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The Politics of Results and Struggles over Value and Meaning in International Development

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The Politics of Results and Struggles over Value and Meaning in International Development

By Rosalind Eyben, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex

Summary

The paper begins with a political history of the 'results' discourse in the public sector in general and in development aid in particular. It examines perceptions of the effects of the discourse's artefacts (tools and protocols), identifies who are the actors promoting these and looks at the drivers of their success. The paper particularly explores how result based management artefacts create and reproduce a certain instrumental meaning and managerial 'best practice' approach to development and exclude other meanings from consideration. This paper is based on the experience of the author in the field of development cooperation and is illustrated with examples from bilateral aid agencies, global funds and international NGOs.

1. Introduction

'The results-based framework within which we operated existed in the context of complex power relationships... Sometimes we found ourselves talking openly and finding support from among the donors, while at other times we had to conceal our true objectives and ensure that the results-based, logical framework outputs were achieved... We found ourselves adopting a language and a set of tools – technical activity reports, expenditure reports and products – quite distinct from the work we were actually doing...When our consortium members protest or refuse to abide by parameters that do not reflect their reality, how am I to respond? Has the time come to liberate ourselves from the project tools that force us to frame our activities within parameters established by others?[1]'

The above quotation is from a front line development practitioner – the intermediary between a grass roots consortium and a bilateral donor agency funding its work. Her emphasis on complex power relationships reflects my own understanding of 'politics' regarding the 'results' discourse and its associated artefacts – 'the set of tools' - that she mentions and that also include

- Base-line data
- Progress reviews
- Performance measurement indicators
- Logical framework analysis
- Success indicators
- Theories of Change
- Results chains
- Cost benefit analysis
- Social return on investment

Such artefacts influence daily work in much of the development sector, particularly but not exclusively in Anglo-Saxon agencies and also in multilateral organisations and global funds. A personal experience provoked my investigation of these 'techniques of power'.[2] As a researcher at the Institute of Development Studies, I was asked to revise one of our programme's log-frames to comply with our funder's new guidance. This

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[1] Rosario León ' The Ghost in the Aid Machine' *The Broker* (2009) www.thebrokeronline.eu/Series/Stories-from-Aidland/The-ghost-in-the-aid-machine
[2] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* New York: Pantheon Books,1980) p.155.

included quantifying the policies our programme would influence or help create, hence requiring that our programme understood policy as a bounded, quantifiable entity. Yet, this same programme had just published a paper that understood policy as a relational, contested and never-finished process. We did not see it as a piece of paper that could be counted. On explaining this to the official we dealt with, the only reply received was 'Please complete the matrix in accordance with the guidance'. So I invented a spurious number. We had complied. But I was angry at being forced to make a mockery of our programme's approach and even angrier at my inability to direct that anger at a particular individual or department. The official who had required we conform was only following instructions; it was hard to locate and therefore challenge the power over us. Indeed, I was aware that many staff in that donor agency were fully aware how the new log frame requirement distorted what programmes like ours were trying to do. Like us, these officials seemed powerless.

Yet it is not that simple. Power produces resistance as well as compliance. That experience helped create a network of individuals and organisations, the Big Push Forward, that challenged the results discourse and its artefacts. 'A first and necessary step', writes Bronwyn Davies, 'in counteracting the force of any discourse is to recognise … its capacity to become hegemonic, to saturate our very consciousness, so that it becomes the … world we see and interact with, and the common sense interpretations we put on it.' [3]

Our task was political. A subtle institutional power practice locks 'members inside and keeps outsiders outside and systematically misrepresents the reality of the situation'.[4] The public has been fed a largely positive story about the virtues and utility of the results agenda. Hence, while accounts about the more negative power dynamics of agenda have circulated over cups of coffee and glasses of beer, detailed case studies have been rare.[5] People are frightened of going public about the distortions and problems. They fear they might expose the sector to an often-sceptical press, or that they will be subjected to ridicule, or worse, put their jobs or their organizations at risk.

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[3] Bronwyn Davies 'Death to Critique and Dissent? The Policies and Practices of New Managerialism and of 'Evidence-based Practice', *Gender and Education* 15 (2003), 91-103 (p.102).

[4] Stewart Clegg, David Courpasson and Nelson Phillips *Power and Organizations* (London: Sage, 2006), p. 179.

