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Participation Denied: The Professional Boundaries of Monitoring and Evaluation in International Development

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Abstract

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of international development programming is expected to produce “evidence-based” insight for both policy and practice. While supportive of evidence-based decision making, critics of contemporary M&E practice charge that it reflects the development industry’s deepening audit culture, causing deleterious effects. I offer the example of a democratization program in postwar Angola to examine how the design and conduct of M&E in this case reinforced social boundaries and hierarchies of power among the program’s own staff members. These professional staff hierarchies effectively barred ground-level evidence noted by implementation agents from being incorporated into the program’s formal knowledge base. The case demonstrates that monitoring and evaluation procedures within development programs, and perhaps in other bureaucracies, must be examined for their social uses and effects among practitioners. These effects not only weaken the production of actionable knowledge for development but, by reinforcing social inequalities within the very industry tasked to combat them, also structurally threaten the endeavor.

Keywords

international development; international non-governmental organizations; Monitoring and Evaluation; program implementation; local staff

Introduction

International development, like higher education, health care, and other service-oriented industries, is increasingly called upon to base its policies and actions on “evidence” that its work does in fact effect social and economic change. In development, such evidence is expected to come both from academically rigorous studies of impact and from the direct experience of the work itself. “Monitoring and Evaluation” (M&E) has thus emerged as both an industry specialization – complete with graduate-level certificates offered at major universities – and as a set of duties that nearly all development professionals must engage in during the course of their work. In the broadest strokes, *evaluation* in international development is the determination of impact, or whether an intervention has achieved its objectives. *Monitoring*, meanwhile, focuses analytically on the process of intervention itself, tracking inputs like cost and activities to verify that the intended protocol is being followed. Put together and done well, development professionals expect that M&E should allow them

to determine whether social change was achieved and, if not, whether the failure was due to an intervention's flawed design or to its faulty implementation. In the best of circumstances, M&E should be flexible, reflective, and iterative, promoting "course corrections" in the ongoing implementation of a program and establishing final conclusions around the effectiveness of its approach (e.g., Roper, Pettit, and Eade 2003).

I argue that M&E as a set of decisions and activities also accomplishes significant symbolic and social "boundary-work" in international development. Moreover, I charge that the social boundaries produced through M&E – whether between development professionals and recipients or among development professionals – can threaten its purposes. Boundary-work should be understood as conceptual demarcation – for instance, how "science" is distinguished from other intellectual but non-scientific pursuits. Demarcations such as those between professional and layperson or expert and amateur are "routinely accomplished in practical, everyday settings" (Gieryn 1983:781) through social and symbolic means. Symbolic boundaries are used to protect a group's autonomy, to enhance its prestige, and often to justify inter-group inequalities, but they may also be necessary for the translation of different kinds of knowledge and perspective across social worlds (Lamont and Molnár 2002). In international development, the primary boundary effected through knowledge practices such as M&E is that between development professionals and recipients (e.g., Li 2007). I highlight here how these activities also produce boundaries inside the industry itself: marking distinctions between different categories of development worker such as national versus international staff or implementation versus administrative staff (Redfield 2013). Though taken to indicate either the demographics of the development workforce or the nature of particular development tasks, these descriptors are also social classifications shaping what power and influence a staff member has within a program or an organization (Peters 2016).

My example comes from the Good Governance in Angola Program (GGAP),¹ a democratization intervention implemented in postwar Angola from 2007–2012 by a consortium of three large international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with funding from a western aid agency. My goal in studying the GGAP was to understand how program staff experienced such work and what development intervention looked like through the eyes of rank-and-file implementers rather than either policymakers or beneficiaries (compare to Mosse 2005 or Scherz 2014). I held no formal responsibilities to the program or its donors but negotiated access to GGAP offices expressly for this study.² Around the mid-point of the program's first phase, in 2008–2009, I accompanied staff members in their daily work over the course of twelve months and attended major programmatic events including retreats, workshops, and team meetings. I was based in Luanda for several months observing the GGAP's headquarters offices there, subsequently splitting my time between the implementation offices of Bié and Huambo Provinces. I conducted iterative, in-depth interviews in Portuguese and English with program staff

¹This program name and all personal and organizational names are pseudonyms.

²Negotiating access in this case most significantly demanded a commitment not to identify the persons or organizations fielding the program that I call the GGAP. I did not offer my research services to the program in any way nor was I approached by them to conduct other work for the program or its parent NGOs or donors. My role was only to be an anthropologist studying the GGAP, which I now recognize is an unusually independent stance to be afforded in the conduct of anthropological research in international NGOs.

members, donor representatives, and the local community members and officers of municipal governments who worked closely with the program. My analysis here is informed by my detailed daily fieldnotes, audio recordings of events that I later transcribed, interview transcripts, and the GGAP's own programmatic materials and evaluations.

