Why does local agency matter? Enabling the local decision space for aid recipients

WORKING DRAFT – COMMENTS WELCOME

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Abstract: The harmful effects of foreign aid on governance institutions have long been documented. This paper uncovers an additional mechanism by which such harm is caused: entangled decision-making with partners. Using a realist synthesis approach to examine the locus of decision-making in aid interventions, the paper highlights the existence of three different 'decision spaces'. Notwithstanding the focus on partnerships in aid, many decisions are made within the 'Local Decision Space', which is where local actors – state and non-state; formal and informal; and including leaders, organisations, groups, and individuals – make choices without directly involving donors or intermediaries. In contrast, decision-making within the 'Partnership Decision Space' is 'entangled', where practices such as negotiation, bargaining, and 'policy dialogue' are used by external actors to influence decision-making. The paper explores how this 'entangled decision-making' can harm governance institutions by undermining accountability, learning, legitimacy, mobilisation, and coordination. This highlights the potential for a different approach by donors, which moves away from entangled decision-making, and instead focuses on creating an 'enabling environment' for the Local Decision Space, and 'crowding in' decision-making by local actors.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In 1969, the Pearson Commission on International Development, ‘Partners in Development’, stated that “[t]he formation and execution of development policies must ultimately be the responsibility of the host alone, but the donors have a right to be heard and to be informed of major events and decisions” (Black, 2019). In ‘Partnership for Development’ (1998), the World Bank stated that “[p]artnership is a collaborative relationship between entities to work toward shared objectives through a mutually agreed division of labour.”

Despite these diplomatic words, many aid practices have followed a more hierarchical model: the principal-agent model (Barder, 2009; Martens et al., 2002; Ostrom, 2002; Savedoff, 2019). In this model the ‘principal’ – the donor – is working with an ‘agent’ – a local government or implementing organisation. This model is perhaps in the background when donors try to secure their preferred policy choices, using tools like negotiation, bargaining, conditionality, ‘policy dialogue’ and compacts (Abrahamsen, 2004; Black, 2019; Brown, 2013; Clemens and Kremer, 2016; Swedlund, 2017; Whitfield, 2008). These methods have their critics: Mkandawire warns against donor policy influence as leading to ‘choiceless democracies’ (1997). For private aid channelled via NGOs, Elbers and Schulp (2011) note that “critics have stressed a gap between the prevailing rhetoric and reality of partnerships”, where power asymmetries undermine partners’ abilities to maintain equitable relationships.

Meanwhile problems of aid ineffectiveness and the harm aid can cause to governance institutions are well discussed (Birdsall, 2004; Grindle, 2004; Knack and Rahman, 2007; Moss et al., 2006; Pritchett et al., 2010; Putzel, 2010; Shirley, 2005). Bräutigam and Knack (2004) describe how donor behaviour can harm institutions and increase the ‘transaction costs of aid’. According to Moss et al. (2006), these harmful behaviours include the “longstanding and well-known list of common complaints about aid: volatility and uncertainty of ODA flows; fragmentation of donor efforts; project proliferation and duplication; conflicting or dominant donor agendas; competition for staff; and high administrative and oversight costs”.

Reform agendas have aimed to tackle these problems, and researchers and practitioners have emphasised the critical importance of ‘ownership’ for the ‘effectiveness’ of development efforts (Booth, 2012; Booth and Unsworth, 2014). Ownership was one of the key principles of the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, where Partnership Commitments 14 and 15 stated that “[p]artner

countries commit to exercise leadership in developing and implementing their national development strategies through broad consultative processes”, while donors committed to “respect partner country leadership and help strengthen their capacity to exercise it” (OECD, 2005). In describing this ‘aid effectiveness’ agenda, Hayman (2011) said that “[d]onors would no longer impose their ideas and policies on beneficiaries, but would work in partnership to achieve a clear set of mutual commitments”.

But the term ‘ownership’ has many different interpretations (Brown, 2017; Buffardi, 2013; Buiter, 2007; Chesterman, 2007; Fisher and Marquette, 2016; Hasselskog and Schierenbeck, 2017; McCulloch and Piron, 2019). One key cleavage between definitions is given by Fraser and Whitfield (2008), who argue that:

“two competing, and potentially contradictory, concepts coexist: ownership as commitment to policies, however they were arrived at; and ownership as control over the process and outcomes of choosing policies. [...] multiple definitions make the term useful as a lubricant in development diplomacy. Host governments, donors and NGOs all use ‘ownership’ as a proxy for the deference others show to their claimed right to influence policy. As such, all can agree that ownership is a good thing”.

Fraser and Whitfield (2008) take a position on this debate, defining ownership as: “the degree of control host governments are able to secure over implemented policy outcomes”. This was echoed by a representative of the G77 group of developing countries, saying that, “greater policy space must be given to developing countries to enable national development strategies to be truly and comprehensively nationally owned” (Maungo, 2006). But some donors view this differently (from Helleiner (2000) cited in Mkandawire (2010)):

“Ownership exists when they do what we want them to do but they do so voluntarily.”

“We want them to take ownership. Of course, they must do what we want. If not, they should get their money elsewhere.”

“We have to pressure the local government to take ownership.”

Perhaps in part due to this contested definition, the technocratic reforms of the Paris agenda have arguably not ended the problems of aid highlighted above. In parallel, longstanding efforts towards ‘localisation’ and ‘locally led development’ appear more

vivid in rhetoric than in donor practice (Baguios et al., 2021; Glennie et al., 2012; Slim, 2021). More recently, there has been increased discussion of ‘shifting the power’ to local actors, and a welcome and long-overdue focus on decolonisation and anti-racism in aid (Baguios 2020; Bond UK, 2021; Peace Direct, 2021). But meanwhile, many donors continue with traditional aid practices, citing their own political and operational constraints among other reasons for lack of change.

This paper aims to tackle this long-standing problem. Section 2 explores the key legitimising narrative of ‘responsiveness’ to the views of those affected by aid, which frames some of the power struggles in the sector. Section 3 presents a new paradigm for analysing these power struggles – by focusing on the locus of decision-making in aid interventions. It identifies three ‘decision spaces’: the Local Decision Space, the Partnership Decision Space, and the External Decision Space.

Partnerships often involve ‘entangled decision-making’, where practices such as negotiation, bargaining, conditionality, compacts and policy dialogue are used by donors to increase their influence.¹ This section explores how entangled decision-making can damage governance institutions by undermining their learning, accountability, legitimacy, mobilisation and coordination. Section 4 examines different aid modalities and reform agendas through the lens of the three decision spaces. It shows how donor practice could evolve in a direction of increased space for local decision-making, with donors providing an enabling environment for local decision-making, and how this might support governance institutions and effectiveness, while managing risk and delivering results. Section 5 concludes.

2 RESPONSIVENESS TO CITIZENS’ PRIORITIES

Donors, host governments, local stakeholders, communities and citizens may all have different views about what policy decisions ‘should’ be made. Donors and local actors use different legitimising narratives, both implicitly and explicitly, to justify their struggle for power against their partners. One key narrative relates to whether different partners are acting in the interests of people in aid-receiving countries.

For these normative issues, let us take as the benchmark the concept of *responsiveness*. As Mkandawire (2010) writes, “at the core of democracy is the idea that governments must be systematically responsive to the desires and interests of

¹ I am grateful to Gilbert Muyumbu for suggesting the term ‘entangled’ in this context.

citizens as expressed through the electoral process.” Responsiveness means that policy decisions reflect what people want and expect from their representatives (DFID, 2006; Benequista and Gaventa, 2011; McGee, 2013), and is related to ‘output legitimacy’ (OECD, 2010). It is particularly important for responsiveness to be inclusive, and to take a broad view of society’s preferences, which includes responsiveness to marginalised groups, in contrast to *biased responsiveness* or *unresponsiveness* (Bartels, 2015), when only some narrow groups are favoured. There is a vast literature on the features of institutions that could support responsiveness, including well-functioning systems of electoral accountability, characteristics of leaders, institutional checks and balances, and a vibrant civil society.

