



A new model of development coalition building: USAID achieving legitimate access and dominant information in Bangladesh's forest policy

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ABSTRACT

The influence of non-domestic actors and institutions on domestic policymaking process has been a constant research topic for a long time in the field of development studies. During recent years, however, the coalition strategy of foreign donors seems to have changed in favor of non-governmental allies in development cooperation, instead of state bureaucracies of the target countries. As a key foreign donor, for instance, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has introduced the forest co-management development concept, altering important policy and institutional settings in Bangladesh. The changes resulted from a combination of development inputs and politics, including funding, technical assistance and coalition with multiple, mostly non-state stakeholders. In this article, we use the concepts of development policy change, the global governance theorem of direct access to domestic policymaking process, and bureaucratic politics theory from development policy analysis for analyzing this new coalition strategy. A mixed qualitative-quantitative methods approach and the case of the USAID-induced forest co-management development model were employed to analyze the new coalition strategy based on the main interests of the donor. The results indicate that in the development process, USAID formed coalitions with non-state actors at all levels, thus circumventing national bureaucracies. The donor substantially involved non-state actors to (1) overcome the dominant information of state bureaucracies by eliciting data in the donors' informal interests, (2) gain control over the implementation process at multiple levels, and (3) enhance pressure on all levels of government for substantive policy changes. In contrast, the initial and very marginal coalitions with state agencies imply an initial cost for legitimately accessing a country's governance system. Furthermore, such detouring of state agencies poses the questions of operational authority and, concurrently, of ownership to sustain the changed practices. A broader implication based on the study findings is to especially consider the sovereignty issue in a development context in a recipient country.

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1. Introduction

The influence of non-domestic actors on domestic policymaking process has, for a long time, been a vibrant research agenda in the field of development studies (Bernstein & Cashore, 2000; Bernstein & Cashore, 2012; Aurenhammer, 2013; Brukas & Hjortso, 2004; Khan, 2001; Ojha, Cameron, & Bhattacharai, 2005; Rahman, Sadath, & Giessen, 2016). In this regard, political analysis of specific aspects of development practice by foreign donors is central to the whole

development process, but has often been ignored in research due to powerful intellectual and institutional barriers therein (Unsworth, 2009). Essentially, “sustaining and scaling up the benefits of the pilot interventions will require a ‘clearer understanding of the politics’ and a ‘supportive national framework’ – the latter implying comprehensive policy and institutional reform (Unsworth, 2009, p. 884). Since, this development cooperation policy (including its development aid) has attracted constant criticism from a wide range of development experts, who, instead of viewing the politics as formal development concerns, extend their focus to informal aspects, such as, to fulfill the interests of powerful actors (Escobar, 1995; Pronk, 2001).

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Over the last two decades, Bangladesh's forest policy, as an important development subsector, has been turned from a traditional production orientation toward conservation (Chowdhury, Koike, & Muhammed, 2009; Millat-e-Mustafa, 2001; Muhammed, Koike, & Haque, 2008; Sadath & Krott, 2012), and received considerable attention due to the live realities of the issues of climate change adaptation-mitigation, biodiversity conservation, and community livelihood (Rahman & Giessen, 2014; Rahman & Giessen, 2017a). However, the sectoral policy has been influenced substantially by international donor aid over the last two to three decades (Rahman et al., 2016; Sadath & Krott, 2012). The participation of local people in forest management was institutionalized in the country through the current forest policy, formulated in 1994 (Giessen, Sarker, & Rahman, 2016; Muhammed et al., 2008), in which emphasis was also given to increase the country's protected areas (PAs) of reserved forest land by 10% by the year 2015 (USAID, 2005, p. 4). Conversely, the international forest policy has attracted much more attention since participatory forestry was incorporated in Chapter 11 of Agenda 21, within the framework of the United Nations' Rio Earth Summit in 1992 (Humphreys, 2006; Muhammed et al., 2008; Rayner, Humphreys, Welch, Prabhu, & Verkooijen, 2010). By that time, several foreign donors (e.g., the World Bank, the Netherlands, Asian Development Bank (ADB), and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) had provided development project aid in adopting the participatory forest management model in Bangladesh, which resulted in several policy and institutional changes in the forestry sector before 2004 (Muhammed et al., 2008; Rahman et al., 2016; Sarker, Rahman & Giessen, 2017).

