Chapter 5

INTRICACIES OF EXPERT ADVICE IN THE AID CONTEXT

Expert advice provided in the context of aid takes place in a setting characterised by colliding interests, political pressures and asymmetric power relations. Such preconditions are obstructive to advisory processes in several regards. First, the linkage of aid and politics makes advice volatile, conditional and supply-oriented in that it is driven by shifting fads and legitimation pressures. Second, advisory processes are hampered by structural flaws related to conceptual deficiencies and employment practices on the part of donor organisations which impede knowledge transfer and learning. Third, advisory relations in the context of aid are structured along a knowledge hierarchy that reinforces power imbalances and marginalises rather than strengthens local expert communities. The various constraints which will be outlined in this chapter explain the failure of expert advice as a means of development assistance. This manifests itself in the persistent dependency on external expertise after decades of ‘capacity-building’ interventions.

The linkage between aid and politics

Aid provided by states to states is inherently political insofar as it is an outcome of political negotiation, and carried out in the realm of politics. The current knowledge paradigm which legitimates external assistance as primarily capacity building tends to mask the intrinsically political nature of aid. The prevailing “economic-centric, technocratic approach to development” (Carothers & De Gramont 2013: 3) is preferred by the international donor community for good reasons:

While economics appears as a rational, scientific domain, politics seem to imply inevitable entanglement with the irrational side of human affairs – with ideological fervor, nationalistic impulses, and other volatile passions.
Economics emphasizes consensual ideas, like the universal appeal of prosperity and the tragedy of poverty. In contrast, politics is all about conflicting visions and objectives. Economics deals in definite goals, with easily measurable signs of improvement. Politics is about subjective values, with signs of progress hard to agree on, let alone measure. (Carothers & De Gramont 2013: 3–4)

This chapter aims to highlight the linkage between aid and politics and its implications for expert advice provided in the context of development cooperation: first by showing how advisory processes are affected by shifting fads regarding aid priorities and modes of operation which are driven by global and domestic politics on the donor side. Attention will then be turned to the legitimation and accountability pressure in aid which, translated into extensive reporting practices, substantially impacts on advisory relations and bureaucracies in recipient countries. Finally, it is elucidated how the linkage between aid and politics causes a twofold mismatch of supply and demand for expertise: the first pertains to advisory subjects and derives from conflicting agendas on both the donor and recipient side; the second concerns a general discrepancy between advice provided and requested which emanates from the fact that it serves donors as a means of influence and control.

**Shifting themes and modes of operation**

Due to its dependency on politics, the aid community is “very fickle” (Interview 27), as a South African civil society leader stated. This equally holds true for priority areas of support and favourite modes of operation. They shift with global trends and domestic developments in donor states. A retired government official in Tanzania commented in this regard:

> Sometimes priorities change. Sometimes an initiative begins well – and then there are things called elections [laughing]. They just happened in France the other day, and you have a change of government – this change of government comes with different policies saying now we are getting out of environment, now I think we are looking at gender, you know. Those kinds of things can actually happen. (Interview 66)

**Fluctuating trends in aid topics and modalities**

The fluctuation of topics in aid can be traced both across and within sectors. Figure 4 displays aid flows to selected areas in the period 1990–2012, drawing on aggregate ODA data from all donors captured in the OECD/DAC reporting
The sharp increase of aid to ‘Government & Civil Society’, a cluster summarising assistance for issues such as public management, institution-building, and fiscal policy and planning, is eye-catching. Aid spent on these areas more than doubled from USD 3 373 million in 1999 to USD 7 236 million in 2000 and went up to USD 21 325 million in 2011 which reflects the career of ‘good governance’ as an aid topic over the last decade. In the same period, HIV/Aids began to receive significant attention from the international community. The steep rise in allocations for health can mainly be ascribed to HIV/Aids-related funding which was pushed through the establishment of the Global Fund and PEPFAR around 2002/2003. With the advent of governance and HIV as donor priorities, the previously strong emphasis on education diminished. While in the early 1990s, education was among the sectors absorbing the bulk of aid resources, it was gradually superseded by other topics in the first years of the new millennium. Despite global campaigns such as the ‘Education for All’ initiative, spending relatively stagnated: whereas the total sum of ODA from 1990 to 2012 increased by 62%, the volume of aid to education only increased by 14%. Similarly, aid allocated for water supply and sanitation did not keep up with other sectors that came onto the agenda, as, for instance, environment which has emerged as an issue in recent years. The volume of aid spent on general environmental protection quintupled from 1995 (the first year in which it was captured as a separate category in the OECD database) to 2012. Since as a cross-cutting theme, environment is also targeted by activities in other sectors (e.g. a forest management programme in the forestry sector), the total amount of environment-related aid can be assumed to be much higher than the graph in Figure 4 indicates (OECD 2012b).

The composition of aid not only shifted across but also within sectors. In education, the once prominent field of vocational education and training faded from the spotlight when at the 1990 World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien basic education came to the fore. Although the concept was originally “associated with the fulfilment of basic learning needs related to learning and life skills for every person – child, youth, and adult” (Buchert 1995: 19), many donors narrowed their focus on (early) childhood development, shifting resources to primary education at the expense of other areas. This new emphasis was reaffirmed by the Millennium Development Goals which set universal primary education by 2015 as a global target. Yet, even prior to 2015, spending figures indicated a sharp downturn in support to basic education.

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80 According to OECD data extracted on 16 January 2013 from OECD.Stat, total ODA amounted to USD 203 221 million in 1990 and to USD 328 339 million in 2012.

81 In 2009–2010, the sum of only bilateral aid which scored environmental sustainability as ‘principal’ or ‘significant objective’ exceeded USD 25 billion, “representing a quarter of bilateral sector allocable ODA” (OECD 2012b: 57).
particularly in low-income countries, with some donors completely pulling out of the area (Global Campaign For Education 2013). Instead, ‘old’ priorities come back into the picture, as an expert working in the Swedish Embassy in Dar es Salaam observed:

*We’ve been (...) focusing on basic education for the last [years], but before that during the 1990s we were very much into vocational training and before that we were also into folk education quite a lot. The Swedish government and Sida Stockholm decided to phase out the vocational training – but now we are moving back as many others.* (Interview 40)

In health, the most significant change was caused by the rise of HIV/Aids as an aid priority. The share of HIV-related funding grew rapidly from around 3%–5% of total health assistance during the 1990s to 24% in 2010, which constituted the largest portion allocated to one specific health area. Moreover, in line with the increasing attention to governance in the first decade of the millennium, ‘health systems strengthening’ came onto the agenda. While still a minor area, its share sharply rose from only 0.2% in 1990 to 4.2% in 2010. A topic which lost its previous significance is maternal, new-born and child health. Although spending in absolute numbers grew at a stable pace between

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82 Data were extracted on 16 January 2013 from OECD.Stat for the following codes: Government & Civil Society (150), Education (110), Health (120) which was added up with Population Policies/Programmes and Reproductive Health (including HIV-related funding) (130), Water and Sanitation (140) and General Environmental Protection (410). For a detailed itemisation of topics in the DAC Creditor Reporting System system, see OECD (2012c).
1990 and 2010, its portion of total health-related aid diminished slightly over time. The variation of spending patterns is illustrated by Figure 5 which covers development assistance for health by focus areas from 1990 to 2010 (Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation 2012b: 70–71):

**Figure 5: Spending patterns in health-related aid 1990–2010**

For a certain time span, HIV/AIDS was the most dominant theme of the international community but by 2013, it seems that it had lost this prominence as an aid priority. Various interviewees pointed out that donors have now shifted their attention to climate change as a new topic of global concern. The following statements were made by an HIV/AIDS activist in South Africa,

83 The table draws on data published by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) in its 2012 report on global health financing. Tracking development assistance for health at a global level, the IHME extracts data from the OECD/DAC Creditor Reporting System, but additionally uses other channels such as audited financial statements and annual reports from public and private organisations. Given the divergent approaches used for capturing aid flows, the total spending figure for health in Figure 5 slightly deviates from Figure 4 which is based on the OECD dataset. Due to donor reporting, a significant proportion of aid to health could not be disaggregated by focus areas and was thus classified as ‘unallocable’. Expenditures which were tied to distinct health targets, but did not fit into one of the six defined focus areas, were summarised in ‘Other’. For details on methodology and data sources, see Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (2012a), (2012b: 25, 70).
by the leader of an education NGO and by a senior officer at the National Environmental Management Council in Tanzania, respectively:

There’s the fact that other issues have arisen, so you know, they’re putting money into climate change rather than into health, and we have to persuade them or try to persuade them that HIV is not gone away. (Interview 27)

The discourse of climate in development, you do it because that’s the new HIV/Aids, that’s the new agenda, you have to check that box. (Interview 70)

Every donor now is running with climate change. Even now here in Tanzania there are other things – we have a lot of problems here. Like the desertification, we have land degradation, we have a lot of erosion, but [those issues] are not receiving attention. You’ve got these conventions, we have the CBD, we have the UNFCCC, we have the other one on desertification, but when you relatively compare these three sister conventions, it’s climate change now on top of the agenda. (Interview 59)

The observation that climate change is the current ‘order of the day’, as a Tanzanian environmental expert put it, is confirmed by spending figures. Since 1998, the OECD/DAC has tracked aid related to global environmental objectives by using the so-called ‘Rio markers’ which help to identify assistance in implementing the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) (OECD 2012b: 60). Figure 6, which covers activity ‘ciprocal objective’, indicates the rapid growth of climate change-related aid. Despite a drop following its peak in 2010, spending on climate change mitigation is still on the rise, while funding for combating desertification has stagnated and aid for biodiversity has declined.

Aid changes its composition not only with regard to sectors and priority areas. We also find shifting fads with respect to modes of operation. Here one can witness almost a cyclical movement: while during the first decade of the millennium the use of harmonised approaches such as sector and general budget support increased, there is now a reverse trend back from joint arrangements to individual assistance in the form of projects.84 In Tanzania, various donors pull out from budgetary support although it is still the government’s preferred aid modality (Economic and Social Research Foundation 2010: 9–10). DFID, for

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84 For details on the emergence of budget support and sector-wide approaches, see Foster (2000) and Haan and Everest-Phillips (2010).
instance, in its operational plan for Tanzania 2011–2015 announced a reduction in general budget support, arguing that according to an evaluation it “was not the most effective way to deliver results in the current circumstances” (DFID Tanzania 2011: 3). At the time of the interviews, Sweden critically discussed whether to continue with general budget support; Canada reconsidered its sector budget support for education. Germany, once a driving force in the establishment of a sector-wide approach in health and one of the largest contributors to the health basket fund, indicated its intention to pull out of the basket and to redirect the focus of assistance towards a system-strengthening approach with emphasis on results-based financing and targeted interventions (GIZ Tanzanian German Programme to Support Health 2011: 6).

Global and domestic politics as causes of aid volatility
The volatility of aid priorities and modes of operation derives from both changing global ideological fads and domestic political developments in donor countries. International agreements reflect the shifting paradigms and principles: the Paris Declaration (2005) placed ‘ownership’ in the centre of aid relations, fostering harmonised approaches, the use of country systems and mutual accountability (OECD 2005). The Busan Partnership Document

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85 Data were extracted from OECD Stat on 21 January 2014 using the Rio markers ‘Biodiversity’, ‘Desertification’ and ‘Climate Change Mitigation’ and counting only activities scoring one of the global environmental objectives as ‘principal objectives’. Data were available since 2002. As the marker ‘Climate Change Adaption’ was only created in 2010, it was not included.

86 A retired expert who had worked for GIZ for decades annotated the shifts in German assistance as follows: “This is what happens in development cooperation, it goes back and forth and back again” (Interview 73).
(2011), in contrast, features a focus on results and “the participation of the private sector in the design and implementation of development policies and strategies to foster sustainable growth and poverty reduction” (OECD 2011b: 10). Although the agreement reiterates the principles of Paris, it implies a different message, prioritising issues such as ‘value for money’ and ‘aid for trade’. As a Swedish expert in Tanzania put it:

*The message nowadays after Busan – we have forgotten everything about ownership, alignment, harmonisation, and what we are talking about in the government is ‘get in the private sector and everything will be solved more or less’ and ‘find new modalities’. Now of course [I’m] exaggerating, but it’s going into that direction.* (Interview 40)

The reorientation towards the private sector and trade has been pushed by two parallel developments, namely the recession of the global economy in 2008–2009 and a liberal conservative shift of politics in aid-giving countries. As a result of the global financial crisis, many donor governments were under pressure to tighten their budgets and thus cut aid; in 2011, ODA from OECD countries decreased for the first time since 1997 (OECD 2012b). Selling a reduction of ODA to recipients, however, is easier if framed as a deliberate decision derived from the discovery that “with trade and specifically with my country, we will solve many more problems now” (Interview 38), as one interviewee commented. The argument is indeed brought forward in this tone: in its Annual Report 2012, the OECD emphasises the “need to engage the private sector much more”, arguing that “the rewards will be substantial: new markets, new productive partnerships, new innovative technologies for developing countries, and more income and jobs” (OECD 2012b: 28). DFID even announced that its new focus on the private sector would “help private enterprise work its miracles as the engine of development” (DFID 2011: 4).

This legitimation fits well with the market-oriented thinking spreading across Western governments where liberal-conservative parties have come to power which justify aid with economic interests and revamp development assistance accordingly. When in 2009 a member of the Liberal Party became minister for economic cooperation and development in Germany, he not only advanced an institutional reform process, but also promoted the involvement

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87 The sudden turn to the private sector as new addressee and theme of aid programmes has provoked stark criticism even within donor countries. The Independent Commission for Aid Impact, a watchdog institution of UK aid reporting to the British parliament, stated in a recent report that “DFID needs to recognise that the private sector is not a developmental panacea”, finding that objectives of private sector work are “excessively ambitious and fail to reflect what is possible, given the complexity of the challenge” (ICAI 2014: 9/33).

