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The politics of effectiveness in Canada's international development assistance

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Abstract

Despite promoting innovations in multilateralism and aid, Canadian development assistance often operates in politically instrumental ways and has been criticized as wasteful and ineffective. Aid effectiveness has thus become a central rubric for programming and assessing aid at the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and a primary means for reforming the global aid architecture. The meaning of effectiveness, however, is not straightforward; it refers variously to development progress, operational efficiency and political utility. This article examines CIDA's effectiveness agenda, focusing on the 2009 Food Security Strategy and the geographic concentration of aid in countries of focus. It argues that this agenda is unlikely to resolve longstanding tensions and contradictions related to the politicisation of foreign aid programs, CIDA's place in the Canadian state and the development impact of Canadian aid.

Keywords: foreign aid; effectiveness; development; Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)

Introduction

The debate over aid effectiveness, especially what the term denotes and how best to measure and assess it, has become increasingly central for aid and development institutions. Effective aid is ostensibly the answer to the complex challenges of development in an era of global interconnectedness even though the unclear and sometimes conflicting objectives of aid programs and the fragmented character of the global aid architecture make effectiveness a chimerical goal. In this context, two distinct meanings of effectiveness have become prominent. One pertains to development progress and the material improvement in the quality of life for recipient communities. The other definition refers to the operational goals and the success of aid interventions in relation to donor-driven criteria and standards. A similar pair of distinct but overlapping meanings also exists with respect to the term sustainability and its use by official development agencies. In both cases, aid institutions must develop norms and measures that can contend with tepid public and official support, while accounting for the wide array of partner organisations and institutions through which they operate (Essex 2010). Effectiveness presents, superficially at least, a clear, close-ended, outcome-oriented concept of what aid is and how it should work.

In practice, however, the distinctions between recipient and donor oriented meanings make effectiveness more difficult and perhaps impossible to measure usefully or across institutional and programmatic contexts. Kindornay (2011) identifies the multiple referents and overdetermined character of aid effectiveness, with the term used variously to mean aid institutions' ability to meet their own organisational goals, better policy coherence across government agencies, the success of specific aid interventions and programs and the general success of the development process writ large. Brown likewise identifies two broad usages of the term aid effectiveness, one referring specifically to aid's "ability to produce economic growth ... when combined with the 'right' policies in recipient countries," and the other emphasising "enhanced commitment and cooperation of donors amongst themselves and with recipient countries." While the latter has coalesced into the principles outlined in major international agreements, most notably the Paris Declaration, discussed below, these remain enframed by neoliberal policy prescriptions stressed by the former, which draws strongly on methods and assumptions about economic growth and development drawn from the World Bank (Brown 2011, 471).

This has produced a contradictory geopolitics of aid effectiveness, in which different meanings and practices of effectiveness operate simultaneously across institutional settings at national and international scales, regulated through high-level agreements on appropriate principles and best practices but muddied by domestic political interests and foreign policy objectives within official development assistance (ODA) agencies. Attempts to better and more regularly benchmark and measure aid effectiveness do not necessarily resolve or displace such tensions and contradictions, and in fact can exacerbate them because of the particular politics of aid in specific national contexts. Such emergent practices of effectiveness highlight the distinction between operational and developmental definitions and usages discussed in this paper. Development progress that produces qualitative improvement in the lives of aid recipients may not be measurable or captured by reference to operational and political rubrics and benchmarks. Likewise, setting targets and deadlines, accounting for dollars spent by reference to infrastructure improved or children fed, and providing annual reports to skeptical legislators focused on domestic politics and foreign policy priorities, does not necessarily ensure that aid has effectively produced development progress.

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA; *Agence canadienne de développement international*, ACIDI in French), like many ODA agencies, has made aid effectiveness central to its strategies and programs, and offers an example of how the dual meanings of effectiveness create and reproduce tensions over the politics of aid within development agencies themselves. Examining how CIDA frames processes of development and aid provision around effectiveness offers a basis for critical assessment of the politics of development assistance, and insight into how efforts to articulate and enact principles and practices of aid effectiveness relate to broader political, strategic, and geographical shifts in the global aid architecture. The question for CIDA is whether the current turn toward effectiveness, fraught with conceptual and political slippage, represents a significant and useful institutional and strategic shift for the agency, or just another round of confusion over mission, mandate, and position?

The genealogical analysis provided here emphasizes the different strategic meanings and uses of effectiveness within CIDA, and how these relate both to different long-term political, economic, and developmental objectives around which structures and practices of decision-making are built and oriented, and to short- and medium-term political calculations within those

structures. These are all constructed around geographical knowledge about what effectiveness is, and *where* and *how* it is to be found, measured, and assessed. I begin with an overview of aid effectiveness in relation to CIDA and the agency's current and historical roles in the global aid system, to provide the historical background and geopolitical context for the agency's current emphasis on and articulation of aid effectiveness. I then look at recent thematic and programmatic shifts at CIDA, focusing on the agency's 2009 food security strategy, adopted in response to the 2007-08 global food price crisis, and the associated strategic concentration of bilateral aid in increasingly fewer countries, especially those where Canada has foreign and economic policy interests, and, particularly as emphasised by large budget and personnel cuts announced in April 2012, those states where operating costs are lowest (Sheikh 2012). These demonstrate the extent to which effectiveness is tied to considerations of aid selectivity (i.e., setting criteria for aid allocation), donor-driven policy objectives and the need to demonstrate measurable short-term development success. I conclude by considering what the dual meaning of aid effectiveness might mean for CIDA as an institution in the Canadian state and the global aid architecture.