In the GGAP, as is common across the development industry, members of the implementation staff were assigned only data collection responsibilities towards M&E. They held no influence over the higher-order tasks of determining what data would be collected, checking and compiling that data, nor making any analytical decisions. This restricted assignment reflected several competing assumptions about implementers' capacities and interests. The administrative staff who determined these assignments held expectations that provincial implementers would have privileged access to first-hand, site-specific information about program implementation and its local impact, while they in Luanda would have greater access to the whole-program perspective. Administrators also presumed, however, that implementers would not understand M&E procedures nor value the knowledge produced by them. Further, administrators anticipated that implementers would little appreciate and perhaps even inadvertently sabotage efforts to track and evaluate the intervention. I demonstrate how the implementation staff did in fact understand and value the broad purposes of M&E and made efforts to contribute intellectually and practically to the undertaking. I charge that in rebuffing these efforts, administrative staff engaged in boundary-work to maintain professional superiority over their implementation colleagues.

The boundary effects of M&E – here, reinforcing the conceptual demarcation between administrative and implementation officers within a program – interest the applied anthropology of development in two ways. First, these effects may negatively impact the broader human resources base of development work. The GGAP suffered serious staffing challenges that threatened its ability to meet its targets in part due to frustrations around M&E and the struggles for authority and influence waged through its practices (see also Peters 2013). More salient, these social effects are concerning because they frustrate the production of accurate and actionable knowledge for development. While not all development programs suffer the problems I observed in the GGAP, other interventions and perhaps other bureaucracies beyond international development could and likely do. Helpful information about the program's implementation and its effects in rural Angolan provinces was never incorporated into the GGAP's formal knowledge base because the staff's internal hierarchies of power prevented such information from being valued. This social barrier was itself produced and maintained within the very activities intended to make information mobile between staff ranks and offices and, ultimately, accessible to donors and decision makers.

While my concerns are the negative consequences of boundary work for the GGAP as a whole and for its implementation officers in particular, the benefits of hierarchical boundaries must also be noted. The GGAP's administrative staff was largely, though not wholly, composed of expatriate members. The most senior program administrators – Osman and Shameem – were themselves from the same developing country in South Asia and had risen through the ranks of the implementation staff there to take on increasingly administrative positions, eventually moving up to become expatriate professionals in other

developing countries. Angola was only the latest among them. Another member of the central GGAP administration in Luanda, Raul, was himself Angolan and sought to do as these men had done – to transfer into an administrative position in a different developing country where he would be an expatriate staff member. Much of the boundary-work engaged in by the administrative staff may have been due to their relational identity needs, bringing them immediate and possibly long-term benefit as they asserted administrative status through reinforcing the implementation staff's inferiority.

Anthropological analysis of the development industry often works in a tradition of considering the endeavor a "social field", in Pierre Bourdieu's (1975:19) sense: "with its distribution of power and its monopolies, its struggles and strategies, interests and profits." This approach asks how power is allocated and contested within the industry and what is at stake in these negotiations. Knowledge production in international development, including monitoring and evaluation activities, is known in this literature to be an inherently social and political activity that establishes legitimacy for the endeavor and maintains boundaries between development professionals and their targeted "recipients." Tania Murray Li (2007), for instance, demonstrates how development's plans and assessments establish conceptual boundaries around certain kinds of knowledge in order to exclude, though not always successfully, certain social, political, and historical factors from institutional consideration unless they can be "rendered technical" and thereby made amenable to development intervention. Exclusively technical knowledge then serves to justify development intervention (Mitchell 2002), shields interventions from political and social critique (Ferguson 1994), and contributes to an image of success as narrowly defined within technical rather than social or political parameters (Mosse 2005).

Critical scholarship on these sociopolitical effects of knowledge production in development situates them almost exclusively at the "development encounter" (Peters 2000) between professional agents or the industry as a whole and the intended beneficiaries. Here, I contribute to a growing literature that demonstrates how other boundaries exist within development as a professional field, even among colleagues with shared purpose. To explicate how GGAP's administrators used the rhetoric and artifacts of M&E procedures to reinforce social and symbolic boundaries between themselves and implementation staff, I briefly explain the structure of these teams, who these staff members were, and with what duties they were generally tasked. I then explain the specific activities and instruments the staff used to conduct M&E. The body of my argument is ethnographic: a series of performances and exchanges among staff members as I observed them at an October 2008 workshop held in Huambo City specifically to address the program's M&E concerns. While the boundary work of GGAP administrators may have furthered their personal projects of professional advancement within the international development industry, it also frustrated their own and others' efforts to advance political and economic development in postwar Angola.

Monitoring and Evaluation in the GGAP

The GGAP was jointly implemented at the time of my research by a consortium of three international NGOs. An American NGO supported the central administrative office in

Luanda, an intervention site in Bié Province and a second rural site. A Canadian NGO fielded two provincial field sites, and a British NGO managed the final field site in Huambo Province.³ Working from 2007–2012 in mostly rural municipalities, the program intended to lay the groundwork for Angola's future fiscal and political decentralization. It was one of the first large development – rather than humanitarian relief – programs fielded in Angola's postwar period by any western bilateral aid agency or international organization.

