BEYOND FOREIGN AID IN AFRICA: IS A NEW NARRATIVE EMERGING?

GORAN HYDEN

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

Introduction

Narratives drive politics. Controlling how reality is understood and can be changed gives power and influence over development. For the last four decades African countries have to a large extent lived off the generosity of the international donor community. The cost of doing so has been obvious: the imperative to follow policy prescriptions that have worked elsewhere and for that reason alone have been treated as relevant and helpful also for Africa. This liberal internationalist approach has been centred on the twin principles of free market and democratic governance. It has served as dominant policy narrative with many governments in Africa embracing it as the way forward. It still has its supporters but the interesting thing about Africa today is that cracks are emerging in this intellectual edifice, thus rendering the narrative less compelling and less attractive. Two factors have been instrumental in causing this apparent change. One is the decline in the role of foreign aid in these countries – especially government-to-government official development assistance (ODA). Foreign aid is still flowing to Africa, but it has changed character and opened the door for new thinking. The second factor is the growing presence in Africa of new actors – new donors that do not insist on policy conditionalities but also many private actors, both investors and charities. The result is that African governments are reconsidering their past development strategies while in search of a fresh move forward. It can be argued that for the first time since the early years of independence, African countries are discovering themselves – what it means to stand on their own legs and taking pride in what they achieve. As part of this self-actualization, the dominant narrative is changing from being "a nation among nations" guided by globally valid norms adopted through such instruments as the United Nations to being "a nation standing alone" driven by a patriotic sense of pride. This paper will trace this change in narrative on the African continent and analyse its implications for its governance and development.

Balance of power shifts in the aid relationship

In the early years of independence, Africans and others shared in the euphoria of independence. There was little scope for a critical perspective. Instead, the general assumption was that now that these countries had gained their independence, they

would control their own way forward. Radical notions of creating a "new personality" and locating development in ideas generated by the Pan-Africanist movement emerged all over the continent. Few of them became reality but in some places like Tanzania they were translated into a socialist ideology emphasizing the need to base national development on a communal philosophy such as *ujamaa*. The interesting thing about the relations with the donors at that time is that they largely accepted the notion of local ownership of development in African countries.

Since those early days, the principles of international development cooperation have evolved through a period of donor control in the last two decades of the 20th century to one of partnership where the ambition has been to balance the concerns and interests of partner countries with the objective of donors to achieve an effective outcome of their aid. Partnership has enhanced the influence of African partner governments in decisions concerning the nature and use of foreign aid in their respective countries. For example, one significant change under the partnership umbrella has been the use of budget support, an instrument that gives partner governments much greater leverage in directing external aid for purpose of meeting national priorities. The partnership principle has stabilized the aid relationship in the last couple of decades, but because it is political rather than legal, its practical application is not without its own controversies (Edgren, 2003). This has become evident especially after the High-Level Meeting in Busan, 2011, where decisions seemed to favour a stronger emphasis on national or local ownership. The question, therefore, is whether African countries are ready for a new phase in which their own initiatives and resources inevitably play a greater role in determining national development. Can they create a new narrative to drive national development beyond foreign aid?

To fully appreciate the dynamics of the aid relationship and where African countries may be heading it is worth examining it a little closer beginning with a sketch of how it has changed over time since the 1960s.

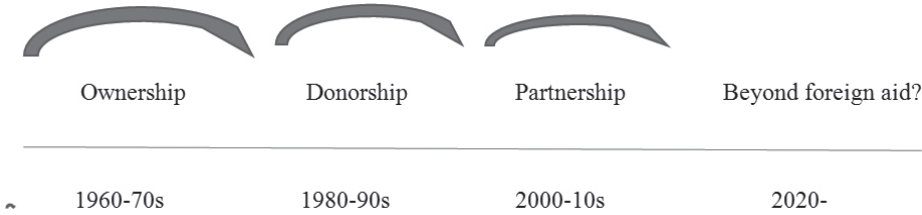| Ownership	Donorship	Partnership	Beyond foreign aid?
1960-70s	1980-90s	2000-10s	2020-

Figure 1. The dynamics of the partnership relations since 1960.

