

**Nilima Gulrajani**

## Organising for donor effectiveness: an analytical framework for improving aid effectiveness

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# **Organising for donor effectiveness: An analytical framework for improving aid effectiveness policies**

**By Nilima Gulrajani<sup>12</sup>**

*To what extent do donor organisational factors impinge on the search for more effective foreign aid? Donors have lagged behind aid recipients in adhering to the principles of aid effectiveness. Explaining the reasons for this demands greater awareness of organisational attributes within donor entities. Donor organisational features that have a credible positive impact on aid effectiveness are identified as the analytical components of donor effectiveness. To date, there have been limited attempts to relate donor organisational factors to aid effectiveness goals. This article elaborates on a number of such relationships based on an empirical examination of donor dynamics in Norway, the UK and Canada. Organisational features identified as contributors to aid effectiveness include a conducive political environment, a powerfully mandate ministry of development, a high-level policy statement on development and bounded professional discretion. Donor effectiveness provides an important lens through which to build a robust post-Busan global partnership.*

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<sup>1</sup> Senior researcher, Global Economic Governance Programme, University of Oxford. Email contact: ng-geg@univ.ox.ac.uk

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# **Organising for donor effectiveness: An analytical framework for improving aid effectiveness policies**

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## **1. Introduction**

If the community of foreign aid donors was to ever be a contestant on the television game show *The Weakest Link*, host Anne Robinson would have almost certainly had the pleasure of proclaiming: “You are the Weakest Link, goodbye.” This is because among all the other actors in the field of foreign aid—multilateral institutions, aid recipients, non-governmental agencies, think tanks, media observers, consultants and academics among others—there is a palpable feeling that donor governments and their publicly-financed donor agencies<sup>3</sup> that manage Official Development Assistance (ODA) are not pulling their weight in the global effort to enhance aid effectiveness. The most recent evaluation of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness noted donor ‘unevenness’ in meeting aid effectiveness targets and unmet ‘commitments’ to changing donor systems and ways of working (Wood et al., 2011). Donors ostensibly lag behind recipients in meeting their obligations “due to lack of policy structures, lack of compliance, decisions running contrary to alignment and disconnects between corporate strategies and their aid agendas” (Wood, June 15 2011). Nevertheless, the reasons for these donor deficiencies remain unspecified and left unexamined in the evaluation report and, for that matter, in most discussions of aid effectiveness.

The 2011 High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan did little to fill this lacuna on the donor organisational factors limiting advancement of the Paris Declaration and its principles and targets. The Forum concluded that

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<sup>3</sup> The term ‘donor’ refers to national governments providing foreign aid. In this paper, we empirically examine longstanding bilateral donor organisations that have responsibilities for reporting ODA to the Development Assistance Committee (DAC). In larger countries, there can be as many as 30 different actors involved as donor organisations (OECD, 2008a: 11).

after seven years of implementation, only one of Paris aid effectiveness commitments had been reached, and more worryingly, that this had been met when the targets were set (Mawdsley et al., forthcoming, Wood et al., 2011: 19). There was little analysis or discussion of the factors that had limited achievement. Instead, aid effectiveness transformed itself into a pejorative word. As of now, there are no concrete commitments to supplant the Paris targets, leaving the goals and objectives of aid effectiveness in a state of confusion and flux.

This article aims to refocus the debate on aid effectiveness by closely examining the Paris Declaration and its commitments and unmasking the silent killers of aid effectiveness lurking inside donor agencies. In doing so, it seeks to build a body of theory and evidence that can support the emerging post-Busan agenda for effective development cooperation. The central tenet for this paper is that explanations of aid ineffectiveness must begin their search within the donor agency itself, more specifically by examining the organisational factors that are plausible influences on the Paris principles and targets. Organisational factors refer to the design attributes relating people, things, knowledge and technologies within a formal framework intended to achieve specific goals (Clegg et al., 2010). In foreign aid, organisational variables have a critical, if sometimes imperceptible, effect on outcomes (Tendler, 1975: 2). For example, the success or failure of policy directives, decision-making processes and strategic management systems will always be mediated by complex interactions of organisational variables like the environment, governance structures, goals and mandates, motivations and culture. Yet, the relation between organisational factors and aid effectiveness remains poorly understood in any single donor entity, let alone theorized and generalized across the donor collective. This paper attempts to make some small steps by building a more robust understanding of the analytical components and mechanisms of donor effectiveness. *Donor effectiveness* refers to the donor-related organisational features that have a credible positive impact on aid effectiveness aims, goals that in this paper are defined

by the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. To date, there has been limited systematic discussion of either the components of donor effectiveness or, indeed, the possible causal relations by which donor effectiveness might impinge on Paris commitments. While there are a number of DAC documents that act as compilations of internal donor management practices, none offer analytical statements on the relation between specific donor organisational variables and aid effectiveness (OECD, 2008a, OECD, 2009a, OECD, 2005).<sup>4</sup>

In order to begin an exploration of this relationship, the paper proceeds as follows. The contemporary policy context for aid effectiveness is presented in the next section. It is suggested that a myopic focus on the technical modalities of aid delivery has come at the expense of understanding the organisational dynamics that determine whether such modalities can actually deliver desired outcomes. Deeper questions of donor effectiveness have been sidelined in favour of quantitative rankings of donor performance constructed using global data on aid delivery mechanisms. This constrained efficiency-driven understanding of donor performance is, however, unwarranted given the widespread investigation of donor organisational dynamics within the social sciences. The literature review in section three points to four organisational variables that shape donor behavior and comprise the framework for donor effectiveness: political environments, donor governance, organisational goals and discretion incentives. Section four utilises these categories to empirically compare and contrast donor dynamics in Canada, the UK and Norway and illustrate the plausible mechanisms by which organisational factors can be linked to the achievement of donor obligations within the Paris Declaration. The paper concludes by recommending that research and policy agendas orient themselves towards the cultivation of donor effectiveness. Advancing the principles of effective development cooperation to which both Northern and Southern donors have

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<sup>4</sup> This is perhaps due to the political sensitivities in singling out good and poor performance among DAC members.

committed to in Busan requires greater grasp of the inter-relations between donor organisation and aid effectiveness.

