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Norwegian Development Aid: A Paradigm Shift in the Making?

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Abstract Norway has remained committed to allocating one percent of its Gross National Income in developing aid. Poverty reduction has also stayed as an overarching objective for the aid budget. The commitment to these traditional pillars in Norwegian aid is also accompanied by major changes: reduced focus on partner countries and bilateral aid and an expanding emphasis on supporting global action, the rise of a flourishing number of new thematic priorities and delivery through multilateral channels. This article maps the evolving continuities and changes in Norwegian development aid since the early 1990s. It relies on an analytical framework based on Peter Halls work on paradigm shifts and his distinction between first, second and third order changes. The explanation for the evolving profile of Norwegian aid is found in a combination of domestic driving forces. Based on Matthew Wood's concepts of puzzling and powering dynamics behind paradigm shifts the article identifies the forces behind evolving aid policies. One is depolitisation behind Norwegian aid – a broad political and popular support and consensus but limited debate leaving much space for foreign policy and self-interest to shape implementation and selection of instruments. A second is linked to a change in the policy arena and the growing dominance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This has led to a multifaceted and fragmented aid profile allowing various dimensions of development aid policies to be shaped by different interests and priorities. It has not yet reached a stage where we can identify a major break with the past and a radical policy transformation. The new focus on climate issues and migration may have the potential to change that and give self-interests a stronger influence over long-term development aid and its objectives. Changes in coalition politics may have the potential to change the majority behind the one percent target and the commitment to poverty reduction.

Keywords: development aid; Norway; paradigm shifts; foreign policy; development poliicy

1. Introduction

The main purpose of this article is to explain the changes and continuities in Norwegian aid since 1990. The main changes have been described by some as a 'silent revolution' (Hegertun, 2021). Are they pointing towards a paradigm shift in the Norwegian approach to development aid and its purpose? Or is Norwegian aid adapting to changing needs and new challenges in developing countries?

The ‘one percent’ target has ensured a steady and significant increase in the aid budget – from NOK 11 billion in 2000 to over 40 billion today. The strong early focus on bilateral project aid to a few priority countries has been replaced by expanding use of multilateral channels through core funding to development banks and UN agencies, to new global funds and to earmarked funding. Poverty reduction has remained an overarching objective, but this has been watered down by an expanding list of thematic priorities and cross-cutting objectives.

We need an analytical framework to understand this evolving combination of continuities and changes in Norwegian development aid. We rely on Peter Hall and his work on paradigm shifts (1993). Hall refers to a policy paradigm as a ‘system of ideas and standards that specifies not only the goals of policy and kind of instruments that can be used to attain them, but also the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing’. A paradigm shift is marked by ‘radical changes in the overarching terms of policy discourse’. He distinguishes between first, second and third order changes. A first-order change consists of minor adjustments in existing policies with maintenance of the overall policy goals and instruments. A second-order change is more substantive with the introduction of new policy instruments and discarding of others. The third-order change represents a shift in means as well as ends. Hall’s explanation for paradigm shifts puts much emphasis on endogenous learning processes. It is a ‘puzzling’ process where policy makers attempt to adjust the goals or techniques of policy in response to implementation results, past experiences and new information. These findings are derived from Hall’s main case – the changes in the United Kingdom’s macroeconomic policies in the 1970s resulting from learning from failures and the emergence of new ideas.

Matthew Wood (2015) has developed further the explanatory factors behind paradigm shifts. He notes that Hall’s paradigm shifts may not only happen as a result of learning processes (‘puzzling’), but also from political processes and pressures (through ‘powering’). Wood argues for a greater focus on the political agency of policy change to explain how and why certain ideas gain footage. He notes that Hall’s ‘paradigm shift’ perspective provides a particularly useful analytical metaphor for radical policy change, capturing the essence of ‘radical’ change as involving the replacement of one identifiably stable and coherent set of ideas with another. Wood relies on the concept of ‘politisation’ to capture the political dynamics behind how and when new ideas gain footage. He finds that the concepts of depoliticisation and politicisation are useful for conceptualising the discursive ‘political’ dynamics of policy paradigms, as they focus on how non-rationalistic rhetorical strategies from diverse political actors may attempt to maintain policy paradigms despite (or irrespective of) their apparent ‘failure’ or shift of paradigms regardless of their apparent ‘success’. This ‘powering’ dimension is combined with dimensions of social learning – the ‘puzzling’ process with changes occurring via practice and evidence-based discussion and evaluation. A process of politisations will often entail a shift of authority from the administrative apparatuses (such as departments and directorates) and sector

networks (where learning from implementation typically takes place) to broader political actors and arenas such as parliaments and political parties.

The recent history and evolution of Norwegian development is covered in several studies, but there are few attempts to analyse the major changes in instruments and the expanding new thematic priorities. Olav Stokke (see the most recent Stokke, 2019) is the doyen of history of Norwegian development aid and foreign policy. He has delivered the key studies mapping party and coalition politics, and parliamentary debates behind the aid volume and the poverty objective. His findings are that Norwegian aid has been driven by altruistic values. Self-interest – commercial, foreign policy priorities – has helped to consolidate the aid volume and influenced the implementation. Terje Tvedt (e.g. Tvedt, 2017) has a different perspective and pursues a rather mono causal explanation behind the evolvement of a humanitarian-political nexus shaping Norway's approach to development aid. None of these studies, however, have sufficiently identified or explained some of the key shifts in implementation identified in this article: reduced support to partner countries, increased earmarked and multilateral funding, and a watered-down commitment to poverty reduction as overarching objective.

The data for this study has been collected from the main aid policy documents in the period, but also from the statistical databases and reports on disbursements and implementation. This includes government political platforms, the aid budget from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and reports to Parliament, the main white papers, parliamentary debates, evaluation reports and 'grey' literature, including also the periodic peer review reports on Norwegian aid from OECD's Development Assistance Committee. Data are also collected from the relevant academic studies of Norwegian aid. The main data source related to aid objectives, priorities and volume are found in government platforms, white papers and the annual aid budget. Primary data on disbursements and instruments are derived from Norad's statistical database, the annual aid budget and a range of documents, including evaluation reports and studies, from MFA and Norad.

The first part of the article maps the first, second and third order components of the paradigm behind the evolution of Norwegian aid since the early 1990s. This includes the goal and priorities; volume; and instruments and management. The second part seeks to explain the continuities and changes. It identifies domestic and international driving forces behind the evolving Norwegian development aid policies. The final part summarises the findings and responds to the question. Are we witnessing a paradigm shift in the making?

