Why Do States Give Aid?

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SUMMARY

Why do states give aid, and are the traditional rationales for aid-giving still valid? There is no argument around the core purpose of aid-giving, which is to address emergency needs, eradicate poverty and contribute to the development and economic growth in lower-income states. States give aid for foreign policy goals, liberal internationalism, economic interests, and domestic policies. However, a more profound structural force contributes to the government's official aid-giving, which is simply a political decision and not a benevolent one. The government's motivations are based on the donor's needs and different forms of self-interest. This force impacts aid allocation and distribution for several regional and global development initiatives to maintain the power structure. The motivation and history of aid-giving "are that the development objectives of aid programs have been distorted by the use of aid for donor commercial and political advantage."[2] The question remains if states provide aid to contribute to economic development, i.e., putting countries on a sustainable path of economic growth, or to reduce poverty, hunger, and diseases. Author Roger Riddell constructs the idea that foreign aid does work after all. However, he does not address the validity of traditional rationales to aid-giving. In other words, this theory fails to mention the lack of transparency and its contribution to a failing foreign aid system.

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[2] Roger C. Riddell, *Does Foreign Aid Really Work?* (2008), ISBN: 9780199544462.

In this essay, the governments' oversight of fiscal management activities and overreliance on the private sector's international transactions in development are explored in further details. Insights and criticisms from authors in interdisciplinary sectors are included to support this exploration. These authors have expertise in law, economics, foreign policy, and political science, which provides insight into various governments' fiscal management and state-building activities in development projects. The following paragraphs theorize and examine legal institutions' motives, legal norms, and lack of transparency in development aid through the lens of multiple scholars.

I. EVOLUTION OF AID

In the Post-World War II era, the United States (U.S.) sponsored aid programs to many developing countries setting a new standard. During this time, a depression interrupted public spending, which created a new precedent and reliance on multilateral donors. The United Nations (UN) was also formed, and the beginning of international assistance programs was made as a diplomatic instrument.

During the Cold War, foreign aid became a permanent element of diplomacy for wealthy states to provide financial resources to emerging economies. In return for official aid giving, low-income states could improve the wellbeing of their citizens. By the 1950s, donor aid allocation and former colonies, i.e., trading partners weakened because of differences in motives. Riddell pointed out that "Switzerland, Ireland, and the Nordic countries (except Finland) [were] more altruistic in their aid-giving, while France, Japan, and the United Kingdom [were] driven by self-interested motives."[3] The pendulum swung between humanitarian and development concerns and political and commercial diversions of aid allocation. In response to the U.S. and Japan's motives, which were to "provide aid to enhance its own security and prosperity, with poverty way down the list of

[3] Roger C. Riddell, *Does Foreign Aid Really Work?* (2008), ISBN: 9780199544462.

priorities."[4] Nordic countries and others created their own smaller technical assistance programs to show solidarity and support nearby countries' imports of goods and services. These programs focused more on "technical aspects of aid, […] align[ing] aid-giving more closely to a broader consistency with strategic humanitarian interests, [i.e., altruistic motives.]"[5] Until the 1980s, a gradual shift in the development aid plan emphasized foreign policy and diplomacy to a development orientation.

The significant trend in development assistance continued to evolve throughout the 1980s. Although the term "neoliberal" was coined in the 1930s during a French Colloquium,[6] this phrase was revived in the 1980s, focusing on a structural adjustment and emphasizing development failures, and attacking planning models in the donor community. Supporters of this movement abandoned the laissez-faire principles of classic liberalism and indulged in the neoliberal agenda. The new strategy "invite[d] an increased role for government as an institutional stabilizer of the economy through its ebbs and flows.[7] Also, the government's role "adopt[ed] a greater tolerance for redistributive taxation and admit[ted] a role for the state in establishing and guiding economic institutions."[8] The neoliberal agenda "push[ed] deregulation on economies around the world, for forcing open national markets to trade and capital, and for demanding that governments shrink themselves via austerity or privatization."[9] Concerning the neoliberal agenda, humanitarian organizations, such as the UN, excluded developing nations from participating in essential state functionalities such as investing in human capital, infrastructure, and monopolized on means of

