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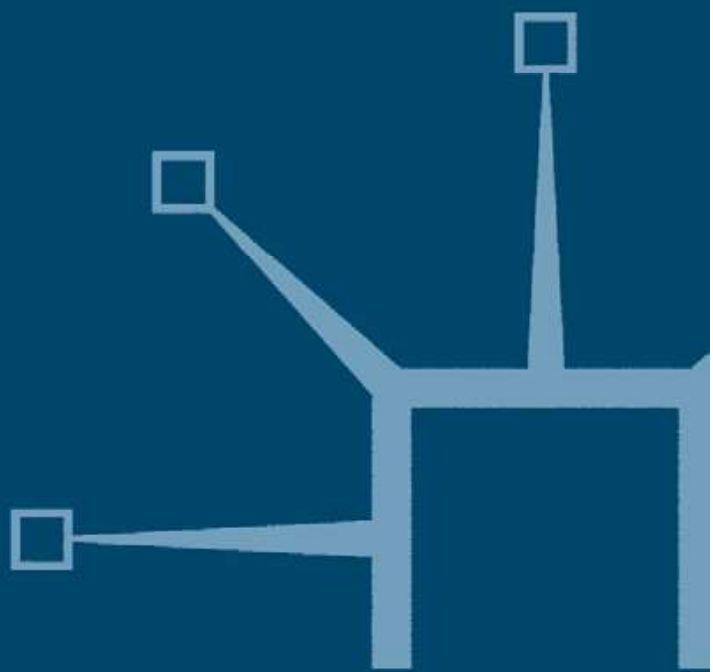
Foreign Aid and Political Reform

A Comparative Analysis of Democracy Assistance and Political Conditionality

Gordon Crawford



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Conclusion

External actors seek to, and indeed do, play a role in the democratisation process in other countries. Since, the 1990s, aid policy has been one new means by which such influence has been attempted by Northern governments. As democratisation is essentially an internal process, it is recognized that impact can only be modest, limited mainly to supporting internal pro-democracy elements and to applying pressure on governments in conjunction with local actors.

Looking at political aid programmes and aid sanctions in turn, this conclusion focuses on critical issues that have an adverse impact on both policy effectiveness and legitimacy. A series of concluding proposals are made for each instrument, aiming to strengthening its normative basis as well as its effectiveness.

10.1 Political aid programmes

10.1.1 Critical issues

To what extent can political aid effectively influence the process of democratisation in aid recipient countries? What limitations and constraints were discovered, both in practical and normative terms?

Although Northern governments have confounded some critics' expectations that democracy promotion would be restricted to a narrow, procedural model, political aid has been found wanting in a number of respects, nonetheless. In these concluding discussions, the problems and constraints associated with both governmental and non-governmental assistance are explored, followed by a series of proposals suggesting improvements to donor practices.

Strengthening democratic government

Regarding political aid to government beneficiaries, a key constraint pertains to the degree of political commitment towards democratisation shown by both recipient and donor governments. This relates to questions of political will, power relations and self-interests. Generally speaking, progress in democratisation occurs largely through the actions of political leaders, either acting in accordance with their own agendas or under pressure from societal actors. Whether pro-democracy influences predominate in a country depends on the outcome of struggles between competing political actors and social classes, with commitment to democratic political reform varying between different actors at different historical moments, often dependent on whether such reforms are perceived as congruent with self-interests. Such considerations seem largely absent from the political aid agenda, however. Indeed, there is more evidence of the effectiveness of political aid being undermined by the lack of political commitment on the part of both recipient and donor governments. Such findings are most stark in those country cases where, in the context of government abuses of human rights, not only are aid restrictions *not* imposed, but also overall aid programmes contain a political aid component directed to government beneficiaries. Examples include US assistance to Egypt and Colombia and UK assistance to Indonesia under President Suharto.