The effectiveness debate

It should not be surprising that effectiveness has multiple overlapping but distinct usages in the context of development assistance; development itself is a slippery term, and the alignment of donor and recipient interests in allocating and implementing aid is rarely perfect. Debates over aid effectiveness stem partly from concerns over how aid money is spent in seeking such alignment. There is a strong relation between conceptualizations of effectiveness in aid outcomes and partnerships, and accountability in aid management and implementation, a relationship institutionalized through several recent international agreements, declarations, and commitments: the 2000 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the 2002 Monterey Consensus on Financing for Development, the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (PD), the 2008 Accra Agenda for Action (AAA), and most recently the 2011 Busan Partnership Agreement (BPA). The PD in particular articulated a set of objectives, principles, and quantitative indicators for coordinating and measuring international action to improve aid effectiveness, centered on broad themes of developing country ownership (i.e., of national development strategies and planning mechanisms), alignment and harmonization of various actors, plans, and programs in the

development process, a focus on managing for results, and mutual accountability in assessment and information sharing (OECD 2005, 2008; Wood *et al.* 2011). As both Hyden (2008) and Gulrajani (2011, p. 207) point out, the managerial reforms embodied in agreements and benchmarks like those articulated through the PD principles fail to confront the character and imbalances of political and economic power in the global aid architecture, and “tend to simplify highly complex dynamics into numeric indicators that may not capture reality in a reliable, unbiased, parsimonious and meaningful manner.” This results in an approach focused on technical and administrative reform at the expense of a more robust political analysis of the aid system and the numerous partnerships, policy agendas, and power differentials that both drive and inform how international principles and agreements are translated into national policies and practices. While such approaches may demonstrate improved effectiveness in relation to quantitative measurements of aid outcomes and aid institutions’ budgetary and policy performance, they also may exacerbate inequalities in the global aid architecture, between the objects and subjects of development assistance, and in the neoliberalized, crisis-prone system of global political economy that supports and constrains the global aid architecture.

In the Canadian context, CIDA’s own effectiveness agenda has developed in conjunction with international agreements and norms, with a discussion paper in 2001 leading to a policy statement concentrating development policy on effectiveness the following year (CIDA 2001; 2002). The 2002 policy noted that an action plan for aid effectiveness “must address the role of civil society in Canada’s aid program and in development more generally” while also building “a stronger public engagement program on development issues...to buttress CIDA’s programs to improve aid effectiveness and to build support among Canadians for renewed funding for development cooperation” (CIDA 2002, p. 3). Nevertheless, both operational and developmental meanings find currency at CIDA, and have coalesced around a specific set of benchmarking and reporting practices incorporated into CIDA’s programmatic and strategic structure, and solidified under Canada’s 2008 Official Development Assistance Accountability Act (hereafter, the ODA Act). This act requires annual reporting of development assistance activities from relevant federal ministers, placing pressure on CIDA and the Minister of International Cooperation to develop measures and assessments of effectiveness that can be reported in this manner. The principles of effectiveness CIDA (2009a, p. 1) outlines consist of “ownership, alignment, coordination and harmonization, managing for results, and mutual accountability,” which in turn

“provide a reference point for increasing the coherence, impact, and effectiveness of aid efforts.” CIDA’s ability to fulfill these principles is measured against performance benchmarks and indicators drawn from the Paris Declaration. The agency’s 2009-12 action plan also sets out a list of goals, complete with numerical targets and deadlines, though many of these remain vague. The seven action areas identified in the action plan are: focus, efficiency, accountability, predictability, alignment (with local communities and other donors), inclusiveness in stakeholder partnerships, and greater attention to fragile states, with specific mention of Haiti and Afghanistan.

While the principles and action items emphasized in the international arena focus primarily on consultation and inclusion of aid recipients and the poor, accountability in aid management, and greater coordination of aid donors and development efforts, the translation of these principles into national policies for development agencies means that particular political and economic interests shape their enactment. In the case of CIDA, and despite the broadly generalizable principles of effectiveness and reporting in the ODA Act, the agency has had to contend with long- and short-term pressures that make effectiveness as much a function of domestic support for the agency and aid, as of development impacts and outcomes in aid recipient communities. Such domestic political and public support is often tied to aid’s foreign policy instrumentality and domestic partisan politics, as demonstrated in a recent scandal that made CIDA and federal Minister for International Cooperation Bev Oda front-page news in Canada.

The scandal centered on the minister’s initial denial and subsequent admission that a CIDA document recommending renewal of funding for the Canadian NGO KAIROS had been altered. The group’s 35-year relationship with CIDA abruptly ended in 2009, when the agency rejected its application for a four-year renewal of a Cdn\$7.1 million grant for its human rights, sustainability, and gender equality work in the developing countries (Dueck 2011). In December 2010, it was revealed that although senior CIDA staff had in fact recommended renewal of the group’s funding in a widely supported and signed memo, someone had strategically inserted a hand-written “not” in the memo at the last minute, reversing its intent and leading to a denial of funding (Curry and Galloway 2011; Mackrael 2010; *The Globe and Mail* 2011). Following over a year of denials, Oda admitted in February 2011 that she had ordered the handwritten insertion that led to the rejection of KAIROS’ funding request. Prime Minister Stephen Harper strongly

defended his ministers' right to intervene in such funding and decision-making processes (Taber 2011), but comments by other cabinet members indicated that more specific foreign policy concerns, linked to contemporaneous debates over the Harper government's support for Israel and corporate social responsibility in the international mining sector, prompted the denial of KAIROS' CIDA funding (Taber 2011; Berthiaume 2010; Mackrael 2010; Geddes 2011; KAIROS 2011; Barry-Shaw and Jay 2012). In March 2011, the Harper government was found in contempt of Parliament, a first in Canadian history, for not providing information as requested by Parliament and making misleading statements (Ibbitson 2011; Payton 2011).¹ A no-confidence vote followed, but the contempt rulings and Oda's actions failed to sufficiently resonate with Canadian voters, however, as the Harper Conservatives won a majority government and Oda retained both her seat and cabinet position in a May 2011 federal election.

