

Rethinking Development Assistance: An Approach Based on Autonomy-Respecting Assistance

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Table of Contents

Introduction

The Failure of the Social Engineering Approach

Autonomous Development

The Broader Context of Evaluation

Organisational and Social Learning

Knowledge Brokering Strategies

Scaling Up Motivation

Revisiting Hirschman

The Common Theme: Autonomy -Respecting Development Linkages

Annex: Volitional and Cognitive Aspects of Five Helper-Doer Themes

Bibliography

Introduction

Today, development agencies are actively rethinking the effectiveness of development assistance. There have been many small or local successes but the goal of sustainable scaling-up has been more illusive. What are the linkages that can be changed by policy-makers that will help scale up micro-successes to have an impact at the macro level? And what is the role of evaluation in promoting a scaling-up strategy? To begin by establishing some concepts and terminology: the macro-micro linkage in development assistance is analysed as a relationship between those offering assistance in some form, the helper or helpers, and those receiving the assistance, the doer or doers.¹ The helpers could be individuals, NGOs, or official bilateral or multilateral development agencies, and the doers could be individuals, organizations or various levels of government in the developing countries. The relationship is the helper-doer relationship [see Ellerman 2001, 2002a].

The Failure of the Social Engineering Approach

Social engineering approaches to development assistance have not been successful. If one sees the doers as trying to find their way through a maze, then the social-engineering helpers see themselves as helicoptering over the maze giving out directions (disseminating knowledge) as well as incentives (providing motivation) to go in one direction rather than another.

* The findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed in this paper are entirely those of the author and should not be attributed in any manner to the World Bank, to its affiliated organizations, or to the members of its Board of Directors or the countries they represent.

¹ Doing includes thinking; “doer” is not juxtaposed to “thinker.” Instead, the “doers of development” (Wolfensohn, 1999) actively undertaking tasks are juxtaposed to the passive recipients of aid, teaching or technical assistance.

In the end, this strategy of assistance fails because both the motivation and the knowledge are external to the doers. If actions are undertaken by the doers simply to receive aid (external incentives), then the actions will be poorly implemented (e.g., gamed to just get the aid) and most likely will not be sustained when the incentives are removed. And "knowledge" acquired from outside experts is likely to be ill-adapted to local conditions, loaded with unshared value assumptions, devoid of the tacit skills, and, above all, only a borrowed opinion rather than the owned knowledge which could be the basis for determined policies.

These problems in the social engineering approach are endemic. Sustainable transformation towards developmental ends needs to be based on motives that come out of the doers' own internal values—and knowledge needs to be grounded on the doers' own learning experiences.

Autonomous Development

Development, at best, should be autonomous development.² But then we immediately reach the contradiction in the engineering approach: *autonomous* action cannot be externally motivated and one's *own* cognitive judgment cannot be simply based on external authority. Indeed, there is a fundamental conundrum in the notion of assistance to autonomous development, i.e., in the notion of "helping people help themselves." If the helpers are having an important impact on the doers, then how can the doers be "helping themselves"? And if the doers are genuinely helping themselves, then what is the role of external helpers? To really improve development effectiveness, we must wrestle continuously with this basic conundrum.

The Broader Context of Evaluation

One place to start rethinking is to reconsider the whole purpose of evaluation in development assistance. Evaluation is usually thought of as part of a rational-technical approach that can be considered as a cycle: make a plan to reach one's goals, implement the plan, evaluate the outcomes and learn the lessons, and then revise the plan and repeat the plan-do-evaluate-learn cycle. But there are a number of reasons why it is difficult to apply this rational-technical model to development. Donald Schön [1971, 1983] summarizes the reasons as novel complexity, genuine uncertainty, conflict of values, unique circumstances, and structural instabilities that take us "beyond the stable state." How can we rethink evaluation in this context?