## 2. Unpacking aid effectiveness

Aid effectiveness is now an integral part of the development lexicon, a term that represents a package of specific ideas and reform measures on how aid can be better managed (Hayman, 2009). For many, the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) has become the authoritative definition of aid effectiveness (Stern et al., 2008: 20). The Declaration, and its successor, the Accra Agenda for Action (2008), defined aid effectiveness in terms of five major principles meant to bind donors and recipients into specific time-limited commitments. 35 bilateral donors, 26 multilaterals, 56 aid recipients and 14 civil society organisations subscribed to these much-publicized commitments. Target categories included: (1) aid recipients exercising leadership over development policies and strategies and leading co-ordination (ownership); (2) donors basing their support on recipients' systems and priorities (alignment); (3) reducing the transaction costs of donor interventions (harmonisation); (4) introducing performance measurement and management mechanisms (results-based management); and (5) ensuring commitment and respect between donors and recipients (mutual accountability). The Busan Partnership Document (2011) sought to widen the application and meaning of aid effectiveness but did so with little agreement on what was to follow in its footsteps (Eyben, 2012, Mawdsley et al., forthcoming). Table 1 presents the formal commitments and explicit targets that *donor* members of the DAC made to the achievement of the Paris Declaration (PD) in 2005.<sup>5</sup> The PD marked a significant departure from previous eras because donors had never been held to specific, time-bound commitments in their aid operations (Stern et al., 2008: 12). As there were no formal measurable commitments made by donors at the Busan Summit however, the PD is taken as the only globally

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<sup>5</sup> Southern donors are not referenced in the Paris Declaration. They attended the 2005 Paris meeting as aid-recipients and are therefore not bound by the same obligations as 'traditional' DAC donors.

accepted framework for concretely assessing donor progress towards aid effectiveness. From Table 1, a number of observations can be made about the ways donors are implicated in the global aid effectiveness agenda.

[Insert Table 1 here]

First, the PD commitments and targets largely **focus on aid modalities that are assumed but not proven to deliver better development outcomes**. Joint donor missions, collaborative analytical work, programme-based delivery mechanisms, publicly accessible and transparent information, and integrated project units are all references to the ways aid is planned, packaged, budgeted and delivered to recipients.<sup>6</sup> The global aid effectiveness discourse thus appears focused on the quality and desired characteristics of aid inputs rather than the likelihood that aid delivered in these formats will achieve results. A 2008 study by the OECD confirmed that the Paris targets lacked explanatory power for development results and were mainly operationally and procedurally focused. At the same time, it also indicated that “there is evidence that aid, when delivered in ways consistent with the Paris Declaration can improve the way aid is managed and delivered” (Stern et al., 2008: viii, 15-16). The Paris Declaration thus largely has the “expectation of results” even if the “pathways to change remain under-specified.” Global aid effectiveness discourse thus remains defined by the operational goals and success of aid interventions, rather than by broader development progress and material improvement in the quality of life for aid beneficiaries.

Secondly, the aid effectiveness **targets concentrate disproportionately on aid efficiency as an operational goal** (Stern et al., 2008: 20). The donor targets seek to mainly minimize transaction costs of aid by reducing duplication, improving coordination, ensuring timely

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<sup>6</sup> Although attempts were made at Busan to widen the range of non-aid modalities contributing to development by moving away from the term aid effectiveness to the term development effectiveness, no consensus on the meaning and definition of this term emerged (Eyben, 2012, Mawdsley et al., forthcoming).

actions, and ensuring coherence both amongst donors and across the donors-aid recipient relation. While these are valuable goals in many circumstances, they are not always so if they come at the expense of other important policy goals. The contemporary aid effectiveness agenda makes strong assumptions that traditional donor public administration systems are inherently poor performance systems requiring greater efficiency to be functionally superior. This occurs without examination of donor dynamics and measurement of efficiency losses and potential gains to be had (Gulrajani, 2011). Efficiency travels as a powerful corporate metaphor of unquestioned administrative good in aid management, a managerial value that takes pride of place in reform agendas (Gulrajani, 2010a). Nevertheless, aid efficiency can only be a vehicle to higher aid performance to the extent that it allows for higher levels of satisfaction of prioritized needs. For example, valuable efficiency savings may occur if recouped funds are ploughed back into overall aid budgets, or used to fund more highly prioritized activities. To the extent that managerialism privileges the value of efficiency without identifying the alternative expenditures to be funded by cost savings, the pursuit of efficiency can only be understood as blind emulation of bottom-line business practices.

Thirdly, efficient technical systems in aid management are seen as **objective tools *external* to a donor agency rather than vehicles that can alter the *internal* environments** within which these tools may be more or less successful. There is limited recognition of the social and political consequences of aid management systems, for example, when performance management systems alter intra-organisational political relations in ways inimical to the delivery of results (Hirschmann, 2002). What seems to be missing is an understanding of how donors' own organisation mediates the implementation of aid and the way technical aid systems in turn influence organisational contexts. This omission may explain why global aid effectiveness targets have yet to be strongly linked to improved development outcomes.



Lastly, even where organisational variables are identified as critical for global aid effectiveness, as for example within the harmonization principles where staff incentives in recruitment, appraisal and training are identified as areas of donor commitment, **there is no deeper discussion of the specific formats these should take based on evidence from donor agencies.** For example, should incentives be positive or punitive? In what spheres of activity should they be enacted? To what extent might formal incentive structures crowd out intrinsic staff motivations to perform? Perhaps as a result of such unanswered questions, there is difficulty in agreeing on universal indicators that will assess progress on all the global aid effectiveness principles (the mutual accountability, managing for results and ownership principles all lack donor targets in the PD). Consequently, the benchmarking of donor performance heavily relies on the creation of indexes constructed using limited notions of aid effectiveness as presented within the PD (Easterly and Pfütze, 2008, Williamson, 2010, Roodman, 2006, Knack et al., 2010, Kharas, 2010, Knack et al., 2011, Easterly and Williamson, 2011). Donor performance in most of these rankings is proxied by a composite index of variables that include aid selectivity, harmonization, alignment, transparency and overhead costs. While these rankings can certainly motivate donors to consider their own practices more carefully, they are also making implicit assumptions about the drivers of donor improvement. Quantitative indexes of donor performance thus suffer from the same weaknesses as the global aid effectiveness discourse by leaving relatively unexplored the ways donor organisational variables intervene to generate variations in effectiveness.