88 For the prevailing rationales used by governments to legitimate aid, see Chapter 4.
of the private sector through public-private partnerships and business-oriented alliances (CDU et al. 2009; Riedel 2010; BMZ 2011). The Netherlands followed this trend shortly after: in 2010, the newly elected government led by the liberal Prime Minister Mark Rutte presented a major overhaul of Dutch development policy. He moved away from social to economic sectors, aligned aid with trade and placed Dutch self-interests in front (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2010, 2011). In Sweden, general budget support came under scrutiny when a liberal politician – herself originally trained as an auditor – took over the post of the development minister and started an intense debate on accountability and control mechanisms, arguing for results-based approaches (Carlsson 2012).

These examples indicate that domestic politics have a significant impact on policies of giving aid (Lancaster 2007). As political actors within donor governments change, this often results in a redirection of priorities and modes of operation. ‘Cash on delivery’ and other forms of results-based aid are the prevailing mode of thinking among politicians concerned about the traceability of aid. Promising transparency and performance, the new modalities are based on a governance logic which is currently in vogue:

> It is basically an iteration of the recent fashion in rich countries to place targets on everything from hospital waiting lists to grades in secondary school. Achieve the target, and you get paid a bonus; fail to achieve it, and you don’t. (Glennie 2011)

Developed by think tanks and innovation units in aid bureaucracies, the new approaches have been embraced by researchers, practitioners and politicians who are optimistic about making aid more ‘effective’. This is not surprising, given that introducing new modalities as soon as (or even before) the current ones show signs of failure, is an intrinsic reflex of the aid community. With reference to alleged innovations donors promise that aid will have more impact in the future than in the past (Lancaster 2007). For recipient countries, however, the frequent changes of political philosophies underpinning development strategies and ways of working attached to them are detrimental. A Tanzanian education specialist engaged in the education sector for more than forty years on both government and donor side described her experience as follows:

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89 Gunilla Carlsson, a member of the liberal conservative Moderate Party, served as Minister for International Development Cooperation in Sweden from 2006–2013.

90 For details on ‘cash on delivery’ and other forms of results-based financing, see Birdsall et al. (2011) and Pearson (2011).
Sometimes these new internationally processed concepts and styles and approaches have a much bigger impact than we think of. Of course for us scholars, it is a way of experimenting and innovation. An idea worked in Ethiopia, maybe it will work in Tanzania. So, perpetually, these countries are experimental. That sustainability and maintaining the system is not really going to happen unless we reach a point of saying, ‘Enough is enough!’ We cannot move with what is workable. Let’s not just introduce new ideas, let’s move on.

Because what I’m hearing constantly now that people of my age, a bit older, say, ‘But we did it in the old days. We had good teachers, children were learning in class, what was happening then that’s not happening today?’ It’s the changes, the approaches. So every time the government is in a learning curve. Sometimes I pity them, because the changes are coming so quickly – before you learn this other one, (…) you are already changing. (Interview 31)

The volatility of aid emanating from its dependency on global and domestic politics has adverse effects on government systems and programmes in recipient countries. It impairs understaffed bureaucracies with ever-changing procedures and requirements, and makes support unpredictable. Government officials interviewed for this study reported various examples of projects and initiatives which had reached deadlock when donor interests changed. A retired doctor in Tanzania who had worked for the government in the field of public health remembered:

There was a school health program in the 1980s and the donor decided ‘that’s the end’, without consultation, all of a sudden it was stopped (…). Locked the doors, no money, no facilities, nothing. Then they come back after some time to continue with that project, they continued, finished, off they go. That was a bad one. (Interview 65)

Similarly, a senior environment management officer working for the National Environmental Management Council in Tanzania reported:

We had another project from the Swedish – way back in the 1990s. And I don’t know what happened, but they withdrew their support. So everything what we had planned within the council also ceased to be implemented. (…) So once [donors] shift their priorities, you have a problem. You find that whatever you planned, you fail to implement. (Interview 59)
In South Africa, a high-ranking official engaged in the education sector reported on a donor government which, when joining the war in Iraq, unilaterally cut aid to schooling initiatives in Limpopo and the Eastern Cape, two provinces in dire need of educational support – “that was a dear lesson for us about commitments” (Interview 21), he commented.

Currently, governments in developing countries are concerned about the drastic decline of international HIV/AIDS funding, primarily due to cutbacks in PEPFAR and the Global Fund (see, for instance, IRIN News 2012, 2013a; Collins 2013; IRIN News 2013b). Given that many government-run programmes are highly dependent on external financing, the reductions put national treatment, care and prevention programmes at risk. In South Africa, PEPFAR funding cuts particularly threaten NGO-run HIV services and specialised clinics which the government struggles to take over (Kahn 2012).

Tanzania currently tries to lessen the effects of diminished external support by setting up an AIDS Trust Fund (Lamtey 2012), in order “to prepare ourselves to continue keeping it as a priority regardless of who else keeps it as a priority” (Interview 63), as a high-ranking member of TACAIDS put it.

The detrimental effects of shifting fads on advisory processes

The “fickleness of aid” (Browne 2006: 7) not only has detrimental effects on budgets and programmes, but also on advice which is above all impeded by discontinuity. Several interviewees in both South Africa and Tanzania underlined that advisory processes require a long-term focus and duration, particularly when they aim at bringing about systemic changes and strengthening capacity. Similar to other respondents, a South African academic stated:

_I think that it’s about being willing to focus on a few things and do it well over long periods of time. I think stability and continuity are absolutely key (...) – iterative processes of learning, focusing on systems and some stability in the policy thinking and ideas._ (Interview 28)

Advisory support which met these conditions often had a substantial impact. A South African interviewee, for instance, highlighted the contribution of GIZ experts in the field of local governance, a permanent focus area of German development assistance since 1994:

91 In November 2011, the Global Fund which accounts for around a quarter of international financing to fight HIV and AIDS announced it would provide no new grants until 2014 due to substantial budget reductions in some donor countries (Boseley 2011; Kelland 2011). In 2013, the US administration under Obama resolved on a continued drop in PEPFAR funding in its budget for the fiscal year 2014 (Aziz 2013).

92 In March 2013, around one thousand South Africans protested against US funding cuts which had led to the closure of a specialised AIDS clinic in Durban (AIDS Healthcare Foundation 2013).
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These guys had a massive impact in the way in which local government takes place in South Africa. Until today, the whole idea of having integrated development plans was done with the help of GTZ (...). They were there through thick and thin. Refined the thing, made it work, and it’s working until today. (Interview 8)

Similarly, South African government officials emphasised the value of German assistance in the area of skills development which profited from the long-term relationship of key actors involved and the fact that it was continued for over a decade (for details, see Chapter 7). One explanation for the relatively stable phase of German development cooperation is that it was headed by the same minister from 1998 to 2009. Eleven years of ministerial leadership, however, is rather an exception to the rule, given the four- to five-year election cycles in many Western countries. Cabinet reshuffles on both the donor and recipient side often come with far-reaching changes in agreements and relationships which directly bear on aid activities in recipient countries. Advice is affected by such changes with respect to its form and substance: the ways of how advice is delivered shift along with preferred modalities of newly constituted donor governments; previously promoted policy approaches are replaced by new concepts, resulting in a “mad pace of new ideas” (Interview 28) recipients are confronted with. The ‘fickleness’ of politics thus collides with the necessity for advisory persistence, which is particularly essential in developing countries where governance is usually more fragile than in established democracies.

**Legitimation and accountability pressures**

Foreign aid is financed by taxpayers’ money. Decision-makers in donor countries thus have to justify aid before citizens, and they need to ensure it is responsibly used for the intended purposes. Accountability is required at all levels of administration involved in aid, from ministries in donor capitals to implementing units in recipient countries. Donor governments are put under pressure to legitimate the expenditure of public funds and account for their use. This strongly affects their advisory activities and has profound implications for administrations in developing democracies.

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93 A high-ranking government official in South Africa mentioned that from his experience, political changes have most significant consequences in the case of the United States: “If a particular party loses, the whole top management must go. So even the agreements that were signed, some of them, people don’t know about them. So it becomes very difficult to pursue those agreements. So that is why some of those agreements were very short-term, I mean, if you look at the Bush administration – when the political party did not win subsequent elections, it was very difficult” (Interview 22).
Results as means of legitimation
While impact and accountability have always been issues in the public debate around aid, they have gained centre stage in the aftermath of the global financial crisis arising in 2008. In times of shrinking budgets, expenditures for development assistance need to be justified even more than before and be completely traceable – “we need to be careful with every nickel” (Interview 30), a Canadian Embassy official remarked. Bilateral donor organisations are particularly obliged to explain what they are doing and with which results. In the UK, for instance, DFID activities are under close scrutiny; a staff member in the Tanzanian country office reported:

Regularly, we have to give responses to parliamentary questions from MPs, and they would relate to programmes of DFID. [For] Tanzania, specifically with regard to education, I usually have to give some sort of direct response to MPs from constituencies. There’s a parliamentary account committee which has done reports on how DFID spends money and their value for money, the effectiveness of the support. And under the current government, the liberal democrat conservative coalition which came into power in 2010, they established a new agency called ICAI which is an Independent Commission for Aid Impact, and they are also now doing country or sector thematic studies. They did one on three East African Countries, Tanzania, Rwanda and Ethiopia a year ago, and they also came to these conclusions, you know. Typically you’re putting too much on budget support, we need to focus more on results and accountability. (Interview 35)

ICAI evaluations and DFID management responses are disclosed online; the findings are critically discussed by the British parliament and widely reported in the media (see, for instance, Chorley 2013; Express 2013; Provost 2013).

Voices slashing development assistance and questioning if it helps at all have become louder, not only in the UK. For aid organisations, this has increased the pressure to give evidence of their impact. They do so primarily by presenting numbers, as the following statements extracted from donor websites illustrate in exemplary fashion:

USAID in Tanzania, HIV/Aids:
By March 2013, 90,918 individuals were receiving antiretroviral treatment through USAID-supported facilities while 129,206 were benefiting from clinical care and 99,498 from community care. During the same period, USAID provided support to 181,092 vulnerable children, and 1,303 individuals with TB received integrated TB/HIV care and treatment. (USAID 2013)
World Bank in South Africa, Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Development Project:
The total number of hectares under formal conservation agreements (...) almost doubled from 1,054,033 ha to 1,953,246 ha by 2011, exceeding the target of 1,454,033 hectares. (World Bank 2013a)

Sida in Tanzania, education and learning:
The Swedish budget support has contributed to sharply increasing public investment in education. One concrete result from the support in 2012 is the construction of 130 new classrooms for around 4,000 students on the island of Zanzibar. (Sida 2013a)

The need to produce ‘visible’ results strongly affects the form and substance of assistance. Various interviewees emphasised that donors tend to prefer project interventions whose impact is directly measurable, at best in geographical areas easy to reach for delegations. Donors refrain from joint support modalities, arguing they are not able to trace their individual contribution. In the field of HIV/AIDS, the treatment focus of external support can partially be explained by the fact that it is simple to count patients provided with antiretroviral drugs, but not the number of lives saved through awareness campaigns – “from care you get results today, you don’t get results today from prevention” (Interview 62), a Tanzanian interviewee remarked.

The accounting imperative in aid
Demonstrating results has become the survival strategy of aid agencies. Monitoring and evaluation practices – often abbreviated as M&E – are their means of legitimation. Performance and audit reports serve as proof of accountability, a notion which in the context of aid tends to be reduced to its technocratic dimension (Mkandawire 2010). Accountability is translated into auditable accounting, as Rottenburg (2000) points out. In practice, this means that all kinds of aid activities, irrespective of their form and substance, are somehow made measurable, compressed into log-frames displaying baseline indicators, inputs, milestones and targets against which they are regularly assessed.

The current practice of generating factuality in the form of quantitative parameters through which the impact of aid is traced is problematic in several

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94 A retired Tanzanian government official commented in this regard: “If you leave them [donors] on their own, they would always start projects in places close to Dar es Salaam or close to Arusha, or where they can be reached quickly, like Mwanza, like Iringa. They won’t go to places like Goma, where you can have sometimes no flights the whole week. So when their bosses come around, they can’t take them there that easily. So they want to do it around Dar es Salaam, so that when their bosses come, they can show the results” (Interview 64).
aspects. First of all, presenting the social world as “an assembly of facts which can be counted, aggregated and audited uses a rhetoric of de-politicization and absolute objectivity” (Rottenburg 2000: 148) which disguises the creational element of accounting. Figures used in appraisal reports, programme documents and evaluations inevitably are a result of method and choice since, put simply, “there are always several means of counting things” (Rottenburg 2000: 147). Hence, numbers are always a product of deliberate decisions for certain ways of calculation and representation. The HIV/Aids situation of countries or regions, for instance, looks different if one draws on prevalence rates as a measure for the extent of the epidemic or incidence rates which indicate the dynamic of HIV transmission.95 Likewise, assessments on the status of education vary depending on the indicators used; the perennial debate around how to measure the quality of education hints at the constructed character of figures.96 Nonetheless, they have become the primary reference for proving impact and legitimating decisions in development cooperation. The continuation of general budget support, for instance, depends on the recipient government’s progress against criteria outlined in ‘Performance Assessment Frameworks’ (PAF) (Driscoll et al. 2005). In Tanzania, the 2013 PAF matrix entailed 38 outcome indicators covering issues such as Standard IV exam pass rates, the number of village land forest reserves or the proportion of births at health facilities (Development Partners Group Tanzania 2012). Given that despite some positive achievements, targets in key areas were not achieved, the Swedish ambassador, speaking on behalf of development partners, announced at the annual review meeting that “the 2014 commitments and disbursements from DPs will be affected, as the performance tranches cannot be released in full” (Hjelmåker 2013).

Similar mechanisms have been established at the sector level where progress is assessed in the course of joint annual reviews. Findings generated through that process strongly affect future support – “you cannot go back to Canada, seek more money when Form Four results are getting worse” (Interview 31), an education advisor working for CIDA in Tanzania commented. Failures in meeting the agreed targets thus put all players involved under pressure. Government representatives need to explain why they were unable to bring

95 This argument was brought forward by a high-level officer of TACAIDS who strongly argued for using incidence as an indicator for the epidemic (Interview 62). Prevalence rates describe the percentage of a certain population or group infected at a particular point in time, whereas incidence rates display the percentage of newly infected people over a certain time span. High prevalence can occur with low incidence and vice versa. Due to data availability, AIDS authorities, international organisations and media mostly use prevalence as an indicator for the epidemic. Incidence, however, is a better measure for reflecting dynamics in the spread of HIV. For details on prevalence and incidence rates, see Mattheyse (2007) and Puren (2011).

