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Centre of African Studies
University of Copenhagen

Development Knowledge and the Global Policy Agenda.

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Whose Policy?

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Professor of International and Comparative
Education & Director of the Centre of African Studies

University of Edinburgh

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Introduction[1]

Arguably, aid or development co-operation have always had an intimate connection with knowledge. From the time of the Truman Inaugural in January 1949, with its emphasis on humanity for the first time having the knowledge and skill to relieve the suffering of half of the world's population, (Rist 1997:71; King 2002) to the present day with agencies identifying knowledge as the key driver in development (e.g. World Bank 2002), knowledge has been central to the aid enterprise. Knowledge has had many different faces in development co-operation, from technical assistance in the South, to technical co-operation training awards in the North, and from despatch of experts, to support of research institutions and networks in the South. The aid modalities have changed a good deal in the last fifty and more years, and especially at the beginning of the 1990s from the agencies' own projects to support of appropriate national policies; and the language has changed to reflect this, with less emphasis now on Northern knowledge transfer and more on joint knowledge and capacity development with the South. But knowledge asymmetries remain one of the key differences between the developing and industrialised worlds, and the recent language of the digital divide just serves to reinforce the divisions in access to higher education, and the stark contrasts in research funding, patents, and numbers of scientists that were already well-known (World Bank 2002).

The present paper concerns one particular aspect of the development community's continuing preoccupation with knowledge, and that is the role of knowledge in the construction of agency policy, and beyond that

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[1] The ideas in this paper have profited from discussions with colleagues and staff in JICA in Tokyo and in Swedish Sida in February 2004, in Wilton Park, UK in early March, and in the Centre of African Studies, Copenhagen in late March 2004.

in the construction of what we term the global development agenda. As bilateral and multilateral donors have increasingly, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, come to see themselves as 'knowledge agencies' and as institutions involved in 'knowledge-based aid' (King 2000), so it becomes important to identify the sources of these claims, and to examine the role of knowledge in the global development agenda. In terms of the older debate about how external research could influence agency policy, it may well appear that the new knowledge discourse conceptualises a great deal of knowledge as being already embedded within agencies. Hence the new knowledge challenge for agencies is sometimes presented as the need for them to capture more effectively and explicitly what they already, in some sense, know (King 2000). In other words, the knowledge sources for their development policies are felt to be potentially within agencies or at least within their reach. James Wolfensohn expressed this famously in the autumn 1996 Annual Meetings Address in the World Bank:

> We have been in the business of researching and disseminating the lessons of development for a long time. But the revolution in information technology increased the potential value of these efforts by vastly extending their reach. To capture this potential, we need to invest in the necessary systems, in Washington and worldwide, that will enhance our ability to gather development information and experience, and share it with our clients. We need to become, in effect, the Knowledge Bank (Wolfensohn 1996: 7).

We shall examine, accordingly, the role of knowledge in the formation of agency agendas, including where appropriate in the UN family, and particularly in the elaboration of what we are calling the global

development agenda. In the process we shall question whether in many of the economically weaker states, these global priorities and initiatives have begun to replace some of their essential national planning cycles. It will be somewhat paradoxical if this does appear to be the case since today, several donors – but most notably Japan – emphasise the crucial importance of self-reliance in development policy at the recipient country level (King and McGrath 2004: pp. 156-159). This notion suggests not only that the recipient government should own the aid agenda and thus be in the driver's seat – a grossly over-used current aid metaphor – but also, and more rarely, that the country should be able to make a substantial contribution towards the financing of the reform agenda, and to its longer term sustainability. In other words, ownership should imply a serious degree of responsibility for implementing and maintaining the agenda.

We shall illustrate this interplay of agency knowledge, country ownership and financing with examples drawn from the global reform agenda for education, but the donor modalities which have facilitated its development and implementation are common to the delivery of aid in other sectors. While the main argument concerns the country level, there may well be parallels with the setting of research priorities in higher education in institutions that are highly dependent on external financing.

A. The Emergence of the Global Development Agenda, 1990-2000

The Role of the World Conferences in Global Agenda-setting

With the elimination of the bi-polar world in 1989, there followed a decade of World Conferences, with education (Jomtien 1990), the rights

of the child (New York 1990), environment (Rio 1992), human rights (Vienna 1993), population (Cairo 1994), social development (Copenhagen 1995), women (Beijing 1995). The impact and visibility of these conferences in the first half of the 1990s were greatly increased by the decision of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee to base their new development strategy – *Shaping the 21*st *Century: the Contribution of Development Co-operation* (OECD/DAC 1996) - on a selection of their main themes. Selection is used advisedly since what appeared in the DAC's six International Development Targets (IDTs) was very much a sub-set of what had actually been proposed by the conferences. Thus, in place of the expanded and somewhat tentative vision of basic education laid out in Jomtien,[2] the DAC version focused in on just two of the most easily quantifiable education targets – universal primary education (UPE) by 2015, and the elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005.[3]

In terms of the ways that the World Conferences themselves translated knowledge into policy, and this in turn was reified by the OECD/DAC process, a good deal more work would need to be done to cover the origins of all six IDTs. But as far as the World Conference on Education for All was concerned, there can be little doubt that it was the World Bank's much earlier research on the crucially important developmental impact of primary schooling that was one of the main themes that found reinforcement in Jomtien.[4] After all, at the World Conference there was a

