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### **When Unintended Effects become Intended: Implications of ‘Mutual Benefit’ Discourses for Development Studies and Evaluation Practice**

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#### **Abstract**

This paper’s starting point is that the dichotomy between intended and unintended effects be linked to past and present official policy discourse on the purpose and objectives of development cooperation. It describes and discusses recent policy trends that move away from development cooperation’s emphasis on developing country benefits towards the pursuit ‘mutual benefit’ as the motivating factor and aim for development cooperation as an area of public policy. Development cooperation has always been driven by a mix of motivations, yet the current trend differs in that it conceptualizes a common development agenda for the donor and recipient country whilst denying the existence of trade-offs between their respective interests. Given that political discourse promotes and prepares legal and accountability systems, public scrutiny and independent evaluation are a few steps behind and restrict to analyzing benefits for developing countries. As per this emphasis they consider all other effects as ‘unintended’ while under a mutual benefit perspective these may in fact have been intentional or anticipated.

Key words: unintended effects, mutual benefit, development policy, development studies, evaluation, aid effectiveness

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## Introduction

In 1996, the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) adopted a strategy titled 'Shaping the 21st Century: The Contribution of Development Co-operation', which presented reflections on the first half century of development cooperation and suggested strategies for the first half of the next century. It acknowledged the OECD states' "*strong moral imperative to respond to the extreme poverty and human suffering*", but equally recognised their own "*strong self-interest in fostering increased prosperity in the developing countries.*" By emphasising that "*people are made less secure by the poverty and misery that exist in the world*", the OECD conveyed a message that development cooperation was as much about 'us' as about 'them' (OECD 1996: 1). The OECD's strategy is not famous for the words just quoted, which most would argue reflect conventional wisdom, yet for the International Development Goals it proposed and which evolved into the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a highly influential global development framework replaced in 2015 by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Whereas the MDGs made a sharp distinction between those countries that had already reached the end-stage of development and committed to supporting the efforts of those countries still 'developing', the 2030 Agenda presents a universal agenda in which sustainable development hinders on the successful tackling of both common and collective challenges (Keijzer, forthcoming).

The new agenda goes beyond the role of development cooperation alone and covers all relevant areas of public policy and requires a strong role for actors beyond the state. It nonetheless presents adjustment challenges to the practice of official development cooperation, which has gone through a long period of planned approaches to ensure optimal effectiveness with regard to producing results for its intended 'beneficiaries' in developing countries. Some OECD members have typically presented aid motives in more self-interested terms than others, irrespective of the situation in terms of increasing or decreasing Official Development Assistance (ODA) budgets. A clear illustration is the United States, which has long advanced a rather explicit position that views development policy as "*a tool for fighting poverty, enhancing bilateral relationships, and/or protecting U.S. security and commercial interests*" (US Library of the Congress 2016: 3), making the mixed objectives of the policy instrument transparent. Research on aid effectiveness has in contrast primarily focused on assessing the influence of aid flows on poverty reduction or economic growth in recipient countries (Lundsgaarde 2013).<sup>1</sup> Observations in this literature of other types of effects tend to be considered as 'unintended' as well as undesired, since parallel polarised debates and associated 'aid fatigue' among electorates have construed evidence of low impact on

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<sup>1</sup> Although policy debates on global development advocate broadening patterns of cooperation beyond traditional north-south cooperation providers and in this context have suggested new labels to refer to key actors, this article uses the established terms 'donor' and 'recipient' for reasons of convenience as well as to make the connection to earlier discussions.

poverty reduction as a sign that aid is failing. The dichotomy between intended and unintended effects can moreover be linked to official policy discourses and law identifying poverty reduction as the objective of development cooperation, as well as to the ODA statistical system that requires eligible expenditure to pursue economic development and social welfare of developing countries as a main objective. Both academic research and independent evaluation take these official policies and accounting approaches as a starting point for analysing development policies and operations.

Current policy trends indicate a mismatch with relevant academic research and independent evaluation, which across the board tend to concentrate on assessing outcomes linked to potential benefits of aid relationships for developing countries. This can be explained with the observation that although general policy frameworks emphasise mutual benefit considerations, the objectives of individual interventions as set out in planning documents continue to emphasise developing country benefits, for which ODA eligibility can be considered a key consideration. Research and evaluation thus focus on assessing to what extent expected results were realised and would consider noncorresponding observations as unintended results. In view of the mutual benefit policies some of these results may however be considered as ‘intended results’ in relation to motives underlying decisions to provide aid in the first place, for instance reflecting the trade-offs made while catering to donor tax payer objectives. Given that mutual benefit aims moreover tend not to be operationalised and have to date not been made subject to criteria for result-oriented planning, further steps need to be made to improve the evaluability of the new policies in order to enable accountability to taxpayers.

