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Foreign Aid: Cultural Values and Norms

Abstract

This contribution focusses on some basic issues concerning the dichotomy between the cultural, and economic values and norms, respectively, of the foreign aid in form of Ordinary Development Assistance. It takes a critical view of the dominant economic values and norms embedded in the Washington Consensus and the neoliberal agenda, by drawing on the works of *Gerhard Banse* and his colleagues, acknowledging the different context in which they presented their deliberations. The concept of ‘Wertidee’ is introduced as a catalyst for cultural values and norms showing a potential for a sustainable culturally based values and norms systems in foreign aid.

Introduction

The dominant theory and practice concerning foreign aid in the form of Official Development Assistance (ODA) as defined by OECD (2015) are to a large extent based on economic, political and socio-political values, norms and sustainability notions. To be more precise, the ideological underpinnings of these prevailing values, norms, and sustainability notions are firmly couched in the neo-liberal agenda of the Washington Consensus as embraced by the various International Financial Institution (IFI)¹ and bilateral aid agency² (henceforth aid agencies). For a better understanding, let me define the two basic notions, namely the Washington Consensus and ODA.

The Washington Consensus is defined as a portrait of mostly neoliberal economic ideologies articulated by economists such as Hayek (1945, 1979) and Friedman (1980) embraced by IFIs and other aid agencies and interna-

1 IFIs include the World Bank (WB), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), at al.

2 Bilateral aid agencies include the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and Swedish International Development Cooperation (SIDA), etc.

tional organisations. Being in danger of oversimplification, the Washington Consensus promotes free trade, macroeconomic stability, floating exchange rates, and free market philosophy.

ODA is defined as:

„...flows to developing countries and multilateral institutions provided by the official agencies, including state and local governments, or by their executive agencies, each transaction of which meets the following test: a) is administered with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as its main objective, and b) is concessional in character and contains a grant element of at least 25% (calculated at a rate of discount of 10%).“ (OECD 2015, n.p.)

However, with reference to *ODA*, a cautionary note is in place here, namely *ODA* excludes humanitarian and military aid. But this may change in the future. That is, *ODA* will most likely include peace and security-related costs, including spending on counteracting extremism and will provide greater incentives for donors to apply non-grant financial instruments with the purpose to advance ‘private sector development in the least developed countries’ (Anders 2016, n.p.). From this perspective, it may be reasonable to suggest that by including military aid, values and norms notions of *ODA* will change.

Setting aside the proposed changes to the focus of *ODA*, it may be appropriate to propose my first theses, namely that an apparent lack of embedment of cultural values and norms into the theoretical and practical framework of *ODA*, a sustainability of aid effectiveness is highly questionable. For the purpose of sustaining my theses, this discussion will proceed from a critical outline of the Washington Consensus and the neoliberal Agenda.

A critical analysis of the Washington Consensus

The Washington Consensus is based on the following ideological stances: (i) Privatization of state enterprises; (ii) Liberalisation of inflowing foreign direct investment; (iii) Tax reform by implementing moderate marginal tax rates and extending the tax base; (iv) Deregulation: elimination of regulations that encumber free market entry or restrict constrict competition, except for a discerning oversight of financial institutions, and regulations warranted for reasons of safety and protection of the environmental and consumers; (v) Low government borrowing, thus maintaining a low fiscal deficits relative to GDP; (vi) Market determined and positive and moderate interest rates; (vii) Competitive exchange rates; (viii) Trade liberalization of

imports, with a specific emphasis on elimination of quantitative restrictions and low and relatively uniform tariffs; (ix) Public spending shifts from indiscriminate subsidies toward broad-based provision of strategic pro-poor and pro-growth, services (i.e. primary education, primary health care and infrastructure investment); (x) Legal security for property rights (Williamson, 1990, n.p.).

For our discussion, it may be opportune here to note that the Washington Consensus was important for determining policy towards purely economic development through ODA in South America, Asia, Middle East and North Africa, and other countries. Two points emerge here. Firstly, the ODA based development did not provide for inclusion of cultural values and norms, beyond the economic and socio-political values and norms embedded in the neoliberal ideology. Secondly, within a framework of the above stated ideological stances the Washington Consensus brought to the fore the following implications for the ODA: (i) Support of the free trade agreements through, for example, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) or North Atlantic Free Trade Association (NAFTA) through reduction of tariff barriers; (ii) ODA loans and grants have a tendency to require that the recipient governments implement free market reforms as a conditionality; (iii) Emphasis on free trade suggesting that developing countries should specialise in goods and/or/services where they have a comparative advantage meaning that developing economies need to stay within the realm of primary industry (Jakupec 2015; Jakupec/Kelly 2015a, 2016).

