An important basis for the workshop is the research conducted as part of the project, ‘Sustainable Demand for Governance – Political Dimensions of Change’, funded by AusAID through its Australian Development Research Awards (ADRA) programme and undertaken by researchers from Murdoch University, International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University, The Netherlands, and Universitas Gajah Mada, Indonesia.
4 Driving Development Effectiveness: Donors’ politics without opposition

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Introduction

Challenges to the liberal consensus on governance in the developing world have attracted much attention, particularly in recent years under the rubric of concerns about “development effectiveness”. This has promoted new interest amongst international donors in political economy, as evidenced in research agendas increasingly focused on obstacles to change, such as the World Bank’s study of governance reform “under real world conditions”; and those focused on levers of change, such as the British Department for International Development DFID’s “drivers of change” approach. However, political economy insights have proved difficult for donors to operationalise and have yet to feed into substantial new departures in donor practice.

Donors’ turn to political economy takes place against the backdrop of broader debates surrounding the international agenda for action set by the 2005 Paris Declaration on Development Effectiveness. The Paris Declaration asserted the centrality of such terms as “ownership” and “partnership” in developmental discourses, and this has been understood in sharply divergent ways by political analysts. Some consider the ownership agenda is too apolitical (Hyden, 2008a; Unsworth, 2009; Rosser and Simpson, 2009), while others see it as ‘augmenting, and not undermining, established notions of good practice’ (Armon 2007: 654).

One debate is whether the insertion of concerns for “ownership” and “partnership” into donors’ relations with recipient government implies new relations of commitment from recipients or control by donors. Supporters of the ownership agenda consider it a matter of donors securing recipients’ commitment to the implementation of policies and programs, which extends to recipients taking responsibility for implementation (Whitfield and Fraser 2009a: 3). Critics tend to see this instead as donors wanting more control over the agenda as a way of limiting policy choices on the part of recipient governments (Whitfield and
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Fraser 2009a: 3, also Hayman 2009: 594). Thus, for Whitfield and Fraser, who has control is more critical than agenda contents and, indeed, how agendas are selected and pursued – through democratic, patrimonial or corrupt processes – because they consider ‘the question of whether a society can minimise foreign influence over its policymaking is logically and politically prior to questions about the quality of internal democracy and about the content of policies themselves.’ (Whitfield and Fraser 2009a: 5).

A further development with respect to the ownership/partnership agenda has been the emergence of the “new conditionality” critique. This has spawned a large literature on the politics of development practices which principally seeks to variously analyse technical processes as a form of coercive “biopower” (Duffield, 2007). Drawing on the writings of Foucault, this literature regards aid practices as comprised of myriad micro-technologies of discipline, which aim to reshape recipient agencies in accordance with donor rationalities (see, for example, Gould, 2005; Harrisson, 2004; Li, 2007). Where this succeeds, it is argued the result is to effect a depoliticisation of development by virtue of removing the bases for resistance within recipient states.

By contrast, our view is that international donors can be in less control of the development agenda than these and other authors suggest. Our point is not that donors generally disdain control; instead it is that they achieve it rather less often than is supposed as the political space for contestation over development agendas (and their implementation) remains rather more open than is claimed. Furthermore, we argue that the space for contestation of donor policies depends upon the way that aid money and policies function in the context of the local political economy. In countries where there is high aid dependence, for example, this may lead to technocratic elites internalising donor models, as in contexts such as Rwanda and Tanzania. Alternatively, different local political economies of aid may see a variety of context-specific strategies of co-optation, negotiation, manipulation and outright resistance. In our case studies in Southeast Asia, we found that international donors are less hegemonic and intrusive than is often portrayed; and the outcome of their intrusions, regardless of the ideology motivating them, is not always necessarily anti-poor and retrogressive, as the Foucaultian approach tends to predict. Therefore, we accept the premise that donors are working from – that political economy issues are critical to aid effectiveness – what we do not accept is that the turn has achieved a break with past thinking and practices. We are not alone in stating that the donors’ turn to political economy has been inconsequential (see
Unsworth 2009); where we make a contribution is in highlighting that the problem lies with donors’ conceptions of development as a public good, essentially uncontested and objectively known, and opposition as temporary, compensatable and open to “partnerships”.

Unsworth rightly indicates the important intellectual and institutional barriers to donors acting more politically; however, we reject her view that development happens when the right political incentives are created (Unsworth 2009: 889-890; also Williams et al. 2009). Instead, we argue political economy analyses need to understand conceptions of development or “good governance reform” as ideological constructs emerging from struggles between coalitions with different, structurally determined, material interests and resources of power. Hence, the analyses of the prospects for particular development projects need to proceed by carefully identifying the historically-determined interests, distributions of power, and processes by which alliances – not “partnerships” – between key groups are formed and maintained. In this way, donors can better know how their programs are interpreted by recipients, how this affects their alliances (or not) and, accordingly, how formal and informal shifts in alliances can strengthen or weaken different ideological perspectives, over short and long terms.

