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The Evaluation Practices of ODA Providers in Assessing the Effectiveness of Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Projects in Vietnam

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Abstract

Vietnam is at the forefront of the environmental, social and health challenges posed by global warming, requiring robust climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies. Official Development Assistance (ODA) is emerging as a potential solution, providing financial support from developed countries to less favoured countries. However, the effectiveness of ODA in addressing climate issues remains uncertain, with criticism mounting over its mixed results and the continued existence of asymmetrical donor-recipient relationships. Through the lens of the Support Programme to Respond to Climate Change (SP-RCC), a joint budget programme launched in 2009 by the French Development Agency (AFD) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and supported by the World Bank, this article examines ODA's commitment to international environmental governance by supporting Vietnam's development of an environmental institutional framework. Focusing on the SP-RCC's evaluation system, which is based on internationally established aid effectiveness criteria, the article shows that the evaluation framework struggles to capture the SP-RCC's contribution to coherent environmental governance in Vietnam. The study highlights the failure of the evaluation to explain and address the lack of cooperation between the different actors involved in the SP-RCC, the problems of the programme's alignment with the Vietnamese government's objectives, and the programme's impact at the local level. The analysis highlights the challenges of aligning international recommendations with national strategies and the complexity of assessing the impact of aid on climate change adaptation and mitigation. The paper contributes to research on aid effectiveness in climate change adaptation and mitigation by taking an original approach: examining the role of international aid effectiveness criteria in guiding ODA targets and the impact this can have on recipient countries. Recommendations include the refinement of evaluation methodologies to improve understanding of aid impacts, the need to emphasise context specificity, and to promote the inclusion of NGOs and academics in donor evaluation systems.

Keywords AFD, JICA, ODA, SDGs, Vietnam

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1. Introduction

Michael R. Greenberg, in his book Environmental Policy Analysis (2007, p. 177), quotes the writer and critic H. L. Mencken to illustrate his point about the conundrum that is environmental policy formulation and implementation: "For every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong." (Columbia Encyclopedia, 2001). Put in the context of economic development and poverty, and the only solution offered for a long time by Official Development Assistance (ODA): "the Big Push", this quote has a slightly satirical resonance. The Big Push is part of the classic narrative of economic development theories and supports the idea that the way out of poverty is through increased foreign aid and investment (Easterly, 2006). Developed in the 1950s and then sidelined in favour of other approaches to development - to name but a few, human capital theories (Schultz, 1961) and the capabilities approach (Sen, 1985) - this discourse made a comeback in the early 2000s with the promulgation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). If the Big Push approach has returned in the early twenty-first century, it is because its ideas are seductive. The problems of poverty or greenhouse gas emissions could be solved by large-scale investment, partly financed by foreign aid, leading to economic growth: the clear and simple answer. In the case of reducing CO2 emissions, the Environmental Kuznets Curve tends to support this hypothesis (Jobert & Karanfil, 2012), although as with the Big Push, this assumption has been strongly challenged, particularly concerning ASEAN member countries (Nasir, Duc Huynh & Xuan Tram, 2019). These theories, presented here in a simplified form, are partly at the root of the debate on the effectiveness of development aid in supporting economic growth and breaking the poverty trap. This debate is fuelled by two opposing camps: scholars who are pessimistic about aid effectiveness (Bossuat, 2013; Carbonnier, 2010; Chavagneux, 2001; Madaule 2021; Marchesin 2021; Mélonio, Naudet & Rioux 2022; Severino, 2001; Severino & Ray, 2009) and scholars who have observed a link between aid and development only under certain conditions (Stokke, 1995; Reardon, 1997; Scholl, 2009; Huang & Pascual, 2017). I describe the arguments and contributions between these two camps later in this article. Since aid effectiveness is the central theme of this article, it is important to note that this concept can only be understood and studied in the light of the international system of which it is a part. Research on ODA is thus embedded in the study of international relations (IR). According to liberalism and neoliberalism perspectives on IR (Malacalza, 2019), ODA is an instrument of global governance that can contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and is also a tool of diplomacy, an idea also defended by theories of international political economy.

While the impact of ODA on economic development and poverty reduction in recipient countries has been the subject of much research, the

redirection of funds to climate change adaptation and mitigation (CCAM) remains a less studied topic (Huang & Pascual 2017). However, the proliferation of major international meetings, such as the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, and international climate agreements, notably the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, have led to the gradual integration of environmental issues into ODA. This shift in the purpose of ODA was accelerated by the promulgation of the MDGs, the Bali Road Map and the Bali Action Plan in 2007, which strengthened action on climate change, and later the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The international meetings and reports on climate change mentioned above highlight the particular vulnerability of developing countries to the impacts of unpredictable weather and climate. At a time when poverty reduction and economic growth are priorities for developing countries, their populations, especially the poorest, are more vulnerable to climate change because of their heavy dependence on agriculture and ecosystem services, rapid population growth and concentration, and poor health services. Without adequate infrastructure and capacity to adapt, developing countries are unable to cope with climate change, which threatens food security and traditional agricultural practices, increases extreme weather events, degrades water quality and availability, and undermines the incomes of the poorest populations (Dar, 2012).

The case of Vietnam illustrates the interconnected nature of the climate and economic issues facing low- and lower-middle-income countries. Vietnam is one of the ten countries most vulnerable to climate change (Bal, Burck, Hagen, Höhne & Nascimento, 2020). Rising sea levels, melting glaciers altering the course of the Mekong River and heavy rainfall are currently affecting Vietnam and, if left unaddressed, will have catastrophic consequences such as population displacement, loss of arable land and a reduction in gross domestic product. In addition, as Vietnam's population grows, so does its demand for energy and electricity. If this electricity is produced using fossil fuels, it will contribute to the release of large amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere (Espagne, Huynh Thi Phuong, Lagrée, & Drogoul, 2022). There is therefore an urgent need to help Vietnam develop appropriate mitigation and adaptation actions. To address these many challenges, the World Bank has calculated that Vietnam will need approximately US$368 billion between 2022 and 2040 to finance climate change adaptation and decarbonization (World Bank, 2022). “In 2015, Vietnam was among the top three global recipients of ODA (in terms of disbursements) after Afghanistan and India”[2] (Carrillo, Thenint & Baye, 2018, p. 4). As Vietnam has moved from a low-income country to a lower-middle income country, aid disbursements to Vietnam have decreased (Chopiton & Ambassade de France au

[2] Original quote in French: “En 2015, le Vietnam comptait parmi les trois plus gros pays bénéficiaires de l’APD mondiale (en termes de versements), se classant après l’Afghanistan et l’Inde.”

Vietnam, 2020). Nonetheless, in 2020 it still received US$1,167 million (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development & Development Assistance Committee, 2023). Vietnam's top bilateral donors[3] are, in order, Japan, Germany, France, South Korea, and the United States (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development & Development Assistance Committee, 2023). While the primary objectives of ODA in Vietnam were economic growth and poverty alleviation, which explains the drop in aid when Vietnam entered the lower-middle-income group, the remaining donors, whether bilateral or multilateral, cannot continue their activities in Vietnam without taking into account the environmental problems that the country faces and will face in the future. Vietnam is therefore a well-chosen case study to examine the reorientation of ODA.