In the GGAP's central administrative office in Luanda were Osman, the program's director; Shameem, its grants manager; and an M&E and communications officer, first Julie and beginning in the program's second year, Raul. Osman and Shameem were seasoned expatriates in the "remarkably circumscribed" social world of international development professionals (Rajak and Stirrat 2011:167, see also Eyben 2011), each having long experience working in developing countries including the South Asian country they were both originally from. Julie was a young British woman working in her first full-time position after completing a master's degree in development studies, and Raul was an Angolan in his first international NGO position. Julie advanced quickly out of the GGAP, moving to serve as the central M&E officer for the British NGO, responsible to address all of that organization's programming. Raul, hired first as Julie's assistant, took on her position fully after she moved on. A final two Luanda-based positions – technical advisors for community development and municipal government development, respectively – were largely vacant in the second year of the GGAP, seldom filled throughout the life of the program.

This central office, staffed by just three to five people at any time, supervised all five provincial field teams and served as the communications hub for the implementing NGOs' consortium. This office also communicated to the donors and in conjunction with them, coordinated with the central Angolan government about the intervention. The administrative staff found their workload quite heavy, even overwhelming. The demands of report writing and M&E specifically occasioned serious complaint from them, and Julie had lobbied strenuously to create what became Raul's position as her M&E "second." Shameem, too, lobbied to create an assistant position to aid his task of managing program funds, even mocking up a vacancy advertisement, but never won approval. To my knowledge, there was no effort to fill the M&E assistant position Raul vacated when he took over Julie's first officer post, as all recruitment was focused on filling Luanda's two open technical advisor positions.

In each of the five intervention provinces, implementation teams were composed of four to five persons, including municipal government and community development agents, and infrastructure and grants managers. These teams structured their work around two poles: the local government offices⁴ and the community. Municipal development agents focused full-time on training local government staff in computer literacy, budgeting, project management, and so on, as necessary to improve government capacity, accountability, and transparency (e.g., Grindle 1997). These GGAP staff members were effectively seconded to local

³In the second phase of the program, the Canadian organization withdrew from the consortium. The American organization took over one of their field sites, and the other simply closed. At the time of my fieldwork in 2008–2009, this change was unforeseen.

⁴"Local government" personnel in Angola are assigned to municipal offices by a central ministry and are not necessarily from the municipality, nor even the province, that they serve. There are no local level elections nor taxation authority, etc., to date.

government offices as a type of in-house public administration coach, exemplar, and knowledge resource, working directly alongside government officials in these municipal offices.

At the other pole, community development agents from each provincial team focused on forming and training community-based organizations to deliberate local priorities and communicate their resources and needs formally to their municipal government. These agents spent the bulk of their time on the move from community to community, arranging meetings and workshops and keeping abreast of needs through face-to-face communications. In most of the implementation sites in 2008–2009, cell phone communications were not yet possible and travel was treacherous – roads and bridges either did not exist or were still being de-mined from the war, and both NGO and government staff were barred from travel at night or overnight in the communities. In these geographically large, rural municipalities, the community development agents had by far the most physically arduous, time-consuming assignments.

Provincial implementation teams also coordinated to help community groups elaborate “micro-projects” with funds from the GGAP and other partners. These were meant to be smaller-scale interventions such as a weeklong training for traditional birth attendants or the repair of a school or clinic, that community groups designed and managed independently but with communication to local government. The projects were used to build community skills but also made manifest the program’s intentions and its utility and became important procedural sites for relationship building between GGAP staff and program recipients. As a whole team in each field site, finally, the GGAP hosted periodic public meetings for government officials and community representatives to interact directly. These were massive undertakings for the teams, committed as they were to helping both sides prepare materials for these encounters and being responsible for community representatives’ travel logistics and expenses.

Within this implementation structure, field staff were also meant to conduct data collection for M&E as they went about their regular duties. The program’s formal mid-point and final evaluations were tasked to two external teams, but even these teams, hired from outside the GGAP, its parent NGOs, and its donors, were expected to use data gathered by the project staff in their analyses. External teams did conduct independent interviews with certain individuals in the course of their evaluations but did not independently collect quantitative or longitudinal data.

Implementers were asked to gather information ranging from “interest stories” to beneficiary income and environmental impact data. Table 1 summarizes the materials field staff were asked to forward to the Luanda office, as explicated in the GGAP’s M&E Manual. At month’s end, for instance, each office was to send an accounting of all activities to Luanda to include meetings’ minutes and “training reports”: brief summaries of the messages imparted in any beneficiary interaction. These should have been prepared by each staff member who had individually interacted with any beneficiary or beneficiary group during the month, detailed with respect to the main goals of the GGAP. No specific format was recommended, however, and implementation teams were very murky on what such missives

should look like or substantively contain. Considering especially the activities of the municipal development agents who worked alongside local government officials as program beneficiaries, the prospect of such detailed training reports was overwhelming indeed. Some staff took literally that they should write down each exchange they had at work all day in the government offices and objected to the task as practicably impossible. Other agents interpreted the M&E manual as instructing them to include a training report only if they ran a formal workshop with government staff; they submitted no training reports at all some months, despite working with government staff each day in a training capacity.