As suggested above, the relationship to date can be divided into three periods. Each has had its dominant theme but has also harboured the seeds of its own demise; hence its dynamic nature. These seeds grow largely from the experience accumulated in each phase.

1960-70s: ownership

In the first two decades, the premise for giving foreign aid was that recipient countries had their basic framework of governance and public institutions in place. The institutional legacy left behind by the colonial powers was deemed appropriate enough to serve the needs of the newly independent states. The role of foreign aid, therefore, was primarily to fill gaps in human and financial resources to enhance the capacity and efficiency of government institutions. For example, expatriates were hired to work as planners and advisors as well as in executive positions such as engineers and doctors to overcome insufficient manpower resources in the partner country. Large numbers of young people were sent for training to acquire managerial and professional skills. In Africa, these efforts were boosted by the euphoria and optimism about the future brought by political independence – a sentiment that was shared not only by locals but also by governments and people elsewhere. Charismatic leaders committed to nation-building and development helped confirm the legitimacy of country ownership. Donors adopted a low profile and without a fixed and finite global agenda of their own, their support was given in response to country-specific five-year plans which, even if they were produced by expatriate consultants, were treated as marks of country ownership. From a partner perspective, these were the "golden years" of ownership. Donors literally had to beg for influence. The 1969 Pearson Commission which made the first official assessment of the partnership relation summarized the situation in the following words:

> The formation and execution of development policies must ultimately be the responsibility of the recipient alone, but the donors have a right to be heard and be informed of major events and decisions (127-28).

In a nutshell, the big difference between then and now is that in the first period donors were expected to support recipients viewed as pursuing the "right" policies while today, recipients are being asked to adopt

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the "right" policies produced by the donors. It is no coincidence that, for example, Tanzania emerged during this period as a donor favourite because it seemed to have in place those "right" factors that would ensure not only aid but also development effectiveness.

The expectations placed on recipient countries, however, proved to be too high. Ownership gradually fell from its high pedestal due to the presence of bureaucratic red-tape, corruption, and other forms of professional ineptitude. Even the "right" policies came into question as the case was with Tanzania's *ujamaa* (e.g., McGillivray et al., 2016). The donor response was to increase their control through such measures as project management structures outside the official government framework. Towards the end of the first phase, the arrow pointed with growing emphasis in the direction of greater donor influence and control.

1980-90s: donorship
The lead publication in this period was the 1981 World Bank report on 'Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa'. It set the tone for the launch of a multitude of *ex ante* conditionalities, first in the form of economic conditions attached to Structural Adjustment, later political conditions attached to a new global "Good Governance" agenda. To the extent that ownership existed at all in the development policy discourse at the time, it was on explicit terms set by the donors. The inequality in the relationship was there for everyone to watch. Among developing country partners, the response was often to play along with the rhetoric of the new reform agenda but stall when it came to implementation. The result was that fundamental reforms of public administration and public enterprises, including the banking system, proved to be largely cosmetic (Jerve, 2002).

As the experience of donorship increasingly turned sour, the idea of a more equal balance in the relationship began to emerge (Nelson, 1996; Maxwell and Riddell, 1998). The first steps were taken already in the 1990s with the introduction of the Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF), followed later by the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). The idea behind these initiatives was to help partners negotiate with donors within a comprehensive policy framework to facilitate the alignment of foreign aid with national priorities. There was also an academic critique of the notion that aid effectiveness – and above all, development in partner countries – would benefit from the application of strict conditions for the disbursement of foreign aid money (e.g., Mkandawire and Olukushi, 1995). Similarly, there was scepticism raised about the extent to which donors would learn fast enough to meaningfully support democratization based on their own good governance agenda (e.g., Carothers, 1999). In short, the balance was tilting in favour of a more equal partnership.

