

ADVISORY LETTER

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

BEYOND A DEFINITION

No. 25, May 2014

Members of the Advisory Council on International Affairs

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Foreword

The Interministerial Policy Review 'Towards a New Definition of Development Cooperation: Considerations on ODA' of June 2013 and the government's response of 17 February 2014 were both published recently. They examine the foundations of Dutch development policy in the framework of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC).¹

Given the importance it ascribes to this subject, the Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV) decided to issue an advisory letter at the earliest opportunity, to add its voice to the debate on ODA in the Netherlands. The advisory letter assesses ideas on modernising development aid and considers their possible effects at European and global level. There is in any case an urgent need to explore modalities for a new framework of development targets, building on the existing framework of donor accountability. The AIV would be willing to further develop the points it has made in this advisory letter if required.

This advisory letter was prepared by Professor M.E.H. van Reisen (AIV/COS) and Professor A. de Ruijter (COS) following input from, and consultation with, the Development Cooperation Committee (COS) and the Peace and Security Committee (CVV) of the AIV. The executive secretaries were T.D.J. Oostenbrink and Ms E.A.M. Meijers.

The AIV finalised this advisory letter at its meeting on 9 May 2014.

1 For a more detailed description of this organisation, see: AIV, 'The OECD of the Future', advisory report no. 54, The Hague, March 2007.

Introduction

The Netherlands has built a good international reputation in development cooperation by providing high quality aid over many years. For a relatively small country, this is a wise investment, adding considerable value to our global positioning. Our strong track record in the aid sector, the knowledge we have acquired and the openings this gives us benefit the Netherlands, and Dutch interests, by creating a positive profile. However, since the status we currently enjoy could easily be undermined and would be difficult to rebuild or replace, it is time to think about repositioning ourselves. From time to time the Netherlands can use development cooperation to add leverage to its foreign policy role in Europe and beyond, not least because development cooperation is firmly embedded in the EU, both financially and otherwise.

The AIV welcomes both the IPR and the government's response to it. This advisory letter is intended to contribute to a fuller exchange of views on the modernisation of aid (also referred to as Official Development Assistance (ODA)). The framework for aid is agreed by international donors in the OECD/DAC.

Since a new and more wide-ranging approach is now needed, the AIV endorses the government's view that agreements must be made about what can be expected from whom and how these efforts should be measured.² Ensuring the predictability of development efforts calls for a system of agreements and undertakings.

Observations on the documents under review

The AIV wishes to highlight various points in the following passages.

Budget neutrality – assessing the consequences for the poorest countries

The IPR assumes that a review of development cooperation is budget-neutral for the Netherlands, since a review is not a cutback. The AIV believes the OECD/DAC system lends itself well to a review of this kind. The report makes a new distinction between developing countries, emerging economies and fragile states. When putting forward scenarios for new definitions and standards, however, it is important to assess the consequences they could have for countries that are making slow progress in working towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and are still dependent on ODA. It is also important to develop strategies for eliminating this dependency in the post-2015 development agenda. This assessment must clarify the income-related and other implications of a redefined ODA in countries where poverty is still widespread.

2 See the relevant European Court of Justice rulings. The first involved border control measures in the Philippines, where the Court ruled that the use of development aid must play a clear role in meeting the socioeconomic aims of poverty reduction. In a second case, relating to proposed counterterrorism measures to promote development in Afghanistan, the Court ruled that planned activities must contribute to the pursuit of the objectives set out in the Treaty. For the full texts of these judgments, see: <<http://curia.europa.eu/juris/liste.jsf?language=en&num=C-403/05>> and <<http://curia.europa.eu/juris/liste.jsf?language=en&num=C-91/05>>. See also: Bart van Vooren and Ramses A. Wesse, *EU External Relations Law: Text, Cases and Materials*, Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 330-331.