Implementers were expected to generate much of the M&E data through their use of certain “instruments” or forms that had been designed by administrators. Implementers were expected to submit a “participant list” for each formal activity they held, for instance. This was a form on which beneficiaries themselves were expected to fill in requested information and provide a signature as evidence of attendance. Field staff were specifically forbidden to fill out participant lists on anyone’s behalf, whether during or after the event, as a protection against fraudulent reporting. Implementers routinely interrupted formal activities to check on the progress of these participant lists circulating through any group and frequently had to arrange for some participants to fill lines for others in cases of confusion or illiteracy. Other data collection instruments, a set of forms called “scorecards” to be discussed further below, were expected to be completed through one-on-one interviews with beneficiaries. Photographs of meetings, discussions, and other events as they occurred and a summation of key accomplishments each month rounded out this collection of required monthly data. Additionally, after every three-to-four month period,⁵ the field teams were responsible for forwarding an additional roster of forms, surveys, and points of verification to the Luanda office.

“Quality” Data for M&E

From the GGAP’s inception, all staff were concerned to monitor and evaluate their work well, particularly as “good governance” is so difficult to define and measure (Kaufmann and Kraay 2007). During the program’s first years, however, M&E became frankly frustrating for everyone. Consider the proceedings of a small workshop held in Huambo City expressly to address M&E problems just before the external team of consultants was due to conduct the mid-term evaluation of the program.

Osman opened the workshop by declaring that it should be informal: he expected “discussion and debate” with everyone “speaking from their hearts.” Speaking first “from [his] own heart,” he said:

Right now, we have lots of problems; the first is that we do not get our data on time...many times we have complaints [from implementers] – “we don’t have Internet, we don’t have email, we don’t have this or that” – and we need to see why. So the first problem is that reports and data do not get submitted on time. The

⁵In different phases of the program, the GGAP’s M&E system asked for these extra data either quarterly (every three months) or trimesterly (every four months) – that this periodization changed over the life of the program was another frustration for the implementation staff.

second thing is that we do not get quality information. We don't get things on time, and we don't get them with good data. This is something I need to achieve. But we need to discuss what you all want to achieve as well.⁶

As Osman finished these opening statements, Maximino, an Angolan supervisor from the British NGO's Luanda office, contributed that it was quite obvious why the M&E system was "not working":

I need to support the words of our director that there is a situation, a clear situation at the level of the consortium, but also at the level of the program that our system of monitoring is not at all effective. We cannot, we are not able to demonstrate, not even to the donors, that we have made any progress. So we have this workshop exactly for this reason: so that those invited, but especially the [field team supervisors], can accept their final responsibility for the implementation of the system. We have an inertia and a resistance on the part of the field teams to implement the system and, for instance, the scorecards. In my personal opinion, the scorecard isn't part of the monitoring of the GGAP but rather an implement to collect data after a forum or a workshop where we can collect the opinions of people who participated, and it only works if people know how to use the information. If you don't know how to use the information, then you don't know how to fill it out so that it can be useful....

As Maximino spoke, murmurs rose among those assembled, protesting the tenor of the workshop opening, the blame being leveled at the field staff, and especially his characterization of them. Just moments into the two-day workshop, implementers had been accused of ignorance and reprimanded for both their perceived "resistance" and for the quality and timeliness of their data submission. Legitimate barriers to communication such as Internet and electricity interruptions had been dismissed as quite possibly fabricated. Most important for my argument here, both Osman and Maximino had each positioned himself firmly on the side of administrative staff as set against implementers. Osman's language of "I/we" versus "you" and Maximino's strong intimations that the field staff was not separated from the administration just by lack of knowledge but was also retarding the administration's – therefore the program's – success, symbolically assert an oppositional boundary between these subgroups of staff. Implementers were quick indeed to protest, as this was not the first time they had been accused of ignorance around M&E.

Fresh in everyone's minds in Huambo City that day was the whole-program staff meeting that had been held in Luanda five months earlier. There, the GGAP's M&E problems had come to a head, and implementers had pressed administrators to organize this M&E-focused workshop as a solution. At the prior Luanda meeting, Pedro, an independent consultant hired to facilitate, had opened the retreat by presenting the results of a preparatory survey he had sent out to all staff members. He had asked them to list the "greatest challenges" facing the program as it approached its midpoint, and each and every respondent had included some mention of the M&E system among them. Summing up these responses, Pedro had separated the concerns of the Luanda office from those of the provincial implementation

⁶The workshop was held in Portuguese; all translations here are my own.

offices, though he had not purposively sampled along this distinction. The grievances themselves fell along an administration-implementation divide. Moreover, most respondents had spontaneously identified the source of M&E challenges as wrongdoing or lack in certain sections of the staff: those in Luanda identified wrongdoing by those in the provinces, and vice versa.