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[2] 'Countries may wish to set their own targets for the 1990s in terms of the following proposed dimensions…'(*WCEFA, Framework for Action*, 3)
[3] How gender disparity in the basic cycles of education could be realistically dealt with 10 years before universal primary education remains a mystery.
[4] Of course World Conferences have become a location for a huge number of special interest groups anxious to try and influence their final agenda. This particular World Conference possibly broke new ground by including a number of key individuals from both North and South within its International Steering Committee, by organising a whole series of regional conferences prior to the main Conference, and by making it mandatory for the official country delegations to include national NGOs.

near-to-final draft of the Bank's new primary education policy available, and that made the research explicit that was merely asserted and taken for granted in the *World Declaration* and *Framework for Action* at Jomtien:

> Primary education has direct and positive effects on earnings, farm productivity, and human fertility, as well as intergenerational effects on child health, nutrition, and education. In considering the effects of education on economic productivity, a wide number of studies conclude that investments in primary education yield returns that are typically well above the opportunity costs of capital (World Bank 1990: 10).

This process whereby a series of World Bank research studies that were originally country and context specific (e.g. Lockheed et al. 1980) become generalised and eventually become so widely disseminated that they no longer need to be sourced to particular countries and research environments is certainly evident in the history of World Bank findings on the multiple developmental aspects of primary education.[5]   Equally, although the World Conference covered multiple facets of basic education – from early childhood education and adult literacy to primary schooling and skills development, it was already clear even before the Conference was over that its two most influential agency sponsors, the World Bank and UNICEF, had made public that they would principally be

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[5] For an early synthesis, see Colclough 1980, and King 1991. For an example of the influence of this World Bank research without explicit references in the text, see ODA 1992. The durability of this body of work is attested by its inclusion in the lead chapter of the *EFA Global Monitoring Report* which is entitled 'Education for all is development' (UNESCO 2002).

supporting primary schooling (King 1990, 16-17; Colclough and Lewin 1993).[6]

This narrowing of original Jomtien agenda of Education for All (EFA) to Schooling for All (SFA) was one of the first steps in the donor determination of the global education agenda. It is not difficult to see how primary education for all children became a more compelling aid objective than adult literacy, early childhood education or nonformal skills development – not to mention post-primary education or tertiary. Access to and completion of primary education – especially by girls – was rapidly to become the core element of the external agenda on education. Primary education was apparently more measurable than nonformal skills development and adult literacy, and it coincided with an increasingly powerful global campaign by NGOs to secure the rights of all children to be in schools (Oxfam 1999). Whether the prioritising of schooling and of girls' schooling in particular was due to the apparently powerful World Bank research evidence or to the fact that universal primary education could be made a more compelling time-bound target than the other elements of basic education is not yet clear.[7]

But the other crucial element which would recur in the 1996 OECD/DAC meeting and also in the 10 year follow-up to Jomtien, held in Dakar, was the notion that the international development community would stand ready to support those poorer countries that could not reach the agreed goals. These pledges were not restricted to primary education, but they were most explicit about the commitment to support this goal of UPE:

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[6] UNICEF had supported Colclough and Lewin's work, a first draft of which was available at Jomtien.

[7] The fact that Jomtien adopted a target for universal access to, and completion of, primary education, by the year 2000 was principally due to the personal intervention in Jomtien of the then Executive Director of UNICEF, Jim Grant. Several countries with large out of school populations were very reluctant to agree to this.

The provision of universal primary education in the economically poorer countries

International funding agencies should consider negotiating arrangements to provide long-term support, on a case-by-case basis, to help countries move toward universal primary education according to their timetable. The external agencies should examine current assistance practices in order to find ways of effectively assisting basic education programmes which do not require capital-and technology-intensive assistance, but often need longer-term budgetary support (WCEFA, Framework, 1990 17-18).

There, the words were out in the open – 'longer-term budgetary support' to help the poorest countries reach SFA. Thus, at the very time, as we have mentioned above, that donors were allegedly beginning to retreat from 'their' projects and move towards policies and programmes 'owned' by their partners in the South, the Northern agency discourse was laying down what those policies should consist of. Equally, the emphasis on the ownership and responsibility of the South for their own priority-setting coincided with a new imperative that the North should assist the weakest countries in particular sub-sectors through budget support. So, along with the new ideas about national capacity, sustainability, autonomy and self-reliance there was appearing a rather different logic about the poorest countries receiving substantial amounts of external funding in order to reach the key Jomtien goal (of the agencies) of schooling for all. In 10 to 15 years' time, direct budget support would be even more salient.

What was not made clear in Jomtien was the crucially important relationship between national financial capacity to provide schooling for all and the obligations upon donors and the world community to make

this possible, especially in the poorest countries. It was not clear whether external aid would be needed just to speed up a process that the country could then take over; or – very different – was it being suggested by the use of phrases such as 'long-term' and 'budgetary support' that there were some countries which would not be able to achieve SFA, and which would be on the donor books for the foreseeable future? We shall return to this tension between national autonomy and financial sustainability on the one hand and the implementation of the global agenda with its overtones of aid dependency – if its targets are to be met – on the other.

