



A U.S. multilateral aid review

Assessing the value of U.S. investments in the
multilateral development system

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INTRODUCTION

The U.S. has been a historic leader in creating and using multilateral institutions to advance American development priorities around the world. Working with like-minded allies, the U.S. played a major role in organizing much of the current multilateral development system, which today includes a diverse set of organizations. These range from the economically focused World Bank Group and the regional multilateral development banks, to U.N. agencies leading on humanitarian and development challenges, to purpose-specific funds such as the Global Fund for HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria (the Global Fund), and GAVI, the Vaccine Initiative.

Despite this outsized role establishing the world's web of aid entities and agencies, the U.S. has never formally completed a comprehensive multilateral aid review (MAR). This paper makes the case for undertaking a MAR, building on legislation proposed in the U.S. Senate in 2017 that would mandate such reviews periodically. There has been limited analysis in the U.S. of the breadth of what must be assessed. In this spirit, it is instructive to study MARs undertaken by other donors and the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN), to understand how the U.S. can glean and apply the lessons of such efforts when it comes to MAR methodology. Such an analysis can help ensure that the U.S. approaches its MAR in a rigorous, informed manner and maximizes the benefits of its outcomes.

This paper seeks to deepen understanding of the use by the U.S. of the multilateral development system to advance its global development priorities. It utilizes the two main components of a typical multilateral aid review: (1) to explore the value and effectiveness of the multilateral development organizations in which the U.S. is investing, and (2) to gauge the alignment of their activities and programs to U.S. priorities.

We begin with an analysis of U.S. financial support for the major individual multilateral organizations, explore the outcomes of the performance reviews that different donors and MOPAN have completed, and end with a set of recommendations for U.S. policymakers.

CONTEXT

As the multilateral development system has evolved to play an ever-increasing role in coordinating and advancing global development, so too have the mechanisms for funding it. In 2014, 41 percent of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) given by the donors of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) went through multilateral channels. Almost three-fourths of this multilateral aid is not earmarked and goes to support the core operations of individual multilateral organizations,¹ with the rest restricted to specific purposes or projects specified by the donors.

The system is adapting and changing in line with today's fast-changing context, driven by several big trends. These include the growing economic size and political influence of key emerging economies, the enhanced agency of many developing countries, a growing set of difficult and complex issues that cross national boundaries, and the recent rise of nationalism and populism. The increased ambitions of the global community and the need for global public goods, reflected in agreements such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the landmark 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change, have created a demand for improved results and coordination.

In response, many multilateral institutions are seeking to ensure that they are fit for purpose. The U.N. Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, who campaigned on a reform agenda, received approval from member states to institute significant reforms to the U.N. development system. In 2016, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD agreed to a reform agenda to stimulate new sources of financing for development. President Jim Yong Kim devoted much of his first term to major changes at the World Bank Group, restructuring staffing, cutting costs, and clarifying its mission and goals.² And a G-20 Eminent Persons Group on Global Financial Governance recently completed a comprehensive review of the system of multilateral development banks, submitting its recommendations in October 2018.³

Part of this evolution includes major new entrants to the multilateral development system. Several, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), organized by China, and the New Development Bank (NDB), organized by the BRICS countries, have a different provenance and geopolitical axis than the traditional multilateral institutions, which were launched by a set of like-minded western countries grounded in a "commitment to market economies backed by democratic institutions."⁴ Others go beyond strict government-only governance to include other development stakeholders, such as philanthropies, private businesses and investors, and civil society.

The Trump administration's "America First" foreign policy has called into question the value of investing in multilateral organizations. The U.S. President's 2018 budget immediately raised concerns about burden sharing, suggesting that attention must be

¹ Approximately 30 percent of ODA from all donors supports core operations for multilateral organizations, a level that has remained consistent for several years.

² The World Bank. *Annual Report 2013*. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTANNREP2013/Resources/9304887-1377201212378/9305896-1377544753431/1_AnnualReport2013_EN.pdf.

³ *Making the Global Financial System Work for All*, Report of the G20 Eminent Persons Group on Global Financial Governance, October 2018. www.globalfinancialgovernance.org/assets/pdf/G20EPG-Full%20Report.pdf.

⁴ See the OECD mission statement: <http://www.oecd.org/about/>.

paid to the “appropriate U.S. share of international spending at the United Nations, at the World Bank, and for many other global issues.”⁵ The 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) that followed stressed the importance of achieving better outcomes in multilateral fora.

Such skepticism about the value of multilateral action has become the administration’s norm. Take, for example, the intent to pull the U.S. out of the Paris Agreement. Or consider the administration’s decision to end its participation in the process to develop a Global Compact on Migration, withdraw from the U.N. Human Rights Council, cease funding for the U.N. Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), and disdain those countries seeking recourse through the International Criminal Court.

In late 2017, Senator Robert Corker (R-TN), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Senator Chris Coons (D-DE) introduced the Multilateral Aid Review Act of 2017.⁶ The legislation would mandate a regular review of the multilateral institutions that the U.S. government funds to achieve its development priorities. The senators’ major impetus seems grounded in development effectiveness, to ensure foreign assistance investments are maximizing their impact. The review criteria would grade individual organizations on both their performance and their alignment with U.S. foreign policy interests. The legislation suggests a methodology to provide a systematic and data-driven approach to assessing the performance of the funded multilateral organizations, evaluating the return on investment to the U.S. taxpayer.

While the motivations and policy perspectives might vary widely, the issues animating policymakers in the administration or Congress cover much of the same ground regarding the extent to which: (1) U.S. investments attract and leverage the investments of other countries; (2) the U.S. shoulders a fair share of the burden; (3) the organizations funded by the U.S. are well-run, efficient, and have the right level of staff, structure, and administration; (4) they maximize their impact and nimbly respond to fast-changing environments; and (5) their mandates and areas of operation match U.S. foreign policy.

The U.S. has never formally completed a comprehensive and publicly available review of the multilateral development agencies that it funds. Presenting an objective measure of performance and organizational effectiveness through the type of review suggested by Senators Corker and Coons would provide taxpayers with a sound basis for understanding their return on investment, while giving incentives to individual institutions to improve and create a “race to the top.”

Other OECD bilateral donors have also been raising these same questions. In the past decade, several—including the U.K. (2016, 2011), Denmark (2013), the Netherlands (2015), Norway (2014), and Australia (2012)—have matched their own analyses with other inputs to create assessments of the individual multilateral institutions they fund. The Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN), a network of 18 countries whose secretariat is hosted by the OECD, has been systematically undertaking assessments and updating their methodology since their start in 2003.

⁵ Office of Management and Budget. *Budget of the U.S. Government: A New Foundation For American Greatness, Fiscal Year 2018*, p. 13. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/omb/budget/fy2018/budget.pdf>.

⁶ S.1928 - Multilateral Aid Review Act of 2017, 115th Congress (2017-2018). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/1928/text>

MOPAN's current methodology, MOPAN 3.0, is a serious attempt to provide a systematic and data-driven approach to assess the organizational strength and performance of selected multilateral organizations. Some of the bilateral donor reviews incorporate MOPAN's information into their own assessments.

