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Publisher: Routledge

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Cambridge Review of International Affairs

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ccam20>

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Published online: 04 Jan 2013.

To cite this article: Dane Rowlands (2012): Individual BRICS or a collective bloc? Convergence and divergence amongst 'emerging donor' nations, Cambridge Review of International Affairs, 25:4, 629-649

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2012.710578>

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Individual BRICS or a collective bloc? Convergence and divergence amongst 'emerging donor' nations

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Abstract *In recent years a number of countries have established more prominent development assistance programmes. These 'emerging donors' are generally low- and middle-income countries with fewer links than traditional donors to multilateral frameworks for coordination. This article focuses primarily on whether these increasingly important donors will converge upon or challenge the behavioural norms that have emerged from traditional donor operations. It offers two main findings. First, although the evidence is incomplete, it suggests that the group of emerging donors is too heterogeneous to pose a collective alternative to the existing aid architecture, though these states may well provide new insights to enrich and improve our understanding and practice of development assistance. Second, it suggests that the case of Russia as a re-emerging donor highlights the conceptual weaknesses of theorizing simply in terms of 'emerging donors' versus 'traditional donors'.*

Introduction¹

In recent years considerable attention has been given to the development assistance activities of major emerging countries whose efforts in this regard were previously ignored or at least substantially discounted. The belated recognition of these programmes coincided with the rise of the geopolitical and geo-economic power of the 'emerging market' countries, especially the larger ones that were grouped

This article builds on research conducted for the International Development Research Centre (IDRC); I would like to acknowledge their intellectual and financial support. I would also like to thank the authors of the original project studies: Alcides Costa Vaz, Cristina Yumie Aoki Inoue, Gregory Chin, B Michael Frolic, Subhash Agrawal, Wolfe Braude, Pearl Thandrayan and Elizabeth Sidiropoulos. Kafui Dansou (IDRC) provided wonderful support and management for the project and comments on the research, and participants at seminars at IDRC and York University added considerably to the quality of the original and subsequent research. I also benefited from discussions with Jean Daudelin, Bill Morton and Yiagadeesen Samy, and from the timely research assistance of Matt Gouett. I also thank the editors and the two anonymous referees for their comments.

¹ This article draws on four emerging donor reports that were produced for the IDRC on Brazil, China, India and South Africa (Vaz and Inoue 2008; Chin and Frolic 2008; Agrawal 2008; Braude et al 2008) and the synthesis report (Rowlands 2008). The original research and findings are supplemented with updated information on these and other emerging donors, especially Russia.

together as 'BRICS'.² The expansion of development assistance programming by these 'emerging donors'³ constitutes perhaps the most interesting and significant event in development assistance in recent years, leading some analysts to ask whether they will 'change the face of international development' (Manning 2006, 371). Their growing presence as development assistance providers introduces considerable heterogeneity into the donor group and may well challenge many of the norms and practises associated with the traditional aid architecture, hitherto dominated and managed by the members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

A key question that arises from the presence of emerging donors is the extent to which their challenge to existing aid norms and practices will be collective or individual, and whether the differences will be dramatic in scale and scope or piecemeal and modest. In other words, will the BRICS behave as a bloc, or will they each find their own path and bring their own contributions to the emergence of new development assistance norms?

The goal of this article is to examine the extent to which these countries' development assistance practises are and will remain distinct from one another and from those of the traditional donors. This article argues that, based on the research findings at this preliminary stage, the group of emerging donors appears too heterogeneous to pose a collective alternative to the existing aid architecture, although these states may well provide new insights to enrich and improve our understanding and practice of development assistance.

The origins of hegemonic donor norms

Modern development assistance programmes emerged in the post-1945 environment of decolonization and Cold War competition. The 'Western' (or 'Northern') analysis of development assistance activities is typically conducted in the awkward space between its technical functions as an instrument of market-oriented development theory and the reality of its inherently political origins and impetus. The current standards and norms by which most researchers evaluate current donor activity arguably arise from this Western tradition, most specifically

²The original version of O'Neill's (2001) grouping—the BRICs—constituted Brazil, Russia, India and China. These four are still the most commonly used in analysis (for example Hurrell 2006), despite other versions that include countries such as Mexico and South Korea. I have followed the convention of adding South Africa to the group to have a more balanced regional representation, and in keeping with the original IDRC project. This membership structure was given official credence in 2011, when South Africa first joined the original four BRIC countries in their annual summit, which first took place in Russia in 2009.

³The term 'emerging donor' is far from ideal (Manning 2006; Rowlands 2010). Some observers would claim that these countries have been involved in some forms of development cooperation for an extended period of time, while others may object to classifying them as donors at all, given that their programmes often fail to meet the technical definitions of development assistance. Despite these flaws, the term is used here both because of its correspondence with the term 'emerging market' and because it does highlight the challenge to some of the traditional notions of what activities makes a country a 'donor'.

in the technical definitions of what kinds of activities can be counted as official development assistance (ODA).

Much of this tradition is embedded within the official coordinating bodies and institutional arrangements of the traditional donors, principally the DAC.⁴ The DAC was created in 1960 within the OECD as a forum of wealthy OECD member donors for the purpose of promoting their conception of development through such things as collecting and analysing data on the aid programmes of its members, and reviewing and assessing donor policies with a view to identifying best practices. Of course the creation of an administrative framework to measure and monitor aid policy requires some standardization of what is to be considered development assistance, a contentious matter because even by 1960 member states had developed divergent practices as donors, despite their relative homogeneity.⁵ Over time a consensus evolved around issues such as to which countries and on what terms could assistance be counted as ODA, though these and other issues are often hotly debated.

