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DONOR RELATIONS AND REALPOLITIK

Mohammad Mizanur Rahman



“This excellent book is one of the rare books on development cooperation written by an author from the Global South. It shows that the practice of the new aid regime by far does not match the formal declarations on more effective aid. Donors, whether traditional or “emerging” ones like China and India, (still) prioritize their strategic and commercial interests. But the book goes beyond that in offering a fascinating inside view in the political and economic constraints hampering more effective aid on the recipient side. The author should also be commended for his well-documented historical analyses and for including a thorough analysis of technical assistance - often neglected in studies on aid relationships.”

—**Geske Dijkstra**, *Emeritus Professor of Governance and Global Development, Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands*

“Mohammad Mizanur Rahman’s new book provides an insider’s view into Bangladesh’s aid sector. Drawing on over twenty-five years of first-hand experience, Rahman meticulously traces the evolution of the global aid landscape and its specific manifestations in Bangladesh. The book is essential reading for those interested in the interplay of *Realpolitik* and the aid industry in Bangladesh.”

—**Dr. Haley J. Swedlund**, *Author of The Development Dance: How Donors and Recipients Negotiate Aid*

“This monograph offers unique insights into the history and contemporary dynamics of the global development aid regime. Based on over 25 years of research, the case study of Bangladesh reveals how aid objectives continue to compete with the business and strategic priorities of donors as well as the political and bureaucratic imperatives of recipients. A critical analysis of Bangladesh’s aid relationships with a range of donors – Japan, UK, China, India, WB and ADB – underpins the political economy approach advocated by this book. It contains invaluable recommendations for donors and recipients alike.”

—**Geert De Neve**, *Professor of Social Anthropology and South Asian Studies, University of Sussex, UK*



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Foreign Aid and Bangladesh

Foreign Aid and Bangladesh offers a rich combination of aid history – from the evolution of aid as a global agenda after WWII to the rise of different multilateral, bilateral, and emerging donors and their policy shifts – and a nuanced perspective of aid partnerships at the country level. Drawing on first-hand experiences and insights, the author deeply investigates the realities of a longstanding aid recipient, Bangladesh, and argues that without a political economy approach, one cannot understand the realpolitik of development aid.

As an emerging economy from the Global South, Bangladesh has been a longstanding partner and recipient of international aid since 1971. Bangladesh has also been active in the global discussions leading to redefining the new narrative and arguments for the new aid regime since the beginning of this century. Building on the analysis of Bangladesh's aid relations, the book shows that there has not been any qualitative shift in aid behavior in the new aid regime that set new norms after the end of the Cold War to ensure recipients' ownership and welcomed an expanding aid landscape by integrating emerging economies from the Global South for achieving better development results. The book analyzes the role of different actors in the development partnership, both traditional and emerging donors – such as China and India, and their partnership practices. It examines different forms of aid and their changing perspective, particularly technical assistance. Based on more than two decades of research and profound insider observations, the book debunks the myth that Southern providers could be more benign to their partners. The arguments placed in the book expose that there is no difference between traditional and emerging donors in ensuring donors' business and strategic interests. While donors continue to ensure their interests in providing aid, the Realpolitik of the situation in the recipient country shows that there is a specific economic and political agenda in pursuing aid.

Presenting a comprehensive picture of Bangladesh's aid partnership, through the lens of new development partnership principles and narratives of development aid, this book will be of interest to scholars and researchers of aid and development studies and political science as well as South Asian Studies. Donor officials, civil servants, and national and international policy communities will also benefit from this book.

Mohammad Mizanur Rahman is an associate researcher (non-resident) at the Institute of Development Policy, University of Antwerp, Belgium. He has over 25 years of civil service practice experience, including four and a half years in a policy specialist role to advocate for aid effectiveness at the UNDP. His research focuses on the political economy of foreign aid, democratic developmental states, development planning, public administration, and governance.

