

Accountability, Feedback and Integration: From Theory to Development Strategy in Sierra Leone

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Summary

This paper will develop a theoretical framework for understanding the failure of and solutions to development in the context of accountability and feedback, and then test this framework through an engagement with specific issues in Sierra Leone. The idea of accountability and feedback will be developed broadly with special attention paid to flows of power through different realms of society (i.e. political, economic). William Easterly's writing on the issue will be augmented with an awareness of how different types of power and interest seeking can be integrated, thereby addressing Amartya Sen's criticism of his work and developing a more powerful theoretical framework of analysis. The case of Sierra Leone will then be examined to show the efficacy of this theoretical framework. Specifically, Sierra Leone's "resource curse," and the chieftaincy will be examined.

In regards to this latter issue, the paper will utilize field research done May-April 2007. The research consisted of controlled interviews, many of which were taped, where voluntary participants from all over Sierra Leone were asked several non-leading questions about prospects for community and national development. There were 28 interviews, with over 50 participants.

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1. Introduction

“Why after 50 years and \$2.3 trillion are there still children dying for lack of 12 cents medicine?” This is a compelling question. A part of the answer can be found in William Easterly’s powerful critique of the top down, “planned” nature of Western aid in *White Man’s Burden*. (Easterly, 2006) Easterly develops in his work a powerful mode of analysis, that of place accountability, or feedback loops, as the engine of economic, political, and social development. In our analysis we will refer to development as meaning simply poverty alleviation, economic growth and gains in political freedom. However, Amartya Sen well points out some important deficiencies in Easterly’s analysis. As we will see below, Sen’s critique offers a crucial roadmap to developing a more sophisticated and powerful theoretical framework for analysing failures of development, building further upon Easterly’s powerful analysis.

2. Easterly’s Theory of Social Change and Sen’s Critique

Easterly, in *White Man’s Burden*, argues that top down “planners” are responsible for the failure of Western aid money to bring the poor out of poverty. (Ibid, 2006) Though he gives a broad analysis of the myriad ways in which “searchers” (Ibid, 2006), who operate in a similar fashion to entrepreneurs, can achieve development objectives while “planners” cannot, the most powerful analytical feature of Easterly’s work is his argument that a lack of accountability and feedback is what has caused so many top down development efforts and intentions to fail.

Two key elements which make searches work, and whose absence is fatal to plans, are feedback and accountability. Searchers know if something works only if the people at the bottom can give feedback... Consumers tell the firm that “this product is worth the price” by buying it, or they decide the product is worthless and return it to the store. Voters tell their local political that “public services suck” and the politician tries to fix the problem. (Ibid. 2006)

This is a critical and important point. Easterly is arguing that accountability and feedback are the *essential characteristics* of effective economic and political structures. This is true of both markets, which operate through the principle of free exchange (Smith, Wealth of Nations), and democracies, which operate through the principle of individuals having a choice of and voice in government.

This is not at first glance a particularly revolutionary point. However, Easterly develops it further by arguing, through a rich volume of empirical, anecdotal and statistical evidence, that the importance of accountability and feedback transcends markets and politics, and is the fundamental engine of the *social change* which leads to development. For this he draws upon the works of Edmund Burke and philosopher of science Karl Popper, who viewed social change as being a process of incremental progress through bottom up or “democratic” flows of information and power:

Burke and Popper recognized the economic and political complexity of society. That complexity dooms any attempt to achieve the end of poverty through a plan, and no rich society has ended poverty in this way. (Ibid 2006)

Here Easterly is clearly departing from a simple analysis of the feedback and accountability which lies at the heart of effective economic and political systems. Instead, he is offering a comprehensive vision of social transformation, one that addresses the complex issue of why Western attempts to effect accountable markets and political systems in developing

countries often fail. It is important to note, however, that Easterly develops this vision in a very truncated fashion: he dedicates only a few pages to the idea, and then moves on to engage a huge and varied range of examples of how aid has failed because it is often “planned” in the fashion Burke and Popper argue against. Easterly does not develop fully his idea of social change; for instance, the question remains how, *exactly*, the political and economic spheres adjoin to create a progressive environment of social change across society. Or how, exactly, structures of accountability and feedback loops can be structured and encouraged in societies which have oppressive or non-functioning states and economies. Perhaps Easterly thinks the answer is obvious, and simply a matter of the removal of constraints and plans. Or perhaps he stays away from discussing broad, social strategies to engineer accountability and feedback loops because it seems a bit too close to the top-down planning he is ardently opposed to. Either way, it is clear that Easterly puts accountability and feedback as the fundamental aspect of the social transformations required for development, but leaves broader, strategic questions about how it is to be encouraged in society alone in favour of a more empirical critique of current aid and aid policies.

Easterly focuses his work more on an empirical, statistical, anecdotal and even rhetorical attack on the “planners” who are rendering aid ineffective instead of fully developing the potential of this powerful observation. As Amartya Sen describes in his review of Easterly’s work, this causes *White Man’s Burden* to stop short of its theoretical potential:

The wide-ranging and rich evidence -- both anecdotal and statistical -- that Easterly cites in his sharply presented arguments against grand designs of different kinds deserves serious consideration. In a less extreme form, they could have yielded an illuminating critical perspective on how and why things often do go wrong in the global efforts to help the world’s poor. (Sen, 2006)

Sen’s view of Easterly’s work as heavy handed is not wholly unjustified. For instance, Sen points out how Easterly’s description of searchers making a market work is oversimplified since there is a critical difference “between the enterprise of supplying ‘what is in demand’ -- which is integrally linked to the buyers’ ability to pay -- and that of supplying needed goods and services to people whose income and wealth do not allow a need to be converted into a market demand.” (Ibid 2006). This is an example of Sen’s general criticism of *White Man’s Burden*: that Easterly does not develop a sophisticated enough theoretical framework of analysis, largely because he fails to analyze the complex interrelationship between economic and political interactions. Sen views him as focusing too much on rhetoric and criticism and not enough on developing his analysis-- the reason Sen describes him as “The man without a plan.” (Ibid 2006)

We can more fully understand Sen’s criticism by briefly looking at some of Sen’s own work. For instance, he criticises Easterly’s heavy focus on the accountability of entrepreneurial “searchers” in the marketplace by pointing out that economic development requires a “clear understanding of why the market had failed to work on its own and of how that could be altered through social efforts to supplement the market.” (Ibid 2006) This is reminiscent of Sen’s Entitlement Approach to famine in *Development as Freedom*, where market participation and economic rights are shown to be essentially interwoven with political concerns. (Sen 1999) This is also where Sen makes his famous argument connecting democracy with famine prevention, arguing that “the process of famine prevention is significantly helped by... the opportunity of open discussion, public scrutiny, electoral politics, and uncensored media.”(Ibid, 1999) In his

discussion of famines, Sen shows the critical “connection between political rights and economic needs.” (Ibid, 1999) Throughout his vision of *Development as Freedom*, Sen importantly connects political and economic structures, actions and activities in society, and this is a clear inspiration for his criticism of *White Man’s Burden*.