[5] But see Tina Wallace and Fenella Porter, with Ralph Bowman (eds), *Aid, NGOs and the Realities of Women's Lives: A Perfect Storm* (Rugby:Practical Action, 2013) <u>and</u> Rosalind Eyben, Irene Guijt, Chris Roche and Cathy Shutt (eds) *The Politics of Evidence* (Rugby: Practical Action, forthcoming 2015)

Hence the Big Push Forward sought to make results a legitimate subject for public debate. We analyzed power from both a political economy and a 'power everywhere' approach. In the first, 'power' is an asset: the politics is about 'who controls the definition of a result and which kind is acceptable to whom'. This kind of power operates through the formal institutional arrangements for policy-making and implementation, such as the civil service, the legislature, local government; certain policy actors, such as ministers and parliamentarians, are visibly powerful. Power as an asset can also be less formal. Private individuals and organizations such as philanthropic foundations or academic think tanks are influencing meaning and value in development. The financial or intellectual capital they deploy gives them legitimacy in articulating and promoting the discourse.

In the history of development cooperation, financial assets have commonly been used to exert political influence. In June 2014, the Board of the Global Partnership for Education (France is a contributor) adopted a new funding model 'to have a positive leveraging effect on the development of national sector-wide policies, strategies and systems'. [6] The largest contributor, the UK, in alliance with like-minded other donors (Australia and the United States) are exercising '*power over*' to determine how the Partnership's funds are used to influence recipient government behavior. 30% of the funds will be used for ex-post payment against pre-determined results, including learning outcomes. The aim is to 'incentivize' governments to conform to a certain understanding of what is an educational result, in other words what is judged as valuable in education. At the 2014 Board meeting, the UK and its allies pushed for a much greater percentage of the allocation to be on such a payment by results (PBR) basis but others on the Board were reluctant to engage too big a proportion of the funds to what will be a bold experiment (the pilot phase was cancelled) and one that they did not fully understand. A Board member who was objecting to PBR emailed me -

> *I don't think the Board really understood the implications of this when it approved this new model – and [recipient] countries certainly were not aware of what this means in practice.*

[6] Global Partnership for Education, 'Report of the country grants and performance committee part 1: operational framework for requirements and incentives in the funding model of the global partnership for education and results- based financing pilot' (BOD/2014/05—DOC 03, May 2014) p.4

It was not just that the UK was the biggest donor. Another kind of less obvious power – the power of discourse - was also at work in this Board meeting. Despite in some cases a sense of discomfort with where it was taking them, it was difficult for most members of the Board to challenge the accepted truth of the necessity for results based management. Everyone wants results! My informant, on the other hand, was keenly aware of how the result discourse gives an instrumental meaning to education whereby children's performance against measurable learning outcomes is the yardstick for judging the value of education. He takes a different, transformational approach to education. He sees education as a process enabling children to imagine their world differently and to act to change their situation. At this meeting the politics of results was a struggle over value, including the value given to process – the means as well as the end.

The results agenda and its artefacts can have perverse effects when power determines which and whose knowledge counts. Furthermore, hierarchical ways of working limit communications and dialogue, constraining a recipient government or civil society organization from discussing with the donor about what is sensible and feasible. Bearing these points in mind, the next section examines the history of 'results' in public sector practice.

2. history of 'results'

The epistemology of 'results-based management' can be traced back to late 18th Century expansion of capitalism. Western Europe industrialised at home, colonized the rest of the world for its raw materials and invented classical economics. This last included the theory of the principal (who invests) and the agent (who manages /implements). Principal-agent theory assumes that individuals are goal-oriented in pursuit of their own interests. Hence, it follows that agents will only pursue the principal's goals when they judge it is also in their own interests. Hence, incentives are required to make the principal's goals interesting for the agent. Carrots (e.g. bonuses) and sticks (e.g. threats of dismissal) have become so normal in modern management that we easily forget how principal agent theory is just one among other theories explaining social reality and human behaviour.

