Trilateral Development Cooperation: Power and Politics in Emerging Aid Relationships

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ABSTRACT

Changes are reverberating through the international development system. This article focuses on (re)emerging development actors in the South and their role in setting agendas, challenging current aid orthodoxies, and re-articulating development cooperation relationships between and within the North and South. Specifically, the article examines trilateral development cooperation, a significant new trend in foreign aid. The first aim is to examine the role of trilateral development cooperation in the changing geographies of development and global partnerships. The second aim is to foreground and critically evaluate the politics of trilateral development cooperation. The authors argue that trilateral development cooperation has potential to improve aid effectiveness, harness the energies and expertise of southern partners, and reshape development relations in more egalitarian ways. Alternatively, however, it may work to co-opt (re)emerging donors into a depoliticized and ineffective aid system. While this argument has been made by many critics with regard to North–South development relations, the authors also question the projection of shared interests and essentialized developing country identities in relation to the South–South element of trilateral development cooperation. The article concludes by emphasizing the need to extend critical perspectives to all elements of the new development partnerships emerging within a rapidly changing global landscape.

INTRODUCTION

The world is becoming increasingly multipolar in terms of the distribution of economic growth and market dynamism, and in both the nature and balance of global power (Broadman, 2007; Kaplinsky, 2005; Nye, 2011; World Bank, 2011). The recent superseding of the G8 by the G20[1] as the premier forum for international economic debate and decision making, for

1. The G8 comprises Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, UK and US. The G20 adds South Africa, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, China, South Korea, India, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the EU and Australia.

example, is a development that Kloke-Lesch and Gleichmann (2010: 13) suggest 'may turn out to be as significant as the collapse of the Berlin Wall' in ushering in a 'new global epoch'. While most analyses of the emerging powers focus on trade, finance, energy, resources, diplomatic relations and military capacity, changes are also reverberating through the international development system (Davies, 2010; Kharas et al., 2011; Manning, 2006; Mawdsley, 2012a; Mohan and Power, 2008; Woods, 2008).

The (re)emerging development actors (a term we discuss below) and recipient (or 'partner') countries are playing an increasingly significant role in setting agendas, challenging current aid orthodoxies, and re-articulating development cooperation relationships between and within the 'North' and 'South' (PCPP, 2011). Voting shares within the Bretton Woods Institutions are being (moderately) adjusted, and new forums are being established within which global aid policy and norms are being renegotiated, challenging the former dominance of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD. The (so-called) 'traditional' donors are responding rapidly to new challenges and opportunities (Kharas et al., 2011; Park, 2011), and in the last five years or so the mainstream official development community — DAC bilaterals and multilaterals — has moved rapidly from neglecting the non-DAC development partners to a far more serious recognition of their potential power and influence. Official discourse is now coloured by respectful discussions of 'new development partnerships'. The global aid architecture is currently being significantly redesigned following agreements at the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, held in Busan, Korea in November 2011 (Mawdsley et al., forthcoming; OECD-DAC, 2012a, 2012b). However, as Woods (2011) cautions, while hegemonic institutions like the DAC, World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are certainly conceding ground, there are still questions about how far this translates in substance or represents a genuine shift in attitudes, assumptions and power.

Trilateral development cooperation (TDC) has emerged against this backdrop of change. This is a development relationship in which a DAC donor and/or multilateral agency (e.g. Japan, Germany or the United Nations Development Programme) 'partners' with a so-called 'pivotal' country (e.g. Brazil, Thailand or South Africa) to work with a third 'partner' (recipient) country (e.g. Ghana, Laos or Mozambique). Earlier lineages can be traced back at least to the 1980s (Wai, 1982), but in the last five years or so interest in TDC has accelerated. As a relatively new departure within international development, TDC has only recently been subject to critical analysis,[2] and detailed, empirically-based analyses remain scarce. In particular, there is limited evidence on its impact and value from the recipient country's perspective (Cabral and Weinstock, 2010), and whether or not it functions as an effective 'partnership'. In addition, the strategic and political motivations

2. See, e.g., Abdenur (2007); AECID (2010); Altenburg and Weikert (2007); Chahoud (2008); Fordelone (2009); Kumar (2008); Mehta and Nanda (2005).

of the different actors — northern, pivotal and recipient — are still poorly understood. A report on EU involvement in TDC states: '[A] key problem of assessing triangular cooperation . . . is the lack of available data and limited exchange among Member States . . . [O]nly incomplete third-source and ad hoc information is currently available' (AECID, 2010: 6).

This article reviews and analyses the current TDC literature with two aims. The first is to examine TDC as a key expression of the changing geographies of 'global development partnerships' (as they are referred to in the dominant discourse). The second aim is to foreground and critically evaluate the politics of TDC. Despite a vibrant sense that global development governance is under significant pressure to reflect the changing nature and distribution of power, TDC may in some ways re-inscribe North–South hierarchies. Furthermore, we suggest that the South–South dimension of the relationship is frequently constructed in depoliticized and essentialist terms, presenting a 'natural' congruity between very different southern states. Policy-oriented analyses of TDC are generally reluctant to confront explicitly the inherently political nature of 'development' and the uneven power relations between different actors enrolled within it. The depoliticization of development, and assertion of supposedly universal norms and values, has long been identified by critics in relation to much mainstream North–South development (e.g. Escobar, 1995; Eyben, 2006; Kapoor, 2008; Li, 2007; McEwan, 2009; Mosse, 2005). We extend these insights to TDC, and argue that critical theorists of foreign aid now confront power relations that are working through a more diverse set of actors within an increasingly complex 'development' arena. Given the limited empirical base, this article can only be suggestive of political and power differentials, and we recognize that the enormous variation in actors, contexts, procedures and projects means that TDC is likely to play out in a wide variety of ways. However, the perspectives developed here are essential to a more nuanced and critical appreciation of TDC, and of the increasingly heterogeneous and pluralizing development landscape more generally.

