Article

South Africa as a donor and southern Africa: the sustainable development goals (SDGs), emerging foreign policy and development themes in the post-Cotonou context

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Abstract

The $130 billion a year global aid industry is going through a seismic change with the Sustainable Development Goals expanding the reach, scope and influence of the aid industry as never seen before. Aid now has the authority to influence policy on everything from patterns of consumption to tax collection. In southern Africa, the changes are intensified because of the demise of the EU-ACP Cotonou Partnership Agreement in 2020 and classification of many in southern Africa as 'middle income'. Middle-income status is less defined by a demise in spending than it is defined by aid being directed more clearly at advancing donor interests as (well as that of the beneficiary). In this context, South Africa's attempt to compete as a donor in Africa appears hampered by an out-dated narrative and capacities ill-suited to compete with traditional donors. New fronts are being opened in southern Africa: donors able to compete will increasingly have to fight for a role and a say in joint donor projects that define, inter alia, which governments are transparent or not, who from the private sector gets to influence policy, what results matter, how to structure, extract value from or pay for the green economy and who gets to define whether an African government is a human rights offender or not. Donors that will shape the development agenda in southern Africa will be those able to define the moral standpoint on which the aid narrative is constructed and those able to deploy the 'technologies' and tools that allow them to define what 'problems' are to be addressed.

Introduction

> At present there is a lot of anti-colonial rhetoric. South-South cooperation is likely to end up in the same boat as North-South cooperation, with exactly the same principles of ownership, etc. (Interview with 'Northern Donor' at donor conference in Addis Ababa, March 2015)

Global policy changes make 2015 a potential turning point for how southern Africa is shaped by political and economic ambitions embedded in the global development project. For a start, 2015 heralded the manufacture of a new global good with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) supplanting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as the global standard for development and aid. At the same time, the European Union has started consultations on a 'post-Cotonou' agreement: the Cotonou agreement is the primary legal and policy basis for EU aid in southern Africa and was renegotiated in 2015. Among southern African countries, South Africa is both a donor and recipient of aid. In 2013, South Africa received R18 billion in aid, the second highest amount recorded in a decade, almost half of it from the EU (stats.OECD.org: 2013 data run). Aid from 'traditional'/OECD DAC donors to South Africa (stats.OECD.org: 2013 data run) rose from about $650 million a year between 2003-2006 to over one billion dollars since 2008. 2013 was the second highest in a decade at $1.3 billion or about R18 billion at September 2015 foreign exchange rates. To muddy the space further, in 2015 South Africa committed to establishing the South African Development Partnership Agency (SADPA) and capitalising the colloquially termed BRICS bank (New Bank for International Development), both of which are tantalising to South Africa's foreign policy wonks searching for levers to shift developmental debates in Africa (Maasdorp 2015).

This paper will show how these combined factors create a playing field ripe for South African engagement in southern Africa's aid playing field but concludes that South Africa is ill positioned to take advantage due to a poor understanding of how global aid machinery works. The paper first examines shifts in global thinking on donors maintain and expand influence, focusing on what emerging aid themes and priorities could mean for how the global development project expands its reach in southern Africa. Next, the paper turns to an analysis of South Africa's approach and capacity as a donor, and its participation in and influence on the developmental debate in southern Africa. The paper finds that donors are driven largely by self-interest in shaping aid interventions and that they employ strategic language and tactics when planning for and evaluating development programmes in order

to achieve self-interested outcomes, and that South Africa's forays into aid are not well-matched to its interests.

The reach of aid and aid to southern Africa and South Africa

The history of aid in southern Africa has not followed a linear trajectory. Whilst there is no universal accepted explanation, before the end of the Cold War aid often presented itself as part of a broader package that usually included military, trade and other rewards to curry favour. Aid being presented as a stand-alone objective with specific financial envelopes or earmarks only really emerged prominently after the end of the Cold War. In many ways, before the Cold War aid was often justified as shoring up strategic geo-political interests and influence in the former colonies. In the late 1990s, following a period of post-Cold War 'aid fatigue', there was however, a notable and measurable paradigm shift that result in aid being branded as in the service of a moral imperative to combat, alleviate and eradicate poverty. As the global poverty alleviation machine's influence grew it attracted the attention of Western decision makers. In the period to 1998, aid declined steadily: with donors struggling to justify their interventions in the developing world aid spending slumped 16 per cent in just five years (OECD 2015b). By 2001, donor spending on aid started to rise again accompanied by a structured narrative justifying intervention in the developing world. Around this time aid also started to embody the Foucauldian notion of a bio-power – exerting power by way of promising to improve the lives of others whilst also manufacturing technologies dedicated to resolving the 'poverty problem'. Aid was repackaged as a selfless and globally endorsed good. In 2000, responding to the increasingly large financial incentives donors deployed to this aid project, the United Nations positioned itself as a primary recipient for these funds by way of eight neat and appealing fundraising categories (https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals) embodied in the MDGs. The MDGs accompanied the expansion of a host of new administrative technologies to service its objectives in everything from public expenditure and financial accountability assessments to the proliferation of epidemiological approaches to poverty alleviation and the proliferation of increasingly sophisticated monitoring and evaluation (surveillance) methodologies. The transition of aid from discrete geopolitical projects to a self-reinforcing global system of technology and donor superiority had begun.