Having a common metric for measuring aid quantities promotes transparency and facilitates cross-donor comparison, allowing the DAC to identify and document best practices and arrange peer reviews of aid programmes. One example of DAC orthodoxy relevant to new donors is the pressure to reduce the use of tied aid by donors. Other common views and approaches are embedded in declaratory statements, such as the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action, which outline frameworks for greater coordination and efficacy in aid delivery. The attempt at coordination, or at least the professed confidence in it, is arguably a key dimension of traditional donor norms, a statement of intent regarding the desirability of addressing the development agenda collectively.⁶

Of course the DAC is primarily a forum in which country governments seek to define their collective agenda and refine their activities in cooperation with their donor peers; despite recent efforts to engage in dialogue with recipient states, there remains a distinct imbalance in the donor–recipient relationship within the DAC. In this context, and despite the limited and possibly declining level of coordination since 9/11 (Woods 2005), donor coordination arguably functions as a mechanism for maximizing donor bargaining power at the expense of poorer countries, and can even undermine aid effectiveness (Chandy and Kharas 2011). This potentially antagonistic relationship is reflected in the academic debate about development assistance motivation, typically framed along a spectrum from recipient ‘needs’ to donor ‘interests’ (Dudley and Montmarquette 1976; McKinlay and Little 1979; McGillivray and White 1993; Alesina and Dollar 2000; Berthélemy 2006). The evidence generally points to the dominance of individual donor political and strategic interests as the driving determinant of aid allocation,

⁴Other coordinating institutions include the World Bank and IMF. See Kim and Lightfoot (2011) for a useful and more detailed discussion of DAC norms.

⁵As Manning (2006, 377) points out: ‘Certainly, the DAC itself is a diverse group. Contrary to the views of some developing countries and civil society advocates, it is a long way from a group of would-be monopolists of wisdom, procedures or indeed standards.’

⁶Hattori (2001) argues that foreign aid should be seen primarily as a symbol, one that is arguably more consistent with constructivist approaches to international relations rather than materialist ones. From this perspective, norms surrounding development assistance could be construed as evidence of constructivism consistent with moral foundations of foreign aid (Hattori 2003).

making aid a more contentious and less collaborative undertaking than is perhaps desirable. The dominance of politics and strategy, however, also means that the DAC hosts many internal debates amongst its members in addition to being a collective mechanism of donor will in the relationship with recipient states.

Contrasting with this political reality is the sense within the development community as a whole that the true objective and motivation of development assistance is the moral one of assisting the less fortunate. The official guardians of this idealistic image of ODA are often the central bilateral donor agencies themselves, the bureaucratic entities that broadly oversee collectively defined flows of assistance in a coherent framework managed by a structured (and democratic) political process. These agencies adhere to the administrative norms and practices of wealthy democracies, and their use of common definitions and accounting rules facilitates cross-donor comparisons. Such comparisons in turn provide an incentive for donor countries to consolidate their efforts and channel them visibly through accepted conduits in order to improve how they look to their donor peers. The democratic practises within DAC members ensure that their development policies inevitably reflect their internal political economy and bureaucratic struggles, making it difficult to generalize about their motivations and approaches.

Development assistance beyond the DAC

Development Assistance Committee donors' share of total ODA rose from 72.5 per cent of all bilateral ODA in 1975 to a high of 98.7 per cent in 1999; it has subsequently fallen to 93.4 per cent in 2008 (OECD 2010).⁷ By virtue of their size, traditional DAC donors established a fairly robust hegemonic position amongst development assistance providers, though not a monopolistic one. There have always been donors outside the dominant DAC establishment who pursued their own assistance programmes, and whose activities varied in terms of their degree of coherence with, or opposition to, their DAC counterparts.

Manning (2006) provides a useful typology and discussion of the non-DAC donor community, identifying four groups.⁸ The first consists of non-DAC OECD members such as Mexico and Turkey, while the second consists of non-OECD European Union (EU) members such as Bulgaria and Romania. For countries in both groups there are strong pressures to align with DAC principles because of the similar norms of both the OECD and the EU, a coherence reinforced by the extensive overlapping membership. In the case of countries such as the Republic of Korea (possibly to be followed by Poland and Turkey) the trajectory from OECD membership into the DAC may be seen in part as a completion of a transition from 'developing country' status to 'developed country', and from recipient to established donor. Despite some variation in speed and extent, these two groups will likely either be formally or implicitly subsumed within the DAC framework.

⁷ Of course, it should be emphasized that these numbers overstate the relative aid efforts, since they include only formally identified ODA. The assistance flows from many non-DAC donors, especially private donors, will be understated.

⁸ Kragelund (2008) uses a donor typology that is slightly different than Manning (2006): EU and OECD; OECD but not EU; EU but not OECD; and neither EU nor OECD. The typology in Kharas (2009) uses DAC bilateral, non-DAC bilateral, multilateral and private.

The third group identified by Manning (2006, 374) is the 'Middle East and [Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries] OPEC countries'. Manning characterizes their assistance programmes as impressively coordinated and united, but restrictive in terms of focus, financing instruments and magnitude. Though not DAC members, these countries have implicitly recognized the DAC's importance by providing partial and roughly comparable statistics on their development assistance activities despite their distinctive and independent approach to aid. While different, their assistance programmes can often be regarded as complementary to those of the DAC, as opposed to contradictory, since many are closely tied through alliances with key DAC members such as the United States.

Manning's last group 'is the most disparate, and the subject of the greatest current interest' (2006, 374). Some of the members of this group are very similar to the OECD states but are not yet full members, including Israel (now an OECD accession candidate country), Taiwan (which for political reasons is limited in terms of its possible engagement with the OECD),⁹ Lichtenstein (with a complex record of international institutional engagement in general and with the OECD in particular)¹⁰ and Thailand, which according to the Thailand Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2006) is actively exploring a formalization of its relationship with the OECD. All four provide data on their development assistance activities to the DAC (Smith et al 2010). Thus some of these states are clearly on the path towards OECD and probably DAC membership, whilst others would be if there were not specific political hurdles to doing so.