National Self-reliance and the International Development Targets (1996)

By the mid-1990s, the global agenda on education had been somewhat redefined within the framework of the International Development Targets (IDTs) of the OECD/DAC's *Shaping the 21st century* (OECD/DAC 1996). The IDTs reinforce the narrowing of the education agenda that had already become evident in Jomtien and they focus on just two aspects of education: universal primary education by 2015 and the elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005. Realistically, the UPE target is re-set 15 years later than the Jomtien goal of 2000, but, illogically, the goal for the elimination of gender disparities in education is set for 2005. The wider set of four other economic, social and environmental targets are all time-bound for the identical date, 2015.

But more important for our purpose here, the OECD/DAC Report presents itself as an exercise in the 'lessons learned' about what works in development co-operation (ibid. 2). What takes place in this synthesising of research about development success and failure into a

concise policy document is very revealing for our pursuit of what happens to knowledge in the process of international policy-making. Intriguingly, in terms of the donor discourse, this short Report makes it absolutely clear, from the record of 50 years of aid, that 'the efforts of countries and societies to help themselves have been the main ingredients in their success' (ibid. 1). Development assistance has been only a complementary factor. The argument is all about countries and their peoples being 'ultimately responsible for their own development' (ibid. 14), about 'locally-owned country development strategies and targets' (ibid. 14), about development only being possible 'if developing countries drive the action, with full participation by all of their societies' stakeholders' (ibid. 11).

And yet, the Report can be interpreted very differently. It is not just the title that suggests that the DAC donors see themselves as playing a key role in 'shaping the 21st century'. But the whole process of identifying these particular six targets, and setting them within a new aid approach that would be much less project-based, and more to do with donor co-ordination and harmonisation, suggests that the donors continue to have a crucial part in the IDT strategy.

As happens so often in the setting of international policy objectives, the more measurable, quantitative goals have taken precedence over the other factors that the OECD/DAC Report also emphasised very strongly. Indeed, the Report had stressed the need for a highly context-dependent approach which gives a very different feel from the one-size-fits-all shape of the IDTs: '…these goals must be pursued country by country through individual approaches that reflect local conditions and locally-owned strategies' (ibid. 2). It argued, in addition, that there were a whole series of 'qualitative factors' that were 'essential to the attainment of these

measurable goals' (ibid. 2).   These included capacity development for democratic governance, human rights and the rule of law.

These critical qualifications of the quantitative targets get completely side-lined in the presentation of the new 'global development partnership effort' around the six 'realisable' goals (ibid.2).   OECD/DAC's concern to have just a limited number of indicators of success by which their efforts could be judged removed these necessary preconditions, and distanced the whole exercise from the complex country priorities of the developing world.   The global development agenda essentially gets fashioned in Paris.

Yet, side by side with the rhetoric of national self-reliance and country ownership goes a vision of partnership that has the donors deeply involved, potentially, in the economies of their Southern partners.   Here is a very powerful expression of just that:

> One way to reinforce locally-owned strategies may be for donors increasingly to finance those aspects of the strategy calling for public expenditure through the budget of the developing country. This approach is being tested in a number of pilot efforts with a view to ensuring both effectiveness and accountability by the developing country (OECD/DAC 1996: 15).

Interestingly, this expression is not restricted to the poorest developing countries.   Quite frequently in the Report, and reminding us of the Jomtien Declaration, is the view that there are many countries where longer term concessional aid will need to be the flip-side of national self-help.

We are left with a paradox in *Shaping the 21st Century* – that it is one of the main expressions of the necessary policy self-reliance of developing countries. And yet it is also one of the clearest expressions of a set of donor-driven and donor-selected policies, strategies and targets that have been agreed by the OECD member states on behalf of the developing world.

Within a little more than a year of its publication, the new UK Labour government had made them the centrepiece of its *White Paper on International Development* (DFID 1997) and by December 2000, Clare Short, the then International Development Secretary, was able to claim that there was an unprecedented consensus across the UN system, the IMF, Regional Development Banks, the G8 and the OECD – that the achievement of the Targets should be the focus of their joint endeavours (Short 2000: 7). Interestingly, there was no reference to their being owned by the South.

Before leaving the IDTs, it may be worth illustrating how Britain's Department for International Development (DFID) which, arguably, took the IDTs more seriously than other agencies,[8] actually worked out a series of Target Strategy Papers (TSPs) that would allow it – and the wider development community – to be judged against the delivery of these Targets. Across these Strategy Papers the use of knowledge and research is illuminating. We have reviewed whose knowledge and research were used to support the Targets, and have reached the following conclusion – first about the Education paper, and then more generally across the TSPs:

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[8] See, however, JICA 1998.

