DEVELOPMENT WORKERS AND GENDER WORK IN LAO PDR

by © Sam E. Morton

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Abstract

This thesis explores how national and international development workers *do* gender equality work in Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) and in turn how their work and living conditions are shaped by what Dorothy Smith calls "ruling relations." Bringing together the growing literature on development workers and organizations, and the sociology of work, I propose the novel concept of the "intersectional maze" to help explain the embodied experience of (dis)orientation for workers navigating gendered and racialized organizational logics. I present data based on four months of research in Laos, 21 in-depth interviews, and participant observation. I find that development organizations should be understood as gendered and racialized organizations that hinder women's and global South workers' opportunities to reach senior level and decision-making positions, and that despite the use of transformative discourse, gender projects in Laos tend to 'play it safe' and focus on service delivery, rather than targeting structural change. As an exploration of the work of gender equality work, this thesis contributes to the recent and growing development literature on development workers and organizations and will be of interest to those working in development, researchers in humanitarian and development studies, sociology, anthropology, political science, and international relations.

Keywords: gender; work; intersectional maze; Lao PDR; international development; ruling relations

General Summary

In this research, I examine national and international development workers' experiences with doing development work in Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). I focus on workers' gender equality work through an exploration of development projects and development organizations. I draw connections between workers' everyday experiences in and outside of work with what Dorothy Smith calls "ruling relations" that shape what appears as choice, preference, and rational for workers. Based on four months of research in Laos, 21 in-depth interviews, and participant observation, I present findings that suggest that the work of gender equality work in Laos is itself a gendered and racialized experience mediated through gendered and racialized organizations. I introduce the concept of the "intersectional maze" to illuminate the labyrinthian gender and racial organizational hierarchies that workers must navigate, contributing to our understanding of why women, particularly women from the global South, remain concentrated in lower-wage jobs in the Laotian development context.

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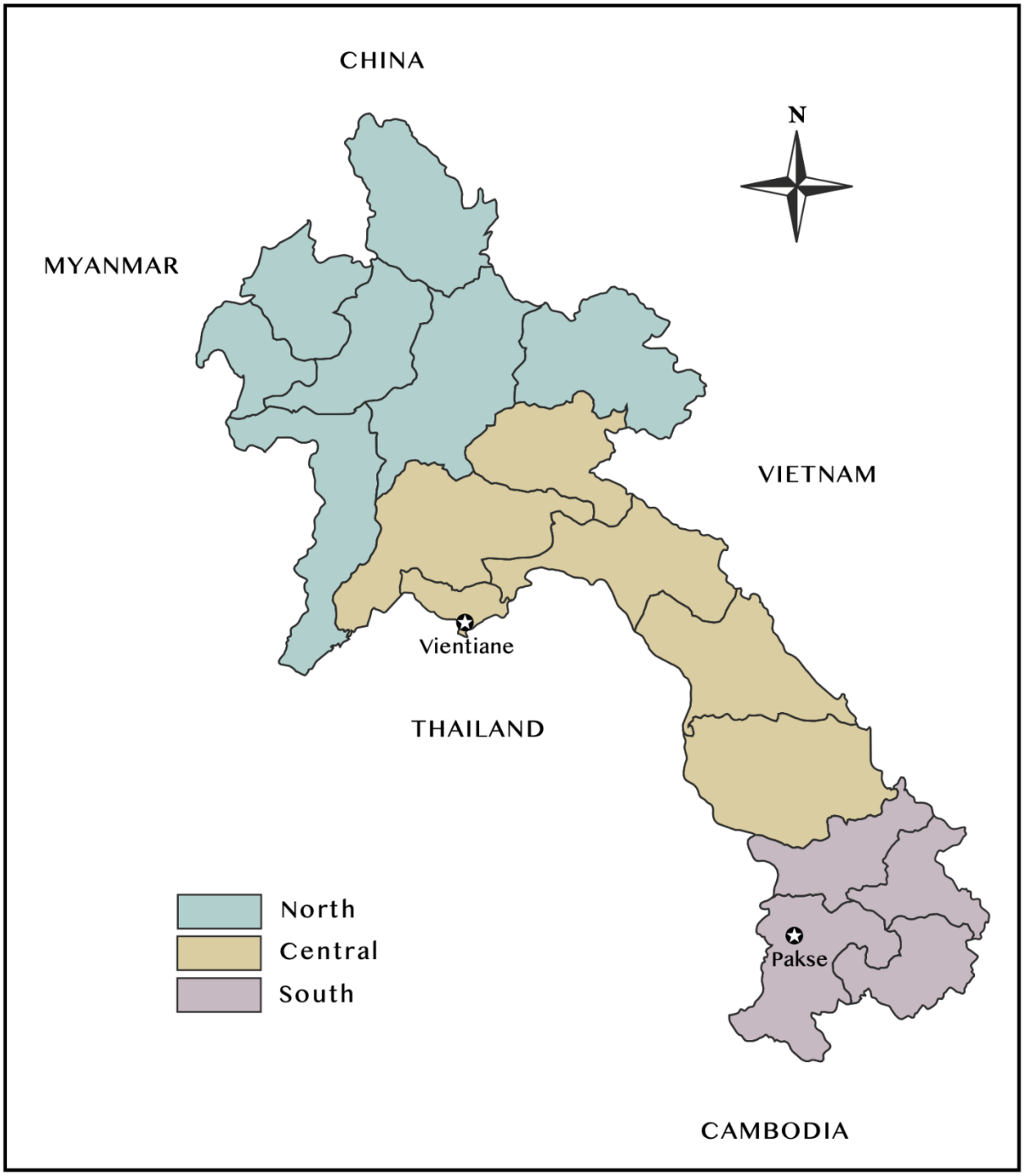
Map of Lao PDR and Research Sites



Map made by Heather Dicks (2022) for use in this thesis.

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List of Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
BPFA	Beijing Platform for Action
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EVI	Economic Vulnerability Index
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FPE	Feminist Political Economy
GAC	Global Affairs Canada
GAD	Gender and Development
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GE	Gender Equality
GNI	Gross National Income
HAI	Human Assets Index
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
IE	Institutional Ethnography
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
LDC	Least Developed Country
LWU	Lao Women's Union
MDGS	Millenium Development Goals
MIC	Middle-Income Country
NCAW	National Commission for the Advancement of Women
NCAWMC	National Commission for the Advancement of Women and Mother and Child
NPA	Non-Profit Association
NWM	National Women's Machinery
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PTBUL	Proud To Be Us Laos
RBM	Results Based Management
SDGS	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UXO	Unexploded Ordinance
WAD	Women and Development
WB	World Bank
WID	Women in Development
WWII	World War II

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In January 2019 I touch down in Vientiane, the capital city of Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR)[1] after 40 hours of travel beginning in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. It has been a year and a half since I have last been to Laos. My new landlords, a married couple from Laos and Canada, and their two young kids pick me up from the airport and we drive back to their house where I am renting a room for the next four months. The house has three floors with five rooms that are rented out to largely international folks like me who are in Laos to work or volunteer for a few months to a year. My housemates during my research in Laos include four young non-proselytizing[2] American Mennonites, an American teaching English for a year, a German medical student, and my landlords' family.

There are familiar sights, sounds, and smells that hit me all at once when I walk out of the airport. Having left winter in Canada, I welcome the night-time blanket of humidity. My eyes are drawn to the little lizards catching mosquitoes, and I faintly smell the perfume of the *champa,* the national flower of Laos, that are planted near the

[1] In this thesis I will switch between using Lao PDR, Laos, and sometimes Lao. As Evans (2002) and Polonyi (2003) have pointed out, there is often confusion around the meaning and uses of "Lao" and "Laos" for non-Lao speakers. The country's name in English is Lao People's Democratic Republic which tends to be shortened to either Lao PDR, or more commonly to Laos. Laos is more often used by researchers, policy makers, and in government reports (Khouangvichit 2010:3). "Laos" is most likely a product of English speakers differentiating between Laos (noun) and Lao (adjective). "Lao" is usually used when referring to "Lao people," "Lao food," "Lao culture." Most Lao people who spoke with me would use "Lao" when speaking about their country in English. I have not altered this when transcribing and presenting quotes in this thesis. Finally, and as Evans (2002:xiv) pointed out, the Vientiane Times, a state-run English newspaper, continues to use "Laos" as an abbreviated form of Lao PDR.

[2] Laos bans all proselytizing by foreigners. Citizens are technically allowed to proselytize with a permit, but in practice these permits are never granted (Fox 2015:193). Proselytizing is the act of trying to convert someone to a religion.

airport, coupled with burning charcoal from roadside food stalls in the distance. I am struck by the changes that have happened in Vientiane in such a short time. When I first came to Laos in October 2017 there were plenty of cafés, restaurants, and shops popping up. I note a further proliferation of these as we pass through downtown from the airport. Though you will not find major American fast-food chains, there are Australian, Italian, French, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and Indian restaurants liberally spread over the downtown core. As we drive, I notice banners in Mandarin near a large shopping centre and a hospital that are both under construction, a sign of growing Chinese investment in Laos. During the twenty-minute drive, we pass two road accidents, and the headlights find the eyes of many stray and neighbourhood dogs.

I have come to Laos to speak with national and international development workers and to observe and participate in their working and personal lives as much as I am able and welcomed to do so. National workers are those from Laos, while international workers are coming to work in Laos from another country. The distinction between these two groups of workers is not necessarily clean cut. For example, some workers I spoke with are Lao-North American or Lao-European. The analytic categories of national and international workers will be further elaborated in chapter 3.

This thesis explores issues of gender, gender (in)equality, and development work through an analysis of development workers, institutions, and gender(ed) development projects in Lao PDR. I am concerned with understanding the multitude of ways that development workers' "everyday/everynight" (Smith 2005:24) experiences

in and out of their development work are shaped in and through the development context in Laos. I use Smith's term of "everyday/everynight" to refer to people's public and private daily and nightly experiences. I am also attentive to how aid and development organizations are structured and shaped by political, bureaucratic, state, and suprastate power dynamics – what Dorothy Smith calls "ruling relations" – that are in flux, contested, formed, and reformed, thus influencing what kinds of gender equality projects become thinkable and doable, and how this in turn frames what possibilities are not only available to workers in this industry, but what appears as rational, normal, and unremarkable.

Central to this thesis is the idea of gender equality (GE) as a means and goal of international development. GE norms have been institutionalized by most countries and almost all of the world's aid donors (Swiss 2012). Institutionalization refers to codifying norms and goals into organizational culture and practices. For example, GE was further institutionalized as a means and goal of development in the United Nations' (UN) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and again in the current Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Some scholars have explained the spread of global norms, like GE, across nation states using World-Society Theory, which argues that world-systems (e.g., international organizations, transnational civil society movements), rather than just the nation state, can explain the spread of similar policy models (Berkovitch 1999a, 1999b; Meyer et al. 1997; Meyer and Rowan 1977). Recent studies seek to explain aid's role in this diffusion process, drawing attention to the role of organizations like the UN and civil society groups as globalizing influences on foreign aid (Swiss 2016, 2018).

For development organizations, GE is at once a normative goal, an institutionalized goal, and a terrain of uneven practices and policies. There is a recent and growing body of literature (Cook 2007; Fechter and Hindman 2011; Heron 2007; Peters 2013, 2016; Roth 2015) that is directed towards development workers themselves, including a small number of studies focused on those who are tasked with *doing* gender equality work (some notable examples include Ferguson 2015; Holvikivi 2019; Resurrección and Elmhirst 2021). The scope of gender equality work is wide and includes gender mainstreaming and the institutionalisation of gender within development organizations, as well as gender work done in different thematic areas. The idea of "thematic areas" is prevalent in development discourse and organizations to separate areas of work, such as education, sustainable agriculture, and global health. Gender experts, or the workers (often women) who are tasked with doing gender work take on a range of tasks as part of their jobs, including conducting gender analyses of development projects; reviewing policies, strategies, and procedures and evaluating their gender implications; raising awareness about gender issues; and integrating gender into project design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation processes to support gender equality goals (Eyben and Turquet 2013; Resurrección and Elmhirst 2021).

Development workers, largely dependent on donor funding cycles and priorities tend to work on a project-to-project basis. Core staff and overhead costs are kept low as donors either will not fund core costs or put a strict cap on the percentage of funds that can be spent on overhead and equipment. Gender specialists and feminists navigate bureaucratic and political institutional environments, trying to make

them more hospitable to those working on the ground and ultimately improve development outcomes for women and girls (Eyben and Turquet 2013). This thesis joins the growing literature (Cook-Lundgren 2022; Ferguson 2015; Holvikivi 2019; Springer 2020; Tiessen 2007) on the work of gender specialists, development workers, and development organizations.

Laos is a communist country. National organizations working in development are not considered *non-governmental* organizations. Rather, they are either part of the government, like mass organizations including the Lao Women's Union (LWU) and the Lao People's Revolutionary Youth Union (LYU) or are seen as service providers by the Lao Government, like non-profit associations (NPAs). NPAs are governed by the Decree on Associations No. 238 of 2017 and face onerous bureaucratic hurdles in becoming officially registered with the government. This has led some organizations to form as social enterprises as these types of organizations face comparatively fewer bureaucratic and political hurdles.

In the Laotian development context NPAs, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs like Oxfam), bilateral (e.g., US Embassy) and multilateral agencies (e.g., United Nations), development banks (e.g., Asian Development Bank), philanthropic foundations (e.g., The Clinton Foundation), faith-based organizations (e.g., Mennonite Central Committee), and consultants (individuals and firms that are usually hired to fulfill managerial and evaluative roles in development projects) all incorporate gender into their work in varying ways that address – or ignore – wider goals of gender equality in development processes. How development organizations,

development workers, and gender specialists, who are overwhelmingly women (Coles, Gray, and Momsen 2015a:511), are able to take forward broad goals of gender equality in the development process is vital to understanding the success and failures of gender equality work as a means and goal of development processes, with real consequences for the women who are often the targets of these projects, as well as the mostly women workers in these organizations.

My research is guided by the question: *how* does the gendered development context in Laos shape national and international development workers' gender work? To inquire into this question, I ask three related questions: 1) how are gender projects carried out? 2) how do organizational structures impact the gendered working conditions of development workers? and 3) how does the gendered context shape the personal lives of development workers? I am interested in the people - the workers - who do gender equality work in development, how they shape and are shaped by the organizations they work in, the communities they work in/with/for/on, and how gender, geography, race, ability, sexuality, and age affect what gendered ways of being and working become more likely for some workers in these particular contexts.

This thesis looks at the work of gender equality work through the people, institutions, and development projects that shape *gender equality work* in the international development industry in Laos. I do this by employing qualitative methods that include four months of research in Laos, 21 in-depth interviews with national and international development workers ranging from one to over three hours, complemented by informal and background interviews with key informants, and

participant observation. Participant observation included co-leading a gender mainstreaming workshop in the south of Laos, attending development industry meetings, and participating in the lives of development workers outside of strictly workspaces, such as at bars and restaurants, social gatherings and celebrations, and more leisurely activities such as going to the pool or sauna, getting a massage, and doing yoga. In the following section, I discuss the development context in Lao PDR.

1.1. Lao PDR

The United Nations categorizes Lao PDR as a Least Developed Country (LDC). Laos' national development strategy is framed in terms of "graduating" from LDC status to Middle-Income Country (MIC) and the country is on course to graduate by 2024. The country's national development plan relies heavily on the construction of hydro-electric dams with foreign investors for these projects largely coming from China, Korea, and Thailand. Laos can graduate from LDC status based on a three-year average Gross National Income (GNI). If the average is high enough then the country can graduate irrespective of the Human Assets Index (HAI) or Economic Vulnerability Index (EVI) (Ministry of Planning and Investment and United Nations Development Programme 2017). In short, the foreign direct investment (FDI) coming from hydro-electric dam projects, among other extractive "development" projects may put Laos on track for graduation without having reached human development markers, such as access to health care, education, and poverty alleviation.

Laos signed onto the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1981. CEDAW is an international treaty

that 187 countries have signed onto, which means they agree to be bound to its provisions and those who have ratified CEDAW are expected to report to the UN in Geneva on their progress towards ending discrimination against women. The 8th and 9th CEDAW reports for Laos were combined and presented in 2018 after some delays. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women that considers and responds to CEDAW reports welcomed the progress the state had made since last being considered by the committee in 2009.

Overall, they commended the State for making progress in the domain of legislative reforms that included the Law on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Children, which criminalized marital rape and prohibits direct and indirect discrimination against women. They were also commended on action plans and national action plans that addressed women and girls' access to health care, education, and freedom from violence. Decree No. 137 (2014) was noted for guaranteeing the equal rights of women with disabilities. Following two pages of commendation were fourteen pages wherein the committee outlines principal areas of concern and recommendations, ranging from raising the visibility of the convention (CEDAW) so that women, especially women living in rural areas are aware of their rights to education and to employment under the convention. Of particular interest for this study, the committee raises its concern with Decree No. 238 on Associations of 2017 that restricts the activities of non-governmental organizations, which in turn restricts women from participating freely in Laotian civil society organizations (UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women 2018). As already mentioned, in the Lao context the term "non-governmental organization" is not used,

as Lao civil society organizations (CSOs) are not considered "non-governmental," given the restrictions they face and the government's view of them as either branches of the government, in the case of mass organizations, or as service providers, in the case of NPAs.

As one UN worker told me, in the Lao context women and children usually "show up together," as the state largely relegates the status of women to their reproductive and familial roles. The Government of Laos has a National Action Plan for Women and Children and two main agencies whose mandates centre on women and children. The Lao Women's Union was formed in 1955 and has historically been responsible for mobilizing women for the Lao People's Revolutionary Party. Their slogan is the "three goods," which means "being a good citizen, being good in development, having a good cultural family" (Gender Resource Information and Development Centre 2006:10). They are responsible for promoting women's status, preserving traditional and cultural roles of women, and promoting unity amongst women of different ethnic groups and social strata in the country (Devex 2021; Gender Resource Information and Development Centre 2006).

The Lao Government formed the National Commission for the Advancement of Women (NCAW) in the early 2000s. NCAW has since been renamed and is now the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children (NCAWMC). NCAWMC can be described as a "national women's machinery" (NWM). NWMs are generally offices, departments, commissions, or ministries within a country's government that directly support the government in achieving their gender

equality targets. This usually includes supporting the government to report on their CEDAW progress. NWMs come directly from the Beijing Platform for Action's twelve areas of concern. The BPFA in paragraph 201 defines how NWM should function:

> A national machinery for the advancement of women is the central policy-coordinating unit inside government. Its main task is to support the government-wide mainstreaming of a gender-equality perspective in all policy areas. The necessary conditions for an effective functioning of such national machineries include: a) location at the highest possible level in the government, falling under the responsibility of a Cabinet minister; b) institutional mechanisms or processes that facilitate, as appropriate, decentralized planning, implementation and monitoring with a view to involving non-governmental organizations and community organizations from grassroots upwards; c) sufficient resources in terms of budget and professional capacity; d) opportunity to influence development of all government policies (BPFA as cited in UN Women 2016:14–15).

Laos has made state-level commitments towards GE, like CEDAW; largely seen as an indicator of a country's embrace of GE norms (Cole 2013). Despite this, and other GE efforts, Laos is ranked 106 of 157 countries on the UN's 2015 Gender Inequality Index (UNDP 2015). The 2018 data shows they have slid in their ranking to 110 (UNdata 2018).

Development agencies, including INGOs, NPAs, UN agencies, bilateral donors, multilateral organizations, and national government agencies are overwhelmingly concentrated in the capital city of Vientiane. Many international development workers who I spoke with are stationed within the capital and make trips to "the field" as part of their work. "The field" for urban-living development workers tends to refer to rural villages in the North and South of Laos. INGOs will typically concentrate their projects in one area of the country, the geography of which is

historically tied to traditional territories of the three major ethnic groups: Lowland Lao (Lao Loum), Midland Lao (Lao Theung), or Highland Lao (Lao Sung) (Ireson and Ireson 1991:920–21).

Some of the larger INGOs working in Laos at the time of this research include Oxfam, CARE International, Plan International, Save the Children, World Vision, Mennonite Central Committee, Humanity & Inclusion, Helvetas, and World Vision. That is only to name a few. The INGO Network, a group initiated by the INGO community in Laos with initial support from the World Bank has 75 INGO member organizations (iNGO Network 2021). Some of the principal organizations working on gender in Laos are the Gender and Development Association (Laotian NPA); UN Women (UN agency); Oxfam Laos (INGO); Care International in Laos (INGO); United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Asian Development Bank (ADB); Proud To Be Us Laos (Lao CSO); Association for Development of Women and Legal Education (ADWLE, Laotian NPA). Again, that is only to name a few, as the vast majority of organizations I came across in my research included gender equality work as either a focus or as part of their development work.[3]

1.2. Outline of Thesis

This thesis is organized into six chapters. In chapters 2 and 3 I establish some of the tools and contextualized information that will set the stage for the following two

[3] The organizations listed are not necessarily where my participants worked. For a more exhaustive list of those organizations working in Lao PDR and those working on gender, consult the iNGO Network (www.directoryofngos.org) and the Civil Society Laos website (www.laocivilsociety.org).

substantive chapters that centre on findings from my primary research. I conclude this thesis with a final discussion of research findings and suggestions for future research.

In chapter 2, I review the existing literature and develop my theoretical framework. The two principal areas of literature that I review are 1) international development, and 2) the sociology of work. Much of the literature on international development is silent on the role of workers in the development process, while the sociological literature on work has largely overlooked development workers. I first discuss a brief history of international development in order to outline relevant theories, discourses, and trends that continue to shape the practices of development organizations and workers. I then turn to how women and gender have been conceptualized and addressed in development, focusing on the gender and development (GAD) approach.

The goal of these brief overviews is to investigate how existing scholarship has conceptualized gender and GE in international development, and how this shapes how gender projects are carried out. I then delve into the growing, yet still quite nascent, literature on development workers themselves. While very little literature exists on national development workers, this section engages with this growing body of scholarship and underscores the importance of including global North/South positionality in discussions of development workers.

Next, I turn to the sociology of work literature, focusing on the concept of the "glass ceiling." The "glass ceiling" is an important concept for explaining barriers women face in reaching higher echelons in their work organisations. I approach this

literature with an eye to how, when applied to development work, the "glass ceiling" helps explain women development workers' experiences in development organizations. From here I develop my theoretical framework. I draw from feminist political economy (FPE), institutional ethnography (IE), gendered organizations theory, and intersectionality in order to illuminate and connect the everyday/everynight experiences of my participants with organizational and political structures, or "ruling relations," that shape and order their possibilities. I conclude chapter 2 by outlining my concept of the *intersectional maze* that has emerged from this study. I apply this concept in chapter 5 to further understand how development workers navigate the development organizations they work in.

In chapter 3, I explain my feminist and reflexive methodological approach and how this influenced the methods I chose to answer my research questions. I outline my main methods, namely in-depth qualitative interviews, "field work," participant observation, and my methods for analyzing my data including transcription, coding, and memoing. I discuss what ethics have looked like in my study and what I view as the limitations of my chosen methods.

In chapter 4 and 5, I present the substantive data and analysis from this study. I begin with laying out how some of the participants in this study relate to the subject position of "development worker." Development workers and organizations construct the targets of gender equality projects, usually women and girls, while they themselves have complex feelings towards their own role of "development worker." I explore gender projects in Laos (chapter 4), arguing that these projects are themselves

gendered in how they are designed and implemented. Looking at women's economic empowerment projects, advocacy and awareness raising, and gender mainstreaming, I find that gender projects in Laos tend to focus on women and girls as individuals, rather than as a gendered constituency. As such, projects targeting gender equality tend to focus on service delivery (delivering a gender training, providing vocational training) rather than transformational change.

In chapter 5, I analyze workers' experiences in development organizations qua gendered organizations. Drawing on Joan Acker (1990), and Christine Williams, Chandra Muller, and Kristine Kilanski (2012), I explore how seemingly gender-neutral development organizations are themselves gendered. I focus on organizational logic as a process that (re)produces gendered and racialized hierarchies through the organization of development work. I concentrate on pay differences, networking, and the career ladder as three areas shaped by organizational logic. I find that professional norms in development, and the production of gender experts and expertise produce a context of development work wherein those most experienced in gender and racial discrimination in this context become the workers least likely to be able to reach decision-making positions and shape how gender work is done.

