



The adoption of women and gender as development assistance priorities: An event history analysis of world polity effects

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Abstract

Growing similarity of development assistance policy and reference to emerging global consensus on development issues has been a striking trend in the foreign aid community in recent years. This article uses event history techniques to undertake an exploratory analysis and test world polity effects on the spread of gender and development policies and institutional structures among 22 aid donors of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee from 1968 through 2003. Findings point to the influence of other donors, international civil society, international treaties and conferences as strong determinants of the homogenization of development assistance policy and the adoption of gender policies by donor organizations.

Keywords

donors, foreign aid, gender, globalization, women, world polity theory

Introduction

In this article I analyse the spread of similar development assistance institutions and policy among major western industrialized countries over the past 50 years through a quantitative analysis of the adoption of women and gender as foreign aid priorities. In that time, development assistance has become a key component of the foreign relations of developed democracies and spawned international standards, organizations and an entire industry of development experts, firms and non-governmental organizations

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(NGOs). Assisting the development of poorer societies has become a taken for granted role for all major industrialized democratic countries. Indeed, even countries which are transitioning towards higher levels of economic and political development in recent years are themselves beginning to offer development assistance funds to their less well-off neighbours.¹

This article explores the global growth in the past half-century of the institution of development assistance. It examines world polity explanations of why development assistance donors have common institutional structures and, more strikingly, common policy priorities and objectives, despite disparate domestic contexts and national interests. Using event history quantitative analysis techniques, I employ a two-stage exploratory analysis to examine the spread of one example of common development assistance policy scripts among the major western donor countries and test the influence of world polity factors to explain the institutional and policy isomorphism found among donors. Although only addressing a limited number of countries, my analysis shows that the spread of development policies among the countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) resembles the diffusion of world polity models and norms seen in other sectors.

I examine the spread of policy models addressing the area of 'Women in Development' (WID) or 'Gender and Development' (GAD) as an exemplar case of the diffusion of policy priorities among aid donors. By analysing the timing of the adoption of WID or GAD policies or the creation of a dedicated WID/GAD unit, I show how the international influences of the world polity played a role in the spread of development assistance policy and institutions. My findings demonstrate that the development assistance sector should be considered a reflection of the enactment of world polity models for foreign aid and that donor institutions of the major western industrialized countries are directly influenced by their interactions with world society. This relationship has not previously been demonstrated in the research literature on development assistance institutions, and suggests an alternative understanding for the motivations behind donor policy agendas on the global level.

Background

Between 1961 and 2003, the proliferation of development assistance institutional architecture proceeded with great speed (Chabbott, 1999; Lumsdaine, 1993). Figure 1 illustrates the growth trends in the number of donor agencies and of DAC members in the period from 1960 through 2005. In 1960 – despite aid having been provided for some years by the ministries of foreign affairs of select countries – there was no such thing as a bilateral donor agency; by 2003, there were donor agencies or specialized units dedicated to the provision of development assistance in nearly every major industrialized country across Western Europe, North America and the Asia-Pacific. At the same time, the growth of the so-called 'Donor's Club', which is the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD, grew at nearly the same pace – indeed, no major development assistance donor in Western Europe, North America, or the Asia-Pacific region is not a member of the DAC in 2007.

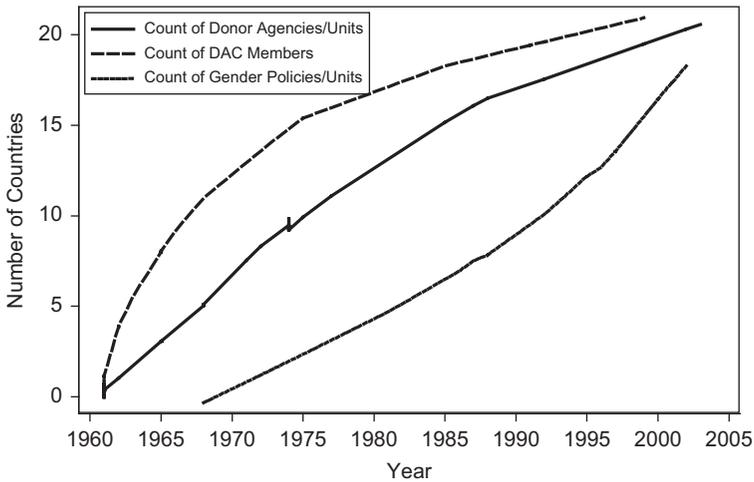


Figure 1. Diffusion of development assistance institutions and policies among DAC member countries

Source: Author's coding of OECD and specific donor agency information.

Presently, the DAC acts as a clearinghouse of all things 'development assistance' in the international community. Aside from tracking and accounting for the destination, amounts and purpose of all Official Development Assistance (ODA) funds globally, the DAC also plays a significant policy role as a forum for discussion and formulation of policy positions and 'best practices' in the development assistance community. The fact that all major donors are also members of the DAC highlights the extent to which this exclusive group plays a significant role in shaping the appearance and function of ODA institutions globally. One way in which this DAC influence occurs is the spread of common policy frameworks through the conduct of conferences and discussions on specific issue areas, the issuing of guidelines for donors to follow in different sectors and through the policing of standards for donors through a peer review process.

Although the DAC is not the only influence on the adoption of common donor priorities, it is clear in the literature on development assistance that donors have been swayed by distinct trends in the focus of aid throughout the years. Development assistance trends in the past have included focuses on: support for industrialization, basic human needs, structural adjustment, human resource development, good governance and even budgetary support. This seemingly ever-shifting focus for aid priorities reflects the high degree of uncertainty involved in promoting development through foreign aid. There is no one guaranteed solution to the problem of development, and therefore donors follow the most current aid trends to maintain legitimacy of their aid programmes. Now, despite this uncertainty, early in the 21st century, western donor policy and practices appear to be increasingly similar and reflective of at least a rhetorical 'global' consensus on development objectives and practices. International organizations and donor agencies alike have

peppered their development policy documents with mentions of this ‘emerging global consensus’ on a variety of issues ranging from water management and poverty reduction to governance and security-sector reform (ADB, 1997; CIDA, 2002; UN, 2003; UNFPA, 1994; USAID, 2002; World Bank Group, 2000, 2002).