THE CHANGING SPATIALITIES OF AID AND DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

The dominant institutions, ideologies and practices of foreign aid are in a state of flux. The credibility of the current aid effectiveness paradigm (which emerged in the late 1990s/early new millennium) is under intense pressure because of the persistence of global poverty, and what will very likely be the high profile and measurable failure to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The reasons for such probable failure are hotly contested (e.g. Hyden, 2008; Vandemoortele, 2011), but many DAC donor governments and publics appear to be increasingly sceptical of the value of aid, while their commitment is also eroded by the impacts of the global financial

crisis. As the aid effectiveness monitoring process has demonstrated, the DAC donors are the furthest from meeting their agreed targets. Perhaps just as important is the growing legitimacy crisis of the global development governance regime. Notwithstanding what is an increasingly pluralistic arena, including South Korea joining the DAC in 2010, and the growing numbers, voice and influence of recipient countries and (re)emerging development partners in the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness and other forums, many view the norms and institutions of the mainstream aid architecture as irredeemably western-dominated (Kondoh et al., 2010; Rhee, 2011; Whitfield, 2008). There is currently intense speculation, debate and negotiation over whether the aid architecture can and/or will bend sufficiently to accommodate these new and alternative actors and perspectives, or whether a more profound rupture is on the horizon (Kharas et al., 2011). However, the terms of this debate often remain centred around a DAC/non-DAC binary, which is then frequently conflated with a simplistic North/South spatial categorization (Gray, 2011; Sidaway, 2012). While this axis certainly remains important, the reality is a more complex landscape of donors and development partners, in which attributes and agendas do not always split along DAC/non-DAC or North/South lines.

The (re)emerging development partners include growing global giants like China and India; regional powers like Brazil, South Africa and Saudi Arabia; rapidly industrializing countries like Thailand and Turkey; and former socialist states, such as Poland, Russia and Vietnam. We refer to these countries as (re)emerging development partners to acknowledge that while some are embarking upon development assistance programmes for the first time, others have long histories of international development cooperation (often simultaneously as recipients of development assistance), in some cases dating back to the 1950s (Mawdsley, 2012a). Moreover, we recognize that the term 'donor' can also be problematic. While countries such as Poland and Saudi Arabia use the language of foreign aid and are comfortable with the label of donor, others such as India firmly reject it because of its associations with what they see as western, paternalistic, hierarchical and neo-colonial models (Six, 2009). Thus, while idioms such as 'development partner' are hallmarks of the mainstream aid system, they are also deployed by the (re)emerging development actors, although with somewhat different resonances and claims. Finally, although space precludes an extensive discussion, we note that 'foreign aid' is not synonymous with 'development cooperation', which is a term preferred by many southern development actors. While the latter includes most elements of DAC-defined foreign aid, it usually also refers to a wider set of development partnerships and practices often more closely integrated with trade, investment and geopolitical interests, and sometimes situated within very different ideological and discursive frameworks to foreign aid (Bräutigam, 2009; Mawdsley, 2012b; Saidi and Wolf, 2011; Tan-Mullins et al., 2010).

The visibility, presence and impacts of this diverse set of actors have grown sharply over the last few years. As a result, they have gone from being almost entirely neglected within western-dominated analyses of foreign aid and development (except as recipients), to being a subject of intense interest and analysis in academic, media and policy circles. Many commentators express concerns that the fragile gains made by the 'mainstream' aid community in recent years towards good governance, aid effectiveness and poverty reduction will be undermined by these (so-called) 'new' actors, even as they also acknowledge the more positive contributions that the 'non-DAC' actors might make (Manning, 2006). Other commentators are more hostile, raising the spectre of 'rogue' donors, such as China, Cuba, Iran and Venezuela pursuing sinister agendas with the help of 'toxic' aid (Naim, 2007). Others view the fracturing of the western-dominated aid cartel in a positive light; here the (re)emerging donors and development partners ought to be instrumental in rebalancing global development governance, offering recipient nations greater choices in their sources of financing and assistance, as well as demonstrating alternative models and approaches to economic growth and development (Kondoh et al., 2010; Park, 2011; Rhee, 2011).

DAC donor states, multilaterals and civil society organizations have begun to acknowledge the emerging powers as development actors and adjust to their growing influence and potential implications (e.g. Glennie, 2011; Mitchell, 2011; Scott et al., 2010). Recent years have witnessed a host of initiatives within the G8/G20, the UN, the World Bank and IMF, the EU and the DAC to engage with these countries (Fues and Wolff, 2010). Outcomes include the creation of new institutions, such as the Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) by the UN General Assembly (under the auspices of ECOSOC) in 2007. The purpose of the DCF is to act as 'the premier forum' for both donors and recipients (distinguishing it from DAC), in which they can share experience, debate good practice and principles, and encourage peer learning, coherence and aid effectiveness (ECOSOC, 2008). In 2005, DAC declared 'outreach' to the non-DAC donors as a formal policy agenda and, in 2006, under the auspices of the Russian Presidency, the G8, OECD and World Bank held a conference to discuss 'Emerging Donors in the Global Development Community'. Bilateral agencies have also re-appraised their relationships — in 2011, for example, the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) announced a major policy shift in its intent to work with and in the 'emerging powers' (Mitchell, 2011). One of the most important new forums is the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness (WP-EFF). Although originally established in 2003 solely for donors, and still hosted (rather problematically) by the DAC, the WP-EFF has rapidly pluralized into a far more diverse organization within which many recipient countries, (re)emerging donors and civil society organizations are asserting their voice and visibility. Its mandate has been extended until summer of 2012 in order to help facilitate the construction of the — as yet very vaguely

elaborated — new global development partnership (OECD-DAC, 2012a, 2012b).