96 For details on the debate around quality indicators in education, see, for instance, Barrett et al. (2006) and Alexander (2008).
about the expected changes despite external assistance; donor staff in country offices struggle to justify the quest for further support to their headquarters.

The significance of figures in legitimating aid explains the frictions around defining indicators and interpreting results reported by various interviewees in both South Africa and Tanzania. In 2013, the performance review in the Tanzanian education sector caused a serious dispute between the actors involved. From the donor’s perspective, the government tried to finagle continued financial support by meeting the minimum percentage of outcomes required with minimum effort, whilst neglecting central issues. An education specialist at the World Bank in Dar es Salaam vigorously complained about the strategy he assumed to be behind the government’s behaviour:

*The government develops milestones which fit in the routine nature of activities. Then at the end of the day it will report: this done, this done, this done (...). When you sum up you find they have made 70%. But sometimes you find that those items which they didn’t do, they are the most important ones to make the effect, the really intended results in that particular milestone or activity.* (Interview 45)

Similarly, a DFID education advisor reported:

*Even jointly agreed indicators [have] come up with some friction, because I think there’s quite a complicated matrix that has got all the process-like indicators. Just saying that you have a process review and the like, whilst increasing the indicators about examining past results, the distribution of teachers in the country, are the pupil-to-teacher ratios equivalent to the remoter parts as to the urban parts of the country, and that’s proved difficult to get in place. In this year, from the exam results of the last year, end of primary and end of secondary, we’ve seen very major drops. But those indicators are things that in theory will trigger performance tranche payments to the government. Those aren’t likely to be met.* (Interview 35)

The government explained its failure with major constraints in implementation, namely “inadequate budget allocations and late receipt of funds; large number of specific actions, which lead into partial implementation of milestones; agreed milestones are not necessarily the same as the Government’s priorities; and, some milestones or specific actions are not clearly worded or well understood by all parties” (United Republic of Tanzania 2012b: 3). Although some of the crucial targets were not achieved, the government’s final ‘score’ in the 2012 education sector assessment was 62%, which according to the underlying scale implies a ‘satisfactory performance’ – an assessment which
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sounds very moderate in light of the education crisis exclaimed by civil society activists, media and parents who blisteringly criticised the government for the deteriorating situation (Nkosi 2012; Tambwe 2013; Twaweza 2013). For donors, however, the public articulation of social change is not pivotal in decision-making. Instead, they legitimate actions on the grounds of the ‘reality’ as constructed in written documentation based on parameters generated through techniques of standardisation and calculation (Rottenburg 2009).

Complexities of data generation in developing countries
Drawing on reports and accounts in countries which struggle to produce the data required for numerical representations of the social world poses a problem. A high-ranking government official engaged in the education sector described the situation in Tanzania as follows:

_This country is very big. You cannot compare [it] with Germany (...). Infrastructure development is not the same. If you have to go from Berlin to Bonn, in a few hours you are already there. You can use email, because power, electricity supply is everywhere. People have got computers, and I’m told nowadays, normally people don’t even write much. They use laptops, desktops and the like, now iPads._

_In our context, that information someone has to scribble and then from the school that report is taken to the district. The district has several schools, they have to be typed, some people have to analyse what is contained in the reports and then that report is taken to region, that region is processed and then it’s taken to the centre. It can take more than the time allocated in the MoU [Memorandum of Understanding] because the MoU is saying you must be reporting every quarter. In some areas that information reaches the school when the quarter has elapsed (...). Now because you didn’t get the report timely, you are disbursed less._ (Interview 60)

In addition to the difficulty of delivering data on time in a country made up of 169 districts which lack a proper road network and basic technological infrastructure, the interviewee pointed to another problem related to reporting, namely the low level of training among actors involved in the compilation of educational figures:

_What is basic education in UK, for example? I’m told generally there are very few – unless immigrants – who don’t go for secondary education. The majority goes up to college. But here, the majority remains at grade seven. This is purely primary. So don’t expect the quality of a thing prepared by_
someone with grade seven can be as good as from a graduate of university. So we say sometimes, ‘Please, you need to understand and bear with us.’

So there’s that departure – expectations vis-à-vis the reality on the ground. We over-expect. Based on the current reality, you shouldn’t over-expect that much the competence and the capacity of those providing those reports (...).

The teachers have never been taught records management. Why should we blame them? (Interview 60)

From the view of the government official interviewed, donors blend out the environment in which recipient governments operate and lose sight of what is happening on the ground. Given the focus on written evidence in aid activities, newly acquired chairs in classrooms do not ‘count’ without formal documentation – “but the reality is that the chairs are there, being used by the kids” (Interview 60). The accounting imperative of the aid community encumbers recipients with reporting requirements which – even in a country such as South Africa which has a comparatively strong administration – overstretches their capacities.

Overstrained recipient bureaucracies
The detrimental impact of aid on recipient institutions has been thematised by various scholars who point to the weakening of already overstrained bureaucracies through project proliferation and donor fragmentation (see, for instance, Morss 1984; Bräutigam & Botchwey 1999; Knack 2001; Bräutigam & Knack 2004; Knack & Rahman 2007; Moss et al. 2008). In response to this criticism, donors proclaimed the principles of ‘harmonisation’ and ‘alignment’ in the Paris Declaration. But their rhetorical commitment has been little translated into practice (Wood et al. 2011). Instead of coordinating procedures and using country systems, agencies continue to impose their own standards of managing and monitoring aid. Several interviewees of this study reported on the pressure related to meeting donors’ demands. An official in the South African department commented in this regard:

The German government might say, ‘I am giving you money to deal with STIs [sexually transmitted infections] but I would like you to report on one, two, three, four, five indicators just to tell me, show me what you are doing with my money.’ And when you look at the existing systems, it doesn’t really accommodate what the Germans want. What do we do? We need to go back to our systems and change them to accommodate those or we create another system just for them to show our accountability. (Interview 17)
The complexity of dealing with donor requirements increases further when multiple players are involved. Even organisations agreeing on ‘joint’ interventions insist on adherence to their respective rules and procedures. A case in point is the ‘CAPE Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Development Project’ carried out from 2004 to 2010 in the South African Cape Floristic Region. While it was praised as the first GEF-funded project jointly implemented by UNDP and the World Bank, the persons in charge of coordinating the cooperation at the South African National Biodiversity Institute faced serious administrative challenges. A key actor involved told us:

*Interviewee:* There are lots and lots of different forms that you have to fill in. You’re doing quarterly reports, we had to do financial reports and financial management reports, one for the World Bank, one for the UNDP, and the formats were completely different … It was very interesting working with both of them because they loved it and it seems to have been one of the very first projects where those agencies have worked together on the ground. And we can see how valuable it was for them and because of that we’re happy to have done it. But for us, it caused a huge amount of extra work behind the scenes, because even though they promised to align reports and would sort of align supervision missions, so they would come at the same time. But out of those supervision missions would still come one thing for the UNDP, one thing for the World Bank (…).

*Interviewer:* And did you find over time that those processes were more closely aligned or did they stay kind of divergent?

*Interviewee:* No, I don’t think that they became aligned. I think that they got their own sort of monsters to feed back on. (Interview 25)

The compulsion of complying with standards designed to ensure accountability in many cases causes severe tensions, delays and deadlocks in cooperation. A high-ranking official involved in the initial stages of the primary education sector reform programme in Tanzania remembered the tedious negotiations between the government and donors on a common reporting format:

*We have the government system of reporting. Donors wanted different systems and it was very unfortunate that different donors had different formats. Now which one would you take? The one of GIZ, would you take...*
the DFID, would you take that of Sida Sweden? So it was very difficult. It took us more than six months to agree on the format. And during that discussion nothing was going on because we haven’t agreed on a format. And someone was saying now, ‘Which kind of format do you people need?’ And eventually they employed [name], he was in Rwanda, was just completing his Masters and he joined for a year, then he provided a good format over there. They said, ‘Wow, this is it.’ And we handled that format for just a year – then they said, ‘Oh no, the format is very complicated, we must go back’. (Interview 60)

The struggle described above took place in the early years of the new millennium when the first Primary Education Development Plan was prepared. At the time of our interviews, more than ten years later, it was still a contentious issue in donor-government cooperation. The subject of deficient quality and timeliness of reports has become particularly sensitive due to the deteriorating situation in the education sector, with donor representatives struggling to justify the quest for further support to their headquarters. The fact that annual reports are not delivered as agreed poses a serious problem for field staff. A Tanzanian education specialist working for CIDA expressed her distress as follows:

The reports don’t show results. I mean they are writing the way they write (...). We have sat together, we have developed the template. And that template, we are saying ideally this is what we should see in your report, (...) this is how it should look like so we see the results and blah, blah, blah. But then, there are times when we are questioning – this chapter on financing is not actually telling us anything. (Interview 31)

The original idea behind designing a common reporting format for the education sector programme was that it would be used both by the government and donors in order to avoid a duplication of bureaucratic efforts. Yet, there are still parallel reporting procedures in place:

In order to get funding from treasury, they have their own quarterly reports in which case the accounting officer in that ministry being the parliament secretary, sits down and says, ‘This is what was done’ and the accounting officer, ‘You gave me this much, this is what we did, these are the shortfalls or whatever’, however they are writing it. So quarterly he writes that, he gets money, he continues to implement his activities – and we are sitting here, waiting for an annual report. (Interview 31)
The significance of those annual reports as a means of legitimation and decision-making on the donor side leads to the paradoxical situation that experts in the field themselves take over drawing up ‘government’ reports:

_We were caught up for some years in actually helping to shape those reports. Why? Because you sit down, you write your project document, in the end of it you say you are going to get this annual report … Now you also have a duty to fulfil this side, you know. So that report has to come through in a way, you are pushing. But there are times when you are actually—even though we say, we read and we provide input, it is not quite just an issue of reading and providing input – sometimes you are actually writing the sentences._ (Interview 31)

This behaviour and the various frictions on reporting issues sketched above indicate the extent to which the reality of development aid is based on presentational practices of documentation (Rottenburg 2009). The reference frame for actors in the aid arena derives from reports and accounts, against which they are assessed.

_The fabrication of facts to legitimate advice_
The accounting imperative not only puts pressure on recipients to demonstrate ‘development’ in the form of figures. It also coerces donor experts to substantiate the impact of their activities in numbers, which is particularly difficult when it comes to advice. First, its impact on policy processes and governance is neither quantifiable nor directly traceable. Second, it usually does not bring about visible change within the narrow time frames of aid interventions. Experts help themselves by generating ‘far-fetched facts’ (Rottenburg 2009) which link advisory support and sector developments in spite of knowing that such causalities are fictitious. The dilemma is evident: either the virtual impossibility to account for demonstrable effects of advice is acknowledged at the cost of negative effects on their missions or the ‘effects’ have to be somehow constructed in order to please their clients.

A health specialist illustrated this dilemma using the example of the so-called ‘Multi-sector HIV and AIDS Prevention Programme’ implemented by GIZ in South Africa on behalf of the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). A substantial element of the programme was the delivery of long-term as well as short-term advice which aimed at strengthening national, provincial and local AIDS councils and improving their coordination and dialogue. Given that these councils were to a great extent dysfunctional at the time the programme was conceptualised, capacity and organisational
development were indicated as main components of support by GIZ.\textsuperscript{98} Such a programme proposal, however, is difficult to sell to the ministry in Germany:

\begin{quote}
The difficulty with this proposal was that we are convinced that it is necessary to strengthen intermediary structures. With three million Euros over three years, it would be crazy to expect making a difference at target group level, so we decided to focus on intermediary structures. But then BMZ [the ministry] says, ‘No, we want to see the change at target group level.’ Then you say, ‘Well, it will eventually occur somewhere.’ ‘No, but we insist on that.’ Basically, the ministry would preferably see us using the three million and proving that as a result of our intervention, the HIV testing rate among adolescents has increased about 50% in this or that district. This is just not possible. But they do not want to hear that. (Interview 5)
\end{quote}

Nonetheless, the proposal in the version on hand did include target indicators such as “the knowledge of the population in supported provinces about the prevention of HIV transmission has increased to at least 80\%”, with ‘baseline’ data ranging from 14\% to 41\% in different provinces.\textsuperscript{99}

The pressure to demonstrate measurable impact at target-group level – which in donor rhetoric is ultimately the population in recipient countries – was also articulated by interviewees in other sectors. A senior manager working on skills development for GIZ in South Africa confirmed being obliged to indicate direct effects in programme concepts, preferably in the form of quantitative data:

\begin{quote}
BMZ doesn’t like qualitative indicators. BMZ prefers concrete indicators and we rack our brains how to get them through quantifiable assessment methods. That is a balancing act. (Interview 3)
\end{quote}

In the ‘Skills Development for Green Jobs’ programme the interviewee was concerned with, one articulated goal was that “70 per cent of graduates from the various green occupations requiring initial or continuing vocational education and training should find suitable employment in the green economy” (GIZ 2013c). As in the HIV awareness example above, it is questionable to what extent the achievements of such targets are attributable to one specific donor intervention, given the multiplicity of efforts and players in the field. The fact that aid agencies nonetheless claim credit for positive changes exclusively

\textsuperscript{98} This information, as well as the following details, was obtained from an internal GIZ programme document which was given to the authors of the study.