As the public sector expanded in the 19th Century, principal agent theory fuelled anxiety that public officials would not deliver 'value for money' without incentives. The

British government accordingly introduced 'payment by results' (PBR) into the elementary school system whereby teachers' pay was based on the measurable results (learning outcomes) achieved by their pupils. But the perverse effects, increased administration costs of verifying the results and the damage this approach did to children's education led to PBR being discredited and abolished by the end of the century.[7] Half a century later, 'results' re-emerged in the public sector through the language of 'management by objectives' (MBO) and popularised in social democratic Sweden with a big public sector.[8] MBO was also introduced in the United States during the Democratic administration's large scale anti-poverty programmes with artefacts such as cost-benefit analysis (CBA) and risk assessment.[9]

By the 1990s 'objectives' had evolved into 'results'. Again, the impetus came from a United States Democratic administration that adopted accounting methods from the private sector.[10] 'Results' was part of a broader shift, commonly known as 'New Public Management' (NPM) that had emerged in the late 1970s. Other elements of NPM include the linking of resource allocation to performance; competition between providers of services; greater discipline and parsimony in resource use; and more general adoption of what is represented as private-sector management practices.[11] Today, NPM prevails in most OECD countries and is exported to aid-receiving countries through development agencies and international institutions like the World Bank.

Critics have argued that performance indicators, when used for control, 'are unreliable: they do not measure performance itself, distort what is measured, influence practice towards what is being measured and cause unmeasured parts to get neglected.'[12] Nevertheless, in spite of, or perhaps because of the criticism, more radical approaches

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[7] G. F. Madaus, J.P Ryan, T. Kellaghan, and P.W. Airasian, 'Payment by Results: An Analysis of a Nineteenth-Century Performance-Contracting Programme', *The Irish Journal of Education/Iris Eireannach an Oideachais,* xxi, (1987), 80-91.

[8] G. Sundstrom, 'Management by Results: Its Origin and Development in the Case of the Swedish State', *International Public Management Journal*, 9 (2006), 399-427.

[9] W.N. Espeland, (1997). 'Authority by the Numbers: Porter on Quantification, Discretion, and the Legitimation of Expertise', *Law & Social Inquiry*, 22, (1997), 1107-1133.

[10] A. Gray and B. Jenkins, 'From Public Administration to Public Management: Reassessing a Revolution?' *Public Administration,* 73, (1995), 75-99.

[11] C. Hood, 'A Public Management for all seasons', *Public Administration*, 69 (1991), 3-19.
  B. McSweeney, 'Management by Accounting', in *Accounting as Social and Institutional Practice*, ed. by A. Hopwood and P. Miller (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1994), pp.

[12] L. Elton, 'Goodhart's Law and Performance Indicators in Higher Education', *Evaluation & Research in Education* 18, (2004) 1-2, pp. 20-128 (p.121)

are being adopted for tackling the principal agent problem, including the re-introduction of Payment By Results (PBR) increasingly popular in those OECD countries where NPM was first adopted and where less rigorous systems have been tried and judged wanting. In the United States, PBR has returned again to schools. Reporting on one such scheme, the *Economist* commented: 'You are transferring from a system where the agents are (to a degree) public-spirited individuals to one that motivates agents to be self-interested'. [13]

A more radical version of PBR is government transferring to the market the responsibility for securing social policy objectives. With 'social impact bonds' the market invests in projects (such as reduction in the long term unemployed) implemented by private sector contractors. If the project succeeds in achieving the pre-determined results, the government calculates the proportion of savings made to the welfare budget through private sector contracting and pays a return on that basis to the bondholders. One of the criticisms of this model is that the intended service users/beneficiaries are not invited to contribute to the design or monitoring of such projects. [14]

3. Results in development cooperation

Following the 2002 Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development, 'results' spread widely through the international development sector. In 2003 the Joint Venture on Managing for Development Results, was set up within the DAC Working Party on Aid Effectiveness, and the Paris Declaration on Effective Aid (2005) included 'results' as one of its five pillars. Most DAC members have since developed results-based management strategies. Switzerland, for example published in 2011 a primer on results-based management (RBM) that introduced a revised log frame with a 'results chain [that] clearly shows the plausible, causal relationships among the elements' [15] and stresses the importance of baselines and key performance indicators. The Dutch Government revised its co-financing agreement with its big INGOs, obliging them to make a single global log-frame with aggregate data from the work undertaken by multiple partners in many different countries. DFID revised its log frame to include

[13] http://www.economist.com/blogs/freeexchange/2012/08/teacher-incentives

[14] D. Whitfield, 'The Payments-by-Result Road to Marketisation' in *Critical Reflections: social and criminal justice in the first year of Coalition government*, ed by A.Silvestri (London: Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, 2012)

[15] Rudolf Batliner, Ruedi Felber and Isabel Günther, *A Primer on Results-Based Management,* (Berne: State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO, 2011), p. 5

mandatory baseline numbers. In 2010, with a change in government and an even greater emphasis on results alongside the introduction of a new artefact – the 'business case' - DFID revised yet again its log frame and, like the Swiss, emphasized the results chain.[16] In a joint press release shortly before the Busan conference on development effectiveness in 2011, heads of development agencies from Canada, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, UK and USA emphasized a focus on results and greater involvement of the private sector.

