

Comments on

The new global agenda and the future of the multilateral development bank system

This paper suggests ways to improve policy and operational coherence among multilateral development banks (MDBs) and outlines how better shareholder governance could bring this about. It also focuses on the need for durably financing infrastructure investment in developing countries as well as for regional and global public goods.

Overall, the paper is professional, well written (“cities where we cannot move or breathe”) and set into the global context of the UN Agenda 2030. I recommend it for publication as an e-journal article, despite some criticism as indicated below. I do so under the provision that the Kiel editors of the e-journal consciously want to publish a rehash of what has been published at [Brookings](#), [CGD](#) and [ODI websites](#).

The paper reads somewhat like an advertisement for multilateral bank coordination and lending at a time when the multilaterals are under assault, notably by the likes of Trump-Bolton. The discussion with a ‘green lens’ fails to review the environmental damage linked to past MDB lending. It does not review evidence of forced displacements or ‘white elephants’.

More importantly in view of the current assault on multilaterals, the paper does not discuss more fundamental issues nor refer to them, such as have been raised by the Meltzer Commission in 2000 and discussed in “Loans or Grants?” in the [Review for World Economics](#): why not avoid the proliferation of multilateral finance (see also [this e-journal](#)) if a mix of grants and market loans can in principle deliver the same results as do the multilateral MDB bureaucracies? Rather, it takes the benefits of MDBs for granted and provides suggestions for reducing overlap and duplication (but not mandate creep).

Another important limit of the paper is its ignorance of critical voices (and now evidence) on the [G20 Compact for Africa](#). That ignorance leads the authors to neglect the client-limits for MDB leverage instruments (blending), notably in low-income Africa. The paper would benefit from delineating those limits.

The literature is cited mostly own prior work or is quite erratic. For example, rather than citing Ahluwalia on GPG finance, the recent [ODI paper by Inge Kaul](#), although fully on the GPG/MDB nexus stressed by the four authors, is not even mentioned.

Overall, the paper preaches to insiders who are convinced of the need of MDBs and is written by insiders, four former officials from multilaterals. It will not convince those dark forces that try to attack multilateral banks. And it is too outdated now and unbalanced as to be presented again in policy fora (as it was December 2017 to the G-20 Eminent Persons Group Symposium on Global Financial Governance in Frankfurt).