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Working Paper

Good for now but not forever: Officials' perspectives on the relevance of the effectiveness agenda and the need for change

WIDER Working Paper, No. 2022/140

Provided in Cooperation with:

United Nations University (UNU), World Institute for Development Economics Research (WIDER)

Suggested Citation: Calleja, Rachael; Cichocka, Beata (2022) : Good for now but not forever: Officials' perspectives on the relevance of the effectiveness agenda and the need for change, WIDER Working Paper, No. 2022/140, ISBN 978-92-9267-273-7, The United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER), Helsinki, <https://doi.org/10.35188/UNU-WIDER/2022/273-7>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/273933>

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WIDER Working Paper 2022/140

**Good for now but not forever: officials’
perspectives on the relevance of the
effectiveness agenda and the need for change**

Rachael Calleja and Beata Cichocka*

November 2022

In partnership with



United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research

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Abstract: This paper investigates whether the current effectiveness agenda—agreed during the 2011 Busan High Level Forum on Development Effectiveness—continues to define best practice in development amidst a rapidly changing development landscape. To do so, we surveyed officials from development agencies and partner countries to understand whether the effectiveness agenda remains relevant for officials who manage official development assistance (ODA) flows, and if not, how it should change. We find that while respondents believe that the effectiveness agenda is relevant, there is strong demand to revise or renew the agenda to overcome technical, strategic, and political challenges that are limiting its implementation. Based on our survey findings, we propose a simple framework for considering options for change, centered around trade-offs related to the inclusiveness of the agenda and the political will available for reform. We conclude by proposing four possible reform scenarios for the next phase of the effectiveness agenda.

Key words: effectiveness, development cooperation, development agencies, survey, politics

Acknowledgements: This paper is a shortened version of ‘[Development Effectiveness in the New Normal: What Do the Changing Roles and Purposes of ODA Mean for the Effectiveness Agenda?](#)’, which was originally published by the Center for Global Development in March, 2022, under the Creative Commons license CC BY-NC 4.0.

This research study is released in connection with the [International Research Conference on the Effectiveness of Development Cooperation](#), jointly organized by UNU-WIDER, the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC), and the European Commission (DG INTPA) on 17–18 November 2022 in Brussels, Belgium.

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This paper is published under the UNU-WIDER project [The state and statebuilding in the Global South – international and local interactions](#). It is released in connection with the [International Research Conference on the Effectiveness of Development Cooperation](#), jointly organized by UNU-WIDER, the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC), and the European Commission (DG INTPA) on 17–18 November 2022 in Brussels, Belgium.

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Information and requests: publications@wider.unu.edu

ISSN 1798-7237 ISBN 978-92-9267-273-7

<https://doi.org/10.35188/UNU-WIDER/2022/273-7>

Typescript prepared by Siméon Rapin.

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The Institute is funded through income from an endowment fund with additional contributions to its work programme from Finland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom as well as earmarked contributions for specific projects from a variety of donors.

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1 Introduction

In 2011, the international community endorsed the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation during the Fourth High-Level Forum (HLF) on Aid Effectiveness (OECD 2012). The agreement marked the most recent evolution of shared principles for effective development cooperation, following on from prior commitments made at preceding effectiveness HLFs in Rome (2002), Paris (2005), and Accra (2008). At the time, the Busan agreement was viewed as a response to changing international realities, as it brought together—for the first time—a broad range of development stakeholders in support of a basic framework for guiding the actions of all development cooperation providers.

A decade on from the Busan agreement, the effectiveness principles are expected to apply in a very different world. The 2008 financial crisis put pressure on development budgets and led to a renewed focus on using official development assistance (ODA) to further the interests of provider countries (Gulrajani and Calleja 2019). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) replaced the narrower Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), institutionalizing the imperative for tackling global challenges—such as climate change, environmental sustainability, and peace and security—to support long-term development. At the same time, the development landscape has seen a proliferation of actors, bringing an increasingly broad range of perspectives to development cooperation (World Bank 2021). Taken together, such changes are shifting both the roles of ODA as a source of development finance and the purposes or goals that ODA is expected to achieve.

Within this changing development landscape, there are questions about whether the current effectiveness agenda remains relevant. On one hand, the shifting roles and purposes of ODA could provide impetus for rethinking principles for effectiveness. On the other hand, the effectiveness agenda is typically viewed as principles that can be widely applied to development activities and that, in theory, should apply in the changing development landscape. In between these positions, the tension is whether and to what degree the current principles remain fit for purpose, and whether revision or renewal of the agenda is necessary in response to the changing development landscape.

This paper explores how the roles and purposes of ODA are changing and what these shifts mean for the implementation of the development effectiveness agenda.¹ To do so, we surveyed officials working within development agencies and partner countries to understand and map perspectives on the changing role and purposes of ODA, and perceptions of the continued relevance of the Busan principles in this changing landscape. Our results show that the implementation of the effectiveness agenda faces three main types of challenges alongside the changing roles and purposes of ODA. First, development agencies face technical challenges applying effectiveness principles to changing contexts and challenges. Second, they face strategic challenges implementing principles in the context of the global challenges that define the SDGs. Third, agencies face political barriers to implementing the effectiveness agenda, including low political interests and poor institutional incentives to prioritizing effective action.

For the purpose of this study, we understand ‘effectiveness’ as the globally recognized principles for effective development cooperation agreed in 2011 as part of the Busan—country ownership, focus on results, inclusive partnerships, and transparency and mutual accountability. While there

¹ This paper is a condensed and revised version of Calleja and Cichocka (2022), with a sharper focus on the implementation challenges facing the effectiveness agenda.

are many ways to define the effectiveness of development cooperation, including in relation to the outcomes of specific interventions, macroeconomic effects, or the effectiveness of provider organizations, our focus on the future of the effectiveness *agenda* necessitates a definition focused on the globally agreed principles (see Paulo et al. 2017).

This paper proceeds in several parts. The next section provides background on how the development effectiveness agenda has evolved and recent changes in the development landscape. This is followed by a brief overview of our survey methodology, and a section describing key survey results. We then analyse the main findings from across the survey instrument, highlighting key challenges facing development agencies in implementing the effectiveness agenda in a ‘new normal’ and propose a menu of options for thinking about the future of the effectiveness agenda before offering final conclusions.

2 How has the effectiveness agenda evolved alongside the changing global context?

The development effectiveness agenda evolved over two decades via a series of international meetings that built, reviewed, and updated its principles alongside the changing development landscape. Emerging in the 1990s, the agenda grew in response to concerns that ODA had largely failed to deliver developmental outcomes, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (Dijkstra 2013). Based on experiences of the prior decades, calls to scale up ODA volumes throughout the 1990s were met with increasing concern about ensuring such spending was also of good *quality* (Radelet 2004). In the years that followed, the imperative of ensuring that cooperation was spent ‘effectively’ was recognized in discussions held during the 2002 Monterrey Consensus and was further elaborated during the first HLF on Aid Effectiveness held in Rome the following year. These discussions coalesced in 2005, when the international community identified five principles of best practice in ‘aid effectiveness’—ownership, alignment, harmonization, managing for results, and mutual accountability—and formalized the agenda with the agreement of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (OECD 2005).