The Development Assistance Committee (DAC), in an approach very similar to the Big Push, advocates increasing aid for climate change adaptation and mitigation to finance the transformation of partner countries, the term referring to ODA recipient countries (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development & United Nations Development Programme, 2019). ODA seeks to internationalise strategic parts of the apparatus of targeted states, enabling them to flesh out international agendas (Hameiri & Scarpello, 2018). For Vietnam, a signatory to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (2015), its commitments to international environmental agendas take the form of implementing nationally appropriate mitigation actions (NAMAs) and regularly submitting its nationally determined contribution (NDC). Vietnam's engagements imply that it is part of global environmental governance. Through the development of the Support Programme to Respond to Climate Change (SP-RCC), initiated by the French Development Agency (AFD) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and supported by three other bilateral donors, Korea EximBank, the Australian Agency for International Development, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and one multilateral donor, the World Bank, ODA providers are influencing environmental governance in Vietnam.

According to liberal and neoliberal perspectives on international relations, ODA is a tool used by actors (international institutions and states) to develop international governance. “However, little attention has been paid to how IR theories can explain the ways in which states and other actors seek to shape aid policies and politics” (Malacalza, 2019, p. 11). By examining ODA's participation in global environmental governance through a study of the SP-RCC's evaluation system, which is based on internationally established aid effectiveness criteria,

[3] Official development assistance can be delivered by a state, which is called bilateral aid, or by a regional or international organization, which is called multilateral aid. If we consider these two types of aid, the main ODA providers in Vietnam are: the World Bank, Japan, the Asian Development Bank, Germany and France.

this article explores the ways IR theories can explain how development agencies shape and evaluate aid for climate change adaptation and mitigation. It is hypothesised that by basing the aid evaluation system on aid effectiveness criteria, the evaluation struggles to assess the SP-RCC's contribution to the development of coherent Vietnamese environmental governance and to analyse the programme's shortcomings.

Part 1 focuses on the evolution of ODA and introduces the case of ODA in Vietnam and the SP-RCC. Part 2 is devoted to the literature review on ODA's main criticisms and debates about aid effectiveness and presents the criteria established by the international community and researchers to evaluate it. Part 3 describes the methodology. The results of the study are reported in Part 4 and discussed in Part 5. Part 6 is devoted to recommendations. Part 7 concludes the article.

2. Part 1: About ODA and the SP-RCC

Official Development Assistance is the financial assistance provided by developed countries to low- and lower-middle-income countries. This aid can take the form of low-interest loans, grants or technical assistance. ODA, in its current form, was conceived in 1969 by the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD (Chavagneux, 2001). ODA was then divided among food aid, emergency aid, refugee assistance, debt relief and some peacekeeping operations (Bossuat, 2013; Van der Veen, 2011). Donor countries have several reasons for financing the development of the poorest countries. It allows them to promote their foreign trade and economic policies while increasing their political and cultural influence (Calandri, 2014). Reflected in the MDGs and then the SDGs, the climate crisis and its impact on economic growth and poverty has become an international concern. This milestone not only influences the objectives of ODA, but also helps rethink how it works and how to make it more effective (Huang & Pascual, 2017; Pawelczyk, Pincet, & Okabe, 2019; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development & United Nations Development Programme, 2019). When the international community agreed on a new agenda for more effective aid in the early 2000s, the programme-based approach was seen as one of the solutions to improve aid effectiveness because it gives the recipient country more freedom of choice. Indeed, the money lent is incorporated into the government's budget (Orth & Schmitt, 2018). The objectives of the programme-based approach are also consistent with the will of ODA donors to promote good environmental governance structures in recipient countries, which means increasing the capacity of recipient governments to make and enforce environmental regulations and deliver environmental services (Fukuda-Parr, 2013; Soeng, Cuyvers, & Sok, 2019; Ortmann, 2017). Stéphane Madaule, former director of AFD, emphasizes the broadening of ODA's objectives which: "are no longer solely economic or

social but also environmental, and [...] go far beyond what made its raison d'être. A gradual shift has taken place: from a North/South solidarity issue, presented as a temporary means to achieve economic catch-up with the North, aid now claims to respond to a collective ambition of a universal nature"[4] (Madaule, 2021, p. 84).

The establishment of the SP-RCC in 2009 reflects the aforementioned evolutions of ODA targets. The SP-RCC was a multi-year program assistance providing financial and technical support for the implementation of the National Target Program to Respond to Climate Change developed by the government of Vietnam in 2008 (World Bank, 2016). The response of the government of Vietnam to the environmental crisis, before the SP-RCC, is described by Stephan Ortmann in his book, Environmental Governance in Vietnam. He argues that despite repeated attempts to improve the legal framework:

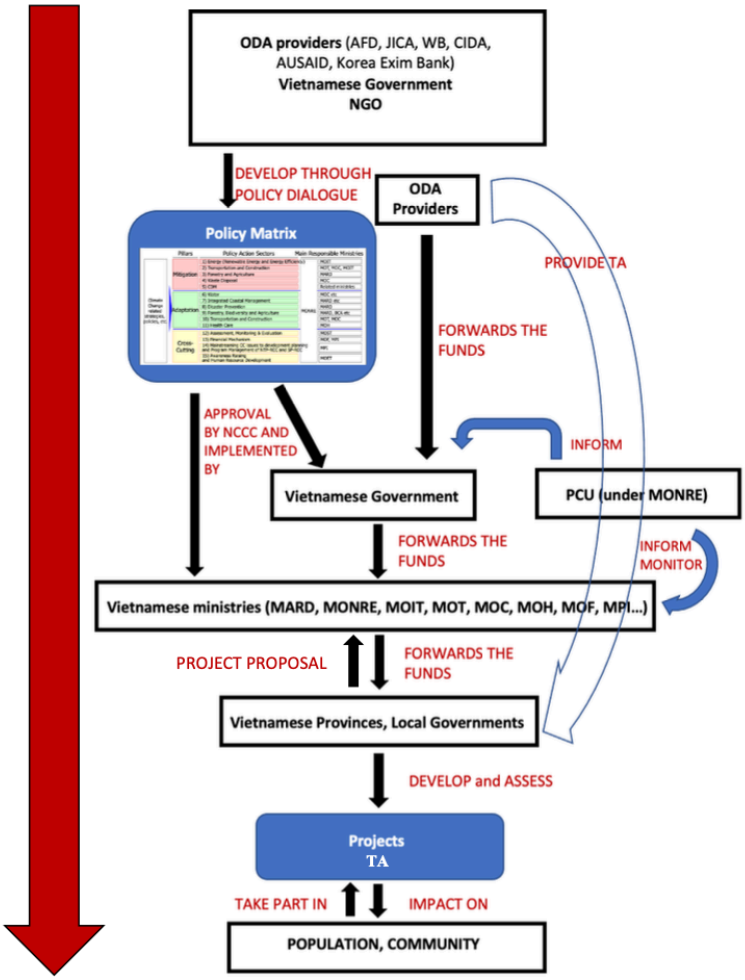
> *"In 1985, the government passed a formal decision which declared that any development should take environmental protection into consideration. In 1986, the government worked on […] a National Resources and Environment Research Program. […] In 1991, the government released its first National Plan for Environment and Sustainable Development. […] The government passed its first environmental law in 1992 [and] elevated its environmental institution to ministerial level in 1992"* (Ortmann, 2017, p. 24-26).