\textsuperscript{99} The programme document extracted the baseline data from a 2008 survey conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council on HIV knowledge and prejudices in the South African population.
for themselves causes annoyance on the recipient’s side. A retired high-
level official at TACAIDS remembered an incident when the wife of the then
US President George W Bush came to Tanzania, praising the success of US
assistance in tackling HIV:

Laura Bush came to the country some time and she was speaking in one
of the different centres and she was saying, ‘Through PEPFAR, so many
hundreds of patients were on treatment.’ And we were saying, ‘That’s lies,
those are lies!’ These were the national figures and there’s the Global Fund
and other people who have actually contributed that. That has brought
problems. (Interview 65)

Hypothetic causalities are a prevalent feature of donor legitimation, although
experts are fully aware of their fabricated nature. As a Swedish education
specialist in Dar es Salaam stated:

I don’t really believe that it’s that easy to say that there are either
a lot of results or no results, it’s not causal – we cannot find these
relationships between our interventions or our support. It’s more complex.
(Interview 40)

In addition to the difficulty of constructing causality, experts face the problem
of conflicting temporalities of aid interventions in developing countries.
The time frames set by their organisations do not allow to “wait for results”
(Interview 53). Several interviewees working for different donors pointed to
the impossibility in delivering the results expected by their headquarters at
the end of a three- or four-year programme. A counsellor in the Norwegian
Embassy in Dar es Salaam, for instance, commented:

For 12 years we have been supporting re-forestation and sustainable forest
management in Shinyanga area. And it took ten years before we actually
had a forest there, before we had the success story and we are saying, yes, it
is re-forested. The local communities are harvesting, improved livelihoods
there. They have funds now to send their children to schools, they have
milk that they can sell at the market, and all these things. So I think
that is also a challenge for us working here, that we have to sell these
stories. You can’t have, you won’t have results in three years or four years.
You have to have ten, 12 years at least before you can really have results.
(Interview 39)
Advice targeting policy and governance issues does not bring about change – howsoever measured – within the short lifespan of donor projects and programmes. Nonetheless, donor staff need to outline targets in spite of knowing they are not achievable. A Tanzanian environment specialist working for UNDP in Dar es Salaam admitted:

*Sometimes I feel embarrassed when you say ‘I will develop a strategy within two years.’ And two years come, you still have stakeholders who are not buying into the strategy you are going to develop. It takes a lot of time.* (Interview 41)

The fact that superior authorities on the donor side nonetheless insist on the formulation of concrete advisory outcomes reflects the accountability pressure which dominates the aid community, and which is transmitted from development ministries to their implementing agencies, from headquarters to country offices, and finally from field staff to their recipient counterparts. This becomes manifest in the exemplary experience reported by a professor at the University of Dar es Salaam who was decisively involved in the Norwegian–Tanzanian cooperation on REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation). When we visited him for the interview in his office, he had just returned from a meeting with his Norwegian partners which had brought about a serious discussion:

*The reason why I was at the Norwegian Embassy: I think a minister for foreign affairs will be coming down to Tanzania from Norway. Then, of course, the Embassy wants some of the activities to be accomplished by the time the minister is here. So that at least they can impress upon him or her and say, ‘These are things we have done’. But some of these achievements depend on – they have to go through the government system. And each and every government has a bureaucracy, has the procedures to adopt things, to approve things. So you cannot just say, ‘I am the donor, I want xyz to be accomplished tomorrow.’ It doesn’t work that way. So you find more of a mismatch on the understanding. And for me who is actually responsible for the REDD initiative in this country, I am caught in between because the Embassy wants some things to be concluded at a given time frame. But the government has stipulated bureaucratic procedures in approving things. And there is no way you can bypass that procedure.* (Interview 69)

External pressure to fast-track aid-related issues and push processes is also experienced in South Africa. A government official working for the Department of Environmental Affairs commented on the impatience of donors:
They use the rationale that they’re investing in South Africa and we need to react immediately. And with our processes within the government, we can’t react immediately. So, sometimes there is that pressure, especially with the GEF funded projects. (Interview 15)

The implication of donors referring to their financial investments to legitimate their demand for prompt government response is evident: their need of accountability potentially undermines state–citizen accountability in aid receiving countries.

The erosion of internal accountability as a result of aid

The deteriorating effect of foreign aid on internal accountability in developing democracies has been thematised by several scholars sharing one argument: when policy-makers are obliged to defend their actions and decisions first and foremost towards external financiers before turning to domestic constituencies, a key democratic mechanism, namely the fiscal–social contract based on taxation, is annulled (Bräutigam 1992, 2000; Therkildsen 2002; Gould 2005a; Glennie 2008; Moss et al. 2008; Mkandawire 2010).

If donors are providing the majority of public finance and governments are primarily accountable to those external agencies, then it may simply not be possible to expect a credible social contract to develop between the state and its citizens. Using the current terminology, aid may undercut the very principles the aid industry intends to promote: ownership, accountability, and participation. (Moss et al. 2008: 269)

The observation that aid erodes public consultation and oversight has been made particularly in countries which receive large parts of their budget from outside (see, for instance, Mwenda (2006) on Uganda). But even in South Africa where aid accounts for less than 1% of government resources, concerns about the political accountability and control of official development assistance are raised. In the National Treasury’s Development Cooperation Review 2010, the authors point out:

Currently the main central mechanism is the annual report on the RDP [Reconstruction and Development Programme] Fund, which only covers RDP fund ODA programmes and concerns the management of the fund (deposits, disbursements and balance) but not the onward management of resources. There is therefore no mechanism that provides Cabinet, parliament and the public with an overview of ODA of all kinds into South Africa on an annual basis. (Fölscher et al. 2010: 16)
Comprehensive and disaggregated data on aid flows and their use are not even accessible to the receiving executive, given donors’ restrictive disclosure policies. Government officials from both South Africa and Tanzania reported on their struggles to obtain accurate information on donor activities in their respective sectors. Not only are there specific expenses, such as the amount spent on expert advice, which is usually not reported to recipient institutions. Moreover, donors bypass government systems which exacerbates the deterioration of democratic control. In Tanzania, only 28% of external contributions for HIV/AIDS interventions are captured in budget books (TACAIDS 2011). PEPFAR funding provided by the US, which makes up 72% of the HIV/AIDS aid budget, is channelled directly to NGOs without going through government structures. A financing officer at TACAIDS criticised this practice in that it divests democratic institutions of their oversight function:

*If the money does not pass through the government machinery, it means it is not being reflected in the books of parliament. And parliament passes the budget though the money is outside, and therefore they cannot follow how it was worked on and how it is accounted.* (Interview 61)

Given that various donors sideline authorities in recipient countries, which deprives their governments of fiduciary control, their commitment to ‘mutual accountability’ emphasised in the Paris Declaration appears hypocritical. Various interviewees in our study from both government ministries and aid agencies stated that accountability in aid relations is still unidirectional and asymmetric: while recipients are constantly pressured to be accountable to their financiers, namely taxpayers in the donor countries, they have no means to hold aid agents liable for their interventions and unintended consequences (Rottenburg 2000).

In sum, aid being given by democratic donor countries to democratic recipient countries results in a paradoxical outcome:

*As things stand, the more accountable a donor is to its own voters, the more onerous and invasive will be its intervention in the receiving economy and the more likely it is to undermine the recipient democratic government’s accountability to its own voters.* (Mkandawire 2010: 1168)

This logic holds for advice as one distinct form of aid as well: the more accountable a donor is to its own voters, the more its advisory activities are directed by its own agenda and interests rather than those of the recipient. That this is indeed the case will be shown in the following section.
Mismatch of supply and demand for expertise

For more than 20 years, a plethora of studies have criticised advice in the form of technical assistance as being “driven by donors rather than provided in response to aid-recipient priorities” (Forss et al. 1988; Jolly 1989; Berg 1993; Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs Norway & Asplan Analyse 1994; Williams et al. 2003: iii; Land 2007; European Commission 2008; World Bank Independent Evaluation Group 2008). Authors consistently find that “this basic and pervasive factor – the donor-driven character of so much technical cooperation – is a root cause of the ineffectiveness of this form of aid” (Berg 1993: 95). In response to the critique, donors acknowledged the importance of ‘local ownership’ and announced that recipients would be allowed more participation in the procurement and management of experts. Shifting administrative responsibilities, however, does not tackle the actual problem which is grounded in the linkage of aid and politics: donors leverage aid to foster issues of their own agenda and use advice as a means of influence and control. The political interests related to aid and the accountability pressures in donor countries explain the frequently diagnosed mismatch of supply and demand of technical assistance.

This is corroborated by our own findings. Ministry officials from both Tanzania and South Africa perceived the donor community as little responsive to their own respective priorities. A member of the South African National Treasury summarised his experience as follows:

Interviewee: If you look at the general development partner relationships, there are only a handful of partners who would come in and say, ‘We are prepared to support what you would want from us.’

Interviewer: Who would that be?

Interviewee: That would be, well, it used to be Sweden. I’m not very attached to the Swedish approach anymore. The Swiss are very much doing the same thing now. The Dutch used to do that, they don’t do that anymore. In fact they have got their own attitude about it. The Norwegians have a similar kind of approach currently. The Danes had it, but they have literally withdrawn. The [European] Commission has very much moved in that direction. The Canadians are very strong in supporting us like that. So primarily, that is the core group that will provide support to us in that way.
The rest of them pretty much come with agendas that are more than you and I could collectively work out. You know, it’s just an incredible amount of agenda (...). So you can see that, you know, we sign all of these grand accords in Paris and elsewhere, and everybody is part of it – and nobody, they just pay lip-service to it. (Interview 38)

Despite the emphasis on ‘demand-driven’ support in international agreements, donors tend to give primacy to their own political agendas in giving aid, irrespective of whether they are in line with the recipients’ priorities or not. As a senior official in the Tanzanian health ministry commented:

Some countries, their people are a little bit more flexible, they can discuss. But some, they are too rigid. For me, I see they all have an agenda and sometimes your agenda and their agenda just collide by coincidence. (Interview 54)

The precedence of donor priorities in development cooperation becomes manifest when agendas do not collide. In our study, several cases provided evidence for frictions which emerged from competing priorities on donor and recipient sides. A comparison of these incidents revealed three different patterns of incongruence.

First, donors intervened in the domestic political domain of recipient countries by pushing certain topics which had not genuinely been prioritised by the government. ICT for basic education, for instance, was driven forward in Tanzania by US assistance; the policy documents developed were mainly a product of donor-funded advisors.

Second, governments explicitly requested external support for a problem identified, but donors refused to assist as the topic was not part of their agenda. A typical example is the common disinterest of donors in higher education. Both the South African and Tanzanian government struggled to secure support for this area. At the time of our interviews, Tanzania’s Higher Education Development Programme was shelved due to a lack of funding required for implementation.

Third and most notably, we found cases of colliding priorities which caused either open or covert conflicts between donors and recipients. The treatment versus prevention controversy in the field of HIV/AIDS, which created tensions between the US government and various developing countries, is a blatant case in point.

All of the examples mentioned above are discussed in-depth in the case studies below (see Chapter 7). What should be illustrated at this point is that donors’ political agendas play a decisive role in giving aid. This has significant
implications for advice in the context of development cooperation: experts are used to leverage certain subjects on behalf of their funding governments which do not necessarily match the primary problems articulated by the recipients.

If advice, however, does not take the concerns of policy-makers into account, it fails to meet a crucial criterion of quality: expert knowledge provided by advisors must not only be technically (or scientifically) sound, but also “politically useful and acceptable. In short, it must be epistemically and politically robust” (Lentsch & Weingart 2009a: 7–8, italics in original). In the realm of aid, one finds various examples of advice which does not meet the second requirement as it is driven by the preferences of the supplier (i.e. the funder) rather than responsive to the priorities of the recipients.

While this mismatch concerns the political layer of advice, vested interests related to aid also create a discrepancy between expertise provided and expertise required or requested. Evaluation reports repeatedly criticise insufficient needs analysis as a major reason for the failure of technical assistance, with donors paying little attention to organisational capacities on the recipient side (Forss et al. 1988; Berg 1993; Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs Norway & Asplan Analyse 1994; DFID 2006; ECDPM & ACE Europe 2006; Land 2007; European Commission 2008). While such studies usually suggest a more systematic diagnosis of needs as a solution, we argue that improving methodologies will not solve the issue. The core problem consists in the use of capacity assessments as a tool for justifying advice which serves donors as a means of influence and control.

In aid-receiving countries, capacity gaps in state bureaucracies are predominantly defined by external actors. It is usually donor-funded consultants who compile sector analyses which commonly find ‘severe capacity constraints at various levels’. Such assessments, however, are invariably biased: they are financed by donor governments who seek to get involved in the policy field under investigation. They are commissioned by aid agencies intrinsically interested in providing assistance. And they are written by professionals whose primary goal as individual consultants is to satisfy their clients in order to get follow-up assignments. While we do not insinuate that the authors of such studies consciously generate skewed results, we argue that they inevitably adopt the perspective of their principals. For the latter, assessment reports fulfil the function of justifying the deployment of experts in that they provide ‘evidence’ for the need on the recipient side. A lack of ‘capacity’ as stated in

100 At length, Lentsch and Weingart (2009a: 8) define political robustness of expertise as follows: “Political robustness of knowledge refers to the acceptability and the feasibility to implement recommendations based on it. An advice is robust if it can be politically implemented and meets the needs of the policymakers. Political robustness normally implies that the knowledge and the preferences of those who can be considered stakeholders are taken into account.”
such documents thus serves as “a generalized (and depoliticized) means of legitimizing external intervention” (Gould & Ojanen 2005: 45).

Given its legitimating implication, ‘capacity’ has become a sensitive notion in the aid arena. An expert working for the Canadian Embassy in Tanzania told us:

“It is actually whenever we mention that word ‘capacity’ to the government, it says, ‘Who do you think you are?’ And the question is, what do you mean by ‘capacity’? So this is also now being taken as a badge, you know, ‘Why are you wishing us that? We are ok’.” (Interview 31)

Several interviewees on the donor side expressed the sentiment that the government did not acknowledge capacity gaps and, as a matter of principle, rejected any advice offered despite – in the view of donors – being in need of assistance.

