

LOCAL OWNERSHIP AND DONOR PERFORMANCE MONITORING: NEW AID
RELATIONSHIPS IN TANZANIA? (*)

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The story of the remarkable recent developments in "aid relationships" and the initiation of aid-donor as well as aid-recipient performance monitoring in Tanzania begins early in 1994, during the administration of President Mwinyi, the immediate successor to Tanzania's first President, Julius Nyerere. Perceptions of poor administration, corruption, inadequacy of democratic processes, and budget mismanagement in Tanzania, together, it seems, with the somewhat prickly personality of the then Finance Minister (Kighoma Malima) led to an unprecedented degree of annoyance with and mistrust of the Tanzania Government on the part of the aid donor community.

At the same time the Government of Tanzania saw aid donors as inappropriately intrusive and demanding, and unable or unwilling to deliver on promises. Finance Minister Malima had publicly blamed Tanzania's poor macro-economic performance (including an inflation rate of over 30% in 1993-94) upon the failure of donors to deliver on their promises, infuriating the donors who perceived it, rather, as the product of his own mismanagement. Despite the Tanzanians' return to relative IMF/World Bank respectability via fairly orthodox stabilization and structural adjustment policies from 1986 onwards, the "aid relationship" was at that time in a perilous state.

Despairing of this situation, the Government of Denmark initiated discussions with the Government of Tanzania with a view to possible mediation efforts. The immediate outcome was the creation of a 5-person "independent group", the membership of which was to be agreed by the Government of Tanzania, to investigate what had gone wrong and what might be done to rectify the situation. The group was made up of two Tanzanians, neither of whom worked for the Government, and three non-Tanzanian academics (one British, one Danish, and a Canadian chairman).

Their terms of reference were broad. They included such overall objectives for the group as ascertaining "how cooperation efforts could be made more efficient", identifying "constraints which...could be reduced by GOT, the donors, or by the partners in common" and assessing "the relevance and effectiveness of the totality of aid programmes". It is noteworthy that they made specific reference to the need for clarification by the group of the concept of "ownership" which,

the terms said, were "now widely accepted as a cornerstone in the relationships between African countries and their donors".

The "ownership" question acquired greatly increased salience in discussions of development problems and practices during the mid- 1990s, not least in the African context where successes with IMF-World Bank-driven "structural adjustment" programmes and donor-driven projects seemed so scarce. A new consensus emerged, which the World Bank itself summarised in a report on aid effectiveness as follows:

"Typically, assistance programmes that the recipient country perceives as being imposed end in failure or have only a small development impact. Governments and beneficiaries do not feel they have a stake when they have not contributed to the development of a programme. Furthermore, 'home-grown' programmes may be more effective in incorporating institutional capacity, reflecting the needs of different domestic constituencies, and addressing constraints." (World Bank, 1995,p.6)

In the words of the chairman of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee(DAC)at the time:

"If donors believe in local ownership and participation, then they must seek to use channels and methods of co-operation that do not undermine those values. External support must avoid stifling or attempting to substitute for local initiative...The principles of self reliance, local ownership and participation which underlie the partnership approach are inconsistent with the idea of conditions imposed by donors to coerce poor countries to do things they don't want to do in order to obtain resources they need. That view of conditionality was always of dubious value. Treating development co-operation as a partnership makes clear that it is obsolete." (OECD,1995, p.7)

Yet these widely-recognized research results and high-level statements of aspirations towards new forms of development partnership between aid donors and recipients seemed, paradoxically, to be accompanied by ever-increasing degrees of external intrusion into domestic political affairs and economic policymaking in African countries(Helleiner,2000a).

Particularly sensitive in the African context was donor intrusion (and failure) in the form of so-called "technical assistance" which had been, by all accounts, quite ineffective in the creation and development of indigenous capacity(Berg,1993;World Bank, 1996)). In this sphere too, impressive new principles for "new orientations in technical cooperation" - emphasizing the need for long-term capacity-building and for local control at all stages by the intended beneficiaries - had been agreed within the DAC of the OECD(OECD, 1994,p.21). Yet little seemed to be changing on the ground at the level of individual country aid programmes.

