Community Driven Accountability in Cambodia

An Oxfam-Monash Partnership Research Project

Aim of this presentation

1. To share our high level findings.
2. To share the tensions we have been grappling with as researchers trying to be accountable to the communities we are researching, and to the institutions that house the research.
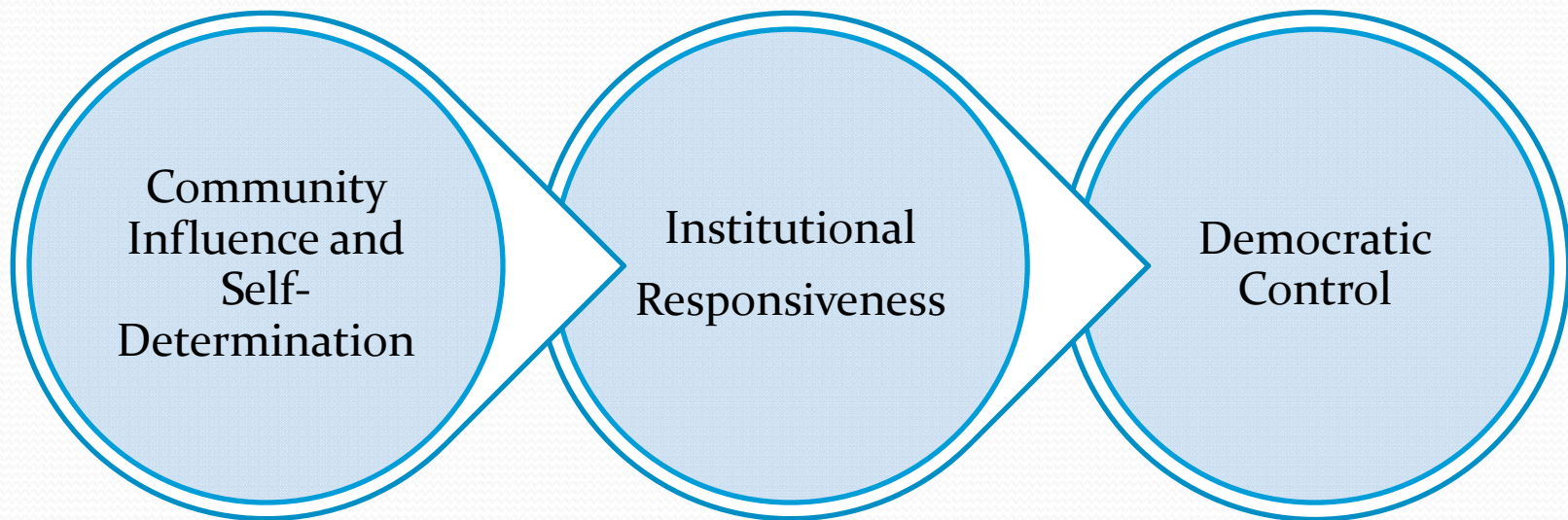
[Note the colour coding]

Central Goal of the Project

- To investigate the factors enabling some communities to develop relatively stronger community-centred accountability processes than others, in relation to development projects that affect them.

- Accountability is a 'western' and particularly 'Anglo-American'-centric concept.

- We have taken an idea that has purchase for us, given our own intellectual backgrounds, and developed a study of its cross-cultural adoption.

