This thesis examines the actors' power relations in the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Support Programme (RWSSSP) in Nepal. I study the power relations in this case through analysing actors' conceptions about development, roles, motivations and conflicts related to the programme. I approach the programme as a case of Finnish aid and reflect it on the academic aid debate. With reflection and comparisons to the different views in the aid debate the case will be put into a wider theoretical context and by confronting the theories with the complex reality of the case some general conclusions may be drawn about the power and roles of different actors in development aid.

The analysis is based on interviews, field observations, different types of literature and archival material. The most important sources of information are the interviews and observations made during my fieldwork in Nepal in September 2004. I performed the analysis of the actors' perceptions on the issues studied using some of the methods of grounded theory for categorizing and conceptualizing my interview data. I also analysed the discourses relevant in the case at hand, not by methods of detailed discourse analysis but rather as a part of the issues scrutinized, manifest in what people say about their actions, relations and motivations. My analysis of the context and project history of the case is based on critical review and textual analysis of archival material, project related documents, relevant academic studies.

My main conclusions relate to the roles and power relations of different actors in the programme, their conceptions and the determinants of a successful programme. In RWSSSP, the practical power seemed to be largely concentrated in the hands of the programme consultant staff having a very central role in programme coordination, planning and implementation. The often criticised donor domination was less prominent, DIDC mainly directed the approaches and principles represented in documents, while the programme consultants controlled the day-to-day operation of the programme and also the picture transmitted about it to the donor. The local government agencies, much promoted in programme documents, had been largely bypassed in practice. Local non-governmental actors were, however, in an important position in the implementation of schemes at community level, but not above that. The central role of the implementing consultants can, in my opinion, be generalised to some extent as donor staff is often far removed from the field and depend on consultants for most information about field level activities.

The different actors' conceptions of development seemed quite similar, which is largely explained by the fact that all actors benefit from representing their needs and conceptions in line with the dominant development discourses. There was, however, a clear difference between the stated and implicit meanings of development. All the actors emphasised the issues prominent in development discourses as development, but also seemed to see development as an immanent process in society through which it develops and "modernises". So, the actors' conceptions of development seemed more similar than many simplifying theories state.

The RWSSSP has often been cited among the most prominent successes of Finnish development aid. This success seems to be based on representing the programme according to the trends of development discourses and on getting measurable results. Such determinants of project success can be largely generalised, as project success is finally judged in the donor countries where only the representation and some quantified results in project reports are seen. Coherent representation and tangible results are needed also to justify aid.

Avainsanat-Nyckelord:
- development programmes - Nepal
- water supply
- sanitation
- power relations
- development aid
- interviews
- grounded theory