Original Article

Struggles in Paris: The DAC and the Purposes of Development Aid

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Abstract This article historicises the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development Development Assistance Committee (DAC) as a site where the meanings of development and the purposes of aid were contested and where gradually a more diverse set of actors were invited to engage in the argument. The author's ethnographic approach examines the micro-level processes of ideological struggle in a 'closed space' that transformed into an 'invited' one. During this transformation, rights-based approaches to development rose and fell within a changing global landscape wherein the DAC seeks to sustain a foothold. The article concludes by considering the future of debates about development within the post-Busan Global Partnership in which the DAC is only one of many stakeholders.

Dans une perspective historique, cet article envisage le Comité d'aide au développement (CAD) de l'OCDE comme un espace où les définitions du développement et les objectifs de l'aide ont été contestés et où un ensemble plus diversifié d'acteurs ont progressivement été invités à prendre part au débat. S'inscrivant dans une approche ethnographique, l'auteur examine les microprocessus de lutte idéologique dans un « espace clos » qui s'est transformé en un « espace d'invitation », transformation au cours de laquelle les approches du développement fondées sur les droits de l'homme ont progressé puis reculé dans un contexte global en mutation au sein duquel le CAD cherche à renforcer sa position. L'article conclut en s'interrogeant sur l'avenir des débats concernant le développement dans le cadre du Partenariat mondial de Busan, où le DAC n'est qu'une partie prenante parmi bien d'autres

European Journal of Development Research (2013) **25,** 78–91. doi:10.1057/ejdr.2012.49;
published online 29 November 2012

Keywords: Development; OECD; knowledge; policies; aid

Introduction

The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) comprises countries in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) providing Official Development Assistance (ODA). In 2011, the DAC celebrated its 50th anniversary as 'a unique international forum where donor governments and multilateral organisations … come together to help partner countries reduce poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals'.[1] Through the work of its subsidiary bodies, the DAC has sought to influence its members' policies and practices in relation to developing countries. The debates in the DAC have both contributed to and mirrored the fractures and contradictions in the wider world of international development, a world that is today rapidly changing as part of a transforming global political economy. DAC members are losing their pre-eminent status in defining development and how to achieve it. By the middle of the last decade, recipient countries were looking beyond the DAC for ideas and policy models (Zimmerman and Smith, 2011). The rising powers – China, Brazil, India and others – are increasingly

important development cooperation actors, influential in shaping international development policies at a time when economic crisis has led to many long-standing donors cutting their aid budgets and taking less interest in development.

These changes were reflected at the Busan High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, the last of four such events organised by the DAC from 2003 to 2011. At Busan, 'partnership', hitherto a euphemism for bilateral aid relations of inequality and dependence, was discursively transformed into a horizontal and complex set of relations wherein the language of 'aid' and of 'aid effectiveness' was replaced by 'development effectiveness', a term subject to so many possible interpretations that everyone could agree to the term, if not – as we shall see – to its content. On that basis, a Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation was agreed upon, involving donor and recipient governments, the private sector, philanthropic foundations and civil society (Eyben and Savage, 2012). Some months later in June 2012, the DAC's Working Party on Aid Effectiveness (WP–EFF) met for the last time to confirm the new Partnership's institutional arrangements. The OECD's Development Cooperation Department (Development Cooperation Directorate (DCD) (the DAC's secretariat) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are to share the administrative duties. Oversight is the responsibility of a multi-stakeholder steering group (on which the DAC has three out of fifteen seats) presided over by three ministerial co-chairs, only one of whom represents the DAC. It would appear that the DAC has lost any claims it might have had to leading the coordination of the institutional arrangements for development co-operation.

Although too early to judge the implications of these changes for its broader influence on development policy and practice, it is timely to examine the DAC as a historically important space for constructing and contesting ideas about development. I follow Lefebvre (1991) in using spatial imagery to understand the DAC as a bounded socially constructed site of face-to-face encounters between differently positioned social actors that in turn are variously located in other overlapping spaces, as in shifting patterns of overlapping diagrams. The dynamics of this 'host of social relationships' (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 88) was a process through which the DAC recursively influenced the politics of aid and international development, including thorough discussions on the meanings of development and hence the purposes of aid, which is the focus of the present article. I consider how participants at DAC meetings were subject to the DAC's spatial tactics of power and control (Low and Lawrence-Zuniga, 2003) within a 'closed space'. For much of the DAC's life, many official aid agency staff and consultants – let alone aid recipients – knew little about what was happening behind closed doors in Paris. However, in the last decade, the DAC's 'closed space' (Gaventa, 2006) gradually transformed into an 'invited' space, and today through the Global Partnership the DAC seeks to maintain its legitimacy through constructing a separate autonomous space in which it is just one of many stakeholders.