Southern Africa saw a notably reinvigorated engagement by donors with

aid to the region booming including to South Africa (OECD 2015). At today's rate ($1: ZAR13.5) aid disbursements to South Africa grew from R6 billion in 2003 to just under R20 billion in 2013. Similarly, aid disbursed to Malawi and Mozambique more than doubled with Mozambique's R33 billion making it the biggest recipient of aid in southern Africa in 2013. The only southern African country to see aid grow faster was Zimbabwe where disbursements grew more than five-fold to just over R11 billion by 2013. Put together, these four southern African countries experienced aid growth from $3 billion to $7 billion in a decade. Aid to these four countries became one of the fastest growing industries in the region: at a compounded growth rate of 8.6 per cent annually, aid grew considerably faster than any one country's economy.

The European Union's Cotonou Partnership Agreement is essentially a financing mechanism by which the EU can direct aid to former colonies. In the five years to 1990 the EU spent €1.3 billion a year on aid through the CPA's European Development Fund. However, by 2014 the EU was spending €4.4 billion a year through CPA interventions representing a compounded growth rate of more than 8 per cent annually. Considering the EU's own anaemic GDP growth rate (estimated at 1.5 per cent in 2015) this growth in aid allocation is startling. In 2015, the EU (UN 2015b: para. 51) confirmed its intention to increase aid spending, almost doubling the EU and EU Member States' collective allocations by 2030.

This vast increase in donor spending has led to increasing competition amongst donors to underscore the argument that aid is a moral imperative and not a study in self-interest. Accordingly, aid is both expanding its sphere of involvement and striving to invoke a sense of technological superiority ensuring donors a position from which to engage and indeed to intervene in developing countries. 2015 saw this dynamic transform the six MDGs into 17 SDGs, underpinned by 169 individual targets through which donors can engage in the developing world. The scope and reach of aid now touches on almost all aspects of development ranging from tax collection to urban management and development of 'appropriate' policies on consumption and production. It also notably shifts the burden for delivery equally onto the shoulders of developing countries through 'common but differentiated responsibilities' (UN 2015: para.13).

A subtle but even more dramatic shift has accompanied this transformation: the expanded reach of aid is reinforced by a globally endorsed moral imperative that compels and justifies donors to allocate funding even before identifying what the money will be spent on. Whereas aid was previously

justified as a response to a particular crisis or situation, since the 1990s aid has been structured through multi-year development plans. These plans are designed based on budget allocations determined prior to the identification of specific needs. In other words, instead of donors responding to an identified development problem, they allocate funds first and only later decide how, not whether, to spend them. Known as ex ante decision making, the trend has steadily grown in prevalence since the World Bank study, *Assessing Aid* in 1998, the 1999 launch of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) debt reduction initiative, and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) framework in 1999. The MDGs adopted in 2000 and SDGs of 2015 are an extension of this project. Aid thus appears to have ceased being response driven and is now a foregone conclusion. The shift is well documented in the literature (Alesina and Dollar 2000, Berthelemy and Tichit 2004, Roodman 2005, Sundberg and Gelb 2006, Easterly 2007, Woods 2005) with much of the research confirming that aid is disproportionately motivated by political, security and strategic considerations rather than humanitarian obligation or altruism (Berneo 2008, Dollar and Levin 2006).

Whilst less well documented in the literature, the aid industry has also added a new and powerful institution at country level, commonly known as national 'aid architectures'. Aid architectures are essentially norm setting institutions comprised of a number of thematic working groups within an overall donor coordination structure. Through national aid architectures, donors pool resources at country level and are thus able to generate shadow developmental policies and to generate consensus on how best to allocate aid in the first place. In southern Africa, national aid architectures have come to be highly influential norm setting and governance institutions shaping how donors give aid in Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In South Africa the national aid architecture is present in key sectors such as gender, HIV/AIDS and health but less well structured comparatively.

Put together, this gives donors sufficient levers, authority and narrative to deploy aid and shape the developmental world as they see fit. Increased funding and accordant human and technical resources allow donor aid to assume an outsized influence on policy making in southern Africa. And through ex ante programming donors are allocating aid prior to and in some cases despite decisions taken by beneficiary countries. The expanded scope of the SDGs combined with the norm setting powers of national aid architectures allows donors to cherry pick a narrative to justify their priorities and accordant spending in pursuit of these priorities.

The changing face of aid: insights from the post-Cotonou EU consultations and the implications for South Africa as a donor in southern Africa

With aid increasing worldwide, the expanding scope and extent of aid to South and southern Africa suggests that the region will face significant changes in their relationships with donors in the medium term future. The EU's public consultations in preparation for the next iteration of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement (CPA) is evidence of this shifting relation: whilst the CPA expires in 2020, in 2015 the EU started formal consultations on a successor agreement. The results of the initial consultations (EU 2015) are of greater value than solely for their relevance to EU aid. Because the EU and EU Member States strive for consensus that they then advance with other donors such Australia, Canada, Japan and the US through international mechanisms such as the OECD's Development Assistance Committee. The EU also comprises the majority of the OECD DAC members and funds more than 50 per cent of aid globally (EU 2014c). The findings of the EU consultations are also in line with what is a growing global consensus on how donors can leverage better value from the aid they pledge.

Following the 2011 Busan conference on development effectiveness a Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation was established to set norms for both Northern and Southern actors. For the most part, Northern actors have concluded that it is in their strategic interest to co-opt emerging powers such as South Africa and China into the global development project, subjecting them to the same norms and ways of working. The 2011 Busan conference represented the formalisation of this consensus. The GPEDC is relatively well resourced with full time staff, funding and access to research and analytic resources provided, for the most part, by DAC donors. The investment in establishing norms to signal or indicate development effectiveness operates around the mutually reinforcing goals of continuously improving the relevance and impact of development cooperation whilst creating the tools for those donors to maintain a competitive advantage. At the same time DAC donors persist with the assertion that the sheer volume of funding is also a determinant of donor credibility, and continue to call for donors to allocate 0.7 per cent of Gross National Income (GNI) to development cooperation (UN 2002: para.42). What this means for emerging donors like South Africa is staggering: in order to match the levels of spending that would give South Africa credibility financially as a donor it would have to increase its current spending of R500

million a year more than twenty-fold.

