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**ARTICLE**

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# Special issue introduction

## Ownership in a post-aid effectiveness era: Comparative perspectives

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### Abstract

**Motivation:** Close to 15 years have passed since the adoption of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, which generated unprecedented efforts to advance effective development co-operation with a central focus on developing country ownership. Under today's international development co-operation realities, involving inclusive agendas, strategic divergence and increasing competition, discussions on ownership, harmonization and alignment have lost traction. Yet the practices of development co-operation relationships show strong continuities.

**Purpose:** This special issue examines how the principle of ownership may be understood and advanced under these new conditions. National ownership is prioritized in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development yet has so far been marginalized by a predominantly piecemeal response and by the rise of "mutual benefit" co-operation.

**Approach and Methods:** This special issue takes an inductive approach to studying specific cases and actors bearing on the challenge of understanding and advancing ownership today, in order to inform future policy and research. The contributions to this special issue mainly draw from qualitative research designs that present detailed research inquiries into specific country and actor cases, drawing from interviews, structured desk reviews of policy documents and the rich body of literature on development effectiveness. They are complemented by two contributions that respectively present quantitative research and probe the critical and post-development literature for additional insights.

**Findings:** Findings point to an increasing prevalence of pragmatism and self-interest among all actors, to the detriment of national ownership. Broad co-operation agendas, a sense of urgency interpreted as a search for quick results, and more diverse, interest- and outcome-driven forms of multi-stakeholder partnerships all entail a more assertive and proactive approach on the part of external actors. Under these conditions, local initiative may either become stifled or be reasoned away. Given this, today's dominant approaches to co-operation raise concerns about their ethics and sustainability.

**Policy implications:** Ownership remains both a requirement and a desired outcome of international co-operation and is key to the effective

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use of public funding. A key requirement to revitalizing the debate on and practice of ownership is to gather better evidence as the basis for informed scrutiny. To this end, policy-makers need to reprioritize independent evaluation at both the individual and collective level.

#### KEYWORDS

2030 Agenda, aid effectiveness, development co-operation, foreign aid, local participation, ownership, partnership

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

“No nation has the right to make decisions for another nation; no people for another people”. *Julius Kambarage Nyerere, excerpt from ‘A Peaceful New Year’ speech, Tanzania, January 1968 (This Is Africa, 2013).*

Over half a century ago now, development co-operation practitioners faced the paradoxical challenge of strengthening the sovereignty of newly independent states by means of external intervention (Brown, 2013; Donaghy and Webster, 2019, pp. 23-99). Depending on their own degree of involvement in colonialism, the newly independent states’ international partners invoked varying degrees of shared destiny and neutral support for self-reliance. Swedish development policy statements in the early 1970s, for instance, strongly emphasized the latter motivation (Keijzer, Klingebiel, Örnemark, & Scholtes, 2018, p. 76). Rhetorically at least, all international partners stressed the importance of ensuring and enabling local initiative, and United Nations (UN) resolutions since the 1970s have stressed the importance of developing country leadership in managing foreign aid. Policy debates since the 1960s emphasized the importance of partnership and recognized that developing country “beneficiaries” and societies at large should plausibly “own,” i.e. commit to, account for, control and benefit from intervention goals, measures and results (Del Biondo, 2017; Black, 2020). Yet international development policy has always been an arena in which a range of motives and objectives, both official and implicit, have to be reconciled (Mawdsley, 2017; Gulrajani & Calleja, 2019). These contradictions have always complicated ownership and its promotion.

More fundamentally, the use of taxpayer funds to support change in faraway places, combined with institutional and individual incentives of various types, was all too frequently accompanied by short timeframes and unrealistic expectations concerning what could be achieved. After a resource-driven economic boom in some, though not all developing countries, a global drop in the prices of raw materials in the late 1970s and the substantial provision of foreign aid in the form of loans resulted in many developing countries falling into a debt trap, some of them less than two decades after independence (Brolin, 2017). International partners’ behaviour in response to these unfortunate trends was characterized by increased “donorship,” defined as a “syndrome in which all initiative emanates from the donor side and donors determine which values and objectives are good for the beneficiaries of aid” (Edgren, 2003, p. 4). The upshot, in the 1980s and 1990s, was a prolonged period of intrusive neoliberal structural adjustment conditionalities and developmental regression in key areas of the post-colonial world.

