating practices INGOs use to demonstrate accountability to their diverse stakeholders will "vary dramatically with the equality, inequality, and intimacy or distance of the relationship" (Tilly 2006:45). Thus, the type of account given is not only an indicator of the power distribution within the relationship, account-making is a site in which the relationship between the account-giver and the account-receiver (e.g., INGOs and funders) is established, repaired, or even contested (Ebrahim 2003; Tilly 2006).

Tilly notes that "upward" relationships demand an account that either explains conformity to existing standardized codes (financial procedures, project performance,

legal obligations) or a technical account that uses specialized disciplines, credible evidence, and the proper technical procedures to identify an empirical causal relationship (econometrics, social science, medicine) (2006). In contrast, accounts given through “downward” relationships adhere more to local conventions and etiquette for routine explanations (informal interaction) or provide a truncated causal relationship through stories of specific actors and individual responsibility (e.g., presenting project findings to village council or PTA). In brief, accounts that flow upward are characterized by technical, expert, and standardized knowledge, while those that flow downward are made up of socially contingent, intimate, and experiential forms of knowledge. As a result, accounts and knowledge are transparent and comprehensible in relation to a particular point of view. Representations of agency are also presented in a particular frame of reference, to make an agent transparent and comprehensible to principal who is a distant “other.” Said another way, an account may not necessarily be transparent or intelligible to the agent being represented in order that it is so for a principal who is distant and experiential removed. In the case of INGOs, their complex accountability commitments often require multiple representations of their work in order that it may be transparent to multi-directional stakeholders.

### **Regulating through Representation**

The purpose of representation within accountability is to control or regulate the agency of actors. In many cases, principals and agents have little or no direct contact with each other, and it is through knowledge-based representations that accountability

relationships are defined, evaluated, and negotiated. Thus, while the concept of accountability orders how the agency of actors intersects, it is through the medium of account-making that the relationship actually takes place. The significance of representation and knowledge to modern oversight, auditability, and regulation has been explored through a number of well-known works elucidating how different forms of knowledge construct the conditions and objects of governance. For example, Scott's *Seeing Like a State* details how upward types of knowledge are a prerequisite for modern states in their large-scale social and environmental planning and interventions (1998). Scott argues that this knowledge or "way of seeing" overcomes the main challenge of statecraft by transforming "what was a social hieroglyph into a legible and administratively more convenient format" (Scott 1998:3). Likewise, Scott and others explore how states rely on formal and technical knowledge to make their populations, resources, and land "calculable" (Ferguson 1998; Mitchell 1988, 2002; Porter 1995; Power 1997). Thus, this type of administrative knowledge necessarily "reformats" a field of understanding through abstraction and quantification to allow for comparisons, equivalences, and standardizations of both entities (individuals, populations, countries, organizations) and their activities (averages, norms, "standard deviations") (Hacking 1990; Porter 1995). While this type of knowledge is most useful in terms of the "upward" interests, the resulting representations are a much simpler reality which is practically unrecognizable by those it aims to signify (Scott 1998). Consequently, this particular view "from above" constructs people, countries, and environments as discrete objects that can be tracked, rationalized, improved, and

otherwise manipulated. The reliance on quantifiable, abstract knowledge by states and other powerful entities not only serves a pragmatic management function, it also operates as a “technology of distance” in replacing the need for intimate knowledge and trust in an accountability relationship (Porter 1995).

In the case of account making, this distant perspective does not simply reflect a static reality; the objects of accounting—the agents and organizations themselves—must necessarily be changed to become observable, auditable, and verifiable (Power 1997). The ability to account requires a reordering of agents to allow for activity to be measured, observed, and represented; the state of being accountable “is never purely neutral in its operations: it will operationalize accountability relations in distinctive ways, not all of which may be desired or intended” (Power 1997:13). Consequently, demanding an agent to account translates into a form of regulation that typically appears self-directed because it requires an internalization and restructuring of the agent in order to produce the types of knowledge required to become accountable. This reorganization is frequently based upon abstract management plans or quality assurance systems which are based upon categories, performance standards, and targets intended to make explicit and visible the components of complex activity (e.g., new public management, results-based management, etc.). As a result,

instead of regulation seeking to penetrate organizational culture from the outside, the image proffered is more that of a form of self-control embodied in the [accountability] system extending its visibility beyond the organization. *The externalization of internal control and the internalization of external controls are not longer clearly distinguishable* (Power 1997:63 - my emphasis).



Similarly, the production of information through these types of accountability systems allow for principals to qualify what is desirable behavior and to develop expectations for achievement. Thus standards, norms, and averages inform the behavior of agents and provide a guide for their own expectations and provide a basis for self-corrections. Evoking accountability can be thought of as a form of indirect governance that operates in the same way as Foucault's "technologies of the self" in which agents must represent themselves as responsible actors, defined within the instrumental interests of the principal. "Technologies of the agent" reinforce the agency of the agent by emphasizing his ability to choose whether or not to be responsible and accountable. In this way accountability is the process of "responsibilization" par excellence in which a particular set of actions and identities is labeled as correct, effective, or otherwise optimal and it is seemingly up to the agents to choose appropriate courses of action (Foucault 1997). Thus, agents are governed by being presented with a narrow range of actions that if chosen, will allow for their ability to represent themselves as responsible and good agents.

### **Representing Agency: Ownership and attribution**

An accountability relationship is about one party being dependent upon another to fulfill or protect their interests. The ability of an individual to pursue her life's interests, for example, depends upon public agencies that keep her physical environment safe, orderly, and fair. Likewise, employers rely upon their employees to conduct specific tasks in order to sustain their businesses and generate a profit.

Accountability is intrinsically about the interdependency between human actors and complex action. Human actors have the ability to affect their world and each other, yet are unavoidably dependent on others to do so. This embedded dynamic within the concept of accountability necessarily problematizes the liberal notion of the individual and freedom. How do we understand fundamentally free, independent, and agential actors if they are also necessarily dependent upon others? That is, in order to hold an agent accountable they must “own” the moment(s) within the causal chain (i.e., interests, actions, and outcomes) in which their particular type of accountability is focused. However, the point of the accountability relationship is to fulfill the agency of the principal; in theory it is the principal who “owns” the causal sequence (i.e., the outcomes) because they came about through the implementation of her interests. So which actor can ultimately claim ownership the results of the accountability relationship? Which actor’s agency is attributed with changing or impacting the world? How are these agencies represented within the causal process?

This tension regarding accountability-agency, ownership-attribution is seen in the field of international development where the particular focus for change is in the day-to-day lives of people in Southern, poor countries. Development projects seek to alter the behavior, beliefs, organizations, environments, and bodies of individuals who also have their own individual (and collective) agency. Development activities work through complex chains of actors which include funders, governments, INGOs, local groups, and politicians, etc. The lines of accountability and ownership become easily blurred. Accordingly, development actors are faced with the challenge of “who

is the principal” in development, or whose interests are development agencies working towards? Development discourse routinely focuses on all three of the causal moments in which targeted communities in poor countries should play a role. People-centered development assigns poor people as the principals whose *interests* should inform and direct how development happens in their countries and communities. Emphases on “empowerment” and entrepreneurial development want poor people to be the direct *actors* and agents of social change. And finally, “scientific” and “evidence-based” development emphasizes technical intervention strategies in which poor people are themselves indicators of a planned result (e.g., lower birth rates, higher incomes, greater knowledge). Consequently, in representing development interventions, poor people are cast as both the principals and the agents as well as being the source of interests, actions, and results in “how development happens.” The ways in which poor people and development actors (funders, INGOs, southern governments, etc.) are represented through various forms of knowledge and accounts reshapes and configures accountability relationships and obligations among them.

### **Depoliticizing Development/Obscuring Agency**

While development projects necessarily involve the intersections of numerous human actors and complex accountability chains, development strategies almost always favored technical and strictly causal representations of their activities. Ferguson’s classic study on development projects in Lethoso illustrates how fundamentally political and administrative decisions are routinely transformed into strictly technical problems with scientific and rational solutions (1998). As a result, this framing of

development and the resulting knowledge serves as a transformative technology; it constructs the target of development (people, countries, resources) “as a particular kind of object of knowledge, and creates a structure of knowledge around that object” (1998:xiv). In many cases, political decisions become the exclusive domain of outside “technical experts” whose credibility is derived through their objectivity, not their participation or experience with the people or activities they are tasked to understand (Mitchell 2002; Porter 1995). Thus, the subjective “interests” of actors are largely stripped out of the intervention schema and replaced by external and “objective” authorities of science, expertise, or numbers. That is, the interests of the development principals (e.g., aid agencies, funders, governments) as well as their agents (e.g., INGOs, contractors, development planners) are omitted from development representations/knowledge, not to mention the erasure of any interests of those populations who are being “developed.” Through these productions of knowledge, development is transformed into a purely causal process in which human agency only makes an appearance in the role of technical agent/project facilitator. The interests of the principals are represented as rational, empirical goals under which all development actors are to be conscripted. Nevertheless, this does not mean that all interests, politics, and power are also removed from development activities. Development continues to be framed by the perspectives and interests of the powerful; “Their problem is to find the right kind of problem; the kind of ‘problem’ that requires the ‘solution’ they are there to provide” (Ferguson 1998:70).

The proliferation of this upward perspective of development has been attributed to the chronic failure of large-scale development and state projects, and scholars have juxtaposed this way of seeing and representing development with the idiomatic and experiential knowledge of the individuals targeted for the development interventions. However, the exclusion of local knowledge from development projects is not simply a technical oversight of failing to gather enough information.

Downward accounts of development often remain outside of the boundaries of official strategies and plans largely because a shift in the directionality of knowledge necessarily requires incorporation, or at least an acknowledgement, of very different and potentially conflicting sets of interests. Thus, in contrast to objective, standardized, and expert upward knowledge, a downward account is fashioned through situated, local knowledge directly relevant and legible to those who are receiving it. Downward accounts require the understanding of, and experience with, the embedded relationships and histories of the intervention context and represent “*partisan* knowledge as opposed to generic knowledge. That is, the holder of such knowledge typically has a passionate interest in a particular outcome” (Scott 1998:318). Downward accounts require the recognition of differences — not only, for example, between the interests of the development INGO and the program participants, but also among the categories of program participants themselves (differences in gender, class, ethnicity, regions, religions, etc.). In this way, the epistemological requirements for downward accountability are explicitly political and inevitably contentious (Kabeer 1994: 90).

## **The Problem of Modern Action and Accountability**

The problem of converting the actions of individual persons into legitimate public actions without denying the integrity and autonomy of the actors can be regarded as the liberal-democratic problem of action (Ezrahi 1990:150).

In this chapter I have sought to demonstrate how accountability is both a political and epistemic practice which configures modern actors in ways that both affirm and limit their freedom and agency. As a “concept in its site,” accountability involves three main assumptions: first, that the actors in the relationship have the freedom to exercise agency; second, that the actors can self-regulate their actions; and third, their obligation goes beyond acting responsibly to also providing evidence by representing their actions in a way that verifies they are responsible actors.

I then explore how accountability relationships represent the intersections of agencies and suggest that this dynamic can be characterized as a simple causal sequence between interest, actions, and results. I argue that evoking the concept of accountability frames an agent within the interests and goals of the principal, in a way that basically instrumentalizes the agent’s agency in order to achieve the principal’s agency. How the agent is instrumentalized depends upon which moment in the causal chain is given the most weight in terms of what the agent must account for (e.g., fiduciary-accountability = interests; transactional-accountability = actions; effect-accountability = results). Shifting the accountability obligation to later in the causal chain introduces more choice and fungibility into the accountability relationship for the principal and thereby reduces the degree to which they are dependent upon a

particular agent. In the case of INGOs which have multi-directional accountability obligations, the distribution of power within their relationships is inversely proportional to the degree of dependency on the relationship (i.e., the accountability emphasis in the causal chain). Thus, INGOs typically have fiduciary-accountability relationships with their downwards stakeholders and transactional- and effect-accountability relationships with their upward stakeholders.

One way in which the agent is instrumentalized is through the production of accounts. Accounts must represent the agent in a way that is transparent, understandable, and credible to the principal and, as such, the resulting knowledge is shaped through the interests and perspective of the principal. In the case of most modern accountability relationships that are characterized by large experiential distances, accounts must be constructed through quantitative, abstract, expert, and otherwise “objective” knowledge in order to be appropriate and credible. These accounts/representations, which have been configured through the particular interests of the principals, serve to regulate the agents as they self-correct within the instrumental logic of their principal in order to become more accountable. I point out a fundamental tension within accountability relationships is to whether the agent or the principals claims ownership and attribution for outcomes of the relationship. The agent must “own” his role within the causal process in order to take responsibility, yet it is the principal’s interests which he is instrumentally fulfilling. Development is then introduced as an example of modern activity that involves complex accountability/causal chains and conflicts of agency. Development projects

represented as technical initiatives obscures the interests/agents of all involved and transform social change into a purely causal process (i.e., one that is without interests).



## CHAPTER III

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### The Modern Development Enterprise: Development as Results

Like an enterprise, we're focused on delivering the highest possible value for our shareholders. In this case, the American people and the congressional leaders who represent them.

- Rajiv Shaw, USAID Administrator (2011)

USAID Administrator Shaw presented his new evaluation policy in January 2011, as a key initiative for making “tough-minded” business reforms throughout the agency. The announcement was made during the same week that cost-cutting Republicans released their proposal to slash the agency’s budget and basically annihilate US foreign aid through congressional defunding (Rogin 2011a). While this most recent challenge to USAID ultimately failed, the criticisms and scrutiny over the value of foreign assistance continue to gain momentum by those who question the rationale of spending billions of dollars in developing countries when very little measurable progress has been achieved in the last 50 years (Easterly 2006; Moyo 2009). Mounting questions about the effectiveness of development programs, along with the recent economic downturn among donor nations, have prompted an urgent demand to demonstrate resources are being spent prudently, including assurances that aid will lead to positive and significant change in the lives of poor people around the world. Given these new demands, it is not surprising that Shaw framed his recommitment to

monitoring and evaluation practices as a key strategy to making USAID “more efficient, more effective and more business-like.”

In an increasingly complex operating environment, the discipline of development demands a strong practice and the use of evaluation as a crucial tool to inform our global development efforts, and to enable us to make hard choices based on the best available evidence (USAID 2011:1).

Through measuring the activities and achievements of development, Shah intends to produce information that will greatly improve the agency’s ability to operate efficiently and effectively and thus, be more accountable to the public. Shah has attributed USAID’s history of poor performance to a deficit in reliable knowledge about the potential and realized outcomes of development interventions: “Just like investors couldn't tell the difference between AAA investments and junk, taxpayers can't tell the difference between development breakthroughs and subprime development” (Shah 2011). Consequently, the agency’s new evaluation and monitoring policies not only intend to hold USAID accountable to the public and congress, but also to hold implementing partners (i.e., recipient governments, contractors, INGOs, local NGOs, etc.) upwardly accountable to the same standards of business-like efficiency and effectiveness. This administrative effort “will require increased short-term investment in order to realize long-term savings” (Rogin 2011b).

The pursuit of development effectiveness has dominated discussions throughout the international community and recent aid reforms, representing a significant shift in the interests and expectation of funders for how development and social change are accomplished in this era of global financial austerity. Shah’s

characterization of the “modern development enterprise” suggests both a political and pragmatic strategy for rationalizing foreign development expenditures in a climate of scarce public resources and budgetary constraints. Likewise, foreign assistance is no longer being justified based solely upon a moral commitment to helping those who are in need or suffering (Karlán and Appel 2011). The transfer of billions of dollars to poor countries is beginning to be framed as a calculated investment that will directly help targeted beneficiaries in southern countries while also contributing to the well-being of those living in donor nations. This is a rationale that Shah reinforces in his speech: “I’ve come to learn that our assistance is not just from the American people. It’s also for the American people. Our assistance develops the markets of the future” (Shah 2011). As a result, development aid and assistance is increasingly being approached by public and private funders not as charity or a contribution, but as an “investment” in a rational venture to develop poor nations. This increasingly pervasive model of development as a modern enterprise is fueling a demand for development actors to verify the effectiveness and efficiency of their work and ultimately to employ a particular form of measurement and knowledge to demonstrate their upwards accountability commitments.

This chapter argues that an emerging approach to development is reflected in the current discussions of aid effectiveness and development reform. While not necessarily a fully articulated theory of social change, expectations and practices for rationalized funding for interventions are linking up the various sectors within development to shape a spreading international consensus about “how development

gets done.” Thus good “business practices” within the sector are becoming standardized, including identifying and aligning objectives to be achieved, rationalizing intervention programs, and conceptualizing desired change in the form of “results.” This approach is structuring the focus of funder interests, the types of knowledge needed to demonstrate these interests, and ultimately the upwards accountability relationships with those who receive funding and implement development interventions. The first section of this chapter briefly reviews the key pieces of international development reform and how these reforms position funders as “investors” seeking measurable results which represent “value for money” in development. The second section discusses the types of measurement practices used by funders to produce “actionable information” as their role as funders seeking long-term sustainable change. The final section looks at how both funders’ interests and the criteria for transparency is shaping accountability expectations and relationships, in particular with those development actors that rely on funders for their resources. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how the notion of accountability is almost always promoted along with the notion of learning, and suggests that this learning is a specific form of self-regulation that de-emphasizes the control of funders, but holds agents “instrumentally accountable” to funders’ interests.

## **The Global Enterprise: Effectiveness as Rationalization**

[S]ystematically building evidence about what works in social development, would make it possible to improve the effectiveness of domestic spending and development assistance by bring vital knowledge into the service of policymaking and program design (EGWG 2006:1)

We are unabashedly obsessed with impact: measuring it, funding it, and scaling it up. - The Mulago Foundation

Administrator Shah's characterization of development as a modern enterprise suggests a newly articulated approach to improving social, economic, and political conditions through a globally rationalized and standardized process of achieving measurable results. Theories of progress and development have informed the provision of aid and economic assistance to poor countries since the notion of "development" was invented (Cowen and Shenton 1996; Peet 1999). While development activities have always been implemented with the expectation of making a positive difference, this emerging configuration of development prioritizes the instrumentality of planned interventions and, as such, issues of efficiency and effectiveness over any particular goal or method for achieving that change. A series of international reforms over the last two decades set the stage for USAID and other funders to legitimize their work as a "business-minded" enterprise. Along with this orientation came the pervasive assumption that like with any business, funders of development should expect tangible "returns" on their investments.

## **The New Poverty Agenda: Linking private benefits to the public good**

By the late 1990s, the failures of tying Official Development Assistance (ODA) to structural adjustment programs loomed as recipient countries showed little growth either in their economies or independence from foreign support. As a result, development strategies started to shift from “top-down” policy reforms to encouraging “bottom-up” growth through reducing poverty of the world’s most vulnerable. Donors had to acknowledge that the poorest segments of society carried a disproportionate burden of the failed development attempts of the past and that alleviating poverty needed complex interventions that included not only economic structures and expenditures, but also the quality of governance and improving the overall well-being of individual citizens. This “New Poverty Agenda” was first articulated by the World Bank in its 2000/1 World Development Report: *Attacking Poverty*, which identified three “fundamentally complementary” areas representing a new configuration of development and a departure from the previous approach of achieving long-term growth through macro-economic reform (World Bank 2001). This new agenda links the well-being and capacities of individuals from the most vulnerable populations with the large-scale public goals of achieving economic, political, and social security within a nation and across the globe.