2. Mapping the policy paradigm(s): development policy from 1990 to 2021

Norwegian development aid has undergone major changes since the 1990s. They will be identified according to three main dimensions derived from the policy paradigm literature: instruments and management; volume; and goals and objectives. Minor

changes in instruments and management will typically correspond to a first-order change, but many are so far-reaching that they will also be classified as a second-order change as defined by Hall. Shifts in objectives refer to third-order changes. The volume, the size of the budget, is typically classified as a first-order change in the policy paradigm literature, but the size of the aid volume is far more than a technical budget issue. The ‘one percent’ target has also become an objective.

2.1. *Goals and priorities*

During the dynamic phase at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, Norwegian aid policy became anchored in targets and norms developed within the UN system. By the late 1970s, the main elements of the stated Norwegian aid and development policies had been formed, involving its volume, predominant objectives, guidelines, orientation and structure (Liland and Kjærland, 2003; Ruud and Kjærland, 2003; Simensen, 2003; Sørbo, 1997; Stokke, 2019).

Poverty reduction has been defined as the main aid objective by Parliament and in government policy documents. It has remained an overarching objective although an expanding list of thematic priorities and crosscutting objectives have tended to weaken the poverty focus. The nominal adherence to the poverty objective has been the case up until the present although the most recent government platform from the 2021 Labour Party–Centre Party government does not make a specific reference to this objective. From 2000 the formal poverty focus was framed with the UN Millennium Development Goals and from 2015 with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (MFA, 1995; 2003a, 2012; 2018). These goals make the eradication of extreme poverty the overall priority.

This declared objective has also been followed by a range of subsidiary and cross-cutting priorities. This has most typically been through an expanding list of thematic priorities. They have evolved and changed in the period. From the late 1980s there was a growing emphasis in Norwegian aid on environmental issues (following the Brundtland Commission emphasis on sustainable development and its final 1997 report – *Our Common Future*). This has remained a priority but with a much stronger emphasis on climate change mitigation and adaptation after 2000 and new priorities within that such as the preservation of tropical forests from 2007 (Gloppen et al., 2012; MFA, 2010). Democratisation and human rights also emerged as a new priority from the late 1980s and gaining momentum with the end of the Cold War and a new wave of democratic elections in Africa (Selbervik, 1997). Promotion of human rights is still one of the priorities in Norwegian aid but is today formally defined as a cross cutting issue together with gender and equality, climate and environment, and anti-corruption.

Private sector development has also remained an important objective – although the focus has shifted from emphasis on promotion of Norwegian commercial interests and delivery of Norwegian commodities towards an emphasis on direct support to

business development in developing countries. Today, there is also stronger emphasis on job creation linked to business development (MFA, 2015, Norad, 2020a). Norfund, the Norwegian development finance institution, has become the main aid-funded instrument to promote this.

And then several other thematic interventions emerged as major new priorities (MFA, 2008; 2017). One is humanitarian aid. This began in the 1990s but gained additional momentum following engagement in countries and regions affected by violent conflict. 9/11 and the war in Afghanistan made peace and security issues and support for stabilisation important new intervention areas. In recent years this has also led to a new focus on the Sahel and migration. From 2005 health emerged as major new priority and 10 years later education and then, but to a lesser extent, oceans and marine pollution became added priorities. The 2019 government added support to vulnerable groups and people living with disabilities. The 2021 government added agriculture and food security.

Beginning in 2014 and 2015 there has been new a new focus on migration following the sharp rise of refugees and asylum seekers entering Norway. This had led to government statements and initiatives to use the aid budget to cover costs related to this. This has been the case since the early 1990s, but after the 2015 European refugee crisis there has been a new emphasis to use the aid budget to prevent migration and to facilitate the return of migrants to countries of origin. This has been supported both by Conservative-led government coalitions and by the Labour Party-Centre Party coalition (see the Jeløya, Granavolden and Hurdal platforms, presented in Table 1). An expanded budget item on migration was added in 2021.

The expanding additional thematic priorities have over time contributed to a crowding out or weakening of the poverty focus. The Auditor General's 2021 report on Norwegian aid through funds managed by the World Bank – the biggest channel for Norwegian aid – noted that some of these funds also went to upper – and middle-income countries contravening Parliament's emphasis on low-income countries and poverty reduction (Riksrevisjonen, 2021). The shift in disbursement of aid from least and low-income countries to middle-income countries and to a range of global initiatives is most manifest in the huge climate-related disbursements. This included major disbursements to Brazil and Indonesia in the recent decade. Likewise, the priorities to security, fragile states and migration may also have weakened the focus on poverty reduction.

While poverty has remained an overarching priority and has been regularly emphasised by Parliament, there has always been a tension behind altruism and self-interest in Norwegian aid policy (Sørbø, 1997; Stokke, 2019). In the 1990s this was mainly manifested in the tying of aid and the use of Norwegian goods and services. Gaining momentum after the millennium the main manifestation of this is more easily found in the relations between aid and Norwegian foreign policy objectives. This is illustrated in tensions and dilemmas related to the coherence of development policies. A 2018 Norad evaluation listed more than 40 dilemmas and identified

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- 2005 Soria Moria 1: Platform for government cooperation between the Labour Party, the Socialist Left Party and the Centre Party 2005-2009.
- Ch 2 on international relations (section on aid). Secure 1% and increase. Poverty reduction as overarching goal with emphasis on human rights and extreme poverty; increased support for peace and conflict mediation; health; environment; new global initiatives related to humanitarian aid through the UN, debt relief and multilateral finance institutions.
- 2009: Soria Moria 2: Political platform for the majority government formed by the the Labour Party, the Socialist Left Party and the Centre Party 2009-2013.
- Ch 2 on international relations (section on aid). Maintain ODA above 1%. More targeted aid with focus where Norway can make a difference and have a comparative advantage. Focus on poverty and gender as overarching goals. Priority to global initiatives in health; climate (forest initiative); promote UN reform, shift from World Bank to UN, more emphasis on addressing inequality and just world order.
- 2013 Sundvolden: Political platform for a government formed by the Conservative Party and the Progress Party.
- Ch. 16 on Foreign and Development Policy. Maintain high level of aid, but no reference to 1% goal, objective: promote democratisation, the realisation of human rights and enable people to work their way out of poverty. Emphasis on efficiency and thematic and geographic concentration, reduced portfolio. Continued priority to global health but education of children will be new priority.
- 2018 Jeløya: Political platform for a government formed by the Conservative Party, the Progress Party and the Liberal Party.
- Ch 16 on Foreign and Development Policy. Maintain aid at 1%. Emphasise policy and alignment with UN SDGs, maintain and expand efforts in global health, climate/ forest initiative and education; more emphasis on mobilising private sector, business development and job creation; expand humanitarian aid; and more. Emphasis on using Norway's position and role as aid donor to secure agreements of return of immigrants in Norway.
- 2019 Granavolden: Political platform for the Norwegian Government, formed by the Conservative Party, the Progress Party, the Liberal Party and the Christian Democratic Party.
- Ch 15: Foreign and Development Policy. Maintain 1%. Emphasis on poverty focus with more allocations to low-income countries in Africa. Focus on vulnerable groups and launch of new programmes to combat slavery. Continued support for global engagement in health, climate/ environment, and education and to new initiative on oceans and marine pollution. Strengthening of Norad and aid administration.

