

Development Cooperation in a Multilevel and Multistakeholder Setting: From Planning towards Enabling Coordinated Action?

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Abstract The call to reduce fragmentation and promote joined-up action is an evergreen topic in development policy discussions. This article reviews past coordination efforts and changes in international cooperation and finds that, in recent years, donors did not adequately apply coordination standards that they promoted, while developing-country governments frequently failed to articulate an effective demand for coordination. Dominant coordination approaches have been inherently statist and managerial, whereas the increasingly multilevel and multistakeholder nature of the changing development cooperation context calls for new approaches involving four elements: positive framing of coordination, enlargement of involved stakeholders, increased focus on enabling over planning, and growing attention to coordination across countries and within sectors. The Sustainable Energy for All initiative serves as an example of a multistakeholder platform confirming both continued coordination needs and a changing perspective on the relevant avenues for addressing coordination deficits.

L'appel à la réduction de la fragmentation de l'aide et à la promotion d'une action conjointe est une constante dans les discussions sur les politiques de développement. Cet article examine les efforts de coordination passés et les changements dans la coopération internationale. Il constate que ces dernières années, les bailleurs de fonds n'ont pas correctement appliqué les normes de coordination qu'ils ont promues, tandis que les gouvernements des pays en développement ont souvent omis de

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faire une requête efficace de coordination. Les approches de coordination les plus répandues ont été intrinsèquement étatiques et managériales, tandis que le contexte changeant de la coopération au développement, de plus en plus pluri-niveaux et pluri-acteurs, nécessite de nouvelles approches impliquant quatre éléments: une présentation positive de la coordination, l'élargissement des parties prenantes impliquées, un accent accru mis sur la facilitation plutôt que sur la planification et l'attention croissante accordée à la coordination au-delà des pays et au sein des secteurs. L'initiative «Energie Durable pour Tous» sert d'exemple d'une plateforme multipartite qui confirme les besoins continus de coordination et fournit une perspective différente sur des façons pertinentes de remédier au manque de coordination.

Keywords Development effectiveness · Foreign aid · Coordination · Division of labor · Multistakeholder partnerships · Sustainable Energy for All

The Evolving Case for Coordination in Development Cooperation

This article examines the adaptation of coordination as a guiding concept to increase development effectiveness to a setting where development actors and approaches are growing more diffuse. Calls to improve the coordination of development cooperation have a long history. They have convincingly been made in times of both expanding and contracting official development assistance (ODA) budgets.¹ Following limited progress during the 1990s, the policy momentum for strengthening coordination gained traction in the period 2002–2008, due to both rising ODA budgets and prominence in the 2002 Monterrey Consensus on Financing for Development and 2005 Paris Declaration (Rogerson 2005; Glennie and Sumner 2016). For countries operating with a fixed ODA ceiling, particularly countries that had achieved the 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) threshold, the economic boom period created disbursement pressure that added to their willingness to coordinate, or at least to discuss doing so. In September 2008, the fall of the Lehman Brothers bank signaled a radically different budgetary context, especially for donors in the European Union, displacing disbursement pressure with visibility pressure (Fejerskov and Keijzer 2013).

Following a common policy narrative, coordination reduces the transaction costs associated with aid delivery by limiting the administrative burden on recipient governments and providing a tool for strengthening the orientation of donors toward recipient priorities (Barry and Boidin 2012; Bourguignon and Platteau 2015). All stages of aid management entail transaction costs, including identification of

¹ An example of the former case is a European Commission proposal published in 1999: “The Member States, like the Community, are under pressure to reduce the volume of official development assistance; they must improve the quality and efficiency of their operations and are now under an obligation to produce visible results. Greater complementarity between Member States’ aid and community aid is an ideal means of obtaining better results and greater visibility” (EC 1999, p. 3).



potential partners, negotiation with partners, and implementation of assistance. Higher transaction costs result from the presence of multiple actors pursuing different priorities and cooperation approaches (Lithman 2014). The goal of limiting transaction costs to increase the value of aid transferred to recipients was a key motivation for crafting the Paris Declaration principles that remain central to the international aid and development effectiveness agenda, being “based on a ‘negative’ efficiency argument more than a ‘positive’ opportunity and outcome argument,” as noted by Glennie and Sumner (2016, p. 13). To counter coordination challenges, donors can pursue several policy responses such as concentrating aid in fewer recipient countries, increasing their reliance on multilateral channels for aid delivery, or shifting to programmatic approaches for aid disbursement at country level (Bigsten and Tengstam 2015).