The focus in this article is on one of the more formalized initiatives currently being tried out, namely trilateral development cooperation. TDC represents one dimension of a fascinating re-articulation of power that is reflective of, and producing, a complex geography of development actors and power relations that goes beyond the two traditional development axes of North–South and South–South. However, whether it works to challenge these essentialist territorial and socio-hierarchical categories is another question.

TRILATERAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

TDC has emerged in recent years as part of the realignment of international aid and development cooperation. 'Triangular' and 'trilateral' development cooperation are often used synonymously, but Rhee (2011) argues that there is an important distinction between them. Triangular development cooperation refers to northern and multilateral support for long-standing and continuing South–South cooperation by 'traditional' partners, often under the auspices of the UN. Trilateral development cooperation, however, refers to a formalized North–South–South development relationship. A variety of international organizations, state and non-state actors can be enrolled, but essentially in this register TDC sets up a project or programme between a DAC donor and/or multilateral agency, partnering with a so-called 'pivotal', 'emerging' or 'anchor' country, to work with a third recipient country.[3] Donor partners can be proactive contributors of resources and expertise (e.g. Germany working with Brazil in Mozambique on quality standards), or take a back seat without directly intervening (e.g. Canada working with South Africa in post-conflict African countries) (TT-SSC, 2011b). The triangular/trilateral distinction is analytically useful, although in practice they are often used interchangeably, and refer to a spectrum of institutional arrangements.

The intention of TDC is to draw on the respective strengths of each partner while promoting new and more pluralized development partnerships. In theory, individual DAC partners and/or multilaterals can offer financial resources, development experience and institutional capacity. Decades of engagement have led to robust institutions, trained personnel, strong

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3. Preparation papers for the HLF4, for example, conflate triangular and trilateral partnerships under the term triangular cooperation (e.g. TT-SSC, 2011a). There is scope for further confusion between TDC and various trilateral initiatives, such as India–Brazil–South Africa (IBSA), which do not involve a northern partner. Although IBSA has a modest formal 'development' remit, it is primarily a political platform (Alden, 2005; Nel and Matthew, 2010).

networks with non-state actors and multilateral institutions, extensive experience of undertaking projects and programmes, as well as familiarity with the norms and requirements of the international development community. For their part, it is expected that the 'pivotal' states can provide goods, services and assistance more cheaply, and in ways that are more appropriate to recipient country settings. The technologies and expertise available are assumed to be cost effective, having been adapted in developing country contexts (Kumar, 2008). Their own experiences of development transition, and often their shared geographies and cultural and linguistic ties, may allow for more efficient and effective delivery of development assistance. For example, Korea and Taiwan argue that their experience of transition to democracy, capitalism and industrial modernity can inform their assistance to other countries 'in transition' (Kim, 2010). Brazil positions itself as a key provider of agricultural technical assistance and social welfare programmes, building on successful domestic experiences in contexts that it can claim to share to some extent with other developing countries (John de Sousa, 2010). Since its own relatively peaceful transformation from apartheid to democratic governance, South Africa has positioned itself as a leader in peace building and post-conflict reconstruction (e.g. in DRC, Lesotho, Burundi, Rwanda, Liberia and Sierra Leone) funded by a range of DAC donor countries (DCIS, 2010). The pivotal states are also expected to benefit through capacity building and learning from northern donors.

Advocates of TDC claim that recipient countries may be able to assert more country ownership and negotiate better development outcomes given the involvement of other southern partners (AECID, 2010; Ashoff, 2010; Schulz, 2010). Although there is a dearth of information regarding the expectations of recipient countries, it might be deduced from their input into the Paris and Accra processes (see below), which promise greater country ownership, that this is one possible motivation for their involvement in TDC. However, claims to better country ownership seem to be the weakest assertion within the policy literature, often falling back on rather limited evidence and platitudes about recipient 'ownership' of development policies and programmes. It may be that development objectives in recipient countries (from poverty reduction, to economic growth, to social protection and so on) are likely to benefit from a more coherent set of relations between different sorts of donors, but there is limited knowledge at present about the benefits of TDC more generally, and particularly of recipient country experiences (Cabral and Weinstock, 2010). This is something to which we return later in this article.

The geographies of TDC reflect the notion of regionally and culturally appropriate partnerships. Most TDC initiatives involve pivotal countries working with beneficiaries/partners within their own region (Fordelone, 2009), such as South Africa, which partners only with other African countries. In other cases, ties embrace wider colonial and post-colonial geographies. Brazil, for example, supports various TDC projects in Latin America

(including in Haiti, Uruguay and Bolivia), but it also partners with Japan, France and Germany, amongst others, to work in Lusophone countries further afield, including Mozambique, Angola and East Timor.

To date, TDC has been premised on claims to a meaningful three-way dialogue that will contribute to the aid effectiveness agenda, centred on the Paris (2005) and Accra (2008) mandates (AECID, 2010). In part a response to criticisms dating back to the 1990s — notably debilitating transaction costs and weak recipient sovereignty and 'ownership' of development (see Whitfield, 2008) — the Paris Declaration sets out a millennial aid paradigm that is in theory centred on recipient country ownership, with developing countries devising their own strategies for poverty reduction, improving institutions and tackling corruption. Donor countries are meant to align themselves behind these objectives, harmonize their activities to simplify procedures and share information, and both developing and donor countries should monitor results. The Accra Agenda for Action further develops the Paris mandate, requiring that donors provide forward information on their planned aid to partner countries; that partner country systems rather than donor country systems be used to deliver aid wherever possible; that conditions on how and when development money is spent be based on the developing country's own development objectives rather than be imposed externally; and that aid should be untied from requirements for the recipient to buy goods and services from the donor.