The first area of this new poverty agenda is the “promotion of opportunities” defined as “stimulating economic growth, making markets work better for poor people, and building up their assets” (World Bank 2001:1). The strengthening of markets is directly tied to providing access to individuals, particularly those who are the least well-off. The stimulation and growth of national economies and the opening

of markets are directly tied to the ability of individuals to pursue their own private livelihoods. The second focus is in the empowerment of poor people “by making state and social institutions more responsive to them” (World Bank 2001:3. Providing poor people a voice in their own development and governance suggests parallel grassroots logic to the improvement and restructuring of public institutions. The notion of attacking poverty through individual empowerment accompanied the rise in civil society movements of the 80s and early 90s, in which private citizens overturned autocratic governments and demanded democratic reform and greater accountability. The final emphasis in the New Poverty Agenda was to address poor people’s vulnerability to a spectrum of risks—“wars, disease, economic crises, and natural disasters.” Reducing the risk of natural and human disasters promises a more stable environment, ensuring development gains can be incrementally built upon and sustained over the long-term at both the individual household and national levels.

In sum, this new configuration of poverty reduction uses the logic of assisting individual poor people to both help themselves and to provide a virtuous circle of global benefits for all. Aid is no longer to be a “hand out” but a “hand up” that builds the capacity of people, local organizations, and governments. Increasingly, ODA in southern countries is used to multiply the opportunities for households’ participation in the market, entrepreneurial growth, and economic expansion. Facilitating the empowerment of poor people strengthens the responsiveness of state government and agencies, reduces corruption, and thus provides more favorable conditions for market growth and foreign investment. And finally, decreasing the risk of wars, disease,

economic crises, and natural disasters is an obvious route to helping poor people by providing a more stable environment for individuals, industries, and government to flourish, while also safeguarding donor countries from the risks of market failures, armed conflicts, and terrorism (Barber 1995). The New Poverty Agenda links together a complex series of both national and worldwide public benefits that are achieved by directly helping individual poor people and populations. Thus, investment in development has been reframed as being in the best interests of recipient nations and providing ODA is now also seen as in the best interests of donor nations; development has the potential of providing global returns for all—from the very poor to the very rich, from the remote village within a poverty-stricken nation, to the urban citizens of northern donor nations. The introduction of the New Poverty Agenda goes well beyond a moral appeal to wealthy donor nations to assist those people who are living a life of extreme deprivation and suffering; it transformed poverty reduction into a pragmatic and instrumental strategy in achieving the broader interests of funders and their constituents (Riddell 2007:35).

This new framing of poverty alleviation as investment provides an internal logic to challenging the record of ineffectiveness in the ODA delivery systems and identifying the best methods for achieving tangible benefits for the broader public. Calls for accountability—among both donor and recipient countries—emerged demanding fiscal transparency that included not only sound investment practices but also that those investments produce measurable and sustainable returns. Thus the new millennium ushered in a series of high-level reforms within the ODA community



identifying a common framework of what these changes should look like, how to measure and communicate these changes, and the best strategies for donors and recipients to achieve them. INGOs were fully rooted within the ODA system by this time and questions about their own performance and impact became entangled in the debates about aid and development effectiveness. The following section briefly reviews the key aid effectiveness reform initiatives within the ODA community over the last decade to demonstrate how ODA, development, and the performance of aid recipients became shaped by this new approach that emphasized measurable returns on investments.

### **Millennium Development Goals: Identifying a standard index of progress**

The new emphasis on poverty reduction prompted a dialogue between both donor and recipient countries about the need to coordinate development efforts in order to make significant progress towards achieving measurable change. This understanding was institutionalized with the signing of the United Nation's Millennium Declaration which represented a "remarkable convergence of views" that resolved to "create an environment—at the national and global levels alike—which is conducive to development and to the elimination of poverty" (Annan 2000). The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) consist of eight universal, development goals and eighteen quantitative targets for all lower-income countries to achieve by 2015. The goals intend to build the capacity of individuals and countries through the tracking of progress against set targets. The principal target of the MDGs is to halve the proportion of people worldwide living on less than one dollar (US\$) per day by 2015.

These MDG targets quickly became “a central yardstick against which most development and development-aid-giving efforts were subsequently to be judged” (Riddell 2007:42). The MDGs provide both donor and recipient nations common indices to communicate and gauge the cumulative progress of development activities taking place within a country. As a result, the outcomes and ultimately the success of development funding became reframed in terms of these shared set of indicators at the national level.

Reducing poverty was reconceived through the achievement of the MDGs as the common lens in which both donor and recipient countries, and all global citizens, could view progress towards development:

The Millennium Development Goals are the most broadly supported, comprehensive, and specific poverty reduction targets the world has ever established, so their importance is manifold. For the international political system, they are the fulcrum on which development policy is based. For the billion-plus people living in extreme poverty, they represent the means to a productive life. For everyone on Earth, they are a linchpin to the quest for a secure and peaceful world (UNMP 2005:2-4).

The MDGs provided a global set of indices to convert and compare recipient nations’ progress in poverty eradication as well as other key measures of social and economic change. The New Poverty Agenda’s logic of linking the improvement in individual poor-people’s lives to the overall development of a nation became institutionalized through strategies to achieve the MDGs.

The Goals are ends in themselves, but for these households [suffering from extreme poverty] they are also capital inputs—the means to a productive life to economic growth, and to further development. A healthier worker is a more productive worker. A better educated worker is a more productive worker. Improved water and sanitation

infrastructure raises output per capita through various channels, such as reduced illness. So, many of the Goals are part of capital accumulation, defined broadly, as well as desirable objectives in their own right (UNMP 2005:4).

As a result, the MDGs' core challenge is to ensure that interventions and strategies known to produce individual benefits can be aggregated in order to have an effect on national indices of progress. That is, only through measuring the aggregated change from discrete projects and interventions can MDG national targets be achieved and the subsequent global public benefits realized through market expansion, security, and stable governance. As such, the task of determining "what works" and then scaling development interventions up to the national level became of critical interest for donors and recipient governments as a prerequisite to bringing "essential MDG-based investments and services to most or all of the population, on an equitable basis" (UNMP 2005:31). Said another way, isolated development projects can help specific populations, but the ultimate return on development investment is fully realized through achieving the standardized indicators of the MDGs.

### **The Consensus Model of Aid: Aligning results to maximize effectiveness**

The development of the MDGs as the global indices of development set the stage for the international community to address the efficacy of development strategies and the inconsistent and fragmented ways in which aid has been delivered to recipient countries began to be highlighted. The past failures of aid have been partly attributed to the nontransparent, uncoordinated, and unpredictable funding which undermined the ability for recipient countries to make significant, cumulative progress toward

reducing poverty and achieving measurable improvements (Easterly 2006). ODA and development funding in general has historically operated without governance, coordination or accountability among or between the over one-thousand mechanisms for supplying development finance across the world. For example, donors rarely had knowledge of other funding streams coming into a country or made attempts to align their program priorities with the needs of the countries populations.

Thus, effectiveness is the central issue in a larger reform model aimed at establishing a cohesive “aid architecture” first articulated and refined through a series of high-level agreements among countries of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD and intergovernmental donors referred to as the “Consensus Model of Aid” (Rogerson, Hewitt, and Waldenberg 2004). The Monterrey Consensus on Financing for Development (2002), The Paris Declaration for Aid Effectiveness (2005), and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008) represent an ongoing international dialogue about key principles for achieving aid effectiveness. These agreements are based on the central tenet that foreign assistance should be coordinated and linked to country-level objectives and with the MDGs serving as the Archimedean point for development progress globally. These agreements involve a series of steps toward synthesizing and standardizing aid practices, including establishing funding commitments, untying aid, making aid more predictable, and integrating aid into the national budgets of recipient countries. Underpinning these agreements was the formulation of five mutually reinforcing principles or “pillars of development” that outline a global configuration of aid in the new millennium (Paris Declaration 2005).

One hundred and thirty-six countries committed to these principles, and while broad in both their scope and nature, they strengthen the practice of development as a global investment and the expectation that the funds provided by donors will be accounted for through tangible and measurable results.

The first three principles—ownership, alignment, and harmonization—are aimed at securing the planning and coordination of development strategies at the country level. The first principle, ownership, emphasizes the importance of effective leadership within recipient countries and signals the responsibility of their governments to produce the optimal conditions in which aid can be effective, including improving national institutions, fighting corruption, and engaging in citizen consultations. The expectation that recipient countries will choose their own development strategies makes them an active and accountable partner in the commitment to achieving the MDGs (Riddell 2007:44). Likewise, this principle reinforces the notion that funders are not “doing development” but are investing in recipient countries in order that they should achieve their own national priorities. As such, the second principle of alignment states that national development strategies should drive funding priorities of donors in order that aid supports and reinforces local institutions, procedures, and overall capacities. Shifting to nation-centric strategies for development offers recipient governments greater control over decision-making in addition to assigning them greater responsibility and accountability in addressing the needs of their own citizens. The third principle of harmonization aims to coordinate donors’ activities within a country to reduce funding redundant

programs and to encourage a “more effective division of labor” among them. The MDGs and the priority of national development strategies provide an organizing framework in which donors and recipient nations can collaborate in achieving a common set of objectives. The coordination of donor activities intends to simplify financial procedures, reduce duplication, and increase the overall efficiency of the ODA system. The principles of ownership, alignment, and harmonization together constitute a new vision of development funding and programming restructured and standardized around investing in national-level priorities and strategies.

The last two principles of the Paris Declaration underline the importance of information, evidence, and transparency to this approach to rationalizing the aid architecture and supporting development effectiveness. Central to the Declaration and within the effectiveness reform movement in general, is the principle of “Managing for Results” or “managing and implementing aid in a way that focuses on the desired results and uses information to improve decision-making” (paragraph 43). Both donors and developing countries can have a shared focus on the production and measurement of results—or in other words, development funding is intended to produce a return on investment in terms of discrete outputs, outcomes and impacts. The practices of setting explicit, time-sensitive objectives and measuring progress with indicators of those objectives “has emerged as the centerpiece of global efforts to improve the effectiveness of public resources and to eventually achieve the Millennium Development Goals” (OECD 2009:1). Once development priorities are set, funding and programming can be further rationalized through the use of logic

models or frameworks—conceptual representations of how resources and development programming produce results, i.e., the desired objectives in the form of measurable indicators. Individual actors throughout the process of national development planning (e.g., ministries, agencies, local districts, and partners such as INGOs) also developed their own sets of measurable targets for their specific role in the causal process of development, in order to provide continuous oversight and as an empirical basis for adjusting programming. Managing for Results rationalizes the alignment process through evidence-based management practices. Lastly, the principle of mutual accountability states that both donor and recipient countries will be accountable for development results which require complete transparency in aid flows between them. This principle of mutual accountability is reinforced through the consensual nature of aid reform in that donors and recipients taking responsibility for the same results (i.e., national development strategies, MDGs) and the ability to demonstrate their responsibility through similar types of management processes (i.e., results-based management). The principle of mutual accountability acknowledges that the investment practices of funders ultimately have ramifications for aid effectiveness.

These principles along with the MDGs outline a new approach to international aid which is fully rationalized and coordinated at the global level. Further, this new approach represents an emerging consensus that establishes the prerequisites necessary to hold actors accountable, in addition to the type of action that actors can be held accountable. Assigning ownership to developing countries imparts both

agency and responsibility to southern governments for progressing towards the MDGs and producing results for the aid received. And while donors share the same goal of poverty reduction (i.e., the MDGs), they are merely “investors” in developing countries’ own strategies within this approach—“donors do not develop developing countries—developing countries must develop themselves” (Herfkens and Bains n.d.:4). Developing nations are expected to self-manage their progress towards reducing poverty and have the ability to maximize their development results, or the returns on donors’ funding through reduction of corruption, reforming local institutions, as well as monitoring development programs through targets and performance measures. Development actors are able to produce accounts that they have acted responsibly and effectively by using established indicators of progress and their results-based management systems. Likewise, a coordinated system of funding and development with shared objectives allows for transparency in donors, recipients, and public citizens to understand the goals of aid and the effectiveness of individual nations and actors in achieving these goals.

The implementation of this new model of aid still remains in a nascent form, with varying degrees of reorganization undertaken by both donor and recipient countries. The latest evaluation of the Paris Declaration found that, “with the exception of some ‘early starters’, the reforms for which partner countries are responsible have been slow to take hold since 2000-05, but have now done so in most cases”(Wood, Betts, Etta et al. 2011:x). The report also noted that while the changes required for donor alignment with the Paris principles are far less taxing, these



countries have “so far demonstrated less commitment than partner countries to making the necessary changes in their own systems” —largely due to the political and bureaucratic will to advocate for aid reform among a wider-range of competing issues (Wood et al. 2011:xi). Despite the slow transformation of ODA bureaucratic structures and practices, the principles of ownership, alignment, harmonization, managing for results, and mutual accountability have become the lingua franca of international aid-effectiveness debates.

Compared with the aid situation 20 to 25 years ago current practice presents a global picture of far greater transparency and far less donor-driven aid today. The ‘free-for-all’ of competitive, uncoordinated and donor-driven activities that were commonplace at that time are now unusual enough to attract rapid attention and criticism (Wood et al. 2011:xii).

ODA, development, and the performance of aid recipients have in turn become shaped by the funders and the publics’ growing interest in measuring and verifying returns on investments from aid recipients—both countries and implementing partners such as INGOs.

While high-level restructuring has yet to be fully realized, many aid agencies, including USAID, have begun a series of internal reforms which embody the same principles driving the international aid-effectiveness movement. The recent Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (2010) frames development as a part of strategic diplomacy that intends to build the capacities for recipient nations and populations in order that they may help themselves.

Through development, we seek to invest in countries' efforts to achieve sustained and broad-based economic growth, which creates opportunities for people to lift themselves, their families, and their societies out of poverty, away from violent extremism and instability, and toward a more prosperous future. Ultimately, development helps countries become more capable of solving their own problems and sharing in solving common global problems (USSD and USAID 2010:ix).

Thus, international aid and development activities are again framed as having expected returns for global (and in particular, American) interests; funding development is not about charity, it is about a rationalized process of change. "We are modernizing State and USAID to promote high-impact development. *We are changing the way we do business, shifting from aid to investment*" (USSD and USAID 2010:10- my emphasis). Similar to the high-level reforms, USAID is not taking on the direct delivery of this change, but they are investing in a whole host of other actors to implement improvement in target countries and populations. That is, USAID intends to "Transform our model of doing business with host nations and other donors so that it relies more on host nations' systems and indigenous organizations, emphasizes accountability and transparency, and improves coordination with other donors, NGOs, and the private sector" (USSD and USAID 2010:10). Thus, this model of investment proposed by USAID and the ODA community in general makes a distinction between who is *doing* development and who is *investing* in it.

Likewise, the framing of development as a business enterprise has been continuously reinforced by Administrator Rajiv Shah when discussing the nature of his agency's work.

I do expect us to act like development entrepreneurs. An entrepreneur is someone who: Develops a clear vision and articulates a development strategy in everything he or she does. At USAID, I'm going to be stressing the ideas of focus, scale, and impact in our program design...Scale successful solutions to benefit millions, not dozens or hundreds. This will require greater focus on lowering the unit costs of our work... And entrepreneurs are, above all, focused on results and effectiveness. Ultimately everything we do is about impact, not outputs, and we have an obligation to ensure that taxpayer dollars are being well spent, saving lives and developing livelihoods (Shah 2010a).

This strategy of USAID is to operate much like an enterprise in making investments in profitable opportunities—in this case, development “solutions” which bring funders a high return on their money in the form of “impacts” or long-term sustainable change. USAID recently announced the Development Innovation Ventures (DIV) program in which to consolidate this approach.

Borrowing from the venture capital model, DIV was created to promote high-return and sometimes high-risk ideas and projects, catalyze game-changing innovations and create new portals of entry for social entrepreneurs to work with USAID. We are working hard to ensure that same spirit of entrepreneurship, of turning need into opportunity, informs all of our work (Shah 2010b).

The metaphors between business, entrepreneurship, and his agency's development practices are readily used by Administrator Shaw to make the point that his agency is undergoing reforms to emphasize efficiency and effectiveness and ultimately to provide public returns on development investments.

#### Private Philanthropy in Development

The framing of development as a type of investment is not limited to the current reforms in ODA and is also seen in the approach of many of today's private funders.

Large foundations founded by successful entrepreneurs, such as the Gates Foundation, are modeling their funding and programmatic approaches after their successes in the private sector (Spero 2010:18). This view of development as investment is made explicit in the Gates Foundation literature:

To catalyze the fundamental and sustained positive change needed to address these problems—to bring about the kind of change that can give all people the opportunity to live healthy and productive lives—our investments must be highly strategic and focused on impact (Gates Foundation 2011:1).

It is no surprise then that many of the reforms in the public funders are in alignment with the private funders approach. (These reforms did not happen spontaneously—Shah worked at the Gates Foundation before being appointed to head the USAID). Private philanthropic organizations are also embracing market-oriented approaches to international development, seeking private-sector solutions to historically public-sector problems. These approaches have recently emerged both international and domestic private philanthropy and are identified with a whole host of terms: social investing, venture philanthropy, social entrepreneurship, social innovation, and social enterprise to name a few. What these approaches all have in common is the pursuit of social returns from economic investments. Michael Edward coined this type of approach as “philanthrocapitalism” which is based on the assumption that “business principles can be successfully combined with the search for social transformation” (2008:7) and is often an implicit frustration/dissatisfaction about the methods and achievements of older forms of philanthropy. Private funders, however, have their own resources and do not have to account to legislative bodies or the public in terms

of how they spend their money or the types of results they produce. Thus, private philanthropy is seen as key drivers of the modern development enterprise, using their independent status to “to take risks, act expeditiously, pursue long-term strategies, and operate in ways that government cannot” (Spero 2010:37).

### **Emerging Logic of Development Funding: Investing in Results**

ODA and large private donors are increasingly approaching development through an investment model. Funders have reiterated that they are no longer “doing development,” they are providing money and resources in order that a measurable level of positive change will be achieved through the actions of others. Broadly speaking, funders are interested in supporting rationalized intervention models which can produce this positive change in the form of “results” (i.e., the outputs, outcomes, and impacts of the instrumental process for achieving change). These generic categories of change are becoming the currency of the modern development enterprise used to determine the value of interventions, and accordingly to evaluate the performance of funders’ investments. Results are increasingly becoming standardized medium of exchange through which measurable indicators are valued in terms of their scope and their temporality (with outputs being the least “valuable” and impacts being the most). While impacts represent the longer-term, most significant changes, all results are cumulative and are instrumentally linked through the causal process. Results are also fungible in that they are used to measure change at multiple levels (individual, population, national, global) and the same indicators can be used for a variety of interventions and contexts. The MDGs are the prime

example of how results (as defined by standard indicators) become the shared medium of development changes. Consequently, discussions of aid effectiveness and efficiency are almost always now communicated in the currency of results, more so than through the actual content or specific nature of what the results signify. Said another way, the present emphasis placed on the effectiveness (i.e., the instrumentality) of interventions has shifted the interests of funders from achieving a particular status or condition within a population or nation (i.e., poverty eradication, health, etc), to the ability of an intervention to influence measurable change in the form of results (and ideally impacts). Consequently, funders are not only interested in verifying the effectiveness of past development interventions, they are also looking to secure development models which can assure their future investments will continue to maximize results for their money.

## **Evidence for Investments: Measuring Results**

[H]ow development is understood and practiced in the real world of the twenty-first century will and should shape how evidence is generated and utilized in order to improve and increase development effectiveness (Khagram, Thomas, Lucero et al. 2009:247).

Monitoring and evaluation are at the heart of evidence-based policy making. They provide a core set of tools that stakeholders can use to verify and improve the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of interventions at various stages of implementation, or in other words, to focus on results (Gertler, Martinez, Premand et al. 2011:3-4).