Compared with the study of power and knowledge practices in other institutions of the international aid system, particularly of the Bretton Woods organisations (for example, Bebbington *et al*, 2004; Toye and Toye, 2005; Broad, 2006; Mosse, 2011), remarkably little has been published about the DAC. Masujima (2004) provides an insider's perspective on why the DAC lost ground to the World Bank in framing the governance agenda, and Ruckert (2008) offers a sophisticated analysis of the DAC's discursive influence in the evolution of what he refers to as an 'inclusive neo-liberal world order'. His neo-Gramscian approach usefully emphasises the tensions and contradictions within the DAC. Suggesting that the DAC should be conceived as 'a social relation, a moment of crystallisation and condensation of antagonistic social forces' (2008, p. 111), he calls for

a historical approach to better understand the dynamics at work in such international organisations. The present article attempts to do this through a micro-level, actor-oriented perspective on the dialectic evolution of discourses and values (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2009) within the wider international aid system that the DAC influenced and was influenced by. This focus on the spaces of knowledge practice means that there is much about the DAC as an institution that is not considered and that merits attention from others.

The original empirical data in this article are derived primarily from an anthropologist's observing participation (Mosse, 2011) that places the author in the text as a reflexive actor, one who is both a committed participant and a critical observer. As a participant, I identify myself among those that Ruckert (2008) describes as trying to get social inclusion on the agenda. My analysis in that respect is based on long acquaintance with the DAC since 1987, when I represented the UK aid ministry in meetings of what was then called the Expert Group on Women in Development (now known as GENDERNET). I also participated occasionally in meetings of other Expert Groups. Thereafter, my interests in power and relations in international aid led me to accept invitations to DAC meetings and conferences, as well as occasional consultancy assignments. I interviewed OECD staff in 2007 and 2008 for research projects; findings from these interviews, as well as from more recent ones in relation to Busan, are also included.

The present article makes no claims to being comprehensive. My knowledge as a reflexive practitioner comes primarily from some of the thematic expert groups and of WP–EFF. Moreover, my epistemological approach considers that any account of social relations is shaped by positionality and thus is unavoidably subject to selection and interpretation.[2] I hope my analysis will stimulate other perspectives of the history, practices and ideological dynamics of the DAC as a site for defining and contesting the purposes of development aid.

The article's two interconnected threads are the DAC's role in shaping the purposes of aid, and how gradually its conversations about these purposes became more inclusive. The DAC's origins and ways of working set the context for an analysis of the thematic working groups or networks as sites of struggle for counter-hegemonic interests. Next, how and why the DAC opened up and the causes, challenges and consequences of its efforts to become a more inclusive and participatory space are explored through an analysis of debates about development effectiveness.

The Donors' Club

The DAC, as a constituent part of the OECD, seeks to influence how the world thinks and acts by identifying and finding good practice solutions to problems; these become standards against which member states' actions are scrutinised through peer review (Mahon and McBride, 2009). The colloquial sobriquet of 'the donors' club'[3] describes the first 40 years of the DAC's history, when the struggles about how the world should think took place behind closed doors. The attention accorded to these by the bilateral agencies' head offices depended on the subject under discussion, on the political stance of the administration in power and, perhaps most importantly, on the internal politics within head offices. This was the case at least in relation to the thematic expert groups, whose history of discursive contestation is relevant for understanding contemporary struggles over the development effectiveness discourse.

Origins and Process

The DAC started in 1960 in Paris as the Development Assistance Group (DAG), whose purpose was to increase the resources for aid to the least developed countries and 'to improve their effectiveness' (Fuhrer, 1994, p. 14). It was serviced by a small secretariat that was to become the DCD. The US Government seconded and covered the costs of a full-time chairman – a tradition that remained unbroken until 1999 when the chairman was provided by France, and since then by Britain and Germany, before reverting to the United States with the current post holder. In 1961, the DAG became the DAC when it was incorporated into the OECD, founded in 1961 as a successor to the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation – usually referred to as the Marshall Plan[4] – constituted after World War II for European recipients of US foreign aid and designed to create a post-war new triangular economic order: the United States would export its products to a Europe grown prosperous through foreign aid, and Europe would provide the United States access to the raw materials from its colonies (Wood, 1986). 'Thirty five years later, one can still trace the basic elements of the aid regime to the complex origins and history of the Marshall Plan' (Wood, 1986, p. 31).

