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The European Union and Policy Coherence for Development:

A norm maker in the OECD system?

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Introduction

With only a little bit more than a year on the clock, discussions on the successor framework of the expiring Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are heating up. While at present, there is a widespread consensus among international, regional and national stakeholders that this post-2015 framework needs to be a *“truly international framework of policies to achieve sustainable development”* (UN, 2013, p. 2), much work still needs to be done on how to translate this overarching principle into specific goals, targets and strategies. One particular barrier that will need to be overcome is tackling the still existing incoherencies between development cooperation and other policy fields. More specifically, if we look back on the MDGs, a persistent critique over the past decade has been that these goals were largely drawn and pursued within the development community, whereas other policy spheres were much less involved, explaining why these not necessarily supported the goals (ECDPM, 2014; Poku & Whitman, 2011).

Against this background, various stakeholders have recently brought the issue of policy coherence for development (PCD) into the discussions on the post-2015 development framework. This is motivated by the fact that regardless of the specific targets and goals that will ultimately be adopted in 2015, they will require a broad and strong approach to policy coherence in order to be successfully achieved. What is remarkable, however, is the fact that this call for greater policy coherence

originates mainly from within the traditional Western donor community. Especially, the European Union (EU) – referring to both the institutions and member states – has proven to be particularly keen on promoting the principle of PCD in the context of the post-2015 framework at the multilateral level. This is obviously the case within the UN setting where discussions on the post-MDG framework are taken place, but also in other multilateral institutions such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), the Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) or the G20, the EU is undertaking efforts to promote the principle of policy coherence (ECDPM, 2014; EU, 2013; interviews).

This article focuses on the EU's efforts to promote PCD in one particular setting, namely, the 'OECD system', referring to the OECD and DAC (see *infra*). The OECD system is the case *par excellence* to evaluate the EU's efforts on promoting PCD for three important reasons. First, the promotion of PCD has become a key priority of the OECD in recent years. While the concept was already launched by the DAC in 1991, limited progress was made by the organisation to further develop and promote the principle throughout the 1990s and 2000s. In recent years, however, the principle of PCD gained new impetus within the OECD system, as reflects from the fact that the promotion of policy coherence takes in a prominent place in the OECD's Strategy on Development (2012) and the new DAC mandate (2011). Moreover, the OECD Secretariat has made the promotion of PCD one of its top priorities with regard to the post-2015 negotiations (Angel Gurría, 2013; OECD, 2013b). Second, the EU – which presents itself as an international leader when it comes to the promotion of PCD – has always been a full member of the DAC and a *de facto member*¹ of the OECD. Consequently, the EU is not confronted with the various legal and institutional hurdles which it faces in most other international development organisations. Therefore, the EU has been able to focus entirely on pursuing its policy objectives, in this case thus the promotion of PCD. Moreover, given the strong (over) representation of the EU within the OECD system (i.e. 6 out of 10 members are affiliated to the EU) and the strong historical ties between 'Brussels' and 'Paris', putting the promotion of PCD on top of the OECD's agenda should be nothing more than a walk in the park for the EU (Verschaeve & Takacs, 2013).

The central aim of this study is thus to explain why the concept of PCD has gained new impetus in the OECD system. More specifically, by engaging in a critical and complexity-sensitive analysis we seek to identify the various (f)actors behind the surge of PCD in the OECD and DAC, allowing us to evaluate the efforts of the EU in this regard. By doing so, we contribute to the overarching research question of this special issue, which wonders what role PCD has in the post-MDG agenda. More specifically, by studying the case of the OECD system, we not only gain insights on the challenges and opportunities

¹ The EU holds a full participant status in the OECD, allowing it to take part in all meetings of the organization.

ahead to promote PCD in the post-2015 framework, but also learn about the EU, which is perhaps the biggest advocator of policy coherence in the ongoing discussions.

In the next section, we provide a brief overview on the OECD system, more specifically on the differences between the OECD and DAC. Then, section three constitutes the methodological section of this paper, in which we elaborate on both the research design and data that have been used to address our research question. In section four, we provide a detailed overview of the main findings of this study. In doing so, we make a distinction between four periods of time, respectively, (i) 1991-1993, (ii) 1993-2001, (iii) 2001-2007 and (iv) 2007-2014. The paper concludes with some general reflections on the findings of this study.

