CHAPTER 3

The International Aid Architecture

EVOLUTION OF FOREIGN AID

The role of foreign aid in development has always been a controversial issue within the international community. At a time when the foundations of modern development economics were laid in the post-World War II (WWII) period, international aid efforts experienced an increase. The departure point for the multilateral aid system was the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), which was established in 1943 by the agreement of 44 nations in November, 1943. Although terminated in 1946, UNRRA focused on the destruction caused by the war by assisting the victims through the provision of basic necessities (UN, n.d.). International financial institutions, including the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), arrived on the scene in the same period, just at the end of and after WWII. With the onset of the Cold War in 1947, the US focused on assisting the countries in Western Europe with the introduction of the well-known Marshall Plan. These efforts, which were based on the West’s anticommunist policies, were followed in 1949 by US President Truman’s Point Four Program, which was directed toward underdeveloped countries. In addition to the bilateral initiatives of the United States, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) was founded in 1961, with the cooperation of developed countries, and the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) operating under it was placed in the
driver’s seat. Thus, the institutionalization of international aid cooperation was formed in the aftermath of WWII. On the other hand, there are also views that deem development assistance a continuation of colonial economics in certain regions. Browne (1997) explains that the 1940s saw the beginning of independence movements among the former colonies, which encouraged bilateral donors in the 1950s to build aid programs as an extension of their colonial obligations.

International aid cooperation, which began with the purpose of tackling the ruins of the old world system, has changed its perspective with regard to “aid content” over the course of time. Emerging theories and growth models in the area of development economics have certainly played a role in this change. During the first decades of the post-war period, the development concept was constructed on the idea of capital accumulation, and therefore foreign aid concentrated primarily on investments. Later, the increasing criticism of aid dependency, as well as the emerging success stories of liberal economic policies, diverted the course toward promoting exports. This rerouting was also impacted by the inability of recipient countries to carry the high burden of debt accumulated from investments. At this point, self-sufficiency for developing countries appeared as a critical issue, leading to a foreign assistance perspective that encouraged not only exports, but also the macroeconomic stability of the recipients. Easterly (2007a) notes that this became the inspiration for the structural adjustment packages of the IMF, the WB, and the Washington Consensus. However, the prevailing economic crises in the 1990s led to new adjustments, including capital controls in aid packages, pointing to the critical importance of institutions.

Over half a century, the international development assistance system was dominated by high-income countries, both bilaterally and multilaterally, but witnessed a wave of emerging donors in the 2000s. However, the outcomes of the decades-long system that has continued primarily under the hegemony of western countries have been increasingly questioned. Even the periodically updated perspectives on foreign aid have not diminished the discussion of the disappointment in results. Here the main issue has been the effectiveness of aid on development and poverty reduction, as success in these two areas has not always been evident. OECD (n.d.) states that lack of co-ordination, overly ambitious targets, unrealistic time and budget constraints, and political self-interest have often prevented international assistance from being as effective as desired. As a result of this recognition, high-level international forums were organized, the first
one being held in Rome, in 2003. Further events on aid effectiveness took place in Paris, Accra and Busan, in 2005, 2008, and 2011, respectively, in an attempt to formulate the principles needed for guidance. Thus, these international forums served as platforms both for ongoing questioning and newly designed commitments.

Although as part of the scope of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the number of poor worldwide was reduced to half of the 1990 level by 2010, hundreds of millions of people still suffer from extreme poverty and hunger today. Besides hunger, the percentage of the world population that just gets by with substandard living conditions is still considerable. In this regard, Sub-Saharan Africa deserves mention. Why and how did the vast amount of aid that flowed to the region for decades not manage to eradicate poverty and enable development as desired? As Chapter 2 of this book discusses, in the world of the 2020s, it is time for many countries in Sub-Sahara and other regions of the earth to leave poverty completely behind. For those who have already defeated poverty, effective international cooperation would help them climb the ladder of economic development. So, what kind of development cooperation approach would be successful? This question, which is also relevant to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is yet to be answered. More importantly, the answers have to be truly implemented.