The KAIROS controversy raises questions about CIDA's political position and instrumentality in the Canadian state, its place and role in the global aid architecture, and the relationship between the agency's strategic emphases and decision-making procedures. It provides a high-profile case in which contradictions between different meanings of effectiveness deployed within and through CIDA came to the fore. Developmental and operational meanings cannot be easily or fully disentangled from one another, as they are both situated in CIDA's institutional materiality as a state agency charged with promoting development abroad and managing a portfolio subject to foreign policy pressures and domestic political interests. The next section examines the historical development of aid effectiveness at CIDA in terms of CIDA's unsure political position in the Canadian state and its place within the global aid architecture, and the impacts of recent global economic, energy, and food crises. These focal points highlight the path of effectiveness as a strategic discourse within CIDA, and how efforts to improve aid effectiveness relate to the articulation of Canadian foreign and economic policy interests through CIDA.

A short history of effectiveness at CIDA

Canadian development policy has long prioritised multilateralism, limited conditionalities on aid provision, and the mutual interests of Canada and developing states. These were outlined

¹ While the KAIROS scandal resulted in one contempt ruling, a simultaneous second ruling by the Speaker of the House of Commons found the government had also breached privilege by not providing information on cost estimates related to anti-crime bills (Payton 2011).

in the 1975-1980 *Strategy for International Development Cooperation* and have been cornerstones of Canadian development policy since. At the same time, this strategic track has both overlapped and conflicted with foreign policy priorities and economic interests, with the 1975 landmark strategy noting that aid could and should produce “catalytic and positive effects on the Canadian economy” (CIDA 1975, p. 14). Within the broad strategic effort to make aid simultaneously an instrument of Canadian generosity, Canadian multilateralism, and Canadian national interest, individual governments have also attempted to instrumentalize aid policy to achieve distinct short-term goals, most notably enhancing Canada’s international prestige and standing and strengthening commercial ties (Brown 2011). The intertwining of humanitarian, developmental, economic, and geopolitical objectives and concerns is not unique to CIDA, of course, and conflicting goals and interests in the strategic management of development aid lie at the root of the effectiveness debate, not just in Canada but across the global aid architecture. CIDA and the Canadian government have for the most part “taken cues from the general international development trends proffered by the [OECD]” and sought harmonization of aid strategies and policies with other donor countries, including when it comes to recent efforts to reform aid through efforts at improving effectiveness (Lalonde 2009, p. 147).

Yet CIDA has attempted major institutional and policy reform under the guise of effectiveness many times before, as previous efforts to restructure and reorient Canadian development assistance and humanitarian efforts built from similar concerns over accountability, selectivity, and outcomes. Agency files available through Library and Archives Canada (LAC) document a history of attempts to improve aid effectiveness through eligibility and selectivity policies.² An undated document (circa 1980) provides a discussion of eligibility policies in Canadian aid provision, aimed at developing “a framework for country eligibility for bilateral development assistance which takes into account Canadian foreign policy interests and developmental, commercial, political, humanitarian, security and other concerns,” and which would guide aid allocation and budget management (LAC n.d., p. 1). This draft policy document noted that, as the bilateral aid program expanded geographically in the 1950s and 1960s, the

² Documents cited here as LAC were found in boxes of agency material held by Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa. Several dozen boxes provided to LAC by CIDA had not yet been fully catalogued or provided permanent accession numbers when ATIP requests were submitted in July 2010. The boxes contained hundreds of file folders that held memos, letters, emails, strategy papers in draft and final format, information on evaluation and assessment of programs, and background material used by CIDA in crafting plans, policies, and programs. Citations provide archival record information used in obtaining access to the files in summer and fall 2010.

agency was forced to make strategic changes related to concerns with effectiveness, including focusing more strongly on eligibility criteria and aid selectivity. A 1966 federal Cabinet decision outlined the strategic principle of channeling aid “largely to countries where *major Canadian interests* were involved and where such assistance would clearly *contribute to the effectiveness of development efforts*” (quoted in LAC n.d., p. 5, emphasis in original). This policy also attempted an 80/20 split of bilateral aid, with 80 percent reserved for “countries of focus” designated by the Cabinet, while phasing out “marginal” aid programs; the draft report highlighted, however, that “[n]either the selection process for countries of concentration nor the basis for the decision for an 80/20 apportionment was made clear” (LAC n.d., p. 5). A major internal foreign policy review in 1970 articulated aid selection criteria more clearly, reiterating the goal of concentrating 80 percent of bilateral aid in selected countries and sectors to specialize and improve aid effectiveness and impact, a goal reinforced in the 1975 strategy (CIDA 1975).

Efforts to more clearly define and measure effectiveness followed throughout the next two decades. An appendix (Annex V) to the early 1980s policy document referenced above outlines four broad eligibility indicators: ‘Need’, ‘Effort’, ‘Relations with Canada: political’, and ‘Relations with Canada: economic/commercial’. Each is composed of several secondary criteria and accorded percentage weights to help create measurable, objective indicators to determine a country’s eligibility for Canadian aid. While the whole process was underwritten by concerns over developmental and operational effectiveness, the potential and specific effectiveness of aid intervention was weighted at 20 percent, and listed as a sub-criterion of “Effort,” defined as a country’s social and economic effort to develop. The relatively low weight accorded to aid’s effectiveness potential was due to the need for “a *subjective* assessment by officials” in determining “the prospects of our reaching target groups within recipient countries” (LAC n.d., Annex V, p. 3, emphasis in original). Although this posed a complex question for CIDA, with effectiveness difficult to measure in any objective sense, the agency continued to devise definitions and measures of effectiveness that could be used to plan aid allocation and structure development policy.

