

Ownership in a changing world of development cooperation

Convener:

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From the very onset, ownership has been a fundamental issue of development cooperation: who owns interventions supported by third parties? It seems plausible that partner countries' beneficiaries and society at large should 'own', i.e. commit to, account for, control and profit from intervention goals, measures and results. However, accountability to donor's taxpayers, uncertainty of cooperation outcomes and belief in their concepts and methods makes donors own – in particular: control – interventions as well. Moreover, development cooperation is an arena in which various motives and objectives, both official and implicit, have to be reconciled, which further complicates ownership and its promotion.

Ownership has been debated for long, including as means for aid effectiveness, as aim in itself, or as an antidote for overcoming 'donorship' and paternalism. The concept's vagueness and the political economy of development cooperation have hampered progress. Recent reviews suggest that in key dimensions such as the use of developing countries' own systems e.g. for public planning, finance, monitoring and evaluation, success in ownership promotion as proclaimed in the Paris-Accra-Busan process has been limited at best. It moreover has been de-emphasised in the deliberations of the Global Partnership on Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC).

Recent evolutions in development cooperation have implications for both the understanding of and process of promoting ownership. New donors, approaches and instruments involve new modes of interaction that change the space for ownership. New global powers challenge the established North/South dichotomy, as does the increasing diversification among developing countries, international partners and the types of finance and cooperation processes these offer. The challenge of poverty reduction is likely to further concentrate in fragile states, where the need for effective cooperation and ownership is high yet difficult to promote. Digitisation, Big Data and results-based frameworks of cooperation involve quantification, standardisation and 'technification' of aid that may affect the influence of people on social change. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Paris Accord emphasise cooperation towards global public goods beyond national interests and the need to base cooperation on a broad basis of multi-stakeholder ownership. At the same time, a new tendency to explicitly frame development policy as pursuing mutual interests and increasing instrumentalisation of cooperation with the civil society, its legitimate space increasingly being under pressure in many developing countries, seem to undermine the declared goal of broad-based ownership in development.

The purpose of the panel is to explore how these recent changes in development cooperation affect the promotion of ownership on various levels and in various directions, such as:

Empirically, contributions may shed light for instance on how recent changes manifest themselves, covering different domains of cooperation including international coordination, multilateral aid, bilateral partnerships, policies and programs, modalities and procedures of cooperation, or on the level of local or operational interaction e.g. in dedicated projects.

Conceptually and ethically, papers could address how the issue of ownership and its relation to other key concepts should be conceived of nowadays, considering the above changes and insights of a long history of reflecting development aid.

In practical terms, contributions could address e.g. how ownership may be achieved and promoted more effectively, how ambitions such as multi-stakeholder ownership can be realistically pursued, particularly in light of recent changes.

We welcome contributions on these or related issues; of particular interest is how ownership based on local values and priorities may be brought together with a universal agenda for global development.