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Outsourcing the business of development: The rise of for-profit consultancies in the UK Aid sector

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Keywords

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Introduction

In 2019, Stephen Twigg MP, Chair of the Select Committee on International Development, and Matthew Rycroft, Permanent Secretary to the Department for International Development (DFID), were guests of honour at the 11th annual PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) International Development Conference. PwC is not the only prominent consultancy with an interest in the sector. Consider, for example, McKinsey, which in its introduction to its

development work, indicates why Twigg and Rycroft would be interested in an event of this sort:

> Our deep expertise in the public and social sectors is complemented with more than 90 years of private-sector experience ... We work as a trusted partner with heads of state, government ministers, and senior leaders of development agencies. … [We work with] proven delivery methods, tools, and solutions for diagnostics, analysis, strategy development, capability building, and implementation ... We help shape the global development debate by investing in proprietary research, fresh thinking, and an extensive publishing program.[1]

Like many of its consultant counterparts,[2] McKinsey promises fresh perspectives, managerial competence, analytical rigour and innovative solutions to bear on the world's most urgent and complex issues. Tangible results are to be delivered quickly. These claims have, it seems, been persuasive. In March 2020, for example, DFID appointed McKinsey to administer the £70 million Invest Africa project. A significant proportion of development programme expenditure – £1.248 billion in 2019/20 (DFID, 2020) – is now delivered through for-profit consultancies like McKinsey and PwC, such that they now manage a similar volume of the aid budget as NGOs, seen as a more traditional aid actor and means of delivery (we define the term 'for-profit consultancy' in more detail below).

The individual expert, or small team of consultants, is a familiar actor in the anthropology of development (see the collections: Fechter, 2012; Lewis & Mosse, 2006; Mosse, 2011b; Yarrow & Venkatesan, 2012), but the professional services or consultancy *firm* has been relatively neglected (despite considerable recent interest in other domains - see recent edited volumes Empson, Muzio, Broschak, & Hinings, 2015; Hurl & Vogelpohl, 2021b). A small if growing literature on consultancies in aid (including Broome, 2021; Brunt & Casey, 2022; Hayes & Westrup, 2014; Keele, 2019; Roberts, 2014; Seabrooke & Sending, 2019, 2022;

[1] Link: https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/how-we-help-clients/international-development Accessed 17 March 2022.
[2] We acknowledge that management consultancies and the major accountancy firms have very different histories and lineages (Kipping, 2021; McKenna, 2006; Weiss, 2019). However, for the present purposes we focus narrowly on their common involvement as contractors or service providers to the UK development state.

White, 2020) stands in contrast with the expansive literatures on other kinds of traditional aid actor: for example NGOs (see for a review Brass, Longhofer, Robinson, & Schnable, 2018) or bilateral donor agencies (e.g. Gulrajani, 2017; Mawdsley, 2019; Pauselli, 2019). The presence of for-profit consultancies in this landscape, now deeply embedded and omnipresent in practice, raises questions for critical development scholars around the scope and implications of their specific development rationalities and practices. We begin to address these questions in this article by tracing the drivers and entry points for the ascendance of for-profit consultancy firms to increasingly significant aid management, policy, audit and relational roles. Whilst our arguments remain tentative (the available data on consultants is notoriously patchy, subject to proprietary information and difficult to trace: (Craft & Halligan, 2017)) we draw conclusions from the juxtaposition of longer-term analysis of for-profit consulting, personal experiences within the professional development sector, and an early phase of research as part of a large ESRC-funded project.[3]

We suggest that the role of for-profit consultancies has intensified, not simply in the volume they manage but also in the centrality of their role to the legitimisation of aid. For-profit consultancies and public sector agencies are increasingly entangled (Froud, Johal, Moran, & Williams, 2017; Hurl & Vogelpohl, 2021a): Kipping has describes the public and private consultancy sector's relations in the US as being 'mutually constitutive' (Kipping, 2021: 37), and the term 'consultocracy' has been used to describe the role consultants have in government decision-making (Hood & Jackson, 1991). New Public Management reforms (Arnold & Cooper, 1999; Christensen, 2005; Jupe & Funnell, 2015; Lapsley, 2009; Lapsley & Oldfield, 2001; Leys, 1999; Shaoul, 2011) and more recently the implementation of cost-cutting austerity measures (Beveridge & Koch, 2021; Hurl, 2018) have provided rich case studies of the growing together of the public and private sectors, and the deepening relations and mutual adaptations that have occurred since.

In this article, we show how for-profit consultancies in international development have moved from primarily project-oriented professional actors to taking on fund management, programme audit and knowledge management roles. Relatedly, we examine how they perform key intermediary roles, orienting aid towards global finance and the private sector.

[3] Details to be added following anonymous review.

Both shifts are central to changes in aid discourses forged under successive Conservative governments, although both had precursors in the New Labour era (1997-2010). We explore how consultants are caught up in the shift from working primarily toward technical and professional agendas, to discourses and practices that revolve around managerial rigour (see e.g. Eyben & Guijt, 2015), stringent scrutiny, and audit and quantitative calculative and evaluative practices (Donovan, 2018). We suggest that global for-profit consultancies are both beneficiaries of, and produce the conditions of possibility for, this work. Both intermediary and management roles echo parallel shifts in professional services firms' wider practices (Roitman, 2021).

We close by arguing that the shift in for-profit consultancies' role is part of a highly politicised re-absorption of 'Development' – as a distinct enterprise or process – into 'development' (Alami, Dixon, & Mawdsley, 2021: 1296; Hart, 2010; Mawdsley & Taggart, 2022), i.e. broader global capitalist processes, driven in this case by the UK government as part of an ideological programme that moves away from the state and towards the private sector, state-capital hybridity, and global capital. The aid ethnography literature has long highlighted the depoliticising effects of the Development industry's technical discourses, whilst acknowledging the processes of translation and contestation characterising delivery (Lewis & Mosse, 2006; Murray Li, 2007; Rottenburg, 2009). The logics and interests of the actors involved in managing and delivering Development projects therefore matter. Critical accounts of the emerging 'consultocracy' highlight how management consultancies have a depoliticizing role in policy processes (Beveridge, 2012; Hurl, 2017; Hurl & Vogelpohl, 2021a; Ylönen & Kuusela, 2019). A growing literature highlights their role in the institutionalization of transnational regimes (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2017; Suddaby, Cooper, & Greenwood, 2007), framed by an institutional duality that brings transnational internal hierarchies to the reproduction of colonial core-periphery geographies (Boussebaa, 2015; Boussebou & Faulconbridge, 2019). Increased use of for-profit consultancies will entail the further depoliticization of British aid delivery and further isolation of aid agencies from contestation, embedding the transnational logics of global capital.

The next section provides a brief overview of the history of for-profit consultancies in the UK's development architecture, including the parallel history of professional services and global management consultancy firms of which they form part. Next we explore two key drivers for the growing role of for-profit consultancies in aid policy and practice: outsourcing of audit functions and key aid management roles, and the reorientation of aid towards the private sector and the interests of global finance. We conclude by addressing the broader implications for development processes in the UK. We should be clear that this is not a comprehensive review of the for-profit development sector by any means; and although we discuss depolitisation implications, we do not otherwise comment on the impacts, effectiveness or value of these service providers.

For-profit consultancies' traditional role in UK development: technical, state-oriented and projectized

The UK government has always outsourced some portion of its aid funding for delivery through for-profit consultancies. As such, they are one 'vehicle' amongst many: as part of the bilateral spend, they sit alongside civil society, multilateral agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and recipient country states, regions and municipalities. Historically, the role of the consultant has mainly been technical in nature,[4] indeed going back to colonial administrations (Morgan, 1964: 12). At the time of the creation of the Ministry of Overseas Development in 1964, some 15,400 officers filled positions in the former colonies and developing world (Morgan, 1964: 61) along with independent technical advisors, university teachers, and local training facilities and training in Britain (ODM, 1968: para 5.04). Technical advice was therefore central to the initial frameworks of aid provision, often in the form of individual experts placed for the purposes of capacity building. In this earlier era, consultants' roles were generally found within and subject to the projects through which aid was delivered. In his analysis of development consultants in the 1990s, Roderick Stirrat describes a floating world of short-term consultants (sometimes as short as two weeks, sometimes four years) working in transient teams across a wide range of tasks (Stirrat, 2000: 34-35). Whether the consultants were moonlighting academics, freelancers or employees of a consultancy company, they serviced processes central to the development enterprise (e.g. as the 'public face' of Poverty Reduction Strategy papers see Craig & Porter, 2006: 87-88). This figure of the consultant is familiar from accounts of Aidland: David Mosse's account of the Rural Development programme in India describes mostly individual consultants, each

[4] That is to say, it was primarily concerned with the available models for development projects, the arguments for them and the practices for their 'implementation' – or translation into specific situations (Behrends, Park, & Rottenburg, 2014).

representing a different professional field (Mosse, 2005). In this rural development project, 37% per cent of the project budget went to technical assistance (Mosse, 2011a: 21). Ferguson's list of the work proposed in phase two of the Thaba-Tseka Development Project captures the complexity and breadth of their work, with twelve pages to list activities spanning health, education, roads and agriculture, all serviced by a central project administration (Ferguson, 1996 [1990]: 88-100). As projects absorbed more of the aid budget, project roles became more significant (Barrie Ireton states that project spend increased from £406m in 1987/88 to £1,649m in 2005/06, 2013: 87). A third key characteristic of for-profit consultants' 'traditional' role was similar to all bilateral spending: 'British aid is given on a government to government basis'.[5] The work of for-profit consultants was oriented towards not one but (at least nominally) two governments: the British government which hired them and the recipient country government. In practice, the technical discourses driving development practice are there precisely to obscure the tensions incumbent in such a relationship and to maintain aid discourse's comfortable assumption that the persistent servant-to-two-masters relationship will be unproblematic (Rottenburg, 2009: 67-68). Technical assistance roles saw for-profit consultancies embedded in developing state agencies, addressing 'capacity building needs' (for all the familiar challenges of 'skipping straight to Weber', Pritchett & Woolcock, 2004: 193; Pritchett, Woolcock, & Andrews, 2013; Wilson, 2007). The picture thus emerges of an earlier era of consultancies working in primarily technical and advisory roles with sectoral expertise (e.g. in rain-fed agriculture, or maternal health); distributed across technical cooperation and (increasingly) project modalities, and oriented towards the public sector as their key interlocutors and partners.

An interesting distinction between DFID and many other government departments emerges from this context. We suggest that UK development was (mostly) insulated from the super-charged entry of management consultancy firms in the 1980s and 1990s, riding the tidal wave of 'New Public Management' (NPM) reform (Arnold & Cooper, 1999; Christensen, 2005; Jupe & Funnell, 2015; Lapsley, 2009; Lapsley & Oldfield, 2001; Leys, 1999; Shaoul, 2011). In other sectors, consultants – notably the Big Four accountancy firms – had profound influence in framing the arguments for privatisation and in administering NPM reforms, due in part to an enchantment with private sector management expertise over public sector

[5] ODA. (1985-86). *House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee*. National Archives (OD 116/65)

practices (Saint-Martin, 1998).[6] For the UK development sector, however, the role of NPM as an entry point for consultants was heavily moderated for various reasons.

In the first place, the measurement and management reforms to the project modality of 1986 (which most resembled NPM) were not there to drive or legitimise outsourcing, for the simple reason that much of development was already outsourced. The introduction of the Logframe,[7] for example, and its attendant technologies was there to reform the project and therefore the conduct of the relations between ODA/DFID and project teams. The new project technologies sought to reframe the management of these processes and to render them more efficient but not to enter into a new world of market-based mechanisms and competition (for the most part – some quasi-government agencies were privatised). Indeed, Logframe guidance documents tend not to refer to procurement at all (Team Technologies Inc, undated). Second, the primary discursive reference point for the project technologies was not private sector excellence but rather development debates on the scope of appraisal, evaluation and participatory design (Cracknell, 2000: 42-47). The Logframe itself ('the Project Framework' as it was known in ODA/DFID) was a planning tool derived from the U.S. military. It was introduced to broaden the considerations in planning projects (beyond chiefly engineering and economic factors) and to open opportunities for social and institutional analyses (Eyben, 2015). As a modality, the project became an arena for development debates around participation, emancipation and control (Dearden & Kowalski, 2003). Lastly, ODA as an agency was always heavily staffed with a large proportion of policy experts, including economists and increasingly political scientists and anthropologists (Eyben, 2014: 74-78, 88-94; Kothari, 2005). The primarily development discursive reference points robbed external consultancies of their unique selling point over the civil servants – their private sector expertise. ODA remained confident in its own capacity to institute reforms.

[6] Although see Kipping (2021) for whom the story of private sector entanglement in the public sector is much longer.

[7] The Logframe or Project Framework constitutes a set of templates and procedures for project appraisal, design, management and evaluation – integrated in a formalised cycle - which enabled (amongst other things) an expansion of relevant factors to include the institutional and social environments.

Moreover, the quantified accountability measures which constituted the Logframe's primary claim to be an NPM administration reform (Cracknell, 2000: 47) were weakened by a subsequent paradigm change in aid discourse under the auspices of Clare Short, the incoming New Labour Secretary of State for International Development. The emerging 'aid effectiveness' paradigm introduced state-partnerships and ownership to the core of aid provision and emphasised contribution rather than attribution of results – limiting in turn the grip of project-based accountability and audit systems. A review in 2008 looking at Logframes over the previous years observed that in many cases, the only number was the page number (interview, former DFID economist).[8] Whilst therefore the Logframe reforms had set in place an accountability mechanism at the project level, the corporate accountability system was indirect, predicated on a scoring system that allowed considerable local discretion to the DFID team in charge, and therefore did not afford the opportunity for internal outcome-oriented control and audit. As a consequence, while in 2005 ActionAid calculated that the £101m or so ODA that was spent by the UK 'was allocated … to the 'big five' accountancy firms (PricewaterhouseCoopers, KPMG, Deloitte Touche, Ernst and Young, Accenture) as well as to free market think tanks like Adam Smith International' (ibid: 35), the development work of these firms remained mostly technical, distributed within projects and state-oriented.

The rise of professional services firms in the UK's aid sector

While consultants have therefore - as outlined above - always been present in the UK's development sector, we contend that a different breed of development consultants has emerged across the sector over the last decade or so. We identify two kinds of for-profit consultancies in the contemporary development services marketplace. The first are large transnational multi-service consultancy firms for whom government and bilateral aid agencies sit alongside a vast array of private and public sector clients across diverse industries. In the UK, management consultants of this type regularly contracted to design and deliver ODA programming include those with roots in accountancy, such as

[8] It was only following the change in Secretary of State and the Global Financial Crisis of 2007/2008, when the New Labour leadership and key internal champions began to tighten the accountability structures (Valters & Whitty, 2017). As we will see in the next section, under the following Conservative administrations more substantial changes started to take place.

PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) or KPMG); engineering consultancy, such as Tetra Tech or Mott MacDonald; or management consultancy, such as McKinsey. In parallel, a slate of smaller, specialist development management contractors are also called upon to support the spending of the UK aid budget. Some of these smaller contractors have their origins in management consultancy for particular industries (such as Palladium, whose roots are partially to be found in rural management service provision). Others in this category are tied more closely to earlier types of development consultants with roots in the third sector or academia. Oxford Policy Management, for example, began in 1979 as an applied research working group on food security and agriculture at the University of Oxford, and only later evolved into a private sector development consultancy.

Any analysis of the growing ‘new’ consultancy role in the UK’s aid sector must also be situated within the wider history of the rise of global management consultancy, and particularly its rapid growth over the last two decades. While the USA and the UK emerge as global leaders in the rise of management consultancy (Kipping & Clark, 2012), the industry does not share the same historical trajectory in both countries. US management consultancy began to emerge in the 1950s, far earlier than in Europe. Some of these mid-century US consultancies have played (and continue to play) an important role in development through USAID contracting, especially those born of Cold War ‘liberal internationalism’. Some, for example, were initially concerned with problems of engineering and agriculture, and have now evolved into more generic strategy and advisory firms (Roberts, 2014). From the 1950s onwards, early strategy firms such as Booz Allen Hamilton and McKinsey began to export US-style corporate management to Europe (Kipping & Clark, 2012: 11-12). These early consultants were predominantly engineers, concerned with scientific management and labour process management. As management consultants spread across the USA and the UK over the next half century, multiple mergers with accountancy and audit firms across this sector – leading to the contemporary pre-eminence in the UK of the firms we now know as the Big Four (PwC, EY, Deloitte and KPMG) - saw tensions emerge over the principal focus (and legal boundaries) characterising their work. Recent decades, however, have seen the re-centring of consultancy across these firms, which are now more commonly referred to as professional services firms than as accountancy practices.

Since the mid-20th century, these for-profit consultancies have played a central role in the expansion of global capitalism through their influence over the management of corporate and financial activity, and their role in training a global cadre of young professionals to work across the private sector (Kipping & Clark, 2012: 5) – and increasingly, also across INGOs and state bureaucracies (Giridharadas, 2019: 22-34; Kipping, 2021: 44). Unlike previous types of development consultant, for-profit consultancies are, as such, lucrative, profit-driven firms, which arguably (albeit to differing extents) play a significant role in driving the widening global inequalities that many more traditional development professionals still believe their work is designed to resist (Boussebou & Faulconbridge, 2019). How then, have these firms come to play such a significant role in the spending of the UK's aid budget?

The changing role of for-profit consultancies in UK aid

How do we explain the (relatively late) shift from technical, distributed and state-oriented consultants to the newer roles described above? We suggest two particular drivers, analysed below.

Outsourcing managerial, audit and knowledge management roles

Following the election of the Conservative-led government in 2010, the new Secretary of State for International Development, Andrew Mitchell, made a series of changes in policy that were to drive outsourcing of key managerial and audit roles to for-profit consultancies. His first major change was to set 'the results agenda' and 'value for money' logics at the centre of his programme (Valters & Whitty, 2017: 27). Whilst – as discussed above - earlier targets had tended to be indirect, and permitted considerable discretion across a decentralised department, the new reforms were more stringent and aimed at controlling and auditing DFID's accomplishments (ibid). This decision was explicitly party-political and presentational, with a view to distinguishing a centre-right Conservative agenda from a space hitherto occupied by Labour, whilst maintaining (at that time) many of New Labour's policy commitments (in fact, the Labour government had already started to harden its position on value for money and accountability, and many of the DfID reforms under the Mitchell had their genesis in the previous Labour administration).

The raft of reforms sought to institute results-oriented audit and management processes based primarily on the quantified measurement of aid projects in one way or another. A Bilateral Aid Review (BAR) was initiated which articulated common targets and evaluated projects against these targets. Along with new, more stringent project reporting requirements and data harmonisation and aggregation processes, these paved the way for a wholesale adoption of results-based management at the corporate and project level, through the tightening of project results frameworks, and their linkage to an aggregated departmental results framework. Corporate level management practices were replicated at the level of projects, with increasing use of payment-by-results (PBR) modalities.[9] To the audit and accountability systems may be added further knowledge management functions based around data generation and evidence-based policy rationalities. These were championed by a powerful advocacy group of senior bureaucrats whose commitment to experimental impact evaluative technologies has been highly influential (Donovan, 2018; Kelly & McGoey, 2018). A growing stream of funding required for-profit consultancies to conduct a range of data project monitoring, results verification, evaluation and learning – under the general rubrics of 'Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning' and 'Third Party Verification' contracts. A contrast may therefore be observed with the role of consultants in earlier NPM accounts where the for-profit consultancy roles were chiefly on policy legitimisation and development around privatisation and NPM reforms (Arnold & Cooper, 1999; Jupe & Funnell, 2015; Leys, 1999; Saint-Martin, 1998) – rather than on providing audit and knowledge management roles themselves.

The outsourcing of newly created audit and knowledge management roles has been coupled with outsourcing core *management* roles in the delivery of aid, beyond the traditional professional service roles of the for-profit consultancies. Several reasons may be identified, linked to corporate pressures being felt by DFID: staffing was not keeping up with the increase in budget, just as management tasks, audit processes and controls were proliferating with the introduction of greater audit compliance tasks (NAO, 2015: 33-42). The pressure was compounded by the decision to rule out recipient states as 'delivery partners' through budget support, amidst a growing scepticism of their reliability and probity (DFID, 2011c; ICAI, 2013b). The prohibition intersected with the new vision of control over aid, as the use of (often weak) country systems to measure and track development over pooled funding meant attributable results were hard to track. A key focus became developing procurement and management capabilities that could work smoothly with contractors as delivery vehicles for the increased budget (ICAI, 2013a; NAO, 2015: 37). DFID continued to focus its attention on 'fragile' and post-conflict states: the 2015 UK Aid Strategy committed to

[9] A modality where the payment is contingent on the attainment of verified results (Clist, 2016).

allocate 50% of aid to fragile states and regions, as a result of growing pressure to focus on fragility as the locus of poverty. Such areas are not only logistically harder to manage and oversee, due to the dangers involved, but their lack of stability also means development programming is technically much harder and requires more oversight. Closer audit attention is necessary but also more difficult. Finally, these audit and professional demands were supplemented by a growing list of compliance requirements pertaining to good conduct and safe-guarding (see for a review IDC, 2020).

As a consequence, DFID was increasingly compelled to outsource aspects of its portfolio management to for-profit consultancies: including aspects of its grant-making role, and contracting and scrutiny of programming. The example of the Girls' Education Challenge Fund (GEC) illustrates how far DFID has been willing to outsource programme and portfolio management roles that might once have been conducted in-house. The GEC was designed in 2012 by a team in Whitehall (DFID, 2011b). PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) – the largest contractor to the UK government – won the initial contract and has been involved in delivery of both the first and second phases of the Fund, worth respectively £355m and £497m. The first phase funded 37 different interventions intended to improve the education of one million marginalised girls. Interventions were identified from three different funding windows, each with different levels of appetite for experimental interventions, with their own grant-making criteria, and each with their own sub-contractors who actually delivered the interventions. Each intervention was overseen and managed by GEC and the team partnered with four corporate sector partners, the Discovery Channel, Coca-Cola (who brought in MasterCard), Ericsson and Avanti. It worked across eighteen countries and involved a consortium of evaluation partners, led by another firm, Coffey (subsequently bought by Tetra Tech, a US-based engineering consultancy), which was responsible for evaluating the success of the project on behalf of DFID, using a highly complex experimental results-based mechanism (Coffey, 2016a).

Whilst the GEC is an unusually complex programme, it serves to illustrate the extent to which DFID was willing to transfer the management of a large section of the aid budget to a contracted fund manager, which would be responsible for everything from digesting evidence to contracting out and managing delivery through sub-contractors. Importantly, the programme's independent evaluator noted that the GEC's functions operated largely in parallel to DFID's country offices and did not engage them sufficiently (Coffey, 2016b: 2).

Other examples include the UK Caribbean Infrastructure Fund; the portfolio approach adopted by the Supporting Peace and Stability in Eastern DRC; and 'Manufacturing Africa' programme; the Good Governance Fund and the African Clean Energy Programme.

The expansion in roles of for-profit consultancies has been driven by a combination of politically motivated and pragmatic reforms. It reflects an underlying shift in the arguments legitimising UK's international development expenditure, from primarily technical to increasingly founded on managerial, audit and evidence-based logics of rigour in delivery. It has been supercharged since 2010, although many of the factors driving the change were already initiated under the New Labour government. The increasing centrality of consultancies is evident in the UK's 2022 aid strategy, which sets British (private sector and other) expertise at the forefront of the UK aid effort (FCDO, 2022). Just as the aid reforms have been designed with a view to capitalise on for-profit consultancy firms' expertise, the aid-focused for-profit consultancy sector has shaped its expertise to the requirements. They have transformed themselves from simply providing primarily technical development experts to provide a much broader set of managerial skills – which when not found within the traditional suppliers of services, would be drawn from skills outside the development specialist teams (for large multi-sector professional service firms) or would be brought in. Consequently, we suggest that DFID and its market of suppliers were mutually constituted, the one shaping the other.

While the strategic alignment of the offering of for-profit consultancies and the needs of DFID/FCDO goes far in explaining the allure of development's new delivery partner, a second (closely connected) set of factors also comes into play. Here, we argue, the alignment between development and for-profit consultants and contractors may be entangled within more profound shifts in the relationship between 'big D' and 'little d' development.

Intermediaries to global finance and the private sector turn

A second key element is the broader reorientation of UK and wider aid agendas towards (global and local) markets. During the early 2000s, New Labour had nominated the recipient state as the key 'owner' of aid, as part of its commitment to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. Amongst other things, they increased volumes of budget support (from £268 million to £461 2003-2008: NAO, 2008: 1), and rejected British interests as a relevant consideration in aid delivery. Within Whitehall, Clare Short insisted that poverty reduction was the primary purpose of aid, and vigorously protected the aid budget from other interests, most significantly those of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and commercial priorities (Barder, 2005: 11; Vereker, 2002: 135). This autonomy was enacted in law through the introduction of the poverty focus and proofed against budget cuts by the commitment to 0.7% of GDP in aid spending (Townsend, 2010).[10] However, post-2010 Conservative governments have brought an end both to these commitments and to the state-centric focus in aid spending. In little over a decade, a private sector turn has come to characterise a large part of the UK's aid spend.

This has necessitated the pursuit of new forms of business and financial expertise by DFID (and more recently by the new integrated Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), into which DFID was absorbed in 2020). In 2010, Andrew Mitchell (2010a) made no bones of his intention to infuse DFID with new private sector know-how, stating in a speech on wealth creation to the London School of Economics that:

> It is my intention to recast DFID as a government department that understands the private sector, that has at its disposal the right tools to deliver and that is equipped to support a vibrant, resilient and growing business sector in the poorest countries. To do this we will need to add new types of people with different skills ... I want DFID to learn from business … to inject new, business-savvy DNA into the department.

Shortly after the election of the coalition government, Mitchell (2010b) announced the creation of a new 'Private Sector Development cadre' at DFID, which has since grown to become one of the department's largest professional cadres. The new mantra was 'making markets work for the poor', focussing on microfinance and access to finance, business regulation reform, productive infrastructure and trade connectivity (DFID, 2011a; ICAI, 2014). The following decade saw the growth and consolidation of the role of the private sector as both contributor to and recipient of UK aid (DFID, 2020: 13).

[10] Although originally drafted by Labour, the commitment to 0.7% of GDP in aid spending was supported by all the major parties and appeared in the Conservatives' election manifesto for 2009, before being brought into law by the coalition government in 2015. In 2021, soon after DFID's absorption into the newly-created FCDO, this commitment was cut to 0.5% of GDP.

Central to these processes has been the turn to mainstream financial markets as a source of development financing.[11] The last decade has been characterised by attempts to boost available development funds through the financialization of the international development sector, in a shift away from the Washington Consensus towards what Gabor (2021) has termed the 'Wall Street Consensus' (Gabor & Brooks, 2017; Jafri, 2019; Mawdsley, 2018a, 2018b; Soederberg, 2013). This shift has seen foreign aid repurposed as a mechanism for de-risking private investment, accompanied by a deepening of the structural role of external private sector actors in development, including mainstream investors and investment banks, venture capitalists, impact investing fund managers and philanthrocapitalists. CDC Group (the UK's development finance institution, which had maintained a low profile throughout the New Labour era) was brought to the centre of the UK aid delivery apparatus. Drawing on £4.3 billion of ODA funds allocated to it for the period 2014-2026 (PwC, 2020: 9), the CDC group – recently renamed British International Investment - has spearheaded a host of new global financing mechanisms in its provision of 'catalytic development capital' designed to 'reduce risks and enable investors to invest more profitably in developing markets' (ibid.).

As the need for business and financial expertise to support these shifts has grown, the government has increasingly turned to those best placed to provide it: for-profit consultancies are uniquely positioned at the boundary between the global corporate and development sectors (reflecting a role undertaken by for-profit consultancies more broadly, see e.g. Roitman, 2021). While for-profit consultancies are not present in all areas of contemporary development programming and delivery, their presence has become significant in those areas in which the UK government is most vigorously driving development's private sector turn. FCDO's IMPACT Programme (Investment Mobilisation for Prosperity and Catalytic Transformation), for example, launched in 2013 to build impact investing market infrastructure across Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. It is managed by global development consultancy Palladium and impact investing advisory firm The Good Economy, while the UK aid-funded Centre for Disaster Protection (promoting government adoption of 'risk financing' tools such as insurance and contingent credit in response to natural disasters and climate change in the Global South) was initially managed by Oxford Policy Management (OPM), before DAI Global UK took over as its managing agent in 2021.

[11] How successful the UK and other multilateral and DAC bilateral actors have been in this effort is another question.

Meanwhile, the Global Head of Infrastructure at KPMG was appointed to Alok Sharma's 2019 International Development Infrastructure Commission, designed to develop infrastructure across the Global South (HMG 2020: 37)

Across these programmes and initiatives, government is rapidly cementing its dependence on consultants and contractors for the provision of both epistemic and skills-based expertise for the management, evaluation and audit of financialized and businesses-orientated aid. Consultancies are also central to the incorporation of impact investing and social finance technologies across these initiatives. The design of development impact bonds (DIBs),[12] vaccine bonds, climate finance and other blended finance arrangements (in which public and/or philanthropic funds underwrite and thus 'de-risk' mainstream investment; see Hughes-Mclure & Mawdsley, 2022; Sklair & Gilbert, 2022) requires complex financial and legal expertise and facilitation between different private and public sector actors - further services that for-profit consultancies are well placed to provide. The Climate Finance Accelerator programme, for example, designed by the UK government's Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to develop investible low-carbon projects across the Global South, is a multi-partner initiative led by PwC (Ricardo Energy & Environment & PwC, 2017).