A draft 1983 review of the international food aid system and Canadian concerns over its structure, operation, and effectiveness, for example, included a brief sketch of what “results” and “effectiveness” might mean in reasserting and protecting Canadian interests in the aid system. This draft defined aid results largely in developmental terms, including economic and political

aspects, while effectiveness was seen as twofold: needed “for its own sake,” especially the “effective functioning of the UN Development System,” but also necessary “to retain public support for multilateralism in general, and the international food and agriculture agencies in particular” (LAC 1983, p. 1). Canadian concern with the global aid system at this time centered on its failure to eradicate or ameliorate hunger, and whether such failure resulted from internal ineffectiveness. The review specifically highlighted the need for more attention to the links between mandates, priorities, strategies, accountability mechanisms, and “efficiency in program delivery”, as well as inter-institutional coordination and resource levels (LAC 1983, p. 2).

By the late 1980s, the process of constructing and assessing eligibility criteria turned more fully toward precise quantification, resulting in a classification of countries based on the amount and intensity of Canadian aid provided, and an “aid eligibility scorecard” for potential aid recipients. A 1990 ranking exercise for Anglophone African states, for example, highlighted five “Level I” categories for measuring eligibility, each divided into several “Level II” subcategories (LAC 1990, p. 1). Each subcategory was weighted and scored, with a potential total of 100 points, though the actual allocation of aid was also shaped by efforts to distribute funding across world regions and within Commonwealth and La Francophonie countries. In this scoring exercise, “Development need” was the most heavily weighted category (30 points), followed by “Good economic management” and “Political/commercial/foreign policy” (20 points each), and finally “Good governance” and “Development commitment” (15 points each). In the 1990 Anglophone Africa ranking, Tanzania scored highest at 63, with several countries falling below 50, and Liberia lowest at 27 (LAC 1990, pp. 1-4). While it is unclear whether or how CIDA continues to use such precise scoring mechanisms, such past invocations of effectiveness demonstrate a long institutional history of using aid selectivity to achieve effectiveness, and constructing mechanisms for “objectively” measuring and assessing particular functional characteristics of aid-eligible countries. The most recent attempt to concentrate resources in a smaller set of countries, discussed below, extends CIDA’s attempts to use geographic concentration to achieve effectiveness, reproduces a strong methodological nationalism in development and aid policy, and maintains foreign policy interests and economic relations with Canada (especially the potential for market development and trade relations) as central components of aid selectivity and policy formulation.

If CIDA has generally pursued effectiveness through technical and functional efforts at quantification and measurement, more recent discussions also have confronted the links between development strategies, funding decision procedures, and relations with other institutional partners. The KAIROS scandal discussed above, for example, raises serious questions for CIDA and its partners about whether and to what extent funding decisions are to be made according to criteria related to development progress and program quality, or to political expediency and strategy (Berthiaume 2010). This political instrumentality is partly linked to new disbursement mechanisms for development aid, in which “CIDA shifted to a competitive bidding process where it sets the agenda and puts out a call for tenders,” and NGOs then put in competitive bids to fill these (Dueck 2011). This method, common at the much larger US Agency for International Development (USAID), was not the norm at CIDA, which typically received funding proposals from NGOs and their partners in developing countries, who were thus allowed to set the development agenda from the local scale. The shift to a competitive bidding process, coupled with a narrowed set of strategic priorities and locations, is meant to build effectiveness and accountability into aid allocation and management processes, but NGOs fear this may politicize their relationship with CIDA in a negative manner and restrict the flexibility of both aid funding and partners in the Global South. Critics also contend that politicizing the aid funding process poses an institutional roadblock that would make it practically impossible to effectively scrutinize every single project to determine its political alignment with the sitting government’s specific objectives (Berthiaume 2010; CCIC 2010; Tomlinson 2010). This highlights concerns internal to the Canadian state that CIDA’s aid and development programs work at cross-purposes with the Canadian national interest and foreign policy, and reflects the desire of the current Conservative government to put its stamp on CIDA and development policy.

CIDA’s current effectiveness agenda also must be placed in the context of recent and ongoing global financial, fuel, and food crises. These combined crises exacerbated already existing poverty and vulnerability, and threw sharp light on the inability of billions of aid dollars, both public and private, to provide a cushion against global economic volatility or to promote sustainable development that could withstand macro-scale shocks. Most directly affecting the poor across the Global South was the 2007-08 food crisis, which saw prices for basic commodities such as rice and cooking oil reach historic highs, and revealed complex connections between global food and other commodities markets, financial speculation and food prices, and

the agroecological costs of oil-dependent agricultural industrialization (Weis 2007; FAO 2009; Jarosz 2009; McMichael 2009; Nellesmann *et al.* 2009; Maxwell *et al.* 2010; Timmer 2010). It also starkly demonstrated what critics had argued for years about the global aid architecture: it was largely ineffective when confronted with cycles of global volatility, that it worked at a glacial pace in terms of real and thorough strategic change, and that domestic policies and geopolitical considerations often prevented adoption of best practices and silenced critical voices. In the wake of these crises (and with food prices rising again throughout 2011 and into 2012), development institutions like CIDA feel heightened political pressure to become, or at least appear, more effective, and the agency's recent initiatives and priorities are in part the result of these crises.

Recent strategic shifts at CIDA

Accordingly, CIDA (2011b) announced three new strategic priorities in late 2009: increasing food security, improving conditions for children and youth, and (most broadly) building sustainable economic growth. These are all directly concerned with aid effectiveness, and aim to re-orient and streamline aid decision-making while defining effectiveness in relation to CIDA's institutional mandate and capabilities. Analyses of CIDA have emphasized the fluidity and precariousness of the agency's position, as different Canadian governments have deployed CIDA's resources in the pursuit of international prestige and various foreign policy goals, sought to reduce, shift, or even cut development aid, and placed pressure on the agency to conform to political and state projects entirely unrelated to aid or development (Morrison 1998; Pratt 1999; Brown 2007, 2008, 2011; Brown *et al.* 2009; Lalonde 2009; Carin and Smith 2010). Despite this, CIDA and Canadian development policy have enjoyed a reputation in the global aid architecture for innovation and attention to recipient and partner needs, even though, as noted, Canadian aid and development policy have generally followed the international lead.