As Figure 1 illustrates, one example of a common policy framework that has been adopted by nearly all donors is a focus on women or gender inequality in the development process. In 1970, only one western donor (Sweden) had a dedicated WID unit, but by 2007, nearly all major donors have adopted some form of a WID/GAD policy or have a dedicated unit within their organization to address WID/GAD concerns. This adoption of women and gender as a development priority has been highlighted in the development literature, tracking the changing nature of donor engagement with these issues over the 35-year period of my study (Moser, 2005; Moser and Moser, 2005; Rathgeber, 1990, 1995). A number of factors responsible for the internalization of women’s rights and gender equality as a development donor concern have been highlighted, and most stem from the creation of a global agenda for states and civil society to support women’s rights across society.

World polity research has demonstrated the extent to which women’s rights and gender equality developed as a world cultural model during the later 20th century (Berkovitch, 1999a, 1999b; Lechner and Boli, 2005). This growth in support for women’s rights across the globe corresponds to the expansion of the women’s movement (Berkovitch, 1999a; Paxton et al., 2006), greater support for gender equality initiatives by international organizations (Berkovitch, 1999b) and increased attention paid to these issues at international conferences like the United Nations World Conferences on Women (Lechner and Boli, 2005). The highlighting of women’s issues during the UN Decade for Women (1976–85) and surrounding the UN conferences also played a strong role in promoting the expansion of the women’s movement and the formation of a large number of women’s international non-governmental organizations (WINGOs) (Berkovitch, 1999a). These factors were all instrumental in encouraging nation-states to protect women’s rights and promote gender equality across a wide spectrum of issues, including addressing women’s health, education and economic opportunities. International organizations like the UN and the WINGOs of the women’s movement collaborated along with governments to establish, refine and institutionalize a normative model for women’s rights and gender equality. World society’s influence on the creation of this model was thus strong and wide-ranging.

As these norms encouraging greater protection for women’s rights and increased acceptance of the notion of gender equality spread among governments, development NGOs and international organizations, a concentration on development issues began to emerge as a significant component of this world cultural model. Berkovitch (1999a) argues that this was due to the coinciding of the UN Decade for Women with the Second United Nations Development Decade, leading to the framing of women’s issues within the development context and a concurrent focus on both issues in the wider international community. Women’s status and development status came to be viewed in the international community as inextricably linked, and gender became a primary concern for development assistance agencies and organizations worldwide (Lechner and Boli, 2005).

Donors have subsequently developed specialized units and policies addressing WID or GAD concerns in their work, and the integration of a global model of women's rights into development discourse has become widely accepted in the foreign aid community.

To be sure, the nature of a donor's gender policy and the details of its implementation vary widely among the DAC members; however, the fact that they are nearly all engaged with the idea of improving gender equality through development assistance as an objective of their work is indicative of the trends towards conformity or isomorphism within development assistance institutions.² Similar evidence can be marshalled to point towards the spread of donor policy models in the areas of environment, human rights, civil society capacity building, governance and security sector reform among many others.

The emergence and spread of development assistance as a foreign relations function of western industrial democracy has been a phenomenon spanning only the last 50 years. Indeed the process continues still, when newly emerging economies and countries transition towards 'developed' status they are also becoming development assistance donors in their own right. Theoretical explanations of this trend in the research literature on development have done little to explore this trend, and therefore research in this area requires alternative approaches to explaining the spread of development assistance and the isomorphism found in policy and institutional frameworks among donor countries. I first briefly touch on the existing literature on the emergence of and motivations for development assistance, and then turn to alternate frameworks which the analysis in this article explores.

Previous explanations of the emergence of development assistance

In the recent literature on development assistance, there have been several explanations of the emergence of and motivations for providing development aid in the post-Second World War era. Two main viewpoints identifiable in the literature are: (1) national interest and the domination of the 'Third World', wherein some authors point to the importance of donor country national interest underlying the provision of aid and the insidious domination of the developing world by the power embodied in donor agendas (Alesina and Dollar, 2000; Escobar, 1995; Ferguson, 1994; Woods, 2005); and (2) international humanitarianism, where donors are seen to be acting on humanitarian or moral grounds in compassionate partnership with poorer societies of the developing world (Lumsdaine, 1993; Opekin, 1996; Pratt, 1994). Looked at in historical perspective, development assistance has been influenced by both national interest and humanitarianism. It is reasonable to assume that no country's aid programme can be characterized as wholly uninterested, nor can it be considered fully humanitarian. The complex politics of development assistance build in components of both of these explanations.

The main shortcoming of these two explanations, however, is their silence on and inability to explain the appearance of nearly identical means of providing development aid in all the major industrialized countries of Western Europe, North America and the Asia-Pacific. Even if common motivations of either national interest/domination or international humanitarianism underlie the provision of development assistance, these motivations fail to explain why donors have been so conformist in their provision of

assistance, following trends of common institutional structures and of common policy priorities or objectives in the face of disparate domestic contexts.

Other research on development assistance and aid agencies also fails to explain the uniformity of policy among aid agencies in a convincing fashion. A recent Coasian analysis suggesting aid agencies act as facilitators between north and south to cut transaction costs and mediate differing agendas between donor and recipient, explains the existence of these agencies, but does little to examine why they promote such similar policies despite disparate domestic contexts for donors (Martens, 2005). Another perspective suggests that development policy is crafted based on 'prevailing development objectives', 'development theory' and data available to measure performance and test hypotheses at any given point in time (Thorbecke, 2006). This framework again offers little explanation for why the prevailing objectives and theories lead to similar policy outcomes over time.

The research literature on foreign aid and donor agencies has not sufficiently addressed the questions this article addresses. This gap in the literature on development assistance requires an alternative framework, and to provide answers to these questions, I argue that it is necessary to turn to the literature on the world polity and globalization from political sociology.