Here the notion appears to be very much one of telling Southern governments what 'international best practice' says on issues that DFID has already identified as central to the education policy debate. There is no place in this vision for Southern knowledge or for issues of context.   Across the TSPs, Southern knowledge deficits are far more in evidence than concerns about the development of Southern knowledge economies or societies (King and McGrath 2004: 102).[9]

Dakar (2000) Reinforces the Financial Commitment to the Education Targets

In April 2000, the world community concerned with EFA reconvened, in Dakar, to examine a decade of attempted implementation of the Jomtien agenda. Two issues are pertinent for our current concerns with knowledge, policy and finance.   First, the collective consensus on education goals went back to the expanded Jomtien Declaration with its six goals and not just the two selected OECD/DAC education targets. In so doing, it would appear to have been little influenced by the huge amount of evaluative data produced for Dakar by the developing world. But, more important, the financing commitment of the international community went beyond what was stated in Jomtien. It was no longer just some or the poorest countries that were mentioned. The famous Dakar pledge on EFA made it clear that there were a substantial number of countries that were potentially involved:

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[9] Although 'the principle of shared knowledge' as a key element in development partnerships has been in DFID's policy since 1997 (DFID 1997: 48), the many organisational changes in DFID's research architecture have made it difficult to see how knowledge from the South has contributed to DFID's overall and sectoral policies.

The international community acknowledges that many countries currently lack the resources to achieve education for all *within an acceptable time-frame*. New financial resources, preferably in the form of grants and concessional assistance, must therefore be mobilised by bilateral and multilateral funding agencies, including the World Bank and regional development banks, and the private sector. *We affirm that no countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by a lack of resources* (World Education Forum, 2000: 9, emphasis added).

For our purpose, a clear linkage had been laid down between the so-called global agenda for education and the future pattern of donor funding. But what was not said in Dakar was anything about the time-frame over which such aid would be made available, or anything about the possible trade-offs between reaching the international goals and increased aid dependency. Nor was there any evidence readily available in the *Framework* that would give any sense of the existing aid dependency of developing countries, at a point immediately before the famous pledge was enunciated. But arguably this could have been important if there had been a genuine concern to balance self-reliance, sustainability and aid dependence.

Millennium Development Goals (2000) as the ultimate external vision of development

By the time, a few months after Dakar, at the September 2000 Millennium Summit, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were elaborated and agreed, a further part of the international architecture of development had been put in place. With the complexity of the now

eight MDGs, rather than six IDTs, and their associated 18 targets and 48 indicators, it is not at all clear how this international architecture relates to the much proclaimed importance of national planning, national priorities or country ownership.[10] Now that there is also a Millennium Project, and a three year research process in place to demonstrate how all countries will be able to reach the MDGs, we seem to have moved a long way from the tentativeness of Jomtien, or from the much earlier and highly differentiated regional strategies of the great UNESCO conferences in Karachi, Addis Ababa and Santiago (*IJED* 1981). In some situations, e.g. DFID and the UK, the MDGs have actually become the centrepiece of their development policy, and, in terms of public accountability, DFID has declared it will be judged by its contribution towards the achievement of these Goals.

When the minimalist target-setting of the MDGs – with their same time-lines for all countries, rich and poor - is compared with the holistic and necessarily sector-wide planning of Ministries of Health, Education, Industry etc, it would be surprising if some countries did not identify the MDGs as the donors' agenda rather than their own.[11] What is intriguing is that donors seem able to combine a discourse that suggests their aid policy is to support country priorities with a conviction that the MDGs should be supported. Here is a not untypical example from Danida:

> Development co-operation must support the national policies for poverty reduction on the basis of partnership. Through a series of UN conferences international agreement has been reached on the following major goals for poverty reduction: [a statement of the 8

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[10] For an extended critique of international targeting of education, see *NORRAG NEWS* No. 33.
[11] It is said that the acronyms, IDTs and MDGs, are very little known or used in many developing countries.

MDGs]….These are ambitious goals and their fulfilment will require a comprehensive international effort. Denmark subscribes to these goals (Danida 2000: 22-23).

This section has examined the way that particular research on Education executed within the World Bank, and principally by economists, translated into a key segment of the World's global agenda for education. It might be possible to argue that some of the other IDTs or MDGs are also supported by an original World Bank research base.[12] More widely, it could be argued that the salience of key concepts such as the informal sector in international policy agendas owe their position to agency-commissioned rather than academic research (King 1991; Boas and McNeill 2004).[13]

B. The New Aid Agenda and the New Aid Modalities

Having sketched one version of the way that research knowledge and convictions about primary education and the schooling of girls became a key part of the global development agenda - to the exclusion of even agency research about skills development or higher education[14] – we would want to argue that these new development priorities were then reinforced by changes in aid modalities. Arguably, this has led to the new agenda of the MDGs having a potentially greater impact, especially in

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[12] For instance ,the IDT on reducing infant mortality and maternal mortality could also be associated with World Bank research on the developmental impact of female education (Cochrane 1986).

[13] Though Keith Hart (1973) is routinely credited with the first use of the term 'informal sector' there can be little doubt that it was the further analysis of the concept by the ILO's World Employment Programme that gave the informal sector its international visibility, and also restricted its relevance to the urban rather than to rural areas (Palmer 2004).

[14] The privileging of primary education through the 1990s took place despite the appearance of research-based policy papers by the World Bank on skills development and on higher education (World Bank 1991; 1994).

the economically weaker countries, than might have been the case in earlier years. These new modalities have begun to work their way through several donor agencies during the 1990s, and they have latterly been affected by a knowledge revolution within the agencies themselves. Interestingly, it has been suggested that the new approaches are more likely to build ownership, capacity and self-reliance in the South.