Development is a knowledge-driven enterprise requiring detailed information about the nature of the issues to be addressed (e.g., water-borne diseases), the current conditions of the areas/populations of interest (e.g., lack of sanitation practices), and the possible interventions/solutions to the identified needs (e.g., digging boreholes or providing chlorine tablets for community water sources). Without this information, the ability of a development program to effect change is obviously limited.

Approaching development as an investment introduces additional criteria in terms of what makes information useful to funders and the types of measurement methods and techniques considered valid for obtaining this information. Specifically, funders require “actionable information” —or knowledge that can identify the best course of action in terms of optimizing their current and future investments in development.

This knowledge cannot be merely descriptive, but must offer funders the ability to choose prudently among alternatives in order to maximize the utility of their resources and limit their investment risks and failures. That is, development investors require information which can evaluate the best options in terms of producing the

greatest amount of desired change (i.e., effectiveness) among a range of possibilities. Development investors need to know which intervention strategies, implementing partners, or target populations have the greatest potential for achieving “results” for their money.

This need for *actionable information* is often discussed in economics as a need to reduce the “asymmetry of information” between transactional partners (Stiglitz 2000). Aid agencies and private donors are almost always located at a considerable distance from their sponsored programs and activities, rarely participating in the day-to-day activities of development. An asymmetry of information occurs because funders are dependent upon others (e.g., implementing agencies such as development firms, INGOs, and local governments) to provide them with accurate information about the progress and problems of their development activities. This imbalance of information is seen to be one of the primary causes of development ineffectiveness and as such, “transparency” is advanced by funders and other practitioners as a central principle of reform. Transparency in this context minimizes asymmetrical information and the accumulation of risk which can come from relying upon multiple transactional partners to pursue interests and achieve goals. In the specific case of funders, “Transparency improves the effectiveness of (development funding) by *improving the quality of investment decisions*” (aidinfo 2008:5- original emphasis). Consequently development investors providing the resources for others to act and implement programming face two classic challenges in relation to asymmetrical information and transparency (Ostrom, Gibson, Shivakumar



et al. 2002:xviii). The first is the *incentive problem* which occurs primarily between funders and those who are using their funds to implement development activities (i.e., their agents). In this classic principal-agent situation, the recipients of funds have more information about the intervention than the funder which makes it difficult for funders to know if agents are fulfilling their transactional obligations, or if agents are pursuing a private set of objectives which are counter-productive to theirs. Funders need a way in which to monitor their agents and partners in order to optimize the efficiency of their investments and reduce shirking and/or unnecessary costs. The second challenge of asymmetrical information for funders is the *adverse selection problem* (Akerlof 1970)– in which information is unavailable for funders (and other interested parties) to select the highest quality products, agents, and strategies which can secure the greatest amount of return for their investment. Funders seldom have the on-the-ground knowledge to determine the types of program interventions or innovations that can produce the greatest positive change for their money given the diversity of contexts and situations in which development activities take place. In sum, investment-funders can reduce the asymmetry of information between themselves and their agents and increase the returns on their investments with these two knowledge based strategies, gaining information that helps minimize the costs and risks of implementing programs (cutting inefficiencies) and generating information to evaluate the types of programming, strategies, and intervention options which will produce the greatest results for their money (generating “top-line” growth).

## **Investment Driven Measurement**

Funders' physical distance from development activities and their desire to maximize their investments shape the requirements for transparency and evidence from their agents (such as INGOs). Said another way, if information about development activities cannot be used to make investment decisions, the information *is not transparent to the funders' interests*. Thus the condition of transparency goes beyond providing a mere description of activities, it makes a corollary assumption that the knowledge provided will facilitate the ability to make choices that can optimize the efficiency and effectiveness of funder investments. Without the possibility of funders changing their course of action or the conditions of their relationships with other development actors, no quantity or quality of information would be actionable. Actionable knowledge requires the ability to assess between different development components (e.g., strategies, people, locations, partner organizations, timelines, etc.) and incorporates criteria for judging the best alternatives between them (e.g., most effective and efficient). Funders need to make comparisons, whether across development components, agents, locations, or longitudinally in order for investment knowledge to be transparent. This transparency requirement for comparing and assessing multiple choices often contributes to funders prioritizing quantitative over qualitative measurements. While funders have acknowledged the value of qualitative forms of inquiry in providing a deeper understanding of particular contexts, in most cases the resulting knowledge does not have external validity required for the transparency for funders. In other words, qualitative information cannot typically be

used to make simple comparisons or evaluative decisions across multiple contexts or development components. Quantifying the components and options of development interventions allows for disparate contexts and items to be collapsed into a singular (or at least a finite number) of unifying scales which can be evaluated by the same criteria. The Millennium Development Goals, for example, allow for development progress to be tracked longitudinally and compared across more than a hundred disparate geo-political and economic contexts.

As a result, public and private funders are moving beyond the traditional informational requirements which at one time asked agents to simply describe their program activities. The ability to rationalize, standardize and measure development programming—central to Results-Based Management and most forms of evaluation in general—is becoming integrated into the planning, implementation, and evaluation of practically all development practitioners. The popularity of conceptualizing development in this way is based on its utility in setting time-bounded objectives and targets which are used to measure performance and achievements of outputs, outcomes, and impacts (OECD-DAC 2010). Development interventions are built upon abstract models that identify the components of a development intervention and map out the instrumental processes expected to achieve the desired change (i.e., results). These causal representations are called a variety of names such as logic models, log-frames, results frameworks, theory-of-change, etc. and vary slightly regarding the elements that are highlighted. However, these models serve as the conceptual backbone to almost all measurement techniques and provide an explicit

causal rationale for how development strategies are to be achieved (OECD-DAC 2010). Specifically, they provide a modular template for how long-term change such as the “reduction of poverty” or “decreased infant mortality” can be achieved through short-term implementation of program resources and activities provided by specific development actors. Said another way, these logic models link a discrete set of resources (funding), program activities (strategies), and actors (development implementers such as INGOs) to explicit objectives for positive change (results). Envisioning a program intervention instrumentally as a sum of distinct components and degrees of change provides a planning template, allowing managers to track program progress and make mid-course adjustments as needed. Measuring indicators based on these models have become indispensable within development (and especially within the development as investment model) because it segments the process of achieving goals into distinct, rationalized components (e.g., resources, actions, resulting products, and resulting conditions) which in turn, opens up a complex inter-related process to all types of possible comparative analyses and adjustments. The processes to be implemented are outlined and categorized, making it possible to compare, adjust, and exchange the components of any process in order to achieve a particular end-goal. Logic models ultimately provide a justification and a rationale for why (or why not) a program succeeded through its representation of a particular strategy or approach to accomplishing objectives.

Performance measurement and evaluation are two basic approaches to measurement that generate information that is transparent and actionable for funders. Performance measurement focuses on whether the implementation of an intervention is on schedule and if short-term results are occurring. Thus performance measurement is focused on a particular program's execution and relates to the specific actors and tasks within a program site. *Performance measurement addresses the incentive problem in development as investment*—funders and other development principals can use this form of measurement to ensure that their agents are acting in accordance to the program requirements and their contractual commitments. The second type of measurement is broadly called evaluation and its purpose is to determine the degree to which the implemented program strategy (i.e., the hypothesized causal process represented by the logic model) has produced the desired change. There is much debate about the particular types of evidence and methodologies needed to make this determination but overall, *evaluation seeks to address the selection problem regarding the types of interventions and innovations that offer the best investment options (i.e., results for money)*. Therefore, to understand the effectiveness of a development intervention, funders need information about the proposed intervention strategy which is intended to produce change (i.e., the logic model of the intervention), how well the implementing agents followed this strategy (i.e., performance/process measurement), and finally, if the implemented intervention did in fact produce the type of change desired (i.e., evaluation).

The Incentive Problem: performance measurement and monitoring

Performance measurement is linked to explicit, time-bounded management goals and objectives and is used to monitor the progress of development interventions in order to facilitate decision making (Hatry 1999). The DAC defines “performance” as: “The degree to which a development intervention or a development partner operates according to specific criteria/standards/guidelines or achieves results in accordance with stated goals or plans” (OECD-DAC 2010). Measuring and monitoring performance throughout the lifecycle of a program or project allows for midstream corrections to ensure that agents are performing as expected and desired results are being achieved. For example, various performance components of a girls’ education program will be measured and monitored—teacher training provided by a local NGO, the attendance of teachers and students, the progress of resources and infrastructure (e.g., classrooms, desks, outhouses, etc. built). Performance measurement provides descriptive and normative information about how the specific components of a program are being implemented within a logical sequence of change.

The type of transparency achieved with performance measurement is the ability to compare the actual performance of an intervention’s components with a pre-established set of abstract objectives, targets, and expectations. Performance measurement is a fundamentally deductive process which makes the activities and actors within a project transparent through comparisons with a designed and rational project execution. Consequently, project implementers are accountable to a projected plan of action and expected outcomes (i.e., a contract).

In order for the components of a logic model to be measured and monitored they need to first be translated into indicators, or measurement instruments, that can be used as a standardized form of evidence. For example, a goal of an intervention may be to educate girls, but this goal needs to be operationalized and indexed in a way in which funders and program implementers can measure and recognize that it has been achieved within the intervention context. The goal of education may be translated, for example, into the indicators “girls who finish the sixth grade,” “girls who have at least 80% of attendance in a school year,” or “girls who go on to complete middle school.” As a result, there are multiple ways in which the performance and results of a development intervention can be operationalized and accordingly, measured and monitored; components of the logic model must be translated into indicators in order to provide evidence of project activities and results. Indicators are the primary tool used to measure change and are used as the proxy for results.

Performance indicators provide objective evidence that an intended change is occurring. Performance indicators lie at the heart of developing an effective performance management system – they define the data to be collected and enable actual results achieved to be compared with planned results over time. Hence, they are an indispensable management tool for making evidence-based decisions about program strategies and activities (USAID 2010:2).

Performance indicators allow for comparisons throughout a fully articulated and rationalized notion of the development intervention. The values of observed performance can be compared with values of targeted performance (e.g., the number of vaccines given). Likewise, the degree of measurable results of an intervention

(e.g., reduction in diarrheal sickness among infants) can be compared with projected results. Using indicators also allows for comparisons across similar components within the intervention. For example, the indicators between INGOs or community based organizations (CBOs) providing the same types of interventions can be compared and disaggregated by regions, ethnic groups, or other variables. As a result, funders are encouraging their implementing agents to standardize their performance indicators so that comparisons can be made across the same types of sponsored programming in different regions and among different recipients. The standardization of performance data also allows for funders to “roll-up” the data of multiple funded interventions in order that they can report the cumulative progress of their investments to their own stakeholders (i.e., across an entire region or country).

In these ways, performance measurement addresses the incentive problem for funders by providing evidence that their implementing agents are in fact working towards the stated objectives. The logic model makes the outcomes, expectations, and performance targets explicit to all parties and serves as a form of principal-agent contract between the implementing partners, funders, and participants. Performance measurement serves as actionable information for management throughout multiple levels of the accountability chain within development—for the funders’ implementing agents (i.e., the INGOs), the implementing agents’ partners and sub-contractors (e.g., CBOs) and for the public in general. Thus, performance measurement serves as a form of direct accountability in that it aligns agents’ activities and actions to funders’ goals in order to maximize program efficiencies. It addresses the incentive problem



for funders by measuring the performance of agents in achieving explicit and quantified targets and results.

The Selection Problem: evaluating effectiveness

Performance measurement is distinguished from evaluation as the general difference between determining if a project has been executed as planned, to whether the planned project model was effective in producing its intended results. Evaluation is defined by DAC as:

The systematic and objective assessment of an on-going or completed project, programme or policy, its design, implementation and results. The aim is to determine the relevance and fulfillment of objectives, development efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. An evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into the decision-making process of both recipients and donors (OECD-DAC 2010).

There are many types of evaluation methodologies used within development (e.g., formative, summative, meta, program, impact, etc.) that provide a range of answers to evaluative questions. For example: Were certain actors more efficient/ effective in providing project services? Were there some project elements (e.g., community outreach, distribution of vaccines, coordinating with provincial agencies) especially difficult to implement? Did the intervention produce the desired outcomes and results? What challenges were unique to the region and what lessons were learned through the implementation of the project? Answers to all of these questions can inform the management and funding of development projects (i.e., investments). Evaluative information can also inform the selection of those intervention

components which are the most likely to produce results—whether that may be the types of “inputs” (e.g., vouchers, direct services, loans, etc.), development activities, implementing agents and partners, project sites, or types of target populations. In the same way, evaluations can also provide information about the types and degree of change that an entire intervention model can produce in terms of development results (i.e., the intervention’s logic model/ theory of change).

Funders typically first choose the particular region and a set of program results that they want to invest, and then find agents in which to carry out their objectives. As such, there is an increased interest by funders in this second type of selectivity, and a corresponding emphasis on the demand for evidence that demonstrates long-term significant change from a particular intervention model. This type of change is generally categorized as “impact” within the development community or “positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended” (OECD-DAC 2010). Impacts are considered the highest level of development results and the term is becoming almost synonymous with aid and development effectiveness. Funders specifically want actionable information about the overall effectiveness of the development strategies they are supporting and to know if these interventions can be credibly attributed with effecting positive long-term change.

Impact evaluations are part of a broader agenda of *evidence-based policy making*. This growing global trend is marked by a shift in focus from inputs to outcomes and results. From the Millennium Development Goals to pay-for-performance incentives for public

service providers, this global trend is reshaping how public policies are being carried out. Not only is the focus on results being used to set and track national and international targets, but results are increasingly being used by, and required of, program managers to enhance accountability, inform budget allocations, and guide policy decisions (Gertler et al. 2011:3-4).

This focus on impact level results represents a significant shift in the last ten years among development practitioners in their desire to gain insight and utility from what were once seen as routine administrative reporting exercises (Khandker, Koolwal, and Samad 2010). “Operational evaluations” traditionally describing the types of activities performed within a program have been criticized as not only inherently biased (often conducted by the implementers themselves or subcontractors, who were both eager to report program successes) but also as meaningless in determining the effectiveness of a particular evaluation approach or measuring the significant types of changes that may (or may not have) come from the intervention. These types of evaluation gauge change through measuring key indicators both before and after the program implementation to determine outcomes; those development interventions demonstrating proper execution and showing some degree of change in pre-post measurements were readily deemed a success. However, critics of this evaluation methodology noted that even though positive (or negative change) was documented over-time, these changes could not necessarily be attributed specifically to the intervention of interest. For example, a basic pre-post evaluation of a project to increase the yield of local farming cooperatives may show that more corn was harvested after community training and organizing activities were implemented. However, measured changes in the pre-post indicators of crop yield could be due to

exogenous factors such as increased annual rainfall, greater market demands, other development interventions in the area (e.g., distribution of fertilizer), rather than being the direct results of the funder's program activities. Thus, even though the conditions for program beneficiaries were documented and measured, pre-post types of evaluations do not determine whether funders' specific investments were the causal agents of the desired change (and therefore achieved their desired goals). Said another way, while significant positive change is universally welcomed within a target population, for investment purposes funders are interested in change relating exclusively to their sponsored intervention model and activities. Regardless of a successful implementation and how much a target population may improve, a funder's sponsored program is an investment failure without credible evidence that it is responsible for lasting, significant positive change (i.e., impact). As a result, establishing a verifiable causal link between sponsored interventions and measured change has become critical in terms of funders' knowledge requirements about projects. Funders are now placing a priority on information that can credibly demonstrate these impacts are directly attributed to implemented project models (the set of activities and actors bounded by a discrete amount of money, time, and organization).

Likewise, the selectivity problem as it relates to an intervention's causal ability has two distinct aspects: evidence that verifies that an already implemented intervention caused the desired results (i.e., internal validity) and evidence that verifies that a similar intervention would produce the same desired results in another,

future context (i.e., external validity). Funders want to ensure that their past investments were indeed successful, but they also are interested in leveraging knowledge about “what works” to reduce the risk of future investments (i.e., results for money).

As such, there is a resurgence among the development and evaluation communities which emphasizes the need for objective, scientifically rigorous evaluations of aid and development interventions. This type of evaluation is expected to produce defensible evidence of an intervention’s potential for producing long-term change (i.e., impacts) and is considered the “gold standard.” Rigorous measurement is currently being advanced by a segment of funders (e.g., USAID, Gates Foundation, UK Department for International Development (DfiD)) and academic centers (e.g., International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, MIT Poverty Action Lab, Center for Global Development). “Poor quality evaluations are misleading” and those that produce inaccurate information are obviously problematic when used to inform decision making (EGWG 2006:3). Impact evaluation is advanced as the paradigm for determining effectiveness because of its ability to produce objective and non-biased evidence of development results. Its advantage over other evaluation methodologies is that it provides a high degree of certainty in terms of the causality, or the instrumentality, of an intervention through the removal of both human interests and human error (i.e., threats to validity) from the evaluative process. Thus, impact evaluation uses statistical methods to provide objective, actionable information that can be used to both determine the effectiveness of past interventions and for

informing funders on the likelihood that similar types of interventions in the future would be sound investments.

The key feature that distinguishes impact from other evaluation methodologies is its ability to assign attribution of results to an intervention; while other forms of evaluation measures significant changes in a population over time, impact evaluation makes the claim of determining attribution of an intervention through the use of a counterfactual. A counterfactual is based on the construction of a comparison group which is statistically identical to the group that participated in the development intervention. “If the two groups are identical, excepting only that one group participates in the program and the other does not, then we can be sure that any difference in outcomes must be due to the program” (Gertler et al. 2011:37). Thus a counterfactual provides a statistical comparison tool to distinguish if the changes that observed would have occurred in the treatment population regardless of the funder’s investment and identifies changes that the intervention directly caused. As a result, impact evaluations can rule out other possible reasons for any changes observed in the treatment population and thus have a high degree of internal validity.

“Effectiveness” within impact evaluation is equated with this exclusive assignment of causality in achieving long-term significant change (i.e., impacts).

Determining attribution and causality are highly valuable in addressing the selectivity problem in that funders can identify the effectiveness of implemented interventions along with evaluating the soundness of their investments. By determining causality, impact evaluation also aims to provide evidence regarding the

potential instrumentality of the intervention model for future investments (i.e., external validity). Impact evaluation statistically verifies that the underlying causal logic of the program produces the desired long-term changes in order that funders and others can have a high-level of confidence that the same causal logic will work in other contexts. Impact evaluation has the ability to inform funders and other development practitioners that the intervention strategy itself achieved the results, i.e., validating the instrumentality of the development model.

The main role of impact evaluation is to produce evidence on program effectiveness for the use of government officials, program managers, civil society, and other stakeholders. Impact evaluation results are particularly useful when the conclusions can be applied to the broader population of interest. The question of generalizability (known as “external validity” in the research methods literature) is key for policy makers, for it determines whether the results identified in the evaluation can be replicated for groups beyond those studied in the evaluation if the program is scaled up (Gertler et al. 2011:14).

As such, impact evaluation provides evidence to both aspects of the selectivity problem—it can inform funders about whether an intervention model has achieved its intended results, and also if this model can achieve similar results in other contexts. In this way, impact evaluation is an example of actionable information that provides knowledge with relevance beyond a particular context in terms of how funders and other development actors can achieve desired results. This represents a shift in funder measurement from an interest to verifying what *has been* achieved, to what *can be* achieved. Said another way, verifying an intervention model’s potential causality through impact evaluations allows development projects to be evaluated as investment instruments (i.e., did our investment yield the expected outcomes? And if

we make a future investment in a similar project, can we expect the same return on our investment?).