The HLFs that followed Paris—held in Accra (2008) and Busan (2011)—broadened the effectiveness agenda to cover activities from a more diverse group of development actors—including the private sector and countries beyond the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) (Lundsgaarde and Engberg-Pedersen 2019). Understanding that the global balance of wealth and influence had shifted during the 1990s, with G20 countries rising to prominence in an increasingly multipolar world, it became increasingly clear that an effectiveness agenda focused on the DACs could not meaningfully cover the full spectrum of development engagement or actors (Rogerson 2011). To account for these changes, organizers of the 2011 meeting in Busan invited representatives from a broad group of development actors—including provider countries outside the OECD DAC, civil society, and the private sector—to help shape the text of the agreement and broadened the scope of the effectiveness agenda from its prior focus on ‘aid’ to an agenda of ‘development effectiveness’ (Brown 2020). The resulting agreement refocused effectiveness around four key principles—ownership, transparency, and accountability; focus on results; and inclusive partnerships—and established the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC) as the institutional body responsible for the governance and monitoring of the agenda.

Despite attempts to broaden inclusivity and participation through the Busan process, subsequent high-level meetings (HLMs) of the GPEDC in Mexico (2014) and Nairobi (2016), and the senior-level meeting held in New York in 2019, saw waning participation—especially from major ‘dual-role’ provider countries (Bracho 2021). While the GPEDC aimed to “broaden the tent” of

development governance’ by giving voice to previously under-represented stakeholders, an inclusive consensus largely failed to materialize, partly due to limited engagement by non-DAC countries (including the BRICS) stemming from concerns around the legitimacy of the GPEDC, with some describing it as a de-facto OECD DAC-led initiative (Li 2017). Indeed, many ‘Southern’ providers considered existing UN initiatives such as the Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) to be more ‘internationally legitimate’ spaces for discussing development cooperation, while others argued that unresolved tensions around ‘burden-sharing’ between Northern and Southern providers, difficulties with defining ‘differential’ commitments and their monitoring, and practical resource constraints limited the involvement of Southern actors (Bracho 2021).

Perhaps importantly, the years since Busan have not seen major revisions to the effectiveness principles or agenda. Instead, the agenda has evolved through smaller reforms that sought to clarify how the effectiveness principles applied in new contexts that had emerged in the development landscape since 2011. In response to the growing role of the private sector as providers of development finance, for instance, the 2019 Kampala Principles on Effective Private Sector Engagement in Development Co-operation were established as parallel principles to guide effective private sector partnerships (GPEDC 2019). At the same time, the GPEDC undertook a substantive review of its monitoring process and framework to contextualize and define the applicability of the effectiveness principles to new modalities, contexts, and actors (GPEDC 2021). Part of the latest review process, under the 2020–2022 Work Program, involves revising the GPEDC’s indicator framework to increase the flexibility of the monitoring process to better align the monitoring exercise to the changing landscape (GPEDC 2020). In doing so, understanding what the effectiveness principles mean in different and changing development contexts is a key objective.

2.1 What is the ‘new normal’ in the development landscape since Busan?

The minor changes to the effectiveness agenda since Busan stand in contrast to the profound shifts that occurred in the global development landscape. Notably, the formalization of the SDGs marked a key moment of change by institutionalizing the need to tackle global challenges as a core purpose of development. Based on the understanding that global challenges will disproportionately affect the poor, the SDGs highlight the deepening interconnectedness of the global system and the reality that failing to address global challenges threatens to undo past poverty reduction and derail the achievement of long-term sustainable development for all.

At the same time, the estimated cost of financing the SDG agenda dwarfed available resources and sparked calls for new sources of finance for global development beyond ODA, which could not keep pace with rising demand. In the years following the global financial crisis, provider governments faced downward pressure on ODA budgets alongside domestic austerity and populist forces. Slow growth in ODA budgets was often coupled with calls to draw on ODA resources to tackle emergent crises; ODA was used, for instance, to cover costs of hosting refugees in the wake of the 2015 crisis in Syria as well as to fund vaccine distribution in response to COVID-19 (Gavas and Pleeck 2021). Alongside stagnant ODA, other flows—both public and private—grew in relative importance, while ‘spiralling investment needs’ made more popular the use of ODA to ‘leverage’ or catalyse private flows (Gavas and Pleeck 2021: 8).

New development financing stemmed from a growing number of development actors engaging in the cooperation landscape (Bhattacharya and Sabin Khan 2020). Recent years have seen the creation of new multilateral development banks such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the New Development Bank and new vertical funds (World Bank 2021). There has been an even starker rise in the number of implementing entities, including other government departments, engaging in development (World Bank 2021; Gulrajani and Calleja 2021). At the same time, there

has been a continued proliferation of non-DAC countries as providers of development cooperation. A survey conducted by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs found that in 2019, more than two thirds of surveyed countries reported providing development cooperation (UN 2020), while another study from 2018 found that 88 countries are active in development cooperation, half of which are considered low- or middle-income economies, demonstrating the complexity of the development system and the importance of actors outside the DAC (Fuchs and Müller 2018).

More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic served as a test case for whether diverse actors and resources could be mobilized in response to an acute global challenge (Calleja et al. 2022). Notably, responses to the dual health and economic shocks of the pandemic showed that while there were some examples of cooperation across diverse actors, global cooperation struggled even in the face of shared crises and at a time when the pandemic was reversing decades of progress toward poverty reduction and human development. By some estimates, it will take a decade of sustained growth to bring poverty numbers to pre-crisis levels, which presents a troubling picture of the challenges ahead and increases the need for action to achieve the 2030 Agenda (Gavas and Pleeck 2021). As the world shifts from immediate crisis response to tackling the long-term global impacts of COVID-19 and building resilience against future shocks, a key question facing the international community is whether the norms and standards of cooperation—including the effectiveness agenda—are fit to the emerging realities of the new development landscape and paradigm.

3 Survey methods

To understand how the roles and purposes of ODA have changed, and the implications for the future of the effectiveness agenda, we launched two surveys—one with officials from development agencies and the other with officials from partner countries.² The main difference between the two surveys is the target population:

- **The provider survey** targeted officials working in a range of development agencies including bilateral agencies from both DAC and non-DAC providers, multilateral development agencies, multilateral or regional development banks, and bilateral development finance institutions. We targeted mid-senior officials working in units responsible for development policy, strategy, or effectiveness. We assume that such officials would have a high-level view of their organization and its priorities, allowing them to respond ‘from the perspective of their organization’. We aimed to include representatives from all major development actors within provider countries (i.e. if responsibility for development involved multiple agencies—ministry and implementing agency—we included individuals from both agencies in our sample population).
- **The partner country survey** targeted partner country officials with responsibility for the management of ODA for their country. These were often mid-senior officials working in Ministries of Planning, Finance, or Foreign Affairs. We ensured that our sample population included a broad range of countries, at various income levels, and across regions.