The U.S. is a member of MOPAN and was its chair in 2015 when MOPAN 3.0 was developed. MOPAN completed reviews of 12 multilateral organizations in 2016 using this approach, and plans to complete 14 more by 2019 and another seven by 2020.

The approaches used by these bilateral donors and MOPAN seek to deliver a credible and impartial analysis of the effectiveness of these institutions. MOPAN's reports are public goods, designed to enhance the organizational learning within and among the assessed multilaterals. The bilateral donors are also interested in the extent to which the organizations they fund overlap with their foreign policy interests, and how well these institutions advance their particular policy priorities.

U.S. DEVELOPMENT INTERESTS AND MULTILATERAL ENTITIES

U.S. engagement in the multilateral development system: In 2016, 17 percent of U.S. ODA supported the core contributions of multilateral institutions, with an additional 17 percent passing through multilateral channels earmarked for specific projects or programs, for a total of 34 percent (or \$11.9 billion) channeled multilaterally.

The U.S. does not develop and publish a government-wide global development strategy. In 2010, the Obama administration distributed a first-ever Presidential Policy Directive on Global Development (PPD-6) to relevant agencies in the U.S. government. PPD-6 called for a U.S. Global Development Strategy to be undertaken every four years and approved by the President. However, no strategy was ever drafted and adopted.

The U.S. does not draft a multilateral aid strategy or provide government-wide guidance regarding the use of multilateral channels to advance its global development priorities.⁷ The closest it comes is the annual report that Congress mandates from the U.S. Treasury regarding U.S. engagement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the multilateral development banks (MDBs).⁸ This report often sets out policy and reforms that the U.S. intends to pursue within these institutions.

Without a systematic multilateral aid strategy, there is limited guidance on the level of U.S. foreign assistance that is reasonable or desired for general multilateral use, or even for specific multilateral institutions. Decisions about funding particular multilateral development entities are generally made on a case-by-case basis.

The lack of defined policy objectives based on clear data and rationales puts enormous U.S. political capital at risk of being misused and misspent. A recent analysis⁹ of the revenues of 53 multilateral institutions between 2014-2016, by John McArthur and Krista Rasmussen of the Brookings Institution, found that the U.S. was the top funder of 24 organizations.¹⁰ The U.S. also enjoys some special arrangements, such as its sole veto power at the World Bank, that enable additional leadership influence.

In addition to its economic size, which allows it to exercise considerable influence in the multilateral system, the U.S. also leverages its financial resources through its participation. Its investments help crowd in and coordinate resources from other countries and stakeholders.

⁷ The 2010 Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR), a joint effort of USAID and the State Department, was committed to strengthening multilateral diplomacy, but producing a multilateral strategy was not one of its recommendations.

⁸ One articulation of U.S. priorities as they apply to part of the multilateral development system is the U.S. Treasury report to Congress on the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the multilateral development banks, mandated by section 1701 of the International Financial Institutions Act. See: Report to Congress from the Chairman of the National Advisory Council on International Monetary and Financial Policies, U.S. Department of Treasury, June 2018. https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/international/development-banks/Documents/NAC_Report_2018_Web_Version.pdf

⁹ McArthur, John and Rasmussen. *Global Views No. 8: Who funds which multilateral organizations?* The Brookings Institution, December 2017. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/globalviews_who_funds_which_multilaterals.pdf

¹⁰ The next closest donors, Japan and the U.K., were the top funder for nine organizations each.

The hazard of having created such a successful system of collective action is that these financial and political commitments from other countries are now taken for granted and accepted as a norm. As part of its “America First” stance, the Trump administration is invoking the notion of burden sharing, asking whether the U.S. currently bears too much responsibility on a particular issue or supports particular institutions too generously. Yet the Trump administration, for all its preoccupation, has not publicly presented an analysis of the increases or decreases in U.S. share over time, nor clarified what it sees as the optimal levels of U.S. participation—and how those levels would affect the overall strategic value the U.S. receives from its leadership and participation in the system.

Multiple U.S. government agencies interact closely with the same multilateral organization, further complicating America’s engagement. Moreover, different U.S. government agencies have primary responsibility for policy development, oversight, and direct engagement with respective multilateral entities. Interactions with the MDBs highlight the complexity of these arrangements.

The U.S. Secretary of the Treasury serves as the U.S. governor at the World Bank Group, responsible for managing U.S. interests among the 189 member countries. The Treasury Department is responsible for core capital contributions and oversight of the International Development Association (IDA), the Bank’s fund that helps the world’s poorest countries. Separately, other U.S. offices or agencies, such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), provide specific programmatic funding and take the lead on certain activities, whether at the country level or through specific multi-donor trust funds.

Similar situations occur with other agencies. The State Department’s Bureau of International Organization Affairs oversees core contributions to UNICEF and UNDP, for example, even though the primary remit of those organizations is for humanitarian and development purposes, and USAID is a substantial funder and partner in their programming.

Determining priorities for a U.S. MAR: The lack of a U.S. global development strategy or clear hierarchy of global development priorities poses a challenge for maximizing the use of a MAR, since the match between a multilateral’s mandate and a donor’s policy interests is one of the two key dimensions usually measured.

This is particularly vexing for the U.S. As the world’s largest economic and military power, with a central role as one of the founders of the multilateral development system, the U.S. has a wide range of foreign policy and development interests—arguably the most extensive of any country. It is the world’s largest bilateral donor. Its foreign aid portfolio touches upon many sectors, countries, and objectives. Establishing levels of priority among this crowded field is a daunting proposition.

America’s diversity of interests, combined with its role in originating the multilateral development system, is reflected in the large number of multilateral institutions where it has a significant interest. In 2016, the United States provided grants from its ODA to more than 80 multilateral organizations and funds, providing at least \$1 million to 65 of them.

A review of the past five NSSes, the one key foreign policy document that includes global development interests and spans every presidential administration since 1987, shows the disparate choices regarding what to prioritize. For example, the Bush administration elevated aid for education, committing in its 2002 NSS to a 20 percent increase in funding and doing so again in its 2006 NSS. Yet education received limited emphasis from the Obama administration and was absent from the Trump administration's NSS. Both Obama strategies outline targeted efforts to help developing countries deal with climate change, though the issue is not mentioned in the Bush and Trump strategies. Even overall objectives shift, as the Bush 2002 NSS commits to doubling the economic size of the world's poorest countries, whereas the Obama focus is on ending extreme poverty.

Taken together, the strategies touch on the entire landscape of international development, from democratic rights and elections to corruption and governance; from the challenges of development in fragile states to the need to revolutionize development finance; from clean energy to environmental sustainability; from extreme poverty to health, water and sanitation, and education.

Recognizing this wide lens, the Obama administration's PPD-6 called for greater selectivity and focus. However, in its 2016 peer review of U.S. development cooperation completed six years later, the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) found that, despite progress, the U.S. still lacked a whole-of-government development strategy and required significant work to strengthen its policy coherence for development.