Consideration of donor effectiveness can go some way to alleviate these weaknesses. Exploring the organisational features within donor agencies and the causal mechanisms that link them to the Paris commitments can instigate greater focus on second-generation pathways through which development results are potentially achieved. It can also encourage re-consideration of efficiency as the main driver of aid effectiveness, explore the limitations of technical solutions and demand greater specificity in proposed

solutions. Ultimately, the search for effective aid ignores a potentially valuable driver of improvement if it downplays the influence of donor organisational dynamics.

### **3. The organisational components of donor effectiveness**

The study of donor organisational behavior is not without precedent. Nevertheless, teasing out the relation between donor organisational attributes and aid effectiveness has not always been the purpose of research investigations. Moreover, while researchers may have had a common interest in the organisational forces that influence donor behaviour, each social science disciplines has concentrated on distinct variables. This section reviews four key organisational dimensions of donor behaviour—environment, governance, goals and discretion incentives (Table 2). These components provide the conceptual backbone for the concept of donor effectiveness.

[Insert Table 2 here]

#### **International Political Economy and the political environment**

Constructive approaches in international relations adopt an explanation of donor behaviour deriving from a varied and somewhat uneven combination of global ideas about development and national state interests. Global norms structure the behavior of donor agencies embedded in their national domestic politics due to the desire for global legitimacy (Weaver, 2008, Boas and McNeill, 2004, Finnemore, 1997). Thus, the increased number of bilateral aid agencies in Southern states can be explained by the desire to conform to global norms of international cooperation in order to demonstrate their advancement as legitimate global actors. Becoming a donor is a powerful symbol of national progress that fuels the expansion of Southern donors. At the same time, global norms do not completely construct the behavior of donors, otherwise donor behaviours would converge to an identical template for aid-giving. As Lancaster explains in her comparison of five foreign aid

donors, such convergence is more theoretical than empirically grounded. Rather, differences in donor policy choices can be explained by the way the global imperative for wealthier countries to give aid to poorer ones intersects with narrower domestic political concerns (Lancaster, 2007: 7-9). In other words, domestic politics and processes mediate the influence of global ideas and become an important determinant of donor conduct. This argument is refined in recent research that suggests it is only those international norms that are congruent with national motives for aid-giving that will influence outcomes (Maurits van der Veen, 2011). International political economy theorists focus their analysis on the manner in which global dynamics strongly influence, without completely determining, donor organisational behaviour. Donor organisations are embedded in intersecting domestic and global environments that are dually negotiated in all decisions and actions. Political environments thus become a critical determinant on aid effectiveness.

### **Neo institutional economics and donor governance**

Neo institutional economics borrows from rational public choice theory and Coasian theory of the firm to suggest that bilateral donors are involved in multiple principal-agent problems across the transnational spaces of development (Gibson et al., 2005: 64, Martens, 2005). Principals enter agents into contracts to achieve goals they cannot achieve themselves. While the bilateral donor agency is in some cases a principal, for example to contractors and consultants hired to implement development projects, it can also be an agent for national taxpayers and their legislative representatives. The latter agents provide funding to the donor agency to carry out development activities in line with their political priorities. Donor behaviour is largely driven by relative cost-benefit calculations that occur within these nested principal-agent relations. Donors are free to decide these costs and benefits, although it is assumed they do so rationally in order to maximize expected utility derived from their behaviour.

Nonetheless, it is the broken feedback loops between donor agents and aid recipient principals that is one of the most distinctive and important aspects of the aid delivery chain. This is because “the people for whose benefit aid agencies work are not the same as those from whom their revenues are obtained; they actually live in different countries and different political constituencies” (Martens, 2002: 14). Bilateral donor behaviours will be oriented upwards towards their own national constituencies because the domestic voting cycle acts as a powerful incentive for accountability in this direction. Conversely, a cost-benefit analysis by the donor would not easily support downward accountability towards aid recipients located in other countries given the lack of a formal sanction mechanism across jurisdictions (Easterly, 2006: 168-169). The ultimate principal for the donor agency thus remains its domestic publics and these must ultimately be satisfied, even if they are worst placed to monitor geographically dispersed development work. National structures are established to keep governments informed of the donor organisation’s achievements as well as maintain support for their work (Gibson et al., 2005: 134-5). These donor governance structures are the formal institutional arrangements that ensure that donor agencies are acting in line with their principals located in the donor nation. Donor governance structures comprise the rules and regulations that outline the scope, rules and responsibilities of the donor agency *vis a vis* national actors with interests in managing aid resources and development policy. These principals generally include the executive and legislative branches of government as well as bureaucratic actors like Ministries of Finance and Ministries of Foreign Affairs. If aid effectiveness demands accountability to principals in poor countries as most now accept, then this can only be secured within bilateral donor governance systems that can also meet the demands of donor principals.

### **The sociology of organisational goals**

Organisational sociologists have pointed to the ambiguous mandates of donor agencies that are the result of contradictory pressures emerging from their environments (Thornton and Ocasio, 1999, Townley, 1997). In complex

environments with a plurality of stakeholders, organisational legitimacy is derived from multiple sources and actors. Maintaining legitimacy at each site provides organisations with resources, power, membership and public approval that ensures they continue to exist and thrive. The behaviour of individual donor agencies is structured by this need for legitimacy from multiple quarters. Ambiguous mandates are symptomatic of organisational imperatives to symbolically maintain the favour of all constituents. In this way, mandates cannot be viewed as cognitively rational or objective statements on official policies, missions and goals (Babb, 2003: 5). Policy documents, while somewhat durable features of organizational life, tend to be interpretable in multiple and contradictory ways. The more constituents there are, the greater plurality of interpretations that exist and the wider spectrum of actions that are made possible. The result is some amount of inadvertent slippage from core goals.