The implementation of environmental legislation, because it happens rarely, remains a problem. Moreover, the relative youthfulness of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE), established in 2002, seven years before the initiation of the SP-RCC, presents challenges in developing a robust legal framework for environmental governance due to its relatively low position within the ministry hierarchy (Ortmann, 2017). The SP-RCC was therefore established by Japan and France to support the efforts of the government of Vietnam and to serve as a forum where various Vietnamese ministries and donors meet. The programme was later joined by the World Bank, the Canadian International Development Agency, Korea EximBank and the Australian International Aid Agency. Money from donor loans was pooled in a central budget that was used to finance "the adoption of laws and regulations, the conduct of studies, but also the effective implementation of financial mechanisms or operations" (Agence Française de Développement, n.d.) (Figure 1). The three main priorities of the SP-RCC were mitigation, adaptation, and cross-sectoral

[4] Original quote in French: "Ils [les objectifs] ne sont plus uniquement économiques ou sociaux mais également environnementaux, et débordent aujourd'hui de beaucoup ce qui a fait sa raison d'être. Un basculement progressif a eu lieu: d'un enjeu de solidarité Nord/Sud, présentée comme le moyen temporaire d'accomplir un rattrapage économique avec le Nord, l'aide prétend maintenant répondre à une ambition collective à caractère universel."

issues related to climate change (Japanese International Cooperation Agency, 2009). Each policy area in which the program intervenes was linked to one or more Vietnamese ministries (Table 1). The program was divided into seven phases, each of which had specific objectives to be met to move on to the next phase.

Figure 1: SP-RCC operations and stakeholder involvement



Source: Authors based on SP-RCC ex-ante and ex-post evaluations and interviews with AFD and JICA employees.

Table 1: SP-RCC areas of focus and line ministries for the program

Field	Line Ministries
1. Disaster preparedness and climate monitoring	Ministry of Natural Resource and Environment (hereinafter, "MONRE"), Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (hereinafter, "MARD"), Ministry of Transport (hereinafter "MOT"), Ministry of Construction (hereinafter "MOC")
2. Food and water security	MONRE, MARD, MOC
3. Proactive responses to sea level rise	MONRE, MARD
4. Sustainable forest management and development	MONRE, MARD
5. Reducing GHG emissions	MONRE, MARD, MOT, MOC, Ministry of Finance (hereinafter "MOF"), Ministry of Planning and Investment (hereinafter "MPI"), Ministry of Industry and Trade (hereinafter "MOIT"), Ministry of Science and Technology (hereinafter "MOST")
6. Mainstreaming climate change	MONRE, MOF, MPI, MARD, Ministry of Education and Training (hereinafter "MOET")
7. Community capacity development	MOET, Ministry of Health (hereinafter "MOH")
8. Financial mechanism	MONRE, MOF, MPI

Note: Ministries underlined in the table above are those that were interviewed or who responded to the questionnaires.

Source: Iida (2019, p. 5)

The SP-RCC was a large-scale programme designed to assist Vietnam in its environmental transition and was unique in terms of its duration, the large number of multilateral and bilateral donors involved, and the amount of money committed (US$ 1269 million). The interest in studying this budget support programme and its evaluation system also stems from the fact that the SP-RCC aligns with the environmental aid agenda and highlights the difficulty of transitioning from the international to the national and local levels in the context of environmental governance. Before examining the results and impact of this program in more detail, the following section reviews the main debates on aid effectiveness and the evolution of the criteria for measuring it.

3. Part 2: Criticisms of ODA and international criteria for measuring its effectiveness

The arguments put forward by academics against foreign aid are numerous. One of the problems with ODA is its origins. Indeed, it can be seen as a tool used by ex-colonial empires to maintain their influence in their former colonies (Balleix, 2013; Hugon, 2013; Malacalza, 2019; Servet, 2010). This aspect can be argued in the case of the SP-RCC, as it was initiated by Japan and France, of which Vietnam was a former colony. This fact leads several ODA specialists to say that aid reinforces asymmetrical relationships between donors and recipients (Chavagneux, 2001). Another frequently voiced criticism is that ODA favors the indebtedness (Wang, Guo & Dong, 2021) of the recipient country, since most forms of ODA are loans. In addition, the projects funded would largely involve outward-looking activities, such as the extraction of raw materials, which would have little or no positive impact on the local population (Easterly & Pfutze, 2008; Madaule, 2021). These criticisms are directed at ODA as a system. Despite its evolution in recent years and its alignment with the SDGs (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development & United Nations Development Programme, 2019), negative comments persist. Thomas Mélonio executive director of innovation, strategy and research at AFD highlights its potential, while recalling that "it lags behind its time and is inadequate in the face of future challenges" (2022, p. 3). Moreover, although ODA continues to be supported and financed, the amounts spent are derisory and no longer seem capable of making a difference in terms of sustainable development (Mélonio, Naudet & Rioux, 2022). Aid has also been criticised for its negative impact on the quality of governance in the recipient country (Soeng, Cuyvers, & Sok, 2019). Aid monopolises public sector personnel, undermines institutions, encourages rent-seeking behaviour, and creates donor dependency. While development agencies are regularly evaluated according to international criteria, described in detail in this article, project evaluation continues to be criticised for its inability to capture the impact of budget programmes at the country level (Grey & Morris, 2018) and for the lack of a mechanism to communicate the beneficiaries' point of view to the sponsors (Martens, 2005). These shortcomings are partly due to poor management of aid data by members of the Development Assistance Committee (Alsayyad, 2020). The true impact of ODA is therefore unknown or poorly understood (Severino, 2001), which led the literature on aid effectiveness to flourish in the 1990s (Baliamoune-Lutz, 2017; Huang & Pascual, 2017).

The main arguments of the aid pessimists have been presented. Another group of scholars provides counterarguments by considering that aid can be effective under certain conditions (Stokke, 1995; Radelet, 2006; Reardon, 1997; Scholl, 2009; Huang & Pascual, 2017). In addition to arguments about the role of foreign aid in reducing poverty and promoting economic growth (Nguyen, Huynh,

Reisach & Kim, 2022), some point to the link between ODA and the promotion of good governance. Foreign aid provides funds to the recipient government to enable it to:

> *"[…] Develop agendas for improving public services, enhancing effective policy formulation and its implementations, and establishing strong, effective institutions. […] foreign aid can be utilized for enhancing state capacity through training and technical assistance […]. This could lead to the enhancement of the quality of public administration and the use of public resources, thus boosting the effectiveness of governance and institutions. […] it can be used to strengthen procedures and institutions for state-society linkages, which includes support for judicial reforms and the rule of law, […] some foreign aid is directly made to empower non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations with truly genuine development agendas in their missions, so that they can engage more productively with their host governments for the benefit of the general public."* (Cuyvers, Soeng & Soken, 2019, p. 134)