However, this last group also includes the BRICS group and similar countries that display wide ranges of affinity for the DAC and OECD and aloofness from the traditional aid architecture. The BRICS group is interesting for four key reasons. First, the BRICS group exhibits an interesting heterogeneity with respect to income levels and political systems.¹¹ Second, they have relatively large and fast-growing economies; their influence over future development assistance patterns and practices will likely grow significantly. Third, all five countries have been, even fairly recently, recipients of assistance from the traditional donors. Finally, the BRICS group includes global and regional powers with their own distinct geopolitical agendas that make them less likely to simply accept and adhere to DAC norms. Hurrell (2006) argues that it is helpful to examine this grouping for four reasons: its members' relative economic, political and military power; their common sense of having been denied a proper degree of influence in international affairs; the development of their own bilateral and multilateral relations; and the

⁹ According to one source, the People's Republic of China is trying to limit Taiwan's engagement with the OECD, in which Taiwan has observer status on a number of committees (Hsu 2008). In any event Taiwan's full membership will clearly remain problematic given the complexity of its international status.

¹⁰ Lichtenstein is not a member of the World Bank or the IMF, and it has had difficult relations with the OECD over its identification as a tax haven.

¹¹ All DAC members are high-income countries according to the World Bank (2011), 2010 gross national income (GNI) per capita ranging from a low of US\$19,890 (South Korea) to US\$79,510 for Luxembourg. According to Freedom House (2011) they rank at worst 1.5 (Japan, Korea, Greece and Italy) on Freedom House's 1 (free) to 7 (not free) scale. By contrast, per capita income ranges from a low of US\$1340 in India to a high of US\$9910 in Russia, Freedom House measures ranging from of 2.0 for Brazil and South Africa to 6.5 for China.

fact that all of them are either outside, or direct challengers to, the Western-dominated system of liberal international affairs.

One example of the potential incompatibility between the BRICS donors and the DAC can be observed from the fact that in the past Russia and China both operated significant foreign aid programmes in direct competition with their Western counterparts. During the Cold War the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) centred on the former Soviet Union and its East European allies provided as much as ten per cent of net global ODA in some periods (Manning 2006, 372). China too has a long history of engagement in places such as South Asia and Africa. These programmes, like their Western counterparts, are generally seen as attempts to acquire and influence client states as part of a global geostrategic competition. With the end of the Cold War the CMEA was terminated and there seemed to be an attenuation of the associated ideological competition; indeed Russia is itself seeking OECD membership. However, in hindsight the immediate post-Cold-War period is perhaps best seen as a temporary hiatus for the Soviet/Russian and Chinese assistance programmes. With globalization and growth leading to the partial consolidation and expansion of the external aid programmes in a number of additional countries outside the traditional DAC group, what are the potential repercussions for the evolving aid architecture?

Heterogeneity in the origins and the rhetoric of BRICS assistance programmes¹²

If the BRICS countries are ranked in terms of proximity to the DAC tradition, Russia would be the closest in terms of tradition, structure, and level of engagement. Whilst the CMEA programmes that preceded its current development assistance efforts competed explicitly with the DAC, the strategic origins of such efforts are certainly shared by many Western donors. Against this rather cosmetic and dated difference may be contrasted the recent evidence of its preference to be seen as an equal to its G8 partners. For example, as early as 2003 Russian Finance Minister Kudrin was pointing out that Russia's forgiveness of debt owed by poor countries made it the most generous G8 donor in terms of ODA as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), illustrating both its preferred comparator group as well as its capacity to use DAC ODA accounting rules to show up its G8 partners (ITAR-TASS 2003). In more concrete terms, Russia's candidacy for OECD membership also clearly signals its preference to be seen as a wealthy developed country. More specifically, its 2007 concept paper on overseas development (Russian Federation Office of the President 2007) bears a strong similarity to the comparable documents from established DAC donors. The stated objectives and principles seem to be completely shared with the DAC. Russia's programming is to be done in conjunction with established donor mechanisms, and the Russian officials have asked for assistance in preparing its aid statistics (Zimmerman and Smith 2011, 735), which are to be reported to the DAC using DAC standards and definitions. Indeed, all of the stated goals and modalities seem perfectly consistent with DAC norms and procedures, including the identification of the United Nations (UN) recommended 0.7 per cent of GDP target for donor contributions and the

¹² Much of the information on Brazil, China, India and South Africa is drawn from the original IDRC country reports.

suggestion that the Russian government 'may require recipients to meet certain [Millennium Challenge Corporation]—criteria, such as fighting corruption and promoting sound economic policies, to qualify for aid ... "We can't afford assistance to be wasted"' (United States Agency for International Development [USAID] 2008). Finally, Russia certainly does not place much emphasis on its own development experience and recent status as aid recipient¹³ as a means of signalling solidarity with developing countries generally.

Interestingly, though, the Russian government has simultaneously exhibited increased interest in the BRICS grouping, including hosting the first summit for BRICS heads of state and government in 2009. While very little of substance has yet emerged from this process, it has provided the Russian government with a useful mechanism to balance its association with wealthier countries in groupings such as the G8 and soon possibly the OECD. This duality allows Russia many useful advantages. On the one hand, its G8 and OECD connections provide the lustre of equality with wealthy and powerful nations in the West, a valuable badge especially on the domestic front. On the other hand, it can also remain aloof from that group by using its BRICS and G20 relationships as a platform from which to contest Western hegemony and avoid the blame for the economic debacle associated with neoliberal economic policies.

Although China's early aid programme shares geostrategic origins with Russia's, there is little apparent desire on the part of the Chinese government to be aligned with the DAC. By emphasizing South–South solidarity and the non-aligned movement, China has attempted to build a base of support outside the main East–West blocs while simultaneously out-manoeuvring the Nationalist government in Taiwan.¹⁴ The apparent hiatus in aid programming in the 1970s and 1980s ended in the 1990s, and overseas aid has accelerated as the Chinese government seeks to secure reliable access to natural resources to support its rapid industrial expansion. As China's global role expands, so too will the reach and magnitude of its assistance.