At the Luanda meeting, Pedro gave an overview of the complaints: administrators charged that data from the implementation offices were incomplete, incorrect, and tardy, while implementation agents asserted that the M&E system was unrealistic, that it adversely affected implementation tasks, and that they received insufficient feedback on data reported. After delivering these results, Pedro organized discussions on these charges wherein administrators decided that the root of these M&E problems was the implementation staff's ignorance of the importance of M&E in the program and in development work more broadly. Raul, the Angolan M&E officer, then delivered a formal presentation that he had prepared in advance on this very presumption. He lectured for an hour around just two points. First, that monitoring and evaluation have different purposes. Second, that both purposes require "quality" of information⁷ to be the implementers' primary concern. While worthwhile, these points did not instruct provincial staff on data collection procedures nor provide helpful feedback on specific reports or data submitted to date. Implementers requested examples of submitted forms or reports to be displayed, critiqued, and used as a basis for instruction on how, precisely, to improve their quality. Finally, implementers requested further training on exactly what purposes the data collected would serve.

With these discussions from the Luanda meeting on everyone's minds, several workshop attendees sought to set a different, more productive tone in Huambo. Those assembled anticipated receiving detailed instruction on how to collect and submit "quality" data for M&E and discussion on how it would be used. As Maximino delivered his support for Osman's statements, then, and protests began to arise from the implementation audience, Alexandre intervened. An Angolan technical advisor who had recently moved from Luanda to supervise a regional field office, he made these suggestions:

Would it be possible to say another thing? In relation to all that Maximino has said, I think there is a big problem in that there is no clarity (*não há clareza*) in what we are doing. So for me an important thing to do today would be to make an outline (*um mapeamento*) of the instruments that make up the M&E system and to make an analysis of which are the most important and a lesson on how you are supposed to use each tool – how it should be filled out. The question of the logframe (*quadro lógico*)⁸ too, would be very good to go over and to explain how each of the tools of the M&E system is linked to the logframe.

As Alexandre here represented the field staff, there is perhaps resistance, but it is not to the fact of M&E's programmatic importance. Rather, Alexandre was contradicting the

⁷Characteristics of data quality were listed (but not defined or discussed) as: validity, integrity, precision, realism, and date-delimitation.

⁸The "logframe" is the "logical framework" around which an intervention and its monitoring and evaluation is designed. It is a table that relates a program's activities, outputs, means of verification, assumptions made about resources available, and the context of the intervention, etc., to one another, causally.

presumption that implementers should simply do as told, with or without access to the underlying logics of the M&E instrumentation. Implementers evinced genuine interest to learn and understand more about the details of each tool and what it could do for the program. As Alexandre spoke, other provincial staff nodded vigorously and added interjections in support of his request for explication. Instead of attending to this request, however, Osman and other administrators only reiterated that M&E is important, leading the group through a series of basic questions.

Although in this next exercise implementers quickly and succinctly answered Osman's questions about the meanings of monitoring ("it is for tracking the implementation") and evaluation ("it is for knowing if objectives were achieved,") he again berated them for not attending seriously enough to M&E. He began to recount instances where he was unable to fulfill requests for evidence of the GGAP's work, expounding on the onerousness of the administration's tasks of compiling and analyzing data and writing reports. Picking up a copy of the most recent quarterly report, he gestured with it at the workshop attendees, saying:

How many revisions do you think it takes to make this document? How much data is in here? Do you think we [administrators] make up the numbers in here? Is that possible? Where do we get these numbers from? But when we don't have information from you, we can't make these documents. This document, what is it for? The first group to use this document is us – it's our document. We have achieved these results. I need to say a few things about how this is a system. When we went to finalize this document, we had so many problems – you know how many emails Raul had to send. You saw them. "Why do these data not link well together? Why do these data not add up? What is correct? Why is so much missing?" But we don't need to do this. You need to just send good information, and then we would not need to do this. This system has been in place for more than one year, and we should not have this problem. I think, a final word, that you all think that this monitoring work is not a key activity. You think that after a [beneficiary] training, you're done, that you don't need to fill anything out, that you don't need to document, you don't take any of this seriously.

In these exchanges, M&E is a venue in which complaints can be registered, blame can be ascribed, and the implementation staff is put in its place as subordinate to the administration. Despite receiving prompt, correct answers to questions on the purposes and importance of M&E, administrative staff can, and do, simply assert that implementation staff misunderstand and underestimate it, thereby making real their own "dominance" within the structure of the intervention (MacLachlan, Carr, and McAuliffe 2010).

