
Global Public Goods

A Threat to Nordic Humanitarianism?

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10.1 The Notion of Global Public Goods

A “global public goods” (GPG) approach to reducing poverty and countering other major challenges has gained increasing support in recent years. Does this sound the death knell of traditional development aid? And what might it imply, more specifically, for the Scandinavian countries?

The concept of a “global public good” is rather new, and can best be understood against the background of the more well-established term “public good,” which derives originally from the work of the famous economist Paul Samuelson (1954). A public good has two properties: First, it is “non-rivalrous,” meaning that consumption of the good by one person does not reduce the quantity available to others. Second, it is “non-excludable,” meaning that it is impossible to prevent anyone from consuming it. A lighthouse is sometimes used as an example: The light it emits is not “used up” by ships benefitting from it; nor can one prevent them from doing so.

Until recently the term was used to relate to the level of the nation state, one of whose purposes, and duties, is to provide such public goods: roads, a police force, and so on. It is interesting to note that a public good is one which will, by implication, necessarily be undersupplied by the market; the state therefore needs to step in, in the interests of all citizens. But this responsibility applies only at the national level. Now, thanks largely to an initiative led by Inge Kaul, the first Director of the United Nations Human Development Report, the concept has been extended to the global level (Kaul, Grunberg, and Stern, 1999). Examples of global public goods that are typically cited include control of communicable diseases, combatting climate change, and well-regulated international trade and finance systems. But it is apparent that the original definition,

by Samuelson, is very restrictive, and there are in practice few cases that strictly fulfil both criteria – “non-rivalrous” and “non-excludable.” Recent policy debates concerning GPGs, however, generally adopt – if only implicitly – a somewhat less demanding interpretation, as discussed below. For the purposes of this article, I shall adopt a rather simple definition: A GPG approach is one which finances global initiatives that benefit all, not only the poor.

Just as in the case of national public goods, a GPG approach necessarily implies that some entity needs to step in – because the market will not serve. Ideally, the United Nations system would be that entity, and it has to some extent served this purpose. But it is weak and underfunded. Finance for global public goods is therefore very limited, relative to what is spent on public goods at national level. It is possible, however, that the severity of major, shared global challenges – such as climate change and pandemics – may be enough to generate an increased level of support, perhaps even financed by some sort of global tax. Some have, as I shall discuss, proposed that a GPG approach should replace traditional development assistance. This view may be understood against the background of a long history of criticism of foreign aid, dating back almost as far as aid itself. Apart from more “ideological” critiques of aid as imperialism (e.g. Hayter 1971), aid has been criticized for simply failing to achieve its intended purpose. In *The Contradictions of Foreign Aid* (McNeill 1981), I analyzed some of the reasons. These seemed to be built into the very structure of the system, which created the bizarre situation that while the total volume of aid was woefully small, a major problem for donors was simply how to get the money spent. This was primarily because of the complex procedures surrounding aid funding, put in place because recipient governments were not sufficiently trusted, a situation which still persists today. The apparently unending challenge facing donors is reflected in the titles of two books by the same author that span a period of 20 years: *Foreign Aid Reconsidered* (Riddell 1987) and *Does Aid Really Work?* (Riddell 2007), and, perhaps, in the fact that my book was republished in 2019.

The GPG approach was designed partly in response to these criticisms of aid. But what are the implications for Scandinavian humanitarianism? I will discuss this question by first summarizing some of the debates concerning the idea of global public goods, followed by a presentation of two specific examples of this approach: a programme to counter climate change, REDD + (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation), and a global initiative for producing a vaccine against COVID-19.

Claims to the effect that foreign aid is an inefficient instrument for development have, in the last couple of decades, been made with increasing force and frequency, and many have been professing the “end of aid” (Gill 2018). It is against this background that a GPG approach has become increasingly promoted. Sumner and Mallett conclude that “a significant shift in the aid system is required” from “aid as resource transfers to something different . . . collective global action” (2012: 72). According to them, recent interest in GPGs

is fuelled, in part, by an understanding of globalization and its impacts. Certainly globalization, on the basis of several measures, has greatly increased in this century, as has concern about its impacts. The main rationale behind providing GPGs is to regulate or compensate for the negative effects of global public “bads,” or “products” which generate negative externalities across borders and reduce utility, such as air pollution, civil war and violent conflict, disease, HIV/AIDS, international terrorism, and financial shocks (Sumner and Mallett 2012: 63).