2000-10s: partnership
Fomenting such a relationship has been the primary objective of the third period. It was achieved through a series of international conferences beginning in Monterey,

Mexico in 2002, a meeting devoted to recasting development financing in ways that would foster greater partnership equality. The official declaration of the new aid architecture came at the Second High-Level Forum in Paris in 2005. The Paris Declaration made ownership one of five principles identified as fundamental to making aid more effective. Two follow-up High-Level Forums have been held to assess the progress of implementing the Paris Declaration. At the first of these – in Accra 2008 – a monitoring survey showed that progress had been made – but not enough (OECD, 2008). With specific regard to country ownership it was noted that the following measures were needed: (1) broaden country level policy dialogue on development, (2) strengthen partner capacity to lead and manage development, and (3) strengthen and use country systems to the maximum extent possible. A similar progress report was submitted at the next follow-up meeting in Busan, South Korea, 2011 (OECD, 2011). The Busan Partnership statement again noted the progress made but in attempting to democratize the concept, also expanded it to include non-governmental actors. The most recent follow-up is the 2016 Progress Report (OECD, 2016), which draws on data collected from a record number of low- and middle-income countries, development partners, and a massive number of other actors engaged in development cooperation, and points out that some progress has been made in realizing the Paris Principles, but it has been mixed (OECD, 2016). With specific reference to ownership, the Report points out that there has been little advancement in strengthening and using country systems for public finance management and procurement. A narrow definition of how to pursue results management is part of the reason. Balancing this orientation with the ownership principle has proved to be a hard nut to crack (Nunnenkamp et al., 2016). Somewhat paradoxically according to the OECD report, the most positive news about the promotion of country ownership come from fragile and conflict-affected states as well as small island states where uses of country systems for financial management had advanced most.

Beyond foreign aid: challenges and opportunities
The inclusiveness agenda that has gained prominence with the adoption in 2015 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has broadened the notion of how to assess ownership since it calls on governments to demonstrate how far they involve civil society and other private actors in the policy process. It is difficult to assess how sincere and meaningful government response is on the ground in partner countries but the call for inclusive participation has had the effect of turning ownership into a political matter, not just another tool to implement the Paris Declaration. This democratization of the ownership concept has made it more complex to measure but it has also helped giving partner countries a boost in their relations with the donors. It also strengthens public demands for a development strategy that builds on local resources and skills.

Although some stakeholders have expressed fears that the ownership concept is losing its significance in the implementation of the Busan Partnership (e.g., UK Aid Network, 2013), this paper argues the opposite. Over the next years, ownership

is likely to emerge as a key principle opening the way for countries to choose their own development models and paths – regardless of how they relate to the "right" policies of the donors. There are many factors that point in this direction. Low- and middle-income countries now have more diverse economies in which foreign aid plays a less significant role than in the past. With direct foreign investments coming overwhelmingly from Asia (notably China, South Korea, and Malaysia) and the Middle East (Kuwait, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates), these countries are diversifying their partnership relations. Within the international donor community, they have a growing influence, for instance, in the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness. Furthermore, there is a realization in these circles that reform initiatives rarely succeed unless propelled by national or local actors (Andrews, 2013) and that an emphasis on results-based management is not enough to ensure greater aid effectiveness (Shutt, 2016). These insights have crystallized into a call for "Working with the Grain" (Levy, 2013), i.e., changing institutions from within rather than through imported models. And an evidence-based discussion in the 2017 World Development Report (World Bank, 2017) suggests that if something works and enjoys legitimacy at national or local level, leave it. The new motto, therefore, seems to be: function is more important than form! Against the background of this changing scenario, the rest of this paper will be devoted to discussing the challenges and opportunities that African countries face in an era beyond foreign aid and how these may shape a new African development narrative.

Challenges

The list of challenges is long and can be divided into two categories: substantive and instrumental. The former ranges from climate change to gender equality with many others in-between. These are formidable, but the most critical challenges are still the latter. How well equipped are African countries in taking on these substantive policy challenges? This is the focus here.

