

Cooperation or Competitive Equilibrium? The Determinants of Lead Donorship in International Development *

Miles D. Williams *Denison University*

Is lead donorship the product of collaboration or of a competitive general equilibrium? The phenomenon of lead donorship—a condition of sustained outsized responsibility by one bilateral donor government for providing development assistance to a developing country—has garnered attention for its proposed ability to foster greater coordination among donor governments by limiting inefficient donor competition and free-riding. But the pro-cooperation properties of lead donorship lie downstream from the strategic context that gives rise to it. Building on an existing theory that embeds lead donorship in a framework characterizing the public and private goods properties of international aid, this study shows that the observed pattern of lead donorship is consistent with uncooperative behavior. This is done using novel measures of donor foreign policy interest and recipient development need and a research design that helps to triangulate when and where aid produces public and private goods for donor governments.

Keywords: foreign aid, lead donorship, development

Introduction

Is lead donorship a product of cooperation or of a competitive general equilibrium? This question has special relevance in light of recent efforts to understand the link between lead donorship—condition of sustained outsized responsibility by one bilateral donor government for providing development assistance to a developing country—and donor cooperation (see Steinwand 2015).

References

- Steinwand, Martin C. 2015. “Compete or Coordinate? Aid Fragmentation and Lead Donorship.” *International Organization* 69 (2): 443–72.

*Replication files are available on the author’s Github account (<http://github.com/milesdwilliams15>). **Current version:** April 17, 2023; **Corresponding author:** williamsmd@denison.edu.