Interviews with government representatives revealed a different narrative. In their perception, donors come with a “mentality that there’s nothing on the ground” (Interview 17), disregarding the local capacity available. Leading officials both in South Africa and Tanzania find themselves under constant pressure to repel the glut of advisors donors try to embed into their systems – “there is always the attempt of ‘let me bring some people’”, a Tanzanian interviewee commented (Interview 63). As an example, she told us an anecdote about tedious negotiations with the government of Japan which had proposed a project with a plethora of advisors attached to it:

“That proposal for support of maternal and child health had everything, including people working for the mortuary. I think that is abuse! Because the starting point should be what are the needs? So we negotiated, we negotiated, we negotiated and negotiated. Finally, after something like just over a year and a half of negotiations, we ended getting a laboratory – which was not the starting point. But it was like extracting a normal tooth – a long painful process. So why does one come to negotiate with the assumption that everybody is asleep and the only people who are awake are coming from Japan? It’s wrong.” (Interview 63)

While this particular incident happened in the Tanzanian health sector a while ago, it is still a prevailing pattern that donors seek to place advisors into recipient countries’ institutions, irrespective of articulated capacity needs. A WHO officer in Tanzania frankly stated that he sees the majority of external experts in the health ministry as ‘supply-induced’:
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We [the development partners] ask the ministry: How many can we bring to you? They don’t request it from us. They don’t request from us, they don’t request in terms of numbers, and in what areas. And sometimes we generate demand for them. (Interview 44)

The observation that development partners ‘generate demand’ indicates that they pursue other interests in providing experts, aside from supporting recipients. In some cases, it is pretty obvious that donor agents bargain for technical assistance in order to care for the careers of their colleagues in the aid market. The following experience, which illustrates such an attempt at job creation, was reported by a leading functionary at TACAIDS:

There’s one particular donor who – we agreed they will give us a technical assistant for a period of one-year negotiable and we said one and we agreed one. Six months down the line, he dares come to me and say, ‘We have an excellent person, his contract has ended at ministry X, I think he could be very useful to help you in one, two, three.’ I said, ‘Well, how do you know? You don’t work here. I work here and I’ve not identified that need, sorry.’ And it was like he couldn’t believe it, he went on and on for four months. Finally, I just decided ‘Look here, if you come here one more time for this, I’m going to the ambassador because it’s not right what you’re doing.’ (Interview 63)

While in this case, the recipient representative refused to accept the unrequested offer for expert assistance, decisions become more difficult when advice comes as an explicit or implicit condition for funding. Although the donor community officially agreed to untie financial from technical support (see United Republic of Tanzania 2006b), it is still common that organisations come with a “package [which] includes bringing in technical assistance” (Interview 69).

Experts placed in ministries and departments grant access to the inner sphere of government and control over resources. 101 This explains why donors insist on posting advisors to recipient units irrespective of capacity needs. The linkage of advice and money was picked out as a central theme by several interviewees; donor staff strongly criticised the prevailing practice of deploying experts for organisational self-interests. A World Bank specialist in Dar es Salaam sharply criticised the aid community for this kind of ‘imposed’ assistance:

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101 The merging of advisory, administrative and supervising tasks in technical assistance assignments has significant implications for the relationship between advisors and counterparts which will be discussed in Chapter 5.
Because you are supporting a programme, because you are bringing money, then you would like to bring anybody to provide the technical assistance – irrespective of whether they need it, whether this guy has actually better capacity and there is no transparency in terms of how you get this guy from the mother country, whoever the supporting country is. (Interview 47)

The question whether there is a genuine demand for expertise becomes difficult to answer when money is tied to it, even more so when governments are highly dependent on external funding. As an expert working for the Netherland’s Embassy in Dar es Salaam said:

If a [donor] country would really come with a package: ‘We want to invest in the water sector over the next five years (…), but we definitely, we insist we want you to get two TAs because it’s really needed’ – I think that, if it’s good or bad, Tanzania would not refuse that. (Interview 38)

The assumption that policy-makers in Tanzania are not likely to reject support although it entails “prescribed technical assistance” (Interview 47) is proved true by the experience of interviewees. An example is given by a Tanzanian health expert who remembered Danida placing nine advisors in the ministry of health as a condition for money and material:

We asked our bosses, ‘But how do you agree on this?’ They said, ‘No, without them we could have not got the EDP [essential drugs programme] drug kits.’ It was a condition that if you want EDP drug kits and this programme to run, you have to have these advisors. So you are aware, your people don’t have drugs – please bring them. (Interview 44)

A government committed to improve the ‘quality of life and social well-being’ of its citizens (United Republic of Tanzania 2010) would face a moral dilemma if it waived the provision of essential drugs for its population (which it cannot afford to procure by itself) on the ground that it does not want to have experts sitting in its ministries. While there certainly are exceptions, decision-makers in Tanzania tend to accept external advice as it increases their scope of action rather than decline support due to its conditionality.

This equally applies to the institutionalised interaction with donor experts in the context of joint funding mechanisms such as general budget support, sector budget support or baskets. Policy dialogue is an obligatory condition of these modalities which have brought about “intense and routine donor involvement”
(Harrison 2004: 88) in government decision-making. In technical working groups, SWAp meetings or annual reviews, donor representatives regularly meet with policy-makers and senior officials to discuss policy issues. From the recipient perspective, however, the starting point for this kind of interaction is the government’s shortage of financial resources and its interest in increasing the budget with external funding. Since consulting donors is a procedural conditionality for disbursements, policy-makers have little other choice than to accept being advised. A director in the Tanzanian education ministry pragmatically stated:

_They’re the funders. They’re the ones who support you, so you have to go into negotiation._ (Interview 49)

In Tanzania, a lot of advice provided either through dialogue structures or technical assistance is pushed through by donors without an explicit request by the government. This can bring about situations where advisors end up placed in offices “with nothing to advise” (Interview 44). As will be shown in the case studies (see Chapter 7), it also leads to overt and covert resistance against external interference in the form of enforced advice which manifests in frictions between external experts and their counterparts.

In South Africa, we found a very different picture. Neither is the government compelled to constantly interact with donors in dialogue forums, nor are departments ‘invaded’ by foreign advisors. The government tends to be selective in whose support to accept or reject. A director in the National Treasury delineated the country’s strategic approach towards expert advice as follows:

_There are some things we choose to bring in and some things we don’t (…). And we say that this is the type of expertise we need. So we already start directing it from that point of view. And we try to control this process so far that we don’t have experts coming in to redirect our policy space._ (Interview 23)

The government’s leeway in selecting assistance is, amongst others, grounded on its relative independence from external financing. Donors cannot use money as a lever to place experts in authorities against an explicit demand. South Africa is an exceptional case in terms of its strong standing against donors, however. The bigger the financial and political power imbalances

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102 For agreements which outline the conditions of joint funding mechanisms in Tanzania, see United Republic of Tanzania (2008a, 2008b, 2011).
between donors and recipients, the more the latter are struggling to defend themselves against ‘imposed advice’ in the form of institutionalised dialogue or technical assistance which does not match their needs.

**Structural flaws pertaining to expert employment**

Expert advice in the context of development aid is not only negatively affected by its linkage with politics. It is also impeded by several structural flaws related to conceptual deficiencies and employment practices on the donor side. First, aid agencies lack clear concepts of knowledge transfer and capacity-building without which expert advice becomes a black-box process with respect to its impact. Second, as a result of changing recruitment patterns in aid agencies, experts often lack adequate expertise, experience and competencies to provide valuable advice to recipients. Third, current employment practices obstruct the building of trust and interpersonal relationships which constitute crucial preconditions for knowledge sharing and learning processes. These obstacles at the micro-level of advice explain why external experts so often fail to achieve their proclaimed primary objective, namely to make themselves obsolete by capacitating counterparts in recipient bureaucracies.

**Vague concepts of knowledge transfer and ‘capacity-building’**

‘Capacity-building’, ‘capacity development’ or ‘capacity enhancement’ are terms that are nowadays found in almost every donor document (Easterly 2002). Yet, the aid community does not have a commonly shared understanding of what these terms mean. Some agencies have not even defined capacity-building internally and lack any kind of strategic vision of how it is supposed to take place. An OECD report compiled in 2009 found that out of 21 DAC members, only ten had “some form of overall capacity development guidance document – either in final or draft version” (OECD/DAC Capacity Development Team 2009: 4). The vagueness of the term also becomes evident in the interviews of this study. Talking about capacity-building, some respondents referred to concrete activities such as professional training courses, while others used it as an umbrella term and framed it as an overall goal of donor support, stating that “all of it is capacity-building in a way” (Interview 1). Considering the ambiguous meaning and use of the term, it is not surprising that the role of

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103 As Easterly (2002: 53) points out, “capacity building has been a theme of donor recommendations since forever, although it continues to exert its fascination in the latest reports”. Easterly made this comment in 2002, but his statement would still be valid today, almost a decade and a half later.
The Delusion of Knowledge Transfer

experts in that context is similarly vague. Aid agencies lack precise concepts of advice and its transformational impact on the recipient side.

A plethora of studies have identified the absence of knowledge transfer concepts as a major shortfall of technical assistance. In practice, the prevailing assumption among actors in advisory functions is that the interaction between external experts and their counterparts implies a learning process on the part of the latter. This is reflected by a statement of a Tanzanian policy-maker who commented:

Transfer of knowledge is there because you take a report to the donor, they analyse the report, and they provide comments. On the basis of those comments you can improve your report. And you meet, you discuss, you get challenges through questions, you respond. In a way, there is an implied building of capacity. (Interview 60)

This implicit process of capacity-building is somehow expected, but not ex ante articulated. Terms of reference for advisory positions and consultancies entail detailed lists of duties (e.g. participation in policy reviews, development of guidelines, conducting analyses etc.), but do not dwell on how knowledge transfer is meant to take place through these activities. The absence of a clear operationalisation makes external experts follow a “strategy of hope” (World Bank 2005a: 5) when interacting with their counterparts. An expert in the Finnish Embassy in Dar es Salaam admitted:

Sometimes it’s difficult to know, of course, what is it that you or the other person picks up from this collaboration, what are the things? Is it the way of working or is it the way of expressing yourself or a way of seeing things? Maybe you understand only later on how it happens. (Interview 36)

The performance of external experts is measured against the input they provided, not against their impact on the recipient side. Given that knowledge transfer is not “factored within the agreement” (Interview 47), as

104 See, for instance, Forss et al. (1988); Berg (1993); World Bank (2005a); DFID (2006); ECDPM & ACE Europe (2006); Land (2007); JICA (2008).

105 A study on DFID-funded technical cooperation, for instance, states that “a significant problem in the assessment of capacity development impact is that the activities reviewed in general did not involve exercises to benchmark capacity and capacity targets were not set. As a result, monitoring of capacity impact was either not built into the project monitoring and evaluation system or was not done so using a consistent analytical framework (for instance one that distinguished the wider institutional setting, the elements of organisational capacity, or individual staff capacities). The absence of such a systematic framework or focus on capacity development limits significantly the quality of the information on which judgements about capacity development impact can be based” (DFID 2006: xiv et seq.).
a Tanzanian World Bank expert put it, it receives less attention by advisors who are under pressure to fulfil the tasks agreed in their contract. Delivering products, meeting reporting requirements and carrying out projects on time often gains primacy over sharing knowledge with counterparts, which takes time and requires commitment on both sides. As a result, experts end up as ‘doers’ instead of being ‘mentors’, with the risk that “when the advisor leaves, you are back to square one because the capacity was not transferred to the team” (Interview 33).

Cases of ‘gap-filling’ experts in government units who create a “vacuum” (Interview 23) after they leave have been reported many times. Interviewees of this study provided several examples from both South Africa and Tanzania where authorities faced serious setbacks when technical assistance ended, but no local staff had been capacitated to use a newly established software system or to conduct a follow-up analysis without external support. The absence of knowledge transfer as an explicit element in contracts and assessment frameworks for advisors is seen as a fundamental flaw in the design and management of technical assistance. The problem that experts thus lack incentives to train or mentor their counterparts (instead of taking over their work) is exacerbated by the fact that they have an interest in keeping their status: simply put, an advisor or consultant is not necessarily keen on making his or her service obsolete by sharing knowledge (for which he or she is hired) with others. As a high-level official in Tanzania commented:

*The thing I have noted with consultants, they don’t want to give you everything. They just give you very little because they want them to be unique, to be calling them every year. Now if they give you everything, you do it yourself, will they continue to have jobs? No. Consultants will always come, do a study, but also create a room for a second follow-up study.* (Interview 60)

The “competitive and money-based” (Interview 8) nature of the consultancy industry in particular creates the perverse incentive to keep knowledge exclusive instead of sharing it. That being the case, the assumption that knowledge transfer implicitly takes place through the interaction between experts and government officials is, to say the least, simplistic. If an expert activity is meant to have any transformational impact in terms of capacity-building, it would be a necessity to explicitly articulate how this is to be brought about and to make it a – if not the – decisive criterion for performance assessment. This is not yet common practice in the aid community, given the absence of clear concepts of advice and its linkage to capacity-building. Knowledge transfer is thus at best
a contingent by-product of advisory processes whose quality is dependent on the commitment and relationship of the individual actors involved.