This paper will explore and discuss recent trends in international development policy and compare how four different actors (Denmark, the European Union, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom) define and operationalise the objective of ‘mutual benefit’. Examples discussed include recent European Commission policy proposals on more closely linking development cooperation to migration policy objectives to stem migrant flows, including the introduction of conditionality relating to readmission of migrants by partner countries, as well as the United Kingdom’s 2015 development policy reforms requiring ODA expenditure to directly meet UK taxpayer interests. The paper will subsequently propose a way forward in accommodating diverse motives in development evaluation by outlining the prospect of composite assessments of results that capture intended results related both to cooperation providers and their intended beneficiaries in developing countries. It presents the concept of ‘intended unintended results’ as an entry point for addressing how to evaluate development cooperation in response to the objective to promote mutual benefits among funders and recipients. Based on this analysis, the paper explores implications for development studies and independent evaluation and identifies relevant questions for dedicated research on development policies that formalise mutual benefit as an overall objective.

## **Mutual benefit: from unintended to intended results?**

The term ‘mutual benefit’, or alternatively ‘mutual interest’, originates from the development policy domain and was not first conceived in the academic sphere. It has been used in various contexts by various stakeholders and thus naturally defies attempts to clearly define it. A recent OECD publication argues that the term originates from a UN conference on South-South Cooperation (SSC), and notes that the concept “(...) is linked to solidarity and equality among countries and implies that international co-operation arrangements have win-win outcomes benefitting all partners involved” (OECD 2016a: 25). Southern think tanks use the concept to distinguish SSC from North-South cooperation, which they argue is an approach to cooperation “where one partner is ‘giving’ and the other ‘receiving’” (NEST 2015: 21). The distinction presented between South-South Cooperation and North-South Cooperation is not based on a structured comparison between the motives of the two categories of cooperation providers, however. In reality, the partnership orientation of OECD-DAC donor policy as reflected in the Paris Declaration similarly reflects an acceptance of mutual interests in the development cooperation relationship (Tortora 2011). As Grimm (2014) suggests in relation to Chinese development cooperation in Africa, the concept of mutual benefit in South-South cooperation may also paper over the real balance of the benefits of cooperation, pointing out that the words ‘mutual’ and ‘equal’ are not interchangeable in this context.

September 2015 saw the adoption of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which contrary to the MDG-based agenda is explicitly presented as a universal agenda for all countries in the world. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at its centre are presented as integrated and indivisible, constituting “*universal goals and targets which involve the entire world, developed and developing countries alike*” (UNGA 2015: 3). The agenda marks a strong rhetorical break with preceding political statements on international development and – while not using the exact term – presents sustainable development as a shared mission as well as a mutual interest. This contrasts with the previous MDG-based frameworks, which continued a long-standing approach to presenting a binary view of the world consisting of a group of ‘developed countries’ that agreed to assist a group of ‘developing countries’ in their efforts to achieve the same end-state. A clear implication is that the scope of the agenda is much broader than the mission and mandate of development cooperation as we know it today and that its realisation requires efforts of all relevant stakeholders and policy fields of all UN members at local, national, regional and global levels.

While a new ‘universal’ development agenda may legitimise donors to include mutual benefit considerations in their development policies, it is not the only factor influencing this. References to mutual benefits may also be linked to efforts to consolidate taxpayer’s support to a budget and area of public policy that supports foreign beneficiaries. The need to do so can be linked to efforts to contain public

deficits in OECD countries, but also to an increase in publications presenting critical views on development cooperation in a way that questions its continuing relevance, and debates in some (social) media pursuing similar ends.<sup>2</sup> In this context, emphasis on mutual benefit would respond to perceived “*what’s in it for us*” questions among taxpayers. That question has typically been answered by governments in two ways. First by means of scaremongering, i.e. by presenting development cooperation as a means to fight terror or prevent migration flows (see Easterly 2016). Second, governments have also argued that development cooperation will contribute to economic growth in donor countries and therefore directly serves national interests. The latter is not new, e.g. discussions in the Netherlands have often argued that stable and developing countries lead to increased trading opportunities (see Lieshout et al 2010), but what is new here is the idea that development cooperation can be used instrumentally to facilitate business networks.