From the examples used by agencies promoting the results agenda, health and education interventions appear most amenable to measurement. In 2011 DFID announced the results it aimed to deliver by 2015. These included 'To secure schooling for 11 million children – more than we educate in the UK but at 2.5% of the cost'.[17] Possibly as a consequence of criticism (including from the Big Push Forward), about DFID's self-representation as the only actor (where were the partner governments in this narrative?) DFID 's language in its annual report for 2011-2012 changed from 'securing' to 'supporting children to go to primary school'.[18]

These same agencies were meanwhile strengthening their results approach through the introduction of Payment by Results [19] that had entered the development sector in 2008 when the World Bank's Health Results Innovations Trust Fund (HRITF) was established and funded by the governments of Norway and the United Kingdom.[20] USAID has been meanwhile rolling out PBR across the world in health and family planning programming; the Global Partnership for Output-Based Aid, established in 2008 by the World Bank and DFID, is financing PBR projects in a variety of sectors and countries and is also is supporting Australia and the Asian Development Bank in developing such projects. [21] The Washington-based think tank, Centre for Global Development has actively promoted PBR or 'cash on delivery' and Anglo-Saxon governments have been its most enthusiastic proponents, as in the case of the Global Partnership for Education cited above. In June 2014 DFID published a PBR strategy

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[16] www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications1/how-to-guid-rev-log-fmwk.pdf.
[17] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/the-future-of-uk-aid
[18]http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130102161318/http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications1/departmental-report/2012/Annual-report-accounts-2011-12.pdf
[19] PBR is just one of the terms used to describe the linking of disbursement to ex-ante results. See Niels Keijzer and Heiner Janus 'Linking results-based aid and capacity development support. Conceptual and practical challenges', Bonn: *GDI Discussion Paper* (2014).
[20] www.norad.no/en/tools-and-publications/publications/evaluations/publication?key=393126
[21] www.gpoba.org/gpoba/sites/gpoba.org/files/Docs/GPOBA%20Annual%20Report%202012.pdf

paper stressing its importance for securing value for money. [22] Nevertheless development economists debate the conditions in which PBR would work well [23] although such debates are sterile in the absence of evidence about happens in practice. Thus, for example, whereas PBR is conventionally accompanied by reduced requirements for financial reporting, nevertheless DFID continues to demand high levels of financial tracking from its grantees.[24]

'Social impact bonds' have also entered the development sector as 'development impact bonds' (DIBs). [25] A scoping study, commissioned by DFID in 2012 about the application of DIBs to family planning, stressed that 'the feasibility of a DIB approach depends on creating a compelling value case for both outcome funders and investors'.[26] Only one reference is made to the need to take note of the views on value by the governments of the countries concerned, let alone the beneficiaries. Eventually, DFID launched its first DIB (in 2014) in a more bounded field, tapping into private sector investors to purchase drugs against bovine sleeping sickness.[27] Meanwhile inspired by the private sector's venture capital model, the American, British, Swedish and Australian governments have promoted 'social impact investing' materializing in the Global Innovations Fund, designed by the Centre for Global Development and launched in New York in September this year.[28]

Large accountancy companies such as KPMG who win large contracts from USAID and DFID have heavily influenced results- based programming. There has also been broader private sector involvement, including from US- based philanthro-capitalists, like the Gates Foundation as well as corporate sector actors involved in public-private

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[22] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfids-strategy-for-payment-by-results-sharpening-incentives-to-perform/payment-by-results-strategy-sharpening-incentives-to-perform

[23] Owen Barder, Rita Perakis, William Savedoff and Theodore Talbot, 'Twelve Principles of Payment by Results in the Real World' http://www.cgdev.org/blog/12-principles-payment-results-pbr-real-world-0

[24] 'How a Shift to More Institutional Donors using Contracts and Payment by Results may Affect ActionAid UK', Unpublished report prepared for Action Aid by MANGO, 2014

[25] For different views on these see http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2014/jan/02/development-impact-bonds-success-network and http://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/development-impact-bonds-and-impact-investing-genuine-impact-or-snake-oil/.