Widely heralded donor goals like poverty reduction and aid effectiveness are often vulnerable to subordination by unstated, countervailing pressures on an aid programme. Using aid effectiveness as an example, securing national "ownership" of a programme can be inimical to the desire for "results" in situations of poor governance (Craig and Porter, 2006). The contradictions between development policy goals like poverty reduction, neo-liberal economic policies and neo-conservative foreign policy might also contribute to significant slippage (Cooke, 2003, Murphy, 2008). Donor nations have naturally glossed over such inconsistencies with the use of diplomatic buzzwords, unrealistic policies and a proliferation of new strategies and solutions, all in their bid to maintain support and legitimacy from multiple quarters (Cornwall and Brock, 2005, Quarles van Ufford, 1988). Unpacking these tensions and framing statements of purpose that openly acknowledge tensions and seek to transcend paradoxes can go some way to making aid effectiveness a more realizable goal.

## **Ethnographic approaches and incentives for discretion**

Anthropologists with interests in foreign aid treat the people, policies and organisations of international development as ethnographic objects in and of themselves (Mosse, 2005: 11-12, Mosse and Lewis, 2005, Mosse, 2011). Development anthropology requires an "actor-orientation" that underlines the responses and lived experiences of individuals involved and affected by wider development processes (Long and Long, 1992, Lewis et al., 2003). In the local organisational spaces of the donor agency, aid-worker elites are both agents and objects of contradictory policies and goals. These workers have the capability for autonomous behaviour from rigid institutional diktats as they broker and translate policies, roles, relationships and representations into tangible and meaningful actions. This autonomy is partly a product of the inherent opportunities for discretion in the complex, diffuse, global realm of development policy work (Weisband and Ebrahim, 2007).

And yet, the aid worker is often implicitly stripped of his discretion to operate in the uncertain environments of foreign aid. Donor pressures to appear infallible and always in possession of the solution to the problems of poverty reduction ultimately limits opportunities to make mistakes, to learn and to critically reflect on their own situation (Ferguson, 1994, Eyben, 2003, Jasse, 2004). However, the search for donor innovation and learning emerges by entertaining uncertainty in situations of complexity, responding to the beneficiary with as much flexibility as possible, extrapolating lessons from past failures by talking truth to power and considering her difficult position as a cosmopolitan elite working on behalf of the world's poor. This requires a permissive cultural environment where shorter-term risks can be sustained for the potential benefits of longer-term rewards in the fight against poverty, in other words where organisations are allowed to "grope along" by straying from conventional orthodoxies without complete certainty of the results that can emerge (Behn, 2007, Lindblom, 1959). At the same time, it is fair to say that unbounded discretion does generate high levels of unpredictability and

uncertainty in organisational processes, potentially reducing elite accountability and limiting organisational focus and responsiveness. Strategic consideration of desired levels of autonomy and rule-following in donor agencies therefore needs to examine existing incentives for professional discretion.

There is clearly a vast literature on organisational attributes in donor agencies that can inform the concept of donor effectiveness. Using these four organisational factors as an analytical starting point—environments, governance, goals and discretion incentives—the rest of the paper demonstrates how each of these variables can be plausibly linked to Paris aid effectiveness goals using comparative evidence from the Canadian, British and Norwegian cases. Establishing a causal relation between donor organisational attributes and aid effectiveness is not without its difficulties, particularly given the complex nature of interactions across all four variables. Furthermore, aggregating donor contributions to aid effectiveness ultimately suffers from the same difficulties establishing the drivers of performance in the corporate, public and non-profit sectors (de Bruijn, 2007, Harford and Klein, 2004, Moynihan, 2008, Radin, 2006, Townley, 1997, March and Sutton, 1997). There is ultimately no robust way to causally attribute individual donor behaviour to aid effectiveness except in small project-related activities using randomized controlled evaluations.<sup>7</sup> Given there is limited ability to use quasi-experimental methods to falsify the relation between donor organisation and aid effectiveness however, qualitative analysis of donor dynamics can begin to distill relationships by which donor organisational features *plausibly* and *validly* influence the achievement of aid effectiveness goals as defined by the PD. Here, comparative case study research in the tradition of public administration and management offer a valuable method. Cases are constructed using secondary literatures and in-depth semi-structured episodic

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<sup>7</sup> Yet, even in the case of randomized controlled evaluations, the nature of the causal mechanism remains elusive. See (Deaton, 2010)

interviews (Flick, 2000, Flick, 2002). Drafts were circulated to interviewees for further validation and refinement of the proposed narratives. Through iterative examination, conceivable relationships emerged concerning the ways donor organisational attributes advance the cause of aid effectiveness. These potential causal mechanisms are non-exhaustive and are offered to illustrate the value of the concept of donor effectiveness. While establishing the robustness of these relationships may require additional investigations, at minimum they indicate potential causal pathways by which donor organisational behavior influences the achievement of aid effectiveness goals.

#### **4. Mechanisms of donor effectiveness: comparing the evidence**

If our literature review points to the relevance of environments, governance, goals and professional discretion as components of donor effectiveness, understanding the mechanisms by which these may enhance aid effectiveness is the next line of enquiry. This section aims to foster greater understanding of the causal mechanisms of donor effectiveness by examining organizational dynamics in Canadian, Norwegian and British donor systems. These cases were selected as they represent both similarity and divergence in donor performance. Norway and Britain tend to be top performers, in direct contrast to Canada (Easterly and Pfutze, 2008, Knack et al., 2011). Examining these cases allows for comparisons of organisational attributes across bilateral donor agencies deemed high performers, as well as across donors assessed as having large differences in performance. The analysis provides the basis for some plausible mechanisms of donor effectiveness across the four organisational categories. Each is discussed below in relation to case narratives.

##### **Political environments**

**Political commitment is a causal mechanism for aid effectiveness.**

The Canadian, Norwegian and UK cases suggest political champions for



aid emerge from domestic political dynamics appropriately intersecting with international policy demands, and that variance in leadership commitment can be linked to variance in the achievement of aid effectiveness goals.

