



CHOOSING THE RIGHT COUNTRIES FOR DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

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REGAINING CITIZENS TRUST: THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL DONORS

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Introduction

In 2010, the international community reflected seriously on the achievements and challenges of development assistance. The United Nations, the World Bank and the US Government, among the major donors, have reviewed their strategies for granting development assistance, as well as taken stock of past successes and failures. Also, the summit of the Millennium Development Goals, held at the United Nations in New York on September 2010, highlighted the shortcomings for meeting the poverty reduction goals set for 2015. Recognizing that corruption represents an obstacle to reaching the established goals, the UN Secretary General pledged to promote accountability “on all sides” of the development assistance process. (United Nations 2010)

Civil society organizations and think tanks are also reviewing the effectiveness and quality of development assistance. Among them are organizations such as the ‘Publish What you Fund,’ ‘The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI)’ and the ‘NGO’s Network for Transparency in Colombia.’ Similarly, the Center for Global Development and Brookings Institute’s Global Economy and Development Program issued the first Quality of Official Development Assistance Assessment, an attempt to measure the quality of Official Development Assistance (ODA), in October 2010. (Birdsall and Kharas 2010).

These reviews of development assistance strategies respond to concerns that targets established in 2010 for reducing poverty are falling behind, but also that the international donor community is losing credibility among the developing world’s civil societies. Quite frequently, be it in Mongolia or Nigeria, citizens are judging the donors as part of the corruption problem rather than as part of the solution. This is the result, primarily, of the obvious lack of monitoring of the resources that these institutions grant to governments. Citizens are often experiencing

first-hand the failures to demand accountability from donors: basic services often subsidized by donors are not delivered, instead political leaders fund ghost or pet projects. It is no secret that the international community has provided assistance indiscriminately to governments that cannot or will not manage it responsibly.

This paper looks at key issues affecting donors' credibility. It points out that providing substantial amounts of development aid to governments and institutions perceived as highly corrupt, often in oil-exporting countries, suggest that the international community could be making the wrong decisions in choosing countries to assist. It argues that perhaps this happens because the criteria used to define "poor countries" is inaccurate for distinguishing between poor countries and poorly managed countries. Moreover, it suggests that the development assistance currently allocated to corrupt and wealthy countries is depriving nations with the commitment to development and the capacity to manage resources more responsibly, the opportunity to move ahead faster.

When the government isn't committed to development, a lot of aid is wasted. That is why the choice of countries is so important.

*John Sewell
Founder
Overseas Development Council
USAID Frontlines, April 2010*

ODA: Who and How Much

International donors provide a staggering amount of Official Development Assistance to developing countries. Between 2008 and 2010, The World Bank granted USD 140 BILLION in assistance to developing countries; while the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for European Economic Development (OECD) awarded USD 120 BILLION just in 2009. Among other donors, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation had spent USD 815 million

on the polio eradication drive by 2010; USD 120 million just in Nigeria. (Ogundipe 2010). Despite calls for increased commitments from the industrialized nations, these figures are impressive primarily when imagining the positive impact these funds have in many needy countries.

The major donors are few but include the most industrialized nations. The OECD established in 2009 that the largest donors by volume were the United States, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and Japan. Five countries exceeded the United Nations ODA target of 0.7 percent of Gross National Income (GNI): Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. The United States was the largest donor providing USD 28.7 billion in net ODA flows, representing an increase of 5.4 percent in real terms over 2008. Its ODA/GNI ratio rose from 0.19 percent in 2008 to 0.20 percent in 2009. Total net US ODA flows increased to each region, particularly to sub-Saharan Africa (+10.5 percent to USD 7.5 billion). ODA also increased significantly to Afghanistan (+39.5 percent to USD 3.0 billion). US net ODA to the group of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) increased by +13.6 percent to USD 8.1 billion.

The largest percentage increases in net ODA in real terms were from Norway, France, the United Kingdom, Korea, Finland, Belgium and Switzerland. Significant increases were also recorded in Denmark, Sweden and the United States. In 2009, net bilateral ODA to Africa was USD 27 billion, representing an increase of 3 percent in real terms over 2008. USD 24 billion of this aid went to sub-Saharan Africa, an increase of 5.1 percent over 2008. (OECD 2010). Despite these large contributions, daunting challenges obstruct significant inroads in improving the lives of citizens in the developing world.

To get some sense of where this aid is going, the top ten recipients of United States' ODA in 2008 were, in descending order:

Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, Egypt, Ethiopia, Colombia, Pakistan, Kenya, Palestinian Administered Areas, and Uganda.