After the outburst above, Osman calmed and began an exercise to systematically review each M&E "tool." Attendees were visibly invigorated by their anticipation of this long-awaited in-depth discussion:

Osman: Okay, so which are the tools that we have inside our monitoring system? What are our forms? Our first thing, when we have an activity – trainings or a forum – we have to

have a participant list, *isn't it?*⁹ This is our first tool. [He writes on the flip chart as though to move on to the next instrument in an enumerated list.]

Alexandre: Excuse me, but we should detail each of these tools – what goes into a participant list, why do we do that, what is useful about this information? Why don't we use another form, why this one?

A tide of agreement rose: implementers had many questions about the details of these forms and were loath to allow Osman to move on without thoroughly discussing this first one, required for every staff activity, even internal meetings. Osman moved as though to list the complete set, however, and even Maximino, who largely sympathized with the administration on the implementers' laxity, tried to pull him into more detailed explication.

Osman: Good, we'll have a discussion like that for every piece of the system. So, the second piece of the system is that we have the monthly report, and then a trimester report....

Maximino: But, Osman, Alexandre's idea is that for each one we should identify what the importance of it is. So, for example, the participant list.... Let us say, what does it show us? We can see the list and we can say, did the [municipal] administrator participate? Did the traditional authorities participate? We can see the diversity of participants coming from the community, and to me this is the value of the participant lists.

Maximino's comments sparked animated conversation: implementers saw great potential for participant lists as records of stakeholder participation in their activities, but questions remained as to the particular format of the sheets and most importantly, how the information would be used and archived in Luanda and beyond. After the workshop, several implementers noted privately that the incredible richness of information contained in participant lists was only available to those with the local knowledge to interpret them. For example, for the reader to know if "traditional authorities" participated in an event, she often must know them by name. The same is true for religious leaders, political party activists, school teachers, nurses, and others, as the format of the GGAP's attendance sheets at the time asked for only the most basic information: name, zone of residence, only sometimes employer or occupation, and sometimes age. In many cases, even identifying participants as female or male required knowledge of the local indigenous language and naming conventions, if not the actual individuals involved. Little of this encoded information was available to the Luanda administrators and even less to foreign donors unless interpreted by those familiar with local convention. Implementers clearly saw the potential of such lists, but also how that potential was not being reached in current use.

Most of the broader purposes of M&E were in fact shared between GGAP administrators and implementers, a significant difference between this case and others that have demonstrated how different groups of development workers engage in the same activities for different, even contradictory reasons (Smith 2003), or otherwise hold disparate opinions on their shared activities (Mebrahtu 2003). The GGAP case suggests that staff positioned

⁹Though Osman conducted the workshop almost entirely in Portuguese, he spoke the language with a heavy south Asian accent, frequently using the English-language phrases "you know" and "isn't it" as fillers.

differently within an intervention do not always hold fundamentally different goals for their work though they may hold different concerns. Here, administrators emphasized a conceptual coherence, organizing their thoughts on M&E around the major “results” envisioned for the program but failing to follow this thread to its logical completion in the everyday work of implementers. Provincial implementers largely organized their thinking by the concrete, social activity asked of them, including its timing, location, and interlocutor, rather than organizing their thoughts on M&E data collection around the sought-after results of the program, though they did understand these. Implementers were more concrete rather than abstract in their thinking but were not less sophisticated; they were more particular, specific, and practical about how data should be collected and what the specific utility of each point of information was, for whom.

M&E concepts and instruments should properly function as “boundary objects” in the way Susan Leigh Star and James Griesemer (1989:408) find that data collection artifacts and procedures work to translate different groups’ interests, expectations, and motivations between them:

In natural history work, boundary objects are produced when sponsors, theorists and amateurs collaborate to produce representations of nature. Among these objects are specimens, field notes, museums and maps of particular territories. Their boundary nature is reflected by the fact that they are simultaneously concrete and abstract, specific and general, conventionalized and customized. They are often internally heterogeneous.

The participant lists, scorecard surveys, reports and minutes sought in development’s programmatic M&E should properly depict society and social change just as field notes, maps, and specimens are used in ecological and natural history research to depict nature. Even concepts such as “accountability” or “democratic participation” should operate as boundary objects that “have different meanings in different social worlds but [as] their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable, [they are] a means of translation” (Star and Griesemer 1989:393). If the artifacts, tasks, and concepts of M&E were successful as boundary objects, they would allow enough autonomy to each participating group – beneficiaries, implementers, administrators, donors, etc. – to engage productively with those objects on their own terms while also facilitating communication between these groups (Star and Griesemer 1989). The experience of the GGAP staff, however, suggests that rather than communicating across group differences, the tasks and artifacts of development M&E were in fact used to reinforce, if not even to produce, those differences.