Studies on aid effectiveness related to climate issues are recent and few in number. The factors underlying the effectiveness of ODA for climate change adaptation and mitigation have not been identified (Radelet, 2006), leading Yongfu Huang and Unai Pascual to say that "systematic research on aid effectiveness for environmental sustainability is hugely lacking" (Huang & Pascual 2017, p. 3). Holger Rogner and Kei-Kit Leung state that "review confirmed that without ODA and other forms of development assistance, many renewable and efficiency projects would not have been implemented in developing countries, with resultant higher GHG emissions". (Rogner & Leung, 2017, p. 116). Using three different indicators: real savings, ecological footprint/biocapacity ratio, and sustainability-adjusted Human Development Index (HDI), Yongfu Huang and Muhammad Ghulam Quibria found that foreign aid promotes sustainable development in recipient countries (Huang & Quibria, 2017). Research that takes a more optimistic view of ODA has in common that it makes the effectiveness of aid conditional on the fulfilment of several criteria (Radelet, 2006), in particular, country ownership and consideration of the social, political and economic context of the recipient country (Grey & Morris, 2018). Indeed, this is one of the criticisms that can be levelled at them, namely that they merely list potential criteria for effectiveness without testing them. However, the introduction of aid effectiveness criteria is the method widely used by international organisations to persuade ODA providers to change their practices. The construction of the international governance of (sustainable) development aid is also based on these criteria. According to Malacalza (2019), foreign aid can be

considered an international regime or semi-regime because it is based on rules that take the form of criteria.

Since 2002 and the Monterrey Consensus, ODA providers and in particular members of the DAC have been trying to elaborate criteria on which donors should base themselves to have good practices that would increase the effectiveness of aid. Thus, in 2005, the Paris Declaration established five partnership commitments between donors and developing countries: ownership, alignment, harmonization, managing for results, and mutual accountability. The Paris Declaration also identifies the following different actions to strengthen aid effectiveness (Owa, 2011):

1- Align aid flows with national priorities
2- Strengthening capacity through coordinated support
3- Use of country public financial management systems
4- Use country procurement systems
5- Avoidance of parallel implementation
6- Predictability of the aid
7- Use of common agreements or procedures
8- Joint missions
9- Joint country analytical work

Three years later, the Accra Agenda for Action is established as a roadmap that ideally both donors and recipient countries should follow to make ODA more effective. In particular, it highlights the main areas that need to be improved in order to promote aid effectiveness, such as the involvement of civil society organizations (CSOs), the use of the recipient country's fiduciary system by donors, the strengthening of this system by recipient countries, the fight against aid fragmentation, the reduction of tied aid in favour of untied aid, better accounting by donors and recipients, coordination between donors and recipient countries to set conditions for the receipt of aid, and improved predictability of aid, in particular through better budget planning (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2008). However, little detail is provided on how donors and recipients can concretely improve their practices or measure their progress or regression. In 2011, a new document focusing on aid effectiveness, the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, was launched. The Busan Declaration lists four common general principles (Bigsten & Tengstam 2015):

- Ownership of development priorities by developing countries.
- Focus on results: learning from experience is important.
- Inclusive development partnerships: including reducing aid fragmentation.
- Transparency and accountability.

Based on these principles of aid effectiveness, the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, a multi-stakeholder organization on development effectiveness created in 2012 following the Busan High Level Forum

on Aid Effectiveness, has developed a list of aid effectiveness criteria (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development & United Nations Development Programme, 2019) (Table 2).

Table 2: Criteria for ODA effectiveness proposed by the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation

Number	Indicator
1	Quality of National Development Strategies and National Results Frameworks
2	Creating an enabling environment for CSOs
3	Quality of public-private dialogue
4	Transparent information on development cooperation
5a	Predictability of development cooperation
5b	Medium-term predictability of aid
6	Development cooperation is included in budgets subjects to parliamentary oversight
7	Development partners' perspective on mutual accountability mechanisms at country level
8	Countries have systems in place to track and report on budget allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment
9a	The partner country is strengthening its public financial management systems
9b	Development partners use partner country systems
10	Untied aid

Source: Created by the author based on OECD/UNDP report (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development & United Nations Development Programme, 2019)

All the above criteria (Tables 2) are non-binding and were developed at major international meetings, mostly by OECD and DAC members. Other stakeholders, such as NGOs, have sometimes been involved in their formulation, notably through the Global Partnership. Despite the elaboration of these indicators and the fact that they are reiterated at every meeting on aid effectiveness or in reports on the subject, many researchers continue to question ODA and point to the failure of donors to respect them (see the authors of the pessimist group above). This raises the question of the real impact of these principles on the effectiveness of ODA, as these criteria are largely donor-driven and do little to develop the central role of recipient countries in ensuring aid effectiveness.

Following the promulgation of the various criteria mentioned above, authors have attempted to rate donor and recipient countries. In 2012, the OECD produced a report on progress in implementing the Paris Declaration and monitoring its criteria. To this end, 12 indicators have been developed to assess progress in the broad categories defined in the Busan Declaration. The results are

mediocre, and the document highlights a lack of commitment by donor countries, particularly in the areas of donor coordination, alignment with partner countries' priorities, aid predictability and mutual accountability. In addition, aid fragmentation has increased. However, there have been improvements in the number of partner countries with strong national development strategies and in the progressive integration of the Millennium Development Goals. (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2012). The promulgation of the MDGs and then the SDGs is good news for improving aid effectiveness, as the adoption of these goals has led to positive changes among donors. Moreover, as the Global Partnership points out, the more effective ODA is, the more it will contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (OECD/UNDP, 2019). The OECD report also provides an evaluation of partner and donor countries. The idea behind this report is that the better the scores are, the more likely it is that ODA will be effective. Six years later, the Global Partnership re-used and slightly modified the indicators and assessed their evolution. The results are the same as in the OECD report from 2012. Positive developments have been made by recipient countries in strengthening national development planning. On the other hand, the alignment of development partners with partner countries' priorities and country-owned results frameworks is declining, the visibility of development cooperation at the country level is weakening, and the strengthening of public financial management systems has not been matched by a significant increase in their use by development partners. The enabling environment for civil society organizations is deteriorating, and there is mixed progress in making development cooperation more transparent (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development & United Nations Development Programme, 2019).

Before the 2012 OECD report on aid effectiveness, several authors attempted to assess donor practices and propose a ranking. These include David Roodman (2006), William Easterly and Tobias Pfutze (2008), Nancy Birdsall, Homi Kharas, Ayah Mahgoub, and Perakiss Rita (2010), and Stephen Knack, Rogers Halsey and Nicholas Eubank (2011). However, it is difficult to assess donors' practices because "most indicators of donor performance are based on plausible but largely untested beliefs about best practices in aid management" (Knack et al., 2011). In addition, the data used for this assessment are derived from data provided by donors to the OECD and are sometimes incomplete or difficult to interpret. The research conducted to evaluate donors has only looked at their overall practice, i.e. all regions and all sectors of activity taken together. The work done by different researchers to rank donors based on OECD data has produced very different results because the evaluation of donors' practices depends on the aid effectiveness criteria used and the methods chosen by researchers. The study of donor practices and their classification according to aid effectiveness criteria produces results that make it difficult to analyse the impact of aid on a recipient country. This article takes a different approach, looking at

how these same criteria have influenced the aid evaluation system and focuses on national and local levels.