The key to this rethinking is to focus on the overall purpose of the cycle which is *learning*. In view of the low effectiveness of many development strategies, there is always the call for "better evaluation" when in fact the problems tend to lie not so much in the evaluations but in the low capability for organizational learning in the helping agencies and the doer organizations. The problems of objective and timely evaluations of subtle social change programs are swamped by the problems in the agencies and organizations "taking on board" the lessons that can be readily discerned by casual observers. Schön calls this "dynamic conservatism" [1971, 48], the ability of organizations to continually adjust so as not to really change. Thus the problems of development evaluation should be reconceived more broadly in the context of the problems of organisational and social learning.³

² See Orlando Fals-Borda and Anisur Rahman [1991], Rahman [1993], Raff Carmen [1996], Norman Uphoff, Martin Esman, and Anirudh Krishna [1998], and Amartya Sen [1999]. And Ellerman 2001.

³ See for instance Senge [1990].

Organisational and Social Learning

The problems of learning must be approached from both the sides of the helpers (e.g., the multilateral and bilateral development agencies) and the doers (e.g., various levels of government, the organizations of civil society, and business firms in the developing countries). While it is an important means for the development agencies to become learning organizations, the real goal is for the developing countries to learn how to learn, i.e., to become learning societies (e.g., the East Asian "tigers"). Perhaps we should start with that goal and then "back out" a supporting or catalyzing role for the development agencies.

The problems in the social engineering approach fostering social change are reproduced in the relationship between the central government (the center or central at the macro level) and the other levels of government, civil society, and the private sector (the periphery at the micro level). The center proposes social policies and provides funds to implement those policies. The periphery disposes and dissimulates. Schön describes the strategies used by the periphery in the game:

- Propose what central wants to hear, but do what you want to do.
- Develop a rhetoric compatible with central policy.
- Play funding agencies off against each other.
- Seek minimum federal control over the use of money.
- Take advantage of a surplus of information about what is going on at the local level, and the high cost of finding out for central.
- Bring pressure to bear on the funding agency, exploiting political insecurities.
- Attempt to gain central's commitment over time, so that it develops a heavy investment in the local venture and finds it difficult to back out. [Schön 1971, 154]

In this hub and spokes model [e.g., Rogers 1983] of implementing social policy, the central hub does the evaluations of its implemented policies in the periphery and then tries to draw lessons and revise plans.

[The standard approach] treats government as center, the rest of society as periphery. Central has responsibility for the formation of new policy and for its imposition on localities at the periphery. Central attempts to 'train' agencies at the periphery. In spite of the language of experimentation, government-initiated learning tends to be confined to efforts to induce localities to behave in conformity with central policy. Localities learn to beat the system. Government tends to bury failure or learn from it only in the sense of veering away from it. Evaluation, then, tends to be limited to the role of establishing and monitoring the extent of peripheral conformity with central policy. [Schön 1971, 177]

What is the alternative? The alternative is a decentralized social learning model. Experimentation is encouraged in the periphery. The center tries to recognize successes and then to foster horizontal learning within the periphery. Instead of using resources to "buy" implementation of centrally determined policies, the center uses resources to help those who are

trying to solve a certain problem to learn from others who seem to have attacked the problem successfully.

Government cannot play the role of 'experimenter for the nation', seeking first to identify the correct solution, then to train society at large in its adaptation. The opportunity for learning is primarily in discovered systems at the periphery, not in the nexus of official policies at the center. Central's role is to detect significant shifts at the periphery, to pay explicit attention to the emergence of ideas in good currency, and to derive themes of policy by induction. The movement of learning is as much from periphery to periphery, or periphery to center, as from center to periphery. Central comes to function as facilitator of society's learning, rather than as society's trainer. [Schön 1971, 177-8]

Perhaps the best example of centrally sponsored system of decentralized innovation and diffusion in a developing country is in China over the last quarter of a century. Contrary to the classical model of reforms being established in the center and disseminated to the periphery, the Chinese recognized local reform models which could be in a region, county, commune, or even brigade. The local model could be in any sector or area such as administration, health, education, or industry, and could be visited by groups from all over China who want to make a similar reform in their locality.

The diffusion of innovations in China is distinctive in that it is (1) more horizontal in nature, (2) less dependent upon scientific and technical expertise, and (3) more flexible in allowing re-invention of the innovation as it is implemented by local units. These aspects of decentralized diffusion are facilitated by China's use of such diffusion strategies as models and on-the-spot conferences. The "learning from others" approach to decentralized diffusion in China was adopted officially as a national policy in the national constitution in 1978. [Rogers 1983, 340-1]

Thus China learned how to learn from its own successes and then later how the center could foster scaling up of those successes across China.