World polity explanations

World polity theories of globalization argue that common institutional and policy models proliferate globally as a reflection of the enactment of 'world culture' (Boli and Thomas, 1999a; Lechner and Boli, 2005; Meyer, 2007; Meyer et al., 1997a). This world culture is a prescriptive set of values, norms and models that establish legitimate actors, actions and interactions for states, organizations and even individuals. Culture in this context does not refer to styles of dress, taste, or appreciation of the arts, but instead to a series of models that outline expectations of how actors (nation-states, organizations, or individuals) ought to appear or behave. The growth of world culture is a result of the interaction of states, international organizations, civil society and academia/scientists to define and implement world polity scripts which are then enacted by actors at all levels. Governments take on these models and implement them as policy that shapes the nation-state to meet the norms for rational and progressive actors established by the world polity. The enactment of these models across diverse groups of actors leads to the isomorphism of policy and practice despite different local contexts (Schofer and McEneaney, 2003). This institutional isomorphism is an inherent characteristic of the world polity, as world cultural models are deemed universally applicable and appropriate for all legitimate states, organizations and individuals. Recent research on the world polity has examined the diffusion of different policies and institutions transnationally including the proliferation of environmental policy, the spread of women's political participation and patterns of treaty ratification (Hironaka, 2002; Ramirez et al., 1997; Wotipka and Ramirez, 2003). These quantitative analyses lend support to the relationship between the diffusion of policies and the enactment of world-level cultural models by nation-state actors. The world polity literature suggests that the moving force behind this diffusion is that states enact models in an effort to seek legitimacy on the

international stage and respond to domestic demands to meet international norms (Meyer et al., 1997a).

Previous research in the world polity literature demonstrated the institutionalization of national development planning and its evolution to a highly global definition of development (Hwang, 2006), but has not touched upon the institution of foreign aid. I argue in this article that development assistance is simply another world polity institutional model intended to be adopted by donor and recipient countries alike in their efforts to display legitimacy as states in the global community. The principles, values and organizational structures implied in the provision of foreign aid to developing societies are all reflections of world cultural norms of development assistance. Not only have all the major western democracies created development assistance machineries and a corresponding development assistance sector of experts, NGOs and aid workers, but developing countries have equally developed means of receiving this aid both at the government and civil society level. This rapid creation and spread of the mechanisms of development assistance in the past half-century, I argue, are direct evidence of world polity influences of globalization, isomorphism and growing conformity. Furthermore, this similarity does not end at the simple organizational structure and mandates of development assistance donors, but as this article shows, extends to more detailed policy models of development assistance. By adopting policy models that reflect internationally agreed upon best practices of foreign aid, donor countries are able to demonstrate their legitimacy as international benefactors of the developing world, and at the same time validate the quality of their aid programmes to their domestic constituency and donor peers. It is explicitly for these reasons of legitimacy and validation that I argue that donor agencies are likely to be affected by world polity influences in their provision of development assistance.

Policy isomorphism

Akin to institutional isomorphism is the presence of similar policies shared among diverse institutions/states. Once institutions are similarly modelled after one another, it seems natural that they would share some similarity in policy decisions and priorities. Yet, it may also appear unexpected to some that institutions from different countries operating under different political contexts, and with divergent goals, might share the same policy priorities with great frequency. In the development assistance sector, policy isomorphism does appear frequently. Donor agencies share common goals, objectives and policies that stem from common policy frameworks. Despite different political, societal and cultural contexts, development assistance is carried out in most instances in a very uniform manner throughout the DAC donor countries. This similarity of policies is argued here to be a reflection of consensus (or consensus-like) agreements that encourage conformity between major donor states at the international level. These agreements yield similar policies in dissimilar contexts, and in turn homogenize approaches to development assistance through the propagation of a limited menu of development assistance models, priorities and parameters within which to operate.

Development assistance proves a challenge to donor institutions and their related organizational fields, as it is a sector rife with uncertainty regarding both goals and means to achieve them. 'Development' as a goal can mean many different things

(Escobar, 1995; Esteva, 1992; Ferguson, 1994; Lumsdaine, 1993; Nederveen Pieterse, 1998; Sen, 1999; Stiglitz, 2002; Woolcock, 1998), and therefore may prove a difficult target to achieve for many states and societies. Assisting in this development proves equally difficult, as there has yet to be identified a single guaranteed driver/engine of development behind which donors can marshal their resources and energies. Indeed, the story of development assistance over the past 60 years has been one of theories offered, tested and often rejected about how to improve the lives of people and bring about 'development'. This remaining uncertainty about how to achieve the aim development may therefore lead to a greater propensity of development assistance institutions to emulate what others are also doing as a way of legitimating actions among a group of peers rather than adopting maverick approaches which may appear more risky. In this sense, the uncertainty inherent in the area of development assistance may increase institutional isomorphism and policy isomorphism in ways that appear to increase certainty about means and ends at the same time as they diminish the variety of efforts to promote development (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Indeed, earlier world polity research has shown that mimicry and other so-called contagion effects can be shown to bear some responsibility for the spread of common institutions and models among nation-states (Jang, 2003; Ramirez and McEneaney, 1997; Wotipka and Ramirez, 2008).

Part of the tendency to emulate other donors may stem from the nature of the development assistance donors as a 'limited field' (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Even with the proliferation of these institutions, we still find only a limited number of donor agencies in the early 21st century – the DAC is composed of only 22 major development assistance donors among the 200-plus countries that make up the current international community. As such, these institutions have a very limited group of others from which to model behaviour, form and policy. A small community of donors may therefore partially explain the high degree of institutional isomorphism in the development sector. As policy models proliferate to more states – sometimes referred to as greater density – states which have already adopted a certain position are liable to influence others to do so. When density of a policy model reaches a certain threshold a 'tipping point' is reached after which comes a 'norm cascade' in which states will adopt a policy or institution to seek greater legitimacy on the world stage (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 901–2). This article's analysis tests the following hypothesis regarding policy density:

H1: The greater number of donors who adopt a WID or GAD policy, the more likely other donors will adopt such policy, too.