Yet the conditionalities associated with this heightened period of donorship were soon discredited, leading through the 1990s to the demise of the structural adjustment era, which was considered to have had a strongly negative impact on development co-operation relationships (Graham, 2017;

Del Biondo, 2017).<sup>1</sup> The introduction of the Comprehensive Development Framework and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) in the late 1990s placed ownership at the centre of policy debates and development studies scholarship. The World Bank's policy on PRSPs stressed that client governments should themselves formulate and thus "own" the agreed poverty reduction agenda to which it would provide financial assistance (Hasselskog & Schierenbeck, 2017, p. 324). Soon after, the 2002 UN Financing for Development Conference in Monterrey, Mexico, as well as earlier Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) based discussions prompted a series of four international conferences on aid effectiveness from 2003 to 2011. These conferences adopted soft standards for the governance and reform of international development co-operation, in which ownership assumed a prominent—indeed central—place. In view of this considerable political momentum, much academic research conducted in this period took these conferences as a basis to probe whether these agreements had been translated into more effective development co-operation practice and improved outcomes (including in this journal, e.g., Rogerson, 2005; Faust, 2010).

The fall of Lehman Brothers investment bank in September 2008 and the subsequent global economic and financial crisis marked a turning point in aid effectiveness approaches, after which the prominence of the agenda declined considerably. Yet the seeds of change had already been planted by the emergence and proliferation of an array of increasingly assertive new "aid providers" (Lundsgaarde & Engberg-Pedersen, 2019; Mawdsley et al., 2014). The fourth and final High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in 2011 mainly sought to "enlarge the (development) tent" to incorporate these so-called emerging donors, including but not limited to Brazil, India and China. Nonetheless, the follow-up process soon lost momentum and prior peer-learning processes lost traction. A key indicator was the discontinuation of the joint evaluation process that resulted in detailed empirical evidence and influential synthesis reports published in the run-up to the third and fourth High Level Fora in 2008 and 2011 (Wood, Kabell, Sagasti, & Muwangal, 2008; Wood et al., 2011). Today, discussions on aid and development effectiveness seem anachronistic, reflecting a declining appetite for collective action on the part of both providers and recipients of development assistance. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015) does recognize the importance of "national ownership," and significant legacies of the aid effectiveness decade linger at country level. However, the broad and inclusive nature of the 2030 Agenda considers virtually everything a priority, effectively undermining developing countries' ability to exercise the sort of ownership that had only recently occupied centre stage within the global development regime.

Recent changes in and new approaches to development co-operation come with distinct implications for efforts to understand and advance ownership. New donors, approaches and instruments involve new modes of interaction that change the space for ownership and are applied in steadily diversifying contexts. In response to aid fatigue and populism more generally, OECD members increasingly frame development policy as the pursuit of mutual interests, resulting in co-operation practices emphasizing particular sectors and themes perceived to reflect particular national interests or values (Keijzer & Lundsgaarde, 2017). Efforts to reduce poverty have become further concentrated in fragile states, where the need for effective co-operation and ownership is high, yet difficult to achieve. On the other hand, poverty remains prevalent in the growing number of statistically "middle-income"

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<sup>1</sup>The degree of difference between the "Washington Consensus" that underpinned this period, and the "post-Washington Consensus" that ostensibly replaced it remains subject to debate. The former involved a decisive tilt towards global markets and the private sector in development policies, entailing structural adjustment conditionalities such as trade and investment liberalization and the privatization of state-owned assets. The latter retained an emphasis on market-led economic growth, but recognized the need for stronger social spending and programmes, a limited role for state industrial policies, and an emphasis on governance reforms. See, for example, Birdsall and Fukuyama (2011).

countries, raising questions about whether development co-operation is superfluous to their capacity for ownership.