One role of the external helping agency is the *capacity-building* job of helping a country set up this type of decentralized social learning process. There is often resistance at both the agency and country levels. Indeed, there is a self-reinforcing lock-in between developing countries that *want* "The Answer" and development agencies that *have* "The Answer."

(Policy-makers) will be supplied with a great many ideas, suggestions, plans, and ideologies, frequently of foreign origin or based on foreign experience.... Genuine learning about the problem will sometimes be prevented not only by the local policy-makers' eagerness to jump to a ready-made solution, but also by the insistent offer of help and advice on the part of powerful outsiders.... (S)uch practices (will) tend to cut short that "long confrontation between man and a situation" (Camus) so fruitful for the achievement of genuine progress in problem-solving. [Hirschman, 1973, 239-40].

Knowledge Brokering Strategies

An external helping agency can not only foster horizontal learning within a country, it can foster cross-learning between countries. This horizontal learning can take the form of visits, secondments, twinning arrangements, or consulting contracts between an organization in one country undertaking a difficult reform and a group in another country which has carried out the reform with some success. The countries should not be too far apart in culture or economic level so that the experience and lessons will be comparable. This is "peer to peer" or "South to South" technical cooperation.

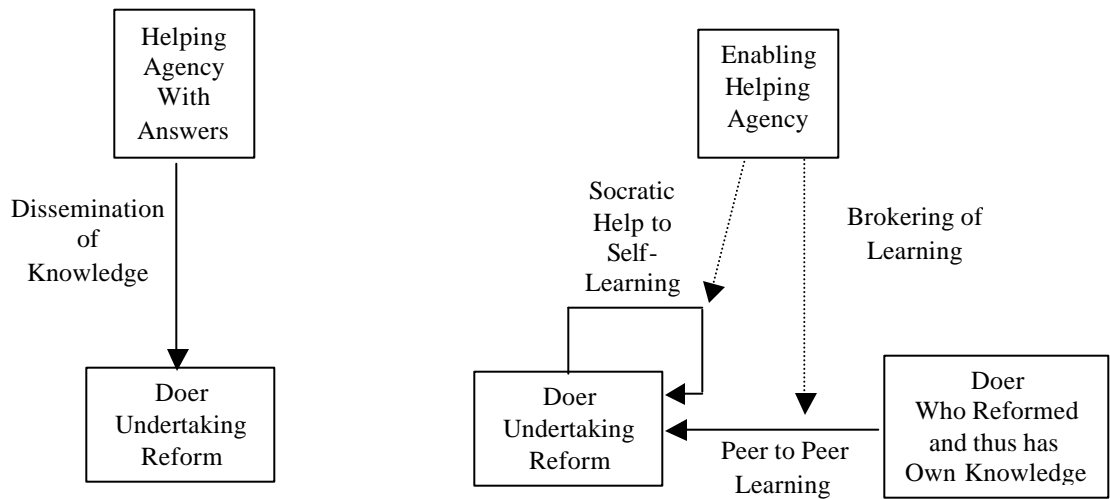
But, it will be asked, what about the expertise of the helping agencies? The helping agency can, it is argued, "scan the world" and learn what works and what doesn't. When they feel confident that they "have the answer," shouldn't they "disseminate" the answer to the doers, and ("just to be sure") make its adoption a condition for receiving aid? This is perhaps a subtle point of pedagogy but the answer is "No!"; instead the helping agency should, by brokering doer-doe relationships or convening meetings of doers, make it possible for the relevant doers to learn "on their own" what works and what doesn't. Otherwise the "knowledge" will only an opinion borrowed from or imposed by experts and will not be the sort of learned lessons that can be the foundation for implementing difficult policies.

In Western thought, this approach to learning dates back to Socrates. Instead of claiming that the "answers" should be disseminated from expert-helper to counterpart-doe, Socrates displayed the humility of knowing that he did not know. He did not put learners in a passive role to receive wisdom, but helped them to try actively to answer questions or resolve problems.