These aid delivery mechanisms are often presented as moving agencies away from the multiple disadvantages of project approaches. These latter have often been said to have resulted in unsustainable project enclaves where the aid initiatives were protected from the mainline ministries by project implementation units, and frequently staffed by former ministry personnel now on higher salaries. By contrast, the new sector-wide approach (SWAP) was thought to be able to co-ordinate a whole range of donor moneys around an agreed set of nationally owned policies for a particular sector such as health or education. Similarly, direct budget support (DBS) has been seen to be moving aid money away from projects and technical assistance. For example, the UK's 2000 *White Paper on International Development*, which encouraged 'nationally owned poverty reduction strategies', committed the government, where circumstances were right, to 'moving towards providing financial support directly to recipient government budgets using their own systems' (DFID 2000a: 93).

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) has been the most recent part of the new aid architecture to be required for the poorer countries of the world. Taken as a whole, these new approaches demand much greater ownership of the policy process than heretofore. They are almost certainly an improvement upon the myriad of unco-ordinated projects, when they are adopted by a government which, however poor,

has elaborated a strongly focused development policy. But the challenge is precisely that in so many of the poorer countries which are the very candidates for these new approaches, the national policy terrain has been eroded by a combination of low salaries, brain drain, and decades of orientation to external donor priorities.   In these circumstances, the very complexity and co-ordination requirements of the new ways of doing aid almost certainly end up being more invasive than the older project approaches, and allow donors to come closer to the heart of governments' financial planning and decision-making.   In this sense, these mechanisms may now be substituting for national planning processes, since they have indeed become synonymous with the national planning activity.

Here, then, is the link to the new aid agenda just described: that for the basket-funding requirements from many donors of massive programmes like free primary education in several of the countries of Eastern Africa, these new ways offer a vehicle to move very large amounts of external money.   This is not to suggest country complicity in proposing fee-free primary education. But such an initiative, which may involve 2-3 million new entrants to schools, and tens of thousands of teachers, and massive needs for textbooks and buildings, is exactly the priority which is now on many donors' agendas, thanks to the IDT/MDG process.   Securing co-ordinated donor support for secondary, technical or higher education would be hugely more difficult. Yet what has been learned in research over the last 40 years about the successful implementation of large-scale reform projects in education seems not to be being applied widely in the adoption of these new modalities (Smith 2003).

The end of self-reliance and the emergence of the world's new 'welfare states'?

Before looking at how the so-called knowledge revolution in agencies has connected with these trends, it may be worth noting what has, arguably, been happening to our other theme of country ownership and national self-reliance in the face of the growing international donor consensus over the contents of the development agenda. In the sphere of education, this connects particularly to the Dakar pledge that 'no countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by a lack of resources' (World Education Forum 2000: 9).

So far from these new modalities coinciding with greater national ownership, what appears to have been developing is a significant number of countries that have become what we may term 'welfare states'. Not welfare state in the usual sense - of a state that has taken responsibility for the health, education and even living allowance for all its people – however poor. But rather a state that is dependent on welfare from the world community for years to come.

Whatever the precise contribution of the newer or older aid modalities to this dependency, it seems to be agreed that there are a substantial number of countries – many of them in Sub-Saharan Africa – where external aid is running at between 40 and 50% of the government's entire recurrent budget. It is hard to be sure of the figures here as some aid money is allocated to the development budget even when it is recurrent. We can be fairly certain, however, that for instance in Zambia the overall contribution of donors to its recurrent budget is 45%. And of the total budget of the Government of Zambia, 17% is being allocated to

education, of which about 60% is provided by external actors.[15] Meanwhile, Uganda is said to be receiving over 50% of its recurrent budget from outside sources, and Mozambique is receiving at least 40% from external funding. In addition, many of the Francophone African countries are said to be highly aid dependent.[16]

One current question, however, might be whether the much clearer focus of the world's development agenda on the IDTs and then MDGs has encouraged a greater readiness in certain agencies to use the new modalities to put more money directly into the national budget as opposed to in self-standing projects. But an equally compelling question is whether the target-focus of much aid may produce a situation where it is unclear what happens when the targets – e.g. in health or education – are actually reached. What does it signify to reach universal primary education – or any of the other targets - by 2015, but to do so with 60% dependency on external funding?

At a time when ownership, autonomy and self-reliance are on the lips of many agencies which help Africa, it may be worth looking at the scale of this help. What is not clear is whether the focusing of the external aid much more narrowly on particular targets and goals has actually increased the extent of aid dependency. There are just some hints that this may be the case, as a series of initiatives and 'flagship programmes' target different dimensions of the millennium goals in particular countries. For instance, in the first *EFA Global Monitoring Report* it is noted of the Fast Track Initiative ([FTI] (which for a set of 18 core countries stipulates a set of key policy and financing norms against which their EFA plans may be evaluated and costed.) that:

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[15] I am indebted to Jan Waltmans of the Netherlands Foreign Ministry for this information.
[16] See also *World Development Report 2004* ch.11, and 260-261.