Global and domestic policy environments aligned in a manner conducive to the creation of a strong political champion for development in the UK. Prior to 1997, the Overseas Development Administration in the UK existed as a branch of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office without a senior figure at its helm. In the run-up to the 1997 general election, the Labour shadow foreign secretary, Robin Cook, recommended the creation of a separate government department responsible for international development with a Cabinet position dedicated to this portfolio. The choice of Clare Short as Shadow spokesperson for Overseas Development and as future Secretary of State was not obvious given she had more interest and experience in domestic policy issues, having occupied the position of Shadow Transport Secretary only a few months prior to Labour's election win. It also merits considering that Short represented the left wing of the Labour Party base and domestic political imperatives dictated that Party leader Tony Blair could not ignore this segment of the party when drawing up his Cabinet. The creation of a Cabinet level position for international development can thus be viewed as both a pragmatic and politically expedient response to placate an important domestic constituency without threatening the central tenets of a New Labour agenda.

While Short's personality and seniority in the Labour Party are often attributed as important determinants of DFID's early successes, there is perhaps too little discussion of the global environment governing the times that fostered her political commitments to development. At the time of her appointment, the search for new models for international development policy had begun in earnest as Washington consensus based policies lost their lustre (Development Assistance Committee, 1996, World Bank, 1997, Gore, 2000). The proposal to create DFID reflected a growing global norm that aid should focus on poverty alleviation rather than strategic national interests (Barder,

2005). Cook's vision was backed by strong support for a new approach to development by Prime Minister Tony Blair and Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown. It was then up to Clare Short to capitalize on this propitious conjunction of domestic and international imperatives. As Short's international profile as a committed development leader enhanced, so too did her domestic political capital grow.

Dynamics in domestic and global environments also positively reinforced political commitments for development in Norway, although perhaps to a lesser degree than the UK. In outward-looking Norway, strong political stewardship on global development is ultimately good domestic politics. As a result, politicians of all stripes aim to positively claim leadership on development issues at both levels whenever possible. This was particularly notable before 2004 when the Minister of International Development jointly presided over the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, yet had little control over the development programme that was overseen by a separate directorate, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD). This essentially left the Minister of Development without an organisation to minister over. In 2004, with the desire to contribute to the global discourse on poverty reduction, Development Minister Hilde Frafjord Johnson reduced NORAD's role in development by centralising strategic development policy responsibilities within the MFA. Just as in the UK, demand from the highest levels for a new global development paradigm allied with domestic political interests of the day and sustained strong commitments to aid agendas. In both cases, this common sponsorship advanced Paris principles like donor harmonization and alignment via new donor fora like the Like-Minded Donor Group and the Utstein Group.

The Canadian case demonstrates plainly that the DAC prescription that assumes better leadership emerges when development is the responsibility of a senior minister (OECD, 2008a: 10) does not differentiate between *possessing* a leadership role and *exhibiting* a political commitment. Counter

intuitively perhaps, the existence of a separate ministerial position to oversee the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has not cultivated strong political commitments to the global aid agenda. CIDA has had separate status from the foreign affairs ministry since its creation in 1968, with a Minister in Cabinet since 1996 (Morrison, 1998: 63). Notwithstanding, over the last fifteen years the common weakness identified in Canada's foreign aid programme has been the lack of political commitment to the international aims of aid and development. At some level this may be a feature of a governance structure that still requires the Minister for International Development to be accountable to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Nevertheless, this is more a *de jure* stipulation that dates since the creation of CIDA and does not reflect the minister's lack of status in Cabinet. To illustrate, the development minister manages the largest pool of development finance in the International Assistance Envelope (IAE), sits on the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee as well as the National Security Committee. Notwithstanding a strong leadership structure, the country has cycled through eight relatively junior and inexperienced Ministers of International Development under both majority and minority governments the last fifteen years, a reflection of the lack of political capital this portfolio possesses. The previous minister, Bev Oda, while the country's longest serving development minister, is also acknowledged as the weakest leader of CIDA to date. She alienated civil society actors with opaque and politically motivated decision-making, centralized power among a close coterie of senior officials and generally demoralized CIDA staff and Canadian development stakeholders alike. This weak domestic leadership minimized Canada's championship of global aid effectiveness. This may explain the "struggle" that the OECD suggests Canada had in putting its discursive commitments to the Paris Declaration into practice (OECD, 2012: 69). Technical implementation is mediated by a domestic political context that legitimizes the parochial exploitation of foreign aid to service domestic ethnic, corporate, geopolitical, regional and linguistic interests and underserves global commitments to aid effectiveness. Even with a Cabinet position for international development, this

weak political leadership undermines Canada's ambitions to achieve the goals of aid effectiveness.

### **Donor governance**

**A powerfully mandated ministry of development that integrates both development policy and aid administration functions can improve aid effectiveness.**

Donor governance structures comprise the rules and regulations that outline the scope of responsibilities of the donor body vis a vis other national governmental actors with interests in managing aid resources and development policy. The cases of Norway, Canada and the UK all point to the value of integrating development policy-making and aid administration into a development ministry with the powers to arbitrate the demands of other national governmental bodies interested in the international cooperation agenda. A ministry with powers of arbitration and authority over development policy setting and aid's administrative execution can ensure upward accountability to taxpayers without sacrificing downward accountability to beneficiaries.

Integration is, by definition, not possible in a specialized arms length agency as this kind of governance structure lies outside the realm of government policy-making.<sup>8</sup> Ministries therefore remain the structure of choice for the governmental development function. Typically the spectrum of choice lies between, on the one hand a Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where aid is a foreign policy concern alongside others and a Ministry of Development with authority over international prosperity and well-being as a broad-based goal (OECD, 2009a). DAC has suggested that the choice between these structures does not matter for effectiveness (OECD, 2008a: 11). Nevertheless, these cases suggest that within a foreign affairs ministry, there is greater risk that development aims are subordinated to foreign policy ones

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<sup>8</sup> Currently, no donor government exclusively organises its development programme as an arms length agency. Where separate development agencies exist as in Sweden and France, their functions are typically delimited to aid implementation, and possess little, if any, power to set agendas, convene stakeholders and advocate policy positions (OECD, 2008a: 11).

because the latter seeks to further national interests on the global stage. Notwithstanding the widespread language of complementarity and mutual benefit that foreign policy realists use, aid altruists suggest rationales for aid-giving often do often contradict with major foreign policy goals (Black, 2007, Pratt, 2000). A strong development ministry is better placed to give more measured consideration of all of the policy spheres and governmental principals with a stake in development, without foregoing aid's humanitarian imperatives and commitment to beneficiary welfare. In other words, donor governance structures that entrust a development ministry with robust authorities for policy setting and execution are better able to protect the global public good aspects of aid effectiveness.