Why are political aid resources disbursed to governments where efficacy is so unlikely? One explanation pertains to what Carothers (1997, p. 122) calls the 'missing link of power', precisely involving a failure to address power relations in a society and ignoring the resistance of powerful actors to a democratisation agenda. In this way, democracy assistance providers presume that it is possible to reduce the democratic deficit of key government institutions, 'without grappling with the deep-seated interests of the actors involved' (ibid.). Democracy assistance thus becomes a technical exercise, with the underlying reasons for the democratic failings of institutions left unaddressed. For example, in judicial reform, it is not asked 'why the judiciary is in such a lamentable state, whose interests it serves in its current form, and whose interests would be threatened by reforms to the system' (ibid.), with clear adverse implications for effectiveness. Another explanation offered here focuses on donors' commitment to democratisation being compromised by the operation of other agendas. As discussed, the selection of countries for US and UK political aid programmes was driven in a number of instances by donor governments seeking political influence in order to

further their own commercial and strategic interests. Therefore, however unconducive the prevailing conditions for democratic reform and however resistant the actors involved, support is extended to the 'administration of justice' in Colombia (by the US) and for 'police training' in Indonesia (by the UK), as part of a package of assistance to governments favoured for reasons of geo-political (as in the former) or economic interests (as in the latter). This analysis questions not only the naïvety of strategy (as Carothers) but also questions the genuineness and seriousness of donor intent and motivation.

To influence the process of democratisation more effectively, there is a need for greater discrimination in the type of governments and governmental institutions that are strengthened and for recognition of circumstances where democratising the state is best pursued through support for non-government actors. Of the donors examined, only Sweden makes an explicit distinction between regime types, respectful or not of civil and political rights, with implications for the measures undertaken and type of organisations assisted. While such a distinction has been commended, the need for a variety of strategies can be extended much beyond a mere authoritarian/democratic divide (something that is examined further below). Indeed, the fact that a government has been *voted* into power does not guarantee a commitment to democracy. As Carothers (1995, p. 67) points out, it is 'perfectly possible for a newly elected government to represent the apparent triumph of democracy but not to be genuinely interested in strengthening either the independence of the judiciary, the autonomy of the parliament or the power of local administrators'. Such outcomes are most likely where democratic transition has not resulted in a change of government, with the ruling party retaining power. Analyses of democratic transition processes indicate that they are frequently initiated from above by incumbent authoritarian governments in an attempt to maintain and legitimate their hold on power, albeit in contexts of internal pressure and threats to their legitimacy. It is also quite possible that a new party in power may be less enthusiastic in office about implementing the democratic reforms they advocated in opposition. Indeed, one can assert with confidence that governments in general are more concerned about power and how to retain it, while it is the populace (or society) who advocate democratic controls.

There are two inferences from this problematisation of government institution building and the need for greater discrimination in the contexts where support is provided. First, it is incumbent on both recipient *and* donor governments to demonstrate a commitment to democratic

reforms, with outside observers encouraged to adopt a watchful eye on their seriousness and genuineness. Supporting democratisation is far more complex than merely providing resources and the technical capacity that are lacking in a given context, that is, the tasks donors can do most simply. Part of the required analysis is an ongoing assessment of the potential for, and obstacles to, democratic reform, with a focus on identifying the pro-reform actors, both within and without government. Second, following on from this, it is clear that the aim of democratising state institutions itself involves more than a top-down exercise. It is somewhat naïve to expect governments to take action of their own accord that will limit their power. In all societies, the role of non-government actors is essential in applying pressure for democratic reform and in ensuring democratic sustainability by maintaining vigilance over the performance and nature of state institutions. For example, the transformation of a politicised judiciary into one characterised by greater independence is likely to require pressure from those outside groups, such as human rights groups and professional legal associations, articulating dissatisfaction with the inadequacies and injustices of legal decision-making processes. Highlighting the significance of such non-government groups moves the argument onto the next issue, the participation of civil society organisations in democracy building.

Strengthening civil society

Donors have extended considerable support to the objective of strengthening civil society. The argument advanced here has been to affirm the significance of civil society to the democratisation process, as a sphere of democratic practice itself and for its role in democratising state institutions. Findings have indicated, however, that donor support to civil society has not been subject to sufficient critical examination, with adverse implications for its effectiveness in enhancing democratisation.