4. Part 3: Methodology

Parts 1 and 2 of this article emphasize that Official Development Assistance operates within the framework of an international aid regime aimed at fostering international environmental governance. Development agencies function as key actors within this regime, employing effectiveness criteria that mirror the norms established by it (Malacalza, 2019). This article delves into the utilization of these effectiveness criteria by development agencies in evaluating their aid within the context of a specific project implemented in Vietnam. The methodology used consists of two stages. First, a content analysis of the SP-RCC evaluation documents was carried out to analyze their content through the prism of aid effectiveness criteria. The aim of this content analysis is to explore how donors take these criteria into account, which criteria are used and how they influence the way the evaluation is conducted and the results it highlights. The AFD, JICA and World Bank evaluations were selected for this study because they were available for consultation. In addition, these three donors are not only the initiators and main financiers of the SP-RCC but also the main donors in Vietnam. With a long history in Vietnam, they have a permanent office in Hanoi and a team of Vietnamese and donor country staff, as well as environmental specialists from Vietnam and abroad. Their knowledge of the country's political institutions is important. It is therefore interesting to analyse their assessments of the SP-RCC through this perspective. In contrast, the Australian and Canadian development agencies and the Korean development bank have had little involvement in the SP-RCC and have not evaluated the project or made their evaluations available.

Once this initial selection was made, the documents needed for content analysis were collected. The amount of information provided by the three major donors is uneven. JICA makes its ex-ante and ex-post evaluations of the SP-RCC available on its website. The final evaluation of the project, which was carried out by an external evaluator, Iida Toshihisa (2019), from OPMAC Corporation, a Tokyo-based consultancy firm specializing in development projects in developing countries, is also available on JICA website. For AFD, the evaluation of the SP-RCC was conducted by Ecorys, a Netherlands-based economic research and consulting firm (Ecorys, 2018). The document is not freely available on the AFD website but can be obtained upon request from former members of the SP-RCC Program Coordination Unit. Less information is available from the World Bank on the SP-RCC. The evaluation of the program is part of an evaluation report conducted in 2016 on the implementation and results of a series of development policy loans (DPO) to Vietnam for climate change development policy operations World Bank. (2016). This document is also available online. Each document

undergoes multiple readings to ensure a comprehensive understanding of its content. Subsequently, the documents are meticulously sorted and categorized based on 11 effectiveness criteria. This systematic analysis enables the identification of the criteria utilized by each development agency and their corresponding outcomes.

The content analysis conducted as part of this research examines the use of aid effectiveness criteria by ODA evaluators. After collecting the SP-RCC evaluation documents, the list of criteria on which this analysis is based was compiled. The effectiveness criteria have evolved since the Paris Agreement (see Part 2). Some criteria have been added by the OECD or the Global Partnership. Other criteria are more implicit and linked to international environmental commitments, such as the 2030 Agenda. The selection of criteria used for this study is summarised below. First, the aid effectiveness criteria developed by the OECD and the Global Partnership (Table 2) were grouped and sorted to avoid redundant criteria. Second, because the SP-RCC operates as budget support, it is highly dependent on the Vietnamese government as the primary entity responsible for establishing and funding the environmental governance structure. As a result, the success of the SP-RCC depends largely on the actions of the recipient country. According to aid effectiveness criteria, this includes promoting greater accountability, facilitating improved donor-recipient coordination, strengthening the fiduciary system, promoting engagement with civil society organisations, and improving the quality of strategies and results frameworks. It is important to note, however, that the primary objective of the SP-RCC evaluation is not to examine how the Vietnamese government is meeting these criteria, but rather to assess how technical assistance and donor support are helping Vietnam to do so. Consequently, in this study the criteria have been slightly adjusted to focus on assessing this enabling role. Third, given the nature and objectives of the SP-RCC, it is not useful to examine whether the evaluators considered the following criteria: untied aid, promotion of public-private partnerships, and harmonization of aid. The SP-RCC was designed as untied aid for the Vietnamese government. Therefore, it is not necessary to include this criterion in this analysis. Strengthening public-private partnerships was not an objective of this project, so this criterion is not included in the evaluation of ODA providers. In terms of harmonization, this indicator refers to avoiding the concentration of numerous donors in the same country or sector and promoting joint projects. Since the SP-RCC is already a joint project, there is no need to assess harmonization. The sorting process produces a list of 8 criteria (Table 3).

Table 3: Aid effectiveness criteria obtained after sorting

Number	Criterion
1	Alignment with partner country objectives and needs
2	Strengthening partner countries' national development strategies
3	Build on the recipient country's public financial management and procurement systems.
4	Predictability and transparency of aid (annual predictability).
5	Strong coordination with partner country (use of common agreements and/or procedures)
6	Coordinating among donors (when working on a joint project)
7	Transparent and monitorable performance assessment frameworks
8	Promote the participation of civil society organizations (NGO, citizens, local government).

Source: Created by the author.

The part 1 of this article reminded that ODA donors, especially DAC members (among them AFD, JICA, and WB), are committed to advancing the SDGs through their aid. Given that the SP-RCC aims to adapt to and mitigate climate change and covers Goals 2, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15 and 17[5], this research also questions the inclusion of these issues in donors' assessment of this program. According to Gabriela Ileana Iacobuţă (Iacobuţă, Höhne, Van Soest, & Leemans, 2021), SDGs have a positive impact on CCAM. Taking these objectives into account by donors could therefore have a positive impact on aid effectiveness. Thus, SDGs could be considered as criteria for ODA effectiveness. Holger Rogner and Kei-Kit Leung (2017) used the OECD effectiveness criteria and demonstrated their positive impact on aid in the renewable energy sector. Their research tends to show that most ODA effectiveness criteria are relevant regardless of the ODA (CCAM) sector, but also suggests that it is important to develop specific effectiveness criteria for ODA in the CCAM domain. They consider technology transfer and greenhouse gas reduction as criteria for assessing the effectiveness of ODA in the area of CCAM. This article does the same. Taking into account recent academic work on the effectiveness of ODA in the field of CCAM, three new criteria emerge: SDGs consideration, technology transfer, and GHG reduction. The 11 effectiveness criteria presented in this section and summarized in Table 4 were then applied to the content analysis of the SP-RCC evaluations conducted by JICA, AFD, and WB. The results are presented in Part 4.

[5] The SP-RCC was launched before 2015, so there is no direct mention of the SDGs. However, the objectives of the program as defined by the donors are aligned with SDGs 2 (zero hunger), 6 (clean water and sanitation), 7 (affordable and clean energy), 9 (innovation, industry and infrastructure), 11 (sustainable cities and communities), 13 (climate action), 15 (life on land) and 17 (partnerships for the Goals).