Through this thesis, I further our understanding of *how* the work of gender equality work is done by development workers. To this end, I find that: 1) gender is an important organizing factor in the lives of development workers, impacting familial and professional opportunities and choices, 2) development organizations should be understood as gendered organizations that hinder women's and global South workers'

opportunities to reach senior level and decision-making positions within development organizations, and 3) despite the use of transformative discourse, gender projects in Laos tend to use a cautious approach and focus on service delivery, rather than targeting structural changes. This is shaped by both the political context in Laos, the influence of global politics, and the spread of neoliberalism in and through development.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

My research sits at the nexus of international development, gender, and work. Much of the development literature has neglected the role of development workers *as workers* and how their work is able to take forward – or hinder – larger gender equality goals of development. There are notable exceptions to this, particularly as Aidland literature (Fechter 2012b, 2015; Fechter and Hindman 2011; Mosse 2011; Roth 2015) and development literatures have increasingly turned their focus to development workers (Cook 2007; Goetz 2001; Heron 2007; Sundberg 2020; Tiessen and Heron 2012) and gender specialists (Eyben 2010; Eyben and Turquet 2013; Holvikivi 2019; Springer 2020). The term "Aidland" comes out of the anthropology of development. It is a convenient shorthand to describe the global scale of aid and development organizations and those that work in development and humanitarian industries.

Similarly, the sociology of work literature has paid little attention to development workers and the organizations that they work in. Recent work on the Global Care Chain has looked at international aid workers' access to domestic workers in global South countries, arguing that access to affordable care enhances the lives of international women aid workers (Hannaford 2020). This "enhancement" is predicated on the availability of cheap local labour that is entwined with the very relations of "postcolonial underdevelopment and poverty that the aid workers' professional work ostensibly addresses" (Ibid:566). Bringing these two areas of literature together allows me to further insights into how the gendered development context in Laos shapes the gender(ed) work of development workers by illuminating the actualities (Smith 2005)

of their work and linking this to the larger socio-political structures that shape, and are shaped by this work. I use the term "actualities" in Dorothy Smith's sense as both a recognition of people as experts in their own lives and as the place where inquiry begins: the everyday/everynight experiences of people's lives. In short, what people do in their everyday/everynight lives is the starting point to explore the social (Ibid:22).

I begin with a historical overview of international development and gender and development in order to ground my research in this history and outline some of the major historical events and trends that have shaped and continue to influence how women and gender equality are addressed in and through development. I then turn to discussing in more detail the growing literature on development workers to which my thesis contributes. Next, I turn to the concept of "the glass ceiling," an important contribution from the sociology of work literature in furthering our understanding of how and why women tend to face systemic barriers in reaching the highest echelons in different work organizations.

Moving into my theoretical framework, I draw on feminist political economy, Joan Acker's theory of gendered organizations, intersectionality, and Dorothy Smith's conception of institutional ethnography, "ruling relations," as well as her understanding of standpoint theory to form a framework that helps explain how the gendered development context shapes the gender(ed) work of development workers. I conclude this chapter by introducing my novel concept of the intersectional maze that will be applied in chapter 5.

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1. International Development

The foundations of what we now know as international development are often located in the post-World War II (WWII) reconstruction era. At that time, the International Bank for Reconstruction (IBRD), now called the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were established during the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944 in the United States. In the decades following WWII, and in the context of decolonization from European empires and the Cold War era, development aid was established as a professional field and diplomatic tool (Unger 2018:4). Post-colonial scholars (Kothari 2005a, 2006; Mohanty 2003) and historians of development (Unger 2018) remind us that international development did not suddenly appear fully formed in 1945, the year that the UN was established, rather the roots of development are inextricably linked to European overseas empire building, American imperialism, and colonial logics that allow for comparison between and ranking of nation states from "developing" to "developed" that then justify development interventions.

Development assistance, generally speaking, is the transfer of resources from wealthy countries to poorer ones, either directly or funnelled through multilateral organizations like the UN or the World Bank. Once the purview of wealthy democratic countries in the 'West,' emerging and non-traditional donor countries, like China and India, have moved into donor roles. From the reconstruction era to the present, development assistance, also called foreign aid, has become a "taken-for-granted

function played by all countries that want to be viewed as players on the global stage" (Swiss 2018:4).

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) is a principal international forum for many of the world's largest donors. In 2019, official development assistance (ODA) from the DAC totalled USD 152.8 billion (OECD 2020). Laos, an aid dependent country, received USD 631,510,010 million in 2019. This substantial sum of development assistance to Laos, shaped by Lao government objectives and donor policy priorities, impacts development outcomes in Laos.

Colonial continuities, such as those that Kothari (2006) traces in her research with former colonial officers who became development officers, is of particular importance when analyzing hierarchies within development assistance and can be understood as the lasting and continuing impacts of colonialism; an exploitative practice of racialized subordination. Fanon ([1968] 2004), among others (see Rodney 1972), argued that the economic dominance of the West would not have been possible without the Industrial Revolution and resource extraction from colonized lands. Consequently, Fanon states that "we cannot accept aid for the underdeveloped countries as 'charity.' Such aid must be considered the final stage of a dual consciousness-the consciousness of the colonized that *it is their due* and the consciousness of the capitalist powers that effectively *they must pay up"* ([1968] 2004:59). Fanon questions the motivation and intentions that underpin aid in development, suggesting that viewing aid as charity is wrong because it ignores the

colonial sources of Western opulence, an opulence that validates donor countries' interventions in the global South.

2.1.2. Gender and Development

Gender and Development (GAD) is the current dominant theoretical framework that shapes GE work in development (Coles, Gray, and Momsen 2015b; Rathgeber 1990; Razavi and Miller 1995). The GAD approach focuses on socially constructed differences between men and women and emphasizes the need to challenge existing gender roles and relations (Razavi and Miller 1995:12). Gender mainstreaming, a policy tool within GAD, was developed as a major global effort to achieve GE and remains a site of debate (Chant and Gutmann 2002; Eyben 2010; Moser 2005; Moser and Moser 2005; Tiessen 2007, 2014; Tiessen and Carrier 2015). Gender mainstreaming in Laos will be examined in this study in chapter 4.

The GAD literature stems from the larger scholarship in international development, as well as feminist theories, theories of gender, gender equality, masculinities, intersectionality, critical race theories, queer theory, and post-colonial studies. GAD is the most widely embraced articulation of an on-going project within development that seeks to bring women into the picture (Rathgeber 1990; Razavi and Miller 1995). Below I will attempt to outline the relevant history of GAD, including its predecessors, and position accordingly some of the important literature and debates that have, and continue to, shape the field, and thus inform the positioning of my research within these larger development discourses.

The Women in Development (WID) framework emerged in the 1970s amid frustration with development interventions in the global South. Shaped by a linear, progressive, and economic modernization model (Rostow 1960), development strategies were increasingly not seen as recognizing or working for women. A critical research perspective began to emerge that looked at the different ways in which "the sexes," and in particular women, were affected by development interventions (Boserup 1970); thus, the WID agenda began.

The UN designated 1975 as International Women's Year in an effort to bring attention to women in economic development (Buvinić 1986). Following this, the UN declared 1975-85 the Decade for Women. Three pivotal conferences were held during this time: Mexico (1975); Copenhagen (1980); and Nairobi (1985) (Mair 1986). Ten years later the fourth UN World Conference on Women was held in Beijing (1995), resulting in the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), of which gender mainstreaming is the principle strategy (Moser 2005). The BPFA was unanimously adopted by 189 countries, including Lao PDR, and remains a key global policy document on gender equality (UN Women 2021).

WID began as a strategy to bring evidence of sexual divisions of labour in the global South to the attention of policy makers predominantly located in the global North (Maguire 1984). It largely focused on integrating women into existing (largely economic) development machinery (Koczberski 1996), and thus has been widely criticized for focusing on women's pay-out from economic development and ignoring the structural causes that create and maintain gender inequality. The Women and

Development (WAD) perspective emerged in the latter half of the 1970s, partly in response to WID's 'add women and stir' approach to integrating women into development. The WAD perspective, drawing from dependency theory (Frank 1966), focused on women's relationships to the processes of development, stating that women's "integration" into development processes as such, serves to sustain unequal international institutions (Rathgeber 1990:9).

GAD emerged in the 1980s from socialist feminist theories. Gender mainstreaming is the primary policy tool used in GAD to advance gendered considerations at every level (e.g., policy, practice, research, project design) in development. GAD is not singularly interested in biological females, rather it takes a broader approach to look at the social constructions of gender across societies and corresponding roles and expectations across and between genders. In this framework, female-only solidarity movements were extended to include feminists across sexes and genders. Men and masculinities are also questioned by some as a social construct and not a biological determinant (Cornwall 1997). Researchers have importantly critiqued that gender is often equated with women alone and GAD fails to critically analyze the gendered category of men (Chant and Gutmann 2002). Development discourse has shifted from feminizing to gendering development (Mcilwaine and Datta 2003).

GAD was concerned with making visible "the socially constituted nature of relations of gender in which women were rendered subordinate to men" (Cornwall 2014:128). Andrea Cornwall (2014) argues that partly because second wave feminists were working in a context dominated by heteronormative and binary ideas of sex and

gender, they themselves reified the household level as the primary place of gender relations. A fallacy of composition has long been perpetuated in international development, where gender relations between cis-gender women and men in heterosexual relationships has stood in for the whole of gender relations. Though an important site of gender relations, this framing reifies particular gender relations and identities and obfuscates others, such as gender non-conforming, non-binary, trans, and genderqueer identities, experiences, and gender relations.

Dominant Western gender and sex essentialisms are naturalized through their circulation in international development, often displacing or ignoring culturally specific, local, and non-dominant understandings and practices of sex and gender. For example, the Western invention of the "male breadwinner," itself a historically contingent, culturally specific, and quite recent phenomena, was "exported to the Global South as a perverse effect of colonialism and Christian missionary outreach, and was naturalized in appeals to men as protector and provider" (Ibid:135). GAD, though recognizing gender as socially constructed, still traffics in Western axioms, including dominant gender and sex essentialisms. This may have been for strategic and instrumental reasons in GAD's beginnings on the part of Western, largely white, and middle-class feminists, however, in the day-to-day doing of gender equality work, this can reify very narrow understandings of gender and the household as the main place where gender relations happen.

As will be discussed further in chapter 4, the concept of gender is often equated with women in development work and gender equality is often understood as equality

between women and men, or females and males, depending on the language being used by the worker(s) or organization(s). This indicates that development work and gender equality work in development may, in practice, treat gender as a fixed variable, and thus reify particular social and cultural understandings of sex/gender and the sex/gender binary through the doing of gender equality work.

A central debate across the three frameworks, and today most centrally located in discussions around gender mainstreaming, is the question of whether feminist aims can be achieved in partnership with non-feminist actors, and through non-feminist means. For example, Plan International's *Because I am a girl* campaign asks donors to "invest" in girls because the "multiplier effect" means they will "lift themselves, their families and communities out of poverty" (Plan International 2017). Recent research highlights the danger of "conflating the empowerment of women as individuals with the feminist goal of removing the structural discrimination which women face as a gendered constituency…" (Chant and Sweetman 2012). Many of the gender projects in Laos can be described as following a WID approach, as they tend to focus on service delivery and women's economic empowerment, rather than addressing structural discrimination. Additionally, many, but not all, projects often equate gender with women. Many of my participants told me that gender is a sensitive issue in Laos, which may help explain the types of GE projects we see in Laos.

Other researchers maintain a pragmatic approach that feminists can secure incremental change within existing organizational structures, and that these changes are instrumental to the larger project of gender equality (Eyben 2010). Though the

terminology of gender mainstreaming and gender equality have largely been embraced, progress towards achieving gender equality (and questions around what that should look like) vary greatly. Additionally, GAD debates have included the question of whether or not gender mainstreaming is a goal, or rather a process.

Post-colonial and feminist researchers have critiqued global North actors for co-opting the empowerment language and goals of global South women, de-politicizing gender equality movements, and maintaining the image of "the Other" who needs to be saved by western (largely white) feminists (Calvès 2009; Cronin-Furman, Gowrinathan, and Zakaria 2017; Jaggar 2005; Mohanty 1988, 2003; Syed and Ali 2011). As Eyben (2015:516) states, the history of promoting gender equality in development cooperation illustrates the propensity of Northern intellectuals to overlook ideas originating in the South. Connell (2007), acknowledging this phenomenon in social science knowledge production, proposes "Southern theory" as a framework for taking seriously knowledge from the global South.

Additionally, gender mainstreaming policies have been critiqued for being ineffective because the actual *responsibility* for achieving gender equality is so diffuse (Tiessen 2007). Gender mainstreaming, as a major policy tool for achieving GE was solidified in the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) in 1995 with promises of transforming gender relations, equality, and empowerment. It remains a key component of development organizations' discourse, policy, and practice. However, Parpart (2014) argues that the actual implementation of gender mainstreaming's promises has been largely disappointing and there is a need to rethink the link between

policy and implementation, recognising that both are political processes. Recognizing these shortcomings, many feminists continue to argue for the transformative potential of gender mainstreaming (Eyben 2010; Hankivsky 2005; Moser 2005; Moser and Moser 2005; Parpart 2014).

The literature continues to host critical debates on the theoretical underpinnings and assumptions of GAD and gender equality. Within broader discussions of development, commitment problems and gender equality norm negotiation both within and between donor and aid recipients can contribute to accounting for ever-changing aid priorities and lack of progress on commitments, including gender equality (Fenella 2012; Krook and True 2012; Swedlund 2017). In organizational studies and institutional theory, the phenomenon known as "decoupling" (Meyer and Rowan 1977) is being used to account for the gaps between policy adoption (e.g., gender mainstreaming) and implementation and progress on gender equality. As some researchers have pointed out, state level adoption of feminist language and commitment to gender equality (e.g., ratification of CEDAW) does not necessarily reflect a substantive commitment and may be used to deflect attention from deeper structural issues (Abu-Zahra et al. 2017:211–12).

2.1.3. Development Workers

Until recently, little scholarly attention was paid to the lives of development and aid workers themselves. Rather, the development literature has tended to focus on theories of development, changes in development policy, shifting development priorities, and the "beneficiaries" of development projects. The studies that have

looked at the lives of development workers tend to foreground the experiences of international development workers from the global North (Baaz 2005; Cook 2007; Fechter 2015; Heron 2007; Roth 2015; Thorpe and Chawansky 2021), with less attention paid to the national workers in their respective countries. There are notable exceptions, with recent studies shifting focus towards national staff, particularly in aid and humanitarian spaces (Beedell 2019; Houldey 2018; Sundberg 2020). Anne Marie Goetz's (2001) work on women development workers is a rare example of a study that examines women development workers' experiences across the North/South, national/international divide. These studies are adding to the literature on aid workers to include national staff, a group of workers who according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) constitute the majority of aid staff in the field and account for up to 90% of aid staff in most INGOs (Stoddard, Harmer, and Haver 2011).

Of the recent attention paid to development workers themselves, "Aidland" literature is of particular note. Anthropologists' recent engagement with development personnel has added fuel to this area of study. "Aidland," as coined by Raymond Apthorpe and now taken up and adapted by a wide array of researchers (Apthorpe 2005 in (Harrison 2013), is a growing area of study. Roth (2015:2-3) argues that "Aidland," as constituting both humanitarian and development people, spaces, and organizations, can be understood as a field of power in the Bourdieusian sense that shapes and is shaped by global North/global South relations.

Recent edited volumes, including *Inside the Everyday Lives of Development Workers* (Fechter and Hindman 2011) and *Adventures in Aidland: The Anthropology of Professionals in International Development* (Mosse 2011), among other recent works (Coles and Fechter 2008; Eyben and Turquet 2013; Fechter 2012b; Roth 2015; van Voorst 2019) make the case for the importance of studying "Aidland" and "development people." For Fechter and Hindman (2011:2), they take seriously the idea that there is a "culture of aid work that shapes the world of development professionals as much as other cultures." Like Aidland scholars, I focus on the everyday/everynight lives of development workers. However, I depart from this area of inquiry in that I begin with the everyday/everynight experiences – *how* development workers do their work and how their work shapes their lives and vice versa – *in order to* illuminate larger structures of power and ordering, what Dorothy Smith calls "ruling relations."

Studies of development workers are largely being done by northern researchers, many of whom are themselves former international aid workers. I highlight this and include myself in this observation to note whose voices tend not to be foregrounded in this area of knowledge production, namely those researchers and aid/development workers who are speaking from countries that are often on the recipient end of the development equation. Where many studies of development workers have tended to focus on "expatriate" or international development workers, I have taken as my starting point "development workers" in an attempt to complicate the categories of "international" and "national workers."

2.1.4. Development Mobilities and Transnational Professionals

Development workers' lives are shaped by hyper/mobility as a constitutive part of their work. Many workers move as part of their jobs; moving from one organization to another, across the country and/or region where they are working to visit "field sites," and to different countries. This mobility is a valuable asset in climbing the career ladder. Transnational movement is differentially available to international and national development workers and differentially valued (Peters 2013). For international workers, particularly those hailing from global North countries, their access and ability to move to and through different global South countries adds to their authority and expertise (Kothari 2005b) in the development field. This authority and expertise allow certain development workers to make knowledge claims about particular groups of people and particular places. For example, a worker from Canada who has been educated at a North American university and has worked in Tanzania, Cambodia, Papua New Guinea, Kenya, and Laos will find – and may themselves use – their transnationalism as a demonstration and reification of their expertise and authority to speak on certain development matters.

The vast literature on the global movement of transnational professionals (Coles and Fechter 2008; Cook 2012; Faulconbridge and Muzio 2012; Fechter 2007; Harrington and Seabrooke 2020; Kuhlmann 2013) and precarious migrant/mobile workers (Amrith 2021; Amrith and Sahraoui 2018; Huijsmans 2008; Marschke, Kehoe, and Vandergeest 2018; Rigg 2007) are useful in understanding how and which development workers relocate to different countries to work, and can help us better understand the mobilities of development workers "in-country." Hypermobility, while

at once signalling professional experience and expertise (always perceived as such for *particular* workers), in practice can manifest as a lack of embeddedness to specific places and people where one is working, stoking mistrust between those workers who leave (for vacation or on to another job posting) and those who stay in the country or in the area.

The study of professions has a long history in sociology (e.g., Parsons 1939). Much contemporary research on professions has worked from the premise that professions are constituted at the national level and dependent on power and privileges granted by the state (Ramirez 2010 in Harrington and Seabrooke 2020). Transnational professionals, like gender specialists in international development, are not tied to nation state mechanisms, such as licensing, in the same ways that a medical doctor is. Other mechanisms, like where they were educated, what countries they have worked in, and what development organizations they have worked for can serve to bolster or undermine their status as a "development professional."

Processes of professionalization function to "achieve the status of profession… and maintain the closure of the occupational group in order to maintain practitioners' own occupational self-interests in terms of their salary, status and power as well as the monopoly protection of the occupational jurisdiction" (Evetts 2013:782). I draw on the professions literature to add context and nuance to the idea of "development professionals" and "gender specialists." As will be discussed in chapter 5, the professionalization of development work is a relatively recent phenomenon.

2.1.5. The Glass Ceiling

Development workers work in development organizations, like INGOs, NPAs, UN agencies, development banks, philanthropic, and faith-based organizations. Where the literature on development workers has tended to foreground their individual experiences, the sociology of work literature, and in particular the concept of "the glass ceiling" highlights the role of hetero-patriarchy in organizations and the structuring of work to explain the barriers women and political minority groups experience in being excluded from reaching the top levels in organizations.

The origin of the term "glass ceiling" is debated. Some accounts attribute its initial use to the work of Gay Bryant (1984), while Marilyn Loden (2017) explains in a BBC News article that she coined the term in 1978 during a panel discussion on women's aspirations. The "glass ceiling," and "glass" in general, has been a powerful metaphor in the sociology of work literature since the 1980s. The "glass ceiling" represents the invisible barrier(s) that keep women and other political minority groups from rising to positions of leadership and decision-making power. This concept emerged from an American context that usually reflected worker experiences within corporations. In part this imagery is effective because of corporate architecture's use of insulated glass to build phallic sky-scrapping structures.

The "glass ceiling" has proved fruitful for researchers who have extended this concept to cover an array of barriers and advantages that have the effect of continuing to concentrate power within dominant groups in work organizations. Others have used the term "glass cliff" to explain why companies promote women to high positions and

then put them into more precarious positions with higher likelihoods of failure (Ryan et al. 2016; Ryan and Haslam 2005). Williams (1992) proposed the "glass escalator" to explain male employees rising in the ranks over women in traditionally feminized professions, such as nursing. Stokes (2015) developed the notion of the "glass runway" to explain gay male designers being advantaged in receiving awards, publicity, and praise in the feminized occupation of fashion design.

Raewyn Connell argues in her book *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science* (2007), that sociology and the social sciences at large cannot be understood outside global history and particularly the history of imperialism. In sociology, general theory is overwhelmingly produced in the metropole (Ibid: 28-9) and applied to or adapted to different contexts. Connell, discussing James Coleman's rational-choice theory, argues that "… a general feature of modern social theory: its lack of interest in place, material context, and specifically the land. Social science usually prefers context-free generalisations" (Ibid:196). The concept of the "glass ceiling" may not be appropriate to apply generally to diverse global work contexts and has been adapted in some cases. For example, the "bamboo ceiling" (Hyun 2005) has been used to describe the experiences of Asian workers facing barriers to career advancement.

The literature on international development, GAD, and development workers provides key insights into how women and gender have been conceptualized in this field. However, the development literature has been largely silent on development workers' experiences as workers in development organizations. The sociology of work literature, particularly that on the "glass ceiling," professions, and mobilities, has

rarely turned to examine development work and workers. Drawing on these areas of research and putting them in conversation with each other illuminates the relationship between conditions and structures of work, and the processes and outcomes of gender equality work in development in Lao PDR. In the following section, I weave together my theoretical framework and describe how and why I have used this particular framework for this project.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The literature review above looks at some of the history of ID that explains how women and gender have been addressed over time, the growing literature on development workers, as well as the concept of "the glass ceiling" and some of the literature on mobilities concerning the movement of transnational privileged and precarious workers. In this research project, I look at the work, specifically the gender equality work, of international and national workers in the areas of 1) development projects; 2) development organizations; and 3) how this work shapes and is shaped by their unpaid work and lives outside of work.

In order to do this, I have developed a theoretical framework that provides the necessary tools to help clarify the relationship between work and development as it appears in the Laotian development context. Together, feminist political economy (FPE), institutional ethnography (IE), intersectionality, and Acker's theory of gendered organizations provide the necessary tools to explore the relationship between gender, work, and development at the micro (everyday), meso (institutional), and macro (global systems) levels, and allows me to theorize the connections within and between

these levels, particularly through taking up Dorothy Smith's concept of "ruling relations."

As Hesse-Biber (2011:24), drawing on Teresa de Lauretis, says in the *Handbook of Feminist Research:*

> The ground underneath the theory and practice of feminist research is ever evolving, and it is the shifting of these tectonic plates of knowledge that provides an opportunity for what Teresa de Lauretis (1988) suggests as "not merely an expansion or reconfiguration of boundaries, but a qualitative shift in political historical conciousness"

Thus, the configurations, limits, and possibilities of what can be known and how one knows are in flux. I follow the path of feminist epistemology in asserting that social location impacts what and how one can know (Anderson 2020; Jaggar 1989). For example, recruiting participants and conducting interviews in English meant that I was not able to speak with national workers who were not already proficient in English, consequently limiting what I am able to find out or know in this context.

2.2.1. Feminist Political Economy

Development policy has addressed economic inequalities and gender-based discriminations, but remains overwhelmingly focused on economic growth and the eradication of absolute poverty (Kabeer 2015). Absolute poverty is typically defined as a person not being able to meet their basic needs and uses a universal baseline to measure this (Eskelinen 2011a), such as poverty lines. Absolute poverty is contrasted with relative poverty. Relative poverty is used to describe circumstances where people cannot afford to participate in their communities in ways that most people in those communities or society are able to. At its simplest, relative poverty is "poverty defined

in comparison to other people's standing in the economy" (Eskelinen 2011b:942–43). Organizing the goals of development around the eradication of absolute poverty, wherein poverty is framed as a failure of individuals to meet their basic needs, tends to obfuscate the processes in which people are denied their basic needs and the means with which to flourish (Nussbaum 2000).

Mainstream development, such as that practiced by the World Bank, is born out of and further entrenches capitalist logics and relations. The prevailing forms of development assistance have followed the rise and proliferation of a neoliberal ideology, characterized by market-oriented reform policies (e.g., Structural Adjustment Policies), small government, privatization, and the power of economic growth to achieve development goals.

FPE starts with the politics of everyday life and focuses on how social categories of difference, such as gender, class, ethnicity, ability, and age are shaped by – and are integral to – larger political and economic structures such as households, work, markets, states, supranational organizations, and transnational networks and movements, such as transnational feminist networks. "FPE foregrounds how capitalism is reproduced through logics and practices that create and marshal difference into its categories of value" (Werner et al. 2017:2). FPE facilitates understanding this abstract process by analysing how these processes play out in specific places, and "the racialized and gendered forms of force and hegemony that this process entails" (Ibid).