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[4] Id.
[5] Id.
[6] Phillip W. Magness, *The Pejorative Origins of the Term "Neoliberalism" – AIER*, https://www.aier.org/article/the-pejorative-origins-of-the-term-neoliberalism/.
[7] Stephen Metcalf, The Guardian, *Neoliberalism: The Idea That Swallowed the World*, (August 18, 2017), http://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/aug/18/neoliberalism-the-idea-that-changed-the-world.
[8] Phillip W. Magness, *The Pejorative Origins of the Term "Neoliberalism" – AIER*. https://www.aier.org/article/the-pejorative-origins-of-the-term-neoliberalism/.
[9] Stephen Metcalf, The Guardian, *Neoliberalism: The Idea That Swallowed the World*, (August 18, 2017), http://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/aug/18/neoliberalism-the-idea-that-changed-the-world.

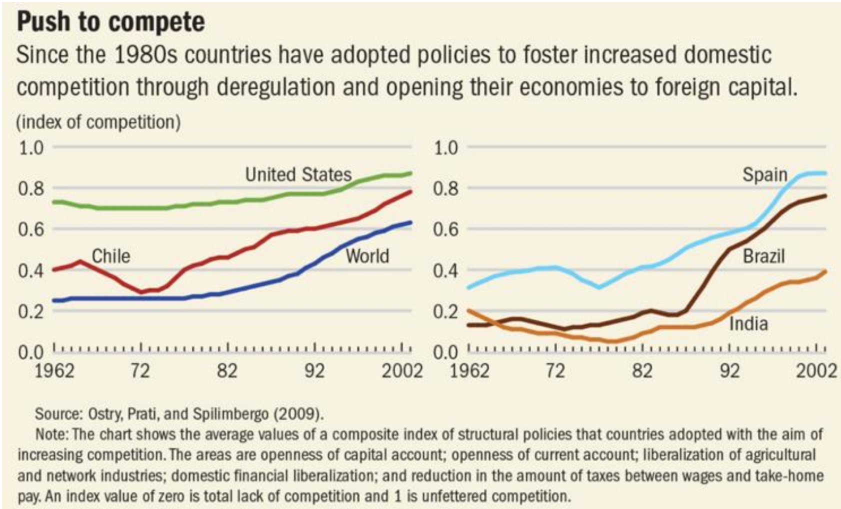
violence. Instead of a fair-trading system among all nations of the world, wealthy countries and private agencies promoted aid work. It appears the way to generate wealth in low-income and developing states is through trade or building strong infrastructure, not just through aid.

This critique of aid effectiveness aligns with both the political motives and the self-interest of the donor community, which expands from traditional state donor contributions to the contributions from the private sector. "Instead of delivering growth, some neoliberal policies have increased inequality, in turn jeopardizing durable expansion [and contributing to boom-and-bust cycles]."[10] The neoliberal policies and new public management subverted the donor community's humanitarian acts and became the legal norm in official aid-giving. A level of professionalism towards aid shifted the expenditure framework and changed how the donor community made budgetary decisions, i.e., log frames and evaluation reports.

As seen in Figure 1, the implementation of neoliberal policies around the world improved technology transfers to emerging economies by foreign direct investment. [11] "Privatization of state-owned enterprises has in many instances led to more efficient provision of services and lowered the fiscal burden on governments."[12]

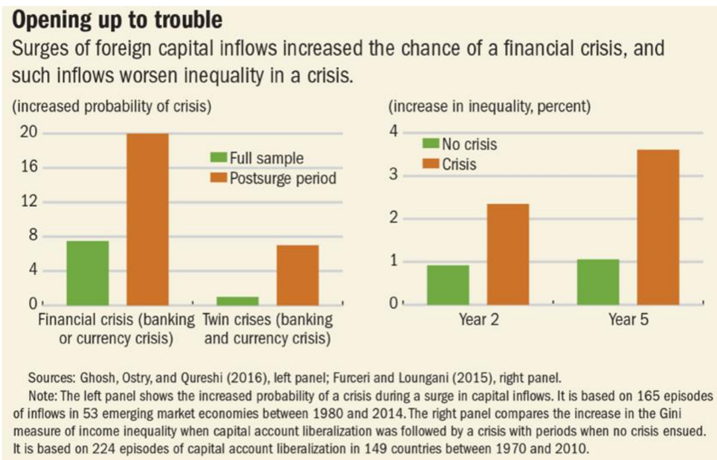
Figure 1.