The shortcomings of the Washington Consensus agenda and ideology have become increasingly evident in the foreign aid arena. (i) As far as the support of the free trade agreements is concerned, it could be argued that free trade is not necessarily and always in the best interest of the ODA recipient developing economies. An austere implementation of free trade and comparative advantage may leave, as history in South America has shown, developing economies delivering volatile priced primary products in conjunction with low-income growth. If, however, developing economies promote new industries on the basis of the concept of modernisation, they may require not only selective tariffs on cheap imports but also government subsidies to become successful in modernisation of the industry, which goes beyond mere primary production (cf. Banse 1998, p. 9ff.) or akin to 'shallow modernisation' (cf. Zacher 2000, p. 55). (ii) Low government borrowing, in order to maintain a low fiscal deficit about GDP, may not produce the desired results. That is, if the government cuts spending at inappropriate timing by implementing of fiscal rules, it can cause unnecessary economic hardship. To explain, post Global

Financial Crisis (GFC) fiscal consolidation has caused low growth rates, and a failure to reduce debt to GDP ratios not only in many developing but also developed economies. If ODA recipient governments are pressured to cut spending, this in turn can also have the side effect of causing diminishing support for welfare programmes, thus increasing poverty. Of course, in the long term, it could be argued that to reduce structural borrowing to manageable levels is beneficial. (iii) Although privatisation under certain conditions may increase efficiency and thereby improve the effectiveness of products and services, it may not do so for key public sector industries and services. With reference to many key public sector enterprises, privatisation can lead to the situation where the private enterprises may ignore the wider social responsibilities, and cultural values and norms. Furthermore, a redirection of public spending towards public sector initiatives such as compulsory education, primary health care and infrastructure investment does not feature prominently in the Washington Consensus oriented ODA, for the former is firmly couched in the neoliberal agenda focussing on market-oriented policies arguing for reduced government interventions. Two points may illustrate the failure of the market-oriented policies. Firstly, the micro-economic crisis of South America in the 1980s and the South-East Asian crisis in the 1990s which were to be overcome through the IMF imposed austerity measures and free market economic structures have shown mixed results and were unpopular in the affected countries. Secondly, the GFC brought to the fore the instability of the free market economy. Beginning in 2007, the GFC has demonstrated the potential for free market ideology to create a continuing economic instability illustrated through high unemployment and low economic growth. In short, financial deregulation has created grounding for continuing financial instability.

In order to produce a balanced view, it may be appropriate to bring to the fore a sympathetic critic of the Washington Consensus. Considering the above stated ten Washington Consensus principles, it could be argued that these may have economic validity. For example, broadening the tax base, implementing sustainable government borrowing, acceptance of flexible exchange rates, investment in education and health services, may improve economic welfare. Depending on conditions, increased competition and privatization may have potential benefits. This would depend on the economic and socio-political values and norms that guide the notions of privatization. The post-GFC and the subsequent EU monetary crisis may be ascribed to the difficulties of managing a single currency, and to a lesser extent to the principles of the Washington Consensus.

The problem with the Washington Consensus broad set economic principles is that it subsequently depends on when, how and under which conditions these are implemented. For example, free trade may be beneficial under the condition of valid and desirable economic and socio-political values and norms. This means that from an economics point of view some developing economies may benefit from limited trade protectionism to develop new industries, which in turn depends on how it is implemented.

To conclude, the Washington Consensus has since the advent of the GFC deviated from its original ideology and a post-Washington Consensus is emerging within the ODA arena (Rodrik 2006; Lopes 2012). Irrespective of the failings of the free market, as demonstrated by the GFC, there is perhaps an advantage in considering each of the 10 Washington Consensus principles. However, it is important to make sure that these principles are subjected to enhanced discrimination and less unmitigated 'one-size-fits-all' implementation.