The OECD system?

As already outlined in the introductory part of this article, the focus of our study lays on the 'OECD system', referring to the OECD and the DAC. While the OECD is typically seen as a monolithic organisation, the opposite is actually true as apart from the OECD, one can also find a small number of other organisations/committees such as the International Energy Agency (IEA) or the DAC, which operate in the shadow of OECD on a more or less autonomous basis. The latter reflects, for example, from the fact that both the IEA and DAC have their own – more strict - membership criteria, are able to voice their opinions on their own behalf and have a (partly) independent budget (Carroll & Kellow, 2011; Lesage & Van de Graaf, 2013; Verschaeve & Takacs, 2013). Therefore, we choose to apply the term of OECD system and make the distinction between the OECD and the DAC, rather than to use both terms interchangeably or lump both together and speak of the OECD-DAC as is typically done in literature.

The origins of the distinction between the OECD and DAC go back to 1959. At that time, the Development Assistance Group (DAG) was created as a forum to reflect upon the volume and effectiveness of aid, which was composed out of all major Western donors at that time, including the EU. In 1961, however, the DAG was adopted by the OECD (which was established at that time), and while legally becoming an OECD committee, it actually remained a largely independent body within the organisation, or as stated by one official a sort of 'OECD within the OECD' (Verschaeve & Takacs, 2013). Ever since, the DAC has been the main body within the OECD system to deal with development issues. However, as already became clear in the introduction part of this article, this does not mean that one can simply ignore the OECD when it comes to issues of development cooperation and more specifically PCD. First, a number of OECD committees (e.g. the ones on trade, climate or taxation) often indirectly touch upon development issues. Therefore, the DAC can opt to collaborate with these OECD committees (or the other way around), for example, in the context of

promoting PCD (Manning, 2008). Second, the OECD also has a so-called Development Centre, which serves as an intellectual meeting place for development experts from both donors and recipient countries. It organizes debates on various topics, and as such can be influential within the OECD in setting the debate on certain issues (Kaysen, 2002; Maddison, 2002; Sauvat, 2002).

Methodology

The central aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of the various (f)actors behind the new impetus for PCD in the OECD and DAC. To address this research question, we apply grounded theory (GT), a qualitative research approach that enables to discover theory through the systematic and simultaneous collection and analysis of data² (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This should be seen as an inductive and iterative process during which new data are collected based upon the emerging theoretical insights. As such, a GT study explicitly rejects the idea of conducting an extensive pre-study literature review³ as this may lead to preconception. Instead, the starting of a GT study is the actual collection and analysis of data, leading to the formulation of hypothesis that emerge from the data and ultimately the discovery of theory⁴ (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As such, GT is quasi-identical to what is known in political science as inductive-process tracing (cfr. Bennett & George, 2005). However, for the sake of clarity, we prefer to use the term ‘grounded theory’ as process-tracing is not necessarily an inductive research strategy, whereas GT clearly is (Bennett & George, 2005; Charmaz, 2004).

Methodologically, this study was carried out in three stages during which we simultaneously collected and analyzed data. In the first stage of this research, we conducted a large-scale document analysis of more than 250 official documents from both the OECD and DAC (e.g. minutes of meetings, agendas, working reports). These documents covered the entire period between 1990 and 2014 and were retrieved from the OECD archives, the OECD website and a number of Member States’ delegations to the OECD. During this stage, we also engaged in participatory observation in two meetings of the DAC which were (partly) dedicated to this topic. In the second stage of this research, we conducted 18 semi-structured expert interviews with officials from the OECD and DAC, as well as

² For a detailed overview on GT, as well as the differences between traditional and recent GT studies see Glaser & Strauss (1967), Strauss & Corbin (1998), Charmaz (2004), Bryant and Charmaz (2007) or Dunne (2011).

³ In line with other recent GT studies (e.g. Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Dunne, 2011; McCallin, 2006; Suddaby, 2006), we took a less orthodox stand on this issue as we conducted a limited pre-study literature review in order to find out whether this research has been carried out before.