Not everyone welcomed the DAC. The UN Secretary General Hammarskjold protested against such a focal point for international development policy that would be led by the United States and other Western powers and independent of the United Nations (Jones, 2011). Its creation at the beginning of the UN Development Decade coincided with the founding in the same year of the German and French development cooperation Ministries, USAID, Sida, the Japanese OECF (for soft credit) and the external-aid office of Canada that later became CIDA (Fuhrer, 1994). OECD member states saw the DAC as a useful forum for the burgeoning number of bilateral aid donors. The DAC, starting with 11 members, has grown to 24, joined most recently (in 2010) by South Korea. UNDP, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are official observers. Every year, the DAC has one high-level meeting involving Ministers of Development from member states and one senior-level meeting of directors-general or their equivalents. In 2011, the senior-level meeting was attended for the first time by representatives of some non-OECD donors, namely, China, Brazil, India, Indonesia and South Africa. Other regular meetings of the DAC involve the work of its subsidiary bodies, discussed later.

The DCD – often referred to as 'the Secretariat' – does not have 'field offices'; staff's development knowledge comes either from previous experience as bilateral aid officials or from what they hear discussed at DAC meetings and conferences, as well as possibly from occasional trips to recipient countries to participate in a DAC peer review or workshop. The old hands place value on being 'process experts' whose task is to secure consensus among DAC members. Secondees may feel that their possibly deeper knowledge of development is disregarded. One of them told the author how her field experience apparently counted for nothing with the old hands – for whom, she alleged, 'consensus' involved in practice supporting the most conservative position among the member states. Governments commonly second staff to influence a multilateral organisation's policies or knowledge base; but whereas in the World Bank or UNDP, for example, there are explicit policies and knowledge to influence, the DCD is more challenging because its official line is that it serves its members and does not itself do any thinking.

Although the OECD – especially the DAC – was largely a creation of the United States, its location in Paris has influenced how business is done. The OECD's main site is the Chateau de la Muette. Once the residence of Baron Rothschild, during the occupation

of Paris it became the German army headquarters, and with the liberation US army headquarters and thereafter the offices of the Marshall Plan. The Chateau and the manner of doing business therein can be viewed as a spatial tactic of the OECD for socialising member state delegates. DAC meetings could be alien and daunting for people posted to head office after years in 'the field'. The Chateau's splendid panelled rooms are intimidating arrangements of great tables organised in a hollow square, around which the delegates sit behind their countries' name plates. As put to me in an e-mail from a bilateral aid agency, 'its combination [of] hierarchical structure and flash meeting rooms/set-out of tables and desks was reminiscent of yesterday's male board rooms'. It was challenging, my correspondent added, to talk about 'poverty, gender, power and rights' in such an environment.

Sites of Struggle: The DAC Thematic Network

Most of the DAC's work is conducted through subsidiary bodies – working groups or networks. Delegates from member states and from multilateral organisations with observer status meet once or twice a year in a formal plenary to discuss the implementation of their biennial work plans that have previously been approved by the Senior-Level Meeting. In addition to the long-established evaluation network and the working group on statistics, there are thematic networks on different policy areas that agree on principles and guidelines for DAC members' practice.[5]

Contributing to such guidelines through active participation in the DAC's thematic work attracted the smaller member states, whose voice in other international development spaces – such as the World Bank Board where they had to share an Executive Directorship – risked not being heard. The dominance of the Washington Consensus in the 1980s and much of the 1990s among most of the larger DAC members (Zimmerman and Smith, 2011) meant that the DAC was also a useful space for bilateral agency staff antagonistic to the Consensus. They sought to construct DAC guidance that they could then use to influence their own organisations, including by using them as basis for discreetly briefing their counterparts in the two bilateral agencies undertaking the biannual peer-review process that uses DAC's principles and guidance for judging performance. Even if their superiors back home were largely dismissive of the DAC's thematic work, in a policy world dominated by economists (neo-liberal or otherwise) non-economists such as anthropologists and human rights lawyers, appointed in response to concerns from domestic constituencies, found in the DAC thematic groups solidarity- and morale-building spaces.