TDC is seen as a key contributor to the delivery of these aims. The assumption is that by joining forces, and bringing different skills and strengths, the DAC and non-DAC donors can improve aid effectiveness through developing better and more appropriate practices (Pantoja and Elsner, 2009: 4–5), while also facilitating greater dialogue and interaction between the three partners. The Bogota Statement (2010: 1), an outcome of a high-level meeting to discuss enhancing South–South cooperation, affirms TDC as a 'Southern-led process' forming 'a bridge between South–South and North–South cooperation'. TDC thus appears to have the potential to help reconfigure and enrich the system of international development cooperation, which in turn ripples through wider arenas of global power restructuring. As discussed below, initial evidence suggests that, despite this potential, the DAC donor/multilateral usually enjoys the power to initiate such arrangements, to control flows of money and resources, and to hold the other 'partners' to account (Abdenur, 2007; Odén and Wohlgemuth, 2011). However, the aid effectiveness paradigm appears to be giving way to a growing buzz around development effectiveness (Mawdsley et al., forthcoming). While there will certainly be considerable continuities, it is likely that mainstream development norms will move towards a stronger focus on stimulating economic growth and productivity, with a larger role for the private sector, and for development investment flows that are less tightly defined than foreign aid. Therefore, TDC is now enrolled within a rapidly changing geography of international aid in which the industrialized, emerging and low-income

countries are adjusting to and shaping a world witnessing the rise of the emerging powers.

Aid defined as South–South or TDC grew substantially from more than US$ 12 billion (nearly 10 per cent of all aid) in 2006 to US$ 16.2 billion in 2008 (ECOSOC, 2010a: 2), although by far the greater share of this is South–South.[4] Nonetheless, by 2010, sixteen of the twenty-four DAC donors had participated in TDC, with Germany, Japan and Spain having most activities, and countries such as Canada, Ireland and South Korea also developing projects (Schulz, 2010). No systematic or comprehensive data bank of these projects exists, but Fordelone (2009) details over sixty projects involving donors such as the US, Japan, the UK, Germany, France and Spain, as well as the EU and World Bank, working with emerging countries such as Mexico, Singapore, Brazil, South Africa and Chile to deliver projects in recipient countries primarily in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. The projects have focused primarily on creating mechanisms for trilateral cooperation, government and civil society, health, and water and sanitation, but range across development issues to include agriculture, education, forestry, tourism, trade and so forth. Schulz (2010) offers slightly more detail on 110 examples of South–South and trilateral development projects.

The significance of TDC has been stated at numerous G8/G20 meetings. An official statement from the Heiligendamm Process (2009: 4), for example, which started in 2007 as a means of encouraging greater political dialogue between the G8 and the G5,[5] suggests that TDC offers 'an opportunity for enhanced national and regional ownership as well as an increase in the support, harmonization and coordination of peace, security and development efforts of the international community'. Multilateral development banks, UN organizations and southern providers of development cooperation are increasingly using this modality (ECOSOC, 2010a: 26); and TDC was a theme of the 2008 and 2010 UN Development Cooperation Forum meetings (ECOSOC, 2010b), which provide space for more equal debate and discussion between southern and northern donors and recipients. TDC was also listed as one of eight 'Building Blocks' at the 2011 High Level Forum of the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness in Busan.[6] In December 2011, the European Commission announced a new Partnership Instrument (2014–20), which among other things will allow the EU to formally work in partnership with emerging economies in third countries through TDC (European Commission, 2011). It also has the support of the UN, specifically through

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4. Caution should be exercised about these figures — not all TDC projects are recorded as such, and data, definitions and monitoring of non-DAC development cooperation is fraught with difficulties. See Bräutigam (2009) for a forensic analysis of errors in reporting Chinese 'aid', for example.

5. The G5 comprises Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa.

6. http://www.aideffectiveness.org/busanhlf4/en/topics/building-blocks/554.html

the UNDP's Special Unit for South–South Cooperation, which funds TDC projects and provides analysis and policy recommendations.

While TDC is partly a response by northern donors to the rise of southern development partners it also signals a shift by some southern actors in how they position their development cooperation discourses and practices. International development is one arena within which states negotiate their role and identity within the international community of states, while attempting to pursue their interests, both directly, and indirectly by shaping international norms and regulations (Alden et al., 2010). Some non-DAC development partners have moved closer to DAC standards and expectations. For example, South Korea joined DAC in January 2010, although it retains some distinctive features in its development cooperation culture and approach (Chun et al., 2010; Kang et al., 2011; Kim, 2010). Other non-members report to DAC annually, using its definitions and formulations of ODA, including the United Arab Emirates and Turkey (Manning, 2006). These development partners are, in different ways and to different extents, converging with the hegemonic centre of bilateral aid governance, although they also retain some policy space to pursue national interests. Other (re)emerging development actors have chosen to keep more distance from DAC and the dominant (DAC-led) agenda of aid effectiveness. Some countries have signed the Paris Declaration as recipients but not as donors; many do not use DAC definitions of ODA and therefore do not or cannot report to it. A minority of non-DAC donors have no interest in closer collaboration or compliance and, indeed, some (notably Venezuela) actively reject western dominance of the aid and development arena. Others, like China and India, cooperate selectively, but on their terms and with explicitly different discursive constructions of aid and development cooperation (Mawdsley, 2012b).

TDC is just one dimension of these profound changes in the landscape of foreign aid. Most policy analyses (e.g. AECID, 2010; Ashoff, 2010; Fordelone, 2009) are concerned with whether it will be effective in achieving targeted development goals given the range of technical and managerial hurdles it confronts, and whether and how it will act to bring together the traditional and (re)emerging donors and development partners. In the next section we turn in more detail to current evaluations of TDC, and argue for a more critical perspective that addresses the politics and power of its North–South–South relations.