Crucially, a necessary condition for any kind of inclusive responsiveness is that comprehensive information on citizen preferences is available to decision-makers. These issues of information are particularly important given the varied priorities of citizens in different countries (Falk et al., 2017), including with respect to the Sustainable Development Goals (Coulibaly et al., 2018). These differences in priorities may also relate to the multidimensional nature of poverty (Ravallion, 2011; Alkire et al., 2015), where data on different citizen views would seem highly relevant.

There is excellent work being done to survey citizen priorities, for example by Afrobarometer and Latinobarómetro. Yet data gaps on citizen preferences persist, in particular for marginalised groups (Melamed et al., 2012; Melamed, 2015), which could hinder inclusive responsiveness of both donors and local leaders. Increasing support for data on citizen preferences in aid-receiving countries could make a difference: for example, there is evidence that politicians do respond to this information, particularly data on the preferences of marginalised groups (Liaqat, 2020).

2.1 MOTIVATIONS OF DONORS

But even if information were available, there are also motivational reasons why donors and local leaders may not respond to an inclusive view of citizens’ interests, priorities and preferences in an aid-receiving country. This relates to their motivations. For donors, the standard dichotomy in their priorities is usually seen to be between self-interest and altruism (Maizels and Nissanke, 1984).² But this dichotomy does not tell the whole story about preferences, because even donors motivated by altruism for the people affected by their interventions may have

² Self-interested motivations are often geopolitical, but can also include donor staff career concerns (Wane, 2004).

different priorities from their intended ‘beneficiaries’, and this could undermine their ‘responsiveness’ to them.

In particular, there is an important difference between ‘paternalistic altruism’ and ‘disinterested altruism’ (Archibald and Donaldson, 1976). *Paternalistic altruism* means that donors have their own views about what is best for citizens in aid-receiving countries, whereas *disinterested altruism* means that donors want to respond to local priorities, and care about the subjective well-being of aid beneficiaries.³ To be responsive, donors would need to have a disinterested motivation, as well as good information on inclusive citizen preferences. Meanwhile we would not expect donors with a paternalistic or self-interested motivation to be interested in information on citizen preferences. With these motivations, responding to citizen preferences would not be a priority.

Donors may argue that a motivation of paternalistic altruism is appropriate in some specific areas where they see local preferences and priorities as problematic. For example, these areas might relate to clientelistic expectations of political leaders, or norms or beliefs in areas such as human rights, gender and LGBTQ issues, or environmental sustainability. This point is well taken. But current donor practices – for example funding gaps for data on citizen preferences – suggest that donors take a paternalistic approach in much broader domains of policy. If responsiveness is important, disinterestedness would be the default, with carve-outs justified in specific areas – but this does not appear to be the case in practice.⁴

2.2 MOTIVATIONS OF LOCAL LEADERS

Meanwhile for local leaders, a key question is whether or not they are responsive to inclusive citizen preferences – including marginalised groups – or if they focus more narrowly on the interests of smaller privileged groups such as elites, or certain factions within society. Inclusive responsiveness could be due, as mentioned before, to factors including well-functioning democratic institutions and a vibrant civil society. In contrast, *biased responsiveness* (Bartels, 2015) may be due to ‘political

³ In the language of economics, if individual i has preferences of paternalistic altruism towards individual j , then i 's utility function could be represented as $u_i(x_i, x_j)$, showing that i cares about j 's consumption. A disinterested altruist's utility function would be $u_i(x_i, u_j(x_j))$, to show that i cares instead about j 's utility. (A third kind of altruism is ‘warm glow’ where the donor only cares about their gift, not its effects.)

⁴ See for example Pritchett (2015).

market imperfections' such as clientelism and patronage, skewing government priorities towards smaller groups of supporters (Keefer and Khemani, 2005). Corrupt and kleptocratic leaders could try to steal resources for themselves and their cronies, leading to 'elite capture' of the state. Political settlements, elite bargains, and political institutions could be 'exclusive' or 'extractive' (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2013; Khan, 2010; North et al., 2009). Leaders could focus on private goods at the expense of public goods, and try to divert resources towards short-term electoral goals, in order to shore up their support with vote-buying (World Bank, 2016).

A perception of biased responsiveness by local leaders is often used as an implicit or explicit legitimising narrative for donor influence over domestic policy decisions. The idea that local leaders may not be acting in the interests of their citizens is a pervasive and often unspoken assumption of donor practice. However, as the above discussion makes clear, there are also risks to responsiveness in terms of donor motivations: in particular, if they are paternalistically altruistic or self-interested. As such, there is no *a priori* reason that donor preferences are more responsive to the priorities of citizens than those of local leaders.

2.3 EVIDENCE ON RELATIVE RESPONSIVENESS

Despite pervasive assumptions about the relative responsiveness of different actors in aid partnerships, there is a lack of empirical evidence – quantitative or qualitative – to compare the responsiveness of the two sides. Techniques to do so exist: following Achen (1978, 1977), there is an extensive quantitative literature in political science on responsiveness, which aims to track the relationships between citizen preferences and government actions. For example, Binzer, Hobolt and Klemmensen (2008), compare citizen surveys to the government's legislative programme (given in the State of the Union or Queen's Speech) and budget allocations. Meanwhile Egan (2008) uses legislative voting records as the variable of government action. Another approach is 'budgetary responsiveness', which compares the allocation of public funds to public opinion (Bernardi, 2016; Soroka and Wlezien, 2005).

These tools have rarely been applied to low-income countries, and (as far as I am aware) not at all to provide empirical analysis of the relative responsiveness of different actors in foreign aid partnerships. Given this gap, Box 1 shows some very preliminary analysis on this question for Burkina Faso and Uganda (two countries where data was available). The charts compare allocations of aid and government

spending to citizen priorities. Further research, both quantitative and qualitative, of the responsiveness of partners in aid interventions would be highly informative.

Box 1 Budgetary responsiveness in Burkina Faso and Uganda

The chart below compares citizen priorities to public spending allocations in Uganda and Burkina Faso in 2012-3. The left-hand bars show the proportion of people who viewed an issue as the most important problem in their country, and the subsequent bars show the allocation of public spending on those issues in the following year. In these and other aid-receiving countries, donor funding can be a significant part of overall public spending, so this allocation is given for three different totals: domestic resources; aid funds; and their combined total – the aggregate budget. The data show some interesting patterns. In Uganda, health is the most important problem for 13 per cent of citizens, but makes up 42 per cent of aid spending, compared with 7 per cent for the government budget, and 15 per cent of the aggregate budget. Meanwhile in Burkina Faso, 23 per cent of people cite ‘water supply’ as their country’s most important problem (classified under housing and community amenities), but government spending on this sector is 1 per cent. For donors, the numbers are difficult to calculate because much of water and sanitation spending come under the same category in the aid spending classification. Spending on water could range between 0 and over 9 per cent (the table presented below takes the average).