The first challenge is that policies are rarely realistic. This is an issue not only in Africa but wherever the promise of a better life prevails, yet it is particularly pronounced there. People's expectations are high that governments deliver on their promises. Politicians realize the need to respond to these expectations in order to stay in power. The international community has added its own pressure by issuing timelines for achieving such complex objectives as "education for all" or "health for all". Little attention has been paid to how such policies can be sustained. Ministerial budgets are insufficient and there is far too much emphasis laid on reaching quantitative targets such as how

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many children are enrolled in primary school education, how many girls graduate from secondary school or how many new school buildings have been completed. This rush to meet unrealistic policy targets has had the effect of reducing the quality of education and health care. Pupils drop out because they realize the limited value of schooling compared to other options. Those who finish school find that they lack the qualifications – in some cases even basic ones – needed for employment. The result has been that a rapidly increasing number of school leavers end up in a frustrating self-employment cycle which is hard to break out of. Even more important is the collective sense of failure that afflicts a country where the potential of the young generation continues to be unrealized. As a nation among nations it is compared to others on a series of indicators that are meant to monitor progress towards democracy and human welfare. Despite faring well on these indicators and an accompanying rhetoric of "Africa rising" in international development circles, the reality of more – not fewer – Africans remains grim.

A second challenge is the limited role of cost-benefit and feasibility criteria in public policy-making. This is not because African governments lack technical and economic expertise but because political leaders generally overrule such criteria in favour of discretionary political considerations. Power trumps rationality. For example, it is not uncommon that personal or party preferences determine allocation of scarce resources without consideration of how it affects the realization of public policy objectives. To be sure, this phenomenon is not an exclusively African challenge, but it tends to be especially pronounced in these countries because demonstrating personal power in public office is an integral part of governance. It is no surprise in this kind of situation policy implementation also suffers. Technical considerations tend to be set aside and bureaucratic rules that typically would apply to a well-functioning public service are bent to serve special interests and thus the production of "club" or community rather than public goods. In short, the government machinery tends to underperform leaving behind an image of government as incompetent or not caring enough.

Yet another challenge is the tendency in so many African countries of marginalizing non-state actors. They may participate in policy consultations but their presence at the table rarely translates into a direct influence on the objectives and content of policy. The relatively open approach to civil society that prevailed in the early years of democratization has since become more confined and in some countries outright oppressive. For example, some have used a State of Emergency law which is justified in the interest of national security but has as its most immediate consequence a slapping down on free speech and association. In other countries, the measures have been more abstruse, yet with the same outcome. In Tanzania the Government has selectively arrested representatives of the political opposition sending a clear message to civil society that it does not overstep its role as "non-political" associations. Civil society organizations that engage in defending and promoting human rights

are among the most likely targets of state oppression. In Burundi recently, a human rights activist, Germain Rukuki, was imprisoned for 32 years charged with having threatened state security by leading an investigation into violence that erupted in conjunction with the country's president, Nkurunziza, seeking a third term as head of state. A Nigerian observer, Abiodun Owolegbon-Raji (2018) summarizes the situation in the following words:

> As with many other aspects of political and economic life on the continent, there is a complexity to African civil society and grassroots activism that escapes the international eye. Civic engagement in Africa has much in common with the West, although there is ultimately one key difference that works to Africa's detriment. Civil society groups in most Western countries can articulate their views in an environment of respect for the physical safety of individuals, tolerance of opposing viewpoints and identities, and commitments to transparency. Their counterparts in the even the freest of African countries cannot say the same.

Opportunities
If the challenges of African countries with a much lesser role for foreign aid tend to lie in the way their political systems are working, the emerging opportunities seem situated in the way that African society is changing. Governance analysis to date has emphasized institutional reforms, initiated and implemented as donor-funded projects or programs. These have largely ignored attention to underlying structural conditions in these countries. As suggested above, however, there is a growing realization even among the donors that institutional reforms lead nowhere if they fail to include a cultural and behavioural change in society. Unlike institutional changes that are treated as possible to accomplish in a short time span, the cultural and behavioural changes that are increasingly being contemplated are slow-moving variables. They take time to mature and need to be driven from the inside – by local "champions" who possess legitimacy as public figures. Even with local champions taking the lead, however, the process may take more than a generation to complete.