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Foreign Aid and Bangladesh

Donor Relations and Realpolitik

Mohammad Mizanur Rahman

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Foreword

This book is a rare gem within the realm of publications on development cooperation, uniquely authored by a scholar from the Global South. The text illuminates a stark disjuncture between the practical implementation of the new aid paradigm and the formal proclamations advocating for more efficacious aid. Irrespective of their classification as traditional or “emerging,” donors such as China and India persist in prioritizing their strategic and commercial interests. However, the book transcends this critique by providing an enthralling insider perspective that delves into the intricate web of political and economic constraints impeding the realization of more effective aid from the recipient’s standpoint.

The author merits commendation not only for this invaluable insider viewpoint but also for the meticulous historical analyses that underpin the narrative. Furthermore, the inclusion of a comprehensive examination of technical assistance, an aspect often neglected in scholarly investigations of aid relationships, adds a layer of depth and nuance to the overall discourse. This dual focus on the external motivations of donors and the internal challenges faced by recipients enriches the analysis, offering a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted dynamics at play within the complex landscape of development cooperation.

The inherent value of the insider perspective cannot be overstated. By shedding light on the intricacies and limitations faced by recipients, the author contributes a nuanced dimension to the discourse, enhancing the reader’s comprehension of the multifaceted nature of aid relationships. Moreover, the quality of the analytical framework employed in this text distinguishes it from others in the field, emphasizing its significance in contributing to the broader academic conversation on development cooperation.

Nadia Molenaers, PhD

Professor

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Preface

Bangladesh seems to be a fascinating case for examining the dynamics of development aid and donor partnerships. After its independence in 1971, it was labeled as a test case of development. Over the decades, the country has managed to sustain decent economic growth and impressive socio-economic development, defying the initial worrying remarks about its future. Nevertheless, there was hesitancy after the independence whether Bangladesh should partner with donors, not least from Western origin, yet development partners have intensely engaged with Bangladesh. This book examines the nature of this development partnership.

Development aid has encountered many ups and downs since it emerged as a form of economic, financial, and technical cooperation after WWII. The end of the Cold War ushered in new hope for the global community and the Global South. More importantly, new donors have impacted the traditional aid landscape profoundly. Additionally, with the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the international donor community made thoughtful calls for reforming aid strategies and practices, marking the emergence of a new aid regime with more focus on equal partnerships rather than the previous hierarchical relationships between donors and recipients, allowing recipient countries to lead and steer aid implementation and collaboration. Following the calls for change and reforms, donor communities have established new norms and principles vis-à-vis the aid recipients and a global platform, GPEDC, beyond the OECD-DAC to advance the dialogues and commitments to aid effectiveness and monitor the progress.

Bangladesh was actively engaged in the evolving process of the new aid regime as an aid recipient. It officially demonstrated its commitment to implementing the reforms and shifts stemming from the new norms of development partnerships. However, one may wonder if there is real progress in reforming Bangladesh's aid behavior with its development partners. This book makes a journey to explain this question. Bangladesh has taken all forms of aid, from food assistance to project financing to technical assistance, and the amount also has been enormous. Similarly, Bangladesh's development partners list is also very long, encompassing the traditional bilateral donors, emerging bilateral partners, multilateral banks, and the UN systems. This book investigates the partnerships of leading donors of all categories to assess the evolving shifts and dynamics.

The author has directly observed Bangladesh's aid dynamics for over two and a half decades. As an insider, he developed critical insights that influenced him to undertake this venture. The author maintains a deep academic interest in the developmental states. After a careful assessment of South Korea's transformation path, it is convincing that development is possible. However, when Bangladesh's trajectory is compared with Korea's development journey, it seems necessary to have deep introspection. The author visited Rwanda back in 2014 and saw the determination of a country that just started coming out of the nightmare of the civil war that witnessed the massacre of a million people. While Korea may be an example of the past, Rwanda is a contemporary experience making aid work for development. Still largely dependent on donors, Rwanda has successfully laid out its pathway for economic progress with a strong sense of policy autonomy and determination.