Current patterns of international development co-operation represent a move away from the situation at the time that the Paris Declaration was adopted, when “government-to-government” co-operation was considered to be the core of development co-operation. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate action emphasize co-operation in pursuit of global public goods, beyond the interests of individual states and transcending their geographic borders. They also prioritize multi-stakeholder partnerships, in which sovereign states are still key but not necessarily primary partners. Moreover, unlike the Millennium Development Goals or prior global development agendas, the 2030 Agenda strongly emphasizes that its goals cannot be realized by Official Development Assistance (ODA) alone. In 2015, the third international UN Conference on Financing for Development convened in Addis Ababa strongly emphasized the need for all relevant actors to “invest” in the new agenda, including through blended finance, which “combines concessional public finance with non-concessional private finance and expertise from the public and private sector” (AAAA, 2015, p. 24). These and other trends pose fundamental questions about both the objects and subjects of ownership in international development co-operation today.

The broad scope of the 2030 Agenda, its commitment to national ownership and particularly its focus on sustainable solutions benefitting current and future generations are in tension with current development policies and operational approaches of international development partners. One example is the response by European OECD members to what has been referred to as the “refugee crisis” in Europe. Largely due to political tensions and low domestic capacity and/or willingness within the European Union to manage the arrival and redistribution of people applying for refugee status, recent development co-operation initiatives are characterized by a resurgence in “donorship.” A frequently cited example is the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa set up by the European Union (EU), which seeks to address so-called—yet largely undefined—root causes of migration from Africa towards the EU. As per the direct articulation and pursuit of donors’ interests, the design of dedicated projects is largely dominated by EU actors (International Crisis Group, 2017, p. 9). Speed of implementation and rapid results are strongly favoured over the long term and dialogic approach that had become a defining feature of development co-operation, and the areas of co-operation are so diverse that it becomes well nigh impossible to determine what collective aims and outcomes are furthered in the process (ECA, 2018).

In this dynamic and diffuse context, development studies scholarship thus faces both conceptual and empirical challenges in relation to ownership: how can we conceive of this principle and the process of promoting it under today’s development co-operation realities? And does evidence from different contexts confirm its continuing relevance, or should we seek new guiding principles for international co-operation? This introductory article presents overarching issues and summarizes key findings and implications from its seven contributing articles. To this end, the conceptual themes and orientations presented in the next section bridge to a discussion of the seven contributions to the issue. We conclude by stressing the urgency of new research to understand the ramifications of the changing development co-operation environment for the elusive yet potentially transformative principle of ownership.

## 2 | DEFINING AND RESEARCHING OWNERSHIP

On November 19, 1970, the UN General Assembly adopted the international target of 0.7% of gross national income for the provision of ODA. This target still features in the 2030 Agenda today. Moreover, the General Assembly emphasized that the financial and technical assistance provided through development assistance should contribute to developing country progress and “should not

in any way be used by the developed countries to the detriment of the national sovereignty of recipient countries” (UNGA, 1970, p. 44). The Pearson Commission report that informed the ODA target similarly stressed that development co-operation is a relationship and needed to be nurtured as such. It called for “a new partnership based on an informal understanding expressing the reciprocal rights and obligations of donors and recipients” (Commission on International Development, as cited in Del Biondo, 2017, p. 1239).

Several authors, including Müller and Sondermann (2016), Hasselskog and Schierenbeck (2017) and Glennie and Sumner (2016), duly acknowledge that efforts to promote aid effectiveness go back a long time, yet consider the “OECD-led Paris process” as a distinct period in the history of development co-operation. Brown (2017, p. 337) identified as one distinctive feature the fact that donors implicitly recognized that past failings were not solely attributable to recipient countries. This in turn inspired the Paris agenda’s understanding of ownership as “the efforts of recipient countries to define and implement their own development objectives and agendas.” Notwithstanding the strong resolve of all involved to tackle what was essentially an “aid inefficiency agenda” (Booth, 2012), the same authors also observed that the lack of speed in implementing reforms belied the considerable momentum generated by the Paris process. The aid effectiveness agenda described in the Paris Declaration, which revolved around the principle of ownership, seemed firmly on the radar in the first half of the 2000s, only to abruptly disappear from the scene a few years later (Husain, 2017). In 2011, aid effectiveness discussions were delinked from the OECD and the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (GPEDC) was launched, with a joint OECD and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) secretariat. However, the mandate of the GPEDC remained open to interpretation, complicated by its three co-chairs, while misconceptions and lack of trust on the part of developing countries resulted in a lack of support (Xiaoyun, Jing, Leistner, & Cabral, 2018).