International consensus on what constitutes effective development cooperation emerged in the OECD/DAC High Level Forum in Rome in 2003, followed by subsequent meetings in Paris and Accra. Originally, aid effectiveness debate centred on reducing transaction costs and improving results based management, but by 2005, DAC donors concluded that the formula for more effective aid was greater engagement and influence on developing country policies such as through the principles of ownership, alignment (with policy), harmonisation (of donors) and making beneficiary countries accountable for 'results' in return for donor funding (the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness). Measureable results have since fallen under the rubric of aid effectiveness, that is, how effective aid is at achieving results.

Aid/development effectiveness is increasingly a norm in and of itself, having garnered incrementally more support towards what is now a global consensus. By 2008 there were 55 partner countries included in the survey which had been expanded to include all five of the Paris Declaration principles of ownership, alignment, harmonisation, mutual accountability and managing for results. In 2011, this norm was expanded further at the fourth High Level Forum in Busan: development effectiveness had evolved to facilitate donors in justifying aid in the name of 'national ownership'. In doing so, recipient governments are positioned as illegitimate, thus opening up avenues for donors to engage with 'non-state actors', including private corporations, while bypassing government. In this vein, aid is repackaged as a complement to other sorts of development financing notably including private sector investment. The OECD's 2014 *Development Cooperation Report* points out that Official Development Assistance (ODA) is only one part of the equation (2014:23): 'At nearly US$135 billion in 2012, ODA represented only 28 per cent of all official and private flows from the 29 member countries of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC). Overall in 2012, developing countries received US$474 billion from DAC countries' when combining public sector lending at close to market rates, philanthropy, charity and foreign direct investment (FDI). At a full 60 per cent above ODA, other sources of aid undoubtedly represent formidable influence and impact in developing countries.

The following themes have prominence throughout aid discourse and are explored to the extent they will likely shape the donor agenda in southern Africa in the post-2015 context.

Transparency

The April 2014 Mexico High Level Meeting Communiqué (OECD 2014b) focused on demonstrating greater transparency and accountability of donors. The narrative around transparency opens up enormous political implications: on the one hand the insinuation that a beneficiary government is not transparent justifies donors in bypassing government as a partner and directing aid allocations in pursuit of their own policy objectives. More importantly, the implication that a beneficiary government is less than transparent becomes an important rationalisation for donors to demand greater access to sensitive government information such as on military spending, other national procurements and domestic revenue collection. The UK's DFID, for example, announced, that it will use its developmental resources 'to push for more tax reform and better collaboration' as part of their contribution to poverty alleviation (Greening 2013). Additionally, the drive for greater transparency will likely manifest through intensified investment in global data collection and surveillance mechanisms. Already donors have established the 2014 aid transparency index, perhaps with unwanted initial consequences since it largely shows the EU, one of the primary funders of the index, being off track as a donor group with divergence between a group of EU 'transparency champions' and those that have made no 'discernible progress to date' (EU 2015b:71). On the other hand, in a world in which emerging donors (such as China and South Africa) are of growing stature, the suggestion, merited or otherwise, that emerging donor governments are less transparent can be used for reputational gain and political edge by more established donors.

Results

The focus on the ability to report results is only set to grow in importance in the medium term future. Ban Ki Moon's December 2014 report *Road to Dignity* accompanies the EU's and GPEDC's repeated calls to improve 'programming for results'. Much of the thinking and analysis on the issue of results is captured in the November 2014 OECD report *Measuring and Managing Results in Development Co-operation.* The report also points to a less-overt intention of the results agenda. Commenting on donors' own failure to focus on results, its authors assert that at the core of the problem is 'a lack of institutional demand for results information for decision making and learning' (OECD 2014a:10) in donor organisations. Put plainly, the focus on results is not about donors responding to their own institutional demands

for results but rather shifting that burden to local/national development partners.

In southern Africa the aid agenda will increasingly be used to demonstrate the superiority of Western donors in achieving results and to steer public debate towards a push for 'evidence based policy making'. Some donors argue that development financing should be measured against universal indicators using a 'common results-based approach' applied consistently in all contexts. That argument rationalises aid for strengthening national statistical systems, which in turn further enables donors to tinker with national information systems and to demonstrate their results as more relevant to the beneficiary government's own performance systems. Evidence based policy making, for its part, often manifests as a rhetorical tool for minimising the authority of elected officials to make policy based on political considerations. At its extreme, donors cite 'evidence' as reason to undermine or refuse funding for decisions taken by democratically elected officials and ministries. In effect, the evidence narrative recasts good governance as being about technocratic decision making over political need. The combination of the increasing reach of the SDGs and the international aid community's authority to set aid agendas, development assistance is positioned to continue to contest the legitimacy of southern African elected officials.

Joint programming: banding together to advocate common priorities

Joint programming is essentially the process of formulating a common front and delivering a coordinated donor message to beneficiary countries. Joint programming pools the human and financial resources of like-minded donors strengthening their analytic ability to understand how best to advocate for desired changes through their country programmable aid. Joint programming also allows donors to adopt multi-year strategies to influence and shape the policies of other donors through the national aid architectures and directly with beneficiary governments. In countries where joint programming is active, those not participating in coordination may see their influence and ability to engage with government diminished.