At the same time, some common threads run throughout these five NSSes. Each one highlights and reinforces the U.S. commitment to the World Bank and the United Nations, often prioritizing reforms to make them more effective and bolster their capacity. There is also a common focus on using evidence and strategies that are proven to maximize impact, an emphasis that increases over time.

Despite the array of issues that surface in a combined reading, there is also a common agenda. Each strategy mentions a role for U.S. leadership in five areas: providing humanitarian assistance, ending hunger, improving global health, promoting women and girls, and advancing democracy and strengthening democratic governance.

U.S. popular support for multilateral engagement: The five areas cited in all the NSSes are not far afield from the priorities that Americans themselves choose. In a 2017 poll of Americans by the Chicago Council of Global Affairs, a clear majority of respondents (68 percent) agreed that the U.S. should take an active role in world affairs, with 61 percent suggesting that the best approach was to take a shared leadership role.¹¹

Such polling results echo findings by a January 2017 University of Maryland questionnaire, where over 80 percent of respondents said that the U.S. should share in efforts to solve international problems and play a shared leadership role. Overwhelming majorities further agree that the U.S. should coordinate its power with

¹¹ Versus being the dominant world leader (32 percent) or playing no leadership role at all (7 percent).

other countries according to shared ideas of what is best for the world as a whole, repeating similar results from 2006 and 2004.

Majorities of Americans have been, and continue to be, strongly supportive of U.S. participation and leadership in the multilateral system. They are also wary of the U.S. imposing its unilateral will.

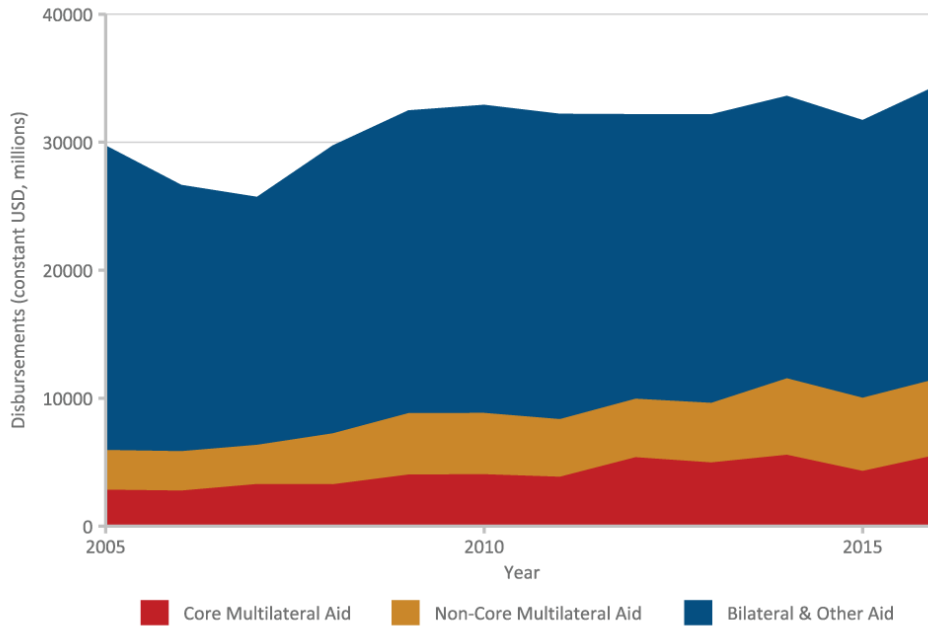
However, a slight majority (55 percent) in the University of Maryland's Public Policy Poll (PPP) think the U.S. has generally done more than its fair share to solve world problems (though this is substantially reduced since 2000). While Americans see an important role for U.S. global engagement and great value in working in conjunction with others, they are sensitive to the U.S. playing a disproportionate role.

Both the PPP and a 2016 Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) poll attempt to ascertain levels of support for specific sectors. Some commonality exists between priorities that emerge in the polls and the issues emphasized in the NSSes. Humanitarian assistance ranks high in both polls, as does support for global health initiatives. While not mentioned in the KFF poll, hunger is the top issue in the PPP. Interestingly, in a clean break with the priorities outlined in the combined NSS documents, support for providing foreign assistance to bolster democracy and build stronger democratic institutions ranks at the bottom in both polls.

Financial trends: These preferences for cooperative global leadership are often reflected in U.S. funding. Using the statistics reported to the OECD by the U.S. government through the Common Reporting Standard (CRS), we looked at the grant portion of U.S. Official Development Assistance (ODA) from 2005-2016. Specifically, we examine ODA disbursements distributed¹² through multilateral entities. All values are in constant 2015 US dollars.

¹² CRS tracks money that was actually spent, so our statistics reflect the funds actually disbursed as opposed to budgeted.

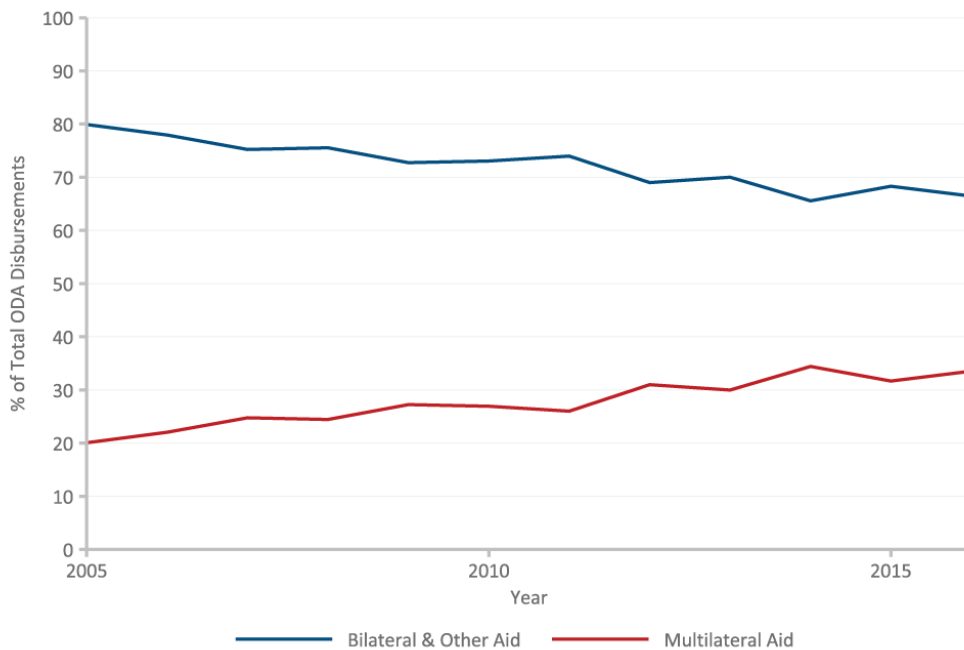
FIGURE 1.
U.S. official development assistance disbursements



Source: Brookings analysis on OECD CRS data.