[10] Jonathan D. Ostry, Prakash Loungani, and Davide Fureri, Finance & Development, *Neoliberalism: Oversold?* (June 2016), https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2016/06/ostry.htm.
[11] Id.
[12] Id.



However, this chart is too complex to establish a direct correlation to the benefits of economic growth while comparing these many countries. If the sustainability of economic growth is correlated to neoliberal policies, distributional impacts must be considered when examining the significant increase of inequalities. The neoliberal agenda created an open market and "pervasiveness of booms and busts [cycles]."[13] The distributional impact of a financial openness, increased inequality, and factors as a risk in these cycles. Figure 2 shows the effects of inequality when an economic crisis ensues.[14]

Figure 2.



[13] Id.
[14] Id.

> Among policymakers today, there is increased acceptance of controls to limit short-term debt flows that are viewed as likely to lead to—or compound—a financial crisis. While not the only tool available—exchange rate and financial policies can also help—capital controls are a viable, and sometimes the only, option when the source of an unsustainable credit boom is direct borrowing from abroad. (Ostry and others, 2012).[15]

The caveat of aid distribution is that donor countries provide aid to emerging economies if donors can have direct access to their markets. This motive enables the power structure and enforces wealthy states to maintain and increase their wealth. While humanitarian organizations and liberal governments intend to eliminate poverty, low-income and disadvantaged groups continue to live in poverty.

The neoliberal focus on development and national ownership created a normative framework, emphasizing effectiveness instead of an instrumental approach. By the early 2000s, security measures, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and experimentalism agenda were the new focus, leading contemporary normative frameworks that shaped the way development aid was given once again.

For example, the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness committed to new strategies to develop resources by including ownership, alignment, harmonization, result management, and mutual accountability.[16] Likewise, this framework for aid effectiveness became a centralized focus, directing donor practices and budgetary expenditures with state objectives. Official development assistance (ODA) became smaller in comparison to other financial resources in development. The MDGs were the starting point to empower and provide low-income countries with different strategies to end poverty and hunger. Fast forward to the year 2015, the UN created Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to achieve a 2030 development plan that builds on the

[15] Id.
[16] *The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action*. OECD, https://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/34428351.pdf.

MDGs. The SDGs were unanimously adopted by the Member States to achieve their own state development goals, to which each goal was widely debated and uniquely crafted by the Member States collectively.

However, the fundamental issue is inequality, not regional level poverty in all wealthy and poor states. The SDGs may be applicable to every country, but the undercurrent to set these goals further pushes the neoliberal agenda and donor self-interests. Wealthy states abandoned traditional rationales for donor assistance in favor of global elites and self-serving policies, enabling significant wealth inequalities across the world.

Aid giving was intended to develop social and economic systems. The tradeoff is that developing these social and economic systems happen if the donor recipient opens their markets to the aid provider. The donor must have direct access to invest in donor recipient markets and be able to generate a revenue from them. Some examples of privatization and its harmful impacts on developing markets are oil, gas, and coal companies. A private company like Shell exploits natural resources and perpetuate planetary inequalities all for profit.[17]

Overall, the agenda for neoliberalism is to maintain the power structure while opening markets to the global economy. Does this agenda provide aid in the way it was intended to be used? Does this strategy benefit the end-user, i.e., poor, and vulnerable groups, if the end goal is to truly reduce poverty and end hunger?

II. PRESENT ACTIONS

[17] Friends of the Earth International, *These Eight Scandals Prove Shell's Long History of Contempt for People and Planet*. (May 22, 2018), https://www.foei.org/news/these-eight-scandals-prove-shells-long-history-of-contempt-for-people-and-planet.