The Tanzanian initiative to explore the reasons for the breakdown in aid relationships and the particular mandate to investigate ownership questions was thus extraordinarily well-timed. Members of the independent group were conscious of the broader international context within which they were working and the potential for much wider ramifications from their assessments

beyond the bounds of the Tanzanian specifics. The group delivered its report, with 21 specific recommendations for both the Government of Tanzania and the donors, in June 1995.

According to this report, the Government of Tanzania was, among other things, significantly to tighten and strengthen the operations of the Ministry of Finance; develop clear priorities in its investment and expenditure systems based on a clear medium- to long-term development strategy (a "vision for the future"); and acquire and retain leadership in its own development efforts.

As for the donors, substantial changes were needed, the report stated, in their "operational culture" at the country level, so as to reduce the vast gap between the rhetoric of "ownership" at DAC and/or donors' headquarters and the country-level reality. As soon as possible after Tanzania's first multi-party elections (in 1995), it argued, there should be both major improvements in Tanzanian economic management - of a "second generation" character, much more difficult and requiring more time than sheer macroeconomic stabilization - and significantly altered relationships between the government and the donors(Helleiner et al, 1995).

Following the election of President Benjamin Mkapa later in the same year, the (new) Government moved quickly to restore the faltering macroeconomic situation; and both the government and elements in the donor community undertook to begin to respond to the report's many recommendations for reform in Tanzania's longer-term development efforts and aid relationships. In the first half of 1996 the Government moved to restore fiscal control through the introduction of a cash management system which left no room for expenditures beyond the limits set by revenue collections. Before the year ended, the Government had agreed on a three-year ESAF (Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility) programme supported by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

In September 1996, the Government of Tanzania met with the Nordic countries to begin to rebuild previously cordial aid relationships and restructure them in such a way as to strengthen Tanzanian ownership of its own development programmes, using the independent group's report as major input. The meeting between the government and the Nordics reached a significant degree of agreement as to the appropriate way forward in aid relationships, and paved the way for the much broader and more significant donor-Tanzanian agreements that were to follow.

The key breakthrough in the improvement of aid relationships came in January 1997 when, in a Government/donor workshop in Dar es Salaam, in which all of the donors participated, and relying heavily both upon the independent group's report and upon the prior Tanzania/Nordic agreement, participants drafted a set of "agreed notes" toward a new way of "doing business". There was a remarkable consensus on the common objectives to be pursued in the new aid relationships and on a number of specific first steps to be taken towards it. The new "partnership" between the donors and the Government of Tanzania would imply, the notes state, "a radical change of rules and roles between the partners in development".

The guiding principle was to be that "Tanzania takes the lead" and that "Tanzania fully owns the development cooperation programmes in terms of planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation." The new aid relationship was also to be based upon a longer-term vision for

Tanzanian development (incorporating such traditional objectives as improved governance, political participation, macroeconomic stability, etc.), strengthened financial management and capacity-building to sustain it, open and honest dialogue, and, perhaps most significant of all, independent "stock-taking", i.e., monitoring and evaluation, of progress towards the agreed objectives.

The "agreed notes" included 16 quite specific points on which progress could be objectively monitored. Contributing significantly to this remarkable agreement was the happy coincidence of the previous arrival in Tanzania of a number of key reform-oriented donor representatives, each with newly decentralized authority to move forward in aid relationships, where they could, without waiting for broader systemic reforms (notably the representatives from the Nordic countries, the Netherlands, the World Bank and, a little later, the United Kingdom). These donors were able, as a group, both to set standards and to exert pressure for change upon their peers... both at this critical time and, as it turned out, also in the subsequent period.