An integrated model of donor governance exists in Norway where the MFA holds overall responsibility for both development policy and its execution. The MFA controls 85% of ODA and its embassies have responsibility for the implementation of development policy. Specialized directorate NORAD provides technical advisory services, quality assurance and NGO grant financing and evaluation services. Interviewees outside the MFA felt that integration within the MFA had constrained Norway's ability to sustainably champion aid policies that do not mainly advance nationalistic, commercial or geopolitical interests. These observers suggested aid has increasingly become a vehicle to cultivate Norwegian soft power, advance its policies in NATO and its interests in the Arctic, secure commercial contracts in Angola and acquire influence in multilateral institutions. Nevertheless, a rising aid budget in Norway had permitted the parallel co-existence of aid effectiveness and national foreign policy goals to date, for example by maintaining and even exceeding its commitment to the 0.7% ODA/GNI target, remaining a leader on untying its aid and continuing to use country procurement and financial systems (OECD, 2008b:57, OECD, 2011). The expansion of the aid agenda to service both geopolitical and humanitarian impulses has, however, resulted in operational dispersion within the MFA, rising administrative burdens and

accusations that Norwegian aid suffers from hypocritical “doublethink” (Curtis, 2010).

Similarly high levels of integration between policymaking and administration exist in the UK where DFID is responsible for both functions. Unlike Norway however, these functions are centralized in a development ministry that has wielded considerable authority to defend aid within foreign policy circles. The separation of DFID from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in 1997 came with substantial authorities for DFID to steer development policy and aid implementation within a whole-of-government framework (Lockwood et al., 2010). Strong political commitments for development reinforced effective physical separation from the FCO and permitted open negotiations between competing rationales for aid in plain full view of the Cabinet (Shafik, 2006). The integration of policy and administrative functions in DFID has strengthened commitments to aid effectiveness commitments across government; for example, DFID took the lead in training staff from other government departments in aid effectiveness issues and was granted permission to decentralize financial authorities and commit to 10-year partnership arrangements with aid recipients to support country support and donor harmonization (OECD, 2010: 72-2). DFID retains an “unambiguous relationship” with other ministries, giving it greater influence on “cross-government thinking on development policy” (OECD, 2008a: 5).

In contrast, Canadian development policy is set by three governmental entities: CIDA, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) and the Ministry of Finance.<sup>9</sup> All these units are linked via the International Assistance Envelope (IAE) that is the main planning mechanism

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<sup>9</sup> Aid also involves secondary partners like the Department of National Defense, Health Canada, the International Development Research Centre and Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

for distributing aid resources to federal government entities.<sup>10</sup> CIDA, however, does not command the same level of authority over development policy that either Norway's MFA or the UK's DFID do. As Canada's recent peer review puts it: "CIDA is responsible for facilitating policy coherence for development across the Canadian government, but it does not appear to have a strong enough mandate or leverage for achieving this aim, nor has it put in place sufficient competent in-house capacity for this responsibility" (OECD, 2012: 38). Perhaps as a result, Canada has struggled to remain achieve some of the Paris targets that require greater flexibility from fiscal rules set by other governmental actors. This includes reporting its funds on government budgets, participating in joint missions, minimizing parallel implementation structures and ensuring greater predictability of funding (OECD, 2011: 170, OECD, 2012: 75). Canadian aid is more susceptible to the vagaries of other government actors that seek to advance domestic policy priority concerns first and foremost. Physical separation as a development ministry has not guarded against this intrusion, perhaps because CIDA's governance structure still formally subordinates its mandate to DFAIT (Morrison, 1998: 63). Without a strong voice in government, aid effectiveness is not mainstreamed across the spectrum of government actors with influence over CIDA's ability to implement its aid effectively (OECD, 2012).

### **Organisational goals**

**A high-level statement that is clear and unambiguous on the purpose of development can enhance aid effectiveness.**

Bilateral donor goals are often articulated in White Papers or legislative mandates. A legislative mandate provides legal authorities for public expenditure that are defined and approved by a legislative body like Parliament, whereas a White Paper provides strategic direction but is not legally binding or a basis for future legislation. High-level statements such as these anchor development policy into a framework for government, especially

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<sup>10</sup> Note not all IAE funds qualify as ODA, and moreover some Canadian ODA is not funded through the IAE.

when stripped of ambiguity (OECD, 2008a: 5). Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, the need for legitimacy from multiple quarters can lead to contradictory aims and a certain amount of slippage from core goals. Canada's legislative mandate appears more vulnerable to such weaknesses than the UK, whereas Norway's White Paper is also susceptible to contradictions and tensions.

The (2002) International Development Act formalized DFID's political commitment to activities that further the aim of poverty reduction, a clear end goal for aid effectiveness. The UK act seals into law the mission of poverty reduction as the legal frame of reference for DFID's work, the standard against which Parliament adjudicates the Department's performance. While the Act does not explicitly forbid the tying of aid or aid that furthers foreign policy, trade or national security concerns, all aid must at least have a "likely" impact on poverty. This ensures that competing foreign policy priorities cannot overwhelm the development agenda (Burall, White & Blick, 2009: 16-17, 21, 25; Lockwood et al., 2010: 69). The Act is also unequivocal in its coverage (all of DFID's work) and provides a strong cultural orientation for the Department. The wording of the UK Act buffers DFID from pressures in government to dilute its development objectives and provides a strong framework for downstream aid management in line with the Paris principles.