For example, international development workers hailing from the global North are largely better paid and have better access to health care benefits than national workers. Adopting a FPE framework makes plain the often-hidden labour of Lao people, particularly Laotian women, in making possible particular "lifestyles" of development workers, while also urging us to take seriously unpaid work (Smith 2016) within development organizations and personal lives of development workers as a constituent element of the work of development work.

I weave FPE into my theoretical framework as a fruitful lens to illuminate ongoing processes that uphold global power inequities that shape and are shaped by development logics and processes. The harms caused by these inequities are then used in development as a reason for wealthier donor countries and organizations to intervene in poorer countries without having to necessarily reckon with the wealthy country's role in producing and profiting off of these political and economic processes of inequity. By viewing international development as complex and contested social relations, I use FPE to locate the everyday experiences of development workers within the gendered development context of Laos and link this to global economic and political processes that produce the logics and norms of development.

2.2.2. Institutional Ethnography and Standpoint Theory

As an exploratory and iterative study, I found my way to IE and have taken inspiration and insights from its principles, incorporating these into my theoretical framework. Institutional ethnography is a method developed by Dorothy Smith. Like FPE, Smith (2005) begins with the daily lives and experiences of people and how these

experiences are mediated through institutions. Like Smith, I am interested in connecting to my participants' standpoints and experiences, and also to the processes and procedures in the institutional context that shape these experiences and permeates into daily lives, decision-making, preferences, and whatever else we experience as rational in our everyday/everynight lives.

I have not focused on texts to the extent that an institutional ethnographer likely would, however this thesis does speak to some of the texts that shape development work in Laos, such as Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs). Development work is shaped by key texts and also development workers produce reports, presentations, policy documents, funding applications, among other texts, that are shaped by and themselves shape institutional norms and relations. Further investigation into the role of texts in development work, and gender work specifically, would be ripe for future research.

Smith (1997:397) writes:

> … from the standpoint of experience in and of the everyday/everynight actualities of our lives, it is the oppressively routine organization, the persistence, the repetition, of capitalist forms of exploitation, of patriarchy, of racial subordination, of the forms of dominance Foucault (1980) has characterized as "power/knowledge," as the local contouring of people's lives that constitute a sociological problematic.

Beginning from the everyday/everynight experiences of development workers has enabled me to identify how their work and lives outside of work are shaped by ruling relations. Smith's method of IE "doesn't begin in theory but in the actualities of people's lives with a focus of investigation that comes from how they participate in or

are hooked up into institutional relations" (2005:207). Ruling relations are about power and understanding processes of subordination wherein everyday/everynight experiences of development workers are shaped by forms of knowledge and processes, norms, and interests that originate in extra-local settings. Linking everyday actualities of how gender work is done allows us to further understand the conditions and processes that development workers experience as shaping their decision making.

Participants inhabit complex webs of place and belonging. This informed my decision to use Dorothy Smith's conception of standpoint theory as part of my theoretical framework. It calls me to return to "the actualities of our lives as we live them in the local particularities of the everyday/everynight worlds in which our bodily being anchors us" (1997:393). Through an IE lens, the everyday doing of gender equality work in the Laotian development industry is understood as being intimately shaped, and to some extent shaping, ruling relations. Adapting IE as part of my theoretical framework, I orient my analysis to the everyday experiences of my participants in order to locate the ruling relations at work in development work.

2.2.3. Gendered Organizations Theory

Joan Acker's foundational work on gendered organizations theory (1990) makes the case that organizational structures are not gender neutral or asexual. She states that whereas earlier feminists' work (e.g., Ferguson 1984; Kanter 1975) advanced the argument that bureaucracy and patriarchy are deeply linked, they nonetheless built their arguments on the assumption that organizations themselves are gender neutral and asexual. Some feminists have argued for the case of feminist

bureaucrats (Eyben 2010). Others have questioned the incompatibility of bureaucracies with (radical) feminists (Billing 1994).

Acker states that a systemic theory of gender and organizations is needed for several reasons. For Acker, organizational practices in part create gendered segregation of work, including between paid and unpaid work, and they in part create income and status inequality. Organizations are also places where images of gender are (re)produced, and where organizational processes themselves produce some aspects of individual gender identity. Finally, Acker reminds us that "an important feminist project is to make large-scale organizations more democratic and more supportive of humane goals" (Acker 1990:140).

Acker's theory of gendered organizations came at a time when work arrangements could still be described in terms of loyalty to a single employer, climbing the career ladder, and long-term job security. Williams et al. (2012) argue that in the decades since Acker's article was published, the social organization of work has changed. Williams et al.'s work focuses on highly qualified women working for "the majors" in the oil industry, however many of their findings resonate with development worker experiences. Work in the "new economy" is "… increasingly organized into teams composed of workers with diverse skills who work with considerable discretion on time-bounded projects and are judged on results and outcomes, often by peers" (Ibid:551). For example, the Results Based Management (RBM) framework used by Global Affairs Canada (GAC) emphasizes the importance of positive outputs and outcomes from development projects. The RBM framework

has been widely criticized for preferencing results over process and valuing that which can be measured over different ways of understanding change. The organizational logic of INGOs and organizations in the development sector can add to our understanding of why women, racialized, global South, and queer workers tend to be concentrated in lower paying and more precarious employment situations.

What does it mean for an organization to be gendered? For Acker, to say that something is gendered means that "advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine" (1990:146). A binary understanding of gender is insufficient for understanding how gendered organizations shape experiences for non-binary workers.

Williams et al. (2012:550) summarize Acker's five processes that reproduce gender in organizations as "the division of labor, cultural symbols, workplace interactions, individual identities and organizational logics." Like Williams et al., I draw particularly from Acker's conception of organizational logic as it "draws attention to how hierarchies are rationalized and legitimized in organizations" (Ibid). Importantly, organizational logic does not just produce gender inequality, rather seemingly mundane aspects of organizations, like job descriptions and evaluations, workplace policies, and pay scales, and the logics that rationalize them are sites and processes where class, gender, race, (a)sexuality, and ability are (re)produced.

Previous work on gendered organizations has tended to examine case studies of specific organizations. Much like Stokes' (2015) work on creative workers in the

fashion industry, I have also found that development work requires a revised approach in order to identify the gendered logic at work in the development industry. In Laos, those working as gender experts or as gender focal points tend to work in networks or coalitions with other GE workers in the industry and other organizations, for example through the Gender Network. It is likely that the experience of the gendered logics, and the intersectional maze operates outside and across organizational boundaries. Thus, I have chosen to look at GE work across the industry in Laos rather than focusing on a specific organization or type of organization.

The idea of gender-neutral organizations is intimately linked to the idea that organizations are asexual. Acker argues that "organizational theory that is blind [sic] to sexuality does not immediately offer avenues into the comprehension of gender domination" (1990:142). Under an asexual discourse, instances of sexual harassment can be painted as the product of so-called bad apples, rather than as components of organizational structure (MacKinnon 1979). Baked into the organizational logic is the figure of the "abstract, bodiless worker, who occupies the abstract, gender-neutral job has no sexuality, no emotions, and does not procreate" (Acker 1990:151). Imbedded in this logic is the suppression of diverse gender expressions, non-hetero sexualities, and workers as parents and caretakers. In development work, the effect of this is that workers who either have a wife or partner to take care of things at home, or workers who are relatively unattached are more likely to be seen as ideal workers as they can quickly move throughout the region and take on new assignments. Adapting a theory of gendered organizations makes visible the organizational logic and processes that tend to disadvantage women in development organizations.

2.2.4. Intersectionality

Intersectionality (Bilge 2013; Collins 2019; Collins and Bilge 2020; Crenshaw 1989, 2017) originates from Black feminist scholars and has constitutive ties with critical race thinking (Bilge 2013:413). Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2020:189), while acknowledging the diversity in how intersectionality has been conceived and deployed, offer this description:

> Intersectionality investigates how intersecting power relations influence social relations across diverse societies as well as individual experiences in everyday life. As an analytic tool, intersectionality views categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, class, nation, ability, ethnicity, and age – among others – as interrelated and mutually shaping one another. Intersectionality is a way of understanding and explaining complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences.

Social categories of difference, like gender, race, class, and sexuality, among others, are "not discrete and mutually exclusive entities, but rather build on each other and work together; and that, while often invisible, these intersecting power relations affect all aspects of the social world" (Ibid).

In this thesis, I focus on development workers who do gender work as part of their jobs. Race, class, sexuality, gender, and age differently shape the everyday/everynight experiences of development workers in their work and personal lives. I draw on intersectionality to help explain how social categories of difference are enmeshed for the participants in this study in ways that hinder or facilitate their ability to rise through the ranks in development organizations. I borrow from this conception of intersectionality, as well as the "glass ceiling," to support my concept of the *intersectional maze*, which will be applied in chapter 5. The intersectional maze

emerges from my data and is a useful concept for understanding how development work is structured, how an intersectional lens helps explain different experiences and outcomes for workers, and the feeling of (dis)orientation many women and racialized workers experience while navigating the structures and norms of development organizations.

2.2.5. Summary of Theoretical Approach

I draw on feminist political economy, institutional ethnography, standpoint theory, intersectionality, and gendered organizations theory in order to understand the complex everyday/everynight actualities of international and national development workers' lives and work in Lao PDR. I draw from FPE and IE to ground this project in the everyday experiences of workers, taking these actualities as the entry point to explore larger phenomena of household, economic, and political systems, and other "ruling relations." I put a theory of gendered organizations alongside FPE and IE. This allows me to understand the relationship between the structure of work, the circulation of organizational logics, and worker experiences in development in Lao PDR. A central focus is on how policies, texts, organizational logics, and work norms shape national and international workers' experiences working in international development.

I weave Smith's conception of standpoint theory, and intersectionality into my theoretical framework. Standpoint theory and intersectionality compliment each other well. Within this study they allow me to make the analytic space necessary for understanding women and racialized workers' experiences in the Laotian development context, including how the social location of workers can change overtime, how they

experience the "ruling relations" that shape development work, and how power relations influence social relations. It is important to have an intersectional analysis of the work of gender equality work in development because development work and the composition of national and international development workers is patterned along class, race, gender, sexuality, age, ability, and global South/North positionality. Lastly, in my theoretical framework I put forward my novel concept of the intersectional maze that draws from the concept of the glass ceiling and intersectionality to explain workers' experiences of (dis)orientation as they navigate the structures and organizational logics at work in development institutions.

My theoretical framework for this thesis emphasises the importance of beginning in everyday/everynight actualities, and from there finding out the questions that matter in this specific context. In the following chapters of this thesis, I apply my theoretical framework to understand gender projects, development organizations, the work of development work, and development workers' lives outside of work. I examine the processes that shape what kinds of gender projects become more common in Laos, as well as the strategies development workers employ for navigating the relatively small political space to push for progress on gender equality, and LGBTQI+ rights.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

The impetus for this study is born out of my experience working in the development industry in Laos and trying to be "the gender person" in the national Laotian organization where I was placed by a volunteer-sending Canadian NGO in 2016-2017. When I began this project, I was focused on the diffusion and enaction of gender norms in the development industry. I was framing this project in terms of a 'clash of norms;' positing that national and international development workers have different beliefs of what gender is, what gender equality looks like, and what work should be done to achieve/work towards gender equality. Of course, that is a part of it, however, I migrated towards wanting to understand how everyday experiences at and outside of work in development are shaped by and through larger systems.

Taking an iterative approach meant that I allowed each interview to surprise me and perhaps change the course of this project, which they did. In this way, I moved from querying those who participated on their ideas about gender, to asking them to tell me about what they *do*. By focusing on *how* these workers live their lives and work on GE and using a qualitative framework with an exploratory and iterative approach I have been able to investigate the relationships between work, gender, and development in Laos and the larger bureaucratic, organizational, state, and suprastate structures that shape these relationships.

In this chapter, I begin with a discussion on my methodological approach to this research project and how it has shaped which methods I have used to gather and analyze data. The principal methods I have chosen to use to gather data are semi-

structured interviews, “field work,” and participant observation. To analyze my data, I have used transcription and coding. To both gather and analyze data, I have used reflexive memoing (Birks, Chapman, and Francis 2008) and “field notes.” A discussion of ethics and the limitations I have identified with my choices of methods is interwoven throughout this section.

3.1. Methodology

Methodology here refers to the approach I have taken in my research, it reflects my philosophical orientation, values, and obligations rather than strictly the methods, that is the tools and techniques, that I have used. I am guided by a conception of feminist methodology as articulated by Mary Fonow and Judith Cook (1991b; 2005): “… feminist methodology involves the description, explanation, and justification of techniques used in feminist research and is an abstract classification that refers to a variety of methodological stances, conceptual approaches, and research strategies” (2005:2213).

3.1.1. Feminist Research and Reflexivity

Feminists have argued that doing research is not a neutral, ‘objective’ act, rather, “social research turns the chaotic and confusing experiences of everyday life into categories of people in society, categories that reflect prevailing political arrangements” (Harding and Norberg 2005:2009). Harding and Norberg, drawing on the ideas of Dorothy Smith (1990), remind us of the power in producing knowledge; that it can reify prevailing political structures and also challenge them. I have been particularly cognizant of the power-knowledge relationship at play in development and

also in academia where there are long histories of people speaking from the global North about "developing countries." I have returned to the in-depth interviews I conducted with the participants in my study again and again as a way of grounding myself and this research in their experiences. Ultimately – as researcher – I do have power to include and exclude data in presenting findings from my research.

One approach feminist researchers have taken to produce work that aims towards social transformation and liberation, is to minimize or eliminate the power differences between researchers and the marginalized groups that are the objects of their study (Harding 2005). Other feminists, noting the impossibility of eliminating this power difference and questioning its desirability, choose instead to address the power differences between themselves as researcher and those participating in their research (Baaz 2005; Holvikivi 2019). The relational power dynamics between myself and those I did interviews with and also those who were not formally interviewed, but I nevertheless studied them through participant observation, are entangled in larger contexts of local, national, regional, and global power dynamics that are themselves in flux, contested, renegotiated, and transformed over place and time.

I value the complexity of my participants' lives, and I am orientated to unraveling some of the actualities of GE work they do by drawing on Smith's concepts and methodologies of IE, standpoint theory, and ruling relations (Smith 1987, 1993, 2005) because it has real consequences for those of all genders who come under the frameworks and logics of such work. For Harding and other standpoint theorists like

Smith, dominant groups are not well positioned to identify the oppressive features of their own beliefs and practices (Harding 2004).

In terms of my methodology, I have been concerned with the relationship between knowledge and power, the importance of gender and other social categories of difference that shape one's standpoint – what can be known in this context – and historically based colonial dynamics that shape how international and national development workers relate to me as a researcher, and how they are shaped by these continuities in their work and social lives.

I have taken a feminist approach to my research. This has shaped my research in a few key ways: 1) I am attuned to relational power dynamics between myself and those I researched, as well as how power operates within the development community in Laos; 2) I have practiced reflexivity (Ackerly and True 2008; Holvikivi 2019) throughout my research project; and 3) I have been guided by a feminist research ethic (Edwards and Mauthner 2012) which for me has looked like being transparent with participants about my motivations for doing this research, rejecting the idea of "value-free" modes of doing social research, embracing the importance of care in research relationships. For example, this looked like deep listening and empathy when some participants disclosed experiences of sexual assault while working in development. "Ethics is about *how* to deal with conflict, disagreement and ambivalence rather than attempting to eliminate it" (Ibid:25).

In regard to power dynamics between myself as researcher and those I researched, I tried to address this by not minimizing it, and also recognizing that I

would not always be the one with more power/status during my interactions with research participants. I designed my methods to be flexible and for participants to have control over where our conversations went, where we met, and the ability to withdraw from the study up until June 30th, 2019, which gave each participant a minimum of two months to choose to withdraw their data from the study. No participants contacted me to withdraw.

Reflexivity, for me, has looked like being aware of my relational positionality and being transparent with my participants about where I am coming from, how I am approaching my research, and how I will manage their data and share results. In terms of practicing a feminist research ethic, I decided during my research project to change my focus from looking at beliefs about gender and framing this as a "clash" between national and international development workers to starting with development workers' everyday/everynight experiences and from there illuminating the "ruling relations" that shape how development workers experience and navigate their gender equality work. This reflects an attentiveness to studying the structures, or "ruling relations" that (re)produce inequality in and through development processes.

I now turn to discussing the tools and techniques I have used to inquire into how the gendered development context in Laos shapes the gender work done there. I have given some examples above of how a feminist methodology and the practice of reflexivity have shaped the methods that I chose. I will further elaborate on this below as I discuss each of my methods in turn.

3.2. Methods

I employ qualitative methods to explore how the gendered development context in Laos shapes gender work for the development workers who do it. Given that this study is exploratory, I concentrated on speaking with current and former national and international development workers who were either in Laos at the time or had recently worked there (within 1 year of when I started conducting interviews). I conducted four months of research in Laos, largely in Vientiane the capital city, and also in Pakse in the south. I travelled to Udon Thani, Bangkok, Phuket, and Koh Yao Noi, all in Thailand, for either personal, logistical, and/or research purposes. I took notes during these trips to Thailand and the conversations I had with development workers in Thailand make up some of the background and contextual information in this thesis.

Where possible, I attended relevant development industry meetings, events, trainings, and social gatherings. My aim was to participate in the working and social lives of development workers as much as I was welcomed to do so. My motivation for undertaking this project comes in part from my own experiences studying international development in Canadian post-secondary institutions and working previously as a Gender Advisor in Laos through a volunteer-sending NGO. More specifically, it comes from not doing much 'gender advising' while working as a Gender Advisor. My value for the national organization was more in my English language abilities, and knowledge of donor jargon in regard to proposal writing and reporting requirements. As they were already experts in gender and in the gendered context of Laos, they did not need "advising" from me, despite that being my job title.

3.2.1. Field Work and Participant Observation

I flew to Vientiane in early January 2019 and stayed until the end of April 2019. During these four months of "field work" I used participant observation to gather data. "Field work" carries some baggage as a term and practice, it has had wide military use. For both development workers and researchers, 'going into the field' can be a linguistic form of othering people and communities that constitute "the field." Literature on field work and ethnography often refer to a series of "reflexive and overlapping stages of entrée, process, and analysis. These themes have historically included: entrée into the setting, finding a place, fieldwork roles and relationships, research bargains, trust and rapport, and leaving the field" (Warren 1988:3). Researchers have argued that the boundaries of entering and exiting "the field" are more sticky and are perhaps better thought of as a continuum of memberships roles from stranger to complete member, with gender representing one aspect of this continuum (Adler and Adler 1987). I use "field work" to refer to my time spent in Laos, with the understanding that my "field" of research is a specific place (Laos) at a particular time (early 2019) and through specific interactions between myself as researcher and those I was able to speak with and observe through being there.

Participant observation is "the process enabling researchers to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting through observing and participating in those activities" (Kawulich 2005). In terms of my observer's stance, I moved between being a "participant as observer" and "observer as participant" (Gold 1958 in Kawulich 2005). Because I had worked in development in Laos, I did have some insider status, or group membership status, how this status was enacted by me or

interpreted by development workers changed depending on the context. I know when I felt more or less apart of the group, when I intentionally distanced myself from the group and when I minimized the difference, but I do not fully know how I was seen by others, though I was attuned to feedback that I got from development workers that gave me insight into how I was being perceived. In some contexts, I would use the word "we" to put myself alongside the people I was speaking with, and at that time – more so than now – I did see myself as working in development.

In other situations, I would stick with "you." For example, the INGO that I had previously worked for in 2016-2017 logistically supported my field work in Laos by agreeing to supervise me, which allowed me to access the SSHRC Michael Smith Foreign Study Supplement and helped immensely in terms of navigating some of the bureaucratic hurdles involved with securing a visa. They also generously loaned me a bicycle for the duration of my field work, which allowed me to bike all over the city and was my main mode of transport during this research. However, it became apparent to me that some development workers thought I was working for this INGO and realizing this is how some were seeing my work, I took the opportunity to be extra clear about who I was, what I was doing, and the nature of my affiliation with the INGO. The INGO had graciously offered me workspace in their office; however, I decided to decline and work at home and in cafés in order to communicate the separation between myself and the INGO. Still, some development workers would see the bicycle I was on and recognize it as a bicycle of the INGO. In these cases, I was always happy to explain the nature of my affiliation and explain the confidentiality of my research and my data management practices that I use to keep their data safe.

For the most part, participant observation for me was principally a general observation of the lives of those working in development and others living and working in the spaces where development workers were, such as vendors at the night market, café and restaurant workers, border guards, and masseuses. Because I had friends and social acquaintances in Vientiane who introduced me to other largely international people, I was invited to social functions like bowling for an American expat's birthday, eating lunch with groups of development workers on their lunch breaks, having dinner together at restaurants and in their homes, or going to a bar. I was particularly welcome among younger (~<35 years old) female development workers, some of whom were and are friends, and I would join them to do yoga, go to the pool, and/or go for a massage, which in Laos can be a group activity.

I was also able to travel with two international development workers to Udon Thani, Thailand for the dual purpose of doing a "visa run" and going to the hospital with a worker who had broken her arm. A national development worker drove us to and from Udon Thani as part of her job. In general, international workers who are in Laos through global North development organizations have access to robust medical care and insurance in stark contrast to most Lao people. A "visa run" is a common experience for international development workers who need to periodically leave Laos and come back in order to obtain a new visa.

The development community in Vientiane has several fora that are specifically geared towards gender. They are typically held every couple of months. I was able to attend one of these sessions while in Laos. I was invited to join by someone in the

group who checked with organizers if it was ok. Once at the meeting, I introduced myself, explained my research, and that I was there to listen and learn. I took some notes during the meeting and made sure to do this in full view of everyone. For the most part I participated as an active listener and took field notes afterwards. Data were collected in notebooks and in files kept in a cloud-based storage management system. I also travelled with national and international development workers to Pakse in the south of Laos to co-lead a gender mainstreaming workshop aimed at Lao Government workers.

Wherever possible, I would attend public events run by development organizations. This included an interactive exhibit at COPE, an organization that works with the Lao Ministry of Health to provide support, such as prosthetic and orthotic services, to those with mobility-related disabilities, including unexploded ordinance (UXO) survivors. Humanity Inclusion (HI) co-organized the event with COPE to raise awareness of the experiences of people with disabilities in Laos and ongoing harms from UXOs. While attending a public presentation on gender in Laos in downtown Vientiane I stepped outside and the owner of the venue approached me to ask why I was taking notes. He shared his concerns with me, that gender is sensitive in Laos and that he did not want to stir the pot, so to speak. I explained who I was, my research, and that the notes I was taking would be used as background information and that I would not individually identify anyone or quote what they said. Despite this being a public event, this was an "ethical moment" where I felt responsible to the Laotian speakers talking about gender in their country, that it was ethical to be there, but not ethical to take data from this space and use it directly in my thesis. One reason

for this is that I cannot fully know the risk speakers are taking to be there in the first place and I did not have the opportunity to speak with them directly in this case.

The development community in Laos feels relatively small and many people knew each other or were aware of each other. I had more access to 'expat' and 'international' spaces, and I made this observation amongst international workers, but the national workers I spoke with agreed with this observation and that the 'gender space' is particularly small. Participating in the social lives of development workers was an important part of building trust in the community, becoming a 'known quantity' and being put into contact with potential participants.

I analyzed my notes much in the same way that I approached my interview data. I reread them several times, made additional notes, and highlighted key themes as they emerged. My notes were also a space where I reflected on the research process, how I was feeling personally, and how I was feeling about how my research was going, and what I thought I was seeing in my observations.

3.2.2. Recruitment

I began recruitment once I had received ethics approval from my university. I began reaching out to existing contacts who worked at INGOs in Laos, the UN, and Lao NPAs. From there I used snowball sampling to recruit more participants, I also shared recruitment materials to key contacts who were free to share these within their networks. I posted in a Facebook group that has a lot of international and Lao members who work in development. I would talk about my research when I was meeting people out and about or through contacts, if they were interested and asked to

participate or thought of someone who they thought would want to participate then they would pass my information onto them, and that person would contact me directly. I was hoping to speak with as many development workers as I could, with an ideal number being around 15-25. I was happy that I was able to recruit 21 workers for in-depth interviews and that several others wanted to speak with me more informally.