Not everyone who participated had a radical agenda. In the 1980s, the British presence at GENDERNET meetings was a gesture to the domestic lobby rather than an initiative for gender equality. The radicals in the group were initially hostile when I became the UK delegate to the network. The United Kingdom was perceived as a blocker, as was the Secretariat (dominated by the long-time Director, Helmut Fuhrer), which resisted the radicals' struggles to strengthen the DAC's position on gender equality. The break through came when the USAID representative, a Republican political appointee and ardent feminist, assumed the Chair of GENDERNET and enlisted the support of the US Chair of the DAC to secure approval for the 1989 Guiding Principles on Women in Development.

Once the environment, gender equality and (later) human rights became legitimate subjects for expert groups, the Secretariat tried to control their disruptive potential by framing them as 'cross-cutting issues' to be addressed in donor policies, rather than seen

as development goals in their own right. However, in the 1990s, partly due to 'the power and agency of counter-hegemonic forces … that pushed their own concerns … onto the DAC's agenda' (Ruckert, 2008, p. 104), the DAC began to attach more importance to value-laden outcomes. The Working Party on Good Governance (subsequently known as GOVNET), established in 1993, included 'Participatory Development' in its title, and human-rights-based approaches were a central theme. 'People-centred' and 'participatory development' were key phrases in the DAC's bold and highly influential *Shaping the twenty-first Century* (OECD, 1996), which defined aid's goals as poverty reduction, social development and environmental sustainability (Therien and Lloyd, 2000), and whose International Development Targets were the basis for the Millennium Development Goals (Manning, 2009).

In 1998, a working group on poverty reduction was established. Some of the delegates at the group's first meeting knew each other well, having been members of an informal alliance drawing attention to the social dimensions of structural adjustment. The emphasis on rights-based approaches in the group's first product, Guidelines on Poverty Reduction (2001), contrasted with the World Bank's World Development Report on Poverty published at the same time.

The World Bank, a powerful and strategic actor in maintaining its version of what should be development (Broad, 2006), responded to the DAC's evident influence on development policy approaches by engaging actively in a number of the thematic groups and securing DAC members' funding for Bank knowledge work. Consequently, at GOVNET meetings, rights and participatory themes became marginal to public sector finance and management issues that the Bank was promoting, and the DAC lost its leadership on governance to the Bank (Masujima, 2004). The Bank also became increasingly influential in GENDERNET, among whose members were the principal funders of the Bank's Gender Action Plan – 'Gender Equality is Smart Economics'. This created tension between those delegates advocating a rights-based approach and those arguing for an instrumentalism, whereby support to gender equality was primarily justified through its contribution to development as growth (author's reference).

The DAC was also one of several sites for ideological disputes between multilaterals. After the Bank took control of the DAC governance agenda, its main challenger on governance became UNDP, whose work was framed in terms of democracy as distinct from the Bank's public administration approach. At a conference organised in 2008 by GOVNET in London to discuss harmonisation of the many different governance assessment methods used by development agencies, the Bank officials – in collaboration with their UK host – played a dominant role in determining the agenda and outcomes. Their tactic included bringing to the conference a sufficient number of Bank staff to allocate one to each of the round tables at which participants were distributed, with instructions to facilitate/steer the group discussions at the tables. At every coffee break, the leader of the Bank team was the centre of attention, surrounded by conference participants, seemingly wanting to be part of his jovial and intelligent charisma, which was displayed equally powerfully when making points from the floor during conference proceedings. The UNDP staff and global civil society allies were wrong-footed, trying to remind the conference of their alternative agenda by reference to a conference that UNDP had organised the previous year in Stockholm. Meanwhile, staff from Swedish and Swiss bilateral agencies struggled to have human rights included in the definition of governance.

Although rarely openly admitted, the debates in these thematic networks were ideological disagreements about development purposes. Within the closed space of the donor's

club and the DAC structure of regular meetings, often involving the same core group of participants, trust-based alliances of shared purpose enabled heterodox positions to be articulated and sustained. However, by the middle of the last decade, it was also becoming more difficult for head office staff from DAC member states to attend meetings of thematic networks. Their governments had not only been cutting back on staff numbers but were also de-emphasising specialisation and expertise, meaning that there were fewer people available or interested in the thematic work. Nevertheless, although attendance at thematic meetings declined, there was increasing participation in the 'aid effectiveness' working party established in 2003. It is in that context I now consider the DAC's transition from a closed to an invited space, where the debates about the purposes of development aid included a broader set of actors.

