
Conclusion

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The central character of this volume – Lucy – is perhaps the governance adviser that some of the authors in this volume wish they had been earlier in their careers: well read, perceptive and healthily sceptical. Her musings, and those of the various authors included here, add up to a broad and suitably jargon-packed reflection of the “concept” laden world of governance. It is no surprise that some of these concepts point to the ability of the sector to efficiently and organically recycle its own history. After all, the new ideas of governance often do bear an uncanny resemblance to the old ideas, including those that were prevalent long enough ago that they have been largely forgotten.

The real question for governance advisers is not the tendency towards conceptual fads (whether version 1, 2 or 3), but rather the changing realities of the environment and the spur that these provide to more fundamental evolutions of approach. For example, aid is no longer as significant a factor in many developing countries as it was. There is also recognition that other models of development finance and support can deliver real impact – and sometimes with far lower transaction costs. The map of poverty is also changing and becoming multi-polar – concentrated in states affected by conflict and fragility, and yet also visible through the inequality of middle-income mega-cities. As a result the environment in which governance advisers will help deliver the SDGs will be very different from that of the MDG period that went before.

In addition to these trends in the wider context there is also increased recognition that governance innovation has often focused on models and not actual programmes and delivery. Work by IMC Worldwide on innovation in governance programming found that change can happen even within the existing procedures and systems of development agencies. Their guide for practitioners would surely find its way onto Lucy’s reading list.

Learning how to make flexibility, adaptability etc. real will therefore be one of Lucy’s greatest challenges; in doing so the relationship with partners will hopefully evolve. Certainly the rise of new bodies such as the Effective

Institutions Platform signal a change towards recognition of more South-South solutions. The challenge posed to the tyranny of experts by more critical partner voices is an encouraging corrective. One of the editors was recently at a forum at which partners raised the issue of the apparent monopoly on information and evidence that often resides with aid agency staff. Governance advisers quote data, research and experts in what can seem like a barrage intended to push through a particular approach. Thanks to new forums, such as the EIP, those days may be coming to an end.

For Lucy this opens up the opportunity for dynamic questions about capturing diversity and dealing with the extraordinary complexity that is inherent to supporting public administration reforms across a range of different countries and contexts. While Lucy has followed a traditional career path she would do well to engage with peers that began their journeys from a different starting point.

In conclusion we would therefore suggest for our fictional Lucy a long conversation with *Afar*, born in the region of the same name – where in 2015 it is said the oldest human fossil was found. *Afar* was educated in Addis Ababa, undertook a scholarship in International Relations in China's oldest university, and took on a position within the private sector before finding himself providing advice to a country's Ministry of Planning. As a young professional, *Afar* struggles with many of the same questions that Lucy is faced with. And yet his points of reference are fundamentally different.

Lucy has excelled at integrating Douglass North, Francis Fukuyama, Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, and Matt Andrews into her thinking on the importance of politics, institutions and problem-driven iterative approaches. *Afar* on the other hand is influenced by a different tradition – finding himself torn between Wang Anshi's 1058 manual on public management focusing on the selection, training, motivation and remuneration of civil servants and Nizam al-Mulk's focus on accountability for results in his 11th century Book of Government or *Siyasatnama*.

Perhaps for Lucy's next project, she might reflect on how best to globalise her request for advice, and connect with many of her peers working to strengthen their own country's institutions and public policies. This also means that it is time to open up the intellectual traditions box that underpins much of the analysis that governance advisers rely on and which are outlined in this volume – from political economy analysis, political settlements, Weberian windows and problem-driven approaches, to stakeholder incentives and engagement practices.

After all, doing development differently implies going beyond the comfort zones of our collective thinking on development. There is a broad consensus in many development agencies on the need to better understand politics and how it affects countries' development paths. But we would do

well to question how these same questions have been tackled by those at the forefront of change – in executive agencies, civil society, the private sector and elsewhere. Lucy might need to explore with Afar how he perceives the political environment in which he operates and how his view of state-society relations are affected.

A key question for Lucy's next project then (and perhaps for GovNet's second volume) is to explore how different intellectual traditions might impact on the ways in which development happens and is best supported. This will help counter any groupthink and some degree of naiveté on Lucy's part as she sits down with Afar to exchange on the state of governance in 2015 and beyond.

A second major question for the future might be how in practice to engage with partnerships on governance – a primarily domestic and politically sensitive area. The term has become a staple addendum in much of our development policy guidance. When asked by their respective hierarchies to engage in partnerships, Lucy and Afar will both need to reflect on what this means for them. What value will they extract by engaging in global or national partnerships focused on institutional reform or broader governance issues? Shining the light on good practices in different contexts is an obvious answer – but what about the trickier question of actually fostering sustainable change in the ways in which a public administration operates. Lucy and Afar might both complain that it adds to their work load and results are not as immediately visible when there is the option to “just get on with it and go it alone”.

It is time for partnerships to deliver on this agenda and to better highlight the results of peer-to-peer learning in dealing with specific technical and political challenges. The Effective Institutions Platform and its Peer to Peer (P2P) Learning Alliances represent an effort to do just that.

Finally, the broader question of geopolitics is one that will need to be tackled by both Lucy and Afar as they progress in their careers. With many development agencies being asked to engage with, and help to inform, national foreign policy priorities; Lucy will have to revisit some of her briefings and notes to self in light real events and the shifting nature of policy and debate.

The changing nature of partnerships for governance reform, particularly in pursuit of the SDGs, is perhaps the most refreshing opportunity for the governance practitioners of the future. This volume, though its dialogue with Lucy, has tried to speak directly to those who work day to day to support governance reform from the perspective of development agencies. It has attempted to sympathise with the challenges, provoke thinking and debate, and most of all to keep a healthy balance of commitment to the cause and openness to the critiques.

The editors of this book started from the viewpoint that there was room for innovation and change – but that there is also a great deal to draw on from the sector, and its journey so far. Each of the papers included in the volume have been provided as a personal contribution to the debate; the vigour and energy that emerges in the discussions around governance is a good sign. The commitment to delivering accountable, responsive and effective institutions both among development agencies, and within its partner organisations and counterpart ministries is the right starting point for Lucy and all her colleagues.