My university's ethics board stipulated that I could not do direct recruitment with people that I did not have existing contact with as this, for the ethics board, would constitute putting pressure on people to participate. During one interview a participant wanted to send me their colleague's information so that I could contact them. I explained to her that her colleague would need to contact me directly and why this was the case. The participant expressed their surprise at how complicated they felt recruitment was for this study. Partly because of this I did find it difficult to recruit development workers who were outside of my existing networks at first. Additionally, those who participated were not likely to share the opportunity to participate with their colleagues because then they would be signalling that they had probably participated already. This was not always the case, and a few participants did share my study with others in their networks.

3.2.3. Interviews

While in Laos, I conducted 21 in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Of these interviews, 17 took place in person and 4 were conducted via Skype with development workers who had worked in Laos within the previous year (as of January 2019) but were no longer in-country. At the start of each interview, I introduced myself as a

graduate researcher and answered questions about my research project. Those who participated in an interview came from a wide array of different countries and backgrounds. Altogether, participants came from a mix of 14 different countries; 16 participants identified as coming from 1 country (e.g., 'I'm from Lao,' 'I'm from Canada'), while 5 participants identified as coming from more than one country (dual citizenship, identifying as mixed race and/or as part of a diaspora, and/or referring to where they grew up being different from the country where they hold a passport).

Of the 21 interviewees, 4 were Lao, 1 of whom identified as an ethnic minority in Laos; 7 identified as either being North American or being partly North American; 5 identified as being European or being partly European; 1 identified as being African, while an additional participant identified as growing up in Africa; 2 identified as being Australian; and 2 identified as coming from an Asian country other than Laos, with an additional participant identifying that their background is Asian. Overall, 10 participants came from 'global North' countries, 6 came from 'global South' countries, and an additional 5 participants had either dual citizenship, lived in multiple countries through migration, or identified as mixed race/belonging to more than one place.

Of the 21 workers who participated in interviews with me, 7 identified as men and 14 as women. Participants worked in a wide range of development organizations, including global North INGOS, UN agencies, bilateral global North state organizations, a development bank, NPAs, Lao CSOs, volunteer-sending organizations, a faith-based INGO, a philanthropic foundation, and both national and international consultants. Several participants worked as Country Directors of INGOs,

5 were international volunteers placed in a range of organizations including a development bank, Lao government departments, and NPAs. Other job positions included Technical Advisor (on gender), Human Resources, Project Manager, Programme Manager, UN workers, consultant, and Management Assistant. Participants had been in Laos anywhere from a few weeks to decades. Most had been in Laos between 6 months and 3 years if they were international workers.

I prepared a semi-structured interview schedule as a guide; however, my research project has been iterative, and the interview schedule changed based on what I learned during each interview. During my interview prep, I reviewed the interview schedule and added specific questions and prompts if there were specific topics that I wanted to discuss with the participant. I strived to cultivate a relaxed conversational atmosphere during these interviews by having a flexible approach so that I could respond to what the person in front of me was saying. I did this by asking participants to pick where they would like to have the interview and shifting demographic questions to the end of the interview if they had not come up organically during the interview. I also spent time at the beginning of the interview to start to develop rapport and speak more casually (e.g., asking how they were doing that day, commenting on the weather) or more familiarly depending on my relationship with the participant (e.g., asking how they are doing and how is their family) before going into my interview questions. In some cases, this led to confusion as one participant in particular had been expecting less open-ended questions. In some cases, I was nervous, particularly when I was interviewing older men, and during these times I tended to stick more closely to my interview guide.

Each participant was informed that their consent is ongoing, and that they may stop the interview at any time, though no one asked to stop the interview. Some participants did not want to sign the consent form, and in my research design I had made protocols such that my participants could give verbal consent. Interviews largely took place in cafes and restaurants; one interview took place at a person's place of work, and four interviews took place over Skype. I declined one volunteer because they persistently wanted to pick me up from where I was staying, and I did not feel comfortable with this. With consent, the interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder. The audio files were then moved to my computer and deleted from the recorder shortly after interviews. I put password protection on all my audio files and transcriptions, in addition to my personal laptop requiring a password.

In thinking through and designing my research, I have been mindful of the safety of my participants, particularly in regard to securing my data and maintaining confidentiality and anonymity. The development community – and even more so the gender community – in Laos is quite small and many workers are known to each other. Most development workers in Laos will remember or will eventually be discreetly told about the forced disappearance of Sombath Somphone on December 15th, 2012, from a street in the capital city Vientiane. Mr. Somphone is/was a community development worker who, among other projects, worked on sustainable food security for rural people in Laos. His forced disappearance resulted in a strong and long lasting 'chill' in Laotian civil society spaces.

These safety concerns shaped my decision to store my research data on a cloud-based system and not directly on my computer while crossing international borders in the unlikely event that my computer was confiscated during a border crossing. It also shaped my decision to give pseudonyms to all participants, to anonymize data as much as possible, and not to directly name the organizations where participants worked. In my consent form it is their choice to be identified, or their organization to be identified, but as I went along in this research, I decided that one participant choosing to be identified could make it possible to then identify others depending on what they said. Where in one particular situation an international participant wanted to be identified, I chose not to because what they shared could be used to identify the national colleagues they worked with. I have erred on the side of caution as much as I know how to because I am aware that I cannot fully appreciate the delicate situation that national development workers in particular navigate in order to be able to do their work.

The development field is jargon and acronym heavy in its language use. Institutional capture (DeVault and McCoy 2002; Smith 2003b in Smith 2005) was a challenge during some interviews. My experience in development, what Smith (2005) calls "work knowledge" is a significant resource in an IE approach; however, my work knowledge and being able to 'speak the language' of development meant that at moments in interviews I was aware a lot of words were being spoken, but I was not sure what experience was being related to me. As Smith writes, "the researcher is up against the capacity of institutional discourse… to subsume or displace descriptions based in experience" (2005:155-56). I was not always aware that I or we had been

captured by the institutional discourse until I re-listened to the interview or read the transcript (Ibid:156). I became more aware of institutional capture as interviews took place. To get back to participants' actual experiences, I would typically ask the participant to describe an example of what they were discussing.

This research is necessarily shaped by the context in which I did my field work and who I was able to interview. As one participant, who described herself as being able to navigate both Lao and Western ways of doing things in development, put it at the end of our interview:

> I don't get anything from it, you know what I mean? And on the opposite way some people may think that they get trouble from it [from being interviewed], like issue, like anything, they don't know, they're afraid that's all, so you will have only specific kind of people [who can/will come and be interviewed]" (Claire, Lao-European)

3.2.4. Transcription, Coding, and Analysis

I began relistening to interviews and transcribing as interviews were ongoing which allowed me to engage in data collection and analysis simultaneously in an iterative process (Hesse-Biber 2017:142). At first, I was practicing verbatim transcription. About two months into my field work I transitioned to selective transcription and using *Transcribe* online software to aid in the lengthy transcription process. I used the automatic transcription feature on this software but found that it was more trouble than it was worth as it was extremely deficient in transcribing non-native English speakers. I relistened to interviews and reread transcripts often. This process allowed me to develop an in-depth familiarity with my research data.

I began by primarily coding interviews in NVIVO. Following several unfortunate technological issues (I have gone through six computers during data collection and the writing of this thesis), coupled with the learning curve of using NVIVO, I found that coding in Microsoft Word was more effective. I kept my field notes on a cloud-based storage system and coded my notes there. While working on a separate research project, I was introduced to Otter.ai transcription software. I migrated all of my transcripts to the Otter.ai platform and used it to check-in with my interview data during the final months of writing this thesis as it allowed me to easily search across the interviews at once and easily click on a coded section to listen again to that part of the interview.

Qualitative analysis is a wide-ranging method of interpreting data. I focused on thematic analysis that involved coding my interview transcripts, sorting these, looking for patterns, sub-codes and organizing codes into larger thematic areas. Lester, Cho, and Lochmiller (2020) propose seven phases for conducting thematic analysis, reminding us that these "phases can be pursued in a systematic way, while also recognizing that qualitative analysis is fundamentally flexible and even a bit *messy* [authors' emphasis]." The seven phases are: 1) preparing and organizing the data for analysis; 2) transcribing the data; 3) becoming familiar with the data; 4) memoing the data; 5) coding the data; 6) moving from codes to categories and categories to themes; and 7) making the analytic process transparent.

I returned to my data and codes/themes in cycles throughout this project. After relistening to interviews and doing my own transcription, I then read and reread

transcriptions while coding, often going back to the audio file to hear the section in context. When I was feeling stuck or far away from my data, I would listen to an interview as I walked or hiked in St. John's. I went through several cycles of coding, that tended to go from borderline over-coding the data to being able to identify umbrella codes and themes in and across transcripts. As a graduate student researcher, I was using a lot of these methods for the first time, as such I was often testing out ways to approach coding, seeing what worked, cycling back to reorganize, revisit interviews, rearrange codes and themes, and experiment with different software to see what worked and what the data gave me when I queried it, for example by looking at word frequencies within and across interviews.

My theoretical framework, drawing on feminist political economy, institutional ethnography, standpoint theory, intersectionality, and gendered organizations theory, informed how I listened to and coded these interviews. I was attentive to identifying how participants did development work and gender equality work in particular. Listening to what they did and how they positioned themselves and their organizations in relation to others helped illuminate what kinds of gendered organizational structures and "ruling relations" were shaping their experiences and how it mattered for them.

In this chapter, I have discussed my methodological approach, the methods I have used in data collection and analysis, as well as discussing some of the limits of these methods on and along. The larger political context of the topics discussed during interviews came through both explicitly from participants and more subtly. Overall, my approach to data collection and analysis has been essential to gaining insight into

the power dynamics, governing structures, and organization of gender equality work at play in this context and how the everyday/everynight experiences of those who participated in this study furthers our insights into the larger political, bureaucratic, state, and suprastate level "ruling relations" that shape workers' experiences, the choices they are able to make, and the types of gender projects that are most common. All of this has material consequences for those who come under the logics of these larger systems, especially the mostly women and girls that GE projects target, and gender specialists, most of whom are women, who consult on, design, and implement these projects.

Chapter 4: Gender(ed) Projects

In this chapter, I explore the gender projects that development workers help deliver in Laos, with the understanding that these projects are themselves gendered. Nearly all development workers that I came across during my field work had at least a small part of their work that involved GE and/or reporting on GE. For many of the workers that I interviewed, GE work was a central or significant part of their jobs. Some workers working with women did not frame their projects in terms of gender equality. GE projects and projects that involve a GE component are shaped in and through the "project cycle."

I begin this chapter with a discussion on the question, who is a development worker? Participants in this study positioned themselves in different ways to the subject position of "development worker," and so before delving into the work development workers are doing in Laos, I look at how those working in development position themselves and how they are labelled or positioned into categories of "local" and "international" in ways that reveal the unstable boundaries of these social and political categories. Next, I explore how development workers construct the targets of their GE work, linking this to the larger "ruling relations" (Smith 1993) that frame the contexts in which development workers can make choices that appear as rational, and develop industry norms for GE work. These "ruling relations" include the political and bureaucratic organization of GE (e.g., project cycle management), professional discourses of international development, State (Lao Government) and suprastate

(United Nations) structures that cultivate specific practices among workers in framing who the targets of GE work are in this context.

I then describe the role of formal and informal networks that shape GE work in Laos. Lastly, I look at three areas of gender equality work that came out of my data, namely 1) gender mainstreaming; 2) women's economic empowerment; and 3) advocacy. I suggest that much of the GE work happening in Laos can be understood as reproducing a "women in development" (WID) model, and that despite the use of transformative rhetoric, GE projects in Laos tend to focus on service delivery, with a small minority of projects more directly targeting shifting power dynamics. This can in part be understood through the relatively small societal space for civil society organizations and, as many told me in Laos, gender's status as a sensitive topic.

4.1. Who is a development worker?

My own experiences of studying and working in international development have illuminated the gulf that exists between popular representations of development and humanitarian workers (also known as aid workers) and the actual arrangements of development work. Humanitarian work tends to be more short term and associated with acute crises or emergencies. For example, when the hydro-electric dam in Attapeu, Laos collapsed in July 2018, humanitarian organisations deployed their workers to the area in order to triage immediate needs. In contrast, development workers are more often working on development projects that are longer term (1-3 years or more). The distinction between humanitarian and development workers is

becoming less relevant as many areas in the world experience protracted crisis and increased precarity (Roth 2011).

While investigating the experiences of development workers in Laos, I found that not all my participants identified themselves as development workers. Many of the workers I spoke with have complex relationships to the subject position of "development worker," and to the industry and concept of international development. Not all development people see themselves or are seen by others as development workers.

Lilly came to Laos through a volunteer-sending INGO, was working as a Gender Advisor with an NPA, and was looking to apply to a one-year contract with a big INGO at the time we met for her interview. Lilly, who identifies as *lok sod,* or mixed race, told me "I've never referred to myself as working in development or being a development worker." She explained that she has a lot of contention with the concept of development work and that her background is in humanitarian aid and grass roots advocacy. She went on to clarify that:

> …this is the first time I could ever be considered on the fringes of development work, but because this is my home country and I work for a grass roots civil society rights-based organization, I'm like 'do I really work in development?' because I have this very clearly biased view towards development work.

Later in our conversation, Lilly says again that she does not view herself as working in development, "… I appreciate the fact that I don't feel like I work in development, but I do work in grassroots because I feel like my grassroots allies really back me up." She says this in reference to calling out the colonial mindset of some development workers

and organizations that she encounters through her work. By positioning herself as on the fringes of development work and as *speaking from* (de la Cadena 2015:53) Laotian grass roots civil society, Lilly feels able and supported by allies to critique some of the harmful practices and discourses at work in the Lao development context. She also notes that because her first name is easier to pronounce for Westerners and that she speaks English, this affords her space where expats see her as white, but she also carries a Lao family name, which gives her certain kinds of recognition amongst national colleagues. She frames this as allowing her to navigate both international and grass roots spaces.

When I asked Emma, a North American woman in her 20s, about her stated desire to eventually return home to North America, she tells me:

> I don't consider myself to be like a development worker really, like that wasn't something that I like, that wasn't what my education was in and even though I'm working in that industry here, like I think I'm more interested in returning to [home country] and doing like climate and environmental work there. Um, so, like I said this is sort of like a little bit of like an exchange experience of being like 'how are these issues attacked in like another country?' And then like when I go back to [home country] maybe it will be relevant. Like, maybe it won't but it's been a really good experience just in terms of like cultural expansion, immersion, getting some experience on issues that I wasn't working on before…

Like several other participants in this study, Emma sees herself as working in the development industry, but not as a development worker. She seems to relate the status of "development worker" with having received formal education in that field. This usually looks like having received an undergraduate degree in International Development, or a related field, and often now requires a master's degree on top of

this. Her motivations for coming to Laos to work were more about seeing how climate and environmental work were being addressed in a different country and to have an immersive experience in another culture. Emma's experience echoes the findings of Tiessen & Heron (2012) who, when looking at the experiences of Canadian youth volunteering abroad, found that their experiences were often framed in terms of their own benefits from cultural expansion.

Not every worker working for a development organization is considered a development worker. Many of the INGOs and NPAs that I visited while in Laos were located in standalone gated buildings that looked like converted homes, often tucked into residential areas. INGOs tended to have more staff and resources, and thus bigger buildings. INGO and more resourced-NPA offices would have a *maebon,* or maid, who worked in the office from before the staff arrived in the morning to after the staff left in the evening. Laotian women working as *maebons* in development organizations are responsible for cleaning and assisting in cooking lunches and preparing coffee and snacks for breaks or during meetings. It was also common for a Lao man to maintain the exterior of the building and tend to the plants that grew on the property. Additionally, development organizations would contract security services to control who entered the property and watch the property 24/7.

David, when describing his office, told me:

> I think the staff is over 20-25 or something like that. And I don't know the exact number. Because when we say that number we include like the cleaner and the guards. And I don't actually know who all of them always are – I do – but I don't know the numbers.

David goes on to list most of the positions within his office, such as Project Managers, the Country Representative, "finance people," among a few other positions, but he does not have a definite sense of the exact number of staff at his OrganizationINGO, partly due to the number of workers who work *in* development agencies, but are not considered development workers, such as *maebons.*

4.2 Constructing the Targets of Gender Work

In the Laotian development context, "gender" is often synonymous with "women." This is not unique to Laos and is common in development discourse and practice (Chant and Sweetman 2012). At a discursive level, men may be addressed as stakeholders in GE projects, but in practice GE projects primarily target women and children by a large margin. GE projects that do target men tend to focus on raising awareness of men's role in preventing violence against women and girls. This tendency reflects wider trends in how men, boys, and masculinities have been addressed in development since the 1990s, first as requiring new attitudes and practices (e.g., to target and change men's role in violence against women) and then as potential allies (Parpart 2015; Parpart and Zalewski 2008). An example of such a project is CARE International's campaign, *Lao Men Standing Up Speaking Out* (SUSO), that was taking place when I first went to Laos to work.

The SUSO campaign involved ten male Lao community leaders including pop music stars, an academic, a Lao Government official, and a Hmong student activist who were featured in public communications materials speaking out against violence against women and challenging norms around masculinity. One of the events

connected to the SUSO campaign was a cook-off where five of the SUSO "champions" participated in a cooking competition as a way of challenging traditional gender roles. A news release of the event (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2015) reports, "The sight of Lao men competing to impress peers with their cooking skills is a novelty in Laos, where it is usually women who work in the kitchen." The SUSO campaign targets men in order to challenge conceptions of masculinity in Laos (CARE Australia 2016). It is unclear how the campaign was seen outside the capital city.

It is also the case that most people I spoke with tend to talk about gender work as equality between women and men. As one national gender expert told me:

> I have to remind and talk all the time when I join the meeting, when I join the platform, or when I provide the training. I always [say] we are not only men and women in the world, in the country. We have to recognize, we have to aware that we have other people around us, and those people have been hidden for many years and it's not fun, it is very stressful. So, we have to open our hearts and our minds. Explain what they are, and who they are, and what they want to be. Not forcing if you are gay to have to marry woman, and parents have to open their perspective. So, every time I join [a meeting, training, etc.] I mention about that. But in our organization, we understand, and we accept [LGBTQI people], but even when it comes to my friends even the PhD graduate from Western world, [they] still mention about men and women only. It's really hard.

There is very little space in the national discourse to talk about and do GE work outside of traditional gender roles for men and women and little space where non-binary and LGBTI experiences are centred, rather than their typical placement as an add-on to the categories of women and men. GE projects in Laos tend to focus on service delivery and instrumental forms of advocacy and implementation. Feminists

have made the case that strategically making incremental instrumentalist changes are still important and can have positive impacts in the lives of women (Sohal 2005).

Development organizations and workers construct the targets of their GE work through policy documents, strategic plans, concept notes, projects proposals, among other texts and marketing/communications materials. The targets tend to be women and girls, with additional social categories of difference added to "women," such as "women with disabilities," "ethnic minority women," and "rural women." Projects tend to target specific groups or subgroups and as a consequence can struggle to enact an intersectional approach that can recognize multiple aspects of a person's political and societal discrimination. I asked Linda, a Country Director, if her organization works with LGBTQI+ folks either as beneficiaries or as part of their staff. She tells me, "Not explicitly. No, I wouldn't say they're like a target population of any of our projects."

The socio-political discursive space in which development organizations can frame GE is shaped by larger "ruling relations" at the state and supranational levels. In Laos, the discursive space and the physical spaces in which GE projects can take place are governed by Lao Government law and oversight, and are shaped by foreign governments, particularly Western governments, and donors, as well as supranational organizations, such as the UN, and development banks like the Asian Development Bank. It is also shaped in and through the professional discourses of international development, GAD, as well as the logics of project management.

The Lao Government typically frames gender in Laos in terms of gender-based violence and the need to protect women and girls, particularly within the boundaries of their traditional roles in Lao society. The GE projects of donor governments, UN agencies, NPAs, and INGOs are governed by Lao Government structures, in the form of national laws, actions plans, and Memorandums of Understanding between the development organizations and the government. International organizations are also governed by the policies and political priorities of their own country as well as rules, regulations, and funding priorities of other donors that provide funding or other partnership.

MOUs emerged as a significant bureaucratic and political tool that could help or hinder development organizations in carrying out their projects in Laos. An MOU is a document that represents an agreement between the Lao Government and one or more development organizations, such as national NPAs, UN agencies, or INGOs. It typically outlines a course of action that has been agreed upon. MOUs are not necessarily legally binding documents and are usually an early step towards implementing a project. When Emma was telling me about INGOs not necessarily having the same leverage as the UN or EU to critique certain issues in Laos, she explained that INGOs might be at risk of not having their MOU signed, or "relationships with the government would be compromised, or they – the government – would sign the MOU, but like, you wouldn't get a lot of permission to actually do things."

Another worker, Marie, shared that the INGO she was working for had "a lot of funds for influencing, but we cannot do that" because they did not have an MOU with the Lao Government. In order to keep working without an MOU, all of their activities under this specific programme area that was part of a larger international funding programme targeting marginalized communities in several different countries were implemented by national partners. Though activities under this programme area could be implemented by national partners, the INGO was not able to play a role in spreading results of the projects or conducting research in target communities. They were able to provide funding and logistical support to their national partners, but they were not able to take a more active role in conducting activities themselves without an MOU in place. Marie was frustrated with this situation. She felt her organization had a particular role to play in conducting research.

One international worker who was Country Director of an INGO shared his experience that "the government here are very hands on… but that's just the system. If we don't like it, we shouldn't be here. It's challenging, but we're also the ones that are guests here." This worker's assertion that if "we" – which in the context of the conversation I understood to mean international workers and organizations – do not like the way work is done with the government in Laos, then "we" should not be here illustrates one end of what I observed as a spectrum of workers struggling with whether they should be in Laos or not. When driving back to Vientiane from a gender mainstreaming training session outside of the capital, a Country Director I was riding with expressed that it always came back to that question for him: whether we should be working in this context or not. For many of the international workers I spoke with,

this was a perennial question, and for some a moral conundrum. Were they 'going along to get along' in ways that compromised their values; were they actually effecting positive change for Lao people; if they were not there, who would do the work? MOUs are one formalized bureaucratic and political process that shapes the relationship between development organizations, the Lao government, and the funding and work they are agreeing to.

GE projects are also being shaped by supranational conventions, agreements, treaties, and norms. For example (and as discussed in chapter 1), CEDAW is an international treaty that Laos ratified in 1981. As a signatory, the Lao Government should report on their GE progress and present these reports at the UN in Geneva every four years. A United Nations worker explained to me that:

> In Lao context there is a National Action Plan for Women and Children together, even like you know, National Commissioner of NCAWMC, National Commission for the Advancement of Women, and Mother and Child, so like even for the government, the women and children show up together. So even though UN, my agency is kind of for having our own program and etc. but then because it is government structure and national policy, we are combining women and children things.

For this UN worker, their office wanted to conduct some programming for just women, but because of the state-level combining of women and children together, they needed to mirror this in order to get along and do their work.

Denis, a newly arrived international volunteer, had only been in Laos for a few weeks when I spoke with him. As part of his 'onboarding' he and his cohort of fellow new arrivals were given a presentation on the gender context in Laos. Such orientations are common for newly arrived international staff to go through in order to

become more familiar with 'the Lao context.' This also indicates that many international staff who arrive in Laos have little knowledge and understanding of the context in which they will be working. During an informal conversation with the international volunteer who did the gender presentation, Denis was told about the Lao Women's Union and their slogan:

> I remember that [name] told me that the saying of the Lao Woman's Union is like 'a good wife, a good cooker,' and like something like not very progressive finally for Lao Women's Union... which is not very progressive if you think about women's rights and gender issues, it's like, put you [women] again in this little box of roles and gender-based roles. So yeah, maybe next generation will change that.

The Lao Women's Union is a state organization and their slogans come from the state. Denis, though getting the slogan wrong, still highlights a tendency among international staff, especially newly arrived staff, to make quick judgements on the status of women in Laos. I spoke with an older international male worker who thought that women's status must be quite high because they can ride scooters and they have stalls in the markets. Such statements can be understood as part of the process of learning about a new place but may also reflect the workers' status as a *falang*[4] development worker because the structure of their work itself induces them to understand, categorize, judge, and make interventions into Lao society in order to affect some kind of social change.

[4] The term *falang* (sometimes spelt *farang)* is used in Lao language to refer to foreigners in general. *Falang*, or something close to it, is used in several Southeast Asian countries, and the actual origin of the term is unclear. The story that I most often heard in Laos is that *falang* originally meant "French person" and was used when the French colonized Laos, later on it came to mean "foreigner" more generally.