⁴ While GT was developed to discover new theory, it may also lead to the rediscovery – and if necessary refinement – of existing theoretical insights (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Suddaby, 2006).

officials from the various delegations to the OECD and DAC (both EU and non-EU members)⁵. In the third and final stage of our research, we conducted a second round of 15 semi-structured expert interviews. Moreover, and in line with a GT research design, we also engaged with existing literature on this topic in order to test, strengthen and further refine our theoretical insights (cfr. Glaser, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Policy coherence for development and the OECD system

Having provided a general overview of the methodological underpinnings of this paper, this section elaborates on the main empirical findings of this study. More specifically, we provide a detailed overview of the efforts of the OECD and DAC regarding PCD over the past two decades. In doing so, we pay particular attention to (1) why the principle gained new impetus in recent years, and (2) the role of the EU within the OECD and DAC on this topic. In doing so, we make a distinction between four periods of time, respectively, a first one between 1990 and 1993, as second one between 1994 and 2001, a third one between 2001 and 2007 and a final one between 2007 and 2014.

Launching the concept: 1990-1993

The principle of PCD came to the fore in the OECD – and by extent the international development community – when it was first introduced by the DAC in 1991. (Foster & Stokke, 1999). More specifically, against of background of general aid fatigue, incoherent donor policies and a growing recognition of the impact of globalization processes, the DAC High-Level Meeting (HLM) made a strong plea for more coherent policies of its Member States *vis-à-vis* developing countries (OECD/DAC, 1991c). The rationale behind this demand was twofold. First, the DAC pointed at the fact that global challenges such as environmental change, peaceful political transitions or the establishment of a well-functioning global economy could not be tackled without substantial economic and social development in the South (OECD/DAC, 1990, 1991a, 1991b). Second, it was felt that in a globalized world, ODA was a vital, yet insufficient instrument to promote development. Therefore, other policies such as trade, migration, environment or private investment also needed to take the interests of the developing world into account (OECD/DAC, 1991c, 1992).

Importantly, the above call had more to it than simply outlining the need for more coherent policies towards the developing world. More specifically, the DAC also put forward an ambitious agenda that revolved around key priorities such as (1) establishing a clear-cut definition of PCD, (2) developing tools to assess the costs of policy incoherence, (3) identifying best practices among its members and

⁵ As various officials were only willing to share their views on the condition of absolute anonymity, interviews are indicated by a general reference only.

(4) promoting more horizontal work on development within the OECD (OECD/DAC, 1991a, 1991b, 1992). As such, it can be concluded that the DAC made a clear attempt to place PCD at the heart of the international development agenda and to make it a key priority of the OECD (interviews).

The actual implementation of this agenda was, however, limited. While the DAC successfully drew international attention to the need of more coherent policies towards the developing world (see e.g. Carbone, 2008; Foster & Stokke, 1999), few actions were undertaken by the to further develop, for example, a clear-cut definition or measurement of PCD. Moreover, also within the rest of the OECD, the issue of policy coherence for development was not considered to be a key priority. As such, most of its work continued to be very compartmentalized, notwithstanding a number of small attempts on behalf of the DAC to work more closely together with other OECD committees such as the ones on trade or environment (Führer, 1996; Manning, 2008; OECD/DAC, 2006a). (interviews)

The reason for this limited success is twofold. First, the DAC's PCD agenda was never fully supported by all OECD (and DAC⁶) members. More specifically, while all of them did endorse the principle, only Finland, Germany and Switzerland actually felt that PCD should become a key priority of the DAC and OECD (OECD/DAC, 1990). On the contrary, most other members – including the European Union – considered PCD to be only of secondary importance, especially in comparison with other topical issues such as participatory development or the promotion of good governance (OECD/DAC, 1990) (interview). Second, the DAC was also strongly divided on the substance of its PCD agenda. More specifically, while a minority of members such as Canada, Finland, Norway, Germany and Switzerland preferred to focus on the promotion of horizontal coherence, and as such supported the PCD agenda as been outlined by the DAC Secretariat (see supra), most other members felt that the focus of the DAC's PCD agenda should lay on tackling policy incoherence among donor countries, thus on promoting donor coordination (OECD/DAC, 1991a, 1991b, 1991c).