[26] 'Family Planning Development Impact Bond, Initial Scoping Report to DFID', Social Finance Limited, 2012, p. 37. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/67321/Family-Planning-Dev-Impact-Bonds-Scoping.pdf.

[27] www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-development-bonds-will-combat-global-poverty

[28] http://www.cgdev.org/blog/unga-dispatch-launch-new-global-innovation-fund

sector partnerships. Coca Cola's 5by20 programme for women's economic empowerment, for example, is co-financed by DFID. Global public-private partnerships are an increasingly significant funding model, particularly in the education and health sectors. Very substantial amounts of money are involved. Yet, the speed at which the agenda is driven forward means that, as far as I am aware, there are no completed evaluations of either the process or outcomes. As already mentioned, DFID and others were too impatient to start with PBR in the Global Partnership for Education to wait for the findings from a pilot phase.

Little systematic, as distinct from anecdotal evidence is available on the effects of the results artefacts on meanings of development and approaches to problem solving other than a major study by two British economists of a performance- incentives approach in the management of 4700 projects by the Nigerian civil service found that although incentives did not significantly reduce the level of corruption, the approach had a negative effect on civil servants' decision-making autonomy and reducing their motivation.[29] There are also some findings about peoples' differing perceptions of the effects of results based approaches, discussed in the next section.

4.   Perceptions of the effects of the results agenda

Most of the public critique of the results agenda has come from civil society organizations, development consultants and academics. Findings from an on-line survey[30] of some 150 self-selected development agencies' staff suggests that whether results-based management is experienced as largely positive or negative is contingent on a person's organizational role and on their organization's location in the aid nexus. People with M&E responsibilities shared more positive experiences than, for example programme officers, while senior staff were more positive than were technical advisors or those in middle management. However, the survey was far from comprehensive. Very few recipient governments and national NGOs responded, with even fewer from smaller civil society organizations in the South. Nevertheless, there is evidence of '*a squeezed middle*' of programme officers in the aid chain (those responsible for managing grants including in-country programmes with local partners) who try to protect front-line practitioners and partner organizations from the exigencies of the artefacts.

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[29] Management of Bureaucrats and Public Service Delivery: Evidence from the Nigerian Civil Service Imran Rasul Daniel Rogger October 2013

[30] Brendan Whitty, 'Chapter Three' in *The Politics of Evidence and Results* ed. by Rosalind Eyben, Irene Guijt, Chris Roche and Cathy Shutt (Rugby: Practical Action, forthcoming 2015).

Cynical compliance may sometimes be accompanied by secret resistance: people carry on working according to their own professional judgment, while reporting up the system in accordance with results artefacts' requirements.[31]

Australian NGO participants at a conference in Melbourne in August 2013 found they had both positive and negative experiences of the results agenda. Positive findings were that time and funding is being prioritized for monitoring and evaluation in programme cycles; furthermore the ability to show results is helpful for development agencies to demonstrate programme impacts and secure public support for development aid. Increased clarity of aims and desired outcomes was also welcomed. On the other hand, many participants felt that the scope for learning and sharing was decreasing narrowing with monitoring and evaluation frameworks that prioritized aggregated data. Moreover, prioritizing such data often brought an inability to capture, value and interpret unanticipated (but valuable) outcomes.[32]

At workshop in Berne in May 2013, Swiss Development Cooperation staff discussed the political effects of the results artefacts. They agreed that safeguarding SDC's values of supporting bottom-up empowerment and a needs-oriented approach is vital. It was also noted that -

> Staff members can be overly zealous in reporting numbers, even when neither necessary nor really informative. Thus a "number culture" should not be overly promoted. "Planned opportunism" to grasp opportunities when they arise in the project management cycle needs to be encouraged, not dismissed because they disrupt reporting. Similarly, the challenge of managing budgets according to a budget cycle must not squeeze out the time needed for reflection. Evidence based learning is important – but the emphasis needs to be on learning rather than accountability, using impact hypotheses as a base and remaining open to change. Numbers are used to communicate results – but are not the only way to do so; here SDC needs to be proactive in communicating its