The Council of the European Commission Conclusions (EU 2011) of November 2011 make joint programming a priority at the highest level. Joint programming is now a global practice. As of December 2014, the EU reported (EU 2015b:72) that 19 recipient countries have joint programming in place,

20 will finalise their joint programming processes by 2016 and 16 more are in the analysis phase for a total of 55 partner countries participating in joint programming to some degree.

The June 2014[1] joint EU-African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) declaration on development in the post 2015 context puts renewed emphasis on the need to concentrate development programming 'around a single set of goals and targets, while taking into account national contexts, capacities and levels of development' (EU 2014d). As the world's biggest donors pool their research and analytic resources they further solidify their advantage over emerging donors like South Africa that are comparatively under resourced and out of the coordination loop. A critical mass of analysis is already translating into more sophisticated programming and ultimately, raising the bar for entry by emerging donors. For example, rural development, which previously focused on convincing governments to adopt European-type agriculture extension services, is reorienting around an all-encompassing 'nutrition' approach. Nutrition, in current donor speak, means everything from complex risk mapping and modelling to supporting local community crisis management, security, health, education and food security systems (UN 2015:SDG 2). The multi-faceted evolution of the sector supplants comparatively straight-forward food security interventions resulting in demand for donors to demonstrate competence in integrated approaches, as well as specialized skills and expertise from agricultural development through to health, hygiene, local governance, peace and security, thus delegitimising emerging donors that may be lacking the sophisticated levels of skill, leadership or technology in a given sector.

Whilst joint programming is a relatively recent phenomenon it is in effect in one shape or form in every country in southern Africa except for South Africa. Additionally, joint programming is increasingly attracting the attention of non-EU donors such as Switzerland and Norway as well as the US, Canada and Australia. As USAID (2011:33) sums it up, 'more actors also means… increased competition to innovate [and greater] opportunities for partnership, division of labour and specialization [in beneficiary countries]'. Opportunities for South Africa, like other emerging donors, to join complex coordinated programming remain few. Even if South Africa decided to participate in joint programming processes, it shies away from specific country financial allocation and has no country level staff to participate in national aid architectures (see below for further discussion).

Climate change

Climate change is fast becoming a defining feature of development cooperation. Climate change has signalled a dramatic shift from using development funding to deliver basic rights for the poor, towards using development funding for global priorities that are equally necessary to rich nations' quest to mitigate the global impacts of climate change. The OECD reports that since 2007, bilateral funding for climate change has grown fourfold with Japan contributing US$7 billion, Germany US$4 billion, and the EU and France respectively earmarking US$2.8 billion and US$2 billion in 2013 alone (OECD 2014d). In 2013, the UK, Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark all disbursed over US$400 million each for climate change programming and the European Investment Bank provided another US$2 billion. Climate change programming reached US$37 billion or about a quarter of all official development assistance that year. The majority of climate change programming addressed mitigation, with 40 per cent of expenditure going to Asia and another 30 per cent to Africa.

At a policy level, development cooperation's increasing focus on climate change mitigation is only expected to continue. The EU's 2012 Agenda for Change and 2014 Joint ACP-EU declaration on *A Decent Life for All,* for example, integrate environment as a third pillar joining social and economic programming as the primary components of development cooperation. Mitigation activities frequently benefit (often Western owned) private sector corporations enlisted to transition carbon-based energy to renewable energy sources. In this space, South Africa has thus far missed an opportunity to engage: despite South Africa's much vaunted environment policies and strong environmental negotiations teams, the country has largely ignored climate change as a field for intervention.

Complementing and partnering with the private sector

In an increasingly globalised world, the private sector plays an important role in public sector reform. For example, Bangladesh improved labour and environmental standards through a (development) compact addressing the causes of the 2013 factory fires. The private sector is also vitally important in fragile states like South Sudan where, the biggest threat to stability is that the private sector is not able to generate sufficient tax revenue to compensate for projected drop in oil revenue. As oil revenue is expected to decrease 60 per cent by 2030 (GRSS 2011:121), tax revenue from the private sector needs to grow 30 fold or 3,000 per cent in the next 17 years merely to keep the

government funded at the level it was at independence in 2011. The private sector also contributes to policy dialogue, such as the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC), and donors increasingly use innovative financing such as financing equity and blended loans and grants in partnership with the private sector. Blended products reduce the initial investment and overall cost for partner countries in eligible projects, financing specialised technical assistance, mobilising risk capital and reducing risks through providing guarantees. By 2014 the EU had already put in place mechanisms to use its grant funding to reduce the cost of lending through blending in seven regional instruments.[2] By comparison, South African businesses receive little in the way of inducement to participate in development from the South African government. Whilst South Africa has supported some business-to-business dialogue, such as through the South African chamber of commerce in Mozambique, some South African businesses operating in southern African argue that it is better to pretend not to be South African to avoid being associated with South Africa's 'bully' status in southern Africa (SA NPC 2012:239).