Both surveys used a combination of purposive and convenience sampling, and most participants were identified using publicly available information or from our networks. For the provider survey,

² Survey approach and full findings were first published in Calleja and Cichocka (2022).

we contacted 330 individuals from 114 development agencies and received full or partial responses from 89 individuals (27 per cent response rate), representing 48 agencies. Most responses to the provider survey were from bilateral DAC development agencies (63 per cent), followed by development finance institutions (DFIs) (10 per cent), non-DAC providers (9 per cent), and multilaterals (8 per cent). For the partner survey, we contacted 251 individuals from 90 partner countries and offered the survey in English, French, or Spanish based on the national language of the target country. We received 28 full or partial responses to this survey (11 per cent response rate), and respondents represented 19 countries across income groups and regions.

We acknowledge that our survey is an imperfect exercise and suffers from three key limitations. First, despite the important role of a range of development actors (such as the private sector, civil society, and philanthropies), we focus exclusively on official providers. This is done as our focus on the changing purposes and roles of development finance makes our survey better suited to an official development agency sample. Second, while total number of responses to our survey represents only a small portion of individuals working in development agencies or partner country governments, we believe that the broad coverage of our survey responses and the seniority of our respondents means that these results provide important insight into the changing role and purpose of ODA and the implications for the effectiveness agenda. Given the smaller sample size for the partner country survey, we use the results cautiously as a comparator and to complement findings from the provider survey. Third, due to the use of primarily convenience and purposive sampling, we recognize that our survey findings reflect the perspectives of respondents but cannot be generalized across the broader population—technical or regional staff within development agencies, for instance, may have different views on the changing role and purpose of ODA. While this is a necessary limitation of our study, this survey targets those with an overarching view of the changing development landscape and implications for the work of their agency.

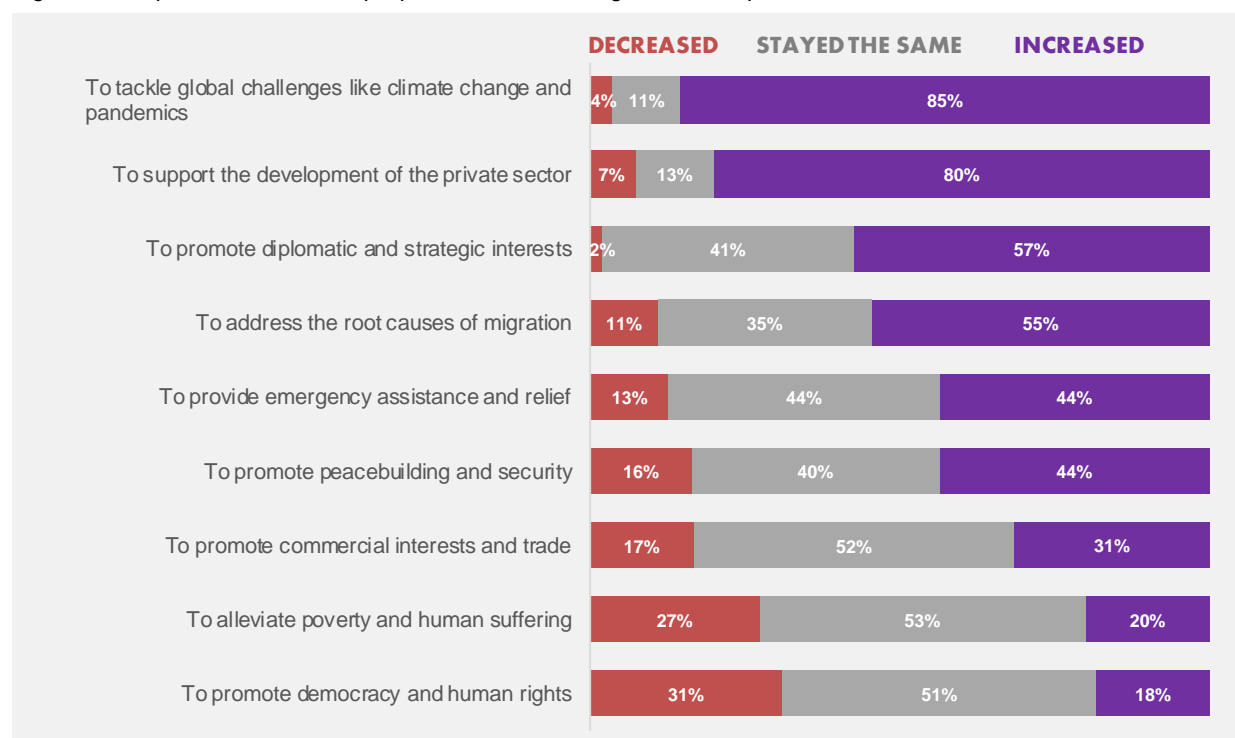
Throughout our surveys, we define the ‘purposes’ of ODA as the goals that ODA is intended to achieve (based on Lancaster 2006), while ODA’s ‘roles’ refers to how ODA is utilized, relative to other sources of finance or modalities for cooperation, to achieve the stated goals. We understand ‘ODA’ as defined by the OECD DAC as ‘government aid that promotes and specifically targets the economic development and welfare of developing countries’ (OECD 2021). Questions about the effectiveness agenda were asked with specific reference to the current agenda as defined in the Busan agreement.

4 Main survey findings

Our survey began by asking respondents to consider *how* the purposes of ODA had changed over the past decade from the perspective of their agency. Responses to both the provider and partner country surveys showed that while most purposes of ODA are becoming *more* important over time, the largest increases were reported for ‘tackling global challenges’ (where 85 per cent of providers officials and 81 per cent of partners indicated this purpose had become more important over the past decade, see also Figure 1). For the provider survey, ‘supporting the development of the private sector’ also saw a large increase in importance, with 80 per cent of respondents listing this purpose as growing in importance, while the partner country survey revealed that 50 per cent of respondents thought that ‘supporting peace and security’ and ‘supporting the development of the private sector’ had become more important priorities for their countries. Perhaps notably, the provider and partner surveys showed differing trends in the prioritization of using ODA towards ‘alleviating poverty and human suffering’. While this purpose saw a significant decrease in importance among providers (with 27 per cent noting a decrease and just 20 per cent noting an increase in the last decade), this stood in sharp contrast with the partner survey, where 50 per cent

of respondents indicated that poverty reduction had become increasingly important, suggesting some disconnect between the engagement demanded by partners and offered by providers.