The world witnessed the havoc ensued by the Covid-19 pandemic. This virus did not create inequalities in institutions' fiscal resources; instead, it created disequilibrium in the donor community's organizational structure and capacity of budgetary expenditures. The pandemic exposed the broken parts of states' infrastructure and emphasized the incompetency and oversight of governments. The accelerated impact of the coronavirus caused governments to allocate financial resources to other internal institutions. The financial response by government to economic crisis is like prior emergency responses. The cycle of emergency response looks something like this: a government's emergency needs escalate, states which lack sufficient savings go into further national debt to meet these needs, the economy is stressed by the greater debt to meet unexpected needs, and the government seeks loans to alleviate the stress. With declining fiscal resources because states must make up for the shortfalls, such as unemployment rates and reduction in business and individual spending, issues like these ones require the government to step in and create central banks to alleviate those demand shortfalls. This approach led to a fiscal engagement where governments don't have discretionary finances to spend or flexibility to spend discretionary resources.

More so, the pandemic put greater demand for action by the state, causing the state involvement in more significant development activities. As a result of neoliberal agendas and policies, governments now emphasize the private sector's participation in fiscal management activities. Although the private sector leverages business to create economic growth and alleviate poverty, the global pandemic calls for more public-private financing mechanisms. Yet, the private sector wanted more of the state's involvement during the pandemic, which goes against the neoliberal agenda. The private sector, just like government institutions, invests in sectors that benefit their self-interests. Failing economies are not as predictable or reliable for investors to ensure a return on their investment.

It has been over a year since the global markets were hit drastically by the pandemic. Now, market economies are debating over which sectors need immediate attention. One of the sectors that needs a closer examination, and more investment is infrastructure. Investing in infrastructure is vital to economic growth, and most global economies need this safety net to bounce back after an economic downfall due to the pandemic. Also, building infrastructure is critical for economic growth because of the "big demographic, and cultural changes, such as the aging and diversification of our society, shrinking households, and domestic migration, [that] underscores the need for new transportation and telecommunications to connect people and communities."[18] For instance, the United States population has added 70 million people since the 1990s.[19] "This tremendous growth, concentrated in the 50 largest metropolitan areas, places new demands on already overtaxed infrastructure."[20] The spending on infrastructure is complex:

> [it] is made up of interrelated sectors as diverse as a water treatment plant is from an airport, a wind farm, a gas line, or a broadband network. The focus on infrastructure in the abstract led to unrealistic silver-bullet policy solutions that fail to capture the unique and economically critical attributes of each. In reality, each infrastructure sector involves fundamentally different design frameworks and market attributes. And they are owned, regulated, governed, and operated by different public and private entities.[21] (Puentes, 2001)

Although there is potential for infrastructure projects to benefit both actors, public and private, the debates of infrastructure spending continue, and the States worsen. "Lawmakers offer a number of proposals to fix what many see as a broken financing system, including more public-private partnerships, a federal infrastructure bank, and increased federal spending."[22] The current conditions of infrastructure in the U.S. demonstrate what happens to public roads, transit, bridges,

[18] Robert Puentes, *Why Infrastructure Matters: Rotten Roads, Bum Economy*, Brookings (November 30, 2001), https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/why-infrastructure-matters-rotten-roads-bum-economy/.
[19] *U.S. Population Growth Rate 1950-2021*, https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/USA/united-states/population-growth-rate.
[20] Robert Puentes, *Why Infrastructure Matters: Rotten Roads, Bum Economy*, Brookings (November 30, 2001), https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/why-infrastructure-matters-rotten-roads-bum-economy/.
[21] Id.
[22] *The State of U.S. Infrastructure*, Council on Foreign Relations, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/state-us-Infrastructure.

and water treatments when it has been drastically neglected and underfunded. Likewise, too much state involvement for the party's self-interest can contribute to further atrocities.