China’s increased investments notwithstanding, the discursive influence of the “emerging donors” seemed disproportionate to the actual scope of their investment and co-operation portfolio. Yet, the reluctant or non-participation of these actors in global discussions on development co-operation effectiveness seemed to reinforce many OECD actors’ own inclination to apply the adage, “if you can’t beat them, join them,” especially given their own difficulties in achieving the Paris objectives of “harmonization” with each other, and “alignment” with developing country priorities. Among other trends, their waning commitment to the Paris process was reflected in official policies increasingly espousing mutual benefit motivations for development co-operation (Keijzer & Lundsgaarde, 2017) as part of what Mawdsley (2018) dubbed “the southernisation of development cooperation.” These conditions may explain why the entire Paris-initiated agenda on aid effectiveness was marginalized into a single paragraph of the 61-page Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development (AAAA, 2015), adopted in 2015 as the international community’s underwhelming collective commitment towards generating the necessary means to deliver on the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

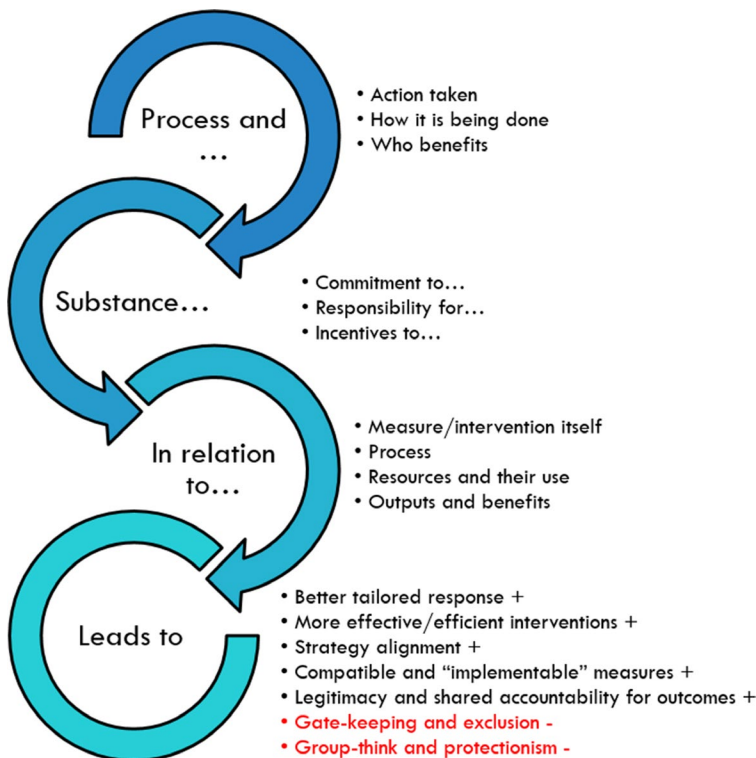
So what do these changing conditions mean to the prospects for the principle of ownership? Whitfield (2009a, p. 4) observed that the popularity of ownership in development diplomacy may be precisely because it is challenging to define, thereby obfuscating debates around decision-making processes in development policy. The same may be observed in the academic realm, with contributions variously emphasizing ownership as developing country leadership (Graham, 2017; Booth, 2012), broad-based consensus (Faust, 2010) or participation (Dornan, 2017). Building on Whitfield and Fraser’s (2010) observation that ownership may be expressed and pursued as commitment and control, a recent study suggested that ownership should be viewed as encompassing both the substance and process of co-operation. Moreover, ownership should not be considered as a static property, but as both a function and feature of relationships between various actors involved in development



co-operation (Keijzer et al., 2018). For example, recent research on the ownership of health financing policies in low-income countries identifies several “pathways” to ownership, thus demonstrating the value of a dynamic and relational understanding of this concept (Kiendrébéogo & Meessen, 2019). The importance of government leadership, then, ultimately depends on the approach to government and policy change adopted in the developing countries concerned.