All INGOs and NPAs that I encountered who worked in the villages needed to work with the Lao Women's Union if their project involved women in any way. Carl, who worked largely on agricultural projects, explained that:

> They [Lao Women's Union] mainly used to be earmarked for certain activities and projects automatically. If you say 'income generation' automatically they say Lao Women's Union should do it. If you say 'gender' then automatically as well. Now there is a little bit of change, they get more and more involved in non-traditional activities, like general extension work, counseling in kitchen gardening, because that's also then linked to nutrition, and nutrition they also say, 'oh it's earmarked as women's business.' From their side there is a tendency to get more involved in other technical extension work as well. Which is fine because the knowledge that you need for extension work is not so high science, and all of them some how are born on the farm or at least their parents so they know about the problems, and they know about how things can be done.

The LWU, as a mass organization, is governed by higher levels within the Lao Government. As we can see from Carl's decades of experience in the country and working with the LWU, they have tended to have areas of work that are 'earmarked' for them, and that in more recent times he has seen that the LWU was becoming more involved in less traditionally feminized areas of work. The LWU is a far-reaching organization and has members in most, if not all, villages in Laos.

The Lao Government is a powerful force in shaping what GE projects can be worked on and how gender and GE can be discussed in public forums, such as state-run media, and at the policy level. This influences how development workers and organizations frame their work on GE. A significant marker for what can and cannot be discussed is whether or not there is a law on the subject. One UN worker explained to me that:

> For example, when we talk about gender, and maybe, you know, gay rights, like, you know, those kind of issue like if, you know, so it's difficult to address those issues that are not really accepted by the government. So how do you know if the government accept it or not? If they have a law, then we can start talking about it. This is how gender-based violence can be a topic because there's a national law. So that means like the government is now like, you know, using the language.

Development organizations take their cue from what laws there are. In some cases, bilateral donors like the European Union, and multilateral organizations like the United Nations who work with the Lao government can use the government's own laws to pressure them to act on, for example, protecting women from gender-based discrimination. In December 2018, the National Assembly had passed a law on disability and rehabilitation

Returning to Laos after two years, I noticed that NPA and INGO engagement with LGBTQI+ issues appeared to have increased. The first public Pride event had been held at the US embassy in Vientiane in 2012, one participant explained to me that at that time former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton "always mentioned LGBT rights as human rights, so it's become a global wake up call to all of her embassies around the world including Lao. This is how the idea of LGBTI rights started in Lao." In 2015, the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOT) was marked in Laos for the first time, organized by Proud to Be Us Laos (PTBUL) with support from the European Union. Since then, IDAHOT has continued to be marked annually. In 2019, "Being LGBT At Work: a study of LGBTI persons in the workplace in Lao PDR" was conducted by the Faculty of Law and Political

Science at the National University of Laos, signalling to civil society organizations that LGBTI issues were being more widely discussed by the government.

The Canadian Government funded a project implemented by PTBUL in collaboration with the Faculty of Law and Political Science that launched in 2019 based on findings from this research called “Pride At Work” (The Office of the Embassy of Canada to Laos 2019). This project is similar to CARE’s SUSO campaign as it is focused on posters and a short video from ‘Pride At Work ambassadors’ that were meant for Lao society at large to raise awareness and “open their heart and mind to ensure the employment in Laos focuses on people’s abilities, competence and merits regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity or race” (Ibid).

When speaking with one national worker who works on LGBTI issues, they told me that their organization did not want to expand to become a larger organization because:

> It's still, you know, it's not very clear, there's no legislation or law policies that actually talk about LGBTI rights in the national paper in national law. So we don't want to do the big thing going reach out to the village and then go to other provinces, it’s going to be more negative than positive if you do that.

Recognizing that without a national law in place, it could be more negative than positive if they tried to expand and implement projects in more rural areas of Laos, their strategy was to focus on advocacy approaches to advancing LGBTI rights in Laos. It is important for them to follow the lead of the Lao Government and target national and international policy makers with their advocacy efforts.

> So now we target the policymakers, that's our priority. The policymakers, the influencers, those people comprises of government agencies, ministries,

> embassy, because they're also government, international government, right. Because most Lao people like to think of them as 'they are foreigners, they're just foreigners,' you know, but well, they are international governments who try to help Lao government achieve the goal, right? And then the world goes round. It's always connected, right? Not just one person do whatever he or she wants to do, because it's a global affairs at the end of the day. So yeah, we target local influencers, policymakers, embassies, INGOs, and most importantly, CSOs [Lao civil society organizations] because we believe that CSO is an important part to voice out to help everybody voice out. Because they represent people from the ground.

By focusing their efforts on advocacy, they aim to widen the policy space where LGBTQI+ issues can be addressed. Those I spoke with working on LGBTQI+ issues have pushed those working in the area of GE in Laos to remember that gender is not synonymous with women and that LGBTQI+ people should not just be included in gender projects as an add on (similar to the early 'add women and stir' approach of WID). Tacking LGBTQI+ issues onto gender projects risks conflating gender and sexuality. The "ruling relations" discussed above govern and shape the spaces in which development workers and organizations construct the targets of their gender work. These relations are in flux.

4.3. Networks

The history of development involves political alliance building and cooperation, often accompanied by exercising soft power to gain political and/or economic influence. Cooperation, coalition building, and collaboration across development organizations are generally thought to increase the efficiency of development interventions. Networks are unique from development organizations, in a few keyways. First, membership in the networks in Laos is voluntary, though some workers may be expected to join these networks as part of their jobs, Secondly, CSO

networks in Laos tend to have even more turnover than INGOs and NPAs as organizations will sometimes send different workers to the meetings, in addition to workers often changing positions or leaving the country. As Guilmette (2007, p. 57) states, “This creates discontinuities and needs for constantly re-explaining things to new comers. Thus, more time is needed to bind the group together, to define a typical style for the group so that members learn gradually how to behave and how and when to take initiatives.” Third, the responsibilities, procedures, and administration of the networks are self-regulated by members, and because participation is voluntary, organizations that are already busy may not prioritize work for the network.

Networking, both in formal professional settings, and in more casual social settings, is an important factor for career advancement amongst development workers. It is also a powerful practice for networking across sectors, geographical areas, and organizations in ways that can build relationships, trust, and reciprocity. Networking by workers can also function as an “old boys club” practice that serves to maintain knowledge and opportunities within particular groups in organizations. Formal and informal networks in Laos are shaped by the gendered contexts in which they function. In more formal networks, members focus their efforts on a specific sector, such as the Agricultural Working Group. For gender and gender equality networks, membership tends to be made up mostly of women gender specialists, though I observed several men at these meetings and noted several members were attending in their capacity as LGBTQI+ advocates.

Several participants remarked that Laos is a "unique context." Based on informal conversations during my field work, I have understood that this is usually referring to the role of the Lao Government in regulating Laotian civil society organizations, as well as the impression of several international staff that civil society is quite limited. One UN worker explained:

> In the Lao PDR it is a very unique context when it comes to interaction with NGO, so the [name of network] was probably the only way I could interact at the systematic level, like I could do one, you know, like if I know someone, but I thought that we should have like some systematic channel for dialogue and discussion.

This worker felt that there should be a formalized way that they could interact with INGOs and NPAs, though they acknowledged that they could have informal discussions with people they knew, they felt it was important that there should be a "systematic channel" for this type of UN-civil society dialogue. The network that this worker was a part of was the only opportunity that they had during their multi-year placement in Laos to have that formalized communication. In general, in Laos the role of the United Nations is to support the Lao Government to implement their own development policies that align with international conventions like the SDGs. The Lao Government will invite the UN to consult, but they do not tend to invite INGOs to these spaces, which limits how much UN workers are formally interacting with civil society organizations.

Many of the gender-specific networks that I was a part of, knew of, or was told about during my field work were dominated by INGOs. The INGO would perhaps send a national staff person to attend the network meeting, but all meetings that I had

access to were conducted in English, even when the majority of participants were Lao-speakers. This reflects the ubiquity of English as the 'language of development,' as well as the historical and ongoing power of global North, English-speaking nations in setting the terms of development. This power imbalance contributes to underlying tensions that exist between NPAs and INGOs.

Networks, and networking, are also a way for Lao civil society organizations to protect themselves; they may be less likely to be shut down if shutting them down would bring outcries from international supporters. However, this can be a risky strategy as it can also produce suspicion if they are seen as working too closely with foreign governments or INGOs. A national worker explained that "when you have many friends, nobody wants to hurt you." INGOs are in a fundamentally different relationship with the Lao Government; they are international and that gives them protection because the worst that could happen to them, as an organization, is that they would be shut down, or individual workers would be deported, like in the case of Anne-Sophie Gindroz who was accused of 'taking up position of anti-governmental propaganda' and wrote a book chronicling her experiences in Laos and her expulsion from the country shortly before the disappearance of Laotian civil society leader Mr. Somphone Sombath (Gindroz 2016).

Unlike international workers, national staff, and in particular workers in NPAs, who may not have the protection of INGOs or the UN, need to work "in the Lao way." I will elaborate on what "the Lao way" is shortly. Not all international staff are in the same boat, where leaving Laos would be relatively unproblematic. One worker I met

was trying to extend his contact with an INGO in part so that he could avoid the political turmoil and violence that was taking place in his home country in East Africa. A national worker articulated the difference between international and national workers in a powerful and poignant way:

> That's why I… also trying to understand the Lao Government, the Lao way of doing things, you know? Because I don't want to attack them. Because at the end of the day, they are my government. Even those foreign government they helped me, but when it comes to four years they have to leave, go back to their country. So what about me? Can I go with you? No, I have to live here, and they are my government. Good or bad, I still have to understand them, but try to bring the mutual synergies between the civil society and government.

The "trust factor" also shapes development worker and organizational relations in gender-focused networks in Laos. My data suggest that both national and international development workers in this context have stereotypes and generalizations about particular development actors. For instance, an INGO worker referred to Laotian Non-Profit Associations as 'non-professional associations' and explained that partnering with NPAs requires double work because their financial record keeping is not good. This workers' discriminatory view of NPAs comes from a long history of working in the country, but is enmeshed with masculine, global North, colonial, neoliberal measures of professionalism and efficiency.

Lilly talked about a similar attitude she has encountered amongst the development community and the embassy community in Laos: "there are some people who still view Lao as their little pet or is like a colony or they have like a colonial attribution when you're doing data collection, or the way they treat our government."

Those familiar with development will no doubt have heard of "donor fatigue," Lilly goes on to describe the fatigue of being a recipient of development aid:

> There's like fatigue on our side to accepting all of this supposed help… this concept that like people from these supposed developed countries are coming here and telling us that we're totally backwards, it's like it's excruciating. So yeah, it's just like you created over generations these tools of oppression and these like systems that you are now coming here to try and unravel but then blaming us for [it]. You oppressed us, we act like we're oppressed, and then you're now blaming us for not having more uptick?

The language of development, such as "donor" and "recipient," "developed" and "developing," entrenches a binary understanding of a unilateral relationship where aid money flows from the wealthy countries to poorer countries. Lilly frames this aid as "supposed help," underscoring that development assistance is not always received as a good thing amongst those it targets.

Being networked with other workers and organizations can facilitate collaboration and the ability to respond quickly to a call for proposals (CfP). A CfP is when a donor invites proposals from development organizations to carry out a project within the donor's parameters/eligibility criteria that the donor will fund if they are successful. While speaking with a national worker about the roles of INGOs and NPAs in LGBTI work in Laos, he told me that he thinks CSOs (i.e., Lao organizations) play a more critical role. When I asked him why this is the case, his response illuminated the role of informal networks amongst national workers that allow them to be flexible, make decisions quickly, and respond in short order to opportunities.

> I think the INGOs they also have their [pause] due to the different status, makes us [Lao orgs] feel distant a bit. Because as you know that INGO come with the strong agenda. It is 'the headquarter want it to be like this, okay, I have

> to follow this,' ya know? But the CSO, the agenda comes from a strong analysis of what the Lao is look like; politically, culturally, developmentally, you know, something like that.
>
> So it's sometimes difficult for Country Office to make like a decision [like] 'Okay, let's work on this together.' But maybe in Bangkok office or headquarters, they say 'Oh, no, maybe it's not the time yet.' So I think still some, what's the word, protocols and stuff that they have to follow... but it's CSO because it's led by the local, by Lao, so I think that the discussion is easier. You can simply WhatsApp 'Well, what do you think?' and then they reply you in tomorrow or in a few hours, but the INGOs you still have to talk with the [higher ups] Yeah. And this is how I see.

This worker highlights both the role of networks and relationships, as well as the structure of how decisions are made or can be made in development organizations that impact workers' and organizations' abilities to collaborate on GE and LGBTI activities and projects. Additionally, for this worker Lao civil society organizations, like his own, are better able to collaborate quickly and appropriately because of their relationships and networks with one another and because of their knowledge and experience of their country.

4.4. Types of Projects

I now move to discussing women's economic empowerment (WEE), advocacy and awareness raising, and gender mainstreaming as three "types" of gender projects that emerged from data. WEE projects usually looked like providing women with vocational training, such as learning how to be a hairstylist, learning handicrafts, like making earrings from old newspapers to sell to mostly tourists, learning weaving and/or accessing better buyers for one's woven goods (often used to make *sinh,* the traditional Lao skirt that women wear), learning how to make and/or accessing markets to sell non-timber forest products like mulberry paper and rattan brooms.

Advocacy involved accessing opportunities to work with the Lao Government to promote, for example, ending violence against women, LGBTI experiences, and the experiences of people with disabilities. A fair number of projects were aimed at raising awareness of a particular issue. For example, the "peak seasons" for more public facing awareness raising gender activities in Laos are around the 16 Days of Activism to End Gender-Based Violence in late November and early December, International Women's Day in March, and more recently IDAHOT in May.

Gender mainstreaming is a policy tool that was solidified in the BPFA after decades of work by feminists, particularly women and feminists speaking from the global South.[5] Among development workers I spoke with in Laos there is a wide range in levels of understanding of what gender mainstreaming is and what workers and organizations are supposed to do to mainstream gender. It is a term that is used ubiquitously but understanding what it really means and what gender mainstreaming looks like in practice is much more uneven. This reflects a larger phenomena in GAD (Cornwall and Eade 2010; Tiessen 2007).

4.4.1. Women's Economic Empowerment

Generally speaking, WEE projects seek to give more power to women through increasing their capacities to make and/or sell things that earns them money. WEE projects operate on the assumption that increasing women's ability to make money will give them more power within their households and communities and that

[5] See the work of Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN, https://dawnnet.org/).

"economic empowerment" represents good "value for money" on behalf of donors because women are understood as also "lifting" their families and whole communities out of poverty with them. Chant and Sweetman (2012:517) point out that projects that "invest" in women and girls and frame this as "smart economics" are directly descendant of the efficiency approach to WID and that we risk to recreate the very problems GAD seeks to transform when we conflate the empowerment of women as individuals with the feminist goal of removing the structural discrimination which women face as a gendered constituency.

Additionally, WEE projects are not critical of capitalist structures, rather their purpose is to further entrench global South women into capitalist systems by making their labour more "valuable," where the value of their labour is understood through its ability to make profit for the capitalist class. As Leah's experience highlights below, WEE projects can also be coopted to serve the interests of elite women in Lao society who almost all come from the ethnic majority group.

It is common amongst the development workers I spoke with to experience differences between what they thought their placement was going to be and what it ends up being. In my own pre-departure training in Ottawa, Canada, we spent a whole portion of our training discussing the possible disjuncture between our expectations of our placement and what the reality may be like. It seemed that – especially for those with shorter term placements of 1 year or less, and those who had less experience in the development industry –some held expectations that they could make a significant impact on the lives of Lao people (which Lao people is usually unclear) in a short

amount of time, and in general that their position and their work in the country was needed. One worker told me "It's not an ideal place for development field because the agenda is kind of fixed and you only talk to the government, or you do some delivery, but you don't make a big difference." Leah, already a seasoned development worker in her 30s when I met her, did not have idealistic expectations of what her short-term position would be in Laos, but nevertheless experienced a disjuncture.

When I ask Leah about how she got into development work, she tells me a similar story to others I have spoken with, that she began as a volunteer and worked her way up into better paid positions. In Laos she was on a volunteer assignment. When I ask how the opportunity to work in Laos came up, she tells me "It was like a break from work rather than a progression of work." Leah's view that her work in Laos was a "break from work" speaks to the career paths that professional development workers are expected to take; one should be advancing, securing bigger contracts, moving into higher up positions, not necessarily going 'back' to volunteer positions once you have already put your time in at the bottom of the job hierarchy.

Leah's position is meant to focus on women in business in Laos. She thinks that the position will help with the Lao organization's efforts to promote and support female entrepreneurship evenly across the country. What she finds is a slightly narrower focus:

> I was expecting, like young and upcoming entrepreneurs to be given guidance and help but it was more about positioning people who are related to it [the women in the organization]. It was more like helping an elite group of women rather than helping women in a general sense and it showed the power dynamics between women within Lao society, which wasn't what I was

expecting…It was really helping the next generation of elite women be elite.

She adds that a male international volunteer had been in her position before her and had not picked up on any of the issues, or at least had not reported any of the issues to the in-country manager. She wonders if "being female you pick up on the nuances of female-to-female relationships that maybe an older man might not notice, but also how they [Lao staff] interacted with him, and what they were willing to disclose was probably different as well."

WEE projects can matter deeply for the Lao women who are able to access them, or are targeted by them, but not necessarily. One worker shared an experience they had in their organization where Lao women with disabilities were returning to their villages after completing a sewing training course and selling the sewing machines they had been given at the end of the project instead of making and selling products made with their sewing machines, as the project had intended. Unintended project outcomes like this are not uncommon and may be a symptom of larger work practices in development where women are targeted for WEE projects in ways that do not necessarily consider their specific circumstances, their positionality and their own motivations and desires for joining such a project.

WEE projects are shaped by capitalist and neoliberal logics. In general, they are aimed at adding women to the formal economy and expanding women's share in its benefits. There is an assumption that increasing women's share of the marketplace will increase their relative power within their households and communities. WEE projects risk promoting women's individual empowerment over larger feminist goals

of dismantling the systematic discrimination of women as a gendered constituency (Chant and Sweetman 2012). In the case of Leah's work, she felt that instead of 'helping women in Laos generally' her work was actually being used to make the next generation of elite women elite.

4.4.2. Advocacy and Raising Awareness

For some development workers, a part of their job involves advocacy and/or raising awareness of a particular issue with particular audiences, like policy makers, the general public, or a target group, like, for example, raising awareness amongst women of their legal right to divorce in Laos. Awareness raising campaigns are framed around a particular issue: ending gender-based violence, increasing women's access to sexual and reproductive healthcare, ending discrimination against women, LGBTI people, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities. There is much overlap between these two areas of work; advocacy efforts often involved or collaborated with awareness raising campaigns, likewise campaigns to raise awareness around a particular issue can be understood as an advocacy strategy.

In Laos, the "peak seasons" for gender/sexuality awareness raising activities in Laos are around the 16 Days of Activism to End Gender-Based Violence in late November and early December, International Women's Day in March, and more recently IDAHOT in May. During my field work in 2019, I attended the "Bike for Her" campaign in March that took place two days after International Women's Day (IWD). IWD was not explicitly referenced in communications materials for the half marathon. I joined as part of the "Civil Society Team Canada" for the event, cycling

through the downtown core, past the President's house, onto Avenue Lan Xang, the widest road in Laos, past the Patuxay monument that looks strikingly like the Arc de Triomphe, down towards That Luang, before the route began to circle back to our starting point near the Fa Ngum Statue.

The Office of the Embassy of Canada in Laos sponsored my and other Canadian development workers' participation in the event. INGOs and NPAs had booths where the marathon began and ended with pamphlets, poster, and clipboards to sign up to learn more about their organizations' various activities and opportunities to get involved. Being in the crowd, I estimated the number of participants to be in the several hundreds. I noticed an NPA's booth where two Lao youth I knew from my previous work in Laos were standing as the crowd milled about the area. The "Bike for Her" campaign exemplifies some faucets of awareness raising campaigns that I noticed in Laos; these campaigns tend to take place in Vientiane, the capital city, they involve a seemingly apolitical activity like a half marathon, and they do not make specific calls to people in power to take specific actions. News coverage, whether in English or Lao language are unlikely to reach the ethnic minority groups who do not speak either language.

The national media in Laos is state run. National workers are attuned to whether the media covers an event in English, Lao, or both English and Lao. The language in which the event is covered is connected to who the intended audience is. The language of the media coverage signals to national workers who the Lao Government is speaking to and to what degree they might be supporting the event.

> I'm sure you used to see, the national media, cover our activities, but it was in English, I'm sure. If you look at the Facebook posts, you will see is all in the English, but the research is in Lao. So there's different protocol and different sensitivity. If they want to share with people with civilian, but [it's] not the top priority then they will put you in English… But if they find it, okay, the country needs to be aware, they will put it in Lao and the team is different… So, if it's in Lao, that means that you probably do something that they like, so much and they put it in Lao. (interview with national worker)

If the coverage is in English this signals that they are making the news/information available only to people who understand English. If the coverage is in Lao language this signals that the governments wants a wider audience of Lao people to understand it and they are disseminating it. It also, as this national worker pointed out above, can signal that the government likes what you are doing. National media coverage as a barometer that national workers pay particular attention to because it gives them a feedback loop on their activities in the eyes of the State.

Development workers and others working in development also practice advocacy within their own development organizations. While sitting across the table from Linda, a Country Director of an INGO, at a large café with floor to ceiling windows and too-loud music, she tells me about a trans woman who used to be a member of their staff:

> We had one staff, she's left now, who is trans. I think she would like to be working in an advocacy role, but she works in international development more generally, probably because she can't find a job doing exactly what she wants to do. She brought the conversation out when she was part of our team, just having lunches with her and stuff like that.

Iris, who felt she was thrust into the "gender focal point" role because she is a woman (her educational background is not in gender), nevertheless tried to advocate within the

organization. In her own European language she told me it is harder to be "gender sensitive" or inclusive in terms of the language than it is in English.

> Every noun, we have a female and the male version. So if you're talking of a third person that is not here, you always have to decide whether the person is male or female, right. And internally [name of organization] was always talking only about men just deciding that you have to think about the women by yourself, you know, and there are lots of studies that show if you are reading a test about whatever – a hospital – and they're taking of doctors, you think of man, like the image in your head, and when they're talking about nurses you're thinking of women. And for me, it's just you cannot do this. It's just wrong. We are working for the government and all [name of country] ministries are only talking of men or using the male version.
>
> So, I just challenged my boss, and also like, the international spokesperson for gender. I just gave them a workshop on how we could do differently. There are different possibilities in [name of language] to include both or all gender… after my training [name of organization] started using it internally and in some contexts also externally, but it's not really mainstream.

Iris finishes telling me about this experience by saying "There's no perfect solution to it. I was just trying to challenge the standards because I didn't like it."

Some workers who work more at a policy level, particularly UN workers given their role in Laos, are invited to review government documents, reports, sometimes event talking points for a politician's speech in order to review from a gender perspective and will use that opportunity to try and advocate for the use of particular language or inclusion of particular issues. There are many different kinds of advocacy work and gender advocacy work happening in Laos. In general, the gendered context in Laos elicits a cautious approach to GE work. One gender expert described it:

> There are many aspects of gender, I mean, when you say gender, like, we don't know what it is. So, I will say, there are different kinds of doing gender work, like one is being really like activists, like a feminist like outside movement, doing awareness and advocacy, you know, like talking to community and

> challenging their notion, and that takes long term commitment. And it's more like provocative sometimes, in the sense that we have to talk about very uncomfortable topics that people do not really want to talk about, or they're not really used to talk about. So that's one element that I think about very difficult part of being gender, gender person, you know, like, gender expert, whatever. And then, that is very difficult in Laos, the activism-based gender things. That's my perception, of course… that's very difficult in Laos.

4.4.3. Gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is a policy tool designed to bring women and gender considerations more generally into every aspect of development processes. This includes thinking about how different genders will be impacted by a project, making project budgets gender sensitive (earmark money for gender), and monitoring and evaluating how your project is impacting "beneficiaries" by collecting sex-disaggregated data. The European Institute for Gender Equality describes gender mainstreaming as involving "the integration of a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation policies, regulatory measures and spending programmes, with a view to promoting equality between women and men, and combating discrimination" (EIGE 2021). Perhaps unsurprisingly, those development workers who get thrust into roles that involve having to mainstream gender, answer to how their work contributes to mainstreaming gender, or write a gender mainstreaming strategy without a lot of (or any) experience in this area struggle to know what is expected of them and what gender mainstreaming actually is.

My conversation with Molly at a café illuminates this lack of or misunderstanding of what gender mainstreaming is and how one should do it. Molly is in her 70s and, at the time of our conversation, has been in Laos for around two

months. She has come to Laos through a volunteer-sending INGO. She tells me that she got into development after her life fell apart (her words) and a friend invited her to go and work in an orphanage in Southeastern Africa. Of this experience she says, "I knew I had to heal, so it was all about me… that was my initiation into development work."