**Insufficient fit of expertise, experience and advisory competencies**

The composition of expert cadres is changing (see Chapter 4). Sector-specialists are increasingly being replaced by ‘hybrid advisors’ and generalists with a background in economics and administration. Work experience is becoming less important as a qualification criterion than high-level academic qualification and international mobility. These shifts in recruitment have significant effects on advisory processes insofar as experts often lack adequate expertise, experience and relevant competencies to provide valuable advice to their counterparts. The insufficient fit of expert backgrounds and the resulting weak quality of advice has repeatedly been criticised in evaluation reports (Forss et al. 1988; Jolly 1989; Williams et al. 2003; World Bank 2005a; DFID 2006; European Commission 2008; World Bank Independent Evaluation Group 2008). In our study, the problem of inadequate expertise was broached as an issue by interviewees on both the donor and recipient side, particularly in the fields of health and education in Tanzania. Many expressed the sentiment that the dialogue in technical working groups has been negatively affected by the changing composition of donor representatives. Generalists and administrators have little to contribute when it comes to sector-specific problems which require specialist knowledge and a deeper understanding of the matters at stake. Since their expertise, instead, increasingly lies in areas such as project management, auditing and accounting rather than on technical issues, it has become increasingly difficult to “talk the same language” (Interview 44) in policy discussions, as an interviewee put it. A Tanzanian health expert with many years of experience participating in donor-government dialogue explained the frictions which emerge from this mismatch:

> You have Rik in the Netherlands [a foreign advisor with a biomedical background], he can understand why you are talking this. But others do not understand because they look at the money, not at the product and they do not know the challenges that are in the country (...). They will stick to these audit reports etc., but they will not see the performance on immunisation coverage and cases like that. (Interview 44)

Similarly, a Tanzanian academic engaged in the education sector told us:

> Many of these development partners, they are not experts in education. But they are supposed to be coordinators or chairs for education and they
interact with the Ministry of Education. I have been with them, I have been to those meetings. It’s very different from a university professor of education talking to the Ministry that ‘this is how things can be done, this is how to change the mind set of science students, this is how laboratory work can be made interesting.’ It’s very, very different. Those people, the development partners, are interested in their money: ‘Has the next tranche been paid, have you received the letter for the next tranche?’ (…) That’s their main interest. (Interview 71)

The managerial knowledge many aid experts nowadays hold helps to administrate programmes and to keep track of funding flows. It is, however, not the type of expertise suitable to fulfil the main objective of the dialogue, namely to provide ‘sound advice’ for tackling sectoral challenges in the respective areas (see, for example, Development Partners Group Tanzania 2007, 2010a).

In addition to the often inadequate expertise of advisors, interviewees expressed concerns about the tendency of donors to send young experts who might be highly qualified with respect to their academic credentials, but lack experience in dealing with complex policy issues. The fact that advisors increasingly become younger is a result of accelerated career paths in international organisations which attract graduates with a low starting age and fast-track promotion (see Chapter 4). While advisory assignments in developing countries push the careers of young professionals, the counterparts on government side often perceive their placement as little helpful if not burdensome. A Tanzanian health expert stated in this regard:

> You bring a person who has never worked in the government, who has read his or her books well and then has got a master just like the other one who needs to be advised. And you are now coming to advise. Then instead of advising, you ask too many questions. How does this work out? (Interview 44)

A third aspect related to the aptitude of experts that turned out to be a central theme both in South Africa and Tanzania was what interviewees framed as ‘personality’. Whether recommendations are perceived as advice, constructive or destructive criticism or even interference is deemed heavily dependent on the way they are brought forward; several officials reported of tensions which evolved when external experts appeared overly assertive and dominant.

Attitudes and behavioural patterns seem to play a decisive role in advisory contexts. Various reports confirm the significance of a certain set of competencies (often termed ‘interpersonal skills’) for the impact of advice, such as listening,
communicative sensitivity, an ability to empathise and a commitment to assist rather than to prescribe (World Bank 2005a; DFID 2006). In contrast to expertise and experience, however, such competencies are systematically neglected in the recruitment and assessment of experts. Even though this may result from the fact that it is more difficult to capture them as qualification criteria, it is nonetheless a structural shortfall which in many cases impairs the quality of advisory relations.

The importance of adequate expertise, experience and advisory competencies on the side of advisors was repeatedly emphasised by interviewees of this study and illustrated not only by negative experiences, but also by examples of experts who were perceived as having the right ‘fit’ and were thus highly appreciated by recipients. A case in point mentioned by different officials was a health specialist working for GTZ (later GIZ) in Tanzania. Although at the time of the interviews, he had already left the country a couple of years earlier, his former counterparts still praised his support in the field of health and HIV. With a high level of specialist knowledge about public health systems and broad experience in other African countries, his advice was considered highly valuable. Officials of the Ministry of Health and TACAIDS described him as an outspoken, but respectful person who had shown sensitivity and commitment in engaging with his Tanzanian colleagues – “he truly believed in partnership as partnership” (Interview 63), a high-level decision-maker stated.

Apart from the individual attributes recipients ascribed to this individual, they highlighted the strong bonds he had built from a long-term cooperation. Staying in Tanzania for eight years, the health expert had an exceptionally long period of assignment in the country. His case illustrates that building advisory relationships requires not only the right mix of expertise, experience and competencies, but also conducive employment conditions; the latter, however, are usually missing in the aid context.

Lack of trust and social ties

A central theme throughout the interviews of this study was the lack of trust and continuity in advisory relationships resulting from employment practices.

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106 A World Bank study suggests ‘listening’, ‘curiosity’, ‘patience’, ‘humility’, ‘flexibility’, ‘empathy’ and ‘building trust’ as core competencies for advisory processes (World Bank 2005a: xiii). While we would argue that ‘building trust’ is more a result of behaviour which is also dependent on other factors (e.g. time), the remainder are similar to the essential competencies that can be identified in this study.

107 The World Bank report, for instance, finds that behavioural competencies are “hardly covered” in the bank’s Overall Performance Assessment framework used for assessing staff (World Bank 2005a: 35).
on the donor side. The theoretical and empirical insights of organisational studies of firms are instructive for analysing conditions at the micro-level of expert advice in aid. While organisational determinants vary, the basic constellation at the individual level is similar: actors encounter each other as potential knowledge sources and potential recipients. The crucial question is which factors determine whether their interaction is a successful learning process that results in knowledge transfer. A major finding in this regard is the significance of social ties, trust and shared visions as manifestations of social capital (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998).

Social ties as a structural feature and interpersonal trust as a relational characteristic have proven to be two crucial elements for knowledge transfer which are closely interlinked (Tsai & Ghoshal 1998; Hansen 1999; Levin et al. 2003; Inkpen & Tsang 2005; Becerra et al. 2008). Several scholars have shown that a close working relationship, in which actors frequently interact, functions as a strong tie that stimulates trust; trust, in turn, enhances the potential of knowledge transfer, as actors are not only “more willing to give useful knowledge”, but also “to listen to and absorb others’ knowledge” (Levin & Cross 2004: 1478). Both elements, social ties and interpersonal trust, share two characteristic traits. First, they are actor-bound in the sense that ties or trusting relationships cannot easily be traded or passed from one person to others. Second, they depend on a “history of interactions” (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998: 244), making time and continuity key determinants for their emergence (Preisendörfer 1995; Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998; Adler & Kwon 2002; Inkpen & Tsang 2005).

Looking at advisory relationships in the context of development aid, we find several conditions impeding the development of strong ties and trust between advisors and advised. A major obstacle in this regard is the high turnover of staff in donor organisations. Experts deployed as advisors spend around two to

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108 Interpersonal relationships have not yet received much attention in the literature on expert advice. In evaluation reports, they are, if at all, mentioned as a side note, but are not further investigated. In organisational theories and management sciences, however, the impact of interpersonal relations and trust in knowledge transfer processes within and across organisations have become key objects of research. See, for instance, Nahapiet & Ghoshal (1998); Zaheer et al. (1998); Hansen (1999); Argote & Ingram (2000); Szulanski (2000); Levin et al. (2003); Levin & Cross (2004); Inkpen & Tsang (2005); Becerra et al. (2008); Hajidimitriou et al. (2012); Alexopoulos & Buckley (2013).

109 Social capital as a concept of social science is used in a wide range of theories and filled with different meanings. Adler and Kwon (2002) provide an overview of definitions across various disciplines. We follow Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) who defined social capital as the “sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit” (243), and differentiated three dimensions: a structural dimension which refers to the “overall pattern of connection between actors” (244); a relational dimension which focuses on the relationship between actors; and a cognitive dimension which includes “shared representations, interpretations, and systems of meaning” (244). The components of all three dimensions have been shown to significantly affect the outcome of knowledge transfer efforts within organisational contexts (Nahapiet 2011).
three years in a country; consultants often only a couple of months. Similar to many other interviewees, a retired Tanzanian government member assessed the average stay of external experts as too short for building a fruitful advisory relationship:

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I \text{ think it needs a much longer period of time of interaction between the local and external experts in working together for a common goal (…). When it’s two years and an expert comes and goes, you don’t really have much, much impact. (Interview 65)}
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The impact of advice is seen as heavily dependent on the relationship between experts and their counterparts. The establishment of social ties through regular and continuing interaction between actors, however, is hampered by the “temporariness of interlocutors” (Interview 71), as an interviewee put it. Building up relationships and trust that constitute essential preconditions for advice requires a time span which exceeds the employment cycles prevailing in the aid community. As a World Bank expert commented:

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By the time you get even on a personal level to understand the guy, then there’s a new advisor coming in. (Interview 47)
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The development of trust is not only hampered by discontinuity but also by the double role of experts as advisors and administrators. In many cases experts not only have the function to provide advice to government officials, but also to monitor the progress of programmes, the adherence to agreements and the proper use of funds. Particularly in the case of technical assistants embedded in ministries or departments, the merger of advising and controlling responsibilities causes accountability conflicts and distrust. The perception among many recipients is that experts placed in state authorities primarily serve as donor agents. A Tanzanian professor expressed the sentiment he observed among government officials in ministries:

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Why do you want them to be in our offices? They will just be here as spies and looking at what we are doing. (Interview 71)
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The practice of linking advisory and supervisory tasks reduces the trustworthiness of advice, as the intentions behind expert engagement get blurred. Recipients who are doubtful of the motivation of advice are less likely to be receptive to it. The fact that experts are perceived as working in the interest of donors

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110 Details on employment conditions are outlined in Chapter 4.
and that they appear to benefit from their intermediary position, which grants them control over resources and access to decision makers, complicates the emergence of a trustful relationship. Various statements of interviewees point to a mutual distrust on both donor and government side about the respective others’ purposes within cooperation.

The perceived discrepancy of intentions and lack of common goals is also confirmed by questionnaire results of this study. Asked about their experience in working with their counterparts, many respondents assessed ‘sharing similar interests in reaching targets’ and ‘sharing a common vision and similar motivation’ as highly problematic issues within cooperation. A shared vision constitutes a major cognitive element in relationships and is proven to have a considerable effect on the emergence of trust in knowledge transfer processes (Tsai & Ghoshal 1998; Levin et al. 2003).

In sum, developing a trustful relationship in a setting characterised by a discontinuity of actors, short time frames and non-transparent interests becomes an inherently difficult endeavour. While individual actors may still be able to build such relationships, the prevailing employment conditions of experts are not conducive to a “waxing process” (Interview 71) at the interpersonal level, thus impeding knowledge transfer processes in the context of aid.

Unequal relationships

With the rise of the ‘knowledge for development’ paradigm, ‘local knowledge’ and its importance for transformational processes have become a central theme in the international discourse on development. The debate affected the aid

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111 Delineating conflicting imperatives of the broker’s role in the political sphere, Stovel and Shaw (2012: 151) state that “acting as a middleman between these two spheres frequently engenders severe distrust from actors on both sides of the divide”. According to the authors, brokers face a constant dual-agency dilemma stemming from the tension between the personal ties essential for brokerage processes and the potential individual gains of their role: “Given that a broker – due to her greater access to information, control over resources, or structural power – has a clear opportunity to gain at the expense of either or both of the groups for whom she is brokering, how does she maintain the trust necessary to continue brokering between them?” (Stovel & Shaw 2012: 154).

112 The distribution of answers in detail (missings not calculated in the percentage): ‘Sharing similar interests in reaching targets’: 10.9% extremely problematic; 36.4% problematic; 40% rather unproblematic; 12.7% definitely unproblematic. ‘Sharing a common vision and similar motivation’: 14.5% extremely problematic; 41.8% problematic; 30.9% rather unproblematic; 12.7% definitely unproblematic.

113 See Warren et al. (1995); Odora Hoppers (2002); Santos (2007). The term ‘local knowledge’ needs some clarification as it lacks a common definition. Post-development/post-modernism scholars often use it interchangeably with ‘traditional’ or ‘indigenous’ knowledge developed and used by a society, as opposed to scientific knowledge. In the context of development cooperation, ‘local knowledge’ usually refers to the knowledge generated in developing countries in contrast to
community insofar as it questioned the prevailing approach of knowledge transfer and shed light on the ignorance of scientific and non-scientific knowledge produced by developing countries (Torres 2001; King 2004). In response to the critique, donor organisations have come up with new policies and strategies which emphasise the commitment to recognise, use and thereby strengthen recipient countries’ knowledge base. Advice should no longer be a one-way street, but become a mutual learning process; experts should no longer only be sent from abroad, but also recruited within the ‘partner country’.

Regulations on expert employment reflect this new approach. The World Bank in its guidelines for the selection and employment of consultants, for instance, highlights its “interest in encouraging the development and use of national consultants in its developing member countries” (World Bank 2011a: 2). Similarly, Danida’s guidelines for technical assistance instruct preference to be given to national experts over external ones:

*The first possibility to consider for any TA needs is whether the required expertise is available nationally. If national expertise is available and most suitable for the TA input required, it would in most cases be preferable if the partner organisation recruits this expertise directly, and under national rules. Using national consultants and institutions for technical assistance can be considered part of capacity development of the human resources base of a country.* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark 2009: 16, bold in original).

Although the emphasis on local knowledge has become a key element of the rhetoric of aid agencies, development cooperation is still characterised by a predominance of external experts and an asymmetric flow of knowledge from the North to the global South. The unequal setting in which donors and recipients operate is reinforced through the creation of “knowledge hierarchies” (Girvan 2007: 16) which marginalise experts in developing countries, and increase the discursive power of the transnational expert community working for international organisations. Procurement practices and employment conditions of these organisations consolidate the hierarchical classification of expertise in the context of development aid.

Western knowledge. In this study, we use the term to differentiate knowledge which is locally available in a given society (both scientific and non-scientific) from knowledge provided by external (foreign) experts.

