Governance Beyond the State

Policy Issue

Inclusive governance and equitable development remain elusive across the world. Development interventions and policy reforms often work in one place but not another, leading to failed programs and unintended consequences. Failures are often blamed on corruption, clientelism, or capture, and differences in success are explained by 'contextual' variation. Yet, the key differences in context remain poorly defined, making it difficult to accumulate knowledge from experience and understand a priori when, where, and why interventions are likely to succeed.

Everyday Choices

GLD Founding Director Ellen Lust's new open-access Cambridge Element, *Everyday Choices*, aims to establish a framework to improve development programming and policymaking. The key to understanding individuals' choices is to recognize that they are members of various religious orders, family or kinship groups, and other communities, as well as the state. Each of these communities makes claims on individuals and affects their choices and actions.
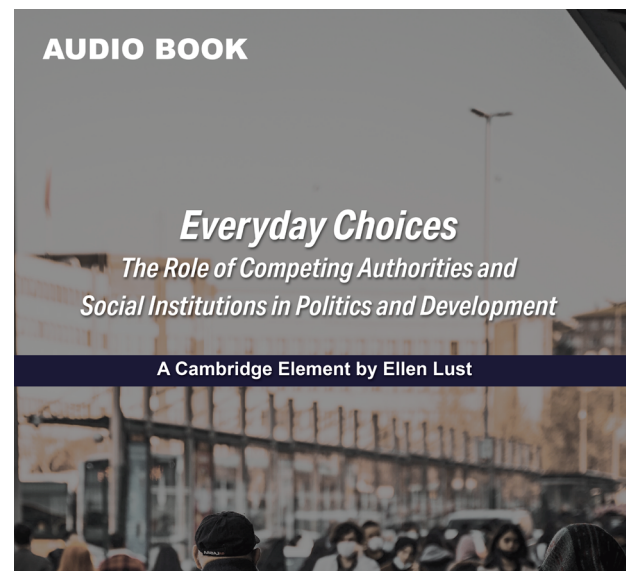
Thus, a bureaucrat who allows her local chief to skip the line, or a voter who casts a ballot for members of their ethnic community rather than a better-qualified candidate, often do so in response to social obligations. However, these actions are often misunderstood as "corrupt" or "irrational." Moreover, policies often fail because policymakers do not understand when and why people comply with obligations associated with communities outside the state.

An Analytical Framework

The framework places the state and non-state authorities on equal theoretical footing. Lust conceptualizes political behavior as the outcome of communities associated with arenas of authority, defined as spheres of engagement with expected allegiances, established authorities, and distributions of power. Within these arenas, social institutions shape individuals' actions by establishing roles, rules, and rewards to ensure the community's survival.

Policymakers and development practitioners must understand the multiple meanings people attach to their actions, consider the importance of different arenas of authority over the question at hand, and recognize how the social institutions within these arenas shape their decisions. Drawing on previous work, *Everyday Choices* provides insights into how one can determine which arenas of authority are most salient and how the nature of social institutions therein may guide behavior.

Everyday Choices is also available as audio book.
Scan the QR-code to listen!

Reconsidering the State

This perspective calls for rethinking the outsized attention given to the state. State-centric perspectives treat outcomes like clientelism, corruption, and tax non-compliance as deviations or "failures" to be solved by strengthening and reforming state institutions. It also envisions electoral rules, administrative boundaries, and similar institutions as purely state institutions. Technocratic approaches thus tend to anticipate laws will have outcomes associated with the official state role and regulation.

However, such approaches often fail. This is because these behaviors and institutions are often driven by and have implications for arenas of authority outside the state. For instance, gender quotas not only alter the representation of women in parliament but also encourage women to act differently within the public sphere – going out to campaign or even sitting in parliament. For communities in which social institutions prohibit such participation, gender quotas not only affect representation in the legislature but also require activities directly at odds with community rules and norms, potentially undermining its authority. State reforms thus foster resistance and, at times, lead to the creation of institutional designs with unintended consequences.

Key Questions for Researchers, Practitioners, and Policymakers

A key contention in *Everyday Choices* is that researchers, practitioners, and policymakers can better diagnose the context in which individuals make choices. The first step is to map out the arenas of authority and social institutions operating in a domain. The second step is to identify the salient issues in peoples' lives, the strength of local power, and the rules shaping everyday decision-making. The final step is to visualize how different arenas of authority and social institutions interact.

Taking the framework into account makes it possible to accumulate knowledge from experience and better understand why policies and programs implemented in one context fail in others. Ultimately, this allows the development of policies and interventions that better respond to the choices and decisions people make in their everyday lives, thereby fostering development.

Impact of State and Other Arenas of Authority

| What are the implications of the choices at hand? | How do authorities view these actions and decisions? | How do individuals view the relevant arenas of authority? | What actions do the relevant social institutions demand? |

Micro- and Macro-level Outcomes

| How are individuals likely to behave? | How do these choices aggregate to affect outcomes? |

About GLD

The Governance and Local Development Institute (GLD) is a research institute based at the University of Gothenburg, originally founded in 2013 at Yale University by Professor Ellen Lust. GLD focuses on the local factors driving governance and development. The institute is dedicated to international collaboration and scientifically rigorous, policy-relevant research in an effort to promote human welfare globally. Findings are made available to the international and domestic communities through academic publications, policy briefs, public presentations, and social media, as well as on-the-ground workshops in cooperation with local partners.

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