In the period when the agenda set out in the Paris Declaration enjoyed high political prominence, evaluation evidence showed to the disappointment of many that, due to necessary transitional measures, transaction costs were increasing rather than declining, highlighting a need for managing expectations as to whether they would eventually decline at all (Wood et al. 2008). In spite of global commitments to strengthen joint action and the compelling theoretical and practical rationales for promoting greater donor coordination, research has revealed limited global progress in improving coordination (e.g., Aldasoro et al. 2010; Wood et al. 2011; Leiderer 2015; Klingebiel et al. 2016a). Even in cases where donor coordination has advanced, structures and processes set up at country level to manage coordination have themselves created additional administrative burdens on recipient governments, producing mixed benefits (Wood et al. 2008; Barakat 2009; Karini 2016). The continued reliance of donors on parallel channels for implementing their assistance in spite of pledges to pool resources underlines that incentives to pursue narrow interests persist and may have intensified. A recent survey points to modest improvements in the use of country systems in recent years, though trends vary across countries (GPEDC 2016). Nevertheless, positive examples of donors converting effectiveness principles into changes in practice also exist, as experiences with delegated cooperation within the Nordic Plus group and joint programming among European Union (EU) member states demonstrate (Latek 2015; ADE 2017).

In coming to terms with these disappointing results, policy debates have offered different views on whether donors or developing-country governments are responsible for ensuring coordination.² While many agreed that uncoordinated aid is costly and reduces effectiveness, there was a lack of evidence on how to organize and manage development cooperation (Glennie and Sumner 2016). Comparative research indicates that differences in structural conditions in African states influenced the degree of success of their negotiations with donors (Whitfield and Fraser 2010), underlining the linkages between national ownership and coordination prospects.

² The European Union’s (2007) Code of Conduct on Complementarity and Division of Labour in fact presents both perspectives in an order of priority: in the first instance the partner country should take leadership to ensure a division of labor among donors, and if the government does not do this the EU donors should themselves coordinate and agree to such a division of labor (EU 2007).



Whereas Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors failed to gain traction on coordination in a context where they maintained clear dominance in shaping the development cooperation agenda, efforts to improve coordination today take place against a backdrop of rising heterogeneity among development actors (Fengler and Kharas 2011; Gore 2013; Fejerskov et al. 2017). In addition to OECD-DAC members and so-called new donors from large emerging economies, global vertical funds and private philanthropic platforms have added to the complexity of the funding landscape. International discussions reflect an increased recognition of the relevance of development contributions from diverse actors (Eyben 2013).

The heightened emphasis on multistakeholder development approaches including partnerships between public and private actors reflects both an acceptance of the importance of actors beyond the OECD-DAC grouping and the reality of stagnant ODA budgets, which have been somewhat camouflaged by increasing in-donor expenditures on refugees in recent years. Although donor governments have been reluctant to commit additional ODA funding, there is an acknowledged need to dramatically increase the resources directed toward the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (OECD 2016). This demonstrates an awareness that many lower-income countries continue to remain reliant on ODA to facilitate public investment in light of low to negative economic growth as well as declining commodity prices and foreign direct investment. Donors have acknowledged this and reaffirmed the existing ODA target for 2030, yet accompany their commitments by calls for private-sector actors to increase their engagement, which they seek to facilitate with certain ODA instruments. Partnerships involving private-sector actors have thus attracted interest as a vehicle for mobilizing resources by providing incentives such as financial guarantees or accompanying technical assistance, while promising to transfer knowledge from the business world.

Efforts to engage with the private sector prominent in current policy discussions are also a response to disappointment over the effectiveness of government-to-government cooperation promoted under the Paris Declaration. At the international level, there has been a surge in multistakeholder partnerships, including those launched by the UN Secretary-General or on the occasion of major international conferences such as the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro. Sharing the common traits that they are voluntary and seek to combine assets of a mix of public and private actors, the label “multistakeholder partnership” covers initiatives that vary in terms of their stakeholder composition, scope, function, and thematic focus (Beisheim and Simon 2016). The emergence of the specific term reflects a realization that global challenges are too complex to rely only on national governments to achieve collective goals. Sustainable development requires dedicated efforts to work collaboratively between diverse stakeholders (also referred to as players or actors), which have been defined as “an individual, organization or group who has a role to play and/or is affected by the outcome of an issue, situation or process” (Woodhill 2010, p. 29).

Against the backdrop of rising attention to multistakeholder partnerships as an expression of a changing approach to addressing development goals, this article analyzes how the recommendation to better coordinate development efforts can be



salvaged in a setting where actors and cooperation forms are growing more diffuse. The article complements an existing scholarly literature conceived in relation to government-to-government cooperation by identifying key dimensions of coordination and their relevance to the new setting of international cooperation heralded by the Busan High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in 2011 (Eyben 2013). The analysis is based on a literature review of theories and empirical evidence on development cooperation coordination, and illustrates the new multilevel and multistakeholder context for coordination with an analysis of the cooperation approach advanced through the Sustainable Energy for All (SEforALL) initiative launched in 2011. The discussion of the coordination mandates within this global multistakeholder initiative highlights both continuities with respect to how to conceptualize coordination practice and how an understanding of coordination efforts may evolve. In particular, SEforALL's status as a convening platform using evidence on gaps and opportunities to encourage public and private stakeholder action frames coordination processes in positive terms as means of unlocking additional resources. This offers a contrast to previous approaches conceiving coordination primarily in terms of its contribution to reducing inefficiencies.