In contrast, Canada's ODA Accountability Act (2008) only applies to development spending that qualifies as ODA or relates to natural disasters, exempting non-ODA spending within the IAE. Not all of CIDA's activities can be classified within the definition of ODA, in contrast to the UK where the Act (2002) covers all DFID's work. At the same time, the Canadian Accountability Act includes ODA expenditures by actors other than CIDA and thus does not cultivate the same sense of purpose for the department that it does for DFID. In the UK Act, aid must have the purpose of poverty reduction. The Canadian Accountability Act (2008), however, requires that aid has the purpose of



poverty reduction *and* be provided in a “manner that is consistent with Canadian values, Canadian foreign policy, the principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness of March 2, 2005, sustainable development and democracy promotion and that promotes international human rights standards.” The Canadian Act thus legally requires ODA to be much more than simply poverty focused while tensions between these various aims are left unexamined. In contrast, the UK Act does not stipulate any supplementary conditions on aid spending in line with national values, foreign policy priorities or democratic principles. In Canada, the Act is little more than a ‘box ticking exercise’ (Morton, 2009), where multiple ticks are permissible and undermine the value of the legislative mandate itself.

Norway’s development policy is not underpinned by any specific piece of legislation as in the UK or Canada, but is the result of the government’s policy platform, its addresses to the Storting and published White Papers (OECD, 2008b: 20). Norway’s most recent White Paper (2009) is impressive and ambitious in its scope (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Norway, 2009). And yet, it has paid lip service to some of the contradictions between its development aims and the reality of its other foreign policy aims, including the operations of its oil industry, its growing arms industry, and the investments of its Pension Fund (Curtis, 2010). Notwithstanding a commitment to policy coherence, unstated tensions and possibilities for slippage abound in ways that can undermine commitments to the goals of aid effectiveness, particularly that of mutual accountability for development results. The lack of strategic prioritization that characterizes the development and foreign policy planning apparatus has left Norway pursuing a single clear aim according to one prominent think tank, namely furthering its public legitimacy (de Coning et al., 2010).

### **Discretion incentives**

#### **Bounded professional discretion can improve aid effectiveness.**

There is evidence that the exercise of discretion by public sector staff

closest to problems can result in more appropriate policy, effective practical solutions and greater public accountability (Lipsky, 1980, Elmore, 1979, Hupe, 2008, Hupe and Hill, 2007). It may also be a way to retain talented staff who value autonomy and room for creativity and experimentation. Nevertheless, all of these cases highlight the importance of professional discretion for aid effectiveness where this autonomy is exercised within clear boundaries rather than indiscriminately permitted.

Within DFID, discretion occurs within the framework of an unambiguous legislated purpose (poverty reduction) and a clear and coherent performance assessment system. This makes the bounds of the risk/reward tradeoff clear, as the risks of professional autonomy must warrant the possibility of better aid outcomes. The UK has used common sense (rather than demanding outright altered regulations with the Treasury or the National Audit Office) to define what constitutes reasonable risks compatible with discretion. In turn, the UK political structure has been willing to apply rules and regulations with greater exceptionalism vis-a-vis DFID,<sup>11</sup> perhaps recognizing that development policy does not hold the identical claims of accountability of other departments given the Department must also consider the claims of beneficiaries external to UK jurisdictions. Discretion becomes less about accommodating everyone on everything and more about exercising the right to choose actions selectively with knowledge of the appropriate limits to this right. Aid interventions can be flexible enough to accommodate the fluid processes of development while still ensuring accountability and responsible resource use. It is in this vein that DFID has been praised for its ability to decentralize staff and financial authority to field-level in a way that supports the Paris principles, allowing it to be the first to act in many cases even when other donors pulled out, for examples in Zimbabwe where DFID continued its work during the crisis phase (OECD, 2010). Nevertheless, as

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<sup>11</sup> For example, by permitting budgetary commitments to extend beyond the three-year budget cycle in the UK, or by embracing a more encompassing understanding of "value" in National Audit Office reports.

Whitehall concerns about value for money, efficiency and impact make themselves felt (Independent Commission for Aid Impact, 2011), the boundaries delineating acceptable risk/reward ratio are in flux. For example, current Secretary of State for International Development Justine Greening is said to be reviewing the authority of Heads of Office to commit to spending downwards from GBP 20 million (Groves, 2013). The professional discretion that was once a trademark of DFID's excellence as a bilateral donor appears to be increasingly under threat.

In Norway, the privilege of a healthy budgetary position that translates into large levels of aid to be spent and a trusting Scandinavian sensibility appears to have fostered almost unlimited discretion with limited concern for the potential costs of discretion. These costs include dispersion of priorities, aid fragmentation, the subtle politicization of the aid program and reduced concern for both impact and efficiency. Meanwhile, in Canada, 'pathological' risk aversion in CIDA limits scope for professional discretion (Government of Canada, 2007: 91). The agency's predilection for "accountancy" rather than "accountability" has minimized opportunities to internally experiment, learn, imagine and innovate (Brown and Jackson, 2009). The fear of bad press and diminishing public and inter-governmental support sustain a general mistrust of CIDA bureaucrats and limited scope for bureaucratic initiative and agency. Instead, CIDA professionals grapple with the demands of complex organisational processes, crosscutting rules and excessive monitoring and reporting procedures driven mainly by compliance related concerns. There is no financial authority provided to field-based staff to react swiftly to emerging issues as approvals from Ottawa are required for all new spending (OECD, 2009b: 13). As opportunities for bounded discretion dwindle, so too do prospects for CIDA achieving its aid effectiveness targets.

[Insert Table 3 here]

Examining the four organisational dimensions of these three donors

reveals some important mechanisms of donor effectiveness and highlights the value of linking organisational attributes and aid effectiveness goals. A holistic assessment of these three cases suggests that a spectrum of donor effectiveness exists, one where the UK may be assessed as a more committed donor than Norway, while Norway itself achieves a superior result than Canada (Table 3). While this broadly corresponds to their respective positions within existing quantitative rankings of donor performance, assessments of donor effectiveness of the kind presented here paint a more nuanced analysis of donor organisational dynamics and allows for closer analysis of similarities and difference.