Discussion

The role of consultants and contractors in UK aid delivery has transformed in both substance and significance. They are no longer simply providing technical services which are state-oriented, and ordered within projects. Rather, they are increasingly central to the FCDO's functions of audit, management and knowledge management; further, they provide expertise and intermediary functions linking aid processes to the broader for-profit and financial sectors. These roles are central to the politicised aid paradigm that has emerged under successive Conservative governments (although with precursors in pre-2010 Labour

[12] The design of DIBs is an area in which the two trends driving the turn towards for-profit consultancy identified in this article converge. The emergence of payment-by-results (PbR) modalities during the 2000s/2010s was a feature of DFID's emerging audit and results-based management framework, as discussed above. From the 2010s, new DIBs and vaccine bonds, growing in popularity across the financializing international development sector, drew inspiration from these earlier PbR models.

governments). They signify a turn to the private sector as an engine of growth and private sector managerial logics and calculative practices as the main domain governing how aid will be given.

This shift in focus is evidence of a deepening in the relationship between the ‘Development industry’ – that Gillian Hart labels ‘Big-D Development’ - and ‘development’ as a global drive towards the expansion of capitalism (Hart, 2001, 2010). As Mawdsley and Taggart (2022) argue: ‘going beyond ‘containment’, Development is ever more deeply inhabited by (capitalist) development’. In the first place, for-profit consultancies act as intermediaries to the logics of global finance and capital which are central to contemporary ‘little d’ development processes (Gabor, 2021; Pistor, 2019). The Development industry is drawn into the discursive framings and ideologies thus introduced. Hindman observed already ten years ago that ‘the aid industry continues to borrow from the corporate world even as it decries it’ (Hindman, 2010: 185). The administrative expertise, insulation and autonomy that had characterised DFID has been breached, necessitating a reconfiguration and creation of new assemblages of expertise in which for-profit expertise is crucial. In this respect, the reconfiguration of aid may be expected to reconfigure its geographies: the key reference points and performances of aid’s legitimacy move from state ministries and meeting rooms and towards the spaces of a globally mobile private sector.

Second, for-profit consultancies are themselves central to small-d development processes, and their deepening role as managers of ‘Development’ processes may be expected to have an impact. After all, while the anthropology of development literature has typically characterised development as being depoliticising (Behrends et al., 2014: 69-72; Ferguson, 1996 [1990]; Murray Li, 2007: 7), the project arena is never fully closed, representing instead ‘the permanent provocation between the will to govern and strategies of struggle, the points at which an opening became a closure, before the next reversal’ (Murray Li, 2007: 273). That is to say, the application of universal technical logics demands a process of translation and application into specific contexts, wherein new hybrid forms can be produced (Gal, Kowalski, & Moore, 2015) and where contestation is possible. The logics and interests of those seeking to govern these processes therefore matter.

It would not do to romanticise the bottom-up or emancipatory structures and practices of either INGOs or recipient developing country states – two of the other main aid recipients and managers. The former's responsiveness to grassroots or bottom-up structures has been heavily questioned (Banks, Hulme, & Edwards, 2015). Upwards accountability processes and practices tend to dominate (Agyemang, O'Dwyer, Unerman, & Awumbila, 2017), as they have remade their own internal processes to fit deliberate audit processes, hollowed out by the same contractual formulations and practices that the for-profit consultancies have seized upon (Boomsma & O'Dwyer, 2019; Cazenave & Morales, 2021; Duval, Gendron, & Roux-Dufort, 2015). Nevertheless, for all the flaws of INGOs, they do retain claims to multi-vocal accountability and an emancipatory and community-orientation (Agyemang, O'Dwyer, & Unerman, 2019). These claims offer space for contestation (Girei, 2016; Winthereik & Jensen, 2017; Yasmin & Ghafran, 2019) and form an important part of their staff's felt responsibility (Agyemang et al., 2017), despite the symbolic violence done to these commitments by the wider discourse (Kuruppu & Lodhia, 2019). It need hardly be said that for any deficiencies in their governance, developing country governments are more politically embedded in their societies than global for-profit consultancies.

Yet there are differences between these actors and the for-profit consultancies. The growing attention toward global for-profit consultancies or professional services firms as actors in their own right highlights their interests in pushing 'an institutionalization of new transnational regimes' (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2017), as they seek to extend their own technical fields of expertise within a forming global landscape (Suddaby et al., 2007: 356). They do so through a variety of active strategies (Boussebou & Faulconbridge, 2019; G. Morgan, 2009; G. Morgan & Quack, 2005). Ian Harper's account provocatively juxtaposes the segregated, literally gated-and-walled-in global health professionals in Nepal with the migrant Nepali health workers who fluidly navigate social settings in their work in health systems in the UK and the USA (Harper, 2011; Mosse, 2011a). The logics of the local environment are excluded, sometimes literally walled off, as their focus is towards a travelling expertise. For-profit consultancies' own structures reproduce the core-periphery dynamics of global capitalism, with a cosmopolitan elite recruited from elite universities, with headquarters in key sites of global capitalism at the core, and a periphery of localised, territorially constrained offices (Clegg, Geppert and Hollinshead, 2018). One may conclude that the growing reliance on for-profit consultancies may be expected to insulate the UK government apparatus further from its primary interlocutors, as possibilities for resistance, contestation and the brokering and translation of other voices in the development sphere may be further restricted.

Conclusions

The growing presence and influence of for-profit consultancies in the aid landscape raises questions for critical development scholars. Whilst there has always been an important role for for-profit consultancies in development, we have shown that since 2010 their role has been supercharged by a politically and ideologically driven development paradigm. We suggest that for-profit consultancies themselves acted as essential prior conditions of formation for this role: their availability has permitted the emergence of a particular conjunction in which the role of consultants has shifted from a primarily technical, fragmented and state-oriented contribution, to the current position where for-profit consultancies sit in influential management, audit and intermediary positions, located between public sector aid donors and the private sector. Each of these roles is necessary to the ongoing enactment of UK aid's current configuration: firms' technical roles as evaluators and audit contractors; their role as managers of aid delivery; their capabilities and positioning as credible intermediaries in portfolio or fund management; and their existing global networks and positioning as actors in infrastructure and financialized spaces. We have further suggested that the shift to increased placement of private sector organisations in key positions has contributed to the reconfiguration of aid relations, reorienting development away from the state and towards the needs of private capital.

The UK government's 2022 'Strategy for International Development' (FCDO, 2022) points to the expansion of the FCDO's engagement with the private sector through the search for mainstream development finance, furthering the use of UK aid to de-risk mainstream investment in development. Of the four priorities laid out in the 2022 Strategy, the first is to 'deliver honest and reliable investment, building on the UK's financial expertise and the strengths of the City of London' (ibid: 5). Plans to achieve this goal include working 'with capital markets to share risk and remove barriers to investment to mobilise finance for development at scale' (ibid: 9), leading to mobilisation of 'up to £8 billion of UK-backed financing a year by 2025 including from the private sector, targeting the main barriers to investment' (ibid: 8). We might expect, therefore, to see a parallel entrenchment over the coming years of the reliance on for-profit consultancies that has enabled the initiation of this trend over the last decade.

While the search for mainstream development financing appears to be a growing trend, however, it is not clear whether the reliance on audit and evaluation technologies outlined above will continue to rise. Recent events on both the global and domestic stage – most significantly the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine – have sent shockwaves across the UK's international development landscape, making it difficult to predict how the role of for-profit consultancies in the design and delivery of aid will evolve. We do know that consultants and contractors are adept at reshaping their offerings to meet emerging demands. Regardless of these uncertainties, however, the shifts in the role and significance of these firms in the recent spending of the UK aid budget that we have outlined above certainly merit further investigation. As the UK government embarks on a new era of development design and spending, critical development scholars would do well to stay attuned to its engagement with for-profit consultancies.

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Dear Editorial Team

We would like to say that we appreciate the helpful, insightful and detailed suggestions made by the referees, which we felt were constructive and positive.

In the table below, we identify the major points made by the referees for ease of reference and have highlighted our responses.

We have considered carefully some of the recommendations made by the reviewers, notably in relation to including comparative data, argumentation around relative effectiveness of differing aid paradigms and the implications of these movements for NGOs. We have concluded that these fall outside the central purposes of the paper and have not explicitly addressed them in our corrections.

Best wishes,

Authors*

Ref	Points requiring response	Responses
#1	A. "Currently we get a historical account of the involvement of consultancy firms in the development sector and explanations for the changes as political. Do we have anything to substantiate that argument?"	Our argument is not primarily that the use of consultancies and contractors is directly political. Rather, consultancies are crucial to the operationalisation of two key changes in the aid paradigm which *are* political: (1) the growth of emphasis on RBM / accountability (and managerialism more generally) can be linked directly to Andrew Mitchell's attempt to distinguish the Labour and Conservative aid policies, in the face of considerable similarity in their platforms (i.e. both emphasising 0.7%, MDGs, anti-poverty focus); and (2) a change in emphasis to the private sector, which is linked ideologically to the conservatives and which we can show in speeches. We have underlined these changes by citing political speeches from relevant ministers in pp. 11 and 15 (comments refer to clean revised draft) and at the start of the discussion section we clarified the wording.
	B. The authors make points about "D" and small "d". The differences need to be explained, and their significance.	We have clarified on pp.4 and 16 the distinction and its significance. In respect of distinction, we mean that Development is a discernible sector or intervention programme, funded by traditional donors, and that development is the broader processes of global capitalism. The significance of this point is analytical in the first place: we wish to locate this in a tradition that moves away from a closed focus on the Development sector and its discourses, to the way that Development discourses, actors and practices interact with

		broader global practices. Secondly, in respect of aid effectiveness, we suggest that these organisations have interests themselves (following Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2017; Boussebaa, 2015) which may affect the practice of aid (although we are not in a position to develop these empirically at this stage of our research).
	C. Reference is made to NPM and financialisation – both need explanation. If the claim is that the role of management consultancy and accountancy firms is an extension of this, the point needs to be explicit and evidenced.	We have looked to clarify that consultancies are conditions of possibility for the two processes, rather than 'extensions of' the rationality (that is, they are needed practically to implement the reform, rather than they are considered preferred options as a result of the claims made by the rationality's content). For NPM this is clarified on p. 13 (para, "As a consequence…", referring back to paragraph starting "The outsourcing of newly…"). nb. We don't think this is NPM in the classic sense as adopted in the Thatcherite reforms in the 1980s and 1990s, but rather is an associated evolution from that starting point – we are careful not to label them explicitly as NPM, although we do treat NPM in the introductory paragraph. For financialisation this is clarified in additions to section on '*Intermediaries to global finance and the private sector turn*' (pp.15-19).
#2	A. Expand UK-specificity to broader European developments.	We appreciate the suggestion and accept the value of the proposed contribution. However we do not feel in the space of an article that we can achieve this: our analytical approach locates the role of consultants and contractors in a close-grained analysis of dynamic political context and rationalities and the internal project management policy – we would not be able to replicate this for another donor agency without considerable empirical and analytical effort and therefore considerable space. We did consider proposing a more efficient approach, for example by deploying indicative statistics; however, on consideration we feel that statistics shorn of an adequate review of context might be misleading.
	On p. 2, you note, that aid is increasingly delivered by "for-profit consultancies like	We take the point. We have inserted on p.2 "These large consultancies dominate the contracting environment as 'prime' contractors,

	McKinsey and PwC" — but what exactly does the word "like" mean here? Some development consultancies may also be really small ("a guy and a laptop").	eligible under framework documents to tender for the largest contracts (DFID, 2020), in turn mobilising and coordinating consortiums drawing from a much broader ecology of individual associates, specialist firms, non-governmental organisations and universities."
	p. 3, first para, you mention that the available data on consultants is patchy and difficult to trace. Yet, the reasons for this may differ from one country to another. It would be interesting to hear why this is so in the UK context. Could be a footnote or in the main text.	We have added to footnote 3 on page 3 to signify that the data is dependent on the procuring agency's policies on transparency and publication, which are often inconsistent and hard to aggregate.
	p. 3, you maintain that consultants are central in the legitimization of aid. Legitimization is always a relation, and it would be good to add, legitimization for whom?	We have clarified the point to make it clear that we are referring to electoral legitimacy, or legitimacy in the eyes of UK electoral politics. We have also included references to political speeches for relevant Secretaries of State in relation to their political / electoral thinking and justifications.
	p. 3, […] it may not be evident for all readers why cost-cutting should lead into increased consultant use, you need to spell it out.	Clarified by addition of: "since the reductions in internal state capacity have necessitated the use of external expertise"
	p. 3, last para — the word "professional" as a past description could be read to imply that they are no longer professional. If you don't mean this, you might as well delete the word, it's not necessary.	We do feel that the word professional is significant, insofar as it refers to a substantive technical expertise rather than an expertise in a closed professional domain of expertise. We have amended to "technically expert".
	In the same para, I'm not sure what "orienting of aid" exactly means in the context of intermediary roles. It could mean, for example, power through performance auditing, participation in funding decisions, etc. This could be more exact.	We have expanded this sentence to read: "Relatedly, we examine how they perform key intermediary roles, orienting aid in its ambitions to engage global finance and the private sector, through the provision of financial expertise and the facilitation of partnerships between government and private sector actors."
	p. 3, footnote 3. While you add information from your ERSC	We have expanded the footnote briefly to that effect.