That real education aims at imparting knowledge rather than opinion, that knowledge cannot be handed over ready-made but has to be appropriated by the knower, that appropriation is possible only through one's own search, and that to make him aware of his ignorance is to start a man on the search for knowledge—these are the considerations that govern and determine the Socratic method of teaching [Versényi, 1963, 117].

Indeed, the key to this more indirect approach is for the helper as midwife to facilitate the doer taking the active role. In a slogan: "Stop the teaching so that the learning can begin!" As George Bernard Shaw put it: "If you teach a man anything he will never learn it" [1961, 11]. Or as management theorist Douglas McGregor said: "Fundamentally the staff man...must create a situation in which members of management can learn, rather than one in which they are taught..." [1966 161]. José Ortega y Gasset suggested: "He who wants to teach a truth should place us in the position to discover it ourselves" [1961, 67]. Or as Myles Horton, founder of the Highlander Folk School, maintained: "You don't just tell people something; you find a way to use situations to educate them so that they can learn to figure things out themselves" [1998,122].

Thus we arrive at the strategy of knowledge brokering rather than "knowledge dissemination."



Two Strategies for Learning and Scaling Up Knowledge

In addition to the "Socratic" reasons for not using a dissemination model, there are large problems in the assumption that the helping agency has "learned" the answer in order to disseminate it. One problem is the difference between local and general knowledge. If the helping agency tries to "broadcast" the answer rather than help the doers learn it on their own, then the broadcast answer will not be adapted to the local conditions of the doers. The "narrow-cast" of peer-to-peer learning may be more suitable for local adaptation. Secondly there is the distinction between codified explicit knowledge (which the agency could in theory retransmit) and the tacit know-how that needs to be transmitted by secondments, twinning, and consulting from doers to doers. Thirdly there is the *Rashomon* effect where different people or groups may draw rather different lessons from the same story of success or failure [see Schön 1971, 210]. Consider, for example, the different "readings" of the East Asian success stories or the tragedy of the Russian reforms. Some mis-readings are very much theory-based on the part of helpers—helpers who are so "scientific" that they "would rather have people die by the right therapy than be cured by the wrong."⁴ And last but not least, there may be strong ideological pressures on the helping agencies to broadcast certain messages and not others regardless of the messages emerging from the success/failure stories.

For all these reasons, it seems best to use the knowledge brokering strategy of scaling up knowledge of what works and what doesn't through supporting or facilitating peer to peer learning as well as own learning. A variation on the brokering strategy is for the helping agency to use its convening power to facilitate meetings of doers with similar problems and experiences. Then some doers may have found solutions to certain problems while other doers will have resolved other problems. Thus the horizontal learning is two-way between the doers. Thus "convening" is a more complex form of brokering doer-to-doer learning.

There is a necessary caveat. This does not mean that the alternative approach will never work. There will always be a few cases where some externally supplied "fix" of technical knowledge

⁴ From Sinclair Lewis' *Arrowsmith* quoted in Scott 1998, 339.

will make "all the difference" to the doers even though the knowledge was not the result of any real learning process and thus was not "owned" by the doers. Examples might include learning to set certain tax or tariff rates, resolve technical problems with infrastructure, develop new improved seeds that can be readily used, or find a drug or medical procedure that can be readily implemented to save lives. Those inclined to social engineering will flood their minds with such cases as if they were the typical case of "technical assistance" rather than a limited special case.

To summarize our results so far, the problem is to scale up successes. We began by looking at the problem from the viewpoint of knowledge. In a stable situation appropriate for rational planning and engineering, we could implement a project or program, evaluate the outcomes, and then use the knowledge gleaned from the evaluation to redesign and improve it. But in the context of the complexities and instabilities of development, it seems better have many small experiments⁵, use evaluation to see what works, and then the helping agency at the "macro" level can broker the doer-doer relationships at the "micro" level to scale up the successes. Eventually stable aspects of the solutions might emerge that could be centrally legislated.