Sen’s Work does well to highlight how Easterly’s analysis of social transformation could be developed much further. More than providing a simple view of the *connection* between politics and economics, Sen gives a specific and far-reaching theory of development that involves a description of *causation*. He describes in detail how certain political factors cause certain economic outcomes – and this is the sort of highly sophisticated, integrated account of social development that Easterly’s social theory lacks. Easterly alludes to a far-reaching vision of social transformation, this seems to be a secondary concern for *White Man’s Burden*- the book remains primarily a vehicle to criticize the lack of accountability and feedback in foreign aid. While Easterly outlines how the basic engine of social development consists of accountability and feedback loops, he does not develop his theory to describe how accountability might be caused through the interaction of political and economic factors. Sen therefore draws upon his own, highly sophisticated work in this area in his critique of Easterly’s work and the underlying social theory in *White Man’s Burden*. But this is not necessarily to criticize Easterly’s writing; it is, in a way, criticizing what he has not written. There remains great potential to develop Easterly’s initial theory, and the criticism which is the main focus of *White Man’s Burden* goes a long way in reinforcing that accountability and feedback are necessary ingredients for progressive social change and development. Even Easterly himself, responding to Sen’s criticism, defends this focus of *White Man’s Burden*, arguing that “a ‘rhetorical drubbing’ can promote accountability.” (Easterly, Foreign Affairs 2006) Regardless, Sen shows effectively that Easterly’s analytical approach can be developed further: in light of its potential, we will now attempt to do so.

Using Sen’s criticism as inspiration, Easterly’s vision of social transformation can be developed into a more powerful theoretical framework for understanding development. Sen points out that there is not enough attention given to the interconnection of political and economic factors in social development, and that “coordination is an issue that receives surprisingly little attention in this grandly conceived book.” (Sen in Financial times, 2006) Though he offers a theory of social change as operating through the “piecemeal democratic reform” of accountability and feedback, Sen’s criticism serve well to bring out the fact that many of the poorest countries face situations of extreme, self perpetuating poverty and cycles of conflict that seem to demand some foreign intervention. Here Sen rightly criticizes Easterly as “The man without a plan” since in *White Man’s Burden* Easterly fails to develop any coordinated strategies for development or intervention, instead arguing vaguely for “piecemeal reforms” and focusing on the lack of accountability within the current structure of Western Aid itself.

Even more problematic, Easterly seems to suggest that intervening to develop the accountability and feedback loops required for good social change is impossible. Easterly himself admits it is a “paradoxical finding” that, for instance, “free markets work but free market reforms often don’t.” (Easterly 2006) The incredibly important question begged by Easterly’s theory of social change – how to instil and create accountability and feedback loops in developing countries that seem unable to achieve it on their own – remains unanswered. This

shortcoming relates to Easterly's failure to describe how accountability might be caused through the interaction of political and economic factors, and what, if any, causal flow exists between economic and political activity. If we are to develop Easterly's theory of social change into a more powerful and sophisticated theoretical framework, this is where we must focus our inquiry.

3. Lessons in Social Power: Harriss-White, Khan, Kohli and Ferguson

We can find an answer to our question of how accountability might be engendered in underdeveloped states through a brief analysis of power as it comes up through an interesting variety of literature on development. Here we are using the term "power" in a broad sense, to refer to economic power (as in material entitlement), political power (as in authority over others), as well as any other exercise of authority, claims or control over others (i.e. military). The work of Barbara Harriss-White, Mushtaq Khan and Atul Kohli in different ways all develop a vision of power and power relationships as moving fluidly through different aspects of society: political, economic, cultural, and so on. Either implicitly or explicitly, they describe a vision of integrated power that demands the sort of rich, coordinated social vision Sen constructs in *Development as Freedom*.

Barbara Harriss-White affirms this view explicitly in *Markets as Social and Political Institutions*. She powerfully re-envisioned markets as "bundles of institutions" and "arenas for struggle between political interests" instead of isolated economic phenomenon. (Harriss-White, 2003) Though she goes on to develop the important consequences of this vision in detail, for our purposes we can remain focused on her vision of markets and subsequent vision of how power operates in society. In her vision of markets as political and cultural "bundles," Harriss-White shows that the analytical constructs of economic and politics are limited in their ability. Though the specialization that occurs when "economic" activity is made a separate analytical field from "politics," Harriss-White shows that something is also lost. This is not to say that the separation of economic and political power is a bad thing; quite on the contrary, the sort of specialization afforded by economic and political institutions and analysis is clearly a powerful tool for development. But Harriss-White points out that society does not completely operate in such an artificially separate fashion:

Markets are vehicles for the exercises of forms of social authority, the origins of which lie outside markets, and which operate outside as well as inside them. (Ibid, 2003)

From this we can take a powerful lesson in social power - that it is not bounded to the analytical realms of politics or economics. Economic power can be the vehicle for political power in her vision of markets, and the two are not so cleanly separate as our analytical constructs would suggest. This is perhaps less obvious in highly developed rich nations, where norms and institutions have come to reflect the analytical separation of a reality which is however also afforded by their highly developed state. A highly developed state can separate spheres of activity and exercises of power more easily than poor countries, as we will now observe through the work of Mushtaq Khan.