Situating ODA flows in a wider framework

The report makes clear that financial flows to developing countries differ in character. These flows have always been treated separately in the OECD/DAC system. However, there is a growing recognition that these different flows should reinforce each other. The OECD/DAC has succeeded in bringing a high degree of accountability to official public ODA in development cooperation frameworks (government-to-government and non-governmental channels). However, these frameworks are not available for other (private) funding flows. In previous advisory reports, the AIV has drawn attention to the need to further expand the existing architecture to address new challenges in international cooperation (such as climate change, migration and security policy) and to accommodate new (private) actors.³

Ownership and predictability

Over time, OECD/DAC targets have been adapted to changing realities.⁴ Yet no matter how useful regular reviews are, a list of this kind does not generate sufficient consensus among donors to tackle major poverty challenges effectively. A recent OECD/DAC report, for example, indicates a downward trend in the volume of ODA to countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, despite recording an all-time high in 2013.⁵ The Paris, Accra and Busan Declarations were concluded to strengthen the global partnership to fight poverty and promote ownership. Predictability is a vital precondition for ownership. It is therefore crucial that a review of the ODA definition is carried out with the greatest care, and in cooperation with partner countries.

Millennium Development Goals: poorest and middle-income countries

The IPR rightly states that the list of countries receiving ODA no longer fully matches the altered context. A first requirement must therefore be to identify the countries that are heavily dependent on ODA and making slow progress in meeting the MDGs. Some countries continue to rely on ODA through public or non-governmental channels because their private sectors are still underdeveloped. The OECD/DAC has also expressed concern about the likely reduction in aid per capita to middle-income countries and emerging economies, 75% of whose populations still live below the poverty line despite

3 On this, see also AIV, 'Interaction Between Actors in International Cooperation: Towards Flexibility and Trust', advisory report no. 82, The Hague, February 2013 and 'New Paths to International Environmental Cooperation', advisory report no. 84, The Hague, March 2013.

4 Before 1989, for example, the DAC looked only at the amount that countries received in ODA (without reference to standardisation or the principle of accountability). After 1989, there was a need for a more prescriptive list, which was compiled in successive years and regularly revised.

5 See: <<http://www.oecd.org/development/aid-to-developing-countries-rebounds-in-2013-to-reach-an-all-time-high.htm>>, accessed on 17/05/2014.

economic growth.⁶ Another concern is the disproportionate concentration of aid in one or two countries ('aid darlings') to the detriment of others. It appears that the countries making the least progress in meeting the MDGs are receiving less ODA. The DAC is therefore calling on the international community to make more resources available to this group of countries.⁷ Rather than a 'saturation point' for ODA, there is likely to be a shortfall in the volume of official aid flows.

Development cooperation architecture and DAC standards as achievements underpinning international agreements

The highly-refined DAC standards have now become the basis for the *acquis* on which international development agreements are founded. They also underpin the mechanism for concluding such agreements, monitoring their implementation and improving their verifiability. A structure of this kind is needed in the broader framework of international cooperation. The growing number of international agreements and the increase in DAC membership shows that the DAC standards have encouraged effective structures for creating global implementing mechanisms. These structures not only influence the volume of aid but also its quality, efficiency, effectiveness, predictability and coordination, all of which are increasingly urgently needed in the broader framework of international cooperation, including the areas of climate, migration and peace and security.

6 'Aid to low-income countries (LICs) is expected to continue to increase – however at a slower pace compared to the previous decade. Its increase will however lag significantly behind the projected population growth rate in poor countries; thus aid per capita is likely to decline. The majority of countries are projected to receive less aid in 2015 compared to 2012 since most of the overall increase in aid is earmarked for a few populous low-income countries with high scores on institutional performance (e.g. Bangladesh, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda).' OECD DAC, '2012 DAC Report on Aid Predictability: Survey on Donors' Forward Spending Plans 2012-2015 and Efforts since HLF-4', OECD: Paris, p. 6. The citation refers to the anticipated Country Programmable Aid (CPA). See: <http://www.oecd.org/dac/aid-architecture/2012_DAC_Report_on_Aid_Predictability.pdf>, accessed on 17/05/2015.

7 '[A]bove and beyond overall levels, ... on a country by country basis, CPA is not being programmed to where it is most needed. The major increases in CPA are projected for middle-income countries in the Far East and South and Central Asia, primarily China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Uzbekistan and Vietnam. It is most likely that the increased programming towards those countries will be in the form of bilateral and multilateral soft loans. The survey suggests a slight increase in aid to Africa; however, this mainly results from increased funding to countries in Northern Africa and large recipients such as Kenya and Nigeria.' OECD DAC, 'Outlook on Aid: Survey on Donor's Forward Spending Plans 2013-2016', available at: <<http://www.oecd.org/dac/aid-architecture/OECD%20Outlook%20on%20Aid%202013.pdf>>, accessed on 17/4/2014, p. 2.