**Why the Failure?**

The idea of removing poverty and underdevelopment from the modern world stage through international support has led to a mixture of global commitments from past to present. In this context, it is a basic requirement for developed countries to carry out their promises, or do their best, as part of the efforts to reach global development targets. The UN General Assembly that was held in October, 1970, served as a platform where specific commitments were born. The resolution that passed in the 25th Session stated: “Each economically advanced country will progressively increase its official development assistance to the developing countries and will exert its best efforts to reach a minimum net amount of 0.7 percent of its gross national product (GNP)\(^1\) at market prices by the middle of the decade” (UN 1970). In 1975, which was the initial deadline

\(^1\) Later revised as Gross National Income (GNI).
for this enthusiastic target, among the DAC countries only Sweden and the Netherlands achieved the target, followed by Norway and Denmark in 1976 and 1978, respectively. Luxembourg joined this club in 2000, and the latest success came from the UK in 2013, but no other DAC country has met the target, at least, consistently. The weighted average of DAC members’ ODA has never exceeded 0.4 percent of GNP (OECD 2016).

In fact, recent DAC statistics show that the ODA figure for 2018 was equivalent to 0.31 percent of the DAC donors’ combined GNI, more than halfway below the target ratio of 0.7 percent. In 2018, only five DAC members—the UK (0.7 percent), Denmark (0.7 percent), Norway (0.9 percent), Luxembourg (1 percent), and Sweden (1 percent)—met or exceeded the target. The highest ODA contribution within the dataset of OECD came from Turkey, which is not a DAC member but an observer, with 1.1 percent in 2018 (OECD 2019).

Thus, data clearly summarize the disappointing situation that prevails almost half a century after the UN decision. This reality emerges despite the fact that many developed countries reaffirmed the targets put forth at subsequent UN and other international conferences and summits, although extending the deadline to 2015 (IIF, n.d.). In other words, a majority of high-income countries have refused, ignored or partly lived up to the responsibility of development cooperation so far. This explains to some extent why the world’s development outlook is below targets. However, the problem of volume is only the first dimension of the international community’s failure. After all, a successful development cooperation does not only depend on the amount, but also on the quality of funding. Just like a number of failures, there exist promising success stories as well. From this perspective, while developed countries must give serious thought to their financial commitments and corresponding contributions, the second dimension to tackle is ensuring the effectiveness of foreign assistance. The world needs to be strongly committed in its determination to achieve both. For the former, the path to follow is clear with a well-defined target. The latter, though, still requires much pondering. In this situation, it is important to take lessons from the reasons for and routes of previous failures, which are widely discussed in the literature with no clear-cut consensus.

Dambisso Moyo (2010) questions the poverty and aid-dependence of Africa, a region that received massive foreign aid for decades, while describing the case of “dead aid,” which hurt the continent. Likewise,
Prokopijević (2007) claims that aid is not only ineffective, but it is arguably counterproductive. In addition, William Easterly (2007b), in his famous book *The White Man’s Burden*, criticizes the decades-old western aid system and calls the failure of all well-intended efforts a tragedy. This camp, which is supported by similar studies in the literature, draws attention to the collapse of the western-designed aid architecture and to the growing inequalities across the globe. On the other hand, as an alternative view to this approach, which stresses the ineffectiveness or actual harm of aid, a second camp praises the positive impacts and/or the promising potential of it. In an effort to contribute to the latter group, for example, Jeffrey D. Sachs (2005) combines a discussion of past failures with a hope for finding a way to end poverty in the future.

When a number of studies from both camps are taken into account, there is certainly an ambiguity on the performance of foreign aid. Yet this is not surprising, especially for studies that rely on aggregate data. As Bourguignon and Sundberg (2007) explain, aid comes with various motives and formats and through multiple channels, as well as being implemented within heterogeneous settings. Thus, measuring the effectiveness is a complicated issue, which can hardly be generalized. In view of this, employing a sector-focused approach and using disaggregated data might provide more valuable insights. However, as Vathis (2013) concludes based on a literature review of this problem, the existence of flaws in econometric analyses together with certain poor theoretical models make analyzing aid effectiveness a challenging task.