Whilst the rhetoric that accompanies its assistance programme emphasizes win–win cooperation, mutual support and respect, and non-interference in domestic affairs (Chin and Frolic 2008), critics emphasize the self-serving nature of these stated principles and some detect a mask for destabilizing the current world order.¹⁵ Of course China's record departs from this rhetoric in the same way that many DAC donors fail to abide by either the spirit or letter of the norms they have created. Brautigam (2009) provides some details of China's programme and identifies elements that clearly promote its commercial benefits to itself, less than clear gains being acquired by the recipient community. Samy (2010) notes that the

¹³ Russia is listed as a recipient of development assistance as recently as 2008–2009 by donor agencies such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development.

¹⁴ The ultimate triumph over Taiwan was the transfer to the People's Republic of the sole 'China seat' at the UN in 1971 and its promotion to the UN Security Council. It is unclear whether the break in China's aid programming in the mid 1970s should be seen as the result of having achieved its strategic objective and a reduction in its need to foster relations with other developing countries (especially in Africa) or whether it was the result of internal political turmoil and changes (see Davies 2008, 3).

¹⁵ Naim (2007) criticizes many emerging donors as self-interested and counter-productive, though he also acknowledges the self-serving motivations of traditional donors as well, particularly the United States. Woods (2008) reviews and questions many of these criticisms.

pursuit of commercial interests hardly sets China apart from other donors, nor does the pursuit of commercial interests eliminate the presence of non-aid trade and investment benefits. Further, China's presence is appreciated even by some well-governed African countries as a competing alternative to traditional donors, with fewer policy conditions and more rapid disbursement (Samy 2010).

Aid conditionality is a key point of contention between China and the DAC. Not only is the 'neoliberal' orientation of traditional policy conditionality inconsistent with China's approach to development (Brautigam 2009, 16), but it violates China's traditional advocacy of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. By contrast DAC members tend to see conditionality as an essential tool for aid effectiveness, and view China's indiscriminate use of development assistance in authoritarian and violent regimes as undermining international efforts to foster good governance.

The remaining BRICS countries appear to be positioned between Russia's apparent comfort with DAC norms and China's professed hostility to them. India shares with China a suspicion of foreign influence, arising in part from similar experiences in nation-building and anti-imperialism. While a slower pace of industrial expansion has meant less pressure to secure resources than China, India has dramatically expanded the size and recipient coverage of its development assistance programming since the late 1990s (Chanana 2009) in pursuit of growing commercial and strategic interests. Simultaneously India came to see its receipt of assistance as antithetical to its self-image as an emerging self-reliant nation with global ambitions and influence, even to the extent of rejecting offers of humanitarian assistance after the 2004 tsunami. Though linked strategically to Russia for much of the Cold War, India shared with China a tradition of solidarity with relatively poor states as well as active support for the non-aligned movement. Despite being regional rivals, China and India were leaders at discussions amongst Asian countries (at Panchsheel) and Asian and African countries (at Bandung) in the 1950s. Katti et al (2009) claim that India's foreign and development policy is based on the Panchsheel/Bandung Principles of equality of sovereign states, non-interference and peaceful coexistence. Similarly Price (2005) argues that the Indian government has clear concerns that aid conditionality and interference are degrading for the recipient, and that assistance should be offered in the context of cooperation and partnership. While Chanana (2009) and Agrawal (2008) suggest that successive Indian governments have seen development assistance as a very public way of advertising the country's new independence and assertiveness both regionally and globally, the legacy of Nehru seems to live on in India's discomfort with the DAC principle of conditionality.

The current development assistance programmes of Brazil and South Africa emphasize their affinity with other less developed countries (LDCs) over immediate political or diplomatic ambitions (Vaz and Inoue 2008; Braude et al 2008).¹⁶ Brazil remains very sensitive to the fact that the term development assistance often implies a hierarchical relationship between donor and recipient, and officially rejects the idea that it is an 'emerging donor' at all (Hochstetler 2012).

¹⁶South Africa's early aid programme—established under its racist apartheid-era regime—was designed to maintain control over the unsustainable homeland states it created, and to maintain a measure of diplomatic approbation.

Policies are described more in reference to the wider debate between North and South (Brazil) and the context of collective African renewal and development (South Africa) instead of in terms of global or regional struggles over power or traditional left–right ideology. Brazil and South Africa do share with China and India an affinity with the old non-aligned movement and sensitivity to hierarchical relations between donors and recipients. Consequently Brazil and South Africa have been careful to downplay regional dominance and emphasize partnership within the framework of horizontal South–South cooperation.

In addition, these two BRICS countries share a fairly recent transition from autocracy to democracy. This experience has arguably left them with a much stronger preference for certain political configurations in recipient states, and with much greater pressure from their own electorate to ensure aid effectiveness. In the case of South Africa there has been an explicit emphasis on democratization, good governance, conflict management and regional integration in its foreign and development policies (Braude et al 2008). Brazil seems less comfortable with political conditionality, though accepts that in some difficult cases (such as Haiti) the principle of non-intervention may need to be diluted (De Sousa 2010). While both countries have expressed concerns about conditionality, they may find it increasingly difficult to balance the political exigencies of their democratic systems with indifference to the governance structures of the countries they assist.

As with all aid programmes, however, political and commercial interests appear to be creeping into the programming of both of the smaller BRICS members (Vaz and Inoue 1998; Braude et al 2008). For all donors, recipient selection is often driven by short-term political events such as state visits, but this problem is especially noticeable in states with relatively small assistance programmes. The balance between the rhetoric of cooperative partnership and the bureaucratic reality of using resources to achieve immediate policy goals is inevitably problematic for all donors. As Hochstetler (2012) points out in the case of Brazil, there are disparate views ranging from those who regard Brazil's assistance programme as an altruistic collaboration with other developing countries, and those who see it as a more self-serving instrument of foreign policy. Burges (2011) acknowledges that while the immediate formal links between political and commercial interests and Brazil's assistance programmes are limited, 'a higher level linkage remains in place'. Others suggest that Brazil has been open about the role of its aid programme as a means to project its image globally (De Sousa 2010).

