
Book Review

The Fragmentation of Aid: Concepts, Measurements and Implications for Development Cooperation



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A new solution to this problem is being proposed in terms of creating a new coordination mechanism at a unified level that encompasses both the groups of actors located at opposite poles in the continuum of “development”. Do we have to look for another new and effective mechanism for coordination two decades down the line to solve another round of realized coordination failure?

The fragmentation of aid has emerged as an issue of considerable concern in the literature on development cooperation today. The phenomenon has often been attributed to multiplication of actors entering the field of international cooperation and thereby affecting “goals, modalities and instruments as well as the numerous operational and non-operational activities”. The edited volume under review offers multiple perspectives on fragmentation and tries to delineate the different challenges posed by such a phenomenon. The volume –outcome of an academic conference organized by the German Development Institute/ Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE) in 2013 – is, beyond any doubt, a welcome effort at flagging the multiple approaches to management of international cooperation and the consequent fragmentations both from critical and sympathetic perspectives.

Those critical of fragmentation consider pluralism as an impending factor affecting aid effectiveness – an issue being persistently raised ever since the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in 2005 and reiterated in Accra (2008) and Busan (2011). An antidote proposed to minimize fragmentation through “harmonization” so that “Donor countries coordinate, simplify procedures and share information to avoid duplication” was identified with such desired effects. The felt need for developing a uniform data dissemination framework that captures the minute details of flow of resources into a recipient country – disaggregated at levels of modalities, sectors and

purposes – is being articulated incessantly to ensure harmonization of international countries across the participants in the process. Needless to mention, these concerns emerged out of the members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC). DAC has been championing the cause for developing a uniform framework for quite some time. Incidentally, most of the donors prominently involved in development cooperation till the early 2000s subscribed to the standard definition of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and voted in favour of harmonization.

The situation changed abruptly with the visibly prominent engagement of some non-DAC countries as contributors to the flow of development assistance across the globe. Incidentally, a good number of them declined to adapt the DAC protocols on development assistance and refrained from identifying their support to others as aid. They, rather, identified some non-negotiable principles that distinguish their philosophy of development cooperation altogether from the principles adapted by DAC. Such an approach – popularly known as South-South Cooperation (SSC) – emphasized on a demand driven and horizontal approach to cooperation aimed at mutual benefit accruing to all the partners engaged in a particular collective effort in development cooperation sans any conditionality. In terms of quantitative measure, level of their development support appears insignificant still today. However, it is realized that such efforts at support have been much more effective in qualitative terms.

It needs to be added that a good number of emerging countries engaged in providing development assistance also preferred to side with the DAC protocols and called for a uniform framework of

data dissemination that would capture the flow of development assistance from the emerging economies as well. Constitution of GPEDC as an outcome of the Busan conference and their ongoing efforts at developing a one-size-fits-all monitoring framework to monitor the effectiveness of development assistance flows from different countries irrespective of their expressed differences in philosophical perspectives, has enhanced the debates around harmonization and fragmentation.

As already argued a good number of the newly emerging countries who engaged themselves in SSC do not subscribe to the DAC protocols and consequently, do not subscribe to the need for harmonization and avoidance of fragmentation. In a pluralistic pursuit, they argue in favour of encouraging multiple approaches to cooperation that facilitate enhance the choice set of desired support for such countries in need of help. Obviously, such a belief shoots down the call for a uniform monitoring and data dissemination framework. Fragmentation that encourages plurality, is not a concern for them, rather is considered an advantage, to realize an inclusive global architecture for development cooperation.

This edited volume is a timely contribution to the present day debate on aid fragmentation and will raise a number of policy issues for further articulation besides providing considerable food for thought to practitioners engaged in development assistance to find their ways out of the confusing maze. However, two issues remain untouched. The first one is about the coverage of experiences in development assistance. The volume allocates disproportionately larger space to the issue of fragmentation from the perspective of the traditional donors, with

the experiences of the non-traditional bilateral, private and philanthropic actors being given very scanty attention. As already noted in the beginning, fragmentation as a consequence of plurality in approach, philosophy and is often argued in favour to encourage multiple approaches to cooperation that facilitate enhance the choice set of desired support for such countries in need of help. Obviously, such a belief shoots down the call for a uniform monitoring and data dissemination framework. Fragmentation that encourages plurality, is not a concern for them, rather is considered an advantage, to realize an inclusive global architecture for development cooperation. Some efforts at examining these arguments would have added immensely to the credibility of this collection.

The second issue is conceptual. Development, or lack of it, is often associated with domestic coordination failure in efficient allocation of available

resources. Failure to organize relevant institutional structure that could have ensured allocative efficiency is identified as the devil of the piece. International development assistance through DAC was conceptualized as a means to provide necessary support in bringing in the required institutional rigour to the developing nations and facilitate their “development”. The issue of fragmentation highlights that such an effort is also manifested with coordination failure at another level – those of the donors who intend to reduce the developmental gaps. A new solution to this problem is being proposed in terms of creating a new coordination mechanism at a unified level that encompasses both the groups of actors located at opposite poles in the continuum of “development”. Do we have to look for another new and effective mechanism for coordination two decades down the line to solve another round of realized coordination failure?

Recent Happenings in Development Cooperation

PALM-Japanese Meet

Pacific Islands Forum Leaders and the prime minister of Japan, Shinzo Abe committed to stronger action on climate change and the sustainable management of fisheries resources at the Eighth Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM 8). Pacific Island Forum leaders and Japanese PM Shinzo Abe committed to strengthening efforts to address the effects of climate change, given the existential threat it poses to Forum Island Countries and the region. They emphasised the need to step up leadership roles in international negotiations, to finalise the implementation guidelines of the Paris Agreement, and increase levels of climate finance commensurate with the needs of FICs. They emphasised zone based management as critical to the future sustainability of our shared fisheries resource. Forum leaders welcomed Japan’s commitment to strong development cooperation and people to people exchanges of 5,000 people over the next three years.