	project in the end, please also specify what these personal experiences are. Otherwise, it sounds ad hoc.	
	p. 4 first para. Not knowing the original sources to which you refer, I don't understand what this means: "framed by an institutional duality that brings transnational internal hierarchies to the reproduction of colonial core-periphery geographies". Could you be more specific?	We have rewritten this: "Analyses stress a duality, therefore, whereby professional services firms at once propose transnational institutions and domains of expertise yet are heavily inflected by their own nationally-rooted organisational histories and hierarchies between offices (in key centres of finance like London and New York), thereby reproducing colonial core-periphery geographies (Boussebaa, 2015; Boussebaa & Faulconbridge, 2019)."
	p. 6 beginning, I wonder if 37% to TA is much or little? Sounds like a lot, in which case you could say so.	We have added "a significant" to the section to make clear our position.
	p. 6 toward the end of the para, it is not clear what "skipping straight to Weber" means. Please specify.	Amended to clarify.
	p. 12 The GEC example made me think of similar dynamics in my home country, where such outsourcings have also been driven by the public sector hiring caps. I wonder if they could also be one factor in this case?	We agree: we refer to that in as one of several factors on the previous paragraph (paragraph beginning "The outsourcing of newly created…") which we identify. The point is less a hiring cap but a failure to meet the rise in budget implied by the commitment to 0.7%, combined with other factors increasing workload. On the specific point, we state it thus: "Several reasons may be identified, linked to corporate pressures being felt by DFID: perhaps most importantly, staffing was not keeping up with the increase in budget, just as management tasks, audit processes and controls were proliferating with the introduction of greater audit compliance tasks (NAO, 2015: 33-42)."
	Reviewer #2 makes additional valuable typographical and editorial points which we have sought to address but have not listed here since they do not require substantive response.	
#3	A. More case studies of how this shift in the architecture of aid has affected the sorts of interventions which aid agencies, especially bilateral agencies, wish to support. Are there specific examples of how	Our point overall is one of extent of a shift, facilitated by the availability of managing agents. To support this argument, we have (1) detailed the increase in expenditure in these fields, drawn from Annual Reports (p. 16, sentence beginning: "DFID/FCDO increased annual spending"). We have also included in a footnote on p.17 a list of

	the character of Development has changed as a result of private sector [something missing here?]	programmes for PwC and DAI. We chose this route, rather than outlining further case studies, with the intention of showing by virtue of the list the various services that managing agents provide to the private sector development and financial sector support. We think this will be more persuasive than adding another one or two cases.
	B. Are there examples of the impact of the turn to the private sector on the way that NGOs go about their business	We thank the reviewer for this question and acknowledge the importance of the point from a research point of view. Whilst we understand non-profits' increasing engagement in competing for contracts as an indication of a behaviour change (our interim data, not yet published, suggests the increase to non-profits, universities and public firms increases from £9.57m in 2010 to a height of £851.42m in 2018), we feel that the impacts on NGOs is not the focus of the article and would require considerable engagement – consequently we have not specifically engaged with this point.
	C. I am also intrigued as to what impact this shift has had on the effectiveness of aid and on the reduction of poverty	Again, we thank the reviewer for a question whose importance we acknowledge. However, we do not feel we are in a position to deal with the comparative outcomes of the aid effectiveness agenda in comparison with the paradigm introduced in 2010 – in the first place, such an evaluative enterprise would be exceptionally complex, given the dynamic and shifting policy paradigms and the notorious difficulty of identifying attributable change; in the second place, our focus is on investigating the role consultants and contractors have played, which have enabled or acted as conditions for a set of policy approaches to aid.
	D. Is there any evidence of the claim that there is a widening of global disparities?	The point we make here is that Global Professional Services Firms play a central role in the expansion of global capitalism as currently formed, and therefore in the current global inequalities produced. We have added text to clarify this (p.10. We have also added a footnote (footnote 10) here, making reference to current research evidencing the growth of global inequalities over recent decades.
	E. "It would strengthen the argument if some figures could be given showing how for-profit	We have included the following: "In 2017, the International Development Select Committee reported that between 2010/11 and 2015/16, the

	organizations have become increasingly important”	bilateral expenditure on contracts increased from 12% (£540 million) to 22% (£1.34 billion) of the overall aid budget (IDC, 2017: 1).”
	F. [2A] It would be interesting to have more comparative data	As we have suggested to reviewer 2, we appreciate the suggestion and accept the value of the proposed contribution. However we do not feel in the space of an article that we can achieve this: our analytical approach locates the role of consultants and contractors in a close-grained analysis of dynamic political context and rationalities and the internal project management policy – we would not be able to replicate this for another donor agency without considerable empirical and analytical effort and therefore considerable space. We did consider proposing a more efficient approach, for example by deploying indicative statistics; however, on consideration we feel that statistics shorn of an adequate review of context might be misleading.
	G. Whilst most of your readers will be aware of what is meant by ‘depoliticization’ not all are and it would be useful … if it was written in a style more accessible to a range of readers beyond the confines of 'critical development scholars’	We have tried to address this, specifically by clarifying our use of the terminology of ‘depoliticisation’ at the top of p.5.

Outsourcing the business of development: The rise of for-profit consultancies in the UK Aid sector

Abstract

While much attention has been paid to the ways in which the private sector is now embedded in the 'DNA of development' (Mitchell, 2011), the role of one group of actors – for-profit development consultancies and contractors, or service providers – has received relatively little attention. In this article, we trace how the growing role of for-profit consultancies and contractors in British aid delivery has been driven by two key trends: first, the outsourcing of managerial, audit and knowledge management functions as part of efforts to bring private sector approaches and skills into public spending on aid; and second, the reconfiguration of aid spend towards markets and the private sector, and away from locally embedded, state-focused aid programming. We argue that both were launched under New Labour, and super-charged under successive Conservative Governments. The resulting entanglement means that the policies and practices of the UK government's aid agencies and the interests and forms of for-profit service providers are increasingly mutually constitutive. Amongst other implications, this trend acts to displace traditional forms of contestation and accountability of aid delivery.

Keywords

development consultants; professional services firms; audit; New Public Management; financialization of development; UK aid; Department for International Development; Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

Introduction

In 2019, Stephen Twigg MP, Chair of the Select Committee on International Development, and Matthew Rycroft, Permanent Secretary to the Department for International Development (DFID), were guests of honour at the 11th annual PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) International Development Conference. PwC is not the only prominent consultancy with an interest in the sector. Consider, for example, McKinsey, which in its introduction to its

development work, indicates why Twigg and Rycroft would be interested in an event of this sort:

> Our deep expertise in the public and social sectors is complemented with more than 90 years of private-sector experience ... We work as a trusted partner with heads of state, government ministers, and senior leaders of development agencies. … [We work with] proven delivery methods, tools, and solutions for diagnostics, analysis, strategy development, capability building, and implementation ... We help shape the global development debate by investing in proprietary research, fresh thinking, and an extensive publishing program.[1]

Like many of its consultant counterparts,[2] McKinsey promises fresh perspectives, managerial competence, analytical rigour and innovative solutions to bear on the world's most urgent and complex issues. Tangible results are to be delivered quickly. These claims have, it seems, been persuasive. In March 2020, for example, DFID appointed McKinsey to administer the £70 million Invest Africa project. In 2017, the International Development Select Committee reported that between 2010/11 and 2015/16, the bilateral expenditure through contracts increased from 12% (£540 million) to 22% (£1.34 billion) of the overall aid budget (IDC, 2017: 1). A significant proportion of development programme expenditure is therefore delivered through for-profit consultancies like McKinsey and PwC, such that they now manage a similar volume of the aid budget as NGOs, seen as a more traditional aid actor and means of delivery (we define the term 'for-profit consultancy' in more detail below). These large consultancies dominate the contracting environment as 'prime' contractors, eligible under framework documents to tender for the largest contracts (DFID, 2020), in turn mobilising and coordinating consortiums drawing from a much broader ecology of individual associates, specialist firms, non-governmental organisations and universities.

[1] Link: https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/how-we-help-clients/international-development Accessed 17 March 2022.

[2] We acknowledge that management consultancies and the major accountancy firms have very different histories and lineages (Kipping, 2021; McKenna, 2006; Weiss, 2019). However, for the present purposes we focus narrowly on their common involvement as contractors or service providers to the UK development state.

The individual expert, or small team of consultants, is a familiar actor in the anthropology of development (see the collections: Fechter, 2012; Lewis & Mosse, 2006; Mosse, 2011b; Yarrow & Venkatesan, 2012), but the professional services or consultancy *firm* has been relatively neglected (despite considerable recent interest in other domains - see recent edited volumes Empson, Muzio, Broschak, & Hinings, 2015; Hurl & Vogelpohl, 2021b). A small if growing literature on consultancies in aid (including Broome, 2021; Brunt & Casey, 2022; Hayes & Westrup, 2014; Keele, 2019; Nagaraj, 2015; Roberts, 2014; Seabrooke & Sending, 2019, 2022; White, 2020) stands in contrast with the expansive literatures on other kinds of traditional aid actor: for example NGOs (see for a review Brass, Longhofer, Robinson, & Schnable, 2018) or bilateral donor agencies (e.g. Gulrajani, 2017; Mawdsley, 2019; Pauselli, 2019). The presence of for-profit consultancies in this landscape, now deeply embedded and omnipresent in practice, raises questions for critical development scholars around the scope and implications of their specific development rationalities and practices. We begin to address these questions in this article by tracing the drivers and entry points for the ascendance of for-profit consultancy firms to increasingly significant aid management, policy, audit and relational roles. Whilst our arguments remain tentative (the available data on consultants is notoriously patchy, subject to proprietary information and difficult to trace: Craft & Halligan, 2017)[3] we draw conclusions from the juxtaposition of longer-term analysis of for-profit consulting, personal experiences within the professional development sector, and an early phase of research as part of a large ESRC-funded project.[4]

We suggest that the role of for-profit consultancies has intensified, not simply in the volume they manage but also in the centrality of their role to the political legitimisation of aid as a part of the electoral mandate particularly of the Conservative party, first as part of a Coalition (from 2010) and from 2015 as the majority party. For-profit consultancies and public sector agencies are increasingly entangled (Froud, Johal, Moran, & Williams, 2017; Hurl & Vogelpohl, 2021a): Kipping has described the public and private consultancy sector's relations in the US as being 'mutually constitutive' (Kipping, 2021: 37), and the term 'consultocracy' has been used to describe the role consultants have in government decision-

[3] In the UK, the procurement data is often made public but is not always aggregated in a useable and mutually consistent fashion between different published datasets; it is frequently organised according to the procuring department, whose rules of publication differ.
[4] One of the authors has experience worked as a technical lead within a DFID prime contractor, as well as independent technical roles. Author details to be added following anonymous review.

making (Hood & Jackson, 1991). New Public Management reforms (Arnold & Cooper, 1999; Christensen, 2005; Jupe & Funnell, 2015; Lapsley, 2009; Lapsley & Oldfield, 2001; Leys, 1999; Shaoul, 2011) and the post financial crash of 2007 implementation of cost-cutting austerity measures (Beveridge & Koch, 2021; Hurl, 2018) have provided rich case studies of the growing together of the public and private sectors since the reductions in internal state capacity have necessitated the use of external expertise.

In this article, we show how for-profit consultancies in inernational development have moved from primarily project-oriented technically expert actors to actors providing fund management, programme audit and knowledge management roles. Relatedly, we examine how they perform key intermediary roles, orienting aid in its ambitions to engage global finance and the private sector, through the provision of financial expertise and the facilitation of partnerships between government and private sector actors. Both shifts are central to changes in aid discourses forged under successive Conservative governments, although both had precursors in the New Labour era (1997–2010). We explore how consultants are caught up in the shift from working primarily toward technical and professional agendas, to discourses and practices that revolve around managerial rigour (see e.g. Eyben & Guijt, 2015), stringent scrutiny, and audit and quantitative calculative and evaluative practices (Donovan, 2018). We suggest that global for-profit consultancies are both beneficiaries of, and produce the conditions of possibility for, this work. Both intermediary and management roles echo parallel shifts in professional services firms' wider practices (Roitman, 2021).6

We close by arguing that the shift in for-profit consultancies' role is part of a highly politicised re-absorption of 'Big-D Development' – as a distinct programme of intervention, often funded by 'traditional' donor agencies like DFID – into 'development' (Hart, 2010), i.e. the broader processes of capitalism's global expansion, which, following Gillian Hart, we understand as "geographically uneven but spatially interconnected processes of creation and destruction, dialectically interconnected with discourses and practices of Development" (Hart, 2010: 119). We suggest that the delivery of state-managed aid funds by private sector consultancy firms – often multi-sector firms with their own interests in global processes of capitalism – is both an example of the enfolding of the Development sector into capitalist progress *and also* an instrument for other articulations of that enfolding, particularly by fostering engagements with the private sector and with development finance (Mawdsley & Taggart, 2022). The aid ethnography literature has long highlighted the depoliticising effects of the Development industry's technical discourses – in the sense of using technical language and rationales to foreclose political debate or contestation – whilst acknowledging the processes of translation and contestation characterising delivery (Lewis & Mosse, 2006; Murray Li, 2007; Rottenburg, 2009). The logics and interests of the actors involved in managing and delivering Development projects therefore matter. Critical accounts of the emerging 'consultocracy' highlight how management consultancies and professional services firms have a depoliticizing role in policy processes (Beveridge, 2012; Hurl, 2017; Hurl & Vogelpohl, 2021a; Ylönen & Kuusela, 2019), similar to the role of development actors. A growing literature highlights their role in the institutionalization of transnational regimes (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2017; Suddaby, Cooper, & Greenwood, 2007). Analyses stress a duality, therefore, whereby professional services firms at once propose transnational institutions and domains of expertise yet are heavily inflected by their own nationally-rooted organisational histories and hierarchies between offices (in key centres of finance like London and New York), thereby reproducing colonial core-periphery geographies (Boussebaa, 2015; Boussebaa & Faulconbridge, 2019). Increased use of for-profit consultancies will entail the further foreclosure of political debate over the principles and values of British aid and further isolation of aid agencies from contestation, embedding the transnational logics of global capital.

The next section provides a brief overview of the history of for-profit consultancies in the UK's development architecture, including the parallel history of professional services and global management consultancy firms of which they form part. Next we explore two key drivers for the growing role of for-profit consultancies in aid policy and practice: outsourcing of audit functions and key aid management roles, and the reorientation of aid towards the private sector and the interests of global finance. We conclude by addressing the broader implications for development processes in the UK. We should be clear that this is not a comprehensive review of the for-profit development sector by any means; and although we discuss depolitisation, we do not otherwise comment on the impact, effectiveness or value of these service providers.

For-profit consultancies' traditional role in UK development: technical, state-oriented and projectized

The UK government has always outsourced some portion of its aid funding for delivery through for-profit consultancies. As such, they are one ‘vehicle’ amongst many: as part of the bilateral spend, they sit alongside civil society, multilateral agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and recipient country states, regions and municipalities. Historically, the role of the consultant has mainly been technical in nature,[5] indeed going back to colonial administrations (Morgan, 1964: 12). At the time of the creation of the Ministry of Overseas Development in 1964, some 15,400 officers filled positions in the former colonies and developing world (Morgan, 1964: 61) along with independent technical advisors, university teachers, and local training facilities and training in Britain (ODM, 1968: para 5.04). Technical advice was therefore central to the initial frameworks of aid provision, often in the form of individual experts placed for the purposes of capacity building.

In this earlier era, consultants’ roles were generally found within and subject to the projects through which aid was delivered. In his analysis of development consultants in the 1990s, Roderick Stirrat describes a floating world of short-term consultants (sometimes as short as two weeks, sometimes four years) working in transient teams across a wide range of tasks (Stirrat, 2000: 34–35). Whether the consultants were moonlighting academics, freelancers or employees of a consultancy company, they serviced processes central to the development enterprise (e.g. as the 'public face' of Poverty Reduction Strategy papers see Craig & Porter, 2006: 87–88). This figure of the consultant is familiar from accounts of ‘Aidland’: David Mosse’s account of the Rural Development programme in India describes mostly individual consultants, each representing a different professional field (Mosse, 2005). In this rural development project, a significant 37% per cent of the project budget went to technical assistance (Mosse, 2011a: 21). Ferguson’s list of the work proposed in phase two of the Thaba-Tseka Development Project captures the complexity and breadth of their work, with twelve pages to list activities spanning health, education, roads and agriculture, all serviced by a central project administration (Ferguson, 1996 [1990]: 88–100). As projects absorbed more of the aid budget, project roles became more significant (Barrie Ireton states that project expenditure increased from £406m in 1987/88 to £1,649m in 2005/06, 2013: 87).

[5] That is to say, it was primarily concerned with the available models for development projects, the arguments for them and the practices for their ‘implementation’ – or translation into specific situations (Behrends, Park, & Rottenburg, 2014).