The analysis presented in this book highlights that Bangladesh's aid relationship is driven mainly by domestic political imperatives rather than objective developmental judgments. The donors appeared to have exploited this domestic political context. Both Bangladesh and its development partners do not appear to have demonstrated any commitment to aid effectiveness principles; instead, they prefer to ensure mutual benefits – business and strategic interests for donors and political dividends for the ruling elites in the country. Nevertheless, Bangladesh participated in the high-level forums on aid effectiveness and performed leadership roles in the GPEDC. It established a dedicated wing for development effectiveness within the ERD, yet there have not been any policy shifts in the government's aid approach and strategies. Garnering more and more aid seems to be the only strategy on the part of the government. There is no sign of aid graduation in sight.

The rise of the Southern donors ushered in hopes in the new aid regime as additional sources of financing. However, Bangladesh's realities suggest that Southern donors, such as India and China focus more on their strategic and business interests. South–south cooperation seems more like a buzzword or rhetoric than a real issue. On the other hand, the traditional donors and the UN steered the aid effectiveness agenda in the post-Cold War context. Bangladesh's partnerships with the traditional donors and the UN systems showed that the aid effectiveness principles are a hollow agenda for them – only lip servicing.

By scanning the experiences of those countries that profited from aid, the author points out that in the study of aid, the most critical aspect one should look at is the domestic governance environment of the recipient. International commitment and principles may help, but the domestic condition is the core. The book asserts that improvement on the domestic front – governance quality, political accountability, policy capacity, bureaucratic integrity, and policy realism – is more crucial than international norms and commitments to manage development. A poor domestic policy environment may continue as a source of predatory and apologetic aid partnerships. Finally, the book claims graduation from aid dependence is more of a domestic political choice than donors' aid principles.

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It was an arduous journey; I encountered many personal and professional constraints while drafting this book over the last two years. However, I am grateful to Allah (SWT) that I could finally complete the task. Alhamdulillah. To begin with, I am particularly beholden to three individuals who were instrumental in dragging me into the project and managing it successfully. I sometimes felt tired (it is always challenging for a practitioner to find time to research and write as academics can do), but I never became frustrated. I had the belief that somehow I would do it!

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The second person is my wonderful colleague, Surayya Akhtar Jahan. One day, she surprisingly told me that she had said to my other colleagues I was busy writing a new book, but that was not the case then. Nevertheless, she wanted to promote my academic profile among my colleagues, yet I felt deeply embarrassed and thought writing a book could only help me escape this embarrassment. After this incident and my commissioning editor's motivation, I developed this book proposal to kickstart the formal journey. I do not know how to acknowledge the encouragement of my colleague Surayya, an enduring well-wisher.

The third individual is my youngest son, Yusuf Ali Zarif. Whenever I read or wrote anything on the laptop, he would ask if I was writing the book and if I would write his name. He constantly asked about the book's progress, forcing me to continue and finish the project as early as possible. Now, he is happy seeing his name in the acknowledgment. I feel equally relieved and thrilled to have completed the task. I could pass his test.

I am generally indebted to many colleagues for their generous help and cooperation at different stages of writing this book. I met many colleagues and discussed various aspects of development aid over the last 25 years. Thus, my

debts are many, but I have nothing to repay. However, as a humble way to express my gratitude, I try to mention a few names here. Some senior civil servants – retired and active in service – and academics shared their thoughts and insights to help me shape my arguments in the book. They were very generous in responding to my request to interpret different aspects of Bangladesh's aid partnership. Their insights and suggestions were highly beneficial to me. A book is bound to deal with many critical issues while explaining and interpreting; some colleagues requested that I not share their names. They preferred to remain anonymous (a pity for me, though).