## **5. Embracing donor effectiveness: the road ahead**

Organisational factors within donor agencies matter for aid effectiveness. This is the foundational assumption from which this call for greater understanding of the causal mechanisms of donor effectiveness emanates. Donor effectiveness is the missing piece of the aid effectiveness puzzle, one that the Phase II Evaluation Report of the Paris Declaration has recognized in no uncertain terms when it states “it is urgent that all donor governments find ways to overcome the internal institutional or administrative obstacles slowing their aid reforms” (Wood et al., 2011: xv). This paper has made some attempt to develop an analytical framework for understanding these obstacles by analytically defining the term donor effectiveness in terms of organisational categories and presenting the causal mechanisms that link organisational dynamics to the PD using case analysis from Canada, Norway and the UK.

Although this article offers potential causal mechanisms of donor effectiveness, this should not be taken as offering a new managerial template for donor reform that can solve all the ills with aid. Rather, the article underlines the value of certain strands of enquiry in the aid effectiveness debate, ones that highlights greater understanding of complex organisational

phenomena inside donor agencies. The concept of donor effectiveness offers guidance for designing and reforming donor agencies against a backdrop where political environments, governance structures, organisational goals, and discretion incentives are contestable and contingent, where interaction effects are uncertain and where causal pathways are non-linear (Gulrajani, 2010b, Gulrajani, 2011). Post-Busan however, there is a danger that even minimalist obligations to donor effectiveness are diluted as Southern donors ask to be exempt from them<sup>12</sup> and Northern donors in their anxiousness to welcome Southern partners into a global framework temper their own ambitions for aid effectiveness. New ways need to be found to engage non-DAC actors in a dialogue about the organisational factor within their own development machinery.

Notwithstanding the complexity of the aid landscape, it is important not to lose sight of donor effectiveness as an achievable, if long-term, goal. There is urgency to understanding the experience of more established donors and to set a minimum standard of organisational behavior against which all donors must adhere. While doing this is not without its challenges, ways need to be found to push the global aid effectiveness paradigm to be both a matter of aspiration and pragmatism. Ultimately, a new generation of aid effectiveness policies that ignores donor effectiveness risks leaving donors, once again, as the weakest link.

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<sup>12</sup> The 2011 Busan Partnership Document is meant to apply to Southern donors on a voluntary basis (Bergamaschi, 2011).

**Table 1. Aid effectiveness principles in relation to donor commitments and targets**

Source: Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005)

	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Alignment</b>	<b>Harmonisation</b>	<b>Managing for results</b>	<b>Mutual accountability</b>
<b>Definition</b>	Partner countries exercise effective leadership over their development policies and strategies and co-ordinate development actions.	Donors base their overall support on partner countries' national development strategies, institutions and procedures.	Donors' actions are more harmonised, transparent and collectively effective.	Managing resources and improving decision-making for results	Donors and partners are accountable for development results
<b>Donor commitments</b>	Donors commit to respect partner country leadership and help strengthen their capacity to exercise it.	<p>Donors base their overall support— country strategies, policy dialogues, development co-operation programmes – on partners' national development strategies.</p> <p>Donors use strengthened country systems (public financial management, accounting, auditing, procurement, results frameworks and monitoring)</p> <p>Where use of country systems is not feasible, establish additional safeguards that strengthen country systems.</p>	<p>Donors implement common arrangements at country level to reduce duplication</p> <p>Donors respect their comparative advantage at country level</p> <p>Donors and partners reform procedures and strengthen staff incentives--for recruitment, appraisal and training --to work towards harmonisation, alignment and results.</p>	Donors link country programming and resources to results	<p>Donors commit to provide timely, transparent and comprehensive information on aid flows so as to enable partner authorities to report to their legislatures and citizens</p> <p>Donors and partners assess mutual progress in implementing agreed aid effectiveness commitments</p>
<b>Donor targets</b>	N/A	<p>Halve the proportion of aid flows not reported on government's budget(s) (with at least 85% reported on budget) (Indicator 3)</p> <p>50% of technical co-operation flows are implemented through co-ordinated programmes consistent with national strategies (Indicator 4)</p> <p>A 2/3 reduction in the % of aid not using partner countries' PFM systems (Indicator 5a)</p> <p>A 2/3 reduction in the % of aid not using partner countries' procurement systems (Indicator 5b)</p> <p>Reduce by 2/3 the stock of parallel project implementation units (PIUs). (Indicator 6)</p> <p>Halve the proportion of aid not disbursed within the scheduled fiscal year(Indicator 7)</p> <p>Continued progress untying aid (no target, Indicator 8)</p>	<p>66% aid flows provided in common arrangements (Indicator 9)</p> <p>40% of missions to the field are joint (Indicator 10a)</p> <p>66% of analytical work is joint (Indicator 10b)</p>	N/A	N/A

**Table 2. Donor organisational factors: a cross-disciplinary summary**

<b>Discipline</b>	<b>Donor organisational dimension</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>International Political Economy</b>	Political environments	Dynamics in the external setting, particularly those occurring at the interface of domestic and global politics
<b>Neo institutional economics</b>	Donor governance structures	Formal institutional arrangements that ensure that donor organisations are acting in line with their principals located in the donor nation
<b>Sociology</b>	Organisational goals	Specific purposes of an organisation
<b>Anthropology</b>	Discretion incentives	Inducements for decision-making autonomy

**Table 3. Causal mechanisms of donor effectiveness: comparing three bilateral donors**

<b>Organisational environments</b>	<b>Norway</b>	<b>UK</b>	<b>Canada</b>
Political commitment is a causal mechanism for aid effectiveness.	Medium	High	Low
<b>Donor governance</b>			
A powerfully mandated ministry of development that integrates both development policy and aid administration functions can improve aid effectiveness.	Medium	High	Low
<b>Organisational goals</b>			
A high-level statement that is clear and unambiguous on the purpose of development can enhance aid effectiveness.	Low	High	Low
<b>Discretion incentives</b>			
Bounded professional discretion can improve aid effectiveness.	Low	Medium	Low

Sources: Mechanisms and ratings based on researcher observations and analysis



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