As Figure 1 illustrates, after an initial dip from 2005 to 2007, U.S. ODA rose steadily, increasing more than 22 percent from 2007 through 2016. As seen in Figure 2, during the same period, the proportion of ODA grants that the U.S. directed through multilateral channels also rose, increasing from a share of approximately one-fifth to one-third. This shows the U.S. has been committed to working multilaterally to advance its global development priorities, reflecting both the preference of the U.S. public and the strategy of successive presidential administrations.

FIGURE 2
U.S. official development assistance by category



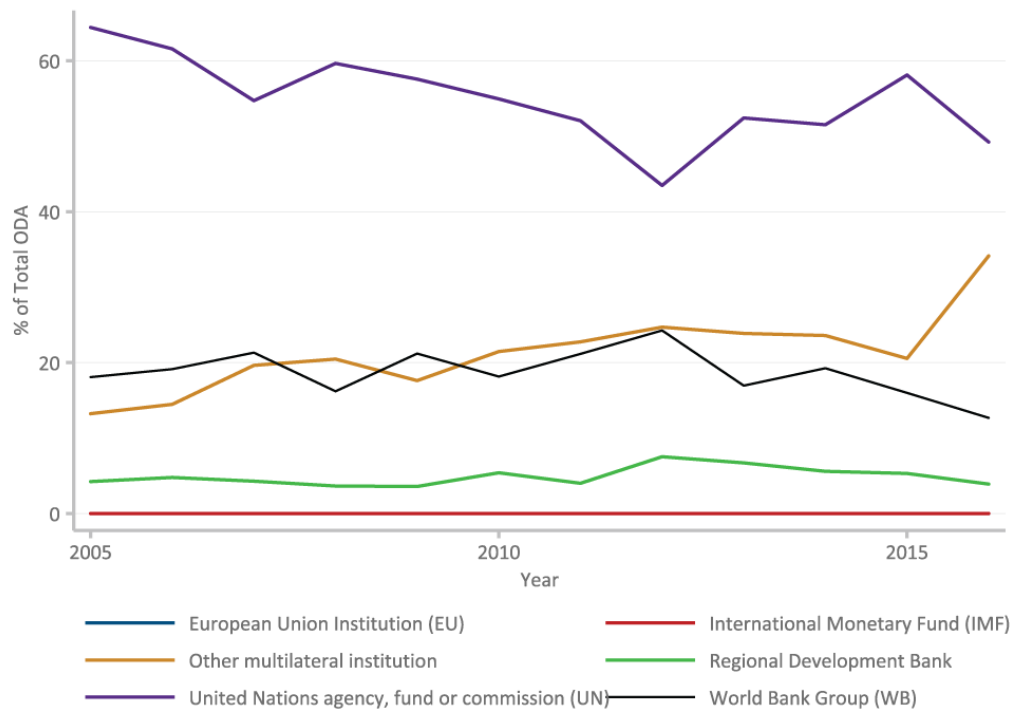
Source: Brookings analysis on OECD CRS data.

Categorizing multilateral organizations by sector with a high degree of precision is challenging, since many major multilateral institutions have programs that cross programmatic areas. Yet looking at a ranking of 2016 multilateral funding by size, it is clear that humanitarian purposes are a high U.S. priority. Five of the top 10 multilateral organizations receiving the most U.S. grant funds in 2016 have major programs providing humanitarian assistance in emergencies and insecure or refugee environments. These include organizations like the U.N.’s World Food Program (WFP), the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and UNICEF.

Another significant portion of U.S. grant support for multilateral organizations goes to advance global health, supporting organizations such as the GTFAM, GAVI, and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Two other categories with noticeable but lesser portions include food security/hunger (the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the Global Agricultural and Food Security Program (GAFSP)) and climate/environment (the U.N. Environment Programme (UNEP), and the Global Environment Facility (GEF). These are also fairly reflective of the breakdown in U.S. ODA overall.

While the overall proportion of U.S. assistance channeled through multilateral development entities has increased, the effect has been different among different categories (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3**U.S. official development assistance by type of multilateral development entity**

Source: Brookings analysis on OECD CRS data.

The total absolute amount going to U.N. agencies has slightly increased over the past decade, but they have lost share relative to other organizations. Zooming in to specific U.N. agencies, we see that general U.N. funding has declined significantly. In addition, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was defunded entirely due to policy concerns, and the absolute amount to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has fallen slightly. Other U.N. programs and agencies hold their ground or increase, with the WFP experiencing significant increases in several years, but their weight is not enough to keep pace with the larger increase in overall ODA.

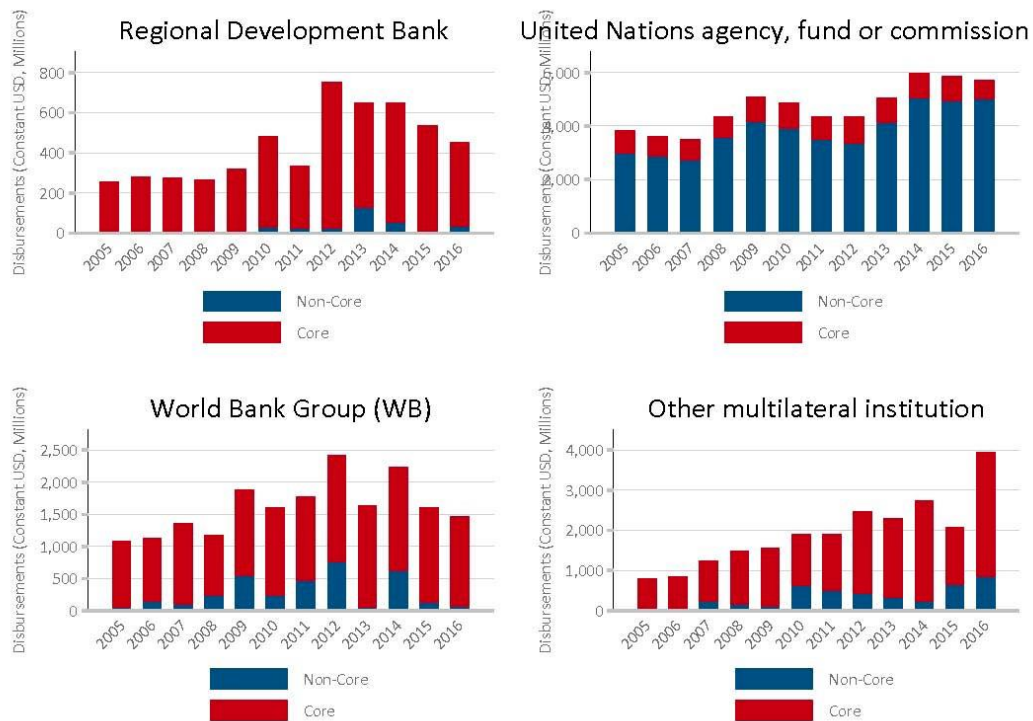
The proportionate share of U.S. assistance distributed through the MDB system, including the World Bank Group and the regional development banks, remains fairly steady throughout.