Limited progress: 1994-2001

In the period between 1994 and 2001 little attention was paid to the issue of PCD. On the contrary, both the OECD and DAC were preoccupied with other issues, in particular rethinking their roles and relevance in the changing international system (interview). The DAC, for example, initiated in 1995 an '*exercice de réflexion*' to reevaluate the role of development aid, and with it its own relevance, leading to the adoption of its well-known report '*Shaping the 21st century*' (Führer, 1996; OECD/DAC, 1996). In a similar vein, the OECD implemented a series of institutional reforms with an eye on

⁶ While this distinction may seem trivial, it is an important one to make as not all DAC members are not automatically represented in the OECD and vice versa. The European Union, for example, is a full member of the DAC, whereas it is a full participant in the rest of the OECD (Verschaeve & Takacs, 2013).

expanding its membership as well as increasing its overall effectiveness (Carroll & Kellow, 2011; Woodward, 2009).

This being said, the issue of PCD did not fall completely off the radar. Most notable – and only important – exception was the above mentioned DAC report *'Shaping the 21st century'*, which called upon the donor community to *"achieve coherence between aid policies and other policies which impact on development"* (OECD/DAC, 1996, p. 2). Nonetheless, the section on PCD stands in sharp contrast with the rest of the report due to its lack of ambition. More specifically, while the report puts forward a set of clear and measurable goals, for example achieving universal primary education by 2015, the section on PCD lacks any form of commitment or target (OECD/DAC, 1996). To some extent, one could rightly say that this would have been impossible because of the ambiguous nature of the concept of PCD. After all, could one for example put forward a goal to half or eradicate policy coherence by 2015? Nonetheless, the report also does not put forward alternative – and more appropriate – goals such as gaining a better understanding of the issue of PCD, or establishing a definition/measurement of the concept (interviews).

The reason for the above lack of ambition was threefold. First, the DAC Secretariat, which was the main driver behind the PCD agenda in the early nineties, had lost most of its initial appetite on this issue. This had everything to do with its previous failed attempt to promote PCD, as well as the fact that James Michel became the new DAC Chair in 1994, succeeding Alexander R. Love who had always taken a personal interest in promoting policy coherence (OECD/DAC, 2008b) (interviews). Second, the OECD Secretariat also took hardly any interest in the issue of PCD. Consequently, no initiative were taken on their behalf to promote horizontal work across the different OECD Committees on development related issues (interviews). Third and final, there continued to be very little support for the issue of PCD among the different OECD (and DAC) members. More specifically, only Canada, the Netherlands, the UK and to a lesser extent Belgium and the Nordic countries showed an interest in paying more attention to the issue, whereas all other members showed hardly any ambition on this topic (OECD/DAC, 2000a, 2000b). This was also the case for the EU, even though the promotion of policy coherence had become one of its key development priorities – together with coordination and complementarity – ever since the entry into force of the Maastricht Treaty (Hoebink, 1999).

New impetus for PCD? (2001 – 2007)

In the period between 2001 and 2007, the OECD and DAC increasingly paid attention to the issue of PCD. Already in 2002, the OECD's Ministerial Council put forward its ambitious 'Action for a Shared Development Agenda', which largely revolved around the principle of PCD. More specifically, the OECD committed itself to *'encourage greater policy coherence in support of the internationally*

agreed development goals, in particular by achieving a better understanding of the *'trade-offs and potential synergies across areas such as trade, investment, agriculture, health, education, the environment and development co-operation'* (OECD, 2002, p. 4).

However, despite the above strong rhetorical commitments, the actual progress made on the issue of PCD was limited during this period. Starting with the institutional reforms, the OECD established in 2002 its so-called 'development cluster'. This cluster groups all OECD bodies that deal with development (or related) issues and aims to facilitate information sharing and collaborative working across the different constituent bodies. As such, its ultimate aim was (and still is) to achieve more coherency within the OECD on development related issues, as well as to gain a better understanding of the issue of PCD (OECD/DAC, 2006a). In practice, however, the added value of the development cluster is questionable as its success *de facto* relies on the willingness of its constituent bodies to collaborate, something which traditionally has been difficult within the OECD (Manning, 2008). As such, the development cluster is according to various officials nothing more than *'an empty shell'* (interview) or *'a form of window dressing'* (interview).