Figure 1: Responses on how the purposes of ODA changed over the *past decade*



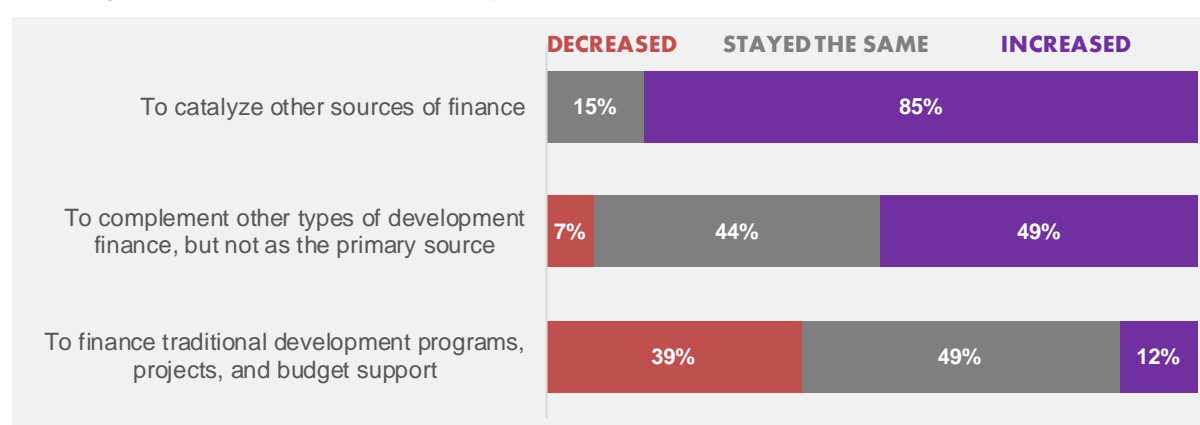
Note: based on 55 responses, asked only for those who selected that the main purpose of ODA had changed in the previous question. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Source: Figure 4 in Calleja and Cichocka (2022: 17), reproduced under the Creative Commons license CC BY-NC 4.0.

Similar findings emerged when we asked survey respondents to consider which purposes they thought would be the most important in five years' time. Respondents to both the provider and partner country surveys predicted that 'tackling global challenges' would continue to increase in importance. Notably, 84 per cent of respondents to the provider survey thought that addressing global challenges would be among the top-three priorities of ODA in the years ahead, with this purpose overtaking poverty alleviation which received the second most provider votes at 69 per cent. While the partner country survey also acknowledged that 'tackling global challenges' would likely continue to increase in importance in the mid-term future, officials indicated it would remain of equal importance with poverty alleviation, rather than superseding it (both purposes were indicated as a top-three priority by 58 per cent of partner respondents). Unsurprisingly, when asked why the purposes of ODA were changing, provider and partner country respondents both noted that these shifts were largely driven by pressures to respond to 'immediate global challenges including pandemics and climate change'—this was named as an important factor by 83 per cent of providers and 66 per cent of partners. For providers, other factors indicated as important drivers of ODA's changing purposes were 'changing domestic strategic and geopolitical priorities' (59 per cent) and the 'SDGs and changing development agenda' (41 per cent), while partner countries most often indicated changes in their domestic development priorities (73 per cent) as a leading driver. Yet among providers, 'changing partner country priorities' were among the least frequently named options motivating changes in ODA's purpose, with just 29 per cent of providers indicating it as an important factor. This finding again raises concerns about the possibly widening gap between partner countries' priorities and the cooperation offered by providers.

Our survey also asked respondents to consider how the role of ODA was changing alongside its purposes. Participants were first asked to rank their agreement with three statements describing key uses of ODA as: 1) a source of ‘traditional’ development finance for programmes, projects, and budget support; 2) a complement to other development flows; and 3) a catalyst to leverage finance from other sources. Responses from both the provider and partner surveys showed general consensus on both the traditional role of ODA (where 86 per cent of providers and 76 per cent of partner country officials either agreed or strongly agreed) and ODA’s complementary role (where 58 per cent of providers and 68 per cent of partner country respondents agreed or strongly agreed). Yet significant differences could be seen regarding ODA’s ‘catalytic role’—while 66 per cent of providers either agreed or strongly agreed that ODA should be used to catalyse other development flows, only 38 per cent of partner country respondents agreed with this use of ODA. In a second question, participants from the provider survey were also asked about how the importance of each role of ODA had *changed* over the past decade in response to ODA’s shifting purposes. Agency officials overwhelmingly indicated an increase in ODA’s catalytic role and a concurrent decrease in its ‘traditional’ role (Figure 2). Indeed, the growing importance of the catalytic role of ODA aligns with shifting purposes, specifically the increased prioritization of using ODA to ‘support the development of the private sector’, as previously identified by providers (Figure 1).

Figure 2: Responses on ‘How has the importance of each role of ODA changed for your organization in response to shifting purposes of ODA?’ (provider survey)



Note: based on 41 responses.

Source: Figure 9 in Calleja and Cichocka (2022: 22), reproduced under the Creative Commons license CC BY-NC 4.0.

4.1 Is the effectiveness agenda still relevant?

While the changing roles and purposes of ODA provide interesting background, the main purpose of exploring such changes was to understand whether and how changes to the development landscape were affecting the continued relevance of the effectiveness agenda, and if so, what types of changes would be needed to ensure it remained ‘fit for purpose’ in the years ahead. To do so, we began by asking respondents from both surveys whether the development effectiveness principles (as outlined in Busan) remain relevant for considering best practice in development. Respondents to both surveys overwhelmingly responded ‘yes’ (85 per cent of provider respondents and 100 per cent of partner country respondents), signaling the continued relevance of the effectiveness principles. When we asked respondents to explain their answer, most participants from both surveys who answered ‘yes’ reasoned that even within the changing landscape, the Busan principles reflect best practice (Table 1). At the same time, a smaller group of respondents to the provider survey (18 per cent) expressed that despite the relevance of the principles, limited political buy-in to the effectiveness agenda had hindered its implementation. Of those who

responded ‘no’, three main reasons were given: 1) respondents argued that the current principles no longer applied in the changing development landscape; 2) respondents argued that the lack of political will had rendered the effectiveness agenda irrelevant; and 3) respondents suggested that the disconnect between the principles and how they apply in practice, and in different contexts, means that the principles are not always relevant.

Table 1: Classification of responses to ‘Please explain why you think the effectiveness principles are/are not relevant’