<p>2021 Hurdal: Platform for the government formed by the Labour Party and the Centre Party.</p>	<p>Subsection on development within section on foreign policy. Maintains commitment to 1%. This shall be linked to UN goals on social, economic and environmental sustainability – no explicit reference to poverty reduction. Priority to health and education and to fight against inequality. Calls for focus on renewable energy, revise forest/climate engagement. Food security and support to small scale producers and climate adaption in agriculture is new priority. The section on immigration and integration also proposes to set up an aid-financed migration fund.</p>
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Table 1: Government platforms on aid.

three recurrent and consistent issues: The contradiction between Norway’s dependence on income from the export of oil and gas and its declared willingness to contribute towards halting global climate change; the dilemma represented by the contradictory desires to protect Norwegian agriculture and rural settlement, and to increase imports from low- and medium-income countries; and the dilemma between upholding Norwegian security interests and advancing human rights (Norad, 2018b).

Table 1 summarises the key message from each of the six government platforms after 2000. Prior to the formation of a new government coalition the parties behind it negotiated a political platform outlining its agreed priorities in each sector, including foreign- and development policies. Judging from these statements alone it indicates a broad consensus behind main positions and commitments, but also that each new government coalition tends to add new priorities. None of the platforms calls for cutting or deleting previous thematic priorities – although subsequent aid budgets will show changes in the allocation of funds. These are mostly minor, such as the 2019 government cutting funding for UN-Habitat and urban development. More significantly was the 2021 cut by the Labour Party-Centre Party government; they cut nearly a third (700 million) of the proposed allocation to education – a priority of the previous Conservative-led government.

In general, Labour Party-led governments and the left have put more emphasis on global dimensions, inequality and rights-based approaches, while the Conservatives have put more emphasis on service delivery issues and the Christian Democrats have called for poverty focus and targeting of vulnerable groups. However, the Conservative-led government from 2013 continued the previous government’s emphasis on global engagement in health and climate and added education as a main new priority. Typically, both Labour Party-led and Conservative Party-led coalitions have given the management of the bulk of the aid portfolio to coalition partners (Socialist Left Party, Centre Party, Christian Democrats). Development aid has never been a controversial or important issue in negotiating these platforms. The exception was

the 2019 government Granavolden platform – which brought the Christian Democrats into the Conservative Party-led coalition.

2.2. Volume

The volume of Norwegian aid has always been strongly anchored in targets and norms set by the UN. The target of 0.7 per cent of Gross National Income (GNI) was met in 1976. In 1983 it reached 1 per cent and has been fluctuating around 1 per cent up to the present although for a few individual years - mainly in the 1995–2005 period it has dropped below (Stokke, 2019). The main fluctuations are linked to uncertainties in predicting GNI, but also in exchange fluctuations. There has been a broad consensus in Parliament around the 1 per cent goal, including an emphasis in periods (the 2009 Soria Moria 2 government platform) that it should be above 1 per cent. The far right (the Progress Party) has regularly called for major cuts (from 2013 to 2019 it was in government and had to drop its parliamentary opposition to this). The Conservative Party has preferred the level to be at 0.7 per cent but has not made it a political priority; its current programme (2021–2025) just calls for a reduced aid budget and stronger emphasis on measuring results. The controversy has rather been on the use of aid funds on domestic priorities – perhaps most strongly evident in 2015 on the allocation of aid funds to cover costs of refugees. In earlier periods the debate was mainly around the selection of partner countries and (in the 1980s and 1990s) on the tying of aid to Norwegian goods and services, the use of conditionalities and more.

The broad support for development aid is also illustrated in the consistently very high general public support for development aid as indicated by periodic surveys of public opinion (Lagerstrøm and Seferi, 2021). Today, nine of out ten Norwegians are supporting development aid – up from seven out of ten in 1972 and eight out of ten in 1990. Even among those supporting the Progress Party nearly seven out of ten are in favour.

While the aid volume has remained fairly constant in relation to GNI, the economic growth has implied a dramatic increase of the aid volume in absolute numbers – from NOK 7.6 million in 1990 to 11.1 billion in 2000 and reaching almost 40 billion in 2020 (see Table 2). As a percentage of total public expenditures (excluding transfer to the Pension Fund), the amount has varied between 2 and 3 per cent.

	1990	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
Disbursements NOK billion	7.6	11.1	18	26.4	34.5	39.5
% GNI	1.17	0.76	0.94	1.05	1.05	1.11
% total public expenditure		2.3	2.8	2.9	3.0	2.8

Table 2: The aid budgets.

Source: Norad's aid database (disbursements in NOK billion), OECD DAC's database (percentage of GNI) and Norwegian government budgets (percentage of budgeted total expenditures).

2.3. Instruments and management

The main changes in Norwegian aid in the period are found in the instruments and channels used for disbursements and in the management of these disbursements. Traditionally, aid policies as it was developed and consolidated in the 1970s and 1980s relied on a 50/50 division between multilateral and bilateral aid. Multilateral aid was typically core funding to UN agencies, development banks and their funds. Bilateral aid was mainly direct support to a small group of partner countries, often project support with Norwegian institutions and individuals playing a key role both in design and implementation. Multi-bilateral (or multi-bi) aid was typically earmarked funding through multilateral institutions for use in a particular country programme. This has changed dramatically beginning in the 1990s and accelerating after the millennium. There are significant changes both in the balance between multi- and bilateral aid as well as in instruments within each.