As with support to governments, a key constraint pertains to the lack of discrimination in the type of groups assisted, with a significant proportion of aid to non-state beneficiaries extended to organisations with questionable pertinence to democracy promotion. The origins of this problem stem from the lack of conceptual clarity in the use of the term civil society, with only USAID providing some definitional focus in the period examined, as well as from the prevailing assumption of the state and civil society as separate spheres in which civil society acts as a counterweight to the state. The conceptual confusion, fuelled by a 're-labelling' exercise, led to a range of non-state projects being classified as 'strengthening civil society' as part of political aid, despite many having

little apparent relevance to democratisation. Regarding its 'countervailing' influence, it was argued (in Chapter 1) that civil society organisations are frequently not autonomous bodies and can be closely related to the state. Although more difficult to ascertain from project data, it is likely that some civil society organisations are either created by government, especially given the attraction of donor funding, or associated with the ruling party, or 'captured' or 'penetrated' either by government or by donors themselves.

In all, the complexity of the nature of civil society and its relationship with the state requires more thought and analysis by donors. The implication again is of the importance of extensive knowledge of the local political context at individual country level. Two aspects in particular can be highlighted. One is to identify those particular organisations that are most relevant for the defence and promotion of democracy. The other is to explore the degree of overlap and interrelationship between non-government actors and the state. The inference is that political aid can then be concentrated on those civil society organisations that are specifically pro-democratic and more genuinely autonomous, thus more able to press for political reform. The choice of pertinent organisations will clearly vary, dependent on both the specific country and the stage of the democratisation process.

The issue of strategy

Clearly, the core strategy (outlined in Chapter 3) of a check-list of institutions and a process of institutional modelling is inadequate, with a variety of strategies required. Different strategies are needed for different phases of the democratisation process, for example, from authoritarian contexts, to those where political liberalisation has not resulted in electoral transition, to the range of transitional situations from electoral facade to where regimes are consolidating genuine change. The appropriateness of strategy is also highly dependent on the specific country context, with considerable variation between, for example, conflict-ridden and post-conflict societies, those emerging from military rule, those characterised by weak or collapsed states. The requisite strategy will also change with circumstances, for instance, where democratisation stagnates or backslides. Additionally, a variety of models need to be examined, learning not only from established democracies, but also, and perhaps more pertinently, from the experiences of recent successful transitional cases on a regional or comparative basis. Optimistically, there is the potential for progress along the democratic continuum in most countries globally. Nevertheless, if external

agencies are to provide support, it is imperative that coherent and appropriate strategies are devised to promote such democratic potential in widely varying contexts.

Such instrumental discussions of increasing the effectiveness of donor support through attention to strategy, in turn, raise a wider, normative issue pertaining to donor legitimacy. Who determines the appropriate strategy? How is it devised? What gives donors the right to select which state and non-state actors should be the beneficiaries of their munificence? How is non-partisanship maintained? How can the external orientation of domestic politics be reconciled with sovereignty? The encouragement of democratic dialogue at a national level between government and non-state actors is a proposed remedy to such questions.

Strengthening national democratic dialogue

Dialogue is fundamental to democracy, itself a form of political decision-making through discussion and negotiation, without recourse to superior force and violence. The importance of dialogue extends to addressing the asymmetrical power relations between Northern and Southern actors, including within democracy assistance itself. It is suggested that the concept of 'national democratic dialogue' has a dual significance, both in reinforcing internal democratic processes and in providing a more legitimate foundation to donor activities. The notion of national democratic dialogue stems partly from the National Conferences held in Francophone African countries at the beginning of the 1990s as a mechanism for the transition to democratic rule, but proposed as a regular mechanism. Initiated in Benin in February 1990, the National Conference involved dialogue between a range of political representatives and, in this first instance, was successful in achieving a change in political regime through negotiation. The concept of democratic dialogue is currently promoted by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) including in the context of ACP–EU relations (International IDEA 1998).