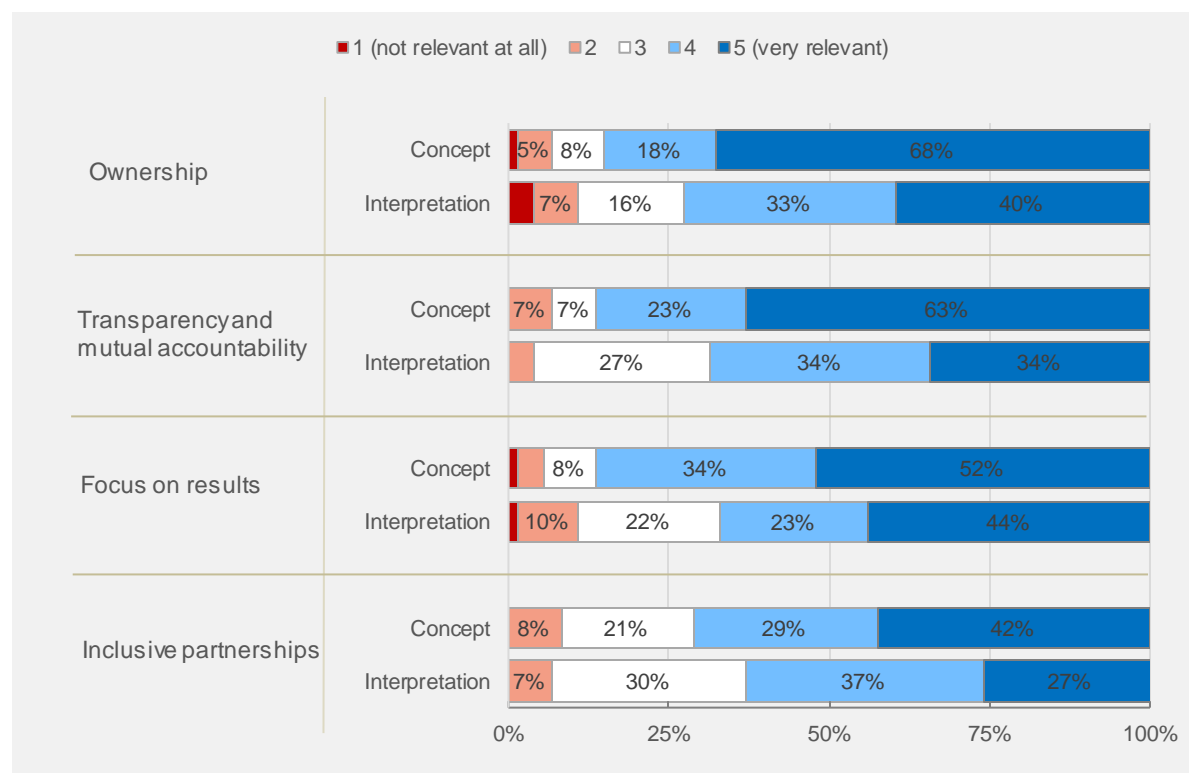
| | Response code | Provider responses | Partner country responses |
|--|---|---------------------------|----------------------------------|
| ‘Yes’ the effectiveness principles are relevant | The principles remain fit for purpose, even if some tweaks are needed. | 38 (67%) | 9 (100%) |
| | The principles may remain fully relevant in theory, but the lack of global consensus, domestic political will, or bureaucratic mandate are limiting effective implementation. | 10 (18%) | - |
| ‘No’ the effectiveness principles are not relevant | Political priorities have changed too much. | 3 (5%) | - |
| | The global development landscape and methods of implementation have changed too much. | 3 (5%) | - |
| | The principles are either too technical or too broad and theoretical to be useful on the ground. | 3 (5%) | - |

Note: authors’ own classifications, based on 57 provider responses and 9 partner country responses, where each response is assigned one code.

Source: Table 1 in Calleja and Cichocka (2022: 24), reproduced under the Creative Commons license CC BY-NC 4.0.

More specifically, we asked respondents to tell us whether each of the effectiveness principles were relevant in ‘concept’ and ‘interpretation’ on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being most relevant). We defined the ‘concept’ of the principles as ‘the fundamental idea underlying each principle’ and ‘interpretation’ as ‘how the principle is applied and measured as part of the effectiveness agenda’ (Figure 3). Notably, respondents to both surveys largely rated all four principles as ‘relevant’ in both concept and interpretation. However, while partner countries seemingly viewed the principles as equally relevant in concept and implementation, officials from development agencies routinely answered that the principles were more relevant in theory (i.e. concept) than in practice (i.e. interpretation). This difference, which we call the ‘relevance gap’, was largest for the ‘focus on results’ principle (19 percentage points more relevant in concept than interpretation), followed by ‘transparency and mutual accountability’ (18 percentage point gap) and ‘ownership’ (13 percentage point gap). Yet the ‘inclusive partnerships’ principle, which had the lowest ‘relevance gap’ was also identified as having the lowest overall relevance in *both* its concept and interpretation by both providers and partner countries.

Figure 3: Relevance of the concept and interpretation of the Busan principles (provider survey)



Note: based on 74 responses for ownership in concept and inclusive partnerships in interpretation, 73 for all others. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Values under 5% not shown.

Source: Figure 12 in Calleja and Cichocka (2022: 25), reproduced under the Creative Commons license CC BY-NC 4.0.

4.2 Should we revise or revisit the effectiveness agenda?

Having shown that the effectiveness agenda remained relevant, we asked survey participants whether there was value in revisiting or renewing the development effectiveness agenda for the years ahead. Notably, respondents to both surveys overwhelmingly answered ‘yes’ (75 per cent from the provider survey and 100 per cent from the partner country survey), suggesting that while the agenda remains relevant, there is strong demand for change. When asked to explain their answer, respondents answering ‘yes’ from both surveys frequently suggested that revision was needed to ensure that the principles keep pace with changing actors, modalities, and purposes in the current development landscape (Table 2). A smaller group of respondents suggested that revision was needed to reignite political interest in the agenda, while others argued that revisions could aim to rethink how the principle of ownership applies outside of the traditional donor–recipient model of development. Of those that responded ‘no’, most reasoned that low political interest with the agenda made revisions unpalatable, suggesting that the main challenge facing the agenda was one of implementation, which could be solved by renewing political commitment to the effectiveness, rather than rethink the current principles.

Table 2: Classification of responses to ‘Please explain why there is/is not value in revisiting or renewing the development effectiveness agenda’

| | Response code | Provider responses | Partner country responses |
|---------------------------------|---|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Yes, revisiting is needed to... | Adapt the agenda to keep pace with a changing development landscape. | 30 (51%) | 7 (58%) |
| | Mobilize the political and bureaucratic environment around the agenda. | 11 (19%) | 2 (17%) |
| | Overhaul the donor–recipient model implicit in the agenda towards more inclusive and equal representation | 7 (12%) | 3 (25%) |
| No, because... | The agenda has value as it stands—it just needs to be implemented. | 7 (12%) | - |
| | The agenda is politically blocked, and any effort to revive it is a non-starter. | 4 (7%) | - |

Note: based on 59 text responses from providers, and 12 responses from partner countries, with each response assigned one code. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Source: Table 2 in Calleja and Cichocka (2022: 26), reproduced under the Creative Commons license CC BY-NC 4.0.

Lastly, we also asked participants how they thought the agenda should change to support its revision or renewal. We presented respondents with several potential options for change, including adding new principles to cover changing cooperation modalities and sectors, as well as options to broaden or narrow the interpretation of current principles, and asked them to select all that apply. Results from our provider survey show a relatively strong demand for adding new principles, particularly to cover different types of development finance (selected by 63 per cent of respondents) and to guide best practice related to new roles of ODA (including using ODA as a catalyst) (selected by 58 per cent of respondents). Adding new principles was also a popular response in the partner country survey, yet the majority (88 per cent) instead suggested that new principles were needed to guide best practice in relation to ODA’s changing purposes (including the provision of global public goods (GPGs)).

5 Discussion

Taken together, the responses to our surveys show that while officials recognize the importance of the effectiveness principles, calls to revise the agenda and evidence of difficulties interpreting and implementing the principles in practice highlight several ongoing challenges. Specifically, when we consider the full answers to our surveys, including text-based responses which we reviewed and coded, we identify three main types of challenges that appear to be affecting the implementation of the effectiveness agenda: technical, strategic, and political.