This paper is written in four sections. In the first section we explain the nature of the turn to political economy that donors and their consultants are now actively debating. This is followed by two sections on the attempts to operationalise political economy analyses, the latter directly critiquing three donor documents. Finally, we suggest an alternative conceptual typology for repoliticising development; one in which the reform orientations of participants are considered centrally.

*Capturing donors’ turn*

With greater international donor acknowledgement of the political dimensions of aid effectiveness, political economy analyses are being viewed as an important means of achieving improvements in development outcomes (see SIDA 2006, World Bank 2009, DFID 2009). In this section we outline how this turn is generally explained before proceeding with more directed coverage of the conceptions of politics involved. The literature we refer to is not limited to the publications of donors themselves, but includes
contributions also from a number of institutes and think-tanks with policy and research links to bilateral and multilateral donor agencies. This means there is not only a degree of institutional overlap arising from individuals crossing over as consultants and staff, a number of the same individuals are also critical observers of the turn, able to reflect back in their institutions on what is occurring. As a result, the discussion below serves to cover the common themes defining the turn as well some of the more outlying views, not reflected in donor documents, but which indicate what is being debated more fully.

International donor’s turn to political economy analysis is most often expressed as the desire to identify the “underlying” causes of the outcomes from their interventions (see Dahl-Østergaard et al. 2005: 19, Booth et al. 2005: 2, Cammack and Thompson 2008, World Bank 2009). Where attention had been on poor governance, faulty institutions and or lack of “political will”, the intention now is to “go beneath the surface” of these to account for these. In this, no one framework of analysis is agreed upon and recommended; mostly there is some variation on the conceptual mix of “actors, institutions and structures”. A second common theme is that donors are wanting to identify not only the obstacles to change, but also the positive levers or “drivers of change” (World Bank 2009: ix, DFID 2005).

There is rather more critical comment on what this means for donors’ practices, generally the need for them ‘to start with the country context, not with a specific policy agenda’ (DFID 2003: 11). Criticisms of technocratic approaches to governance reform are a clear influence here; both with respect to the “straight to Weber” concern to replicate international best practice and the focus on formal institutions, resulting in too little attention to the informal processes that can explain how political actors actually behave and how political systems really work (Hyden 2008b, Unsworth 2006). Whilst for some, this suggests a need for interventions to be adapted to local/country circumstances, for others it suggests more – that the local should be a source of policy and programming initiatives. For example, to quote Hyden:

To date, donor agencies have acted as if the glass is half empty. The challenge has been to fill the void with ideas and practices that have worked elsewhere. What if the glass is viewed as half full and the challenge is to fill it by improving practices already on the ground in Africa? (Hyden 2008b: 1-2)
However, starting with the country context is not the same as a political approach as it can suggest adaption to the status quo. Booth and his colleagues are more concerted advocates of donors as behaving as brokers of change. Their starting point is there are often discernable opportunities for reformers ‘to use strategies and tactics’ to shape development outcomes (Buse and Booth 2008: 3, Booth et al. 2006). From this they conclude donors need to allow greater space for ‘adaptive’ learning and be much more flexible and responsive in their planning and financing of projects and programs (Booth and Golooba-Mutebi 2009: 25). In short, what these researchers have more in mind is that development is a political process, albeit one they view as negotiable.

Going a step further, it is signalled that politics is not something to be avoided; as the essence of development is that donors have to ‘deal with it’ (Booth et al. 2006: 1, Unsworth 2009: 887). As Grindle put it before, it is necessary to ‘accept politics, not as a spanner in the economic works, but as the central means through which societies seek to resolve conflict over issues of distribution and values’ (Grindle 1991: 45). Thus, Edelmann talks of using ‘positive language’ (Edelmann 2009: 74) with respect to political factors. By this he means, instead of thinking that politics is always in the way of things, there is a need to acknowledge the legitimacy and rationalities of political behaviours in their own terms.

We can see then that the literature on donors’ turn to political economy offers plenty of pointers to the implications for development practice. However, despite the urging to do more with political economy analyses, politics continues to be conceived of in largely stunted and instrumental terms. In the next section we indicate this in reviewing the various attempts to operationalise political economy. Overwhelmingly, either political economy insights are used to adapt to the status quo – and essentially avoid politics – or, alternatively, they are viewed into “factors” in the current tool bag of donor interventions (Booth et al. 2006, Chhotray and Hulme 2009: 45).