In this same vein, Severino and Ray (2009: 5) have argued that “our conventional understanding of ODA is looking more and more outdated, becoming increasingly irrelevant as a tool for action.” According to them, the global public goods theory brought to light “the fantastic disconnect between old concepts and new realities. It was the first time that the task of dealing with market failures that characterize world commons was given the statute of public policy” (Severino and Ray 2009: 7). They list the provision of GPGs as one of the three key tasks of international development assistance today. They also observe the relative reduction in significance of bilateral donors since the 1990s; a phenomenon also noted by Sumner and Mallett (2012).

Not only have the size and number of major international NGOs (e.g. Oxfam) expanded but we have also begun to witness the emergence of a range of new actors, from private foundations (e.g. the Gates Foundation) and businesses (e.g. Project (RED)), to transnational thematic funds (e.g. GAVI). Additionally, there is now an array of different sources of funding and aid channels. For example, at the 2010 MDGs Summit, the Leading Group on Innovative Financing for Development proposed a “Global Solidarity Levy” which would be used to finance global public goods. (Sumner and Mallett 2012)

Fifteen years ago, a major study was undertaken entitled *The Future of Development Financing: Challenges, Scenarios and Strategic Choices* (Sagasti, Bezanson, and Prada 2005), with substantial support from

Sweden, which also hosted the Secretariat. It is interesting to quote what this study had to say about GPGs in relation to aid. The following is extracted from table 3.2. Motivations for development assistance:

International solidarity and religious motivations: 1) Altruism, ethical and humanitarian concerns; 2) Religious proselytism:

Narrow and enlightened self interest: 1) Strategic and security interests; 2) Political interests, which focus on obtaining political support for foreign and domestic policies; 3) Economic and commercial interests.

Provision of international public goods: 1) Emergence of regional and global problems, which concern both donor and recipient nations; 2) Maintaining stability of the international system, to foster the long-term interests of donor countries. (Sagasti et al. 2005: 51)

In summary, motivations for financing GPGs are very mixed, and range across the full spectrum from self-interest to altruism. Some would locate GPGs in the middle of this spectrum. But Smith and MacKellar are more skeptical about motives: “[T]he GPG concept is firmly rooted in the self-interested use of domestic monies” (Smith and MacKellar 2007: 4). They also see a number of problems with the GPG approach (especially within the health sector, with which they are well acquainted). Three of these may be briefly stated.

According to Smith and MacKellar, the concept of global public goods encourages policymakers in rich countries “to view health assistance not only as humanitarian but as a selfish investment in protecting the health of their *own* populations” (Smith and MacKellar 2007: 1). Also, “Since a GPG calls for collective action, then, clearly, one’s favourite program must be producing a GPG. This has given rise to ‘fuzziness’ and ‘trendiness’” (Smith and MacKellar 2007: 2). They argue that “the GPG perspective has informed a number of major new initiatives to provide ... communicable disease control. These include the GAVI Alliance ..., Stop TB, Roll Back Malaria, and others” (Smith and MacKellar 2007: 3). But this has, unfortunately, “encouraged so-called ‘vertical interventions’ (e.g. provision of vaccines rather than support to public health systems)” just at the time that “many in the public health community moved ... from towards broader approaches.” “The danger is that the GPG agenda will promote focused interventions easy to ‘sell’ to voters at home because they address an identifiable menace, at the expense of broader health system strengthening” (Smith and MacKellar 2007: 3). A third important issue they raise is whether international assistance for GPGs comes at the expense of aid. They refer to a study

by Reisen, Soto, and Weithoener (2004) that “concluded that the average bilateral donor’s allocation of US\$1 to GPG production reduced its spending on non-GPG foreign assistance by US\$0.25” (Smith and MacKellar 2007: 3).

