Governance for development in Africa: building on what works

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What doesn’t work and what might

- Governance is making development in Africa slower and more inequitable than it needs to be
- Part of the problem is ‘good governance’, which isn’t evidence-based and doesn’t work
- There is a relevant evidence base and APPP is contributing to this with new data and ideas with particular reference to Africa
- It is time to make this count, even though it means challenging cherished ideologies in North and South alike
Four topics

• From ‘best practice’ to ‘best fit’
• A realistic take on elections, citizen empowerment and public goods
• The leadership factor and the politics of it
• Implications for aid effectiveness
… the ‘universal best practice’ approach to governance for development is bankrupt

Brian Levy
From ‘best practice’ to ‘best fit’

- Build constructively on existing institutional arrangements – ‘work with the grain’
- Good institutions solve the collective action problems actually posed in particular contexts – so generic formulas are unlikely to work
- What work are ‘practical hybrids’ – marrying modern professional standards with elements that borrow from the host society
- Aid should enable, not block, local problem-solving
- Direct funding is not good from that point of view, and can do real harm
- So do less of that, and pay more attention to the enabling environment for initiatives that are technically sensible and locally anchored
... rely less on the congenial assumption that all good things go together

ODI voice evaluation
Elections, citizen empowerment and public goods

- A widespread assumption that development problems need more democracy, citizen empowerment and governments ‘held to account’
- Attractive idea, but ideological, not evidence-based
- Democracy a desirable goal, but has different effects in different settings (North et al) and is not a reliable route to better provision of public goods in the medium term
- Better elections get you more efficient clientelism, not better public goods
Elections, citizen empowerment and public goods

- Citizen pressure is at best a weak factor and at worst a distraction
- The policy messages in WDR 2004 have been over-sold, evidence has been misreported, and evaluation findings (ODI, IDS) neglected
- The real evidence says that combined top-down + bottom up approaches are what work
- APPP findings are adding, in this respect, to 10+ years of IDS research (Future State ++)

“... what African countries need are leaders who are able to show that they can get things done.

Blair AGI
The leadership factor and the politics of it

• The overwhelming emphasis on bottom-up pressure and accountability provides an alibi to all those who prefer not to think about the biggest problem – lack of developmental leadership

• But where is it going to come from, politically?

• ‘Neopatrimonial’ political regimes are not all the same

• But appreciating the differences means stopping judging regimes by the standards applicable under advanced capitalism

• Instead, consider more carefully what a country’s citizens find acceptable

• And pay attention to Mustaq Khan on anti-developmental and pro-developmental uses of economic rents

• Côte d’Ivoire …
“… the aid business must change to meet the needs of development, not the other way round.”
Implications for aid effectiveness

• Ahead of Busan, we must tie ‘ownership’ more firmly to leadership – not to whether parliaments and CSOs have had a say
• Alignment needs to be about helping that kind of leadership to emerge, not about technicalities – it is time to abandon the polite fiction that current leaders are committed to development
• In these and other respects, working in a politically realistic, ‘best fit’ way is challenging for donor organisations
• Boldly articulated research and evaluation findings can help a bit …
Implications for aid effectiveness

• But there is no avoiding the basic challenge of re-educating politicians and publics in the North:
  – that getting the right skills to the right places to help institutions to change is a sound use of development budgets
  – that chasing ‘results’ with more cash in the context of unresolved institutional problems is not

• Thank you!
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