In light of these parameters, ownership is defined here as the extent to which “developing” actors involved in a dedicated development co-operation relationship consider their involvement in terms of control over process and substance to be both sufficient and desirable over time. Based on this understanding of ownership, the development co-operation relationship goes beyond the life cycles of individual development interventions or strategies and is also influenced by interactions beyond the specific domain of development policy. Figure 1 presents key dimensions of ownership that can be assessed from this understanding of an otherwise elusive concept.

The Paris Declaration’s understanding of ownership, emphasizing recipient government leadership at the strategic level as informed by earlier OECD policy discussions in the late 1990s (Hasselskog & Schierenbeck, 2017), has been criticized by many analysts for adopting a static and narrow understanding linked to the existence of national poverty reduction plans. The above, more dynamic conceptualization may be criticized, on the other hand, for broadening the concept’s boundaries to encompass most of the other concepts associated with the Paris agenda, such as harmonization and alignment. Its main purpose here is heuristic rather than conceptual, as its broad dimensions may facilitate an exploratory inquiry into the understanding and appreciation of ownership today by various development co-operation actors.



**FIGURE 1** Key dimensions and pointers of ownership in development co-operation relationships

Source: adapted from Keijzer et al., 2018, p. 57

To illustrate the benefit of this approach, a recent study of the application of harmonized allowances guidelines in Malawi by NGOs concluded that the government did not take ownership of these guidelines, despite the fact that they had been formally endorsed by the Office of the President and Cabinet. The authors concluded that this was mainly because the development of the guidelines was driven by government's external partners, whereas government was only consulted at a late stage to endorse the outcome. A different approach to managing the process dimension of ownership might have led to a more effective outcome (Ngwira & Mayhew, 2019, p. 9). Research on health financing policies confirms that a balanced relationship among both external actors and their development country counterparts may result in broad-based ownership and support to government policies over time. Two essential pathways to such shared ownership are identified: (1) technicians first, politicians second, whereby a small group of actors is mandated to engage in small-scale piloting; and (2) politicians first, technicians second, where a high-level political decision—e.g., the abolition of citizen user fees for public health—is followed by the involvement of technical actors to “make it work.” Both approaches can—but also might not—lead to a situation of strong and balanced ownership (Kiendrébéogo & Meessen, 2019).

Beyond these specific considerations, it can be observed that both the policy discussions and academic debates to date have focused on “in-country co-operation,” often further focusing on bilateral donors interacting with developing country governments. While much development co-operation continues to be delivered through these bilateral modalities, current patterns of co-operation feature an increase in highly intermediated relationships, with many “new” actors interposing themselves between and with both donors and recipients (Keijzer et al., 2018). Additionally, there is a trend towards fewer allocation decisions being taken in-country, as opposed to (for example) the headquarters of bilateral donors, or the boardrooms of international initiatives and funds. Both development policy debates and academic research need to adjust to these new realities, which hold unsettling implications for the still-prevalent question of how ownership is to be secured, and by whom.

### 3 | COMPARING FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS OF THE SEVEN CONTRIBUTIONS

This special issue's first contribution, by Brown (2020), delves into the proliferation of donor-driven private sector partnerships, seeking to understand the prospects for and limits to democratic ownership in the mining sector that are associated with them. Examining the case of Canadian support to extractive industries in Peru, the article notes a shift towards instrumental support to various actors, with the aim of enabling mining operations through the promotion of a favourable investment climate and a “social licence to operate,” benefitting in particular companies that are based in the donor country. In this context, and departing from more pluralist forms of engagement in the past, current co-operation patterns reflect a limited, state-centric vision and understanding of ownership, based on what governments (claiming to speak on behalf of citizens) prioritize, rather than a more democratic conception that takes into account what poor people and communities actually want.