EVALUATING TDC

The existing literature on TDC is almost entirely policy-oriented, seeking to monitor progress, identify hurdles and feed information to stakeholders within national and international official and non-state development institutions and forums (Fordelone, 2009; Schulz, 2010). In this section we briefly

outline and review this literature. We then raise two sets of critical interventions, the first centred on the 'North–South' element of TDC, and the second on the 'South–South' element, noting and critiquing the problematic nature of these territorial constructs.

While there is considerable optimism surrounding TDC, a number of problems have also been identified. Most of these are familiar to development policy makers and professionals struggling to implement the Paris Agenda within the more dominant North–South policies and programmes. They include difficulties in aligning legal frameworks, budgeting and procurement procedures, sectoral priorities, reporting criteria, management structures, monitoring goals and frameworks, as well as the availability of appropriately trained staff. Fordelone (2009) adds that a lack of clarity around the division of roles and responsibilities can create inefficiencies in TDC project implementation. TDC may, therefore, result in even more bureaucratic and administrative complexity within an already highly proliferating sector struggling to achieve harmonization and alignment goals.

These problems are amplified because TDC tends to involve a larger range of actors than either North–South or South–South cooperation, and is often not even restricted to three collaborating agencies or partner institutions. A screening report to the Task Team on South–South Cooperation of existing case studies reveals that some partnerships have involved the collaboration of up to eleven parties (Schulz, 2010). A joint Japan–Brazil pilot project (2007–10), for example, which trained health staff for a hospital in Angola, involved two Angolan counterparts (the Ministry of Health and the hospital), two official Brazilian parties (the official development agency in Brasilia and the Brazilian Embassy in Luanda), three Brazilian universities, Japan's aid headquarters and its offices in South Africa and Brazil (Schulz, 2010: 24).

The novelty of TDC adds a second challenge. Where operational procedures and policy guidelines are not yet formulated, initiating a TDC partnership can be extremely time and resource consuming for all partners (Ashoff, 2009; UNDP, 2009). Fordelone (2009: 7) notes that of the DAC donors involved in TDC, only Spain and Japan have set formal objectives for these partnerships, although others have included TDC as part of their wider strategies to foster regional cooperation. According to Schulz (2010), delays from six to twenty-four months are commonplace in translating the initial agreement into the start of implementation. This is often the case even where donor countries have established national commitments to and experiences of TDC. For example, Spain's partnership in 2009 with Chile to support Paraguay's public sector reform experienced 'more challenges in management, coordination, and implementation than traditional North–South cooperation: the convergence among three countries with distinct management systems, the diversity of stakeholders, the geographic and cultural distances, the uneven horizontality in the relations, and the indecision on the rules of the game' (Schulz, 2010: 24). Furthermore, Fordelone (2009) suggests that the limited scale and scope of TDC initiatives, which usually adopt a project-based

approach, can be problematic in generating duplication of effort, dispersion of resources and incoherence among different initiatives. Finally, there are risks of TDC projects being potentially disconnected from the broader development goals set out by beneficiary countries (OECD, 2005).

These technical/managerial issues inevitably confront very different partners seeking to work together, and are the classic domain of mainstream development professionals and policy makers seeking to reform and improve structures and processes. Such problems were on the agenda at the HLF4, as were proposed technical/managerial solutions — the need for regional and sub-regional platforms to broker demand-driven cooperation, prioritizing long-term initiatives over short-term interventions, and more systematic assessment of transaction costs (TT-SSC, 2011a). However, we suggest that this framing, although progressive in many ways, shares a wider reluctance within the mainstream aid community to acknowledge or confront explicitly the ideological differences about what constitutes 'development' and how to achieve it, and the uneven power relations — not just capacities — between different actors that are common in much of the official, mainstream policy discussion and documentation on development (Hyden, 2008; Rogerson, 2005). The new millennial paradigm with its focus on partnership and country ownership is insistently presented as a consensus. However, critics note that political realities are suppressed in this vision of a technical realm, which relies on an underlying assumption that agents have an agreed set of goals and market-led means to achieve them, encompassed within the liberal framework of the Millennium Development Goals (Dijkstra and Komives, 2011; Hyden, 2008; Rogerson, 2005). The *politics* of development — the interests of particular states, sectors and institutions within donor and recipient countries, the fundamental disagreements over the nature of development and the right route(s) to achieving it, and inequalities of power and agency — are invariably bubbling away below the surface of these debates, meetings and forums, but are rarely formally acknowledged within official documentation and pronouncements. Recipient resistance to donor plans and agendas continues to be framed as a lack of capacity or will (attributed to corruption and narrow power politics). While these are indeed problems that often inhibit aid effectiveness, these explanations do not acknowledge the political nature of aid and development, including within TDC arrangements.

The Paris Agenda treats poverty reduction primarily as a technical issue rather than also an essentially political one (Djikstrata and Komives, 2011). A political frame acknowledges that there is no consensus on defining poverty, why it exists and how best it should be addressed. Governments change as part of the normal democratic process, and so do priorities, personnel and policies. Different civil society organizations, trade unions and social movements may also articulate very different understandings of these key questions. This cultural and political plurality is insufficiently reflected in the Paris Agenda forums and agreements. Thus, notwithstanding the language of partnership, in which stakeholders are consulted about their priorities in

order to ensure country-led strategies, the actual shift in the power to set development agendas has been far more circumscribed (Baaz, 2005; Odén and Wohlgemuth, 2011). Many critical commentators (including BetterAid, 2011; Hyden, 2008) argue that 'participatory' spaces and processes are little more than an exercise in massaging consent, and constitute only a veneer of partnership, beneath which powerful national and international actors define the agenda around their own interests.