The highly influential development economist Jeffrey Sachs, “a great fan of the Nordics” (see below), sees GPGs as the future. Giving evidence to the UK parliament Select Committee on Economic Affairs, he said: “This does not mean the end of international financing; it just means that we would move to international financing for truly global public goods, whether it is the environment, disease surveillance or other things, but not aid per se.”¹

The issue of global public goods is discussed in Simon Reid-Henry’s contribution to this volume. Here, he presents “the history of two touchstone moments in the history of Nordic internationalism” and describes how Gro Harlem Brundtland displayed a policy of what he calls pragmatism, first in her role as head of the World Commission on Environment and Development (1983–1987), and later as Director General of the World Health Organization (1998–2003): driven by the political realism that characterizes social democratic politics, and seeking to mobilize technological and market-driven solutions in pursuit of this end. Gro supported the technical argument of economists, such as Jeffrey Sachs whom she commissioned to lead the World Health Organization (WHO) Commission on Macroeconomics and Health. This kind of approach replaced idealism and altruism by hard-headed analysis. This appears to align closely with GPG thinking. The rationale underlying global public goods is technocratic, dispassionate. It is a logical way to address the challenges of the world, motivated by the mindset of the economist more than the idealist. Or, indeed, the revolutionary. GPGs represent a stark contrast to the aspirations of the New International Economic Order (NIEO) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1974 (UNGA 1974) in the wake of the oil crisis following upon the Yom Kippur War in 1973.² Rather, GPGs may be seen as a sort

¹ House of Lords, Select Committee on Economic Affairs Inquiry on the Economic Impact and Effectiveness of Development Aid. Evidence Session No. 13. 6 December 2011. www.parliament.uk/documents/lords-committees/economic-affairs/DevelopmentAid/ucEAC06122011Ev13.pdf.

² See Marklund, Chapter 8, who writes: “The insight that development aid under present conditions would not substantially alter global power relations provided one of the basic tenets of the vocal demands for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) in the early 1970s.”

of global welfare state. This is something which one might regard the Scandinavian countries as particularly well placed to promote.

To quote Jeffrey Sachs again,

As I have worked around the world for the past quarter century, I have repeatedly – some would say relentlessly – pointed to the Nordic model as the proof that modern capitalism can be combined with decency, fairness, trust, honesty, and environmental sustainability. The Nordic Way – essentially the Social Democratic Way – has been the proof of concept to help convince the world that there is indeed a path between the vulgar inequalities of US capitalism and the failed central planning of so many moribund economies. (Sachs 2015: 36)

But is there perhaps a cost – for Scandinavian countries – in moving from traditional foreign aid to GPGs? How well does the latter approach fit with humanitarianism, so important for the international reputation and national identity of these countries? To provide some empirical basis for discussion of this issue, I will illustrate the dilemma by reference to two relevant examples of a GPG approach: REDD+ and vaccine production.

10.2 REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation)³

Climate change is a massive challenge facing Scandinavia, and indeed the whole world. As a result of a series of United Nations Climate Conferences – so-called Conference of the Parties – and lengthy technical reports by the International Panel on Climate Change (almost) all nations have agreed on the need to take concerted action to reduce carbon emissions. To express it in the technical language of economics, these countries have all agreed to contribute to the provision of a “global public good.” One of the major initiatives that falls under this heading is the so-called REDD+ program (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation). As its name implies, REDD+ involves seeking to reduce carbon emissions by – to put it simply – paying people, firms, or countries not to cut down trees. The intention was that REDD+ would create the basis for an international (“cap and trade”) system of tradeable emissions quotas which would be self-financing. A “cap” would be placed

³ The additional “plus” sign refers to conservation of forest carbon stocks, sustainable management of forests, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks.

on each country's permitted level of annual emissions. A country (typically rich) could exceed this level by buying part of the assigned quota of another country (typically poor) which had a level of emissions lower than their assigned quota.

The idea of REDD+ was first presented during the Kyoto protocol negotiations in 1997, but formal recognition of REDD+ was not achieved until December 2007 at the 13th Conference of the Parties under the Bali Action Plan. Here, Norway announced that it would commit an amount of 3 billion NOK (approximately 500 million USD) annually, for five years, for rainforest protection. This is a huge sum by any standards. (And Norway is still by far the largest REDD+ donor, accounting for about 50 percent of all global funding.) To put the matter in perspective: This financial pledge corresponded to about 0.1 percent of Norway's gross domestic product, a figure that is comparable (in relative terms) to the total amount of aid given by some donor countries, such as the USA (0.15 percent). Not only was this a massive financial commitment, the decision was taken with lightning speed. "The decision came as a surprise to the general Norwegian public and most of the public administration" (Hermansen et al. 2017: 8). The story began in September 2007 when the leaders of two Norwegian environmental NGOs sent a letter to leading Norwegian politicians, proposing that Norway should allocate 6 billion NOK p.a. to the initiative (Hermansen and Kasa 2014). Only two months later, in December, the Prime Minister made a massive financial commitment at the meeting in Bali (a sum amounting to exactly half of that suggested by the two NGOs). And approximately one month after this, Norway formally initiated its International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI) as part of a cross-party climate settlement. During this process, however, a decision was taken that this – a seemingly classic example of a global public good – would nevertheless be classified as aid.