In their contribution, Keijzer, Klingebiel, and Scholtes (2020) present an analysis of how ownership is understood and promoted in Liberia and Rwanda, two post-conflict states previously at the forefront of the aid effectiveness agenda. Whereas international partners laud Rwanda's development progress, while expressing concerns over governance, the opposite is the case with Liberia. The article's analysis of changing development co-operation relations in both countries shows considerable strategic drift in Liberia's approach to development co-operation management, whereas Rwanda has stuck to an established system to manage its external partnerships that rewards and disciplines donor



behaviour. In these divergent contexts, the article shows interesting commonalities in the behaviour of external partners.

Swedlund and Lierl (2020) focus on a specific and prominent approach to development co-operation, namely the provision of budget support. This modality was once considered to directly enable ownership, yet has equally been criticized as a new approach to conditionality and donorship. Challenging the view that the reduction of budget support was more or less directly determined by donors, a bargaining model and evidence from Rwanda and Tanzania emphasizes the need to understand aid provision as a negotiated compromise between donors and recipient countries. Critically, donors' political inability to make sustainable commitments to provide budget support seems to have been crucial in the decline in its use, to the frustration of their recipient "partners."

Focusing on German development co-operation in the Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) countries, Furness (2020) analyses what the near doubling of German ODA to the region since the start of the Arab Spring has meant for development co-operation in practice. Drawing from historical institutionalist and aid effectiveness literature, he observes that (1) Germany's broader foreign policy system failed to produce a clear MENA strategy due to political differences and bureaucratic inertia; and (2) the priorities that have been defined tend to favour German and European security interests rather than the development and humanitarian priorities of the region. Notwithstanding its considerable fragmentation and policy incoherence, Germany's assistance in the region has the overall effect of prioritizing short-term stability over support for unpredictable political change, to the detriment of a focus on ownership.

Drawing from evidence on changing co-operation realities in Cambodia and Rwanda, Hasselskog (2020) analyses the implications of increasing ownership for local participation and vice-versa. The article suggests that, though the two ideals of local participation and national ownership are both aimed at somehow coming to terms with the inequalities that are built into aid relationships, they cannot be assumed to go hand-in-hand. The Rwandan government's use of the vocabulary of participation has been perceived as a local transposition of international development discourse, while government itself emphasizes these are rooted in Rwandan traditions. In Cambodia, meanwhile, participatory activities are by comparison more strongly concentrated in projects and programmes formulated and funded by foreign actors. In neither of the countries, however, does the claim of involving the local population translate into deeper levels of participation, i.e. substantial involvement of marginalized actors. The contribution signals a need to further investigate different forms and characteristics of national ownership and of local participation respectively, as well as of the more complex interrelations that are likely to prevail between the two.

Against the setting of Canadian development co-operation in Ghana, Black (2020) investigates the partnership–ownership nexus with particular attention to the implications of new, highly intermediated forms of partnership for established patterns of bilateral co-operation. Complementing Hasselskog's contribution interrogating the linkages between ownership and local participation, Black's contribution observes how proliferating and diversifying partnerships "de-centre" traditional bilateral relations. The trend towards multi-stakeholder co-operation thus tends to aggravate longstanding challenges of donor proliferation and co-ordination, interfere with Ghanaian actors' capacity and networking (as key conditions for country ownership), and accentuate donor sensitivity to established understandings of failure and success. The broader development co-operation trend towards more disciplined thematic focus among donors as a condition for engagement, strongly reflected in the Canada–Ghana relationship, further complicates and compromises country ownership.