Scaling Up Motivation

All human action has both a cognitive side and a motivational side.⁶ So far I have focused on scaling up the cognitive side of development successes—the knowledge of what works and what doesn't. But there must also be a motivational side to scaling up. Returning to the maze analogy, the social engineer helicoptering over the maze not only tried to disseminate the knowledge of how to get out of the maze but also tried to provide the motivation to turn one way rather than another. On the knowledge side, I argued against the vertical dissemination of answers in favor of brokering horizontal learning between doers—some doers in search of answers and other doers with relatively successful experience.

I will make the analogous argument on the motivational side. The best linkage between the helping agency at the macro level and the doers at the micro level is not for the agency (as "principal" in a principal-agent relationship) to try to "vertically" supply extrinsic or exogenous motivation for the doers (as "agents"), e.g., carrots and sticks contained in loan or aid conditionalities. Helpers need to find where positive change is afoot on its own perhaps only on a small scale. And embedded in any society are linkages and pressures that could be thought of as the endogenous transmitters of motives for action. The best role for the helping agency is to try to catalyze those endogenous linkages that will amplify and spread any discovered developmental successes.

The idea is to foster transformation not by imposing motivations from the outside but by catalyzing the motivational mechanisms already endogenous in a society.

⁵ Where theory is unavailable or of little use (e.g., the early days of natural science), innovation comes from widespread tinkering and experiments with successes being scaled-up, not from "theory-guided" implementation.

⁶ In cognition, the idea is to get one's representation of the world to correspond with the world, while in volitional action, the idea is to get the world to correspond to some intended representation of the world. See the Annex for more on the volitional and cognitive sides of helping relationships.

Revisiting Hirschman

None of this is particularly new. It is a rendition of Albert Hirschman's notion of "unbalanced growth" [1961] which he juxtaposed to the social engineering vision of integrated big-push "balanced growth" programs. The helper starts by searching for the successes, perhaps hidden successes, which can then spawn more transformation.

I began to look for elements and processes...that *did* work, perhaps in roundabout and unappreciated fashion. [T]his search for possible *hidden rationalities* was to give an underlying unity to my work. ...[T]he hidden rationalities I was after were precisely and principally *processes of growth and change already under way* in the societies I studied, processes that were often unnoticed by the actors immediately involved, as well as by foreign experts and advisors." [Hirschman, 1984, 91-3]

Hirschman at one point refers to the principle of unbalanced growth as "the idea of maximizing induced decisionmaking" [1994, 278]. The problem-solving pressures induced by "*change already under way*" will call forth otherwise unused resources and enlist otherwise untapped energies. As reform efforts move from one bottleneck and crisis to another (in comparison with the smooth planned allocation of resources in a project), then "resources and abilities that are hidden, scattered, or badly utilized" [1961, 5] will be mobilized. Reform programs need to awaken and enlist local energies and knowledge for trial-and-error problem solving. But each problem solved brings to the foreground other problems and opportunities (forward and backward linkages). Change unfolds because "one thing leads to another"—not because a given rational plan is being implemented step by step.

As these social processes develop largely on the basis of their own released energies, new demands will be made on the center or government to reform institutions, to provide infrastructure, and to clear away impediments,⁷ and that in turn will spur further progress on the ground.