The opportunities that will set the parameters for African development in a period of declining foreign aid are already emerging and will crystallize into more permanent structures as the process of social change continues. For African governments, it is necessary to latch on to these opportunities and turn them into positive outcomes. The most important such opportunities that governments must seize are discussed below.

The first is *urbanization*. As suggested above, African countries are exposed to continuous social change but governments are not really in control of the process. Change rather than development characterizes what happens in these countries. Nowhere is this more evident than in Africa's rapidly growing cities. Planning is impossible without substantial loss of capital in the form of houses and other struc-

tures that must be demolished because they stand in the way of an officially approved plan. Correcting this type of spontaneous social change to give room for a more rational solution to urban development is costly yet it must be carried out to pave the way for a modern and workable city environment. This is already taking place in many of Africa's megacities where, for instance, rapid transport systems are being built to ease traffic congestions caused by too few or too narrow streets to cope with increased demands by motorists of all kinds. Dar es Salaam has its *Mwendo Kasi*, a system of special lanes for rapid bus transport. Addis Ababa has a similar system, though rail-based, which allows passengers to move in spacious tram cars. These are just the beginning and other cities are introducing their own improvements by adopting modern road and bridge design. For example, the construction of flyovers at key junctions has become an increasingly popular solution to traffic gridlocks.

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The second opportunity is *the rise of an indigenous professional and commercial middle class*. African countries have since independence relied on a bureaucratic elite that has lacked the ability to drive development because it has been subjected to a form of political rule that has failed to tap its talents. As a result, bureaucrats in Africa have remained an unproductive group in society. The emergence of an elite outside the state with its own vision of the future and a demand of government to serve its interests, African countries are only now beginning to have the social forces to create and drive a national form of development. To be sure, many African economies still rely on foreign companies for capital but with a growing number of local business leaders, their integration into economy and society is a much greater prospect than if they are obliged to work with and through the administrative elite alone. The latter tend to hold a wait-and-see, if not an outright suspicious view of foreign investors while the commercial and professional elite sees them as partners and is willing to engage in a productive give-and-take approach to development. Holding back the growth of the private sector and by extension the rise of this commercial and professional elite outside the state amounts to missing an opportunity for countries to move ahead on their own with declining – and perhaps eventually no foreign aid.

A third opportunity is *youth mobilization*. Like the commercial and professional elite, youths in Africa are increasingly based in the cities. They constitute perhaps the most untapped potential for the future but because of their numbers and lower social and economic position in society, they constitute a complex collective action problem. Situated in the informal sector, young entrepreneurs are more often competitors than collaborators. Although there are examples of youth succeeding in creating companies or cooperatives of their own, the challenge is of such proportion that turning it into an opportunity requires a mobilizational approach. Some countries like Tanzania have created a national youth service in which recruits learn skills that allow them to become employable or ready to start their own business. Others have introduced similar types of youth brigades ensuring that young men and women after graduation from high school can learn productive trades. Many business enterprises participate in these schemes or have their own youth training programmes that help tap the talents of the youth. The same is also the case with many charities that focus on training youth as part of their contribution to national development in African countries. Sustaining and expanding these ventures is necessary in a context where external aid is playing a much less prominent role and the market rather than the government is likely to produce and allocate resources.