National democratic dialogue involves the encouragement of a formal and structured dialogue on the democratisation process, bringing together key stakeholders, both government and non-state. Dialogue encourages political debate on the state of democracy and democratisation in a given country context, addressing both obstacles to and opportunities for further progress. Clearly, debate involves differences and disagreements, but the aim is to seek consensus on the priorities for democratic development. The process of dialogue stimulates an ongoing political dynamic between elections. Outcomes can be at

both organisational and sectoral levels, with the former including the strengthening of pro-reform networks, and the latter involving the identification of key areas of reform. Additionally, donors are provided with opportunities for support through external funding that have emerged out of an internally-driven process.

The concept of national democratic dialogue is potentially a key to a number of outstanding issues in discussions of the role of external agencies in democratisation. First, it reasserts the primacy of democratisation as an internal process to which external assistance is subordinated. The lead role of democratic government is respected, while ensuring the participation of civil society. Second, guidance on appropriate democratisation strategies is provided by the outcomes of national dialogue, a shift from external prescriptions and providing a more legitimate foundation for external support. The integrity of donor efforts is more assured given that they are directed from within the recipient country, rather than influenced by hidden agendas and/or particular self-interest. Third, recipient government commitment to democratisation is enhanced through their engagement in dialogue on democratic consolidation with the range of non-state stakeholders. Fourth, coming full circle, the process of dialogue itself contributes to the fundamental objective of promoting democratisation. By its nature, it reinforces and deepens the democratic process, encouraging the development of a democratic culture and providing a mechanism for conflict prevention and/or resolution. Indeed, donor governments are encouraged to introduce such a model to address the democratic deficits in their own countries.

10.1.2 Towards democratic development: concluding proposals

One aim of this work has been to critically evaluate the implementation of political aid measures by Northern governments. Finally, a series of concluding proposals are offered as a contribution to ongoing discussion on the promotion of democratic development, aimed at strengthening the legitimacy of democracy assistance as well as its effectiveness.

1. An increase in the political aid component of overall aid budgets to at least 10 per cent would be more in line with the prioritisation accorded to this area.

2. 'Mainstreaming' political aid as an integral element of individual country aid programmes enables greater coherence in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of political aid activities. Short-term

projects, typical of budget line funding, are inappropriate for support to the long-term and complex process of democratisation.

3. Nonetheless, *human rights and democracy budget lines remain an important mechanism for channelling support to non-governmental organisations where non-democratic regimes retain power.* Support to the organisations that defend and promote civil and political rights in such contexts is frequently crucial to sustaining prospects for future democratisation. Assistance can be disbursed direct to local human rights and pro-democracy groups or through international human rights organisations, whose expertise and comparative advantage in this sphere has been noted.

4. *Country assessments are an important methodological tool* to determine appropriate strategy and to facilitate the design of political aid programmes. Undertaken on a regular basis, assessments examine the evolving nature of the democratisation process, with wide coverage of both governmental institutions and civil society, as well as broader knowledge of the country's political context. Where national democratic dialogue occurs, as proposed above, this *itself* will largely perform the function of a country assessment. Otherwise, it is necessary that country assessment methodology includes consultation and dialogue with the range of local stakeholders. Not only does this ensure greater inclusiveness of opinion, but also that the consequent strategy has local endorsement.

5. *Inclusion of co-operation with local civil society organisations is an essential element* of overall political aid programmes. One dilemma attached to 'mainstreaming' political aid is an inherent tendency towards 'top-down' government institution building, given that recipient governments become the main partner in co-operation programmes, yet it is necessary that a substantial programme of support to pertinent non-state actors is maintained. An unwillingness by recipient governments to countenance donor assistance to non-state actors would question their own commitment to democratisation.

6. *Support to civil society to be more narrowly focused on those organisations that are of particular significance for the defence and promotion of democratic government.* Relevant organisations will vary between countries *and* between phases of the democratisation process, but can most commonly be described as civic advocacy organisations, rather than those pursuing a more sectional or private interest.

7. *Regional imbalances in the distribution of political aid to be addressed.* In particular, more extensive donor support to democratic development in Asia is required, along with greater examination of the potential within the Middle East.