Understanding Coordination and Clarifying Its Absence

Improving coordination in development cooperation has been a mainstay recommendation for promoting more effective use of resources to foster development objectives. Already in 1969, the Pearson Report expressed concern that fragmentation by many development cooperation players limited its potential impact and recommended more coordinated action as a means of adapting cooperation to future challenges (Pearson 1969). Wide recognition of the inefficiencies in development practice related to an absence of joint planning, duplication of activities, and limited attention to achieving a complementary division of labor provided an impetus for enshrining the objectives of harmonization and alignment in international aid effectiveness agreements (OECD 2008; Klingebiel et al. 2016a).

In the most basic terms, coordination is a form of cooperation among actors that contributes to an adjustment of practices to promote mutually beneficial outcomes (Milner 1997). Woods (2011) and Chandy and Kharas (2011) distinguish cooperation from coordination in development by suggesting that cooperation relates to collaborative efforts involving agreement on common goals and joint planning to achieve them, while coordination can be considered a technical exercise at the level of implementation to avoid the negative consequences of overlap with the activities of other actors. This distinction rightly points to the multilevel character of decision-making relevant for aid implementation but mistakenly conflates different levels of action with different activities that all have a coordinating function. For example, agreement on common goals and implementation approaches can also take place through the mechanism of joint country assistance strategies, indicating that collaborative planning is not purely a higher-level process (Linn 2009).



Proposals for improving coordination in international aid effectiveness agreements have focused on country-level coordination activities. In the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, the term “coordination” features in the central objective of the ownership principle, defined as being fulfilled when “partner countries exercise effective leadership over their development policies, and strategies and coordinate development actions” (OECD 2008). The principle of harmonization points to coordination challenges beyond a country-centered development framework by prodding donor governments to share information and make their planning and management systems more compatible in order to improve both in- and cross-country division of labor (OECD 2008). However, policy discussions on implementing aid effectiveness have focused mainly on improving the within-country sectoral division of labor and increasing donors’ reliance on joint planning and financing instruments in order to link donor aid allocation decisions to national strategies that identify priority areas for investment under the heading of alignment (see, for instance, EU 2007). Efforts to facilitate coordination include country-level dialogue structures to increase information exchange among aid providers and facilitate interactions with recipient governments, and support for pooled funding approaches (Delputte and Orbie 2014). One reason for the country-level focus of coordination is that decisions of OECD donors about where they would maintain a physical presence constituted sovereign political decisions, so that the cross-country division of labor agenda never really got off the ground.

Development cooperation coordination takes place at multiple levels and in different actor constellations, encompassing both donor self-coordination and partner-driven coordination activities. The plea to promote division of labor underlines that aid allocation decisions taken at donor headquarters shape country-level coordination prospects by determining which actors are present in a particular geographical context or sector. The analysis of aid fragmentation has emphasized that donors have typically made aid allocation decisions independently of one another, limiting the extent of the concentration of aid resources to reflect areas of donor specialization (OECD 2011; Klingebiel et al. 2016b).

Even in cases where donors have pursued aid concentration, bilateral interests rather than a consideration of how changes in their portfolios fit within an international division of labor have tended to drive these decisions. The persistence of differences in the underlying priorities of individual donor countries and their interpretations of what interventions are appropriate to address broadly framed development goals present challenges to transforming coordination practice on the ground (Dijkstra and Komives 2011; Barry and Boidin 2012). Another underlying driver of coordination challenges at country level is the global proliferation of bilateral and multilateral agencies, initiatives, and instruments, which carry diverse priorities and bureaucratic procedures with them (Gulrajani et al. 2006). Aldasoro et al. (2010) note that donors have adopted a more specialized approach to aid delivery that limits coordination, pointing to incentive problems at different levels of the aid relationship to explain poor coordination. These include donor preferences for global action instead of concentration of effort, pressure to promote self-interested aid, and administrator incentives to withhold information about interesting projects due to competition concerns with other funders.



While some coordination deficits derive from the reluctance at donor headquarters to pursue collaborative approaches with other donors, other shortcomings in coordination originate from the fragmented character of individual donor systems. The rising role of environment ministries in overseeing climate finance provides one example of the challenges of bureaucratic fragmentation (Pickering et al. 2015). Strong differences persist among bilateral donors in the extent to which they have devolved decision-making to the field level, as well as different organisational approaches ranging from strong reliance on dedicated implementing agencies to more market-oriented outsourcing models (Dietrich 2016). These characteristics may explain the difficulty for donors to reach agreement amongst themselves in the absence of a strong push from recipient governments. In either case, such donor-led coordination should be regarded as a second best option (Klingebl et al. 2016b).