As it stands, the Washington Consensus is partly linked to the potency of the US economy. However, the US economy is likely to decline in relative terms vis-à-vis the Chinese and Indian economies. As far as ODA is concerned, the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the New Bank led by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (aka BRICS Bank) are forging a new 'consensus' (Jakupec/Kelly 2015b, p. 34). It could be argued that with the advent of the BRICS bank is creating a new consensus replacing the free market neoliberal ideology embedded in the Washington Consensus with a state-led economic growth based on a 'socialist-oriented market economy' which is fostered by a strong development bank (Jakupec/Kelly 2015b, p. 39).

The Neoliberal Agenda

As we will see neoliberalism and the Washington Consensus are two sides of the same coin. In order to set the scene for the discussion, let us define, however simplistically and briefly the concept called 'neoliberalism.'

Neoliberalism can be defined as a collection of economic policies maintained by an ideology that argues for the diminution of state-intervention in the economy and an advancement of laissez-faire capitalism to support personal freedom and human well-being through economic efficiency (Harvey 2005; Kotz 2000). Neoliberalism has its roots in the school of thoughts, as advanced by such as the Chicago School, the Austrian School, and the Mont Pélérin Society (Davidson 2004/05).

In accord with the Washington Consensus, development aid policies following this line of thought include a reduction or elimination of (i) capital controls and trade barriers, along with abolition of deficit spending, eradication of redistributive taxation, cessation of controls on international exchange, termination of economic regulation, reduction of public goods and service provisions, and minimization of active fiscal and monetary policies (Munck 2005; Nawroth 1961).

So what is the neoliberal agenda about foreign aid? The main point is that neoliberalism has been imposed on developing countries by Brenton Woods institutions like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) the proposed International Trade Organisation (ITO) which emerged later as the World Trade Organisation (WTO) (Woods 2009). Other institutions, such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), followed the same principles. In effect, much criticism leveled at the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund is that they wield tremendous power and influence in the allocation of development funding, but exclude the voices of developing countries most adversely affected by the Washington Consensus financial and trade policies.

To be sure, in theory, neoliberalism is principally about allowing trade between nations to be free of governance impediment. It should assure free movement of goods, services, resources and enterprises in an effort to continuously find resources at reduced costs with the aim to maximize profits and efficiency. Thus tariffs, regulations and specific standards, laws, legislation and regulatory measures, as well as capital flows and investment restrictions, are seen as barriers to free trade. In other words, the aim is to be able to permit the free market to naturally balance itself based on forces of market demands, which is crucial to successful market-based economies.

It is not necessary here to rehearse the whole political agenda of neoliberalism as much has been covered above under the heading of the Washington Consensus. It should suffice to state that the underlying assumption governing the notions of neoliberalism and the Washington Consensus then is that the free markets are a good thing. This may well be the case, but regrettably, reality differs from theory.

From a foreign aid or ODA perspective, neoliberal policies can be seen as positives and negatives. As far as the former is concerned, there were many pioneering results as far as foreign aid is concerned. Progress, economic growths, for some economies were significant on both the donor and

recipient side. However, many people in developing countries experiences increased poverty because the modernization, innovation and economic growth which was to be achieved through neoliberal policies and the reliance on the doctrine of the Washington Consensus did not eventuate, at least as far as their immediate needs are concerned. One of the reasons is that neither the Washington Consensus ideology nor the neoliberal economic agenda has articulated sufficiently the need for cultural values and norms that go beyond the free market theory.

Towards cultural values and norms in development aid

Given the absence of values and norms for the development aid, especially ODA, which go beyond the simplistic ‘one-size-fits-all’ free market agenda governed by the Washington Consensus and neoliberal economic agendas, it is necessary to draw on the wider relevant literature. The discussion here is focused on cultural values and norms. To be sure, as it was pointed out above, the ODA landscape shows the existence of economic and socio-political values and norms. However, the important missing concept is the notion of cultural values and notions that govern the perception of the cultural life-world of the ‘community’ of beneficiaries.