International organizations

One of the chief influences within the world polity is that of international organizations, whether intergovernmental or non-governmental. Evidence from earlier research has emphasized the rapid growth of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) in the modern age and their role in spreading world cultural models (Boli and Thomas, 1997, 1999b). INGOs are implicated in the spread of institutions and models ranging from environmental protection to population control policies and much more (Barrett and Frank, 1999; Frank et al., 1999). Although INGOs are not the central force in the global system, they nonetheless actively influence nation-state actors and 'lead states, individuals, and organizations to incorporate new purposes and goals in their

constellations of interests and to abandon older purposes and goals that fall out of favor in world culture' (Boli, 1999: 297). As such, the INGO as a key aspect of the world polity can fill the role of 'rationalized other' offered by Meyer et al. (1997a) to denote those groups which generate the discourses that are refined to form world cultural models.

The world polity literature also points to the significant role played by intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) as institutions through which the cultural models of the world society propagate (Meyer et al., 1997a, 1997b; Schofer and McEneaney, 2003; Wotipka and Ramirez, 2003). Chief among these is the United Nations, an organization which with its numerous sub-bodies and affiliates has provided a structure through which nation-states coordinate on issues such as environment, food, health, development and others. The UN system also provides a means of legitimating the state on the global level. All member countries of the UN are held to a common set of standards and expectations which essentially define the roles and responsibilities of the state in the modern era (Meyer et al., 1997a). By being a member of many of these intergovernmental organizations, states are held to a standard of membership that indeed defines institutions and policies at the nation-state level and promotes isomorphism and conformity. In the case of development assistance, a number of these organizations exist, most importantly the OECD DAC, World Bank and the United Nations.

Within specific substantive issue areas, the influence of focused international organizations may be more relevant than the membership in a more broadly based organization like the UN. For instance, in the area of environmental protection, the growth of the international environmental movement and role of international environmental organizations have been shown to influence the adoption of environmental policies and institutions (Hironaka, 2002; Meyer et al., 1997b; Schofer and Hironaka, 2005). Other research has shown that the growth and influence of the international women's movement has affected women's political representation in parliaments throughout the world (Paxton et al., 2006). The theorized influence of the women's movement and the growth of international feminist discourse on issues of women's involvement in society and on gender inequalities can thus be seen to operate at least partially through the influence of international women's organizations. This influence operates through a nation-state's level of integration into these movements and organizations and can be termed its level of embeddedness in the actors that compose world society. In the case of the spread of WID/GAD policy among development donors, I therefore include a measure of memberships held by a state's citizens in a sample of women's INGOs (WINGOs), as a means of testing the following proposition regarding embeddedness:

H2: Greater numbers of women's international non-governmental organizations in which a country's residents are members will increase the likelihood of donors to adopt a WID/GAD policy.

International conferences and treaties

Aside from actual membership in international organizations like the UN or the OECD DAC, world polity influence is also exerted by attention drawn to particular issues through the creation of international treaties on the matter or the conduct of high-level international conferences on the subject.

Treaties are perceived as a means of standardizing nation-state approaches to an issue through embracing common definitions, expectations and objectives. Throughout the lifespan of the UN, there have been many treaties that have been responsible for disseminating common concepts and norms throughout international law, particularly in the area of human rights. Notable examples include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Some world polity research has highlighted how the diffusion of treaty ratification throughout the international community itself can be considered a function of world polity influences (Wotipka and Ramirez, 2008). At the same time, treaty ratification implies a common framework being applied in multiple nation-state contexts. In the case of the growth of WID/GAD policy in development assistance, the most influential treaty would be the CEDAW and its focus on protecting women's rights and furthering gender equality. Countries ratifying this treaty in the period after 1979 should be more likely to integrate some of its principles into their development assistance framework in the form of a WID/GAD policy.

Earlier research has also highlighted the extent to which UN conferences, for instance, can be considered a form of 'global ritual' through which principles and messages are disseminated and reinforced among nation-state participants (Lechner and Boli, 2005). Indeed, major UN conferences on the topics of environment, human rights, population and women have had substantial impact on shaping global consensus on these subjects. In the case of the diffusion of WID/GAD policy, the influence of the four major UN conferences on women from 1975 through 1995 are the most salient, with these conferences progressively integrating the notion of women's rights as human rights more fully into development discourse with each meeting (Lechner and Boli, 2005; Moser and Moser, 2005). Due to the high degree of attention drawn to women's issues and gender inequalities surrounding these conferences, I argue that in the periods following each conference, countries should be more likely to engage with WID or GAD ideas and therefore be more likely to introduce a WID/GAD policy or unit within their donor agency.

Given the focus drawn to women's rights and gender inequality by CEDAW and the four UN conferences on women, my analysis tests for the influence these conferences and treaties had in the following hypothesis:

H3: The ratification of the CEDAW or the occurrence of the UN World Conferences on Women will increase the likelihood of donors to adopt a WID/GAD policy.

Domestic factors

The common thread running through most research on the world polity has been the testing of international influences such as INGOs, treaties and contagion effects, however; it has been less common for world polity research to focus specifically on domestic factors shaping nation-state interface with world cultural models. Some research has included a focus on the nature of nation-state structures as intervening factors on how world polity policy and institutional models are translated within the state (Hironaka, 2002; Ramirez et al., 1997). In the analysis that follows I focus my analysis on two domestic aspects of the development assistance sector: donor agency structure and donor generosity.

Donor agency structure. It can be argued that donor structure can be viewed as consisting of two components: agency autonomy and locus of decision-making. Agency autonomy refers to the status of the institution as either a stand-alone agency/body within the government of the country (autonomous), or as a sub-unit of the ministry of foreign affairs (integrated). Locus of decision-making refers to the seat of primary decision-making regarding decisions related to ODA disbursement to countries on a bilateral basis. When these decisions are taken primarily at agency headquarters we identify a 'centralized' decision-making type, and in contrast, when decisions are primarily taken in the field offices located in recipient countries these are identified as 'decentralized' donors. Agency-wide policy decisions still tend to be centralized even in this second instance.