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[31] Rosalind Eyben, 'Hiding Relations. The Irony of Effective Aid', *European Journal of Development Research*, 22, (2010), 382-397.
[32] http://www.acfid.asn.au/get-involved/files/results-evidence-value-for-money-practice-note

message in a frank and convincing manner.[33]

A research study of external financing on women's rights organizations in Bangladesh and Ghana found that the leadership in these organizations believed that the quality of relations between donors and grantees was most important rather than the effect of particular artefacts. Nevertheless, donor emphasis on management systems and reporting had had a positive effect on organizational strengthening and effectiveness, especially, however, when accompanied by a sense of partnership and trust within a long-term relationship between donor and grantee. In contrast, the organizations had found that when short-term and fluctuating project-related funding was combined with the pooling of donor funds and a decrease in good quality, direct relationships, the results artefacts worked to discourage grantees from designing strategies with social transformational outcomes. [34]

All these cases indicate development practitioners' concerns about how the results agenda may limit understandings of process, including adaptive learning and the importance of quality relationships. The next section takes these concerns further in considering how the drivers of best practice are generating a transactional rather than a transformational understanding of development.

5.   The drivers of 'best practice' and the influence of the results agenda on understandings of development

Three principal drivers of 'best practice' in development cooperation appear to be the political pressures to seen to be in control in a world of uncertainty and surprises; disbursement pressure and the politics of accountability; and thirdly, the sector's internal dynamics in response to the changing environment of international aid.

The *urge to be in control* leads to defining development issues as simple problems that

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[33] Jane Carter The Politics of Evidence Sharpening the poverty focus of donor development efforts – or dumbing it down? June 2013, http://www.poverty-wellbeing.net/?preview=1&langID=1&navID=11034&itemID=11034&versionID=8126&officeID=25

[34] Sohela Nazeen and Maheen Sultan, 'Mobilising for Women's Rights and the Role of Resources in Bangladesh', Synthesis Report for Pathways of Women's Empowerment, (Dhaka, BRAC Development Institute 2010).

respond to best practice solutions in which results can be easily agreed and measured. Based on his experience running USAID Andrew Natsios has argued that such projects that emphasize measureable outcomes tend to drive out projects that produce immeasurable ones. 'Crowding out of less measurable activities has in turn led to a greater emphasis on service delivery instead of institution building and policy reform as the predominant programmatic approach to development.'[35] The approach taken by USAID, like-minded donors and the global public-private partnerships has significantly influenced other actors, including aid recipient governments, United Nations agencies and international NGOs.

This is exemplified in a study that looks at the influence of two global public-private partnerships on understandings and approaches to women's health at national and local levels.[36] The authors conclude that gender equality in health is significantly undermined by these global partnerships' results-based approaches that fail to take a holistic approach and de-contextualize women's health from the political and social context that shapes their lives. The authors warn that this may lead to policy makers forgetting that women's health is fundamentally linked to women's empowerment and rights and they urge the importance of monitoring process to better understand and monitor the broader social context of health interventions.

Even a development agency subscribing to a normative human rights framework may prejudice women's empowerment if the agency focuses on time-bound and measurable outcomes and ignores context and process. Ola Abu Al Ghaib chaired a network of disabled women's groups that aimed to provide its members with the space and time to build their self-confidence as a precursor to entering into national policy spaces to claim their rights. She describes what happened when she negotiated a grant from a UN agency committed to the rights of women but that nevertheless ignored the situation of highly marginalized women and insisted that within a two year funding period the network was to organize its members into a national advocacy coalition that delivered measurable policy change. [37]

The desire for control - symptomatic of a refusal to engage with complex process in a dynamic and uncertain world - has created both elaborate performance measurement

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[35] Andrew Natsios, 'The Clash of the Counter-Bureaucracy' Centre for Global development (2010) www.cgdev.org/content/publications/detail/1424271 (2010: 61).