It is important to recognize that all donors, 'old' and 'new', share some similarities in their origins and rhetoric. To varying degrees their public statements of solidarity with the recipients of their assistance mask the presence of hierarchical roles and mixed motivations; Mawdsley (2010) rightly warns against simplifying complex motivations and administrative realities. Just as countries within the DAC display heterogeneity, so are there the differences within and between BRICS countries in terms of how they reconcile the tension between geopolitical strategy and humanitarian benevolence, and their tolerance of gaps between rhetoric and action. Dreher et al (2011) examine the sparse data on the aid distribution of established and emerging donors (unfortunately having to exclude China and Russia) and find that while new donors seem to be less sensitive to recipient need than traditional donors, and disregard problems such as corruption, by and large the two groups exhibit a lot of similarity in their

behaviour. Thus the binary concepts of 'emerging donors' and 'traditional donors' may conceal more than they reveal.

The attitude towards one core concept—policy conditionality—illustrates a key area of distinction. Development Assistance Committee donor countries seem committed to the use of policy conditionality, a view that Russia seems inclined to share even if it interprets it somewhat differently. By contrast the other BRICS countries are all less enamoured of conditionality as a principle of development assistance, albeit to varying degrees. Whilst it would be naive to exaggerate this distinction—all donors expect their aid to generate some policy influence—it highlights one area where emerging donors differ substantively from their DAC counterparts, and yet will find it difficult to forge a common alternative.

Administrative arrangements and institutional structures

As outlined in section two above, most DAC donors adhere to certain administrative norms in the operation of their development assistance programmes. Most have a central development organization along with a few separate agencies that administer specific components of development assistance. While the relative policy, budgetary and administrative influence of the central agencies varies, for the most part there are fairly clear lines of reporting and rules of accounting that facilitate the central coordination of activities. By contrast, for BRICS countries it is generally too early and the circumstances too opaque to characterize the administrative structures of their aid programmes. There appear, however, to be both considerable variation within and rapid evolution of these structures.

Russia again seems something of an outlier with clear predilections for DAC-type structures, though it has been able to provide a considerable volume of ODA without an extensive separate organizational framework. A large element of Russian ODA has been in the form of contributions to multilateral organizations (for example the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria) or, more significantly, via debt forgiveness (ONE International 2010a). These sorts of activities can be managed easily through central administrative structures: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Finance are the lead agencies in development assistance, coordinated by the President (Russian Federation Office of the President 2007). Whilst Russia has so far been able to make a big impact in development assistance through the forgiveness of debt and other multilateral initiatives, ultimately a more complex organization will be required as bilateral programming expands and debt stocks disappear. Consequently, Russia has engaged in talks with other DAC agencies such as USAID, and reviewed its structures, in preparation for its own possible development agency. One USAID (2008) publication quotes a senior official from Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs as saying that Russia plans to 'develop bilateral mechanisms for aid delivery' over the next five years, and that 'As Russian bilateral assistance increases, we plan to establish a government entity, maybe even named RUSAID' (USAID 2008). In 2008 the Russian government renamed its agency for Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) affairs *Rosstrudnichestvo* (Roscooperation), the Federal Agency for CIS Affairs, Compatriots Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation (ONE International 2010a; ITAR-TASS 2008). Though the country is still without

a centralized development assistance administration, it seems that Russia is embarking slowly down the path taken by most DAC members.

China, by contrast, seems to have opted for an administrative structure that is distinct from those of either the DAC or Russia. China's arrangements are arguably the most centrally coordinated of the BRICS countries' (at least in theory), though paradoxically they are not the most centrally administrated. Chin and Frolic (2008) identify two focal points for administration, the government itself (the Department of Aid to Foreign Countries within the Ministry of Commerce)¹⁷ and the parallel structures within the Chinese Communist Party (the International Liaison Office of the Party's Central Committee).

Chin and Frolic (2008) remark on the absence of a unified administrative structure and the multiplicity of influential ministries, which range from strategic oversight from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the line ministries that serve as executive agencies and sources of information. Despite these competing forces, Chin and Frolic (2008) note that China's programme is surprisingly coherent, with well-defined rules for policy-making and budgeting.

Davies (2008, 2) provides a different perspective, stating that 'There is clearly no official definition of aid at present ... The current inconsistencies in China's definition of aid give rise to the lack of clarity on its framework and policy-making process, as well as the implementation of aid programmes.' Based on conversations with Chinese officials and researchers, Davies (2008, 2) goes on to suggest that as a consequence of weak lines of communication and poor financial tracking 'aid spending is quite disorganised and lacking in effective coordination'. These two assessments of China's aid programme may well coexist, both implying that China does not currently intend to pursue the independent (or quasi-independent) aid agency approach typical of the DAC donors.

India's development assistance structure is arguably less coherent than China's, though it seems to be evolving rapidly. The core focal point for India's current aid programmes is the Ministry of External Affairs, which directly operates the largest bilateral programmes (Afghanistan, Bhutan and Nepal) as well as the technical training and cultural assistance programmes. The Ministry of Finance plays a secondary role that includes its oversight of soft loans via the export credit agency, the EXIM Bank. Agrawal (2008) concludes that despite the apparent coherence of this framework the different components of the assistance programming do not appear to be integrated. In 2007 the Indian government announced its intention to create a specialized aid agency to act as a central coordinating mechanism. ONE International (2010b) identifies this prospective organization as the India International Development Cooperation Agency, but as of 2011 there is no evidence that things have progressed much beyond the original announcement, and a review of the current Ministry of External Affairs

¹⁷ It is perhaps also informative that the central department managing development assistance is located in the Ministry of Commerce, providing added weight to the observation by Woods (2008) that China's assistance programme in particular links aid to both trade and investment. Whilst such commercial connections would traditionally be seen as contaminants of DAC donor programmes, and evidence of donor self-interest, the increased recognition of the need for investment and trading opportunities as being of equal or greater importance than aid in the development process forces us to think more carefully about the 'donor interest versus recipient need' debate.

organizational structure suggests that aid programmes remain fragmented amongst various departments.