This discussion points to a spectrum of motivations or interests that can influence development cooperation objectives. At one end of the spectrum, aid might in theory be considered entirely self-interested if its purpose is to appeal to a domestic audience or a set of concrete donordefined interests. One example is the packaging of aid-financed projects as part of wider deals in the donor’s interest, such as the notorious case of the Pergau Dam in Malaysia that was financed by the UK’s foreign aid budget as a part of an arms trade deal (see Lankester 2013).<sup>3</sup> Progressing along the spectrum, aid may be provided to address a mixture of donor and recipient motives. A variety of development cooperation practices fit within this category. The mixed motives driving aid practices can explain tied aid, where donors may provide aid to address social and economic development needs of developing countries while reducing the overall value of the transfer by ensuring that donor suppliers capture a component of the aid provided or investments reflecting genuinely shared interests among cooperation providers and recipients. Another example can be found in discussions on the link between security and development, with recent policy proposals stating that “development cooperation address several root causes of insecurity, conflicts, complex crises and the flows of refugees, displaced persons and irregular migrants” (EU 2016b: 8). In this case, the policy goal is not to directly subsidise donor actors but to influence outcomes that are visible within the donor country (i.e. fewer migrants arrive). At another end of the spectrum, the motives of aid flows could in principle be driven entirely by the interests articulated within developing countries. One example concerns European aid to its former colonies in the 1970 which, in theory, left it fully to the recipient countries to decide what the funds should be spent on (Frisch 2008: 15).<sup>4</sup> In reality, the paucity of

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<sup>2</sup> One overview paper on this literature was published by De Haan (2009).

<sup>3</sup> Even this illustration might provide an example of aid for mutual benefit as it points to an exchange relationship and a Malaysian interest in the hydropower project.

<sup>4</sup> The European Commission for Development at that time was quoted as saying: “*C’est votre argent!*”

examples of purely donor-interested or recipient-interested aid underlines that aid flows generally reflect a balance of interests of involved parties, but that the weight of motives—and the extent to which they tip toward donor interests, recipient interests, or a happy equilibrium between the two--varies depending on the circumstances.

It should be emphasised that the idea of mutual interests or benefits per se is not new. However, the idea that the simultaneous pursuit of development cooperation reflecting donor selfinterest and recipient needs is legitimate and useful increasingly guides the public discourse justifying development funding. Development cooperation has always been driven by a mix of motivations, yet over time the OECD DAC community elevated a recipient-driven rationale for providing development assistance over a donor interest-driven rationale. One example of this discursive shift is that as debates on tying of aid progressed, only ‘supporting developing countries’ emerged as the de-facto official motive. While this discourse found consensus among key stakeholders, the continuation of ‘informal tying’ meant that the same mix of motivations persisted (see Carbone 2014). International reference frameworks including the Paris Declaration added weight to the normative discourse emphasizing the value of a partner-driven development cooperation approach. That agenda was a natural extension of knowledge accumulated over fifty years of development practice that concluded that development funding would have a better ability to shape development outcomes if beneficiary interests were at the centre of aid management (see Booth 2011).

The discursive shift toward partner-driven development encapsulated in the Paris Declaration may have diverted attention from an underlying continuation of aid practices where both donor and partner interests were promoted. Evidence of the gap between the aid effectiveness discourse and actual practice came in evaluations of the implementation of the Paris Declaration, where reforms at the country level in terms of outlining national development cooperation strategies appeared to advance more than donor efforts to relinquish control via more collaborative approaches with other donors, for example (Wood et al. 2011). The OECD publication mentioned above acknowledges that various DAC members subscribe to a mutual benefit rationale for providing ODA, yet observes that activities that are primarily motivated by the DAC member’s own interest and/or benefit both the DAC member and developing countries alike are considered not eligible for reporting as ODA (OECD 2016a: 25). This is regardless of the question of whether such interventions may have a developmental impact, since the definition of ODA requires that expenditure to have “*promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as its main objective*” (OECD 2003: 1). This reflects that development policy debates frequently have to take the limitations posed by ODA reporting criteria into account. As per the definition of ODA, it could be

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*Vous l'utiliserez au mieux de vos priorités. Nous sommes là pour vous apporter des conseils techniques en cas de besoin*” (Frisch 2008 : 15).

argued that mutual benefit cooperation would only be formally reportable as ODA if the donor's interest is of a secondary nature as well as consistent with the main objective of producing developing country benefits.<sup>5</sup> Donors have thus had an incentive to downplay their interests in providing aid and the benefits they expect to receive from supporting developing countries.