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Abbreviations and acronyms

AAA	Accra Agenda for Action
AAAA	Addis Ababa Action Agenda
ADP	Annual Development Program
AfDB	African Development Bank
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
ARA	American Relief Administration
BIG-B	Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt
BPPA	Bangladesh Public Procurement Authority
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
CDF	Comprehensive Development Framework
CPTU	Central Procurement Technical Unit
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DAG	Development Assistance Group
DC	Development Cooperation
ECA	Economic Cooperation Agency
EPB	Economic Planning Board
EPTA	Expanded Program for Technical Assistance
ERD	Economic Relations Division
EROA	Economic Rehabilitations of the Occupied Areas
FOIP	Free and Open Indo-Pacific
GARIOA	Government and Relief in Occupied Areas
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GED	General Economics Division
GHQ	General Head Quarters
GPEDC	Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation
IAM	Indian Aid Mission
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ICM	Indian Cooperation Mission
IDA	International Development Association
IDEAS	Indian Development and Economic Assistance Scheme
ITEC	Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation
LCG	Local Consultative Group

LoC	Line of Credit
MDGs	Millenium Development Goals
MIDI	Moheshkhali-Matarbari Integrated Infrastructure Development Initiative
MINICOFIN	Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning
NDB	New Development Bank
NOD	Nairobi Outcome Document
NSS	National Security Strategy
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OEEC	Organization for European Economic Cooperation
OTCA	Overseas Technical Cooperation Agency
PD	Paris Declaration
PEC	Project Evaluation Committee
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SAP	Structural Adjustment Program
SCAAP	Special Commonwealth African Assistance Programme
SCAP	Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers
SECA	Society for Economic Cooperation in Asia
SUNFED	Special UN Fund for Development
TACB	Trade-Related Capacity Building
UNEDA	United Nations Economic Development Administration
UNEPRO	UN East Pakistan Relief Operation
UNEPTA	United Nations Expanded Program of Technical Assistance
UNRO	United Nations Relief Organization
UNROB	UN Relief Operation in Bangladesh
UNROD	UN Relief Operation in Dhaka
UNRRA	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
USOPRR	US Office for Planning for Relief and Reconstruction



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Introduction

Mapping the shifts and turns in the international aid landscape

The fall of the Berlin Wall, signaling the end of the Cold War, ushered in new expectations that development aid would take a new turn to ensure that it benefits the world's poor economies – the aid recipient countries. There were primarily two reasons behind such expectations: foreign aid, to a great extent, during the Cold War regime was used for political purposes, ignoring largely the development needs of the recipient countries, and the structural adjustment program (SAP) advocated by the major traditional donors and multilateral lending agencies, such as the World Bank (WB), in the 1970s and 1980s became highly counterproductive to many aid recipient countries. Both incidents became watersheds for development aid, invoking sincere introspections.

The end of the Cold War was a turning point for another reason: it triggered globalization, promoting broader connectivity worldwide. Consequently, people's economic development gained particular currency and became an international development agenda in a more connected and interdependent world. In such a milieu, the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) expressed its renewed commitment toward the world's poor people's economic development by adopting the statement: "Shaping the 21st Century: The Contribution of Development Co-operation in 1996" (OECD, 1996). This statement opened a new environment for discussing global development and the development partnership's effectiveness after the Cold War.

Following the OECD's call, a few years later, in 2000, the world witnessed the milestone global declaration for development encapsulated as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Goal 8 of the MDGs powerfully expressed a more solid and beneficial global partnership. The adoption of the MDGs by the UN created a new wave of development globally, and ensuring the results of development interventions became a central consideration. After the MDGs, the international aid regime saw considerable shifts in the approach, scope, and strategies. Several high-level forum meetings took place, and finally, the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC) emerged in 2011. The GPEDC established four principles for managing development aid and partnership, focusing on results heralding a new aid regime (GPEDC, 2016).

2 *Introduction*

In tandem with the post-Cold War changes, the rise of some countries from the Global South prompted a new turn in international cooperation. Brazil, India, Mexico, South Africa, and China appeared as alternative development financing sources beyond the traditional donors. These new Southern donors, generally known as emerging donors, have profoundly impacted the global aid landscape and partnership architecture. The new donors particularly challenged the monopoly of the Northern countries and institutions in setting the global development agenda and partnerships.