In this respect, the agency's effectiveness agenda as reflected in its three new priority areas represents a somewhat paradoxical institutional turn, which must be viewed in relation to the crisis of development aid that has occurred around tensions and contradictions in what Ananya Roy (2010) labels a moment of "millennial development," and made more acute by recent global crises. The shift from aid strategies built on bottom-up responsiveness to local and national scale partners in developing countries (with the caveat that this has never been as rosy

and equal a partnership as presented by CIDA or its contracting partners) to one developed and organized at the global scale through international workshops, conferences, and agreements specifically on effectiveness, demonstrates the power of effectiveness as a globalizing discourse and set of practices, as well as the limits of effectiveness when set against neoliberal globalization and the particularities of national context. It suggests that aid in general possesses a track record of *ineffectiveness*, and that global agreements on principles and actions, which are then downloaded to multilateral and national development aid strategies and institutions, constitute a necessary and reliable means of defining and ensuring aid effectiveness. This reinforces a methodological nationalism reliant on state-centric models of development and aid planning, while producing and reproducing a global-scale space of international norm articulation that is potentially at odds with the needs and demands of localized actors and settings. The Accra Agenda, Paris Declaration, and Busan Partnership Agreement themselves are products, reflections, and active embodiments of a managerial regime of aid reform that encourages institutional scaling up and international alignment, harmonization across country-level plans, and technocratic approaches to partnership, accountability, and measurement.

The translation of such international agreements into an aid effectiveness agenda specific to Canada has already been detailed. I now examine how CIDA has put this into practice with respect to its most recent strategic priorities, especially the 2009 food security strategy. The food security strategy in particular demonstrates how CIDA has attempted to enact its effectiveness agenda in relation to a specific development challenge, one made worse by the 2007-08 food price crisis and its lingering effects. The prioritization of food security, as well as women and children, must not be seen as simple responses to urgent and overlapping global crises that threatened and reversed development progress made over the last two decades, but also as part of a wide-ranging emphasis on integration into globalizing circuits of capital, expertise, and policy embodied in CIDA's sustainable economic growth priority. The latter provides a more overarching but highly generalized and not especially novel framework for agency action, offering a laundry list of action areas and expected outcomes centered on global market integration, small and medium sized enterprises, and skills acquisition for the poor (CIDA 2010c). This synthesizes and rehashes mainstream neoliberal discussions of development and developing countries' economic performance: the need for greater accountability and transparency from governments; the importance of innovation, investment, and trade openness;

the crucial roles played by entrepreneurs, competition, and commodified knowledge in a global economy; and improvement of access to credit and other financial services for the poor. Within this mash of recent agency priorities, two approaches meant to ensure and improve effectiveness, but which also highlight and exacerbate tensions between developmental and operational meanings of effectiveness, stand out: first, the targeting of Canadian bilateral aid on specific sectors and social constituencies, and second, the strategic concentration of Canadian aid resources in an increasingly smaller number of countries. A closer look at the food security strategy and the “countries of focus” designation demonstrates this.

The 2009 Food Security Strategy

CIDA’s new food security strategy emphasizes setting targets against which aid outcomes can be measured to determine maximum effectiveness, enacting and reproducing the managerial assumptions and quantitative practices underlying the effectiveness agenda. As compared to the strategic priorities on women and children and sustainable economic growth, the food security priority and strategy are more fully fleshed out, coming they do on the heels of a severe food price crisis that demanded an urgent and detailed response from the global development community. Accordingly, CIDA's food security strategy presents a clear example of how the establishment of hard benchmarks, deadlines, and national action plans in relation to the complex and over-determined character of poverty, vulnerability, and food insecurity exacerbate contradictory tendencies between operational and developmental meanings of effectiveness. The strategy identifies three “paths to action” for Canadian development aid focused on food security, a term which itself derives from UN practice and declarations, and has been subject to critique in relation to market dynamics, development, political rights, and climate change (Lappé *et al.* 1998; Sen 1999; Watts 2000; McMichael 2003; Young 2004; Huish 2008; Jarosz 2009). The three paths to action – focusing on sustainable agricultural development, making food aid and nutrition assistance “more flexible, predictable and needs-based,” and investing in publicly available agricultural research and development – outline commitments that are by no means new, but which nonetheless orient CIDA toward international goals and objectives that have become the post-crisis mantra within the global aid architecture (CIDA 2009b, pp. 2-3).

CIDA outlines each of these in relation to operational and strategic priorities, and a list of expected results detailing how effectiveness is assessed for each goal. CIDA leaves

developmental and temporal targets relatively vague, perhaps reflecting the difficulty of attaching specific numerical benchmarks and objectives to food security situations that remain vulnerable to unpredictable market and geophysical dynamics. For example, while the focus on sustainable agricultural development emphasizes national and regional food security strategies and investment in agricultural research, especially that based on agroecological practices, it also encourages CIDA to be more proactive in leading efforts to build accountability mechanisms for developing country governments, enhancing partnership and harmonization between donor governments, coordinating with international financial institutions such as the World Bank, and integrating agricultural markets and value chains (CIDA 2009b). Yet the strategy provides minimal detail on expected results to follow from these foci, stating only that “Increased sustainable agricultural production and productivity by rural small-scale farmers, especially women farmers,” and “Strengthened policies, more accountable institutions, and better management processes within partner governments” should be targeted (CIDA 2009b, p. 4). There is no indication that CIDA has worked out means and benchmarks for assessing effectiveness against such targets, or that such assessment could even occur; the only solid target highlighted is the doubling of agricultural research funding over 2007-08 levels in three years.