Despite the inconclusiveness of relevant studies, there is a unanimously accepted global fact that points at the gap between the goals and the outcomes of the seventy-year-old international aid system. In fact, all failed cases refer to the ongoing mistakes and shortcomings in the system, including the parties or implementations. In this context, aid content and practice are two different and delicate issues to manage, while the dynamics of each recipient country are critically important to consider. Therefore, it is not possible to draw a standard picture with regard to the formation and impacts of development assistance. The key issue here is learning lessons both from failed cases and inspiring practices, with the purpose of re-shaping the development assistance architecture. As Kaln (2020) states in his article on the recent coronavirus pandemic, multilateral action and solidarity may sound like a cliché, but it is more urgent than ever. In this regard, a better understanding of the factors behind success and failure is of paramount importance.
What to Do?

Accordingly, this chapter attempts to provide a simple framework that categorizes major factors on the path to effectiveness in light of the literature as well as practical observations and discussions. The framework focuses on the design and delivery of development assistance, which are the pillars that shape the desired impact in an integrated way.

Design is the departure point of all development assistance, and hence is critically important. How foreign development cooperation is formulated at the very beginning is the keystone of the outcome. For example, in a report evaluating the economic performance of Sub-Saharan Africa just before the 1990s, the World Bank (1989) points at the countless examples of badly chosen and poorly designed public investments, including some in which the WB itself had participated. A good design for development projects or programs requires a multifactorial approach, which is outlined below. To be able to draw the right roadmap, each factor is important to consider individually.

Decision-maker: Who designs the assistance?

The brains behind projects and programs are of critical importance. Who plays the leading role in the cooperation design? Is it the provider or the receiver? A number of cases from past experiences show that unilateral designs handled only by the former are more likely to fail. The reason behind such failures is primarily the donor’s lack of information or awareness of the real needs and the setting of the recipient country. Discussing the scope of the failures of western aid to Africa, Ayittey (2005) emphasizes that the programs in question lacked transparency, and the people being helped were seldom consulted. It is also a fact, as Easterly and Pfutze (2008) state, that the peculiar situation of the aid bureaucracies is that the intended beneficiaries of their actions have no political voice to influence the behavior of the bureaucracy. Therefore, a success story can only be realized through an interactive process that includes an active dialogue and consultation with local actors. Whitfield (2009) gives the Botswana model as an example for this approach, where the recipient government laid out its own needs and designs for its projects, and then donors came into support those projects. Recommendations and experience sharing from bilateral and multilateral institutions are always welcomed, as long as they align with the country facts. The key here is adopting a bottom-up policy and a cooperative attitude. As reiterated at the Busan (2011) Forum, partnerships for development can only succeed
if they are led by developing countries, implementing approaches that are tailored to country-specific situations and needs.

**Purpose: What is the goal?**

The second critical factor for a good cooperation design is setting out the purpose carefully and specifically. Does the project or program address an existing need? Is it outcome-oriented? Is it practical and rational in terms of implementation? Does it prioritize the benefit to the recipient? A partnership that is not framed by affirmative answers to these questions would be either a waste or a diversion of resources. In this regard, having a good grasp of the local region is essential in setting the right goal, while being loyal to the recipient’s interests is another sensitive issue. According to discussions in the literature, traditional assistance programs in the past included many cases oriented toward various interests that prioritized the benefits to developed countries. Schraeder et al. (1998) discuss the aid activities of traditional donor countries from the perspective of ideological, political, and economic benefits. Avoiding the selfish mistakes of past experiences is also closely related to choosing the right type of cooperation.