Operationalising political economy

Broadly it is accepted that international donors have found it particularly difficult to operationalise political economy; to translate research insights into actionable strategies (Warrener 2004, Dahl-Østergaard et al. 2005: 23-25, Scott 2007: 89, de Haan and Everest-Phillips 2007, Bird 2008, Unsworth 2009, Chhotray and Hulme 2009: 45). As Unsworth
makes clear, donors’ approaches have remained largely technocratic and ‘there is little evidence that it is prompting them to question their (mostly implicit) assumptions about how development happens’ (Unsworth 2009: 884).

First, political economy analyses are said to enable international donors to trim their ambitions for reform to better align them with what is “feasible” and “realistic” in different contexts (World Bank 2009: 12-13, DFID 2009: 150-17). As Unsworth (2009: 887) observes, ‘a common experience is that political analysis can prompt country programme managers to adjust their expectations, review overall priorities, and make changes in project design and aid modalities’ (Unsworth 2009: 887). The trimming can apply to goals, timeframes and expectations of a clear result (Booth et al. 2006: 60, Dahl-Østergaard et al. 2005, de Haan and Everest-Phillips 2007: 12). Political economy analyses are considered to equip international donors with the knowledge to better understand the risks of failure they face and to cut their cloth accordingly. In this light, the donors are in fact aiming to avoid political engagement by sticking to working within the status quo.

Alternatively, political economy analyses are operationalised as a way to equip donors to identify leaders or “champions” to be the drivers of change. Williams et al. describe these as individuals within political and bureaucratic elites who are ‘motivated by considerations of the greater public good’ to ‘play a pivotal role in promoting change’(Williams et al. 2009: 28). However, they warn such individuals are not necessarily powerful; they may be committed but ineffective. Also, they may ‘often have multiple agendas and issues’ and so ‘their needs, incentives, and constraints’ need to be fully understood (World Bank 2009: 47). The focus on elites is significant: de Ver (2008: 49) includes leaders from business and civil society, but her attention to “coalitions” is still limited to the interactions among them and not between them and the marginalized poor, for example.

More than any other, there is a view that political economy insights can be operationalised by efforts directed at changing resource and or political incentive structures (Landell-Mills et al. 2007, Booth 2008, Unsworth 2009, Chhotray and Hulme 2009: 41, Williams et al. 2009). Incentives are in this respect the “carrot” alternative to the “stick” of conditionality: both are considered to encourage desired behaviours. Whereas “champions” are essentially already made, here the intention is to create and shape new reformers. This can be allied
with the concern to identify the winners and losers from change, to ensure that the losers are sufficiently compensated to avert their resistance (Meier 1993: 387).

However, despite there being wide acceptance of the role of incentives as drivers of change, there is little actual analysis ‘of how incentives and political processes operate in practice’ (Landell-Mills et al. 2007: 5, also de Haan and Everest-Phillips 2007: 10). Williams et al. (2007) are critical of attempts to use only financial leverage, arguing for longer term institutional changes to support actor behaviour; yet they do not abandon incentives, all they do is source them differently, in institutional frameworks. From our perspective, it is likely that the incentives international donors can offer are one or more among many that the targeted recipients face. Moreover, donor programs are often designed to link with – and promote – the very capitalist development processes that can provide other, “perverse” incentives not to participate or comply (by, for example, providing alternative revenue sources). It is one thing to examine the political economy of particular, “intentional” (planned) development processes; it is another to consider the political economy of related, “immanent” (structural) processes, and how these intersect with the planned interventions (see Cowen and Shenton 1996: 4).

The thinking on incentives is linked to the ‘principal-agent problem’ in rational choice theory (see Nunberg et al. 2010). This is ‘the problem of motivating one party to act on behalf of another’ (World Bank 2009: 51): the issue being how to get one actor (the agent) to behave in ways that satisfy the preferences of another (the principal, the donor). Critically, because individuals are assumed to act according to their rational calculations of the best way to enhance their utility, they are thought to be best motivated to change by personal inducements. Linking incentives to utility maximisation does not enable understandings of the political process in terms of inequalities of power and ideology (Whitfield and Fraser 2009b: 36, Grindle 1991).

Alternatively, political economy analyses are said to enable better communication strategies. DFID reports that political economy analyses have improved ‘the quality of dialogue and engagement with partners’ (DFID 2009: 18). Communication strategies are to be directed at reformers, opponents and the public in general to facilitate “voice”, deliberative dialogue and coalition building (Odugbemi and Jacobson 2008). In World
Bank terms, information campaigns and intensified dialogue with key stakeholders can be drivers of change in that they ‘deepen the understanding of reform issues and/or to win support’ (World Bank 2009: 20). Otherwise, the World Bank also refers to the need for ‘information and communication campaigns’ (World Bank 2009: 21) in which international donors act as "honest brokers". There is similar talk in relation to coalition building – wherein donors work to develop linkages between different pro-reform individuals and or groups to aggregate, support and embolden the drivers of change. For example, Booth and Golooba-Mutebi speak of ‘another kind of facilitation, namely the brokering or negotiation of difficult change processes, turning potential realignments of interest into actual realignments’ (Booth and Golooba-Mutebi 2009: 21); there are ‘conditions in which an intelligent third party can expect to play a useful role, as an enabler of constructive realignments’ (Booth and Golooba-Mutebi 2009: 21) between different actors. Both the communication and honest broker approaches stress the contingencies in political alignments, but again with rather less attention being paid to the inequalities of power and ideology.