Table 3 shows the distribution between bilateral, multilateral, and multi-bi aid. It illustrates major changes in the balance between these three and the decreasing role of bilateral aid.

Table 3 does not capture the full importance of these changes. Table 4 provides additional data based on recipients of Norwegian aid. It identifies the share of aid being disbursed to three main categories of recipients: multilateral institutions, Norwegian NGOs, and the public sector in developing countries. It shows the decreasing share allocated to public sector in developing countries (3 percent in 2020) and the dominance of multilateral institutions (60 percent in 2020). The disbursements to Norwegian NGOs have remained consistently large, but stable as a share of the aid budget.

2.4. Global engagement and multilateral aid

There are major changes in funds disbursed through multilateral institutions. Historically (including the 1990s), this was allocated as core funding to several institutions with the World Bank, UNDP and UNICEF being the three biggest recipients. This was supplemented by smaller disbursement as earmarked funding, mainly for country programmes in specific partner countries ('multi-bi'). This has continued, but there has been a shift from core funding to earmarked funding. In 2020, 42 per cent of the aid to multilateral systems was core funding while 58 per cent was earmarked. Much of this is linked as major support to new global funding mechanisms

Percentage of total aid	2001	2006	2010	2015	2019
multilateral	28.0	28.8	23.3	22.6	22.7
bilateral	50.0	45.0	51.2	54.5	42.8
multi-bi	17.0	22.0	25.5	23.0	34.5

Table 3: Bilateral, multilateral and multi-bi aid.

Source: 2001 and 2006 data are derived from OECD, (2008) and data from subsequent years from OECD DAC's statistical database.

Disbursement channel (percentage share)	1990	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
Multilateral	42	41	51	48	46	60
Norwegian NGOs	n. a.	18	17	14	14	15
Public sector in developing countries	n. a.	14	10	8	8	3
Others*	58	27	22	30	33	23
<i>Total (NOK billion)</i>	<i>7.6</i>	<i>11.1</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>26.4</i>	<i>34.5</i>	<i>39.5</i>

Table 4: Disbursement channels 1990–2020.

*‘Others’ include a range of recipients including international NGOs, Norwegian public sector institutions (including costs related to refugees in Norway), Norfund (private sector support), as well as Norwegian costs of managing aid.

Source: Norad aid statistics.

addressing new challenges. The World Bank, UNDP and UNICEF are still (2020) the top three but as number four, six and nine we find three new funds – the Global Alliance for Vaccines (GAVI), the Green Climate Fund (GCH) and the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM). Much of the funding to the new global funds is classified as core funding. This is coupled with earmarked funding to existing institutions and funding mechanisms (Bu and Lomøy, 2022).

This trend is primarily evident in the Norwegian engagement in global health, climate issues and more recently also education. This includes global health funds such as GAVI and GFTAM. In relation to climate, the focus was on the preservation of tropical forests and REDD+ as well as funding for GCF. There was a similar emphasis on the use of earmarked funding for thematic and global purposes (rather than the previous emphasis on country programmes). Based on DAC statistics, a Norad study found that 21 per cent of earmarked funding was allocated to global public goods in 2018 – the highest among the OECD DAC donors (for Sweden it was 14 per cent, and for Denmark and Finland 11 per cent) (Norad, 2021a).

Core funding to global funds in health and climate currently amounts to nearly 10 per cent of the aid budget. Adding earmarked funding Norwegian climate aid amounted to 16 per cent of total aid in 2020 (Norad, 2021b: 90). Nearly half of this was related to the tropical forest initiative. Disbursements related to global health amounted to nearly the same. Considering the additional Covid-19 related disbursements for vaccines and distribution since 2020 more than a third of the aid budget is now allocated to climate and health.¹

2.5. The changing and diminishing role of partner countries

There are also major alterations in bilateral aid. The relative share of bilateral aid was not just significantly reduced. Its composition also changed. The first trend was a

¹ The 2020 disbursements to global health were not available, but see the main trend as reported in Norad (2017a).

major reduction in the role of partner countries. Bilateral aid was increasingly disbursed to an expanding list of countries. In the late 1990s Balkan countries were the biggest recipients of Norwegian aid. Since the millennium different categories of recipients have been introduced. In the early 2000s there were six main partner countries and 18 partner countries. From 2013 this was reduced to 12 focus countries and in 2017 three types of partner countries were introduced: those qualifying for long-term development aid; those where the focus should be on stabilisation and conflict prevention; and a third group was developing countries deemed to be important for their global role. However, the focus on partner countries as reflected in disbursement figures and country strategies was weak with significant expansion of funding to other and new countries.

In 2018 a White Paper on Norwegian partner countries put renewed emphasis on the partner concept, abolished the third category ('global importance') and paved the way for new country strategies being formulated for each of them (MFA, 2018). The White Paper introduced a division between two types of partner countries. For ten countries – Colombia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Indonesia, Malawi, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Tanzania and Uganda – the main focus should be on long-term development while for six – Afghanistan, Mali, Niger, Palestine, Somalia and South Sudan – the focus should be on stabilisation and conflict prevention. DR Congo was later added to the list. However, funding is still provided to a much larger number of countries. In 2020, 27 countries – according to Norad's aid statistics – received more than NOK 100 million in earmarked funding – ranging from Syria at the top with nearly NOK 950 million to Liberia with NOK 134 million. One of the formal partner countries received much less (Ghana with about NOK 24 million in 2020).

The second trend in bilateral aid is the shift away from direct project support (often) designed and implemented by Norwegians. Instead, we saw stronger emphasis on partner responsibility and implementation by recipients themselves. The shift began in the early 1990s (MFA, 1995; Norad, 1990; NOU, 1995) and gained momentum with the move towards budget support in the late 1990s. However, budget support has since 2014 largely disappeared although for some time it survived through multilateral trust funds (earmarked funding). Instead, we have seen an expanding use of earmarked funding through multilateral institutions in country programmes. During the last decade, we have also seen an increasing use of Norwegian public institutions as providers of short-term technical advisors mainly through training courses and workshops with officials in government institutions in partner countries and in other developing countries.² Direct bilateral support to government institutions (state-to-state) has almost disappeared.