I argue in this study that donor structure can be a determining factor of influence of world polity policy models on a donor state. An integrated donor would be more likely to resist externally generated models that were possibly not in keeping with national interests, whereas a more autonomous donor may be more likely to adopt such models. More autonomous donor agencies would be more likely to seek legitimacy from other donor agencies internationally and therefore be more readily influenced by processes of mimetic isomorphism like those identified by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). A donor agency autonomous from the ministry of foreign affairs would face greater uncertainty regarding its policy mandate, as it would be less closely coupled to national foreign policy concerns. Therefore the autonomous donor agency would seek to legitimate its foreign aid focus by modelling best practices of behaviour from other donors, rather than relying on policy direction from within the rest of the government. Unfortunately, this argument has not been previously tested in the literature, and therefore my expectation is based on the reasoning that greater distance from policy-makers grounded in national interest would increase uncertainty and open an organization to externally generated policies which are more universal in nature. The donor's decision-making locus may also mediate world polity influence, in that a decentralized donor may have greater exposure to world polity rationalized others, and therefore is more likely to adopt policy scripts than a centralized donor. Indeed, donor decentralization has been advocated by the DAC for much of the last decade as a means of diminishing donor country national interests in devising effective development assistance programmes that more appropriately suit local conditions and priorities. I test the first of these relationships using the following hypothesis:

H4: The greater autonomy of a donor agency, the more likely they will adopt externally generated policy scripts related to WID/GAD.

Donor generosity. Earlier research has shown that levels of donor generosity, aid measured as a proportion of national income, are directly related to domestic political structures such as the magnitude of the welfare state and state commitment to social democratic values (Noël and Thérien, 1995). Implied in the argument that development assistance can be seen to be in the more generous countries simply an externally oriented extension of the welfare state is an underlying motivation of humanitarianism. Given that higher generosity reflects greater humanitarianism, I argue here that greater generosity also reflects more openness to outside ideas, therefore more susceptibility to world polity influence:

H5: The higher the level of aid as a proportion of GNI, the more likely the donor will adopt externally generated policy scripts related to WID/GAD.

Diffusion of WID/GAD policy in the development assistance sector

Thus, by examining the world polity influences of density and embeddedness, along with the timing of treaties, the staging of major international conferences and looking to key domestic factors within the development assistance institutions, my analysis will test the effects of the world polity on the nation-state. Testing the five hypotheses laid out above will provide insights into the working of the world polity and its interface with the nation-state in the development assistance sector.

Methodology and data

Method

Event history modelling techniques have been widely used in earlier world polity research (Frank et al., 2007; Hironaka, 2002; Ramirez et al., 1997; Wotipka and Ramirez, 2008). This article employs a constant rate event history model to explain the rate at which a donor country is likely to adopt a WID/gender policy or unit. With this approach, the rate of transition from no policy to policy adoption is assumed to be time-independent and dependent on only the vector of related covariates (Ramirez et al., 1997). The model appears as:

$$\log [r(t)] = B'X$$

In this case, r represents a country's transition rate from having no gender policy or unit to the destination state of having either a gender policy or unit within the donor agency, X represents the vector of covariates and B the vector of related coefficients. If we exponentiate each side of the equation we show the time to transition (r) and the influence on this time of each covariate ($\exp(B)$) (Ramirez et al., 1997). Model results demonstrate the effect of each independent variable on the time between a country entering the risk-set in 1968 after the advent of the first gender unit in Sweden (or at the year of the onset of aid provision for five later donors) and the adoption in each country of their own WID/GAD policy or unit.³ The year 1968 was selected for the beginning of the risk-set for existing donors at that time, because I felt it was only reasonable to assume countries were at risk of developing their own WID/GAD policy or unit after the advent of the first WID/GAD unit.

My analysis proceeds in two stages. First, I examine the effects of the various world polity measures independent of domestic donor characteristics. I then include the measures of donor autonomy and generosity to examine the extent to which the institutions of each country's development assistance sector shape world polity influence.

Data

My dataset consists of event timing, donor structure, international organization membership and domestic context variables for 22 member countries of the OECD DAC, as well

as yearly time series of ODA disbursement levels for each country (Paxton et al., 2006; Roodman, 2005). My risk-set includes 22 countries, 20 experiences of transition and a total time at risk of 418.5 country years.

The dependent variable in the analysis is the rate of transition for a donor country from the origin of the first donor WID/GAD unit in 1968 (Sweden) to either its adoption of a WID/GAD policy or the creation of the WID/GAD unit in its organization. This information was compiled for each country using available information from current gender policy documents, evaluation reports and OECD DAC peer review reports. Examples of these events are typified by the passing of the Percy Amendment by the US Congress in 1973 requiring American aid to address WID issues or Canada's adoption of its first policy guidelines on WID in 1976.⁴ The rate is measured by taking the duration in years between entry into the risk-set and the creation of a unit or establishment of a policy and then matching it with a dummy variable to indicate occurrence of the WID/GAD event – countries which have yet to experience the event are coded with a zero for those years prior to adoption. In the year a donor adopts a WID/GAD policy or creates a unit, the dummy is set to 1 and they exit the risk-set. Countries never experiencing a transition are right-censored and exit the risk-set in 2003.

In the first stage of my analysis, I include several covariates to test the effects of world polity factors on the adoption of gender policy that reflect influence stemming from mimicry of other donors, international treaties and conferences and international organizations.

The possibility of donor mimicry is examined through a measure of the overall density of the policy model on the global scale by a count of donors who have already adopted a WID/GAD policy or unit. This count variable is time-varying by year.

International influences of treaties and conferences are measured through two variables. The first is a timing variable that accounts for the year in which each donor country ratified the CEDAW. This is a time-varying dummy variable with a reference category reflecting those countries not yet ratifying the treaty in any given year following the creation of the CEDAW in 1980.⁵ The second variable accounts for the timing of significant international conferences. More specifically, it is a categorical variable that splits the risk-set into two time periods that correspond with the two most recent UN World Conferences on Women (Nairobi 1985 and Beijing 1995). This variable includes two categories: the post-Nairobi/Beijing period after 1985 and a reference category pre-1985 prior to the Nairobi conference.⁶

The final world polity variable is a measure of embeddedness in the world polity as indicated by the presence of a country's residents holding membership in a select sample of WINGOs (Paxton et al., 2006). Countries in my dataset range in the number of memberships for their citizens from 2 to 24. This is a time-varying covariate with data collected in select years. Following Paxton et al., I interpolate the missing values for years falling between these collection points (2006).⁷