For example, the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, highlights the inadequate government response to the environmental injustice and the misleading transactions between Michigan's politicians and the private company, Nestlé.[23] The humanitarian crisis in Flint started in 2014:

> [T]he city switched its drinking water supply from Detroit's system to the Flint River in a cost-saving move. Inadequate treatment and testing of the water resulted in a series of major water quality and health issues for Flint residents—issues that were chronically ignored, overlooked, and discounted by government officials even as complaints mounted that the foul-smelling, discolored, and off-tasting water piped into Flint homes for 18 months was causing skin rashes, hair loss, and itchy skin.[24] (Denchak, 2018)

This example in Flint, Michigan, validates the more profound structural force contributing to poor infrastructure, which boils down to political decisions. A fair assessment of this example highlights how this political act involved the decisions of policy makers. Their decision to reduce costs over the sustainability of the health of the local community demonstrates misleading partnerships between both public and private parties.

More so, it is essential to keep the Flint water crisis in mind, but it's equally important to know that not all public-private partnerships (PPP) projects end up in corruption or harming vulnerable communities. Instead, contract laws and reliable PPP infrastructure projects have the potential "to connect supply chains and efficiently move goods and services across borders."[25] Also, after successful PPP developments, reliable infrastructure supports economic growth and connects communities "to higher quality opportunities for employment, healthcare, and

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[23] Anne Trubek, *As Flint Suffers and Nestlé Prospers, Many Are Asking: Who Owns the Rights to Michigan Water?*, Belt Magazine, https://beltmag.com/flint-nestle-michigan-water-rights/.

[24] Melissa Denchak, *Flint Water Crisis: Everything You Need to Know*, NRDC (2018), https://www.nrdc.org/stories/flint-water-crisis-everything-you-need-know.

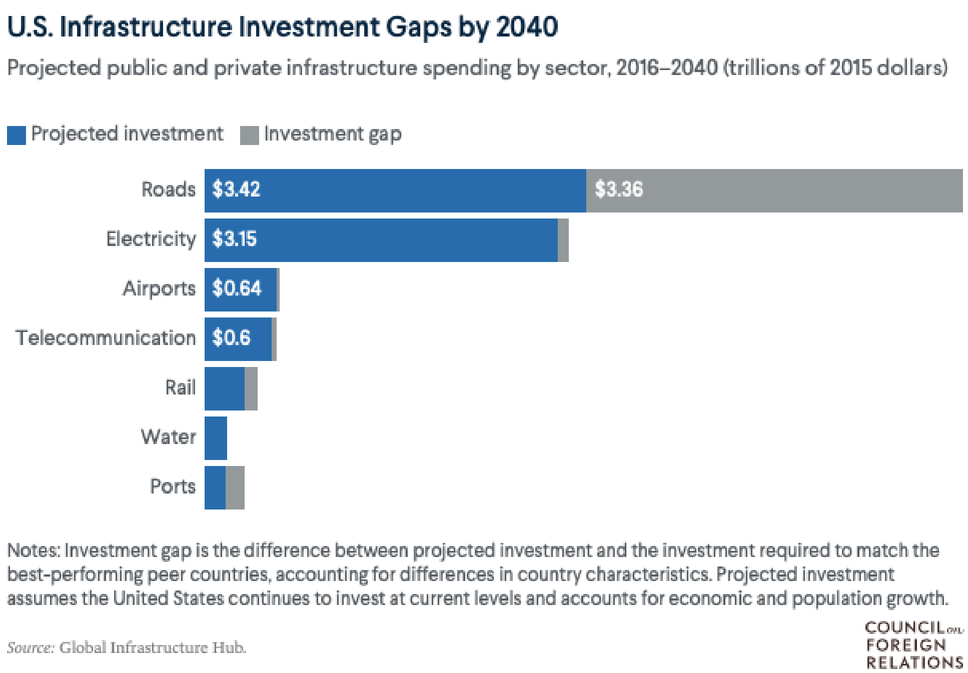
[25] Robert Puentes, *Why Infrastructure Matters: Rotten Roads, Bum Economy*, Brookings (November 30,2001), https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/why-infrastructure-matters-rotten-roads-bum-economy/.

education."[26] Transparency and accountability in written laws help to enforce contractual obligations and rules that are involved in dispersing development aid. Also, strong legal institutions and good governance enforce these legal agreements and licenses. The rule of law principles and transparent oversight in creating and maintaining those laws are vital to the success of aid-giving.

III. FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Amid the economic crisis caused by the coronavirus, states continue to debate how to improve their infrastructure. The U.S. faces significant shortfalls in transportation, water, and other systems, according to analysts.[27] As shown in Figure 3, analysts address the gap in infrastructure and the fiscal needs to support the U.S. economy.[28]

Figure 3.



[26] Id.
[27] *The State of U.S. Infrastructure*, Council on Foreign Relations, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/state-us-Infrastructure.
[28] Id.

Correspondingly, the Biden Administration created a new plan to invest $2 trillion to improve the nation's infrastructure, which is still waiting for Congress's approval.[29] Biden's infrastructure plan appears as the remedy to the nation's development issues, but the debate over financing continues among skeptics. Supporters of the neoliberal agenda want to push new models of private sector involvement, which seems more cost-efficient and effective. In comparison, public spending would support the economic needs impacted by the pandemic.

The proposed plan isn't the universal remedy for the nation's development issues, but it is a step toward addressing these issues. Since 2002, the World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report ranked the U.S. in fifth place, and in the 2019 report, the U.S. ranked thirteenth in a broad measure of infrastructure quality.[30] According to experts, the "U.S. infrastructure is both dangerously overstretched and lagging behind that of its economic competitors, particularly China."[31] The quality of infrastructure in the U.S. and the international community is further analyzed:

> [The infrastructure investment] can be traced to very different funding levels. On average, European countries spend the equivalent of 5 percent of GDP on building and maintaining their infrastructure, while the United States spends 2.4 percent. Other countries tout investment far higher. China's infrastructure spending averages roughly 8 percent of its GDP, and that amount is only expected to increase with the country's ambitious coronavirus recovery plans. Simultaneously, China's Belt and Road Initiative is slated to increase the country's economic influence across Asia.[32] (McBride & Siripurapu, 2021)

While the U.S. policymakers and others continue to debate over funding priorities for the nation's infrastructure plan, Chinese investors turn to developing countries to generate revenue for their infrastructure projects. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also referred to as "Silk Road," is

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[29] Id.
[30] Klaus Schwab, *The Global Competitiveness Report 2019*, ISBN-13: 978-2-940631-02-5, World Economic Forum, http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_TheGlobalCompetitivenessReport2019.pdf.
[31] *The State of U.S. Infrastructure*, Council on Foreign Relations, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/state-us-infrastructure.
[32] Id.

a plan to connect "more than 70 countries on the continents of Asia, Europe, and Africa via a series of rail, road, and sea infrastructure projects."[33] The motive of such a project involves the Chinese government's economic and political integration expanding across regions. This initiative is funded through several bank loans, public and privately owned, which demonstrates a balance of political self-interest between all parties involved. The central bank loans for this project are funded by "China's three government policy banks, the large state-owned banks, and sovereign wealth funds such as the Silk Road Fund."[34] Other private investors for the BRI are "the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and New Development Bank."[35]

Refinitiv, a data provider for the Belt and Road Initiative projects, points out that there is no official fiscal attachment to labeling these projects, despite the loans made by global lenders.[36] For instance, projects labeled as the BRI are "require[d] a signed memorandum of understanding or a joint statement of cooperation between China and the host country."[37] Also, these infrastructure "projects with Chinese involvement are those not officially disclosed as belt and road projects, but which still have direct Chinese participation as either the owner, consultant, contractor or financier."[38] The perceived lack of transparency between international transactions brings criticism from the west, claiming the debt increase for the BRI in developing countries creates a debt trap. This widely controversial topic between some European countries and the U.S. criticizes Chinese investments in developing countries and questions if such projects generate

[33] *How Big Is China's Belt and Road Initiative Debt and What's next?*, South China Morning Post, (July 19, 2020), https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3093218/belt-and-road-initiative-debt-how-big-it-and-whats-next.

[34] Id.
[35] Id.
[36] Id.
[37] Id.
[38] Id.

enough money to pay off the debt.[39] This kind of debt trap highlights organizational structures and challenges faced in the donor community as the world rapidly shifts to globalization.