A third key characteristic of for-profit consultants' 'traditional' role was similar to all bilateral spending: 'British aid is given on a government to government basis'.[6] The work of for-profit consultants was oriented towards not one but (at least nominally) two governments: the British government which hired them and the recipient country government. In practice, the technical discourses driving development practice are there precisely to obscure the tensions incumbent in such a relationship and to maintain aid discourse's comfortable assumption that the persistent servant-to-two-masters relationship will be unproblematic (Rottenburg, 2009: 67–68). Technical assistance roles saw for-profit consultancies embedded in developing state agencies, addressing 'capacity building needs' (for all the familiar challenges of institutional change processes Pritchett & Woolcock, 2004: 193; Pritchett, Woolcock, & Andrews, 2013; Wilson, 2007). The picture thus emerges of an earlier era of consultancies working in primarily technical and advisory roles with sectoral expertise (e.g. in rain-fed agriculture, or maternal health); distributed across technical cooperation and (increasingly) project modalities, and oriented towards the public sector as their key interlocutors and partners.

An interesting distinction between DFID and many other government departments emerges from this context. We suggest that UK development was (mostly) insulated from the super-charged entry of management consultancy firms in the 1980s and 1990s, riding the tidal wave of 'New Public Management' (NPM) reform (Arnold & Cooper, 1999; Christensen, 2005; Jupe & Funnell, 2015; Lapsley, 2009; Lapsley & Oldfield, 2001; Leys, 1999; Shaoul, 2011). In other sectors, consultants – notably the Big Four accountancy firms (PwC, KPMG, Deloitte Touche, EY) – had profound influence in framing the arguments for privatisation and in administering NPM reforms, due in part to an enchantment with private sector management expertise over public sector practices (Saint-Martin, 1998).[7] For the UK development sector, however, the role of NPM as an entry point for consultants was heavily moderated for various reasons.

In the first place, the measurement and management reforms to the project modality of 1986 (which most resembled NPM) were not there to drive or legitimise outsourcing, for the

[6] ODA. (1985-86). *House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee*. National Archives (OD 116/65)
[7] Although see Kipping (2021) for whom the story of private sector entanglement in the public sector is much longer.

simple reason that much of development was already outsourced. The introduction of the Logframe,[8] for example, and its attendant technologies was there to reform the project and therefore the conduct of the relations between ODA/DFID and project teams. The new project technologies sought to reframe the management of these processes and to render them more efficient but not to enter into a new world of market-based mechanisms and competition (for the most part – some quasi-government agencies were privatised). Indeed, Logframe guidance documents tend not to refer to procurement at all (Team Technologies Inc, undated). Second, the primary discursive reference point for the project technologies was not private sector excellence but rather development debates on the scope of appraisal, evaluation and participatory design (Cracknell, 2000: 42–47). The Logframe itself ('the Project Framework' as it was known in ODA/DFID) was a planning tool derived from the U.S. military. It was introduced to broaden the considerations in planning projects (beyond chiefly engineering and economic factors) and to open opportunities for social and institutional analyses (Eyben, 2015). As a modality, the project became an arena for development debates around participation, emancipation and control (Dearden & Kowalski, 2003). Lastly, ODA as an agency was always heavily staffed with a large proportion of policy experts, including economists and increasingly political scientists and anthropologists (Eyben, 2014: 74–78, 88–94; Kothari, 2005). The primarily development discursive reference points robbed external consultancies of their unique selling point over the civil servants – their private sector expertise. ODA remained confident in its own capacity to institute reforms.

Moreover, the quantified accountability measures which constituted the Logframe's primary claim to be an NPM administration reform (Cracknell, 2000: 47) were weakened by a subsequent paradigm change in aid discourse under the auspices of Clare Short, the incoming New Labour Secretary of State for International Development (who became Secretary of State in 1997). Clare Short and DFID committed themselves in their first White Paper of 1997 to the principles of the emerging international 'aid effectiveness' paradigm. This paradigm introduced state-partnerships and ownership to the core of aid provision (DFID,

[8] The Logframe or Project Framework constitutes a set of templates and procedures for project appraisal, design, management and evaluation – integrated in a formalised cycle - which enabled (amongst other things) an expansion of relevant factors to include the institutional and social environments.

1997: para 2; OECD, 2005) and emphasised contribution rather than attribution of results – limiting in turn the grip of project-based accountability and audit systems. A review in 2008 looking at Logframes over the previous years observed that in many cases, the only number was the page number (interview, former DFID economist).[9] Whilst therefore the Logframe reforms had set in place an accountability mechanism at the project level, the corporate accountability system was indirect, predicated on a scoring system that allowed considerable local discretion to the DFID team in charge, and therefore did not afford the opportunity for internal outcome-oriented control and audit. As a consequence, while in 2005 ActionAid calculated that the £101m or so ODA that was spent by the UK 'was allocated … to the 'big five' accountancy firms (PricewaterhouseCoopers, KPMG, Deloitte Touche, Ernst and Young, Accenture) as well as to free market think tanks like Adam Smith International' (ibid: 35), the development work of these firms remained mostly technical, distributed within projects and state-oriented.

The rise of professional services firms in the UK's aid sector

While consultants have therefore – as outlined above – always been present in the UK's development sector, we contend that a different breed of development consultants has emerged across the sector over the last decade or so. We identify two kinds of for-profit consultancies in the contemporary development services marketplace. The first are large transnational multi-service consultancy firms for whom government and bilateral aid agencies sit alongside a vast array of private and public sector clients across diverse industries. In the UK, management consultants of this type regularly contracted to design and deliver ODA programming include those with roots in accountancy, such as PwC or KPMG); engineering consultancy, such as Tetra Tech or Mott MacDonald; or management consultancy, such as McKinsey. In parallel, a slate of smaller, specialist development management contractors are also called upon to support the spending of the UK aid budget. Some of these smaller contractors have their origins in management consultancy for particular industries (such as Palladium, whose roots are partially to be found in rural

[9] It was only following the change in Secretary of State and the Global Financial Crisis of 2007/2008, when the New Labour leadership and key internal champions began to tighten the accountability structures (Valters & Whitty, 2017). As we will see in the next section, under the following Conservative administrations more substantial changes started to take place.

management service provision). Others in this category are tied more closely to earlier types of development consultants with roots in the third sector or academia. Oxford Policy Management, for example, began in 1979 as an applied research working group on food security and agriculture at the University of Oxford, and only later evolved into a private sector development consultancy.

Any analysis of the growing 'new' consultancy role in the UK's aid sector must also be situated within the wider history of the rise of global management consultancy, and particularly its rapid growth over the last two decades. While the USA and the UK emerge as global leaders in the rise of management consultancy (Kipping & Clark, 2012), the industry does not share the same historical trajectory in both countries. US management consultancy began to emerge in the 1950s, far earlier than in Europe. Some of these mid-century US consultancies have played (and continue to play) an important role in development through USAID contracting, especially those born of Cold War 'liberal internationalism'. Some, for example, were initially concerned with problems of engineering and agriculture, and have now evolved into more generic strategy and advisory firms (Roberts, 2014). From the 1950s onwards, early strategy firms such as Booz Allen Hamilton and McKinsey began to export US-style corporate management to Europe (Kipping & Clark, 2012: 11–12). These early consultants were predominantly engineers, concerned with scientific management and labour process management. As management consultants spread across the USA and the UK over the next half century, multiple mergers with accountancy and audit firms across this sector – leading to the contemporary pre-eminence in the UK of the Big Four accountancy firms – saw tensions emerge over the principal focus (and legal boundaries) characterising their work. Recent decades, however, have seen the re-centring of consultancy across these firms, which are now more commonly referred to as professional services firms than as accountancy practices.

Since the mid-20th century, these for-profit consultancies have played a central role in the expansion of global capitalism (and contributed, as such, to the growth in inequalities driven by this capitalist expansion in most countries around the world).[10] They have enacted this role

[10] While inequality is notoriously difficult to measure, the World Inequality Report 2022 affirms that "income and wealth inequalities have been on the rise nearly everywhere since the 1980s" (Chancel, Piketty, Saez, & Zucman, 2022).

through their influence over the management of corporate and financial activity, and their role in training a global cadre of young professionals to work across the private sector (Kipping & Clark, 2012: 5) – and increasingly, also across INGOs and state bureaucracies (Giridharadas, 2019: 22–34; Kipping, 2021: 44). Unlike previous types of development consultant, for-profit consultancies are, as such, lucrative, profit-driven firms, which arguably (albeit to differing extents) play a significant role in driving the widening global inequalities that many more traditional development professionals still believe their work is designed to resist (Boussebaa & Faulconbridge, 2019). How then, have these firms come to play such a significant role in the spending of the UK's aid budget?

The changing role of for-profit consultancies in UK aid

How do we explain the (relatively late) shift from technical, distributed and state-oriented consultants to the newer roles described above? We suggest two particular drivers, analysed below.

Outsourcing managerial, audit and knowledge management roles

Following the election of the Conservative-led government in 2010, the new Secretary of State for International Development, Andrew Mitchell, made a series of changes in policy that were to drive outsourcing of key managerial and audit roles to for-profit consultancies. His first major change was to set 'the results agenda' and 'value for money' logics at the centrepiece of a political programme which had retained many of the hallmarks of Labour policy:

> "I saw that this was space occupied by Labour, not the Tories. I said what does a centre-right development policy look like? It was clearly the results agenda."(interview with Andrew Mitchell, 2016, quoted in Valters & Whitty, 2017: 27).

Whilst – as discussed above – earlier targets had tended to be indirect, and permitted considerable discretion across a decentralised department, the new reforms were more stringent and aimed at controlling and auditing DFID's accomplishments (ibid). This decision was explicitly party-political and presentational, with a view to distinguishing a centre-right Conservative agenda from a space hitherto occupied by Labour, whilst maintaining (at that time) many of New Labour's policy commitments (in fact, the Labour government had already started to harden its position on value for money and accountability, and many of the DfID reforms under the Mitchell had their genesis in the previous Labour administration).

The raft of reforms sought to institute results-oriented audit and management processes based primarily on the quantified measurement of aid projects in one way or another. A Bilateral Aid Review (BAR) was initiated which articulated common targets and evaluated projects against these targets. Along with new, more stringent project reporting requirements and data harmonisation and aggregation processes, these paved the way for a wholesale adoption of results-based management at the corporate and project level, through the tightening of project results frameworks, and their linkage to an aggregated departmental results framework. Corporate level management practices were replicated at the level of projects, with increasing use of payment-by-results modalities.[11] To the audit and accountability systems may be added further knowledge management functions based around data generation and evidence-based policy rationalities. These were championed by a powerful advocacy group of senior bureaucrats whose commitment to experimental impact evaluative technologies has been highly influential (Donovan, 2018; Kelly & McGoey, 2018). A growing stream of funding required for-profit consultancies to conduct a range of data project monitoring, results verification, evaluation and learning – under the general rubrics of 'Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning' and 'Third Party Verification' contracts. Increasing the depth of the supplier market for evaluation services was the subject of a specific strategy (DFID, 2014: 10). A contrast may therefore be observed with the role of consultants in earlier NPM accounts where the for-profit consultancy roles were chiefly on policy legitimisation and development around privatisation and NPM reforms (Arnold & Cooper, 1999; Jupe & Funnell, 2015; Leys, 1999; Saint-Martin, 1998) – rather than on providing audit and knowledge management roles themselves.

The outsourcing of newly created audit and knowledge management roles has been coupled with outsourcing core *management* roles in the delivery of aid, beyond the traditional professional service roles of the for-profit consultancies. Several reasons may be identified, linked to corporate pressures being felt by DFID: staffing was not keeping up with the increase in budget, just as management tasks, audit processes and controls were proliferating with the introduction of greater audit compliance tasks (NAO, 2015: 33–42). The pressure was compounded by the decision to rule out recipient states as 'delivery partners' through

[11] A modality where the payment is contingent on the attainment of verified results (Clist, 2016).

budget support, amidst a growing scepticism of their reliability and probity (DFID, 2011c; ICAI, 2013b). The prohibition intersected with the new vision of control over aid, as the use of (often weak) country systems to measure and track development over pooled funding meant attributable results were hard to track. A key focus became developing procurement and management capabilities that could work smoothly with contractors as delivery vehicles for the increased budget (ICAI, 2013a; NAO, 2015: 37). DFID continued to focus its attention on 'fragile' and post-conflict states: the 2015 UK Aid Strategy committed to allocate 50% of aid to fragile states and regions, as a result of growing pressure to focus on fragility as the locus of poverty. Such areas are not only logistically harder to manage and oversee, due to the dangers involved, but their lack of stability also means development programming is technically much harder and requires more oversight. Closer audit attention is necessary but also more difficult. Finally, these audit and professional demands were supplemented by a growing list of compliance requirements pertaining to good conduct and safe-guarding (see for a review IDC, 2020).

As a consequence, DFID was increasingly compelled to outsource aspects of its portfolio management to for-profit consultancies, including aspects of its grant-making role and contracting and scrutiny of programming. Stated otherwise, the availability of a market of consultancy firms was a necessary condition of possibility for the delivery of these reforms, given the funding constraints noted above. The example of the Girls' Education Challenge Fund (GEC) illustrates how far DFID has been willing to outsource programme and portfolio management roles that might once have been conducted in-house. The GEC was designed in 2012 by a team in DFID's London headquarters (DFID, 2011b). PwC – the largest contractor to the UK government – won the initial contract and has been involved in delivery of both the first and second phases of the Fund, worth respectively £355m and £497m. The first phase funded 37 different interventions intended to improve the education of one million marginalised girls. Interventions were identified from three different funding windows, each with different levels of appetite for experimental interventions, with their own grant-making criteria, and each with their own sub-contractors who actually delivered the interventions. Each intervention was overseen and managed by GEC and the team partnered with four corporate sector partners, the Discovery Channel, Coca-Cola (who brought in MasterCard), Ericsson and Avanti. It worked across eighteen countries and involved a consortium of evaluation partners, led by another firm, Coffey (subsequently bought by Tetra Tech, a US-based engineering consultancy), which was responsible for evaluating the success of the project on behalf of DFID, using a highly complex experimental results-based mechanism (Coffey, 2016a).

Whilst the GEC is an unusually complex programme, it serves to illustrate the extent to which DFID was willing to transfer the management of a large section of the aid budget to a contracted fund manager, which would be responsible for everything from digesting evidence to contracting out and managing delivery through sub-contractors. Importantly, the programme's independent evaluator noted that the GEC's functions operated largely in parallel to DFID's country offices and did not engage them sufficiently (Coffey, 2016b: 2). Other examples include the UK Caribbean Infrastructure Fund; the portfolio approach adopted by the Supporting Peace and Stability in Eastern DRC; and 'Manufacturing Africa' programme; the Good Governance Fund and the African Clean Energy Programme.

The expansion in roles of for-profit consultancies has been driven by a combination of politically motivated and pragmatic reforms. It reflects an underlying shift in the arguments legitimising UK's international development expenditure, from primarily technical to increasingly founded on managerial, audit and evidence-based logics of rigour in delivery. It has been supercharged since 2010, although many of the factors driving the change were already initiated under the New Labour government. The increasing centrality of consultancies is evident in the UK's 2022 aid strategy, which sets British (private sector and other) expertise at the forefront of the UK aid effort (FCDO, 2022). Just as the aid reforms have been designed with a view to capitalise on for-profit consultancy firms' expertise, the aid-focused for-profit consultancy sector has shaped its expertise to the requirements. They have transformed themselves from simply providing primarily technical development experts to provide a much broader set of managerial skills – which when not found within the traditional suppliers of services, would be drawn from skills outside the development specialist teams (for large multi-sector professional service firms) or would be brought in. Consequently, we suggest that DFID and its market of suppliers were mutually constituted, the one shaping the other.

