Chapter 12
International Cooperation in Development: The Need for a Multidimensional Normative Approach

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ABSTRACT

The development aid of affluent to poor countries is currently much debated. Though in the decades of aid many people have been helped to survive and improve their living conditions, the problem of severe poverty and injustice is far from solved. Three types of critique explain this failure to a large extent: first, the way in which the development assistance is provided, or not; second, the observation that motivational and informational problems frustrate the collective-actions that should lead to “development”; third, ideological critique that the cooperation is too much an extension of the predominant modernist, neoliberal economic, and financial system of our time. Analyzing development cooperation and assistance with the NPA leads to the identification of normative characteristics of this practice. If the actual realization of development cooperation and the larger institutional context of this professional practice would respect that normativity, the effectiveness and justice of the cooperation could significantly be improved.

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INTRODUCTION

Development aid of wealthy to poor countries continues to be a matter of debate and political controversy. In recent years several traditional donor countries (mainly Western Europe and North America) have moved to some combination of aid and trade (EC, 2016; OECD & WTO, 2015).

The criticism of spending money on development cooperation is not new. Especially since the 90s, scholars have presented thorough critiques on the (mainstream) practice of aid or cooperation in development. We will summarize and discuss their main arguments in the next section.

Before doing so, we want to point out that the aid and cooperation given in recent decades have had positive results at the level of the quality of life of many people (Crosswell, 2009). The report of the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy (Van Lieshout, Went, and Kremer, 2010) makes clear that in social sectors advancements have been realized, like decreased infant mortality and an increased rate of children that go to school. At a global level, we can note that the outcomes of the former Millennium Development Goals can certainly be seen in many of the areas that the goals addressed, including halving extreme poverty and global under-five mortality while literacy rates, gender equality and environmental sustainability increased more or less substantially (UN, 2015).

Yet these achievements are not the whole story. In spite of relative improvements many of the poorest countries have actually seen their real per capita incomes decline since the 1970s and more than one billion people still live on less than $1.25 a day (Ovaska, 2015, p.175; World Bank, 2015). Overall however, the percentage of extremely poor has declined in many countries. At the same time the economic and financial inequality has increased (Oxfam International, 2015). The critique of some scholars is not that aid has not helped many people directly, but that the structures that maintain poverty have not been changed. One scholar for Africa summarized the situation as follows (Tefsaye, 2010).

The continuing failure of official international aid to encourage the emergence of a self-sustaining growth in agricultural and industrial sectors, geared to local needs, has led many to question the appropriateness of aid per se. [....]

Development has to come from within and not without, if it is to be sustainable. Aid creates aid dependency and aid addiction that undermines Africa’s capacity to help itself. A situation where aid becomes the biggest component of the annual budget of a country’s recurrent expenditure and almost all of its capital expenditure undermines democracy and accountability to citizens.
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