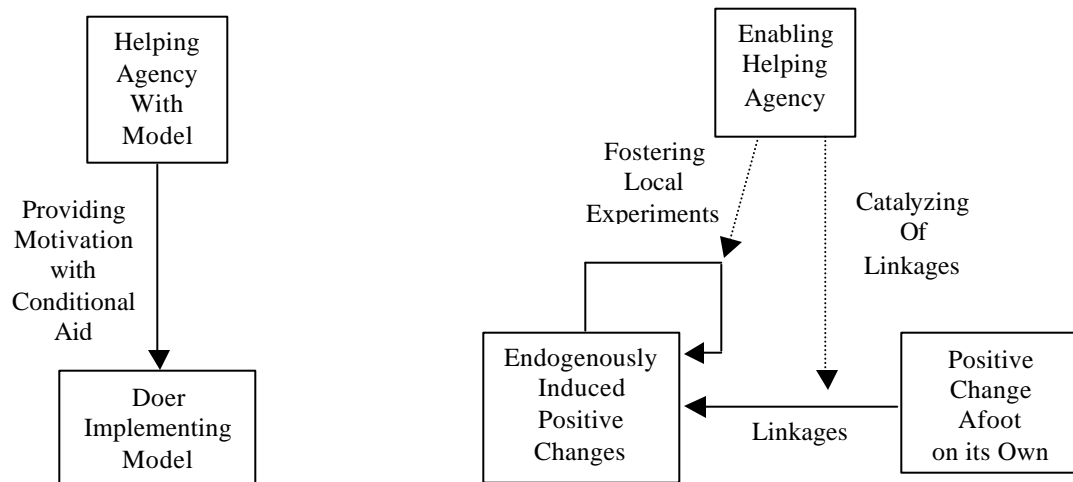
There are many well-known public or semipublic goods of this sort, from power, transportation, and irrigation to education and public health. Often designated as "infrastructure," as though they were preconditions for the more directly productive activities, these goods have more usually been provided in response to urgent demands emanating from such activities and from their need for consolidation, greater profitability, and further expansion. [Hirschman 1981, 80-1]

These induced demands for reforms are quite different from the externally imposed conditionalities that stipulate certain reforms. In psychological terms, the domestic induced demands for reforms supplies the government with a more "intrinsic" motivation for reform in

⁷ Hirschman quotes approvingly a consulting engineer who suggests a road surface that would better elicit pressure for maintenance on the public works authorities. "We assumed that, with the increasing truck and bus industry in Columbia, local pressure would be applied to the Ministry of Public Works to repair the deep holes which will develop in cheap bituminous pavements if maintenance and retreatment is delayed, and that such pressure would be greater than if a gravel and stone road is allow to deteriorate." [1961, 143] This strategy might be compared in effectiveness to a "conditionality" toward the same end.

contrast to the "tough performance-based" carrots and sticks imposed by external development agencies and donors. Thus the external helping agency, instead of trying to buy reforms with conditional aid, should find where virtue is afoot on its own to address "pressing problems" and use resources to catalyze and grow that virtue, using the linkages to induce larger demands for reforms on the government.

There is again a necessary caveat. This does not mean that the alternative approach will never work. There may always be the cases where the helper can supply external motivation to start things off with a "stroke of the pen" reform and then the reform "takes off" and scales up on its own. Typical reforms of this nature are price liberalizations that will be readily implemented by market participants and thus require no organizational or institutional capacity-building. All helping agencies "dream" of such propitious interventions but unfortunately they are rare special cases.



Two Strategies for Motivating Scaling Up

The Common Theme: Autonomy-Respecting Development Linkages

Now we can begin to draw out the common theme in the treatments of knowledge-based and aid-based assistance. In the knowledge case, the juxtaposition between the two strategies is based on whether the knowledge comes to the doers from the expert-helpers or arises out of the doers' own learning processes including interactions with other similar doers and which is facilitated by Socratic-helpers. Where the doers do not have the relevant knowledge, then the Socratic-helper would encourage the doers to search, experiment, and study other doers (and would refrain from disseminating what the helper took to be the answers). Once working answers were found by some doers, the helper would promote peer-to-peer learning to spread, to readapt, and to scale up the knowledge to other doers. The knowledge thus arises out the doers' own learning processes (experimentation, selection, and cross-learning) so it is owned knowledge.

In contrast, the engineering-oriented helping agency has answers from whatever source (e.g., globe-scanning researchers) and transmits or disseminates them to the doers based on its

"authority" and one-sided arguments delivered in public-relations-style reform campaigns.⁸ Since the helping agency has, in the fullness of its knowledge and expertise, already decided on the answers, there is no need to overload, distract, or confuse the doers with the arguments for the alternatives. Thus the doers are saved the "trouble" of going through "that 'long confrontation between man and a situation' (Camus) so fruitful for the achievement of genuine progress in problem-solving." The knowledge, however, is then only the borrowed opinion of experts, may be ill-adapted to the doers' circumstances, would be devoid of the tacit know-how components of knowledge, and may be heavily laden with theory or ideology or both. Years later, evaluation departments in the helping agencies can discover that the reforms were not well implemented by the doers so that the "hamster-wheel" of conventional development assistance can turn a few more rounds with "clearer" instructions to doers and "tougher" outcome-based conditionalities.