The new aid regime emphasizes national ownership of aid recipients and results in aid partnerships to ensure development effectiveness at the recipient end. It underlines the expanded meaning of development, which considers people's well-being and dignity as the ultimate objectives. The rise of the human development concept broadened the definition of development. Recipient-focused development partnerships altered the past aid relation, which was hierarchical – aid donors vs. aid recipients, with little room for the developing countries to contribute to development policy and discourse. In the hierarchical aid relations, more or less, the recipient developing countries followed the development template originating from the Global North. In this phase, aid relations were just a different form of colonialism; the aid recipients were politically independent but tied up with rich Northern countries and their institutions.

Thus, the new aid discourse seemed to have opened a new phase for aid-recipient developing countries to appear as active participants in global development dialogues and discussions. The shift in the vertical aid relationship brought aid providers and recipients at par, helping emerge a partnership of equals. Both providers and recipients were expected to share the same dignity and prestige in the partnership. Global institutions such as the UN and other multilateral political and financial institutions embraced the changes. They became committed to bringing shifts in their aid behavior, complying with the new features of development aid. As a consensus at the Busan High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, 2011, the emergence of the GPEDC signaled a paradigm shift in the sense that the OECD had to accept the appearance of another platform to steer the development aid agenda. Thus, after more than a decade of Busan HLF, examining the implications of these paramount shifts and turns in aid partnerships at the recipient level is imperative.

Since the establishment of the GPEDC, it has brought out several monitoring survey reports to assess the changes in aid behaviors (OECD/UNDP, 2014, 2016, 2019). Before the GPEDC monitoring survey reports, there were two rounds of assessments to examine the changes in aid relations by checking the degree of implementing the Paris Declaration principles (OECD, 2008, 2010). GPEDC surveys have become primary sources of evidence to monitor aid relationships; however, deeper analysis of the country-level conditions and realities may give us a more comprehensive spectrum to mark the critical factors that may have higher implications on aid relationships.

The importance of making Bangladesh a country case

As an emerging economy from the Global South, Bangladesh has been a long-standing partner and recipient of international aid since 1971 as an independent state. Over the decades, Bangladesh has maintained a sustained aid partnership with all types of donors and in all areas of cooperation – from humanitarian assistance to project financing. Despite economic progress, foreign aid accounts for financing one-third of Bangladesh's annual development program (ADP), a yearly articulated document mentioning projects for socio-economic development. Bangladesh's reliance on external development financing is still overarching.

Because of Bangladesh's longstanding engagement with aid donors, the country has always been active in global development discussions and dialogues. It actively participated in all high-level forums on aid effectiveness and contributed to the conversations. However, the literature survey identified that Bangladesh's aid relationship within the new context is yet to be analyzed as academic research. The earlier prominent works (Islam, 2003; Sobhan, 1982) mainly reflected the formative years of Bangladesh's aid relations. Both works followed a unique approach to narrating personal stories surrounding their roles and contributions to developing aid partnerships after the independence when both worked at the Planning Commission as Deputy Chairman and Member, respectively.

Many years later, Rahman (2018) researched Bangladesh's policy ownership in the poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP). Though the work was comprehensive, the primary focus was on the PRSP. The book did not feature the evolving nature of foreign aid. Notably, the importance of the new aid regime as a concept was missing in the study. Quibria and Islam (2015) made another venture to assess Bangladesh's aid effectiveness, but the scope was limited, and it was only a chapter in a book.

Another significant turning point in Bangladesh's aid partnership is that Bangladesh experienced a new type of development collaboration after 2008. The government of Bangladesh pursued international aid more proactively, expanding its partnerships with emerging donors while at the same time maintaining its past relations with traditional DAC donors and multilateral financing institutions. The aid disbursement to Bangladesh in the last 10 years outweighs the quantum of the past 40 years (ERD, 2023). This dramatic shift invokes an analysis of the local conditions through the lens of political economy. This staggering increase is because of the development imperatives of the government. The government focused more on infrastructure and regional connectivity, which is not devoid of the regime's political considerations. During this period, aid triggered a new political alignment on the domestic front vis-à-vis some of its donors.