Coordination deficits also stem from the fact that development cooperation involves numerous sectors and therefore touches on the portfolios of a variety of governmental actors within recipient countries. A central planning ministry may have different views on desired coordination practices and goals compared with line ministries, given differences in resource maximization strategies across ministries. While laudable and not without results, earlier efforts to promote coordination were assumed to rest on “complete preference alignment and trust at country level between donors and recipients” and thus took for granted the existence of incentives that were often lacking (Rogerson 2005, p. 532). For instance, in developing countries with inadequate civil servant base salaries, governments have used uncoordinated cooperation to maximize benefits in terms of per diems (see Skage et al. 2015). Moreover, developing-country governments may perceive coordination among donors as restricting their possibilities to exercise leadership and room for maneuver (Klingebl et al. 2016b). Fragmentation in these different forms feeds into transparency problems: it becomes difficult to trace sources of aid and promote accountability around particular issues.

As the field of actors engaging in international cooperation expands with the proliferation of private actors and the growth of multistakeholder initiatives, the potential arenas for coordination and the various actors involved expand along with them (see Engberg-Pedersen et al. 2014). Past approaches to strengthen coordination have however typically assumed the solution to be found in intensified planning and top-down, centralized decision-making processes that focus on country-specific outcomes. In the next sections, we further analyze dominant approaches to managing coordination in development cooperation and advance two suggestions for how to adjust practices to the changing cooperation landscape. The first suggestion is to reframe the driving motive for coordination from emphasizing the inefficiency of non-coordination towards a more positive framing that underlines the link between coordination and mobilization of additional resources for development, stressing the gains resulting from heightened awareness of how actors’ activities fill gaps and complement the actions of other stakeholders. The second is to move from a rather centralized statist approach to “plan” coordination to an approach that seeks to “enable” coordination among a multitude of stakeholders.



Distinguishing Degrees and Practices of Coordination

In addition to differentiating between the coordination challenges that relate to different levels of action and actors involved in coordination efforts, it is useful to acknowledge the spectrum of activities that reflect varying degrees of coordination. Focusing on the country-level coordination of United Nations agencies, Mahn (2013) presents an aid coordination continuum where the exchange of information among donors represents a lower-level form of promoting consistency and coherence in practice while the arbitration of decisions and consequently joint decision-making reflects the highest degree of institutionalization of actor coordination. Informal consultation practices constitute a middle ground in this conceptualization. Thus, coordination progresses from the development of a common information base to a given actor's use of this information to inform decision-making, to the adoption of joined-up approaches involving a planning and implementation component.

Although policy debates often imply otherwise, coordination in development cooperation should be understood as a means to an end, and not an end in itself (Klingebiel et al. 2016b). It is impossible to coordinate in the absence of a clear and shared goal for doing so, such as avoiding that two projects planned by different donors end up pursuing contrary aims (LeBlanc and Beaulieu 2006). Because such a shared goal is often ambiguous or missing, what is commonly referred to as "coordination" is in practice often limited to information sharing among donors (Delputte and Orbie 2014). Yet, as the discussion of the Sustainable Energy for All (SEforALL) case suggests, information sharing should be viewed as an enabler of coordination rather than as a form of coordination in its own right. It can enable coordination when stakeholders have the volition to use the information as a basis for decision-making, yet information sharing may also take place *ex post* when decisions that could have been coordinated have already been taken. The usefulness of information sharing should thus be judged against the observation of coordination outcomes (ECDPM 2008; LeBlanc and Beaulieu 2006).

Available research on initiatives to improve aid transparency illustrates how information availability and information sharing may enable coordinated action. Efforts to increase the scope and quality of aid data such as the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) have expanded donor reporting, however researchers have questioned the impact of these global information sharing platforms, especially because of the missing link between data availability and uptake. Research on aid transparency has concluded that it maintains a donor-centered notion of accountability where following the disbursement of taxpayer resources takes precedence over recipient accountability (McGee 2013). At country level, the aid management platforms facilitated by the Development Gateway seek to support planning processes by providing information management tools to capture aid flows, encourage stakeholders to shape data collection processes, and feed knowledge generated from these efforts into decision-making (Development Gateway 2015). Direct publishing of information on aid programmes in accordance with the IATI standard has reduced the relevance of such country-based platforms, although they



may still have relevance in covering non-OECD donors or donors reluctant to report under IATI. Both approaches will only be considered relevant and durable if actors use this information as a basis for coordination, as otherwise they will simply be perceived as adding to development cooperation's already considerable transaction costs.

Evaluations of coordination efforts convey a similar understanding of the varying intensity of coordination practices. Leblanc and Beaulieu (2006) consider information sharing activities as nonsystematic and low-intensity forms of coordination and highlight the development of a common agenda, strategic approach, common programming, and joint monitoring and evaluation of programs as further degrees of coordination. In their evaluation of EU donor coordination efforts in the promotion of local development, they concluded that, in the EU context, both the commitment to coordination and the available resources for promoting it were low. An EU Parliament-commissioned study on the costs of non-coordination among EU donors reached a similar conclusion, estimating that poor coordination resulted in the loss of approximately 20% of the value of European aid. These losses stemmed from the higher transaction costs related to overlap and duplication reflecting the lack of donor concentration in areas of comparative advantage and the inefficient allocation of aid across countries. While pointing out variations in coordination practice linked to country-level differences in governmental approaches to aid management, the report's broader message was that coordination is hindered by donor interests even in the EU setting, despite the existence of a legal basis in EU treaties for the promotion of coordination (Nogaj 2013; Klingebiel et al. 2016b).