While the strategic alignment of the offering of for-profit consultancies and the needs of DFID/FCDO goes far in explaining the allure of development's new delivery partner, a second (closely connected) set of factors also comes into play. Here, we argue, the alignment between development and for-profit consultants and contractors may be entangled within more profound shifts in the relationship between 'big D' and 'little d' development.

Intermediaries to global finance and the private sector turn

A second key element is the broader reorientation of UK and wider aid agendas towards (global and local) markets. During the early 2000s, New Labour had nominated the recipient state as the key 'owner' of aid, as part of its commitment to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. Amongst other things, New Labour increased volumes of budget support (from £268 million to £461 2003–2008: NAO, 2008: 1), and rejected British interests as a relevant consideration in aid delivery. Within Whitehall, Clare Short insisted that poverty reduction was the primary purpose of aid, and vigorously protected the aid budget from other interests, most significantly those of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and commercial priorities (Barder, 2005: 11; Vereker, 2002: 135). This autonomy was enacted in law through the introduction of the poverty focus and proofed against budget cuts by the commitment to 0.7% of GDP in aid spending (Townsend, 2010).[12] However, post-2010 Conservative governments have brought an end both to these commitments and to the state-centric focus in aid spending as part of an ideological centre-right programme, described by Justine Greening as a "radical shift" that saw the private sector as the crucial driver of development (cited in Mawdsley, 2015 at p.339). In little over a decade, a private sector turn has come to characterise a large part of the UK's aid spend.

This has necessitated the pursuit of new forms of business and financial expertise by DFID (and more recently by the new integrated Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), into which DFID was absorbed in 2020). In 2010, Andrew Mitchell (2010a) made no bones of his intention to infuse DFID with new private sector know-how, stating in a speech on wealth creation to the London School of Economics that:

> It is my intention to recast DFID as a government department that understands the private sector, that has at its disposal the right tools to deliver and that is equipped to

[12] Although originally drafted by Labour, the commitment to 0.7% of GDP in aid spending was supported by all the major parties and appeared in the Conservatives' election manifesto for 2009, before being brought into law by the coalition government in 2015. In 2021, soon after DFID's absorption into the newly-created FCDO, this commitment was cut to 0.5% of GDP.

> support a vibrant, resilient and growing business sector in the poorest countries. To do this we will need to add new types of people with different skills ... I want DFID to learn from business … to inject new, business-savvy DNA into the department.

Shortly after the election of the coalition government, Mitchell (2010b) announced the creation of a new 'Private Sector Development cadre' at DFID, which has since grown to become one of the department's largest professional cadres. The new mantra was 'making markets work for the poor', focussing on microfinance and access to finance, business regulation reform, productive infrastructure and trade connectivity (DFID, 2011a; ICAI, 2014). The following decade saw the growth and consolidation of the role of the private sector as both contributor to and recipient of UK aid (DFID, 2020: 13).

Over the last decade, development's 'private sector turn' has been accompanied by an appeal to financial markets as a source of development financing at scale.[13] Ostensible attempts to boost available development funds through private financing have brought about the financialization of the international development sector, representing a move away from the Washington Consensus towards what Gabor (2021) has termed the 'Wall Street Consensus' (Gabor & Brooks, 2017; Jafri, 2019; Mawdsley, 2018a, 2018b; Soederberg, 2013). DFID/FCDO increased annual spending on banking and financial services from £155.6m to £392.6m between 2012 and 2016; on services in support of business from £30.8 to £89.8m; and on support to production sectors as a whole £269.2m to £521.0m over the same time (DFID, 2018: 160). Financialization has seen the reconfiguration of the financing and design of many activities implemented under the banner of 'Big-D Development' (Hart, 2010, see above), and new trends "aimed explicitly at deepening and expanding financial markets and logics in the name of development" (Mawdsley, 2018a: 265) have transformed the development sector into an emerging marketplace for speculative investment capital. These trends have seen an expansion of the structural role of external private sector actors across the development sector, including investors and investment banks, venture capitalists, impact investing fund managers and philanthrocapitalists. Importantly, they have also increasingly seen foreign aid repurposed as a mechanism for de-risking private investment. In the UK's development sector, these shifts have been evidenced in moves to bring the CDC Group (the

[13] How successful the UK and other multilateral and DAC bilateral actors have been in this effort is another question.

UK's development finance institution, which had maintained a low profile throughout the New Labour era) to the centre of the UK aid delivery apparatus. Drawing on £4.3 billion of ODA funds allocated to it for the period 2014–2026 (PwC, 2020: 9), the CDC group – recently renamed British International Investment - has spearheaded a host of new global financing mechanisms in its provision of 'catalytic development capital' designed to 'reduce risks and enable investors to invest more profitably in developing markets' (ibid.).

As these shifts have taken hold, the need for business and financial expertise to support them has also grown. Recognising that for-profit consultancies are uniquely positioned at the boundary between the global corporate, financial and development sectors (reflecting a role undertaken by for-profit consultancies more broadly, see e.g. Roitman, 2021)by them more broadly, see e.g. Roitman, 2021). the UK government has relied heavily on consultancies to help implement reforms to its development financing practices. While we do not suggest that the impetus for the financialization of development can be traced directly to the work of for-profit consultants, we do contend that consultants have been key actors in providing *the conditions of possibility* for these shifts. In other words, consultants have facilitated the practical implementation of financializing reforms across the UK's development agenda. (reflecting a role undertaken by for-profit consultancies more broadly, see e.g. Roitman, 2021). While for-profit consultancies are not present in all areas of contemporary development programming and delivery, one of the areas in which their presence has thus become significant is that in which the UK government is most vigorously driving development's financializing and broader private sector turn. FCDO's IMPACT Programme (Investment Mobilisation for Prosperity and Catalytic Transformation), for example, was launched in 2013 to build impact investing market infrastructure across Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. It is managed by global development consultancy Palladium and impact investing advisory firm The Good Economy. Meanwhile, the UK aid-funded Centre for Disaster Protection, which promotes government adoption of 'risk financing' tools such as insurance and contingent credit in response to natural disasters and climate change in the Global South, was initially managed by Oxford Policy Management (OPM), before DAI Global UK took over as its managing agent in 2021. In a further example, the Global Head of Infrastructure at KPMG was appointed to Alok Sharma's International Development Infrastructure Commission, established in August 2019 "with a mandate to make recommendations on boosting private capital investment into sustainable infrastructure" across the Global South (HMG, 2020: 2, 37). [14]

Consultancies are also central to the incorporation of impact investing and social finance technologies by the UK government . The design of development impact bonds (DIBs),[15] vaccine bonds, climate finance and other blended finance arrangements (in which public and/or philanthropic funds underwrite and thus 'de-risk' investment; see Hughes-Mclure & Mawdsley, 2022; Sklair & Gilbert, 2022) requires complex financial and legal expertise and facilitation between different private and public sector actors – further services that for-profit consultancies are well placed to provide. The Climate Finance Accelerator programme, for example, designed by the UK government's Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to develop investible low-carbon projects across the Global South, is a multi-partner initiative led by PwC (Ricardo Energy & Environment & PwC, 2017). Across these programmes and initiatives, government is rapidly cementing its dependence on consultants and contractors for the provision of both epistemic and skills-based expertise for the management, evaluation and audit of financialized and businesses-orientated aid.

Discussion

The role of consultants and contractors in UK aid delivery has transformed in both substance and significance. They are no longer simply providing technical services which are state-

[14] To illustrate with examples of two firms who specialise in this field: in addition to the work on IMPACT (worth £17.0m) PwC won contracts as managing agent for programmes including: the Flexible Facility for the Private Sector Development Programme in the Democratic Republic of Congo (£35.0m); the Accelerating Investment and Infrastructure in Nepal programme (£19.1m); the Work and Opportunities for Women programme (£10.2m); the Financial Sector Stability Programme (£3.4m); the Investment Climate Facility of UK Specialist Expertise (£3.0m) as well as multiple smaller contracts. In addition to work on the Centre for Disaster Protection (worth £30m), DAI won contracts as a managing agent for: Market Development in Northern Ghana (£14.3m); Economic Growth in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, (£19.0m); energy and financial services under the Mexico Programme (£24.2 and £9.5m respectively); the Arab Women's Enterprise Fund (£9.6m). Each of these involves the provision of flexibly directed expert services and expertise to outcomes intended for the promotion of private sector growth or financial services specifically.

[15] The design of DIBs is an area in which the two trends driving the turn towards for-profit consultancy identified in this article converge. The emergence of payment-by-results modalities during the 2000s/2010s was a feature of DFID's emerging audit and results-based management framework, as discussed above. From the 2010s, new DIBs and vaccine bonds, growing in popularity across the financializing international development sector, drew inspiration from these earlier payment-by-results models.

oriented and ordered within projects. Rather, they are increasingly central to the FCDO's functions of audit, management and knowledge management; further, they provide expertise and intermediary functions linking aid processes to the broader for-profit and financial sectors. These roles are central conditions for the ability to operationalise the politicised aid paradigm that has emerged under successive Conservative governments (although with precursors in pre-2010 Labour governments). They signify a turn to the private sector as an engine of growth and private sector managerial logics and calculative practices as the main domain governing how aid will be given.

This shift in focus is evidence of a deepening in the relationship between the 'Development industry' – that Gillian Hart labels 'Big-D Development' - and 'development' as a global drive towards the expansion of capitalism (Hart, 2001, 2010). Analytically, Hart's argument focuses on how the changing discourses, practices and ideologies of Development shed light on and often serve global capitalism. As Mawdsley and Taggart (2022) argue: 'going beyond 'containment', Development is ever more deeply inhabited by (capitalist) development'. We suggest that the role of for-profit consultancies is an expression of a deeper entanglement of Development processes with prominent actors in global capitalist processes: as key intermediaries facilitating engagement with other important actors within global capitalism; and as interests in their own right, since they are critiqued as forming a growing 'consultocracy' with their own interests (Sturdy, Kirkpatrick, Reguera, Blanco-Oliver, & Veronesi, 2020; Ylönen & Kuusela, 2019) and tendency to produce homogenised global institutions (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2017).

For-profit consultancies act as intermediaries to the logics of global finance and capital which are central to contemporary 'little d' development processes (Gabor, 2021; Pistor, 2019). The Development industry is drawn into the discursive framings and ideologies thus introduced. Hindman observed already ten years ago that 'the aid industry continues to borrow from the corporate world even as it decries it' (Hindman, 2010: 185). The administrative expertise, insulation and autonomy that had characterised DFID has been breached, necessitating a reconfiguration and creation of new assemblages of expertise in which for-profit expertise is crucial. In this respect, the reconfiguration of aid may be expected to reconfigure its geographies: the key reference points and performances of aid's legitimacy move from state ministries and meeting rooms and towards the spaces of a globally mobile private sector.

Second, for-profit consultancies are themselves central to small-d development processes, and their deepening role as managers of 'Development' processes may be expected to have an impact. After all, while the anthropology of development literature has typically characterised development as foreclosing debate through the deployment of technical argument (Behrends et al., 2014: 69–72; Ferguson, 1996 [1990]; Murray Li, 2007: 7), the project arena is never fully closed, representing instead 'the permanent provocation between the will to govern and strategies of struggle, the points at which an opening became a closure, before the next reversal' (Murray Li, 2007: 273). That is to say, the application of universal technical logics demands a process of translation and application into specific contexts, wherein new hybrid forms can be produced (Gal, Kowalski, & Moore, 2015) and where contestation is possible. The logics and interests of those seeking to govern these processes therefore matter.

It would not do to romanticise the bottom-up or emancipatory structures and practices of either INGOs or recipient developing country states – two of the other main aid recipients and managers. The former's responsiveness to grassroots or bottom-up structures has been heavily questioned (Banks, Hulme, & Edwards, 2015). Upwards accountability processes and practices tend to dominate (Agyemang, O'Dwyer, Unerman, & Awumbila, 2017), as they have remade their own internal processes to fit deliberate audit processes, hollowed out by the same contractual formulations and practices that the for-profit consultancies have seized upon (Boomsma & O'Dwyer, 2019; Cazenave & Morales, 2021; Duval, Gendron, & Roux-Dufort, 2015). Nevertheless, for all the flaws of INGOs, they do retain claims to multi-vocal accountability and an emancipatory and community-orientation (Agyemang, O'Dwyer, & Unerman, 2019). These claims offer space for contestation (Girei, 2016; Winthereik & Jensen, 2017; Yasmin & Ghafran, 2019) and form an important part of their staff's felt responsibility (Agyemang et al., 2017), despite the symbolic violence done to these commitments by the wider discourse (Kuruppu & Lodhia, 2019). It need hardly be said that for any deficiencies in their governance, developing country governments are more politically embedded in their societies than global for-profit consultancies.

Yet there are differences between these actors and the for-profit consultancies. The growing attention toward global for-profit consultancies or professional services firms as actors in their own right highlights their interests in pushing 'an institutionalization of new transnational regimes' (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2017), as they seek to extend their own technical fields of expertise within a forming global landscape (Suddaby et al., 2007: 356). They do so through a variety of active strategies (Boussebaa & Faulconbridge, 2019). Ian Harper's account provocatively juxtaposes the segregated, literally gated-and-walled-in global health professionals in Nepal with the migrant Nepali health workers who fluidly navigate social settings in their work in health systems in the UK and the USA (Harper, 2011; Mosse, 2011a). The logics of the local environment are excluded, sometimes literally walled off, as their focus is towards a travelling expertise. For-profit consultancies' own structures reproduce the core-periphery dynamics of global capitalism, with a cosmopolitan elite recruited from elite universities, with headquarters in key sites of global capitalism at the core, and a periphery of localised, territorially constrained offices (Clegg, Geppert, & Hollinshead, 2018). One may conclude that the growing reliance on for-profit consultancies may be expected to insulate the UK government apparatus further from its primary interlocutors, as possibilities for resistance, contestation and the brokering and translation of other voices in the development sphere may be further restricted.

Conclusions

The growing presence and influence of for-profit consultancies in the aid landscape raises questions for critical development scholars. Whilst there has always been an important role for for-profit consultancies in development, we have shown that since 2010 their role has been supercharged by a politically and ideologically driven development paradigm. We suggest that for-profit consultancies themselves acted as essential prior conditions of formation for this role: their availability has permitted the emergence of a particular conjunction in which the role of consultants has shifted from a primarily technical, fragmented and state-oriented contribution, to the current position where for-profit consultancies sit in influential management, audit and intermediary positions, located between public sector aid donors and the private sector. Each of these roles is necessary to the ongoing enactment of UK aid's current configuration: firms' technical roles as evaluators and audit contractors; their role as managers of aid delivery; their capabilities and positioning as credible intermediaries in portfolio or fund management; and their existing global networks and positioning as actors in infrastructure and financialized spaces. We have further suggested that the shift to increased placement of private sector organisations in key positions has contributed to the reconfiguration of aid relations, reorienting development away from the state and towards the needs of private capital.