² A separate department (from 2021 a unit) within Norad – the Knowledge Bank – has been established to facilitate this. See <https://www.norad.no/om-bistand/kunnskapsbanken/>

Norwegian NGOs have remained a main channel in bilateral aid partner countries. Some 15 per cent of all Norwegian aid is channelled through Norwegian NGOs (and 20–25 per cent if we include disbursements through international and local NGOs). However, in contrast to the 1990s, Norwegian NGOs are today much less involved in operational activities; with the exception of humanitarian aid NGOs now implement through local civil society organisations (Tjønneland, 2018).

A final feature is the continued emphasis – reinforced in the last few years – on poor and vulnerable groups. This has led to special initiatives and programmes being established targeting different groups (such as children or people with disabilities). This has mostly been pursued and implemented through NGOs but has also been evident in relation to humanitarian aid and in certain multilateral programmes (e.g. in health).

2.6. Management

The final main change is the evolving and changing role of the Norwegian aid administration itself (see also the OECD Development Peer Reviews (OECD, 2008; 2014 and 2019) and Norad, 2018). Norad, the chief development aid directorate, has played a key role in developing and implementing Norwegian aid since its establishment in 1968. It was in a strong position also in the 1990s as an agency under the MFA.³ However, the role of Norad and the relations between Norad and MFA came under scrutiny. An MFA-commissioned study identified two options in 2002: either a major strengthening of Norad (the ‘Swedish’ model) or a full integration of Norad with MFA (the ‘Danish’ model). The Minister for development cooperation (from the Christian Democrats) then decided in 2003 on a ‘merger’ between the two models. Norad was retained as a smaller agency serving as technical advisors to MFA and its embassies and with operational responsibilities in fewer areas (such as civil society and private sector support). A large portion of the Norad staff was relocated to MFA. The Ministry assumed operational responsibilities for an expanding part of the aid budget (MFA, 2003b). Norad staff numbered 233 in Oslo and 106 in the country missions in 2000. Total staff was 231 in 2010, 236 in 2015 and 251 in 2020 (man-years as reported in MFA’s annual budget proposals).

In the subsequent decade, several further management changes were made. The large budget allocation to the Norwegian Forest and Climate Initiative from 2007 (totalling between 7 and 10 per cent of the aid budget) eventually led Parliament to allocate this part of the budget direct to the Ministry of Climate and Environment

³ From 1984 to 1990 Norway had a separate Ministry for Development Cooperation and with Norad as its directorate. With the closing of that Ministry and its reintegration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norad became a directorate under MFA and with operational responsibility for implementing Norwegian bilateral aid (operational responsibility for multilateral and humanitarian aid was with MFA).

and not via MFA.⁴ Norad would then also serve as agency under this Ministry in relation to the aid-funded Forest Initiative. Further changes followed – all linked to implementation challenges and justified by the need to improve management effectiveness and efficiency. There was a process of first with the Labour Party coalition government (from 2009) introducing a process of increased centralisation including reduced flexibility for embassies (Norad, 2018). This was followed by the Conservative Party-led government from 2013 beginning a process of concentration (Norad, 2020b). The concentration included both an intended sharper focus on fewer countries (see above) and a major reduction in contracts. The number of contracts was reduced from over 7000 in 2013 to about 3250 in 2017 (Deloitte, 2021: 78).

A new agency – a continuation of the old *Fredskorpset* – was also established under MFA– the Norwegian Agency for Exchange Cooperation (Norec) to facilitate Norwegian-South and South-South exchange of personnel (Tjønneland et al., 2016). And Norfund, established in 1997 as the main Norwegian development finance institution and an affiliate institution under MFA, had its funding drastically increased and operations expanded to promote business and private sector development in the South (Norad, 2015).

Then in 2019 major changes were made in relation to Norad. The new 2019 Conservative Party-led coalition government opted for strengthening Norad through transferring operational responsibility from MFA back to Norad (see the 2019 Granavolden government platform). This included most areas where the constitutional responsibilities rested with the development cooperation minister (the main exception being funding to the Norwegian Research Council and refugee costs in Norway). In volume terms this implied that Norad was delegated operational responsibility for about half of the aid budget. Operational responsibilities resting under the Foreign Minister stayed with MFA; this included North Africa and the Middle East, Afghanistan, Ukraine and the Balkans, humanitarian, peace and security and more (Cf. MFA, 2020 and subsequent appropriation letters from MFA to Norad).

3. Driving forces: explaining continuity and change

The discussion above has identified both major continuities and significant changes in Norwegian development aid. The overall poverty objective has remained as the nominal primary purpose. So has the aid volume and commitment to the one percent target. The overall objective has as outlined above been watered down by an expanding number of thematic priorities and crosscutting objectives. The main changes are found in the instruments for delivering aid – especially the rapid

4 Erik Solheim, development cooperation minister from 2005 was from 2007 also the Minister for Climate and Environment. When he stepped down from both in 2012 the constitutional responsibility for the Forest Initiative was moved from MFA to the Ministry of Climate and Environment.

growth in earmarked funding through multilateral institutions, and the changing and diminishing role of bilateral aid through country programmes. This will be classified as first and second-order changes by Peter Hall, (1993). Are the changing instruments and reduced importance of the poverty objective also indicating an emerging third-order change – a shift in policy objectives and the approach to development aid? And how do we explain the mix and relations between continuity and change? Can we explain this through a process of learning of what works – a process of ‘puzzle’? Or do we have to turn to changes at the political level through changes in policy arenas and pressure from interest groups and new objectives – the ‘powering’ process (Wood, 2015)?

We argue that there are three main domestic drivers behind the evolving Norwegian development aid policies that shape its current characteristics. Each is influenced in different ways by global developments. Below we review and analyse each and the impact they have on the evolving Norwegian aid policies and the current profile of Norwegian aid.

3.1. *Depolitisation – the absence of politics and the preservation of norms and values*

The main literature on Norwegian aid has emphasised the importance of broad political support and consensus behind the aid policies. Parliament has generally upheld poverty reduction and has been inclined to reinforce this when government have tended to stray too far away from this (Stokke, 2019). This has been justified by reference to the key original purpose, or the norms and values, of aid. This is illustrated both in efforts to strengthen Norad, in the launch of new initiatives for vulnerable groups, incorporating poverty concerns related to support for global goods and more.

However, there has been limited debate in Parliament and in the public about the changes in instruments and new thematic priorities introduced over the past two decades. Policies have not been contested and when they have only aspects have come to the forefront.⁵ There is usually limited attention to the big issues and the instruments and approaches in Parliament’s regular processing of the government’s proposed aid budget.