[36] Jasmine Gideon and Fenella Porter, 'Unpacking Women's Health in Public-Private Partnerships. A return to instrumentalism in development policy and practice?' *Wider Working Paper* 2014/009 (2014)

[37] Ola Abu Al Ghaib, 'Chapter Eight' in *The Politics of Evidence and Results* ed. by Rosalind Eyben, Irene Guijt, Chris Roche and Cathy Shutt (Rugby: Practical Action, forthcoming 2015).

systems and an emphasis on quick deliverables, as in the case just cited. Paul Farmer, a professor of global health at Harvard, has pointed out how this mind set may have contributed to the Ebola epidemic through a refusal to take a holistic, long term approach to building health systems -

> I've been asked more than once what the formula for effective action against Ebola might be. It's often those reluctant to invest in a comprehensive model of prevention and care for the poor who ask for ready-made solutions. What's the 'model' or 'the minimum basic package'? What are the metrics to evaluate 'cost-effectiveness?' The desire for simple solutions and for proof of a high 'return on investment' will be encountered by anyone aiming to deliver comprehensive services....Anyone whose metrics or proof are judged wanting is likely to receive a cool reception.[38]

Through 'benchmarking', 'best practice' carries the promise that there is an optimum way to do things that delivers best value for money. Modeled on corporate sector practices, this is deliberately apolitical designed to eschew any ideological commitment (which of course does not preclude such best practice being shaped by tacit values and ideology).

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[38] Paul Farmer, 'Diary' *London Review of Books* 36, 20, (20 October 2014) p.38

The *need to demonstrate accountability* to domestic constituencies in the OECD countries that provide the bulk of grant-based development finance has made Value for Money a key element in the results discourse. VfM is about optimising economy, efficiency and effectiveness of resources. The table on the next page elaborated by Cathy Shutt illustrates how VfM in its current discursive form reflects a transactional (managerial and technical) as opposed to a transformational (political and power sensitive) approach.[39]

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[39] Cathy Shutt, 'Chapter Four' in *The Politics of Evidence and Results* ed. by Rosalind Eyben, Irene Guijt, Chris Roche and Cathy Shutt (Rugby: Practical Action, forthcoming 2015).

Transactional and transformational differences relevant to VfM[40]

Issue	Transactional development	Transformational development
What aid is, who owns it and whose values count.	An investment by donors and taxpayers who set standards of what they consider good value using market prices as units of value.	Part of a redistributive social justice project that incorporates valuation systems that recognize the importance of social relationships.
What aid is trying to achieve.	Short-term development results often linked to donor government strategic, political and commercial interests.	Longer term changes in power relations in support of social justice e.g. between different groups of citizens, between governments and citizens, between donors and citizens.
Who are the main learners and users of VfM evidence and analysis	Donors and international policy makers	Recipient governments and citizens
Nature of aid relationships	Contractual service delivery	Solidarity partnerships
Accountability priority	Taxpayers and donor governments	Recipient governments and citizens
What we know about outcomes and contributions to these	Everything is knowable provided we find the right methodologies.	Some things are unknowable and emergent.
Ability to use VfM analysis objectively and neutrally	It is possible to overcome methodological problems and political interests and make neutral decisions.	Decisions are always political and shaped by subjective interests.
Appropriate tools for VfM analysis	Cost efficiency, effectiveness and benefit analyses	Social return on investment analysis or multiple criteria decision making analysis that incorporate subjectivities of decision makers and non-monetisable values
Appropriateness of using a neo-classical economic concept like efficiency	Efficiency is unproblematic and encourages healthy competition that produces benefits in terms of more people reached.	Efforts to increase efficiency can increase inequity as less powerful suppliers/partners costs likely to be squeezed most.

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[40] Shutt op.cit.

During her interviews for a detailed qualitative, historical study of Swedish development cooperation, [41] Sida staff told Janet Vähämäki, that currently development projects are designed as if they had a single bottom line of maximising profits for shareholders (i.e. Swedish taxpayers). Staff felt that the increasing emphasis on results and reporting systems had made them lose sight of Sida's purpose: 'Results, transparency and accountability have become the primary reform objective, prioritized above content themes, such as gender and poverty reduction.' [42]

Results-reporting is attractive for demonstrating effectiveness to an audience with little knowledge of the multi-stakeholder power dynamics of even the simplest project. Hence, in 2013 Oxfam was telling its supporters that it tackled the root causes of poverty with 'simple, smart solutions'. The reality of development work has become ever more distant from what its supporters are told about it. The misrepresentation to Swedish citizens of how development works in practice led five of Sida's Department Heads to write to the Minister for Development Cooperation about difficulties and complexity of applying results based management -

> We are concerned about the image that you [the Minister] give of Swedish development assistance in articles and interviews in the media. It is not based on the results that development cooperation actually achieves. It does not describe the complex reality of managing for results in development cooperation.[43]