Mushtaq Khan portrays a coherent vision of the transition from primitive accumulation to capitalism through a variety of works. In *Corruption and Governance in Early Capitalism: World Bank Strategies and their Limitations*, he points out that pursuit of aid policies to

eliminate corruption, defined as “the use of public office for private gain,” fail to understand the complexity of this transition and “are inappropriate for the problems which developing countries actually face could contribute to worsening political instability by raising impossible expectations.”(Khan, 2002) This is because, in a similar fashion to Barbara Harris-White’s description of markets, Khan describes how economic power is often sought through political institutions and relationships. This is not something developed countries are free from, *or* a necessary impediment to development. It is only when the corrupt become undisciplined and capital consuming, in a similar fashion to Mancur Olson’s “Roving Bandit” (Olson, 1993), that they impede development. (Khan 2002) Moreover, Khan argues that attempts to address corruption in a simplistic economic fashion are bound to fail, as corruption is a complex political as well as economic phenomenon. (Khan 2001)

Importantly, Khan is describing an interrelationship between political power and economic power: that politics is, especially during a country’s transition from primitive accumulation to capitalism, quite naturally a realm for pursuing economic interests. Khan argues that the West developed by disciplining corruption rather than curbing it; and that the most rapidly developing countries in the world today like China (and Korea before it) are quite corrupt but in a *disciplined fashion*. (Khan, 2006) Khan also points out that poorer developing countries are not able to achieve much separation between political and economic relationships and institutions because of the costs required. There are “structural impediments to good governance” and sophisticated economic institutions like “stable property rights are very expensive to achieve.”(Khan, 2006). Therefore approaching developing countries with an overly separated vision of the political and economic realms misunderstands the integration of economic and political power and interest seeking, and does “a huge degree of violence to history.”(Khan, 2006)

Khan’s work reinforces the integrated vision of social power that Barbara Harris-White describes in markets by showing that corruption is essentially the same phenomenon of the integration of economic and political exercises of power. More importantly, Khan describes how less developed, poorer countries cannot afford to reflect the analytical separation of economics and politics in their institutions and development processes, since this separation was *not* a part of rich countries development and is very expensive or hard to achieve. As well, Khan’s criticism of Western attempts to prevent all corruption highlight the importance of being sensitive to the high degree of integration of political and economic power in poorer, less developed countries. From this, we can start to see what our discussion of power can yield for Easterly’s theory of social change: a broader vision of how economic and political exercises of power are integrated, especially in poor, underdeveloped countries. Also of interest to us is how Khan describes a possible way of fostering development within this integrated context: the disciplining of the corrupt through legitimate authority. To explore this idea more, we will now turn to the work of Atul Kohli.

Kohli, in *State Directed Development*, describes how “political patterns” in different states – neopatrimonial, fragmented-multiclass and cohesive-capitalist – effected different degrees of economic development in different developing countries.(Kohli, 2004) Importantly, Kohli concludes that the discipline and cohesion of cohesive capitalist states like South Korea best promote capital accumulation and growth, finding similarity with Khan’s description of

development there.(Ibid, 2004) Kohli essentially conducts an analysis of states and their development with a sensitivity to how political power has influenced, effected or inhibited economic development. An important part of his conclusion is that he finds *cohesion* to be of paramount importance in this relationship: it is what allows for the disciplining of corruption that Khan argues essential for development and growth. Here Kohli is referring to the galvanization of political and economic interests across society, expressed through broad exercises of power across both economic and political spheres. Unfortunately, the cohesive-capitalists states that Kohli analyzes lack political freedom, and it is not obvious from his work how this cohesion can be achieved. But we can still take an important point from Kohli's work: that in the face of the integration of different types of power and their exercise in developing and underdeveloped countries, *cohesion* is a powerful force for economic development. We will therefore turn to Ferguson's *Anti-politics Machine* to elucidate further the concept of cohesion, and how it can be influenced by intervention.

James Ferguson discusses, through a rich and specific examination of the economic and social impact of an enormous array of NGOs and aid organizations in Lesotho, how they disrupt political accountability. "The 'developmental state,'" Ferguson argues, "is a knotting or a coagulation of power" and the social impact of NGOs and their practices destabilizes this.(Ferguson, 1994) Intentionality and the accountability of the state is convoluted amidst a myriad of entangled, often un-coordinated NGO plans and operations. In this complex "machine" of the state and social practices, Ferguson argues that "as one cog in the 'machine,' the planning apparatus is not the 'source' of whatever structural changes may come about, but only one among a number of links in the mechanism that produces them."(Ibid, 1994) This is a highly sophisticated vision of how power operates in society; in a complex, almost fragile alignment of a variety of factors from custom, to politics, to economics.

Ferguson's analysis of Lesotho shows that large scale interventions can threaten the legitimacy of states and coherency of social structures by deriding the complex set of relationships they are composed of- thus becoming "the anti-politics machine."(Ibid 1994) The repercussion for our concept of social cohesion is clear: since social cohesion is the galvanization of these complex sets of interests and relationships into broad, integrated exercises of power, it is clearly a complex phenomenon (surely part of the reason Kohli does not seek to explain how it might be developed). As a result, cohesion is not likely to be fostered by top-down plans and interventions. In fact, Ferguson makes a strong case that such interventions, especially when uncoordinated, adversely effect social cohesion by disrupting the "machinery" of social structure.

4. Cohesion and Integration

From our examination of power in the development discourse, we can take two important concepts: cohesion and integration. Barbara Harriss-White and Mushtaq Khan bring to the forefront how the exercises economic and political power in society are not so cleanly separated as our analytical constructs might suggest- especially in poor developing countries. Khan and Kohli both highlight that this requires of developing countries a high degree of coordination and integration of political and economic power. Kohli develops this further into the idea that social cohesion – the galvanization of political and economic interests across society, expressed

through broad exercises of power across both economic and political spheres – plays a critical role in economic development. Ferguson describes how the societies are complex and do not operate simply through top down political or economic flows power: they amount to a social “machine” where important connections exist vertically through the authority structures of institutions but also horizontally across different groups, relationships and forms of power in society. Therefore social cohesion must be seen as a complex galvanization of an even more complex set of relationships; and developing social cohesion is clearly not possible through an exclusively top down approach.

Though rich, developed countries specialize activities and institutions through the analytical constructs of economics and politics to good effect, power and interests remain fundamentally unspecialized in society. David Keen (2005) shows that in Sierra Leone’s recent civil war even military power and action was a vehicle for the expression of economic and social grievances. Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss all the implications of military power being a vehicle for other interests, it is a superb example of just how *integrated* the pursuit of interests and the form they take across different types of power can be. Integration, defined for our purposes as the expression or pursuit of interests in an unspecialized manner through different realms of power – often simultaneously – is therefore a critical strategic and theoretical consideration we can take from our examination of power.