In the second stage of the analysis, two measures are included in the models to account for factors relating to the differing characteristics of each country's development assistance programmes. First, I include a measure of donor structure, specifically the autonomy of the donor body from the ministry of foreign affairs in each donor country. This is a dummy variable, where I have coded autonomous donors as one, and set integrated donors as the reference category. Donor autonomy was coded to reflect the institutional

Table 1. Exponential models of rate of WID/GAD policy adoption, 1968–2003

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
WID/GAD count	0.13** (0.05)			
WINGO membership		0.14*** (0.04)		
CEDAW ratification			0.73 [^] (0.41)	
World Conferences on Women (pre-1985) Post Nairobi and Beijing, 1985 onwards				1.12* (0.48)
Constant	-4.06*** (0.51)	-4.88*** (0.57)	-3.41*** (0.32)	-3.68*** (0.42)
Log likelihood	-23.60	-24.16	-26.54	-24.92
Number of events	20	20	20	20
Number of countries	22	22	22	22
Country-years at risk	418.5	418.5	418.5	418.5

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. Reference categories in brackets.

[^]significant at $p < .1$; * significant at $p < .05$; ** significant at $p < .01$; *** significant at $p < .001$.

setup of each country's donor agency over the majority of the time they are included in the risk-set. Coding of this variable is shown in the Appendix. Second, I include a measure of overall donor generosity by including a time-varying covariate of ODA as a percentage of gross national income (GNI) in constant 2004 US dollars (Roodman, 2005). In the models this variable is logged to reduce skewness.

Results

Results from the first stage of my exploratory event history analysis of the rate of WID/GAD policy adoption are shown in Table 1. Results are provided in four models which each test a specific world polity variable of interest to test the hypotheses outlined earlier.

Model 1 includes the density measure count of WID/GAD policy adoptions or unit creation. The significant coefficient for the density measure indicates an increased rate of adoption for countries as the global count of WID/GAD policies increases. This decreased time means an increased rate of adoption, and confirms support for hypothesis H1. The influence of WID/GAD policy density is significant at the $p < .01$ level.

The influence of WINGO membership is tested in Model 2. The WINGO measure is significant at the $p < .001$ level and is associated with an increased rate of policy adoption. The greater the number of WINGO memberships held by a donor state's citizens the more quickly it is likely to adopt a WID/GAD gender policy within its development assistance donor. This confirms hypothesis H2.

In Model 3 I include the CEDAW ratification, which fails to meet the typical $p < .05$ threshold for significance, but does have a p value of less than .1. This marginal

significance suggests that support for hypothesis H3 regarding treaties and conferences is not confirmed in this model. The direction of the coefficient and the marginal significance suggest that countries ratifying the CEDAW are quicker to adopt a WID/GAD policy than those that have not, but this relationship merits further exploration in stage two of my analysis.

Model 4 includes the conference variable and shows that in the period from 1985 onwards, encompassing the conferences in Nairobi and Beijing, countries experienced a faster rate of WID/GAD policy adoption than in the pre-1985 era. This finding is significant at the $p < .05$ level and confirms the role of conferences outlined in hypothesis H3.

Table 1 does not include a full model incorporating all four of the main world polity influence variables in a single model, due to problems of multicollinearity between the measures. A typical solution to this problem would be to drop one or more of the variables from the analysis; however, because the article takes a specific exploratory focus on these factors in particular, I have elected to maintain the models as presented. Because my variables are count and time-period based dummies, there is significant correlation between the measures. This multicollinearity could not be reduced through transformation of the covariates, and yielded distorted coefficients for some of the measures. This collinearity does not affect the results as presented in this article, and is a regrettable side effect of working with count data and a small N dataset over time.⁸

Table 2. Exponential models of rate of WID/GAD policy adoption, 1968–2003

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Donor autonomy	0.16 (0.27)	0.19 (0.39)	0.00 (0.40)	0.14 (0.33)	0.17 (0.33)
Donor generosity (logged ODA % of GNI)	0.61 [^] (0.33)	1.03* (0.48)	0.56 (0.39)	0.73 [^] (0.38)	0.78 [^] (0.42)
WID/GAD count		0.16** (0.05)			
WINGO membership			0.14*** (0.04)		
CEDAW ratification (No)				0.84* (0.37)	
World Conferences on Women (pre-1985)					
Post Nairobi and Beijing, 1985 onwards					1.22** (0.47)
Constant	0.38 (1.85)	1.51 (2.49)	-1.63 (2.18)	0.64 (2.13)	0.67 (2.33)
Log likelihood	-26.51	-21.01	-23.32	-24.82	-23.11
Number of events	20	20	20	20	20
Number of countries	22	22	22	22	22
Country-years at risk	418.5	418.5	418.5	418.5	418.5

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. Reference categories in brackets.

[^]significant at $p < .1$; * significant at $p < .05$; ** significant at $p < .01$; *** significant at $p < .001$.

Testing for the two hypotheses related to donor structure (H4) and generosity (H5) is illustrated in Table 2. The five models in this table incorporate my measures for donor autonomy and generosity, first on their own in Model 1, and then alongside each of the world polity measures in Models 2 through 5. Although the direction of the coefficients for each variable is consistent with my prediction, neither is statistically significant throughout. These results fail to confirm my hypotheses regarding donor structure and autonomy (H4); however, some support is shown for H5. In Model 2 the significant coefficient for donor generosity demonstrates that more generous donors are more quickly going to adopt WID/GAD policy scripts. The significance of this measure does not meet the $p < .05$ threshold in other models, but is marginally significant at $p < .1$ in Models 1, 4 and 5.

Table 2 also shows that all four of my world polity measures are significant and confirm my hypothesis when donor structure and generosity are controlled for. Indeed, Model 4 shows that the CEDAW ratification is now acceptably significant at the $p < .05$ level, confirming the role of treaties in shaping WID/GAD policy adoption as hypothesized in H3.

Discussion

Three main factors can be identified as playing some part in the diffusion and adoption of WID or GAD policies or functional units within the major donor countries of the OECD DAC: (1) policy density and embeddedness in international organizations; (2) influence of the international community through treaties and conferences; and (3) domestic development assistance sector characteristics. I briefly address each of these areas.