Interpreting the Instruments of M&E

Consider the GGAP staff’s divergent perspectives on one of the most important M&E instruments, the “scorecards.” Administrators had developed two forms, one each for community members and for municipal officials. Each required an implementer to ask questions about a respondent’s experiences with and perceptions of the local government-community relationship. By aggregating responses, the GGAP sought to quantify and track improved “good governance.” Administrators expected that implementation staff would

routinely carry copies of each scorecard with them as they conducted regular work, to be administered to a respondent whenever opportunity arose. There was no targeted sampling strategy nor scheduling for soliciting respondents because, as senior staff explained to me, any community member's opinions were taken to be as informative as any other's.¹⁰ Administrative staff discussed this as an inclusive, even egalitarian approach to "taking the temperature" of each community or municipal administration. At the program's mid-point, though, only a smattering of scorecards had been received from four field sites, and the fifth office had submitted none.

Implementation staff were decidedly unconvinced these scorecards were worthwhile. Implementation agents mocked the scorecards for being written in unintelligible Portuguese and for including questions and response options that were either outside the ken of local community members or were frankly offensive. Consider the version targeting community members after a municipal or communal forum meeting. One question sought to ask whether or not the interviewee "felt excluded" from any phase of municipal planning (see Table 2).

Implementers could not countenance offering these answer-options as though they could accurately record community members' experiences or opinions on civic participation. Field staff particularly objected to asking respected community members to identify, for instance, their own "weak education" as a factor in their "exclusion." A later question was literally incomprehensible to field staff, who, it is important to note, were expected to provide impromptu translations from Portuguese into Mbundu, Ibinda, Tchokwe, Nganguela, and so on (Englund 2006).

Table 3 contains the exact language of another question from the Portuguese document with literal English translation to retain some of the errors and incongruities of the original. I believe the question is meant to ask about interviewees' experiences with their *Administração Municipal* (municipal administration or AM). If the English sentences are impenetrable, those in Portuguese are worse, including as they do fundamental errors of spelling and grammar. While poor grammar, word choice, and spelling errors alone could impede full understanding, this set of questions was additionally, and endlessly, amusing to field staff as it sought comment on the respondent's *relações* (relations). A native Portuguese speaker seeking to ask about a community's or an individual's interactions with local government offices could quite naturally use a number of terms including *vínculos* (bonds), *ligações* (linkages), or *conexões* (connections) but would never use the term *relações* as it nearly always strongly intimates sexual relations. This language was likely chosen by expatriate administrators as the closest to the colloquial English use of the term "relationships." While they chuckled and made jokes about this and other errors, most implementers were able to parse the word within the context of the GGAP's intervention methods and did their best to compensate for such shortcomings.

¹⁰This approach received criticism in the program's final evaluation report wherein independent evaluators stated that panel data would have been more useful. I am unaware of any discussion of the formation or use of panels for the GGAP's evaluation at its mid-point.

While seemingly superficial, such errors can have real impact on an intervention and are instructive as to the dynamics of power among members of a program staff. The municipal development officers of each intervention site were particularly embarrassed by these forms, as their interviewees were well-educated local government professionals who could accurately diagnose such flaws. Despite receiving suggestions – the most basic of which were of course to correct language errors – administrators did not substantively revise these instruments. Not even Raul, a native speaker of Portuguese, did so when he took over the M&E officer position from Julie. When field staff pressed the administration to “redesign” the forms because they were “inappropriate” and “too difficult to use,” administrative staff took these complaints to be largely about the physical formatting of the forms and responded by restructuring the layout of the questions and answer-options on the page – re-orienting the form from portrait to landscape, for instance – rather than considering alterations to the substance of the questions themselves.

While some implementers did try earnestly to understand the intent behind the scorecards, to discuss them with community members and government staff and to send their best efforts to Luanda, others refused to entertain these instruments in any way. Some, I am sure, fabricated a few responses. Basic and even egregious errors were, for the most part, generously overlooked and compensated for by implementers in their daily work, though this conceptual and practical effort went unrecognized by administrators. Implementers’ more substantive suggestions were similarly disregarded by administrators, Angolan and expatriate alike. For instance, though unsystematically selecting community members to interview was cause for suspicion in many rural communities (compare with James 2012), requests for a transparent systematization went unheeded. Similarly, field staff worried that conducting these interviews blurred their roles from advisory to more evaluative positions in the eyes of some community members and, especially, municipal administration officials, but received no response from the administration about this reputational and relational concern.

The Internal Boundaries of International Development

Tania Murray Li (2007:4) has asked “how programs of improvement are shaped by political-economic relations they cannot change; how they are constituted, that is, by what they exclude.” The case of the GGAP demonstrates that certain of development’s social and political exclusions happen through the very means of knowledge production meant to capture those insights and render them useful for intervention. Others, also, have noted a hollowness in M&E activities, as when the superficial formatting or structure of a report or form is attended to without similar attention to its substantive content. Rather than accuse such vacuous replication as stemming from ignorance or malfeasance, China Scherz (2014:100) asserts that certain professionals “enthusiastically learn these techniques of self-monitoring with the aim of marketing themselves for other work in a philanthropic field that requires fluency in the language of audit.” It is not the substantive skills of knowledge production that are sought or offered in such marketing, as Scherz (2014) demonstrates, but often only the apparent form of it. Such “entrepreneurial self-making” allows development workers to enter cognate employment markets and to compete for advancement within the broader industry. This kind of self-making, especially as administrators increasingly

themselves come originally from the ranks of implementation agents, as Osman and Shameem did, may explain how GGAP administrators could confidently assert themselves to be M&E specialists despite a near pathological attention only to the form, and not the substance, of M&E materials and procedures.