In the context of this book, it is appropriate to raise two questions. First, how come such a huge financial commitment could receive such overwhelming support: from all but one of Norway's seven political parties? Second, why was it classified as aid? Both these questions lead to interesting insights into the motivations of Norwegian "humanitarianism." I will address each in turn.

REDD+ was initially presented by its advocates as a "win-win," and later "win-win-win" policy: In other words it was argued that this program would not only counter climate change, but also reduce poverty and protect the world's biodiversity. Later on again, in Colombia, REDD+ money was suggested to be used as an incentive in peace negotiations:

yet a fourth “win” to add to the total. REDD+ would thus appear to be a perfect fit for a Scandinavian approach to fulfilling their duties as good global citizens, ticking all the boxes referred to in this book.

For Norway, especially, one can see the attraction of this particular GPG. Some have expressed the matter very simply: It diverts attention from Norway’s embarrassing role as a major exporter of oil and gas and, some would add, the investments of its massive sovereign wealth fund in fossil fuel-related activities.⁴

In their article “Norway: A Dissonant Cognitive Leader,” Boasson and Lahn (2017) describe the very active role played by Norway in the United Nations Climate Conferences: “Government documents and officials frequently stress Norway’s ability to act as a bridge builder, aiding the negotiating process by facilitating agreement among other actors” (Boasson and Lahn 2017: 198). And Norway was generous in financial terms also, quite apart from REDD+: “In the period 2008–2012, Norway ranked highest in absolute terms among countries’ voluntary contributions to the UNFCCC process” (Boasson and Lahn 2017: 198). But, as they point out, the country lacked a comprehensive domestic climate policy. Instead of focusing on domestic GHG reductions Norway preferred “contributing to solutions that work well on a global scale” (Boasson and Lahn 2017: 200). In terms of international politics this has been quite a successful strategy, since Norway has not received much criticism in the climate debate. But the situation is rather different at the domestic level, where the oil industry has been a controversial political issue for more than 20 years. This is the background against which the huge – and very rapid – commitment to REDD+ funding was made (Boasson and Lahn 2017: 201). The initiative arose “in the middle of the run-up to the negotiations of a cross-political climate settlement in the Norwegian Parliament” and it “became one of the hottest proposals in the climate policy ‘bidding war’ between the government and the opposition.” Against the background of the long-standing debate about Norway’s climate policy, the red–green coalition government did not wish to be seen as less ambitious than the more conservative opposition (Sølhusvik 2012: 181).

But why – to turn to my second question – was REDD+ classified as aid? Reducing carbon emissions is clearly a classic GPG: Norway

⁴ Following criticism, especially from NGOs, the Norges Bank Investment Management (NBIM) finally, in 2013, included “severe environmental damage” among the criteria for excluding companies from the investment portfolio. (Hermansen et al. 2017).

contributes, but also benefits, by virtue of countering climate change, yet the government chose to define the money as development assistance. This was particularly tempting, since it enabled Norway to achieve the magic figure of 1 percent of gross domestic product devoted to aid. In parliament, there was little resistance to this decision, although “some NGOs working with poverty and development, as well as the Christian Democratic Party and the Socialist Left Party, have from the very start been critical of the possible negative effects on poverty reduction by redirecting aid money to rainforest projects in relatively rich countries like Brazil” (Hermansen and Kasa 2014, 16).

Not only are there principled reasons for not treating REDD+ as aid, it also led to very anomalous situations. Brazil, a middle-income member of the G20, appears – to their irritation – as a major recipient of Norwegian development assistance (Hermansen and Kasa 2014: 16). So too does Indonesia, not a particularly poor country.