### **Transparency, Actionable Information, and the Public Good**

In summary, funders are seeking information about the performance of their agents and the effectiveness of development interventions to produce positive change. This information needs to be transparent or “actionable” to funders in ways that allow them to achieve their interest in optimize the efficiency and effectiveness of their investments. As such, monitoring and evaluation methodologies and the resulting data must meet several criteria to be credible evidence to inform funder choices. First, the information must allow for comparability either across similar units (e.g., agents, populations), against set targets or expected outcomes, or across time. This comparability is often achieved through using standardized measurement indicators, averages, and statistical tools. Second, measurement that assesses effectiveness—the ability to produce an effect—is based upon an articulated assumption of expected or demonstrated causality. The measurement of funder sponsored-programs is based on an instrumental notion of how results are instrumentally achieved (i.e., logic models). And finally, this information needs to be seen as objective, or free from bias. Funders cannot remedy the problem of asymmetrical information if their monitoring and evaluation data are not valid either from the self-interests of other parties or faulty methodologies. The current practice of funder-driven measurement is to conduct external evaluations of program effectiveness in order that the assessment will be



considered credible. These mutually reinforcing criteria establish the utility and credibility of information for funders in making their investment decisions.

However, this particular configuration of funder-driven measurement produces a distinctly “public” transparency because it must necessarily be legible and communicable to those outside of the specific development project. For example, recent international reforms to standardize indicators and measurements of development progress like the MDGs are seen as vital efforts in expanding the transparency of aid to the public: “Common definitions and a common format for reporting ... are a *global public good* that would be of enormous benefit for a wide range of organizations and systems” (aidinfo 2008:20-original emphasis). Thus knowledge about a specific funded program in a specific location can be extracted and made transparent through the use of standardized, objective, and rigorous measurement in order that comparisons can be made across development practices. Likewise, evaluations that have the ability to provide generalizable knowledge about development effectiveness have been advocated by both funders and researchers/evaluators on the basis that it is also a “public good.” “Credible impact evaluations are international public goods: the benefits of knowing that a program works or does not work extend well beyond the organization or the country implementing the program” (Duflo and Kremer 2003:32). That is, knowledge about development effectiveness not only assists funders in increasing their ability to make choices about their past investments, it is also advanced as valuable to the international development sector at large in planning and making choices about other

intervention strategies. In particular, credible evidence in the form of scientifically generated knowledge about “what works” or the instrumentality of development program models is in and of itself a worthy investment as it contributes to the overall public understanding about social, economic, and political change.

The value of impact evaluation is best understood as part of a broad scientific enterprise of learning, in which evidence is built over time and across different contexts, forming the basis for better policymaking and program design. This type of knowledge is, in part, a public good, in the sense that once the knowledge is produced and disseminated, anyone can benefit from it without depleting or excluding others from its benefits. In this way, investments in building knowledge can have tremendous and unpredictable returns (EGWG 2006:13).

Thus, evaluative knowledge that is universally communicable and applicable can be used by the public to inform and validate their own decisions about selectivity in terms of development strategies. That is, external validity transforms the measurement knowledge about a specific project into public good, and brings even more value to the funders’ investment of the original project.

Similarly, knowledge seen as objective and credible can be used by funders and public bodies to justify political choices. “In this sense, information and evidence become means to facilitate public awareness and promote government accountability” (Gertler et al. 2011:4). Thus evaluations that produce transparent accounts based upon objective, unbiased, and instrumental knowledge become actionable because they provide information to choose among possible options, and also provide an implicit

rationale for selectivity based upon the criteria of effectiveness (i.e., instrumentality).

For example,

[B]y credibly establishing which programs work and which do not, the international agencies can counteract skepticism about the possibility of spending aid effectively and build long-term support for development. Just as randomized trials for pharmaceuticals revolutionized medicine in the 20th Century, randomized evaluation have the potential to revolutionize social policy during the 21st (Duflo and Kremer 2003:32).

That is, funding agencies and public agencies can use this knowledge to justify their choices about programmatic support (selectivity of development strategy/investments), specific regions to support (selectivity of beneficiaries), and implementing partners (selectivity of agents). Funders' stated rationale of maximizing effectiveness and increasing the instrumentality of their sponsored program interventions then serves as means to remove political bias and interest (including their own) from decisions about development programming.

The paradigmatic example of this is an impact evaluation conducted of the program Progressa (now called Oportunidades) that sought to improve the education, health, and nutrition of children in Mexico through providing conditional cash transfers to households linked to regular school attendance and health clinic visits (World Bank 2004). The program implementation and evaluation were designed to produce a counterfactual through the randomized selection of the participant households. Rigorous statistical analyses were conducted by an independent research institute which demonstrated important positive impacts in school enrollment, health clinic

attendance, and nutrition (World Bank 2004). As the result, the evaluation verified the effectiveness of using the development model cash-transfers to achieve measurable long-term impacts and the program's implementation was scaled-up in Mexico and similar programs were initiated through Latin America based upon its demonstrated effectiveness. The evaluation was designed not only to demonstrate the efficacy of the program model, it was also intentionally designed to provide objective evidence that could justify the program's continuation and expansion regardless of the political climate.

Carefully constructed program evaluations form a sound basis for decisions of whether or not to scale up existing projects, as positive results can help to build a consensus for a project. ...Part of the rationale for the decision [to randomly select participants for the Progressa program] was to increase the probability that the program would be continued in case of a change in the party in power (Duflo and Kremer 2003:10).

As the evaluation authors note, an explicit objective of the Progressa program evaluation was to "produce generalizable knowledge" which in turn could be "used to help establish the best use of government resources" (IFPRI 2000:9). Thus transparent objective knowledge can inform funders and public agencies about the best strategies to take, but also serves as an instrumental justification for the political decisions ultimately made. Otherwise, programmatic decisions are often seen as being informed by biased preferences or those who advocate for a particular perspective (Behrman and Skoufias 2006). While evaluations need to be accurate to inform future strategy, the resulting knowledge must also be seen as a credible validation for the actions taken. Objective and scientifically rigorous evaluations such as those

conducted by Progressa become transparent to both the funders/government and the public (to whom they are in turn accountable) because they provide objective, “scientific” justifications for public choices (i.e., selectivity). Thus, Progressa has been celebrated as a success not only because it was able to demonstrate its effectiveness, but also because it was able to use this evidence of effectiveness to secure continued political support.

### **The Aperspective Objectivity of Effectiveness**

Ongoing reforms to rationalize and demonstrate effectiveness are often justified based on their utility in making aid and development more transparent and accountable to the public. Approaching development as an enterprise sets up an internal logic that values interventions based on their demonstrated and projected effectiveness. The information needed by funders to maximize results includes measures of agents’ performance and the demonstrated causality of an intervention. These specific actions are made public through the translation of individual and local change into standardized results (e.g., MDGs). The instrumental achievement of results in turn produces public goods in terms of measurable benefits, scientific knowledge, and actionable information.

Thus, this instrumental transparency produced by funder-driven measurement is characterized by its aperspectival objectivity which eliminates the idiosyncrasies of development information and provides the greatest degree of transparency across development actors (i.e., funders, recipient countries, development implementers) and

to the public at large. “Indeed, the essence of a perspectival objectivity is communicability, narrowing the range of genuine knowledge to coincide with that of public knowledge” (Daston 1992:600). The removal of both human interests and error transforms evaluative information into credible knowledge that is valuable and “actionable” to both funders and the public at large. Said another way, this a perspective objectivity transforms local knowledge into generalizable knowledge by replacing the agency of specific development actors and local contexts with the causality of development interventions.

Similarly, characterizing the development as a modern enterprise and the ensuing drive for effectiveness transforms development into an instrumental venture that is assessed according to the degree in which it can produce results. Thus instrumentality (how to achieve change) may take precedence over the actual substance of development (what type of change should be made). Likewise, individual benefits gained by the poorest populations are transformed into global public goods through the funder-driven measurement and this instrumental transparency. While a specific group of people may reap the benefits of a funder’s investment (e.g., poor villagers in Bangladesh gain access to mosquito nets, and thereby have improved health outcomes), the measured results and/or the evidence of the mosquito-net intervention’s effectiveness have also become valuable public resources, or “global public goods.” Thus, the funding of development can be credibly justified through this process of instrumental transparency, and can represent investing in development as a virtuous circle of benefits for all.

## **Accountability and Learning in the Modern Development Enterprise**

Evaluation helps us to be more effective and efficient with our use of the resources we have available, but it also serves other purposes. It provides evidence of accountability. It provides a path to improvement (Scriven 2007).

The value of impact evaluation is best understood as part of a broad scientific enterprise of learning, in which evidence is built over time and across different contexts, forming the basis for better policymaking and program design (EGWG 2006:13).

USAID bases policy and investment decisions on the best available empirical evidence, and uses the opportunities afforded by project implementation to generate new knowledge for the wider community. Moreover, USAID commits to measuring and documenting project achievements and shortcomings so that the Agency's multiple stakeholders gain an understanding of the return on investment in development activities (USAID 2011:1).

The global push among funders to produce evidence of effectiveness is now almost always linked to their ability to demonstrate transparency and upwards-accountability for their own domestic governance structures and the public at large. Similarly, the monitoring and evaluation practices required by funders frame their upwards-accountability expectations for their own agents such as contractors, INGOS, and recipient countries. Accountability in these contexts is typically characterized as the classic principal-agent requirement to ensure that the agent is complying with the principal's interests. As such, accountability is formulated very much like an "audit" in which agents are evaluated against agreed-upon responsibilities. The OECD-DAC evaluation glossary defined accountability as:

Obligation to demonstrate that work has been conducted in compliance with agreed rules and standards or to report fairly and accurately on performance results vis à vis mandated roles and/or plans. This may

require a careful, even legally defensible, demonstration that the work is consistent with the contract terms (2010).

This formulation of accountability clearly addresses the funders' need to use information to address the incentive problem of their agents and compliance within the principal-agent relationship. This articulation of accountability (i.e., transactional-accountability—see Chapter II.) inevitably foregrounds that agents and principals (e.g., ODA funder and an INGOS) may have divergent interests and that there is an asymmetry of power characterizing the relationship. In the case of ODA funders, assigning the principal role to “the public” in terms of accountability is uncontroversial—with the common expectation that citizens of these democratic countries are the principals to whom the funding agent should demonstrate accountability. However, highlighting transactional-accountability also acknowledges the dominance of funders over those same agents for whom they have worked to redefine their relationships with as “partnerships” and suggests an incongruity regarding the role of funders and their degree of control over the development process. While not necessarily controversial, funders' overt demands for transactional-accountability foreground a conceptual dissonance in the current governance of international development, as well as the existing power differentials which recent aid reforms have sought to de-emphasize. For example, recipient governments of southern countries are now expected to take ownership for identifying their own development priorities and pursuing the conditions that promote progress. Stressing the need for these same actors to demonstrate compliance to funder-driven rules and standards suggests that they are not entirely in control of their



own development processes. Clearly there is a place and demand for this type of principal-agent relationship in development given the past levels of corruption and failures of southern governments to translate millions of dollars of aid to any real benefits for their citizens. However, the exclusive use of monitoring and evaluation information for compliance and audit purposes runs counter to the current movement of affirming the ownership and agency of funders' partners. As a result, while monitoring and evaluation are universally associated with meeting accountability requirements, measurement processes are frequently held up as equally beneficial to the agents through a the companion responsibility of "learning." Thus, in today's rhetoric about the need for accountability is almost always accompanied by a similar call for "learning." USAID's most recent policy on evaluation, for example, states that evaluation has two primary purposes: "accountability to stakeholders and learning to improve effectiveness" (USAID 2011:5).

### **Learning as Effect-Accountability**

In addition to using monitoring and evaluation information for accountability in terms of compliance and auditing purposes, a key aspect of measuring results in development is to promote effectiveness through learning. Learning in this context is about talking the information and knowledge created through measuring results and using it as a guide to inform decisions and improve programming. This concept is borrowed from the corporate sector's idea of "learning organizations" which uses knowledge management to engage in a continuous cycle of self-improvement. (OECD 2001:18). In contrast to using measurement to primarily gauge compliance,

the failures and shortcomings of agents are recast as a valuable knowledge that contributes to self-improvement and also to the wider understanding of development. Thus the ubiquitous practice of collecting “lessons learned” is predicated on the assumption that information about past experiences can both be used within an organization to improve effectiveness and can also be transferred to other organizations to contribute to a public understanding of development.

The promotion of learning addresses funders’ need for both compliance (the incentive problem) and for selectivity (the quality problem) in a way that acknowledges the agency and autonomy of the agents, while at the same time promoting funders’ own interests in achieving effectiveness. First, learning is a form of self-regulation in which agents take the information produced through monitoring and evaluation in order to inform future practices. Said another way, learning agents are not regulated directly by their principals but instead are encouraged to use monitoring and evaluation information to guide and self-regulate their own actions. Thus, the need for principals to conduct direct oversight and monitoring is ideally reduced with agents tracking their own progress and achievements in order to inform their future actions. Second, the goal of increasing effectiveness aligns the interests of both the principal and the agents towards demonstrating causality. Producing evidence of achieving results generates a particular type of knowledge that is in turn used to define, inform, and shape future programming of agents. The focus placed on effectiveness (e.g., contributing to the MDG indicators) rearticulates the work of agents into results, with the priority placed on demonstrating long-term sustainable

“impacts.” Likewise, learning organizations are expected to incorporate public knowledge (i.e., objective and scientific knowledge) about development within their own practices. Similar to the ways in which objective “evidence” is used to justify a funder’s decisions in terms of selectivity, this same evidence is expected to be incorporated by the funder’s agents as objective guidelines for informing their decision making and behavior. That is, through the expectation of “learning,” agents self-regulate their behaviors towards maximizing their effectiveness and demonstrate responsible and evidence-based decision making. Lastly, funders can use their agents’ demonstration of learning as a basis for their own selectivity purposes. USAID and other ODA funders are increasingly replacing conditionalities with the notion of selectivity where recipient countries are expected to demonstrate their own willingness and initiative in optimizing the effectiveness of their funds and reducing corruption. “Selectivity focuses aid on good performers—countries that have reasonably good policies and institutions—and on serious reform efforts, already under way, by governments and societies that have taken responsibility for designing their own policies and institutions” (USAID 2002:24). Thus, “learning” allows for both the reinforcement of ownership and a commitment to achieving results; demonstrating learning becomes both a practical and normative “signal” to funders that their agents are aligned to their own instrumental interests of maximizing effectiveness (i.e., ownership), making them more attractive/competitive in terms of funders’ selectivity.

As such, the twin expectations of accountability *and* learning within development both function to regulate agents and address funder requirements for knowledge in terms of performance and selectivity, as well as to reiterate the agency of their partner and owner agents. However learning, or effect-accountability, does this through largely stripping the agent of their own interests and replacing them with a commitment to achieve “change” informed largely by a perspectival knowledge. Thus, effect-accountability transforms agents (e.g., countries, contractors, and INGOs) into “causal agents” that are working toward an a-perspectival vision of development. This is what Ferguson calls the “anti-political machine”:

By uncompromisingly reducing poverty to a technical problem, and by promising technical solutions to the sufferings of powerless and oppressed people, the hegemonic problematic of “development” is the principal means through which the question of poverty is de-politicized in the world today (1994:256).

## Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the growing tendency of private and public funders to frame development as an enterprise in which their main goal is to achieve value for money by producing measurable results (OECD n.d.). In this period of financial austerity and financial crisis, funders are taking on the role of investors, rather than the “doers” of development. As such, the enterprise of development not only offers specific benefits to the poor and vulnerable within southern countries, investing in development also provides tangible benefits for global citizens in terms of stronger markets and more secure and stable nations. The most recent reform efforts in international aid and development progressively emphasize rationalizing development

interventions in order to increase their effectiveness and efficiency in achieving measurable change.

Consequently, funders need knowledge that can inform their investment efforts and provide evidence of their effectiveness. The argument is made that in order for this evidence to be useful and transparent to funders' interests it must be "actionable" or be able to inform their choices. Performance measurement and traditional forms of evaluation provide evidence that the key components of a development strategy have been implemented and contractual obligations with their agents were fulfilled. This information helps remedy the incentive problem faced by funders; implementation data allows funders and program managers monitor specific program components and actors and make adjustments to optimize efficiency. Funders, in turn can use this information as evidence that public or donated funds have not been mismanaged and have been used for their designated purposes. Recent reforms in aid and the emphasis on development effectiveness have brought increased attention to information that addresses the selectivity problem, in that funders and others are interested in evidence that development interventions have been effective in achieving desired results and if the same type of intervention would be a good investment for future programming. In the drive towards effectiveness, funders are increasingly interested in achieving the highest level of results, or "impacts," and the ability to attribute these results to their funded intervention. Thus impact evaluations, which provide evidence of the causality of an intervention, have grown in importance and popularity with the development community for their ability to demonstrate the

internal validity of an intervention's effectiveness and by demonstrating external validity of the intervention to other contexts. Thus transparent and credible evidence of effectiveness must include comparability, causality, and objectivity. This instrumental transparency is characterized by an aperspective objectivity that is seen as credible actionable information for funders while it also makes the resulting information transparent for public purposes/public good in three distinct ways: funder-driven measurement provides communicability with the public, it provides scientific-knowledge that is generalizable across different contexts of development, and it both informs and justifies selectivity for public actions based on effectiveness. Thus the virtual-circle of benefits that put forward in the investing in development model is demonstrated through this type of instrumental transparency and its ability convert the individual and local positive change into "results" and a public good.

Finally, accountability is seen as an important rationale for funder-driven monitoring and evaluation practices. However, using this information for compliance and audit purposes poses a contradiction within the recent development reforms whereby funders' relationships with agents (i.e., recipient countries, INGOs, contractors, etc.) have been recast in a more egalitarian light as "partners" and as owners in control of their own development agendas. The promotion of transactional-accountability is incongruous in that it foregrounds the asymmetries of power between funders and their agents and the ability of funders to demand agents to account as a condition of receiving resources. As such, the need for accountability within development is presently accompanied by the notion of learning. Learning is

in fact another form of regulation, but it relies on the agent to self-modify behavior to increase their effectiveness based upon a perspective knowledge. This form of effect-accountability depoliticizes development by realigning the agents' interests toward increasing their causality (and masking their own self-interests). As a result, the current formation of upwards-accountability in development serves to both align development agents to the interests of funders, and to focus on change as an instrumental/causal process, rather than a one that is deeply imbricated by the interests of its agents and participants.

## CHAPTER IV

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### People-Centered Approaches: Development as Enabling Agency

Normative approaches to economic and social progress have always existed alongside more technical orientations to development based upon moral appeals for “reversals” in the entrenched power imbalances of the north and south (Chambers 1997; Kabeer 1994). These approaches come from a number of intellectual backgrounds but share an interest in reframing progress from the point of view of people, and specifically those people who are the most vulnerable, deprived, and disenfranchised (Hickey and Mohan 2004). This family of orientations to development, discussed broadly here as “people-centered approaches,” realigns development strategies towards enabling the agency of marginalized populations so they may have the capacity to act and improve the quality of their own lives and foster progress within their communities, governance structures, and economies. These approaches have challenged the market-dominated view of development preoccupied with the health of national economies with an alternative vision which focuses on the conditions and resources needed to ensure the well-being and freedom of poor people to take action towards their own interests (Nelson and Dorsey 2003:2012).

This chapter examines how the current emphasis on human agency in development, as seen by the people-centered commitments to participation and empowerment of the poor, has implications for knowledge-based accounts and claims of “downward accountability” by development agencies and INGOs. The first section



begins by briefly discussing influential movements which decisively placed the agency of poor people at the center of development. These include the efforts to assign development as an internationally recognized human right and Amartya Sen's articulation of the linkages between development and freedom which have both contributed to the current orthodoxy of the moral and instrumental emphasis on the enlargement of poor peoples' agency through participation and empowerment. The following section discusses how a focus on human agency drives particular methodological requirements for producing knowledge about poor peoples' experiences and measuring people-centered interventions. I argue that the measurement practices and the resulting representations of people-centered interventions function to both constitute and validate the transformation of poor people into modern agents of development. The final section suggests implications in resulting from these particular representations of poor people as the primary agents of their own progress in terms of making claims for downward accountability from development agencies, INGOs, and governments.