Newly created purpose-specific funds—those focused on a specific sector or country—account for much of the increased use of multilateral entities. Their proportional share also rises throughout the time period analyzed. Two big winners in particular are the GFATM and GAVI, both independently created outside the U.N. and MDB system. The Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund II, a major multi-donor trust fund that uses World Bank systems, also received significant contributions.

As demonstrated by the below charts, in general, the funding given to U.N. agencies tends to be much more restricted than the funds given to other types of multilateral entities. For other types of multilateral agencies, core contributions significantly outweigh restricted programmatic funds. For the U.N. agencies, it is the opposite.

FIGURE 4

U.S. official development assistance disbursements to various multilateral entities



Source: OECD CRS data.

Conclusions from this analysis include:

- **The share of ODA going to multilaterals has increased over the past decade.** This reinforces the traditional U.S. view of the value of investing through multilateral channels to achieve development and humanitarian priorities. In this respect, policymakers have been reflecting the preferences of the American public, whose instinctive choice is to have the U.S. work in partnership with other countries on global issues and avoid imposing a U.S.-only agenda—balancing instead global and U.S.-specific interests.
- **At the same time, the increased use of newer purpose-specific funds and restricted funding signals a growing emphasis and imperative to meet specific U.S. priorities through multilateral channels.** This tracks the growing drive among U.S. policymakers for greater selectivity and focus among development priorities, a trend that seems likely to continue. It also reflects the increased expectations of policymakers and the public to attribute specific measurable results to U.S. investments. This imperative goes beyond the portion of U.S. ODA that flows through multilateral channels—indeed, it is an analogue to the Congressional earmarks and narrowly defined Presidential initiatives that increasingly define the U.S. budget for global development.
- **The high proportion of earmarked, non-core support for the U.N. agencies is in keeping with a general trend among OECD donors that has been termed the**

“bilateralization” of multilateral aid.¹³ Critics of this trend suggest that it poses a threat to the core tenets of multilateral action. Bilateralization is seen primarily as a workaround for donors, helping them retain individual control and influence as their power to influence governance and decisionmaking of specific institutions is diluted. At first glance, this appears to suggest a reduced U.S. interest in multilateralism. In light of the increased U.S. investment in newer purpose-driven multilateral funds, however, these earmarks can also be seen as a move to achieve higher levels of effectiveness while reflecting the imperative to directly attribute U.S. investments to specific results. This seems more about having the proverbial cake and eating it too: preserving U.S. influence, attribution, and control while also gaining value and leverage from the coordinated and collaborative action that multilateral participation offers.

- **This growth in purpose-driven funds also highlights a potential trade-off between investing financial and political capital, time, and energy to reform existing multilateral institutions versus creating new institutions or channels.** These newer channels can be seen as natural disruptions in the multilateral marketplace, creating pressure to improve more established channels. Also, as private sector partners and private investments become increasingly important for achieving development outcomes at scale, new multilateral alliances or channels unencumbered by a traditional multilateral governance structure may be more attractive to non-governmental stakeholders, offering more flexibility and opportunity for participation.

¹³ Tortora and Steensen. *Making Earmarked Funding More Effective: Current Practices and a Way Forward*. OECD, 2014.

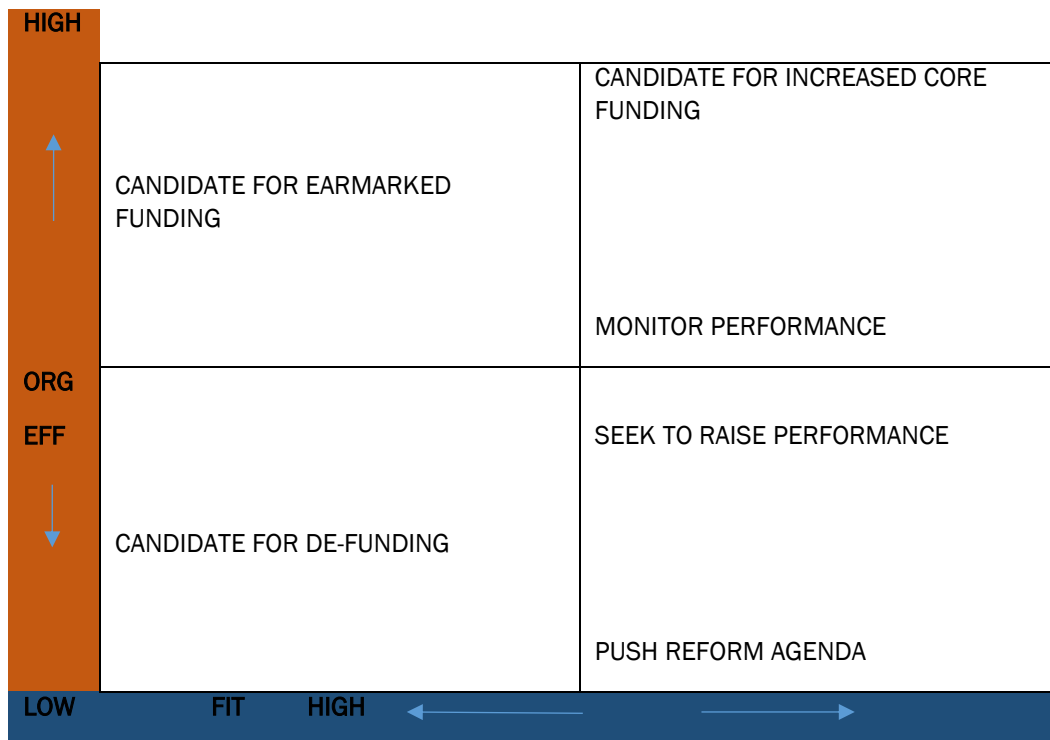
MARS

Background: The multilateral aid reviews that reviewed here include Australia (2012), Denmark (2013), Norway (2014), the Netherlands (2015), the U.K. (2016, 2011), and MOPAN’s assessments using their 3.0 methodology (2015-2016).

MARs by bilateral donors basically explore two overlapping dimensions: an organization’s strength and effectiveness, and its alignment with the donor’s policy priorities. Said simply: is it a focused, high-performing organization that is achieving results, and does its mandate, focus, principles, and places of operation fit with the donor’s primary policy interests?

The measures related to organizational effectiveness generally consist of the extent to which operations align with organizational mandate, strength of management, levels of transparency and accountability, and delivery of results. The idea is to develop an objective measure of performance and organizational health. The donor then draws from its own development priorities and policies to determine the multilateral organization’s fit with its policy interests. The presumption is that the combination of the two measures—effectiveness and fit—provides the basis for potential actions the donor might consider, as depicted in Figure 5.

FIGURE 5
Effect of MAR on donor actions



As an example, after the U.K.’s multilateral review in 2011, it decided to stop funding four organizations, pursue vigorous reforms at four others, and increase funding to six organizations.

