

The Political Dimension of Aid Effectiveness: Assessing the Principle of Ownership

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The past five years have witnessed unprecedented international efforts to improve the effectiveness of Official Development Assistance (ODA) in contributing to African countries' economic development and poverty reduction. The idea of ensuring that partner countries have ownership over their development policies was upheld in the Paris Declaration as one of the cornerstone principles necessary to ensure such effectiveness. However, the implementation and evaluation of this principle has raised questions and debates, both at the level of practitioners and of academics. The problem lies essentially in the difficulty in distinguishing between "actual" and "virtual" ownership, and the negative impacts of the latter on the possibility of obtaining the desired results.

This means that developing countries should own their development policies instead of being driven by international donors. However, the principle of ownership has only one indicator, which is the existence of a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, a document that has to be approved by the World Bank and is normally prepared with technical assistance from donors. Both practitioners and academics have questioned the validity of this indicator to actually assess the principle of ownership.

Taking the case of Mozambique's PRSP, the Plano de Acção para a Redução da Pobreza Absoluta (PARPA I (2001-2005); PARPA II (2006-2009); PARP 2010-2014), this paper will analyse the content and process of preparation of the three documents and explore the process of deliberation that leads to a PRSP. It aims to show that in this process that involves multiple actors and stakeholders, ownership is a matter of degree rather than a natural consequence of the existence of the document. Recognising that there are two important dimensions in the deliberative dynamics of the formulation of a PRSP the internal and the external dimension - , the paper will search for other elements of this principle that can be better indicators of ownership, such as the weight of different actors in deliberation at the internal level, the degree of consistency of the government's positions, and the extent to which donors are able to put pressure for certain policy options. The paper will seek to demonstrate that certain combinations of these factors lead to different outcomes in terms of ownership, a variable that should be measured as a matter of degree and not by one single indicator.