More formalized mechanisms for coordination have in recent years included various types of country-level dialogue forums or working groups, often organized according to sector. In a number of African states (e.g., Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia), these forums were guided by various forms of "joint assistance strategies" that presented government decisions on the priority sectors and which donors should be active where. The strategies prominently included "donor matrices" summarizing the donor sectoral focus that both government and donors had agreed to (see Odén and Wohlgemuth 2011). All of these strategies were however overtaken by events, for instance because of changes in government, but mainly because the developing country's leadership ultimately chose not to push the donors to act accordingly.

Whereas joint assistance strategies could be construed as "partner-led" coordination efforts, albeit facilitated by direct donor support via resources for studies and meetings, another more formalized mechanism concerns the EU's efforts to promote joint programming. While attempted before with limited results, new efforts made in parallel to EU development assistance programming for the period 2014–2020 involved a number of "pilot countries" where joint programming could take place in line with the needs and interests of all involved parties. It consists of two sequential steps, starting with a joint analysis of the country situation followed by a common response outlining how EU development partners will provide support and measure progress. A recent evaluation of the EU's experiences with joint programming in 14 countries observes that the joint programming agenda has contributed to raising awareness among donors about their respective activities



and enabled progress in collective planning at field level. However, the evaluation also noted that the EU and member state-driven character of the process as well as the persistence of disparate plans at headquarters level has limited the impact of joint programming in increasing effectiveness (ADE 2017). In fact, the trend of donors more assertively promoting their own interests in pursuit of “mutual benefit” strategies (see Keijzer and Lundsgaarde 2017) has been confirmed in another evaluation that points to an increasing recentralization of aid allocation decisions (Visser et al. 2017).

The discussion above highlights that, in spite of the potential efficiency gains through more coordinated action and the development of formalized coordination mechanisms to promote country-level collaboration among development actors, the achievement of coordination gains continues to face numerous constraints on multiple sides of the development cooperation relationship. Research on aid relations in aid-dependent African states has revealed, for example, that barring a few positive examples, incentives to coordinate have been poor to absent among both African governments and their international partners (Whitfield and Fraser 2010).

Building on the conventional wisdom that coordination counters rising transaction costs, development policy debates imply that a greater heterogeneity of actors means the challenge of coordination increases. When combined with the observation that the record of improving coordination among established cooperation providers is mixed, lowered expectations for development coordination are apparent. Recent policy statements, including most prominently the 2015 Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development, reduced both the prominence and priority for coordinated action. The absence of a strong statement of intent and a central “management push” however does not mean that development actors do not recognize the utility of coordination or that there is an absence of coordination in practice. Though most research on aid effectiveness takes written statements of intent as a starting point and measuring stick for empirical findings on development practice, future research on aid coordination requires a more expansive approach that situates coordination practice in a fluid global development setting that is both multilevel and multiactor in character. While such an approach suggests a shift away from country-centered analysis of coordination challenges, it does not present a distinct alternative to country-level action but rather an umbrella to capture a broader range of coordinated action.

Multistakeholder Initiatives and the Coordination Challenge

Alongside other examples of diversifying cooperation models, global multistakeholder initiatives create new coordination challenges at multiple governance levels. The focus on promoting effective collaboration frameworks in the context of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC) remains on strengthening country systems, and the alignment of the GPEDC with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development means that its starting point is that sovereign states are the primary actors tasked with its implementation. Global Partnership



Table 1 Comparing main characteristics of past and present efforts to promoting coordination in development cooperation

| State-centric coordination | Multistakeholder coordination |
|---|---|
| Negative framing, emphasizing the costs of non-coordination | Positive framing, emphasizing the gains of joint action |
| Limited to official actors: governments and their bi- and multilateral development partners | Multistakeholder orientation, and an explicit ambition to go beyond official actors |
| Emphasis on top-down planning and centralized decision-making | Focus on enabling as opposed to directing coordination |
| Country-specific “across the board” efforts | Cross-country and sector-centric efforts |

reflections on multistakeholder partnerships thus emphasize that they are embedded in a country-level logic and should be considered complementary to national planning policies. This hints at a blind spot within the development effectiveness discussion, which has generally neglected the potential contribution of multistakeholder partnerships to coordination, for example with respect to informing resource allocation patterns across countries. There may also be a contradiction in suggesting that there should be more space for multistakeholder partnerships when existing country-level coordination structures are maintained. A focus on preserving existing structures may limit the potential to expand participation of diverse stakeholders in collaborative processes. While prior discussions have tended to look for the solution in more coordination at the level of individual countries in relation to the ownership debate (e.g., Whitfield and Fraser 2010), under the 2030 Agenda, proponents of coordinated action may look rather at transnational efforts to drive and facilitate these efforts. This does not imply that developing-country governments should no longer be involved and that coordination may be decided “for them,” but rather that the process will be organized differently.