The growing attention to mutual interests among OECD DAC donors should thus not be interpreted as a fundamental change with respect to development practice but rather as a shift in discourse communicating the goals of development cooperation to domestic audiences and the international community. The expanding palette of cooperation providers (including China, India, and South Africa) where the logic of 'win-win' is an explicit motivation for providing development funding along with growing pressure on public budgets have enabled the 'mutual benefit' discourse to (re)surface within the OECD DAC community. The 'fit' in the latter community is however highly different: during the past and present decades, and to various degrees, DAC members have sought to respond to the perceived 'aid fatigue' among taxpayers as well as to the various critical studies by an increased focus on result-based management. This has driven much additional investment into monitoring and evaluation, as well as into new approaches to planning that stimulate officials to be as explicit and concrete as possible as to what results should be achieved through development cooperation. Given the link to their institutional legitimacy, efforts have been made to aggregate results achieved at the level of individual development agency, so as to allow for demonstrating these results and prove the 'value for money' derived from development cooperation (see Holzapfel 2016).

In contrast, no such operationalisation effort has accompanied recent policy statements presenting mutual interest objectives for development cooperation. Development policy continues to pursue concrete and specific results in developing countries, yet should also help deliver on mutual interest benefits which generally evade such specification. In other words, it remains unclear how much increased security, trade opportunities or decreased refugee flows taxpayers should expect in return for shouldering ODA budgets that cater to developing country needs and interests. The absence of specification efforts by development policy makers also limits the evaluability of the concept of mutual benefit, with evaluability defined as the "*extent to which an activity or a program can be evaluated in a reliable and credible fashion*" (OECD 2010: 21).

When analysts accept the assumption that the purpose of development cooperation is to produce benefits for developing country stakeholders, any other observed effects ought to be considered as 'unintended'. A recent literature review on unintended effects argues that such unintended effects could be

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<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that throughout the decades the OECD members have introduced various 'derogations' in ODA statistics to allow for the inclusion of reporting that does not primarily promote the above stated definition, such as in-donor refugee costs and imputed student costs.

either anticipated or unanticipated. The academic literature does not consider whether unintended effects occur, but instead has concentrated on the question as to why they are occurring. Two schools of thought can be distinguished: a first that links the occurrence of unintended effects to human errors made in planning and implementing development interventions, and a second school arguing that reality is inherently complex to the extent that unintended effects would be unavoidable even when assuming the possibility to plan and implement a perfect development intervention (Koch and Schulpen 2016: 3, 4). Their structured review of 64 articles assessing unintended effects showed that 76% exclusively focused on negative unintended effects that could be linked to either of these two schools of thought (Ibid.: 9).

This paper presents a different explanation for why the unintended effects occur, which also touches on the question of whether they occur, namely that effects are unintended as a consequence of the overall policy framework misrepresenting development policy as pursuing a single dominant aim. The reality that other aims and purposes of development cooperation may be presented in overall development policies but are not reflected in programming documents and accountability frameworks, and thus cannot be made subject to official scrutiny, does not mean that these effects are unintended. These effects can instead be considered as ‘intended unintended effects’ of development cooperation. Thus, limitations in recognizing the potential for and the explanations of unintended effects in development practice can be driven by a lack of comprehensiveness in defining the objectives of aid investments prior to assessing results. Limitations in the description of aid objectives may in turn contribute to negative appraisals of the value of these investments.

The next section will further examine these intended unintended effects by means of an analysis of recent policy evolutions in four DAC members. It will do so by comparing recent policy statements and cooperation trends with official policies for evaluation.

**Mind the gap: official policies and scrutiny**

The above discrepancy between mutual benefit conceptualisations and ODA rules results in a somewhat schizophrenic situation for DAC members: they may officially that their development policies pursue a ‘mutual benefit’ objective, yet they are discouraged from reporting to the DAC that their activities are in line with their overarching policies. A distinction can be made here between those DAC members who have a legal basis setting out the objectives of development policy from those that do not.

