

# Preface

The demand to demonstrate the impact of foreign aid funding has grown exponentially in the last decade. This results from both increasing disbursements of Official Development Assistance (ODA), as well as tightening fiscal environments in most OECD countries, resulting at least in part from the Global Financial Crisis. There is considerable agreement that assessing the impact of investment in social sector development programming of foreign aid is both essential and highly problematic. Significant literature exists on methodological disagreements on how best to measure impact, as well as a wide range of technical manuals and “toolkits.” Most evaluation does not focus on impact. When it does, there are often significant methodological issues. Much of the literature on impact assessment of foreign aid is either atheoretical, or loosely based on thinking embedded either in evaluation, or risk mitigation.

The aim of this volume is to provide a critical analysis of social sector impact assessment of foreign aid, within a theoretical framework of development theory and practice, with particular reference to the dominance of the neoliberal paradigm in international aid. This book provides a contemporary discourse and critical analyses of existing practical and theoretical approaches to Impact Assessment for ODA. It juxtaposes perceptions and problematics of existing *a priori* assumptions governing impact assessment for ODA with newly emerging paradigm shifts including the rise and rise of neoliberalism, the fallout from the Global Financial Crisis, and post European Monetary Crises. Within this context, the book provides insights into emerging policies and practices, theoretical and practical frameworks, and IA design and implementations activities.

The core argument in the book is that *Aid for Trade* and *Value for Money* paradigms are the main promoters driving the global ODA in our “post GFC,” post EMC agenda. Thus, multi and bilateral aid agencies are required by their political masters to meet these new agenda goals as efficiently and effectively as possible at minimum of cost, with best possible benefits for the target audiences such as recipient countries’ citizens, businesses, the workforce, and other stakeholders. Additionally, new donors and nontraditional aid partners in the private sector provide further challenges and opportunities for Impact Assessment.

This book consists of a range of diverse views, contexts, experiences, and analysis. There is no intent for the chapters to be read sequentially. However, they all contribute to the core theme. The first two chapters provide a detailed analysis and critique of the current state of thinking on aid flows within international development, and the demand for both effectiveness and efficiency (Chapter 1); the increasing demand for, evolution of, and context for impact assessment in foreign aid (Chapter 2). Chapter 3 engages in an in-depth analysis of global economic paradigms, and the dominance of the neoliberal agenda as the driving force in aid allocations, and quality or results measurement. Chapter 4 extends this debate with an analysis of Aid for Trade, a classification of ODA which now accounts for up to one third of ODA flows, and is unashamedly a trade-focused construct.

The following two chapters move into a more applied discussion about aid effectiveness and aid impact with; an applied view of the theory and practice of impact assessment from three highly experienced practitioners (Chapter 5); and the application of neoliberal and neostructural reforms in the Pacific (Chapter 6).

Following on from these chapters, which provide a clear context and discourse from which the remainder of the contributions follow, the next five contributions delve more deeply into specific

debates around specific applications of impact assessment, through Regulatory Impact Assessment (Chapter 7), an analysis of the potential overall impact of development agencies (Chapter 8), and the role of knowledge (Chapter 9) co-ordination (Chapter 10), innovative approaches to existing information (Chapter 11), and an application on qualitative methodology within the contemporary development context (Chapter 12).

Some opportunities, and issues with the Impact Assessment Agenda area were raised through an analysis of the link between monitoring and impact assessment (Chapter 13). Chapter 14 explores some of the challenges and opportunities of understanding and measuring impact through an analysis of two diverse, but informative case studies from Save the Children, Australia. Chapter 15 takes a wider look at issues facing Non Government Development Organizations in assessing the impact of their work. The contributions to this volume provide a unique range of vantage points from which Aid for Trade, Value for Money impact assessment in foreign aid paradigms. The contributions explore bilateral, multilateral, and Non-Government Organizational perspectives. The final chapter (Chapter 16) identifies and explores the areas of commonality between the diverse contributions, both in terms of theoretical and practical applications.

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