First, policy density and nation-state embeddedness in international organizations appear to be important determinants of the diffusion of world culture policy models. My results show support for the hypotheses I outlined in both these areas: when taken on their own, both policy density and embeddedness appear to be salient factors in the diffusion of gender policy among the community of development assistance donors.

Measuring density as the count of donors already possessing a gender unit or policy allows us to convey the notion of a critical mass of donors adopting the idea and influencing their peers in doing so. The fact that the latter half of the donors considered in the analysis adopted a WID/GAD policy or unit in a 10-year period from 1992 to 2002 suggests that in the early 1990s a critical mass of donors sufficient to cause a tipping point or norm cascade caused the spread of the policy priority to the remaining DAC members (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). Furthermore, given that many of the most influential donors (Sweden, US, UK and Canada) had adopted a WID/GAD policy early on also may have influenced later adoption by some of the smaller donors.

The embeddedness of donors in the international women's movement also appears to have an effect on their expression of women's rights and gender equality in their development assistance donor policies. The spread of these values among donor institutions cannot be separated from the spread of similar principles throughout western democracies in the last few decades, and as has been shown elsewhere, these principles are directly linked to the work of the international women's movement (Berkovitch, 1999a, 1999b; Paxton

et al., 2006). Other international organizations could equally be considered in playing a role in shaping donor policy. For instance, the rapid growth in the number and type of international development NGOs in the past century can also be expected to demonstrate some effect on donor policy (Chabbott, 1999); however, because of the direct link of donor WID/GAD policy to values and norms championed by the WINGOs of the international women's movement, donor embeddedness in this type of organization is the most relevant for this case.

Second, the influence on donors of the international community through treaties and conferences is another world polity factor that helps to explain the diffusion of common policies among diverse donors. My results show that, controlling for donor characteristics, the ratification of the CEDAW was powerful enough to shape donor institutions to include a women's rights or gender component, as the requirements of the convention set out expectations for government institutions in adopting countries to adopt special measures to combat gender inequality and discrimination against women. The fact that ratification is not significant in the first stage analysis raises some alternative explanations that need to be considered. For instance, the implementation of international treaties following ratification does not always do justice to the spirit of the values and principles outlined within treaties (Wotipka and Ramirez, 2008). Given that all but three of the donors included in the study ratified the CEDAW in the 1980s, but more than half of the sample of donors did not develop a donor gender policy until later in the 1990s, the notion of decoupling evident in the slow implementation of CEDAW principles needs to be considered. The symbolic support for women's rights evident in CEDAW ratification is not matched immediately by more substantive change in donor policy.

This decoupling and lack of substantive conformity to CEDAW expectations may have been rectified to some extent by the renewed focus on women's rights and gender equality that surrounded the UN World Conferences on Women in Nairobi in 1985 and Beijing in 1995, as each country in my sample would have participated in both conferences. What are some of the possibilities in how this influence was exerted? One option is that the donor role in supporting the attendance of many developing country NGO participants in parallel meetings to the Beijing conference may have helped to spur a donor focus on gender that was only weak in earlier periods. In addition, donor representatives included in the official government delegations to these conferences may have played a role in returning to the donor agency with greater motivation to adopt policy in the gender and development area. These possibilities also exist at lower-profile international meetings on the topic of gender, including the annual meetings of the DAC network on gender. Since 1981, the DAC has had an internal network of donors to discuss and explore women's issues and gender equality. On a smaller scale, these DAC network meetings can work to serve a similar function for donors that the UN conferences play at a national level. As such, both international treaties and conferences or meetings seem to have a role to play in the diffusion of common donor policies, whether at the national level or in terms of individual donor participation in some aspect of an international conference or meeting.

Finally, despite the weak statistical evidence illustrated in the previous section, my argument that the structure and level of generosity of the development assistance donor

has an effect on the readiness of a donor to accept externally generated world polity policy models bears further investigation. With donor generosity showing statistical significance in some models, my assertion that the more generous donor – those associated with greater humanitarian motivations rather than national interest – will more quickly adopt the policy models of the world polity is not rejected. This argument, however, would only hold in the case of a world polity model which has underlying humanitarian motivations. In the case of a policy area such as security-sector reform or conflict prevention, this relationship may not hold because of the closer link of that policy model to the national interests of donor countries. In such an instance, I might expect the opposite relationship to hold true. Those donors with a greater degree of motivation linked to national interest – less generous, and possibly more closely linked to their ministry of foreign affairs – would then be more likely to adopt a world polity model derived from national interest values and norms.

The limitations of the event history methodology and the small sample of donor countries involved may be partially to blame for the inconsistent results shown earlier. Selection of gender policy as the focus for this article's quantitative analysis may have been substituted for any number of other donor policy models including environment, governance, or even security-sector reform; however, these analyses were not pursued here for lack of sufficient event data. Results from analysis of these issues might highlight different factors, as nation-state interface with the world polity is liable to be different depending on the subject at hand.

The quantitatively measured relationships between variables representing different aspects of the world polity nation-state interface identified here do only a little to explain social processes at work in the world polity. The detailed interactions of the nation-state and the international community are in fact always person-to-person interactions involving officials, experts and organization representatives. Complementary research using qualitative methods to examine these processes has already demonstrated this to be the case (Swiss, 2011). It is possible that these interactions account for the actual transfer of world cultural models from the world society to the nation-state level, and also to other organizations and individuals. Using the example of the creation of gender policies and units by development assistance donors has simply been a means of illustrating this process at the highest level. Drilling down into the actual interactions and human agency involved in taking policy decisions is the next step required in this research agenda.

Conclusion

This article has illustrated the influence of the world polity on the development assistance sector. By showing that international organizations and conferences, other donors and domestic contextual factors have shaped the adoption of gender policies among development donors, the article has demonstrated that development assistance and its related policy priorities can be considered a manifestation of world polity institutional frameworks. Furthermore, my research shows that quantitative evidence of world society influence extends beyond the spread of large-scale institutional models such as development assistance to the lower-level policy details expressed within these

institutions. In this sense, the institutions and policies created, spread and refined by the world society can be seen to have tiers of complexity, with more detailed policy models addressing certain sectors nested within broader institutional frameworks. This nesting of world society institutions and policies has not been explored previously in the literature, and my findings suggest it is a phenomenon that merits further investigation.