The top ten OECD ODA recipients in 2008 were, in descending order:

Iraq, Afghanistan, Ethiopia; Palestinian Administered. Areas, Viet Nam, Sudan; Tanzania, India, Bangladesh; Turkey. (OECD 2010)

Lax Control Mechanisms

Despite being late comers to the struggle against corruption, international donors have acknowledged that corruption is a basic obstacle to development.¹ As such, the international development agencies have sponsored programs that promote transparency and accountability mechanisms in practically every developing country. The donor agencies themselves created internal safeguards against corruption, at least at the project and policy levels and primarily, under pressure from civil society. The World Bank, for example, has established “social and environmental safeguards, greater transparency and consultations requirements, and the creation of the Inspection Panel for purposes of evaluation and redress.” (Ebrahim 2009)

Yet, these measures have been limited, and development assistance can easily become corrupted. The bulk of the funds often end up in the hands of contractors, who receive these stipends through procurement and contracting processes that are riddled with corruption traps. Common among these contracts are conflicts of interest between the private and the public

¹ The international donor community refused, until 1998, to talk about corruption in relations to development assistance. The argument was that monitoring the funds and demanding accountability would be perceived as interference in the domestic affairs of the host country.

sector, often represented by one and the same. Blatant embezzlement or selling of drugs and supplies by government officials are not uncommon actions either. Citizens, who are increasingly well-aware that these dealings are going on, perceive ODA as a factor contributing to, rather than mitigating, corruption. They often complain that the multilateral agencies fail to monitor the government institutions that are responsible for implementing projects, and thus allow millions of dollars that could have a positive impact on their lives, to be wasted. Health and education programs, as well as the financing of public works, are particularly sensitive to these mismanagement practices.²

Development Assistance for Corrupt Governments

The allocation of ODA to highly corrupt governments is very common. While the argument has been made that this assistance supports efforts to combat corruption, and it often does, there is ample evidence that highly corrupt governments are more prone to take advantage of development assistance for their own benefits. In fact, it seems that the availability of development assistance further fuels the greed of leaders and public officials of governments that are already corrupt. As a result, development assistance going to corrupt governments and institutions is too often wasted.

Evidence of ODA mismanagement appears daily in the news. Haiti, for example, has received millions of dollars in foreign aid over decades and has little to show for it. In fact, when hit with a powerful earthquake in 2010, the rapid collapse of Haiti's infrastructure confirmed that the ODA had been misused. In Afghanistan, the second largest ODA recipient, more than USD

² The author has heard these citizens' complaints while conducting corruption assessment surveys in Mongolia, Nigeria, the Dominican Republic, and Honduras, and while working on anticorruption initiatives in African and Latin American countries.

3 BILLION in cash were openly flown out of Kabul International Airport from 2007 to 2010.

Part of this money is believed to be “siphoned from Western aid projects and U.S, European and NATO contracts to provide security, supplies and reconstruction work for coalition forces.”

(Rosenberg 2010) The Afghan leadership has no qualms in acknowledging that, *millions of dollars are leaving this country but it is all taken by politicians. Bribes, corruption, all of it.*

(Rosenberg 2010)

The siphoning of essential resources, notably drugs and food, is perhaps the most detrimental to the poor. In Somalia, for example, aid and relief supplies are routinely diverted by merchants, warlords and government officials. (Mungcal 2010) . Despite having safeguards against corruption, even the Global Fund to fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, has had to suspend assistance to several countries because of mismanagement of funds.

Moreover, ODA is reaching governments not trusted by their citizens to handle the funds. In Ukraine--a wealthy exporter of gas--more than 50 percent of its citizens believe that their government is very ineffective in fighting corruption. The country ranked No. 146 among the 180 most corrupt countries (according to Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index –CPI-- for 2009) but still received USD 618 millions in ODA in 2008. The same thing is happening in the Philippines and Iraq, where the population-- 51 and 26 percent respectively-- do not trust how their governments to fight corruption.

Unfortunately, international donors are regularly choosing the wrong countries as beneficiaries of ODA. According to the 2009 CPI, several of the governments considered as the most corruption in the world were among the top ten OECD and USA recipients of ODA in 2008.. The chart below lists some of the worst corruption offenders, starting at the top, #180

Somalia. It correlates the high corruption perception ranking to the amount of ODA received, using World Bank figures. Iraq ranks very high (No. 176) out of the 180 in corruption perception yet is the largest recipient of ODA in the world. Sudan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nigeria, ranking #176, #139, #139 and #130 respectively in TI's corruption perception index, follow Iraq and Afghanistan as top recipients of ODA.