Still, the very concept called ‘culture’ is difficult to define. According to Hauser and Banse (2011), there are multiple difficulties ‘when dealing with the concept of culture’ (p. 31). According to Hauser and Banse (2011), there are three ‘conflicting characteristics of culture which cause difficulties’ (p. 32), namely: (i) Continuity and change denoted as a concept called culture. On the one hand there is the cultural tradition (i.e. continuation of the existing cultural values and norms), and on the other hand, the new cultural forms emerge in parallel to the existing ones (i.e. existing cultural values and norms change, replace existing ones). (ii) Standardisation and differentiation, referring to culture as a proclivity of value standardisation including behaviour patterns which on the one hand act as uniform notions, and on the other hand as variations according to individual, subcultural and minute culture values and norms. (iii) Openness and boundaries, referring to national cultures. In terms of openness, national cultures are open to influences from other cultures and their values and norms, and on the other hand, national cultures denote boundaries of communities and community-based cultural values and norms. To put it differently, communities recognise specific behaviours, cultural values and norms as their own and these determine the communal world view (Hauser/Banse 2011). Hauser (2011) referring to cultural diversity in terms of values and norms elucidates:

Cultural communities develop over time as behavioural and communicative groups in a common geographic space and on the basis of specific norms and values that have been formed through the interaction of the community with and within a specific „environment” socially and naturally, which represents a frame of reference” (p. 160).

In this context, cultural values and norms are historically based, which have developed over time within a parameter of the lived environment. These cultural values and norms are the bases for the social systems and their actualisation, commanding a distinctive social, economic, political and technical structures and developments (cf. Banse/Metzner-Szigeth 2005; Hauser 2011). In addition, we may also view norms and values from macro, meso, and micro levels. To put it in a context of development aid donors and recipients it could be argued that values and norms based on the above mentioned Washington Consensus and neoliberal ideology are within the realm of macro level, those espoused by the ODA recipient government as meso level and the recipient aid communities as micro level values and norms (cf. Szlavik/Füle 2011).

However, the additional question here is how to interpret the macro-level values and norms governing IFIs which are grounded in the Washington Consensus and neoliberal ideology? It may be argued that traditional cultural norms such as norms of customs, norms of conventions and norms of law are derived not from value systems but ‘Wertideen’ (value ideas) (cf. Kant 1968; Weber 1922).

In essence, the ODA donor agencies and recipient country have as their ‘Wertidee’ the as a sustainable development of the society leading a collective poverty reduction by increasing the societal participation in the economic growth and thus economic benefits. This is from cultural values and norms perspective a simplistic proposition, especially since the economic paradigm is not the sole concept embedded in cultural norms and values. The question is how far, if at all, can specific cultural values and norms be reconciled with the ‘Wertideen’ of a different culture. Here we have identified two concepts which need our attention. One is the sustainability of cultural values and norms, and the other is the sustainability of the economic development required for poverty reduction.

Sustainable Development, ‘Wertideen’ and Cultural Values and Norms

From the development aid perspective, the concept of sustainable development is seen as recognising that

...growth must be both inclusive and environmentally sound to reduce poverty and build shared prosperity for today's population and to continue to meet the needs of future generations. It is efficient with resources and carefully planned to deliver both immediate and long-term benefits for people, planet, and prosperity... [based on] ... three pillars of sustainable development – economic growth, environmental stewardship and social inclusion.” (World Bank, n.d.; n.p).

However, it is obvious that the question is the value and norm basis. As a 'Wertidee' the World Bank view of sustainable development may be seen as useful, but how it is to be realised within given meso level and micro level cultural values and norms? The response to this question may well be that there is a need to recognise or reconcile differences between 'Wertideen' and the inherent cultural values and norms at macro, meso, and micro levels – of donor agencies, recipient governments, and beneficiary communities. However, a cautionary note is required, namely to point out that in the ODA arena 'Wertideen' are not only socio-politically, but more so from a socio-economical vantage point needed.

Taking into account that ODA is set in a global context, the three levels of cultural values and norms, but especially the organisational (macro level) of the donor agency, is subject to competition with others, namely with other communities, societies, and cultures, whose values and norms differ from each other. The very notion of cultural diversity within and amongst ODA donors has not reached any significant level of attention in the discourse of sustainable development. However, the concept of sustainable development through ODA is a 'Wertidee' rather than a universal value such as 'justice' or 'freedom' (cf. Jonas 1984). At the same time, universal value produces certain 'Wertideen' that produce meanings in a specific context.