Parliamentary debates are typically dominated by issues such as the role of Norwegian NGOs and their project implementation (although in the past we have also seen debates around the selection of partner countries and other issues). This is likely a combination of active lobbying by the NGOs and the appeal in focusing on project aid and direct benefits for intended beneficiaries on the ground. This may have been reinforced by reduced focus on direct bilateral to partner countries following the

⁵ This may contrast with some other countries, such as Finland or Denmark in recent years, but see also a recent study of the politisation of EU’s development policy (Hackenesch, Bergmann and Orbie 2021).

shift to multilateral instruments and – perhaps – growing frustrations with difficulties of identifying the link between Norwegian funding and results on the ground. The limited political engagement – or lack of politisation – has also implied that there is much bigger space for MFA and its aid institutions, including Norwegian NGOs and related stakeholders, to shape and implement aid policies. It has made it possible for the ministers and the MFA to play a bigger role and launch initiatives without much parliamentary and public debate. This also implies that domestic concerns, self-interest and other priorities not related to development purposes may have a greater influence in shaping the implementation of Norwegian development policies.

Parliamentary and coalition politics have played a crucial role in maintaining this broad consensus. The Christian Democrats were particularly important on the conservative side. They had the development aid portfolio in the governments from 1997 to 2005 and in 2019–2021. The Liberal Party has usually sided with the Christian Democrats on aid issues. During the Labour Party-led coalition governments (2005–2013) the Socialist Left Party had the portfolio. The role of coalition politics is perhaps best illustrated with the Christian Democrats during the Conservative minority government from 2013 to 2018; a coalition between the Conservative Party and the Progress Party with the Christian Democrats and the Liberals providing parliamentary support and ensuring majority in Parliament. In its 2015 budget the government proposed a major cut in the civil society grant – a main source of the funds channelled through Norwegian NGOs. This was reversed by Parliament (Stortinget 2015: 31). Since then, the government has tended to avoid challenging its Parliamentary base – and the Christian Democrats in particular – on aid issues. The aid policy also became an important carrot in the efforts by the Prime Minister to encourage the Christian Democrats to join the government. Eventually, the party joined the government coalition in January 2019. The new government platform (Granavolden) reinforced several classical aid values, including emphasising the focus on poverty and vulnerable groups, calling for a stronger Norad and more.

3.2. Foreign policy objectives – shaping new instruments and implementation

Parallel to the limited role of Parliament the MFA has increased its dominance in shaping development aid through new foreign policy priorities and implementation. The tensions between foreign policy objectives and the altruism of long-term development aid have always been a feature, but they remained in the background during the Cold War. It was mainly evident in tied aid and the use of Norwegian goods and services. That began to change in the 1990s. In the last two decades, other Norwegian foreign policy priorities and self-interests have been important in shaping the implementation of Norwegian aid. This includes the use of earmarked funding through multilateral channels, selection of bilateral partner countries and the launch of new thematic priorities. And at the same time: the aid budget increasing more rapidly than the non-aid or ordinary component of MFA's budget creating an

unintended pressure to turn to the aid budget to fund foreign policy initiatives. In 2020 MFA's aid budget was 77 per cent of the total MFA budget, excluding administrative costs. The administrative costs were about the same for the aid budget (the so-called 03 budget) and the ordinary foreign policy budget (the '02' budget) and amounted to about 2.3–2.4 billion for both. (See also more on this in Deloitte, 2021).

Three main manifestations of the expanding global engagement had a strong impact on development aid. It began in the 1990s but accelerated after the millennium.⁶ The first was MFA's engagement as peace mediator – beginning with the Labour Party-governments from 1990 to 1997. The first was the Israel/Palestine conflict and then later in numerous other countries (Balkan, Sri Lanka, Guatemala, Sudan and others). This 'activist' approach to mediation and peacebuilding was made possible with the end of the Cold War; it was not a threat to foreign policy interests and was soon also judged to be an asset for Norway in international politics (Sørbø, 1997). This was also closely linked to other developments in Norwegian foreign policy: the broadening of Norway's global engagement moving beyond the high north, Europe and East–West (Larsen, 2005).

This new approach was later to be followed also by other governments. The Conservative Party Foreign Minister's first official visit to Washington in 2001 may be a symbolical illustration of the new consensus. The US Foreign Minister was not much interested in discussing Northern European or Norway–Russia relations; he was keener on discussing Norwegian views on Sudan and Sri Lanka (Sørbø, 2013). Following this, the Conservative Foreign Minister – initially critical of the Labour Party's 1990s engagement on these issues – made several steps to institutionalise and strengthen MFA's capacity to engage in peace mediation, including setting up a dedicated Section on Peace and Reconciliation and with its activities largely funded by the aid budget.

Further impetus was provided by 9/11 and the war on terror from 2001 and later the emphasis on stabilisation in fragile and conflicted countries. This had major implications and direct impact on aid policies and disbursements of aid. Dedicated budget chapter items on these issues emerged, related interventions expanded (especially humanitarian aid) and – above all – new countries became major recipients as a result. This included Balkan and Palestine in the 1990s and then later Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar and Somalia and most recently Colombia, Niger and Mali. Significant flows also went to humanitarian assistance and stabilisation efforts in Syria and Iraq and the surrounding region.

A second main manifestation was linked to a major scaling up of Norwegian financial and political engagement in relation to what is sometimes today referred to as global public goods. This has been dominated by support to health and climate

6 See the Soria Moria government platforms 2005 and 2009, MFA, (2008) as well as the background studies and discussion papers commissioned by the MFA on Norway's foreign policy and globalisation – Lunde and Thune, (2008), and Mølster and Weltzien, (2013).

programmes. The global health engagement was based on previous experiences and strong Norwegian global activities, especially linked to Gro Harlem Brundtland's period as Director General of WHO (from 1998 to 2003) and with the foreign minister from 2005 as her chief of staff. Most funds were disbursed through multilateral channels – including core funding and earmarked funding to existing institutions and core funding to new global funds. This has continued to the present with new priorities being added linked to vaccines and vaccine distribution following the Covid-19 pandemic. Extensive funding is coupled with strong Norwegian political activity and diplomatic leadership in the global area.

The Norwegian Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI) started from scratch, but quickly became a main pillar in Norway's global engagement on climate issues (McNeill, 2021; Reid-Henry, 2021). The original proposal was developed by two NGO leaders (from the Rainforest Foundation and the Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature) and adopted by the Minister and the government (Hermansen et al., 2017). A range of new countries became major recipients of Norwegian aid as a result (e.g. Brazil, Indonesia, and Guyana).