Development Assistance to Countries Ranking High on the CPI

2009 CPI Ranking (out of 180)	Country	Population 2008 (million)	Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in USD Billions	GNI per capita (Atlas) Current USD	Net Official Development Assistant in USD Millions (WB)	US Official Development Assist (ODA) 2008
180	Somalia	9	n/a	n/a	\$ 758	\$ 243
179	Afghanistan	29	11	370	\$ 4,985	\$ 1,816
178	Myanmar	50	n/a	n/a	\$ 534	\$ 71
176	Iraq	31	n/a	n/a	\$ 9,870	\$ 3,246
176	Sudan	41	58	n/a	\$ 2,384	\$ 848
168	Haiti	10	6	n/a	\$ 912	\$ 259
168	Guinea	10	4	350	\$ 319	\$ 43
168	Burundi	8	1	140	\$ 509	\$ 30
162	Venezuela	28	311	9,170	\$ 534	\$ 9
162	Angola	18	85	3,360	\$ 369	\$ 42
154	Yemen	23	27	960	\$ 305	\$ 25
146	Ukraine	46	180	3,210	\$ 618	\$ 99
139	Pakistan	166	165	950	\$ 1,539	\$ 383
139	Bangladesh	160	80	520	\$ 2,061	\$ 93
139	Philippines	90	167	1,700	\$ 61	\$ 71
130	Nigeria	151	207	1,170	\$ 1,290	\$ 363

Source: Transparency International, Corruption Perception Index (CPI) 2009, World Bank Group, World Development Indicators Database, April 2010; US ODA Database, 2008.

Substantial amounts of ODA are going to the most corrupt governments. Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nigeria each received more than USD one BILLION in 2008, as the chart shows. Iraq and Afghanistan topped the list, receiving USD 9,870 million and USD 4,985 million, respectively; Pakistan got USD 1,539 million ODA. Even when the

amounts are less exuberant, like USD 319 million for the mineral-rich, corrupt government of Guinea, one must question if a profoundly corrupt government can be trusted to manage the resources efficiently and effectively.

Donors provide several reasons to justify these levels of assistance: extreme poverty, recent civil strife, undergoing processes of transformation, economic vulnerability and more, but fail to take into consideration the environment in which these situations take place. While there is no hard data on wasted and mismanaged assistance, serious doubts persist on the willingness of highly corrupt governments to handle ODA any better than how they mismanage their own country's public resources. Corruption assessments conducted in most of these countries confirm that corruption is endemic and affects every sector of society.

Why are corrupt governments receiving most of the ODA? One argument frequently heard is that the development assistance is tied to the national interest of the donor country, particularly the United States. *Save the Children* argues, for example, that “The US Government provides budget support to strategic allies like Pakistan, Jordan and Egypt where it balances fiduciary risks against political gains.” (Save the Children 2010) While this has been historically correct, in the present situation the correlation of numbers provides a more complex picture. The United States, for example, provided Afghanistan—a country where it is deeply involved-- USD 1,816 million in 2008, less than half of the total USD 4,985 net ODA recorded by the World Bank. Similarly, the US provided less than half of the total ODA received by Iraq and Pakistan. This implies that other donor /entities that do not have a stake as high as the United States in these countries are also providing ODA, regardless of substantial risk for waste, fraud and mismanagement. One plausible explanation is that the criteria for international

agencies used to classified countries that quality for ODA is not accurate in all cases, as will be discussed next.

Development assistance for wealthy countries

Industrialized nations have responded to the call of the Millennium Development Goals for increased assistance to countries that are making a genuine effort to fight poverty. The G8 (the Group of Eight most industrialized countries) have promised aid to countries that are “genuinely committed to poverty reduction, good governance and economic reform.” (United Nations 2010). The Least Developed Countries, those with low income, weak human resources indicators and economic vulnerability, also classify for additional assistance. In addition, the 79 poorest countries are entitled to assistance from the World Bank’s International Development Association (IDA), which is the “single largest fund for basic social services in the poorest countries.” (World Bank 2010) These commitments are essential for many countries to develop and move ahead.

