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# Aid effectiveness: bringing country ownership (and politics) back in

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## Abstract

The 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, reaffirmed in Busan in 2011, grew out of a consensus on the importance of 'country ownership' for the success of development efforts. But in Paris and again in Busan it was tacitly assumed that most aid-recipient countries already have development-oriented political leaderships. This article considers that assumption untenable and asks whether donors have any role in assisting the emergence of developmental regimes. Aid as such is probably on balance bad for the institutional fabric of poor developing countries. Therefore, firstly, more attention should be given to reforming the non-aid policies of donor countries which are known to affect for the worse the economic and political systems of developing countries. And secondly, more thought should be given to using aid to help country actors overcome the collective-action problems that prevent them from moving towards more developmental politics.

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I have received helpful comments on drafts of this article from numerous colleagues and friends, the guest editors, two journal referees and participants in the workshop 'Unpacking Aid Effectiveness' convened by Nilima Gulrajani at the London School of Economics on 21 June 2011. The work received support from APPP, a consortium research programme funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and Irish Aid for the benefit of developing countries. The views expressed are my own and not to be attributed to DFID, Irish Aid or any of those acknowledged above.

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## Notes

1. [OECD](#), Paris Declaration. The evidence base was large and diverse but was captured in the literature of the period by, among others, [van de Walle and Johnston](#), Improving Aid; [Killick](#), Aid and the Political Economy; [World Bank](#), Assessing Aid; [Booth](#), Fighting Poverty; and Koeberle et al., Conditionality Revisited.
2. Unfortunately, some aid practitioners have fallen into the habit of referring to the Paris commitments, including those on ownership, as 'principles' or treating them as behavioural imperatives to be observed regardless of context. In the worst case, 'respecting ownership' translates as 'don't question the motives or performance of the government'. This is a fundamental error. A good example of country ownership thinking applied wisely to a fragile country situation would be [Englebert and Tull](#), 'Postconflict Reconstruction in Africa'.
3. It is not an assumption that is made in any serious study of the political economy of the aid relationship: for example, [Mosley et al.](#), Aid and Power; [Martens et al.](#), Institutional Economics; or [Gibson et al.](#), Samaritan's Dilemma. Of course, this approach to ownership purposely puts the accent on political drivers, and on leadership understood as a political issue (following [Leftwich and Wheeler](#), Politics, Leadership and Coalitions), not on technocratic criteria. The Paris Declaration monitoring survey has used a World Bank assessment of the quality of countries' operational development strategies as a proxy for ownership, on the grounds that the real thing would be

impossible (and controversial) to measure. Even in these narrow terms, however, most countries get a medium to low rating ([OECD](#), Aid Effectiveness 2005–10, 30).

4. The tendency for political competition to give public policy-making an extremely short-term orientation, and therefore a limited ability to address the real challenges of national development, is a standard theme in political science work on the majority of sub-Saharan African countries. Two of the most telling examples of the modal pattern are treated in depth by [Lewis](#), *Growing Apart*; and [Mutua](#), *Kenya's Quest for Democracy*. The much discussed recent improvements in economic growth rates and some social indicators across the region do not justify a revision of this basic diagnosis, partly for the reasons given by [Amoako](#), 'Transforming Africa'; and [ECA and AU](#), *Economic Report on Africa: African economies need transformation, not just growth, and the politics of transformation are very demanding*.

5. From [Morss](#), 'Institutional Destruction' to [Blundo](#), 'Une administration à deux vitesses'.

6. [Booth and Fritz](#), *Good Governance*, 28–31; [Tavakoli and Smith](#), *Insights from Recent Evidence*.

7. [Molenaers and Nijs](#), 'From the Theory'; [Molenaers](#) and Renard, *Budget Support*.

8. [Joint Venture](#), 'Report on the Use'; [Knack and Eubank](#), *Aid and Trust*.

9. The case for regarding PRSPs, or even the new generation of National Plans, as a true expression of the policies which govern what the state and politicians actually do has been dead for some while ([Booth](#), 'Missing Links'; [Dijkstra](#), 'PRSP Approach'). For a good sectoral example, see [Cooksey](#), 'Marketing Reform?'.

10. In this way, my argument shares some elements with widely read anti-aid books such as those of [Easterly](#), *White Man's Burden*; and [Moyo](#), *Dead Aid*, but ends up in a different place.

11. [Moss et al.](#), 'An Aid-Institutions Paradox', 274.

12. [Bräutigam and Knack](#), 'Foreign Aid'; [van de Walle](#), *African Economies*.