Another anomaly is that the program has been administered not by either of Norway’s normal aid organizations – Norad (the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation) or the Ministry of International Development – but by the Ministry of the Environment. The latter Ministry does not have experience or competence in dealing with aid – and very little with tropical forestry. (In order to implement the programme they relied very heavily on a Norwegian NGO, the Rainforest Foundation, and foreign consultants). The decision to break from past practice was agreed between Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg and Erik Solheim who was at that time, and most conveniently, both Minister of the Environment and Minister of International Development. According to an interview with Solheim, part of the reason for this decision was that

this is a political project to drive the climate fight. To locate it within Norad was never an alternative as I see it, because the leaders of the program needed daily access to me as the Minister. This was a signature Norwegian effort to change global behavior and could only succeed at the highest level of politics, meaning at the center of the Ministry. (Hermansen et al. 2017: 8)

This could be seen as a minor, and “one-off,” bureaucratic decision. Or it could be seen as a portent: the implementation of global public goods initiatives may in the future be the responsibility not of aid agencies but line ministries.

REDD+ certainly turned out to be a very difficult program to implement. One of the greatest problems was how to get the money spent.

This is because REDD+ is based on “performance-based” payments, i.e. funds are, in theory, paid out only on the basis of proven reductions in emissions – which are not easy to establish. Furthermore, there are certain conditions attached which derive from Norway’s policies for development aid, which would perhaps not apply if this were classified as GPG funding.

The REDD+ programme would appear to be a good example of a GPG approach, since combatting climate change benefits both rich and poor. But for reasons of national interest and political convenience, Norway chose to define it as aid. This may perhaps not be possible in future. It is the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) that determines what may properly be included in each country’s annual development assistance statistics,⁵ and they are beginning to be restrictive on this issue, as my second example will show.⁶

10.3 Vaccine Production

In the health sector, it is arguable that a shift from foreign aid to more of a GPG approach is already well underway in Norway. According to Sandberg and Andresen, “the transition of global health from being a subject of development aid to becoming part of the foreign policy agenda started at the turn of the millennium with the creation of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization and the leadership of Brundtland in the World Health Organization” (2010: 302). They identify the government white paper on foreign policy, entitled “Interests, Responsibility and Opportunities: Key Strategies of Norwegian Foreign Policy” (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009), as marking “A new and expanded understanding of national interests in the face of globalization” (Sandberg and Andresen 2010: 306). This contrasts with the past, when, according to Lunde (2008), Norway was reluctant to

⁵ By a great irony, Erik Solheim, the Norwegian minister who was instrumental in classifying REDD+ as aid, left that post to become head of OECD-DAC. In that role he had to inform Norway that they had not – in the relevant year – achieved the 1 percent target, because, according to OECD-DAC rules, aid statistics are based on expenditures not commitments, and REDD+ money was not getting spent.

⁶ There is also ongoing discussion, not only referring to Norway, about whether expenditure on migrants should count as aid. As Thomas Gammeltoft-Hansen (Chapter 2) notes, the migration policy of the Scandinavian countries potentially clashes with its nation brands more generally.

assert foreign policy in terms of its own national interests. According to Andresen and Sandberg, national interests have “come to include new issues, where securing global public goods, such as improved environment or control of infectious disease, is seen as essential to secure Norwegian societal interests” (Sandberg and Andresen 2010: 306).

The case of global health, which they explore, is one “where an issue that has traditionally been confined to the development aid and public health specialists, has changed to become part of new and broader conceptualizations of Norwegian interests in a globalized world” (Sandberg and Andresen 2010: 310). Here, Jonas Gahr Støre, the Norwegian Foreign Minister, played a key role. He had earlier worked as Chief of Staff to Brundtland in WHO, and “[T]he deliberate move to place health on the foreign policy agenda was therefore a continuation of Støre’s engagement with health in WHO” (Sandberg and Andresen 2010: 315).

Sandberg and Andresen identify GAVI – the Vaccine Alliance – as “a key starting point for the broadening of the Norwegian global health portfolio” (2010: 310). GAVI was established in 1999 when the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) donated the sum of \$750 million to fund the production of vaccines against certain diseases associated especially with child mortality and morbidity in poor countries. This is an extreme example of the increased scale of private foundation finance, noted above, which has resulted in a huge shift in the balance of influence at international level, at the expense of WHO. As noted above (see also Blume, McNeill, and Roalkvam 2013), although GAVI has brought very considerable benefits, it has also been the subject of some criticism – most notably for favoring “vertical,” hi-tech programs at the expense of strengthening national health systems (Storeng 2014). The funds provided by BMGF have since been far more than matched by national donors – especially Norway. During the first five years of GAVI, Norway not only remained the largest donor country in the GAVI Alliance, but GAVI was also the biggest single program in the Norwegian development aid budget with NOK 500 million yearly.