8. A larger proportion of political aid to be disbursed directly to organisations in recipient countries, governmental and non-governmental, with a decreased proportion of funds benefiting donor-based consultancy and training firms. An increase in 'direct funding' of SNGOs is particularly endorsed. The model of using NNGOs as conduits for disbursal of funds to SNGOs also has advantages, benefiting from the close partnerships established between like-minded organisations.

9. Increased utilisation of multilateral organisations as implementers of political aid is suggested, especially UN bodies. Their enhanced legitimacy in situations of conflict resolution and peace building was particularly noted.

10. Good governance measures to encourage open and accountable government require a focus not only on strengthening executive capacity, but also on those institutions, governmental and non-governmental, that have a role in exercising democratic control over executive power, for example, legislatures, national audit bodies, ombudsman institutions, and societal organisations such as the media and research institutes.

11. Support to democratic local government is crucial, valued as a mechanism of enhanced public control and participation in decision-making processes. It must be noted, however, that decentralisation *per se* does not necessarily strengthen democracy.

12. Donor support for economic adjustment programmes should be made conditional on being subjected to democratic decision-making processes, including public scrutiny and parliamentary approval. Incompatibilities have been noted between economic policy sovereignty, an essential element of democracy, and the imposition of structural adjustment programmes by the powerful international financial institutions (IFIs), abetted by Northern governments. Findings here have highlighted the dovetailing between some good governance measures (for example, financial accountability) and donor surveillance of the implementation of economic adjustment programmes. Donors can demonstrate the primacy of national democratic politics and their commitment to economic policy sovereignty by making their support for economic adjustment conditional on it being subjected to the democratic process.

13. Gender equality is a fundamental principle to strive for through increased support for women's rights, for improved access for women to public office, and for women's advocacy groups. The dearth of evidence of such measures is partially accounted for by the poor record of Western democracies on women's representation in government. The Scandinavian countries are an exception and could take a lead role in

activities to overcome gender inequalities in political affairs, with lessons to be learnt by donor and recipient countries alike.

14. Donor support be provided for the implementation of the 1992 UN Declaration on Minorities. One test of a democratic society is its protection and promotion of minority rights, one indicator being the implementation of the UN Declaration.

15. The concept of 'do no harm' requires donor vigilance against negative, unintended effects. It is incumbent on donors to ensure that political aid programmes are continually scrutinised in order to identify potentially harmful effects of political intervention, especially the fuelling of conflict. Donor agencies require not only expertise in democracy and good governance matters, but also a thorough knowledge and understanding of local political contexts.

10.2 Aid sanctions

10.2.1 Critical issues

Questions surrounding the effectiveness and legitimacy of aid sanctions have been highlighted as key interconnected issues. In assessing the 29 instances of political conditionality along lines of effectiveness, it was discovered that aid restrictive measures had been successful in only a minority of cases. Investigating the reasons for policy *ineffectiveness* in the majority of cases, it was found that the weakness of the measures taken had more explanatory power than the strength of the recipients. Stokke's six hypotheses regarding effectiveness were generally confirmed, though with the evidence generating additional propositions. Two of these, the degree of countervailing economic and strategic interests and the degree of political will of the donor, strongly questioned how seriously Northern donors had pursued their stated objective of promoting human rights and democracy. This dimension was explored further in the examination of consistency of application, with overwhelming evidence from three lines of investigation that political conditionality had been applied weakly or not at all in circumstances of donor economic and political self-interests. Thus, policy implementation had been characterised by the selective and inconsistent application of human rights and democracy criteria. It was argued that this undermines both policy legitimacy and the credibility of donor motivations, as well as having an adverse impact on effectiveness.

For many commentators, these findings may be not only unsurprising but also anticipated. They will confirm the intuition of those sceptical of

the whole political conditionality agenda that it would not be an effective policy instrument and that implementation would be characterised by inconsistency. Others of a more pragmatic or realist viewpoint will point to the underlying flaw in appraising policy application solely on the basis of consistency. Their view is that of course there will be inconsistency given that the promotion of human rights and democracy is only one of a number of foreign policy concerns that impact on development co-operation. How can political conditionality be considered separately from other foreign policy goals? Further, is it not naïve to expect that Northern governments will place human rights and democracy at the centre of their foreign policies, or that such concerns will take precedence over issues of trade or perceived 'security'? Rather, is it not to be expected that donor government positions will be adopted on a country-by-country basis, with human rights concerns often competing with other more compelling interests? This may lead to inconsistency when decisions on aid sanctions are examined in terms of one criterion only, that of human rights, but is this not an inevitable aspect of policy implementation in the real world?