As the previous sections have indicated, coordination achievements have been constrained by the preferences and practices of both donor and recipient governments as well as by the expanding field of actors engaging in cooperation efforts. The analysis of the rise of multistakeholder initiatives and other cooperation forms points to adjustment needs in development practice that go beyond addressing the unfulfilled commitments of these parties. Based on the preceding analysis of the literature on past efforts to promote coordination in development cooperation and the emerging evidence on the changing nature of cooperation under the 2030 Agenda, Table 1 summarizes the main shifts underlying a reorientation in the debate on coordination in development cooperation.

The next section analyzes one global multistakeholder initiative to further explore what this reorientation entails. The purpose of the section is not to determine whether the initiative has been effective per se, but rather to look into the extent to which and how it reflects the four aspects of multistakeholder coordination identified here. The description and analysis of the initiative’s design features and operations provide initial reflections on how to analyze the effectiveness of such



initiatives, which are set out in the concluding section to inform further research inquiry.

The Sustainable Energy for All Initiative

The Sustainable Energy for All (SEforALL) initiative presents a relevant case study to analyze the changing character of development cooperation and stakeholder perspectives toward coordination for several reasons. First, it is an initiative that seeks to improve chances to achieve collective goals through partnerships at multiple levels of governance with a variety of actors, including business and civil society. Second, its agenda exemplifies the effort to reconcile traditional poverty reduction objectives with goals to advance environmental sustainability, reflecting an important thematic area in the evolution of the global development agenda. Finally, although it seeks to provide a platform for significantly expanding private investment in support of the agenda and enabling new partnerships, it functions as an extension of multilateral and bilateral development cooperation to the extent that it receives donor support and relies on existing implementation channels at country level.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon launched SEforALL, a central multistakeholder partnership initiated under his leadership providing a foundation for the formulation of Goal 7 on the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, in 2011. The Secretary-General stated clearly that the promotion of coordinated action was at the heart of the initiative: “My initiative brings together governments, private sector and civil society because we need to work together. Governments set the priorities and create the policy framework, providing the lever that can generate private investments. Business is an essential partner, critical to achieving tangible results. And civil society has a key role in helping us to reach those most in need and providing appropriate services” (UNSG 2014). The initiative seeks to advance three interrelated objectives: (1) ensuring universal access to modern energy services, (2) doubling the rate of improvement in energy efficiency, and (3) doubling the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix. The initiative operates at different levels, with a lean global secretariat at its focal point. At the global level it has a convening function, seeking to mobilize support from governments, private-sector actors, and civil society to address its ambitious agenda. Thematic and regional hubs as well as a variety of thematic and country-level activities intend to translate the agenda into concrete output (Lundsgaarde 2016). The network character of the initiative and dispersion of coordination responsibilities among different actors is a quality shared with other multistakeholder partnerships (Pattberg et al. 2012).

SEforALL encapsulates the changing global development policy agenda in two key respects. First, it provides a vehicle for reconciling climate change, poverty reduction, and economic development objectives, and therefore reflects the consolidation of environmental and development agendas outlined in the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. Second, in relying on diverse partnerships including expanded commitments among private-sector actors as a key means of implementation, it focuses on the mobilization of a broad palette of actors beyond



government to advance the goals of a green transformation. In organizational terms, SEforALL presents itself as a platform enabling other actors to work together more extensively and effectively toward the achievement of the initiative's main goals, rather than as an entity with a strong planning function in its own right. Supplying other actors with relevant information outlining the scope of energy challenges and investment opportunities to address them provides a core channel for exercising this enabling role (SEforALL 2016).

As a platform operating at different governance levels, varied organizational units undertake coordination functions to advance the initiative's broader goals. Key examples include the initiative's thematic hubs, intended to facilitate uptake of energy efficiency-promoting and renewable energy technologies around the world, and regional hubs that support implementation in specific geographies. The regional hubs of SEforALL housed at regional development banks emphasize coordination as a central component of their mandates in supporting the initiative. Thus, the African hub housed at the African Development Bank emphasizes its objective: "to coordinate and facilitate the implementation of the SEforALL initiative on the African continent," while the Asia-Pacific hub hosted by the Asian Development Bank similarly promises to "facilitate and coordinate core activities within the region."³ In outlining its main responsibilities associated with SEforALL, the Inter-American Development Bank-based regional hub for Latin America and the Caribbean highlights that: "increased coordination related to sustainable energy will help catalyze major new investment opportunities in order to speed-up the transformation of the world's energy systems, help eliminate energy poverty, and increase prosperity."⁴ The small teams at the hubs are expected to serve as intermediaries between the global initiative and regional and country-level actions while encouraging the development of partnerships supporting implementation within their geographies (SEforALL 2016). The emphasis on coordination in the description of the mandates of these entities is notable because it suggests an upgrading of the perceived value of coordination as a means of supporting the achievement of development goals from an ancillary element contributing to the more efficient use of resources to a central justification for the creation of the initiative. SEforALL presents itself as a convening platform that uses evidence on gaps and opportunities related to advancing its core goals to stimulate action among varied stakeholders (SEforALL 2016). In this respect, coordination functions are framed in positive terms as means of unlocking additional resources, rather than as corrective measures to reduce inefficiencies.

