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Good Governance, Developing Countries and Aid: A Description of Donor Policies, Challenges and Dilemmas

Abstract

The social and economic problems of developing regions are among the most significant global challenges. Possible solutions for poverty reduction, and methods and forms of international aid appear from time to time in different aspects. The role of the international community as well as the recipient state has been significantly re-evaluated over the past few decades. The exclusivity of economic development has been replaced by the importance of social and human development, as well as effective state involvement and democratic values. The author's main aim with this paper is to provide a descriptive study on the range of interpretations that good governance may provide when examining the issues of developing regions and international development aid. It is important to emphasize the correlation of good governance and economic development, as well as the demonstration of the presence of good governance in development policy discourse though examples of multilateral and bilateral donors. Alongside the evolving trends in international development discourse, the main challenges and dilemmas of the correlation between international development aid and good governance will be discussed. The main result of the study is that although the principles of good governance have recently been an integral part of the aid policies of multilateral and bilateral donors, in reality these standards are rarely enforced. In addition to the processing of relevant literature, the examination of this issue is based on the analysis of relevant reports and data from the concerned international organizations.

Keywords: good governance, developing countries, international aid, donor policy

INTRODUCTION

The challenges of the developing regions and the possible solutions are parts of a remarkably complex problem that appear time to time in different aspects. The international community considered development aid as insurance of the advancement of developing countries until the end of the 1980s. As a reaction to the lack of political aspects in the discourse on development, the issue of correlation between (good) governance and development appeared from the 1990s. There is a consensus in the international community that several criteria of good governance significantly contribute to a country's long-term economic and social development. However, it is no consensus on how good governance in fact relates to development processes, and on which segments of governance should we focus, which are essential for the development of the affected countries (Burnell–Rakner, 2011). Good governance is related not just to the effectiveness of democratic values, but to a certain government's actions against poverty or for the sake of the state's development. In this sense we can claim that the quality of governance plays a vital role in development, as better (or more effective) governance may achieve results in development, such as the increase of wages, higher educational rates or reduction of infant mortality (Kaufmann et al., 1999).

However, experience has proven that proper allocation alone is not sufficient for aid to reach their targets: the utilization of support is also a critical aspect. According to this idea, the government of the receiving country has just as much responsibility in utilizing the support effectively as the members of the donor community have in the allocation. The recipient countries must fulfil certain requirements, which have gone through significant changes: in recent decades governance minimums were added to the basic criteria of economic performance. So instead of going upwards on the charts of economic indicators, it is more requested from a country to maintain an effective governmental performance for the interest of social (and economic) development.

The primary aim of this paper is to provide a descriptive study of the range of interpretations that good governance may provide while examining the issues of developing regions and international development aid. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that the objective of the study is not to argue for or against good governance, nor is it intended to find solutions and proposals for dilemmas of foreign aid.

1. GOOD GOVERNANCE AND THE DEVELOPING REGIONS

1.1. BASIC TERMS

Before we take the correlation between governance and the developing areas into consideration, we should clarify the term *good governance*. The performance of governments was measured alongside different ideas, aspects and values through time. In many countries, the neoliberal state organization ideology from the 1970s is still in effect, stating that a government performs "well" if it withdraws from as many fields as possible and preserves its *"small and decentralized"* character (Pálné Kovács, 2013, 6). It is important to note that from the 1970s, determined state interventionism was blamed as the reason for backlash and it hinders of economic development. According to this neoliberal (or neoclassical) theory, the governments of the developing countries must ensure the maintenance of a free market and must step back, as this is the only way to encourage investments, economic development and the improvement of national welfare (Gilpin, 2004).

The recent interpretation of good governance mostly means that the aim of the nation-states is that they must operate through internationally acclaimed governance standards and requirements in the world of globalization (Pálné Kovács, 2013). In this sense, the requirement system of good governance can be divided into two aspects: firstly, it can mean the given country's democratic character, which includes the basic criteria of a legal state, freedom of press and speech, and the division of power, etc. Secondly, it may refer to the efficiency of a state in regulating public spending, organizing public services, or in one word: *public policy efficiency* (ibid., 8). Multiple indexes and charts are made to measure good governance based on several indicators and aspects, from which we can draw the conclusion that a connection can be observed between a country's efficiency/development and the performance of the government. Thus, we must consider not only the achievements of a certain country (either in economic or human development scale) but also the *way* it achieved these results. The so-called *Worldwide Governance* indicators can be divided into six sections: 1. accountability and participation; 2. political stability and security; 3. governance efficiency; 4. quality of regulation; 5. effectiveness of the legal state; 6. determined actions against corruption (Kaufmann et al., 1999).