Thin (weak) notions of accountability

information

transparency

consultation
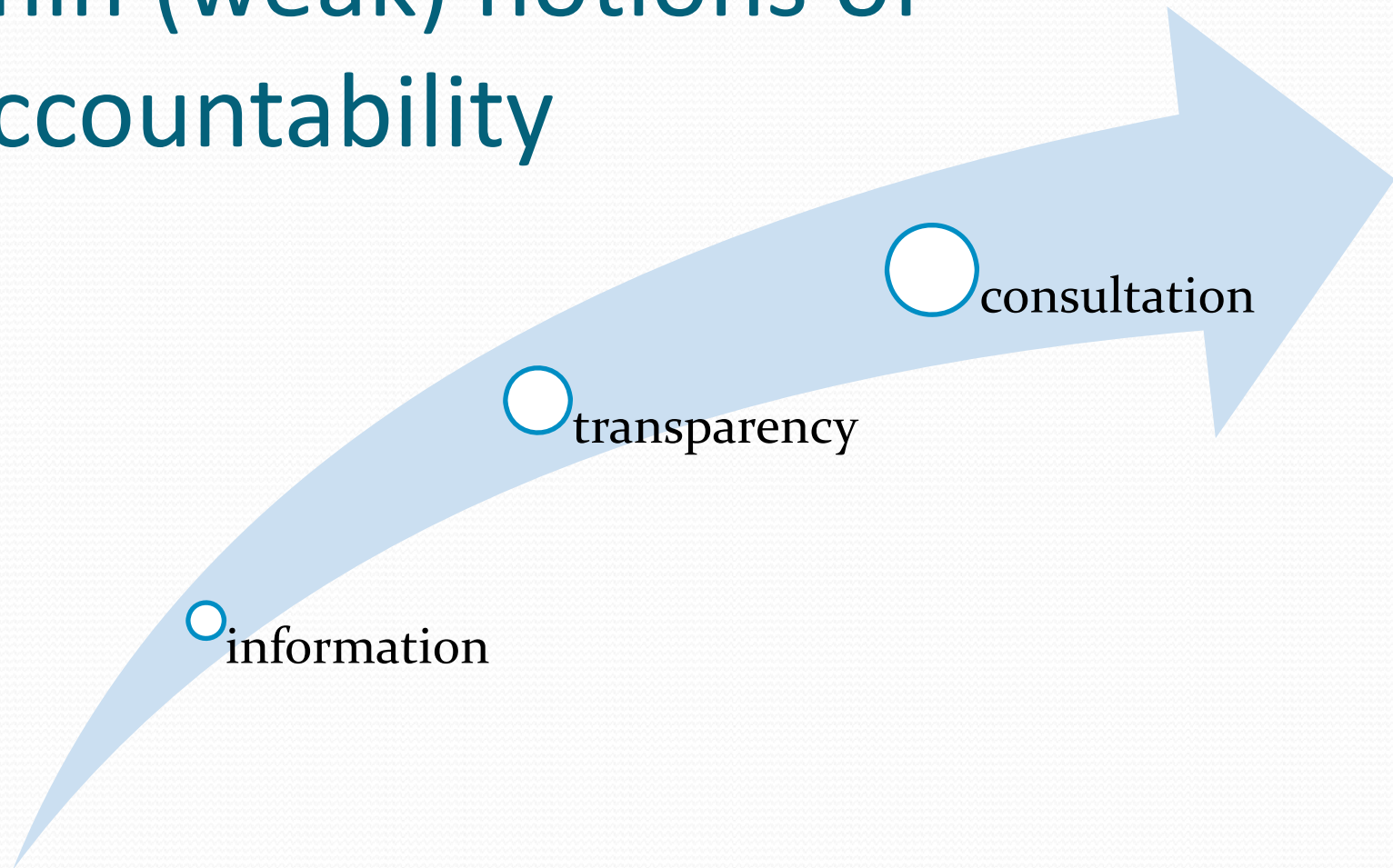
Thick (strong) notions of accountability