114 After arguing that the use of national experts would strengthen the local knowledge base in the recipient country, the text continues: “National consultants are generally better attuned to government officials and departmental cultures, as well as to the private sector in the country – and, using national consultants may be a cost-effective solution” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark 2009: 16).
CHAPTER 5 Intricacies of Expert Advice in the Aid Context

The creation of knowledge hierarchies

The procurement of experts turns out to be a sensitive issue in the cooperation between donor organisations and recipient institutions. The frictions that arise in the context of procurement point to power struggles underlying the process of assessing expert qualification in which donors – despite all claims of ‘local ownership’ – still hold the authority to set formal and informal rules. In some cases, the gap between donor policies and practice is appalling. According to the World Bank policy for the selection of consultants, for instance, the responsibility of procurement lies with the borrower (World Bank 2011a); a Tanzanian expert working for the World Bank in Dar es Salaam, however, told us:

*The participation of the ministry or the government is usually very minimal. I see in some areas they do participate in terms of selection, hiring and so on, but it's just face value.* (Interview 47)

The cases in which recipients are potentially involved in procurement are limited. Experts for representative positions such as sector specialists or first secretaries are internally recruited by the employing organisation and, in the case of bilateral agencies, often require citizenship in the donor country and respective language skills. Consequently, while there may be some exceptions, representative positions are usually filled by foreign experts. This may not come as a surprise, but one has to bear in mind that experts in such positions are higher up the hierarchy and – at least in a country such as Tanzania – have the widest scope of influence in the sector they are concerned with.

When it comes to procuring advisors and consultants, the extent to which recipients have a say in the process varies from agency to agency. Generally, Nordic countries and UN agencies are perceived as less prescriptive than other bi- and multilateral agencies such as GIZ or the World Bank which set

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115 Although English is used as a standard official language in the aid community, many of the bilateral organisations require advanced skills of their respective country’s language for leading advisory positions. The Swedish development agency Sida, for instance, states on its website that "most positions require good knowledge of Swedish (written and spoken), and also Swedish citizenship or a residence permit" (Sida 2013b). In our interviews, this was justified by the need to be able to report to and communicate with headquarters in the respective language. Interestingly, online adverts for job vacancies are often distributed only in the official language of the donor country and not translated into English or French or the language of the country of assignment. At the time of research, Sida published vacancies on its website only in Swedish. Similarly, many job descriptions of GIZ are only published in German (although posted on the English website), making it difficult for experts from abroad to identify potential job opportunities.
strict conditions and requirements. Consistent with many other interviewees in recipient institutions, a senior officer working for the Tanzanian National Environmental Management Council summarised his experience in the following way:

Interviewee: In case it is a credit from the World Bank, they have a range of conditionalities that these kinds of projects must be internationally advertised and experts compete.

Interviewer: And do they, have they got any influence on which experts you choose?

(...)

Interviewee: Yes, they have the final say. Because you have a number of experts, you conduct the evaluation, the evaluation has to be submitted to the World Bank, then they are the one who say that ‘okay, this is the kind of expert we would like to work with based on the qualifications’ (...). You don’t have the final say as a country or as a project. Everything, whatever you raise, must have no objection from the World Bank. In fact, there is a little flexibility. Whenever we work with international organisations like the UNDP – they don’t attach strict conditions like the other one. Because at least there is the flexibility. If we work with the UNDP, they can bring money, then we will do everything in terms of advertisement, sourcing the experts and everything. (Interview 59)

While aid agencies differ in terms of setting procurement regulations and conditions, they share the practice of differentiating between “national” and “international” experts. National advisory positions are open only for nationals of the respective country. International posts, in contrast, are internationally advertised. The scope of recruitment, however, is not the only difference. Across all aid agencies, international experts tend to have superior positions in comparison to national experts. The hierarchy between the two becomes manifest in inequalities with regard to remuneration, authority and ascribed credibility of expertise. Prevailing procurement and employment practices create a market which structurally discriminates experts from developing countries.

Finding an answer to the question of how the distinction between national and international experts emerged and how it is legitimated is not easy. The categorisation is commonly used in human resources policies and staff management documents of donor organisations; it is, however, never
thoroughly explained on which justification it is based and which demarcation criteria are used. Asked what decides whether a job is tendered as a national or international position, interviewees provided two answers. The first referred to the assumed availability of domestic expertise: the donor and the recipient jointly decide if experts are likely to be found locally, and if not, they would advertise for an international expert. This approach would be in line with the principles set out in policies of recipient countries, for example, the Joint Assistance Strategy for Tanzania which states that “procurement of TA will use national rather than foreign expertise or supplies whenever these are able to meet VFM [value for money] and capacity development requirements” (United Republic of Tanzania 2006b: 11–12).

The second answer justified the practice in terms of compliance with market rules: advisory jobs or consultancies that exceed a specific financial threshold require an international bidding process. In fact, aid agencies within the European Union which serve as public sector authorities are subject to EU directives and thus need to tender consultancy contracts amounting to EUR 200 000 and more in all EU member states (GIZ n.d.; European Union 2012). Similarly, the World Bank has set monetary thresholds for each borrowing country which determine whether short lists for consultancies may be limited to national consultants or must include foreign candidates. In both South Africa and Tanzania, this ceiling is currently set at USD 300 000 (World Bank 2016: 5). These regulations are justified with the aim to foster competition and ensure the best ‘value for money’.

The differentiation between national and international experts in the context of development aid is so common that it is rarely questioned. Yet, it demarcates expertise, drawing a line between experts in recipient countries and experts from abroad. A Tanzanian government official in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism remembered an occasion at which the differentiation of national and international experts was challenged:

*Actually at one time, we had a very strong debate at the steering committee meeting. We just wanted to hire an international expert and someone from the university actually asked the chair, ‘at least make a definition of an international expert. Who would be an international expert?’ And the consensus actually came that someone might be a Tanzanian, but also have an international qualification.* (Interview 55)

Similarly, a permanent secretary in Tanzania argued:

*Our professors learnt in universities from abroad, maybe similar universities. For example, at the University of Dar es Salaam, some of my*
good professors there studied at Harvard. Some are better, they got their PhD there. So they have got good expertise and they are also used by some international organisations like UNICEF and they present papers abroad, outside there. So this connotation of international and local is not good. (Interview 60)

Many interviewees expressed the sentiment that the differentiation between national and international expertise implicitly downgrades the expertise and experience of experts in recipient countries. The perception of a hierarchical classification is, indeed, formalised in prevailing employment conditions. National and international advisory positions differ greatly with regard to remuneration and assigned authority. It is common practice in the donor community to use different payment scales for the two categories: the international expert is paid according to the organisation’s headquarter’s salary scale, while national experts get a ‘local pay’ (see, for example, World Bank 2010b; GIZ 2011; United Nations 2013b). Although the latter is normally adjusted to the highest level of payment for similar work in the local market, the salary of an international expert usually exceeds the rate of a national one by far. This applies to both longer-term advisory jobs and short-term consultancies. A Tanzanian professor with an international reputation sharply criticised the huge inequalities in remuneration he experienced in the context of aid projects:

The international consultant being paid maybe EUR 1500 per day, the local consultant, no matter how skilled you are, full professor, and you are told your rate is EUR 300; I think that’s even on the high side. But actually at the end of the day, you are the one to do the work because (...) those foreign experts, they don’t know the local environment, where to source the materials. They end up doing the editing of the document that you have done (...). And if you are lucky, you’ll be acknowledged in the final document. If you are unlucky, even the name will not appear. (Interview 69)

116 The United Nations agencies, for instance, pay locally recruited National Professional Officers and General Service staff members according to the principle that “staff should be compensated in accordance with the best prevailing conditions of service in the locality; consequently, they are paid not on the basis of a single global salary scale, but according to local salary scales established on the basis of salary surveys” (International Civil Service Commission 2013: 14). Similarly, the GIZ policy for national personnel states that remuneration should be “in line with usual market conditions”, specifying that “remuneration is comparable with that provided by private sector and international companies and other DC organisations competing with GIZ in the country” (GIZ 2011: 2).
The huge discrepancy in remuneration was not only confirmed by several interviewees of our sample, but has also been documented by studies on the use of advisors and consultants in the aid context. A comprehensive report on technical assistance in the context of Global Fund grants, for instance, states:

*While precise details are not available, the studies showed clearly that local consultants in all the study countries receive far less than their international counterparts: local consultant rates were in the range of [USD] 100–350 per day, whereas international rates ranged from [USD] 250–650 per day, with Ethiopia reporting international rates of up to [USD] 1000 per day. Although there is insufficient evidence with regard to cost effectiveness to draw any solid conclusions, it should be noted that in some countries local consultants are deemed to provide more effective support, in part because of their ability to understand and work within the local context.*

(Coordinating AIDS Technical Support Group 2009: 8–9)

The difficulty in presenting concrete, comparable data results from the fact that most donor organisations do not disclose salary scales or rates for advisors – oftentimes, not even recipient institutions are informed how much international advisors get paid. Other organisations are not able to provide an official payment scale for the simple reason that they do not have one. A study on the use of consultants in the United Nations system found that UN agencies either used outdated or imprecise remuneration guidelines or did not have any internal policies or guidelines at all, resulting in “significant discrepancies and inconsistencies in remuneration across the system and within each organization” (Terzi 2012: 31). On its website, the UN provides indicative rates not for consultants, but for professional staff. In 2013, an internationally recruited senior advisor seconded to Dar es Salaam was offered a total annual salary between USD 142 614–183 934 (United Nations 2013a).\(^{117}\) A National Officer employed as senior programme officer received between USD 53 988–88 537 (United Nations 2012).\(^{118}\) Although the two positions differ in terms of the scope of responsibilities and thus the salary data do not allow a direct comparison, the numbers shed light on remuneration levels for national and international senior positions.

The unequal and opaque pricing of expertise in the context of development cooperation causes tensions and strained relationships, particularly when

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117 This is the salary band indicated for internationally recruited professional staff at the senior level, that is, senior experts hired as advisors or programme directors.

118 This is the salary band indicated for experts categorised as national staff and employed as senior programme or senior administrative officers (total net remuneration: TSh 88 661–145 397 thousand).
experts from within the country and from outside are paired and supposed to deliver as a team. A high-ranking senior official in Tanzania remembered a programme in which two senior professors complained about being paid less than their team leader, a relatively young consultant from the UK:

_The professor was saying: ‘We have almost the same job, we know this country, we travel a lot, we almost do everything. This fellow is just coordinating our efforts and is paid very highly and we are paid lower. We are professors; he is just a PhD holder. I have my professorship for the past 20 years; this is just a doctor for seven years back.’ The professors were not happy._ (Interview 60)

This case points to the second aspect of hierarchy to be found in employment conditions, namely the practice of putting international experts into a higher position than their national collaborators. Irrespective of academic degrees or work experience, “the lead will be the external, then the national consultant will do kind of support” (Interview 68). Job descriptions advertised by aid agencies confirm this pattern. While international experts are delegated leading tasks, national ones are employed to assist.¹¹⁹

Although donors vary, the status of international experts is usually higher than that of national staff in country offices.¹²⁰ The discrepancy is a pattern found across the aid community and documented by workforce data. In 2011, 49% of DFID’s total staff held senior posts as civil servants or advisers, whereas only 18% of the national staff in overseas offices (so-called “staff appointed in-country”) was employed at that top level (National Audit Office 2012). A similar picture is found at GIZ: national personnel in recipient countries made up nearly 70% of GIZ’s total workforce in 2012. While this is a high share of locally recruited staff, only 11% of this group were employed as leading or

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¹¹⁹ To give just one example of what these arrangements look like: a procurement notice published by UNDP announced a tender for one international and two national consultancy positions to support the implementation of the National Mine Action Programme in Vietnam. The roles and responsibilities were assigned in the following way: as the team leader, the international consultant should manage the team, design the scope and methodology of the study, and draft and finalise the report. The two national consultants, classified as team members, were given the tasks to collect and review documents, participate in the design of the study and its implementation, contribute and assist in the production of the required deliverables, and translate the reports into Vietnamese, amongst others (UNDP 2013b). This example reflects the prevailing division of labour when consultants are ‘paired’, as it is called in the aid community.

¹²⁰ Generalising our observations, the discrepancies between international and national staff are greater in bilateral agencies and less pronounced in multilateral organisations. In UN agencies, for instance, national experts have a solid standing, forming the core technical cadre in country offices. In the World Bank country office in Dar es Salaam, key positions for certain sectors such as the senior health or education specialist were filled with Tanzanian experts at the time of our research. One level up the hierarchy, however, the posts of task team leaders in health and education were held by international experts, namely, foreigners.
senior professionals (GIZ 2013a).\textsuperscript{121} Aid organisations tend to boast about the use of national staff in their ‘partner countries’; however, as the data above show, this does not necessarily mean that they put local experts at equal level with experts sent from abroad.

The internal divide of staff is, however weakly, noticeable in donor organisations. A South African expert who had worked for a foreign embassy in her country for over ten years told us that she had constantly been aware of the status difference between herself and foreign colleagues who were consciously or unconsciously suggestive of knowing ‘a little bit better’.\textsuperscript{122} Such kind of implicit downgrading of local expertise was broached as an issue by national experts and government officials in both countries of the study, particularly in Tanzania. Repeatedly one comes across the sentiment that donors consider foreign expertise as more ‘credible’. A Tanzanian health expert with years of experience working for the government reported:

\begin{quote}
There could be six-month consultancies which you can recruit from domestic market or you can recruit from abroad. Now you need to look at where do I get these professionals? You might have somebody in the domestic market with experience and he has done similar work – then we have the problem of credibility of the report he will be writing. Because the credibility, (if you are with) GIZ or Danida, you are more credible (…). When local, national experts are reporting, you get a lot of criticism. We have experience here. We were developing the health financing strategy with Professors from the University of Dar es Salam. I tell you, that strategy has never ended. In fact, it ended up them saying ‘no, we cannot accept this document’.
\end{quote}

Interview 44

The term ‘credible’ in this context implies both a high quality of expertise in a technical sense and ‘objectivity’ or ‘independence’. The tendency to perceive international expertise as more neutral and local expertise as potentially biased is even reflected in official donor documents, in which the “lack of distance to the partner organisation” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark 2009: 15) is mentioned as a potential risk of recruiting national consultants. Being aware of the subliminal disregard of local expertise on the donor side, decision-makers in government ministries and departments tend to adopt a very pragmatic strategy. A permanent secretary in Tanzania stated in this regard:

\begin{quote}
121 The remaining national personnel were categorised as professionals (29%), junior professionals (10%), assistants (20%) and support staff (30%). The shares were calculated using data taken from the company’s 2012 Annual Report (GIZ 2013a: 55).