Finally, there are attempts to operationalise political economy insights through donors acting to ‘build demand’ for change among citizens (AusAID 2007, Haley 2008). This is generally conceptualised as working ‘outside the state to build progressive change coalitions across civil society, the private sector and the media’ (DFID 2009: 6). Recently, AusAID has acknowledged that its own responses to the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action have focused on ‘ownership’ and ‘harmonisation’ (AusAID 2009: 1-2) with partner governments and not with in-country non-state actors. Accordingly, the agency is now working to see how ‘engaging with civil society can help extend “ownership” beyond central government’ (AusAID 2009: 1-2). In this way, political incentives are operationalised in ways that recast the principals as citizens who can (or ought to) wield the weapon of accountability to demand good development from their agent politicians (who want to be re-elected) (World Bank 2009).

Compared to the trim ambition response above, this is clearly a more proactive and indeed apparently political response from donors. However, a question is what demands are to be supported? Are we observing donors attempting to build new, previously untapped support for their own (struggling) programs, or are they looking to support (more concertedly than in the past) the “organic” demands of existing social movements? The gap between these
need not always be great, still it is useful to compare the “build demand” response to solidarity actions. Solidarity means engaging with the movements of poor and marginalised people because it is the authenticity of their demands, not the technical correctness of their solutions that makes them authoritative. An important point is that solidarity entails taking sides in historical conflicts that are as well often deeply ideological. By contrast, to what extent does the “build demand” response require that civil society organisations, for example, trim their own reform ambitions to comply with donors’ expectations for the resultant social order? The power relationships in these two are very different. Currently, most official development “partnerships” with civil society organisations are directed at the effective implementation of the donor’s program.

**Critiquing the turn**

In this section we elaborate on what is missing from the political economy turn of international donors. In bringing politics back into development, the donors have not radically transformed their notion of development, but have emptied the concept of politics of its meaning and resonance. This is achieved through the retention in donor discourse of the idea that development ‘is a public good’ (Hyden 2008b: 3). The precise nature of this public good is affected by context to be sure, but it is objectively identifiable as operating in the public interest all the same. This conception of development is antithetical to an understanding of development itself as political. Hyden (notes, international donors have ‘tended to take authority, consensus and the pursuit of collective goals as givens. … [They have] acted on the premise that there is a “negotiated order” between equal partners’. He adds, ‘The alternative [view] that collective goals may be the negotiated outcome of conflicts between parties holding different degrees of power is never considered’ (Hyden 2008a: 262-63).

Evidence for this conception of politics can be found across a range of donor documents. Here we focus on three: *Building Demand for Better Governance: New Directions for the Australian Aid Program* (2007), *Problem-Driven Governance and Political Economy Analysis: Good Practice Framework* (2009), and *The Politics of Poverty: Elites, Citizens and States: Findings from Ten Years of DFID Funded Research on Governance and Fragile States 2001-2010* (2010). Although these documents are clearly not representative as a sample, they were selected following a wider review of numerous documents produced
by bilateral and multilateral aid agencies. The first two, produced by the World Bank and AusAID, exemplify three broader patterns identified in donor approaches to political economy: namely, a reassertion of development as a public good, objectively identifiable; a consequent view of opposition as temporary and compensatable rather than structurally and ideologically determined; and the use of a variety of framing strategies to avoid awkward realities that threaten this view. Such strategies include: emphasis on the “local” at the expense of the national; emphasis on service-delivery rather than, for example, redistribution of resources; an understanding of “structural factors” as primarily concerned with geographical realities and resource endowments rather than as related to issues of economy or class; and concentration on citizens as clients of public services rather than as contenders for control over state institutions and resources. These emphases shore up a conception of development as essentially technical and uncontested, allowing an embrace of politics as a bargaining process rather than as a struggle aimed at reforming entrenched structures of power.