The goal of increasing harmonization between donors also insufficiently engages with the fact that donor interests are served through foreign aid, which may act as a brake on coordination efforts (Hyden, 2008). Aid is a foreign policy tool for all countries, although it is operationalized around very different notions of what constitutes desirable goals. The DAC has made significant achievements in developing, promoting and regulating shared norms and standards, but these are based on soft laws (Paulo and Reisen, 2010), and official donors are shaped by their specific national histories, institutional arrangements and political cultures (Lancaster, 2007). Kondoh et al. (2011:6) point out that '[a]lthough DAC is often assumed to be a like-minded group with convergent interests the standardized DAC aid model is neither unequivocally articulated nor shared'.

To date, these critical perspectives on North–South aid relations have largely not been turned upon TDC. What is particularly complex — and interesting — about TDC is that it goes beyond both the traditional aid/development cooperation relationships of North–South and South–South. Although TDC is enrolled within an aid effectiveness agenda that, for the time being, remains western-led, as Kharas et al. (2011) observe, this must be understood as an evolving and reforming process. TDC may indeed increasingly come to constitute a form of development partnership that is able to better reflect the changing realities of power, and it is certainly being positioned as a promising new modality by many southern actors. While supportive of TDC's stated agenda to develop more egalitarian partnerships, the critical approaches outlined above suggest caution must be exercised. In the following sections we develop these arguments around North–South and South–South relations in TDC partnerships.

North–South Relations

Mainstream advocates of TDC suggest that it constitutes a viable and practical means of forging new development partnerships between North and South in genuinely horizontal, respectful relationships. It might not only improve aid effectiveness (the credibility gap), but also help bridge the legitimacy gap of a northern-dominated development regime (Kharas, 2007). However, TDC can also be read as an attempt to protect and replicate older patterns of northern hegemony, with the DAC bilaterals and/or northern-dominated multilaterals setting the agenda while pivotal states act as little

more than cheap contractors, with beneficiaries as passive recipients. A report by UNDP (2009: 157), for example, highlights comments by 'many pivotal and beneficiary countries' that 'donor policy and priorities tend to take precedence over those of partner countries'. It continues: 'one pivotal country mentioned that triangular cooperation projects were often implemented as the result of initiatives originating from donors; when it had put forward a triangular cooperation initiative, the initiative had not been backed by donors and was not carried out' (ibid.).

There is some evidence from early assessments to suggest that DAC members and multilaterals may insufficiently internalize TDC experiences in order to critically reflect on their own development ideologies and practices, or learn from the pivotal and recipient countries (AECID, 2010; Woods, 2008). TDC may well act as a vehicle to co-opt the (re)emerging donors into existing hegemonies of development ideology, policy and practice, without a genuine dialogue about different approaches to development. This would be familiar terrain to many critics of longer-standing North–South development relationships (Whitfield, 2008), and it is notable that to date there are some major absences among potential pivotal states, such as China and India. There is evidence, however, that some pivotal states are able to direct the relationship to some extent. According to Rowlands (2008: 16), Brazil is open to 'trilateral' cooperation, but, 'though less reticent [than China and India], Brazil remains wary of such arrangements, and takes care to ensure that it is not simply re-establishing older hierarchical relations wherein it plays a subordinate role to a traditional donor'.

Similarly, Vaz and Inoue (2007: 17–18) observe that:

> Brazilian officials are concerned that triangular operations might divert the country's assets to priorities other than those pursued by Brazil. They argue that triangular cooperation should not be an avenue for Brazilian organizations to subcontract work in developing countries. For this reason, Brazil is inclined to follow a careful and selective approach to triangular operations, seeking to avoid a replication of traditional North–South international cooperation patterns. The country sees such operations as positive when fair partnerships are developed, and also when ownership by the beneficiary evolves.

Brazil, however, is a very particular case. Its history of development cooperation dates back to the 1960s, its development agency was established in 1987, and it is one of the most vibrant and significant of the emerging powers. While it appears to demonstrate that 'pivotal' development partners can indeed exert some autonomy and agency *vis-à-vis* northern partners within TDC, this would need detailed, empirical analysis of specific projects. It remains open to question whether less powerful pivotal states have the capacity and willingness to exert similar authority and agency.

In terms of the relationship between northern donors and recipient states within TDC arrangements, there seems to be less evidence of change. Despite the presence of a southern pivotal state in the relationship (of which more below), it appears — although policy reports are somewhat vague

on details — that recipient countries are still often subordinated to donor priorities and structures. Ashoff (2009) suggests that the focus of attention and energies within TDC partnerships has largely been on the collaboration between the traditional donor and the pivotal state. This reflects the realpolitik of 'traditional' donor interests in engaging closely with the important emerging powers, since these are the relationships that are deemed to count as the North wakes up to their growing influence and importance. In some cases, pivotal countries may also derive greater prestige and influence from their relationship with richer countries (UNDP, 2009), and focus their priorities and investments in building the 'traditional' donor–pivotal state relationship. Ashoff (2009) suggests that where this is the case, the recipient country cannot take the lead. A joint 2009 Spain–Chile partnership to aid the modernization of the public sector in Paraguay is one example. This was initiated by Spain with Chile, but differences of opinion with Paraguay on the formulation of the project apparently presented difficulties for the latter in taking up leadership (Schulz, 2010).

It appears that, to date, the traditional donors have not prioritized ways of facilitating recipient country leadership within TDC projects. There have been few initiatives to strengthen consultations with recipient countries, or for the TDC donor country or international organization to provide assistance through country offices to help with communications. A UNDP report (2009: 183) cites a single example from Colombia. In short, measures to improve participation by recipient countries have been limited. Following the critical literature on North–South relations discussed above, we suggest that treating the challenges of TDC as technical/managerial problems alone is unlikely to address the problem. The politics of development, at various scales and in various registers, require more explicit acknowledgement.