All of this planning for a minor "revolution" in the aid relationship in Tanzania was accomplished, it should be noted, some years in advance of the formulation of the concepts of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) in the IMF or Comprehensive Development Frameworks (CDFs) in the World Bank. Also ahead of the times in this respect, and attributable in part to the recommendations of the 1995 independent group, were the Government's development, with widespread stakeholder consultation and thus a broader degree of "ownership" than had been characteristic of earlier policy documents, of first, its "Tanzania National Development Vision 2025", finalized in 1997 (though not in print until 1999); and then its "National Poverty Eradication Strategy", issued in 1998 to move forward an important component of the agreed "vision".

It was a particularly significant accomplishment to agree in January 1997 on specific and monitorable first steps to be taken in pursuit of the agreed aid relationship objectives. Similar or related objectives have not infrequently been agreed at high-level international meetings at the level of broad rhetoric, without serious effort to translate them into specific required actions. Specific undertakings of the kind agreed at the January 1997 donor-Tanzania meeting have many advantages over the more typical pronouncement of highly general agreed objectives or targets.

First, they provide an important "reality check" as to what exactly the parties to an agreement are actually agreeing upon. Second, when specific next steps are addressed, it is possible to generate genuine dialogue on concrete issues and there is potential for the negotiation of compromises where these may be necessary. Third, specification of the details of agreement can make explicit the areas in which experimentation is proposed and in which all parties acknowledge, in advance, that there may be some risks and need for "learning by doing". Lastly, as already implied, the listing of specifics facilitates a clear process of monitoring and evaluation. Agreement on specific first steps was critically important, then, for the successful operationalization of the agreed new objectives of a new form of partnership between the donors and the government of Tanzania, a partnership based upon firm national ownership.

It was recognized from the outset that significant changes in the aid relationship were likely to be difficult to achieve. Some expressed skepticism, and many still do, about the possibility of any

kind of genuine "partnership" between powerful donors and financially dependent governments anywhere. (For one early and much-quoted such assessment see Patel, 1971, p.305). But problems en route to a new partnership-based aid relationship can arise from both sides of the emerging relationship.

Among the most serious of such potential problems are probably the following five:

1) There may be confusion or disagreement as to what exactly is meant by "ownership" of national programmes. Some donors seem to believe that "ownership exists when recipients do what we want them to do but they do so voluntarily"(Helleiner, 2000). In some conservative donor circles, the rhetoric of the transfer of programmes to local ownership may also be regarded as shorthand for their efforts to increase self-finance of programmes and thus reduce aid flows. On the other hand, recipients may naively assume that transfer of ownership amounts simply to turning over the money to the local Treasury with few further questions asked. If there is no agreement as to what national ownership actually means in practice, there are likely to be continuing problems in achieving it. Indeed that is why specific monitorable steps, such as were agreed in the Tanzanian case, are so potentially important.

2) There is always a danger that immediate pressures and short-term needs overwhelm the agreed longer-term objectives. Both sides of the aid relationship are vulnerable to this potential difficulty. Even those with the most sincere commitment to the ultimate objectives may find it necessary, at times, to address urgent problems directly and thus to postpone resolution of the real and ongoing issues of ownership. Both donors and recipients must understand and accept the fact that there may be some short-run costs and risks as the longer-term ownership objectives are more vigorously pursued and given higher priority. Any productive investment involves a "gestation period" during which there are no returns and indeed there are costs. Real change takes time.

3) The recipient (Tanzanian) government may fail to establish those minimum administrative and political conditions that are sufficient to establish its credibility with donors as to its capacity to "lead" and/or to take effective ownership. As aid flows decline and donors become more selective in their choice of countries to support, in order for a new development partnership to be able to function the Government of Tanzania will have to behave so as to continue to inspire donor confidence and trust. Bedevilling the Tanzanian image in the donor community in recent years, for instance, has been the political situation in Zanzibar. It would be tragic if the complexities of Zanzibari politics came to impede the significant progress that the Tanzanian Government and its aid donors have been making on the development cooperation front.