The *sector's internal dynamics* is the third driver of a technical and self-declaredly results agenda. Despite changes in the domestic political climate, de-politicisation has enabled official agencies and NGOs to preserve their access to funds. Nevertheless, in a time of austerity, aid budgets been subjected to jealous scrutiny from other Departments, along with intense parliamentary and media interest, obliging development agencies to further exaggerate their claims to deliver results. Donors like USAID, Australian Aid and DFID make themselves excessively visible through branding, putting their logos on everything they provide to demonstrate the significance of their aid to their domestic audiences to whom they see themselves

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[41] Janet Vähämäki, 'Chapter Seven', in *The Politics of Evidence and Results* ed. by Rosalind Eyben, Irene Guijt, Chris Roche and Cathy Shutt (Rugby: Practical Action, forthcoming 2015).
[42] Vähämäki, op.cit.
[43] Vähämäki, op.cit.

primarily accountable. Results-based management requires *attribution* rather than *contribution.* In 2012 DFID claimed to the British public that it had secured 'schooling for 11 million children – more than we educate in the UK but at 2.5% of the cost'. Everyone else involved in helping those 11 million children get to school had disappeared from the narrative. Meanwhile, multilateral agencies, competing for funds from donor governments find themselves obliged to adopt the results paradigm. In 2011, a senior manager in a large United Nations agency phoned to talk about his frustrations with the agency's donor governments -

> We negotiated for several months with [a government funder] and they themselves knew it was ridiculous what they were asking for but they said it was political. In the end it comes down to money and for X millions of dollars we had to agree.

Traditional aid agencies, both official and non-governmental also fear increased competition from private foundations and individual charitable giving. Kharas and Rogerson argue that should social welfare programmes financed and implemented by private sector philanthropy and social impact investing were proved to deliver better VfM than official aid agencies, the latter would lose credibility and budgets. [44] This perceived risk encourages official aid agencies to demonstrate they can competitively deliver VfM, disregarding issues of local ownership and sustainability or simply join forces with the private sector.

Conclusion

The results agenda is moving very fast and it is not clear when it will run out of steam. With a recent change in government in Sweden, it appears that one of the discourse's earliest protagonists is shifting away from 'results' as quantifiable deliverables. [45] Meanwhile, those promoting the discourse are acting on faith rather than evidence, devising and promoting new artefacts and approaches urging their adoption even before they have been piloted. At the Mexico global partnership conference (April 2014) to

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[44] Homi Kharas and Andrew Rogerson, 'Horizon 2025: Creative Destruction in the Aid Industry', *ODI Research Report* (Overseas Development Institute, 2012).
[45] Personal communication from Janet Vähämäki, 28 October, 2014.

follow up the Busan High Level Forum all agreed that 'results' were important. Who could say they were not? Nevertheless, an ECOSOC document published in the run up to the Mexico conference noted that the current approach of some DAC actors to a results orientation 'are considered narrow and inadequate' by others who have developed their own approaches to delivering effective assistance to the poor'.[46] South-South Cooperation was noted as an important case in point.

At the same time, even in contexts where 'results' appear to be hegemonic, creative adaptation is maintaining or reclaiming transformative meanings of development. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, for example, has adopted the language of results-based management to improve its evaluation and planning capabilities while firmly rejecting a transactional approach to development that normally accompanies the discourse. And in the UK, some British NGOs enabled by relationships with 'politically savvy DFID staff equally frustrated with DFID's focus on economy and efficiency' are succeeding in interpreting value for money in ways consistent with transformational development. Nevertheless, it is only some grantees that have succeeded thus. As Cathy Shutt observes, the difficult challenge for those supporting transformational development is to not dilute their efforts and ideas of what counts as evidence of change.[47]

DFID's 2014 policy paper on Payment by Results recognizes that there is no evaluation evidence to date about the effects of such an approach. Other donors would be wise to wait for such findings before following DFID and its allies in taking an enthusiastic leap into the dark. At the same time, development agencies that have traditionally taken a more transformative approach to development, such as Switzerland, might well want to consider the risks of over-enthusiastically implementing even the more conventional aspects of the results agenda.

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[46] UNDESA, 'Accountable and effective development cooperation in a post-2015 era.
Background Study 1. Quality of Development Cooperation: Accountability, Impact and Results' UNDESA and BMZ (April 2014).
[47] Shutt, op.cit.

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