Burkina Faso		Public spending % allocation 2013			
Functions of government (COFOG)	Most Important Problem % 2012	Government (88%)	Foreign Aid (12%)	Aggregate Budget	
04 – Economic affairs	39%	32%	38%	33%	
06 – Housing and community amenities	24%	1%	5%	1%	
07 – Health	20%	4%	7%	5%	
09 – Education	8%	14%	15%	14%	
03 – Public order and safety	7%	2%	4%	2%	
10 – Social protection	0%	3%	9%	4%	
02 – Defence	0%	2%	0%	2%	
05 – Environmental protection	0%	0%	7%	1%	
08 – Recreation, culture and religion	0%	6%	0%	5%	

Uganda		Public spending % allocation 2013			
Functions of government (COFOG)	Most Important Problem % 2012	Government (77%)	Foreign Aid (23%)	Aggregate Budget	
04 – Economic affairs	46%	22%	23%	22%	
07 – Health	13%	7%	42%	15%	
03 – Public order and safety	10%	7%	5%	7%	
06 – Housing and community amenities	8%	2%	3%	2%	
09 – Education	8%	16%	5%	13%	
10 – Social protection	1%	4%	10%	5%	
02 – Defence	0%	8%	0%	6%	
05 – Environmental protection	0%	0%	5%	2%	
08 – Recreation, culture and religion	0%	0%	0%	0%	

Data sources: Afrobarometer, OECD/DAC CRS, BOOST, UNCTAD. Author's methodology and calculations.

(Uganda and Burkina Faso are the two African countries for which fiscal data were readily available and classifications were feasibly comparable. For information on data sources and methodology, see Appendix.)

To sum up, for both donors and local leaders, there could be failures of inclusive responsiveness if policymakers’ preferences are not anchored in those of citizens. In terms of the different motivations described above, for local leaders, a failure of responsiveness could be due to biased responsiveness. For donors, it could be due to self-interest or paternalistic altruism. And despite the implicit or explicit use by both donors and local leaders of ‘responsiveness’ as a legitimising narrative to claim power from their partners, there is little evidence to support these claims. Without evidence of citizens’ views, and analysis of how donors or local leaders respond to them (or do not), this narrative does not provide a clear way to resolve this power struggle over

values between aid partners. The next section takes a closer look at how these and other power struggles affect governance institutions.

3 ENTANGLED DECISION-MAKING

Concepts of agency, power, autonomy and authority have long been of scholarly interest in many fields (Dahl, 1957; Lukes, 1974; Bourdieu, 1977; Morriss, 1987; Gaventa, 2006). For Knight (1992, p. 41), “[t]o exercise power over someone or some group is to affect by some means the alternatives available to that person or group”. Meanwhile Aghion and Tirole (1997) point to Herbert Simon’s definition: “the right to select actions affecting part or the whole of an organisation”. ‘Decision rights’ confer the ability to make certain choices within organisations (Athey and Roberts, 2001; Bartling et al., 2014).

These topics have seen growing attention in development, for example in relation to the study of leadership (Andrews, 2016; DLP, 2018; Hudson et al., 2018; Lichtenstein et al., 2006). Andrews et al. (2010) show how leaders can grant authority to create ‘space for change’, and analysis of state fragility points to the relevance of authority for statebuilding efforts (Campbell, 2018; Carment et al., 2008; Chandler, 2005; Putzel, 2010; Teskey et al., 2012; Zaum, 2007). Autonomy and decision rights have been studied in relation to the work of aid agencies (Honig, 2018; Rasul and Rogger, 2018) and decentralisation (Bossert, 1998; Smoke, 2003).

3.1 METHODOLOGY: WHAT IS THE LOCAL DECISION SPACE?

Among the many definitions of governance, a key one is “the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented)” (United Nations ESCAP, 2009). This paper focusses on decision-making in order to analyse how power is distributed and managed in aid interventions, and how this can affect governance institutions. Decision-making is just one way to think about power in aid relationships, but it is a practical and crucial one (Elbers and Schulpen, 2011; The Spindle, 2020).

In terms of methodology, this section uses a realist synthesis approach, which identifies context, mechanism, and outcome (Pawson et al., 2004; Abimbola et al., 2019). On the **context**, this relates to the locus of decision-making – discussed in the following paragraph in terms of three ‘decision spaces’. For the **mechanism**, it focusses on the agency of local actors, given the emphasis on ‘shifting the power’ and

‘localisation’ in reform agendas. For the **outcome**, Section 3.2 analyses the potential harm to governance institutions that result from the interplay of these elements.

There are many decisions to make throughout an aid intervention, and this paper explores a key new observation: that although partnerships are pervasive in aid, and often the focus of reform agendas, many important decisions are made outside of the partnership context. This observation gives us three ‘Decision Spaces’: three contexts where decisions can be made:

- The **Local Decision Space**, where local actors (including domestic state and non-state actors, and communities or citizens⁵) make decisions among themselves with no interaction with external partners or intermediaries;
- The **Partnership Decision Space**, where local actors, external actors and intermediaries make decisions between themselves; and
- The **External Decision Space**, where external actors such as donors (including bilateral or multilateral donors, or philanthropists or corporate foundations) make decisions among themselves, without involving local partners or intermediaries directly.

These three decision spaces provide the context for decision-making in aid.

Next we look at the mechanism, or agency – in particular ‘local agency’ and what local actors’ efforts are directed towards within each Decision Space. In the Local Decision Space, the agency of local actors, leaders and communities is engaged in local decision-making: for example, exploring and choosing between different options, and interacting with stakeholders. In the Local Decision Space, local agency is not used to engage or negotiate with donors or intermediaries at each step. This provides an important context for many decisions within aid interventions – one that is often overlooked. Indeed, space for local decision-making is often seen as the residual after decisions are made in the External or Partnership Decision Space.

In the Partnership Decision Space, decision-making is ‘entangled’. Local actors engage in negotiation and bargaining with donors and intermediaries, for example in discussing conditionality triggers or compacts, or the monitoring and reporting requirements for funding, or agreeing on project design or targeting, or other

⁵ The term ‘local’ is contested, and will be understood differently in different contexts (Mac Ginty, 2015). In this paper the term local is used in a general sense to denote any domestic actors – state and non-state, formal and informal, from the national level to communities – in contrast to external actors like donors and other international funders.

activities of ‘policy dialogue’. As such, the agency of local actors is deployed in ‘entangled decision-making’ with partners, as different actors vie for control and ‘ownership’, each trying to secure the agreement of their partners for key decisions. Moreover, as alluded to above, the more space there is for decisions to be made in the Partnership Decision Space, the less there would be for same decisions to be made within the Local Decision Space: a form of ‘crowding out’.

In the External Decision Space, decisions are made by donors without involving local actors. But the agency of local actors could still be deployed here, in trying to understand, anticipate and manage the effects of external decisions. In particular, if decisions in the External Decision Space are opaque or unpredictable, they may add to uncertainty in the policy environment in the Local Decision Space. For example, local actors may need to find ways to deal with the volatility of aid flows, or to manage the effects of donors or intermediaries frequently changing their objectives and implementation decisions. Finally, like the Partnership Decision Space (PDS), decisions made in the External Decision Space (EDS) can potentially reduce the space available for decisions in the Local Decision Space (LDS).

3.2 THE EFFECTS OF ENTANGLED DECISION-MAKING

This section analyses the outcomes of the interactions between context and mechanism for decision-making in aid interventions. In particular, it focuses on the effects on governance institutions of the interactions of the three decision spaces with local agency. It considers outcomes in respect of: accountability; process legitimacy; contestation and mobilising support; authority and coordination; and learning and knowledge. In so doing, it identifies the potential harm to governance outcomes when decisions are made within the Partnership Decision Space. This analysis implies that decision-making within the Local Decision Space can be a way to avoid these harms to governance institutions.