In the World Bank’s formulation, two recurring concepts suggest the assertion of development as a public good. The first concept is that of ‘progress’ (World Bank 2009: 10): the utility of political economy analysis is that it allows analysis of situations ‘where political economy factors appear to prevent progress that is otherwise considered possible from a technical perspective’ (World Bank 2009: 10). The unquestioned assumption that the World Bank policies equate to progress, objectively measured from ‘a technical perspective’ is maintained despite awareness that opposition may emerge from ‘underlying drivers such as the relationship between stakeholders, available rents and how they are distributed, interests, collective action dilemmas and incentives’ (World Bank 2009: 9-10). The Bank acknowledges that there may be opposition to reform: ‘many of the reforms ... involve changes to power relations, rent-seeking approaches or to ingrained incentive structures’ (World Bank 2009: 11). Yet these are never problematised in terms of the assertion of “progress”: the Bank’s framework proceeds from the assumption that the Bank’s account of “good governance” is unquestionably for the good of all over the long term. This has an impact on the way that the Bank conceives of opposition itself. Opposition cannot be regarded as serious or legitimate, even though it may be understandable in cases where particular groups bear an unfair proportion of the costs of development. Yet this is regarded as either temporary or compensatable, given the overall dividends from “development”. The idea that development may attack the material
interests of certain classes in society in order to benefit others is never taken seriously. Opposition is reduced to coordination problems associated with the difficulties of transition, rather than structurally and ideologically determined conflict. Consequently, structural analysis in World Bank documents is never fully elaborated: where it occurs it focuses mainly on geographical issues such as distributions of natural resource endowment. There is no concern to unpick structural inequalities of dominance and subordination within society, or to analyse how these might be entrenched or attacked by development processes.

For AusAID (2007 and 2009), equally, the emphasis on development as, ultimately, good for everyone has led to antagonism towards “oppositional” groups. AusAID uses the concept of “partnership” to frame a different sort of politics, associated with the building and coordinating of networks of governance rather than with struggle between dominant and subordinate groups. AusAID defines partnerships as ‘strategies that increase links between local communities, local government and civil society in the planning, delivery and performance assessment of local services, or plans to meet other local development challenges’ (AusAID 2007: 7). This range of strategies can be used, it is asserted, ‘to develop collaborative rather than oppositional relationships with government on various issues’ (AusAID 2007: 7). Indeed, partnerships are intended to be based upon ‘mutual respect, transparency, shared planning and decision-making, co-ordination and support’ (AusAID 2007: 5). Rather than constituting a process which is essentially contested and contentious, producing new relations of domination and subordination, development is now regarded as largely uncontroversial and “of mutual benefit”. The possibility of structurally disadvantaged groups existing in persistent relations of subordination vis-à-vis elite actors – whether state, non-state, or community elites – is precluded. Instead, opposition is reframed as the pursuit of self-interest at the expense of the public interest – hence the inordinate focus on patrimonialism as a form of rule that is antithetical to this. Opposition, even in the classical liberal form of assertive scrutiny of the state and rights based resistance to expansions of state power, can therefore be largely dispensed with.

AusAID’s model of partnership runs the risk of imposing forms of collaboration that disguise and marginalise conflict, rather than allowing it political expression. Indeed, AusAID makes the ability to ‘have a respected and credible voice’ contingent upon the ability to engage in approved forms of partnerships, rather than taking a ‘blunt oppositional
approach’ (AusAID 2007: 2). This narrows the scope of acceptable forms of opposition to well within the rather broad limits envisaged by classical liberalism. It further raises the prospect of replacing liberal institutions with new forms of network governance which, via partnership relationships backed by donor funds, expand the reach of the state far more widely than before. For donors, admitting the legitimacy of opposition entails undermining the authority of technocratic development models. One strategy for ameliorating this problem is to narrow the scope of development, and this has been achieved by two means. First, the fashion for decentralisation has prompted a narrowing of the spatial horizons of development. Second, a shifting of the focus of “development” from economic growth to provision of services allows a narrowing of the conception of the state-society relationship. The assumption is that the major mode of engagement between citizens and governments is as consumers of services. That citizens should be empowered to assess the performance of those services, is central to the new public management model associated with the neoliberalisation of states in the West from the early 1980s. This is significant, since drawing upon the neoliberal, market-based model of community relations in fact obviates the need for the kinds of structural analysis that “demand for good governance” approaches initially posited. Once the citizen has been tacitly recast as a consumer of services, “empowerment” becomes oriented around mechanisms for complaint or consultation about a restricted list of government activities (Jayasuriya and Rodan 2007). While the stranglehold of pernicious, “rent-seeking” and “patrimonial” elites remains to be tackled, there is little else on the liberal horizon for politics to deal with, except the day to day brokering of minor conflicts.

Combining these two trends and pitching development as a process of service delivery which occurs at the “local” level within “communities” makes it easier to assert that it is also consensual. Reliance upon the “community” and the local level has the effect of reducing the scope of politics to the level of the “village” while framing out larger scale, specifically structural processes of transformation. Of course village politics can be and often is contentious and stratified; however, it is also often very well policed and poorly networked internationally, so that practices of opposition or processes of exclusion are less overtly contentious. Looking specifically at service delivery also reduces the extent to which even intra-village politics interferes with the assumption of fundamental consensus. At the village level, most services – e.g. health, education, access to justice, use of the vote (AusAID, 2007: 4) – are externally provided goods; their quality and scope are rarely the
subject of intra-village contestation unlike, say, regimes of land ownership and resource control.