Yet, countries with substantial amount of resources are included in those categories. IDA Borrowing Countries, for example, include both oil producers and exporters, like Nigeria, Congo, Angola, and Azerbaijan. They are also listed among the 79 poorest countries that qualify for special assistance; Angola is also listed among the 50 least developed countries in the world. Perhaps it is time to question if these countries should indeed be listed among those with the lowest income, or instead, among those with the highest levels of unequal wealth distribution.

Angola, for example, is Africa's second largest exporter of oil and a major producer of diamonds. Since 2004, its gross domestic product has increased more than 400 percent. *Human Rights Watch* has outlined that in Angola "billions of dollars in oil revenue illegally bypassed the Central Bank and disappeared without explanation." (Human Rights Watch 2010)

It's been more than 20 years since the civil war ended and the government of José Eduardo do Santos, in power since 1979, has refused to use the oil revenues to improve the life of its people. Instead, about 17 percent of the national budget is for the discretionary use of the executive branch with no accountability for it. (IRIN News 2006) Foreign assistance to Angola, which has little or not impact on the life of its people, needs to be reevaluated. Angola is a wealthy country. Its citizens are poor. Its government is corrupt. ODA will continue to elude the millions of Angola's poor as long as its government receives and mismanages it..

Angola is not the only oil exporting country receiving ODA. Ten of the top 15 oil exporters received ODA in 2008, as the chart below shows. Again, and not coincidentally, these oil-rich governments are among the most corrupt, according to CPI 2009 as well as to numerous independent corruption assessments. In fact, Nigeria, the world 7th largest exporter of oil and Iraq, the 12th largest, are among the biggest recipients of development aid. In 2005, Iraq received 20 percent of total ODA disbursements, while Nigeria received six percent of the total. ODA for Iraq, Nigeria and Angola alone amount to more than USD 11 BILLIONS per year.

Top 15 Oil Exporters, ODA and CPI

Top Oil Exporters - 2008	Country	Official Development Assistance 2008 (Million US\$)	Ranking CPI 2009
1	Saudi Arabia	0	63
2	Russia	0	146
3	United Arab Emirates	0	30
4	Iran	98	168
5	Norway	0	11
6	Kuwait	0	66
7	Nigeria	\$ 1,290	130
8	Venezuela	\$ 534	162
9	Algeria	\$ 316	111
10	Angola	\$ 369	162
11	Libya	\$ 60	130
12	Iraq	\$ 9,870	176
13	Mexico	\$ 149	89
15	Kazakhstan	\$ 333	120

Source: Energy Information Administration (EIA), Country Energy Profiles, 2008

There is no doubt that all these oil exporters, including Iraq, Nigeria, Angola, Kazakhstan, among others, need international assistance, particularly technical assistance to make their institutions function correctly, curb corruption and create the conditions to share the wealth of the nation with all of their citizens. But they can pay for the technical assistance. (As have the oil rich nations of the Gulf.) International agencies can still provide the technical know how and the required expertise and these countries should be paying for it. This would leave genuine development assistance for the truly needy nations that are able and willing to handle it responsibly.

The ODA to highly corrupt and resource rich countries pose three principle challenges.

1. Is it justifiable to provide assistance to governments that have mismanaged their country's wealth and resources, especially when the stakes are high that the development

assistance will also be wasted? Should that ODA not go to countries that really need it and/or can manage it more responsibly?

2. Can donors justify to those countries' civil society that they continue to support corrupt governments that are wasting valuable national and international resources?
3. Is it fair for citizens in the industrialized countries at trying economic times to use their tax revenues to support corrupt governments and wealthy oil nations?

The international community would be well to ponder these questions.

THE CASE OF NIGERIA

For almost 50 years, ODA to Nigeria has run like water into a bucket full of holes. The U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO), which serves as the auditor for the U.S. government, has conducted several evaluations of the US aid to Nigeria. As early as 1967, it concluded that the Nigerian government did not provide the required manpower for implementing seven of ten technical assistance projects they reviewed. It also found the Nigerian government reluctant “to agree to formal coordination among donors.” The GAO evaluation also found that:

- Project agreements containing substantially the same provisions, were negotiated year after year, even though the host country failed to meet its prior obligations in terms of contributions to the project.
- Lack of mutual understanding of objectives hampered the attainment of project goals.