The institutional framework for development assistance in Brazil is arguably even more diffuse than in either China or India, despite the presence of the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC) as a coordinating mechanism within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The diffusion occurs because of the presence of other powerful institutions within the development assistance field (four major line ministries) and a multiplicity of executing agencies with multiple funding sources and diverse mandates. Vaz and Inoue (2008) suggest that perhaps the key reason for the absence of central control is the limited resources available to the ABC, restricting its capacity to entice cooperation from other units in the pursuit of its overall strategic objectives. De Sousa (2010, 3) indicates that, 'Currently, 120 institutions are said to be involved in Brazilian development co-operation' and that ABC is responsible for only one-fifteenth of development expenditure. A recent article in *The Economist* (2010) also notes the relative weakness of ABC in establishing a coherent development assistance programme, and reports that, prior to her election as Brazil's president, Dilma Rousseff was 'mulling over the idea of a new development agency to raise aid's profile'. As is frequently the case, the subordination of development assistance to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also makes such programmes susceptible to inconsistency due to the vagaries of foreign affairs priorities. Vaz and Inoue (2008) and Burges (2011) note that high-level diplomacy and presidential visits often generate significant pressure to deflect development assistance towards complementary undertakings.

South Africa's development programme seems the least coherent, although steps are now being taken to improve internal aid coordination through changes to the machinery of government (see Braude et al 2008; Vickers in this issue). The reason for the existing incoherence has been the presence of too many focal points for policy-making, and the absence of a single powerful central agency. The key institutional framework for development assistance in South Africa appears to be the African Renaissance Fund (ARF).¹⁸ Created in 2000 and located within what was then the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the ARF is the most focused development-oriented agency in South Africa. Unfortunately it is small, is subject to significant input from the Ministry of Finance and shares development assistance duties with powerful line ministries such as Defence and with various parastatals and other agencies, all of which dilute ARF's coherence (Braude et al 2008). While the annual reports of ARF provide some financial accounts, these represent only a fraction of what might be considered the development assistance effort of South Africa. The largest financial flows are associated with the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) and the Multilateral Monetary Area (MMA). Both of these negotiated agreements include provisions for transfers to be made effectively from South Africa to the other member states; in the case of SACU there is an explicit development transfer allocated according to the inverse of each member's GDP per capita. While these transfers do not qualify as ODA, some element of them should indeed be considered development assistance.

In 2008 the Department of Foreign Affairs was renamed the Department of International Relations and Cooperation, ostensibly emphasizing the development

¹⁸The complete name is the African Renaissance and International Cooperation Fund.

programming component of the department. Whether this change has deeper implications for the prominence and administration of South Africa's diverse portfolio of development cooperation activities is unclear. Braude and colleagues (2008) notes that many of South Africa's aid efforts are demand driven, with key roles played by ministers and embassies in identifying potential projects, the execution of which could be done by a myriad of agencies. The retention of ARF within the newly named department suggests that development policy will continue to be subject to the same pressures as before.

Clear variations in institutional coherence exist amongst these emerging donors, however, and it is interesting to speculate why this might be. Russia's framework is centrally coordinated through (ostensibly) the President's Office, which seems consistent with strong central control by the executive; a possible single agency in the future may even reinforce this control by diluting the influence of the Ministries of Finance and Foreign Affairs. China's arrangements exhibit strong elements of centralization as well (though not within an independent development agency), which reflects the traditions of central planning and the requirements of Chinese Communist Party oversight. The more diffuse structures in India, South Africa and Brazil exist despite these countries having had reasonably well-functioning structures to coordinate *incoming* flows, which have been identified as potential mechanisms for adding coherence to outflows. In all cases the relative novelty of large assistance programmes (after many years as major recipients) and the occasional suggestion of creating centralized agencies suggest that such dispersed arrangements are simply the starting point that may ultimately lead down the same path taken by the development agencies of traditional donors.

The degree of decentralization may also be a function of the extent to which development assistance is seen as an important instrument of strategic international policy. In Russia, China and possibly India it may be more important to retain centralized policy control over development assistance in order to achieve regional and global objectives. In Brazil and South Africa the strategic benefits of development assistance may be more limited, and hence these countries may be more tolerant of a decentralized system with many agencies taking on dispersed projects.

Ultimately, however, the structures of development assistance in these countries appear to have developed largely by happenstance, conscious design being manifested only on occasion and never comprehensively. That these emerging development assistance programmes have started off with various organizational arrangements that differ from one another and from the DAC standard is hardly surprising. Many emerging donors have only recently gained prominence, are managing a complex transition from aid recipient to donor, have fewer material resources to devote to the efforts and do not have the implicit or explicit peer reporting and evaluation objectives of DAC members. Perhaps of equal importance is the fact that for many poorer donors some aspects of their early development assistance programmes did not require central budgetary support, but were driven from the bottom up as win-win cooperative exchanges (as the Chinese government would emphasize) by line departments in countries facing similar development obstacles (Rowlands 2008). In this regard Russia again stands out as somewhat distinct from its BRICS colleagues, having started off with a more top-down, centralized programme that was disconnected from line departments. Operationally, Russia appears interested in adopting DAC administrative norms and arrangements more quickly because of its objective of comparability with

other wealthy donors; being seen as comparable to the United States is a critical dimension of Russia's search for global power status (Mankoff 2009).

International collaboration

One of the most important insights regarding the extent to which emerging donors intend to align with existing donor frameworks is their current stance on international collaboration. Woods (2008) notes that emerging donors generally have little interest in collaborative or multilateral frameworks for providing development assistance, since they have little influence at established multilateral agencies, though both their interest levels and influence do seem to be increasing. By extension, collaboration on a bilateral or plurilateral basis may put an emerging donor in a lopsided relationship with a more powerful traditional donor. For these reasons such collaborative exercises are problematic unless the collaboration be with one's immediate peers.