'More Open, More Engaging and Inclusive'

A reformed DAC – one that is more open, more engaging and inclusive (Foreword, OECD, 2010)

By the middle of the decade, non-OECD countries were emerging as important donors, 'weakening [the DAC members'] bargaining position' (Woods, 2008, p. 1206). The rising powers' approach to financing economic infrastructure, which did not subscribe to the panoply of DAC guidance on social, political and environmental matters, was attractive to recipient country governments for whom these matters were often unwelcome conditions. As Kragelund (2011) points out, this non-OECD assistance is in fact very similar in nature to what the rising powers themselves received from OECD donors some 20 or 30 years earlier – in other words, before concerns for people and the environment mattered much to the DAC and these new actors were to shift the grounds of the debate back to a greater emphasis on economic growth as the purpose of development.

The DAC's parent body, the OECD, had been adapting to the growing power of the South by becoming more inclusive. Barriers began to lower when Mexico joined the OECD in 1994, to be followed shortly thereafter by South Korea. The latter also joined the DAC in 2010. Greater inclusivity and openness was reflected in the re-organisation of the OECD's physical space, including the construction of a large airy building with modern meeting rooms and a bustling cafeteria where staff, delegates and visitors mingle, free Wi-Fi, broad open spaces and comfortable sofas. All these contributed to a more welcoming atmosphere than in the formidable Chateau, helping the DAC change its image from 'elite members' club … an unfair perception, given that more than any other organisation we want the views of developing countries'.[6]

The DAC's move towards greater openness can be traced back to *Shaping the twenty-first Century* (OECD, 1996), which emphasised partnership and recipient ownership 'to rebalance relations, moving from the highly conditioned donor mindset of the structural adjustment era' (Manning, 2008, p. 3). This led to the 'decisive innovation' of setting up a Task Force to examine donor practices with '15 developing countries as full partners in the discussion' (Manning, 2008, p. 3). However, it was difficult for the DAC to keep pace with the rising expectations of inclusiveness. When by the middle of the decade the DAC was privileging 'aid effectiveness', its managerial discourse inadvertently exposed the political question of *who* decides *what* is 'development', as reflected in the two principal criticisms of the 2005 Paris Declaration on Effective Aid. These were the closed nature of the space in which the Declaration was agreed upon (Steinle and Correll, 2008; Glennie,

2011), and the focus on means – aid – rather than on development ends (Alemany *et al*, 2008).

The DAC responded to these criticisms by including a broader group of stakeholders in the preparations and discussions at the follow-up to Paris in the 2008 Accra meeting.[7] Despite these efforts, the DAC's role in setting the Millennium Development Goals and its drive to enrol everyone in the aid effectiveness agenda was leading to recipient governments and multilateral agencies grumbling that as an exclusive donor club it had an inordinate amount of global influence. In 2008, just before Accra, the United Nations was finally successful in achieving Hammarskjold's ambition to challenge the primacy of the DAC by establishing a parallel institution – the UN Development Cooperation Forum (DCF). Although the DCF is new, relatively untested and meets only once every 2 years, the fact that it framed its agenda as '*development* effectiveness' (Brown and Morton, 2008) posed a discursive challenge to the DAC's *aid* effectiveness. And at the end of 2009, a major UN High Level Meeting on South–South Co-operation that took place in Nairobi promoted a different model of development relations.

The DAC undertook a 'reflection exercise' concerning its relevance in this 'changing development landscape' (OECD, 2009, p. 1) as an attempt to update its ways of working and improve its public image that was subject to criticism such as from a Southern civil invitee to a 2007 conference in Paris on 'country ownership' organised in preparation for the Accra conference. For him, the DAC represented everything that was wrong with the aid system:

> It's not the money – it's not that much. We need much more if we want to get all the kids into school. It's not their intellect – most of them are pretty dumb. So where does their power come from? It's something left over from 200 years ago but [is] still around (personal communication to the author).

Although such language was not used in public, the sentiments were shared by the three principal sets of actors for whom the DAC was now opening its doors: recipient governments, the non-DAC donors – the rising powers – and organised global civil society. However, by inviting these diverse perspectives into the donors' club, the problem of consensus-building was exacerbated. At the same time, the DAC ways of working risked making invitees feel that their presence was largely tokenistic.[8] It is in this context that I now discuss how the DAC has sought to work with these actors and consider how member states and individual delegates have positioned themselves in the ongoing debate about the purposes of development aid.