Whatever criticisms there may be of GAVI, the benefits accrue almost entirely to poor countries, so this is not a case of a GPG. Financing for research into a vaccine against COVID-19, however, is very different. As is well known, COVID-19, at least initially, hit rich countries much harder than poor. Every country had an immediate and powerful interest in producing a vaccine. They also had strong motives for collaboration: sharing information, non-patenting, etc. (By contrast, the Ebola outbreak

impacted almost entirely a small number of poor countries. There was a rapid, and rather successful, global response which was very largely driven by national interest, and aimed at preventing its spread to rich countries.⁷ This proved successful; and as a result Ebola returned to the category of “neglected diseases,” as the subsequent Ebola epidemics in the Democratic Republic of the Congo demonstrate (de Bengy Puyvallee, and Storeng 2017; Honigsbaum 2017)). In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Norway, like many other countries, has devoted very significant funds to counter the disease, some spent in Norway, others as a contribution to a collaborative international effort. This would certainly appear to count as a good example of a GPG.

Here, as with REDD+, there has been debate in Norway as to whether such funding should be classified as aid. The following account relies heavily on the online journal *Development Today* (DT), a source of independent comment on aid in Nordic countries.

CEPI (The Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations) was established in 2016 by a consortium including Norway, India, the Gates Foundation, and the Wellcome Trust, to coordinate and fund research on vaccines for pathogens prevalent in low-income countries. (Swedish aid for research on vaccines has, at least until 2020, been channeled through the Seoul-based International Vaccine Institute, which only targets neglected tropical diseases.) Since January 2020, CEPI has provided support to eight consortia around the world working on COVID-19 vaccine candidates. “CEPI has launched an appeal of USD 2 billion for this work, and has received pledges amounting to USD 765 million, most of this funded by bilateral aid.”⁸ (By comparison, donors have so far contributed USD 550 million to the United Nations’ USD 2 billion humanitarian appeal on COVID-19.)

Norway proposed to the OECD that grants to CEPI be reportable as official development assistance (ODA). The DAC Secretariat initially accepted this, but stated in early 2020 that they would re-visit the question. But soon after, DAC concluded that “research for a vaccine for COVID-19 would not count as ODA as such a vaccine would benefit

⁷ This stimulated debate as to how the international community could best respond to future pandemics. See Moon et al. (2015). One initiative was the World Bank’s Pandemic Emergency Financing Facility (PEF). See Stein and Sridhar (2017).

⁸ D. A. Usher, “Donors Strongly Defend Use of Aid to Fund Coronavirus Vaccine Research,” *Development Today*, 21 April 2020. www.development-today.com/archive/dt-2020/dt-3-2020/donors-strongly-defend-use-of-oda-to-fund-coronavirus-vaccine.

developed countries as much as developing countries, and should therefore be considered as contributing to addressing a global challenge.” The OECD makes a distinction between CEPI’s original core work, which targeted vaccines for infectious diseases affecting primarily developing countries, and the recent focus on supporting research on coronavirus vaccines. As for funding related to research on a vaccine against COVID-19, this does not count as ODA because the novel coronavirus is “not a disease disproportionately affecting people in developing countries.” Since COVID-19 is a virus that targets the whole world, it could be difficult to argue for the use of ODA to develop a vaccine.⁹

In a recent short article, James Love questions whether financial support for the development of a COVID-19 vaccine constitutes a GPG approach.¹⁰ The author starts by citing several entities that make such a claim: the South Centre (“aims at ensuring that the technologies needed to address the pandemic are considered, as a matter of principle, global public goods”); Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) (“COVID-19 medical tools should be considered ‘global public goods’”) and the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, (“African countries should also have quick, equal and affordable access to any eventual vaccine and treatment, which must be considered as global public goods”) and the European Union (which in their draft resolution to the World Health Assembly (WHA) on the COVID-19 pandemic, asserted that it “recognizes population-wide immunization against COVID-19 as a global public good . . .”). But the Chair of the WHA drafting committee on the resolution apparently concluded that “population-wide vaccination” was a global public good for health but the vaccine itself was not. Love challenges even this view. He demonstrates how restrictive Samuelson’s definition of a GPG actually is, while also acknowledging that “There are certainly non-excludability aspects of both herd immunity and the elimination of the colossal cost of the pandemic responses, as well as robust non-rivalry in consumption characteristics of inventions, data, know-how and knowledge from testing and evaluation of