Fundamental human rights, democracy and civil society

The 2012 Agenda for Change, 2014 joint ACP and EU declaration on *A Better Life for All*, and Ban Ki Moon's December 2014 *Road to Dignity* report affirm the need to safeguard fundamental rights and democratic principles as cornerstones of sustainable development. Aside from the possibly genuine commitment to human rights and democracy, rights-focused interventions are also a means to differentiate and broaden support for Western donors over countries such as China, Turkey, Russia and the Gulf States. The April 2014 Mexico High Level Meeting Communiqué called for development cooperation to strengthen 'the critical role of parliaments [in] overseeing development cooperation processes and action plans' (GPEDC 2014:para.13). The 2011 Busan Partnership Agreement calls for greater space for participation of civil society in national development processes and the April 2014 GPEDC (OECD 2014c:para.14) report on *Progress Since Busan* highlights 'democratic ownership' as a central pillar of sustainable development. Such statements lay the foundation for donors to diversify development cooperation away from an almost exclusive focus on government and towards using development cooperation to secure influence through civil society as well. For its part, South Africa's executive has opted to almost completely reject engagement with civil society as an aid strategy, allegedly to avoid what could be seen

as Western-style support for critique of African governance (*The Economist* 2015).

South Africa as a donor and its influence in southern Africa

The previous section endeavoured to show how traditional donors are investing vast intellectual and financial resources contributing to the manufacture of a sophisticated and credible narrative to justify aid interventions, including in southern Africa. In doing so, donors also strive to solidify their technical authority by translating their norms into international benchmarks such as in the Global Partnership on Effective Development Cooperation. At the same time, through the OECD peer review mechanisms and by investing in their own human, technical and organisational resources, traditional donors have developed a skill set that confers an almost unassailable comparative advantage in now commonplace aid themes such as public financial management, epidemiology, statistics, monitoring and evaluation. Their technical skill set also serves to justify their continued engagement and favourability, particularly over emerging donors such as South Africa.

This reality should be cause for concern for South Africa because, as its own National Development Plan (NDP) recognises, South Africa is seen in southern Africa as a 'self-interested hegemon' (SA NPC 2012:238) and its aid to date had not been particularly effective or meaningful (Hendricks and Lucey 2013a, 2013b). With southern Africa vital to South Africa's economic, security and trade interests, it is surprising that South Africa is not doing more to compete in the post-2015 aid context instead leaving development and policy elaboration to the whims of traditional donors.

South Africa's international policy (and developmental) objectives

South Africa's policy basis for exerting itself as an international development partner rests on the two pillars of 'creating a better South Africa' through protecting the country's interests abroad and '[creating] a better and safer Africa and a better world' (SA DIRCO 2010:Exec. Summary). Financing for these pillars is 'through key vehicles such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the African Renaissance and International Cooperation Fund; strengthening political and economic integration of the Southern Africa Development Community; strengthening South-South relations' (SA DIRCO 2010:13). Financing for international

development cooperation is positioned under the DIRCO's programme 4, which allocates funding outside DIRCO's recurrent budget for participation in international funds and organisations as well as dedicated funding for development cooperation projects. Formalising South Africa's capacity to fund development cooperation abroad is cited in the foreword to DIRCO's 2010-2013 strategic plan where minister Maite Nkoana-Mshabane calls for 'the establishment of a South African Development Partnership Agency (SADPA) to promote development partnership' (SA DIRCO 2010:17). Whilst the government has failed to meet its own targets in establishing SADPA, it continues to spend on aid, financing projects through the African Renaissance Fund (ARF) facility but with an increasing bent towards acting as a 'development partner' rather than a donor. DIRCO (SA DIRCO 2013:Financial Report) reported the 2012 and 2013 ARF expenditure at close to R1.1 billion.

In an attempt to differentiate itself from Western donors, South Africa insists its intentions abroad are less about self-interest than that of traditional donors. The government asserts that, 'South Africa has a unique history, position and advantage to play a major role in Africa's development' (SA DIRCO 2012: slide 4). The government further claims its exceptionalism in that its approach involves 'co-crafting the policy focus; sharpening the delivering mechanisms and broadening the instruments for development cooperation' (see the SADPA strategy table).

Paradoxically, traditional donors routinely call themselves 'development partners' whilst arguing they are uniquely more ingenuous or less motivated by their own national interests than other donors. Furthermore, South Africa's claimed exceptionalism is not much more than an embodiment of the aspirations of the 2005 Paris Declaration, with emphasis added by invoking the concept of 'Ubuntu'. The European Union-Africa, Caribbean and Pacific's Cotonou Agreement goes even further with the rhetoric of equal development partnership and, to back it up, actually transfers contracting authority over EU monies to beneficiary countries, including in southern Africa. Put simply, there is nothing exceptional in claiming to be a 'development partner' rather than a 'donor'. Much like South Africa's own currency, the term appears to be of depreciating value.

SADPA's Framework and Approach

SADPA Framework Draft DC – Policy Areas	SADPA APPROACH
PRINCIPLES	Solidarity; cooperation over competition, mutual benefit, equality, national ownership, creation of viable states based on self-reliance, sustainability – philosophy of Ubuntu
AREAS OF SUPPORT	Includes both regional priorities and individual country priorities; both DAC and non-DAC sectors
STRATEGIC APPROACH	•Demand driven priorities – co-crafted; mainstream issues; capacity focus •People Centred Development – development of societies; benefit people •Partnerships – co-ownership, mutual benefit; North and South; South-South; and non-Government •Catalytic initiatives – quality of progress rather than quality of aid; unlock potential •Development effectives – national ownership, sustainability, capacity generating, Paris Declaration •Results Based Management – results orientated
IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH	A flexible framework with many different development cooperation modalities and partnerships, but with good governance elements embedded in the methodology
INSTRUMENTS	•Mainly grants and technical coop. Loans, JVs and PPP's – with commercial sectors •Budget, sector, programme, project, basket
ROLE OF PARTNERS	All partners must make a contribution and take responsibility for programme, and results
CONDITIONALITY	Development progress must support the partner/ region, procurement within the region; other conditionalities – to be determined on a case-by-case basis.
QUALITY ASSURANCE & M&E	Strong focus on rules for accountability, good governance, reporting and monitoring, knowledge management and evaluation (within limits); reporting to SA Parliament and public