However, a brand-new format of community-based forest management emerged at the beginning of the 21st century, premised upon co-management to conserve and manage forest PAs in Bangladesh. The model was introduced through the financial and technical assistance of the foreign donor, USAID (Development Project Proposal (DPP), 2004; Chowdhury et al., 2009). To establish this co-management approach, the USAID implemented a series of development projects in the protected areas of Bangladesh (DPP (Development Project Proposal), 2004, DPP, 2009; Technical Assistance Project Proposal (TPP), 2015a; TPP, 2015b) from 2004. Over the last decade, the majority of the country's forest policy changes have appeared in the community-based forestry sub-sector and the majority of policy and institutional reforms have been influenced by the USAID-induced development aid (Rahman et al., 2016). In this regard, Rahman et al. (2016) argues that non-domestic donors have limited formal options to influence decisions on a recipient country's policies. Moreover, it is difficult to methodologically establish a causal relationship between global influences and domestic consequences (Aurenhammer, 2013; Lindstad & Solberg, 2010). However, it is important to assess the international forest regime and other international and transnational efforts "that constituted 'governance' – influenced behaviors towards solving problems for which they were established" (Bernstein & Cashore, 2012, p. 2). This sort of influence by a non-domestic donor on domestic policy has also been highlighted in several national (Giessen et al., 2016; Rahman & Giessen, 2017; Rahman et al., 2016b) and international (Burns & Giessen, 2016; Pavez & Bojanic, 1998; Gautam & Pokhrel, 2011; Klassen, 2003; Singer, 2008; Smith, Colan, Sabogal, & Snook, 2006; UNDP (United Nations Development Program), 2011) studies. In this context, Bernstein and Cashore (2000), Bernstein and Cashore (2012) suggest that international actors may access and subsequently influence the domestic development policy field politically by forming partnerships with national and international counterparts (see Bernstein and Cashore (2000), Bernstein and Cashore (2012); Roberts, 1998; Unsworth, 2009).

Furthermore, the broader bureaucratic politics theory claims that the foreign donor, as a state bureaucracy, comprises both formal and informal interests (Giessen, Krott, & Möllmann, 2014; Krott, 1990; Niskanen, 1971; Rahman & Giessen, 2017; Sahide & Giessen, 2015b; Wibowo & Giessen, 2015a) and the donor may form coalitions with other state and non-state actors by providing funds and other resources to influence policymaking (Bernstein & Cashore, 2012; Böcher, 2016; Burns & Giessen, 2016; Roberts, 1998). Foreign donor organizations themselves may either be state or non-state actors. Prominent cases of the former are public development cooperation agencies such as GIZ, DFID, or USAID (Rahman, Sarker, & Giessen, 2016). In this study, we focus on such public organizations. This makes the selected foreign donors under study likely to act according to the model of state bureaucracies, which hold public mandates, administrative ideology and legally-based decision making power (Berthélemy, 2006; Downs, 1967; Krott, 2005; Peters, 2010; Wintrobe, 1997). In a similar way, USAID created access into the country to influence domestic policymaking and proceeded to form coalitions with non-state actors at all levels to circumvent national bureaucracies to, thereby, satisfy their informal political interests. Hence, methodologically employing a mixed qualitative-quantitative methods approach to analysis of all the USAID-funded development project aid in this field, the study aimed to explain the coalition strategy of a donor in a recipient country, based on the donor's main interests.

The following chapter introduces the theoretical framework of the study. A description of the case and empirical methods are given in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 presents the results, followed by the discussion in Chapter 5. Finally, the conclusions are drawn in Chapter 6.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Development aid and the development policy process

Whether development aid serves development interests of recipient countries or interests of donors itself – has often been a much discussed and debated issue in the field of development studies (Berthélemy, 2006; Sobhan, 2004). This question entails key aspects regarding motivations of development actors behind bi-lateral aid (Boyce, 2002). Studies regarding political economy of foreign aid have focused on the motivations of donors as being related to fulfill informal self-interests by providing development aid in a recipient country (Hoeffler & Outram, 2011; Lewis, 2003; Maizels & Nissanke, 1984; Younas, 2008). Many development studies support that donor's informal self-interests outweigh formal development goals in bi-lateral aid allocation decisions (Clark, 1992; Dowling & Hiemenz, 1985; Svensson, 1999), and the informal interests span to entire political, economic and other strategic self-interests of development and powerful actors (Gulrajani, 2017; McKinlay & Little, 1977; Pronk, 2001; Allesina & Dollar, 2000). Escobar (1995) depicted the development discourse as a new domain of thought and experience – a new strategy for dealing with the alleged problems – a systematic production of knowledge and power. The study of development as discourse is comparable to Said's study of 'Orientalism' – "dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it" (Escobar, 1995, p. 6). Gellert (2005, p. 1345) observed a marked shift of development discourse from "authoritarian state developmentalism to neoliberal globalism". In Burns's (Burns, Krott, Sayadyan, & Giessen, 2017) views, this neoliberal privatization and deregulation further weaken state actors and their capacities. In this context, regarding management of natural resources, Ostrom (1990) believes that local community institutions can be very successful, whereas, Scott (1998) opined that state regulations generally considered the most promising options.

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