The coordination and facilitation roles presented as central functions of SEforALL's regional hubs are expressed in a variety of activities. The African Development Bank—considered SEforALL's most advanced regional hub—emphasizes the contribution of policy guidance in promoting coherent and consistent approaches to the implementation of the SEforALL agenda across Africa, while convening activities such as event organization and technical

³ http://www.se4all.org/hubs_african-hub (accessed April 28, 2016); http://www.se4all.org/hubs_asia-pacific-hub (accessed April 28, 2016).

⁴ http://www.se4all.org/hubs_latina-america-and-the-caribbean (accessed April 28, 2016).



assistance to support the formulation of country-level implementation strategies provide examples of its facilitation work (SEforALL Africa Hub 2015). The hub thus serves a knowledge management function distinct from operational activities of the development banks that can include making investments to address SEforALL priorities. The Asian hub of the initiative, explicitly organized around a partnership between the Asian Development Bank, the United Nations Development Programme, and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, similarly counts networking and knowledge sharing activities as main elements of its mandate (SEforALL 2015).

Knowledge management contributing to coordination takes different forms. It corresponds to low-intensity coordination that emphasizes generating and distributing relevant information rather than higher-intensity coordination involving joint planning. On a broad level, increased attention to the sustainable energy agenda in Africa has heightened awareness among bilateral and multilateral development actors of the utility of systematized knowledge about ongoing energy initiatives on the continent. To expand the information base on the geographical scope and distribution of energy initiatives, their sectoral focus, and selected components of initiative design, the SEforALL Africa hub collaborated with the Africa–EU Energy Partnership to conduct a mapping of energy initiatives on the continent (Africa–EU Energy Partnership 2016). While this mapping exercise only produced a broad overview of energy initiatives in Africa, it provides a basis for further information collection efforts guided by the Africa hub to background actor coordination by highlighting where international public investments in the energy sector have been concentrated and encourage complementary future investments. This effort reflects the potential of the multilevel initiative to influence decision-making on resource allocation in the energy sector across countries and to highlight where investment gaps exist that a variety of stakeholders can contribute to filling.

The policy guidance functions of the SEforALL initiative are not limited to the regional hubs and represent a key element of promoting the consistent implementation of the agenda at country level. Core documents provide a common structure for formulating country action agendas outlining current energy profiles and prospects and how to translate SEforALL goals to a given country context. The preparation of investment prospectuses follows the development of action agendas and identifies possible areas for investment for a variety of public and private investors.⁵ These guidance documents call for the creation of country-level focal points in the form of an SEforALL secretariat to reduce overlaps among governmental actors whose mandates relate to varied dimensions of the SEforALL agenda and span regulatory, planning, and financial roles in addressing energy access, efficiency, and renewable energy goals. The wide scope of actors influencing energy development outcomes is illustrated in Nigeria's action agenda, which indicated that 20 ministries had participated in consultations providing input into the document alongside representatives from federal states and stakeholders from the private sector and civil society, academia, and the donor community. Its SEforALL

⁵ <http://www.se4all-africa.org/the-africa-hub/what-we-do/policy-elaboration-and-guidelines/> (accessed November 17, 2016).



secretariat intends to bridge conflicts among governmental actors and facilitate dialogue among relevant energy stakeholders by promoting information collection and dissemination activities (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2016). Such activities emphasize the role of SEforALL country secretariats as conveners rather than entities with an autonomous planning mandate.

Given that the SEforALL initiative remains young, there is a gap between the coordination mandates attributed to regional hubs and country-level secretariats on paper and their implementation. An assessment of early country-level experiences with SEforALL implementation in Nepal highlighted that the appointed cross-governmental coordination forum to guide SEforALL implementation faced challenges related to its dependence on various ministries for technical expertise, its limited ability to shape the agendas of other governmental actors, and the persistence of divided energy-related mandates across bureaucracies (Lundsgaarde 2016). The multidimensional character of the SEforALL agenda, addressing energy access, efficiency, and renewable energy goals that imply regulatory and funding shifts affecting diverse sectors, creates a demand for action that touches on a variety of jurisdictions. The evidence from Nepal illustrates that, in spite of its global network structure and thematic focus, the SEforALL implementation model integrates elements of a country-focused development cooperation approach and its inherent difficulties, in light of continued compartmentalization among ministries and donors in addressing energy challenges. This is also clear from the outlook for further implementation of the initiative in Africa, which emphasizes the need for advances in terms of embedding the initiative in national planning processes and strengthening coordination efforts among government ministries and among donors (SEforALL Africa Hub 2017). Cross-governmental coordination based on the convening and awareness-raising role of small secretariats will take time to take root.