3.2.1 Accountability

First we examine the crucial topic of accountability (Lindberg, 2009, 2013). Political accountability strengthens the principal-agent relationships – and hence the social contract – between leaders and society (Devarajan and Khemani, 2016; Page and Pande, 2018; World Bank, 2017, 2016). But Moss (2006) points to the ‘aid curse’, which is similar to the natural resource curse: “[l]arge aid flows can result in a reduction in governmental accountability because governing elites no longer need to ensure the support of their publics and the assent of their legislatures when they do not need to

raise revenues from the local economy, as long as they keep the donors happy and willing to provide alternative sources of funding”. This is often called ‘dual accountability’, shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Dual accountability

Figure 11.1 The feedback loop between beneficiaries and donor country taxpayers is broken

a) Source: WDR 2004

FIGURE 3.1 The dual accountability dilemma for donors engaged in fragile and conflict environments

b) Source: WDR 2011

This view is well-known, but with the methodology of this paper we can provide an additional insight. Comparing decisions made within the Partnership Decision Space and the Local Decision Space highlights a key issue. This relates to Schedler’s view that leaders must hold power in order to be held to account for it:

“Without power, without the capacity to make decisions and the corresponding capacity to attribute decisions, it does not make any sense to talk about accountability. Nobody can hold you accountable for things beyond that person’s control.” (Schedler, 1999)

This echoes the views of eminent thinkers:

“Public attention must be easily directed, in each case of good or bad administration, to just the man deserving of praise or blame. There is no danger in power, if only it be not irresponsible. If it be divided, dealt out in share to many, it is obscured.” (Wilson, 1887)

“Responsibility is null and void when nobody knows who is responsible. ... there must be one person who receives the whole praise of what is well done, the whole blame of what is ill” (Mill, 1861)

With entangled decision-making, it may not be clear to citizens who has actually made a decision – whether it was imposed by donors or decided by local leaders. And if it is not clear who is the author of a policy decision, it is not clear who should be held accountable for it, or how. Entangled decision-making within the Partnership Decision Space can therefore blur accountability relationships between local leaders and citizens, thereby undermining them.

Two further observations can be made on blurred accountability. First, it can undermine the supply response of citizens to reforms, such as whether to make investments, because it is not clear whether reforms will remain in place after donor incentives change (Collier et al., 1997). Second, it can also expose donors to the risk of being held accountable by their own stakeholders for the missteps of their government partners (Dasandi and Erez, 2017).

3.2.2 Process legitimacy

The next outcome relates to ‘process legitimacy’ – which is when the process by which decisions are made meets citizens’ expectations (OECD, 2010). Recent findings suggest that process issues can be more important than delivery in some settings (Nixon et al., 2017). Democratic theory describes how leaders are generally expected to make policy decisions:

Decision-making should, according to democratic theory, be a task where government plays a leading role. Decision-makers should be elected officials acting on a popular mandate and being held accountable by the electorate in general elections. Goal-selection and decision-making [...] are inherently political tasks. (Peters and Pierre, 2016)

Where decision-making is entangled with partners, process legitimacy could be damaged by decisions being made in ways that do not align with citizens’ expectations for policymaking. In each country context, constitutional and/or traditional requirements determine how leaders are expected to make or facilitate policy decisions. Formal legal or constitutional provisions set out the roles of key actors in the policy process including ministers, cabinet, legislature, subnational bodies, communities etc. One example of this problem is if time frames of National Development Plans (NDPs, or Poverty Reduction Strategies), negotiated with donors, overlap with electoral terms. This overlap could constrain and undermine the policy debate that usually takes place during an electoral campaign (Faust, 2010; Mkandawire, 1997; Woodward, 1994). Meanwhile negotiations over conditionality could be seen as illegitimate, due to lack of transparency (Babb and Carruthers, 2008).

3.2.3 Contestation and mobilising support

Andrews (2016) shows how the understanding of leadership is moving beyond a focus on ‘heroes’, to an acknowledgement that leaders emerge from and depend on their local context (the Tolstoy critique), and also of multi-agent leadership, where many

people play a role in moving change forward. Lichtenstein et al. (2006) note that “leadership is a dynamic that transcends the capabilities of individuals alone; it is the product of interaction, tension, and exchange rules governing changes in perceptions and understanding.” The Developmental Leadership Programme (2018) found that:

“Developmental leadership involves groups of individuals contesting, negotiating and cooperating over the core values and ideas that shape the distribution of power and resources in society. Ideas are not an academic luxury or affectation. They are powerful in the systematic ebb and flow of winning hearts and minds. Politics is, ultimately, a battle of ideas. Successfully contesting the ideas that underpin institutions is central to explaining how change happens. Leaders and coalitions have to manufacture and mobilise support for certain ideas to justify the basis of their power. They have to demonstrate their ideas align with what people think is right for society.”

But what happens to these relational processes of contestation and mobilisation, if policy decisions are negotiated with external donors behind closed doors? The content of policy decisions provides some substance upon which these relational interactions between leaders, stakeholders and citizens can be built and developed. In light of citizens’ different views, leaders need the space to work with different groups, make connections and find compromise, in order to be able to reach a decision that has enough support from stakeholders. In contrast, entangled decision-making with donors and international intermediaries, could have a ‘crowding out’ effect, because the same decisions cannot be discussed, contested and agreed between local citizens, stakeholders, communities and leaders.

Moving to implementation, this can also be influenced by whether or not people get a chance to express and discuss their views about the possible options. For example, Barr et al. (2012) find that, for parental monitoring of schools, better results were achieved if people were given the chance to talk about what should be monitored. This happened even though community decisions on monitoring criteria did not end up being very different from a standard template. It was the facilitated process of expression, deliberation, and agreement, which galvanised action. Without Local Decision Space for discussion and negotiation, these activities could not occur. This discussion shows how entangled decision-making with external partners can harm the crucial processes of local leadership, contestation, and mobilising support.

3.2.4 Authority and coordination

The next governance outcome of interest relates to the exercise of authority, in particular in support of the coordination of activities across multiple actors. At the Paris Declaration, donors committed to ‘align’ themselves with government priorities. The Paris architecture used two operational methods to support this: policy and systems alignment (Booth, 2012).⁶ But the results were disappointing: ‘policy alignment’ to national development plans was too lax, as the plans expanded to become the proverbial Christmas tree (Booth, 2012). Meanwhile the idea of ‘systems alignment’ – when donors channel aid through a host country’s financial management and delivery systems – is arguably underused due to donor concerns about effectiveness and fiduciary risk. As such, these methods have been unable to prevent aid fragmentation and proliferation (Barder, 2009; Leiderer, 2015).⁷

Despite the costs of donor collective action problems, this failure is arguably due at least in part to power struggles between partners. For example in the case of environmental policy in Madagascar:

“There are many groups involved in environmental policy in Madagascar, and we all need to work together. Everyone wants to coordinate, but no one wants to be coordinated” – Staff member of the National Office of the Environment, Madagascar (Brinkerhoff and Crosby, 2002, p. 117)

That is to say, in many countries, donors and INGOs have the discretion to decide not to participate in government-led donor coordination efforts, or to do so only partially. Decisions about alignment methods may be made within the Partnership Decision Space, and therefore be continually up for debate and negotiation with partners. As such, local leaders’ ability to coordinate donor activities risks being undermined by entangled decision-making, leading to costly collective action problems.

3.2.5 Learning and knowledge

Finally, if decisions are made within the External Decision Space or the Partnership Decision Space, this can prevent local leaders, bureaucrats and communities from making decisions for themselves within the Local Decision Space. This crowding out

⁶ The Paris agreement only mentioned the term ‘authority’ in relation to donors, not governments. These points related to donors delegating authority to ‘lead donors’ or to their field offices.

