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***Cultivating Development; An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice.* By David Mosse. London and Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2005. 315pp. £17.99 pb.**

It is unusual for a book to elicit as strong and varied a set of responses as Mosse's latest book, *Cultivating Development*, has done. Over the past couple of months I have heard PhD students talk enthusiastically about the sudden focus they are able to give their work after the appearance of *Cultivating Development*; I have heard a development studies academic search for the right phrase to describe it and land on 'really actually – groundbreaking'; I have heard accounts of the anger the manuscript caused and the unease when it became clear that the book would finally be published after a protracted tug-of-war with some of the implicated informants; I have mentioned it at a conference panel and immediately had the question thrown back at me from the audience: 'But do you agree with what Mosse *means*? And does he *mean* that policy – doesn't matter?' Mosse's writing has that incisive ability to make people ask questions that even they themselves are provoked by as they are asking them. And sure enough this kind of ability has a tendency to trigger a range of reactions, from tension through perplexity to curiosity and inspiration. In all cases, when people react it is because they recognise, quite rightly, that what Mosse does in this book is somehow very unusual.

He does not, in any way, say that policy 'doesn't matter'. On the contrary. He presents an ethnographic analysis of the dynamic between aid policy and practice that makes us think about both these categories in new ways afterwards. More specifically, he presents an analysis of how the policy-practice dynamic played out in the DFID-funded Indo-British Rainfed Farming Project (IBRFP) amongst the Bhil 'tribal' communities in rural Western India. Mosse was himself involved in the project as a consultant for over a decade, and his previous long-term 'insider' role in the project makes this book both of special interest and especially brave.

And yet, beyond his own tricky double set of roles, it is surprising in itself that what Mosse does here should seem so new. What he does is, in effect, straightforward ethnography. Maybe one of the most important realisations to come out of the book is precisely the surprising power that ethnographic method can have when it is done well. Mosse simply describes what happens. In the project. In meetings. In the office. When the consultants discuss their drafts. When staff make practical decisions regarding implementation. On field trips. In everyday conversations. In everyday tensions. There is an especially intriguing chapter on what happened during a PRA exercise. There is

insightful analysis of the role of relations within the project. There is a highly credible chapter on consultant work routines.

Mosse describes, in short, how a development project finds its own ways of working itself out. And how these ways are rarely based on policy in the way that we usually assume –but that they can nevertheless be turned into policy after the event. Any development professional will find many scenarios and episodes that they can instantly recognise here. And as the many entrypoints into this development project slowly build up into a rich and thick description of the world of the project, it becomes clear that this candid description forces us to engage with candid questions – especially about the book’s two principal concepts: practice and policy. ‘What if,’ as Mosse formulates it, ‘development practice is not driven by policy? What if the things that make for good policy are quite different from those that make it implementable? ... What if, instead of policy producing practice, practices produce policy, in the sense that actors in development devote their energies to maintaining coherent representations regardless of events?’ (p. 2). It becomes evident that the dynamic between policy and practice is deeply important in the project – but not for the reasons one would think.

Mosse is good at raising questions. However, he leaves many of the next steps to the reader. We have to work out the consequences ourselves – in terms of our understanding of policy processes (So why does policy matter then? Why do we carry on investing in policy even when its own overt reason – to guide development practice – falls through time and time again? It cannot purely be a question of cash), and our understanding of ethnographic method and writing (Why is a careful dissection of policy not the same as dismissing policy? And what happens to academic boundaries when ethnographic writing has such a clear effect on those written about? What is writing as social practice?). Mosse does not answer more than a fraction of our questions – and then makes us ask a raft of new ones. In this respect his book challenges everyone concerned – whether academics, policymakers or practitioners – to raise their game. This is what it is like when someone opens up genuinely new lines of investigation.