The UK government's 2022 'Strategy for International Development' (FCDO, 2022) points to the expansion of the FCDO's engagement with the private sector through the search for development finance, furthering the use of UK aid to de-risk investment in development. Of the four priorities laid out in the 2022 Strategy, the first is to 'deliver honest and reliable investment, building on the UK's financial expertise and the strengths of the City of London' (ibid: 5). Plans to achieve this goal include working 'with capital markets to share risk and remove barriers to investment to mobilise finance for development at scale' (ibid: 9), leading to mobilisation of 'up to £8 billion of UK-backed financing a year by 2025 including from the private sector, targeting the main barriers to investment' (ibid: 8). We might expect, therefore, to see a parallel entrenchment over the coming years of the reliance on for-profit consultancies that has enabled the initiation of this trend over the last decade.

While the search for development financing appears to be a growing trend, however, it is not clear whether the reliance on audit and evaluation technologies outlined above will continue to rise. Recent events on both the global and domestic stage – most significantly the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine – have sent shockwaves across the UK's international development landscape, making it difficult to predict how the role of for-profit consultancies in the design and delivery of aid will evolve. We do know that consultants and contractors are adept at reshaping their offerings to meet emerging demands. Regardless of these uncertainties, however, the shifts in the role and significance of these firms in the recent spending of the UK aid budget that we have outlined above certainly merit further investigation. As the UK government embarks on a new era of development design and spending, critical development scholars would do well to stay attuned to its engagement with for-profit consultancies.

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Outsourcing the business of development:
The rise of for-profit consultancies in the UK Aid sector

Abstract

While much attention has been paid to the ways in which the private sector is now embedded in the 'DNA of development' (Mitchell, 2011), the role of one group of actors – for-profit development consultancies and contractors, or service providers – has received relatively little attention. In this article, we trace how the growing role of for-profit consultancies and contractors in British aid delivery has been driven by two key trends: first, the outsourcing of managerial, audit and knowledge management functions as part of efforts to bring private sector approaches and skills into public spending on aid; and second, the reconfiguration of aid spend towards markets and the private sector, and away from locally embedded, state-focused aid programming. We argue that both were launched under New Labour, and super-charged under successive Conservative Governments. The resulting entanglement means that the policies and practices of the UK government's aid agencies and the interests and forms of for-profit service providers are increasingly mutually constitutive. Amongst other implications, this trend acts to displace traditional forms of contestation and accountability of aid delivery.

Keywords

development consultants; professional services firms; audit; New Public Management; financialization of development; UK aid; Department for International Development; Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

Introduction

In 2019, Stephen Twigg MP, Chair of the Select Committee on International Development, and Matthew Rycroft, Permanent Secretary to the Department for International Development (DFID), were guests of honour at the 11th annual PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) International Development Conference. PwC is not the only prominent consultancy with an interest in the sector. Consider, for example, McKinsey, which in its introduction to its

development work, indicates why Twigg and Rycroft would be interested in an event of this sort:

> Our deep expertise in the public and social sectors is complemented with more than 90 years of private-sector experience ... We work as a trusted partner with heads of state, government ministers, and senior leaders of development agencies. … [We work with] proven delivery methods, tools, and solutions for diagnostics, analysis, strategy development, capability building, and implementation ... We help shape the global development debate by investing in proprietary research, fresh thinking, and an extensive publishing program.[1]

Like many of its consultant counterparts,[2] McKinsey promises fresh perspectives, managerial competence, analytical rigour and innovative solutions to bear on the world's most urgent and complex issues. Tangible results are to be delivered quickly. These claims have, it seems, been persuasive. In March 2020, for example, DFID appointed McKinsey to administer the £70 million Invest Africa project. In 2017, the International Development Select Committee reported that between 2010/11 and 2015/16, the bilateral expenditure through contracts increased from 12% (£540 million) to 22% (£1.34 billion) of the overall aid budget (IDC, 2017: 1). A significant proportion of development programme expenditure ~~– £1.248 billion in 2019/20 (DFID, 2020) –~~ is ~~now~~ therefore delivered through for-profit consultancies like McKinsey and PwC, such that they now manage a similar volume of the aid budget as NGOs, seen as a more traditional aid actor and means of delivery (we define the term 'for-profit consultancy' in more detail below). These large consultancies dominate the contracting environment as 'prime' contractors, eligible under framework documents to tender for the largest contracts (DFID, 2020), in turn mobilising and coordinating consortiums drawing from a much broader ecology of individual associates, specialist firms, non-governmental organisations and universities.

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[1] Link: https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/how-we-help-clients/international-development Accessed 17 March 2022.

[2] We acknowledge that management consultancies and the major accountancy firms have very different histories and lineages (Kipping, 2021; McKenna, 2006; Weiss, 2019). However, for the present purposes we focus narrowly on their common involvement as contractors or service providers to the UK development state.

The individual expert, or small team of consultants, is a familiar actor in the anthropology of development (see the collections: Fechter, 2012; Lewis & Mosse, 2006; Mosse, 2011b; Yarrow & Venkatesan, 2012), but the professional services or consultancy *firm* has been relatively neglected (despite considerable recent interest in other domains - see recent edited volumes Empson, Muzio, Broschak, & Hinings, 2015; Hurl & Vogelpohl, 2021b). A small if growing literature on consultancies in aid (including Broome, 2021; Brunt & Casey, 2022; Hayes & Westrup, 2014; Keele, 2019; Nagaraj, 2015; Roberts, 2014; Seabrooke & Sending, 2019, 2022; White, 2020) stands in contrast with the expansive literatures on other kinds of traditional aid actor: for example NGOs (see for a review Brass, Longhofer, Robinson, & Schnable, 2018) or bilateral donor agencies (e.g. Gulrajani, 2017; Mawdsley, 2019; Pauselli, 2019). The presence of for-profit consultancies in this landscape, now deeply embedded and omnipresent in practice, raises questions for critical development scholars around the scope and implications of their specific development rationalities and practices. We begin to address these questions in this article by tracing the drivers and entry points for the ascendance of for-profit consultancy firms to increasingly significant aid management, policy, audit and relational roles. Whilst our arguments remain tentative (the available data on consultants is notoriously patchy, subject to proprietary information and difficult to trace: Craft & Halligan, 2017)[3] we draw conclusions from the juxtaposition of longer-term analysis of for-profit consulting, personal experiences within the professional development sector, and an early phase of research as part of a large ESRC-funded project.[4]

We suggest that the role of for-profit consultancies has intensified, not simply in the volume they manage but also in the centrality of their role to the political legitimisation of aid as a part of the electoral mandate particularly of the Conservative party, first as part of a Coalition (from 2010) and from 2015 as the majority party. For-profit consultancies and public sector agencies are increasingly entangled (Froud, Johal, Moran, & Williams, 2017; Hurl & Vogelpohl, 2021a): Kipping has described~~s~~ the public and private consultancy sector's relations in the US as being 'mutually constitutive' (Kipping, 2021: 37), and the term 'consultocracy' has been used to describe the role consultants have in government decision-

[3] In the UK, the procurement data is often made public but is not always aggregated in a useable and mutually consistent fashion between different published datasets; it is frequently organised according to the procuring department, whose rules of publication differ.

[4] One of the authors has experience worked as a technical lead within a DFID prime contractor, as well as independent technical roles. Author d~~D~~etails to be added following anonymous review.

making (Hood & Jackson, 1991). New Public Management reforms (Arnold & Cooper, 1999; Christensen, 2005; Jupe & Funnell, 2015; Lapsley, 2009; Lapsley & Oldfield, 2001; Leys, 1999; Shaoul, 2011) and ~~more recently~~ the post financial crash of 2007 implementation of cost-cutting austerity measures (Beveridge & Koch, 2021; Hurl, 2018) have provided rich case studies of the growing together of the public and private sectors since the reductions in internal state capacity have necessitated the use of external expertise~~, and the deepening relations and mutual adaptations that have occurred since~~.

In this article, we show how for-profit consultancies in in~~t~~ernational development have moved from primarily project-oriented technically expert ~~professional~~ actors to actors providing ~~taking on~~ fund management, programme audit and knowledge management roles. Relatedly, we examine how they perform key intermediary roles, ~~orienting aid towards global finance and the private sector~~ orienting aid in its ambitions to engage global finance and the private sector, through the provision of financial expertise and the facilitation of partnerships between government and private sector actors. Both shifts are central to changes in aid discourses forged under successive Conservative governments, although both had precursors in the New Labour era (1997–~~-~~2010). We explore how consultants are caught up in the shift from working primarily toward technical and professional agendas, to discourses and practices that revolve around managerial rigour (see e.g. Eyben & Guijt, 2015), stringent scrutiny, and audit and quantitative calculative and evaluative practices (Donovan, 2018). We suggest that global for-profit consultancies are both beneficiaries of, and produce the conditions of possibility for, this work. Both intermediary and management roles echo parallel shifts in professional services firms' wider practices (Roitman, 2021).[6]

We close by arguing that the shift in for-profit consultancies' role is part of a highly politicised re-absorption of 'Big-D Development' – as a distinct ~~enterprise or process~~ programme of intervention, often funded by 'traditional' donor agencies like DFID – into 'development' (Hart, 2010), i.e. the broader processes of capitalism's global expansion, which, following Gillian Hart, we understand as "geographically uneven but spatially interconnected processes of creation and destruction, dialectically interconnected with discourses and practices of Development" (Hart, 2010: 119). ~~broader global capitalist processes, driven in this case by the UK government~~ We suggest that the delivery of state-managed aid funds by private sector consultancy firms – often multi-sector firms with their own interests in global processes of capitalism ~~as part~~ (Boussebaa & Faulconbridge, 2019;

Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2017) – is both an example of the enfolding of the Development sector into capitalist progress ~~(Ylönen & Kuusela, 2019)~~*and also* an instrument for other articulations of that enfolding, particularly by fostering engagements with the private sector and with development finance ~~of an ideological programme that moves away from the state and towards the private sector, state-capital hybridity~~(Mawdsley & Taggart, 2022)~~, and global capital.~~. The aid ethnography literature has long highlighted the depoliticising effects of the Development industry's technical discourses – in the sense of using technical language and rationales to foreclose political debate or contestation –~~,~~ whilst acknowledging the processes of translation and contestation characterising delivery (Lewis & Mosse, 2006; Murray Li, 2007; Rottenburg, 2009). The logics and interests of the actors involved in managing and delivering Development projects therefore matter. Critical accounts of the emerging 'consultocracy' highlight how management consultancies and professional services firms have a depoliticizing role in policy processes (Beveridge, 2012; Hurl, 2017; Hurl & Vogelpohl, 2021a; Ylönen & Kuusela, 2019), similar to the role of development actors. A growing literature highlights their role in the institutionalization of transnational regimes (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2017; Suddaby, Cooper, & Greenwood, 2007). Analyses stress a duality, therefore, whereby professional services firms at once propose transnational institutions and domains of expertise yet ~~, framed by an institutional duality that brings~~ are heavily inflected by their own nationally-rooted organisational histories and ~~transnational internal~~ hierarchies between offices (in key centres of finance like London and New York), thereby reproducing ~~to the reproduction of~~ colonial core-periphery geographies (Boussebaa, 2015; Boussebaa & Faulconbridge, 2019). Increased use of for-profit consultancies will entail the further ~~depoliticization~~ foreclosure of political debate over the principles and values of British aid ~~delivery~~ and further isolation of aid agencies from contestation, embedding the transnational logics of global capital.

The next section provides a brief overview of the history of for-profit consultancies in the UK's development architecture, including the parallel history of professional services and global management consultancy firms of which they form part. Next we explore two key drivers for the growing role of for-profit consultancies in aid policy and practice: outsourcing of audit functions and key aid management roles, and the reorientation of aid towards the private sector and the interests of global finance. We conclude by addressing the broader implications for development processes in the UK. We should be clear that this is not a comprehensive review of the for-profit development sector by any means; and although we discuss depoliticisation ~~implications~~, we do not otherwise comment on the impact~~s~~, effectiveness or value of these service providers.

For-profit consultancies' traditional role in UK development: technical, state-oriented and projectized

The UK government has always outsourced some portion of its aid funding for delivery through for-profit consultancies. As such, they are one 'vehicle' amongst many: as part of the bilateral spend, they sit alongside civil society, multilateral agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and recipient country states, regions and municipalities. Historically, the role of the consultant has mainly been technical in nature,[5] indeed going back to colonial administrations (Morgan, 1964: 12). At the time of the creation of the Ministry of Overseas Development in 1964, some 15,400 officers filled positions in the former colonies and developing world (Morgan, 1964: 61) along with independent technical advisors, university teachers, and local training facilities and training in Britain (ODM, 1968: para 5.04). Technical advice was therefore central to the initial frameworks of aid provision, often in the form of individual experts placed for the purposes of capacity building.

In this earlier era, consultants' roles were generally found within and subject to the projects through which aid was delivered. In his analysis of development consultants in the 1990s, Roderick Stirrat describes a floating world of short-term consultants (sometimes as short as two weeks, sometimes four years) working in transient teams across a wide range of tasks (Stirrat, 2000: 34–35). Whether the consultants were moonlighting academics, freelancers or employees of a consultancy company, they serviced processes central to the development enterprise (e.g. as the 'public face' of Poverty Reduction Strategy papers see Craig & Porter, 2006: 87–88). This figure of the consultant is familiar from accounts of 'Aidland': David Mosse's account of the Rural Development programme in India describes mostly individual consultants, each representing a different professional field (Mosse, 2005). In this rural development project, a significant 37% per cent of the project budget went to technical assistance (Mosse, 2011a: 21). Ferguson's list of the work proposed in phase two of the

[5] That is to say, it was primarily concerned with the available models for development projects, the arguments for them and the practices for their 'implementation' – or translation into specific situations (Behrends, Park, & Rottenburg, 2014).

Thaba-Tseka Development Project captures the complexity and breadth of their work, with twelve pages to list activities spanning health, education, roads and agriculture, all serviced by a central project administration (Ferguson, 1996 [1990]: 88–100). As projects absorbed more of the aid budget, project roles became more significant (Barrie Ireton states that project expenditure increased from £406m in 1987/88 to £1,649m in 2005/06, 2013: 87).

A third key characteristic of for-profit consultants' 'traditional' role was similar to all bilateral spending: 'British aid is given on a government to government basis'.[6] The work of for-profit consultants was oriented towards not one but (at least nominally) two governments: the British government which hired them and the recipient country government. In practice, the technical discourses driving development practice are there precisely to obscure the tensions incumbent in such a relationship and to maintain aid discourse's comfortable assumption that the persistent servant-to-two-masters relationship will be unproblematic (Rottenburg, 2009: 67–68). Technical assistance roles saw for-profit consultancies embedded in developing state agencies, addressing 'capacity building needs' (for all the familiar challenges of institutional change processes Pritchett & Woolcock, 2004: 193; Pritchett, Woolcock, & Andrews, 2013; Wilson, 2007). The picture thus emerges of an earlier era of consultancies working in primarily technical and advisory roles with sectoral expertise (e.g. in rain-fed agriculture, or maternal health); distributed across technical cooperation and (increasingly) project modalities, and oriented towards the public sector as their key interlocutors and partners.