⁹ D. A. Usher, “OECD: Grants to CEPI for Corona Vaccine Research Do ‘Not Count as ODA,’” *Development Today*, 16 June 2020. www.development-today.com/archive/dt-2020/dt-4-2020/oecd-grants-to-cepi-for-corona-vaccine-research-do-not-count-as-oda.

¹⁰ J. Love, “The Use and Abuse of the Phrase ‘Global Public Good,’” *India-China Institute*, 9 July 2020. www.indiachinainstitute.org/2020/07/09/the-use-and-abuse-of-global-public-good/.

products.”¹¹ As indicated above, and demonstrated here, it is difficult to precisely identify what is, or is not, a GPG. Perhaps the *knowledge* that will, hopefully, be created, and lead to the development of an effective COVID-19 vaccine is a very good example. But, as Love points out, intellectual property rights could render also this “excludable.”

Rather than entering a more extended discussion of definitions, it is sufficient for my purpose to note that in the international development policy debate a GPG approach is interpreted more widely than Samuelson’s definition would imply: to refer to financing global initiatives that benefit all, not only the poor. It is clear that both developing a COVID-19 vaccine and REDD+ are examples of such initiatives. And both have been supported not only by Norway but also – to very varying extents – other Scandinavian countries.

10.4 Implications for Scandinavian Countries

Norway is not the only Scandinavian country to be promoting GPGs. Schaffer (this volume) describes Sweden’s revised Policy for Global Development (*Politik för global utveckling*) which entailed a major revision of Swedish ODA goals, and added two new “directions”: conflict management and human security, and global public goods. The government of Sweden has been very supportive of the GPG concept. They recently even described the UN system itself as a global public good.¹² (It seems unlikely, however, that they would apply the same term to weapons exports, though this has apparently been argued by some in Sweden: see Chapter 5.) Schaffer shows how Sweden likens their global approach to their social democratic domestic policies: “Even if complete models cannot be exported,” the bill notes, Swedish modern history shows how central social security, welfare state, and labor market policies are for social stability – experiences which “are important in global perspective too” and motivate a “special Swedish engagement” (Utrikesdepartementet 2003: 56).

¹¹ J. Love, “The Use and Abuse of the Phrase ‘Global Public Good,’” *India-China Institute*, July 9, 2020. www.indiachinainstitute.org/2020/07/09/the-use-and-abuse-of-global-public-good/.

¹² Swedish statement at the UN Security Council Open Debate on “Maintenance of International Peace and Security: Strengthening Multilateralism and the Role of the United Nations.” Published November 9, 2018.

In partnership with France, Sweden established a task force in 2003, responding to The Development Financing 2000 initiative (Financing and Providing Global Public Goods: Expectations and Prospects) which recommended establishing an International Task Force on Global Public Goods, largely to reduce “fuzzy thinking” and clarify “what part of any good is global and what part is not” (Sagasti et al. 2005: 28).

The Task Force on Global Public Goods reported in 2006, and identified six priority global public goods (GPGs): (i) preventing the emergence and spread of infectious disease, (ii) tackling climate change, (iii) enhancing international financial stability, (iv) strengthening the international trading system, (v) achieving peace and security, and (vi) generating knowledge (Sankar 2008). The Secretariat was located in Sweden, which provided substantial support and commissioned the study: “The Future of Development Financing: Challenges, Scenarios and Strategic Choices,” referred to above (Sagasti et al. 2005).

Denmark, too, has been supportive of GPGs. As noted by Engberg-Pedersen and Fejerskov in Chapter 6, this is partly out of a recognition of the importance of policy coherence but self-interest also plays a part. It has become legitimate to prioritize Denmark’s national self-interest in development assistance across the political spectrum.