…there is an obvious risk that the higher levels of external support entailed by FTI will increase aid dependence, as the extent of national ownership of plans and policies formulated via the PRSP instrument remains uncertain (UNESCO 2002: 177).

It may also be the case that compared to the separate financing of a whole series of individual aid projects, the sheer scale of what is needed to achieve EFA, and the availability of SWAPs and Direct Budget Support as new modalities to move larger amounts of money may encourage both donors and recipients to do just that.

A very tentative conclusion about the conjunction of a global aid agenda with new ways to deliver aid is that, for all the rhetoric about country ownership and autonomy, aid dependency may actually have increased. It would be difficult without detailed work at the national level to be clear precisely how the new aid architecture intersects with what remains of national planning processes in the economically weaker states. But it seems just possible that with the setting of a single set of targets for the whole developing world, individual countries may well decide to take on greater dependency or indebtedness in order to be seen to be 'on target'. As far as the specifically education goals were concerned, the *EFA Global Monitoring Report* of 2002 offered, for all individual countries, 'an interim answer to the question as to whether the world was on track to achieve Education for All (EFA) in 2015' (UNESCO 2002: 12). For the no less than 71 countries judged to be at risk of missing one or more of the quantitative goals, there could well be temptations to take on greater commitments than are economically sustainable. Countries that decide on such a route may turn out eventually to be in the very position that Ellerman so eloquently analyses:

Conventional development assistance in Africa typically tries to transplant a "best practice" backed up by conditionalities on policy-based lending or aid to motivate the country to implement the best-practice recipes. Yet, this policy reform process is designed to promote neither active learning nor lasting institutional change…..The substantial external incentives may temporarily overpower the springs of action that are native to the institutional matrix of the country, but that will probably not induce any lasting institutional reforms (Ellerman 2004: 10).

In this extended case study of the role of research in education in the construction of the global development agenda, it seems clear that it was agency-commissioned research that played the key initial and subsequent roles in the formulation and monitoring of a part of the world agenda. There is little or no evidence of research from the South having played a part.

There may be a parallel to this lack of local influence and autonomy at the institutional level also, - in the tertiary education systems of highly economically dependent countries. In higher education environments where the bulk of the development budget as well as almost all moneys for research are sourced externally, and predominantly from the development assistance community, there is a conspicuous absence of longer term basic research, and a predominance, instead, of research and consultancy associated with the agency policy concerns (Court 1983; World Bank 2002).

C. Knowledge Generation and Policy in the Era of the Knowledge Agency

Knowledge management and sharing within agencies

We anticipated at the outset of this paper that the era of the knowledge revolution within development agencies might not substantially alter the role of agency-commissioned research and agency knowledge in the construction of international policy. Indeed, as the new ideas about multilateral and bilateral bodies becoming knowledge agencies and learning organisations, and being involved with knowledge-based aid began to circulate from the late 1990s, it was plain that they were sourced very much from the corporate sector in North America and in Europe. There was, accordingly, a powerful tendency for the emphasis to be on the capture, synthesis and more cost-effective utilisation of the agencies' enormous existing knowledge bases rather than on the generation of new knowledge. The private sector's interest in tapping the tacit knowledge of its employees was an obvious dimension of its concern with comparative international advantage. And the transfer of this preoccupation with leveraging staff knowledge across the many branches of multinational firms was one of the first influences on the shape of knowledge agencies. Paradoxically, it was an early report by the consultancy firm, Arthur Andersen, that fed into the World Bank's emerging knowledge management (KM) system (Andersen 1996). Andersen used to claim that within 24 hours, by tapping its worldwide network of expertise, an answer to any staff member's question anywhere should be delivered. Its report for the Bank stressed the need for the new system to provide information and knowledge to managers on a just-in-time basis, and the information and knowledge had to be authoritative and definitive (Carayannis and Laporte 2002). Similarly,

DFID in the UK was clearly influenced in its early thinking about knowledge management by British Petroleum (BP), and not least by BP's KM text, *Learning to Fly* (DFID 2000b; Collison and Parcell 2001).

From 1996 in the World Bank, and from 2000 in some other bilateral and multilateral agencies, the focus was on mechanisms for sharing and synthesising the huge amounts of operational knowledge that was already held by staff members of agencies. A series of more or less formal knowledge sharing networks[17] was encouraged, as were advisory services and websites, to facilitate the spreading, first round the World Bank, and then other agencies, of just-in-time development knowledge. These exercises were hugely helped by new information and communication technologies. There are now some 80 of these Thematic Groups in the World Bank alone, down from over 120 in the late 1990s; and there are smaller numbers in some of the other agencies.

In terms of our current concern with the relation between research and policy, their focus has certainly been less on knowledge generation than on knowledge dissemination. Following the words of the O'Dell et al. (1998) – 'If only we knew what we know', their emphasis has principally been on making World Bank, CIDA, JICA or DFID's existing knowledge better known to like-minded groups within their respective organisations (King and McGrath 2004). There have been one or two groups which have clearly had a link to policy - notably the Tertiary Education Group in the World Bank, that is said to have played a supportive role in the development of the Bank's recent policy text on *Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education* (World Bank 2002). But, overall, it would seem, to judge from the World Bank's own evaluation of *Sharing Knowledge* in the institution, that there has been

insufficient connection between the Thematic Groups and the Bank's research programme (World Bank 2003).