Many of the responses to our surveys identified *technical* issues—related to difficulties applying the effectiveness principles to new modalities, partnerships, and in changing contexts—as a key challenge affecting the implementation of the effectiveness agenda. Several officials pointed out that while the Paris and Busan agreements were both largely grounded in a development model where ODA’s traditional role—based on government-to-government funding of programmes through modalities like budget support—was taken ‘as the norm’, the changing role of ODA has

left the development community in need of clarification on ‘what the principles refer to’ in light of new development modalities and partnerships (provider respondents #89 and #14; partner respondent #39). The increasing importance of the ‘catalytic’ role of ODA, for instance, led several respondents to raise concerns regarding the applicability of the principles to cooperation modalities involving the private sector. One respondent from a DFI shared the perception that applying the existing effectiveness principles to their work has been akin to ‘hammering a square peg into a round hole’, as the principles had been ‘designed for grant aid’ and were not clearly applicable to investment-based action (provider respondent #11).

Others raised questions about the applicability of the ownership, results, and partnership principles, which respondents found relevant conceptually, yet were unclear on how the principle should be interpreted and implemented in practice. On ownership, for instance, several respondents questioned how the principle should be applied in different contexts, such as fragile states, arguing that the type of ‘government’ ownership typically associated with the effectiveness principles might not be possible in all country contexts (provider respondents #42, #120). As a result, they sought clarity on how this principle should apply under different conditions, and whether and how a ‘whole of society’ understanding of ownership could instead be implemented in contexts where democratic backsliding or political fragility make government ownership less feasible. This consideration often motivated calls for a ‘complete overhaul’ of the country ownership principle, from one focused on ‘government ownership’ towards an interpretation that prioritizes ‘democratic’ ownership over development plans and spending in order to enable a ‘clearer focus on those most left behind’ (provider respondents #14, #63, and #103). Indeed, respondents from both surveys brought up the need to broaden concepts beyond central governments, ensuring that as ‘more actors (public, private, social, local) are joining and playing important roles,’ and arguing that these actors should be visible in how the principles are understood and implemented (partner respondent #37). Similarly, several provider officials also expressed concern that the current effectiveness principle on inclusive partnerships remains ‘too vague’ to be meaningfully implemented (provider respondent #20), and that there is a growing need to clarify and ‘unpack what the principles mean when we work with other partners’, especially when ODA is used to catalyse or complement development contributions from other actors (provider respondent #89). Indeed, both surveys identified ‘inclusive partnerships’ as the principle with the largest applicability problems (Figure 3, above), with respondents seeking clearer guidance on what it means to partner effectively. Others also pointed to difficulties implementing the ‘results’ principle, particularly when engaging in complex or policy-based interventions without a simple measurable ‘output variable’, suggesting that this principle might be easier to apply with project-based interventions than other types of programmatic or policy engagement (provider respondent #20). To a degree, the challenges linked to implementing the results principle may also stem from changes to its interpretation over time, with the original ‘managing for results’ principle, which aimed to focus on the link between inputs, outputs, and outcomes, becoming ‘recast technocratically’ as a ‘management tool’ for aggregating and considering provider agency ‘results’ (Brown 2020).

At the *strategic* level, evolving understandings of ODA’s role and purposes raise questions about how the agenda can be meaningfully implemented in an SDG context. Understanding that the Busan principles—and prior effectiveness agendas—emerged during the MDG era, which focused on traditional development challenges and primarily relied on ODA flows, the global, intergenerational, and broad range of partnerships envisioned under the SDGs highlights the need to rethink how the effectiveness agenda applies in this changing context. Indeed, concerns related to the applicability of the effectiveness principles to the SDG context were evident in responses to questions about why the effectiveness agenda should be revised, to which the majority of

respondents from both surveys argued that revision was needed to ensure that the effectiveness agenda is aligned with the demands of a changing development landscape (see Table 2).

More specifically, some respondents raised questions around how key principles—notably ‘ownership’—should apply in the SDG context. In part, the challenge is linked to the increasing prioritization of global challenges, and the imperative to provide global public goods that underlies the achievement of the SDG agenda. With addressing global challenges becoming an increasingly important purpose of ODA (see Figure 1), there are important questions about how to apply effectiveness principles, which have traditionally been implemented at the country level, to the global context (see also Keijzer et al. 2018: 21). The question, for instance, is one of who *owns*—or should own—projects intended to provide GPGs that benefit all countries. While GPG projects are implemented in a country, the shared benefits of GPGs make it unclear how to balance potentially differing incentives and plans between the local and global. Similarly, the long-term orientation of the SDGs and the imperative to tackle global challenges for the good of future generations show that ‘ODA is transforming into a transfer instrument of wealth between generations’ (provider respondent #13), raising further questions about how to assess ‘results’ and measure the effectiveness of programmes designed to support a long-term sustainable future.

Finally, several respondents—specially to the provider survey—linked poor implementation of the effectiveness principles to their declining *political* relevance. Domestically, agency staff noted that amidst an ‘onslaught of emergencies’ and ‘fiscal limitations’, their political leaders and diplomatic colleagues had become increasingly uninterested with the effectiveness agenda in favor of more short-term or geostrategic concerns (provider respondents #46 and #44). Officials argued that the lack of prioritization by ministers has left their agencies under-resourced and unequipped with the ‘internal structures, incentives and capabilities’ necessary to make good on effectiveness commitments (provider respondent #43). For instance, staff noted that while delivering on commitments to inclusive partnerships and country ownership may require ‘extreme dedication at the country level’, ‘pressures to disburse’ funds swiftly and limited resources to facilitate deeper partnership mechanisms have inhibited their agencies’ capacity to deliver on these principles (provider respondent #46). Indeed, the absence of institutional or individual incentives for officials to prioritize the effectiveness agenda raises important questions about the likelihood that staff will prioritize effectiveness in the face of competing pressures, including those which may be more closely aligned with agency priorities and, crucially, with individual performance incentives (Brown 2020).

Similarly, others argued that the increasingly geostrategic nature of ODA and pressures to align spending to the providers’ national interest have become ‘a more powerful force than the Busan principles, which are losing ground’ (provider respondent #83), raising further questions around the political impetus for implementing the effectiveness agenda. While the pursuit of the national interest and the effectiveness agenda are not incompatible, the risk is that the former is prioritized at the expense of the latter. Indeed, recent case studies found evidence that the imperative to actively ensure partner-country ownership is being displaced by a focus on provider objectives and accountability standards (Keijzer et al. 2018, 2020). This shift, they argue, is highlighting the growing importance of the ‘what’ of development over the ‘how’ associated with the effectiveness principles. At the same time, low domestic political appetite for the agenda has been exacerbated by international perceptions that Busan has failed to inspire global collective action, not having been fully embraced by key global actors, including many of the major South–South Cooperation providers. This consideration places individual providers in somewhat of a double bind: while our survey confirms feelings that the ‘principles are not well shared with emerging partners’ (provider respondent #79), officials also noted that the principles can ‘only [be] relevant if all donors (traditional, new, emerging) abide by them’ (provider respondent #4).