<b>Box 1: Contrasting recent ‘mutual interest’ statements with legal bases for development cooperation</b>			
<b>Recent policy statements on development assistance/cooperation</b>			
<b>United Kingdom</b>	<b>Netherlands</b>	<b>European Union</b>	<b>Denmark</b>



<p>“the UK’s development spending will meet our moral obligation to the world’s poorest and also support our national interest.”</p> <p>(UK 2015: 9)</p>	<p>“Our mission is to combine aid and trade activities to our mutual benefit”</p> <p>(MFA NL 2013: 40)</p>	<p>“development policy will become more flexible and aligned with our strategic priorities”</p> <p>(EU 2016a: 48)</p>	<p>“We will be driven by the wish to promote Danish foreign and domestic policy interests at one and the same time.”</p> <p>(Regeringen 2016: 3)</p>
<p><b>Legal basis for development assistance/cooperation</b></p>			
<p>“assistance provided for the purpose of (a) furthering sustainable development in one or more countries outside the United Kingdom, or (b) improving the welfare of the population of one or more such countries”</p> <p>(UK 2002: Art 1(1))</p>	<p>No law on development cooperation</p>	<p>“Union development cooperation policy shall have as its primary objective the reduction and, in the long term, the eradication of poverty.</p> <p>(TFEU 2009: Art 208)</p>	<p>Both international goals and Danish interests featured in Art 1 of law</p> <p>(Regeringen 2012: Art 1)</p>
<p>Source: own elaboration</p>			

This select overview shows that only in the case of Denmark there is a complete match between the legal and political objectives of development cooperation, whereas for the Netherlands the absence of a law means the main restriction lies in the otherwise reasonably soft ODA reporting process (see Keijzer 2016). In the case of the UK and the EU there would be legal limitations to placing development and own interests on an equal footing, though the rather vague concepts employed (i.e. poverty reduction, sustainable development, welfare) means that any perceived violation of the legal basis would be hard to prove in court. A recent proposal for a new shared development policy statement by the European Union and its member states considers that the interrelated goals of the 2030 Agenda makes it necessary for the EU to look into “*integrated actions that can create cobenefits and meet multiple objectives in a coherent way*” (EU 2016b: 10). This would seem to suggest that actions can pursue multiple benefits simultaneously without generating trade-offs, and consequently that development cooperation can pursue both the EU Treaty’s objective as well as additional objectives.

The public discourse on development cooperation in all three EU member states unequivocally expresses mutual benefit objectives, with this being particularly contentious in the Netherlands and

Denmark since the policy reforms have been accompanied with ODA budget cuts as well as increasing expenditure on in-country refugee expenditure. In the case of the Netherlands, its decision to introduce ODA budget cuts was accompanied by a shifting central focus of Dutch cooperation is shifting towards the economic sectors, which was accentuated under the government the appointment of a minister for foreign trade and development cooperation.<sup>6</sup> This change in direction sought to strengthen the relationships among development objectives, global public goods, such as climate policy or protecting biodiversity, as well as Dutch national interests. Accompanying the government's decision to close down of several embassies in developing countries, its development policy was revised to reduce the number of its partner countries from 33 to 15. In addition, the closer alignment to national interests was supported by narrowing the development policy's thematic focus to just four areas: (i) security and the legal order; (ii) water; (iii) food security; and (iv) sexual and reproductive health and rights, targeting women in particular (OECD 2011; MFA NL 2013). The change in ministerial mandate also accompanied a transfer of officials at the trade ministry to a new directorate-general for external trade based in the MFA, and consequently a new dynamic in terms of shaping and operationalising development policies.

In Denmark, a change in government in the summer of 2015 contributed to a heightened emphasis on the use of aid to promote national interests. As noted above, this shift has accompanied significant aid cutbacks, as the Danish government decided to lower its annual ODA target to 0.7% of its Gross National Income (OECD 2016b). The government's development cooperation strategy for the period from 2017 to 2020 highlights several priority areas that reflect an interest-driven rationale for providing aid. These include an increasing focus on supporting the stabilisation of fragile regions such as the Sahel to prevent the rise of violent extremism, prioritizing efforts to prevent illegal or irregular migration, and promoting inclusive and sustainable growth and development to advance economic interests (Regeringen 2016). Though the attention to addressing root causes of migration hints at benefits of funding for migrant-sending countries as well as for Denmark, the reference to a stronger emphasis on funding related to African governments' migrant readmission policies suggests that the measurement of benefits in this area should focus especially on donor-related outcomes. With respect to the priority area of sustainable growth and development, the articulation of shared benefits is more explicit, outlining that Danish development cooperation addressing this goal will: *"focus on energy, water, agriculture, food and other areas where Denmark has particular knowledge, resources and interests. This will contribute to creating sustainable communities with economic opportunities and jobs – especially for young people. This will also benefit the Danish economy, trade and investment"* (Regeringen 2016: 6). The transparency of the national interest orientation is striking within this strategic document, as it is presented as an expression of how

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<sup>6</sup> Ireland and Finland had earlier appointed ministers with such a double portfolio, but for the Netherlands this was a first.