The aspects listed above may serve as a useful referential point for studying and comparing different government performances. However, this method is not capable of measuring certain institutional failures, which may be responsible for poor governance and performance in a given country or region. It is important to note that it is a remarkably difficult task to create a generally applicable system of requirements where all the items indicate the cultural, economic, historical and political differences between states, regions and continents (Burnell–Rakner 2011).

1.2. GOOD GOVERNANCE AND THE UN'S DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The importance of good governance and poverty eradication became more pronounced in the UN's development agenda at the turn of the millennium in which the UN system used and unified the development experiences, achievements and remaining challenges of the past decades (Mingst–Karns, 2011). The Millennium Declaration adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2000[1] stated it is required from the states to fulfil the criteria of good governance in order to achieve the desired development objectives. According to the declaration, it is essential to create an environment that helps development and reduction of poverty, the honouring of universal values (e.g., basic human rights), as well as to accompany noble intentions with capabilities. These require comprehensive institutional and structural reforms, which require – beside the support of the international community – the determined actions of the affected states' governments

[1] General Assembly Resolution 55/2.

(UN, 2000). However, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) established on the basis of the Millennium Declaration do not explicitly include good governance as a separate goal or indicator. The program concluded there are aims that can be reached by 2015 on 8 different fields, taking the most severe social problems and factors hindering economic and social development into consideration. Among the goals, we can find the reduction of poverty rate among the population; the establishment of public education accessible to everyone; gender equality; the reduction of infant mortality; the struggle against the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; and the development of environmental sustainability. The program monitors the countries regularly, it examines what efforts each government took in order to achieve the determined goals, on which fields did the country show progress, and on which fields are deficits present (UN, 2015)[2].

Although the MDGs and their results are by no means negligible, they have several criticisms regarding their effectiveness, relevance or measurement techniques. One of the most important critiques highlights that the goals intended to reflect merely on visible social problems, however, long-term and sustainable development – both economic and human – cannot be achieved simply by eradicating poverty or hunger (Ramcharan–Ramcharan, 2020). Furthermore, the MDGs miss the fact that a large number of the developing countries with a high rate of extreme poverty and hunger or with dysfunctional health care system are suffering from armed conflict. Without taking this crucial point into consideration, the special needs (e.g., restoration of civilian infrastructure, disarmament) of conflict-affected countries cannot be fulfilled and the MDGs cannot be universally achieved (Hill et al., 2010). Finally, the stated goals do not nuance the economic, geographical and cultural differences between continents and countries. They do not perceive the differences along which some countries have been able to achieve poverty reduction sooner and more effectively, and why the poorest countries are still struggling with the problem of extreme poverty (Dalgaard–Erickson, 2009).

With the "expiration" of the Millennium Development Goals, the UN Commission passed Agenda 30 containing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which set a system of goals for another 15 years to fight global challenges. *Agenda 30* – just like the Millennium Goals – retained the importance of overcoming the societal challenges mentioned above. At the same time the SDGs gave more attention not only to environment protection and climate change or economic development, but it emphasizes the issue of global and national government performance more significantly than its predecessor (UN,

[2] Surveys and reports conducted in 2015 measuring the efficiency of the program. Besides measuring the set goals at a global level, special attention was paid to developing regions, including: sub-Saharan Africa; Southern Asia (with or without India); Latin America and the Caribbean; Southeastern Asia; Eastern Asia (with or without China); the Caucasus and Middle Asia; Western Asia; and North Africa. The UNDP made reports separately for each country in relation to the achieved goals and challenges (UN, 2015).

2015). Although good governance is not included as a separate goal or indicator in the SDGs either, the sixteenth goal (SDG 16) expresses the demand for improved government performance, democratic values, peaceful and just societies, and acknowledges their importance in development.