The new Conservative coalition-government from 2013 continued this engagement but added other priorities, in particular with an expanding and strong focus on global initiatives in education. Other initiatives were gradually added. The new 2021 Labour Party-Centre Party government added agriculture and a migration fund to the list.

It must be added that Norwegian aid in areas such as health or climate issues had a long history. The new dimension – or departure from the past – was linked to global engagement and its increasing delink from bilateral country programmes (see also Eggen, 2021).

The final manifestation was driven by the need to make aid more effective as a response to the Millennium Development Goals and the changes in the Western aid architecture. This was most strongly evident during the Christian Democrat's Hilde Frafjord Johnsen's period as development aid minister from 1997 to 2005. She put aid effectiveness firmly on the agenda, globally and in Norwegian aid.⁷ This had a major impact on the Norwegian approach to aid. It continued to be so also after her period, but gradually lost some of the political steam. It builds on the previous changes in bilateral aid introduced in the early 1990s (the changing approach to project aid) but added donor coordination and global engagement to the mix. Its legacy is perhaps best evident in the increased reliance on earmarked funding through multilateral institutions in country programmes.

7 A main initiative was the informal Utstein group of donors (Norway, UK, Germany and the Netherlands) which played an important role both at the global and national level in shaping Norway's approach in the aid effectiveness period. See also the study of the Utstein group in Michalopoulos (2020).

Norwegian commercial interests have not been important in shaping Norwegian aid policies in the period under review and after the end of ‘commodity aid’ in the 1990s. While support for Norwegian companies and their global expansion has always been an important foreign policy objective, this has generally not been funded through the aid budget. Historically Norwegian commercial engagement in developing countries was linked to shipping and to a much lesser extent (but funded by aid) hydropower. Today the Norwegian locomotives in developing countries are major companies operating in oil and gas (with renewables emerging), telecommunications and fertilisers and investments through the Norwegian Government’s Pension Fund Global (the oil fund). The focus on business and private sector development is however increasing and consumes a small but expanding part of the aid budget. This is mainly through Norfund (development finance) but also through short-term technical assistance from Norway in areas such as finance management, energy, fisheries and more. Currently, Norway is exploring other instruments through loans and guarantees to mobilise private capital which may draw on lessons from similar mechanisms in Swedish and Danish aid (Wade, 2022). This has been supported both by Conservative and Labour party-led coalition governments.

The closer links between foreign and development aid policies also led to calls for improved coherence between foreign and development policies. This was given its first sharp articulation in the 1995 report from the government-appointed North–South commission and reiterated in the subsequent white paper on development aid (MFA, 1995, NOU, 1995). In the last decade, the government’s annual aid budget has included an annex on coherence in development. More recently the focus on SDG’s had provided an additional impetus to the coherence issue. This takes us two the next section and structural characteristics behind the evolving approaches to aid.

3.3. *Structural features: aid volume and learning*

Two dimensions of development aid policy set it apart from other Norwegian sector policies: the volume and the changing arena for management and implementation. This had distinct impacts on the aid policies and evolving profile of Norwegian aid. An aid volume set at one percent of GNI implies a continuous expansion of the budget itself. In recent years this has implied that the budget increases by NOK 2–3 billion a year. Any Minister coming in will find fresh funds available to fund new priorities. This has contributed to the expanding list of thematic priorities and new initiatives without the parallel need to revisit old priorities and approaches.

The expanding budget also put much pressure upon the implementation capacity of the Norwegian aid administration. This was and is an important contributing factor in the search for multilateral channels for disbursing aid. There is not sufficient capacity to significantly expand disbursement through traditional bilateral channels.

Historically, aid officials and the aid institutions have at crucial times often been important in shaping dimensions of policies and implementation, and possibly more

so than in other public sectors because of the limited political interest and engagement. The first main illustration of this was the Norad strategy from 1990 (Liland and Kjerland, 2003, Norad, 1990). This strategy implied significant changes in Norwegian development aid. At the time Norad was a strong institution under the then Ministry of Development Cooperation (which was incorporated in the MFA in 1990). Based on lessons from failures and shortcomings of prevailing approaches Norad launched a major ‘spring cleaning’ with a shift from the previous emphasis on Norwegian-managed projects towards a focus on partner responsibility and ownership. Norad maintained a strong position into the early part of the new millennium, but its role was gradually reduced following the reorganisation between MFA and Norad in 2004. Following the 2019 Granavolden-government platform Norad has again delegated significantly greater operational responsibility – although this was not followed by any significant increase in staffing and professional capacities.

In the second half of 2021, Norad began launching a series of high-profiled think-pieces discussing the role of development aid in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. This included a report on the role of global public goods and how and to what extent they should be funded through Official Development Assistance, and the implications for poverty reduction. It suggested the introduction of a new aid category to capture the large Norwegian aid flows directed to public goods that were not targeted at low-income countries, poor population groups and immediate needs (Norad, 2021a).

The reorganisation combined with an expanding aid budget has brought the issue of strategic direction and learning to the fore. This has emerged as a weak dimension in the Norwegian aid system with impacts on effectiveness and results. Recent studies have pointed out that MFA is failing in facilitating the link between lessons learned and strategic directions. The link between overall aid policy and operational activities is weak. This has increased with the major expansion in disbursement through multi-lateral channels and the challenge of linking this to bilateral country programmes. While Norwegian aid policies have been centralised and concentrated, there is much decentralisation within the MFA with most departments managing significant aid funds. The Department for Sustainable Development plays an important role in facilitating policy development related to parts of the aid budget but is not set up to provide a link to operationalisation and knowledge management. This contributes both to a fragmented portfolio and failure to adapt policies to results and lessons learned (Bu and Lomøy, 2022, Riksrevisjonen, 2021). Within other public sectors there are rules, procedure and guidelines in place (through the ‘Utredningsinstruksen’ from the Ministry of Finance and its Agency for Public and Financial Management) to improve decision-making processes and reduce fragmentation. MFA and foreign policy making are exempted from many parts of these guidelines.