The delineation of interest seeking and power along economic or political lines in society has clear benefits: but it is not a panacea, especially for poor developing countries which are not able to immediately achieve the strict delineations that exist in rich, developed countries. These delineations remain important; especially in the examples of military force or capital consuming political corruption, it is apparent that integration can be a destructive phenomenon. However, to simply expect development *though* the separation of activities is problematic: strong, separated economies, governments and institutions are more realistically viewed as a goal of development rather than a means to it. The reality of *integration* must therefore be an essential consideration in any examination of how a society works, and what can be done to foster development.

5. Integration, Accountability and Feedback

Our previously developed concept of integration allows for a better technical understanding of how aid and interventions can foster accountability and feedback by shedding light on the relationship between economic and political accountability. It is not fundamentally problematic when power is exercised across arenas (political in economic and vice versa). Instead, integration should be accepted and even pursued in the context of feedback and accountability. For instance, under this view of integrated accountability and feedback, political intervention in markets should be acceptable if it serves to make the market more accountable – i.e. To correct market deficiencies. This is something Sen agrees with, and even points out in his critique of Easterly: that any theory of development and/or social change needs to understand “why the market had failed to work on its own and of how that could be altered through social efforts to supplement the market.” (Sen, 2006)

Similarly, and perhaps more interestingly, developing Easterly’s theory with the notion of integration implies that political accountability should be developed through economic

accountability. Our examination of power in the development discourse shows that interest seeking itself is not delineated into political or economic arenas: interests are sought in unspecific exercises of power which can mix together political and economic activity. This means that economic incentives and structures can (and do) influence political activity. Easterly alludes to, though never fully develops, the far-reaching potential of this idea in his discussion of how the economic efficacy of property rights illegally adopted in Xiaogang, China slowly led to changes in political policies. (Easterly, 2006) Just as Sen describes a causal picture of political freedom effecting economic entitlement, our development of Easterly's social theory suggests that political freedom might be effected through the powerful material incentives of accountably structured markets and market activity.

Easterly points out throughout *White Man's Burden* the fact that accountability and feedback loops create desirable *outcomes* through their efficiency. This essentially comes down to the issues of information and incentives: Democracies are better at preventing famines, as Sen points out, because they are better informed than, for instance, the Maoist communist regime was. (Sen, 1999) Markets also generate better operationally relevant information for producers due to their feedback loop (buyers responding directly to consumers, rather than plans) and so producers are accountable to consumers. The end result is that accountable polities and markets are more effective at producing the results people in them want.

The efficiency of accountable economic activity, and subsequent wealth generated for those involved, has the power to galvanize different groups and political interests. Accountability and feedback loops create a self-propelling incentive through prospect of material gain which, if viewed in the context of integration, can display far-reaching effects. Going back to Easterly's example of Xiaogang, China, the results of illegal, impromptu and accountably structured property rights "were to spectacular to stay secret for long." As a result these reforms eventually filtered through to the policy makers of the Maoist regime and were the beginning of China's liberalization away from strict communism. (Easterly, 2006) The sheer effectiveness of economic accountability is in the interests of all. Even those elites who seek only to pillage their country will still have the incentive of a "stationary bandit" (Olson, 1993) to see the economy they seek to pillage get bigger and wealthier. Similarly, economic efficacy has the power to bridge different groups and social tensions through material interests: if these groups can get richer through tolerance and working together, they often will. (Easterly, 2006) Citizens and elites of developing countries pursuing their interests in an unspecialized manner through different realms of power means that the material effect of markets can do more than create wealth: it can be the great unifier of interests. Integration therefore provides an important insight into the technical aspect of development and aid: that there will be secondary or "collateral" effects with any intervention. Moreover, if we combine this insight with Easterly's work on accountability and feedback, it becomes clear that this is not necessarily a bad thing. Instead, it suggests that broader strategies and indirect vectors of change should be a part of any development effort. This is an important idea since, for instance, political interventions by foreign countries can be viewed as illegitimate or with suspicion, and governance which is unaccountable and growth-impeding can remain popular with the majority. The example of economic accountability influencing political accountability exemplifies such strategies, and will be further developed later in this analysis.

This same understanding of the integrated political and economic structure of society also makes it clearer why top-down, donor driven development often does not work. The fact that the citizens and elites of developing countries pursue their interests in an unspecialized manner through different realms of power means that they do so in ways that are often not anticipated by planned interventions and aid. As a result, aid and interventions can cause “collateral damage” to existing functional economic or political relationships. This is what Ferguson (1994) describes as happening to Lesotho; that the broad-spectrum effect of the aid industry is to compromise the delicate structures of political and economic accountability that existed before. This phenomenon has also been poignantly observed by Peter Uvin in his examination of *The Development Enterprise in Rwanda*:

Our projects tell the farmers and artisans that if they organize and work hard, they will develop. But what is for these people the real-life model of success? . . . Who is the person that becomes wealthier fast? . . . Most of the time, the person who becomes richer did not have to join cooperatives, did not have to attend training sessions, did not need project credit. He became richer very fast because he had 'friends' in the right places, and because a little present given can always lead to a little present received. In that case...do we have any credibility at all? (Uvin, 1998)

In a similar fashion, the unanticipated effect of top-down interventions and economic policies on African economists is observed by Mkandawire in *The Spread of Economic Doctrines in Postcolonial Africa*:

Through their conditionality, donors filter the knowledge usable by local policy makers. It is the donors that suggest or sanction the approval of local economists both directly and indirectly. It is they who define who are “real economists” and governments have learned that they save time if they use these donor-certified economists to prepare their documents. As a consequence, what policy makers get is not a smorgasbord of ideas, but the one idea of which they have financed the production. In addition, much of the cream of the new competence in economics is captured by donors themselves, and is often deployed by them. (Mkandawire, 2004)

Integration therefore sheds significant light on how accountability and feedback loops can be strategically effected but also on why top-down plans and aid do not work. The broad effects of interventions and policies must be understood in the context of the integrated, unspecialized expressions of interests and power in developing societies. In the latter part of this analysis we will show through example what, specifically, this can mean.