1.3. GOOD GOVERNANCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

It is still undoubted that the reduction of poverty requires economic growth, which has always been preferred by the developing regions compared to social development. Economic development, as the exclusive requirement of the elimination of poverty had been in effect until the 1990s. However, the importance of government performance and state efficiency also came into focus apart from (or instead of) the economic system of requirements needed for social development (Kimura, 2011).

Based on the Millennium Development Goals – despite the fact that it describes the achievement of goals as dependent on the government's performance – good governance may serve as a basic condition of economic growth, which may provide a splendid foundation for the countries of the developing regions to achieve results not only in economy, but also in demographic and social indexes.[3] It is worth highlighting that the World Bank declared poverty as a significant social problem in its World Development Report in the 1990s for the first time after the organization had been heavily criticized for its development and credit initiations called the *Structural Adjustment Program.*[4] The program that targeted the economic skyrocketing of the developing regions was mostly criticized because the financial support and the loans resulted in significant withdrawals from the social branch (Kimura, 2011).

Considering these above-mentioned aspects, the governments of the developing regions are facing vital challenges: they must spend funds on healthcare, education, infrastructure and the creation of a social safety net without letting these expenses hinder investments and economic efficiency. Besides these, they must participate in economic development as well: they must provide favourable circumstances for the private sector, remain (or become) attractive for foreign investors, provide the proper legal framework and infrastructural conditions for these, and they must not forget about developing their human capacities (ibid.).

In order to implement and maintain these in harmony, governments in developing regions must be encouraged to do the following: establish transparency and accountability, implement efficient utilization of public expenditure and ensue imbalance, provide equal access to justice for all members of society to ensure

[3] These include the increase in the education rate, the reduction of infant and child mortality, and the significant improvement of healthcare and hygiene conditions.

[4] The World Bank received the most devastating criticism from the Independent Commission of the South on Development Issues that includes the countries of the global south. This organization emphasized the lack of a human aspect in SAP's development *("development with human face").*

equality before the law, strengthen civil society and non-governmental civil society organizations, create a certain level of freedom in economic processes, and provide the legal framework necessary for the functioning of the government and the efficient maintenance of the state bureaucracy (Ashrafun–Uddin, 2007).

Here we should take a glimpse at the balance of the triangle of economic growth, government participation and social advancement. We can find some developing countries that still serve as examples for the tendency that they prefer measuring their development in economic indexes rather than in demographic ones. It is an exceedingly significant issue, as numerous countries can only remain competitive and join the international market if they violate environmental and labour standards and ignore basic human rights – which serves as a strong basis of child labour, extreme environmental pollution and cruel working circumstances. These countries try to become more attractive for foreign investors by failing to provide the proper legal frameworks and ignoring the above-mentioned anomalies (Gilpin, 2004).

2. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN DEVELOPMENT AID AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

2.1. DONOR POLICIES

The idea of good governance – as we mentioned earlier – has become a vital part of development policies in the recent years: international aid and loan organizations (UN, EU, World Bank, etc.) make efforts to expand the criteria system of good governance. These organizations see the effectiveness and rational utilization of loans and development aid in effective governance (Pálné Kovács, 2013; Temple, 2014).

The focus on the importance of government performance has become more common from the 1990s after the so-called Congress of Washington, as the exclusive economic conditions and requirements imposed on developing countries in the restructuring programs of the 1980s to promote economic progress did not live up to their expectations (Burnell–Rakner, 2011; Szent-Iványi, 2005). World Bank reports from the 1990s give an account, with sharp criticism, of the organization's aid practices and the questionable effectiveness of restructuring programs (Stiglitz, 2003). The World Development Report was the first to detail the challenges and anomalies appearing in development aid targeting the elimination of poverty. The report highlights that some developing countries have benefited from the development aid they have been given, while many donor states are stuck with the so-called 'development aid dependency'; the financial aid did not achieve the goals set out (reduction of poverty, economic development, etc.) (World Bank, 1990). The report points out that the correlation between the measure of aid and reduction of poverty is quite difficult to identify, as aid is only one of the several factors that can positively influence the economic and social progress of a country. Therefore, the World Bank emphasizes the indisputable role of the recipient state in the report, according to which aid effectiveness depends primarily on the measures taken by the recipient countries to utilize aid (World Bank, 1990). However, it is also important that the report recognizes not only the role of the recipient state, but also the responsibility of donor countries and organizations in the success or failure of aid. According to this, donor countries have often ignored the institutional aspects of poverty reduction programs, and the characteristics and needs of the recipient countries. The report also highlighted that donor countries/organizations have failed to involve targeted social groups and that it is the responsibility of the donor community to support governmental measures aimed primarily at reducing poverty (creating jobs and income opportunities, provide adequate social networking, etc.). In addition, donors need to be much more cautious when monitoring aid, meaning that additional aid can only be provided to affected states if the donors are convinced of the proper utilization of support (World Bank, 1990).