Metrics: MOPAN’s 3.0 methodology has the most comprehensive set of indicators of any of the MARs we studied. It divides its assessment among four performance areas, with scores weighted from 12 key performance indicators (KPI) based on 57 micro-indicators (MI).

This breadth of coverage is particularly noteworthy, since the data is confined primarily to organizational effectiveness. As can be seen from Table 1, the MARs conducted by the bilateral donors generally have a significantly lower number of indicators, which are split between organizational effectiveness and policy overlap. For example, the U.K. divided its 2016 assessment (considered a high mark among donor-led MARs) between two main performance areas (i.e., organizational performance and performance in pursuit of U.K. priorities), with a total of six sub-components and 16 assessment questions—and half of those are focused on the relationship between U.K. and multilateral priorities.

As MOPAN is not a donor itself, it focuses on assessing organizational effectiveness, leaving the axis of “fit” to donors themselves. However, MOPAN does incorporate into its assessments a set of cross-cutting policy dimensions that its members deem as good development practice, in line with “universal development and humanitarian aims.” These include gender equality, environmental sustainability and climate change, good governance, and human rights. These occupy limited space within the overall assessment.¹⁴

TABLE 1
Indicators for MARs conducted by bilateral donors

Measurement Hierarchy	MOPAN	Australia	Denmark	Norway	Netherlands	UK 2016
KEY THEMES						
Performance	X	X	X	X	X	X
Fit		X	X	X	X	X
COMPONENTS	12	7	8	7	16	6
INDICATORS/ QUESTIONS	57	24	MOPAN + 13 add'l	NOT LISTED	NOT LISTED	16
Type						
ORG PERF	52	14	MOPAN		8	8
POLICY	5	10	13		8	8
Multilateral	0-8	3	3	0	0	1

¹⁴ MOPAN has one Key Performance Indicator (KPI 2) and five Micro-Indicators (MI 2.1 a/b/c, 5.5, 9.4, 9.5, 9.6) that assess these cross-cutting policy issues, out of 12 KPI and 57 MI overall.

Approaches: All the bilateral donors completed a desk review of relevant public documents as well as any relevant evaluations that its own government might have conducted. They also consulted with key government colleagues, at headquarters and, in some cases, in country offices. These are undertaken at varying degrees of breadth and depth; the U.K. engaged in a two-step process to deepen the feedback.

Donors are often able to draw upon their own representatives who serve on the governing board or other committees within the organization, as well as the teams who regularly engage with the particular organization. Donor-country development NGOs are also generally consulted, and the U.K. made it a point to consult with the private sector.

These bilateral reviews also often refer to each other. Donors share information with one another, and often refer to MOPAN. MOPAN, however, is explicitly barred from referring to the assessments done by bilateral donors. It relies solely upon its own primary data collection and independent analysis.

MOPAN also completes a desk review of organizational materials, and uses on-sites visits and interviews with organizational staff and leaders. MOPAN and the bilateral donors approach data collection on a markedly different scale: MOPAN will review between 100-200 documentary sources, for example, while a bilateral donor assessment might reference 20-30. MOPAN undertakes a targeted survey among a number representative donors, recipient country leadership, partners, and peers. They transparently publish the results of their surveys in their assessments. Their many micro-indicators and surveys provide a quantitative base for their findings, reinforcing their drive for objectivity.

Measuring multilateralism: What is striking after a review of these assessments is how limited they are in exploring and seeking to measure, especially in a quantitative manner, the unique aspects of being multilateral. The indicators of organizational performance that are utilized could be usefully applied to most implementing partners and international NGOs (or, for that matter, most any large enterprise that spans multiple countries and domains).

The implicit assumption underlying these assessments is that the multilateral development system and its organizations are unique in fundamental ways from other entities that advance global development. Yet those singular aspects are not central to the measurement of their performance.

In its 2008 report on multilateral aid,¹⁵ the OECD surveyed donors on the advantages of engaging with multilateral agencies, presumably in lieu of other partners. The outcomes included:

- Economies of scale
- Global governance – setting global development principles and standards
- Political neutrality and legitimacy
- Abundant resources – capital and know-how
- Providing advisory and technical assistance

¹⁵ OECD. 2008 DAC Report on Multilateral Aid. OECD Publishing, Paris. 2010. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264097322-en>.

- Low transaction costs
- Providing public goods.

The U.S. response to the 2008 survey reinforces a desire to “advance its national security and foreign policy interest and to promote its values.” Its other reasons included: “(a) global solutions for global threats and crises; (b) to advance American values of freedom, democracy, and prosperity; (c) to set international standards; and (d) to leverage US resources for the greatest good.”

The report suggests that “working with multilaterals may also reduce the burden for donors and partner countries compared with bilateral aid.” The U.S. leverages both financial resources and influence through its participation in the multilateral system. Its investments help crowd in and coordinate resources from other countries and stakeholders.

The hazard of having created such a successful system of collective action is that the financial and political commitments from other countries are now often taken for granted and accepted as a norm. The U.S. is now focusing on burden-sharing (the flip side of the equation) as a priority, yet the Trump administration has not publicly presented an analysis of the increases or decreases in U.S. share over time, nor clarified the optimal levels of participation.

Aspects of cooperative membership and coordination are not entirely missing from the MARs. For example, one of Australia’s seven main components is “Contribution to the Wider Multilateral System,” and its three indicators include: promotes coordination; makes a critical difference; promotes knowledge, policy, or innovation. Thus three out of its 24 indicators touch on multilateralism (though the second is fairly generic). Norway’s assessments employ indicators on openness of an organization to reform, and the extent to which Norway might be able to have influence within the organization. Yet such indicators are more about Norway’s policy priorities than about performing optimally on key multilateral dimensions. While none of MOPAN’s micro-indicators are directly targeted toward these specific dimensions, up to eight or nine can be usefully viewed through this prism.

The U.K., in its 2016 MAR, gets to the heart of the matter with one question: does supporting the organization provide an advantage over its bilateral aid? Yet this is just one indicator out of the 16 used for its assessments, based on a fairly subjective analysis.

For a MAR, one might expect a more central thematic role in measuring the value of the multilateral attributes of the organization, similar in importance to the match between organizational mandate and donor priorities.

Also, since many of the performance indicators focus on delivery of services and results, efficiency, and alignment of strategy and budget, organizations whose primary mandate depends in large degree on attributes such as “setting global development principles and standards” and “political neutrality and legitimacy” may find themselves comparatively disadvantaged by the scales that are utilized.

Denmark’s MAR uses three multilateral indicators out of a total of 13 policy indicators. However, Denmark’s thorough description of “New Multilateralism” policy outlines its perspective on the value of the multilateral system and how to strengthen it while

advancing Danish priorities. Denmark then applies the main tenets of that policy based on the outcomes of each individual agency's score, laying out its future intended actions. This decision tree is thus nuanced and transparent. Such an approach also provides Denmark a platform to view its intended actions in the context of the system as a whole.