6. Integration, Accountability and Feedback Elucidate Cohesion

A cohesive society is, in effect, one where the goals of growth and development somehow permeates all sectors, activities and groups with different interests: making society into one efficient, capital accumulating, private-enterprise supporting “machine.” For instance, Kohli (2004) goes into detail about how the strong state of Korea effected its development agenda across society utilizing a coordinated political, economic and social strategy to do so. Acknowledging the reality of integration in developing societies also allows us to better understand why cohesion is essential to development and how it can be fostered through accountability and feedback. Specifically, accountability and feedback require a form of participation which encourages cohesion and can improve the legitimacy and efficacy of institutions. To better understand and elucidate how accountability and feedback can foster cohesion, let us first examine what inhibits it.

Much of what inhibits cohesion is the territory of political economy, though the complex exercises of power and social structure we have examined go beyond this. A fragmentation of political goals and social structure is a large part of what Ferguson describes in *The Anti-Politics Machine*. It is also what Easterly describes of development “planning;” that top down initiatives are not connected to realities or incentives “on the ground.” (Easterly, 2006) This fragmentation is quite the opposite of the sort of social cohesion Kohli describes: a key part of cohesion in *State Directed Development* is the alignment of political and economic interests, of state and society. (Kohli, 2004)

Economies can be politicized in a fashion that prevents cohesion: Ferguson describes an extreme example in *Global Shadows* (2006) of what Kohli describes as the neo-patrimonial state in *State Directed Development*: when factors converge to allow a rich elite to use the economy exclusively for their own gain. In this instance the economy is purposefully fragmented and dislodged from those participating in it. Thriving on resource rents (Ferguson, 2006), aid (Easterly, 2006) or undisciplined corruption (Khan, 2002), the elite maintain and expand wealth while the economy and society are fragmented and suffer. Ferguson even goes so far as describing the corrupt, oil-rent supported Angolan government as little more than a “landlord.”(Ferguson, 2006) When the economy is politicized with patronage, capital-consuming corruption and used as a form of plunder it clearly inhibits cohesion. The state and economy are fragmented and dislodged from the “machine” of society, and politicians become “roving bandits” in their own countries. (Olson, 1993)

Another important inhibitor to cohesion is when states lack a real presence or legitimacy with their citizens. For instance, Menkhaus, K and J. Prendergast in *Political Economy of Post-Intervention Somalia*(1995) give an intriguing picture of how different regions of Somalia were operating effectively through separate, locally-set up political structures despite the fact that the country as a whole was effectively in a state of anarchy. Though the country “Somalia” had external international recognition and a “functioning” government body, the state has no effective presence at all “on the ground.” Infrastructure, police, even law itself were no longer provided by the state. (Ibid, 1995) Though things have changed much in Somalia since their writing, Menkhaus and Prendergast provide an interesting look at how the state and it’s essential functions are an important part of cohesion. The state must have a presence on the ground if people are to share common interests and galvanize their actions across a given society. While cohesion occurs through the coordinated integration of political, economic and social power, it can be inhibited through the fragmentation of political and economic interests and interest-seeking within a state or society.

Accountability and feedback seem to encourage cohesion since, as we have already touched upon, there is great potential for economic efficacy to be a galvanizing factor in society. Without being repetitive, we can simply elaborate that the material effect of markets and accountable economics, as the great unifier of interests, can in this way build cohesion. However, this point is insufficient for our analysis, since it does not explain how, exactly, accountability and feedback might exist throughout and across different groups in society in a broad sense. Yet our examination of what inhibits cohesion clearly points to structural factors, such as state-citizen relationships, as critical considerations. The economic efficiency point therefore remains

more of a technical, strategic consideration: one which relies upon the outputs of accountable structures and feedback loops. There are, however, important ways in which accountability and feedback (viewed in the context of integration) *structurally* encourage cohesion and are responsive to the problems which inhibit it. It is to these structural considerations which we will now turn.

David Hulme, in *Protecting and Strengthening Social Capital in Order to Produce Desirable Development Outcomes* (2000), stresses the importance of process and participation as well as using local knowledge and local institutions in development projects. Hulme arrives at this view through an examination of the idea of “social capital,” which he points out is imprecisely defined and often vaguely referenced in the development discourse. (Hulme, 2000) Participation, though not a panacea on its own, does play a critical role in galvanizing groups and developing relationships which foster development. (Putnam, 1993 and Platteau, 1994) By being agents rather than patients in social structures and relationships, participants are given an important sense of ownership and legitimacy. (Putnam, 1993) Yet Easterly cites Tanzania as an example of how participation can actually exacerbate social tensions and conflict with democracy if stressed in an artificial, top-down fashion. (Easterly, 2006) This also reflects current research which has found that post-war civil society programs in Iraq which try to develop social capital and cohesion vertically in a top down manner have not been effective: mainly because of a lack of legitimacy. A more horizontal approach that involves the participation of diffuse groups to strengthen horizontal ties has been argued to be more effective. (Kathem, 2007)

In contrast with top down, planned “participation” is the unplanned and locally driven participation involved in accountability and feedback. The quality of the participation in accountable markets or states is more genuine, being a constituent part of their structure rather than a “result.” Accountability and feedback imply participation which is driven from the bottom, not forced from the top. As a result, accountability and feedback loops can build cohesion through the strong sense of legitimacy conveyed to participants, a legitimacy which can be critical in galvanizing different groups and participants with conflicting interests. (Granovetter, 1985) Integrated accountability and feedback implies society-wide participation: and therefore stand to have a legitimizing and subsequent galvanizing effect on society as a whole. Being attentive to integration allows for a broader vision of accountability and feedback in a developing country, and allows for a similarly broad vision of participation and legitimacy as a result. In this way accountability and feedback, if viewed and applied broadly, structurally encourage cohesion through the legitimizing participation inherent in their operation.

Institutions – the rules and norms constraining human behaviour (North, 1990) play a critical role in social structure. (Ferguson, 1994) and are also importantly improved through accountability and feedback. Institutions play an important part in providing the social setting for markets and market activity (Moore, 1994) as well as good governance (Putnam, 1993). They have now also been recognized by the World Bank (2005) as a critical factor in growth. The legitimacy fostered by the participation accountability and feedback require plays an important part in the quality institutions and their ability to promote cohesion. If institutions lack this legitimacy, critical political, economic and social discord can result as Mamdani (1996) shows

through an examination of how the legacy of colonialism has manifested itself in the institutions and politics of many post-colonial societies.