The fourth opportunity is *continued democratization*. Efforts to democratize Africa in recent decades have been largely misguided because they have treated the process in terms of projects that need to be monitored and evaluated by outsiders. This has led to an unrealistic rush to institutionalize democratic forms of governance. No country in the world has ever become democratic through such pressure to perform. As suggested above, a true institutional change takes time because it relies on changes in human behaviour and cultural outlooks. It cannot be accelerated through a sole focus on changes in organization and management or constitutional reform. Democratization takes time and it has its ups and downs or advances and backslides. The latter may be a concern in the short run but are often exaggerated as they are not a perennial phenomenon but one that contains their own lessons for moving forward. As it turns out in global perspective, African countries have fared reasonably well although there have been few eye-catching leaps forward. The point, however, is that expectations of what can be accomplished have generally been excessive both among African and foreign observers. Democratization creates its own winners and losers. As such it is a political and contested process, the outcome of which must be settled by stakeholders in these countries. This is how democracy has come about in other regions of the world and there is reason to give African countries the same opportunity to move ahead, learning as it takes two steps forward and often one backward. There is also reason to consider an approach to democratization that does not strive to introduce all aspects of it at one and the same time. European countries, for example, did not become democratic in every respect at one single point in their history. Democracy evolved one aspect at a time. In Sweden, transparency and accountability in public life preceded electoral democracy. Neighbouring countries

followed a similar path. The history of democracy, in other words, demonstrates that the institutionalization of democratic norms tends to become much more solid if the demand for it follows an organic process. As opinion surveys like the Afrobarometer have shown: Africans do indeed want more democracy but their own perception of what it means differs from the indicators that Western democracy experts and analysts have in mind (Bratton, 2010). Through its dominant discourse over the years, Western donors have kept African countries on too short a leash leaving them little scope for trial and error. With donors retreating, the opportunity will no doubt grow for African governments to take the governance issue into their own hands.

A new narrative?

As part of this process of finding their own way, African countries are also likely to recognize that they need to develop a new narrative, one that better represents the status of standing alone. To date, Africa's development challenges have been largely viewed through a nationalist lens. These countries have engaged in nation-building and as members of the international community expectations have been that they adhere to norms and values of a liberal international order. The story of Western foreign aid centres on strengthening these norms and values so that they do to end up in chaos. During the foreign aid regime, there was no alternative except possibly excommunication. African governments were not always in agreement with what they were told to do, but the situation in which they found themselves meant that their acts were reactive. By being treated as cases of charity, their response was often generated out of a sense of inferiority. Political leaders felt that their countries were not given enough respect. They adopted a nationalist approach indicative of the protection of national sovereignty. There is evidence that this tendency to have to "strike from below" is beginning to give way to a fresh approach that is both proactive and imbued with a growing measure of self-confidence rarely seen before. This points to the development of a new narrative that emphasizes patriotism rather than just nationalism, a pride drawn from positive achievements by the countries on their own.

This narrative has been evolving gradually since the early years of this century. It may be hard to identify its precise origin, but one important marker was Thabo Mbeki's speech at the United Nations University in April 1998 on the African Renaissance and especially its follow-up – the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) in 2001 and the accompanying reinvention of African unity in the form of the African Union in 2002. Notable steps more recently include the reformation of the legal regime to enable African countries to earn a larger share of the exploitation of their natural and mineral resources, Tanzania being a case in point. Another involves setting policy priorities that truly reflects strategic visions for the next couple of decades. Yet others centre on the nature of development agenda for these countries. As Kenyan President, Uhuru Kenyatta, told Western government representatives in April 2018 in a dialogue over the nature of political regime in African countries: "We do not want to follow your agenda; we have our own!" In

Ghana, the newly re-elected President, Akuffo Addo, has labelled his development strategy "Beyond foreign aid".

Conclusions

With Western foreign aid playing a less important role in Africa and other actors are making their presence felt, the conditions for development in these countries are changing. The new patterns that emerge are not uniform but can be summarized in a number of challenges and opportunities that African governments and other local stakeholders must consider. In this new context where African governments increasingly demonstrate a readiness to stand on their own feet, a fresh narrative is also emerging. Unlike past narratives it has a distinct patriotic tone and content. There is pride of what Africans can do on their own. This patriotic narrative reflects trends in other regions of the world where politics is becoming increasingly patriotic. The underlying discourse suggests that it is not so much the liberal international order that matters as it is a pragmatic and practical approach to accelerating development through more decisive local initiatives. What is important to African leaders today is that things work, not the form it takes. This obviously leaves the door open to greater diversity in terms of how African governments approach development which includes incorporating lessons from the "developmental state" experience in East Asia. ☀

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