122 This statement was made during a feedback workshop in the context of the study. To preserve the anonymity of the person, no further details are provided.
\end{quote}
For us, we argue that even the local ones have got expertise (…). But when they [the donors] say ‘if you insist on the local, we don’t provide money’ and you want this thing to be done in order for you to make progress, so you agree. (Interview 60)

The unequal assessment of expertise leads to the paradoxical situation that experts in recipient countries come “behind the umbrella of the foreign companies” (Interview 59), as an interviewee put it. Local experts team up with consultancy firms abroad, creating a win-win situation for both: while the former increase their degree of credibility, the latter can claim to provide experts for the country of assignment, which increases their chance to win the bidding process. An officer in the Tanzanian National Environmental Management Council remembered such a case in the context of the World Bank/GEF ‘Lake Victoria Environmental Management Project’:

There was an assignment which was given to a Netherlands company, a consultancy firm. But you find most of the activities were being done by the Tanzanians. But the company which was engaged came from the Netherlands. They were just coming for about two or three weeks and went back, but all the fieldwork, data collection, everything was being done by professors from the University of Dar es Salaam. But as professors, they could not have that assignment (…). (Interview 59)

Local experts are not necessarily excluded from an international bidding process. Depending on the financing agency’s procurement rules, they are in some cases also eligible to apply for international posts. The rules of the game in that competition, however, put them in a rather inferior position in contrast to applicants from abroad. The process of selecting experts in the aid market is guided by standards set by donor organisations. Expertise is rated against qualification criteria such as university degrees, publications and previous assignments, and the quality of technical proposals. Applying such assessment

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123 Unfortunately, it was difficult to obtain clear answers to the – at first glance – simple question whether experts from recipient countries are eligible to apply for internationally tendered advisory positions in their own countries. We were not able to obtain relevant information from documents publicly disclosed by donor organisations. Hence, we tried to clarify this issue by contacting some agencies directly by email (emails sent on 05 November 2013). DFID’s press office did not reply at all. Two contacts at GIZ could not provide a definite answer, adding that this was a ‘complicated question’; one of them explained that he had never worked with a national holding an international position, but he had heard from colleagues that there are exceptional cases. Only an agency commissioned by Danida for administering bilateral positions made a clear statement: “All bilateral Danida adviser positions are available to all nationalities, meaning that also experts in recipient countries are eligible to apply for the advertised positions” (Email of Mercuri Urval Denmark, received 05 November 2013).
factors tends to marginalise experts from developing countries, as they are not able to keep up with experts from the North, as the NEMC officer pointed out:

They [foreign experts] come with big CVs, so it is difficult to compete (...). In fact, in most cases – in my opinion – I think you find that whenever they submit their financial or technical proposals, probably they are quite good compared to our national experts. And you find that in most cases they have a track record. They have done quite similar kind of studies in other countries. So when it comes to competition, in most cases you find that they just win. (Interview 59)

This experience of a Tanzanian natural scientist points to a couple of structural obstacles which diminish the competitiveness of local experts, irrespective of their actual individual expertise. First of all, given the constraints of science systems in developing countries, the academic records local experts are able to provide are usually less comprehensive and, again, less recognised. In this context, two points were raised which concern local experts working as scientists and likewise as consultants, namely the problems of unequal credit distribution and a hierarchical classification of research output. An internationally well-respected Tanzanian scientist touched on both issues, reflecting what has been said in other interviews:

There is this misconception that there is this categorisation of the publications. Something published in Africa is ‘grey literature’. Something published in the West, in America, that’s top class literature. So even in the IPCC [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change], in the beginning we were told you have to handle ‘grey literature’ with care because it doesn’t merit scientific credibility. Those kind of insulting sort of statements – and sometimes you get annoyed.

And further:

Actually, if you find most of this good piece of work which has been done in Africa, much of it has been done by Africans, but they don’t feature them in the documents. Mostly, scientists from the West take the credits. (Interview 69)

124 For a comprehensive analysis of the state of public science in countries of southern Africa, see Mouton et al. (2008).
The problem of unequal credit distribution was reported for both scientific articles and consultancy reports. As the majority of publications are financed from outside, experts in developing countries frequently experience ‘disappearance’ when it comes to authorship, making it difficult for them to document research or consultancy experience.

The fact that funding usually comes from Europe or North America limits the employment opportunities of experts from developing countries, as there is a clear tendency of financiers to select advisors from their own region. A Tanzanian policy-maker summarised his experience in the following way:

EU member states, if they give your government money to recruit foreign consultants, if you take one from outside the EU member states, I can tell you even the report may be rejected. I don’t know why. May I ask you because you come from the EU member states – do you have an implied policy that money from your state should be financing consultants from same countries? (Interview 60)

The pattern that European or US financiers prefer experts from their own countries or regions was confirmed by various interviewees and mentioned as a major obstacle hindering the development of an African consultancy industry. Although international organisations increasingly emphasise the importance of South-South exchanges and make some sporadic attempts to create regional consulting pools, there is still a funding gap and a lack of institutional backing for experts from developing nations. That, in turn, makes them less competitive in the international market. They are disadvantaged as they are less able to provide a comprehensive track record of previous assignments as advisors in other countries. Due to the lack of experience and institutional support, they may also be less conversant with the codes of the consultancy industry. As one interviewee put it, “a consultant is not here to create new things. He’s here to package them well” (Interview 68). This packaging requires the use of certain terminologies, formats and methodologies developed and certified by international organisations. As Evers and Menkhoff (2002: 21) point out, “choosing the right language and the appropriate concepts is an essential prerequisite for success” in the market. To demonstrate such consultancy skills in applications and technical proposals is often a challenge for experts in developing countries with little experience in the market. The competitive edge they could claim over foreigners, namely profound knowledge of their countries with regard to political structures, societal and cultural issues, and

125 An example is the PEPFAR-funded Grant Management Solutions project which employed consultants from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean to advise governments receiving Global Fund grants (Anderson 2008).
local language skills, is usually given less weight in the selection process than formal qualification criteria and certified technical competencies. Comparing adverts for international advisory positions, it is noticeable that in most cases previous experience in the country and/or basic skills of the local language in the country of assignment is – if at all – mentioned as an asset, but not as a decisive requirement.

In sum: with the authoritative power to define expertise, donors have created a market which ranks “international (that is, Northern) knowledge at the top and so-called local (that is, Southern) knowledge at the bottom” (Girvan 2007: 16). Procurement practices and employment conditions in that market reinforce the hierarchy between external and local expertise, and thus marginalise expert communities in recipient countries instead of strengthening them. The donor community thereby preserves the prevailing epistemic hegemony of the North which sets specific conditions for knowledge transfer between external and local actors.

Hierarchical relations between advisors and counterparts

The hierarchy between international and national knowledge characterises not only the expert market, but also the relationship between external experts and their local counterparts in their practical operations. Commenting on the manifest status difference between the two parties, a Tanzanian advisor working for a foreign embassy stated:

> Once you are a recipient, the relationship cannot be equal. That cannot be.

(Interview 31)

Donor organisations frame advice as a process of mutual learning, but in reality the actors involved still perceive it as a one-directional transfer of knowledge, with foreigners imparting their knowledge to local officials. Many interviewees expressed the sentiment that external experts are generally ascribed superior expertise and competency. Even in cases where advisors and counterparts have a similar training background and scope of work experience, there is an implicit asymmetry in authority, as a Tanzanian professor pointed out:

> We have been to school together, we know each other, we know our capacities. But of course, when they’re here, they’re treated as people who can give you instructions. (Interview 69)

From the recipient perspective, donors often come with the attitude that local counterparts are not capable to perform without their assistance. This becomes
The delusion of knowledge transfer is evident in reactions on policies, plans and programmes which, if prepared without external support, are sharply criticised by the aid community. This leaves senior officials in government ministries and departments under the impression that donors generally downgrade local capacity in order to legitimate the placement of external experts within their organisations.

The fact that foreign experts, coming with expertise and money, often have regular access to high-level decision-makers exacerbates the status difference perceived by government staff. South African and Tanzanian officials interviewed for this study expressed their frustration about how foreigners work themselves into powerful positions and claim to interact only with the leading figures of recipient authorities. A director in the South African Department of Health said:

> Sometimes they come here – which is a big, big, big problem – they come here and they prefer to work with people at the highest, highest level. For example, the head of the department or the deputy of the head of the department. And then they don’t want to work with us. And we are the people that are more skilled and we are the people that have more information on this (...). I’m knowledgeable about these policies and frameworks. So their preference of wanting to meet with the highest level makes frustration. (Interview 18)

Another factor that creates discrepancy and inequality in what is supposed to be a ‘partnership’ between local officials and external advisers is the obvious differences in living standards and salary. In the questionnaire sample, every second respondent assessed this as a problematic or extremely problematic issue within cooperation. Incidentally, a similar impression is also expressed by Tanzanian programme officers in the study Eriksson Baaz (2005: 94). The distribution of questionnaire answers in detail (missings not calculated in the percentage): 13.2% extremely problematic; 37.7% problematic; 39.6% rather unproblematic; 9.4% definitely unproblematic.

Table 4 provides only exemplary figures to give an impression of the existing salary differentials.

In extreme cases, consultants earn more in one day than what government officials get paid in a month. Again, it is difficult to provide data on donor and government pay which allow a sound comparison.

Table 4 provides only exemplary figures to give an impression of the existing salary differentials.

In extreme cases, consultants earn more in one day than what government officials get paid in a month. Salary differentials of that extent create resentment among government staff towards experts from outside. Though not an openly addressed issue, the stark discrepancy implicitly affects the cooperation, as a Tanzanian World Bank officer pointed out:

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127 A study conducted by ActionAid International provided concrete numbers for Cambodia where “adviser fees of $17,000 per month are several hundred times higher than the salary of a typical government employee, at only $40 per month” (Greenhill 2006: 34).
CHAPTER 5 Intricacies of Expert Advice in the Aid Context

Here is a foreign and here is a guy, local, and they’re all experts according to their level. One, of course, is remunerated by his own government – very high, his living conditions and everything. This [other] poor guy is on a very rudimentary salary, a miserable salary, and they are supposed to be equal. That would also bring in some kind of tension (...). Now they are supposed to work at that level with somebody who definitely is different. I mean, they are equal but different. You see what I mean. (...) Although it’s not straight outspoken, but you see that kind of element.

[The local guy] probably would just continue doing business as usual. Not really then having willingness to learn, readiness to learn from this guy – he will know it won’t make any difference to me. But who would like to make a difference to the system, you see. So that commitment is a problem. (...). Basically you are bringing in advisors to try to strengthen a system which is a de-motivated system (...). At the end of the day, you just go back home and nothing has changed. That’s my own experience, how I see it. (Interview 47)

All the different aspects delineated above – knowledge, influence, living standards – demarcate a boundary between external and local actors, and

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Table 4: Monthly salary bands of advisors, consultants and government staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Recipient country</th>
<th>USD min.</th>
<th>USD max.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TZ, PMO-RALG</td>
<td>Senior forest officer (government scale TGS F)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TZ, PMO-RALG</td>
<td>Principal economist Policy and Planning Division (government scale TGS H)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1 365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA, DHET</td>
<td>Deputy director, Academic planning, monitoring and evaluation</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>4 867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFID</td>
<td>Senior advisors (band A2)</td>
<td>7 036</td>
<td>10 145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFID</td>
<td>National health advisor in Tanzania</td>
<td>2 539</td>
<td>3 754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Nations</td>
<td>Senior level professionals in Dar es Salaam</td>
<td>11 885</td>
<td>15 328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Nations</td>
<td>Senior level professionals in Pretoria</td>
<td>11 280</td>
<td>14 549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AusAid</td>
<td>Long-term advisor (discipline group c, job level 4, e.g. senior advisor on biodiversity)</td>
<td>13 017</td>
<td>19 525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AusAid</td>
<td>Short-term advisor (discipline group c, job level 4, e.g. senior advisor on biodiversity)</td>
<td>708</td>
<td>1 063 (daily rate)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


128 To provide a sound comparison, salary data in this table have been converted into USD and inflation-adjusted.
rank them in an order in which the former is higher than the latter. The extent to which that hierarchy is pronounced certainly varies. In both South Africa and Tanzania, however, policy advice in the context of aid takes place in an unequal setting in which “knowledge serves the function of justifying hierarchical relations” (Girvan 2007: 6).

The intricacies of expert advice in the context of aid highlighted in this chapter can be summarised as follows: policy advice within development cooperation takes place in a setting permeated with conflicting interests and power inequalities between donor and recipient countries, with the latter being in a weaker position due to their dependency on external support. Given the strong linkage of aid and politics, advisory processes are affected by shifting fads in terms of topics and modes of operation, legitimation and accountability pressures, and a potential mismatch of donor interests and recipient needs. At the micro-level, structural flaws in expert employment and hierarchical relations create conditions that obstruct the knowledge transfer between advisors and their counterparts. As a result, expert advice largely fails to achieve its main objective, namely to increase the capacity of recipients in a way that ultimately makes them independent from outside assistance.

Consequently, governments in developing democracies find themselves caught in a perpetual cycle of being advised by external experts who circulate in core government institutions and are involved in all stages of policy-making. Considering that these experts share a certain epistemic culture and are primarily accountable to their financiers, that is, the donor community, the expertise they communicate to their client governments is not neutral, disinterested expert knowledge, but is shaped – often implicitly – by particular paradigms and interests. Expert advice in the context of aid thus becomes a conduit for external influence under the guise of knowledge transfer. This raises the question how this affects especially young democracies such as South Africa and Tanzania, as these are particularly vulnerable to the loss of decision-making autonomy and, thus, legitimacy. To what extent are they threatened by knowledge transfer as it was characterised and under which conditions are they still able to defend their decision-making autonomy in the political realm?