These discursive strategies allow the assertion of a “political” approach to development which in fact leaves almost entirely intact a regime in which donor priorities are imposed onto recipient communities and governments in a manner highly reminiscent of conditionality. Use of the term “ownership” does little to disguise this: although it features heavily in contemporary aid discourse, it is rarely used without ambivalence. For AusAID, a key concern of governance programs is ‘building the demand’ for good governance (AusAID 2007: 3, emphasis added), suggesting that intervention is required to orient community action to priorities identified by donors. Elsewhere, however, the document specifies that local priorities ‘may not match donor-identified priorities’ and that ‘[l]essons from past experience highlight that when external actors identify these issues, they risk not only lack of local interest and ownership, but also legitimacy’ (AusAID 2007: 4). The World Bank shares the same ambivalence towards ownership as the AusAID document. Thus, the Bank comments: 'Because feasible solutions are sensitive to the political economy context, they should in principle be more compatible with country ownership a key principle of the development effectiveness agenda’ (World Bank 2009: 12). Yet, as with the AusAID document, the preoccupation is with ‘building support’ (World Bank 2009: 15) for pre-existing World Bank agendas, and much discussion is devoted to the utility of the analysis for decisions and options for “the team” and for the “reputational risk” of the Bank (see World Bank 2009: 10).

The DFID document, The Politics of Poverty, goes much further towards reinvesting the politics of development with ideas about structurally produced inequality and collective struggle. In synthesizing ten years of research, DFID reports: ‘Research has shown that political context and process is central to shaping the way politicians and policy makers decide for or against progressive changes that can deliver legitimate, capable, accountable and responsive states’ (DFID 2010: 5). The assertion of “progress” is associated with ‘the role of contestation and bargaining between the state, elites and citizens in building the public institutions that deliver development’ (DFID 2010: 5). It is important to note that contestation and bargaining remain associated with means, rather than with ends. “Development” remains to be “delivered” rather than constructed through political action.
However, in the report, a key concern with “the political settlement” allows attention to structural inequalities embedded in political institutions that maintain the dominance of elites at the expense of subordinate groups.

Consequently, DFID’s agenda for rethinking development allows much more emphasis on struggles for power among unequal contenders than either AusAID or the World Bank is prepared to admit. DFID acknowledges the need to promote “active citizenship” whereby citizens develop as actors, capable of claiming rights and acting for themselves’ (DFID 2010: 52). Furthermore, the development of citizens as actors is regarded as requiring the forging of “broad coalitions” which promote changes through ‘contention and contestation – both inherent in how they are framed and in how they are fought’ (DFID 2010: 55). In regarding contentious coalitions as drivers of change, DFID explicitly challenges ‘approaches to participation and civic engagement, which reduce such processes to technical solutions, or to notions of and processes of “national ownership”, achieved through non-contentious consultation and dialogue – but which veil vast chasms of differences in power and interest’ (DFID 2010: 55). DFID regards the mere provision of state-sponsored space for participation as insufficient to challenge such inequalities: the mobilization of ‘broad-based coalitions’ on their own terms is required (DFID 2010: 64), and this should apply to ex ante contention over policy as well as ex-post contention over the quality of services delivered (DFID 2010). This leads DFID to an understanding of development which requires collective action to challenge dominant power relations.

In this vein, DFID rejects AusAID’s appeal to the “local community” as a means of avoiding contentious politics. Indeed, the DFID report specifically asserts that decentralised institutions are ‘no more likely, in and of [themselves] to be more accountable’ (DFID 2010: 47) noting that local politics is just as elitist as national politics, and that decentralization can be used to shore up national level inequalities, rather than to undermine them.

However, even in DFID’s relatively radical formulations we see certain restrictions imposed. First, DFID persists in viewing collective struggles as something that need to be understood in order for donors to achieve their goals in promoting change. For example, the report notes with respect to fostering coalitions for change that ‘strengthening organisations that are on the margins of the network and have few relations to the state is
likely to have limited impact. On the other hand, strengthening those central to the network and well-connected to the state is likely to produce far greater impact’. DFID concludes from this ‘the need for some caution, especially on the part of external organisations, about their ability to engineer quick institutional fixes’ (DFID 2010: 70). While the caveat is well-made, it is only relevant if collective action is seen as an instrument for “institutional fixing” rather than as an end in itself, in terms of challenging power relations in society.

Similarly, in its concluding chapter, DFID notes that outsiders have far less influence over local development processes than is often assumed’ (DFID 2010: 92); yet again, this statement is delivered as a warning rather than as the starting point for rethinking the purpose and nature of “development”.