⁷ Different methods to deliver ‘alignment’ and coordination are available, for example aid markets (Klein and Harford, 2005; Easterly, 2007; Barder, 2009) or aid regulation.

could inhibit the development of policy-making skills through learning-by-doing. For example:

“...the foreign aid system has undermined the development of state institutional capacity by externalising policymaking. [...] One result of donor dominance over decision-making has been to arrest the processes of policy learning among African policy elites.” (Van de Walle, 2004)

“Non-Western states increasingly lack even the formal capacity to formulate public policy independently of the requirements of international institutions. In effect, these states have been reduced to the administrative bodies of external power.” (Chandler, 2005)

Feedback loops are crucial to learning-by-doing, for example, by allowing actors to respond to changing circumstances by changing practices or procedures. In turn, the effects of these changes provide new information, which can lead to further iterative improvements. In terms of decision spaces, local actors may engage in learning, but if they are not making the decisions that respond to that learning, their feedback loops are incomplete. Decision-making within the Local Decision Space can allow these feedback loops to connect, which in turn could support adaptation and innovation by local actors. But if decisions are made within the Partnership Decision Space or the External Decision Space, these local feedback loops are interrupted.

Another important point is that decisions made in the Partnership Decision Space or External Decision Space can make the environment more complex for local actors and local policymakers to navigate. For example, as mentioned earlier, there may be uncertainty, volatility and lack of credibility in these external decisions. In sum, decision-making outside of the Local Decision Space can harm the processes of local learning, adaptation and innovation.

Table 2 summarises the key findings of the analysis in this section. We have found that for each of the five outcomes which relate to the sustainability of local governance institutions, entangled decision-making in the Partnership Decision Space can cause harm. This is not to say that decision-making in the Local Decision Space would be certain to reverse or avoid these harms. Rather that decision-making in the Local Decision Space can provide a way to avoid these harms, and hence support governance outcomes and the sustainability of institutions.

<u>Context:</u> locus of decision-making	Local Decision Space	Partnership Decision Space	External Decision Space
<u>Mechanism:</u> agency of local actors	Focused on local decision-making with local stakeholders	Focused on entangled decision-making with partners	Focused on dealing with effects of external decisions
<u>Outcomes:</u>	Decision-making in the LDS has potential to avoid harm to governance institutions	Decision-making in the PDS can harm governance institutions, can crowd out the LDS	Decision-making in the EDS can add uncertainty to LDS, can crowd out the LDS

Table 1: Summary of findings from this section on the effects of different loci of decision-making in aid

4 REFORM EFFORTS AND DECISION SPACES

This section reviews a limited selection of aid modalities and reform agendas through the lens of the three decisions spaces. It finds that many approaches which espouse the rhetoric of supporting local leadership, ownership and locally led development, may not enable decision-making in the LDS in practice. Many in fact focus on the processes of the Partnership Decision Space, including trying to improve relationships, in a kind of ‘ever closer union’. As such, despite shared aspirations for change, many aid practices continue to operationalise Pearson’s caveat that donors should still be involved in decision-making. In contrast, other measures used by donors do work to support or expand the Local Decision Space in different ways. For example, by providing information and evidence to local decision-makers, by providing funding or other in-kind resources to them, or by facilitating local spaces for discussion, participation and deliberation. We even find that some decisions in the EDS have the potential to ‘crowd in’ decision-making in the LDS, for example by providing incentives, structure and credibility that can support local decision-making. The selection of modalities examined here is a short review of some relevant approaches, and is by no means intended to be comprehensive or in-depth.

4.1 THE TOOLS OF 'OWNERSHIP'

Many different aid tools were introduced to support 'ownership'. How do these look when examined through the lens of the three decision spaces? A key example is the national development strategy (NDS, or poverty reduction strategy paper, PRSP), which was chosen at the Paris Declaration as the metric for country ownership, and as a way to support participation and engagement between leaders and citizens. But instead, NDSs have often ended up providing a route for donor influence, giving them a significant role in decision-making (Abrahamsen, 2004; Easterly, 2013). That is, we could say that the NDS was in the LDS in theory, but the PDS in practice. Fisher and Marquette (2016) note this 'major unresolved tension': "[d]onors commit to empowering developing country stakeholders politically and operationally only while they are perceived to remain committed to progressive development and governance policies, as defined, largely, by OECD-DAC states (Booth, 2011)."

Another aid modality designed to bolster ownership and 'use country systems' was budget support. This expanded the LDS by providing more funding for government priorities, as laid out in the budget. But it was usually attached to conditionality,⁸ decisions about which take place either in the PDS (if they are negotiated) or the EDS (if they are imposed). Conditionality has been extensively criticised, including for skewed incentives and weak impact, for example due to donor credibility problems (Babb and Carruthers, 2008; Collier et al., 1997; Commission on State Fragility, Growth and Development, 2018; Devarajan and Khemani, 2016; DFID, 2013; Kentikelenis et al., 2016; Killick, 1997; Pritchett et al., 2010; Svensson, 2003). It appears to be very difficult to induce 'political will', which is often seen as a black box (Hudson et al., 2018), and governments often evade conditionality using 'isomorphic mimicry' (Andrews et al., 2017a), or related 'weapons of the weak', like backsliding (Scott, 1987). Other design elements of budget support may remain in the EDS, for example timing – the latter leading to often-discussed issues with aid volatility. So while the narrative around budget support is of increasing 'ownership', the bundle of incentives and resources it provides retains many decisions in the PDS and EDS.

More generally, the focus at Paris on 'using country systems' is echoed by efforts within the localisation agenda to spend international resources via local organisations, including NGOs and CSOs. But we can observe that the flow of funds

⁸ Collier (2011) points out that budget support is one instrument with two objectives (transferring funds to enable spending and also inducing policy change via conditionality), which is in violation of the Tinbergen rule.

through local hands – whether state or non-state – does not necessarily imply that key decisions, such as those about the goals and design of programs, are also made locally. Indeed, many decisions about how these funds are spent could be made in the EDS or PDS, so that local actors who receive international funds are simply the implementation agents of donor programmes. In contrast, if key decisions about spending are transferred to local leaders, then this could expand the LDS – even if implementation is contracted out to other organisations.

This analysis highlights the importance of the local decision-making system as a key ‘country system’ to be ‘used’ and supported. Aid coordination and transparency initiatives can help to enable local decision-making, by providing local decision-makers with clear information about the allocation of funds. These include measures to encourage the use of comparable and locally consistent classification frameworks for aid spending, including fiscal years, charts of accounts, and country results frameworks. Reporting that shadows the domestic budget calendar in terms of timing of reports on projected and executed funds; and ensures that monitoring and evaluation of all projects and programmes is comprehensive and comparable within a country, could also support local decision-making.

Meanwhile early decisions in the EDS about what level of fiduciary risk and delivery effectiveness donors would accept when using country systems, could provide helpful incentives for reform in the LDS. These may be implemented as funding windows with eligibility requirements or *guardrails* – negative exclusions⁹ – for activities or sectors that donors would not be willing to fund or support, while allowing different policy options to be proposed and funded. Or incentives could relate to reducing the ‘implementation gaps’ of existing statutory policies and procedures, in order to help to underpin the credibility of institutions. These kinds of incentives could support local decision-making in the LDS, and provide an alternative to policy conditionality.

Results based aid (Birdsall et al., 2010) is another method of using country systems, that could potentially provide more space in the LDS for decisions about design and implementation of funded projects. The extent to which this aid modality falls into the LDS depends on how results indicators are agreed. Results indicators could be imposed from donor strategies (in the EDS) or negotiated between project partners within the PDS. Only if the results indicators are taken from pre-existing country results frameworks (as required by SDG 17) would this element enter the LDS.

⁹ It may be more feasible to decide on negative exclusions than ideal choices (Wolff, 2015).