In general, it could be said of several agencies which took seriously the challenge of knowledge and learning that the focus of internal knowledge sharing has been relatively low-key and almost invisible to the outside world. It has involved better agency intranets, better connectivity between headquarters and country offices, and more staff development activities. But it could hardly be called a knowledge revolution, and it does not appear to have very directly affected traditional operational work.

One of the key issues for what was discussed earlier in this paper is whether agencies have rethought their organisational and professional work in terms of the new aid modalities that were analysed above. It is difficult to judge merely from the names of the groups, but it does appear that though the majority of the World Bank groups continue to represent traditional professional fields such as Early Child Development or Tertiary Education, others such as Pro-poor Growth and Inequality, or Empowerment and Social Capital, are much more cross-cutting. However, it is in some of the bilaterals that the new approaches to aid delivery seem to be more explicitly reflected in the agency. In Swedish Sida, for instance, there is a separate unit charged with thinking about the new ways of delivering aid, and they have produced a series of analyses of Sida polices on *Capacity Development* (Sida 2000), on *Sector Programme Support* (Sida 2000), and on *Sida at Work* (Sida 2003). What is striking, particularly about *Sida at Work*, is that it examines over some 80 pages the new roles for Sida staff, as 'analyst', 'dialogue partner', and 'financier', over and above their continuing roles

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[17] Normally called Communities of Practice in the corporate literature.

as sector specialists.   The sheer complexity of the new cooperation approaches has some resonance with what we said earlier about the demands of the new aid modalities. Sida argues that 'Gradually, a technical approach has given way to a more comprehensive approach involving socio-economic and legal structures' (Sida 2003: 29).

Naturally, Sida points to the fact that their cooperation partners continue to have primary responsibility for analytical work at all levels, from comprehensive poverty reduction strategies to specific analyses of programmes/projects. But it is difficult not to reach a conclusion that the 70 pages of *Sector Programme Support* as well as *Sida at Work* merely confirm a likely new imbalance in policy dialogue between the donor and the recipient in the new modalities of aid. This notwithstanding, *Sida at Work* provides a uniquely thoughtful and unprecedented insight, amongst bilateral donors, into the complexity of the aid process in the early 21st century.   Despite what has been said above, Sida's attitude towards knowledge in development remains firm: 'The process of learning needs to be based on the realisation that no party can claim superior knowledge that should be superimposed on other parties' (Sida 2003: 38).

If Sida offers one insight into organisational learning to face new knowledge conditions, DFID offers a rather different one. There is a similar concern to move away from the traditional role of the sectoral specialist with their sectoral knowledge. Instead, the whole of the large policy division in DFID has been restructured, to break down the old sector silos, and to bring new teams together to collaborate on the basic cross-cutting themes of development knowledge. Groupings now have names such as: 'Reaching the very poorest', 'Service delivery', 'Drivers

of change' and 'Growth hub' (DFID 2003).[18] DFID's research, too, has been broken out of its original separate silos and integrated into a central research department, the better to meet the overarching millennium poverty reduction goals.

By contrast, Japan's International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has been moving in the opposite direction. From its long tradition of using generalists – in JICA as in the rest of government – to deliver projects, it has for the first time in 2003, under the influence of the knowledge management initiative, begun to introduce sectoral expertise and sectoral teams.

Our preliminary conclusions on what is termed internal knowledge management in the agencies, therefore, is that for the first several years of aid agencies seeking to become knowledge agencies, or learning organisations, the predominant focus was on the development of the knowledge of their own staff rather than on knowledge development in the South.

Agency knowledge management and sharing with partners

Even though external knowledge sharing came later and was secondary, in some agencies, the privileging of knowledge development in and with the South had been there long before the new knowledge discourse arose in the late 1990s. Sida and its research wing, SAREC, had, like the IDRC and the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, been in the business of supporting Southern knowledge and research development for years. What the arrival of the knowledge-for-development discourse did was to focus much more sharply on the centrality of knowledge in aid

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[18] Some groups remain identifiably similar to the old sectors.

modalities. And again the vision was perhaps clearest and most partner-oriented in the case of Sida:

> The central issue of all development cooperation is to contribute to the development of knowledge – in the partner country, in Sweden and internationally (Sida 1997: 28).

The danger for agencies that started with several years of sorting and synthesising their own knowledge resources – in what has been termed internal knowledge sharing – is that when they finally turn their attention to their clients and partners in the South, the agencies might well have decided on what was their priority knowledge for development. There is more than a hint of this in DFID's development of its Target Strategy Papers, discussed earlier. These derived directly from the IDTs, as we saw, but it has been estimated that only a minute proportion (less than 4%) of the bibliographic research resources that sustained them were taken from the South. More than 84% were themselves agency-commissioned work (King and McGrath 2004: 119). Furthermore, as DFID rethinks its now centralised research strategy, there are powerful forces suggesting that DFID's entire research strategy could be made more coherent by being organised around the MDGs. This is of course more coherent; but the question must be whether the whole process of agreeing the IDT-MDG goals, followed by the elaboration of the Target Strategy Papers, and then, finally, the setting of research priorities are really a completely Northern process.