Yet while political factors appear to be a significant hurdle for the effectiveness principles' implementation, respondents were in two minds about whether revisiting Busan would be able to address these concerns. For some, revisiting Busan could breathe political life back into the agenda by reinvigorating dialogue on good practice and creating the space to 'further probe' challenges for more meaningful global collaboration on effectiveness, including via renewed engagement with 'emerging actors' (provider respondent #8). At the same time, among those respondents who saw little value in renewing the effectiveness agenda, many argued that political factors could not meaningfully be addressed, either because the agenda is politically blocked beyond rescue at the domestic level, or because in the current geopolitical context, 'there is no way to make all actors agree' (provider respondent #37).

The technical, strategic, and political challenges to the implementation of the effectiveness agenda raise important questions about its future—how can the agenda be meaningfully utilized if those responsible for its implementation (at least in part) remain unclear on how the principles should be applied and lack the political mandate to make effectiveness a priority? With responses to our survey showing that these issues are—at least in part—driving calls to renew and revise the effectiveness agenda, the question becomes one of how the agenda can and should change to address the implementation challenges that are seemingly affecting the use of the agenda in practice. In short, what are the options available for reforming the agenda in a way that provides technical clarity, focuses on future strategic needs, and renews political interest to improve the likelihood of implementation in the years ahead?

6 The future of the effectiveness agenda: four scenarios

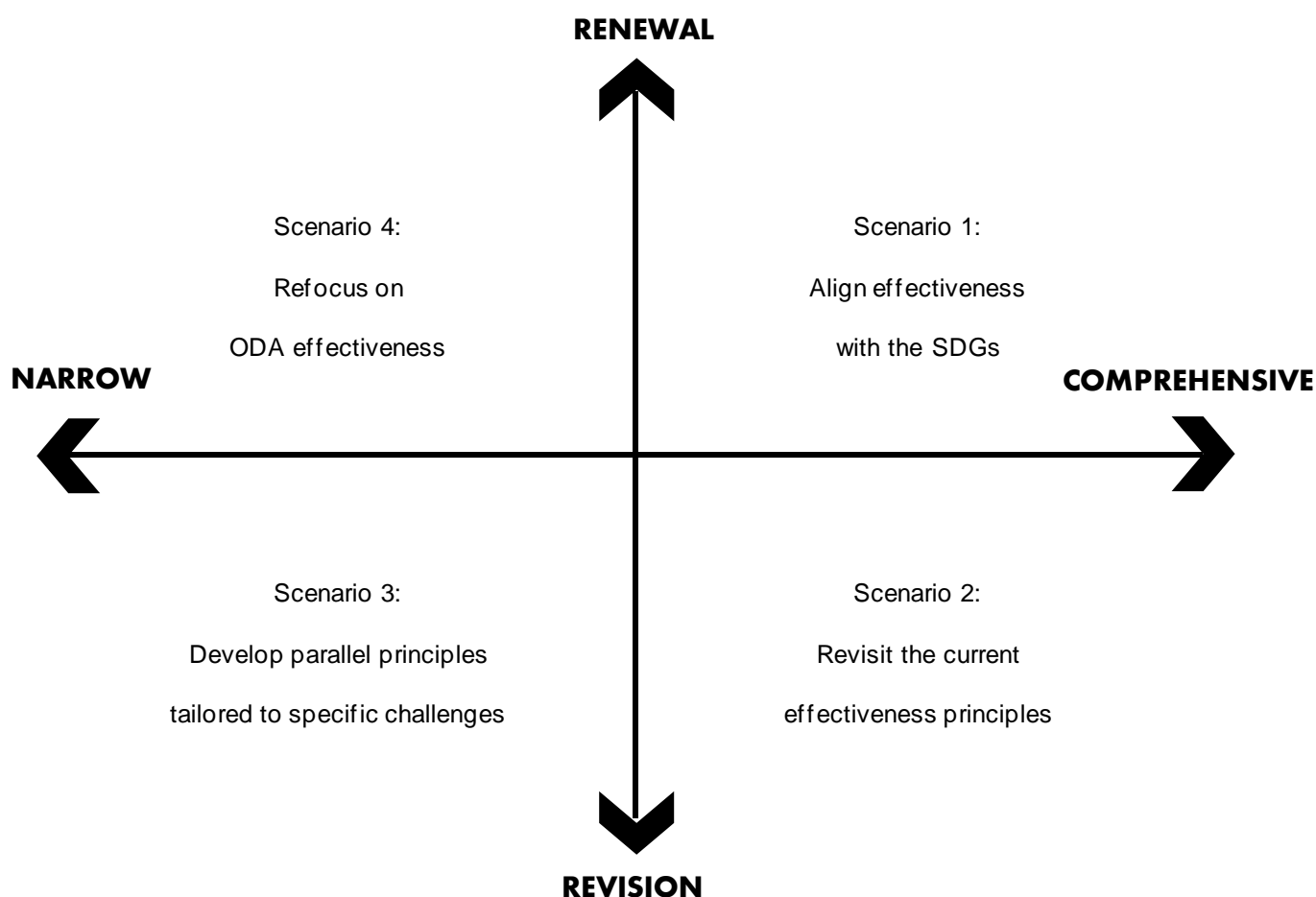
While the implementation challenges facing the effectiveness agenda identified in our survey contributed to calls to revise or renew the agenda, there was a lack of consensus among respondents around how the agenda should change to ensure it remained fit for purpose and to overcome the challenges that limited its use in practice. Instead, when taken together, responses to our survey appeared to point to two key trade-offs or questions that frame the current challenges associated with implementing the agenda and potential avenues for reform.

The first question considers the appropriate scope of the effectiveness agenda and asks what future iterations of the agenda should cover? In part, this question responds to concerns around the technical applicability of the agenda, with potential answers spanning from narrower coverage—which could make it easier to articulate how the agenda should be applied in specific contexts or in relation to specific actors, yet risks losing the legitimacy and simplicity of a single effectiveness framework—to a more comprehensive effectiveness framework designed to guide action across a wide variety of contexts, yet which lacks the granularity to show how the agenda can be applied in different contexts.

The second question considers the degree of political will available for renewing the effectiveness agenda. Given findings that the implementation of the effectiveness agenda is currently limited by low political will, it is clear that political momentum around the agenda—to some degree—will be a critical enabling factor to drive the agenda forward. If strong political will exists across relevant actors, then there may be potential to agree on a fuller 'renewal' of the effectiveness agenda with renewed global political leadership and attention. However, if political will is more limited, undertaking a more ambitious effort may ultimately increase risks of inaction and failure, making a modest 'revision' of the agenda both more realistic and desirable.

Using a simple 2x2 table, we use these two questions of coverage and political ambition as the basic framework for our thinking on potential reform options for the effectiveness agenda (Figure 4). Each option involves a different set of risks and opportunities, and has different implications for *what* is revised, *who* is involved, and *where* the governance of the agenda sits. For a fuller description of the framework and options, see Calleja and Cichocka (2022).

Figure 4. Scenarios for future of the effectiveness agenda



Source: based on Figure 15 in Calleja and Cichocka (2022: 39), reproduced under the Creative Commons license CC BY-NC 4.0.