Defining ODA and international public goods

A report on ODA published by the UK Treasury in 2003 examines the relationship between financial aid and its results.⁸ It also highlights the link between expenditure, activities and outcomes (such as the number of vaccinations given and overall health, or health care for mothers and infants and levels of infant mortality) as examples of a plausible connection between input and output. The 0.7% target appears to be successful in eliciting international pledges as long as the expenditure that falls under the standard is clearly defined.⁹ The AIV has consistently underlined the importance of an internationally accepted standard: the fact that, in spite of the financial crisis, ODA expenditure went up in 2013, including among non-DAC members, suggests that it enhances international commitment to poverty reduction.¹⁰

International public goods

In addition to the ODA target, which concerns socially-oriented public goods, there are increasing demands for standards to be set for the financing of other public goods (including climate and security) and of international public goods (IPGs) by other actors. The possible consequences of such an expansion would be considerable and would require significant resources.

The international and European framework

International consensus on the 0.7% aid target has grown in the last decade. In 2002, UN member states called for concrete action to meet the goals agreed at the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey. At the European Council in Barcelona that year, EU member states undertook to meet the 0.7% target by 2015 by adopting specific interim targets. New EU member states committed themselves to a lower interim target (0.33% by 2015), thereby accepting their responsibility in helping to finance the MDGs. The Treaty of Lisbon defines poverty reduction as the primary objective

8 Booth, L., 'The 0.7% Aid Target', SN/EP/3714, House of Commons Library, 10 June 2013. On the one hand, the report draws attention to the ODA system's focus on input, referring to a comment by Clemens and Moss (2005) that the target of 0.7% of GNP says nothing about a country's actual needs. Clemens and Moss criticise the 2002 UN report that calculated that an amount equal to 0.7% of GNP would be required to meet the Millennium Development Goals. However, they also qualified their remarks by stating that the standard does at least give an indication of the international commitment to global poverty reduction. Clemens, Michael A. & Moss, Todd. J. 'Ghost of 0.7%: Origins and Relevance of the International Aid Target', Centre of Global Development, Working Paper Number 68, September 2005.

9 The ways member states stretch the standard is a constant topic of discussion. This has prompted the DAC to establish a peer review in which countries evaluate each other's policy against the ODA framework.

10 Estonia (+22.3%): due to increases in humanitarian aid and contributions to EU institutions; Hungary (-2.1%); Israel (-6.2%); Latvia (+12.2%); Russia (+26.4%): due to an increase in bilateral aid; Turkey (+29.7%): due in part to the Syrian refugee crisis; UAE (+375.5%): to address needs in Egypt. See the press release: <<http://www.oecd.org/development/aid-to-developing-countries-rebounds-in-2013-to-reach-an-all-time-high.htm>>, accessed on 17/05/2014.

of development cooperation.¹¹ EU member states are obliged to tie development aid to results in reducing poverty.

Some countries have already substantially increased their ODA expenditure. The UK and Germany, for example, are working towards meeting the 0.7% target by 2015. New EU member states have also contributed to development cooperation through the EU budget, the European Development Fund and bilateral aid. Changes to the 0.7% target would therefore have major repercussions for all these budgets.

Promoting Dutch priorities

The Netherlands has traditionally played an important role in setting development policy priorities, for example with regard to gender, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights and human rights in general, with Dutch funding supplemented by contributions from other donors. It is therefore in the Netherlands' interests to promote an international framework that can help increase funding by other donors in these areas.

Definition and accountability of innovative financial instruments

Innovative financing instruments are not defined consistently.¹² For example, using environmental (including climate and energy) levies to fund international environmental cooperation comes up against budgetary objections and regulations in the Netherlands. Internationally, however (in the EU and other multilateral forums), using innovative instruments to fund international cooperation is both possible and a topic of discussion.

Private sector flows

The term 'innovative financing instruments' is also sometimes used to refer to private sector funding, and increasingly also to a mix of funding flows, such as public-private partnerships or other financial mechanisms designed to give more leverage to funding. This is leading to a growing overlap between private and official funding flows. It is therefore important to register and audit unofficial financial flows separately wherever possible. The development of good registration systems (with labelling or earmarking and peer reviews) could increase transparency and the scope for accountability.