Furthermore, throughout the report, key terms such as “exclusion/inclusion,” “mobilisation” and “legitimacy” are substituted for a careful analysis of different types of coalition or collective action. The report claims that ‘capacity to mobilise supporters’ is essential for effective rule, and that this capacity flows from ‘social legitimacy’ (DFID 2010: 17). However, in this section of the report, legitimacy and mobilisation are seen as a function of institutional design rather than as a function of distributions of power achieved through struggles between elites and masses. This, arguably, glosses over the particular dynamics of political action. Although later in its report, DFID flags the need for broad-based coalitions to undertake collective action, these are regarded in terms of securing policy change rather than as fundamental to the political settlement itself. As such, the opportunity to connect the achievement of policies with the redistribution of power in society is lost: the latter is discussed almost solely in respect of founding moments in post-conflict states, while the former is related to questions of service delivery, losing the opportunity to regard development, even outside fragile and post-conflict situations, as a process of open-ended struggle and contestation.

The language of exclusion, inclusion and marginalisation opens up the prospect of discussing inequalities in distributions of power and access to resources, and making this fundamental to conceptions of development. Here, too, DFID goes far further than either the World Bank or AusAID in acknowledging persistent structural inequalities between groups. However, DFID limits its discussion of these largely to issues of ethnicity and
gender. Thus particular and salutary attention is paid to the need to remove structural obstacles to the empowerment and participation of women, indigenous groups, ethnic minorities, dalits and so on (see for example, DFID 2010. 17; . 34; . 44). Far less attention is paid to a broader understanding of class-based structures of domination, which would make the politics of struggle a far more central and challenging problem for donors. As it is, these elisions allow a conception of the politics of development which requires a redistribution of power at the margins, to be sure; but in the interests of legitimising elite settlements at the centre.

Taking the repoliticisation of development entails reconceptualising politics as a struggle between coalitions, not merely at the margins, but at the centre; and allowing conceptions of development to be articulated as an outcome of this form of contention. Political economy analysis thus needs to understand conceptions of development or “good governance reform” as ideological constructs emerging from struggles between coalitions with different, and structurally determined, material interests and resources of power. We employ the term “alliances” rather than “partnerships” as a means of emphasising the contingent nature of political coalitions, and their formation as an effect of the interplay of structurally determined interests, distributions of resources, and contending ideological positions. Analysis of these allows development outcomes to be thought through, not merely as the extent of adherence to or “ownership” of liberal norms, but as part of an ongoing process of struggle for control over the distribution of power and resources in society. For donors, this has the added value of giving emphasis to the nature of contending groups and their processes of formation; the stability or otherwise of alliances over time; and the ideological underpinnings of conceptions of “development” that are being contested.

From this perspective it makes sense to distinguish between, not only the constituencies that are “for” or “against” a particular project, but between the long term and short term interests of different groups more broadly. Short term interests may or may not broadly align with project aims; long-term interests are more concerned with an overall perception on the part of interested actors regarding ways in which strategies for maintaining domination or contending for power will be affected in the broader sweep of change associated with neo-liberalisation, globalisation and donor intervention. Understanding long term ideological imperatives can inform a political debate between donors and recipients that goes deeper than the sterile language of ownership and incentivisation.
Toward a Typology

As a starting point for such analysis, we suggest a research agenda for political economists working in development contexts which begin by elaborating questions of how ideas of reform emerge from struggles between and within alliances of reformers and opponents. The alliances forged around reform, we contend, are not “partnerships” but the stuff of politics itself. As such, reformers themselves, in relation to a particular reform agenda, can be categorised into idealists; pragmatists; and opportunists (see Table One below). Importantly, reformers (and opponents) may or may not have official responsibility for the reform’s implementation. Rather than look to who has official, institutional responsibility and seek their commitment or “ownership”, we suggest that a broader determination of reformers and opponents provides greater clarity about the interests and power relations involved and, also, about the nature of pro and anti-reform alliances and how they might be understood and maintained or countered. Alliances can be disaggregated into two subcategories: tactical alliances, based upon conceptions of short term instrumental gain; and dedicated alliances based upon ideological convergence around particular conceptions of reform (see Table Three below). Similarly, alliances against reform can be disaggregated into different types of opposition. We identify three categories: wreckers, who directly oppose reform as antithetical to short and long term interests; obstructers, who may be uninvolved in the short term in the particular reform, but whose interests and position, over the long term, form part of the overarching structures that idealists seek to transform; and recalcitrants, whose interests are tangential to the reform process, and whose passivity is a drag on reform efforts. Short term tactical or long term dedicated alliances may form between these different subcategories in order to oppose reform efforts.