4) The aid recipient government is sometimes "set up" for failure by over-optimistic forecasts and expectations, both on the part of donors and of the government itself. Assessments of prospective performance have almost invariably been biased upwards in the African context; certainly this has been the case in Tanzania. Performance and policy reform targets for African countries are often too numerous, too onerous, and inappropriately phased. Development programmes can thus easily be "overloaded" and when the country fails to reach its targets its government risks being categorised as a "failure" and therefore as "undeserving" of further assistance. It is incumbent upon both donors and recipients, as they work to construct new forms

of partnership and aid relationships, to work at being realistic about the prospects for economic performance and for policy change, and to take adequate account of unforeseen contingencies, both in their planning and in their evaluations.

5) The normal bureaucratic incentives and imperatives within aid agencies may simply overwhelm the new partnership/ownership objectives. Aid bureaucrats must move their money, meet their own organizational deadlines and answer to their own political masters. In the words of the independent group in Tanzania: "Each donor has its own aid policies and 'agenda', and is anxious to pursue its own objectives even when these are not shared by the government. Constitutional, parliamentary and accounting requirements, aimed at ensuring proper accountability for the use of taxpayers' money, may also increase donor intrusiveness, a tendency that can only be enhanced by the perception...that corruption is a large and growing problem...It is also likely that agency staff will be under pressure to ensure that they spend their budgets, even if it requires a degree of bulldozing to achieve this result, and they may well see it as in their own career interests to secure a high level of aid giving or lending. They are also under pressure to show quick results and short-term efficiency. There are few rewards for those who are prepared to sacrifice short-term performance for the sake of slower but more sustainable progress." (Helleiner et al, 1995, p. 15) Thus perhaps the greatest risk of all - and the greatest potential impediment to change - is that mere lip service is paid to the newly agreed objectives while bureaucratic ways are found by the staff of aid agencies to continue with business more or less as usual.

By now it should be clearer than ever how critically important it is that forward motion towards the agreed objectives should be regularly, systematically and independently assessed. The Government of for achieving the agreed stock-taking of progress in the implementation of the first steps agreed at the January 1997 donor-Government meeting.

Responsibility for this stock-taking (or, better, monitoring and evaluation) of progress, especially towards the effective "transfer of ownership" of development programming from donors and international financial institutions to the Government of Tanzania, which was the core of the agreement to pursue a new form of partnership, was initially assigned, at the invitation of the latter Government, to the former chairman of the original group of independent advisors. As agreed, his stock-taking report was made to the next Tanzania donor Consultative Group (CG) meeting in late 1997.

By this time it was still a little too early in the change process for very much to have transpired. In March 1999, however, again at the invitation of the Government of Tanzania, and with the full and frank participation of all of the external partners (external donors), a more comprehensive assessment of progress towards the agreed objectives and implementation of the agreed first steps was requested by the Government and it was again undertaken by the same independent assessor. Qualitative grades (from A to F) were assigned by the assessor to the progress achieved on each of the (now 18) agreed steps; and his report was presented to the 1999 CG meeting for discussion (Helleiner, 1999).

The independence of the assessor and his familiarity with the Tanzanian development context were critically important elements in the achievement of both frankness in the report and broad

acceptability of the assessment process on the part of all parties. (This is not to suggest that all parties agreed with all of the assessments! The IMF resident representative, for instance, took strong exception to some comments on IMF practices in the report.)

The 1999 report was mixed in its assessment of progress towards new aid relationships and ownership transfer in Tanzania. It recognized a significant shift towards Tanzanian leadership, particularly in the sphere of macroeconomic management (notably in the preparation of its own Policy Framework Paper and Public Expenditure Review). It also noted that aid donor attitudes and practices had changed significantly, and that much more genuine dialogue between donors and recipients was taking place. Several donors were also contributing to sectoral-level "basket funds" in some sectors, the uses of which were determined collectively, under Tanzanian leadership. Tanzanian budget and financial control systems had been strengthened, and corruption, while still a serious problem, was being more aggressively addressed.