In nearly a hundred years of official aid giving, wealthy states strengthened this dependency path through international trends and outside pressure from international humanitarian organizations and central banks.[40] Path dependency also shows the linkage between political and strategic interests of governments, which are not purely an altruistic motive to eradicate poverty and show solidity. There isn't a perfect solution for solving all development aid issues. PPPs are not the only solution to help address emergency needs in the current stages of the pandemic. Governments rely heavily on PPP projects to promote donor-country commercial interests to further the political interests of the State in recreating a path of dependency or debt trap as illustrated with the Belt and Road Initiative. This approach to development projects is similar to the post WWII era of an overreliance on multilateral donors. Although this assessment isn't entirely fair because new mechanisms in the development field have improved from earlier days. Though, the fundamental forces for aid-giving remain the same.

More so, the assessment about the validity of donor assistance and their traditional rationales demonstrates how their role should be reciprocal compliance. Historical examples described how the PPPs can change aid: "private-sector involvement can further obscure the picture because the winners of bids may use a host of subcontractors or insist that some information is kept confidential for commercial reasons."[41] This information portrays the private sector in a misleading way, which alludes to the idea that private companies are less likely to invest in the knowledge of local cultures and build intentional relationships with local governments to

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[39] Id.
[40] Carol Lancaster, *Foreign Aid: Diplomacy, Development, Domestic Politics*, *Chapter 1*, (2006).
[41] The Economist, *Doing good, doing well; aid and the private sector*, at 423, 455, (May 6, 2017), Retrieved from http://flagship.luc.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.flagship.luc.edu/magazines/doing-good-well-aid-private-sector/docview/1895923947/se-2?accountid=12163.

monitor and evaluate long-term economic impacts. The new challenge is for the donor community to meet the state requirements in short and longer-term initiatives.

IV. RULE OF LAW APPROACH

The rule of law and the legal system is a critical element to the ways in which development financing is disseminated and the key reason why aid is given in development. One of the pillars in rule of law is contract enforcement, which is fundamental for markets to function properly. These procedures increase predictability and guarantee that investment contracts will be adequately upheld in local courts. If commercial practices are not reliable or contractual disputes become inefficient in time and cost, then the economic development relies less on these transactions. Then, traders shift to personal and family contracts, and the banks reduce the amount of funds available for business expansion because the banks cannot guarantee their debt will be collected. When these practices shift in international investments, the limited financial resources negatively impact trade, investment, and economic development. Good practices in enforcing contract laws are administered by the state and sets consequences when a breach of the agreement is found. Some considerations to appropriate implementation practices include effective contract enforcement, institutional requirements to support contract enforcement, and alternative dispute settlement processes.[42]

More so, the donor community, complex entities with multiple moving parts and authorities, have several motivating factors, including financial gain and altruistic behavior in relation to aid. These motives may taint the value of what they do in donor assistance programs, but the deeper structural forces involved in development aid go beyond pure humanitarian motivations.

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[42] *Contract Enforcement and Dispute Resolution, OECD,* https://www.oecd.org/investment/toolkit/policyareas/investmentpolicy/contractenforcementanddisputeresolution.htm.

In conclusion, there is hesitation in believing that any abrupt changes that evolve into a new development plan like the U.S. infrastructure plan or Belt and Road Initiative will improve the quality of life for everyone. The conditions of financial management activities will continue to put a band-aid over significant issues, sweep tragedies under the rug, and completely ignore the driver of conflicts in aid-giving. Identifying these issues requires a level of competency and release of greed that most governments do not possess. Upholding the rule of law does not seem to be a priority when the driver of conflict and holding officials accountable is not addressed fairly. As much as official aid-giving approaches and strategies change, the more they stay the same. More so, as the technologies advance, modes of communication change, and sources of information expand, humans at their core change far less. The essential characteristics and traits of humans as barely changed throughout history, even though the rapid pace and structure of our world may suggest something different. For a new development plan to create a lasting change, fundamental transformations must occur. In other words, the nature of aid-giving must change as we encounter a crossroads during the global pandemic.

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