A similar conclusion applies at the substantial level. Most important achievement was the inclusion of a new chapter on PCD in the DAC peer reviews from 2002 onwards. Consequently, DAC members could no longer simply neglect the issue of PCD in their bilateral policies. Moreover, the peer review process allowed them to learn from each other's good (or bad) practices (OECD/DAC, 2007b, 2008e) (interview). At the same time, however, much more could have been achieved if the DAC would have put forward a clear-cut definition and/or measurement of PCD in order to systematically assess and compare progress on this topic over time or across the different DAC members (Carbone, 2009; Picciotto, 2005) (interview). Apart from the above effort, both the OECD and DAC undertook few other initiatives to achieve a better understanding of PCD. In fact, only on the topics of aid for trade, agriculture and the security-development nexus, a number of (in-depth) studies were undertaken based upon which policy recommendations were formulated (Manning, 2008; e.g. OECD, 2003; OECD, 2006; OECD/DAC, 2003).

The rationale behind this increased attention for PCD - but at the same time the limited progress made on the issue - is twofold. On the one hand, there was a growing support for the issue of PCD across the different OECD(-DAC) members, explaining why the OECD and DAC - both intergovernmental IOs - increasingly focused on the issue. Most notable was the EU, who became an active promoter of PCD alongside the traditional advocates of the issue within the OECD such as Canada, the Netherlands, the UK or the Nordic countries (OECD/DAC, 2006b, 2007c) (interview). This shift in attitude was rooted in the intra-European efforts on PCD, which turned the EU from a

highly incoherent into a coherent bilateral donor (Carbone, 2008; OECD/DAC, 2002, 2007e). Apart from the EU, also a number of other influential OECD members such as France, Germany or the US became less reluctant – or indifferent – towards the promotion of PCD, mainly inspired by the events on 9/11 and the importance of development cooperation in the fight against terrorism (interviews). On the other hand, PCD still was only one of the many issues on the political agenda of the OECD and DAC, explaining the limited progress on this topic during this period. This can be explained by the fact that priority was given to other issues – in particular financing for development and aid effectiveness – by both the OECD and DAC Secretariat as well as the different members of the organization (Manning, 2008) (interviews).

PCD in recent years (2007-2013)

In recent years, the OECD and DAC made the promotion of PCD a key priority, as reflects from the OECD Strategy on Development (OECD, 2012) and the new DAC mandate (OECD/DAC, 2011). The first signs of this new impetus for PCD came to the surfaces around 2007. At that time, the OECD established a PCD unit within the office of the Secretary General, responsible for the promotion of PCD within the OECD, as well as an informal network of national focal points for PCD, responsible for strengthening the dialogue on this topic between the OECD and its members states' capitals (interviews). In 2008, the OECD Ministerial Council encouraged the organization to make work of the actual implementation of its previous commitments on PCD, in particular the above discussed '*OECD action for a shared development agenda (2002)*' (OECD, 2008). A similar plea was made by the Council two years later (OECD, 2010), and by the time of the OECD's 50th anniversary in 2011 there was a broad consensus within the organization to draw a comprehensive strategy on development in which PCD would be given a prominent place (OECD, 2011). This ultimately led to the adoption of the OECD Strategy on Development in 2012, a strategy which literally states that '*enhancing policy coherence for development is one of the [OECD's] primary objectives*' (2012, p. 5).

In pursuit of this objective, the OECD puts forward an ambitious agenda that aims to (1) develop systematic and evidence-based analyses of the benefits (and costs) of (in)coherent policies, (2) come up with a set of robust indicators to monitor progress on PCD, (3) focus on key issues such as food security, illicit financial flows and green growth and (4) foster dialogue on this issue within the organization as well as across different development stakeholders (OECD, 2012). Ever since, the OECD has been in the process of implementing this agenda, as reflects , for example, from the ongoing efforts to develop a measurement of PCD (OECD, 2013c) or the recent studies on topics such as food security (OECD, 2013a), sustainable development (OECD, 2014b) and illicit financial flows

(OECD, 2014a). Moreover, the OECD puts much emphasis on placing the promotion of PCD at the heart of the post-2015 debates (e.g. OECD, 2013a; OECD, 2013b) (interviews).