Danish development cooperation can be adapted in light of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Although this policy framework does not mention the concept of mutual benefit, it is clear that the government considers the 2030 Agenda to be compatible with the promotion of diverse interests where the balance between donor and recipient benefits can vary depending on the particular theme.

In the case of the UK fundamental changes have been made within less than five years. The government first insisted on improving ‘value for money’ of UK aid, defined as *“maximising the impact of each pound spent to improve poor people’s lives”* with the following implications for practice: *“we need to be more innovative in how we assess value and we need to get better at articulating what results we are buying with UK taxpayer’s money”* (DFID 2011: 2). The 2015 UK Aid Strategy includes a full chapter on value for money, yet argues upfront that *“our aid budget will be restructured to ensure that it is spent on tackling the great global challenges – from the root causes of mass migration and disease, to the threat of terrorism and global climate change – all of which also directly threaten British interests”* (UK 2015: 3). This representation of mutual interest as an objective for development policy would be in line with a public goods focus, the second category of donor interests we introduced above, and the strategy’s foreword moreover maintains that the restructuring of its budget can be done in a way that simultaneously *“meet our promises to the world’s poor and also put international development at the heart of our national security and foreign policy”* (Ibid.). The strategy alludes to various reforms and processes that have been put in place to ensure value for money, but does not substantiate how these structures will be put in place to serve the restructuring of the budget and the new strategy for UK aid.

Reflecting its unique governance system, the EU exhibits strong differences across the regions in which it is active with respect to the prominence of poverty reduction as an overall objective, which is in part due to its institutional setup for development cooperation where cooperation under the European Neighbourhood Policy is implemented by a separate Directorate General (DG). Another DG is mandated to implement development cooperation with other developing regions, while cooperation with 79 states in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific is governed under an international agreement, whereas cooperation with Asia and Latin America as well as thematic (i.e. horizontal) cooperation finds a legal basis in dedicated EU regulations. In addition to this legal setup, the EU also acts as manager of the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, which was launched in November 2015 and shows a strong focus on mutual benefits (see Castillejo 2016). With a budget of over 1.9 billion euros for the period 2015-2020, the EU’s press release explicitly states that the Trust Fund does not aim to contribute to poverty reduction, but instead *“has been designed as a fast mechanism to address root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa whilst increasing stability”* (EU 2015).

As all other areas of public policies, development policy is subject to regular independent scrutiny and as a matter of fact was well ahead of other government departments in creating formal evaluation

functions. OECD members’ development administrations typically use a mix of centralised evaluations. This mix can include long-term oriented evaluations targeting large intervention portfolio as well as thematic or cross-cutting issues, and decentralised evaluation functions that tend to commission evaluations of specific interventions (Keijzer, forthcoming). Evaluations are generally guided by overarching policies and strategies that set out the overall objectives and purpose of the evaluation function within the wider development policy cycle as well as set out guidelines and quality criteria for evaluations in function thereof. Box 2 presents quotes from the evaluation policies and strategies of the same four members which illustrate the main focus and objective of their independent evaluation efforts.

<b>Box 2: Illustrative statements on the role and focus of evaluation</b>			
<b>United Kingdom</b>	<b>Netherlands</b>	<b>European Union</b>	<b>Denmark</b>
<p>“The main purpose of evaluation is to improve development interventions through assessing their merit and value in achieving</p>	<p>“IOB evaluates the implementation of the Netherlands’ foreign policy, giving particular attention to its relevance, efficiency</p>	<p>“Management and staff in EU Delegations and at Headquarters are continually encouraged to make extensive use of</p>	<p>“The policy recognises that Danish development cooperation - knowledge as well as financial assistance - is</p>
<p>development outcomes and impacts.”  (DFID 2014: 4)</p>	<p>and effectiveness, the sustainability of the results achieved and the consistency and coherence of the policy.”  (IOB 2009: 11)</p>	<p>evaluation findings to better support the efforts of developing countries to eradicate poverty and maximize the impact of our aid on poverty reduction, better governance and sustainable growth.”  (DEVCO 2014: 3)</p>	<p>a contribution to change processes in developing countries aiming at reducing poverty, promoting human rights, democracy, sustainable development, peace and stability.”  (Danida 2016: 1)</p>
Source: own elaboration			