On the other hand, should a normative dimension to foreign and aid policy be abandoned meekly in the face of such realist arguments? What are the counter arguments? First, it is obviously correct that human rights concerns co-exist with and cannot be addressed in isolation from other foreign policy objectives. Yet the evidence presented here demonstrates that when *any* other foreign policy goal comes into conflict with the promotion of human rights and democracy, then it is the latter that is abandoned. In a hierarchy of foreign policy objectives, an element of consistency is that human rights and democracy concerns are at the bottom of the pile. Second, it is itself inappropriate to examine policy implementation in this area solely from a realist or pragmatic perspective. Northern donors have *themselves* chosen to move their foreign and development policy to an arena where they are appealing to certain norms as universally binding – that is, respect for human rights and democratic principles. The implications are that inconsistency in policy implementation cannot easily be dismissed as a function of conflicting foreign policy objectives. Universal norms require both donor and recipient governments to act according to defined standards. If donors, having stipulated the norms themselves, then act more in accordance with self-interests, this not only exposes them to the accusation of double standards but also undermines the credibility and legitimacy of the policy agenda. If donors' commitment to the principles of human rights and democracy is at best partial and dependent on the

lack of competing self-interests, they can hardly require development partners to abide by those principles in a manner that commands respect.

10.2.2 Towards a strengthened normative framework: concluding proposals

Initial discussions of the literature on political conditionality established the legitimacy in principle of human rights conditionality. Simultaneously, it was noted how legitimacy in practice depended on the *manner* of policy implementation. Findings have demonstrated the failure of donors to apply human rights policy 'fairly and equally', as undertaken in the Final Declaration of the UN Vienna Conference in 1993. The following suggestions are put forward in the spirit of forging policy instruments in which the values of human rights and democracy are shared and within which the participation and authorship of recipient nations is enhanced. The primary endeavour is to *internationalise* policy implementation.[167]

1. A human rights clause

A human rights clause be introduced as a standard component in development co-operation agreements. In line with EU practice, this clause would be an essential element of the agreement with an associated 'suspension mechanism'. This provides a firm, legal and contractual basis, agreed by both parties, to respect for human rights as a threshold condition of development assistance, with known consequences if breached.

Two outstanding issues remain, however. First, how are human rights defined? Second, should the clause be extended to include respect for democratic principles, as EU practice has evolved? As a threshold requirement, *it is suggested that human rights be delimited to civil and political rights only,* as defined in the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and ratified by the majority of the world's states. This suggestion does not contradict the 'indivisibility' of human rights. In contrast to the 'aspirational' nature of economic, social and cultural rights, civil and political rights are appropriate as a threshold condition: they are subject to implementation without delay or deferment, whatsoever the level of economic development of a ratifying state.[168] Further, *it is suggested that the clause is not extended to democratic principles*, due to the current lack of a clear definition of democracy in international law. This is not to deny the importance of democracy. On the contrary, as discussed in Chapter 1, democracy concerns are in fact covered by civil and political rights as an

essential element of democracy and as a pre-requisite for meaningful elections.

2. Assessment criteria and performance indicators

Having achieved definitional clarity, it is then possible to develop *an inventory of criteria by which country performance will be assessed, and of measurable performance indicators*. Tomasevski's (1993) criticisms of the arbitrary and discretionary manner of donor decision-making are recalled. It is suggested that criteria be based on the guidelines provided by international human rights bodies, notably the UN Human Rights Committee, the supervisory body of the ICCPR. A list of measurable performance indicators can similarly be determined in co-ordination with such bodies.