### **Foundations of People-Centered Approaches**

People-centered approaches were mainstreamed by the 1990s, through three significant contributions articulating the principle that the agency of the poor should be the central driver of effective and sustainable development programming. These advances include the recognition of development as a human right, the intellectual

contributions of Amartya Sen, and the institutionalization of these ideas in the Human Development Report.

### **The Right to Development**

The human person is the central subject of development and should be the active participant and beneficiary of the right to development (UN Declaration on the Right to Development 1986, Article 2.1).

The historical emphasis on the economic development of southern countries remained conceptually distant from political and social reform until the 1980s, when the collapse of the former Soviet Union softened the resistance to linking political freedoms and social development with economic prosperity (Hamm 2001). Using the language of human rights and individual entitlements, the 1986 United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development affirmed that positive social, political, and economic change are interrelated requirements for the well-being of all individuals. The Declaration introduced the notion of development as an entitlement and brought attention to the corresponding duties of states, civil societies, and the international community. Several international conferences<sup>1</sup> in the 1990s followed the Declaration which served to expand the meaning and significance of the right to development and “helped to create the understanding that democracy, human rights, sustainability, and social development are interdependent” (Hamm 2001:1007).

Four basic principles from modern human rights theory inform the theoretical and normative assumptions about today’s people-centered development efforts

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<sup>1</sup> The 1993 UN World Conference on Human Rights (in Vienna), the World Conference on Women (1995) in Beijing, and the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen (1995).

(Munro 2009). The first principle, *universality* (or nondiscrimination), affirms that all people are equally entitled to the pursuit and enjoyment of development and the path of progress should not be determined by existing power imbalances. One group of individuals cannot justify enjoying the benefits of development over any other and all people, by the very nature that they are human, are entitled to the basic requirements of life. The second principle, *indivisibility*, highlights the interdependent nature of all rights, making it impossible to ignore one set of rights in the pursuit of another. For example, the ongoing practice of Western democratic countries to place an exclusive emphasis on civil and political rights while ignoring economic, social, and cultural rights is unacceptable under the right to development paradigm. Likewise, the pursuit of economic progress of southern countries necessarily needs to be accompanied by political and civil protections.

*Participation* is the third principle which emphasizes individuals, regardless of social or economic status, must be treated as “participatory citizens rather than passive recipients of development”(Mitlin and Hickey 2009:8). Participation of “developing populations” is both a means and an end to development in respecting their fundamental right to political and civil involvement in their own fates. The last principle, *accountability*, maintains people are “active subjects or claim holders” which implicates corresponding duty-bearers (Munro 2009:190). Central to this principle of accountability is the expectation that those people who have been previously excluded from the public sphere should be able to claim their entitlements from duty-bearers—whether that is through political structures or civil society, or in

relation to other social groups whose rights may be in direct conflict with theirs (Duni, Fon et al. 2009:50).

Redefining development as a human right emphasizes a process of social change that is just as concerned with how development happens as it is with achieving development outcomes. Perhaps most significantly, human rights principles provide a normative framework which shifts the rationale for development from helping those people who are in need to one in which individuals are entitled to demand the basic conditions with which to exercise their own choices and agency. Thus, development becomes an undeniably political endeavor around expanding the ability of people to claim their entitlements from duty-bearers in order to manifest individual and collective progress.

The right to development was an important shift in reconceptualizing poverty as a condition requiring action by duty-bearers; however, the right to development has been criticized as remaining largely “aspirational” as a set of moral imperatives, leaving both the exact nature of these entitlements and corresponding obligations of the duty-bearers’ undefined (e.g., Archer 2009; Munro 2009). Some scholars even go as far as to argue the use of human rights is counter-productive to realizing positive change in the lives of the most vulnerable; human rights instruments offer little protections for the poor as they are notoriously difficult to enforce and are without legal or practical mechanisms to hold states or international actors accountable (Hamm 2001; Uvin 2004, 2007). Further, it is unrealistic to assume those populations subjected to the most pernicious forms of discrimination and poverty are aware of

formal rights let alone have the ability to make claims upon them. In sum, the right to development laid out a broad normative framework for supporting the agency of individuals but did not provide concrete methods for people-centered initiatives to determine how these rights (or the lack thereof) manifest in the lives of poor people. As a result, the right to development was left without a means to evaluate the nature of this right or a structure to hold accountable the actions of so-called duty-bearers.

### **Development as Freedom**

Much of the theoretical underpinnings for rights-based and people-centered approaches in general have been heavily influenced by Amartya Sen's treatment of freedom as the "basic building block" of development (Sen 1999). Sen argues human development should go beyond economic growth to ultimately expanding the capacity for individuals to make independent choices and act upon those choices within the world, i.e., freedom. He argues that "freedoms are not only the primary ends of development, they are also among its principal means" and identifies the basic freedoms instrumental for promoting development (i.e., economic opportunities, political freedoms, social facilities, transparency guarantees, protective security) (1999). Sen operationalizes freedoms into what he calls "capabilities," or substantial freedoms required to enjoy "the kind of life he or she has reason to value" (Sen 1999:87. Capabilities include the various activities and states—or "functionings"—of "being and doing" that make up a person's well-being. That is, a person's ability to exercise his or her agency is dependent upon existing capabilities (substantive freedoms) to pursue functionings (beings and doings).

Sen specifies that these capacities have two dimensions. On the one hand, individuals must be free to make their own choices and act upon them, which Sen calls the “process aspect of freedom.” On the other hand, real choices must be made available in order for individuals to have the capacity to choose them. This is what Sen calls the “opportunity aspect of freedom.” In terms of development, freedoms must both be protected and enabled. Sen also points to the interconnected nature of these instrumental freedoms: “Linkages between different types of freedoms are empirical and causal, rather than constitutive and compositional” (1999:xii). What people are able to do and to be is highly dependent upon the improvement of these freedoms taken together. Sen’s ideas about freedom and development form the basis of the “human development approach” which provides a tool and framework within which to conceptualize and evaluate poverty, inequality, and well-being (Roebyns 2005:94) and succinctly defines human development as a process of enlarging people's choices. Sen’s ideas continue to be discussed and expanded upon throughout academic and practitioners circles (e.g., Deneulin and Shahani 2009; Nussbaum 2011) and have been hugely influential in shifting the focus of development from addressing the low income of individuals to the deprivation of basic capabilities.

### **Human Development Report**

Sen’s ideas regarding capabilities, freedoms, and the well-being of people are empirically connected through his contributions to the annual Human Development Report (HDR) commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme. As one of the primary creators of the report, Sen’s aim was to shift development beyond

the classic economic measures of GNP and income and to anchor development thinking and measurement on people and the process of enlarging their choices (UNDP 1990:1). The Human Development Index (HDI) is a composite of life expectancy, educational attainment, and indicators which allows for the measurement and comparison of the well-being of populations across countries and over time. Since 1991, the report has introduced further indices that address issues of inequality and gender (i.e., Inequality-adjusted HDI and Gender Inequality Index). In 2000, the HDR focused on human rights and in essence formally brought the right to development and Sen's capability approach together by offering an intellectual framework that allowed the human rights community to engage more effectively with "development" (UNDP 2000:18). The report made the case that a minimum standard of living is a human right rather than abstract development benchmark and therefore poverty can be considered a human rights challenge. The divergence between these two views of poverty is seen when contrasting the HDR indices with the MDG indicators. The MDGs refer to people as objects of development goals but not their agents; as a result, these two frames of development illustrate "important conceptual differences" between "agency, accountability, the analysis of causes, and symptoms of poverty" (Nelson 2007:2042).

### **People-Centered Approaches to Development Programming**

Under a rights-based approach the "recipients" of development are reframed as rights-bearing actors with legitimate claims on duty bearers, rather than as supplicants standing bereft before their patrons (Hickey and Mitlin 2009:220).

Many official aid agencies (DFID), intergovernmental organizations (UNDP, UNICEF, UNFEM), and INGOs (Oxfam, CARE, InterAction, Save the Children UK) have formally adopted people-centered approaches (and also commonly called “rights-based” approaches) throughout their work. Rights-based approaches share an explicit emphasis on the linkages between rights and freedoms, accountability, empowerment, participation, non-discrimination, and concentrated attention to the most vulnerable groups. These include commitments to integrating participation for people affected by interventions in all aspects of the program, addressing the root causes of poverty and marginalization, enabling the recognition and respect for human rights standards, and addressing issues of exclusion and discrimination (Nelson and Dorsey 2008:93).

While these approaches share a core set of principles, there is an “enormous range of interpretations” of the best ways to protect the freedoms and promote the agency of the poor across agencies and organizations (Cornwall and Nyam-Musembi 2004; Uvin 2004). Overall, people-centered approaches do not necessarily alter what development organizations or agencies do (e.g., promote healthy behaviors, foster economic activity for women, manage agricultural markets, or encourage disaster-preparedness), but rather place a priority on the ways in which intervention activities are implemented (van Weerelt 2001:15). In addition to achieving traditional development goals, people-centered approaches must also demonstrate these intervention outcomes are achieved through the choices and agency of the poor. Or in other words, people-centered development must empower poor people to achieve



development outcomes. Empowerment in some form or another becomes a compulsory outcome of people-centered approaches, promoting “a group’s or individual’s capacity to make effective choices...and then to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes” (Alsop, Bertelsen, and Holland 2006:10).

While people-centered development agencies and INGOs may support a host of activities in diverse sectors—such as good governance, natural resources, household economic activity, human services—they all share the need to demonstrate their commitments to the freedom and agency of the poor by producing accounts of both their program activities’ means and ends. People-centered development must demonstrate the means of development is empowering for *effectiveness* purposes as the “achievement of development is thoroughly dependent on the free agency of people” (Sen 1999:4). People-centered approaches are based upon the premise that sustainable progress cannot be achieved without a process that supports the decisions and interests of individuals—that is, progress cannot be “delivered” to individuals it must be achieved through the agency of those it involves. Also, for *evaluative* reasons, people-centered approaches must assess if the change resulting from their program activity has come about with the enlargement of peoples’ agency; the primary criterion of the success of people-centered development is the expansion of poor peoples’ abilities to pursue their own interests (i.e., empowerment). As a result, verifying both the means (participation) and the ends (empowerment) of people-centered development is critical to ensuring development agencies and organizations are true to their people-centered commitments. The antithesis of a people-centered

approaches are those top-down interventions where people are prescribed solutions to externally defined problems based upon the wishes and priorities of funders, governments, or other development actors. People-centered approaches “necessarily opt for process-based development methodologies and techniques, rather than externally conceived ‘quick fixes’ and important technical models” (UN/OHCHR n.d.). As a result, people-centered approaches require a significant amount of time to allow for the involvement of poor people in the development process, which may include planning, priority setting, implementation activities, monitoring, and evaluation. The program activities themselves are intended to enable the active participation of poor people in achieving the development goals. The focus on process is linked to programs effectiveness and a recognition that the realization of rights and freedoms may only be visible in the long-term. As such, participatory activities are expected to foster the agency of individuals and their involvement in aspects of programming often becomes a proxy for effectiveness (UNFPA 2010:111).

In sum, people-centered approaches have redefined issues of poverty, illness, and inequality into fundamental deprivations of human agency and freedom. The linking of human rights and development has fixed the social and economic well-being of individuals with their ability to exercise political and civil rights. Acknowledging the relationship between poor peoples’ rights and their well-being normatively reframes the involvement of states, development aid, and organizations as duty-bearers (rather than purveyors of charity) in which poor people can make claims. Likewise, the

infusion of rights-language into the field of development has also highlighted the relational nature of agency, going beyond discussions of entitlement-holders and duty-bearers, to making the connection explicit between the capacity for action and contextual conditions such as cultural opportunities, security, and imbalances of power. The intellectual contributions of Amartya Sen and others have provided the theoretical foundations between abstract rights and freedoms and the enlargement of individual capacities and functionings. At the basis of people-centered approaches is the acknowledgement that the condition of poverty is not exclusively defined as resource deprivation, but expanded to include a lack of capacity to act on their choices and to make claims on duty-bearers. Development organizations and agencies which formally take on a people-centered approach (such as rights-based approaches) commit to making progress through enhancing the agency of the poor. As such, people-centered programming must provide accounts that verify a process that enhances the agency of the poor, and that demonstrate program outcomes have come about through their empowerment.

### **Accounting for People-Centered Development**

Information is power. Informed citizens are better equipped to take advantage of opportunities, access services, exercise their rights, negotiate effectively, and hold state and nonstate actors accountable. Without information that is relevant, timely, and presented in forms that can be understood, it is impossible for poor people to take effective action (Narayan 2002:15).

Participatory approaches to development are about the identification, collection, interpretation, analysis and (re)presentation of particular forms of (local) knowledge (Kothari 2001:143).

Like all development efforts, people-centered approaches are a knowledge-based practice relying on performance measurement, project monitoring, evaluation, and even impact analysis to inform program implementation and assessment. However measurement and knowledge-production activities within these approaches are fundamentally shaped by a core commitment to poor-driven progress and the need to account for the agency of the individuals and communities involved in program interventions. As such, people-centered approaches need to produce accounts with emic transparency to support the agency of the poor in addition to accounts with etic transparency in order to provide evidence to external stakeholders that development outcomes were achieved through the empowerment of the poor.

### **Catalyzing Agency with Emic Accounts**

[T]he key promise of participatory methodologies is that they are ‘experience-near’ in terms of their participant/respondents: they are able to reflect more closely the knowledge and worldview of people themselves than more formal, abstract, or ‘scientific’ approaches (White and Pettit 2004:4).

In participatory research, knowledge is not produced for its own sake, but is seen as being embedded in processes of social change or problem solving, inseparable from the idea of action (Brock 2002:9).

Knowledge plays a central role in people-centered development as a necessary requirement for enlarging poor peoples’ choices and their overall agency. People-centered approaches are as concerned with information asymmetry as other approaches, but go further in linking the absence of critical knowledge with the broader disparities of power and resources; thus, measurement and the resulting

analytics are essential tools to reaching the goals of addressing these imbalances and enabling the agency of the poor. That is, people-centered approaches normatively demand their own type of “actionable information” which can facilitate a broader emphasis on empowerment and anchoring the locus of action and choice with poor people themselves. For example, knowledge-based practices hold the promise of “transformation” in which individuals become conscious of their own situations and develop an expanded notion of possible alternatives. Generating knowledge also informs the interests and corresponding choices of poor people, allowing them to identify the best course of action to achieve their interests. And finally, the production of relevant knowledge leads to poor people taking active steps towards improving their well-being (i.e., empowerment).

The engagement of poor people with knowledge as both its producer and consumer drives the transparency requirements for people-centered measurement. Participatory measurement, or “the co-production with poor people of information about poverty which reflects their perspectives” has become a foundational practice in people-centered development (Brock 2002:1). The involvement of poor people in measuring key aspects of their lives and development interventions has its roots in participatory action research which uses forms of community inquiry and self-reflection to inform collective action for social change (Brisolara 1998; Cousins and Whitmore 1998; Daigneault and Jacob 2009). In the 80s and 90s, models for participatory measurement under the “transformative” umbrella proliferated within the field of development including “participatory rural appraisal”(Chambers 1994b),

participatory poverty assessments (Brock 2002), deliberative democratic evaluation (House and Howe 2000), collaborative action research, empowerment evaluation (Fetterman 1996), community monitoring, self-evaluation, participatory planning, monitoring, and evaluation (Estrella 2000), etc. Approaches to participatory measurement often cite the importance of learning, negotiation, and flexibility as core attributes of any participatory exercise (Estrella and Gaventa 1996:4).

The specific methodologies employed by participatory approaches are varied and at times fluid, depending upon the context of the exercise (Lilja and Bellon 2008). The range of tools, techniques, and processes of participatory measurement often result “in a customized mix and sequence that is iterative and complementary” (White and Pettit 2004:5). Traditional methods such as focus groups, field work, and in-depth interviews are used as well as interactive and visual techniques such as community mapping, workshops, list-making which can be collaboratively analyzed with ranking and scoring. Participatory mapping and modeling, transect walks, matrix scoring, well-being grouping and ranking, seasonal calendars, institutional diagramming, trend and change analysis, and analytical diagramming are all undertaken by local people. These techniques represent a “growing family of approaches and methods to enable local (rural and urban) people to express, enhance, share and analyze their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act” (Chambers 1994b:1253). For example, measurement techniques tailored for non-literate populations use tokens as counters and substitute visual representations in place of numbers and text-heavy accounts.

Participatory methods are intended to yield information that can inform the choices and actions of poor people through “enabling local people to articulate and analyze their own situations” (Cornwall 2003:1328). That is, “actionable information” for participants must necessarily be comprehensible and applicable to the lived experience of poor people if it is to allow them to understand and be active participants in their own progress (Jackson and Kassam 1998). The priority is placed on emic transparency of local situations, relationships, and realities over the framing of poor peoples’ experiences into preexisting categories and definitions (Chambers 1994a, 1994b, 1997). This type of situated knowledge is typically (but not always) qualitative in nature and stresses internal validity from poor people’s perspectives. Thus, the people-centered measurement is derived from experience rather than theory, basing its validity on local rather than universal claims to knowledge (Kabeer 1994:82). “The issue is not therefore to measure ‘complete objective truth’, but to establish in a systematic way the most relevant indicators for the question at hand—a process which is inherently subjective and partial” (Mayoux and Chambers 2005:278). This reversal from the traditional “outsider’s view” aimed at producing objective and interest-free accounts, intentionally provides a “preferential treatment” of views and voices of the poor (Jackson and Kassam 1998).

In other words, a bias must be built into the participatory evaluation process in favor of the poorest interests and their allies. The powerful and elites can participate, but their voices cannot be permitted to dominate... This fundamental commitment to a bias in favor of the least powerful constituencies in the evaluation exercise sets participatory evaluation apart from other collaborative forms of assessment (Jackson and Kassam 1998:5).

Consequently, the intentional emphasis on emic transparency and local knowledge within people-centered approaches has been criticized for what is seen as its discounting of the standard conventions of scientific research (Lilja and Bellon 2008; Pittman 2008). Proponents of participatory methodologies reassert that the “rigor and reliability” which scientific methods are designed to produce are not the main challenges for participatory measurement; but rather, “ensuring that their mainstream use achieved their potential for enabling very poor women and men to have an equal voice in priorities and policies for pro-poor development” (Mayoux and Chambers 2005:272). In other words, participatory measurement is not aiming to provide accounts that are transparent, objective, or necessarily credible to *external* stakeholders. The primary function of participatory accounts is to contribute to the process of development which furthers poor people’s empowerment. Poor people’s participation in planning, monitoring, and evaluation practices is intended to produce accounts that shift the balance of power in favor of local people and communities, and give them control and ownership of the project and resulting information (Cousins and Whitmore 1998; Hamm 2001). In contrast, conventional forms of data collection in development have been characterized as an “extraction” of information and local knowledge from the poor which exclusively benefits the interests of distant parties (e.g., funders)(Chambers 1997; Pittman 2008). People-centered approaches intentionally keep control of both the process and the resulting information in the hands of poor-people in order that they “own” the findings. “Such an approach clearly makes it difficult to sustain the conventional separation between ‘data’ such as



measures and indicators and the ‘methods’ used to generate them” (White and Pettit 2004:8).

### **Producing Evidence of Empowerment with Etic Accounts**

[I]f empowerment cannot be measured, it will not be taken seriously in development policy making and programming (Narayan 2005:ix).