Additionally, the findings in this article highlight the complexity of modelling a social process such as this quantitatively at the macro international level, and arguably point towards the need for other research methods to flesh out in richer detail the processes at work in this situation. Indeed, existing research investigating these same questions using qualitative techniques has worked to illustrate these processes in greater detail by answering questions about the common social processes and mechanisms at work in the development assistance sector in several countries (Swiss, 2011). By combining the findings from this quantitative event history analysis with future qualitative findings, it will be possible to demonstrate in greater detail the means by which world polity influences in the development assistance sector have led to greater consensus and conformity of policy among donors in recent years.

Appendix: Data coding

Country	Formation of donor agency/unit	Gender unit/policy	CEDAW ratification	Donor autonomy
Australia	1974	1976	1983	Autonomous
Austria	1974	1995	1982	Integrated
Belgium	1962	1981	1985	Integrated
Canada	1968	1976	1981	Autonomous
Denmark	1971	1987	1983	Integrated
Finland	1972	1995	1986	Integrated
France	1992	2000	1983	Autonomous
Germany	1975	2001	1985	Autonomous
Greece	1999	2002	1983	Integrated
Ireland	1974	1996	1985	Integrated
Italy	1987	1998	1985	Integrated
Japan	1974	1992	1985	Autonomous
Luxembourg	1985	1997	1989	Autonomous
Netherlands	1965	1986	1991	Integrated
New Zealand	2002	2001	1985	Autonomous
Norway	1968	1975	1981	Integrated
Portugal	2003	–	1980	Integrated
Spain	1988	–	1984	Integrated
Sweden	1965	1968	1980	Autonomous
Switzerland	1977	1993	1997	Integrated
UK	1961	1988	1986	Autonomous
US	1961	1973	–	Autonomous

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Notes

1. For instance, in recent years some countries of the former Warsaw Pact have become ODA donors in their own right. Furthermore, more economically advanced countries in Asia like China, Thailand, and even India, have begun providing development assistance to some neighbouring countries. Indeed, in November 2009, the Republic of Korea joined the OECD DAC to become a recognized provider of ODA.
2. Indeed, the diversity of implementation of these policies and units shows that despite similar form (isomorphism) within the world polity, there is striking differences between states when it comes to application of these common models. This leads to the phenomenon of decoupling within the world polity.
3. Event history analysis 'risk-sets' are the group of observations, in this case countries, counted as 'at risk' for the event to take place. When the event takes place, event history analysis acknowledges a 'transition' from 'origin' to 'destination state'. Five donors who began providing aid later than the rest of the DAC enter the risk-set at later dates: Ireland, 1974; Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain, 1980; Greece, 1996.
4. Please see Appendix for a full list of coding of the dependent and other explanatory variables.
5. For further information, see the year of CEDAW ratification listed for each country in the Appendix.
6. Other models including a categorical variable that accounts for all four of the World Conferences on Women post-1975 yield similar results to this, showing that the dichotomy of pre- and post-1985 is the salient marker for the timing of these conferences. This is consistent with the literature on how gender and development became more central to the international women's rights agenda post-Nairobi (Moser and Moser, 2005).
7. The WINGOs data were collected and coded by Paxton et al. (2006) and examine a select sample of 30 WINGOs over the time period from 1930 to 2003 in 196 countries. Though 30 WINGOs is a low number in the context of the wide array of WINGO actors involved in the international women's movement, I argue that the variable accurately reflects the extent of embeddedness of a society in the international women's movement. As an alternative measure of embeddedness, I ran models controlling for the formation of a national-level chapter of Oxfam in each donor country to proxy national embeddedness in development-related civil society. The results showed significance when the Oxfam variable was included on its own in a model, but the *p*-values dropped below the acceptable threshold of significance when donor autonomy and structure variables were included. Given that WINGO membership is more closely linked to discourse on women's rights and gender equality, I decided to proceed with only this measure of embeddedness.
8. Results for this model are available upon request.

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Biographical note

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Résumé

Les femmes et l'égalité des sexes adoptés comme priorités de l'aide au développement : approche par l'analyse historique des événements des effets de la politique planétaire

La concordance croissante entre les politiques d'aide au développement et la référence à un nouveau consensus mondial sur les questions de développement apparaît comme l'une des tendances marquantes de ces dernières années parmi les acteurs de l'aide internationale. Cette étude fait appel aux techniques d'analyse historique des événements pour mener une étude exploratoire et évaluer les effets de la politique planétaire sur l'expansion des politiques en matière d'égalité des sexes et de développement et sur les structures institutionnelles, concernant 22 pays donateurs du Comité d'Aide au Développement de l'OCDE (Organisation de Développement et de Coopération Économiques) entre 1968 et 2003. Les conclusions de cette étude montrent l'influence d'autres donateurs, de la société civile internationale, des conférences et des traités internationaux comme facteurs déterminants dans l'homogénéisation des politiques d'aide au développement et dans l'adoption de politiques en matière d'égalité des sexes par les organisations donatrices.

Mots clés: Aide internationale, donateurs, égalité des sexes, femmes, globalisation, théorie de la politique planétaire

Resumen

La adopción del género y las mujeres como prioridades de la ayuda al desarrollo: Un análisis histórico de eventos de los efectos de la comunidad mundial

En los últimos tiempos se ha producido una fuerte tendencia hacia el incremento de las similitudes en las políticas de ayuda al desarrollo así como las referencias a la emergencia de un consenso global sobre las cuestiones de desarrollo. Este artículo usa las técnicas del análisis histórico de eventos para llevar a cabo un análisis exploratorio y testar los efectos de la comunidad global sobre la difusión de políticas y estructuras institucionales de género y desarrollo entre 22 donantes de ayuda del Comité de Asistencia de la Organización para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo Económico desde 1968 hasta 2003. Los resultados muestran la influencia de otros donantes, la sociedad civil internacional, los tratados internacionales y conferencias como fuertes determinantes de la homogeneización de la asistencia a la política de desarrollo y la adopción de políticas de género por las organizaciones donantes.

Palabras clave: ayuda externa, donantes, género, globalización, mujeres, teoría de la comunidad mundial