Overlap and coherence

In its response to the IPR the government said it expected 'development cooperation to become part of a new and wider system of international cooperation' in the medium

11 Article 208 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (post-Lisbon):

1. Union policy in the field of development cooperation shall be conducted within the framework of the principles and objectives of the Union's external action. The Union's development cooperation policy and that of the Member States complement and reinforce each other. Union development cooperation policy shall have as its primary objective the reduction and, in the long term, the eradication of poverty. The Union shall take account of the objectives of development cooperation in the policies that it implements which are likely to affect developing countries.
2. The Union and the Member States shall comply with the commitments and take account of the objectives they have approved in the context of the United Nations and other competent international organisations.

12 They could, for example, refer to international financial transactions for development (a tax on foreign currency transactions), a developmental focus on special drawing rights, an international financial facility, private donations, a global lottery and/or remittances from migrants.

term. This is a view shared by the AIV. A new system should increase policy coherence and synergy between development and climate/environment, security and migration. Policy coherence in the European *acquis* concerns policy areas like trade, financial policy, fisheries and agriculture, which affect the attainment of development goals. Synergy is also a factor in policy on migration, but in the absence of an effective poverty policy, undesirable migration will grow, so a clear development policy remains relevant. This key principle of policy coherence is still insufficiently addressed in the OECD/DAC, but it is particularly vital in avoiding discrepancies between policy areas.

Climate and development

The overlap between development cooperation and adjacent policy areas is a fact. In climate policy, for example, adaptation programmes are also relevant for development. Development will certainly help increase resilience to shocks and trends resulting from climate change and environmental degradation. International cooperation on climate is a wide-ranging theme which to some extent runs parallel to development in the sense of poverty reduction, but certainly not in every respect. For example, spending on programmes to reduce industrial and transport emissions is generally done in partnership with non-low-income countries, which is highly desirable in the interests of effectiveness. International environment and climate policy will thus generally extend beyond development cooperation, in terms of official (public) as well as other funding. Wholesale incorporation of climate policy into development policy (and of its budget into ODA) would therefore be conceptually difficult and practically undesirable. In future, the 0.7% ODA norm will become even more important in achieving poverty targets, given the progressive shift of funding to climate change. It is therefore important to decide how much extra funding should be set aside for climate change measures over and above the 0.7% poverty reduction target.

Peace and poverty reduction

There is an important link between conflict and poverty. Given that a secure environment is one of the conditions for effective poverty reduction, it is vital to strive for coherence between military peacekeeping operations and the fight against poverty. In 2012, worldwide military spending totalled USD 1,753 billion, or 2.5% of global GDP.¹³ By contrast, international spending on development cooperation in 2013 came to only USD 134.8 billion (equivalent to 0.3% of GNI).¹⁴ In the Netherlands, however, the contrast yields an opposite picture. The Netherlands is one of the world's top six providers of ODA, but in relative terms it has come to have one of the lowest defence budgets of the NATO countries, well below the 2% norm.¹⁵ This raises the question of whether the Netherlands' contribution is in line with that of other countries. It also shows, however, that international expenditure on aid for poverty reduction is relatively low compared with global expenditure on security.

13 See: SIPRE, <<http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex>>, accessed on 14/4/2014.

14 See: <<http://www.oecd.org/development/aid-to-developing-countries-rebounds-in-2013-to-reach-an-all-time-high.htm>>. Total spending on ODA was lower in 2012. When comparing the two spending categories it must be remembered that defence is a core task of government (which holds a monopoly on the use of force), whereas public spending on development cooperation is complementary to income from exports, private foreign investments and remittances from migrants to their country of origin.

15 See: AIV, 'Open Letter to a New Dutch Government: The Armed Forces at Risk', advisory letter no. 22, The Hague, September 2012.

Recommendations

1. *Reliability, ownership and predictability*

The definition of ODA is a key part of the system of international agreements and cannot be unilaterally abandoned. Any discussion on changing the definition must be in line with the Paris, Accra and Busan Declarations on aid effectiveness, the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the post-2015 development agenda. This is necessary to maintain a basis for trust among development partners, which is vital if development cooperation is to be effective.