Since that first experience in the mid 2000s she travelled to many different countries before encountering what she described as a ceiling that she could not move past.

> Then I hit the placement that I agreed to in [country in South Asia]. I realized very quickly that there was a ceiling that I couldn't progress beyond. Every time I tried to access government agencies or community agencies to help me with this project, which focused on older women… I began to understand slowly that in developing countries there appears to be a hierarchy academically… I already had three degrees and I figured that was enough… but in that context I wondered if I should go back and complete my PhD. Whether that will make a difference in terms of the magnitude of the difference that I could make in that placement. And so, I went back… and indeed its worked, I believe, partially to my advantage very much in [East African country], for example, where I was able to make inroads and develop MOUs… because they wanted someone with a "doctor" in front of the name.

Molly's experience relates to many women's experiences of encountering the "glass ceiling" in work organizations. In Molly's case, age is also an important factor that she feels influences how she is seen in her development work. While working in development she felt that she encountered barriers to getting projects she was involved with off the ground because she did not have a PhD. She conflates her experiences across many countries and feels that, in general, "developing countries" have an academic hierarchy. A lot can go into shaping how a PhD is valued, such as the country where the PhD was obtained, in what discipline, under which supervisor(s), at

what institution, and by whom. In this latter regard, Molly, as a white British Canadian woman in her 70s, felt that by obtaining a PhD she was able to push through "the ceiling" she had encountered in her development work while trying to get government and community support for a project targeted at older women. Some researchers have explained this type of phenomena through the notion of subjectivities: by obtaining a PhD, Molly was able to deemphasize her womanness and age, and move closer towards the ideal bourgeois subject, which stems from a white, male, British colonizing ideal (Heron 2007). Her doctorate codified her knowledge and experience as expertise and gave credence to her work in development, including her work on gender mainstreaming in Laos.

When I met her in 2019, she was a doctor working on a literature review of gender mainstreaming in Laos.

> What I'm seeing over and over and over and over and over again is that the awareness of gender mainstreaming has been addressed, but not implemented. So, I hear it in the different studies that have been done. Different papers have been written. I don't find as much literature as I expected to find that has been addressing this issue, you know, since 2015. So, it's been very much that recent. Yeah. It's another frustration…
>
> …that's been part of the problem from the definitions, but then the wording, the words I mean, so there's lip service given, people think they understand gender mainstreaming, but really, the really real true procedures and pieces of it, are not fully understood. And so, people sort of grasp the idea, but not fully. It's, 'oh, yes, we must make women as important as men.' So, it's still a separate thing. We don't understand how it has to be seamless if you know what I'm talking about.

To mainstream something means that it is integrated into every aspect of what you are doing seamlessly versus being tacked on. Molly is finding that there is not as much research on gender mainstreaming in Laos and she thought there would be and that

there is a gap between the number of trainings on gender mainstreaming that have happened and the implementation of gender mainstreaming in project documents that she is searching out and reading.

One UN worked described an example of what gender mainstreaming looked like in a UXO project:

> The mainstreaming is the women, to have them in leader, in the different positions, women in the leadership position… and also in each element of the UXO project, how gender is integrated, for example, if you help women victim of UXO or what they need, what is the women need to improve their livelihood and their income. And that is before we start the project, we have the inception periods of the project, and we discuss with the stakeholders and Lao Women's Union and also the women victim of the UXO and they said that the capacity that they want is helping them to train them on food processing.

Here, the UN worker, who is a gender expert, tells me that gender is considered from the inception of the project by having discussions with the LWU and women survivors of UXOs, and that more generally gender mainstreaming means considering gender in every aspect of the project, and having women in leadership positions. As mentioned, some workers are thrown into working on gender mainstreaming without understanding what it is and what it entails. Iris told me, "I never got any training for it, you know, I never studied gender, or I never got a training, what it means to, to mainstream gender within our projects, right." I encountered a frequent disconnect between understanding gender mainstreaming as taking gender into account throughout the entire project cycle, and the practicalities of what that actually looks like in projects.

Development organizations often address the need and institutional commitment of GE by creating a position in their organizations of 'gender focal point,' 'gender expert,' 'gender and social inclusion officer,' among others. If the organization does not have enough resources, ability, or desire to create a stand-alone position, the role of being the 'gender person' may be tacked onto an existing role. Appointing or hiring a "gender focal point" is a strategy within gender mainstreaming meant to ensure that the responsibility for mainstreaming gender and increasing capacity of other staff rests with a particular person; that it is not lost in the shuffle of paperwork, projects, and funding deadlines. In practice, it can have the effect of downloading responsibility for gender onto one person in the organization.

Being "the gender person" comes with its own set of challenges for those I interviewed. Sean tells me about some of the discrimination he experiences for being a man and working in gender:

> It is very hard, quite hard for myself. I think the men who will work on the gender, because currently in my life I work with the gender, I have a lot of women friends. I always work for the women, at the same time the people in the society think that you are different people. Like, 'Sean is gay, Sean is a lady boy, has a lot of women friends,' but what I really proud is because I can show the men who work for women, who work on the gender is not like, it's not the thing they think who I am. I'm proud I work for women and men. But I think it's like my work will make the man see that the women is important and make the women see the men is important. We are together, not try to divide. As I said, in the society they will look at you, look at me, as different, but however this is the thing that I'm proud.

Molly, in her work as a Gender Advisor, was finding that her position was reproducing work that had already been done.

> I'm wondering whether Gender Advisor might become Gender Program Monitor and Evaluator or something more specific. Because otherwise, I just,

> I'm concerned that the wheel will be reinvented all over again, and more studies done, and more work done, and more training done, and more conferences. And then what? That's my big concern right now."

As she was conducting a literature review of gender mainstreaming in Laos, she was finding that in general monitoring and evaluation procedures were missing from gender programming that would allow follow-up to see what people learned, for example, six months after a gender training. It is difficult for smaller organizations especially to be able to adequately fund monitoring and evaluation.

In this chapter I have focused on how gender projects in the Laotian development context are themselves gendered. I began this chapter with a discussion of who is considered a development worker in Laos and how my participants positioned themselves in relation to the status of development worker. I argued that the categories of "national" and "international" are unstable. Following this, I explored how the targets of gender work are constructed. Women and girls remain the primary targets of gender equality projects in Laos. When men are addressed, it is quite narrow and usually in their role of helping to end violence against women and children.

Networks serve an important role in the gender and development landscape in Laos. They allow gender specialists to form coalitions across organizations and leverage their work for broader goals of advancing GE outcomes. They can foster relationships, trust, and reciprocity among workers and development organizations. In the Laotian development context, which is characterized by several of my participants as being small, and gender work, which is often described as a sensitize topic in Laos, trust is an important factor that facilitates gender work in this context.

"Ruling relations" shape the types of gender projects that are designed and implemented in Laos. These include the political and bureaucratic organization of GE (e.g., project cycle management), professional discourses of international development, State (Lao Government) and suprastate (United Nations) structures. I found that, despite transformative rhetoric, gender projects in Laos tend to take a cautious approach and focus on service delivery, rather than target more structural causes of women's gendered subordination.

In the next chapter I flesh out the concept of the "intersectional maze" and use it to understand workers' gendered and racialized experiences in navigating work and managing their careers in international development. Drawing on gendered organizations theory, I examine how aspects of work, like pay, opportunities to network, and ability to move up the career ladder are deeply shaped by the relationship between power and social relations. I argue that development work has become increasingly professionalized and that an effect of this is that those workers who are experts in gendered and racialized subordination through their lived experience become less likely to reach decision-making positions in development organizations.

Chapter 5: Navigating the Intersectional Maze

> … because men are assertive because they know the way up [in the organization], it's like they know the maze inside and women are clueless how to get out of it…
>
> -Marie, gender specialist working in an INGO

I leave my apartment as the sun is setting. The congestion of rush hour traffic is starting to ease. Trucks and cars maintain some of the order of their lanes, while those on scooters weave in and out of traffic. Bicycle is my preferred mode of travel; it is safer than walking, as the presence and quality of sidewalks varies greatly, and it allows me to move faster than I can run should a dog decide to chase me. I am on my way to meet Marie. I pass Pha That Luang, the great Buddhist stupa, just as the sun passes below its golden gilded tower, bathing the area in a warm glowing light. I lock my bike and helmet, and head inside the café where Marie is already waiting for me.

I first met Marie when I was working as a Gender Advisor in Vientiane a few years ago. She is back in Vientiane from her home country working for the same international non-governmental organization as when I first met her. An hour into our interview I ask Marie about pay differences between national and international staff in her INGO. She tells me that she thinks the gender profession is elitist. When I ask her what she means, she says she has years of experience working in her home country government, in INGOs, and with Laotian NPAs as a gender expert, yet she recently learned that she is being paid significantly less than her two white male colleagues who are on similar consultancy contracts. The finance person where she works, a Lao woman who she describes as a friend of hers, told her about the pay inequity. When

Marie asked her friend why that was the case, "my friend told me [it was] because you accepted it." Marie explains:

> … I knew when they contracted my previous boss… who is actually just doing the same that I'm doing … of course he's paid 300% more because he's white [Marie laughs] … because the thing is it's unfair, it should be them [the INGO] who enlightens those who are not really expert on these business negotiations to empower them to see this is how you should do it. It's like I'm not valued, that's how it feels.

Marie goes on to say, "I was asking like can you give me more, like $200USD, just an assistance for my rent, it's not too much." She explains that she was struggling to afford rent and basic living costs for her and her family, while working a full-time contract with a well-known INGO. Marie was struggling to pay rent and live a "decent" life, something she explained was important for her so that she could perform at the level necessary to be effective in her work. Nevertheless, she said she felt that if the INGO was able to pay her more then they would have. Marie's description above, of men, and in particular her white, global North, male colleagues, knowing the right ways to negotiate higher pay and advance their careers – to navigate the intersectional maze – is emblematic of many of my participants' experiences of working in the development industry.

What Marie calls a "maze," feminist sociology of work scholars have long called the "glass ceiling." In this chapter, I develop my concept of the "intersectional maze," as it has emerged from my data, and position it in the context of the sociology of work literature that has been discussed in chapter 2. I argue that the metaphorical imagery of the maze does important work in advancing an intersectional and gendered analysis of the work of development work because it lends itself to theorising both the

structure (maze) and experience of (dis)orientation felt through the process of navigating the intersectional maze.

Simply put, the intersectional maze is a metaphor for understanding workers' experiences of navigating development organizations and norms that are gendered, racialized, and classed (among others) and which (re)produce hierarchicalized social categories of difference, like gender, race, and global North/South positionalities. I tease out two intersecting processes at work in the intersectional maze that (re)produce advantage and barriers that shape a workers' ability to navigate the development industry, namely: 1) gendered organizational structures; and 2) professionalization and the production of experts and expertise. Results in this chapter help further our understanding into how development organizations, as gendered organizations, shape gendered working conditions for development workers, and how an intersectional analysis is critical for understanding how multiple social categories shape worker experiences in and outside of work.

5.1. Gendered Development Organizations

When Acker (1990) proposed a theory of gendered organizations, it was at a time when work could still be described in terms of loyalty to one employer, climbing the career ladder, and long-term job security. These work arrangements do not reflect the experiences of any of the development workers with whom I spoke. Mobility (changing country, working for different organizations) is a common aspect of development work. For example, one worker, who at the time of interview had only worked for one development organization, was planning to leave Laos soon to work

for a different organization. She told me that she felt she had already stayed too long in one position and that staying in one country or in one position would have negative consequences on her ability to access better jobs and opportunities.

Development work tends to be project based and involve teams working on projects, usually managed by a project manager who is in turn managed by a programme manager depending on the size of the project, organization, and amount of funding. Workers are typically evaluated in comparison to the "deliverables" outlined in their job descriptions and/or employment contracts. Here, I will discuss three facets of the organizational logic at work in development organizations, including: 1) pay differences; 2) networking; and 3) the 'career ladder.' Organizational logic is one process that Acker (1990) first identified as producing both classed and gendered organizations. In development, where there are such obvious and deeply entrenched inequities between and within groups of workers from the global North and global South, organizational logics are also racialized and produce racialized organizations.

5.1.1 Pay Differences

Differences in pay is an explicit example of how organizations attach monetary value to their workers. Pay scales and pay inequities reflect organizational logics at work in a particular development organization and in the industry at large, as no development organization operates in a vacuum. As we know from the literature, pay inequity along social categories of difference such as gender and race, is pervasive in many sectors around the globe (e.g., the gendered pay gap). Marie's experience reflects how organizational norms in development organizations, in this case the

practice of negotiating for higher pay on consultancy contracts, are hierarchicalized along social and political categorisations, such as gender, race, and global North/global South positionality. Another feature of organizational logic in development organizations at large is the pay inequity between global North and global South development workers. Among my participants, those from the global North, Lao PDR, and other global South countries remarked on differentiated pay.

Pay differences between national and international staff have been well documented in development worker forums (Denskus 2017; Devex 2018) and academic literature. One team of researchers working on the "Are Development Discrepancies Undermining Performance?" project labelled this widespread practice the "dual salary system" (Carr et al. 2010; McWha-Hermann and Carr 2016). National staff tend to be paid less than international staff, however pay disparity within development is also gendered, racialized, and differentiated within the broad categories of "international" and "national." Women international development workers from the global North tend to be paid less than their global North male colleagues (Abrahams 2018), while international staff from global South countries tend to be paid less than global North international staff.

The issue of pay inequality and discriminatory pay and benefit practices in development and aid organizations tends to evoke strong responses from the workers. Many of my participants who are international workers tended to use defensive or deferring strategies to make sense of their relatively privileged position when speaking with me about their high salary compared to that of their Lao colleagues. There are

also pay differences among international workers that reflects hierarchies within and between organizations and "types" of development workers. For example, a development professional working for a bilateral organization like the German development agency GIZ will be well paid and may even receive "hardship pay" for working in Laos, while an international volunteer from Canada will receive a stipend that is substantially less than the GIZ worker's salary, but which may still be more money than some of their Lao colleagues are making. As in the case of Marie, there are examples where women and men are doing the same work but are being paid differently. My data points to issues of wage gaps, and gendered and racialized job segregation, however there is no representative data that I know of which measures pay gaps and job segregation in development organizations.

In my own experience as a volunteer, working at least Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., I was given a living allowance of around $600USD in addition to having my housing and medical insurance paid for. National colleagues who worked as project assistants, usually hired on after having worked as unpaid volunteers, received roughly a third of my stipend, plus comparatively modest health coverage, while the full-time administrative assistant received even less salary with no benefits.

Gillian is an Australian woman who was in her first full-time, salaried development job when I met her at a café in downtown Vientiane. She had done volunteer placements in a small island in the South Pacific, and another country in Southeast Asia before pursuing higher paid employment in international development.

As someone who felt new to international development, I asked her if she had found anything to be surprising about the industry. She reflected that:

> I suppose in the first instance in [country of first placement] when I realized about international development it was because I was house sitting and dog sitting for some of the expats who were working in international development, so working in roles like I am now, so I was house sitting for them while they were on holidays. The guy used to jokingly refer to himself and his wife as the mercenaries and we were the saints because we were volunteering versus [being paid] …it's such a small microcosm that there's not a lot of difference between the volunteers and the paid expats, it was amazing to us and him that... just the imbalance

Gillian observed that there was not much difference between volunteer and paid expats in terms of qualifications. The aid organizations recruited "highly skilled professionals" to do volunteer roles, while the same organizations, or donors, paid development workers to do development projects. Gillian saw this as an imbalance between volunteers and paid expats, but she also said it led to "understanding that you actually can fund a lifestyle and get paid and feel like you're contributing as well. So that's the mercenary and the saint in me."

The image of the mercenary and the saint are common stereotypes of development workers that sort workers into types, largely reflecting their motivations for doing development work in global South countries. R.L. Stirrat's (2008) article *Mercenaries, Missionaries and Misfits: Representations of Development Personnel* describes the mercenary as a development professional, someone who works on a permanent or consultancy basis for international development banks or major multilateral and bilateral development agencies. The mercenary has "no commitment to eradicating poverty or whatever, but simply to their own self-interest… they are

motivated solely by this self-interest and not by any higher morality" (Stirrat 2008:408). The saint, or what Stirrat calls the missionary, usually works in an NGO, has less access to the material benefits that characterize mercenaries, and are understood within their proximity to the "real people" that they are helping. "While the latter [mercenaries] are presented, and present themselves, as being motivated by financial gain, the stereotypical NGO worker is motivated by a sense of duty and obligation" (Ibid:412). In practice, development workers rarely embody these stereotypes to their extremes, but nonetheless the images of the mercenary and the saint became important for Gillian as she discovered that she could be well compensated (i.e., wages comparable to a similar position in Australia) while doing development work.

The figures of the mercenary and the saint also speak to an ethical tension in international development and among development workers, particularly those of the global North: can one do well financially, while doing "good"? Anne-Meike Fechter, an Aidland scholar, suggests that because development foregrounds the global South "other," the moral dimensions of doing development work and the lifestyle one can live while doing so is largely missing from the development ethics literature, as the ones who "do" development tend to remain invisible in development literature (Fechter 2012a). My findings echo those of Fechter, whose field work took place in neighbouring Cambodia, that some development workers face uncertainties around the moral dimensions of their lifestyle and the lifestyle of other development workers.

Gillian, who experienced a pay imbalance among volunteers like herself and paid expats working in development during one of her previous positions, then went on to secure a well-paid international development job. When reflecting on the pay inequity between her and her Lao colleagues she told me:

> …there is an imbalance in pay. Some of that I understand because I'm coming from a place personally, this is how I justify it to myself, I'm coming in from a place where I was on a pretty good salary to begin with, I'm Australian educated, I've funded that myself, so I was a single mom, I worked very hard for that and the Australian system is not cheap, so when I sort of look at that, we don't have the opportunities for scholarships that people from the emerging countries have, so in that sort of sense the fact that I can draw a larger wage back home helps me justify the larger wage that I get here. At the same time, when I look at what the local wages are... um... my responsibilities are more at work as well, so I have larger responsibility and I think because of cultural differences, I have a much higher work ethic. That's a cultural thing, so I can see the disparities in pay, but also there's such a huge disparity like in some of the UN ones that are even more so, I just don't understand how it operates or how it's even considered fair… I just find that the inequity of it all is challenging there, very difficult to deal with.

Gillian states that people from the emerging countries have more scholarship opportunities than "we" do. Coming from a Canadian academic environment, I found this comment surprising. A key informant was able to provide some context stating that in Australia the government has squeezed universities and are continually raising school fees, while at the same time they have a large scholarship program called Australia Awards that is a soft power relationship building program "dressed up" as scholarships. Gillian felt that students coming from emerging countries had more opportunities for scholarships than she herself had had as a single mother. This perceived inequity became part of the explanation for now receiving higher pay.

To justify her higher pay, Gillian claims that she has a "much higher work ethic" than her Lao colleagues. This claim is racist as it labels Lao workers *in general* as less hard working than she is. These types of claims on ideas and cultures of work ethic (e.g., a Lao work ethic, a European work ethic) are embedded with colonial-based stereotypes of Others around what working hard is. In this case, Australian and capitalist work norms, that often operate under an assumption that the norms themselves are neutral, taken for granted, and unquestioned as a particular norm, are held for Gillian as the standard for her work ethic. Different work norms can be a source of tension and fodder for racist assumptions of "Others'" work norms. It was not uncommon for my participants from the global North to justify their higher salary in terms of working harder and having a higher work ethic or being more professional.

Lao workers that I spoke with also told me about pay differences in their organizations and the development industry in Laos at large. I met Sean at a café in between his office and where I was staying on a sunny, hot afternoon. There is a Buddhist temple across the street. During our conversation we can hear a monk chanting over the loudspeaker at the temple. Sean stops speaking for a moment while he listens to the monk and says, "that is a good Buddhist" before turning back to our conversation. I ask Sean about his experiences with pay differences between his work in NPAs and INGOS now that he is working as a consultant. When I first met him he was working full-time in an NPA. He tells me about the pay differences between national and international staff:

> As you know, it is very different paid for the international or foreigner, and that's that. I don't know why. But I also [pause] what is the criteria of how they

> manage on this? But I think it is very, very different. Because for example, Lao staff they get that [paid] quite really low. But international staff quite high, I don't know what is the criteria. Because of the language? Or degree? Or experience? Or knowledge?

Sean's experience of being paid less than international staff and observing this in the industry in Laos reflects the feeling of disorientation that comes along with navigating the intersectional maze and not knowing why certain norms are the way that they are, especially when you are being disadvantaged by them. Sean's experience also shows that navigating the maze cannot be understood through gender alone, rather an intersectional approach is needed to account for other social categories of difference and how they impact pay inequity in the development industry. For Sean, as a young man from an ethnic minority group in Laos, he navigates prejudices within Laotian society towards his ethnicity, while also steering course through gendered and racialized development organizational structures that maintain a dual pay system for international and national staff.

Most workers I spoke with mentioned pay differences. One country director that I spoke with told me about how his organization navigates the pay differences:

> Ya, so there's two markets for staff. When I arrived, we had 8 international staff and now we have 3. It's a priority to train national staff. It's not nationalising, we're still an international office. There are two contract types, international staff can be on a national contract and national staff can be on an international contact.

It was unclear how often this happened in practice, though I did know of one international worker who was considering taking a national contract with this organization. This participant also mentioned that if their position came available, a

Lao person could apply for it through the global North office and potentially be on an international contract.

When I asked one UN worker about the challenges that she faces in her work, she told me that the main challenge is funding, and that "the funding is really small." She explained that this is because most of the money that was originally intended to invest in South Asia and in Laos was redirected when new donor priorities came up to focus on countries experiencing ongoing conflict, and post-conflict areas. She commented that given the funding challenges, international staff can be key for funding mobilization, but that the cost of the salary of international staff is very high, and so placing international staff in her UN agency would be a costly investment. She went on to say, "It's very normal that our salary, if compared to them, I don't know how many times we have less than the international staff I guess… in one month they earn like more than $10,000 dollar [USD], but for national staff it is $2,000." The UN worker is guessing at the salary differences between a national staff person, such as herself, and an international staff person working in the Regional Office.

Though I am not sure if these numbers are accurate, it is interesting that this worker feels that a five-fold difference in pay between national staff in Laos and international staff reflects this inequality. When I probed further on why having international staff helps with funding mobilization, this worker told me that "I think because the international – most of the funds are from the international, from the Western, and they would have capacity in terms of language and networking." Ability to network in English is seen as a monetarily valuable skill because the assumption is

that, in general, international staff will have greater access to securing funding from Western/global North donors, such as USAID, the European Union, and various United Nations funding mechanisms.

5.1.2. Networking

Networking is an important practice for advancing one's career in international development. Networking and mentoring networks also serve to reinforce power being maintained by certain groups in organizations but can also be a strategy for navigating and challenging existing power hierarchies. In terms of the intersectional maze, networking and mentoring are key processes where information is exchanged, and relationships develop that help workers navigate their jobs and careers and obtain higher positions and salaries. Networking, especially in so far as it helps build relationships, can be an important part of building trust amongst colleagues, bosses, and within the industry. Networks and networking should be understood through an intersectional lens. As we know from previous research, networks and networking is not a neutral activity that all workers can access and benefit from equally, rather it is a practice that is highly gendered and racialized (Williams et al. 2012).

My findings on the importance of networking for development workers in Laos echoes the findings of Williams et al. (2012:568) in their study of female geoscientists working for the major oil and gas companies:

> Networking has always been important for professional development… [women] are often excluded from powerful men's networks, yet women's formal networks, when they exist, are not powerful and may actually have negative consequences for women's career development… Because of the centrality of networking, the resulting gender inequality is thus embedded in

the organizational logic of the new economy.

Networking opportunities, particularly those outside of regular business hours are harder to attend for workers who have familial care duties. This tends to be women and in Laos this tends to be Laotian women, as international women who have to care for children or other family members are more likely to be in higher up positions and therefore are able to hire Lao women to support domestic and care work. Many jobs in development are not hospitable to families. As such, women in lower paid positions who come to Laos to work tend not to have children.

Often while overseas, volunteers, interns, and entry-level development workers can end up at social gatherings with higher ups from development organizations. Amongst national workers that I interviewed, I found that drinking with colleagues from other organizations and with Lao government officials was an important networking opportunity to make things happen. Networking, and especially networking where alcohol is involved is an important gendered experience in this context.