Community Influence and Self-Determination

Institutional Responsiveness

Democratic Control
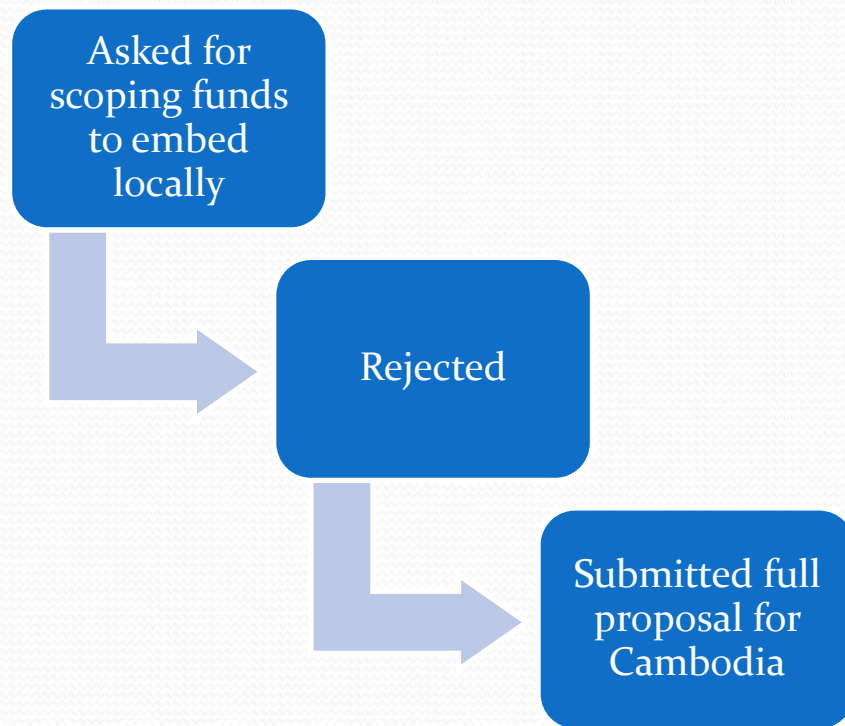
Key Investigation Areas

Understanding of entitlement to influence	Available forums for influence
Capacity to influence decision making	Role of NGOs and other external actors

Initial project development

Asked for scoping funds to embed locally

→ Rejected

→ Submitted full proposal for Cambodia

Result:

- Project would quickly assess Oxfam Integrated Development program before Oxfam Australia exited = short timeframes.

- Housed in a known NGO – Equitable Cambodia – with an interest in accountability set up by an American.

- No strong ties with local institutions.

The Case Studies

Case studies of 3 development projects affecting communities

- Rural/urban
- At different stages of development and impact
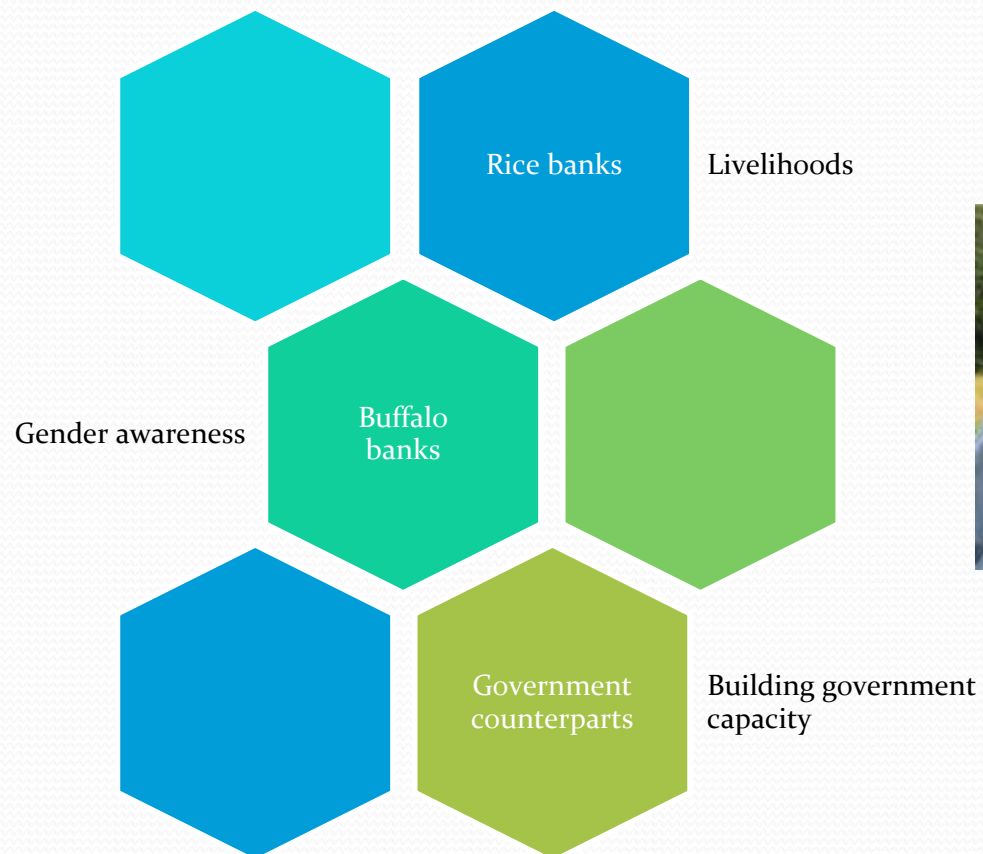- Range of involved actors (government, companies, IFIs, NGOs)