The Challenges of Broadening Participation

> 'Invited spaces' and opportunities to participate that are made available … are often structured and owned by those who provide them, no matter how participatory they may seek to be.
> (Cornwall, 2008, p. 275)

The DAC's challenge of deciding who to invite to which kind of meeting – and whether invitees would accept – is exemplified through the instance of one thematic network that decided to invite 'Southern representatives' to its meetings to check whether the policies and guidance being proposed were relevant to development realities. The aim was participation from recipient governments, think tanks, the private sector and civil society. Members were invited to suggest names. In the event, only three such participants were appointed – all from civil society and two from the same African country. There were no

invitees from 'partner governments'. Afterwards, some delegates wondered how this had happened. Moreover, it was never clarified with the invitees what was expected of them. Agreeably surprised that they could speak freely at the meetings, which by this time had become rather less formal (even when the venue was still the Chateau), they were nevertheless baffled as to their role and privately expressed irritation about tokenism. As no one had given thought to provide them with any briefing about the DAC or this particular subsidiary body, at first they had to struggle to follow the discussion and understand its purpose. Over coffee, a delegate commented with heavy irony that it was a pity the Southern participants had only been invited once the network's work programme had already been established, thus preventing them from shaping the agenda. However, their eventual contribution to the content of the guidance drafted by the network noticeably reinforced the ideological position taken by the representative from the member state who had initially proposed Southern participation.

Although it was becoming *de rigueur* to invite Southern participants (both from government and civil society) to one-off events such as large conferences, of which there were many in the run-up to Accra, DCD staff found choosing participants to be 'a big headache', as one explained to me. He had asked network members to suggest names but they had found this difficult because, as he remarked, people in head offices have little direct contact with anyone in aid-recipient countries, including – with a laugh – their own colleagues in the field. A further challenge was the tradition of organising large events according to the highly formal customs of the Chateau, including chairpersons appointed because of their status rather than their ability to facilitate the inclusion of diverse voices. Nevertheless, at the conference on 'country ownership' mentioned above and despite the Parisian formality of the venue provided by the French Government, as well as a gender blind spot resulting in only one of the 33 speakers being a woman[9] a serious effort was made to be inclusive. Recipient governments and Southern civil society participants were able to argue freely about country ownership. Thus, a Minister of Finance from a highly aid-dependent country spoke of how he had taken advantage of World Bank conditions (and he himself was a former World Bank official) to introduce a policy to which he knew the majority of the population, if consulted, would have objected. He commented that, compared with the 1990s, relations between Ministries of Finance and the international finance institutions are nowadays very harmonious. 'Just because you didn't design the car, it doesn't mean that you don't own it and drive it', he said. This remark outraged civil society participants, including one who remarked that the North does not need armies if it can shape the content of a recipient government leader's head.

Much had changed compared with a DAC conference on human rights in which I had participated 10 years earlier. Then, Southern participation had been both more limited and less diverse, and the process had been extremely formal. By 2007, the (mainly male) participants were able to voice a range of opinions on an intensely political matter. Nevertheless, their presence depended on DAC members having paid their airfares, and access was by invitation only. As is often the case with such invited spaces, some invitees also worried that their attendance was a co-opting strategy to defuse opposition.

The Paris Declaration principles implied that the DAC should not concern itself with a recipient government's policy choices. But if DAC members' new role was simply to deliver effective aid in support of country-led policies, did this mean that the DAC's thematic policy work involving reflections on the purposes of development was no longer necessary? In advance of the Accra High Level Forum (2008) to monitor the implementation of The Paris Declaration, the thematic networks engaged in a flurry of activities

to regain lost ground. GOVNET, ENVIRONET and GENDERNET organised together in 2007 a conference in Dublin to bring substantive content discussion into the WP–EFF – by now the most important subsidiary body in the DAC. Thus, in a strategic response to the absence of environmental, human rights and gender equality goals from the Paris Declaration, Mary Robinson was primed to give a keynote address in Dublin using the discourse of 'development effectiveness' (as distinct from 'aid effectiveness'). She said that this meant in practice bringing the 'cross-cutting issues' from the margins to the centre of development.[10] However, as I now discuss, this was not a meaning of 'development effectiveness' that everyone accepted, as became evident in the preparations for the Fourth High Level Forum scheduled for 2011.