Source: DIRCO 2012

Evidence suggests that South Africa behaves no different and no better than traditional donors, either. The Institute for Security Studies' (Hendricks and Lucey 2013a, 2013b, Lucey and Gida 2014) review of South Africa's development programming in Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan illustrates an unremarkable approach to aid with South Africa making the same mistakes traditional donors do. Projects are similarly designed, often use the same implementing partners (eg UNDP), repeat the same sort of successes and sustainability failures as traditional donors, and demonstrate an unwillingness to acknowledge or learn from others. As one senior official of a Northern donor explained to the authors at a conference in March 2014 in Ethiopia, 'In terms of an African agenda and South-South cooperation, at present there is a lot of anti-colonial rhetoric. South-South cooperation is likely to end up in the same boat as North-South cooperation, with exactly the same principles of ownership, etc'.

A survey of the literature shows that South Africa's assertion that it, unlike traditional donors, sees other African governments as 'equals' is not backed up by the evidence either. The Parliamentary Monitoring Group (2002), for example, reports on the 2012 Working Group on the African Union that the deputy director general of the Department of International Cooperation (Foreign Affairs) 'expressed concern at the *ignorance amongst some African countries*' (PMG 2002) and proceeded to argue that South Africa should invest in international development cooperation to support **'**the fight against colonialism and poverty, and concerted efforts at nation building…constitut[ing] the building blocks towards African solidarity. It is against this background and the resultant marginalisation of the African continent that the concept of an African renewal has emerged'. If anything, these comments affirm that South Africa presumes that traditional donors will opt to lead rather than support, and aim to educate, 'conscientise' and help Africa 'emerge'.

South Africa's superiority narrative is wedded to a sense of moral obligation and a moral imperative in official government documents. DIRCO's 2010-2013 Strategic Plan recognises (italics added):

> Critical to our strategic approach in ensuring that the Consolidation of the African Agenda becomes a reality, we are all then *summoned or beckoned to relentlessly*: promote programmes aimed at regional economic integration; prioritise the implementation of NEPAD; work towards the establishment of a South African Development Partnership Agency (SADPA) to promote development partnership… and last but not least, *champion the attainment of MDGs in African countries by 2015.*

This imperative to intervene and 'improve' Africa might be tangentially linked to South Africa's political, economic and security interests, but it is not motivated by those interests. Instead, as recognised by Vickers (2013), South Africa's foreign policy is justified by the history of a struggle against apartheid, hence the appeal to idealised notions of 'solidarity' and struggles against 'marginalisation' and 'colonialism'. The foreign policy recommendations from the African National Congress's 4th National Policy Conference of June 2012 illustrate this point perfectly. South Africa's

> independent views and courage on the international and diplomatic stage have been acknowledged by many countries, their governments and political parties…The emergence of growing economic powers, especially China, India and Brazil, have a perspective that is informed by their struggles against colonialism, and [are] therefore accustomed to acting multi-laterally, thus share our commitment to rebuilding and transforming the institutions of global governance…South Africa must combat the hypocrisy of Europe, the United States, and the NATO military alliance that is consistent with their divisive policies in the Middle East, as well as North Africa. (ANC 2012: para.7,11,13)

South Africa's foreign policy and approach to aid appears rooted in a sense of superiority (whether justified or unjustified) over other African countries, creating the paradox that South Africa's policy makers may suffer the same superiority complex as traditional donors despite the rhetoric otherwise.

South Africa's competence as a donor

In August 2013, the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) (Besharati 2013) released a report titled *South African Development Partnership Agency (SADPA): strategic aid or development packages for Africa?* The report provides a unique insight into government's thinking. In the section on South Africa's perceived comparative advantage the author, Neissan Besharati, draws on official remarks made by the DIRCO deputy-minister Marius Llewellyn Fransman at what was a SAIIA–DIRCO Roundtable held in Pretoria in December 2012. Besharati (2013) reports that DIRCO has concluded that South Africa has specialist expertise not available to many Western donors, particularly in exporting South Africa's developmental model abroad. Evidence suggests otherwise. In any sub-sector of development cooperation, from de-mining through peacekeeping to tax reform and public financial management, there are established and well-

resourced Western think tanks, training programmes, armies of consultants and international NGOs, able to compete with South Africa's best. Even if South Africa has specialist expertise in its own 'developmental model' it is not immediately clear which countries in Africa are trying to replicate it. It is no longer true that South Africa's development model is seen as exceptional to that of Rwanda, Kenya, Nigeria or other non-African countries for that matter (India, Brazil). Furthermore, considerably more global attention is paid to Rwanda and Ethiopia's developmental model than South Africa's, a fact that South Africa's policy makers seem blind to.

Besharati (2013) cites South Africa's skill in peace building, reconciliation and democracy as another comparative advantage based on Africa's perception of South Africa 'as a beacon of democratic freedom in Africa'. There was a moment in the 1990s when this was true but that reputation has been tarnished by racism, xenophobia, fidelity to Mugabe's brutal regime, devastatingly high crime rates and persistent corruption.