The quotes reflect that whereas overall development policies put forward ‘mutual benefit’ objectives for development cooperation that ODA expenditure should cater to, independent scrutiny largely if not exclusively focuses on the benefits to developing countries. These evaluation policies do not simply reflect the ruling policy direction of the day, but have been incrementally given shape over time. Moreover, their overall objectives and aims reflect the content of the interventions as expressed in

standardised planning documentation. This documentation in turn is oriented towards ODA reporting practices, and thus promotes an equally strong focus on developing country benefits. That being said, evaluations may often not be successful in determining results achieved at the impact level, let alone define any unintended effects as shown in the literature review by Koch and Schulpen (2016). This can be illustrated for the European Commission, as a structured analysis of 57 evaluation reports found an overall lack of evidence in the evaluations on progress towards the ‘global impacts’ as set out in the legal instruments for EU development cooperation. Instead, a practice could be seen that evaluations remain limited to measuring results at lower levels of the intervention logic, which are then assumed to also contribute to furthering the global impact as defined for each instrument. The study included an analysis of the legal instruments themselves and concluded that their logic could be substantially improved and specified to benefit both the user and subsequent ex-post evaluation efforts (Mackie et al. 2011). As some of the instruments reflect overall objectives of a mutual benefit nature<sup>7</sup>, this implies that efforts to better evaluate the intended effects needs to be first made before one could proceed with determining any unintended effects.

The case of Denmark provides perhaps the clearest policy-evaluation gap. The introduction of the evaluation refers to the 2012 law on development’s requirement for development policy to combat poverty and promote associated development objectives, as well as serving “*Danish national interests in a peaceful, stable and just world*” (Danida 2016: 2). The guidelines further note that the interaction of development policy with other policy areas as well as the political economy in developing countries is well-known, and also considers that development cooperation frequently works in tandem with other cooperation efforts. The Danish guidelines further stress that evaluations should enable both accountability and learning and should be supported in this regard by the ministry’s priority to make its development cooperation efforts more result-oriented and guided by theories of change. All in all, the document by and large focuses on the first objective under Danish law, while offering no priorities or methodological guidance on evaluating whether development cooperation serves the Danish national interest. This lack of clarity reflects a general problem with the use of the term ‘national interest’ to justify development policy orientations, as it may be advanced as a tool to convince domestic audiences that the balance of motives for aid tips toward the donor interest side without defining the nature of the interests at stake in any detail.

To consider how an evaluation would go about assessing to what extent development cooperation has served the national interest, it is possible to distinguish between two sub-categories of national interest: (1) national interest as served by a peaceful, stable, prosperous and just world; and (2) direct

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<sup>7</sup> One example concerned the European Neighbourhood Policy under the 2007-2013 period, which defined the global impact as “*Development of an area of prosperity and good neighborliness between EU and partners*” (Mackie et al. 2011: 53).

promotion of national interests through effects that can be captured by individual donor countries, whether in the form of economic benefits or other outcomes such as reduced migrant flows. The second type has long been implicit in the policies of DAC members given its association to the practice of aid tying, but as the paper suggests is becoming increasingly explicit. It may be assumed that the first type, which pursues public goods that can be presented as furthering mutual benefits will be less likely to produce trade-offs with developing country benefits compared to the second type that tends to promote private goods. These two categories point to different results chains. For the first category of desired outcomes an evaluation may view a donor investment as one contribution to a broad outcome related to improving conditions in the developing country and in the event of positive outcomes accept that the donor country's interests have been furthered even if the donor in question has made a small contribution to the endeavour. In contrast, the demonstration of narrowly defined national interests being served requires that an evaluation describe a more direct causal chain between the donor investment and the donor-specific outcome. An evaluation pursuing the second approach and observing that donor benefits predominated in the cooperation relationship would imply official recognition by that donor of violating ODA reporting requirements, and therefore less likely to happen.