Subsequently, the World Bank's reports focused on the importance of government participation in the country's development aid and development issues. It described the receiving state's responsibility as the locomotive of economic development in its study *Assessing Aid: What Works, What Doesn't, and Why* (World Bank, 1998). This approach was considerably in line with the general international concept at the time that a developing country's appropriate economic policy, institutional and legal framework could mean economic (and subsequently social) development and the targeting of allocated support (World Bank, 1998; Szent-Iványi, 2005). Donor countries/organizations also need to select the countries to which they donate on the following basis: a country with low income but properly established institutional structures and adequate economic policy should receive much more financial aid than a similarly low-income country that has not provided the economic policy circumstances that is required for progress (World Bank, 1998, 14). This so-called *selective aid allocation* is subject to some criticism, as this practice results in the poorest and poorly-governed states receiving less support, which are the most in need (Paragi et al., 2007).

Good government performance, as a basic requirement for developing regions, is also a characteristic of donor countries that are aiding "alone", which, like international organizations, have made some key elements of good governance as conditions of continued allocation of development aid.

In this regard, the United States was the first donor country to make the quality of government in the recipient countries a condition of development aid in the first half of the 1990s. In 1995 the Clinton administration made it clear through the *United States Agency for International Development* (USAID) strategy that the development of a country should be measured not only by economic indicators, but also by the performance of the political system and government, and support should be adjusted according to these. The Bush administration – following the Clinton administration – did not only continue this aid policy, but with the establishment of the *Millennium Challenge Corporation* (MCC) donor agency in 2004, it was made clear that the United States would be generous in its support of countries that are governed justly; they invest their available financial and human resources in the social development of the population and in economic progress. The then American president - and his predecessors - justified their aid policies by stating that good governance is one of the pillars of development, so the United States "rewards" countries that fight against corruption, respect basic human rights, and respect the idea of the legal state (Ashrafun–Uddin, 2007; Paragi et al., 2007).

Besides the United States, the United Kingdom has also strongly advocated for development aid to be determined on the basis of the performance of the aided governments. In a compilation released in 2006 by the *Department of International Development* (DfID), this country determined the methods and forms of aid it provided, depending on the recipient country's governance quality. At the same time, the United Kingdom, instead of focusing on the principles of democracy and the rule of law, focused on the fight against poverty, so it concentrated primarily on the efforts made by the governments to promote social development. Based on these, the document lists four basic ideas, which may provide guidance when determining the aid allocated to the receiving countries: (1) Is there determination towards reducing poverty? (2) Is there determination towards providing the basic human rights and fulfilling international duties and contracts? (3) Is there determination towards improving the utilization of public spending and reducing corruption? (4) Are there intentions for popularization of good governance, transparency and accountability? (UK DfID, 2006)

In addition, the report outlines three types of eligible countries where the United Kingdom determines the level and modalities of aid. The first group includes states with good governance, a strong commitment to the elimination of poverty and a proposition of development. In this case, the governments of these states will receive direct, long-term, predictable financial support to increase their budgets and government public spending, helping to eradicate poverty and increase funds on social spending. In countries where there is a weaker commitment to social development, the modalities of aid to governments may need to be restructured: the free utilization of financial support may be abolished and the aid that is meant to support spending must be spent on specified purposes; support may be replaced by support of a non-financial nature[5], the utilization of which shall be verified if possible. Finally, in countries where there is a lack of willingness to improve the quality of life among the population, aid must bypass the government and be distributed through international aid organizations, NGOs, so that aid flows instantly to targeted social groups, and areas of support (education, healthcare, etc.) (UK DfID, 2006).