The same story holds for the other two action paths. The focus on enhanced and more flexible nutrition and food aid programming prioritizes continuation of CIDA’s partnership with the World Food Programme (WFP), incorporation of nutrition and micronutrient programming in food security initiatives, and strengthening “national and regional food reserves and food crisis alert and prevention systems” (CIDA 2009b, p. 6). Working with the WFP and considering nutritional aspects of food security are hardly groundbreaking initiatives, and the expected results are both vague and banal: “More lives saved and better overall health as a result of improved access to sufficient quantities of nutritious food,” and “Improved quality and effectiveness of food aid programming” (CIDA 2009b, p. 6). The focus on agricultural research and development provides more specificity, but emphasizes existing partnerships (with, for example, the International Development Research Centre and the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research), leading to better farmer access to locally adapted technologies and expertise, environmentally sustainable increases in food production and productivity, and more resilient agroecological systems producing more nutritious food (CIDA 2009b, p. 7).

While it is perhaps unfair to critique this strategy on the limited specificity of its targets and expected results, especially since such exercises cannot guarantee positive developmental outcomes on their own, it is important that CIDA (2009b, p. 8) itself concludes by stating that the agency “will review its progress against the Food Security Strategy and report this progress and any lessons learned on a regular basis.” There is little that would provide a basis for benchmarking progress, and a major component of development policy innovation, the complete untying of all Canadian aid by 2013 (food aid has been untied since 2008), is not mentioned at all. The annual reports mandated by the ODA Act, on the other hand, restate these action areas while also providing anecdotal and piecemeal evidence of the agency’s progress toward effectiveness, offering detailed but limited vignettes of improved food security and agricultural research funded by CIDA. The 2009-10 report notes that a partnership between CIDA and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Vietnam’s Soc Trang province resulted in two new rice varieties and an expansion of agroecological practice in the greater Mekong Delta region (CIDA 2011a, p. 5). This report also details funding for WFP, and Canada’s progress in fulfilling food aid commitments made at the summer 2009 G-8 meeting. Other major reports that would provide detailed analysis of benchmarked progress and precise measures of effectiveness (CIDA 2010a, 2010b, 2011c) include only basic aggregate numbers on spending and piecemeal evidence of effectiveness in action. CIDA does identify the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as benchmarks for assessing aid effectiveness and progress toward recognizable development outcomes, concluding that, with respect to its three new thematic priorities, the agency has made “[s]ignificant progress” (CIDA 2010a, p. 9).

Since there is no comprehensive tabulation of CIDA’s work relevant to food security, progress toward effectiveness, developmental or operational, is impossible to assess. This is not to suggest that such tabulation *could* be provided and was withheld, or even that such an exercise could provide a substantive means for gauging and ensuring the effectiveness of aid focused on food security. It does, however, demonstrate the duality of effectiveness as goal and rubric, as the food security strategy’s expected results aim to both improve systems of food production and food security in developing countries, and expand and intensify CIDA’s partnerships within the global aid architecture and prove its value as an agent of Canadian statecraft internationally. A 2009 report by the Auditor General of Canada (OAG), however, suggests that operational aspects and measures of effectiveness trump those related to developmental progress, at least for

observers and decision makers in the Canadian state. The OAG (2009, p. 31) argued that the agency had not yet “put in place the required management processes to implement and monitor its aid effectiveness commitments,” and criticized CIDA’s failure to narrow its focus and priorities, develop a comprehensive long-term plan for itself, streamline the funding approval process, and make clear “the Agency’s direction and long-term commitment in individual countries or regions” (p. 18; see also CIDA 2010a, p. 10). In terms of CIDA’s ability to fulfill its mandate under both the ODA Act and its own effectiveness agenda, the OAG (2009, pp. 1-2) focused primarily on *internal* mechanisms rather than development outcomes, noting that “[r]obust management processes – which include specific action plans, performance targets, assigned accountabilities, and management review – are crucial to sustain implementation of [CIDA’s] commitments and directions over time.”

Despite the difficulties of putting effectiveness into practice in new aid strategies and priorities, the discursive framing of effectiveness emphasizing social and sectoral targeting and conformity with global scale processes and norms has become solidly entrenched at CIDA, and in the wider global aid architecture. National institutions such as CIDA produce and reproduce the space of the global aid architecture, with the rubrics, measures, and practices of effectiveness articulated in national strategies shaping and shaped by a relatively inaccessible global space of strategic decision-making. In turn, the developing world is framed as a set of calculable spaces knowable by the measure of effectiveness of aid intervention within them. The flip side of this suggests that where aid is *ineffective*, it should not be deployed, or, considering CIDA’s position within Canada, that institutions managing aid accounts ineffectively are not to be trusted, especially in times of crisis and budget restraint. Thus, the two distinct meanings of effectiveness are tightly intertwined, as CIDA’s own effectiveness as a state agency, measured by its ability to handle its funding envelope and fulfill its operational mission in accordance with partner agencies (part of which involves the capacity to effectively report on aid effectiveness), is directly predicated on the effectiveness of aid provided, measured against indicators that often do not, and perhaps cannot, capture the complexity of food security, poverty, or development as a whole.

Geographic concentration and countries of focus

A related aspect of CIDA's effectiveness agenda is the concentration of aid resources in fewer countries. This process of geographical narrowing is premised on the idea that tighter focus on fewer recipients heightens effectiveness by targeting aid more precisely to those places where it can be most useful, and by increasing coordination between aid donors. Canadian aid and CIDA in particular have been subject to strenuous critique because of perceived lack of focus and far-flung dispersion that ostensibly limits effectiveness and impact (Brown, 2011, pp. 476-478; Munro 2005, pp. 427-428). Yet the causal relationship between geographic and thematic focus and greater aid effectiveness and impact remains assumed rather than proven (Munro 2005). Brown (2011, p. 477) also notes that donor attempts to narrow aid's focus and to limit where it goes violate the principle of developing country ownership of development strategies, risk leaving many needy places out in the cold, and obfuscate the importance of aid volume as an aspect of effectiveness. In this respect, the two meanings of effectiveness remain problematically intertwined, as illustrated by current concerns with country selectivity and fragile states in attempts to align CIDA with Canadian foreign policy objectives. CIDA (2010a, p. 3) identifies two overarching strategic goals for its aid programs: "Sustained support and informed action by Canadians in international development" (focused on maintaining and expanding domestic support for CIDA and its mission), and "Increased achievement of development goals consistent with Canadian foreign policy objectives." The latter is vital to understanding how country selectivity proceeds as CIDA works to implement the aid effectiveness agenda in a way that aligns the agency with other parts of the Canadian state.