The Meanings of 'Development Effectiveness'

The DAC's efforts to become more inclusive manifested themselves most visibly in the WP–EFF. Framing the WP–EFF as a multi-stakeholder process, the DCD was conscious that such arrangements 'mask abuses of power' and 'a more structural enduring inequity' (Edmunds and Wollenberg, 2001, p. 232). It was claimed that as the DCD only serviced it and that (from 2008) the WP–EFF had two co-chairs representing donor and recipient governments, this transformed the WP–EFF from an 'invited' to an 'autonomous' space (Gaventa, 2006); but such claims were judged to be unconvincing, and not only because its meetings were held in the OECD. A recipient government official attending such a meeting told me the DAC's rejection of a proposal from recipient country governments that their officials should be seconded to the DCD showed that the DAC did not truly want partnership. Hence, the DAC's challenge was to remain a credible development policy space while having a restricted membership, without the legitimacy enjoyed by its new competitor – the DCF.

The 2011 High Level Forum in Busan was to be hosted by South Korea, seen as a bridge between the traditional donors and those of the rising powers. The WP–EFF had the challenge of involving diverse actors in agenda-setting: not only recipient governments but also the rising powers, which the Korean hosts wanted, as well as global civil society which many of the traditional donors wanted. By framing Busan's objectives as a partnership for 'development effectiveness' a way forward was offered, as overlapping chains of meaning allowed for multiple ownership of the concept. Just as development buzzwords 'gain their purchase and power through their vague and euphemistic qualities, their capacity to embrace a multitude of possible meanings, and their normative resonance' (Cornwall, 2007, p. 472), so demands for clarity can lead to definitional conflict in which various constituencies fight to claim their meaning as *the* meaning. This is what happened in the run-up to Busan.

In response to my email about how *she* understood 'development effectiveness', a DCD 'cross-cutter' explained:

> The genesis of the 'development effectiveness' language in the context of the Paris Declaration and Accra was from us cross-cutters (gender equality, human rights and environment) in an effort to move the focus from improving the efficiency of aid delivery back to qualitative impacts in our areas.

This was a claim that 'development effectiveness' had originated from counter-hegemonic actors within the DAC. Global civil society networks – in conversation with the cross-cutters – were also claiming to have coined a similar meaning. Better Aid, a civil

society network, published in 2010 a statement concerning a rights-based perspective to development.[11] This was in line with their criticism of the Paris Declaration's ignoring the transformative processes required to secure development impact. Yet at the Seoul G20 summit in 2010, 'development effectiveness' was understood as going beyond aid to include trade and foreign direct investment as key to achieving development with South–South Cooperation seen as driver of development effectiveness. And that same year, the Second African Regional Meeting on Development Effectiveness understood the concept as 'country-led, coherent, coordinated and results-driven'.[12]

In response to this confusion, during a week of WP–EFF meetings in late 2010, the DCD organised a large, inclusive and well-facilitated workshop to discuss 'development effectiveness', mooted by Korea to replace 'aid effectiveness' that had become a magnet for criticisms of aid from many different sources (Kindornay, 2010). A DCD background note to the workshop identified three current meanings. The first was synonymous with 'aid effectiveness' but with a particular emphasis on 'results'; the second was that 'development effectiveness' implies a broader agenda than 'aid', requiring private sector flows; and the third was the realisation of rights and social justice – the aspirations of the 1990s, which were absent from the 'aid-effectiveness' agenda.

The workshop revealed that development effectiveness as 'results' reflected DAC donors' concerns about value for money at a time of cuts to domestic budgets. For centre–right donor governments, for whom private sector investment is the development driver, development effectiveness' meanings of 'results' and 'beyond aid' meanings could usefully be combined to achieve some common ground with the rising powers. Recipient government participants also stressed that development as spurring investment and increasing productivity. A think-tank participant reflected that as South–South Co-operation is based on mutual economic interest rather than poverty reduction, the rising powers have less problem with achieving policy coherence between trade and aid than do traditional donors; and that this begged the question of whether traditional donors might therefore wish to follow suit by adopting 'development effectiveness' to disembarrass themselves of the direct poverty reduction goals of aid, which the DAC had taken the lead in promoting in the 1990s.

A question about whether one could define development effectiveness without defining development provoked a strong reaction from recipient government officials. One said:

> If people in a slum in [her capital city] were told that here in Paris there was a meeting on development and that it could not agree on what it is they need, they would be amazed. We know what we want and the issue is how to get there. It's simple. The people in [name of city] want houses, food and good government.