People-centered development’s focus of enabling the agency of program participants is accompanied by technical objectives for achieving traditional outcomes like food-security, sustainable agribusiness, or girls’ education. However, what distinguishes people-centered programming from other approaches to development is a requirement to demonstrate their technical outcomes have been achieved via the agency of the poor (i.e., empowerment) (Narayan 2005). Still, people-centered development agencies and INGOs are pressed by funders and other upward stakeholders to produce accounts that verify technical outcomes from their programming that span across communities, districts, or even entire countries. Thus, in addition to producing local accounts of development activities, people-centered programming must also generate etic accounts of its work. The divergent transparency requirements for these two types of accounts of people-centered interventions pose a number of methodological challenges in producing evidence of empowerment.

First, there is an inherent tension between the intentional privileging of the local concepts and categories (i.e., emic transparency) used in participatory accounts and the need for an aggregated vision to understand a program’s effects across multiple localities. Combining data resulting from participatory measurement poses

the challenge of standardizing what was normatively and instrumentally intended to reflect specific experiences and realities, into general indicators which can be compared across multiple sites of program implementation (Brock 2002). In addition, participatory data are intended to be “owned” by those that produce it and using data outside of informing the participants raises critical questions about “how it can be shared and disseminated and to whom” (Mayoux and Chambers 2005:291).

Second, measuring any form of empowerment entails a complex causality between contexts, program activities, individual choices, and behaviors (Mahmud, Shah, and Becker 2012). “Particular pathways of change vary from context to context” and even among individuals within the same context (Mahmud et al. 2012:610). Likewise, empowerment is a multi-dimensional process in that an individual may be empowered in one aspect of her life but not necessarily others (e.g., women may have the formal right to vote but may still have very little control within her household). Therefore, to claim individuals or local communities are “empowered” does not guarantee that they are free and exercising agency in all aspects of their lives. Further, it is not possible to directly observe the process of empowerment as it is largely an internal process and difficult to quantify. As such, the achievement of empowerment is most often deduced through observing actions which are assumed to be the results of empowerment. The underlying phenomena are measured and evaluated by the proxy of observable behaviors (Narayan 2005:15).

Third, assigning attribution in people-centered programming may be technically, as well as politically, fraught when it comes to representing how

technical outcomes have been achieved. On the one hand, development agencies and organizations are pressed to demonstrate that their program activities have been effective and achieved some manner of tangible outcomes (i.e., higher vaccination rates, increased school attendance, greater access to potable water, lower corruption). On the other hand, people-centered outcomes as a matter of principle, must necessarily be realized through the agency and action of those individuals targeted. Interventions become multi-step processes whereby development organizations and duty-bearers contribute to the enhancement of individual and community agency, which allow for the achievement greater levels of well-being. Representing causality exclusively as the results of a program intervention rather than through the empowerment of the poor has the potential to undermine people-centered commitments. This tension becomes apparent in discussions about “scaling up” those programs that have been proven effective through etic accounts. In some sense, identifying a replicable, scalable development intervention implies a top-down approach that overrides the organic processes and resulting choices that people-centered development intends to foster (White and Pettit 2004:17).

The insistence that successful development projects be replicable assumes that different situations are equal; on the contrary, every situation is unique. We can learn principles and guidelines, and develop insights, but *the attempt to replicate shows disrespect for the specificity of people's processes of development and their ways of taking control* (Kaplan 2000:34 – original emphasis).

Thus, a scalable program is by definition a predictive top-down model that can achieve prescribed outcomes and can be viewed as negating individuals' choices and paths to empowerment. As a result, the ways in which empowerment is measured are

intertwined with a set of implicit assumptions about how development “happens”; this in turn has potentially conflicting representations of people-centered approaches predicated on active participants achieving change rather than passive recipients following the directives of development programming.

### **People-Centered Accounts: The making of modern agents**

Participation and empowerment is about processes in which people act as agents—individually and as groups. It is about the freedom to make decisions in matters that affect their lives; the freedom to hold others accountable for their promises, the freedom to influence development in their communities (Alkire and Deneulin 2009:30).

PM&E [participatory monitoring and evaluation] is about promoting self-reliance in decision making and problem solving—thereby strengthening people's capacities to take action and promote change (Estrella 2000:4).

Participatory accounts within people-centered approaches are meant to reverse the historical practice of treating local populations targeted for development intervention as passive “objects of knowledge and management” (Escobar 1995:23). Knowledge-production within development has been largely produced by expert-driven measurement and representations of poor people as static “empirical entities” rather than dynamic human actors with their own priorities and interests (Foucault 1994). Likewise, these simplified representations obscure both the agency of the poor and the embedded power structures which replicate disenfranchisement through their objectification (Ferguson 1994; Mitchell 1988, 2002; Rose 1999; Scott 1998). People-centered emic accounts are based upon the expectation that the poor should be

the active “subjects” of measurement (Rubin 2003:22). That is, local accounts provide a subjective representation of conditions of the poor and their prescribed interventions, allowing for measurement and the resulting knowledge to be created from and for specific, situated actors.

Participatory measurement also serves as a mode of subjectivication in the Foucaultian sense; that is, poor “people are invited or incited to recognize their moral obligations” to participate and become effective agents of their own development (Foucault 1997:264). Participatory measurement is about producing a kind of self-knowledge to enable the “conscientization” of the poor (Freire 1998; Harris-Curtis 2003). The act of measuring, analyzing, and evaluating their own experiences becomes a central technique in informing and empowering action, including the formation of an “imagined autonomy” that allows people to conceptualize their own agency (Cleaver 2009:137). Thus, people-centered measurement not only produces knowledge-based accounts representing the poor as primary agents of development, the act of participating in the creation of these accounts serves to shape and constitute the poor *as* agents. The process of creating emic accounts transforms poor people from passive beneficiaries of assistance to strategic actors that have the ability to weight evidence, make rational choices, analyze options, and take decisive actions towards their own well-being (Estrella 2000). Thus, poor people are transformed into modern actors who have the ability to “envision

alternative paths of action, decide among them, and take action to advance the choice path as an individual or collectively with others” (Narayan 2005:42).

These internal transformations are not only linked to the ability of poor people to act in their own interests, but also to participate more broadly in the public sphere.

If the art of participatory evaluation is to create a moment of truth, its ultimate role is to reform. By conscripting a community in the simple and sensible act of knowing more about itself, it also engages the members in changing the way they behave politically, for participatory evaluation is a model for democracy and inevitably introduces a democratic routine that everyone can practice (Freedman 1998:34).

Thus, participating in knowledge production is also intended to produce effective citizens able to make demands on the existing power structures.

The focus on rights-based versions of participation is about shifting the frame from assessing the needs of beneficiaries or the choices of customers or clients, to foster citizens to recognize and claim their rights and obligation-holders to honour their responsibilities (Cornwall and Nyam-Musembi 2004:1424).

Thus, people-centered accounts form modern actors who are able to make claims and hold others to account; accountability is what distinguishes people-centered development from charity (Uvin 2004).

Along with creating modern agents for development, participatory measurement implies that the resulting change will occur through democratic processes. Eitic accounts of empowerment also serve to validate that the outcomes of development interventions were achieved through the agency of individuals and communities. That is, measures of empowerment serve to confirm that development interventions have been implemented and achieved through a participatory process and democratic decision-making through agents primed to participate in public life

and to claim their responsibilities as a citizen. In sum, participation fosters the ability to demand accountability from duty-bearers and governments whereby an “empowering approach to state reform can be viewed as strengthening the *demand side of governance*” (Narayan 2005:12 – original emphasis).

Consequently, empowerment is as much about the making of a certain type of individual which has the capacity to act to achieve their own interests through democratic processes, as it is about achieving development outcomes. Participating in the production of accounts promotes the ability of individuals and communities to achieve incremental and planned changes through rational analysis, consensus building, and coordination.

### **People-Centered Accounts: Debating Downward Accountability**

The beauty of empowerment is that it appears to reject the logics of patronizing dependency that infused earlier welfare modes of expertise. Subjects are to do the work on themselves, not in the name of conformity, but to make them free (Rose 1999:268).

At the heart of any rights-based approach to development are concerns with mechanisms of accountability, for this is precisely what distinguishes charity from claims (Uvin 2004:131).

People-centered interventions aim to shift the locus of control “downwards” to the most vulnerable and disenfranchised individuals in order that they may become active agents of their own development. A critical aspect of this shift is the involvement of poor people in the production of knowledge-based

accounts about their lives and development interventions; these accounts both inform poor people about their choices and possible actions and serve to transform participants into modern agents who can make rational choices and take strategic actions towards achieving their interests. A corollary to this expectation in people-centered development is that empowering poor people will also enhance their ability to demand accountability. However, while people-centered accounts measure and represent the agency and empowerment of the poor, they also have the potential to mask the roles of other development actors whom the participants may have reason to hold accountable. That is, the focus of people-centered accounts on the agency and actions of development participants may serve to obscure the interests and actions of potential duty-bearers. The methodological focus of poor people's agency (in both constituting and representing their empowerment) may eventually make it more difficult for the poor to hold other development actors to account.

Within the downward accountability commitments of people-centered development, the poor are considered the “principals” whose interests should inform and direct how development happens in their own countries and communities. Applying the working definition given in Chapter II to people-centered development, accountability is the ability of development agencies or INGOs (the “agents”) to provide evidence to individuals and communities targeted for an intervention (the “principals”) that credibly demonstrates that



poor people's interests are being served. As such, how do people-centered accounts (emic and etic) represent development "agents" actions and contributions towards poor people's interests? How do people-centered accounts help program participants make their claims for "downward accountability" from aid agencies and INGOs? There is a commonsensical notion that the participation of individuals and communities in the planning, monitoring, and evaluation of programs, are a de facto demonstration that people-centered programming is downwardly accountable. While this claim can obviously be challenged based on the quality and extent of participation in an intervention, the relationships between people-centered development, their knowledge-based accounts, and claims for downward accountability should also be critically examined.

### **Structuring Identities and Interests**

The current orthodoxy of participation in development has been at the center of ongoing discussions about the assumed and actual outcomes of actively involving poor people in the planning and measurement of interventions (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Hickey and Mohan 2004). A primary critique within these discussions is that the enthusiastic rhetoric of participation and empowerment neglects the fact that participating in any type of intervention necessarily structures both people's identities and choices. The faith in the "local" knowledge produced through participatory accounts overlooks what is taken for granted as an a priori representation of "community" which has in most cases been constructed through the lens of program

objectives and feasible treatment areas as opposed to organic networks or political affiliations (Ferguson 1994; Hayward 1998; White and Pettit 2004). Along with these representations of community circumscribed by the interventions themselves, people-centered accounts have also been critiqued for the assumption that they reflect a shared and negotiated consensus among the various members and groups within a particular collective (White and Pettit 2004:17). Participatory methodologies in fact become highly problematic when they “authenticate” existing power imbalances (either extra- or intra-community) through moral claims to representing marginalized voices (White and Pettit 2004:18). As a result, the homogenizing influence of participatory accounts pose the danger of de-politicizing development through an uncritical privileging of “the local” as the site of action (Williams 2004:560).

Likewise, the choices and actions that follow participating in development processes are inescapably framed within the particular interventions and the interests of the development “agents.” That is, individuals and communities are invited to participate in development interventions that have already been approved of and funded by development actors outside of the targeted communities. For example, interventions are initially constructed through the strategic interests of the development agency or organization, funders, and the host government before they are presented to “local people” for participation. Thus, people are empowered to act in ways that are seen as correct or appropriate towards prestructured objectives in general areas that have been deemed in need of improvement (Clever 2009; Ryan 2011). As such,

[T]he question that arises with regard to empowerment is not so much 'how much' are people empowered but rather 'for what' are they empowered. And in the case of many if not all participatory projects it seems evident that what people are 'empowered to do' is to take part in the modern sector of 'developing' societies (Henkel and Stirrat 2001:182).

While a primary goal of participatory and people-centered approaches is to ensure that the priorities and interests of poor and disenfranchised will drive development programming, the very process of producing accounts organizes and articulates "local" interests within the outlines of what is deemed appropriate program activity.

### **Principals without Agents**

A second key critique of the participatory paradigm relevant to people-centered accounts is that they rely on a largely individualistic view of change focusing on personal transformation rather than altering broader structures of inequality (Williams 2004:559). This includes an assumption that the poor have elected to participate in development activities, ignoring the fact that refusing to participate is equally an act of agency (Cooke and Kothari 2001). Participation also takes on a moral imperative whereby the transformation of the poor and disenfranchised is required before progress can be achieved; this call to personal action has been likened to religious experiences (Francis 2001; Green 2000; Henkel and Stirrat 2001). Individuals and their communities are called to form and act upon life choices, with the ultimate goal of mobilizing development with little assistance from external actors.

By honing skills to monitor and evaluate their development, communities become capable of managing the development process on their own. This ability, and the motivation that it engenders, enables

communities to independently sustain their development process (World Bank 2002:20).

This “responsibilization” of the poor and marginalized stresses their ability and agency to work towards self-sustaining progress, while de-emphasizing the role of development agencies and organizations. The responsibility for the consequences of participatory interventions is thus shifted to the poor themselves: “By disowning the process they initiate, development agencies thus set themselves up as only ‘facilitating’” (Henkel & Stirrat 2001:183). The agency and motivations of development actors become obscured and redirect critical questions regarding their management and leadership of the project. In sum,

Just as the localized community of programme beneficiaries can be potentially empowered to achieve development through project facilitation, the failure to achieve it ultimately lies with local populations, local knowledge and local constraints (Green 2000:78).

The responsibilization of the poor serves to remove or at minimum, muddy the roles of development agencies, organizations, and other stakeholders in which the poor would otherwise make claims. The singular focus on the agency of the poor also poses the risk of exaggerating their “capacity to cope and progress under structural constraints, sometimes to the point that they are effectively framed as responsible for both their plight and their recovery” (Hickey and Mitlin 2009:221). Likewise, the focus on the action and agency at the local levels can promote a blindness to the socioeconomic structures and political realities in which poor people must inevitably negotiate for real change to be achieved (Botchway 2001:146-47). Accounts that omit, and therefore mask, linkages to important power dynamics and the ways in

which the actions of development actors shape poor people's experiences and chances to make significant change are often missing from people-centered accounts (Kothari 2001). This has led to claims that despite the desire to address the imbalances of power and equality within development by empowering the poor, participatory practices of people-centered approaches are in fact circumscribing development to the local experience of poor people which has a de-politicizing effect on achieving significant and lasting change (Green 2000; Leal 2007).

Consequently, downward accountability in people-centered development can be seen as transforming poor people themselves into both the principals and the agents of development. Instead of representing the actions of others (such as development agencies, INGOs, and government) in terms of poor people's own interests, people-centered accounts articulate local interests as produced through the objectives of specific development objectives. Likewise, project outcomes are seen in terms of the degree in which poor people were empowered and deemphasize the pragmatic roles of development actors and duty-bearers. The transparency requirements for people-centered accounts end up place limits on whom and what can be accounted for.

Practitioners of participatory research and development assume that local knowledge will reverse the previously damaging interventions which treat locals as passive recipients. *However, the reversal has been almost complete, so that the individual agent has become the key political site* (Mohan and Stokke 2000:253 – my emphasis).

As a result, the production of self-knowledge or measuring empowerment does not necessarily equate to accounts for regulating the actions of development agencies,

INGOs, and others. Much of the expectations for these accounts have been for those who have the greater balance of power to 'learn' from the poor. However, the potential for these accounts "depends on how they are used and by whom and the levels of political will not only to 'hear the voices of the poor' but also to 'listen' and take action" (Mayoux and Chambers 2005:272). Unlike other configurations of fiduciary accountability, poor people rarely have the ability to choose between development agents (i.e., elected or hired officials). That is, in most cases poor-people cannot chose among different development agencies or INGOs for services or interventions that assist them in improving the quality of their lives and their empowerment. The ability for the poor to hold development actors and duty-bearers accountable remains contingent on how their own actions are represented.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has looked at people-centered approaches to development and the normative focus on enlarging the freedom and choices of poor people. The goal of people-centered interventions is to transform passive recipients of assistance into the strategic agents of their own progress. Both the right to development and Amartya Sen's development as freedom laid out a series of principles, stressing that the process of development is as important as its outcomes. Thus, development cannot be "delivered" to poor people; individuals and communities must achieve their own well-being through their participation and ultimately their empowerment to act in their own interests.

The central role of knowledge in people-centered approaches was discussed to illustrate that the focus on the agency of the poor requires accounts that have both emic and etic transparency. Emic accounts are produced through participatory measurement practices which promote the conscientization of the poor and assist them in identifying choices and strategic action in order to achieve them. Etic accounts are required by development agencies and organizations that reflect the aggregated results of program interventions and often take observable behaviors and attitudes of individuals as proxies for their empowerment. The last section examines the assumption that the participation of poor people in the production of accounts equates to the downward accountability of development actors. However, I use critiques of the participatory paradigm to challenge this assumption of accountability and to argue that the intervention process itself shapes (regulates) both the interests and identities of poor people. Likewise, the focus of both etic and emic accounts within people-centered approaches serves to responsabilize the poor and obscure the actions and agency of those “agents” that claim downward accountability.

## CHAPTER V

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### Intersections of Accountability: Measuring the Effectiveness of INGOs

The task of understanding the connection between knowledge and INGO governance — or even simply defining what accountability precisely entails for these organizations — is complicated by the fact that INGOs have only recently emerged as highly visible actors both in poverty-reduction campaigns and as advocates for those southern voices least likely to be heard (Anheier, Glasius, and Kaldor 2001; Collingwood 2006). Their rapid entrance onto the global stage has been closely associated with civil society, which locates the work of INGOs in an independent space of collective action and outside traditional state and market structures. This view of INGOs has been readily promoted within the economic reforms and structural-adjustment programs of the Washington Consensus and provides the rationale behind the normative claim that INGOs uniquely offer strategic and ethical advantages in promoting development around the world (Edwards 2004; Kaldor, Anheier, and Glasius 2003; Keane 2003; Williams 2008). By the 1990s, this view was widely embraced by the official aid agencies (e.g., World Bank, IMF, USAID, etc.) and many northern-based INGOs became the preferred recipients of funding over Southern states (Fisher 1998). Confidence in INGOs as a new category of global actor and a “magic bullet” for development (Edwards and Hulme 1996) reached its historical climax with the then–Secretary General of the United Nations declaring that NGOs were “the new superpowers” of the 21st century (Annan 1998).



Yet this exuberance surrounding the promise of INGOs was short-lived. By the early 2000s, the expanding flow of official aid to INGOs and their growing influence in development resulted in a backlash that deeply challenged their legitimacy as favored actors in humanitarian aid and development (Jordon and Van Tuijl 2006a). Stakeholders began asking for evidence about INGO performance that demonstrated they were in fact more effective service providers and more responsive to the needs of local populations (Chandhoke 2002; Feldman 2003; Howell, Ishkanian, Obadare et al. 2008; Kamat 2003). Southern governments questioned the efficacy of INGOs operating within their borders but without any nationally coordinated development strategy (Hayden 2002). INGOs were censured for a lack of financial transparency and for not clearly documenting how donated funds had benefited their intended recipients (Gibelman and Gelman 2004). Concerns were also raised by those who argued that the heavy reliance on INGOs in developing countries actually undermined nascent local NGOs and other democratic structures by supplanting the authority of elected bodies and publicly supported policies (Anderson and Rieff 2005; Blair 1997; Rahman 2006). Other critics charged that their dependency upon official aid agencies and private philanthropies essentially led to INGOs serving as contractors who implemented strategies “from above” rather than advocating for or addressing local interests (Bebbington and Riddell 1997; Chandhoke 2002; Hudock 1999; Hulme and Edwards 1997; Jenkins 2001; Kamat 2003; Lipschutz 2005; Pasha and Blaney 1998; Robinson 1997). Still others pointed to the lack of professionalism and the autocratic and non-participatory ways in which

some INGOs internally functioned (Feldman 1997). In short, their rapid entrance into development and the resulting backlash called attention to the fact that INGOs were a new type of organization that operated outside of any existing global regulatory or governance structure (Collingwood 2006; Easterly 2006).

