

ABSTRACT

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The study is motivated by the maintained needs to scrutinise and critically reflect upon interventionist rationales in development assistance, to put development intervention in perspective by regarding it as part of the context where it is implemented, and to bring these two perspectives together. The starting point is an indication of a common mismatch between what is intended when aid is formulated and what happens when it is implemented. In the study, aid is regarded as an instance of intervention and as based on commonly non-articulated assumptions about societal change and different actors' roles, which help explain interventionist practice – though few would assign to those assumptions when made explicit. Local contexts are regarded as living settings with certain specifics and dynamics with which a development intervention comes to interact, which helps explain why things do commonly not evolve as anticipated. The purpose is to investigate how such inherent rationales relate to such local dynamics, and the research problem is formulated thus: *How do interventionist rationales unfold as a development intervention is implemented in a local setting?*

The inherent rationales are traced by situating development aid in the context of other sorts of intervention aimed at creating societal change and improving human welfare. Explorations of high modernist and colonial welfare intervention, along with an outline of trends in post-Second World War development aid, lead to the delineation of some underlying rationales. The implementation interplay is explored through empirical case studies in three Cambodian villages where a governance intervention is being implemented. Starting in a comprehensive and explorative manner with an ethnographic approach, the case studies are gradually narrowed down to focus on how development intervention is perceived, related to and accommodated, guided by four research questions.

The findings suggest that development intervention is apparently based on flawed assumptions of societal change as technical and makeable and on futile ambitions to predict and control. The study suggests that there are remaining reasons and room to intervene in poor societies, but that assumptions and ambitions need to be altered and local appropriation endorsed.

Keywords: development intervention, development aid, development cooperation, local development, local dynamics, local governance, interplay, Cambodia

Development Intervention on the Ground

*Inherent rationales of aid and their encounter with
local dynamics in three Cambodian villages*

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