Comparison of factors that strengthen or weaken community-centred accountability processes

The Oxfam Australia Integrated Community Development Project

- "**Why the integrated approach?** Starting from scratch, communities wanted the basic foundations to rebuild their lives. The integrated approach is designed to create simultaneous changes in communities that reinforce each other, to encourage self-sustaining development. For example, improvements in food production are supported by access to clean water, which is strengthened by activities to enhance gender equity. The alternative is standalone projects, but these can often fail."

Rice banks — Livelihoods

Gender awareness — Buffalo banks

Government counterparts — Building government capacity

The Boeung Kak Lake Urban Development Project

equitable cambodia

"Boeung Kak lake residents clash with riot police yesterday in Phnom Penh, Wednesday, November 30, 2011" [http://ki-media.blogspot.com.au/]

"A woman from Boeung Kak Lake community is stopped by local security guards near a blocked main street near the Phnom Penh Municipality Court during villagers' gathering to call for the release of anti-governments protesters who were arrested in a police crackdown, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, Friday, April 25, 2014." [www.voacambodia.com]

The Lower Sesan II Dam Project

Culture and Environment Preservation Association

Protect Our Culture and Environment Today, Not Tomorrow

3S Rivers Protection Network

3S RIVERS PROTECTION NETWORK

Sre Kor (Stung Treng). 28/02/2013: Members of this indigenous Tampuon minority demonstrate in the street of their village [John Vink]

Representatives from communities along the Sesan, Sekong and Srepok rivers protesting in front of the Chinese Embassy in Phnom Penh, Dec 12, 2013. [Radio Free Asia]

Emerging Findings

- The strength of accountability processes depends critically on a given community's capacity and sense of entitlement to influence decisions about development projects that affect them

Claiming accountability from government

Sesan	Oxfam	All	BK
"Leaders teach people how to follow the rules"	"A good leader listens"	- Started thinking of government as parent – with strong hierarchy - Process of disillusionment re parent concept - Changes across time in relation to understanding of accountability of government - Confusion between different outsiders – often confusion between NGOs and government	"Government is our servant and is not the master of us"

Change since NGO intervention

| Sesan	Oxfam	All	BK

Difficulty formulating claims:
• low self perception as claim makers
• fear and intimidation in past high
• geographically isolated
• don't know who is responsible and thus who to make claims of
	Follow normal hierarchical process:
	- strengthened participation
	- strong gender awareness with greater participation by women
	- participation rather than claim making
		Lingering paternalism
		- involvement of NGOs has significantly shaped different perceptions of ability to make claims
		- whether claim making is a criticism of government – **whether unsettling authority relations** - is the main factor shaping nature of mobilization and change in perception of role of government
			- believe can make claims and articulate demands/wants in relations to government
			- NGOs made them articulate demands early in process
			- other important factors influencing strategy:
			  o not isolated – central
			  o have clear mechanism for complaint making
			  o access to international community
			  o easy access for media