Lao PDR has one of the highest rates of alcohol consumption in Southeast Asia. The Lao Brewery Company, founded in 1973, is owned by the Lao government and the Carlsberg Group. The company produces a range of beers, generically known as "Beerlao." Beerlao is tightly woven with images and enactments of Lao national identity and is a major part of socialising, business, ceremonies such as weddings, funerals, *baci* ceremonies, and holidays such as Pi Mai Lao (Lao New Year), and the

dragon boat racing festival in October. Beerlao has a 99% market share (Carlsberg Group 2021), and its consumption is ubiquitous across the country.

Drinking, and especially drinking Beerlao, is an important part of socializing and networking in Laos. Alcohol emerged as an important theme for many of the development workers that I interviewed, ranging from enjoyment, to feeling pressure to drink, and experiencing norms around alcohol consumption as gendered; what was acceptable for men drinking, was not necessarily acceptable for women. During my own "onboarding," a male colleague gave us, the newest crop of international volunteers, a presentation on alcohol in Lao PDR that included some strategies for politely declining Beerlao, or something stronger like *laolao*, a rice whiskey. These included asking someone else to drink it for you because they are stronger, pretending to take a sip, or taking a sip and then ducking away to spit it out. Beer, served over ice, will be meticulously refilled by one's host or server, never straying below half full for any measure of time, unless you have raised a toast, which happens frequently, and drained your glass. Drinking that involves networking and networking that involves drinking can blur the lines of the professional and the social. Women development workers tend to have less access to these networking opportunities, as such the organizational logic, of which networking is a part, reproduces advantage for the "ideal" male development worker.

5.1.3. Leapfrogging up the Career Ladder

Development work gives some workers the opportunity to jump to a higher position in organizational hierarchies in ways that are gendered, racialized, and

classed. Barbara Heron's work (2007) makes the argument that white, western women working in international development benefit from opportunities that they would not be granted in their home country in ways that are highly gendered, raced, and classed. Several of my participants reflected on having opportunities in Laos that they felt underqualified for or felt they would not have access to if they were not in the position of international development worker.

Emma and I met up at a Korean-owned French café for brunch. She said that "I have responsibilities here that like I wouldn't be given in the US as, like, an employee in an organization." When I asked for clarification, she reflected that:

> I mean for instance if I were to enter an entry level position at an NGO in the US, like, I wouldn't necessarily be the person who is in charge of, like, submitting a multi-million-dollar grant proposal, whereas, like, here, I am… I've been able to get more involved in work here in ways where I think there'd be more barriers in doing that in the US.

Postcolonial and development scholars have traced colonial continuities, such as colonial-era administrative structures and discourses, that pervade the theory and practice of international development (Kothari 2006). In Emma's case, she is a young white woman and a recent graduate from the United States who finds herself responsible for multi-million-dollar project proposals. Some women in development are able to reposition themselves into a different subjectivity position more akin to their white male colleague's positions back in their home countries.

At INGO headquarters in global North countries, the tasks that Emma is carrying out in Laos would be much more likely to be the responsibility of a more senior staff member. These tasks include being the high-level last set of eyes on a

multimillion-dollar project proposal before it is submitted to a donor. It also includes being in a position to manage others, though as Emma told me she was not comfortable with managing her Lao colleagues and resisted this as part of her job. The arrangements of development work produce opportunities for younger Western volunteers, interns, and workers to gain experience that they would not be able to in their home countries.

5.2. The Professionalization of Development Work

Like development organizations themselves, professionalization and relatedly the production of experts and expertise, is not a gender-neutral process. In order to navigate the intersectional maze, workers must cultivate and maintain their status as a development professional. Experiences, possibilities, and opportunities for development workers are mediated through organizational hierarchies that are gendered and racialized. For many development workers, the task of navigating organizational hierarchies in their industry is an embodied experience. In particular, participants who are women, women of colour, people of colour, an ethnic minority, and/or queer more often remarked on an unease in the organizational norms of their workplaces.

For instance, I asked Emma if she could tell me about a time where she felt underestimated in her job. She responded that she feels undervalued if things at her work require Lao language capacity because she has a pretty good level of Lao language.

> People are like ‘oh, let’s do this in English’ and I’ll be like ‘damnnnn, I was trying so hard’ so sometimes people underestimate my ability to understand

> things, but I think that's a fair assumption to make because the assumption is that foreigners don't speak Lao and it probably would be more efficient for other people to speak English and for me to speak English.

Emma did not tell me that she felt underestimated in her knowledge and capacity to do her job well. Rather, she felt that her ability to speak Lao was underestimated by her Lao colleagues. This highlights that for Emma her whiteness, global North positioning, and education do some of the work of performing or signalling her expertise and professionalism. She is read as having expertise and being a professional right away and has not had to prove it in ways she may have to in her home country.

The language of international development is largely English, and this is the case in Laos as well. Emma, whose first language is English, nevertheless feels underestimated in her ability to speak and understand Lao language, so even though she makes attempts to speak Lao, her national Laotian colleagues will switch to English in her presence. Although this frustrates Emma, she does recognize that the vast majority of the time international staff do not have a high level of Lao language and national workers are used to having to speak in English with international staff. Emma felt that for the most part her abilities were overestimated by her Lao colleagues and that this had to do with her being a white foreigner:

> I think that people vastly overestimate my capacities honestly, um, again just like going back to the like being a white foreigner that comes into Laos, there's a perception that people have of me, that I have a lot more experience than I do or that I'd be able to do a lot more management than I am comfortable doing. Um, and so ya in a certain way that's been nice because it's given me more responsibility but at the same time it also gets back to that discomfort of like, I don't wanna, I don't have the qualifications to be like managing other people in my office, nor do I want to do that.

The concept of professionalism (Abbott 1988; Evetts 2013; Faulconbridge and Muzio 2012; Kuhlmann 2013; Larson 1977; Ramirez 2010) tends to valorize individual behaviours that match up with expected group norms for a particular profession, and organizational structures and policies that promote a specific way of "doing business." Processes of professionalization are seen by some researchers as a gendered historical construct (Evetts 2013:782). They create inside and outside groups (Abbott 1988), which can maintain and perpetuate job segregation along social categories of difference. The quasi establishment of development work as a transnational profession rewards those who have received formal education on gender, for example, and devalues workers who are experts in gender because of their lived experience. Professionalization is seen by some as a "positive outcome, as a process that has benefited particularly female-dominated occupational groups (e.g., midwifery) in comparison with medical dominance" (Evetts 2013:782).

Organizations are gendered processes that obscure gender, sexuality, and the body through gender neutral, asexual discourses that are part of processes of control in work organizations (Acker 1990). The processes of organizations tend to reward economic and labour efficiency, getting the most out of your money, more value for your donor dollars, contracting tasks to consultants/experts, keeping your core staff small, and making use of national and international interns, fellows, and volunteers.

Women are very present in development organizations, though their presence is not evenly distributed in types of development jobs. Women workers, both national and international, tend to be funnelled into certain kinds of jobs and tasks in their

organizations. Gender experts, specialists, and focal points are overwhelmingly female. I also observed that women in development organizations in Laos are less likely to be in higher up, decision-making positions. I did notice more national women working in finance, logistics, and administrative positions. One office I visited had a finance and admin officer who worked in the main room of the office. She handled logistical tasks for arranging trips to "the field" for other staff members and provided a lot of support to international volunteers, especially female volunteers as she would accompany them to purchase fabric to have their *sinh* made (skirt that women wear). As her desk was close to the entry way of the office, she received many questions and inquiries from those entering the building, so on top of her finance and admin work, she also did the overall work of managing the office atmosphere.

The ideal development professional does not have to care for children or elderly family members, they are untethered to the demands of reproductive and domestic labour, this ideal worker is implicitly male. Many development organizations do not have supportive policies for parental leave, breast feeding, and childcare, as such we see more women drop out of development when they have small children to care for. Policies to protect workers and 'beneficiaries' from sexual assault, harassment, and exploitation are unevenly developed and implemented. A female country director shared with me that her strategy for dealing with the sexism she experiences from her country's ambassador to Laos is not to let it get to her. Another country director told me that their INGO has an anonymous feedback channel where workers can report incidences of sexual harassment, assault, and/or abuse, and that they have a zero-tolerance policy, meaning that anyone accused of sexual misconduct

would be immediately suspended pending an investigation. When sexual harassment is coming from the very top, it can make it that much harder for workers experiencing harassment to report it, whether anonymous reporting systems are in place or not. For example, in 2018 when the Oxfam sexual exploitation story broke, it was learned that a senior aid worker was kept on in Haiti for more than a year despite reported sexual harassment claims (Gayle 2018).

The ways in which development workers' jobs are organized implicitly sifts women out as the demands of reproductive and domestic labour come into conflict with their jobs. For example, it is vastly more difficult for a mother of young children to work nights and weekends to get a project proposal in before the deadline, or to hop on a plane or bus to head to 'the field' for a week because some issue has come up where they are implementing a project. Of the development workers I spoke with in Laos, the large majority did not have children. One international volunteer from North America was accompanied by his wife and three small children; a rarity for international volunteers as this participant told me they had a hard time finding a volunteer-sending organization that would provide some financial support to have his family with him. John, an international volunteer from East Africa, was working away from his children and wife while he was in Laos. Some international workers with young children had the resources to hire Lao women to provide childcare and domestic service. A national gender expert I spoke with had access to familial support to help care for her children.

The intersectional maze, imbued with organizational logics and shaped by ruling relations that include professional norms, makes it hard for women in particular to reach the top of the professional ladder. The organization of labour within families is also unequal and has been found to overly burden women with unpaid social and reproductive work. How labour is organised within families and households shapes and is shaped by work arrangements for development workers. Women workers, workers with disabilities, and ethnic minority workers all experience barriers to breaking into development organizations and reaching higher levels once in the organization. One of the national gender experts I spoke with was working with an INGO at the time of our interview. In the last ten minutes of our conversation, she told me how she felt that the well-resourced development organizations, like her own, need to examine their human resource policies to support women to reach higher levels in development organizations, support inclusive breastfeeding, support workers with disabilities, and provide parents the choice to take the time they need to take care of newborn children.

When I asked her if she was seeing such policies for herself or her colleagues she laughed before responding, “I don’t see much in Lao. No, of course they follow government policy when the woman give birth, they can take leave for three months, but see for the exclusive breastfeeding is six months. Only one organization or two in Lao that follow that policy, the woman can take six months.” She goes on to explain that having the policy in place is one thing, but that it has to based on “women’s decision and whether you want to take six-month leave, or whether you take a month

or two months. I don't want to stay home, you know, I want to go to work." I ask her about her male colleagues who have newborns, she tells me that:

> Man can take three days, at least two days. If you want to take longer than that you have to take annual leave, but some organization give one week. Its not enough and its not support about the gender equality, you still put the role to women to taking care of your baby. Because you have breastfeeding you have to stay with them? No, you don't have to. That's your choice.

She explains to me that ethnic minority Lao are also systemically excluded from entering and climbing the ranks of development organizations. There are well over 180 different ethnic minority groups in Laos, the majority of whom live in rural areas and engage in subsistence agriculture. National workers from the ethnic majority group do not often speak the local languages at the 'field level.' She tells me that:

> I saw a few organizations working in the field level, people from Vientiane cannot speak the local language, so they have to open the position to volunteers [from ethnic minority groups] so the young man and woman volunteer come and work with the organization, then they can move up to another position. But it's still very limited… you want to promote them but they're still lowest level because they [the development organizations] don't provide enough support.
>
> Ok, now you [an ethnic minority volunteer] are project manager and you are supposed to do everything like other project manager who have master or PhD degree, you know? That's a very harmful practice, and then of course they cannot do the job… if you put the person in the high position then make sure that position not reduce that person's self confidence, or not have the negative impact for their performance.
>
> The staff who have PhD or master's degree can write 20 minutes per page in English, you have to do like that. No, they cannot. Have to consider not only gender, but also other.

Understanding professional norms of development, for example knowing the right language to use when sending an email, or norms around how time should be managed (e.g., arriving early to meetings, staying late to help colleagues) are learned and not

given. Ethnic minority Lao workers face many barriers in accessing the work knowledge that other workers have been enculturated to. Development organizations need ethnic minority Lao to help them communicate with rural and ethnic minority communities where they are implementing development projects, but do not necessarily provide them with appropriate supports to navigate the professional norms of the industry.

5.2.1. From Birkenstocks to Briefcase

In fall of 2016, I started a one-year college program in Toronto on project management in international development. During the week I would get up before the sun, race to the train station and commute into the city from Guelph; a daily roundtrip journey that took four and a half hours. My cohort consisted of around 65 fellow students, many were coming from the Greater Toronto Area, or further afield in Southern Ontario. A few had moved from other provinces to attend the program, while a small number were international students or new Canadians.

During class one day, an instructor was talking about the professionalization of international development. She jokingly said that the picture of a development worker had shifted from Birkenstocks to briefcases. The program was housed in the school of business. The emphasis on professionalism in the industry was clear. It was an institutionalized example of the increasing credentialization of development work. Unlike the technical experts who designed water sanitation systems, or the engineers, development workers were seen as somewhat more versatile, and able to do fair work on a wide range of tasks. Specialization became a way to make more money and build

a career. For example, there are gender experts, WASH experts, agricultural experts and so on.

When I asked my participants about how they first got into development work, many said that they had started by doing volunteer work, low-paid or unpaid internships at NGOS while they were completing their undergraduate degrees or had recently graduated. For Lao participants, the main paths into working for INGOs or the UN, organizations that tend to pay more, were by taking on an internship at an INGO or working at an NPA, getting the experience in the sector, and then being seen as qualified for the INGO positions.

Development as an industry has promoted professionalization. This can be seen in the rise of credentialization as mentioned above. Faulconbridge and Muzio (2011:138) remind us that theorization of the professions should be time and space specific. What may be true of a profession in Canada is not necessarily reflected in the development profession (if it can even be made into a singular profession). Here, professionalization broadly refers to "the regulation of the production of producers and the regulation of the production by producers" (Ibid:141). In other words, professionalization refers to the processes and strategies that control who comes to be seen as a development professional and how development professionals exert control over development processes, including gender projects.

Knowledge-based credentials play a role in controlling standards of practice and excluding those with lived experience (but not necessarily a university credential)

from reaching higher and better paid positions in development. Evetts (2013:788) argues that:

> The *ideology* of professionalism that is so appealing to occupational groups and their practitioners includes aspects such as exclusive ownership of an area of expertise and knowledge, and the power to define the nature of problems in that area as well as the control of access to potential solutions.

The ability to define the problems and solutions to gender inequality in Laos is incredibly powerful. This is shaped by ruling relations that include bureaucratic and professional norms. In this case, the discourse and practice of professionalization in development shapes whose expertise and authority are valued when designing and implementing gender projects

In the case of volunteer sending organizations, such as Cuso International, they now actively recruit (mostly) Canadian "experienced professionals" to fill positions with the aim of "building skills and transferring knowledge" to their partner organizations. In contrast, when their organization began in the 1960s, volunteers tended to be young, recent graduates (Cuso International 2020). Volunteer positions can range from the volunteer paying the NGO, whether through personal fundraising or their own means, to receiving a stipend to cover their costs of living. In my own experience, I was expected to raise $2,000CDN which would be matched by Global Affairs Canada funding 1:9. So, by fundraising $2,000CDN, the Canadian government matched it with $18,000, thus covering the costs associated with my placement.

5.2.2. Life Outside of Work

I asked most of my participants about their lives outside of work. I wanted to understand how they spent their time when they were not working. My thinking was that this may produce some insights into how the personal lives of development workers are gendered, which we know is an under-examined area in the development literature (Fechter 2012b). I quickly found that what participants were telling me about their lives outside of work was actually deeply shaped and inextricably connected to the arrangements of their work lives and processes of professionalization in the development industry. Asking my initial question revealed the fluidity and tensions between "work lives" and "personal lives" for many development workers, particularly those who move to Laos to work from another country, as they are most often separated from familial and personal connections that shaped their personal lives in their home country.

I begin by discussing *hypermobility* as a feature of development workers' work that shapes their lives outside of work. Moving around is valued for its own sake in development work and is a professional norm. The fact of being a transnational professional often puts international development workers into contact with "expat" communities. I conclude this chapter by exploring some dynamics in the "expat" community for development workers.

Development workers' lives inside and outside of work are shaped by *hypermobility.* International volunteers, interns, consultants, and staff move from another country, sometimes their country of citizenship and sometimes another global

South country where they had been working, to Laos for work. Some development workers travel with their spouse/domestic partner, and their children. Assignments in-country are often short and there are professional norms and pressure that steer workers to continue their hypermobility and move to a different country after Laos. Four of the development workers I interviewed had already left Laos and were working in different countries. Development workers' lives outside of work are shaped by the hypermobility of their work arrangements.

Hypermobility refers to both development workers regularly changing countries throughout their careers and is also a defining feature of how they can live while in Laos. The ways that development workers move through the city, the country, the region, and internationally is a useful entry point through which to further understand the everyday lives of development workers and how their ways of living are shaped in and through development work. Mobilities, or ways of moving, centres the embodied and technologically entangled ways that development workers live their lives in and out of their paid labour. The types of mobility available to a worker is imbued with meaning, conveying their economic means, preferences, ability, gender, nationality, and can also signal to others their relational status in Laos. It can signal their class, ability, work position (e.g., Canadian volunteer using a bicycle supplied by an INGO; contract national staff using their scooter or car), and even citizenship, as we see with foreign embassy vehicles.

Development workers who cross international borders by car, plane, bus, or train also signal their position vis-à-vis barriers and allowances to border crossing. It

may signal their status as a short-term volunteer who may work on a tourist visa because of the lengthy process in obtaining the proper work visa. While carrying out this research in Laos I crossed the border into Thailand with a couple of other development workers, one of whom needed to do a "visa-run" and the other who needed to visit the hospital in Udon Thani. All of us on this trip held either Lao or Canadian passports and had no trouble crossing either border. When I had first gone to Laos to work in 2016, I crossed the border from Laos into Thailand with a colleague who had an Indian passport. That time, I also crossed the border easily. My colleague travelling with an Indian passport needed to pay for her tourist visa to enter Thailand and had to have an interview in a separate room before being allowed to enter the country. Obtaining and maintaining one's visa while working in Laos, which often involves crossing international borders for visa-runs, is a state-level "ruling relation" that governs who may enter and stay in the country.

The terms expat and expat community are commonly used to refer to *certain kinds* of mobile workers. Social class, country of origin, and economic status shapes which mobile workers are seen as expats, immigrants, or migrants. Expat, short for expatriate, simply means 'out of the country' or 'fatherland.' In the development context in Laos, the development workers that are considered part of the expat community tend to originate from global North countries, though not exclusively. I met a Vietnamese woman working for an inter-governmental organization who considered herself an expat. Agnes, a country director of an INGO, tells me that the expat community in Laos is very small "so you automatically will always meet people who are working in development sector."

Lilly, part of the Laotian diaspora who came to Laos through an international volunteer-sending organization, tells me about how she feels accepted by the Lao community, but feels that her mixed-race ethnicity is questioned by the expat community. When I ask her if she could explain a little more, she tells me:

> I think the reason is because I ruin their archetype of the Asian woman. I'm loud, I wear pants, I'm embracing and seeking out conflict at times… I'm ruining their holiday. So, if they push me down enough, they can get back the sense of their authentic experience here in Southeast Asia.

Lilly, as a mixed-race woman of colour, unsettles the gendered, racialized, and classed hierarchies that are at work in the Lao expat community by existing in a way that comes up against the stereotypes of Lao women.

In Vientiane, the development community is relatively small, and many workers can be connected to each other through a few degrees of separation. International volunteers and interns, and paid expats will hang out together and socialise, especially if they are around the same age, though your status as a volunteer or intern will likely be flagged if you ride a bicycle versus a scooter.

Several of the younger (20s, 30s) white women that I spoke with told me about how they wrestled with the stereotype of an expat, or of an international development worker being an older white man from the global North who imposes a Western way of doing things. Emma, a North American woman in her 20s, told me that:

> I'm very conscious as not wanting to come across as that foreign expat who is like 'we're gonna do this the Western way,' or 'let's listen to me speak for an entire meeting' and not having any consultation with the people whose country we're actually affecting. I think it goes back to colonial mindsets and some of the socialisation I've had that Western views are dominant or right.

Emma is worried about being viewed by her Lao colleagues as a certain kind of foreigner – one who dominates workspaces and imposes their Western ways of doing things.

Leah, one of the rare development workers who chose to walk as her primary means of transport in Vientiane tells me about her uncomfortable experience with some older expat men that she had noticed while walking.

> One night, when I was walking back from having a massage, I saw a man checking a child out, like really looked like he was completely, like he was checking out a woman and I looked, and it was a child. A few things like that made me… and I'm not even a mother, but that kind of protecting… like I just wanted to go and stand between them. I felt conscious of this in Laos where I haven't in other places.
>
> Working in development, I wonder if men, when you're in developing countries, I wonder if men notice it or if it's kind of invisible to them, like it's not something they pick up on.

The majority of international development workers that I spoke with did not regularly socialise with Lao people outside of work. There were two workers I interviewed who spent the majority of their social lives outside of work with Lao colleagues who became friends. Emma tells me that "a lot of my social life just ends up being around men and it ends up being like going out to drink at bars. My social life is more with Lao men than Lao women." We get onto the topic of alcohol, and she tells me about how the drinking culture is extreme in Laos and how at first she felt like she had to keep up with how much her male friends/colleagues were drinking.

> I said I normally go out with guys who are my age and a lot of my guy friends who are like nice people just end up turning kind of gross when they're out drinking. There's constant comments about the girls who are serving beer, the Beer Lao Girls, the Heineken Girls, or the Carlsberg Girls who are wearing these really short dresses and like heels and like they're always 'have a drink

> with us' like 'what are you doing afterwards?' like 'do you have a boyfriend?' They always flirt with the girls and even after they're like 'no, no, yes I have a boyfriend' and so for me that's like probably one of the most uncomfortable things about going out to drink, even like a friend I have I know he has a girlfriend, he continually does that with like the girls who serve. So I think that's just like, that's a cultural thing that I even have like, that I know is really wide spread and even more significant in rural areas where those girls, like the Beer Lao Girls have more of a tendency to be a mistress than here in Vientiane. Maybe it's done for fun, but it's like constant.

Another feature of life outside of work is the day-to-day work of maintaining one's household and caring for family and friends depending on the worker. Domestic work, care work, and service work performed largely by Lao women greatly enhances the lives of international development workers in Laos, especially female workers from the global North who are well resourced but experience an unequal division of reproductive labour. Hannaford (2020) argues for putting this dynamic in development into the larger scholarly conversation on domestic work and global inequality, including the Global Care Chain. The dynamics of power and privilege that build the interface of Lao women's cheap labour and development workers' 'lifestyle' is not evenly distributed. From my data, I found that international workers benefitted from Lao women's domestic, care, and service work, but that the benefits were more concentrated among better-resourced workers. That is to say, international workers in well-resourced development organizations tended to have much greater access to Lao women's labour to expand their access to affordable childcare, domestic work, and service work.

In this chapter, I have proposed the concept of the intersectional maze as a useful metaphor that helps theorise both the structure (maze) and experience of

(dis)orientation felt through navigating gendered and racialized development organizations and the ruling relations that shape workers' experiences in "the maze." I discussed the rise of professionalization in international development, arguing that this reinforces insider and outsider groups that shape whose knowledge, authority, and expertise are valued when designing and implementing gender projects in Laos. In the next chapter, I will summarize what I have attempted to do in my thesis and outline what I think are important areas for future research.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In my research, I first set out to understand how development workers' perceptions of gender and gender equality influenced what kind of gender equality development projects became thinkable and therefore 'doable' in Lao PDR. As an exploratory and iterative study, I became sensitized to the force that the arrangements and actualities of work have in shaping the experiences of development workers in Laos. I adjusted course and sought to explore how the gendered development context in Laos shapes workers' gender work. Through four months of research in Laos, 21 in-depth interviews, participant observation, and background and key informant interviews I have examined the relationship between the everyday/everynight experiences of development workers and the ruling relationships that shape so much of what appears as choice, preference, and rational for workers in this context.

My main research question of how the gendered context in Laos shapes workers' gender work, has been accompanied by three supporting research questions: 1) how are gender projects carried out? 2) how do organizational structures impact the gendered working conditions of development workers? and 3) how does the gendered context shape the personal lives of development workers? Taking these questions as my jumping off point, I found that workers' experiences, choices, and abilities to take forward gender equality goals are shaped by more than their own beliefs around what gender is, what gender equality looks like, how it should be achieved, and who should work towards it.