By 1967 and despite these difficulties, the United States had provided USD 200 millions to Nigeria while the rest of the international community had offered an additional USD 937 million, a substantial amount at the time. These funds supported Nigeria's comprehensive economic

development program expecting that, “as a vigorous, open economy, it might move toward self-sustaining economic growth.” (Government Accounting Office 1967)

By 2000, the GAO issued another report that included an assessment of deteriorating conditions in Nigeria. It noted that, “the State Department reported that Nigeria is the hub of narcotics trafficking in Africa, noting that Nigerian criminal organizations operate extensive global trafficking networks and control the Sub-Saharan drug markets.” It also reported that the “Nigerian traffickers now account for as much as 30 percent of the heroin seized at American ports.” The GAO indicated that according to an official of the U.S. Secret Service, “Americans lose at least \$100 million a year to advance fee fraud” in schemes perpetrated mainly by Nigerians and their accomplices. (GAO April 2000)

In 2005, Nigeria received six percent of total ODA. Yet, Nigeria’s own Economic and Financial Crimes Commission revealed in the same year that military dictators had stolen or squandered USD 500 BILLION dollars, the equivalent of all Western aid to Africa during the previous 40 years. (Ayodele, et al. 2005).

Nigeria is the seventh largest oil exporter in the world. It fails to benefit from substantial oil revenues because corruption is chronic throughout its national and regional governments. Nigeria is a very wealthy but poorly administered country that needs technical assistance and can afford to pay for it. The continuation of ODA to Nigeria fosters its dependency on foreign aid already created among its leadership while continuing to undermine Nigerians’ trust in international donors.

Conclusions

There are plenty of reasons why the institutions providing much needed ODA are losing credibility. Alternatives abound for restoring trust while meeting their commitments to development. For one, world famous singer Bono, who lends his name and fame to improving the lot of the developing world, has suggested that:

What we need is an independent unit—made up of people from governments, the private sector and civil society—to track pledges and progress, not just on aid but also on trade, governance, investment. It's essential for the credibility of the United Nations, the MDGs, and all who work toward them. The promise we made at the start of this century was not to perpetuate the old relationships between donors and recipients, but to create new ones, with true partners accountable for each other and above all to the citizens these systems are supposed to work for. (Bono 2010)

Promoting accountable partners among donors and grantee is a crucial task, and so is rebuilding citizens' trust in the donor institutions. It will not be an easy task but the donor community could start by reviewing how they choose the right countries to which to provide development assistance. These right countries are those whose governments are committed to development and can manage their own public resources along with development assistance, responsibly and accountably. This means that the level of corruption of a prospective recipient of development assistance should be taken into consideration when making a decision to grant ODA.

Donors must stop funding wealthy governments with development assistance. The criteria that describe or qualify countries into one of the categories eligible for ODA must be revised in order to distinguish between truly poor countries and poorly managed countries, as well as between low income countries and those wealthy countries with insurmountable inequality in distribution of wealth.

The wealth and resources of many rich countries, such as many of the oil exporters, are being squandered by ineffective and inefficient governments that are creating and perpetuating more poor citizens every day. Instead of helping the truly poor and destitute nations, international donors are, instead, too often funding poorly- managed countries and wasting the ODA that could be going to nations where the assistance would really make a difference. As Mr. Sewell so eloquently argues, the selection of countries is critical for the success of ODA.

The United States Agency for International Development, for example, no longer maintains missions in Uruguay and Costa Rica, two Latin American countries with governments committed to development and low levels of CPI. If development assistance now allocated to Nigeria, Angola, Pakistan, Iraq and other corrupt and wealthy countries were to go to them, or to Barbados, Estonia, or other countries that have shown themselves to be accountable to their own citizens, that assistance could work wonders in helping accelerate their development.

Moreover, the international community should denounce publicly those corrupt leaders and governments. Just a few decades ago the social culture changed regarding human rights when abusive leaders and regimes were made pariahs by open condemnation of international organizations and donor countries,, the same should be done today against corrupt leaders. In fact, those who are pilfering their nations' resources as well as the development assistance, thus denying basic services to their citizens, are, in fact, violating human rights.

Wealthy and corrupt countries can afford to pay for the technical assistance they need to improve their lot. The allocation of billions of dollars to the corrupt oil exporters have left other countries and regions, like Central America, deprived of the assistance needed to fend off the risks of state capture by narco corruption and violence. Finally, indiscriminate ODA to corrupt

countries has fostered a dependency on aid, providing national governments that could easily afford to serve their citizens an available excuse for not delivering adequate social services. In the end, the impoverishment created by wasted ODA eventually leads to humanitarian crises of extraordinary proportion that require even greater ODA, as we have so sadly witnessed in the aftermath of the recent Haitian earthquake.

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