Factors influencing capacity and entitlement

- Quality of **information**, **organization** and **resources** at community level
- **Community norms and expectations**, grounded in political culture
- **Roles, strategies and capacities** of NGOs operating in the community
- **Relationships** between communities, NGOs and government
- Centralized versus decentralized **structure of project decision-making**

Factors that determine differences in participation and claim making

Sesan	Oxfam	All	BK

• Age the biggest factor – older generation tied to land and not mobile. Biggest stake in the dam.
• Those with other sources of income less concerned and involved in claiming accountability
• Gender – men more active as community reps
• Commune council – has women reps as a matter of policy, but one woman reported that she missed the important consultation because she was making the tea.
	• Distinction based on those who live closer to the centre of village and those who live more peripherally
	• People at periphery say they didn't hear about meetings
	• Some people say they do not have time to participate in meetings because of livelihood pressures
	• Women the strongest participants in village level committees, but less so outside the village.
		• Men tend to have more contact with outsiders and be more confident with outsiders because leave the village more often.
		• Barriers based on geographic isolation and language for ethnic minority villages
			In the beginning, men represented the claims of the community.
			But then, strategy decision to put women at the front:
			    • Reduce violence
			    • Women not in formal jobs so less risk of losing them
			    • Women available for meetings
			• Yet women still subject to domestic violence
			• Broad range of ages represented in movement
			• Biggest distinction based on whether live on land or water and security of title

Embedding the research locally
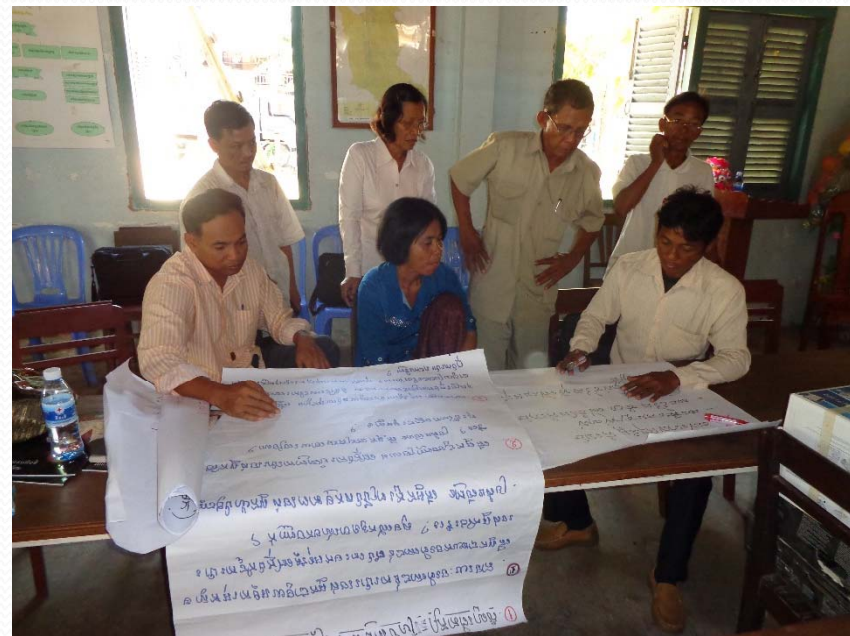
Embedding the research locally

- Use of participatory research methods throughout the project.
- Decision not to conduct *action* research.
- Visited communities to share and check findings.
- A number of workshops and meetings with Cambodian NGOs to feedback and check research.
- Developed materials with women from Boeung Kak for other communities.
- Feeding in research to other Oxfam initiatives such as the Active Citizenship and Accountability hub.
- Ongoing discussion about how to embed.

Limitations of our accountability

In Cambodia:

- Not linked with local universities.

- Did not plan the research sufficiently with local groups, other than Equitable Cambodia where we were based.

- Research not generated based on local demand or need, but on Oxfam and Monash priorities and interests.

In Oxfam:

- Still need to ensure that feeds into programs and doesn't end up as another report on a shelf.