**Type: What kind of cooperation is on the table?**

International assistance is categorized according to various definitions. While OECD-DAC offers a traditional taxonomy, there are also studies that further develop it or suggest alternatives to it. Tandon (2008) stands out among these studies with the rainbow-colored spectrum he created. The spectrum starts with the category *Purple Aid*, which depends on solidarity with the people of the receiving countries, activities that start at the bottom step—raising awareness about an existing social or political injustice—and graduate upwards to the provision of an alternative development model. This kind of cooperation is generally managed through the initiative of heads of states. *Green/Blue Aid*, the second category on the continuum, focuses on the provision of global public goods, covering all kinds of “untied” grants and assistance. These two groups represent the kinds of cooperation that give genuine consideration to the recipient country’s benefit. The *Yellow* and *Orange* categories in the spectrum include geopolitical, strategic, and commercial interests, including loans. At the end of the spectrum lies *Red Aid*, which is aimed at encouraging or supporting a particular ideological viewpoint among the governments and/or peoples of the recipient countries. Thus, aid programs based on Washington Consensus conditions are considered to constitute a widely implemented example of Red Aid. It is known that untied and unconditional assistance are also among the principles underlined at the Accra
In the same vein, Tandon (2008) criticizes the decades-long IMF bail-outs to the hard-pressed economies of countries in need. Tandon’s aid taxonomy is just an example of classifications that can be used in the discussion of acceptable assistance types. The main point is that “genuine” cooperation gives precedence to the recipient’s benefits, while also favoring an untied formulation. Efforts for raising awareness about humanitarian challenges, untied technical know-how transfers, as well as grants, assistance, and cooperation with no conditions are among the ideal examples of genuine aid. Similarly, Action Aid (2011) describes the types of aid that do not meet the minimum standards of real aid as “substandard,” and based on an analysis done in 2009, it found that the overall rate of substandard aid in the scope of the study was 45 percent. As an interesting finding, the largest portion of substandard aid was composed of unwanted and overpriced technical assistance.

**Address: Who benefits from it?**

In designing assistance, it should be borne in mind that the end goal is reaching out to the people in need. In this context, there appear two main questions. The first is about the proportion of funding that is spent for the intended people. How much of the financial input assigned for cooperation goes to the final output? This has been a controversial issue, since a considerable part of assigned budgets has been spent on the employees, consultants, and overhead costs of agencies. Easterly and Pfutze (2008) discovered that multilateral aid agencies have significantly higher administrative budgets, albeit with tremendous variation across agencies. The aid sector has long been criticized in this matter, when the allocated budget falls short of the desired outcomes and is diverted to another destination. Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) give details from Afghanistan as an example of this failure. In analyzing all experiences, the key solution is creating effective teams with minimum cost, as certain bilateral agencies have presented the good practice of “doing more with less.” The second question in this framework is determining the exact destination for the assistance. Where will the assistance end up and who will benefit from it? There is, in fact, no standard prescription here, because of the varying governance structures in countries. While cooperating with state institutions fosters trust and success in some countries, it leads to a double mistake in countries with decayed or corrupt institutions. In light of this reality, by taking institutional structures into account, design has to be made in a way that the assistance of interest reaches those who need it. Project-based assistance that yields concrete outcomes that directly
address the needs of local people serves as an ideal kind of cooperation in a majority of cases. In addition, as Dedu et al. (2011) note, rural areas, where poor people live who are in real need of help, are ignored most of the time. Thus, including rural communities and their needs within the range of cooperation definitely matters.

Term: Does it serve short-term or long-term purposes?

Another ideal feature of cooperation is its ability to support development in the long term. In this respect, design should include a planning that leads to productivity and sustainability. Answering this question affirmatively is critical in order not to end up with idle investments, wasted resources, and aid dependency. Ayittey (2005) documents the failed state enterprises in certain African countries, which were established via foreign aid, but more through considerations of prestige rather than concerns for economic efficiency. Lessons learned from a number of previous mistakes show that assistance should be designed in a way that promotes interaction but does not distort behavior in the local community to which it is addressed. In this framework, the vital importance of humanitarian assistance cannot be denied, despite its short-term impact. However, it is also known that these short-term efforts create a risk of aid-dependence in the recipient country. Food aid is a well-known example. Put differently, while humanitarian assistance is an imperative for partner countries in times of crises, it should evolve into sustainable forms in time. Thus, a principal issue here is establishing the relationship between humanitarian and development assistance. In this context, Linking, Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD) helps understand the holistic nature of the issue. LRRD tries to harmonize short-term relief and long-term development through effective political and financial coordinating mechanisms (EU 2012). As Mosel and Levine (2014) explain, LRRD-ness is not a quality of a project, but rather a way of approaching a situation, with the purpose of preventing the most vulnerable people from falling into crises over and over again. Although LRRD itself has been a matter of discussion in terms of its definition and relevant implementations, the point here is that an approach that connects the present time with tomorrow for building a sustainable future makes sense. In other words, adopting a holistic cooperation perspective in context-appropriate countries is valuable. Furthermore, designing permanent and effective projects require thinking how to promote agricultural productivity and build manufacturing capabilities. As Whitfield (2009) highlights, this further necessitates
focusing on the infrastructure requirements of production: roads, railways, ports, electricity, and water for commercial purposes. Also, in their study on aid effectiveness, Arndt et al. (2011) conclude that emphasis on channeling funds to physical capital investments of a public nature, as well as to human capital improvements appears prudent.