The SADPA report also highlights South Africa's institutional and human resource development capabilities as part of its comparative advantage. It is difficult to see, however, how South Africa's training and research institutions compare to those in the West particularly in terms of attracting Africa's elites. In doctoral programmes, for example, the American academic machinery both better finances students and typically offers them more highly ranked education and research institutions. The report correctly notes that South Africa has a comparative advantage in technical systems for public financial management and tax collection in Africa. However, there is no evidence to suggest that African countries will be more open to South African advice on public financial management than they are to that from larger donors like the World Bank and IMF. At the same time, the expertise in the South African Revenue Service (SARS) and Treasury do not necessarily transfer into skills that are seamlessly deployable in an international development setting. In aid, public financial management is as much if not more so about diplomacy and partnership building than transferring skills.

Finally, the report points to South Africa's success investing in infrastructure and agriculture. South Africa does appear to have strong capacity in these areas but the utility of such skills in the development cooperation space is limited because South Africa does not have (or has not made available) the depth of capital necessary to compete with Western donors, let alone its southern peers. The sheer volume of capital available

for lending from China, Brazil, Russia and the Gulf States dwarfs South Africa's. That said, South Africa's Industrial Development Corporation enjoys a strong reputation in southern Africa that could perhaps be better mobilised by SADPA.

Even more telling is the fact that South Africa's own planners don't believe that DIRCO has the capacities to be an effective international development partner. The *National Development Plan* (NDP) 2030 calls on DIRCO to safe-guard and improve relations in the region but only after starting with a withering assessment of South Africa's competencies noting that within the southern African region, there is the perception that South Africa is acting as a bully, a self-interested hegemon that acts in bad faith among five neighbouring countries. As such, South Africa enjoys less support in the region than it did in the period immediately after 1994, when the country held pride of place among world leaders. Indeed, the difficulty the country faced in securing the top leadership position in the African Union reflected South Africa's waning influence as well as a number of other factors that have limited South Africa's reach. While the issue of the African Union leadership has been resolved, a significant effort is required to increase South Africa's role and space that promotes and protects the comparative advantages of all countries on the continent towards mutual gain (SA NPC 2012:238). The text continues with the NDP bemoaning, 'despite playing a key role' in peace settlements on the continent, South Africa has gained little by way of expanded trade and investment opportunities. South African diplomats have great skill in drafting memoranda of understanding (MOU), policy statements and agreements, but lose momentum when it comes to implementing agreement terms or following up on promises of benefits' (SA NPC 2012:238).

The NDP's comments are corroborated by the Institute for Security Studies' (ISS) (Hendricks and Lucey 2013) findings in Burundi, for example, where Memoranda of Understanding on 'defence, education, agriculture, economic cooperation and sports and recreation' signed by South Africa in 2011 remain, two years later, in 'an embryonic state' with South Africa's interventions viewed as 'ad hoc, piecemeal and without substantive impact'. Despite South Africa 'portray[ing] Burundi as a shining success story of intervention in Africa', stakeholders report South Africa as being uninvolved since 2009. ISS analysts commented, 'returning to Burundi…we could find little trace of the ten years that South Africa participated in peace-making and peacekeeping activities, at a relatively substantial cost. Its post-conflict

development and peace building interventions have been too few and far between to make a visible and lasting impact' (Hendricks and Lucey 2013a). Similarly, Hendricks and Lucey (2013b:5) argue that in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) 'the majority of [South Africa's] interventions can be characterised as short-term and uncoordinated programmes that have lacked sustainable impact. There is also little evidence of follow-up or of monitoring and evaluation to [re]address issues as they arise…[bad] planning and a lack of understanding of the context may have produced tensions' producing an unintended consequence only too familiar to more established donors. ISS findings on interventions in South Sudan paint a similar picture. Vickers (2013:549) concludes that, 'as a development partner in Africa, which involves substantial aid spending, [South Africa] is not delivering any commercial dividends for the country, especially in situations where South Africa has underwritten the costs of peace, stability and post-conûict reconstruction. In several African crises, South Africa's peace diplomacy has paved the way for external powers to enter these markets and reap the rewards'. He goes on to point out that this picture is particularly stark when considering the DRC where despite South Africa's interventions, it found itself losing investment and trade opportunities, not just to traditional donor countries but to emerging ones such as China too. Any hopes South Africa had to solidify favoured partner status based on a common African-ness would appear to have failed.

Aside from the capacity challenges detailed above, there are few indications that the post-2015 environment will be kinder on South Africa. Some emerging themes further substantiate the incongruity of South Africa's claims to exceptional donor status:

- **Size of funding and 0.7% of GNP target:** South Africa has not committed to meeting the OECD DAC target of spending 0.7 per cent of Gross National Product on international development assistance. With South Africa currently spending only 0.05 per cent (R500 million annual African Renaissance Fund allocation compared to R1 trillion 2013 general government budget) of its annual budget or just over 0.01 per cent of GNI on development cooperation, it will be hard for South Africa to justify being taken seriously due to its low level of commitment to aid.
- **Transparency:** ISS studies criticise South Africa's reporting, monitoring, oversight and selection processes as weak. DIRCO itself recognises the need to strengthen its capacities to manage and implement projects, but there are no signs that South Africa will submit data to transparency

mechanisms, such as the International Aid Transparency Initiative, or to the OECD even though emerging donors such as some of the Gulf States, China, and even the Gates Foundation are now doing so.