4.2 EVIDENCE AND LEARNING

As well as access to resources, another key way to enable local decision-making is the provision of information, evidence and technical advice, which can make a difference to policy choices (Knack et al., 2020). However, when evidence is provided by external actors, it may be done in a way which constrains, rather than enables, decision-making in the LDS. Box 2 illustrates this point, where power struggles between partners can lead to distortions in the use of expertise, evidence and knowledge. In particular, if technical advice does not include different recommended options that local actors can choose between, this means that the only real question for local leaders is ‘take it or leave it’. Technical advice that does not include substantive options that local actors can choose between, implies that many important decisions have been pre-made in the EDS, which in turn can constrain choice in the LDS.

Box 2: Closed versus open technical advice.

In the UK, the key formal route for technocratic advice to politicians is via written submissions. These are short, clearly written, and designed to solicit a formal policy decision from a minister. They include key information like the options available (including doing nothing), the pros and cons of each one and trade-offs to be made, and the official’s recommendation. An example is given on the left below. On the right is an example technical donor report to an aid-receiving government, which is much longer and more detailed, but contains no options or choices. It does not appear to be designed to elicit a decision – implicitly, the message is ‘take it or leave it’. We could call these two types of advice *open* or *closed* technical advice.

<p>Title Capturing the essence of the subject in the title helps the minister to prepare to receive information on that subject; it also saves the writer words later on.</p> <p>Issue Define, precisely and very briefly, the point to be decided, or the problem to be solved. The issue will often be something like <i>How to achieve X or Whether to do Y or Z</i>.</p> <p>Recommendation Set out, also briefly, what you want the minister to agree to.</p> <p>Timing Insert the date by which you want the decision. Classifications such as <i>Routine, Urgent or Immediate</i> are open to interpretation; dates aren’t.</p> <p>Background Describe, as briefly as possible, how we reached the situation where a decision is required and provide any supporting facts essential to making the decision.</p> <p>Ministerial submission</p> <p>11 pages 3 options 1 recommendation</p>	<p>T 2 PROPOSAL.....21</p> <p>PROPOSAL SUMMARY.....21</p> <p>1. INTRODUCTION.....22</p> <p>2. RATIONALE.....22</p> <p>3. STRATEGY.....23</p> <p>4. PROJECT INTERVENTION LOGIC.....24</p> <p>5. GOAL AND OBJECTIVES.....24</p> <p>6. DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES.....24</p> <p>7. EXPECTED OUTPUTS.....27</p> <p>8. EXPECTED OUTCOMES.....28</p> <p>9. ASSUMPTIONS AND RISKS.....28</p> <p>10. PROJECT MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE.....29</p> <p>11. MONITORING AND EVALUATION.....32</p> <p>12. WORKPLAN/TIMELINE.....33</p> <p>Donor report</p> <p>82 pages 8 recommendations 0 options</p>
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(Submission text from: http://www.civilservant.org.uk/library/2015_Working_with_Ministers.pdf)

An alternative method is shown in Box 2, which is the standard bureaucratic approach of providing at least three options for ministers to choose between (including doing nothing). This approach provides more space in the LDS for substantive choice. A related issue is the potential for ‘unbundling’ technical advice

from funding, so that funding is not dependent on the choice of option (Harford et al., 2004; NYU Working Group, 2020). Other measures to support evidence for decision-making in the LDS could include providing facilitated spaces where policymakers receive technical advice on a topic from multiple sources, e.g. conferences or virtual open pitches. Technical advisors hosted within ministries who report to local actors, not to donors, could also mitigate the number of ‘pre-decisions’ in technical advice.

There is also evidence that external actors’ lack of local contextual knowledge can lead to poor programme design and weak implementation (Grindle, 2004; Pritchett et al., 2010). Knowledge hierarchies can also play a key role, for example when “locally derived expertise is often ignored in policy recommendations” (Siddiqi and Kamruzzaman, 2021). Perhaps in response to this issue, there are some efforts to improve the availability and use of evidence within the local context. Support for local academics (Ostrom, 2002; Shirley, 2005), think tanks and infomediaries is a key issue, as is support for the use of evidence by policymakers (CGD, 2018; Datta et al., 2016; Dom, 2018; Evans, 2018; Stewart et al., 2019). This includes funding and incentives for national statistics, including for subnational, detailed and regular socioeconomic data and surveys. Support for peer learning with South-South and triangular connections can also support more relevant knowledge exchange.

Another key aspect of evidence and information relates to responsiveness to citizens’ views. Organisations such as Afrobarometer, Latinobarómetro and others produce and disseminate this kind of crucial information, as can grassroots CSOs that work to represent citizen views. Meanwhile donor modalities can provide incentives and support for more inclusive and responsive policymaking, for example via encouraging or mandating participation, accountability, transparency and deliberation. Related measures, including ‘convening and brokering’ (Green, 2013) can help to support these processes and increase the salience of the views of citizens, in particular of marginalised groups, in the decision-making process. A key question though is whether decisions are actually made via participative processes, and whether these decisions actually impact policy. We should also note that even if decisions made via participation do have impact, decisions about which spaces to facilitate, on which topics, and who to invite to them, are crucial.

4.3 THE SECOND ORTHODOXY

An important critique of aid practice argues that traditional aid underestimates the non-linear and complex nature of change (Andrews et al., 2017b; Green, 2016). Failures of solution-driven aid and linear planning tools have led to the emergence of a so-called ‘second orthodoxy’ (Teskey, 2017; Booth, 2018), methods for ‘doing development differently’ (Andrews and Wild, 2016), and a range of approaches that are politically smart; locally led; and adaptive (Booth and Unsworth, 2014).

Thinking and working politically (TWP) is an important strand of these new methods, which prioritises better understanding of political dynamics and context (Laws and Marquette, 2018). Many donors are using new ‘politically smart’ tools such as Political Economy Analysis (PEA) to better understand a country context. Yet this is often done without including local actors at all:

“The general exclusion of host state stakeholders from the PEA enterprise means that the diagnosis of “problems” and “opportunities” for intervention are decided upon by donor officials largely in isolation from those groups and communities whose “problems” these – putatively – are, and whose support and “buy-in” is required to make such interventions effective.” (Fisher and Marquette, 2016)

As such, PEA may work to support decision-making in the EDS, not the LDS. A potential alternative might be to draw on PEA to inform the policy options that are offered to local actors.¹⁰ This could provide useful information to support decision-making in the LDS.

Another important strand of the second orthodoxy relates to adaptive approaches. These can better deal with a complex environment and so-called ‘wicked problems’ (Ramalingam, 2013), and include making small bets and failing fast, using rapid feedback to learn and iteratively improve in real time (Andrews et al., 2017b; Ang, 2016). Although adaptive management emphasises the importance of learning and feedback loops, it does not clarify ‘who is learning’ (Hudson, 2017), and as discussed earlier, if local actors are neither learning nor deciding what to do with that knowledge, the feedback loops are not operating in the LDS but instead in the PDS or EDS. In another example, the World Development Report on Governance and the Law highlights the role of leaders, and advocates approaches that are adaptive and

¹⁰ I am grateful to Kojo Pumpuni Asante for making this point at ESID 2019.

politically smart (World Bank, 2017), but a search of the document for the phrase ‘locally led’ returns zero results. Green and Guijt (2019) worry about the emerging codification of adaptive management, warning that “it needs to return to a greater emphasis on localizing programme design and leadership in the local context.” From this evidence, the second orthodoxy risks being locally informed, without being locally led.

In addition, if there is an emphasis on external actors using adaptive management for decisions made in the EDS, and frequently changing their practices in response to new evidence, these changes could add complexity and uncertainty to the environment for local decision-makers in the LDS. Alternatively, external actors could add stability and credibility to the policy environment of the LDS, by making predictable and credible decisions in the EDS. This would indirectly support local actors who are using adaptive processes to tackle complex issues, rather than adding to the complexity they face.