Table 4: Criteria for ODA effectiveness for climate change adaptation and mitigation

Number	Criterion
1	Alignment with partner country objectives and needs
2	Strengthening partner countries' national development strategies
3	Build on the recipient country's public financial management and procurement systems
4	Predictability and transparency of aid (annual predictability)
5	Strong coordination with partner country (use of common agreements and/or procedures)
6	Coordination between donors (when working on a joint project)
7	Transparent and monitorable performance assessment frameworks
8	Promote the participation of civil society organizations (NGO, citizens, local government)
9	Relate to sustainable development goals
10	Facilitate the transfer of sustainable technologies
11	Positive impact on greenhouse gas reduction

Source: Created by the author based on OECD/UNDP report (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development & United Nations Development Programme, 2019) and Holger Rogner and Kei-Kit Leung (2017)

The second methodological stage involves a framework analysis conducted on transcripts derived from 10 in-depth semi-structured interviews. These interviews were carried out between March 2023 and January 2024, encompassing locations in Tokyo (Japan), Paris (France), Hanoi (Vietnam), and online platforms. Participants included individuals directly engaged in the SP-RCC, such as development agency personnel (AFD, JICA), consultants, and NGO representatives (CARE International and WWF). Searches conducted on the professional networking platform LinkedIn, utilizing keywords such as JICA/SP-RCC, AFD/SP-RCC, and World Bank/SP-RCC, facilitated connections with former JICA personnel. Following introductions about my research, I inquired whether they could facilitate introductions to individuals in Japan, France, or Vietnam who had direct involvement in the programme and/or its evaluation. Subsequently, these contacts were reached out to and requested permission for interviews. Depending on their availability and geographic location, mutually convenient times and venues were arranged. Following each interview, interviewees were asked if they could facilitate connections with other individuals involved in the programme. Simultaneously, requests for interviews were dispatched via email to AFD, JICA, and the World Bank. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours and was recorded. One of the interviews was conducted by e-mail. The interviews were then transcribed using MacWhisper

software and, for those conducted in French (AFD) or Japanese (JICA)[6], translated into English by myself. Respondents were provided with and subsequently signed a consent form, which included a comprehensive presentation of the research, the objectives of the interview, the anticipated utilization and retention of data, a reminder of their rights during and subsequent to the interview, as well as the option for partial or complete anonymization of responses. The questionnaire was designed around 4 themes:

- The SP-RCC process and the role of the interview within the programme.
- Difficulties encountered in the implementation of the programme.
- The evaluation system.
- The impact of the programme on the objectives set.

To analyze the transcripts, a framework analysis was conducted, following a systematic five-step approach: familiarization with the data, framework identification, indexing, charting, and interpretation. This method was selected for its adaptability to tailor-fit the specific objectives of the research (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). Moreover, it is known for being 'essentially independent of theory and epistemology' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78), making it a pragmatic choice for data analysis in the context of an explorative approach. Framework analysis is particularly recommended for studies focused on evaluative research questions, such as exploring stakeholders' experiences of an event or program (Parkinson, Eatough, Holmes, Stapley, & Midgley, 2016). Another advantage of this method, pertinent to this article, is its efficiency in handling data collected and transcribed by the same researcher (myself), enabling a swift and simultaneous process of data familiarization and framework identification. The results of the framework analysis are presented in Part 4: results.

5. Part 4: Results

The results section is structured as follows: first, the results of the SP-RCC are examined using the aid effectiveness criteria as a framework. Second, the main unanswered questions about the results and impacts of the SP-RCC, as identified in the evaluation documents, are presented. Finally, the third section presents the results of the framework analysis. The content analysis of the SP-RCC evaluations shows that the three donors used the aid effectiveness criteria developed by international organisations to assess the program (Table 5). There is no obligation to use these criteria to evaluate aid. Each donor is free to use them all or to choose

[6] None of the interviews were conducted entirely in Japanese, and the questions were always asked in English (with the exception of the interviews with AFD staff, which were conducted entirely in French). However, interviewees whose mother tongue was Japanese and who were aware of my understanding of Japanese sometimes answered certain questions in their mother tongue.

to evaluate some but not others. The use of these criteria underscores that development agencies not only follow the guidelines of their home countries but also uphold global development commitments. They are therefore agents of the international aid regime.

In AFD's case, all the effectiveness criteria were mentioned in the evaluation, but only some of them were evaluated. JICA and the World Bank also used some of the aid effectiveness criteria to evaluate the SP-RCC (Table 5). To measure these criteria, the SP-RCC evaluators from OPMAC (JICA) collected quantitative data, such as the number of projects created and environmental policies implemented, and qualitative data through interviews with staff from the various Vietnamese ministries involved in the programme. Similarly, the World Bank has developed a list of indicators to evaluate its participation in the SP-RCC, and the evaluation is based on quantitative data. This methodology closely resembles that used by JICA. Each indicator is a target to be achieved and this is considered to have been achieved according to, for example, the number of projects implemented, or the number of people trained. Each donor has focused its evaluation on the priority themes of the country to which it belongs and the areas in which its technical assistance has been deployed. AFD's evaluation focuses on energy efficiency, JICA's on water and forestry management, and the World Bank's on water management and training of energy auditors and managers. The three evaluations indicate satisfactory outcomes for the program overall.

Table 5: Inclusion of aid effectiveness criteria in AFD, JICA and WB SP-RCC evaluations and assessment results

Criterion / Donor	(1) Alignment with partner country objectives and needs	(2) Strengthening partner countries' strategies	(3) Build on the recipient country's public financial management and procurement systems	(4) Predictability	(5) Coordination with partner country	(6) Coordination between donors	(7) Transparent and monitorable performance assessment frameworks	(8) Participation of civil society organizations	(9) SDGs	(10) Facilitate the transfer of sustainable technologies	(11) Positive impact on GHG reduction
AFD											
JICA											
WB											

Table legend

- Criterion evaluated by the donor. The result of the evaluation is considered positive by the donor.
- Criterion evaluated by the donor. The result of the evaluation is considered mitigated or unsatisfactory by the donor.
- Criterion not evaluated by the donor but mentioned by the donor, either directly or indirectly.
- Criterion not included in evaluation.

Source: Created by the author based on SP-RCC evaluations conducted by AFD, JICA and the World Bank.

Examining the criteria used by donors provides a clearer understanding of how the SP-RCC has bolstered Vietnam's environmental goals and assisted in

establishing an environmental institutional framework in accordance with international agreements (such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreements) and supported by global institutions, in particular, OECD, Global Partnership, and UNDP. Vietnam's significant need for financial and technical support in the environmental sector was evident when the SP-RCC started. The evaluations underscore the support for Vietnam's governmental aspirations, as outlined in its Nationally Determined Contribution and National Energy Development Master Plan, along with contributions to the budgets of various Vietnamese ministries. Prioritizing the demonstration of the SP-RCC's alignment with the partner country's objectives and needs, as stipulated by aid effectiveness criterion 1, was a focal point of the evaluations.

The evaluations also underline the role of the SP-RCC in developing and strengthening Vietnam's environmental institutional framework (criterion 2). According to the JICA report, 93% of the policy actions identified in the SP-RCC inception meetings have been successfully completed. The AFD report highlights that the SP-RCC has led to the implementation of several policies related to climate change adaptation and mitigation. It also highlights the establishment of a National Committee on Climate Change (NCCC) chaired by the Prime Minister. At the provincial level, both the JICA and World Bank reports note that all Vietnamese provinces have disaster preparedness plans after the completion of the SP-RCC. Regarding the institutional environmental framework, the World Bank's assessment highlights the SP-RCC's contribution to the development of a new legal framework for integrated water management and the issuance of the Decree on the Implementation of the Water Law. The financial impact of the SP-RCC (criterion 3) was assessed by each donor and was rated as mixed by AFD and JICA, as the contribution of the SP-RCC budget support funds to increasing government spending on climate change (CC) was rather limited, even though a financial mechanism for using ODA for climate finance through budget support is in place. The predictability of the SP-RCC (criterion 4) was rated positively.