This assistance of the helping agency does not respect the cognitive autonomy of the doers; the doers are being "fed" knowledge by the helpers. In contrast, the Socratic-helper provides assistance in a way that is enabling rather than controlling—that respects rather than overrides the cognitive autonomy of the doers.

The same themes play out regarding motivation. In the engineering model, where the helper is "controlling," the helper provides the motivation externally in the form of conditions on loans or aid. Since the motivation of the doers is, by assumption in the principal-agent relationship, to get the aid-bait rather than to undertake the reform as an own-motivated effort to solve pressing problems, the situation is ripe for all sorts of games as is clear to anyone who has carefully observed the "aid business" during the last half century. Moreover, since the reform-like behavior is motivated by the aid, even that behavior is likely to revert when the aid stops.

The alternative to the helper supplying motivation is where the helper finds virtue afoot on its own. "In these situations, the donor would set himself the task of rewarding virtue (or rather, what he considers as such) where virtue appears of its own accord." [Hirschman 1971, 204] The helper would try to catalyze linkages, maximize demonstration effects, and in others ways to amplify the found small beginnings of positive change. Since the initial efforts and the transmitting linkages are endogenous to the system, these reforms might be catalyzed and strengthened by the helper but are not dependent on the helpers for the continuance of the reforms. Moreover, the reforms are more likely to be genuine rather than "make-believe" due to the internal motivation. Since the helpers are trying to strengthen or amplify the doers' actions taken on the basis of own motivation to solve pressing problems rather than override those motives with "tough output-based conditionalities," the helpers are providing autonomy-respecting assistance.

I have argued that autonomy-respecting assistance both in the cognitive and volitional dimensions is the sort of macro-micro development linkage that will best support not only genuine reforms but the scaling up of those reforms.

⁸ Some large development agencies now have "development communications departments" to help design and implement these propaganda campaigns.

Annex: Volitional and Cognitive Aspects of Five Helper-Doer Themes

Elsewhere I have developed five themes that describe an autonomy-respecting helper-doer relationship [see Ellerman 2001, 2002a, b]:

- "First Do": Helper should start from where the doers are (not from a *tabula rasa* or from where the helper is);
- "Second Do": Helper should see the world through the doer's eyes;
- "First Don't": Helper should not impose will upon the doer;
- "Second Don't": Helper should not made doer object of benevolent charity; and
- "Third Do": Overall, respect the autonomy of the doer.

The volitional and cognitive sides of the five themes are summarized in the following table.

General Theme in Helper-Doer Relation	Volitional Side	Cognitive Side
1 st Do: Helper starting from doer's position	Help in actions that start from the doer's present situation in the world.	Help that starts with the learner's present knowledge, not from a <i>tabula rasa</i> .
2 nd Do: Helper seeing through doer's eyes	Help with actions guided by doer's own perceptions of the present situation.	Help with learning that starts with how the learner sees the world, e.g., helper "giving reason" to learner.
1 st Don't: Distortionary assistance	Conditional aid to induce a certain action by doer.	Giving biased information and one-sided arguments to induce a certain belief by learner.
1 st Don't (restated positively): Non-Distortionary Enabling Assistance	Giving lump-sum aid to enable own-motivated doer action.	Giving unbiased information, both sides of arguments (e.g., through Socratic dialogue), and neutral knowledge tools to learner.
2 nd Don't: Giving results to doer as a gift.	Doing action for the "doer" so results are a gift.	Giving the answers to the "learner" so beliefs are at best borrowed opinions, not knowledge.
3 rd Do: Autonomous activity of doers.	Own-motivated action resulting in owned product of one's autonomous action.	Self-directed learning resulting in owned knowledge (able to give reasons, arguments, and evidence).
3 rd Do (restated negatively): Externally determined actions/beliefs	Making choices according to externally supplied incentives—like a marionette.	Adopting externally supplied "opinions" on the basis on conformity to authority or fashion.

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