A similar shift also took place at the DAC. More specifically, from 2007 onwards the DAC increasingly focused on PCD in its work (e.g. OECD/DAC, 2007a, 2007d; OECD/DAC, 2008d). In doing so, the DAC was increasingly engaged in horizontal work on this topic across the OECD, though the main focus of its work on this topic continued to lay on its peer review, from which a number of lessons were drawn on how to promote PCD in an effective way (OECD/DAC, 2008a)(interview). Most notable is, was the strong focus on PCD during the DAC's strategic reflection exercise – a process initiated in 2008 to update the DAC's mandate after more than 40 years – as one of the three task teams⁷ responsible for this job focused exclusively on the issues of PCD and global public goods (OECD/DAC, 2010) (interview). Not surprisingly, this led to the adoption of a new DAC mandate in which the promotion of PCD was put forward as a key priority, which needs to be achieved in close collaboration with other OECD committees and bodies (OECD/DAC, 2011).

Importantly, this new impetus for PCD can first of all be attributed to the direct and indirect efforts of the EU on this topic. Directly, the EU has been *“one of the most persistent and strongest advocates of PCD in the OECD”* in recent years (interview). Not only was the EU among those actors that put the issue systematically on the agenda (e.g. OECD/DAC, 2007d, 2008c) (interview), it also added substantially to discussions on PCD, for example by presenting studies it had conducted on this topic in order to acquire a better understanding of the issue (e.g. EU, 2009; OECD/DAC, 2009). Moreover, in 2009, the European Commission and the European Parliament took the initiative to organize – together with the OECD – a large international conference on this topic in Brussels (OECD, 2009).

Importantly, the EU also indirectly helped putting the issue of PCD central in the work of the OECD and DAC. More specifically, in the second half of the 2000s, the European Commission undertook a series of efforts to promote PCD in both its own policies, as well as those of its member states (Carbone, 2008; Orbie, 2012). Consequently, the latter gradually started to pay more attention to the issue, which in turn significantly expanded the group of OECD members that were in favor of PCD. In fact, one could even say that in the discussions on PCD there is a clear divide between ‘Europe’ and other countries (putting Canada and Norway aside) (observations, interviews). Off course, it should be noted that it were a small group of EU members – including France, Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands – that pushed the Commission in the first place to be more ambitious on PCD (Hoebink, 1999, 2005).

⁷ The other two task teams dealt with governance of global development co-operation and the internal organisation of the DAC's work

Finally, it should be stressed that also other actors deserve some credit, in particular the OECD Secretariat and its PCD unit. More specifically, both in the drawing of the OECD Strategy on Development, as well as in its actual implementation, the PCD unit has taken up a strong and proactive role (interview). Nonetheless, it should be noted that without the help of the EU (and its member states), it would have been impossible – or at least much harder – for the latter to assume itself the role it currently holds, as stated by various OECD officials (interview). After all, the OECD still is an intergovernmental organization, and it was not until the adoption of the OECD Strategy on Development that the OECD Secretariat was fully able to take on a leading role on PCD.

Discussion and conclusion

- Under construction –
 - EU played a key role in placing PCD on the agenda
 - Most persistent and strong advocator of PCD
 - Helped making the concept PCD ‘incontournable’
 - Directly: efforts within the OECD system
 - Indirectly: efforts in Brussels
 - Prominent role in substantial work on PCD

However, also various other factors that should be taken into account as well:

- Role of the OECD Secretary General and its PCD unit
 - Bureaucratic politics
 - strengthen its central role and further integrate the DAC in the OECD
 - institutional survival: best way to secure the future of the OECD is by shaping the international system (e.g. OECD will monitor PCD)
 - Prestige → every IO wants to contribute to the post-2015 discussions
 - ‘neoliberal’ belief in PCD
- Role of the DAC
 - Gave in its reluctance towards PCD at time of reflection exercise
 - Initially PCD seen as way to secure its own survival (strengthening ties with the OECD)
 - More recently: PCD no longer seen as way to secure survival, but ‘relict’ from the past. Survival currently secured through
 - Modernizing ODA
 - Enlargement
- International context
 - Increasing focus on ‘beyond ODA’ dimension of aid
 - Economic crisis
 - Climate crisis

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