In these debates, the DAC cross-cutters and civil society participants found little support from other participants in favour of understanding development as social justice and rights rather than being about growth and basic needs. This was mirrored the following year in Busan where in her speech at the closing ceremony Emele Duituturaga, Co-Chair of the Open Forum for Civil Society Organisations' Development Effectiveness, said:

> We underscore our conviction that growth is not the engine room of development. Development is about fulfilling the rights and needs of people. Growth is a means to that end, but which needs to be monitored and held accountable for poverty, inequalities and environmental degradation.[13]

Conclusion

> Before Busan, I only knew that I did not like how the aid effectiveness debate had developed. After Busan, I do not know in which direction development policy/development cooperation will evolve. It seems to me that the bilateral cooperation à la ODA will come to its end – sooner or later anyway. What can be said to committed practitioners struggling for good results of their work?
>
> Email from a bilateral aid official to the author, December 2011

Why did bilateral agency staff participate in DAC meetings? Sending someone from head office to participate in a DAC meeting could be explained as the political statement of a rich country – a performance of contributing to solving the world's problems. Being seen to be members of a club is thus arguably more important than the content of the discussions, and members can choose the extent to which they implement non-binding consensual statements such as 0.7 per cent aid target or the Paris Declaration on Effective Aid. However, another explanation – which does not exclude the first – is that some head office staff strategically participated in meetings, particularly in the thematic groups, as a roundabout means of influencing their own agencies' policies. Disastrously for those who had managed to get consideration of rights and participation into DAC policy discourse during the 1990s, the content-free nature of 'aid effectiveness' allowed the erstwhile hegemonic discourse of development as growth and basic needs to return to centre stage. As the WP–EEF grew in importance and inclusiveness, so the DAC thematic networks had to shape their activities in response to or in resistance to the Paris agenda. Today, more than has previously been the case, the DAC thematic networks may be content-free as the DAC loses its influence over development debates and economic growth has become the dominant meaning of development effectiveness within the new Global Partnership.

Writing at the turn of the Millennium, Therien and Lloyd (2000) commented that aid was no longer a field of conflictive and ideologically charged positions between North and South. Busan confirmed this, although the ideological content of the consensus has shifted with the emerging powers of the South setting the agenda, one that is no longer the people-centred and participatory development approach of *Shaping the twenty-first Century* that the DAC played such an important role in creating. As in the email cited above, bilateral agency staff committed to rights-based approaches found themselves wondering what to do, and it is left largely to global civil society networks to sustain the rights perspective in debates about development. But what the future holds is unclear; much of the financing for such global networks originated through the efforts of these same staff in bilateral aid agencies, which are now losing the influence to do so.

For a limited period, the involvement of a broader group of actors in discussing aid effectiveness has kept the DAC at the centre of development policy; but if 'aid' remains what it has become, an unfashionable notion, we can expect that the ideological struggles will be pursued with alternative resources and in other spaces than the DAC.

Acknowledgement

A preliminary version of this article was presented at a conference on 'Unpacking Aid Effectiveness' at the London School of Economics in June 2011. I am grateful to the organiser, Nilima Gulrajani, for her comments on a revised version of that paper and to Alex Shankland for his feedback on a subsequent draft.

Notes

1. www.oecd.org/dataoecd/43/32/40986871.pdf.
2. See May (2002), Denzin and Lincoln (2005).
3. For example, by the Chair of the DAC in his statement to the G20 Working Group on Development: www.oecd.org/dac/DAC%20Chair%20Statement%20to%20the%20G20%20on%20Busan.pdf
4. After General George Marshall, who was US Secretary of State in 1947 when the programme was launched.
5. See OECD (2010) for details about the work of the subsidiary bodies.
6. Statement of Brian Attwood, Chair of the DAC: www.one.org/blog/2011/05/24/interview-brian-atwood-reflects-on-50-years-of-the-oecd/
7. Although it has been argued that the discussion remains exclusionary due to the absence of those whose voices have been historically marginalised (Wallace, 2009).
8. This was mentioned to me by several Southern civil society participants at DAC events.
9. See also Tina Wallace's (2009) analysis of another preparatory conference for Accra, where something similar happened.
10. See OECD (2007).
11. Development effectiveness in development cooperation: a rights-based perspective', October 2010 www.betteraid.org/en/betteraid-policy/betteraid-publications/policy-papers/393-development-effectiveness-in-development-cooperation.html
12. www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Generic-Documents/NEPAD_CEO%20-%20CLOSING_SPEAKING_NOTES.pdf
13. www.betteraid.org/en/news/high-level-forum-on-aid-effectiveness-/530-cochair-speech-hlf4.html

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