The World Bank, by contrast, made much more explicit in a paper which went to their Board in mid-2001 that not only should their repository of development knowledge be shared with clients, but that Southern research and knowledge should themselves be prioritised. For an

organisation which had been on its back feet in defending some of their other global knowledge initiatives, such as the Development Gateway and the Global Development Network for privileging Bank knowledge, this was a major shift. It is worth quoting at some length:

> Changing the way we think about development to integrate knowledge as a central driver of growth, security and empowerment; update our view of the Bank's business and the way we measure and value our outputs and impact – from transferring knowledge and resources, to enabling learning and building capacity …. We need to move beyond the idea of the Bank as the repository of finance and knowledge that is transferred to clients, and towards the idea of the Bank as a facilitator and enabler of client learning – the crux of capacity building, and the best way to create sustainable policy shifts and development (World Bank 2001: 33-4).

This is a powerful vision, and it reminds us that capacity building – so widely used in the 1960 and 1970s by Ford, Rockefeller and IDRC – had come in from the cold in the early 21st century. And it might appear to be the key concept that has been missing from the construction of global development agenda with which we have been concerned.[19] In a series of studies, led by the UNDP, but supported in their dissemination and promotion by other donors, notably JICA, the World Bank Institute, CIDA and GTZ, the crucial role of capacity development has been mapped out as central to the new aid relationship (UNDP 2001; 2002; 2003). Indeed, capacity development is presented as a crucial complement to the global architecture of the Millennium Development Goals. Like *Shaping the 21st*

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[19] For a detailed discussion of the Bank's external knowledge sharing initiatives, see World Bank 2003: 19-32; and King and McGrath 2004: 76-92

Century, seven years earlier, the final report of the three UNDP volumes is replete with the language of 'Ownership', 'Leadership' and 'Policy Dialogue', and, naturally, capacity development is analysed in all its main guises, individual, institutional and societal.

But there is one dimension that is, surprisingly, virtually absent from UNDP's final volume, *Ownership, Leadership and Transformation: Can We Do Better for Capacity Development?* (UNDP 2003), for all its detail and its 56 case studies of successful capacity development. And that is the core modality of capacity development via the formal education system, and especially higher education and the maintenance of national research capacity. Almost every other kind of capacity is illustrated in the case studies except this, which is arguably a precondition for many of the others. This is a particularly important oversight in a volume that situates capacity development so close to the Millennium Development Goals, when the MDGs themselves have nothing to say about education above the basic level.

In reviewing the most recent preoccupation of agencies with both knowledge and capacity development, we would argue that the agencies have not started with the dramatic knowledge deficits of the South, nor with the key question of how knowledge management could assist knowledge development in the South. A continuation along their present internal trajectories could be counter-productive; it could end up making agencies more certain of what they themselves have learnt, and more enthusiastic that others should share these insights, once they have been systematised. While on the external knowledge sharing side, there is still little evidence of dramatically increased support to knowledge development in the South.

Missing Elements in the Linking of Knowledge and Policy

The last 15 years have seen the creation of the MDGs which in the opinion of the UNDP do 'provide a strong, unequivocal political framework to orient international development aid' (UNDP 2003: xiii). Whether they may also come to be seen as a new set of aid conditionalities, following the era of structural adjustment, it is clearly too early to say.[20] The history of their construction, examined through the single lens of education, would suggest that a very particular strain of agency research contributed to this process, and that the further elaboration of the Targets through the OECD/DAC and individual agencies such as DFID drew very little from Southern research or even consultation. The interplay between this global agenda, the new aid modalities, and the realities of development in the economically weakest countries has been little researched, but there are perhaps questions to be asked about the centrality of time-bound MDG targeting by agencies and the massive, and possibly increasing aid dependency of a substantial number of countries.

The discovery of knowledge management and knowledge sharing by agencies, and the rediscovery of capacity development, have done little in most agencies to alter the aid relationship. It is particularly striking that the celebration of knowledge for development in the agencies happens to have coincided with a period of continued deterioration of the higher education and research environments in many parts of the developing world, and especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank 2002). The World Bank's recent identification of knowledge accumulation and application as the major drivers of economic development in the 21st

century has served merely to underline the continuing knowledge deficits in many countries. For these states, the weak, and externally dependent condition of higher education and research is doubtless a contributory factor to the erosion of the policy terrain which we described earlier, both in government and in civil society. Equally, the absence of sufficient and sustained critical work on the new development architecture in sites in the South leaves much of the agency consensus unchallenged. It is vital that national researchers, think tanks and knowledge networks in the South engage with the structures and modalities that have emerged, and explore in detail, at both the macro and institutional levels, their implications for the ownership of knowledge and of the development project more generally.[21]

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[20] UNDP warns of the PRSPs: 'There is also a danger that without sufficient trust and open dialogue, the papers (PRSPs) can be seen as yet another donor requirement rather than a genuine shift in modalities' (UNDP 2003: 57).
[21] For examples of this critical engagement, see Aklilu, Coraggio, Mwiria, Tilak and Torres, in Gmelin et al. (2001).

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