Again, back to GPEDC, Bangladesh has occupied the leadership role since GPEDC's inception. Initially, it was an executive committee member, but between 2016 and 2022, it was one of the Co-chairs. As a GPEDC leader,

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Bangladesh was expected to demonstrate its high commitment to implementing the aid effectiveness principles. Bangladesh has joined all the monitoring surveys the OECD and GPEDC have conducted since 2008. In that sense, Bangladesh's country-level evidence is significant and necessary for global and local audiences. While Bangladesh participated proactively in assessments, the surveys showed limitations in portraying the country's situation in aid management and partnerships. It was because the participation was part of a worldwide survey, likely to have a narrow scope. The second point is that these surveys were government-led and not academic studies; therefore, the analysis has overlooked the nuances of development aid at the country level.

A long-term observation is needed to underline and identify the nuances more emphatically. A country case study in a global survey cannot offer substantive lessons or insights unless the research is conducted comprehensively – from evolution to gradual shifts in domestic fronts vis-à-vis international aid practice and discourse. The current research fulfills this obligation and necessity. The author has a unique experience studying Bangladesh's aid relationships for multiple reasons. He has practiced civil service for over two and a half decades and has worked in nine ministries/divisions, including the Planning Commission. He was a policy specialist in the Aid Effectiveness Project, sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and participated in many events at home and abroad concerning GPEDC and aid effectiveness. He was also actively engaged in several rounds of GPEDC monitoring. Therefore, as an insider and an active participant, he developed a unique perspective on development aid partnerships.

Building on the preceding discussions, the author argues that Bangladesh's case will be ground-breaking work in analyzing aid dynamics at the country level in a new context of development cooperation. This book provides detailed background on how development aid emerged as a global agenda. It also discusses different types of donors – multilateral, bilateral, and emerging – and their partnerships with Bangladesh to unravel the dynamics. The donors and agencies covered in the study are Japan, the USA, India, China, WB, and Asian Development Bank (ADB), Bangladesh's top partners. Traditional bilateral donors and multilateral agencies have endorsed the GPEDC aid effectiveness principles. China and India refrained from continuing with GPEDC and did not endorse the aid principles. However, they are driven by their own aid policies. OECD and GPEDC emphasize the importance of Southern donors like India and China in the aid landscape. China and India are actively engaged in Bangladesh's development financing; therefore, this book presents a unique opportunity to look at Southern donors' aid practices alongside DAC donors.

The book's presentation style in explaining aid, its turning points, and different donors' partnership practices bears special significance. The reason is that the book is significantly devoted to narrating the history. It has presented a historical account of how development aid emerged as a global agenda after

World War II (WWII). In this description, the book successfully explores several milestones and turning points in the journey of development aid. The accounts also underline that aid has always been intertwined with politics and political interests. The chapters dealing with different donors also offer rich historical details: how the particular donor country and agency evolved as donors and financial institutions, predominant features of their policies, etc. Following the historical discussions, the book assesses their aid partnerships vis-à-vis Bangladesh.

Another particular aspect of the book requires mention that it analyzes the evolution of technical assistance from a global point of view and Bangladesh's experiences with it. Technical assistance is as necessary as development financing to undertake and manage the development agenda. Much is not available in the literature to track the genesis and development of technical assistance, not least Bangladesh's experience. The discussions and contestations concerning technical aid are likely to fill the void. Additionally, there has been a lot of pampering surrounding the Southern donors, notably India and China, and their impact on the international aid landscape. However, Bangladesh's experiences pinpoint that this seems much ado about nothing.

Nevertheless, Bangladesh's aid experience represents a country case, yet it has the potential to be representative of the experiences of the Global South. Because of its rich historical account, this book has made an outstanding contribution to the global literature on development aid, and it has become a great source of reference for students and researchers worldwide.

Some methodological considerations

The author derived insights and arguments from several sources. The first source is the professional experience of over 25 years working in nine ministries and the UNDP. It provided a huge opportunity to observe the interplay between the government and its agencies and donor communities. From the long and deep observations, the author became convinced that the local political and economic aspects also strongly come into play in aid relations. This understanding made the author more interested in employing the political economy approach to the study. Participation in international and national events on aid and development partnerships became another opportunity to observe the happenings minutely.