Scandinavian countries are proud of their leading the world in terms of the amount of aid they give relative to GDP. But this achievement could be negatively affected by a shift to GPG financing. As noted above, it is OECD/DAC that determines what may be classified as aid and they are becoming increasingly restrictive. A less technical, but for the Scandinavian countries perhaps more fundamental, question is what a shift to GPGs may mean for Scandinavian identity and reputation. While it is recognized that self-interest does enter the picture, it is nevertheless the case that the high level of aid from Scandinavian countries is widely perceived as evidence of their altruism, their humanitarianism. As discussed elsewhere in this book, this is positive for both their international reputation and identity. The question is whether replacing aid by GPG would negatively affect this situation.

It may here be helpful to refer to the reflections of Lars Trägårdh (2018). He asks whether the basis of the Swedish model of social democracy is based on altruism or “reciprocity and conditions,” and suggests that a Swedish citizen is not expected “simply to demand rights or expect compassion but to perform duties and uphold their own end of the contract” (Trägårdh 2018: 98). “Above all it is a social contract based on institutions, taxation, borders and a common legal space”

(Trägårdh 2018: 98). This is how it works at the national level; and Trägårdh asks the question whether it is possible to “scale up” to the international level: social democracy on a world scale.

The answer, according to Trägårdh’s thinking, would appear to be that it depends on the nature of the relationship. Do poor countries “demand rights or expect compassion” or do they “perform duties and uphold their own end of the contract.” Let us consider the two examples, REDD+ and development of a COVID-19 vaccine, in the light of Trägårdh’s analysis.

In the case of REDD+, poor countries do not “demand rights or expect compassion.” The programme is based on the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities” that has been adopted by the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework on Climate Change). Poor countries do therefore perform duties; by reducing deforestation – at a cost to their economies in terms of reduced revenues. This would appear to constitute “reciprocity and conditions,” in Trägårdh’s words. What makes the matter more complicated is that they are compensated for their loss.¹³ If the system does indeed come into full effect, it will represent a transfer of resources from rich countries to poor countries, because the emissions quotas will be such as to benefit the latter. In summary, this is a complex case, and what the outcome will be is yet unclear. It seems to resemble an international tax which redistributes from rich to poor; but all do benefit, and all have responsibilities.

The case of a COVID-19 vaccine is also complicated, and will depend on how the situation develops. Consider, for the sake of argument, the case that best resembles a GPG, i.e. where intellectual property rights over the vaccine are not exercised. Here, there would appear to be no reciprocal responsibilities for those countries which are not involved in the research that leads to the development of the vaccine. But does this imply, following Trägårdh’s binary distinction, that this is necessarily a case of altruism? Surely not. It could be argued that it is altruistic of whoever develops vaccine that they share it without enforcing their intellectual property rights; but the vaccine would, nevertheless, benefit all – rich and poor.

¹³ More accurately, they will be compensated if or when the proposed system of tradeable emission quotas comes into effect. The funds so far provided, by Norway and others, were intended to “jump-start” such a system.

10.5 Conclusion

In recent years, there has been an increasing tendency – among Scandinavian and other countries – to shift from traditional foreign aid to a GPG approach. Such a system of international relations contrasts dramatically with the radical New International Economic Order (NIEO) of the 1970s. Indeed, these might be said to constitute two extremes on a spectrum. To exaggerate somewhat, the latter represents world revolution, the former a global welfare state. Somewhere in between we have aid; motivated, at least in the case of the Scandinavian countries, primarily by humanitarianism. But “pure,” altruistic foreign aid is beginning to be replaced by a different approach: the financing of GPGs that benefit the rich as well (and perhaps even more than) the poor.

It is hard to deny the rational, technocratic argument that financing global public goods is a better approach than aid, and should replace it. The Scandinavian governments, at least in principle, accept this logic. But would such a shift deal a blow to the identity and reputation of the Scandinavian people? For an individual citizen, less satisfaction is surely derived from being a dutiful payer of one’s national taxes than a generous philanthropist. Similarly, citizens of the Scandinavian countries might be expected to derive limited satisfaction from being transformed from humanitarians into (merely) dutiful global taxpayers.

But the impact on international reputation, as opposed to national identity, may be less damaging. To be a dutiful (international) taxpayer can surely enhance a country’s reputation – especially if there are no sanctions for nonpayment, and many countries are not so dutiful. If, as seems likely, many countries are slow to accept the shared responsibility that a GPG approach implies, then the reputation, and perhaps even identity, of the Scandinavian people may be maintained if they establish a position – as they have so far often done – among those in the vanguard.

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