Regarding coordination between donors and the partner country (criterion 5), the evaluation carried out on behalf of the AFD presents policy dialogue as an important feature of the SP-RCC but considers it unsatisfactory because it didn't meet donors' expectations. The question of why this has happened remains unanswered. Donor coordination is important for understanding how the SP-RCC works as a joint project (criterion 6). As mentioned in the AFD evaluation, there was a lack of coordination as the various meetings organised during the programme did not serve as a platform for dialogue. Donor coordination also suffered from a lack of focus on fewer issues and a lack of agreement among donors, particularly on certain energy-related issues. The evaluation carried out for AFD does not propose any solutions to remedy this situation. Neither do those carried out for the World Bank or JICA.

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions (criteria 9 & 11) is one of the key commitments made by the signatories to the Paris Agreement. It is one of the indicators of Sustainable Development Goal 13 and also one of the ODA targets. The evaluation of the SP-RCC carried out by Iida Toshihisa uses this criterion to highlight the overall impact of the SP-RCC. It argues that although GHG emissions will increase due to Vietnam's growing energy consumption, the environmental policies introduced during the SP-RCC will have a positive impact and allow emission rates to be achieved that are well below those projected under BAU scenarios. This finding is consistent with the work of optimists in development assistance (Rogner & Leung, 2017). However, in the context of this assessment, it is more an assumption about the potential impact of the SP-RCC rather than an assertion based on indicators and data.

Although each of the aid effectiveness criteria developed by international organisations is mentioned in at least one of the three evaluations, few of them are assessed in depth. Moreover, the use of these criteria, which impose inflexible frameworks on the evaluators, does not provide answers to questions that are essential to understanding the contributions of the SP-RCC. For example, there is no explanation or solution for the declining alignment of the SP-RCC with the needs of the Vietnamese government. With regard to donor involvement in strengthening environmental governance in Vietnam at the central level, the evaluators criticise the SP-RCC's Programme Coordination Unit for its moderately satisfactory performance. The reasons for this and possible solutions are not mentioned in the evaluation. The involvement of NGOs in the programme (criterion 8), one of the main objectives of the SP-RCC, is not mentioned in the evaluation. Similarly, there is no study of the implementation of laws and regulations and their impact on local environmental governance at the provincial, commune and district levels. It is therefore impossible to understand how aid has benefited local people and responded to environmental problems related to poverty, ethnic minorities, women and young people, who are the most vulnerable to climate change (Dar, 2012).

In order to understand the impact of the SP-RCC, its shortcomings and to answer questions ignored or left unanswered by the AFD, JICA and World Bank evaluations, it is necessary to go beyond the results presented in the evaluations and the framework imposed by the effectiveness criteria. To do this, I have drawn on the interviews conducted with SP-RCC stakeholders. As explained in the methodology section, the interview questionnaire was designed to give participants as much freedom as possible to talk about their experiences with SP-RCC. The first two steps of the analysis framework (familiarisation and identification) made it possible to identify 6 response themes into which the interviewees' responses could be classified (step 3 indexing): the origins of the programme, the Vietnamese institutional framework, the scope of the programme, donor behaviour, programme evaluation and the role of NGOs in the project. I

carried out all the steps with pen and paper, as I expected to have the flexibility to quickly rearrange, collapse and split categories as data understanding deepened These 6 categories were then rearranged (step 4 charting) to address the following 3 themes: the reason for the decline in development partner alignment, the role of civil society and local government in SP-RCC, and the impact of the programme on Vietnamese environmental institutions. The following paragraphs present step 5 of the framework analysis: interpretation.

According to interviewees, the capacity of Vietnamese ministries to implement environmental legislation was limited at the start of the SP-RCC. Climate change adaptation and mitigation were new issues for the Vietnamese government. Similarly, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment was a new ministry that lacked the resources and legitimacy to take on the role of coordinator of the SP-RCC. There was no environmental governance at the central level, nor a strong institutional framework to support it. The SP-RCC involved most of Vietnam's ministries and resulted in an extensive list of objectives to be achieved (e.g. creation of several hundred laws), programmes to be implemented (e.g. training and workshops, disaster management plan) and stakeholders to be involved (e.g. NGOs, local governments, community-based organisations). In addition, the SP-RCC funded around sixty local projects set up by the Vietnamese authorities with technical assistance from donors. Interviewees felt that although the SP-RCC's objectives were in line with those of the Vietnamese government, the programme was far too broad and involved far too many government agencies. One example mentioned several times was the fact that the Programme Coordination Unit, which was supposed to act as a link between the Vietnamese ministries involved in the project, liaise with donors, and monitor results, consisted of only six people. The SP-RCC is budget support, which means that donors lend money to the Vietnamese government to help it achieve its environmental goals. The government decides how much money to allocate to each ministry. As Vietnamese ministries are often in competition with each other, this has created tensions that have led some ministries to lose interest in the SP-RCC. These reasons help to explain why, as the SP-RCC progressed, it became increasingly disconnected from the real needs and objectives of the Vietnamese government. In addition, several interviewees felt that the loan was far from sufficient given the scale of the project.

This lack of financial and human resources also helps to explain why civil society organisations were only moderately involved in the SP-RCC. Two people working for two international NGOs present in Vietnam, CARE International and WWF, were interviewed. According to them, although the NGOs were invited to the SP-RCC biannual meetings, their role was only advisory. At no time were they involved in setting up programmes at the local level, while local INGO action is being developed in Vietnam. Although the SP-RCC was intended as a platform for cooperation, it did not provide a framework for involving all stakeholders.

Similarly, Vietnamese NGOs and community-based organisations were not represented, less for lack of will than for lack of resources.

At the central level, local stakeholders were not represented at meetings or in decision-making. However, training and workshops were organised at the provincial level (criterion 10). In addition, local authorities were able to submit CCAM-related projects to the various ministries for SP-RCC funding. About sixty projects were accepted. As they were implemented at the provincial, commune or district level, these programmes necessarily involved local people and civil society organisations such as the Women's Union, the Youth Union and the Farmers' Union. However, there is no documentation or evaluation of these projects. None of the interviewees were able to provide any information about these projects, apart from the assumptions below regarding the involvement of local population and community-based organisations.

Finally, one of the main shortcomings of the programme, according to the interviewees, is its evaluation system (criterion 7). None of the three donors were satisfied with the evaluation, which does not assess the results of the programme, but only its implementation at the central level. As a result, most questions about the impact of the SP-RCC at the local level such as the implementation of laws, the strengthening of institutional frameworks and the outcomes of the sixty projects developed, remain unanswered. Some of these outcomes should have been evaluated by Vietnamese ministries. However, there was no evaluation system in place in Vietnam to allow this. Furthermore, budget programmes were also new instruments on the donor side, especially in the area of climate change adaptation and mitigation. Consequently, according to several interviewees, a tailor-made evaluation system for the SP-RCC should have been developed in advance, but the Vietnamese government should also have been supported in data collection. This was not done due to lack of resources. Standardised criteria were used to evaluate a programme that was anything but standard.