Beyond this distinction between public and private good oriented national interests that are promoted through mutual benefit policy, it is important to stress that neither of the two objectives are presently adequately substantiated and operationalised by means of the result-oriented planning tools adopted by the four DAC members examined here. While aid interventions are commonly supported by detailed result chains setting out the inputs, activities and results at various levels (from output to impact) in relation to developing country interests (see Holzapfel 2016), no such specification is made for the donor interest. Instead, the level of ambition for donor interests remains ambiguous, which means that an evaluation or research inquiry cannot typically proceed by analysing planning documents and looking into the extent to which the anticipated results have been achieved, or whether any unanticipated effects occurred. This situation also complicates a dialogue at the practitioners' level to determine to what extent mutual benefits have delivered, or even to establish what they were supposed to deliver.

## **Conclusion:**

This paper presents a straightforward argument, namely that to examine unintended effects of development cooperation it is first necessary to outline the intentions of both cooperation providers and beneficiaries. Thus the article makes a distinction between hidden and revealed objectives and emphasizes the value of greater clarity on the balance of objectives associated with given cooperation inputs as a basis for improved evaluation and research. Improved definition of mutual benefits is important in defining the future justification for development cooperation from both donor and recipient perspectives. However, this

paper also makes clear that doing so requires a political shift in thinking and not only technical adjustments in evaluation practice, and points to some challenges in this regard, notably ODA reporting requirements and legal bases for development policy of some DAC members. This would provide a means to improving the evaluability of mutual benefit objectives as set out in overall development policies and enable donors to be accountable to taxpayers about the full breadth of the development policy, not only the part that directly caters to developing country interests.

For many experts familiar with the development policy field, it is obvious to note that aid motives are many and varied. Bourguignon and Sundberg indicate, for example, that the fact that “*the empirical literature on aid effectiveness has yielded unclear and ambiguous results (...) is not surprising given the heterogeneity of aid motives, the limitation of the tools of analysis, and the complex causality chain linking external aid to final outcomes*” (2007: 316). Although there are thus many explanations for imprecise measurement and attribution of aid-related outcomes, the gap between the recognition of competing aid motivations and the assessment of results focused on benefits to developing country populations seems especially striking at a time when many donors increasingly feel pressure to communicate the motives for aid to domestic audiences in more selfinterested terms. This gap may also reflect some disciplinary differences in what questions aid researchers consider relevant. Bearce and Tirone (2010) highlight a difference in interests between political scientists, who have documented the mixture of donor-focused and development-oriented motives in a voluminous literature explaining aid allocation patterns, and economists, who have guided research on aid effectiveness. They underline the analytical value of attempting to link the study of motives to aid effectiveness by taking up the classical example that more positive effects of aid on economic growth were observed after the end of the Cold War, as donors’ strategic interests in aid provision diminished.

As the extensive body of work on aid effectiveness has developed, conceptual and empirical advances have enabled improved understandings of the conditions under which aid can be more effective. Even as evidence using an aggregated measure of aid pointed to generally positive effects on economic growth and poverty reduction, scholars focused growing attention on the diverse effects that could be associated with different types of aid flows (Addison et al. 2005). One strategy for improving assessments of effectiveness is thus to disaggregate aid flows to highlight the different purposes associated with particular interventions; another is to distinguish different levels of possible effects, as Barrett (2006) has illustrated in relation to a discussion of intended and unintended effects of food aid, for example.

In conclusion, this paper also seeks to confirm the urgency for development researchers and evaluators to seek not to fall behind the curve in terms of continuing to represent development cooperation as pursuing a single dominant aim. Three directions for further work seem promising in this regard. First, both development researchers and evaluators could move beyond theory-based approaches of inquiry that

take operational strategies as put on paper as a starting point, towards analysing changes in developing countries and subsequently determine to what extent and in what way development cooperation supported developing country efforts to advance specific priorities.<sup>8</sup> Secondly, more basic research could be done with the aim of further specifying stakeholders expectations of donor-specific benefits in providing aid as perceived by different stakeholders, building on the distinction between public and private good benefits proposed in this paper. A third approach would seek to combine the assessment of donor-specific and recipient-specific benefits to account for the range of benefits anticipated for a given intervention and chart how these benefits are balanced out in the implementation process. Sharpening an understanding of the ‘intended unintended effects’ of development cooperation related to the identification of the full scope of interests at stake as defined here will improve further research on the unanticipated effects of international cooperation.

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<sup>8</sup> Although theory-based approaches continue to dominate in the field of evaluation, some relevant experience has been gained in pioneering evidence-based approaches such as the 2011 joint evaluation of Dutch support to capacity development (see IOB 2011).



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