This mounting disapproval resulted in a “credibility crisis” and set off widespread deliberation about how to reestablish international confidence in INGOs as development actors and members of global civil society (Brown 2008; Collingwood 2006; Jordon and Van Tuijl 2006a; McGann and Johnstone 2006; Naidoo 2004). The INGO sector began to search for structures that would allow INGOs to demonstrate their organizational legitimacy and effectiveness while at the same time remaining in the autonomous space of civil society. Developing a global regulatory regime was an unlikely solution given the level of diversity among INGOs and their funders (e.g., official aid, private contributions and foundations, sponsorship, etc.) in addition to the practical difficulties in overseeing their transnational operations. INGOs and others were quick to point out that strong regulation by states or other bodies poses a serious threat, not only to their ability to be responsive and innovative actors, but also to their role in advocating against the status quo (Howell et al. 2008). Likewise, a strong case began to be made for people-centered approaches to development, which emphasized that INGOs’ ultimate obligation should be to the local communities and populations in which they worked, not to distant regulatory bodies or potentially hostile state governments (Nelson and Dorsey 2008). Thus the credibility crises highlighted the need for a decentered

governance structure that could validate INGO organizational legitimacy without stifling their independent status. INGO governance increasingly became articulated through the rhetorical prism of accountability and further defined through numerous self-regulatory initiatives that identify minimum standards for organizational integrity and performance (Edwards 2000).

While there has always been a consensus that INGOs should be accountable, defining *what* accountability precisely entails for their governance continues to be complicated by the fact that their work cannot be easily demonstrated through the traditional mechanisms of the market, the state, or a single overarching regulatory body. The current tendency is to define INGO accountability in relation to various stakeholders, such as donors, home and host governments, local communities, INGO staff, and the development and INGO communities at large. INGOs not only act as intermediaries between these complex relationships; they must also negotiate a form of “multidirectional accountability” (Bryant 2007) that addresses the diverse or even competing interests of their upward, downward, and horizontal stakeholders (Attack 1999; Brown 2008; Commins 1997; Ebrahim and Weisband 2007; Jordon and Van Tuijl 2006b; Lewis 2007). Thus the debates about the nature of INGO accountability quickly become imbricated with the need to define the importance of, and priorities among, various stakeholders. As a result, the current discourse around INGO accountability has begun to articulate a new form of decentered governance which is in essence regulation by stakeholder relationships.

Initiatives to define and construct INGO accountability regimes currently span across the development community (e.g., Civicus 2005, InterAction 2005), academics (e.g., Bendell 2006; Charnovitz 2006; Fox 2001; Jagadananda and Brown 2005; Jordon and Van Tuijl 2006a), and INGOs themselves (e.g., Action Aid 2006). Although obvious distinctions exist among these efforts, they all invariably had to address two interrelated questions in order to identify the content of INGO accountability commitments. First, as important actors in civil society and development, who are the people, organizations, entities, and governing bodies *to whom* INGOs should be held accountable to? And second, what are the technical methods, measurements, and processes *with which* INGO can produce appropriate accounts for these stakeholders? Accordingly, political questions about “who” should be included in INGO accountability commitments are inextricable from the epistemic criteria and processes for “how” accountability should be demonstrated.

### **Directionalities of Power**

INGO–stakeholder relationships vary considerably depending upon the size of the organization, the countries in which it works, the focus and sector of its activities, its funding structures, and so on. For example, the INGO Accountability Charter identifies ten disparate stakeholder (Civicus 2005). Nevertheless, if accountability relationships are looked at from the standpoint that they are shaped by different configurations of power (Weisband and Ebrahim 2007), there are three basic power directionalities that emerge within the accountability discourse. First, INGOs are

*upwardly accountable* to those stakeholders upon whom they are to some degree dependent — typically funders, states, and binding regulatory bodies. Second, INGOs are also expected to demonstrate *downward accountability* to those stakeholders who rely on the services and work of the INGO to meet their needs and improve their lives. Relationships with local “partner” NGOs, communities, and individuals are all shaped by notions of downward accountability. In addition to operating among these vertical power configurations, INGO must establish *horizontal accountability* towards stakeholders who share the same organizational vision. The primary horizontal relationships are within the INGO itself, its staff, and volunteers (i.e., internal stakeholders), but may also include other international and national NGOs and the broader community of development practitioners and scholars (i.e., external stakeholders).

These three directionalities provide a functional map of INGO relationships and outline the different configurations of power INGOs must simultaneously negotiate in order to demonstrate their accountability and transparency. These relationships, of course, do not operate in isolation from each other. Part of the challenge of INGO accountability is that the various types of accountability commitments are continually being negotiated and shaped by the wider network of external stakeholders and within the broader political, social, and economic environments (Barman 2007). Likewise, there are many differences between stakeholders whose relationships are characterized by the same directionalities of power (e.g., between different funders or local communities). However, these three

directionalities provide a heuristic framework in which to begin investigating how the relational nature of INGO stakeholder relationships influence the “multi-leveled, pluralistic, and contested nature of the terrain of accountability” (Weisband and Ebrahim 2007:16).

### **Directionalities of Knowledge**

INGO account-making is heavily dependent upon formal knowledge practices such as monitoring, evaluation, and assessment to provide accounts of their organizational performance and the impacts of their work. However, there is much variation within these practices with respect to what is considered an appropriate “account.” Account-making expectations are not consistent among all stakeholders and the epistemological criteria for what constitutes a credible, legible, and ultimately transparent account are largely determined by the nature of the accountability relationship and its directionality of power.

In sum, account-making is not a neutral technical practice. The interests of the “who” of INGO accountability are inextricable from the methodological “how” of account-making. Transparency for accountability is therefore not simply a matter of access to information. It is about producing knowledge that is compatible with the stakeholders’ interests and modes of understanding: “Clear transparency sheds light on institutional behavior, which permits interested parties...to pursue strategies of constructive change” (Fox 2007:667). The multi-directional character of INGO accountability relationships suggests that distinct accounts must be produced for their

upward, downward, and horizontal stakeholders, resulting in INGOs implementing a type of methodological pluralism to ensure all of their commitments are met. In other words, the complexity of INGO political obligations is further complicated by the fact that they must also juggle different criteria for what constitutes appropriate knowledge for their account-making. The methods and types of account-making activities used by INGOs also do inter-relational work in that they serve to balance or prioritize certain stakeholder interests. Debates about the most appropriate methods to measure the work of INGOs have political implications; and likewise, the inclusion of different types of stakeholders in INGO accountability commitments has methodological and epistemic consequences for their account-making practices.

### **Directionalities of Measurement in INGO Account-making**

Although INGOs have for decades practiced some form of accountability towards funders in the form of reporting activities, the increased funneling of development funds through INGOs and a series of high-profile cases of NGO fiscal impropriety and mismanagement accelerated demands that the NGO sector professionalize. Critics urge NGOs to incorporate fiscal and quality accountability measures through public management practices such as results-based programming, performance measurement, and the use of logic models or logical framework analysis (Foresti 2007; Rubin 2003). These initiatives seek to rationalize program activities and funding and to construct discrete indicators and targets. Their measurement practices enable funders to track progress and effectiveness in ways that can be used in lieu of the private sector's "bottom line" to make comparisons between project

implementers (Barman 2007). Although many different forms of and approaches to evaluation are currently in practice within the development community (Bamberger 2000; Foresti 2007), the most recent shift in measurement has come from funders (World Bank, n.d.) and development-policy groups (Easterly 2006; EGWG 2006) who are promoting “impact evaluation” to test the effectiveness of an intervention model. The recent push to reform aid and to demonstrate and quantify development effectiveness (Koch 2008) has fueled the demand for “rigorous statistical models” based on randomized controlled trials and “counter-factual analysis.” Advocates of these types of studies argue that such methods are ultimately the only credible, conclusive way in which to determine the effectiveness of development interventions (Donaldson, Christie, and Mark 2009). While not all funders are requiring this type of specialized account, this highly technical method of “scientific” measurement within evaluation research is increasingly being advanced by some as the “gold standard” for development (Jones 2009). Proponents of impact evaluation argue that its ability to factor out contextual variables generates knowledge that is widely relevant across development (not just to a specific project) and is a “public good” in that it has the ability to inform decision-making by determining whether an intervention model will be effective if replicated in other locations (EGWG 2006:13). As such, the official aid development is increasingly under pressure to provide evidence that public investments have yielded positive and quantifiable returns.

The influence of these “upward” measurement and accountability requirements on INGOs has not gone unnoticed. While few would assert that INGOs



should remain entirely unaccountable to upward stakeholders, serious concerns have been raised regarding the implications of funders' requirements for INGOs' resources, missions, and definitions of their own success. For example, the monitoring, evaluation, and reporting activities are in some cases burdensome, requiring staff time and resources for producing accounts for funders that could be used to provide program services. Likewise, funders' requirements to operationalize and measure program activity and performance in terms of funder-generated monitoring and evaluation criteria eventually shape the INGOs' definitions of their own successes and performance (Benjamin 2008a; Ebrahim 2007)). Critics of large-scale statistical evaluations argue these types of studies necessarily reduce complex social interventions into simplistic regression models that are ultimately useless for assessing the entire scope of an organization's work (Nelson 2008). Others maintain that that in their attempts to professionalize and demonstrate effectiveness to their upward stakeholders, INGOs have been depoliticized and have abandoned their commitments to advocate for the least powerful (Chandhoke 2002; Jenkins 2001; Kamat 2003; Lipschutz 2005; Robinson 1997). The assertion has also been made that the funder-NGO relationship is established through the professional accounts and audit statements — to the extent that the production of reports and quantitative data are given more weight by funders than the actual quality of the work in the field (Perera 1997). “In sum, the information requirements of funders are capable of influencing NGO activities as well as NGO perceptions of success and failure” (Ebrahim 2003:85). Thus critiques of the technical methods and practices for

producing knowledge-based accounts to funders often show the political tensions between INGOs and their upward commitments.

Likewise, an emphasis on INGOs demonstrating their downward-accountability commitments has challenged these highly technical, quantitative, and expert-driven monitoring and evaluation practices (such as impact evaluations) based on the claims that they privilege external perspectives and knowledge, and dismiss the experience and inputs of the communities, individuals, and local organizations. INGOs with explicit people-centered commitments place local communities and individuals at the center of development programming as the designated agents of change. Incorporating participatory, qualitative, and local forms of measurement and assessment is consequently seen by some as the most appropriate method for demonstrating downward accountability (Chambers 1994b, 1997). Participatory techniques like Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) identify project priorities as well as collect data that are most meaningful to the individuals and communities that the INGOs serve. This represents an intentional shift from viewing research and evaluation as an extractive exercise to one that is empowering for the participants (Thomas 2008). Accordingly, descriptive and qualitative methods are often identified as the most credible way in which to produce downward accounts that are relevant to those at the local level (Chambers 1994, 1997; Mayoux 2007). Participatory methods have not gone without their own critics. The nature, extent, and influence of these practices have been deeply questioned, with critics pointing out that the symbolic and rhetorical functions of

participatory practices may give participants a “voice” but ultimately no power to directly affect important policies or decisions (Cooke and Kothari 2001).

Accordingly, INGOs are currently looking for ways in which to incorporate participation that is meaningful, recursive, and influential within their processes for planning, monitoring, and evaluation — but also as an indicator of their own downward accountability (LEAD 2008; Mayoux 2007).

INGOs have come to acknowledge their downward-accountability obligations through their value-based missions (Lindenberg and Bryant 2001; Jordan 2007; Nelson and Dorsey 2008). The recent importance of demonstrating accountability to stated core values and principles reflects a need to present a unique INGO identity and organizational relevance among a growing number of international and national NGOs competing for the same pools of funding and support. Likewise, horizontal accountability also serves to protect INGOs from the encroachment of more powerful upward stakeholder interests and to gain distance from the critiques that they have become co-opted development contractors. INGOs and their advocates have made the case that funders overburden INGOs with their multiple reporting and measurement requirements that produce information that is meaningless to INGOs’ own operations and decision making. As a result, there has been a movement to advocate for a shift away from rote reporting activities, and towards developing accountability systems that produce knowledge that INGOs can use in the continuous improvement of their programs (Britton 2005; Brown 2007, 2008; Ebrahim 2003a, 2005, 2007; Benjamin 2008; Benjamin and Misra 2006). This call for “organizational learning” can be seen

as a strategic move towards reclaiming the accounts that are produced to demonstrate upward-accountability commitments, to be used by INGOs in achieving their own organizational missions (Williams 2009). This move towards learning highlights INGOs as development actors with valuable experience and technical knowledge. It also reframes development failures into “learning opportunities” that should be treated as sources of greater understanding and improvement (rather the censorship or defunding). Thus, horizontal accountability can “reappropriate” upward measurement and account-making practices into a format that highlights the effectiveness, innovation, and organizational legitimacy of INGOs themselves (Ebrahim 2007).

INGOs are often simultaneously negotiating distinct types of knowledge in order to provide credible accounts to their various stakeholders. This is not to say that multiple methodologies (quantitative and qualitative) and modes of research (expert and participatory) are not used together to construct an account; it is common practice among INGOs to use multiple methods in order to triangulate their findings. However, it is the boundaries and tensions between these various methodologies and purposes that begin to outline the distinct epistemological nature of account-making and their requirements for credibility.

This section has highlighted how the relationship between different types of INGO stakeholders and their knowledge and measurement practices demonstrate their accountability commitments. In sum, the transparency of an account is relative to the power directionality between the INGOs and its stakeholder. INGOs need to use specific types of knowledge in order to make their work and accomplishments legible

to their stakeholder, but this knowledge also serves to shape and redefine the work of INGOs through the “narrow vision” of their stakeholders’ interests (Benjamin 2008; Ebrahim 2003). Highlighting this fundamental link between the political and epistemic nature of account-making suggests that INGOs’ measurement, monitoring, evaluation, and other knowledge-production activities are important sites in which accountability is being constructed and negotiated. The next section looks at how these measurement practices are used within two INGOs working in Bangladesh.

### **The Practice of Methodological Pluralism**

Uncovering the relational and epistemic complexity of INGO accountability leads to many questions about how INGOs manage the boundaries between their multiple accountability commitments. How do INGOs reconcile parallel accounts for different stakeholders that measure the same phenomena? Can a stakeholder’s account influence the relationships that INGOs have with their other stakeholders? How do INGOs use stakeholder accounts to support their own (horizontal) accountability? Examples presented in this empirical section suggest that even though INGOs produce distinct accounts to different stakeholders, the resulting knowledge continues to be reconfigured and influenced by the existing directionalities of power.

### **Background of INGOs**

Fieldwork was conducted with the Bangladesh country offices of two US-based international development organizations which are members of an international

coalition of INGOs. Each INGO has conducted development activities in Bangladesh for more than thirty years. The INGOs were selected because they are well recognized and are considered leaders in the development field, often being asked to sit as representatives of civil society in global fora. Additionally, large INGOs were selected (as opposed to local NGOs or INGOs with limited development roles) because these organizations serve as important intermediaries between national aid programs, private funders, governments and NGOs, and local communities, and therefore necessarily have extended and complex stakeholder networks.<sup>2</sup>

### **Description of INGO Measurement, Monitoring and Evaluation Practices**

The monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems for both INGOs' projects were planned with the donor at its implementation, and principally designed to measure the donor's four strategic objectives. In both organizations, the project-measurement activities, while complex and multifaceted, can be generally categorized into three distinct types of measurement processes. The first process is what some INGO staff called a "traditional" evaluation practice in which a baseline, midline, and end-of-project assessments are used to measure project progress in terms of outcomes. These measurement activities are all carried out by external consultant firms. The baseline and final evaluations survey a representative sample of households in the project

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<sup>2</sup> Interviews, site visits, and document collection were conducted at the country office headquarters in Dhaka and field offices and program sites in the Rangpur and Barisal districts. The data collection focused on the monitoring and evaluation practices for a five-year food-security project, however staff from other projects and in different organizational roles were also interviewed. The food security project is funded by USAID and represented the majority of both organizations' budgets and project activities during its operational period. Although the INGOs were the principal funding recipients, they worked with over 60 local partners to implement the program activities. The scope of the project includes multiple sectors: food distribution, household agriculture and market access, maternal and child health, sanitation and access to clean water, disaster management, and girls' education.

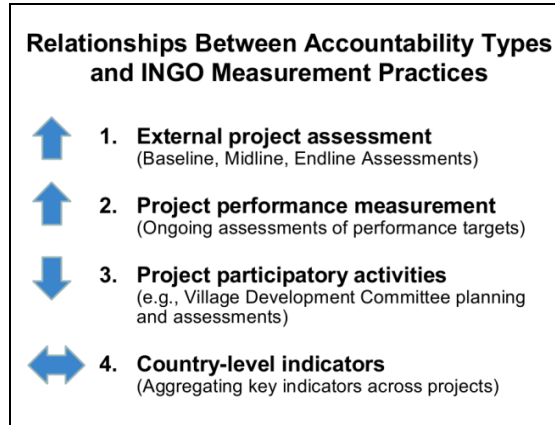
target areas to assess their status in terms of economic, health, and education, decision-making, and other well-being indicators over time. Performance-measurement systems were the second type of M&E used in the projects. These systems allowed the INGOs to regularly measure and assess the status of process indicators (e.g., program activities) and outcome indicators (e.g., immediate changes in population) against a set of targeted values. Performance indicators were also developed with the funder and organized around the funder's strategic objectives. Data were collected primarily by staff and community volunteers and were submitted by the implementing partner NGOs to be aggregated at the district/regional office level. Targets for each of the indicators were developed at the onset of the project, based on information collected from the baseline data. The performance data were submitted to the funders through quarterly reports and were also regularly shared with implementing partners. The last type of measurement process used in the projects' M&E systems was participatory planning and monitoring. In the first INGO, Village Development Committees were initiated or used for community-level planning and monitoring. At the beginning of the project, field staff facilitated a community-mapping exercise that rated each of the households' wealth on a six-point scale. Households with the fewest resources in the community (those identified as "very poor" or "poor") were then targeted for participation in project activities. As a result, the selection of the program participants was directly relative to their own communities' overall economic context. Village Development Committees also prioritized community-development projects and periodically assessed their villages'

progress against self-generated indicators. The committee-generated data were compiled by M&E staff but stayed primarily at the field-office level. The second INGO incorporated participatory procedures in its disaster preparedness programming, holding community members responsible for filling out checklists regarding the emergency preparedness of their communities. These three general measurement practices—external assessment, performance measurement, and participatory processes—made up the majority of the data collection for the food-security projects.

Both INGOs report additional country-level data to their US headquarters. The first INGO is implementing an initiative to measure organizational impact in terms of four strategic program areas. These “strategic frameworks” define and operationalize impact areas for the Bangladesh country office and are intended to “go beyond the project level” to measure the work of the organization as a whole in terms of achieving these frameworks. Key indicators are submitted to their US headquarters on an annual basis which are intended to reflect the work of the Bangladesh office as a whole. As for the second INGO, it also submits data for five universal indicators to their headquarters annually, which have been collected and aggregated from project-level data.



**Figure 2: Relationships between Accountability Types and INGO Measurement Practices**



This general overview of the INGO’s project and organizational M&E activities highlights the different measurement practices and accountability relationships that are being negotiated in tandem. This is not to say that these practices all align perfectly within one directionality or are conducted in isolation from each other. On the contrary, it is at these points where different measurement practices and directionalities meet where the variation between stakeholder interests and the transparency of accountability practices becomes visible. Interviews with program and M&E staff in the next section demonstrate examples of how these different sets of interests and knowledge interface with each other and illustrate the challenges in constructing credible and legible accounts for different types of stakeholders.