It is important to note, however, that progress in the reform of technical assistance was assigned poor marks. The "agreed notes" of January 1997 had set ambitious targets. In order to be effective, it was stated therein, technical assistance (TA) "should be so as to:

- establish appropriate modalities for integrating TA in the overall human resource endowment available in the country;
- institute modalities for effective capacity building and enhance the capacity-building role of TA;
- enhance complementarity between TA and local human resource utilization and development;
- enable the opportunity cost of TA to be considered explicitly by all the partners;
- ensure that selection and management of TA is the responsibility of the Government of Tanzania." (Helleiner, 1999, appendix)

The independent report noted that many donors did now provide more data, hired more local firms and individuals for technical and professional tasks, and tried to involve the Government of Tanzania more than before in the selection of TA personnel. Nevertheless, among other comments on this topic, it observed that TA expenditures "contain large elements that are not cost-effective so far as Tanzanian development is concerned and frequently serve other (donor) objectives.... Much of the technical assistance expenditure in Tanzania is perceived by the Government as an unnecessarily wasteful use of scarce aid resources, contributing little either to local human resource use (employment) or to capacity-building which together are the among the Government's top priorities.... They are also perceived by the Government as positively detrimental to the development of local ownership of Tanzanian programmes.... Despite some progress, technical assistance expenditures... remain among the most sensitive issues in the jointly agreed effort to transfer ownership to Tanzanians." (ibid, p. 19)

World Bank assessments of African performance and prospects have offered similar assessments of technical assistance elsewhere on the continent (World Bank, 2000). The proportion of total development assistance made available to Tanzania in the form of technical cooperation has dropped in the past few years; and this is seen by most Tanzanians as a sign of progress in the aid relationship.

The 1999 comprehensive report also recommended, among other things, that an ongoing process of independent monitoring of aid relationships and emerging problems therein, no longer reliant on only one person, should be instituted by the Government of Tanzania and its external development partners; and this was agreed, in principle, at the 1999 CG meeting.

Between that meeting and the subsequent CG meeting, in April 2000, the Government of Tanzania worked to develop both its (newly-required) PRSP and, unique to Tanzania, a "Tanzania Assistance Strategy" (TAS) to govern its ongoing relationship with the aid donors. At the 2000 CG meeting, the Government and the donors reached a new agreement, in principle, that in the implementation of the TAS (and therefore implicitly also in the PRSP and CDF processes) donor performance would (continue to) be independently monitored and evaluated, as well as Tanzanian performance. This would, it was agreed, create better balance in aid relationships, and give concrete expression to the stated and agreed aspirations toward genuine partnership and open dialogue between donors and the Government of Tanzania, and Tanzanian leadership in poverty reduction and development efforts. Debate took place at this meeting over the appropriate elements for future monitoring of donor performance, based in large part on a discussion paper circulated by the Government of Tanzania (written by the former independent assessor). Most donors, but not all, seemed to accept its recommendations that donor performance monitoring should include the following elements, among others:

- the degree of compliance with governmental requests for timely and standardized information about aid expenditures and plans;
- the degree to which aid expenditures are incorporated within the government's budgetary system;
- the degree to which donor projects and programmes are coordinated, integrated into governmental expenditure frameworks and recognize governmental priorities;
- shortfalls in aid disbursements relative to previous aid commitments;
- the degree to which aid is untied with respect to country of procurement and/or available for local procurement;
- the degree to which the timing of aid disbursements is responsive to exogenous shocks to the Tanzania economy;
- the degree to which aid commitments are made for time periods longer than those which were the norm in the past;
- the share which procurement tied technical assistance makes up of total aid expenditures;
- the degree to which aid disbursements are for humanitarian rather than developmental purposes.

(Detailed argument for the use of such performance indicators in the monitoring of aid donor performance may be found in Helleiner, 2000b).