A MAR FOR THE UNITED STATES

Methodology: To explore how the U.S. might use a MAR, we compared the organizational effectiveness rankings of three different assessments from a similar period: MOPAN 2015-2016, U.K. 2016, and the Netherlands 2015.

Given the different scoring systems, and the different set of institutions that each MAR covered, we developed a rank order for each sample of organizations covered by a particular MAR. We then compared the relative rankings across each series.

To develop the MAR-specific rankings, we calculated a percentile ranking for each institution. To do this, we measured its performance on each MAR's individual components relative to the entire set of institutions assessed by that MAR, where 0 percent indicates the lowest rated institution, and 100 percent the highest rated institution. The average of those component percentiles provided a final score that was used for ranking.



We excluded components that measured convergence with a donor's-specific policy priority, and used only those measures that assessed organizational effectiveness. Given the significant differences in periods, sample sizes, sets of organizations, scoring systems, and evidence gathered, this method allows only rough comparability.

TABLE 2
Organizational effectiveness rankings of three different assessments

	MOPAN 2015-16*	U.K. 2016	NETHERLANDS 2015
AfDB	68.30	68.42	75.00
AsDB			70.83
CDB		31.87	
CERF		21.15	
CIFs		50.14	
CommSec		18.82	
EBRD		68.91	75.00
ECHO		52.47	
EU		51.51	
FAO		46.93	60.42
GAVI	54.43	80.96	70.83
GEF		43.13	
GFDDR		38.28	
GFTAM	64.26	85.71	75.00

	MOPAN 2015-16*	U.K. 2016	NETHERLANDS 2015
GPE		26.56	
ICRC		44.73	
IDB	74.67	67.72	47.92
IFAD		55.27	64.58
IFC		53.25	72.92
IFRC		19.18	
ILO	38.87		54.17
IMF			68.75
IOM		15.02	
ITC			45.83
OHCHR			50.00
PBF		29.08	
PIDG		52.70	
UN HABITAT	56.84		20.83
UN Women		35.49	68.75
UNAIDS	58.84	38.00	54.17
UNCTAD			25.00
UNDP	43.27	52.11	60.42
UNEP	58.94		72.92
UNESCO		0.00	43.75
UNFPA		50.50	64.58
UNHCR		32.23	60.42
UNICEF	60.75	52.70	62.50
UNIDO			41.67
UNITAID		48.90	
UNOCHA	10.67	22.99	52.08
UNODC			50.00
UNRWA			52.08
WB	75.80	76.65	77.08
WFP		52.06	62.50

	MOPAN 2015-16*	U.K. 2016	NETHERLANDS 2015
WHO		25.55	37.50
WTO			54.17

KEY:  Top quartile
 Bottom quartile

Application: The comparison shows a fair amount of congruence among the top performers. The World Bank and African Development Bank rank in the top quartile of all three MARs. The Global Fund and GAVI rank in the top in both the U.K. and Netherlands samples, with the Global Fund also just below the top quartile of the MOPAN sample.

In 2016, these four organizations were among the top 11 multilateral organizations to receive ODA grants from the U.S.

Of those organizations included only in the UK and Netherlands series, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is in the top quartile of both. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) are rated highly by the U.K. and in the second quartile by the Netherlands.

One clear incongruity is the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB, which is in the top quartile of the MOPAN and U.K. samples, yet in the bottom quartile of the Netherlands sample. (This has since changed to be more in line with other assessments in the Netherlands' more recent scorecards).

The bottom end of the scale is less conclusive, as most organizations in the lowest quartile were assessed by only one of the three MARs. The World Health Organization (WHO) and UNESCO rank in the bottom quartile of both the U.K. and Netherlands series (neither were included in the MOPAN series). The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) receives very low ratings from both MOPAN and the U.K., and is just above the lowest quartile in the Netherlands' MAR.

Focusing solely on the numerical scores demonstrates its limitations. The level of precision is misleading (especially given the different methodologies used in the individual MARs). An analytical narrative provides a better window into the strength and performance of an organization, as well as a better basis for learning.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM), for example, scores second lowest in the U.K. series. This means it rates among the weakest organizational strength and effectiveness among all the organizations reviewed by the U.K. The U.K., however, flagged IOM as a poor performer in its earlier MAR in 2011 and pushed for targeted reforms. The narrative in the U.K.'s 2016 assessment subsequently praised IOM for its progress and improvement. This demonstrates how the simple quantitative analyses of these MARs, as currently constructed, provide only a snapshot in time, which limits the ability to identify improvements and lapses. It is important to use this

snapshot as a starting point for a larger examination and engagement with the institution in question, rather than make funding changes solely on a simple snapshot.

The U.S. provided over \$522 million to IOM in 2016, the sixth largest amount it provided to a multilateral organization. It was IOM's top funder, providing 35 percent of its budget, and IOM's mission strongly matches the humanitarian purposes that both the American public and the U.S. government have highlighted as a priority for U.S. global engagement. Using its findings from its 2011 and 2016 MARs, the U.K. has been pursuing focused reforms at IOM. The U.S. would benefit from building upon this work and adding its own evidence and analysis to develop objectives it might pursue in partnership with IOM over the next several years.

IOM, UNOCHA, and WHO all rate low on the comparative scales developed for this study. All play a leading role in their respective fields in setting and applying global norms and standards; developing and facilitating legal and coordination frameworks; supporting research and dissemination of knowledge; developing policy and guidance; and, providing technical assistance for implementation.

These are the types of roles that gave birth to the multilateral development system. They are objectives for which multilateral organizations are uniquely suited. They are also the attributes that get limited attention and where success is hard to measure within the current quantitative frameworks of these MARs.

A crystal-clear perspective on the benefits that these multilateral organizations offer is vital. Likewise, it is essential to know upfront what the U.S. seeks to get from its support. The U.S. is the largest funder of IOM, UNOCHA, and WHO. This provides substantial leverage to create momentum for better performance, but requires clear objectives and transparent rationales, which also take into account the weaknesses of the quantitative analyses of a MAR. If the U.S. chose to reduce its participation based on a MAR score, it would be giving up substantial influence in seminal organizations that are central to advancing key U.S. priorities in the humanitarian global health arenas. Adequate attention must be paid to the larger and systemic trade-offs of such a decision. That will not come from these organization-specific assessments.

At the same time, such assessments provide evidence for transparent decision-making and are vital inputs for policymakers wanting to maximize the return on investment to the U.S. taxpayer. For example, the U.S. recently decided not to renew pledges to the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Global Agricultural and Food Security Program (GAFSP). IFAD was in the top quartile in the U.K.'s 2016 assessment, and the early development results from GAFSP are promising. This raises questions about the U.S. decision—especially as food security is a development priority, and global hunger is on the rise. The rationales for this reduced funding did not acknowledge these results, and it is unclear to what extent it was taken into account.