## Custom Accounts

INGOs routinely measure the same project indicators multiple times and with different M&E methodologies. For example, an M&E officer<sup>3</sup> explained that the participatory forms of measurement and monitoring used in the project often resulted in the same findings as the other project M&E methods, as was the case with village-level assessments of food-security indicators that were equivalent to data gathered by the INGO staff. Given the accuracy of the participatory methods, I asked if the participatory data were included in the final evaluation. He replied “no, that was not the purpose of the [final] evaluation,” even though the final evaluation included the same indicators. The participatory data were only intended to inform the local communities themselves:

It is more important for that community to know what is the performance of that community... I mean we are taking the information, we are extracting the information, but we feel that it is more important for the community because they are the actors.

Thus the data resulting from the participatory methodology, even though it produced the same outcomes, were only considered relevant to a particular local context. The participatory data came from involved actors and framed the intervention in terms of specific sites and individual Village Development Committees. M&E staff routinely stressed that what distinguished the evaluation data for the funder was the fact it was conducted by an external evaluator:

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<sup>3</sup> INGO-A, M&E Project Technical Coordinator Interview, Dhaka, August 27, 2009

[The evaluators] are an international [firm], very accepted, [and they are] official to an outsider. And again it was not because we do not have capacity [to conduct the evaluation] but so that [we can say] it is coming from the third parties...about how good or bad that we did. That's why we commissioned those things to the outsiders.

In contrast to the situated and local perspective the participatory data provided, external experts were brought in to measure the program activities for their donor. In this case, an outsider provided a credible account by providing a disinterested, objective perspective.

This incontrovertibility of accounts across directionalities of power is further illustrated in a conversation<sup>4</sup> between staff members, one who is responsible for project M&E and the other country office staff responsible for measuring the total impact of the organization in Bangladesh. The country M&E staff mentioned that since their organizational mission explicitly states they work with the extreme poor, she needed to come up with a definition of what that meant within each of the projects in “exact terms” such as daily income or another recognizable quantifiable measure which could be easily understood by funders and other external stakeholders. The project staff reiterated that his project identified the extreme poor through the participatory mapping exercises because they had found that other commonly used indicators of wealth (e.g., land ownership) were inaccurate and not suitable to the Bangladesh context. Consequently, the project staff argued that the participatory exercises were the most valid method of identifying the project's target population in terms of the INGO's mission to help the poorest of the poor. The country staff

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<sup>4</sup> INGO-A, M&E Project Technical Coordinator Interview, Dhaka, August 27, 2009 (with Program Quality Officer)

acknowledged using this criterion internally made the most sense, but she was told by INGO managers that outside stakeholders were not going to understand or accept it as a credible explanation. She still needed “some sort of established indicator that will explain how our program participants are selected” and would allow comparisons to be made between the poor in Bangladesh and throughout the world (e.g., household daily income).

These two examples highlight the relative importance between the actual contents of accounts with the methods by which measurements were conducted (Village Development Committee vs. expert evaluator). The validity criteria (subjective community consensus vs. objective scaled quantitative indicator) ultimately made the data nonfungible between different directionalities of stakeholders. Even though the participatory data proved to be accurate, and perhaps at times a superior representation of reality, they were not considered appropriate or legible to their upward and external stakeholders based upon their methodology.

### The Ripple Effect

An INGO project manager<sup>5</sup> explained that when the performance management system was first developed, it included over 200 indicators that needed to be continually measured and reported to the funder. The scope of the data requirements soon became operationally unwieldy, and the INGO negotiated with the funder to revise and reduce the indicators to about a third of the original requirements. Even so,

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<sup>5</sup> INGO-A, Project Chief of Party Interview, Dhaka August 27, 2009

he pointed out that it was still a daunting amount of information to handle: “As a manager, how can you review and make sense of seventy indicators?” In order to do so, the M&E staff developed a system that converts each indicator into a ten-point scale. The value of standardizing the indicators, the staff member noted, was that he now had the flexibility to compare different types of performance across regional offices, field offices, implementing partners, and all the way down the project chain to community volunteers. The project manager qualified that this information was used “purely for operational management” but that it had been “extremely important” because it “gives me a picture immediately [of] what is going on as far as performance, so it can be addressed.” This ability to easily condense, assess, and compare the performance of the many implementing components was imperative to the organization because, in the manager’s words, “we have to be more intelligent in the way we do business.”

This use of standardized indicators was also mentioned by a director<sup>6</sup> of a local, implementing NGO. He asserted that the INGO’s reduction of project data into uniform scales of performance ended up disadvantaging his organization. “When you are looking [at the performance-measurement indicators] it is very fair, but in reality it’s very difficult.” He pointed out that although all of the implementing NGOs in the project were equally measured by the ten-point scales, his NGO had to work harder to produce the same results and he felt that smaller NGOs like his were more vulnerable to external factors that could more readily interfere with project outcomes and

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<sup>6</sup> INGO-A, partner NGO Manager Interview, Rangpur District, August 23, 2009.

performance ratings. He reasoned that the ten-point performance scale was in actuality deeply misleading: “The software program is very nice, and the data-collection system is also good, but the question is the methodology.” Ideally, he argued that the measurements should take into account the wide differences in staff capacities and regional characteristics among the implementing NGOs, and provide a more accurate picture of his organization’s unique challenges and accomplishments. Ultimately, the manager felt, as a “downward” partner, that this measurement methodology was biased when used to compare the effectiveness and competitiveness of his local NGO with the large national NGOs (e.g., BRAC) and could result in significantly negative consequences for his organization in terms of securing future contracts. The INGO’s efforts to simplify and manage their donors’ data requirements had a ripple effect on how the local NGO’s performance was defined, assessed, and perceived. In this example, even though the INGO was able to transform the donors’ requirements into a format that was useful and legible for their own operations, this was because these data were primarily used to hold the local NGOs “upwardly” accountable. That is to say, the INGO was able to convert and use the funder’s accountability data to monitor their local NGOs because the data remained along the same directionality of power.

### Contesting Methodology

Another example of the intersecting boundaries between different methodologies can be found in the monitoring system of one of the INGOs’ directly

implemented child- and maternal-health projects. Mothers are issued a bar-coded health card that serves as a permanent record of their child's relevant health information including vaccines, number of health visits, and weight. The project electronically collects individual level data longitudinally (rather than only aggregated data at the field office) and M&E field workers can supervise the community health volunteers records by conducting household spot checks to ensure that the recorded data are accurate. As one of the M&E staff noted, the new monitoring system "works like glass"<sup>7</sup> to provide the INGO with a clear view of the project all the way down to the individual beneficiary level. The monitoring data also allow for management staff and the community volunteers to target individual children and households for follow-up interventions. The INGO M&E staff were very enthusiastic about the ability to compare the nutritional status of program beneficiaries at the community, volunteer and individual-child levels, and optimistic about the impact these highly individualized data will ultimately have on their project's results.

On the other hand, an M&E staff member<sup>8</sup> from a partner NGO challenged the way in which the INGO was measuring their child- and maternal-health activities. Even though the INGO system provided greater detail than their own method, the partner-NGO staff did not consider it valid in demonstrating upward accountability to funders: "[INGO staff] are not collecting data. They are compiling data. They are calling it monitoring, but I think it's not monitoring. It's their supervisory system and

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<sup>7</sup> INGO-B, Regional Project M&E Officer, Barisal, September 1, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> INGO-B, Project NGO Partner M&E Team Interview, Barisal, August 31, 2009.

reporting system.” One could argue that both methods (measuring all participants vs. measuring a statistically significant sample) would yield similar end results, yet the partner-NGO team member questioned the appropriateness of the INGO’s monitoring practice based upon the fact that it was not “representative.” The comprehensive monitoring data allowed project staff to directly intervene if a child’s or a health volunteer’s numbers dropped. While the capacity to target specific program participants was considered “supervisory” by the partner NGO, his organization also used his monitoring data to oversee, adjust, and intervene in project activity. Yet the difference between the two monitoring methods seems to be a matter of impartiality and anonymity. In the case of the INGO’s bar-code monitoring system, the “compiling” of personal data and the ability to target individuals was presented as an issue of surveillance and not appropriate for external account-making. In contrast, the monitoring data of the partner NGO was made up of cases which were randomly selected to represent an abstract category of “beneficiary group.” In short, he considered his monitoring system to be a detached and objective way to assess the funder’s strategic objectives, as opposed to what he saw as the INGO’s comprehensive data which allowed them to control specific participants.

### Reappropriating Accounts

The ways in which the INGO’s discrete measurement systems intersected was highlighted during conversations with the country-level M&E staff responsible for conceptualizing and planning countrywide program objectives and indicators. This



countrywide measurement system is currently being developed and will eventually measure indicators across all of their approximately 25 individually funded projects within Bangladesh. The demand for this program-based, rather than project-based, measurement system was generated by their long-range strategic plan that identified the need to establish the INGO's relevance in terms of their own organizational objectives, values, and comparative effectiveness with other development actors. Measuring their impact in terms of the INGO's own goals is a knowledge-based strategy to make "it no longer... possible for donor contracts and projects to be the main driver of the organizational structure."<sup>9</sup> A program staff member<sup>10</sup> explained the importance of a distinct INGO measurement system: "without the common impact indicators, you can't show one picture of what the organization does or is achieving." Although their development work in Bangladesh has always involved some type of M&E system, project M&E reports were historically submitted directly to funders and rarely made it to the country-level office. This new measurement initiative is constructing meta-program indicators that specifically relate to the INGO's mission and allow them to start producing accounts that demonstrate cumulative impact (i.e., significant change in the lives of the project participants) and "not just reporting numbers."

This initiative to develop a distinct M&E process to demonstrate organizational accomplishments faces methodological challenges in aggregating the complexity among its projects which span multiple and diverse sectors over

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<sup>9</sup> INGO-A. (2008) The shift to a programmatic approach: A case from INGO-A Bangladesh. Achieving the Programmatic Organization: Programmatic Shift Workshop, Istanbul, Turkey

<sup>10</sup> INGO-A, Conversation with Program Quality Officer, Dhaka, August 20, 2009.

significant periods of time. The transition towards measuring programmatic outcomes also presents a challenge in constructing indicators and measurements that reflect the advocacy and empowerment focus of the organization's strategic programming and value-based mission (i.e., their "organizational niche"). For example, the INGO has conducted a series of extensive case studies about women's empowerment which detail the conditions and outcomes of their advocacy projects.<sup>11</sup> Program and M&E staff frequently referenced these case studies and expressed that they personally felt the qualitative method was the most accurate measure of the impacts on empowerment, given the difficulty in quantifying such contextual issues and the intimate and personal nature of the programming. However, as an organizational M&E staff member<sup>12</sup> pointed out, while these case studies are extremely valuable to the organization itself, they pose a dilemma: "there are no numbers to prove that we had an impact."

[W]e're good at doing in-depth case studies, but we cannot use this to convince funders or make a difference at the policy level. We cannot convince them that case studies are representative of a large population and a basis to make policy changes at this level.

She went on to give an example of the difficulty in developing universal indicators of empowerment which are appropriate to the entire country context of Bangladesh. In some regions, a significant indicator of empowerment is the percentage of women wearing shoes because within these communities the local tradition demands that sex workers remain barefoot in public. An increased incidence of sex workers wearing

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<sup>11</sup> Strategic Impact Inquiry in [INGO-A] Bangladesh: Programmatic and Organizational Emphasis on Gender Equity, n.d., Dhaka, Bangladesh.

<sup>12</sup> INGO-A, Conversation with Program Quality Officer, Dhaka, August 27, 2009.

shoes in public represents a significant shift in both social norms and individual empowerment of the women in this region. However, this indicator loses its original meaning if applied to other women in Bangladesh, or with external stakeholders unfamiliar with its relevant cultural context.

This last example demonstrates some of the inherent dilemmas of using methodological pluralism to demonstrate accountability along different directionalities of power. First, the INGO is working towards reappropriating donor-driven M&E data into a format that can demonstrate their achievements in terms of their organizational mission and strategies. It is difficult, nonetheless, to construct a horizontal-accountability system that is legible to both their own organizational vision and from the perspective of their external “official observers.” A horizontal account must confirm their distinct identity and objectives while producing knowledge that is meaningful to their own organization’s decision-making and learning. But in order to produce a comprehensive measurement of its programmatic objectives across all of its individual projects, the INGO is epistemologically forced to take “a view from a distance” by using quantitative indicators to aggregate their very different types of project activities into one measure. This unavoidable abstraction, however, ultimately is in the format of an “upward account” which provides limited, meaningful “horizontal” knowledge about their project activities from which the organization itself can learn. The advocacy nature of the INGO’s programmatic commitment to “downward” accountability further complicates the task in providing a comprehensive picture of the INGO’s accomplishments. The INGO takes an

explicitly rights-based approach to their work with empowerment as the key pillar of their mission and horizontal-accountability commitments, but, as discussed above, it is very difficult to account for successes in achieving empowerment through an abstract or quantitative measure. The INGO not only needs to demonstrate the “big picture” of their impact for the purposes of their own organizational learning, they also need to use this account to demonstrate their comparative effectiveness in terms of other development actors which are competing for ever-shrinking pools of available funds. Finally, the INGO must communicate their work in a method that is seen as transparent, valid, and compelling to external stakeholders in order to successfully advocate in national and international areas on behalf of those who are voiceless.

The above examples demonstrate how multiple forms of accountability intersect in the measurement practices of two INGOs in Bangladesh and highlight the boundaries between epistemic requirements for account-making among different types of stakeholders. Even though each of the distinct measurement practices share the ultimate goal of measuring the effectiveness of the INGOs’ activities, “[t]he idea that there is a single objective organizational effectiveness independent of the judgments of various stakeholders is no longer tenable or useful” (Herman and Renz 1997:202).

## Conclusion

This chapter has underscored the relationship between the multidirectional accountability of INGOs and their need to produce credible accounts for different types of stakeholders through a form of methodological pluralism. I argued that INGOs' accountability should be understood as both a political and an epistemic practice, and that it is fundamentally shaped by directionalities of power. This relationship between the “who” and “how” of accountability was illustrated by linking the two debates about the most appropriate methods to measure their effectiveness and INGOs' obligations to prioritize stakeholder groups with the least power. I then looked at the measurement practices of two development INGOs in Bangladesh to explore how various power directionalities were associated with different account-making requirements, and the resulting tensions, considerations, and contestations that occur between different directionalities of measurement.

As was seen in the empirical examples, purely technical or generic forms of measurement essentially cannot exist. M&E data are rarely fungible between different stakeholders, especially across the different directionalities of power that characterize INGO–stakeholder relationships. Likewise, account-making is not simply about representing the work of INGOs. The knowledge produced for account-making purposes has the ability to reformat and shape the actors and processes being accounted for, including the INGOs, their stakeholders, and local communities. Although the same field of activity is shared among implementing NGOs, the INGOs

themselves, the funders, and the local target populations, the methods used to understand these entities and phenomena are determined by the interests of stakeholders for whom the INGO constructs accounts. As a result, these examples suggest that multidirectional accountability presents both epistemic and political challenges for INGOs in successfully balancing the interests of their divergent stakeholders.

## CHAPTER VI

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### Methodological Pluralism and the Paradox of Multidirectional Accountability

This dissertation has examined how development activities are made legible through various measurement and knowledge-production practices. Unlike the monolithic view of Scott's authoritarian states, the field of development is crowded by the multiple perspectives of stakeholders who are demanding accountability and transparent accounts. On the surface, accountability in development suggests a straight-forward expectation for one actor to act responsibly toward another; however, each claim for accountability actually includes a configuration of how progress should occur and who should be involved. The causality of the New Development Enterprise is radically distinct from People-Centered Approaches even though both of these approaches are currently promoted and even implemented within the same organization. A focus on accounts and how they ultimately represent the work and actors of development, is a site in which conceptions of development and change will be negotiated and contested.

It would seem that the key to successfully using methodological pluralism for multidirectional accountability is ensuring parity among stakeholder accounting practices. In reality, the production of any type of knowledge entails significant demands on organizational resources (e.g., money, staff time and expertise,

participants' time) already stretched thin through the basic provision of development activities. Donors routinely build M&E measurement into their funding structures to ensure that their accountability mechanisms are in place while local developing communities and populations are without the same leverage to demand a proportionate effort from INGOs. Despite growing expectations that participatory elements should be integrated within donors' own M&E requirements in order to remedy this imbalance, critics have pointed out that these "ceremonial" measurement practices cannot be considered true accounts since they rarely enable participants to make significant change within the funders' projects (Cooke & Kothari 2001).

In addition to the resource issues that INGOs face in terms of constructing balanced accounts, they are also currently experiencing several distinct epistemic-political pressures to prioritize the form of knowledge that reflects the interests of upward stakeholders. First, there is an increased requirement that INGOs, and official development aid in general, "rigorously" demonstrate that funding allocations are "evidence-based" and empirically justified. Constructing evidence for determining who will receive funding and what type of development activities merit support must of course be aligned to external and upward stakeholders. Any decision-making by either funders or INGOs that is not validated through this particular type of measurement (i.e., quantitative, standardized, and "scientific") lies open to criticisms of partiality, patronage, and waste. Thus, the current climate in development reform has shifted from addressing the greatest human needs to this emphasis on investing in the "biggest impact" (Edwards 2008; Glenzer 2008). A related pressure is the need



for INGOs to demonstrate their competitiveness vis-à-vis other development actors including other INGOs, emerging large-scale national NGOs, and for-profit development contractors. As such, the value-based commitments of INGOs are being deemphasized within the development community with the expectation that funding be justified through a demonstration that its recipients are indeed efficient and results-based organizations. In order for distinctions to be made among competing actors, the measurements of development performance and impacts are necessarily becoming more quantified and standardized. Similarly, even though INGOs may generate rich idiographic accounts for local communities and their own organizational learning, they still must aggregate and translate these accounts into a form of knowledge that will allow them to successfully advocate to external and “upward” stakeholders (governments, official aid agencies, etc.) on behalf of their “downward” stakeholders. The successes of INGOs working as transnational intermediaries between local concerns and more powerful entities has been well documented (Keck and Sikkink 1998), but questions remain about those voices that may be muted or lost during the epistemic translation on their behalf, from emic (“downward”) accounts to etic (“upward”) forms of knowledge.

While INGO governance continues to be articulated through the rhetoric of accountability, the preliminary evidence suggests that this form of regulation presents a paradox for securing INGOs’ legitimacy in development. Expectations for demonstrating multidirectional accountability may in fact ultimately take INGOs further from the sources of their credibility as development actors—their contribution

as unique, value-based organizations and the ability to be responsive and accountable to those stakeholders who are the least powerful. The presumption that INGOs have the ability to negotiate between their diverse stakeholder accountability commitments while remaining independent ignores the reality that INGOs have been ultimately forced to prioritize and address these interests against one another (Brown and Moore 2001). In addition, relying on multidirectional accountability as a form of decentered regulation provides no guarantee that INGOs can remain unobstructed actors working within civil society for the interests of the most vulnerable; regulation by relationship has ultimately reproduced existing power directionalities among INGOs and their stakeholder relationships. Acknowledging the interdependence between the relational and technical requirements of account-making leads to similar implications for the current trend to promote the notion of “mutual accountability” within the aid and development community (Brown 2008; OECD 2005). It is one thing to say that all parties must be accountable to each other, but the nature of these shared obligations suggests that they will continue to be defined through established political and epistemic hierarchies currently found within international aid and development (AGCSAE 2008).

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