6. Part 5: Discussion

The results of the study of the SP-RCC and its evaluations show that ODA's purpose no longer solely the political and economic interests of donors, although these objectives remain. ODA is now integrated into global environmental governance, evidenced by donors relying on international aid effectiveness criteria to guide and evaluate their assistance. The objectives of the SP-RCC were therefore to establish international standards of governance in Vietnam, through the establishment of an institutional environmental framework and the formulation and implementation of environmental policies. However, the SP-RCC has only partially achieved its objectives. Several explanations are offered in this section.

The inappropriateness of the programme to the Vietnamese political system is part of the answer. Vietnam's political structure, described as a

centralised-decentralised system (Lam, 2020), makes it difficult to transfer international environmental standards from the national to the local level. By encouraging Vietnam to strengthen its institutional framework based on international recommendations, the SP-RCC has tended to complicate matters. As a result, Vietnam now has a very sophisticated environmental legal framework, which unfortunately overwhelms the environmental state, particularly at the local level, due to its complexity and some overlap (Ortmann, 2017). The multiplicity of government agencies within ministries makes the environmental institutional framework very complicated to understand and operate, especially as there is also a lack of communication between the various Vietnamese ministries.

Although the SP-RCC is not the cause of this situation, it has contributed to exacerbating it. In addition, the many limitations of the evaluation system have had the effect of masking the aforementioned problems. Had the SP-RCC evaluation focused on outcomes and issues rather than implementation, it could have been useful for both the Vietnamese government and ODA providers. According to Easton's model, an effective system transforms inputs into outputs and uses the feedback generated from the outputs as new inputs (Ortmann, 2017: 46). By generating a very limited feedback loop, the evaluation of the SP-RCC does not contribute to the development of knowledge on the effectiveness of aid for climate change adaptation and mitigation. The poor quality of the evaluations is also due to the fact that they were designed for the countries that fund ODA, France and Japan, and not for development agencies and recipient countries. These evaluations are designed to show that the project has been implemented according to procedures and that it is in line with the objectives of international environmental agreements, as demonstrated by the evaluators' use of aid effectiveness criteria.

The SP-RCC has also failed to build trust among the development agencies present in Vietnam and between these agencies and the Vietnamese government. The termination of the SP-RCC was triggered by JICA's withdrawal from the programme in 2017 and a change in Vietnam's policy orientation towards ODA. The Vietnamese government decided to reduce the use of loans to avoid over-indebtedness. This change in policy has also increased Vietnam's distrust of ODA providers, although their assistance remains essential. International NGOs are also suffering from this change, as it has become more difficult to develop projects and obtain funding from ODA donors.

7. Recommendations

This article can be used as a basis for further discussion and work on improving ODA assessment. Following the study of the SP-RCC and its evaluations carried out by AFD, JICA and the World Bank, I suggest giving priority to impact evaluations that focus on the results of programmes and projects

rather than their implementation. This means thinking about evaluation in advance and adapting it to the specificities of the project and the field. Aid effectiveness criteria make it possible to assess the general orientations and practices of donors (Birdsall, N., Kharas, H.J., Mahgoub, A., & Perakis, R., 2010; Easterly & Pfutze, 2008; Knack, Halsey & Eubank, 2011; Roodman, 2006), but they are not adapted to the scale of a specific programme, as the case of the SP-RCC illustrates. Establishing mixed evaluation teams composed of both aid and recipient country specialists, including people from academia and civil society organisations, could be one way to improve evaluations. In the case of AFD and JICA, the SP-RCC evaluations were carried out by non-Vietnamese external consultants using the criteria provided by the development agencies. In order to analyse the impact of a programme or project, it is essential to know how the recipient country operates. It is not possible to carry out an in-depth evaluation using only external consultants.

According to Shahar Hameiri and Fabio Scarpello (2018, p. 149), donors should develop strategies and alliances to implement their projects and make their aid more effective. In the case of Vietnam and ODA to CCAM, this means strengthening links with civil society organisations, international and local NGOs, the Vietnamese academic community and other donor agencies. This is currently far from being the case, as evidenced by the coordination problems highlighted by the SP-RCC evaluation and interviewees.

Many conditions need to be met for aid to be effective, as the various research studies on the subject presented in part 2 of this article show. They are sometimes contradictory. For example, Steven Radelet considers that aid works best in countries with good policies and institutions (Radelet, 2006), but Thomas Mélonio advises that aid should be redirected to the poorest countries, which rarely have good environmental policies and institutions (Mélonio, Naudet & Rioux, 2022). In the case of Vietnam, given the country's political functioning and the government's preferences regarding foreign aid, the conditions for increasing the effectiveness and usefulness of aid could be to reduce the size of projects to make them easier to implement and to focus aid on the poorest populations. They are the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, but they also benefit the least from Vietnamese government aid.

Foreign aid as it exists today can be seen as an international environmental regime with its own norms (effectiveness criteria), its own actors (states and development agencies) and its own goals (tackling environmental crises). Studying aid effectiveness criteria means studying how this regime works, but also its limitations, one of which is its evaluation system. With regard to research on development assistance and its effectiveness in the field of CCAM, one important limitation is that aid and “aid relationships are viewed within the framework of an international system, rather than through a ‘local’ lens” (Malacalza, 2019, p. 18). This limitation means that the ODA analytical framework, particularly in international relations studies, fails to propose a multi-actor approach

focusing on aid recipients. I recommend further research on the relationship between ODA and community-based organisations and NGOs in particular, in order to understand the impact of ODA at both local and regional levels.

8. Part 7: Conclusion

This article examines the impact of internationally defined aid effectiveness criteria on the evaluation of ODA-funded projects using the example of the SP-RCC and Vietnam. The methodology is twofold, based on a content analysis (SP-RCC evaluation document) and a framework analysis based on the transcripts of 10 interviews. The main arguments and findings of this article are as follows:

(1) The international organisations that provide guidelines for the management of development aid also influence the evaluation framework established by donors and the criteria used by these donors to assess their projects.

(2) The evaluation criteria reflect the existence of international aid governance. Despite each donor advocating for its own interests, donors adhere to the international frameworks recommended at the global level.

(3) The use of these evaluation frameworks leads to low-quality evaluations that do not take into account the diverse contexts of recipient countries, as the study of the SP-RCC evaluation system in Vietnam shows.

(4) Donors claim the importance of aid in achieving sustainable development goals, but do not evaluate how their aid contributes to this.

(5) In addition to the weaknesses of the SP-RCC evaluation system, this study highlights that the specific characteristics of Vietnam, its political system and the relationships between the various actors involved in aid have not been considered, resulting in very mixed SP-RCC results.

(6) Even when the international aid regime aims to develop national environmental governance in recipient countries, as was the case in Vietnam, the results are mixed because the national context and complexities are not taken into account.

It is important to note that this study focuses on three donors that are members of the DAC and share many similarities. It is therefore limited in that it does not address the issue of aid effectiveness of donors that are not members of this committee. Furthermore, despite interviews with people who have worked in certain Vietnamese ministries, the Vietnamese government's view of the SP-RCC and its evaluation remains unknown. Finally, this research focuses on the case of Vietnam, but other countries, such as Indonesia, have been the subject of an ODA-based programme in the area of CCAM. Extending the scope of the study to other countries could strengthen the analysis of aid effectiveness in the area of CCAM in Southeast Asia.

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