Scenario 1 involves rethinking and redesigning the effectiveness agenda to reflect the changing landscape and development vision embodied by the SDGs. In doing so, this scenario responds to strategic concerns about the applicability of the effectiveness agenda to new challenges by revising the effectiveness principles or clarifying how existing principles should be applied to the challenges, modalities, and partnerships embodied in the SDGs. In doing so, this scenario aims to be broad in scope, covering the full spectrum of cooperation and actors. This option aims for inclusivity, which could in turn increase the legitimacy of the agenda as a global process and bring new political momentum for effectiveness. At the same time, however, questions remain as to whether this option is politically feasible—the broad inclusiveness envisaged by this scenario might make it more difficult to reach a viable consensus with concrete commitments among the many disparate groups of actors relevant for global development in the current landscape. Under this scenario, it may also be necessary to move the governance of the agenda to the UN system. Based on the understanding that achieving the SDGs is a global goal, and that questions around the

legitimacy of the GPEDC—which has been seen as a de-facto DAC-led forum—have led some non-DACs to disengage from the process, moving governance of the agenda to an international arena able to encourage broader participation might be useful (Bhattacharya and Khan 2020).

Scenario 2 would focus on a more modest revision of the current Busan agenda, including through clarifying existing principles and monitoring indicators to provide guidance for emerging challenge areas or non-ODA flows. Efforts in this vein are ongoing as part of the GPEDC’s current reform process (GPEDC 2021) and could help overcome technical and strategic implementation challenges. This scenario would also attempt to renew consensus across the broad range of actors that were originally involved in the Busan agreement, and monitoring of the agenda’s implementation would remain with the GPEDC, supported by the OECD-UNDP Joint Support Team. This option has the lowest barriers to entry and would impose the lowest costs in terms of time and resources, as it would build on existing efforts at the GPEDC. However, given that this scenario does not dramatically differ from the current approach, there are questions about whether it could encourage participation from actors who have previously disengaged from Busan and whether the technical changes envisioned under this scenario go far enough to address implementation challenges or ‘future-proof’ the agenda for years ahead.

Scenario 3 would focus on creating targeted sub-principles for specific themes, partnerships, and emerging challenges under the umbrella of the broader effectiveness agenda in response to technical implementation challenges. To some extent, this is already materializing with several sets of principles such as those for private sector engagement (Kampala Principles) or cooperation in fragile contexts (Grand Bargain) developed in recent years. While all actors would be able to engage under this scenario, those most affected by specific challenges would likely be the main participants in each set of principles. Responsibility for monitoring compliance with each set of principles would likely also be divided across relevant bodies—the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), for instance, could monitor the effectiveness of climate finance (aligning with the framework suggested by Kaul 2021)—while coordination of the broader agenda could remain under the umbrella of the GPEDC. The benefit of this scenario is the ability to provide technical guidance tailored to specific challenges, contexts, or types of action, including for future challenges that may arise. As each set of principles would target a more like-minded set of actors, the potential for meaningful engagement would in theory be maximized within each subset of principles. Yet separate sets of principles could increase the complexity of the agenda, create silos, and undermine coherence. Further, a lack of clarity on who would be willing to champion and monitor each set of principles creates the risk that this scenario would become ‘business as usual’ in the absence of meaningful improvements.

Scenario 4 recognizes the uniqueness of ODA as a development flow and would work to renew effectiveness principles with a focus on the changing roles and purposes of ODA. Due to the focus on ODA, this scenario would give ODA-disbursing agencies the primary mandate to uphold and champion the effectiveness principles—including, where relevant, when implementing projects with partners in other sectors. This would likely make DAC members and multilateral agencies the primary relevant actors under this scenario. Similarly, governance of the agenda would likely shift back to the OECD DAC, while the GPEDC, which is already partly hosted by the DAC, could continue its monitoring role. By focusing on ODA, this scenario increases the likelihood of more ambitious consensus among the relatively like-minded ODA providers. Refining the agenda to focus explicitly on ODA could bring greater clarity, both to the applicability of the principles and the actors responsible for implementation (see also Taggart 2022), and is likely a more politically feasible and lower-cost option, as relevant GPEDC processes are already established and capable of monitoring ODA effectiveness. At the same time, however, this scenario risks side-lining issues around broader, beyond-ODA, development effectiveness,

including around the provision of GPGs. It is also likely to exclude non-DAC providers who do not subscribe to the ODA concept, potentially undermining past—and future—engagement efforts. Finally, there is a risk that by choosing this option, actors fall back on the principles defined in the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (ownership, harmonization, alignment, results, and mutual accountability) and its associated challenges (see Wood et al. 2011). Given changes to the development landscape in the years since, there are important questions about whether it is possible or desirable to separate ODA from other sources of development finance.

While these four scenarios provide a starting point for considering some of the questions and constraints that frame the future of the effectiveness agenda, in reality, none are expected to present a perfect way forward. Indeed, the most realistic trajectory is likely found somewhere in between the scenarios, combining parts of each into a feasible vision for the future of the effectiveness agenda. In the years ahead, the effectiveness agenda faces several challenges to ensuring it remains useful in practice—not the least of which is generating political interest to drive the agenda forward—and will need to adapt to remain fit for purpose. Yet the question of which permutation of the agenda will be best placed to guide effective action and generate shared buy-in to support the implementation of the SDGs remains open for debate.

7 Conclusions

Our survey shows that the changing development landscape is raising important questions about how the effectiveness principles apply to a development agenda which is focused on addressing increasingly global challenges, through a broad variety of instruments implemented by a diverse group of actors. Despite technical, strategic, and political challenges to implementing the agenda, an overwhelming majority of respondents to both our provider and partner country surveys said that the effectiveness principles continue to remain relevant as best practice in development engagement. At the same time, they recognized the need to revise or renew the agenda to clarify the applicability of principles to changing development contexts, to align the agenda with the current development vision, and to renew political interest in effectiveness for the years ahead. Yet how the agenda should change remains an open question.

We proposed a basic framework for thinking about the future of the effectiveness agenda, based on the level of political appetite for reform and the intended coverage of the agenda. This framework defines four potential scenarios for the future of the effectiveness agenda, each of which includes trade-offs in the opportunities, risks, and feasibility involved. For policy-makers focused on the future of the effectiveness agenda, the key challenge will undoubtedly be finding a solution that balances political feasibility with the changes required to ensure that the effectiveness agenda is fit for the future.

At the midpoint of the SDGs, there is a moment for policy-makers to meaningfully rethink what it means to be effective in a context defined by global challenges and interdependencies. Doing so will be crucial to informing actions toward addressing the complex global and local challenges that stand between current progress and achieving the SDGs. In light of challenges to the implementation of the agenda, missing this moment could risk the success of future development outcomes. Acting now could provide a stronger basis for effective and global cooperation to tackle future challenges. While decisions about whether and how the agenda should change will undoubtedly involve a long, complex process, and potentially tough negotiations among actors with different viewpoints, reigniting discussions on development effectiveness is a necessary first step to ensuring the agenda can keep pace with the changes ahead.

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