Bangladesh's leadership roles in GPEDC vis-à-vis the country's status quo in reforming aid practices became a puzzle to the author. It worked as a motivation to untangle the puzzle. For the last 25 years, there has been a significant accumulation of literature on aid and its political economy. This literature helped the author frame the analytical approach to the study. Some prominent scholars' arguments regarding national agenda setting and aid influences motivated the author to dive deep into a country case. Literature on developmental states further encouraged the author to believe that domestic contexts and realities are crucial in ensuring the development and results of aid.

One of the key sources the author employed to garner insights and understand the subtlety was the long discussions with senior policymakers. In the last 20 years (2003–2023), the author has met over 100 senior civil servants/policymakers, including 15 secretaries (5 were Economic Relations Division (ERD) secretaries) to the government. Most respondents were from the ERD and Planning Commission and several line ministries and project directors. The author also had opportunities to discuss with several officials through group discussions at ERD and the Planning Commission. The author's main objective was to get realities and nuances on the ground. Therefore, he was more inclined to learn from the policymakers, as many of them were insiders.

Apart from the discussions, different project evaluation committee (PEC) meetings at the Planning Commission, donor consultations, and aid negotiations offered an outstanding opportunity for the author to read stakeholders and see the practical aspects of partnerships. Without actual participation, it is not easy to know that a DAC donor, once one of the Co-chairs of GPEDC, argued in a meeting that they could start their project without the approval of the government of Bangladesh as their (donor) ministry of finance approved the budget. Indeed, they started. Or when a senior civil servant said in response to the queries regarding high consultancy that you know donors are like this, and we have to adjust! How could one know this unless one gets immersed in the situation?

The outline of the book

Beyond the introduction, the book has ten chapters, including the conclusion. **Chapter 1** provides an overview of development aid as a global agenda. In making the overview it sheds light on the foundational phase of foreign assistance as it happened after WWII and other turning points, such as the Cold War complexities, the role of the UN in promoting aid, and the post-Cold War policy shifts at the global level with implications for the recipients. One of the sections of this chapter discusses the new norms of development aid within the context of the 21st century. This chapter comprehensively maps the more than seven decades of aid experience, eventually a quick reference to learn about development assistance.

Chapter 2 explains the analytical framework that the book adopted to place its arguments. Taking the cue from Chapter 1, it identifies the prominent markers of the new aid regime. This chapter describes 'true ownership' and 'searchers vs. planners' theories and the necessity for looking through the political economy approach to test a country case. Finally, it navigates Bangladesh's political and governance trajectory to understand the political economy of development partnerships.

Chapter 3 presents a fascinating description of Bangladesh's aid relations. When Bangladesh became independent, it was initially reluctant to partner with Western donors, but its economic fragilities ultimately forced it to look to the donors. Therefore, this chapter tells the story from an unwillingness to an

active engagement with multiple donors. It also explains the government's current state of partnerships and the institutional architecture to coordinate with donors. Drawing on international references, it pictures how aid under the leadership of the UN played a role in addressing the crises during the liberation war and beyond. These references are not available in contemporary literature; this retrieving gives an occasion to connect with the past.

Chapter 4 portrays the evolution of Japan and the US as bilateral aid donors. Both are important countries for their global contribution and assistance to Bangladesh. Japan's case appears to be an excellent example of a country ravaged during WWII but later becoming a predominant bilateral donor. This chapter also presents the US' contribution to promoting aid as a global public good. Both are active partners of Bangladesh. Japan has helped Bangladesh build infrastructure. Thus, this chapter assesses their partnership as Bangladesh's leading bilateral donors in light of the domestic political economy and new aid norms.

Chapter 5 discusses Bangladesh's partnerships with two multilateral banks – the WB and ADB. While the WB is a global multilateral development bank, the ADB is regional. Both have maintained multifaceted partnerships with Bangladesh for several decades. Both banks are committed to DAC policies and, ultimately, GPEDC principles. The chapter analysis identifies that both banks historically profoundly influenced Bangladesh's development policies. The discussions show that both banks faced difficulties at birth due to the challenges posed by the US. The chapter explains that the country partnership policies of the banks impact the aid partnership strongly, mainly because they can constrain the government's policy autonomy. Broadly, this chapter offers a historical perspective of the two banks and simultaneously illustrates the dynamics of partnerships with Bangladesh.