Another issue is brought up by Gannovetter in *The Strength of Weak Ties* (1973) in his discussion on embeddedness: that participants in economic structures may have functional, socially embedded relationships that cannot be anticipated in top-down, socially abstracted economic reforms. Crucially, the bottom-up and locally driven participation required by accountability and feedback allows participants to use their knowledge of what is going on “on the ground” to inform and legitimize institutions. Easterly explicitly acknowledges this in his discussion of accountability and feedback. He asks

How can top-down Planners make markets work when it requires understanding not just free markets but also the bottom-up search for the social norms, producer and consumer networks, and kin relationships that facilitate exchange?...All in a society must develop the informal social ties that make our individual market choices possible. The chances are low that the international jet set will understand...enough to make markets work.” (Easterly, 2006)

Francis Cleaver (2002) describes “institutional bricolage... a process by which people consciously and unconsciously draw on existing social and cultural arrangements to shape institutions in response to changing situations,” as critical to the success of institutions. Accountability and feedback, which Easterly praises precisely because they allow for bottom-up social evolution and reform, play a key role in the institutional bricolage Cleaver argues is essential for common resource management and collective action. (Ibid, 2002)

Accountability and feedback improve institutions by legitimizing them and making them responsive to economic and political changes as well as unique social networks and relationships. Again, integration is an important consideration here: the complexity of social networks and exercises of power is a critical factor requiring institutions to be accountable and subsequently adaptable. The fact that institutions simultaneously effect different arenas of power and interest-seeking is also why they have the potential to foster cohesion, improve the relationship between state and private enterprise, and contribute to a subsequent climate of capital accumulation – *if* they involve accountability and feedback. These same arguments about integration, modality and adaptability can be extended to the nation state as a whole. Feedback needs to filter through to the top of the social structure, and governance must have some effect “on the ground.” But as Ferguson points out, there are many contributing forces and competing interests involved in making this possible. Therefore, to avoid fragmentation and politicization of the economy by elites, a sustained series of feedback loops and accountability across society’s different groups of association and arenas of power is required. This way the state and economy can align with the interests of those at the bottom and with private enterprise. As well, the participation of different groups in the state can itself be a legitimizing exercise. (Easterly, 2006)

The World Bank’s recent publication, *Economic Growth in the 1990s: Learning from a Decade of Reform* (2005) reflects much of what we have developed so far with accountability, feedback and integration. This work contains a plethora of evidence and lessons learned from previous attempts to foster growth, with one of the central underlying themes being that growth is a complex, contextual phenomenon. Good institutions (themselves relative to context), modality and adaptability are seen as the way forward: “The key is countries’ ability continuously to adjust and reform institutions in a manner that enables them to sustain higher

levels of income and lay the basis for further growth.”(WB, 2005) There is no blueprint for good institution, the World Bank writes, because

While there are some *functions* that institutions need to perform in any society, the *form* through which institutions can perform these functions can vary considerably. (Ibid, 2005)

This observation is also reflected in E.A. Brett’s rich reconstruction of development theory (forthcoming), which stresses among other things the need for “institutional plurality.” (Brett 2005) So while institutions are critical to growth and development, they institutions can vary greatly and still fulfill this role. As the World Bank notes, this “leaves open the question of how to improve institutional performance.”(WB, 2005)

The Bank also finds that “incremental approaches to public sector governance are more effective” and that “growth entails more than the efficient use of resources... it is also a process of social transformation.”(Ibid, 2005) This is also a critical reality which our theoretical framework of integrated accountability and feedback is highly responsive to. As Easterly point out, accountability and feedback allow for a vision of social change through “piecemeal reform.” If augmented with an understanding of how interests are pursued in an unspecialized manner through different realms of power, this vision can be developed to give a technical and theoretical account of how social transformation, cohesion and ultimately development occur. Our theoretical framework of integration, accountability and feedback can serve as a guide to the improvement of institutions without dictating any specific form: Institutions can be made more accountable through a case by case approach that utilizes the strategic and technical implications of integration. This will be shortly demonstrated through the example of the chieftaincy in Sierra Leone.

7. Summary: Integrated Accountability and Feedback as a Theoretical Framework

Through his theory of social change, Easterly argues that accountability and feedback let the people at the bottom of institutions, states and economies guide them to success: for who else has a more accurate and intimate knowledge of what is going on and what needs to be done? For Easterly, accountability and feedback loops are the core causes of development. It is not particular economic or political policies, therefore, that have led the west to development. Instead, it is the fact that policies, governments and institutions were affirmed and rejected through a process (or “bricolage” as Cleaver describes) made effective through structures of accountability and feedback. But Easterly’s vision is too narrow, as Sen points out. He does not engage the issue of how political and economic activities are often causally interrelated.

Augmenting Easterly’s theory of social change with the notion of integration gives it a better technical understanding of the complex interactions between political and economic arenas of power. We can also move beyond Easterly’s critique of top-down planning and aid as ineffective in itself, and understand how top-down interventions and aid can effect “collateral damage” on functional relationships in a developing society. Equally as important, accountability and feedback – if viewed and pursued in the context of integration – can provide a structural account of how cohesion might be facilitated: through broad social participation and legitimate, effective institutions. Accountability and feedback loops are not a panacea: in fact, they are by nature unspecific and require contextualization. They can be pursued in different forms, in

different contexts and in different societies. In answering Sen's criticism and exploring further the relationship between accountability, feedback and power in developing societies, we have therefore arrived only at a starting point. We have gained a powerful theoretical framework, but further analysis and specific strategies remain to be developed.