Russia was not really one of the donors Woods was examining, and may well be the exception that proves her general rule. While Russia's activities have so far been fairly limited in nature, there are early signs of conformity and collaboration with current DAC activity and established multilateral institutional arrangements. Indeed, and partly as a consequence of having only a nascent development agency, Russia has seemed quite content to contribute primarily through multilateral health initiatives and via the debt relief framework established by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). As noted, Russia also seems inclined to accept the notion of conditionality as defined by traditional DAC donors, making multilateral and bilateral cooperation with DAC members easier. As it establishes its own active bilateral agency it will no doubt do less programming through multilateral agencies, but OECD membership will impose additional pressures for conformity with DAC principles. Russia's use of multilateral channels for assistance, however, may well be the result of its self-image as a powerful state that does not have to passively accept the preferences and procedures currently embedded within these institutional arrangements.

Woods' claim that new donors are little interested in collaborative or multilateral assistance programs reflects her focus on the case of China. Chin and Frolic (2008) also note a general reluctance on the part of the Chinese government to become involved in collaborative development assistance. Given its strong political motivations for aid provision, it is understandable that China would prefer the influence it acquires through bilateral programmes. Of interest, then, is Beijing's recent acquiescence to working more cooperatively with other donors. The initial steps were taken in the context of local regional programming through the Asian Development Bank and Greater Mekong Subregion, where China was anxious to be seen as a team player that would wield considerable influence. China has also become more active in other regional development banks, such as the Inter-American Development Bank. Similarly, specific sectoral initiatives that afforded China significant benefit or influence also became acceptable. Chin and Frolic (2008) suggest that as China becomes more comfortable in these shared arrangements, and less concerned with the concomitant infringements of its policy prerogatives, participation in multilateral arrangements may become a more significant part of its programming. The record of traditional

DAC donors illustrates clearly that many international collaborations are consistent with the pursuit of donor self-interest. Brautigam (2011, 753) suggests that, while such engagement might increase in the future, it is likely to remain mostly 'symbolic', and will not bind China to DAC norms, in part because China's development assistance rarely meets the formal definition of ODA. In addition, it seems unlikely that China will embrace anytime soon a very intrusive form of peer review, in part because its assistance programmes do not lend themselves easily to Western notions of transparency (Paulo and Reisen 2010).

India, too, has seemed reticent to surrender its policy autonomy to collaborative ventures. Agrawal (2008) notes that, whilst India has a general affinity for large groupings such as the UN, G77 and non-aligned movement, its commitment to them has generally been limited to support in principle. Smaller groupings may hold some attraction provided India plays a dominant role. Consequently there is no real evidence of significant multilateral engagement in development assistance from the government of India. Agrawal (2008) does note, however, that cooperation with the international community in Nepal and Afghanistan, and increased contact through research and technology linkages, may make India more open to cooperation. Price (2005) makes a similar observation in the context of India's efforts after the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004. Here India took a lead role, but also allowed the UN to assist in overall coordination. Price suggests that the positive experience in this instance may also help shift Indian opinion towards a more favourable view of multilateral frameworks for development assistance. India may thus become more open to international collaborations even when they include large wealthy countries, provided that it is a true partnership and not simply the recreation of traditional hierarchical arrangements. India seems even more open to collaborating with peers, as illustrated with the India–Brazil–South Africa (IBSA) arrangement, an initiative in which the three countries discuss common political and sectoral approaches, and collaborate on jointly financed projects through the IBSA Fund for Alleviation of Poverty and Hunger (IBSA 2012).

Brazil has been much less reticent to work with other donors. Triangular partnerships with a traditional donor and a recipient are common for Brazil. Vaz and Inoue (2008) provide several examples of Brazil partnering with Japan, Germany and the United Kingdom. Though less reticent, Brazil remains wary of such arrangements, and takes care to ensure that it is not simply playing a supplementary and subordinate role to a 'senior' donor. Despite its apparent greater openness to collaboration, there is little evidence that such arrangements constitute a significant component of its development assistance activity. Burges (2011) suggests that part of the problem is administrative incompatibility between Brazil's assistance programmes and DAC procedures, a situation that persists despite years of Brazilian–DAC discussions. In a wider context, however, Brazil is much more willing to participate in larger multilateral arrangements, where power imbalances are more diluted. A study of Brazilian development assistance by the Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada (IPEA) and ABC indicate that roughly three-quarters of Brazilian aid flows through established multilateral channels.¹⁹

¹⁹ Whilst Hochstetler (2012) is the immediate source of this citation, I thank an anonymous referee for identifying the original IPEA–ABC study.

Like Brazil, South Africa also seems reasonably open to trilateral arrangements and other forms of collaboration (Braude et al 2008). Most cooperation is with another established bilateral donor, often from Europe. Multilateral collaboration is rare. Rather than see these arrangements as diluting its policy autonomy, the South African government seems to see such efforts as useful ways to leverage its own limited resources to scale up development projects and as a means of maintaining engagement with other donors (including some who provide assistance to South Africa itself). In addition trilateral arrangements appear to provide South Africa with a visible role in the projects while minimizing the risk that it will be seen as attempting to dominate African affairs. Given its general comfort with cooperation it is not surprising that participation in programmes such as IBSA is also being pursued, as that is more clearly a collaboration of equal peers.

As with other aspects of development assistance programming, Russia seems reasonably comfortable working with multilateral arrangements. At the other extreme is China, which seems far more hesitant to operate in collective arrangements unless, perhaps, it can clearly play a major role in a smaller regional group. The other BRICS countries appear to lie between these two extremes, balancing in different ways their desire for programme effectiveness and international respectability with their concerns about having to subordinate their policies to the practices of more powerful states.

A BRICS bloc?

It is easy to say that the BRICS are not a bloc that will challenge the DAC. The evidence presented here makes it clear that Russia's approach to development assistance is often quite distinct from the other emerging donors'. Indeed the increasing tendency for Russia to align its views with those of its G8 and European peers has been noted in several areas of foreign policy. Aslund (2010) argues that 'Russia has few common interests with the other BRICs and hardly any with China'. Russia's alignment could be due to its relatively higher income per capita, the dominance of its European cultural roots, or its recent history as a global superpower; understanding which of these processes are relevant is important for our understanding of the emerging donor phenomenon. However, Russia also knows how to protect its own interests, which are often different from its G8 partners'. As a powerful state it can mimic the DAC and abide selectively by its rules without having to abandon its independence. This capacity allows it to follow more traditional approaches to development assistance in conjunction with the DAC while simultaneously pursuing alternative objectives in the same way as other BRICS countries.