Selectivity thus remains prone to foreign policy priorities rather than development needs and institutional capacities, an issue long identified as a problem at CIDA and many other ODA agencies. In its 2009-10 development report, CIDA (2011a, p. 67) lists twenty "countries of focus" for its bilateral aid programs, with Afghanistan receiving more than twice as much aid as any other country in 2009-10, at Cdn\$204.83 million.³ Bilateral development aid to these twenty countries of focus constituted 81 percent of CIDA's total bilateral aid, "surpassing the 80-percent target set for 2010-11" by Minister Oda in early 2009 (CIDA 2010a, p. 10). Furthermore, CIDA asserts that the majority of resources going to these countries are designed "to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of aid in support of progress toward country development goals"

³ The next highest was Mali, which received Cdn\$92.85 million. CIDA's other countries of focus as of 2009-10 were: Bangladesh, Bolivia, Colombia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Haiti, Honduras, Indonesia, Mozambique, Pakistan, Peru, Senegal, Sudan, Tanzania, Ukraine, Vietnam, West Bank and Gaza, and the Caribbean region (CIDA 2011a, p. 67).

(CIDA 2010a, p. 22). Importantly, the shift to geographically concentrate aid in a subset of focus countries is geared toward a more robust and comprehensive country planning strategy, which “include[s] an analysis of the recipient country’s needs as identified in their national poverty reduction strategy or national development plan,” and ostensibly harmonizes CIDA aid programs with partner countries’ own development plans, which are in turn often linked to the poverty reduction strategy papers associated with World Bank support and financing (CIDA 2010a, p. 22). This approach signifies a strong interest in aligning *state* strategies, while also allowing donors such as Canada to define and constrain developing country priorities through long-term development planning processes.

As the OAG (2009, p. 12) audit of CIDA details, “pursuing alignment on an ongoing basis is important, and maintaining current and detailed knowledge of the country context is critical,” though a shift to long-term program-oriented development planning as part of this state-by-state approach presents problems for the agency in terms of developing performance indicators to measure aid effectiveness over the long term and across a whole country plan. Indeed, the OAG (2009, p. 16) argued that CIDA “should set clear performance targets regarding how much of its aid should be delivered through these approaches,” but also pointed out that in aligning CIDA country plans with those of partner states, the agency failed to sustain its own planning mechanisms. Plans often expired without being replaced, and CIDA spent time and resources devising country plans only to never approve or implement them. Despite the adoption of a new country-level planning mechanism in 2008, the OAG reported that confusion over the purpose, process, and format of new strategies was the norm, all pointing to a failure to harmonize strategies and meet the requirements of CIDA’s effectiveness agenda. The lack of coherence and specificity in country-level planning and decision-making demonstrates the hazards of slippage and overlap between the two meanings of effectiveness for CIDA. Developmental effectiveness hinges on operational effectiveness, a task against which the agency’s resources and capacities seem potentially overmatched; or as the OAG (2009, p. 17) report stated, “harmonization with external parties demands internal coordination and cohesion,” qualities sorely lacking at CIDA, a problem no doubt linked to the more or less constant search for more focus and concentration in aid themes and geographic selectivity.

More broadly, the strengthening of government-to-government relations and the state’s legitimacy as an agent of development planning and progress via country level planning, echoes

strategic framings that reinforce a methodological nationalism common to other development agencies and international financial institutions (Essex 2008; Roy 2010). CIDA's effectiveness agenda, and the double meaning of effectiveness embedded within it, lend themselves strongly to a state-centric understanding of development processes, and of effectiveness as a means of measuring aid outcomes and efficiency. A major concern is what happens when country level planning and strategy confronts so-called "fragile states," where the partner government is weak, corrupt, illegitimate, or even functionally non-existent. This is important given that two of CIDA's countries of focus are Haiti and Afghanistan. After a decade of occupation and war in Afghanistan and repeated episodes of failed intervention in Haiti, the idea that development and humanitarian assistance in such locations could be assessed usefully and according to the rubrics outlined within the aid effectiveness agenda seems problematic at best, and dangerous at worst. As Call (2008, p. 1494) points out, concepts like "fragile state" and "failed state" stem from political and cultural assumptions about what constitutes successful state form and action, and lead to "narrow and univalent policy prescriptions that obscure other important conceptual issues and practical challenges" for development, security, and long-term peacebuilding.

The emphasis on fragile states stands out as contradictory within the aid effectiveness discourse. It presents numerous opportunities to demonstrate alignment with other aid donors, cooperation with developing country partners, and strategic support for Canadian foreign policy, which identifies Haiti and Afghanistan as key sites for the expression of Canada's global leadership and responsible multilateralism. On one hand, development progress in such locales can be enumerated in terms of lives saved, children fed, schools built, and farmers assisted, allowing for numerous opportunities to objectively benchmark progress. On the other hand, fragile states like Haiti and Afghanistan, where the state itself is largely a convenient fiction, represent a potential bottomless pit for development funding, with millions of dollars spent and little sustainable headway made. Effectiveness remains a quality to be measured against dollars spent, as internal government reports on CIDA and Canadian development assistance all make clear. The emphasis on fragile states also constitutes a core element of the international effectiveness regime articulated in the Accra Agenda, the Paris Declaration, and the Busan Partnership Agreement.