Given the impact of a possible review of the definition of the 0.7% standard on the EU development budget, the EDF and the bilateral development relations of EU member states, the AIV believes that this standard should be upheld as the basis for a new and broader system of international cooperation in which verifiable international agreements are concluded to finance the wider spectrum of IPGs such as the environment, climate and security.

As part of a follow-up to the declarations on aid effectiveness, a review of OECD/DAC targets would need to be agreed with partner countries, in the spirit of genuine partnership. This is necessary in working towards ownership and aid predictability. In shaping the post-2015 development agenda, too, goals must be linked to clear, quantifiable agreements on financing, implementation and cooperation.

2. *Conformity with EU legislation*

The Treaty of Lisbon defines poverty reduction as the primary objective of development cooperation. EU member states are therefore obliged to tie aid to results in reducing poverty, and spending must be relevant to achieving this aim.

3. *Stepping up efforts in countries lagging behind in achieving the MDGs*

Analyses of progress in attaining the MDGs show that results in ODA-dependent countries are lagging far behind. Increased efforts are therefore needed to close this gap. In implementing the Busan agenda and the New Deal for fragile states, closer coordination could help provide these countries with more effective support in fighting poverty.

4. *Defining innovative financing instruments and private sector contributions*

Innovative financing initiatives cannot be worked out in further detail in this advisory letter, yet it is highly important to point out that a clear definition of such initiatives must be agreed. Accountability of innovative financing and private sector instruments and blending should be closely linked to a commitment to achieve results in reducing poverty and reaching other international cooperation goals. This can only be done if private actors commit to accountability mechanisms that allow the attainment of results to be independently verified. The need to develop transparent accountability mechanisms for innovative financing could increase in response to growing potential demand for such instruments to finance a much wider international cooperation agenda in the future.

5. *Overlap and coherence*

The principle of policy coherence can certainly be developed in more detail within the DAC framework. In considering the overlap with adjacent policy areas, the key question must be which efforts are complementary to ODA and which contain an element of ODA. In the first case, these efforts would have to be additional to ODA,

while in the second, they would count as ODA efforts. In the light of growing financial flows to fund climate change measures, we must therefore decide what level of additionality we must achieve to finance measures to mitigate climate change over and above the 0.7% target for poverty reduction, and what measures can be ascribed to poverty reduction. Climate-specific financing should be addressed in a supplementary goal which is translated into an additional set of international spending targets for climate. The same applies to spending under the heading of peace and security and migration, which can be linked to international agreements through additional goals. The form such agreements should take will need to be examined closely so that both their formulation and their implementation are realistic and effective. This could ultimately lead to embedding ODA in a broader framework of international public goods which can be used to tackle the new challenges we currently face.

6. *Towards a new framework of commitment targets*

The AIV recommends rapid and far-reaching modernisation of the goals and best efforts obligations for international cooperation, based on the actual resources and measures that are likely to be needed to meet the development goals outlined by the UN and the OECD within the foreseeable future. The current 0.7% target was drawn up nearly half a century ago on the basis of a calculation of the financial needs of developing countries, many of which are now in a very different situation. When reviewing the target and redefining the parameters for aid, account must be taken, in addition to finance for emergency aid, above all with the scarcity of capital available for low-income countries. This also calls for a detailed analysis of the global efforts needed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, the new post-2015 development goals soon to be adopted, and the associated UN global sustainability goals. The opportunities available and responsibilities assigned to the different categories of countries, private enterprises and international and civil society organisations in helping to achieve international development goals must be established as objectively as possible. A comprehensive assessment of this kind is urgently needed. The AIV is naturally willing to contribute to such an assessment by developing in more detail the points it has raised in this advisory letter.

List of abbreviations

AIV	Advisory Council on International Affairs
COS	Development Cooperation Committee of the AIV
CVV	Peace and Security Committee of the AIV
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EDF	European Development Fund
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
IPR	Interministerial Policy Review
IPG	International public good
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SRHR	Sexual and reproductive health and rights
UN	United Nations

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* Issued jointly by the Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV) and the Advisory Committee on Issues of Public International Law (CAVV).

** Joint report by the Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV) and the General Energy Council.

*** Joint report by the Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV) and the Advisory Committee on Aliens Affairs (ACVZ).