Arms-length support (Booth, 2013) is another second orthodoxy approach to supporting locally led solutions, which is locally embedded and intentionally separated from direct donor control. Problem-driven iterative adaptation (PDIA) is a prominent example (Andrews et al., 2017). In supporting local actors in making decisions, key elements of these approaches lie within the LDS. However, there is some anecdotal evidence of conditionality-led programs continuing alongside, reducing the attention that can be given to local priorities identified by arms-length approaches. The second point to note is that many of these approaches work directly with specific individuals – ‘policy entrepreneurs’ – and have thus been described as ‘picking winners’ (Williams et al., 2019). With these targeted approaches, many decisions may have been made in the EDS, including which local champions to work with, in which sectors and location, and which external staff and resources to use. There is a strong focus on how to pick the right champions and avoiding those who could turn out to be problematic – a kind of Type I error (false positives). But less attention is paid to the risk of Type II errors (false negatives): that is, omitting to support other worthy champions who could benefit from support.

4.4 DOING MORE OR DOING LESS – OR BOTH?

Green (2017) makes a distinction between new methods in aid practice for ‘doing more’, and those which propose ‘doing less’. ‘Doing more’ includes the approaches of the second orthodoxy, while ‘doing less’ includes focussing “on supporting an

‘enabling environment’ of transparency and access to information, rather than engaging with particular political processes”. In this vein, for example, Devarajan and Khemani (2016) suggest two key roles for donors: supporting transparency and citizen political engagement, and state that:

“There is an inherent hubris in assuming that external actors will have the capacity to identify the appropriate entry points and engineer reforms in the right direction, simultaneously solving both the technical policy problem and that of adapting it to political constraints. Ex ante, there is little reason to believe that the selected entry points are the right ones; they may make the situation worse. The incentives of donor organisations to show results and count reforms as success are further reasons to search for other approaches that do not depend entirely upon external agencies’ getting both the economics and the politics right.”

In another angle on ‘doing less’, Hudson et al. (2018) note that:

“More successful, transformational and legitimate ways of engaging with the political process are often aimed at creating space and strengthening the political environment and process rather than picking winners. This provides the space for institutional indigenisation to occur, without being co-opted or short-circuited. [...] external actors should seek to support agents to change institutions they inhabit rather than engineer or plant institutional change more directly. They can do so by opening up the spaces of politics and for contestation – and not by trying (a) to intervene to determine outcomes and (b) to directly engineer the properties, let them emerge through process.”

These methods can be seen as indirect or ‘oblique’ support: as Roche & Denney (2019) say, “there is recognition that donors can play a role in not just ‘picking winners’ or champions, [...] but in helping to shape the environment which allows local leadership to emerge and thrive.” Rather than viewing politics as a constraint or source of failure (Venugopal, 2018), this echoes the idea that ‘politics matters’ for development. As Hudson et al. (2018) note, “Politics is not the obstacle, it is the way change happens”, highlighting the possibility to “[a]llow the political process to run its course. Don’t jump to the answers.” (Hudson et al., 2018). There is even the potential to “politically sterilise [aid] from all the dictates of donors” (Green, 2018).

What would such an approach look like in practice? Drawing on the analysis in this paper, shifting decisions to the Local Decision Space would be one way to ‘do less’ by deliberately transferring power and decision-making to local actors. In particular, stakeholders in an aid intervention could use a **decision mapping or audit tool** to understand where different decisions are being made, and potentially explore how to shift more of them to the Local Decision Space. Shifting some decisions to the LDS in different ways would then involve ‘doing less’ of many common tools of the PDS, including policy conditionality, policy dialogue, negotiating over NDPs/PRSPs, etc.

The next question is, what could donors ‘do more’ of, to make such an approach successful? The ‘exam question’ for donor action would now be different, as follows:

- When decisions are made within the Partnership Decision Space, the implicit exam question that donors face is:

“What do we think is the ideal policy choice for this country/community, and what tools/practices/approaches can we use, to make sure this ideal policy choice is adopted and implemented by local decision-makers?”

- When decisions are made within the Local Decision Space, the exam question for donors is:

*“How can we use our resources and capabilities to make it **easier** for unknown local decision-makers to choose and implement policies which respond to the needs and priorities of their citizens/communities, are based on evidence, and are grounded in local realities? (And make it harder for them not to?)”*

This would still be an extremely challenging exam question. It would acknowledge donors’ weaknesses in identifying ‘good’ policies, and of ‘picking winners’. But even though they do not know ex ante what the right answer is, they can still use their resources, knowledge and expertise to support local actors in the process of discovering it. Potential methods could follow from the descriptions earlier in this section, and work to enable and support local decision-making in the LDS, directly or indirectly, and ‘crowd in’ decisions there. A package of all these types of approaches – doing more and doing less – could be called Enabling the Local Decision Space.

An important element would involve supporting the governance outcomes set out in Section 3 by acknowledging, respecting and enabling the roles of local leaders in decision-making. As described above, decision-making within the Local Decision

Space could provide a way to avoid the harms of entangled decision-making in the PDS. In particular, respecting and enabling the roles of local leaders in mobilising support for those decisions, in leading or facilitating a legitimate process to make them, in being held accountable for them, in adapting them to changing circumstances, and in coordinating their implementation. This requires donors to treat governance institutions in a rather different way from current practice. An approach that enabled the Local Decision Space could be attractive to donors in terms of risk, efficiency, results, and governance, but it would involve a fundamental change of mindset, away from the protagonist's role.

A last word on donor motivation. The focus on responsiveness in the Local Decision Space may make this approach more attractive for interventions designed with a motivation of disinterested altruism, and less attractive for those with a motivation of paternalistic altruism. But even so, self-interested donors may find an approach with enables the Local Decision Space could align better with a diplomatic and respectful approach to aid-receiving countries.

5 CONCLUSION

The sections of this paper highlighted three key issues. First, that neither donors nor local leaders can be assumed *a priori* to be more responsive to the views and needs of citizens and communities affected by aid. Second, that entangled decision-making can be harmful for governance institutions. Third, that many aid modalities attempt to retain power for donors, rather than transferring it to local actors.

Following this analysis, an alternative approach to aid interventions was presented: enabling the Local Decision Space. This approach could transfer more decisions to the Local Decision Space, provide an enabling environment and 'crowd in' local decision-making, and avoid undermining governance institutions.

Such an approach and may be uncomfortable territory for donors to begin with, as it would involve relinquishing the role of a protagonist – the movie star – and instead taking on a more supporting role. But it has several possible advantages. It could support governance outcomes including accountability, legitimacy, coordination, mobilisation, and learning. And it could lead to better policy choices that are grounded in the local context and responsive to local needs. It could meet donor needs regarding risk perceptions and results. And it could support diplomatic connections by ending the hierarchical donor-recipient style of aid relationships.

The price for all this would be that external actors would no longer have direct (or attempted) control over the policy choices of aid-receiving countries, or the details of their governance arrangements. Rather than trying to ‘get to Denmark’ (Fukuyama, 2004), it could perhaps allow aid-receiving countries to be treated a little bit more like Denmark, where Jante’s law describes some important cultural values (Box 3). As Fraser and Whitfield (2008) say, “protecting sovereignty remains the most realistic means to achieve people’s aspirations for greater control of their lives. It is still a precondition for bringing power closer to people.”

Box 3: The 10 rules of Jante’s Law (Sandemose, 1933)

1. You’re not to think you are anything special.
2. You’re not to think you are as good as we are.
3. You’re not to think you are smarter than us.
4. You’re not to convince yourself that you are better than us.
5. You’re not to think you know more than us.
6. You’re not to think you are more important than us.
7. You’re not to think you are good at anything.
8. You’re not to laugh at us.
9. You’re not to think anyone cares about you.
10. You’re not to think you can teach us anything.