For example, 'justice' or socio-economic equity, in the form of socio-economic values is, in essence, a 'Wertidee' because it refers to and is based on normative settings, which are not negotiable or can be called into question. But how can such 'Wertideen' put into practice, for the underpinning values are as already stated, neither subject to negotiations, nor questionable? To put this in an ODA context

As a value notion of sustainable economic development, the 'Wertideen' of the donor agencies and the recipient governments are often competing (cf. Krugman/Wells 2004; Stiglitz 2005; Easterly 2006). To illustrate the point: As stated above, the major aid agencies pursue the 'Wertideen' of the Washington Consensus, which is based on neoliberal values. Against this many developing countries such as PR China and Vietnam pursue the 'Wert-

ideen' of the aforesaid 'socialist-oriented market economy' which is based on neo-Marxist values. To put this in a global context of development aid, the current model of sustainable development is in itself an illustration of a 'Wertidee' and thus culturally delineated. Thus the 'Wertideen' of the 'socialist-oriented market economy' are in a direct competition with the 'Wertideen' of the neoliberal Washington Consensus, and thus in completion with other societies' socio-economic values. However, the ODA literature is to a large extent mute on the cultural and socio-economic differences between the donor organisations and the recipient countries, which can be traced back to the respective values and norms in different socio-cultural settings.

As a notion of value, 'sustainable development' in developing countries can be canvassed within an array of normative settings, which are not called into doubt by neither the donor agency (as far as they 'Wertidee' is concerned) nor by the recipient governments (concerning their own 'Wertideen'). The latter for example may refer to issues of social justice based on the inherent values and norms of the society, whereas the former may refer to the issues concerning the 'principle of responsibility' or 'accountability' according to the aid agency's organisational culture, values and norms and imposed on the recipient governments and societies. Thus, potentially we recipient societies values and norms pitched against the donors' 'principle of responsibility' or 'accountability' imposed on the recipients.

Conclusion

It is arguably evident that the values and norms of the aid agencies, whose 'Wertideen' are firmly couched in the neoliberal ideology articulated through the Washington Consensus are mono-dimensional, disallowing other ideologies, 'Wertideen' and values and norms. To sum up, the predominance of the neoliberal economic values militates against the social and socio-economic values of many developing countries with diverse cultural foundations. While there is a general agreement amongst aid agencies that economy plays a vital role in ODA, there is little evidence that the neoliberal agenda has been embraced by developing countries. Even in the developed world, the mood is turning against the neoliberalism with its open markets. There is much evidence showing that the population in many Western nations are turning against the free market ideology (Stiglitz 2005; Jakupec/Kelly 2015a; Skipper 2016).

This phenomenon will have an impact on the ODA agenda, potentially leading to changes in value and norms shifting from economic to cultural

emphases. However, this should not be construed as a pure dichotomy. There is a 'third way,' namely to reconstruct the dominant economic paradigm as to become socio-economic allowing for a diverse cultural genus. In short, there is a need to bring cultural values and norms back into the socio-economic agendas of aid agencies. Only, if we have such a shift, sustainable outcomes of ODA may eventuate.

The differing values and norms that exist between the aid agencies and the recipient countries' cultures are seldom being subjected to a scholarly discourse. This, of course, may account for much misunderstanding about a value laden effectiveness of foreign aid. My concluding argument is that the economy-culture dichotomy that exists presently in the ODA arena depict two different global efforts which need to reach consensus on essential values and norms, in order to advance future sustainable development amongst aid recipient nations. This of course requires an open, culturally and socially inclusive and global dialogue about which values and norms are acceptable, both from the ODA donors' and the recipients' perspectives.

Such a dialogue, necessarily, contain some implicit as well as explicit coordination of balancing and selecting different, at times, competing values and norms, ranging from the cultural imperatives to economic choices on how to reduce poverty in developing countries through ODA. Such a dialogue and subsequent decisions are presently made difficult because the general trend amongst the Washington Consensus aid agencies and their followers consider their values and norms absolute and perceive any attempt to negotiate as inadmissible. Thus, most debates regarding values and norms which diverge from the economic agenda and try to pursue a sustainable culturally based values and norms (cf. Tauscher 2011) are presented as fundamental disagreements over the relevant of particular 'Wertideen'.

Yet, the proposition to open up a dialogue on the diversity of valued and norms ranging from the economic to the social to the cultural, is not a utopian idea. It may support the achievement of sustainable ODA with mutually acceptable culturally sensitive in the form of culture and culturality (Hauser/Banse 2011) and economically effective outcomes. Perhaps the basis for achieving such success lies in the cognition that ODA does not have a final stage, but is continuously evolving in which cultural values and norms denote lessons learned.

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