- **Results:** StatsSA is one of the more competent statistics organisations on the continent and could prove to be a resource. South African universities also have comparatively strong statistics and analysis departments and are accessible to African governments partly due to their comparatively lower costs. However, a dearth of numeracy skills and robust competition for skilled statisticians and monitoring and evaluation experts domestically has prevented South Africa from readily deploying those skills abroad. Furthermore, the National Development Plan acknowledges that South Africa is far from meeting its own benchmarks for effective results based monitoring of government activities. The cumulative picture suggests that South Africa is on its back foot when it comes to participation, much less leadership, in the international debate on results in development cooperation.
- **Joint programming and influencing national aid architectures:** South Africa has made a habit of publically distancing itself from traditional donors but the failure to coordinate has led the ISS to disparage South African initiatives in Burundi, Rwanda and the DRC, for lacking coordination, instead being designed and implemented parallel to existing coordination systems. There is some evidence that DIRCO is interested in consulting with other emerging (and particularly Southern) donors and some South African civil society organisations and think tanks, notably SAIIA, ISS and Accord. Nonetheless, lack of skilled staff at the country level is holding it back; with country programmable aid and national aid architectures serving as the primary mechanisms through which donors exert influence, South Africa's lack of aid professionals posted to countries in the region means it simply will not be able to participate.
- **Climate change:** The OECD's 2013 report on the state of development financing reports South Africa as being one of the biggest recipients of ODA-financed climate change funding, implying significant local capacity to absorb funds and implement climate change projects. There is also evidence suggesting that national capacity in the sector, mainly in private consultancy firms like One World and international agencies like UNDP, is strong. Within government, the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) is widely recognised as having a strong negotiations team, good technical capacity and meaningful policy-making experience. South Africa

also can draw on the capacities in state owned organisations such as the Centre for Science, Innovation and Research (CSIR), Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) and the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA). DBSA is purported to be in the process of strengthening its capacity to act as a national implementing agency for the South African government. If South Africa were to summon its expertise in the climate change space it could conceivably fashion an authoritative alternative voice in southern Africa, sharing technical expertise and experience to negotiate good returns on climate financing, for example. To do so would require DIRCO to better incorporate climate change into its aid policy agenda.

- **Complementing and partnering with the private sector:** South Africa has excellent and potentially transferable experience partnering with the private sector and state owned enterprises. Notably, the Mozambique development corridor project and Lesotho water-energy schemes showcase South African influence, especially the case since South Africa's experiences are distinctly African and are state driven examples that resemble the sort of developmental state interventions that China is famous for.
- **Fundamental human and democratic rights:** South Africa has deep experience and technical capacity in the human rights and democratisation space. The capacities, however, are increasingly paradoxical within South Africa's own foreign policy: support for Zimbabwe, a benign response to xenophobic violence, one of the highest income inequality ratings in the world, and the most recent steam rolling of constitutional rights during the 2015 State of the Nation Address have undermined South Africa's credibility.

Conclusion

This paper argues that the post-2015 environment will see considerable change in how aid is programmed and what it might achieve in southern Africa. With South Africa emerging as a donor, it is important to ask what South Africa can do to meaningfully participate in and influence the policy setting agenda that will be manufactured by the aid machinery in southern Africa. This paper shows that South Africa's aspirations to differentiate itself as a development partner worthy of special consideration by African governments is not matched by the necessary capacity nor by evidence of an approach that sets South Africa apart from other donors. Furthermore,

whilst South Africa vocally acts to reject Western or Northern donor 'norms', it still seeks to influence them to behave differently. Unfortunately for South Africa, this puts the country in a strange place where it neither appears to be positioned well to exert influence on beneficiary countries according to South Africa's own stated criteria; nor does it appear to be well positioned to be of significant influence within the norm setting mechanisms largely controlled by Western and Northern donors. This is largely because South Africa, by rejecting the norms of Western and Northern donors also means it recuses itself from the conversation on setting those norms. At the same time, South Africa's inability to offer a competing and compelling model for delivering aid means that instead of Western/Northern donors and beneficiary government's pausing to consider South Africa's approach, they appear to be bypassing South Africa as a meaningful dialogue partner.

The Achilles heel in South Africa's approach to aid is that it invokes a moral imperative without substance, a claim that invites observations of hypocrisy and incompetence. Embarrassingly but rightly so, *The Economist* (2015) magazine dismissed South Africa's donor ambitions as equally both 'clueless and immoral'. The reason is simple: South Africa has crafted a narrative that only works if the rest of the world is not paying attention. So long as South Africa positions itself as the antidote to imperialism and exploitation across the continent, it simultaneously accuses other international powers of being imperialist exploiters, whilst also casting African leaders as incompetent, corrupt and in the grasp (under the influence) of traditional donors.

The real way forward is not to withdraw but rather to participate. South Africa can still strategically pursue a more robust role, establishing itself as an influential and respected development partner, but it cannot do so without allies. South Africa needs to engage from within the aid system and from that position act as part of a global alliance against exploitation and imperialism (if such a thing exists). To have credibility in this endeavour, however, South Africa must be aware that efforts need to be grounded at home as well as projected abroad. Sweden, for example, is a leading global voice on gender equality but does so by setting the bar high at home and building alliances with other donors worldwide. Similarly, if South Africa is to be a credible donor in Africa it needs not only to invest in its own institutions, be they government, academic or civil society, but also strive to show that it can comprehend complex new aid architectures and fit itself into coordinated strategies, rather than falling into the trap of resisting

integration solely for the sake of (unsuccessfully) projecting exceptionalism.

Finally, South Africa's focus on countries far afield and already aid-saturated, such as Burundi, South Sudan and DRC, suggests that it has failed to calculate the potential value of donors' continued and expanded investments in southern Africa. Southern Africa is the region in Africa where South Africa's reputation is poorest and interests are strongest. It is ill advised, then, to continue spending aid in countries where South Africa has less standing, whilst losing ground in countries deeply integrated with South Africa's immediate economic, trade, security and other interests.

Notes

1. http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-14-202_en.htm
2. https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/policies/innovative-financial-instruments-blending_en

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