The final contribution to the special issue by den Heyer and Johnson (2020) draws on post-development and critical theory to analyse two Canadian development initiatives. The reflections and critique

presented suggest a continued preoccupation with “upstairs ownership” as embodied in official documents and strategies at the expense of “downstairs ownership” that emerges in multi-stakeholder relationships centred around but not limited to more grassroots, “South–South” development co-operation realities. Whereas the former focus is understandable due to the nature of development co-operation and cross-border relations more generally, the neglect of the layered and relational aspects of co-operation practice distorts dominant understandings of how these may best be planned and managed effectively, and obstructs recognition of prospects for more transformative forms of ownership.

## 4 | DISCUSSION AND OUTLOOK

This special issue set out to gather evidence and reflections with a view to understanding how the principle of ownership may be adapted and advanced in today’s substantially altered development co-operation environment. Whereas ownership continues to be prominent discursively, the conditions under which development co-operation now operates, and the new policy and political realities to which it relates, have effectively marginalized this principle and with it, the broader aid and development effectiveness agenda to which it anchored. In recent years, there has been a strong dissonance between country ownership and the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that calls for long-term adjustments towards integrated multi-stakeholder responses on the one hand, and political realities encouraging short-term, narrowly self-interested calculations and the tackling of the symptoms of unsustainable development, on the other.

Within this big picture, a multitude of actors (both state- and non-state) are involved who, notwithstanding a strong push for centralization and standardization, enjoy high levels of discretion in how they choose to contribute to the shaping co-operation relations over time. Hence, these contributions—individual and collective—both reflect and reinforce the growing variations in the co-operation realities of today. This diversity itself however is not the dominant observation emerging from the contributions that follow. Rather, the various articles’ findings suggest that this diversity can be expected to increase now that the influence of a horizontal effectiveness agenda, as reflected in the mobilization surrounding the Paris process, has waned. This has put the sustainability of the agenda’s core principles to the test—above all the principle of ownership. The contributions show that in several countries and contexts, ownership is still promoted through the actions of co-operation actors, where it features both as a means to maintain relationships as well as an end in itself. Nevertheless, the specific forms it takes are evolving—sometimes quite rapidly.

Beyond specific geographic contexts and themes, the evidence presented in this special issue also points to current challenges in promoting ownership among the individual actors involved. Among the providers of external funding for development co-operation, interest- or brand-driven policy frameworks contribute to increasing levels of competition and compromise responsiveness to local contexts and needs. Whether these relate to the commercial interests of Canada in extractive industries, or European and German security interests in the MENA region, the policies prioritize particularistic gains at the expense of longer-term partnerships and vision. Of course, it could be argued that this is simply a reversion to the earlier history of instrumentalized “foreign aid,” but given the potential ramifications of this trend it should nevertheless be exposed and challenged.

On the side of those formally considered beneficiaries of the development funds concerned, changing and shrinking civic spaces are seen as both responses to and results of changes in technology and communication patterns, eroding prospects for expanded rights and improved equity. The more project-oriented approaches to co-operation and the short-termism reflected in the co-operation patterns revealed in the articles that follow reduce the legitimacy of external partners’ efforts to enter into a

dialogue with developing country authorities over these unsettling societal trends that go beyond the specific projects concerned.

Since the onset of the global financial crisis and the rapid erosion of the foundations of the post-Cold War order, important and sometimes drastic changes in patterns of international development co-operation have emerged. The history of development co-operation, as briefly touched upon in this introduction, has been prone to circularity in both policy and practice (for a further discussion, refer to Swedlund, 2017). The new approaches that have been taking shape in recent years are yet to solidify and reveal themselves through independent evaluation and scrutiny—whether as recurrences of old approaches or the emergence of fundamentally new ones. Such evaluations were key to propelling the past aid and development effectiveness agendas. Future research and evaluation efforts will be well advised to specifically analyse the sustainability effects and ownership impacts of the current (somewhat complex and confused) patterns of co-operation. Doing so would help to determine whether these patterns represent promising new ways of working in an increasingly post-hegemonic environment, or a reversion to the practice of aid as a more-or-less sophisticated effort to buy influence, so prevalent during the 1970s and 1980s.

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