As in other fields, options for professional mobility in international development depend upon one's successful claims to valuable expertise and experience. Such options, and such claims, also depend upon safeguarding who has rights to them – after all, the more common such expertise is, the less valuable it becomes. GGAP staff internally contested each other's justifications as to what programmatic elements were most important for M&E both because they held genuinely divergent perspectives on the program and because demonstrating M&E expertise is an increasingly valuable currency in the development industry. Administrators rejected implementers' critiques of the M&E system on the basis that field staff did not hold sufficient commitment or expertise. Field staff demonstrated knowledge and often sophisticated concerns about the program's M&E both out of professional concern to accurately assess the intervention and to challenge the imposed hierarchy between themselves and their administrative superiors in Luanda.

The artifacts and rhetoric of monitoring and evaluation, and of knowledge production in development more broadly, lend themselves especially well to strategic manipulation at and across the composite social boundaries of the industry. They should properly do so as boundary objects in Star and Greisemer's (1989) sense, translating knowledge across social divides. The example of the GGAP, ironically, cautions that such manipulations may also be used for the more immediate social purposes of contesting power inequalities within the very industry tasked to remediate global social inequalities.

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Table 1

Monitoring and Evaluation tasks for the GGAP implementation staff, by reporting period

Time Period	Information To Be Submitted to Central Office
Monthly	Government scorecards Community scorecards Participant lists from all activities Key monthly accomplishments Event photographs Training reports and minutes from all activities
Quarterly / Trimesterly	Municipal administration questionnaires Verification of how many municipal financial reports were sent to provincial government or shared with the public Verification of any municipal development plans being incorporated into provincial or national systems Copies of any memoranda of understanding signed by the administration during the quarter / trimester
During micro-projects	Monitor environmental impacts Conduct baseline of income levels before implementation

Table 2

Verbatim question from the GGAP's community "scorecard" instrument (left). Translation by author.

Em alguma fase do Processo de Planeamento Municipal se sentiu excluído?	Do you feel excluded from any phase of the Municipal Planning Process?
a) Não	a) No
b) Sim, Porque sou mulher	b) Yes, because I am a woman
c) Sim, Porque sou jovem	c) Yes, because I am a youth
d) Sim, porque sou deslocado	d) Yes, because I am a dislocated person
e) Sim, por causa da linguagem técnica usada	e) Yes, because of the technical language used
f) Sim, Por causa da minha fraca educação	f) Yes, because of my weak education
g) Sim, por causa de uma posição oficial do governo	g) Yes, because of an official position of the government
h) Sim, porque não os sinto tratarem seriamente os assuntos	h) Yes, because I don't feel the topics are seriously treated
i) Sim, porque outros participantes dominam a agenda	i) Yes, because other participants dominate the agenda
j) Sim por causa da minha posição social	j) Yes, because of my social position
k) Sim, por alguma outra razão (Descrever)	k) Yes, because of some other reason (describe it)

Table 3

Verbatim question from the GGAP's community "scorecard" instrument (top). Translation by author.

<p>Sobre as relações com AM (Marque com afirmações aplicável a si)</p> <p>A) Nas minhas relações com AM (Expressadas em fórum) tenho recebido algumas directivas e leis. Eu não penso que tenho alguma influência para mudar as política municipais</p> <p>B) A minha relacao com AM (Expressada neste Fórum) é uma. As minhas opiniões não exprimem com abertura. Mas eu não estou claro como as minhas opiniões são incorporadas nos plans</p> <p>C) As minhas relacoes com AM (Expressadas neste Fórum) são visíveis pois consigo rever as minhas ideias nos assuntos públicos</p> <p>D) As minhas relações com a AM (Expressadas nestes fóruns) são boas, nas tomadas de decisões, as autoridades incorporam as aspirações da comunidade</p>	<p>About relations with the Municipal Administration (MA) (mark which statements apply to you)</p> <p>A) Within my relation with the MA (expressed in forum) I have received some directives and laws. I do not think I have any influence to change municipal policies.</p> <p>B) My relation with the MA (expressed in this forum) is one. My opinions are not expressed with opening. But I am not clear how my opinions are incorporated into plans.</p> <p>C) My relations with the MA (expressed in this forum) are visible but I can review my ideas on public matters</p> <p>D) My relations with the MA (expressed in these forums) are good, in the taking of decisions, the authorities incorporate the aspirations of the community</p>
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