The SEforALL agenda not only promotes collaboration among diverse government ministries at country level but also encourages engagement from stakeholders beyond government, in particular private-sector companies that are considered important partners in mobilizing funding and expertise and providing technologies to address sustainable energy goals. The lack of coordination among governmental entities can present an obstacle to private-sector actors to engage with the agenda, for example when overlapping jurisdictions confuse potential domestic and foreign investors about the governmental entry points to obtain information and bureaucratic requirements for receiving project approval. At the same time, forums for coordinating activities of international development partners may be insular in character, limiting their accessibility to diverse stakeholders. In the context of an expansive thematic agenda, the need to attract a broad range of actors to contribute to its implementation, and the recognition of the limitations in donor-centric coordination efforts of the past, there is a need for reflection on whether and how to integrate the coordination functions of donor-focused forums into national and global platforms in which information management provides a basis for resource allocation decisions.



Conclusions

This article's starting point is that, although the challenge of improving development cooperation is as old as the development policy field itself, the circumstances in which the challenge is addressed and the nature of appropriate responses to coordination challenges have evolved. The first decade of this millennium saw intensive efforts to strengthen coordination, coinciding with a period of strong economic growth in donor countries and corresponding disbursement pressure. Today's reality is different and characterized by critical public debate in donor countries, contracting real ODA budgets, and "visibility pressure." In the same period, the number and heterogeneity of development actors have surged and the global development agenda has become more expansive in the shift from Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Despite all these changes, one constant aspect is that there will be limited effectiveness of coordination efforts unless "recipients" have a concrete interest in making that happen and—ideally—are in the lead. Paradoxically, past efforts have often seen donors take charge and largely determine the conditions and process through which the recipients should take that lead. The country-level components of the SEforALL initiative confirm that national governments will continue to have a pivotal role in shaping the policy context influencing the effective use of resources and in outlining the character of investment needs within specific sectors.

Although the sustainable development agenda implies a holistic approach to addressing development challenges, the example of the SEforALL initiative, anchored in Goal 7 of the agenda, nevertheless highlights a trend away from centralized and planned cooperation strategies of the past. A key shift is the move from a government-to-government logic toward more flexible platforms for promoting collaboration among diverse actors that have a thematic rather than country-specific focus. This transition in part reflects the network character of the initiative and limited capacities of its conveners to steer the activities of partners contributing to the implementation of the expansive agenda. In contributing to expanding the information base on investment needs related to sustainable energy and policy reforms that spur advances in the sector, the platform serves as an intermediary between stakeholders at global, regional, and national levels.

This article does not assess the effectiveness of SEforALL in addressing its ambitious goals but rather presents the initiative as an illustration of how development cooperation and by extension different stakeholders' interests for coordinated action are changing. Assessment of the initiative's success in contributing to closing investment gaps and encouraging collaboration among diverse stakeholders therefore also presents an opportunity to examine the value of a changed approach to coordination. Although many traditional development partners are among the actors that SEforALL seeks to mobilize, the platform accepts that its goals can only be reached if a wide spectrum of partners including private-sector players participate in this process. To contribute to ensuring that the efforts of these actors pull in the same direction, the practice of coordination within the initiative



appears to privilege efforts to provide a multitude of actors with a useful information basis to fill relevant investment needs by making knowledge available and facilitating exchanges among actors over the promotion of formalized coordination mechanisms. As providing information alone does not imply that actors reorient their behavior in response to it, the initiative's ability to encourage uptake of core knowledge products to guide the activities of diverse stakeholders will likely be critical in influencing its success.

While this article does not challenge the continuing relevance of “partner-led” coordination, it transcends the donor-led versus partner-led dichotomy and leaves it open which actors are in fact best placed for making such coordination happen. Where it previously was a consideration of partner-led versus donor self-coordination, questions may now include what types of coordination functions should be emphasized and in which forum such coordination should best be realized. As coordination approaches shift, country-level and comparative assessments can examine the extent to which existing practices are absorbed or displaced by new approaches in considering the value of alternative coordination approaches. As a result of including more actors beyond governmental stakeholders, there is a need to move away from ideas around “planned coordination” as presented in early joint assistance strategies or ongoing EU joint programming initiatives towards an approach that ensures optimal enabling conditions for coordination to happen more organically and—for lack of a better word—opportunistically. The multiple levels of governance to which a platform like SEforALL can connect raises the prospect that one consequence of the advance of global multistakeholder initiatives is that improvements in coordination can follow from upstream information sharing, implying an increased willingness to use available data on resource needs as a basis for allocation or investment decisions.

The time is ripe to reframe both the motivations for coordination and processes for putting it into practice. As expanding agendas and ranks of development stakeholders downplay the relevance of country-level donor coordination structures and the aid management interface, there is an opportunity to shift attention to cross-governmental information management and competencies at the recipient level to create coherent framework conditions for welcoming financing. Both policy and academic research domains should adjust agendas accordingly, in considering how to move from an OECD-inspired and dominantly negatively motivated coordination push towards one where coordination is seen as an opportunity for mobilizing additional contributions toward development goals and promoting the effective use of resources that diverse stakeholders offer.

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