[5] Food, medicine, vaccines, school assets, etc.

2.2. THEORY VS. PRACTICE

Despite the theoretical links between good governance, aid and donors' policies, we have to discuss the reality regarding donor countries' practices. Although there is no consensus among researchers on the effectiveness of aid, the impact of aid on development, and the relationship between good governance and aid (Udvari–Ampah, 2018), some important findings should be highlighted here. Research on aid, aid effectiveness and donor policies in recent decades has shown that the conditions and sanctions attached to good governance are unlikely to apply, and that discrimination against dictatorial regimes does not appear in practice. This means that anti-democratic regimes in developing countries do not necessarily receive less aid (Burnside–Dollar, 2000; Alesina–Weder, 2002). Donor countries are much more in pursuit of their strategic interests, and in many cases take into account historical, colonial ties (Alesina–Dollar, 1998; Collier–Dollar, 2001). However, these countries do not always cover those who seek to adhere to basic public policy minima or those who would be most in need of external assistance.

Whereas in many cases the primary objective of aid is economic and/or social development, it is important to emphasize that aid given to democratic governments can be used much more effectively to raise the living standards of those living in the recipient country and to reduce poverty. It means that aid that dictatorial countries receive can favour corruption is more likely to be ineffective and hardly capable of achieving the original purpose of foreign aid (Kosack, 2003; Collier, 2008; Kalyvitis–Vlachaki, 2012). It is also important to point out that even with aid conditionality methods, the amount of aid does not necessarily have a positive effect on the public policy performance of the recipient country (Collier–Dollar, 2002), at the same time, aid can contribute to positive results achieved in a country where the conditions for good governance are met (Burnside–Dollar, 2000; Collier–Dollar, 2002).

3. CLOSING REMARKS, CONCLUSION

The study attempted to outline the role of good governance in international development aid. In light of the above, the emphasis has gradually shifted from the exclusive importance of economic development to the need for a well-performing state.

Good governance has played a significant role in the development policy discourse in recent decades, as a result of which the recipient countries must not only meet economic criteria, but also account for their political development and government performance. This includes, but is not limited to, the legitimacy of the current government; efficient use of public expenditure; the efficient functioning of public institutions and state bureaucracy; respect for fundamental human and political freedoms; guaranteeing the security of the population as a whole and of various social groups (religious and ethnic minorities); and the transparent operation of government decision-making processes. In addition, the relevant government must be able to make appropriate public policy decisions to implement the decisions made and to translate them effectively into practice. Donor countries, aid and lending organizations can choose the size and modalities of the aid disbursed; if there is evidence of a risk of inappropriate or inefficient use of aid by a given government, the aid will not be channelled to the population through governments, but with the help of international NGOs. The enforcement of democracy and the rule of law in developing countries is an interesting dilemma. The question is whether a state where the fundamental criteria of the rule of law, political freedom are exercised only to a limited extent or not at all, but there is an intention and commitment on the behalf of the government to eradicate poverty, can be sanctioned or not. On the other hand, we have seen that the policies of donor countries in reality fall far short of the principle of 'aid in return for good governance'. This means that recipient countries where the criteria for good governance are not met will not necessarily receive less aid. This also means that aid to corrupt governments does not necessarily serve its original purpose (poverty reduction, social development) and that aid is not suitable for democratizing dictatorial regimes.

Finally, we must pay attention to the political instability in developing regions, the expansion of crisis areas, and the unresolved conflicts and civil wars escalating for years. Despite outside help (humanitarian aid and international development support), the weakening, fragile states do not fulfil the requirements to properly protect the most vulnerable civilian population[6], provide appropriate education and healthcare, eliminate and impeach military organizations recruiting and arming children, and deal with domestic migration and the masses of refugees moving within the national borders.

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[6] The protection of the civilian population includes the prevention of armed assaults against populated areas, schools, hospitals and other public institutions, ethnical cleansings and genocides.

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