Although donor agreement on these elements was not complete (Japan, for instance, argued vigorously that its projects deserved assessment purely upon their developmental effectiveness), they were incorporated into the Government of Tanzania's draft terms of reference for the independent group to be charged with responsibility for monitoring progress in aid relationships. The Government's draft terms of reference also called explicitly both for an updating of progress

made with respect to the 18 points of earlier agreement (upon which the 1999 report had commented) and for the development of further donor performance indicators (together with the assessors' best estimates thereof).

There followed extensive discussion between the donors and the Government of Tanzania, discussion already initiated at the 2000 CG, over the detailed terms of reference for the agreed new independent report on progress towards the agreed new form of development partnership, and other modalities of such an institutionalized independent monitoring and evaluation system.

Agreement was easily reached that the group should be balanced and independent. The agreed plan was that it would be made up of three Tanzanians (not in the employ of the government), one non-Tanzanian African, and three experienced and nongovernmental professionals from donor countries. Responsibility for assembling and supporting the team, it was also agreed, would rest with the independent Economic and Social Research Foundation of Tanzania (ESRF).

An early casualty of the discussions concerning the group's terms of reference (TOR) was the CG discussion paper's recommendation that donor performance indicators should be recorded and assessments made with respect to each of the major sources of external support to Tanzania. In the previous independent reports of 1995, 1997 and 1999, the naming of individual bilateral donors was avoided (although there were some specific references to the IMF and World Bank). The bilateral donors now agreed that only collective donor performance monitoring should be attempted.

More significantly, as discussions continued, emphasis shifted, under donor pressure (led by Japan, and buttressed by the U.S., Germany and France), away from the previous primary concern with the transfer of ownership and toward the more traditional, not to say old-fashioned, concept of "aid effectiveness". To some degree this may have reflected the perceived (by some donors) failure of the Government to consult sufficiently broadly, at the earliest stages of its development of the terms of reference for the group's monitoring activity; the draft TOR's perceived undue emphasis upon donor behaviour, indeed particular forms of donor behaviour; and the initial absence, this time, of an independent "honest broker" to help in the achievement of agreement. With respect to this last point, once the independent ESRF entered the process, movement towards agreed terms of reference moved more quickly and smoothly.

The terms of reference finally agreed for the independent monitoring group, although still within the framework of the new Tanzania Assistance Strategy (TAS), no longer include the development of new donor performance indicators and efforts to measure them. Local ownership now appears as only one of 5 explicitly mentioned "broadly agreed" means of increasing aid effectiveness, and, rather than being seen as the "cornerstone" of development partnership, the objective is now only its "promotion". (The other "broadly agreed objectives" are reducing transactions costs in aid delivery; enhancing predictability of aid flows; consolidating accountability requirements and results orientation; and making technical assistance more supportive of local capacity building needs.)

The group is also mandated to establish a "fresh baseline" for the development partnership that takes into account "contextual changes" since the January 1997 agreement, including the

emerging transactions costs and potential ambiguities surrounding the new experiments in collective decision-making and the associated complexities of appropriate assignment of responsibility and accountability. This mandate seems entirely reasonable as long as, in the current context, it does not imply a relative downplaying of the previously central issue of ownership. More ominously, perhaps, the independent group is also requested to assess the utility of its own exercise and provide a case for "continuing with it or otherwise".

Clearly the Government of Tanzania conceded some ground in this discussion. But far more significant than any such concessions are the facts that it took place at all; that, in the end, agreement was reached; and that a solid independent assessment of progress in aid relationships will again be presented to the next Tanzania CG meeting. The terms of reference will still leave plenty of room for the independent group to develop its own (potentially innovative) assessment methodologies, make critical assessments, and offer fresh proposals for improvement and change.

No doubt the struggle over the terms and modalities, and even the very existence, of this innovative independent monitoring process in Tanzania will continue. Certainly nothing achieved thus far has been written in stone. There is bound to be considerable further "learning by doing" as the process evolves. What is indisputable, however, is that the Tanzanian experience in the reform and monitoring of aid relationships has been of a pioneering character and deserves both worldwide attention and worldwide support.

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