As important as Russia's clear distinctiveness is the absence of evidence that the remaining four BRICS countries have a common approach to development assistance. Of these four countries, South Africa and Brazil arguably have the most in common in terms of the evolution of their development assistance programs, the accompanying rhetoric, willingness to collaborate and, perhaps willingness to entertain the norms and policies of the DAC. This affinity might be explained by the fact that these two countries are relatively wealthier (per capita) than China and India. They also share a fairly recent history in terms of the emergence

of democratic government and institutions from a more authoritarian and repressive past, and occupy similar regional and global geopolitical statuses.

At the other extreme, China appears to be the most suspicious of traditional aid arrangements and of collaboration, though perhaps no longer dogmatically so. It is also poorer than Brazil and South Africa in per capita terms (though faster growing), and does not share their democratic structures. It can also better assert both regional and global interests with extensive economic and military capability.

In terms of apparent affinities to current aid arrangements, India lies somewhere between China, on the one hand, and Brazil and South Africa, on the other. It exhibits both prickliness with respect to questions of donor hierarchy and pragmatism with respect to collaboration. Interestingly, the proposed explanatory characteristics indicate some interesting variation from the pattern observed so far. India is the poorest of the BRICS countries in per capita terms, and has the longest democratic history of them. However, these characteristics seem to partly cancel each other out: being poorer may increase its concerns about relative donor power and make it more suspicious of any framework dominated by the DAC. At the same time, being democratic provides a degree of political coherence with DAC donor countries, as well as making it subject to domestic political pressures for aid effectiveness and accountability. Its geostrategic status places it clearly between China as an emerging global power and the more regionally focused Brazil and South Africa.

So while the analysis here tentatively suggests some interesting explanations of the diverging relationship of emerging donors to the traditional aid frameworks, there is too little evidence to assign explanatory power to competing factors such as wealth, democracy and geopolitical status. The diversity of these factors, however, along with political traditions and rivalries, suggest that aside from Russia these countries will be slow to engage with the DAC architecture, though they are unlikely to mount a collective challenge to it.

Even if they are not a bloc, however, their presence and collective weight still have important implications for the architecture of development assistance. Though they are signatories to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, their support was qualified by their indication that they were doing so as recipients, not as donors. In a display of foresight and sensitivity, the South Korean government (itself a recent DAC member and thus a valuable bridge between old and new donors) invited the emerging donors to the Fourth High Level Forum (HLF4) on aid effectiveness in Busan in 2011. What emerged was what Kim (2011, 2) describes as 'half success and half failure'. The success stems from simply getting a diverse group of participants at the table, the acknowledgement of the value of South–South cooperation and the promotion of trilateral arrangements as a possible way forward for some development programming. The failures, according to Kim (2011, 2) stem from the fact that the 'Busan Outcome Document is only a resolution which is lower than the declaration reached in Paris', and that Busan led to some potentially problematic revisiting of previously accepted aid principles. Of particular interest is the unsuccessful effort to define more rigorously the concept of aid effectiveness, and the apparent dilution of the pressure to untie aid. The agreement to push for untying aid was a long and difficult battle within the DAC, one that may be revisited in light of the practices of emerging donors.

Final observations

The diversity of emerging donors should prompt us to revisit some of our preconceptions about development assistance. First, development assistance needs to be regarded as a continuum along which better-off nations assist those which are somewhat worse off, and not simply a relationship of giving from very wealthy states to much poorer ones. The emphasis is on relative capacity to provide assistance, and the gap between donor and recipient need not be particularly wide. In fact it might be useful to consider more carefully the idea that international development assistance is simply an extension of the transfer system that exists within nations, communities and families (Noël and Thérien 1995). From this perspective emerging donors should be seen as a normal development rather than an aberration.

Second, viewed along such a continuum, the donor–recipient relationship becomes much more complex and varied. Just as wealthy donors bring many lessons and imperatives to development assistance programmes, so too do poorer and emerging donors. The perspective of poorer donors may be particularly valuable in teaching us how a more balanced donor–recipient relationship may be structured, and how a history of relative poverty and powerlessness might inform the specifics of aid programmes.

Third, the presence of emerging donors highlights the problems of the traditional debate about donor interests and recipient needs. The need for poorer donors to limit the net resource costs of assisting others leads to an emphasis on win–win cooperation, even if that implies that commercial interests will overtly shape development assistance. The purity of motivation is difficult to distinguish for any donor, and one lesson from emerging donors is that perhaps it is not that important either. This observation suggests not that DAC donors should relax their efforts to ensure that their current programmes deliver maximum benefits to poorer countries, but rather that they pursue more robustly trade and investment policies that benefit both sides even if they are not counted under ODA. In fact, a related observation is that the accounting rules for ODA have long since ceased to make much sense from any perspective, and the programming by emerging donors challenges us to rethink the purpose and principles of measuring development assistance in order to ensure that such efforts prioritize good development outcomes ahead of accounting convenience.

A fourth observation is that the presence of relatively poorer donors opens up new opportunities for development assistance partnerships. These donors may be able to provide valuable services as more credible intermediaries between traditional wealthy donors and poorer recipients, as they possess similar experiences and appropriate technologies and policy solutions to share with those still struggling with familiar development impediments. Such trilateral arrangements will provide useful venues for developing donor norms that are more reflective of the experiences of developing countries.

Finally, our current understanding of development assistance is inevitably shaped by the norms that have emerged through institutions such as the DAC and the World Bank. A future with a more vibrant emerging donor community may challenge some of these norms (the measurement of aid, the evaluation of aid effectiveness, the use of policy conditionality, the frameworks for negotiating and administering aid programmes) while reinforcing or converging on others.

Some of these challenges may simply be destructive, cynics might suggest, but there is also a good chance that from these challenges more robust and universal standards of conduct will emerge for the benefit of donor and recipient states alike and, more importantly, for the benefit of the poor.

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