On the other hand, even perfect designs would risk failure if delivery is not well planned. For this reason, operational details are crucial to complete the cooperation successfully. In fact, partners on both sides are responsible for achieving a happy end, but providers have to pay special attention to the effective completion of all phases. Below are the main factors that affect the delivery process of international assistance.

**Speed: Does it fall victim to bureaucracy?**

One of the leading criticisms of traditional donor activities across the world has been the high level of bureaucracy. Easterly (2002) remarks that the bureaucratic characteristics of foreign assistance have remained remarkably persistent throughout its fifty-year history, despite the international community’s awareness of the problem. The environment that created aid bureaucracies led those organizations to define their output as money disbursed rather than service delivered. Unwieldy bureaucracy is known to reduce the speed of delivery, and sometimes to cause total failure. Easterly (2007b) explains how bureaucracy and over-planning at multilateral agencies failed to turn aid money into critical services for the poor in Africa. Action Aid (2011) notes that associated delays are estimated to be massive. An interesting detail is that emerging countries within the international cooperation system have made a difference to their reputation by responding more speedily and less bureaucratically when implementing development programs (Fengler and Kharas 2010).

**Accountability: Who is responsible for delivering results?**

An operation’s success is closely related to the responsibilities undertaken by international institutions, and hence their employees. A much-debated issue has been the lack of motivation on the part of agency workers, as well as their ignorance of final results. Whitfield (2009) associates this problem with micro-level relationships, which refers to the everyday practices of agencies. The literature also defines it as a principal-agent problem, since aid workers did not take full responsibility in a number of cases. Prokopijević (2007) points to the notable difference between the practices of multilateral and bilateral institutions in terms of accountability, where the latter exhibit a better performance. In this
regard, it matters to a great extent that the country takes ownership of the project.

**Transparency: Is fund management clear and reliable?**

Transparency is fundamental to assess and improve the performance of cooperation partners. In fact, a better transparency also creates a stronger accountability. However, in the past most agencies were not transparent in how they spent the funds. Easterly and Pfutze (2008) find, surprisingly, that most multilateral agencies, albeit with exceptions, failed to report the details of their expenditures. In this respect, DAC’s efforts are meaningful, given that some non-DAC members report to it as well. Both the Accra and Busan Forums have emphasized the critical role of transparency along with accountability in development cooperation efforts.

In brief, experience shows that the factors outlined above have to be carefully considered by countries and agencies in order to draw successful roadmaps for international development cooperation. Components of this framework are globally debated issues, indicating that the most important need for cooperation partners remains the “decisiveness” in finding the best and most effective path. As Nobel Laureate Esther Duflo (2009) stated, spending aid effectively and rationally is possible, and thus, demonstrating the political will to do so would restore the confidence that the world is quickly losing.

Recent projections point at dismal figures for poverty and underdevelopment by 2030, the period when the global community is supposed to have eradicated poverty from earth. In this setting, data combined with the aging global commitments heighten the humanitarian responsibility of cooperation partners to collaborate further, and in an effective way. The past is full of frustrations, but also carries a light of hope. For the sake of humanity, the international cooperation architecture does not have the luxury of failing any longer.

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