South–South Relations

The novelty of TDC lies in its attempt to harness together two historically very different — if arguably complementary — forms of development relationship. The hegemonic institutions have historically been rather dismissive of South–South cooperation (SSC). However, South–South cooperation has a distinguished lineage within the Bandung conference, the Non-Aligned Movement, the creation of the G77 and UNCTAD, and the insistence on the autonomy, sovereignty and dignity of the Third World (Alden et al, 2010; Braveboy-Wagner, 2009; Nel and Matthew, 2010). South–South development cooperation (SSDC) is viewed by many as a more egalitarian and progressive set of relationships, based on a 'horizontal process of experience sharing and knowledge co-creation rather than a vertical transfer in traditional North–South relations' (Rhee, 2011: 264). The flows of resources, personnel, expertise and knowledge, it is suggested, are more likely to be appropriately targeted, practical and experience-based, being rooted in

similar socio-political background and development capacities and challenges. For example, local government reform in Lao PDR benefited from the experiences of Vietnam, another post-socialist state, which proved to be more appropriate and effective than those of Japan and other developed countries (Rhee, 2011: 263).

Within TDC, the pivotal states are presented as providing specific expertise, but also closer linguistic and cultural identities, and shared colonial/postcolonial and 'developing' country experiences, affinities and attitudes (ECOSOC, 2010b; Kumar, 2008). However, while these claims are entirely possible and desirable, they need to be subject to the same rigorous enquiry as the assertions of partnership by northern actors. Within the mainstream literature on TDC (and indeed on SSC), the relationship between the pivotal state and the recipient country is sometimes cast as one of a naturalized alliance of mutual understanding. This assumes an essentialized southern identity, which fails to reflect the power and politics of development (Palat, 2008, 2009).

Amongst other things, this assumption neglects the difficulties faced by recipient countries in taking up ownership of TDC projects, despite the presence of southern partners. For example, following what was reported to be a successful knowledge exchange funded in partnership with Japan (2003–08), El Salvador's Vice-Ministry of Housing and Urban Development showed less interest in leading a partnership with Mexico once Japan's involvement ended, although the case study did not elaborate on why this was.[7] In some cases, recipient countries are deeply suspicious of the intentions and impacts of newer southern partners, especially regional hegemons. Brazil and South Africa, for example, both have to confront a degree of reservation, or indeed active hostility, towards their regional weight and power. Their role as donors expands their range of foreign policy tools. This is certainly the case in their bilateral activities, and may also colour the reception of TDC projects amongst their recipients.

Taking the case of South Africa, there are clear economic benefits in providing development assistance to other African countries to promote stability and greater regional integration. It is no coincidence that peacekeeping efforts have been focused in countries, such as DRC, in which South African companies had prior operations (Braude et al., 2008: 13). TDC enables South Africa to play an increasing role in the continent while lowering the costs of engagement. Post-conflict assistance in countries such as DRC, Burundi and Sudan has often been followed by commercial flows. Peacekeeping activities

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7. See the full report at http://www.southsouth.org/uploads/pdf/Boosting_SS_Cooperation_in_the_Context_of_Aid_Effectiveness.pdf (accessed 1 November 2011). This lack of detailed analysis is emblematic of much of the current literature on TDC, valuable though these initial mapping exercises are.

create opportunities for more diverse forms of development and commercial activity. Thus:

> South Africa has both the geo-political stature and political will to drive this agenda, and it has the financial, infrastructural and institutional capacity that the rest of the region generally lacks. Its private sector and parastatals have the capacity and desire to be partners in the process, not out of any particular sense of solidarity, but because they see business opportunities from the process that foreign capital does not. (Smith et al., 2006: 29)

For this reason, South Africa's economic pre-eminence raises concerns that its role as a pivotal TDC country will entrench and extend its dominance, with rather less benefit accruing to recipient countries. South Africa's TDC policy of only working with other African beneficiaries reflects the practical value claimed by TDC — the African expertise that South Africa supposedly brings to the relationship — but also a strategic agenda — its hegemonic interest in regional security and integration.

The relationship between TDC and wider foreign policy goals is also apparent in the case of Brazil. Brazil has a substantial impoverished population, but justifies directing resources to other countries by claiming considerable technical expertise in a variety of social, health and agricultural fields, and on a number of other grounds: claiming to be an altruistic regional and global actor; strengthening cultural ties, especially within the community of Portuguese language countries, which in turn helps underwrite trade agreements, technology transfer and diplomatic solidarities; the pursuit of regional leadership within Latin America; and the boost that SSDC and TDC give to Brazil's wider global status, especially in terms of becoming a nodal point in IBSA, the BRICs and the G20 (Abdenur, 2007). But, as Abdenur rightly asks: why TDC? Bilateral relations can be much more easily managed in the national interest than multilateral relations. It appears that, for Brazil, TDC 'constitutes a specific tactic for national self-promotion within a broader strategy of foreign relations' (ibid.: 12). Engagement in and promotion of TDC help consolidate Brazil's place as a pivotal southern country in the international arena. Unlike traditional multilateral channels (e.g. UN peacekeeping), TDC allows Brazil closer engagement and a more visible profile with northern partners and with recipient countries. Because TDC represents something of a break from the 'autarkic rhetoric of leftist developing states in earlier decades' (ibid.) it reflects a new spirit of compromise and collaboration with the traditional powers. In the complex interplay of international politics — at the UN, the WTO and other global forums — this could, arguably, help promote Brazil's global image and reputation with powerful industrialized countries, without sacrificing its southern solidarities or sense of sovereignty. While the various interests and agendas that Brazil pursues within TDC arrangements may align with those of its recipients, and indeed, be effectively achieved, they may also diverge. This is rarely acknowledged within the TDC policy literature — including that emanating from pivotal states.