3. Monitoring performance

Monitoring and evaluation of the political situation in recipient countries for aid allocation purposes appears to occur on a fairly *ad hoc* basis, mainly responding to crisis situations as they arise. A *systematic and regular monitoring of performance is suggested*, based on existing monitoring mechanisms of the UN and regional systems of human rights,[169] as well as those of international human rights NGOs. There are both pragmatic and normative benefits to greater use of UN monitoring bodies. They are well established, with experience both of standard setting and measuring compliance. They are endowed with legitimacy, mutually acceptable to all parties, and can contribute to the development of a 'commonly shared normative framework' (van Boven 1995).

4. Transparency

It is essential that the whole process is characterised both by agreement between parties and by transparency, including dialogue with recipient countries. Clarity is required regarding which violations will trigger which restrictive measures, enabling recipients to respond to any perceived unfair treatment by donors. Transparency is also necessary to permit donor parliaments and wider publics to fully participate in policy discussions. To this end, *an annual report could be submitted to individual donor legislatures, including the European Parliament*, on the promotion of human rights and democracy through development co-operation, including negative measures taken.

5. An international body

To facilitate joint Southern and Northern authorship of the aid policy regime, as well as to avoid duplication of effort by individual donor governments, *an international body could be delegated responsibility* for the above tasks. As well as the initial one-off tasks of defining concepts and criteria, the responsibilities of this body could include ongoing country performance monitoring and the investigation of instances of perceived violations as they arise, removing determinations of what constitutes contractual breaches from Northern hands.[170] *The preferred location is within an existing UN agency.*[171] As regards decision-making, this international body would have the competence to make recommendations, including on charges of violations, although individual donor governments would have the choice to accept or disregard its advice.

6. Legislative mandate

Following the example of the US Congress, in order to circumscribe the discretionary powers of individual donor governments to act in a selective and subjective manner, *donor legislatures could amend aid legislation to mandate a suspension of assistance to governments who engage in gross abuses of civil and political rights and/or take power through a military coup.*

10.2.3 Effectiveness and legitimacy

The compatibility of instrumental and normative issues within political conditionality has been demonstrated, with effectiveness and consistency strongly interlinked. Inconsistent policy application has a detrimental impact not only on policy legitimacy but also on its effectiveness. Similarly, strengthening the normative framework and applying policy objectively and non-selectively both increases legitimacy and has positive implications for effectiveness. Further, an enhanced ethical dimension within foreign policy implies the use of a broader range of instruments, namely trade restrictions, arms embargoes, and diplomatic measures. These are especially relevant in situations where aid sanctions have limited impact on their own. Again, the implications for effectiveness are positive. Additional links between effectiveness and consistency have been demonstrated in this study. The greater the specificity of political reforms required for development assistance to be maintained, the greater the likelihood of effectiveness. Moreover, if donors give due regard to the reforms called for by internal movements, then both legitimacy and effectiveness are augmented.

The relative ineffectiveness of aid conditionality in some circumstances should imply neither its worthlessness nor the maintenance of development assistance to governments culpable of political repression. Rather, aid restrictions need to be implemented with greater integrity by Northern donors and with enhanced Southern participation, entailing the fair and equal treatment of all nations, as part of a larger package of non-co-operation with regimes that show contempt for the rights of their citizens. The alternative is a rhetorical commitment only and a practice that continues to be based on self-interest and characterised by an assertion of power over poorer and weaker nations.

10.3 Democracy promotion and neo-liberal hegemony

Wider critiques of the West's 'putative' promotion of democracy were made by some writers, as discussed in Chapter 1. Before making some final comments, it is useful to briefly recall their arguments.

Gills *et al.* (1993) used the phrase 'low intensity democracy' to describe the West's narrow interest on procedural democracy, a mechanism of intervention to enable the removal of discredited authoritarian rulers, to provide democratic legitimacy for the implementation of harsh adjustment measures, and to pre-empt and co-opt demands for more substantial change. In separate works, Barya (1993), William Robinson (1996), as well as Gills *et al.* (1993), share a view of Western democracy promotion as the political element of a wider project to establish global neo-liberal hegemony, itself operating in the interests of transnational capital. Within such a project, economic concerns are clearly paramount and political restructuring essentially a means to ongoing economic liberalisation. These are propositions which, by their nature, lend themselves less readily to the type of empirical investigation undertaken here. Thus, (dis)agreement with such statements is more a matter of judgement. To what extent does the evidence here enable more informed judgements? The findings are mixed, some tending to support the thrust of radical left arguments, others tending to qualify their statements.