CONCLUSION

In an era when the multilateral development system is under pressure to deliver greater value and adapt to an increasingly challenging environment for global development, MARs offer a credible, evidence-based tool to improve performance and create a race to the top among multilateral organizations. Methodologies for MARs, such as MOPAN's 3.0, have grown increasingly sophisticated, drawing upon surveys, consultations, interviews, and material reviews to create a data-driven, statistical basis for analyzing results and fit with donor priorities. Other countries than the ones profiled here have also undertaken these reviews, so it is important to avoid unnecessarily burdening multilateral organizations. Doing these assessments well has significant transaction costs, and MOPAN's data collection—which is comprehensive, high-quality, and publicly available—can serve as a common basis for assessments by bilateral donors.

Assessments provide complex snapshots of organizational performance, but underemphasize measurement of how well agencies deliver the expected benefits of multilateralism. Current practice focuses primarily on the strengths and abilities of each agency as if it were comparable to any type of implementing partner, underemphasizing assessment of the attributes unique to multilateral organizations. The metrics and approaches used are comprehensive, especially in MOPAN's 3.0 methodology, but the benchmarks to determine organizational strength and performance are generally applicable to any type of large, complex organization. The measurement of these dimensions of organizational excellence are sophisticated and useful. However, they should be viewed as a starting point and be accompanied by metrics that more rigorously assess the unique values associated with multilateral cooperation. Assessments also fall short when it comes to capturing performance trajectories and showing the extent to which an organization is improving or regressing.

Discreet, case-by-case multilateral assessments are one helpful tool for allocating U.S. assistance within a wide range of options, but they offer limited insight into the performance of the system as a whole. The multilateral system has grown to be a major force in global development, comprising an important ecosystem that donors are increasingly relying upon to deliver results. Yet there are limited opportunities and analyses that examine whether the system as a whole is calibrated for maximum impact. Individual assessments mostly miss issues such as overlaps and redundancies within the system, and whether the division of labor could be improved; the complementarity and level of collaboration, and whether territorial issues are crowding out potential impact; the right size for the system related to other parts of the development donor landscape.

Measuring U.S. priorities against the activities of individual organizations underplays the importance of the multilateral development system as a whole to U.S. strategic interests. The practices, norms, and approaches developed and shared within the multilateral development system serve as the DNA for global cooperation and the provision of global public goods. Those standards are largely a legacy of a sense of shared purpose among like-minded donors, marked by a commitment to human rights

and democratic institutions.¹⁶ The U.S. enjoys strategic benefits from its leadership within the system. MARs provide a valuable window into the individual rate of return on investment in a particular organization. Yet they fail to take into account the holistic picture that the U.S. enjoys from its engagement. There needs to be a joining of individual performance with performance of the system as a whole.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Use MOPAN 3.0 as the basis for assessing the organizational effectiveness of the multilateral organizations that the U.S. funds. MOPAN's 3.0 methodology is a methodical, fact-based assessment of organizational effectiveness jointly designed by the major aid donors. The U.S. chaired that design effort. MOPAN's focus on making objective and evidence-based analysis to inform policy decisions is helping to institute a standard way of assessing performance and value as policymakers weigh trade-offs. There is no need to duplicate this effort—the U.S. instead should draw upon its investment in MOPAN and use its assessments as the core building block for its own MAR.

Focus U.S. government efforts on assessing the degree to which a multilateral organization represents U.S. interests. Accepting MOPAN's analysis of organizational performance frees up the U.S. government to concentrate its analysis on the fit between individual multilaterals and U.S. priorities. Combining such a fitness analysis with a MAR could serve as a tool for U.S. leadership to identify useful reforms where necessary and understand progress in complex, multi-faceted organizations. Such an approach could help maximize value for aid investments while also insulating decisions from inconsistent methodology that may be subjective or anecdotal, penalizing organizations and undermine credibility.

Clarify policy objectives regarding the role and value of multilateral institutions, as well as that of the multilateral development system, to U.S. development interests. To make a MAR worthwhile, the U.S. should develop a multilateral aid strategy. This requires identifying what the U.S. expects from its participation, analyzing the advantages of participation, and addressing perceived challenges. A multilateral strategy should also identify ways the U.S. can use the multilateral system to support policy interests where it does not provide significant sums bilaterally, yet wants to have influence. A strategy will help situate the performance of individual organizations within the context of the overall system, to optimize strategic decisions and trade-offs as to where to expend political capital and leadership. The geo-political implications and impact on strategic interests should be weighed as decisions are made to increase or reduce investment and involvement in particular organizations, or parts of the multilateral development system.

Incorporate and measure the attributes of multilateralism more centrally in its assessment. The metrics of the current assessment methodologies, including MOPAN, are limited in the ways they measure what it means to be multilateral. To improve the evidence base and maximize its usefulness, indicators that capture the distinctive

¹⁶ For example, the OECD's [mission statement](#) highlights that “the common thread of our work is a shared commitment to market economies backed by democratic institutions and focused on the wellbeing of all citizens.”

dimensions of multilateral institutions should comprise a larger portion of a MAR, rather than be tangential. Such criteria should be central to any measurement system that is recommended for the U.S. MOPAN might be encouraged and resourced to add such indicators and make them more important in its scoring. Any criteria used for a U.S. review should also force an analysis that, similar to the U.K., asks what advantages the organization delivers over U.S. bilateral aid.

Take a comprehensive view of leadership in the multilateral development system, and consciously create leadership or exit strategies. The extent of U.S. involvement and leadership in the multilateral development system puts the U.S. in a unique position and has implications for decision-making. Considerations related to U.S. increases, reductions, or exits in participation in multilateral organizations should be viewed in light of the opportunities such moves provide other countries, and the related potential for changing norms or development practices as leadership and influence evolves or shifts. When rebalancing, the U.S. would be wise to develop a transparent strategy for transferring or cultivating leadership with like-minded countries, to ensure to the extent possible that norms, standards, and development practices remain aligned with U.S. policy interests.

Undertake individual assessments on a regular basis, to identify trends and follow changes within particular organizations and the system as a whole. Snapshots offer temptingly precise rationales for decision-making. In reality, their ability to forecast potential future benefits from an investment are limited. The outcomes of a MAR should be placed within the context of a larger analysis of the organization's history, evolution, and future prospects when options and decisions are proposed. Changes in leadership or the external environment, the time needed to execute reforms or improvements, and the time needed to evaluate impact are all key considerations. Assessments should be conducted every 3-4 years to develop trends lines and measure the consistency of performance as well as the impact of any reforms that are undertaken, and MOPAN should be appropriately resourced to do this.

While a U.S. MAR offers no panacea for optimizing the return on U.S. investment through multilateral development institutions, it would fill a critical gap and develop a useful evidence base that is now mostly missing. It could also help the U.S., in a changing and challenging environment for international development, leverage its longstanding support and leadership of these institutions. Doing so, however, requires the U.S. to develop a clear policy perspective and set of expectations from its participation in the multilateral development system. This should be a critical piece of any foreign assistance strategy or review, based on evidence and presented transparently. Only then will the U.S. public get a full picture of the value that the U.S. receives through its engagement multilaterally on development issues—and what it might be gaining, or giving up, with any shifts.