Calls for management by results and better use of lessons learned have been frequent themes in Norwegian aid policies – at least since the early 1990s. Several recent studies undertaken by Norad’s evaluation department have identified the

current limits of knowledge management, particularly related to its strategic use and the link to projects and programmes (Norad, 2017b and subsequent studies). This is also a recurrent theme in the peer reviews from OECD's Development Assistance Committee (see OECD, 2008; 2014 and 2019). On the other hand, the OECD reviews highlight that this is also coupled with Norway's ability to take risk and act quickly, especially in relation to development aid in fragile and volatile contexts. One key feature highlighted in studies and reviews, including in the peer reviews from OECD DAC, is the absence of an overall approach to the use of multilateral channels. While at one level the aim is to strengthen the multilateral system through core funding this is undermined by the expanded use of earmarked funding to pursue other foreign policy priorities.

3.4. *Global challenges, international politics and the aid regime*

Finally, while domestic driving forces are the key explanatory factors in shaping the evolution of Norwegian aid global challenges and the Western aid architecture have played an important role in shaping dimensions in the evolving Norwegian aid policies. Partly, this has been as a motivational factor, but also as direct explanatory factors for key features of development policy. Historically (pre-1990), UN norms have been crucial as were the role of other Nordic countries, especially Sweden (Stokke, 2019). In recent decades, with the end of the Cold War, the new war on terror, climate issues and, more recently, migration has had a crucial impact also on priorities in Norwegian aid. Global aid priorities through the UN – the MDG and the SDGs – have also been significant in shaping key features of Norwegian engagement and evolving aid priorities. The main manifestation of this is the closer links between foreign policy interests and development aid. These closer links have also been reinforced by another trend in global politics: the weakening of the role of the traditional aid donors and the rise of new powers and actors in international politics (Tjønneland, 2012).

At the same time, the global aid architecture and its norms and policies had a strong impact on how Norwegian aid was managed and delivered and on the use of channels and instruments. This was most strongly visible with the aid effectiveness agenda from the late 1990s and in the first decade of the new Millennium, but it has remained an important dimension also after. The OECD DAC and its guidelines have been important in providing guidelines and technical knowledge of how to make aid work and its performance, perhaps especially in relation to Norad and its operational departments. So has knowledge and ideas produced by especially the World Bank and the former DFID in the UK. The role of the Nordic countries on the other hand may have lost some of its previous importance as a focus and framework.

We may also refer to the global and like-minded group of donor countries as an international aid regime. The application of the regime theory in relation to ODA is useful in the sense that the policies and performance of individual countries cannot

be explained without reference to convergence of state policy goals, articulated norms and the adoption of standards of behaviour. The OECD DAC has been at the forefront of developing performance standards which have been quite influential in how development aid – also in Norway – is delivered (Cf. also Hook and Rumsey, 2016).

Above all: global developments and priorities of Norway's alliance partners have all been important in shaping Norwegian foreign policy engagement, including aid priorities. This is perhaps best illustrated by the government's commission of inquiry into Norway's total engagement in Afghanistan, a main recipient also of Norwegian aid. The assessment concluded that Norway's main achievement was its support to the US and NATO. This is summarised in the title of the final report – Norway was *En god alliert* ('A good ally') (NOU, 2016).

4. Conclusion: towards a paradigm shift?

Major changes have taken place in Norwegian development policies since the 1990s. Are we witnessing major and radical departures from previous policies and approached to development aid – a change in means as well as ends? Using the terminology from Peter Hall, (1993) the observed changes can be described as first and second-order changes. These changes are technical (first order), but they have also been coupled with the introduction of new thematic priorities and new instruments (second order). These changes have been slow and gradual. There are also changes in the objectives – in the end. The poverty objective has remained the overarching purpose, but an expanding list of thematic priorities has watered down and weakened the poverty focus. At times Parliament has reinforced the emphasis on poverty reduction when the implementation has been perceived to have strayed too far away from the poverty focus. This is evident in the commitment to a high aid volume and strong poverty focus in certain sectors, including also through some of the new instruments.

Some of these changes and continuities can be explained by learning with evidence and experiences leading to modification and introduction of new instruments. Changing realities and new challenges – from climate changes to refugee crisis – have also led to new interventions and new instruments. But this is not sufficient to explain the far-reaching changes identified in this article: the focus on global goods and global engagement in Norwegian aid, and the reduced emphasis on bilateral partner countries and country programmes. These changes have also been characterised as a 'silent revolution' in Norwegian development aid (Eggen, 2021; Hegertun, 2021).

The explanations for this evolving profile of Norwegian aid can be found in a particular combination of driving forces and exogenous changes: in politisation and the policy arenas. This is what Wood, (2015) refers to as the 'powering' dynamics behind changes. One is linked to *depolitisation* and the role of the MFA. The political and popular commitment to aid has remained very high in Norway, but at the same time development policy is a sector characterised by limited political debate and

strong consensus between political parties. This has provided much scope for ministers and the MFA to launch new priorities and instruments without much public scrutiny or debate. The expanding aid budget also made this possible without a need to change previous priorities.

The second set of driving forces is linked to the evolving and changing *policy arena*. One is the growing dominance of the MFA, the pursuit of foreign policy priorities under the umbrella ‘global engagement’, and a weakening of Norad. This has contributed to a rapid increase in the use of earmarked thematic funding through multilateral channels, core funding to new thematic interventions and reduced focus on bilateral partner countries. The aid budget has become an increasingly important instrument in the diplomatic activity of the Ministry. Furthermore, the Ministry’s role was coupled with internal decentralisation in Oslo and a weak link between overall policies and new priorities on the one hand and strategic and operational management on the other. Norad has been in a weak position to facilitate improved knowledge management and feed lessons learned into strategic planning. Norad’s role is now being strengthened, but with the reduced role of bilateral country programmes its operational focus may also be shifting to global issues.

The outcome of this interplay between different driving forces is a multifaceted and fragmented aid profile allowing various dimensions of development policies to be shaped by different interests and priorities. This has led to the mix between continuities and change in Norwegian aid over the past 20–30 years. Some of these changes are far-reaching – new instruments and the focus on global issues – and have also watered down the poverty focus and with much less focus and attention to local contexts and poor countries.

These changes have not reached a stage where we can characterise this as a paradigm shift in Norwegian aid. This may change linked to a continued expanding focus on global issues and a further decoupling of aid from the poverty objective. Climate concerns and migration, have the potential to make the aid budget a far more politicised sector in Parliament. Coalition politics both on the conservative side and on the left have been crucial in maintaining Parliament’s commitment to poverty reduction and key features of the old paradigm. Changes in the majority behind government coalitions increase the likelihood of further changes in the paradigm – perhaps most evident in an increased allocation to global purposes and a reduced aid budget.

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