13. That is, protecting the recipient from the consequences of his or her bad decisions.

14. Gibson et al., *Samaritan's Dilemma*.

15. [Putzel](#), Do No Harm.
16. [Lindemann](#), Do Inclusive Elite Bargains Matter?; [Dijohn and Putzel](#), Political Settlements; [Parks and Cole](#), Political Settlements.
17. [Andrews](#), 'Good Government'; , 'Moving the Governance Agenda' and Development Trajectories; [Pritchett et al.](#), Capability Traps?.
18. [Glennie](#), Trouble with Aid.
19. [Moore et al.](#), 'Assuring our Common Future'; [Brown et al.](#), 'Addressing the International Drivers'.
20. [Rodrik](#), One Economics.
21. [Gray and Khan](#), 'Good Governance'; [Khan](#), 'Governance and Growth'.
22. [Grindle](#), 'Good Enough Governance'.
23. Shivakumar, Constitution of Development; [Future State](#), Upside Down View.
24. [North et al.](#), Violence and Social Orders.
25. [Faust](#), 'Policy Experiments'.
26. [Levy and Fukuyama](#), Development Strategies; Levy, Development Trajectories.
27. Levy, Development Trajectories, 5.
28. See the previously referenced blog site (Levy, 'Moving the Governance Agenda').
29. Amoako, 'Transforming Africa'; ECA and AU, Economic Report on Africa.
30. [Booth](#), 'More Realistic Approaches'.
31. [www.institutions-africa.org](http://www.institutions-africa.org).
32. [Kelsall](#), 'Rethinking the Relationship'; [Kelsall etl al.](#), Business, Politics, and the State.
33. That is, there will be a systematic blurring of the distinction between the wealth of the state and the personal wealth of the ruler or rulers, leading to some degree of institutionalised acceptance of rent-seeking on the part of the political leadership.

34. Discussed respectively by [Vaughan and Gebremichael](#), Rethinking Business and Politics; [Booth and Golooba-Mutebi](#), 'Developmental Patrimonialism?'; and [Dawson and Kelsall](#) 'Anti-developmental Patrimonialism'.
35. [Whitfield](#), Growth without Economic Transformation; Kelsall, Business, Politics, and the State, Ch 4.
36. [Cooksey and Kelsall](#), Political Economy.
37. [Booth](#), 'Getting Governance Right'.
38. [Unsworth](#), 'What's Politics Got to Do With It?'.
39. This is a central theme of the training course on applied political economy analysis in which I am one of the facilitators with Alex Duncan and Samantha Wade of The Policy Practice (see [PP and ODI](#), 'PEA in Action').
40. For chapter and verse, see [Sandler](#), Global Collective Action; Gibson et al., Samaritan's Dilemma.
41. [Frenken and Müller](#), Ownership and Political Steering; [Rauch](#), 'Multiple Ownership'.
42. As emphasised earlier, ownership of development efforts at the national level is hardly settled by the mere adoption of a strategy document national development plan; so it is not just the multitude of actors at sector level that creates the need to build ownership by addressing collective action problems.
43. <http://www.propcom.org/> [Accessed 7 November 2012].
44. , What Fits Best? and What's Really Happening?
45. [Shivakumar](#), Constitution of Development; [Geddes](#), Politician's Dilemma.
46. State Partnership for Accountability, Responsiveness and Capability (<http://www.sparc-nigeria.com> [Accessed 7 Nov 2012]). For an illuminating discussion of equivalent issues in Indonesian districts, see [Rosser et al.](#), Leaders, Elites and Coalitions.
47. <http://www.tonyblairoffice.org/africa> [Accessed 7 November 2012].
48. <http://www.trademarkea.com/> [Accessed 7 November 2012].

49. Of course, donor agencies face their own severe problems of collective action, notably when attempting to impose governance conditionalities in a consistent way on recipient countries. That might suggest that they would be unlikely to be good at solving those of others. However, the kinds of interventions illustrated above are alternatives to conditionality and other devices that depend on direct and coordinated donor action. That is one of their advantages.

50. See [Eyben](#), 'Hiding Relations'.

51. Glennie, *Trouble with Aid*, 105–106. That is, it costs relatively little and involves less conflict with powerful interest groups than measures in the fields of trade, small arms and financial regulation that could contribute more to poverty reduction.

52. For a fuller account of these issues which differs from mine only on details, see Unsworth, 'What's Politics Got to Do With It?'.

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#### Related Research Data

[Marketing Reform? The Rise and Fall of Agricultural Liberalisation in Tanzania](#)

Source: Development Policy Review

[Une administration à deux vitesses Projets de développement et construction de l'État au Sahel](#)

Source: Cahiers d'études africaines

[Policy Experiments, Democratic Ownership and Development Assistance](#)

Source: Development Policy Review

[Rethinking the Relationship between Neo-patrimonialism and Economic Development in Africa](#)

Source: IDS Bulletin

[African Economies and the Politics of Permanent Crisis, 1979–1999](#)

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