First, are donors merely intent on promoting 'low intensity democracy'? Evidence against such a proposition has indicated the significant support provided to broader dimensions of democratic development, in particular support for civil society organisations, somewhat contrary to Barya's specific expectations (1993, p. 21). Yet, it remains questionable whether donors have explicitly encouraged the 'popular participation of civil society in the decision-making of the state', as seriously doubted by

Barya (ibid., p. 17), with findings here highlighting the often indiscriminate and haphazard nature of civil society assistance. Taking a somewhat distinct tack, W. I. Robinson (1996, p. 319) anticipated the *inclusion* of civil society in democracy promotion, with donor intent to develop allies and co-opt civil society bodies, pre-empting more radical change. Investigation of such claims requires the detail that country case-studies provide, and it is noted that Ngunyi *et al.*'s (1996, p. 23) study of Kenya did affirm a process of donor selection of favoured civil society groups and the exclusion of more radical actors.

Second, to what extent is democracy promotion subordinate to a neoliberal hegemonic project, that is a means to wider ends, primarily economic? Again, the evidence is mixed. On the one hand, the political reform agenda has been shown to be closely interrelated with that of economic liberalisation, especially with regard to executive strengthening measures. For all the bilateral donors, these constitute a substantial proportion of overall political aid and it has been noted how such efforts often dovetail with structural adjustment programmes, for example, measures aimed at financial accountability and the provision of statistical information. Ostensibly promoting open and accountable government, they enhance the 'policing' of structural adjustment programmes by donor institutions. Moreover, it remains questionable whether civil society organisations that pose a challenge to economic orthodoxy have received donor sponsorship, with investigation through country case-studies required. Hearn's findings on civil society support in Ghana, South Africa and Uganda are pertinent, however, with 'civil society organisations committed to promote liberal democracy and economic liberalism [being] the most popular with donors' (Hearn 1999, p. 4).[172] Additionally, there is evidence here that some donors, notably the US and UK, pursue democratisation when it coincides with their economic interests, yet abandon democracy promotion when it contradicts such interests, for example, the 'non-cases' here. Further, hidden agendas surface when political aid programmes are established with governments that are most unlikely proponents of democratisation, for instance, in Egypt, Colombia and Indonesia, the former two supported by the US and the latter by the UK. The democracy building component could be interpreted both as a means to exert political influence and as an attempt to legitimate substantial aid programmes with non-democratic governments, allies for a variety of economic and geo-political reasons.

On the other hand, some findings make it difficult to sustain the idea that the predominant thrust of political aid is as a means to Western

global dominance. From the project information gathered here, it is evident that many measures are unequivocally dedicated to promoting various aspects of democratic development, for instance, the human rights projects supported by the EU and Sweden, with support channelled to NGOs with proven track records in such fields. To imply that such organisations can be so easily manipulated by donor agendas and deflected from their own objectives is insulting in itself.

Thus, findings on these broader issues are inconclusive, unsurprisingly, with more detailed country case-study research required. The evidence here has indicated that there is some basis for criticism of a propulsion to democratisation from outside that aims at asserting a political system that reinforces the current restructuring of global economic exploitation. Nevertheless, this is balanced by examples of quite distinct practices, exhibiting commitment to the principles of human rights and democratic development. Yet, perhaps this presentation of diversity does enable us to make a more informed judgement. The differences in practices that have been evident from the comparative examination highlights that the picture of neo-liberal hegemony is less a description of how the world is and more an account of *some* attempts to construct it, albeit those of powerful actors. How is a counter hegemonic strategy developed? One component is precisely through radicalising the democracy promotion activities discussed here. By this means a neo-liberal hegemonic agenda can be unsettled and the effects of its thrust mitigated. It is through addressing the policy deficiencies and radicalising policy implementation that the processes of Western dominance can be undermined. Discussions here are intended to be a contribution to that end.