All donors and development partners pursue geostrategic and commercial interests through foreign aid — this should be neither a contentious point nor masked behind assertions of a depoliticized humanitarian or development mission (although these too are genuine elements amongst the motivations for foreign aid).[8] The real issues centre on whether and which donor interests align with the development needs of recipients (donor interests can include peace or privatization, improved gender education or supporting autocratic regimes), and on what trade-offs and compromises are made when they do not. Assuming a congruence of interests simply because two states are deemed to be 'developing' is naïve (Prashad, 2007). Moreover, power and politics operate not only at this geopolitical scale, but in the micro-practices and local scales of development on the ground. Taela (2011) is one of a few scholars to have conducted ethnographically-based work on TDC partnerships (see also Constantine and Shankland, n.d.). She found that Brazilian development workers in Mozambique were by no means exempt from the superior attitudes for which western aid workers are sometimes criticized, and they too experienced differences in culture and understanding with their Mozambican counterparts.

Given that a large number of low-income and (re-emerging) partner countries and 'traditional' donors are expressing a growing interest in TDC, it is becoming increasingly urgent that rigorous, detailed, field-based and intellectually sophisticated research is undertaken to inform policy makers working with bilateral and multilateral agencies, civil society organizations and the private sector. This requires a detailed knowledge of institutions and organizations involved in cooperation, and asking searching questions about who initiates and negotiates the parameters/goals of the projects; what financial, managerial and administrative arrangements are established within and across the different sites of the partnership; what monitoring and evaluation procedures are established, and on whose terms. These types of study remain scarce, but they are vital if we are to understand and respond to a rapidly changing development terrain.

CONCLUSIONS

TDC is in its relatively early days. While various opportunities and challenges are identified in a number of policy and think-tank assessments, almost all commentators agree that there are not yet sufficient data to assess TDC rigorously (AECID, 2010), and despite all the excitement, its novelty and administrative demands may inhibit its rapid expansion. In theory, TDC has the potential to improve aid effectiveness, harness the energies and expertise of southern partners, and challenge the complacency of

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8. Being 'political' does not necessarily make aid ineffective, just as being 'ethical' does not make aid effective. For that matter, being 'effective' does not mean that aid is virtuous.

northern donors. A great deal of support and impetus seems to be coming from the South and, while there is currently a dearth of critical academic analyses, interestingly much of what does exist is a product of southern research (TT-SSC, 2011b: 4). Fordelone (2009: 1) concludes that TDC works best when beneficiary countries 'participate actively in and have ownership over projects/programmes', when providers of 'South–South cooperation and DAC donors align to beneficiary countries' development priorities', and when 'partners divide responsibilities based on their area of expertise, so as to make best use of their comparative advantage'. Existing analyses, such as those by Fordelone (2009) and Schulz (2010), are unable to draw a clear conclusion about whether TDC is generally more cost effective, and note that transaction costs (the administrative burden of managing aid relations, which tend to fall especially heavily on strained poorer country bureaucracies), may actually rise given the expanded partnerships.

Much of the policy writing on aid and development, including that relating to the (re)emerging donors and TDC, overlooks the politics of development. Recipient countries are expected to 'actively participate', but experience suggests that this must be within the parameters and expectations of donors. Both sets of donors are meant to 'align with beneficiary country national priorities', but this constructs the nation unproblematically as sharing interests, despite the fact that consumers do not always share the same concerns as employees, informal workers may clash with unionized workers, the rich and poor have different interests, and different ideas about what constitutes development abound (Palat, 2008, 2009; Prashad, 2007; Ssewakiryanga, 2011). It also assumes that development cooperation is fundamentally designed to be a tool of development. While this is indeed a genuine desire for many in the field, to exclude the various ways in which cooperation also acts as a foreign policy tool (including commercial and geostrategic extension) is disingenuous. The harmonization and alignment process has, as yet, done little to formally acknowledge or tackle this uncomfortable truth in the case of North–South flows (Hyden, 2008), and the same can largely be said of analyses of TDC. This contrasts sharply with the noisy debates about the ways in which other (re)emerging donors, such as India and China, openly pursue their national interests through bilateral development cooperation activities.

A key question that emerges from these reflections concerns whether TDC will be a means through which the norms and (mostly) 'soft laws' shaping international development will shift (Paulo and Reisen, 2010). While marking potentially significant transformations in the global development regime, some critics note that most initiatives remain directed at improving aid delivery and are a long way off addressing more structural imbalances in the governance of aid (John de Sousa, 2010). Policy makers in pivotal countries appear to be aware of the danger of TDC domesticating (re)emerging donors to dominant values and interests. While the DAC and many of its members, the UN, and other development organizations talk increasingly

of dialogue, cooperation and even co-learning with the emerging powers (e.g. Mitchell, 2011), the extent to which this language will be internalized, with northern donors reflecting critically on their own development ideologies and practice, and learning from the pivotal and recipient countries, remains to be seen. However, we would extend this critical lens to the South–South dimension of TDC. In some cases pivotal states have an interest in promoting a rather essentialist notion of shared identity, experiences and interests, and expertise in particular technologies or social programmes. While this may well be the case, it can act to obscure equally important power hierarchies, cultural divides and vested interests within and across the South.

Power works through official aid channels (Whitfield, 2008), and it remains to be seen whether the new 'partnership' model of development that encompasses TDC will lead to more egalitarian relations. Continued scrutiny of the role of pivotal states in TDC, as well as the experiences of recipient countries, will enable a fuller assessment of the potential of TDC to reshape global development cooperation such that the latter might work more effectively in the interests of poorer countries and poorer peoples. We argue that this requires a political debate, and not just a technical/managerial discussion, about the contested nature and geography of development and its uneven social and spatial rewards within and across North and South.

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