8. Using Integration, Accountability and Feedback to Address Development Issues in Sierra Leone

Though it is not within the scope of our analysis to fully utilize our theoretical framework of accountability and feedback considered in context to integration, we can demonstrate its potential through an examination of development issues in Sierra Leone. Perhaps no issue is greater in this diamond-rich country than its experience of the "resource curse:" the fact that its mineral wealth has *contributed* to growing poverty, inequality and even the civil war itself through the well publicized "blood diamonds." (Moody, 2007) In a similar fashion to what Ferguson describes in Angola, the "kleptocratic tendencies of the Freetown elite" (Jackson, 2006) is made possible by a political and economic disconnect between elites and ordinary, impoverished Sierra Leoneans. This, in turn, was made possible largely by the political legacy of colonialism as Mamdani (1996) describes, which some have argued was exacerbated by later interventions of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. (Keen, 2005 and Moody, 2007) With little attention being paid by colonial masters and international institutions/aid to accountability and feedback, unaccountable internal politics left the country fragmented, corrupt and ripe for civil war. (see again Keen, 2005, Jackson, 2006 and Richards, 2004) As a result companies operating in Sierra Leone before and during the civil war, like Sierra Rutile Limited, adapted to the political landscape and operated through bribes and elite patronage. (Moody, 2007) Due to the corruption and fragmentation of Sierra Leone, local people, of whom thousands had to be relocated because of mining operations, saw little benefit and "irreversible" environmental damage occur. (Ibid, 2007)

Sierra Leone's wealth of kimberlite diamond veins contributed further to the degeneration accountability and feedback. As Paul Collier explains in *The Bottom Billion*:

Because resource-rich countries do not need to tax, they do not provoke citizens into supplying the public good of scrutiny over how their taxes are being spent. While in its general form this undermining of accountability has been understood for a long time, it has usually been seen as an explanation of why resource-rich societies are more likely to be autocratic. Our key point is that this same undermining of accountability operates within polities that, at least on the criterion of electoral competition, are democratic. What gets undermined is not electoral competition, but the political restraints on how power is used. (Collier, 2007)

Importantly, Collier describes how resource rents undermine accountability not only in a strict political sense but through the integration of political and economic interests. The resource curse is very much a problem of accountability; it is both made possible by and itself reinforces the fragmentation of state and society, elites and the poor.

Sierra Leone's resource curse is largely the result of a failure of political accountability, and so escaping the resource curse requires the development of institutional, political and economic accountability in an integrated fashion. As Sachs, Stiglitz and Humphreys explain in *Escaping the Resource Curse* the solution lies in

strengthening state-society linkages. As oil revenues flow in, multiple forces act to unlink elites from their populations. They no longer, for instance, require revenues from taxes on their citizens. These dynamics can be countered politically by expanding the scope for broad-based participation in decision making. (Sachs, Stiglitz and Humphreys, 2007)

Accountability and feedback, as we earlier described, are essential in such a strategy. It is critical for Sierra Leone, if it is to overcome its resource curse, to develop more accountable economics and politics. As daunting a task as this surely is, steps in the right direction could include involving more local feedback and accountability in mining operations; something that can be achieved through the multilateral organizations involved in managing and monitoring economic activity, as well as through corporations and their growing sense of “corporate social responsibility.” Developing these points in detail and with attention to our theoretical framework is a worthy subject for subsequent research, but unfortunately not within the scope of our analysis. We will instead move on to give a single, very specific example of how our theoretical framework can shed light on one of the most contentious issues facing Sierra Leone today.

As the above example shows, governance reform in Sierra Leone is a critical issue, and no issue more contentious than the chieftaincy. At heart, the chieftaincy is an unaccountable institution developed into its current form through the indirect rule of colonialism. (Keen, 2005b and WB, 2005) The exploitation of male youths and control over marriage the chiefs exert has been cited as a cause of rural outflow and “the failure of chiefdom governance was a cause of the (recent) war.” (Richards, 2004. See also Keen 2005a and 2005b, Jackson, 2006 and Fanthorpe, 2005) However, the chieftaincy is still widely respected and finds popular support with the majority of Sierra Leoneans. Because of this, Fanthorpe (2005) argues against the current DFID policy of fast-tracking a decentralization process:

The chieftaincy is the historic focus of struggles for political control over the Sierra Leonean countryside. Both the national elite and the rural poor remain deeply engaged in these struggles, and many among the latter continue to value customary authority as a defence against the abuse of bureaucratic power. (Ibid, 2005)

Similarly, Paul Jackson affirms that “there is little demand for an end to the chieftaincy system,” but that “governance at local level requires constructive relationships between chiefdoms and local governments and not simply a reshuffling of ...old ways of doing things.” (Jackson, 2006)

Brian Johnson, DFID Sierra Leone’s project coordinator through much the civil war and re-construction efforts, argues that the straightforward re-enforcement of the systemic patronage that the Chieftaincy represents risks replicating the causes of the conflict: it amounts to “the same care, different driver.” (Thompson, 2007) DFID, which has a major bilateral aid agreement with Sierra Leone and subsequently great influence on reconstruction and development strategies there, has re-developed local district councils to counteract the oppressive influence of the Chiefs. (DFID, 2003 and 2006a) However, these councils depend upon the chiefs for monetary and often political support. (Thompson, 2007) So while many authors agree that the chieftaincy inhibits development in Sierra Leone and was a cause of the war, policies and efforts to address the issue chieftaincy remain dubious.

Richard’s 2004 World bank report on prospects for community-driven development in Sierra Leone observes a “lack of cohesion in rural communities,” due in part to the chieftaincy. However, the report concludes that “there is evidence of extensive change in social attitudes

among marginalized groups in the countryside, and these changes need to be understood and built upon.”(Ibid, 2004) Keen, in *Conflict and Collusion in Sierra Leone* (2005) also argues that the Chieftaincy and lack of recognition felt by young men in the rural areas was a major cause of the war, and that

This raises the question of how a desire for recognition can be accommodated in a process of reconstruction and reform. A serious attempt to make rights real would itself be a huge contribution.(Keen, 2004)

But how can rights and recognition be made real? If we use our theoretical framework of integration, accountability and feedback, we can strategize about how these rights can be made real through *economic accountability*. If economic activity can be made accountable and even democratic, then this has the potential to effect the political and social structures of rural Sierra Leoneans. This strategy is also non-confrontational as it does not overtly seek to alter the political landscape of rural communities– an important consideration since the chieftaincy enjoys popular support and respect.