6 APPENDIX: AN EMPIRICAL APPROACH TO BUDGETARY RESPONSIVENESS

The three data sources are as follows:

- **Citizen preferences:** the open-ended Afrobarometer survey question “What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today?”
- **Government spending:** BOOST datasets via the World Bank
- **Aid spending:** OECD/DAC Creditor Reporting System (CRS)

The analysis in Box 1 uses the Classification of Functions of Government (COFOG) as the unifying structure. The Afrobarometer survey responses on the ‘most important problem’ were mapped onto the COFOG headings (Table A1). Next, these were compared to government and donor spending allocations. Uganda and Burkina Faso are the two African countries on the World Bank BOOST portal whose budget data is available in the COFOG classification. For donor spending, the OECD CRS categories were mapped across to COFOG (Table A2). Some categories related to water and sanitation were not clearly allocated, and spending here was split 50:50 between the two possible COFOG categories. In order to directly compare spending from both aid and domestic resources, exchange rate data from UNCTAD was used, and in the case of Uganda whose fiscal year runs 1 July – 30 June, a series for calendar year spending was calculated using averages.

Box 1 illustrates of the type of analysis that results from this mapping, which may be helpful in tracking the match between public policy choices and citizens’ needs and wants. Following the budgetary responsiveness literature, the analysis looks only at sectoral allocation, excluding central government, since few people identified non-sectoral problems in the Afrobarometer survey. The responsiveness literature often uses changes in budgetary allocation in the following year, but in this dataset, the changes were rather volatile and so levels of sectoral spending were used.

Potential avenues for further research include questions of how these spending allocations come about, for example the sequencing between government and donor spending decisions, which then make up the allocation of the aggregate budget. The literature on budgetary responsiveness often uses survey questions that specifically ask about spending allocation, which do not appear to be available in many aid-receiving countries. Future work could improve the methodology, look at other countries, and work with more data sources. There are also many other ways to empirically analyse responsiveness including legislative behaviour and political speeches, and qualitative methods.

Table A1: Mapping the “most important problem” to COFOG

Afrobarometer Round 5 Survey: First answer to the question: “In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address?” Allocated under COFOG headings 01-10.		Burkina Faso 2012	Uganda 2012
	01 - General public services	0	0.1
19	Services (other)	0	0.1
	02 – Defence	0	0.0
	03 - Public order and safety	7.3	9.8
23	Crime and Security	3	1.3
25	Political violence	0.1	0.0
26	Political instability/ ethnic tensions	0.3	0.5
27	Discrimination/ inequality	0.3	0.4
28	Gender issues / women's rights	0.3	0.1
29	Democracy/political rights	0.5	0.8
31	Civil war	0.1	0.0
10	Land	0.6	0.5
24	Corruption	2.1	6.2
	04 - Economic affairs	39.3	46.0
1	Management of the economy	1.4	10.1
2	Wages, incomes and salaries	3.3	1.8
4	Poverty/destitution (*1/3)	2.0	4.1
6	Loans / credit	1.2	0.8
7	Farming/agriculture	4.8	1.5
8	Food shortage/famine	11.7	4.1
9	Drought	0.2	0.3
11	Transportation	0.6	1.4
12	Communications	0.1	0.1
13	Infrastructure / roads	5.5	7.0
16	Electricity	1.2	2.4
18	Unemployment	6.7	8.5
32	Agricultural marketing	0.6	2.9
780	Inflation / High food/commodity prices		1.0
	05 - Environmental protection		
	06 - Housing and community amenities	24.2	8.3
15	Housing	0.8	0.3
17	Water supply	23.4	8.0
	07 – Health	20.2	13.1
20	Health	18.1	7.9
21	AIDS	0.0	0.3
22	Sickness / Disease	0.1	0.8
4	Poverty/destitution (*1/3)	2.0	4.1
	08 - Recreation, culture and religion,		
	09 – Education,	7.7	8.3
14	Education	5.7	4.2
4	Poverty/destitution (*1/3)	2.0	4.1
	10 - Social protection,	0.1	0.5
18	Orphans/street children/homeless children	0.1	0.5
	Other	1.3	14.2
9995	Other	0.1	0.4
0	Nothing/ no problems	0.9	0.1
5	Rates and Taxes	0.3	13.5
781	Presidential term limit		0.2
		100.2	100.2
4	Total poverty/destitution	6.1	12.2

Table A2: Mapping COFOG and CRS

CRS/DAC Sector		COFOG sector
1000: Total All Sectors		
450: Total Sector Allocable		
110: I.1. Education, Total	9	Education
120: I.2. Health, Total	7	Health
130: I.3. Population Policies/Programmes & Reproductive Health, Total	7	Health
14010: Water sector policy and administrative management	5 or 6	
14015: Water resources conservation (including data collection)	5	Environmental protection
14020: Water supply and sanitation - large systems	5 or 6	
14021: Water supply - large systems	6	Housing and community amenities
14022: Sanitation - large systems	5	Environmental protection
14030: Basic drinking water supply and basic sanitation	5 or 6	
14031: Basic drinking water supply	6	Housing and community amenities
14032: Basic sanitation	5	Environmental protection
14040: River basins' development	5	Environmental protection
14050: Waste management/disposal	5	Environmental protection
14081: Education and training in water supply and sanitation	5 or 6	
15110: Public sector policy and administrative management	1	General public services
15111: Public finance management	1	General public services
15112: Decentralisation and support to subnational government	1	General public services
15113: Anti-corruption organisations and institutions	3	Public order and safety
15114: Domestic revenue mobilisation	1	General public services
15130: Legal and judicial development	3	Public order and safety
15150: Democratic participation and civil society	1	General public services
15151: Elections	1	General public services
15152: Legislatures and political parties	1	General public services
15153: Media and free flow of information	8	Recreation, culture and religion
15160: Human rights	3	Public order and safety
15170: Women's equality organisations and institutions	3	Public order and safety
15180: Ending violence against women and girls	3	Public order and safety
15190: Facilitation of orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility	10	Social protection
152: I.5.b. Conflict, Peace & Security, Total	3	Public order and safety
16010: Social/welfare services	10	Social protection
16020: Employment policy and administrative management	4	Economic affairs
16030: Housing policy and administrative management	6	Housing and community amenities
16040: Low-cost housing	6	Housing and community amenities
16050: Multisector aid for basic social services	10	Social protection
16061: Culture and recreation	8	Recreation, culture and religion
16062: Statistical capacity building	1	General public services
16064: Social mitigation of HIV/AIDS	7	Health
200: II. Economic Infrastructure & Services, Total	4	Economic affairs
300: III. Production Sectors, Total	4	Economic affairs
410: IV.1. General Environment Protection, Total	5	Environmental protection
43010: Multisector aid	1	General public services
43030: Urban development and management	1	General public services
43040: Rural development	1	General public services
43050: Non-agricultural alternative development	1	General public services
43081: Multisector education/training	9	Education
43082: Research/scientific institutions	9	Education
510: VI.1. General Budget Support, Total	X	Follow government allocation
520: VI.2. Developmental Food Aid/Food Security Assistance, Total	10	Social protection
530: VI.3. Other Commodity Assistance, Total	4	Economic affairs
600: VII. Action Relating to Debt, Total	1	General public services
700: VIII. Humanitarian Aid, Total	10	Social protection
910: Administrative Costs of Donors, Total	X	No mapping
930: Refugees in Donor Countries, Total	X	No mapping
998: IX. Unallocated / Unspecified, Total	X	No mapping

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