Chapter 6 unpacks the intriguing nature of partnerships of emerging donors with a country from the Global South. While the chapter unfolds the history of China and India becoming donors, it also sheds light on the progression of partnerships with Bangladesh. The chapter elaborates on the aid policies of the two emerging donors. Bangladesh's partnerships with these two partners have gained momentum in the last decade. The underlying forces of the partnerships indicate that both countries have significantly influenced Bangladesh's domestic political landscape. While both countries have become alternative sources of development financing, it is not free of cost. The business and strategic interests of the countries dominate the evolving nature of the relations. The chapter argues that there is hardly any room to pamper the Southern donors as they could be as good or bad as any other donor. More importantly, both donors lack the commitment to democracy and the environment while partnering for development projects.

Chapter 7 makes a unique contribution as there is a considerable shortage of literature discussing technical assistance in Bangladesh. Like other chapters, it also deals with the history of technical assistance, and the analysis made in the chapter identifies that technical assistance appeared as a cooperation

modality along with financial aid. Soon after WWII, countries from the Global South sought capacity-building assistance. Bangladesh's experience with technical assistance is also rich. Just after independence, Bangladesh started receiving technical assistance. The chapter explains how donors use technical assistance to incentivize the recipient country and its officials to extract financial and strategic benefits and how it can affect the morale of the bureaucracy because of the accompanying incentives. More importantly, the discussions substantiate that the aid donors are flagrantly non-committed to aid effectiveness principles, severely undermining national ownership and priorities. The chapter makes a severe point about why Bangladesh continues to have rampant technical assistance even after five decades of independence. The chapter attempts to give some explanation that may seem uneasy to many.

Chapter 8 underlines that aid can help; nevertheless, there are a lot of criticisms surrounding it. Experiences from Korea, Botswana, Rwanda, and India convince us that aid can be part of development. However, the essence of their experiences is that making aid work requires a lot of domestic cleaning rather than global or donor commitment. If the domestic front lacks commitment, policy capacity, and an autonomous policy environment, aid cannot be helpful. When Botswana became independent, it was one of the poorest countries, but it progressed well because it allowed the politics and institutions to work for development. Korea did the same thing. Despite being hugely dependent on aid, Rwanda has successfully demonstrated its leadership in aid relations due to political commitment and strong institutions. India still faces the challenges of poverty, but decades ago, it made clear that they would move without being dependent on aid and made firm policy decisions about which aid they would accept and which they would not. Broadly, these countries leave the lessons that effective and enabling institutions and policy environments accompanied by political commitment can make aid work and ensure leadership and ownership in aid relations.

Chapter 9 builds on the aid partnerships assessment done in the preceding chapters and argues that understanding how different factors play out in aid relations vis-à-vis Bangladesh and its partners is crucial to assessing the current nature of development aid at the country level. As the book's findings, the chapter highlights several challenges stemming from both donors and domestic fronts and claims that these challenges constitute the realpolitik in Bangladesh's aid relations. This chapter presents the book's essence and states that effective partnerships cannot occur without addressing domestic constraints. The book's findings postulate that there has not been any significant shift in global aid relations. Aid partnerships continue to be dominated by donors' interests; however, country-level political realities and regime interests are also responsible for donor-dominated development cooperation.

The **concluding chapter** offers some concluding remarks. Drawing on the analytical insights, it emphatically argues that donors are unlikely to change their aid behavior and will likely continue to strengthen the hierarchical aid relations despite their apparent commitment to aid effectiveness agenda.

Therefore, there seems to be no hope on the donor side. Considering the experience of the successful countries in effective aid management, the chapter offers some recommendations that Bangladesh may consider moving forward. Specifically, the country should revisit its policy perspective regarding development aid, human and institutional capacities, and morality and integrity in governance.

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