Richards’ 2004 report offers an important window of opportunity to develop accountable economic activity in Sierra Leone. The report concludes that the agrarian crisis was and continues to be “a major cause of rural poverty and war in Sierra Leone.”(Richards, 2004) It also observes that the agrarian crisis is in part technical, due to a lack of markets, equipment, roads and training. In a series of interviews done for this paper, the demand among rural Sierra Leoneans to increase agricultural activity and output was explicit – with almost all interviewees in the Eastern, diamond rich province citing agriculture as a preference over mining. (Interviews: Kono, Port Loko, Freetown and Bo in 2007) But without land, tools, start up (seed) costs and sometimes even functioning roads, it remains to difficult an option to pursue, and so many labourers turn to the open pit mines and the promise of quick riches. One interviewee, a farmer outside of Kono explained:

Roads are considered a very serious problem. Fertilizers, agro-chemicals, seeds and equipment, these are scarce or not even available. For example, we don’t even have any organized seed communes in this country. We just rely on seeds from local growers. (Interview: Sahr Momdeh, Kono, 2007)

Agricultural development provides a critical opportunity for economic aid and intervention to address this technical problem. Moreover, if we utilize our theoretical framework of integration, accountability and feedback, we can develop an idea of how aid interventions into the technical agrarian crisis can challenge the seemingly unrelated oppressive structure of the chieftaincy.

The solution is to encourage economic activity while paying special attention to integration and accountability. Specifically, the organization of labour required to work large tracks of land can be structured in a democratic, accountable fashion. If done in a fashion sensitive to the chief’s authority it can easily be non-confrontational. There also exists a powerful material incentive for all involved to initiate and continue the structure of accountability and feedback: the initial incentive can come from aid or intervention in the form of training and start-up costs, but as productivity increases the incentives and strategy will become self-propelling. The structure of labour can be organized through a labour “association” which is democratically structured and involves direct community participation. Importantly, the democratic nature and incentive structure of these “associations” should more closely resemble a corporation than a

“cooperative.” A directing president, formal democratic structure and strong incentives for individual performance are critical points of departure.

Field research has found that this structure is, in fact, already being used with success in Sierra Leone despite a very limited amount of aid and start up incentives. In one instance, Cooperazione Internazionale or COOPI (an Italian NGO working throughout Sierra Leone) has piloted such a program in Kono district. Interviews with COOPI’s in-field project coordinator found that associations extremely similar to what has been described above were linked together with social development projects like schools or community centers, and had a 29 out of 32 success rate over a two year pilot period. (COOPI, 2007) The associations are community owned, community operated and community accountable. The project is monitored by COOPI and conditionalities built into support which ensures that the associations are productive and fully democratic. The more productive the associations, the more support they receive from COOPI. There is a strong material incentive with the association since

they have been used to work on an individual basis. We are sensitizing them to work together with modern agricultural practices. We have the results. We provide them with 12 bushels(of rice)... after harvest the result is 205 bushels.(Interview: COOPI Project Coordinator, Kono, 2007)

By re-shaping economic activity in the community through aid or conditional investment, these associations stand to re-shape the communities and their attitudes towards governance. Through the accountability, feedback and participation involved in the structure of these associations, they can build upon the changing attitudes and demand to “make rights real.” At the same time the productivity of the associations, allows them to be *sustainable, self-propelling* challenges to the traditional land and labour systems of rural communities. COOPI’s associations in Sierra Leone align well with our framework of analysis by combining considerations of integration, accountability and feedback to promote simultaneous political and economic community-driven development.

Another example of such an association comes from Kids Action Sierra Leone, a Community Based Organization based in Freetown, Port Loko and Kono Districts. There is no connection or communication, either formal or informal, between COOPI and Kids Action Sierra Leone, yet a very similar model of accountably structured agriculture supporting social initiatives has been developed by this CBO. Donald Ola Theopolis Smart, a Sierra Leonean who holds a masters in agriculture and is the director of Kids Action Sierra Leone, supports a farming association in Songo, Port Loko district with a budget of less than 12,000 USD in foreign donations. (Kids Action Sierra Leone, 2007) The association is designed to maximize individual incentives to perform through individual accountability and also through a democratic, accountable structure of governance which does not conflict directly with the chieftaincy:

I form the cooperatives with the consent of the chief who is in fact going to be a member. He is not going to be the head man of that association, because he has his own role as a traditional leader. We are going to democratically elect the leader. We are not undermining the leadership of the chief... the village chief or the town chief, in any way. He still has power. But the leader of the association has the power to delegate responsibility. He has control to make important decisions. (Interview with Donald Ola Theopolis Smart, Freetown, 2007)

The model is so effective, Smart supports an orphanage in Freetown and an agricultural vocational training school in Gbomsamba with the return on his investment.

Both COOPI and Kids Action Sierra Leone prove through their operation of democratic, accountable associations that such associations are profitable and acceptable in communities still operating under traditional structures of governance. These associations can be set up in a non-confrontational manner, and through their economic viability they are sustainable and self-propelling. Most of all, they reflect in practice what we have discussed in theory: that accountability and feedback can galvanize communities and interests and can effect change indirectly from one arena of power to the other. By encouraging the economies and labour of traditionally governed communities to be more accountable and therefore more viable through locally driven and owned economic initiatives, the broader organization and values of the community stand to change as well – especially in light of the “changing attitudes” and “desire for recognition” Richards and Keen observe.

9. Conclusion

Accountability and Feedback are the essential engines of what makes social structures, institutions, economies and states effective at promoting the interests of their participants. Easterly does well to show that this basic reality has often been ignored in the pursuit of more complex policies and strategies for development. But this powerful insight into social change and development can be taken further. Seeking out this potential, we have used Sen’s criticism of Easterly’s *White Man’s Burden* as a point of departure to pursue a broader vision of Easterly’s work: one that in the end, seems to reflect the rich vision of the causal interrelationship of politics and economics which Sen himself holds. Understanding how interests can be pursued in an unspecialized manner through different realms of power – what we have described as “integration” – sheds significant light on how accountability and feedback can be a part of development strategies and broader social changes. Accountability and feedback have the power to effect change across different arenas of interest seeking, through their material results and participatory, cohesive-facilitating structure. Yet what we have developed is a starting point: our brief examination of Sierra Leone, though in no way comprehensive, hopefully reflects the value and potential of our theoretical framework. Accountability and feedback, empowered through a sensitivity to unspecialized interest seeking and integration of power in society, can provide powerful insight into local, national and global development. Clearly, further analysis and specific strategies remain to be developed. If we are to accept accountability and feedback as central features of free, prosperous economies and polities, perhaps no task begs such an analysis more than the issue of *global* governance and accountability.

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