To frame and investigate these questions, I turned to feminist political economy, institutional ethnography, and theories of gendered organizations. As my data showed me that development organizations are not just gendered, I brought in intersectionality to help explain how multiple and overlapping socially constructed categories of difference, like race and gender, are relationally experienced and (re)produced through the organization of work. I took inspiration in particular from the concept of "ruling relations" as developed by Dorothy Smith to help explain political and bureaucratic norms, professional discourses, and state and suprastate actors that shape the experiences of development workers. Taking seriously development workers qua workers, the feminist sociology of work literature opened new avenues to examine how development organizations are themselves gendered and racialized, producing advantage and barriers for the workers who navigate them. The everyday/everynight experiences of development workers in their paid and unpaid work is the starting point through which I have investigated linkages between their experiences and the ruling relations that shape this experience.

To conclude my thesis, I will synthesize my findings based on my research questions. I then situate this research in literature on development workers, gender, and work, and offer a summary of the contributions this thesis makes to both international development and sociology of work scholarship. I conclude with an outline of possible next steps for research in this area, emphasising new questions that my findings may pose and the implications of these findings for development organizations. This thesis joins recent scholarship in examining development workers and organizations. My

thesis contributes to our understanding of workers' gendered and intersectional experiences of navigating gendered and racialized organizations.

6.1. Gender(ed) Projects

In the development industry in Lao PDR, gender projects are designed and implemented with the aim to improve outcomes for women and girls. Gender projects are rarely framed in terms of targeting men and boys, and LGBTI+ people are sometimes added to gender projects. At the time of this research, I noted an increase in projects targeting LGBTI+ people and an increase in LGBTI+ issues being discussed in INGO, NPA, and UN network spaces compared to when I had worked in Laos a few years earlier. Gender equality, as both a means and goal of development is widely embraced in development, though it remains a terrain of uneven policies and practices. Gender equality norms are institutionalized by most countries and almost all of the world's aid donors (Swiss 2012).

This led me to the question: *how are gender projects carried out in Lao PDR?* First, I found that gender projects in Laos are themselves gendered in who they target, how they are designed, and how they are carried out. In Laos, as in many development contexts, women and girls are overwhelmingly the targets of gender projects. Their complex realities of gendered subordination are rendered into more individualized time-bound projects that target, for example, women's economic empowerment, as a means of gaining access to money, and therefore greater decision-making power within their households and communities. The question remains on whether targeting individual women's access to global capitalism can, over time, lead to greater gender

equality for women, as a gendered constituency, as feminists have pointed out (Chant and Sweetman 2012).

Development projects in Laos either have gender as the principal component or include gender as a cross-cutting consideration in a project that focuses on, for example, sustainable harvesting of non-timber forest products. I found that gender equality projects in Laos tended to take shape as women's economic empowerment, advocacy and raising awareness, and gender mainstreaming. Women's economic empowerment projects often target rural and poor women to provide them with skills and knowledge of the market in order to make and/or sell goods. Many of the projects I observed in the capital city of Vientiane were feminized handicrafts like weaving and sewing *sinhs*, making jewelry, and learning to cut hair. In more rural areas, projects that I observed, or that workers told me about tended to focus on efficiencies around women's work to sustain their households in order to reduce the inequality in the gendered division of labour and women's time spent on domestic and reproductive labour. As my research shows, women's economic empowerment projects can also be steered towards furthering advantage among elite women predominantly from Laos' ethnic majority group.

Many gender projects in this context focus on raising awareness, usually of violence against women and children, which is underpinned by the relatively new law against violence against women and children that passed the National Assembly in 2015. Advocacy can be an aspect of gender projects, but my research showed that development workers and organizations engage in advocacy as a strategy to advance

gender equality and LGBTI+ issues in the Lao political landscape. I also found that Lao organizations, whether formally registered as non-profit associations or not, are particularly attuned to signals that the Lao Government gives on whether and how a certain issue can be discussed. For example, if the state media publishes news coverage of an event in Lao language, then this is a good sign that the government is supportive of the event and wishes to share knowledge of the event more widely. If this were not the case, the news coverage would likely only be in English in a media outlet like the Vientiane Times.

Gender mainstreaming is usually not a standalone gender project. You would not be likely to find an INGO in a rural village in Laos trying to mainstream gender. Rather, development projects will mainstream gender into the project design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. Development organizations may also have gender mainstreaming projects or initiatives within their organizations where they house the organizational responsibility for ensuring that gender is considered in every aspect of their development projects. Gender mainstreaming is a policy tool designed to bring women and gender considerations more generally into every aspect of development processes. Organizationally this can take the form as a gender expert, gender specialist, or gender focal point shouldering the responsibility of ensuring that gender is considered throughout the organization and/or project. They may consult with colleagues on their diverse projects and offer suggestions on how gender can be considered throughout the project cycle.

My research shows that for some gender focal points or gender advisors, there is confusion around what gender mainstreaming means and how one should do it. I also found that those who take on or are given/forced into the position of gender focal point within their organization are sometimes siloed in their work. While on an organizational chart, it could look promising that there is a gender focal point, in practice this can mean that other workers are not given opportunities to advance their own capabilities in advancing gender mainstreaming. In one particular case, a worker I spoke with was made the gender focal point within her bilateral organization because, she felt, she is a woman, as her educational and work experience was not in gender.

6.2. Gendered Working Conditions

Thanks to the works of Acker (1990), Williams et al. (2012), and many other feminist researchers, we know that organizations themselves are not gender-neutral asexual places. Extending Acker's seminal work into the area of development organizations, I found that organizational logics in the development industry in Laos (re)produce advantage and barriers in ways that are gendered, classed, and racialized. Introducing the novel concept of the "intersectional maze," I have offered initial insights into how the embodied experience of navigating institutional norms is experienced as (dis)orientation and how knowledge of institutional norms can manifest as ease and familiarity in navigating the intersectional maze.

I traced how pay differences, networking, and workers' job responsibilities and career advancement are shaped within gendered organizations that produce advantage and barriers for particular workers, while using seemingly gender-neutral language that

draws on the figure of the 'ideal worker,' who is implicitly male and largely untethered from domestic responsibilities. If development organizations have good reasons for perpetuating a dual salary system (Carr et al. 2010), my research shows that they are not widely understood by the workers that this system disadvantages. For those this salary system advantages there is also confusion on why it is the case, but there are also defensive and deferring strategies used by workers to justify their higher pay (e.g., having a higher work ethic, making a 'sacrifice' to work in Laos vs. their home country, etc.).

Professionalization of development work, along with the production of experts and expertise, including gender experts, are further faucets of gendered and racialized processes at work in the development industry and the intersectional maze. Professional discourses and norms are part of the "ruling relations" that shape the everyday experiences of workers and the actualities of their work. I found that for those who do not meet some standards of "professionalism" and/or whose expertise is not institutionally recognized (e.g., being a gender expert because of your life's experience of being a woman in global patriarchy) are less likely to advance to higher levels in their organizations and in the development industry in Laos. I found that Lao women and ethnic minority Lao tend to face the greatest barriers in advancing to higher levels in development organizations.

Gendered working conditions shape what life is like outside of work for national and international development workers. For many workers I spoke with, *hypermobility* shapes their lives in and out of their jobs. For well-resourced

international workers, travelling to Luang Prabang in the North of Laos, or somewhere in the region like Thailand, Cambodia, or Vietnam may be available to them as long weekend or vacation trips. Workers with familial care responsibilities are less likely to be able to travel with little notice to visit project sites. Lao women workers in general are less likely to be posted to rural and remote locations for extended periods of time because of what is seen as culturally appropriate and their domestic and familial duties.

I found that international workers at volunteer, intern, and entry levels in development organizations were less likely to have young children and be in Laos with their families. This is partly because workers in those positions tend to be younger in general (20s, 30s) and also because few organizations provide adequate support for workers' families to travel with them for shorter term jobs in development. The 'expat' community in Laos is relatively small. I found that international workers often socialized with other 'expats' with very few international workers spending most, or even some, of their time outside of work with Lao colleagues and/or friends. Finally, I found that international workers who are well resourced tend to benefit from Lao women's labour in the form of domestic services (e.g., renting lodgings with a *maebon* who cleans the workers' apartment).

6.3. Contribution to the Literature and Future Research

The development literature has scarcely, though increasingly, examined development workers qua workers and development organizations qua gendered organizations. The sociology of work literature has rarely focused its lens on the work of development work. Aidland literature (Fechter 2012a; Mosse 2011; Roth 2015) has brought forward development workers themselves as important subjects of research,

arguing that illuminating the complex realities of aid and development workers who carry out development projects is integral to further understanding the development project. This literature has tended to focus on Northern development workers, with recent work looking at national workers (Beedell 2019; van Voorst 2019).

Studies of development workers have also examined relationships between gender, identity, colonial histories, and the 'helping imperative' (Cook 2007; Heron 2007). These studies have provided valuable insights into how largely white female development workers from global North countries see themselves and position themselves in relation to their work vis-à-vis the gendered dynamics of the contexts in which they are working. My thesis adds to the development literature by illuminating development workers' relationship to the subject position of development worker, expanding our understanding of the everyday/everynight experience of development work for the workers who do it, and by linking worker experiences to the "ruling relations" that shape so much of what appears as choice, preference, and rational for development workers, particularly in the area of gender and development.

The sociology of work offers valuable concepts and theories for understanding development work and organizations, particularly the concept of "the glass ceiling" (Acker 2009; Stokes 2015; Williams 1992) and theories of gendered organizations (Acker 1990; Williams et al. 2012). This thesis contributes to the sociology of work literature in three keyways: 1) adapting Acker's and Williams et al.'s work to development organizations, 2) building on the "glass ceiling" literature and proposing the novel concept of the "intersectional maze" as a way to understand the embodied

experience of (dis)orientation that workers experience as they attempt to navigate gendered, racialized, and classed development organizations and their organizational logics, and 3) by adding to the literature on the globalization of professions.

The findings from this research highlight the need for development organizations to address their internal policies that shape the work and lives of their workers. Policies for parental leave, protection from sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment, and opportunities for mentoring, training, and advancement shape advantage and disadvantage for workers. Development organizations should seek to recognize their roles in maintaining the dual salary system, unequal gendered divisions of labour within organizations, and the systemic barriers that tend to keep women and ethnic Lao from reaching the higher levels in development organizations.

As an exploratory study, this thesis covered a wide range of issues in the gendered work of gender work and development work more generally in Lao PDR. Future research should investigate each of these areas – gender(ed) projects; development organizations; and unpaid work/leisure time for development workers – in more depth. Furthermore, this area of research will benefit from a more faithful use of the method and theory of institutional ethnography, specifically further analyzing the texts that mediate workers' experiences through institutions. This research should be conducted by someone who is proficient in written and spoken Lao language as my finding have highlighted that the Lao Government communicates to the public in English and/or Lao language depending on the audience they would like to target. Finally, we must continue to look beyond perceptions of development work and look

more diligently at the actualities of work and everyday/everynight experiences of development workers. Furthering our insights into *how* the work of development work is done illuminates how "ruling relations" shape what work is possible, expanding our insights into how (and which) development workers are able to – or hindered from- taking forward the gender equality goals of development.

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Appendix 1: Ethics Approval

Interdisciplinary Committee on
Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR)

ICEHR Approval #:	20192079-AR
Researcher Portal File #:	20192079
Project Title:	*Gender Equality: Perceptions and Practices among Development Workers in Lao PDR*
Associated Funding:	Not Funded
Supervisor:	Dr. Liam Swiss
Clearance expiry date:	**January 31, 2023**

Dear Ms. Samantha Morton:

Thank you for your response to our request for an annual update advising that your project will continue without any changes that would affect ethical relations with human participants.

On behalf of the Chair of ICEHR, I wish to advise that the ethics clearance for this project has been extended to **January 31, 2023**. The *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2) requires that you submit another annual update to ICEHR on your project prior to this date.

We wish you well with the continuation of your research.

Sincerely,

DEBBY GULLIVER
Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR)
Memorial University of Newfoundland
St. John's, NL | A1C 5S7
Bruneau Centre for Research and Innovation | Room IIC 2010C
T: (709) 864-2561 |
www.mun.ca/research/ethics/humans/icehr | https://rpresources.mun.ca/

Appendix 2: Recruitment Materials

Recruitment for Study on Development Workers

My name is Samantha Morton, and I am a graduate student in the Department of Sociology at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador. I am conducting a research project called *Gender Equality Perceptions, and Practices among International Development Workers in Lao PDR* for my master's degree under the supervision of Dr. Nicole Power and Dr. Liam Swiss. The purpose of the study is to understand the experiences of development workers in Lao PDR and their understandings of gender equality.

I am contacting you to invite you to participate in an interview in which you will be asked to speak about your work and life history, experiences with gender equality initiatives, and day-to-day work experiences. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns you may have, or if you wish to participate. Participation will require approximately 45 minutes – 1 ½ hours, however the interview could be longer or shorter at your discretion. Interviews will be held at a location we both agree to, such as a café or via Skype.

The criteria for participating is to be currently working or have worked in the international development industry in Lao PDR. Participants must be at least 18 years old.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me at semorton@mun.ca to arrange a meeting either by Skype or in person.

If you have any questions about me or my project, please contact me by email at semorton@mun.ca or by phone at +1 416-985-6127.

If you know anyone who may be interested in participating in this study, please give them a copy of this information.

Thank-you in advance for considering my request,

Samantha Morton

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr.chair@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Listserv/email posting:

Sabaidee! My name is Samantha Morton, I am a graduate student at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada, and I am seeking participants for my study with development workers in the context of Lao PDR as part of my master's thesis research project.

Do you or someone you know work, or has previously worked, in the field of international development in Lao PDR? If you are willing to participate in a short interview (between 45 minutes and 1 ½ hours), please contact me by email at semorton@mun.ca.

The interview will cover topics such as your work and life history, experiences with gender equality initiatives, and day-to-day work experiences. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns you may have, or if you wish to participate.

Thank you!

Samantha Morton

Facebook/Messenger posting:

Hello!

I am reaching out to you because I am interested in speaking with folks who are currently or who have experience working in the development context of Lao PDR. I am a graduate student at Memorial University in Canada and I am conducting this research as part of my master's thesis project.

If you have willing to participate in a short interview (between 45- 1 ½ hours) please contact me by email at semorton@mun.ca.

The interview will cover topics such as your work and life history, experiences with gender equality initiatives, and day-to-day work experiences. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns you may have, or if you wish to participate.

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr.chair@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Appendix 3: Consent Form

Informed Consent Form1

Title:	Gender Equality: Perceptions and Practices among Development Workers in Lao PDR
Researcher:	Samantha Morton, Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador Email: semorton@mun.ca; Phone: +856 20 52 457 205
Supervisor(s):	Dr. Nicole Power, Department of Sociology, Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador. Email: npower@mun.ca Dr. Liam Swiss, Department of Sociology, Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador. Email: lswiss@mun.ca

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled "Gender Equality: Perceptions and Practices among Development Workers in Lao PDR".

This form is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. It also describes your right to withdraw from the study at any time. In order to decide whether you wish to participate in this research study, you should understand enough about its risks and benefits to be able to make an informed decision. This is the informed consent process. Take time to read this carefully and to understand the information given to you. Please contact me, Samantha Morton, if you have any questions about the study or would like more information before you consent.

It is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part in this research. If you choose not to take part in this research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future.

Introduction:
My name is Samantha Morton. I am a master's student in the Department of Sociology at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador. As part of my master's thesis, I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Liam Swiss and Dr. Nicole Power. This research is supported by Dr. Swiss' SSHRC Insight grant on global aid norms and SSHRC Canada Graduate Scholarship.

Purpose of Study:

1 The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr.chair@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

day-to-day experiences of development workers, including the organization of development institutions, enables or constrains particular kinds of gender work.

What You Will Do in this Study:
You are being asked to participate in a face to face interview, conducted by myself (Samantha Morton). Questions will cover your work history and experiences in development, industry dynamics, day to day life in Lao PDR, and personal as well as organizational experiences with gender and gender equality. You may refuse to answer any question at any time, and may withdraw from the interview at any time.

Length of Time:
Your interview will take between 45 minutes and 1 ½ hours, but may be longer or shorter at the discretion of the participant.

Withdrawal from the Study:
You can stop and/or end your participation during the interview at any time during the interview. Should you choose to end the interview, you can request to have any data removed that I have already collected, or request that data collected up to this point still be used.

You can request to have your data removed any time before June 30, 2019. If you decide to withdraw from the study, your interview transcripts will be destroyed and your information will be removed from any writing or analysis already completed.

Possible Benefits:
There is little immediate, direct benefit for participating in this study, beyond the ability to talk through your experiences in development, and gender equality. Your participation will greatly benefit development communities, particularly in gender and development, and sociological communities, as we carry on an important turn to researching development workers and organizations.

Possible Risks:
While there is no physical risk to participation in this study, it is possible that questions in the interview may trigger negative feelings, emotions, and/or memories. There are online resources that may be useful to you such as:

- *Global Aid Worker* (http://globalaidworker.org/). An online community where aid workers (also relevant for development workers) can share their experiences. Specific discussion groups and resources available for women and survivors of trauma.
- *The Headington Institute* (https://www.headington-institute.org/overview) offers online resources on building resilience, managing stress and burnout (including self-tests), and understanding and coping with trauma, among others.

These resources are in English. You may want to do an internet search in your preferred language to find additional online support options.

Anonymity sections below, I can remove your name and other identifying characteristics at your request. You can also contact me after your interview if you'd like me to remove some or all of your data from my study.

Confidentiality:
The ethical duty of confidentiality includes safeguarding participants' identities, personal information, and data from unauthorized access, use, or disclosure.

To ensure, to the best of my ability, that your data remains confidential I will be storing your data in password protected files on my personal computer (see below for more detail). I will not report your participation in this study to any individual or organization.

Anonymity:
Anonymity refers to protecting participants' identifying characteristics, such as name or description of physical appearance.

As interviews may take place in the presence of others (e.g. café, place of work), as well as myself, anonymous participation cannot be guaranteed. If you wish, I can remove personal identifiers, such as name, job title, name of organization, physical appearance etc., in order to anonymize the data. Given that participants for this research project have been selected from a relatively small community (development workers with experience in Laos), some of whom may be known to each other, it is possible that you will be identifiable, and thus this presents a limit to anonymous data.

The data from this research project will be published, and presented at conferences. With your consent I will report direct quotations from the interview. It is your decision if you want your name to be pseudonymized and some or all identifying information removed from my report and thesis.

Should you request to be identified, I will not anonymize your data unless your request to be identified conflicts with another participant's request to have their data anonymized. You will not be identified in publications without your explicit permission.

Every reasonable effort will be made to ensure your anonymity if that is your preference. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have concerns around how your data is being used. It is my goal and responsibility to use the information that you have shared responsibly. Once we have completed your interview you will have the opportunity to provide me with additional feedback on how you prefer to have your data handled.

Recording of Data:
Upon your consent, this interview will be audio recorded. If you do not wish to be recorded, I will write notes during the interview instead. You may request to have the recorder turned off at any time, and request that any recording of you be erased.

Use, Access, Ownership, and Storage of Data:

Data will be stored electronically on my laptop in a password-protected file. The laptop I am using is the property of Memorial University and is encrypted. My laptop, additionally,

data security. It may also be stored on a password protected external hard-drive. No data will be printed in hard copy before it is anonymized and pseudonymized. Dr. Nicole Power and Dr. Liam Swiss will have access to this data only through my personal computer as they will provide insight into analysis and presentation. At no point will raw data be transferred to these parties, or any other, electronically.

Data will be kept for a minimum of five years, as required by Memorial University's policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research, after which point it may continue to be stored on a password-protected external hard drive, but will be removed from my personal computer.

Third-Party Data Collection and/or Storage:

Data collected from you as part of your participation in this project (pseudonymized transcripts of interviews) will be stored electronically by *Google Drive* and is subject to their privacy policy, and to any relevant laws of the country in which their servers are located. Therefore, anonymity and confidentiality of data may not be guaranteed in the rare instance, for example, that government agencies obtain a court order compelling the provider to grant access to specific data stored on their servers. If you have questions or concerns about how your data will be collected or stored, please contact me/or visit the provider's website for more information before participating. The privacy and security policy of the third-party hosting data collection and/or storing data can be found at: https://policies.google.com/privacy?hl=en

While your pseudonymized transcript is stored on *Google Drive*, I will use 2 Step Verification to provide additional security. Audio files will be uploaded to my laptop in a password protected file and then erased from the recorder once transcribed.

Reporting of Results:
The findings will be published in my thesis project, available through Memorial University of Newfoundland. It may also be published in journal articles, which may appear online, and may be presented at academic conferences.

Upon completion, my thesis will be available at Memorial University's Queen Elizabeth II library, and can be accessed online at: http://collections.mun.ca/cdm/search/collection/theses.

With your consent, data will be reported using direct and indirect quotations, and may include personal information provided by participants. It is your choice if you prefer that some or all identifying details are removed or pseudonymized for your anonymity.

Sharing of Results with Participants:
Upon completion of this project, results will be published in my thesis (Samantha Morton), and may be used for various scholarly publications beyond the thesis. A report will be produced in plain language, geared to participants, which will be available to you upon request.

Questions:
You are welcome to ask questions before, during, or after your participation in this research. If you would like more information about this study please contact: Samantha Morton (semorton@mun.ca), or Drs. Liam Swiss (lswiss@mun.ca) and Nicole Power (npower@mun.ca).

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Consent:
Your signature on this form/or oral consent means that:

- You have read the information about the research.
- You have been able to ask questions about this study.
- You are satisfied with the answers to all your questions.
- You understand what the study is about and what you will be doing.
- You understand that you are free to withdraw participation in the study without having to give a reason, and that doing so will not affect you now or in the future.
- You understand that if you choose to end participation **during** data collection, any data collected from you up to that point **will be retained by the researcher, unless you indicate otherwise**.
- You understand that if you choose to withdraw **after** data collection has ended, your data can be removed from the study up to June 30, 2019

I agree to be audio-recorded	☐ Yes	☐ No
I agree to the use of direct quotations	☐ Yes	☐ No
I allow my name to be identified in any publications resulting from this study	☐ Yes	☐ No

By signing this form, you do not give up your legal rights and do not release the researchers from their professional responsibilities.

Your Signature/ or Oral Consent Confirms:

☐ I have read what this study is about and understood the risks and benefits. I have had adequate time to think about this and had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered.

☐ I agree to participate in the research project understanding the risks and contributions of my participation, that my participation is voluntary, and that I may end my participation.

☐ A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date

Researcher's Signature:
I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen to be in the study.

_____ _____
Signature of Principal Investigator Date

Appendix 4: Initial Interview Schedule

Section I: Development Industry in Laos

1. **So you're here in Laos, how did you get here?**
2. **What surprised you the most when you got here?**

3. Can you tell me a little about the organization where you are currently working?

4. Could you tell me a bit about your background in international development?
    a. How long have you worked in development for?

5. What do you feel/think is working well in development in Laos?
    a. What do you think is not working as well?
    b. **Prompt:** Why do you think this is?

Section II: Gender Equality Initiatives in the Workplace

6. **How do you feel you're fitting in at work?**
    a. **Is there anything you find frustrating?**

7. Does your workplace engage in gender equality initiatives?
    a. If yes, what's involved with those initiatives/activities?

8. Does your work (in particular) involve gender equality initiatives?
    a. If yes, what does that look like?
    b. If no, do you think it should? Why/why not?

9. How long has your workplace been involved in gender equality programming?
    a. What sort of work are you currently doing on the issue of gender equality?

10. What types of people and organizations do you personally interact with regarding gender equality activities?

11. Are there any differences in how these people and organizations are approaching gender equality? Any similarities?

Section III: Perceptions of Gender Equality

12. **What does "gender equality" mean to you?**

13. **Do you think there's tension in how different people, groups, or organizations see "gender equality"?**

14. **How does gender relations here in Laos compare to other places you've been? What about back home?**

15. Do you think most people in your organization share the same opinion of what gender equality is?

16. Do you think that INGOs in Laos share the same vision of gender equality?
    a. Are there similarities or differences with how NPAs approach gender equality?
    b. Have you had an experience in your work life where there has been differences in what gender equality looks like?
    c. **Prompt:** why do you think this is?

17. **Do you think your family and friends outside of work feel the same way as you do?**

Section IV: International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOS) and Not-for-Profit Associations (NPAs, i.e. local Lao development organizations)

18. What is your assessment of INGO participation in gender equality initiatives?

19. What is your assessment of NPA participation in gender equality initiatives?

20. Can you think of anything else that I should know about you and your organizations involvement in gender equality activities?

21. **Do you think there's anything I should ask, but haven't?**

Thank you for taking the time to answer all of these questions today, it was very interesting and I really appreciate your time. Please don't hesitate to follow-up with me if you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study.