A further category of actors is also significant in analysis of reform prospects – namely gatekeepers (see Table Two below). These are actors who hold power over the issue area and can facilitate or block reform action. This group is worth specific attention because, regardless of other interests that might come into play, maintenance of the gate keeping role is likely to form one of their key concerns. The role of gatekeepers is significant in considering how an interest in maintaining or altering long term distributions of power over policy processes is a key determinant of ideological convictions in particular policy areas.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reformers (in relation to a particular reform agenda)</th>
<th><strong>Idealists</strong>: interested in reform in so far as it advances long term goals of social transformation.</th>
<th>Form dedicated alliances only with ideologically likeminded actors; likely to reject tactical alliances.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Pragmatists</strong>: have long term goals of social transformation but also consider short term gains significant.</td>
<td>Form both dedicated and tactical alliances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Opportunists</strong>: have short term goals of self-interest; long term goals unrelated to reform agenda. Hence commitment is contingent and tactical.</td>
<td>Form tactical alliances.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table One. Types of Reformers

In addition, other key actors are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gatekeepers</th>
<th>Hold power over the issue area and therefore need to be onside in some way.</th>
<th>Short term and long term goals may coincide with reformers in some respect, or not; but maintenance of gate keeping position is likely to be one of their objectives. May be drawn into tactical alliance, but the power they hold entails that they can withdraw at any time with little cost to themselves.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opponents</td>
<td><strong>Recalcitrants</strong>: oppose reform because they see no advantage in supporting it.</td>
<td>Interests tangential but their cooperation is in some way necessary if their recalcitrance is an issue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Wreckers</strong>: oppose reform because they regard it as operating directly against their interests.</td>
<td>Interests are directly affected, and they will attempt to form tactical alliances (e.g. with recalcitrants) or dedicated alliances in opposition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obstructers</td>
<td>Not directly involved in the reform process, but their interests and activities form part of the broader structures that make reform difficult.</td>
<td>Interests and goals are wider than the specific reform programme, and form part of the overarching structures that idealists seek to transform.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table Two. Other Key Actors

A further step in constructing a typology for analysing the relationship between actors, distributions of power, and ideological approaches to reform, is to consider the power relations operating within alliances constructed around reform agendas. Co-operative alliances emerge among groups with broadly even distributions of power among themselves.

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As such, changes in perceptions of interest or divergence in goals are likely to more swiftly result in a breakdown in the alliance. Controlling alliances emerge among groups with unequal distributions of power among themselves (see Table Four below). Consequently, they may more easily maintain outward shows of stability even when under stress; but divergences in interest or breakdowns in common perceptions may cause the emergence of subversion from within. As asserted by a number of political economy analyses, the degree of formality of these alliances may be highly varied, from contractual or written agreements to loose groupings of support.

Having disaggregated reformers, we disaggregated their alliances further. These alliances are *cooperative*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Formal</th>
<th>Informal</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dedicated</strong></td>
<td>NGO or political party coalitions; long term programme funding relationships</td>
<td>Networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tactical</strong></td>
<td>Some kinds of short-term coalitions; project agreements</td>
<td>Ad hoc movements; political deals involving accommodation and compromise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table Three. Cooperative Alliances

These alliances are *controlling*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Formal</th>
<th>Informal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dedicated</strong></td>
<td>Co-optation (e.g. membership of an advisory board, encouraging the member to shift allegiances or modify aspirations over the long term)</td>
<td>Clientelism (e.g. promise of inclusion over the long term in a flow of benefits or informal rewards)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tactical</strong></td>
<td>Contractualism (e.g. one group is formally employed by another to achieve a particular purpose or legal or contractual obligations are brought into play to achieve compliance)</td>
<td>Coercion (pressure and/or inducements brought to bear to ensure compliance over the short term)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table Four. Controlling Alliances

A crucial aspect of this kind of analysis is that it draws attention to shifts in distributions of power among and within alliances, and the effect of this on the ideological framing of reform agendas. As such, this typology is capable of sustaining a more nuanced analysis of fluid and contested situations than models based upon incentivisation of rational preference-pursuing
actors; or models based upon pragmatic replication of good-enough solutions. Analysis of the relationships between class structure, power, and ideology in the context of alliances of reform allows for richer appreciation of the way that strategies of contention are both constrained by context and continually evolving. As such, this approach allows a more truly political analysis of the ways in which reform coalitions emerge and subside, and, finally, a properly political analysis of the support role that donors can play in that process.

Conclusion
The political economy analyses that have become prominent in donor thinking over the last decade reflect, in our view, an astute, recognition of the centrality of politics to the conceptualisation of development and reform. However, donors have been unwilling to import an adequate conception of politics itself into their analysis, resulting in political economy approaches that have failed to offer new ways of understanding aid programming. In particular, there has been insufficient recognition that contention over development means and ends represents more than transitory conflict over temporary or compensatable costs and benefits attached to the mechanics of change. We argue for a richer conception of politics as comprising entrenched struggles between groups emerging as a result of structurally determined inequalities in the distribution of power and resources within society.

Notes
i As these authors point out, it is obvious here how “principal-agent” dilemmas feed into this concern

References


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