The slippage between developmental and operational definitions of aid effectiveness, and the preoccupation with devising indicators and measuring outcomes, cedes the determination of

state effectiveness in fragile and failing states to foreign policy experts and military strategists. Despite the rhetoric of accountability and partnership, the government-to-government aid relationship remains one based on power differentials strongly institutionalized in the international state system, and the focus on aid effectiveness does little to flesh out abstracted notions of state form and function deployed in discussions of accountability and partnership. Definitions of partnership focused primarily on numbers and locations of stakeholders included and the ability to maintain institutional links over several funding cycles, form the limits of meaningful consideration of developing state capacities in this iteration of effectiveness. But while the state remains responsible for legitimating and facilitating development planning and success within the fractured global aid architecture, civil society organizations and other non-state actors have taken on a more important role as planners, funders, and implementers of aid and development programs. As noted, concerns over the politicization of funding have strained CIDA's relations with such organizations, while the *type* of partnerships CIDA has pursued with the private sector and civil society have also drawn criticism.

For example, the agency has partnered with international NGO World Vision and Canadian mining company Barrick Gold to support "corporate social responsibility" (CSR) efforts in the mining sector in Peru, one of CIDA's countries of focus. Barrick has faced strong criticism from Canadian, Peruvian, and international NGOs, as well as numerous protests from indigenous communities in Peru, over water quality and access in relation to Barrick mining operations in that country. Observers have argued that CIDA's support of CSR and other development projects in Peruvian communities affected by mining activities subvert local communities' rights and help Barrick avoid taking responsibility for environmental and social damage in areas where it maintains mining operations (Arnold 2012; Carin 2012; Coumans 2012). Yet the recently launched Canadian International Institute for Extractive Industries and Development, to which CIDA will contribute \$25 million over the first five years of operation, indicate that the geopolitics of mining are poised to remain an important focus of agency action, including and perhaps especially in those countries of focus, such as Peru, Bolivia, Ghana, and Indonesia, where extractive industries form both a major part of the national economy and a sink for Canadian development aid and private investment (CIDA 2012).

CIDA's narrowed geographic focus, meant ostensibly to avoid overlap, concentrate resources, and ensure incorporation of foreign policy objectives, and thereby heighten

effectiveness, threatens to undo broader and longer-term traditions of flexible, multilateral cooperation that have made CIDA a relatively well-respected and innovative agency in the global aid architecture. CIDA's effectiveness agenda, built around two distinct and perhaps incompatible usages of this term, signals the potential emergence of a form of multilateralism in which multiple development institutions move in the same direction but separately, working through numerous bilateral relationships and accountability mechanisms downloaded to relatively constrained agencies like CIDA, developing country governments, and NGOs, and failing to adequately pool resources to tackle developmental issues that do not neatly fit country-level programming or donor-driven forms of measurement and assessment. Development challenges such as the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the deterioration of agroecological systems, or the collapse of social safety nets, cannot be adequately addressed by programs or actors that primarily emphasize operational effectiveness, nor are they likely to be solved by aligning CIDA with foreign policy priorities designed first to meet the strategic economic and geopolitical objectives of the Canadian government, rather than people and communities in a wider set of developing countries. Short-term pressures of reporting effectiveness outcomes also undercut the qualitative improvements that aid can produce over periods longer than a single budget cycle. As one commentator at a prominent Canadian development think tank noted, "When you narrow [development] down to hardware [e.g., aid-financed infrastructure], and things that are going to take place within the life of a two year funding window, then you really ignore the bigger picture and longer term results that you expect" (quoted in Mazereeuw 2011, p. 11).

Conclusion

CIDA's future is certainly tied to its effectiveness agenda, which contains significant tensions, slippages, and contradictory tendencies between operational and developmental meanings of effectiveness, articulated at the global scale and within the agency. Development agencies, CIDA included, have come to measure effectiveness primarily through techniques and modalities associated strongly with operational effectiveness. Associated with this emphasis on operational effectiveness, itself a product of short-term domestic political pressures and longer-term institutional dynamics emphasizing cost efficiencies and the subservience of development aid to foreign policy and domestic politics, has been the articulation of measures and indicators predicated on a kind of effectiveness tautology. Aid is determined to be effective when measured

against deadlines, targets, and benchmarks set by ODA agencies and backed by international norms and agreements, while the ability to set such targets and devise appropriate measurement procedures has itself become a benchmark of effectiveness. Such practices may improve the reporting ability and political credibility of agencies facing domestic political and economic challenges, but they do little to promote long-term development processes and qualitative improvement in the lives of the poor and vulnerable.

CIDA itself stands at a crossroads with respect to effectiveness. The KAIROS scandal highlighted the agency's increasingly problematic relationship with civil society groups, a problem exacerbated by budget cuts and attempts to narrow thematic and geographic focus in aid programming and allocation. CIDA's development mandate also remains secondary to the sitting government's foreign policy strategies and priorities. Further, it remains unclear how the agency's adoption of the effectiveness discourse, and the construction of reporting and accountability mechanisms based on an operational understanding of aid effectiveness, will improve or maintain CIDA's history of multilateralism in aid policy formulation and implementation, or facilitate more nimble and cogent responses to global crises. Most importantly, the recent strategic priorities and geographic concentration associated with the enactment of CIDA's effectiveness agenda work to formulate targets and outcomes to measure the effectiveness not only of aid provided, but also of CIDA, developing country governments, and implementing organizations. But what can be expected of a conceptualization and program of aid effectiveness which does not adequately account for power differentials in the global aid architecture, relies on technocratic reforms and managerial approaches, and works within neoliberalized global circuits of finance and trade that remain politically opaque and dangerously volatile? This seems a recipe for failure according to CIDA's effectiveness agenda, and potentially leaves both the agency and its development partners holding the bag when the next financial, food, or energy crisis washes out micro-scale progress under a macro-scale wave of devaluation, dispossession, and economic collapse. The current and likely future usage of effectiveness at CIDA, with its contradictory slippage between developmental and operational connotations and referents, does little to settle longstanding debates over agency mandate, mission, and stature within the Canadian state, and potentially exacerbates the impacts of budget cuts and further politicization of Canadian aid programs.

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