An interesting distinction between DFID and many other government departments emerges from this context. We suggest that UK development was (mostly) insulated from the super-charged entry of management consultancy firms in the 1980s and 1990s, riding the tidal wave of 'New Public Management' (NPM) reform (Arnold & Cooper, 1999; Christensen, 2005; Jupe & Funnell, 2015; Lapsley, 2009; Lapsley & Oldfield, 2001; Leys, 1999; Shaoul, 2011). In other sectors, consultants – notably the Big Four accountancy firms (PwC, KPMG, Deloitte Touche, EY) – had profound influence in framing the arguments for privatisation and in administering NPM reforms, due in part to an enchantment with private sector

[6] ODA. (1985-86). *House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee*. National Archives (OD 116/65)

management expertise over public sector practices (Saint-Martin, 1998).[7] For the UK development sector, however, the role of NPM as an entry point for consultants was heavily moderated for various reasons.

In the first place, the measurement and management reforms to the project modality of 1986 (which most resembled NPM) were not there to drive or legitimise outsourcing, for the simple reason that much of development was already outsourced. The introduction of the Logframe,[8] for example, and its attendant technologies was there to reform the project and therefore the conduct of the relations between ODA/DFID and project teams. The new project technologies sought to reframe the management of these processes and to render them more efficient but not to enter into a new world of market-based mechanisms and competition (for the most part – some quasi-government agencies were privatised). Indeed, Logframe guidance documents tend not to refer to procurement at all (Team Technologies Inc, undated). Second, the primary discursive reference point for the project technologies was not private sector excellence but rather development debates on the scope of appraisal, evaluation and participatory design (Cracknell, 2000: 42–47). The Logframe itself ('the Project Framework' as it was known in ODA/DFID) was a planning tool derived from the U.S. military. It was introduced to broaden the considerations in planning projects (beyond chiefly engineering and economic factors) and to open opportunities for social and institutional analyses (Eyben, 2015). As a modality, the project became an arena for development debates around participation, emancipation and control (Dearden & Kowalski, 2003). Lastly, ODA as an agency was always heavily staffed with a large proportion of policy experts, including economists and increasingly political scientists and anthropologists (Eyben, 2014: 74–78, 88–94; Kothari, 2005). The primarily development discursive reference points robbed external consultancies of their unique selling point over the civil servants – their private sector expertise. ODA remained confident in its own capacity to institute reforms.

[7] Although see Kipping (2021) for whom the story of private sector entanglement in the public sector is much longer.
[8] The Logframe or Project Framework constitutes a set of templates and procedures for project appraisal, design, management and evaluation – integrated in a formalised cycle - which enabled (amongst other things) an expansion of relevant factors to include the institutional and social environments.

Moreover, the quantified accountability measures which constituted the Logframe's primary claim to be an NPM administration reform (Cracknell, 2000: 47) were weakened by a subsequent paradigm change in aid discourse under the auspices of Clare Short, the incoming New Labour Secretary of State for International Development (who became Secretary of State in 1997). Clare Short and DFID committed themselves in their first White Paper of 1997 to t~~T~~he principles of the emerging international 'aid effectiveness' paradigm. This paradigm introduced state-partnerships and ownership to the core of aid provision (DFID, 1997: para 2; OECD, 2005) and emphasised contribution rather than attribution of results – limiting in turn the grip of project-based accountability and audit systems. A review in 2008 looking at Logframes over the previous years observed that in many cases, the only number was the page number (interview, former DFID economist).[9] Whilst therefore the Logframe reforms had set in place an accountability mechanism at the project level, the corporate accountability system was indirect, predicated on a scoring system that allowed considerable local discretion to the DFID team in charge, and therefore did not afford the opportunity for internal outcome-oriented control and audit. As a consequence, while in 2005 ActionAid calculated that the £101m or so ODA that was spent by the UK 'was allocated … to the 'big five' accountancy firms (PricewaterhouseCoopers, KPMG, Deloitte Touche, Ernst and Young, Accenture) as well as to free market think tanks like Adam Smith International' (ibid: 35), the development work of these firms remained mostly technical, distributed within projects and state-oriented.

The rise of professional services firms in the UK's aid sector

While consultants have therefore – as outlined above – always been present in the UK's development sector, we contend that a different breed of development consultants has emerged across the sector over the last decade or so. We identify two kinds of for-profit consultancies in the contemporary development services marketplace. The first are large transnational multi-service consultancy firms for whom government and bilateral aid agencies sit alongside a vast array of private and public sector clients across diverse

[9] It was only following the change in Secretary of State and the Global Financial Crisis of 2007/2008, when the New Labour leadership and key internal champions began to tighten the accountability structures (Valters & Whitty, 2017). As we will see in the next section, under the following Conservative administrations more substantial changes started to take place.

industries. In the UK, management consultants of this type regularly contracted to design and deliver ODA programming include those with roots in accountancy, such as ~~PricewaterhouseCoopers (~~PwC~~)~~ or KPMG); engineering consultancy, such as Tetra Tech or Mott MacDonald; or management consultancy, such as McKinsey. In parallel, a slate of smaller, specialist development management contractors are also called upon to support the spending of the UK aid budget. Some of these smaller contractors have their origins in management consultancy for particular industries (such as Palladium, whose roots are partially to be found in rural management service provision). Others in this category are tied more closely to earlier types of development consultants with roots in the third sector or academia. Oxford Policy Management, for example, began in 1979 as an applied research working group on food security and agriculture at the University of Oxford, and only later evolved into a private sector development consultancy.

Any analysis of the growing 'new' consultancy role in the UK's aid sector must also be situated within the wider history of the rise of global management consultancy, and particularly its rapid growth over the last two decades. While the USA and the UK emerge as global leaders in the rise of management consultancy (Kipping & Clark, 2012), the industry does not share the same historical trajectory in both countries. US management consultancy began to emerge in the 1950s, far earlier than in Europe. Some of these mid-century US consultancies have played (and continue to play) an important role in development through USAID contracting, especially those born of Cold War 'liberal internationalism'. Some, for example, were initially concerned with problems of engineering and agriculture, and have now evolved into more generic strategy and advisory firms (Roberts, 2014). From the 1950s onwards, early strategy firms such as Booz Allen Hamilton and McKinsey began to export US-style corporate management to Europe (Kipping & Clark, 2012: 11–12). These early consultants were predominantly engineers, concerned with scientific management and labour process management. As management consultants spread across the USA and the UK over the next half century, multiple mergers with accountancy and audit firms across this sector – leading to the contemporary pre-eminence in the UK of the Big Four accountancy firms~~- we now know as the Big Four (PwC, EY, Deloitte and KPMG)~~ ~~-~~ saw tensions emerge over the principal focus (and legal boundaries) characterising their work. Recent decades, however, have seen the re-centring of consultancy across these firms, which are now more commonly referred to as professional services firms than as accountancy practices.

Since the mid-20th century, these for-profit consultancies have played a central role in the expansion of global capitalism (and contributed, as such, to the growth in inequalities driven by this capitalist expansion in most countries around the world).[10] They have enacted this role through their influence over the management of corporate and financial activity, and their role in training a global cadre of young professionals to work across the private sector (Kipping & Clark, 2012: 5) – and increasingly, also across INGOs and state bureaucracies (Giridharadas, 2019: 22–34; Kipping, 2021: 44). Unlike previous types of development consultant, for-profit consultancies are, as such, lucrative, profit-driven firms, which arguably (albeit to differing extents) play a significant role in driving the widening global inequalities that many more traditional development professionals still believe their work is designed to resist (Boussebaa & Faulconbridge, 2019). How then, have these firms come to play such a significant role in the spending of the UK's aid budget?

The changing role of for-profit consultancies in UK aid

How do we explain the (relatively late) shift from technical, distributed and state-oriented consultants to the newer roles described above? We suggest two particular drivers, analysed below.

Outsourcing managerial, audit and knowledge management roles

Following the election of the Conservative-led government in 2010, the new Secretary of State for International Development, Andrew Mitchell, made a series of changes in policy that were to drive outsourcing of key managerial and audit roles to for-profit consultancies. His first major change was to set 'the results agenda' and 'value for money' logics at the centrepiece of ~~his~~ a political programme which had retained many of the hallmarks of Labour policy:

> "I saw that this was space occupied by Labour, not the Tories. I said what does a centre-right development policy look like? It was clearly the results agenda."
> (interview with Andrew Mitchell, 2016, quoted in Valters & Whitty, 2017: 27).

Whilst – as discussed above – earlier targets had tended to be indirect, and permitted considerable discretion across a decentralised department, the new reforms were more

[10] While inequality is notoriously difficult to measure, the World Inequality Report 2022 affirms that "income and wealth inequalities have been on the rise nearly everywhere since the 1980s" (Chancel, Piketty, Saez, & Zucman, 2022).

stringent and aimed at controlling and auditing DFID's accomplishments (ibid). This decision was explicitly party-political and presentational, with a view to distinguishing a centre-right Conservative agenda from a space hitherto occupied by Labour, whilst maintaining (at that time) many of New Labour's policy commitments (in fact, the Labour government had already started to harden its position on value for money and accountability, and many of the DfID reforms under the Mitchell had their genesis in the previous Labour administration).

The raft of reforms sought to institute results-oriented audit and management processes based primarily on the quantified measurement of aid projects in one way or another. A Bilateral Aid Review (BAR) was initiated which articulated common targets and evaluated projects against these targets. Along with new, more stringent project reporting requirements and data harmonisation and aggregation processes, these paved the way for a wholesale adoption of results-based management at the corporate and project level, through the tightening of project results frameworks, and their linkage to an aggregated departmental results framework. Corporate level management practices were replicated at the level of projects, with increasing use of payment-by-results ~~(PBR)~~ modalities.[11] To the audit and accountability systems may be added further knowledge management functions based around data generation and evidence-based policy rationalities~~.(DFID, 2013).~~ These were championed by a powerful advocacy group of senior bureaucrats whose commitment to experimental impact evaluative technologies has been highly influential (Donovan, 2018; Kelly & McGoey, 2018). A growing stream of funding required for-profit consultancies to conduct a range of data project monitoring, results verification, evaluation and learning – under the general rubrics of 'Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning' and 'Third Party Verification' contracts. Increasing the depth of the supplier market for evaluation services was the subject of a specific strategy (DFID, 2014: 10). A contrast may therefore be observed with the role of consultants in earlier NPM accounts where the for-profit consultancy roles were chiefly on policy legitimisation and development around privatisation and NPM reforms (Arnold & Cooper, 1999; Jupe & Funnell, 2015; Leys, 1999; Saint-Martin, 1998) – rather than on providing audit and knowledge management roles themselves.

[11] A modality where the payment is contingent on the attainment of verified results (Clist, 2016).

The outsourcing of newly created audit and knowledge management roles has been coupled with outsourcing core *management* roles in the delivery of aid, beyond the traditional professional service roles of the for-profit consultancies. Several reasons may be identified, linked to corporate pressures being felt by DFID: staffing was not keeping up with the increase in budget, just as management tasks, audit processes and controls were proliferating with the introduction of greater audit compliance tasks (NAO, 2015: 33–42). The pressure was compounded by the decision to rule out recipient states as 'delivery partners' through budget support, amidst a growing scepticism of their reliability and probity (DFID, 2011c; ICAI, 2013b). The prohibition intersected with the new vision of control over aid, as the use of (often weak) country systems to measure and track development over pooled funding meant attributable results were hard to track. A key focus became developing procurement and management capabilities that could work smoothly with contractors as delivery vehicles for the increased budget (ICAI, 2013a; NAO, 2015: 37). DFID continued to focus its attention on 'fragile' and post-conflict states: the 2015 UK Aid Strategy committed to allocate 50% of aid to fragile states and regions, as a result of growing pressure to focus on fragility as the locus of poverty. Such areas are not only logistically harder to manage and oversee, due to the dangers involved, but their lack of stability also means development programming is technically much harder and requires more oversight. Closer audit attention is necessary but also more difficult. Finally, these audit and professional demands were supplemented by a growing list of compliance requirements pertaining to good conduct and safe-guarding (see for a review IDC, 2020).

As a consequence, DFID was increasingly compelled to outsource aspects of its portfolio management to for-profit consultancies~~:~~, including aspects of its grant-making role~~,~~ and contracting and scrutiny of programming. Stated otherwise, the availability of a market of consultancy firms was a necessary condition of possibility for the delivery of these reforms, given the funding constraints noted above. The example of the Girls' Education Challenge Fund (GEC) illustrates how far DFID has been willing to outsource programme and portfolio management roles that might once have been conducted in-house. The GEC was designed in 2012 by a team in ~~Whitehall~~ DFID's London headquarters (DFID, 2011b). ~~PricewaterhouseCoopers (~~PwC~~)~~ – the largest contractor to the UK government – won the initial contract and has been involved in delivery of both the first and second phases of the Fund, worth respectively £355m and £497m. The first phase funded 37 different interventions intended to improve the education of one million marginalised girls.

Interventions were identified from three different funding windows, each with different levels of appetite for experimental interventions, with their own grant-making criteria, and each with their own sub-contractors who actually delivered the interventions. Each intervention was overseen and managed by GEC and the team partnered with four corporate sector partners, the Discovery Channel, Coca-Cola (who brought in MasterCard), Ericsson and Avanti. It worked across eighteen countries and involved a consortium of evaluation partners, led by another firm, Coffey (subsequently bought by Tetra Tech, a US-based engineering consultancy), which was responsible for evaluating the success of the project on behalf of DFID, using a highly complex experimental results-based mechanism (Coffey, 2016a).

Whilst the GEC is an unusually complex programme, it serves to illustrate the extent to which DFID was willing to transfer the management of a large section of the aid budget to a contracted fund manager, which would be responsible for everything from digesting evidence to contracting out and managing delivery through sub-contractors. Importantly, the programme's independent evaluator noted that the GEC's functions operated largely in parallel to DFID's country offices and did not engage them sufficiently (Coffey, 2016b: 2). Other examples include the UK Caribbean Infrastructure Fund; the portfolio approach adopted by the Supporting Peace and Stability in Eastern DRC; and 'Manufacturing Africa' programme; the Good Governance Fund and the African Clean Energy Programme.

The expansion in roles of for-profit consultancies has been driven by a combination of politically motivated and pragmatic reforms. It reflects an underlying shift in the arguments legitimising UK's international development expenditure, from primarily technical to increasingly founded on managerial, audit and evidence-based logics of rigour in delivery. It has been supercharged since 2010, although many of the factors driving the change were already initiated under the New Labour government. The increasing centrality of consultancies is evident in the UK's 2022 aid strategy, which sets British (private sector and other) expertise at the forefront of the UK aid effort (FCDO, 2022). Just as the aid reforms have been designed with a view to capitalise on for-profit consultancy firms' expertise, the aid-focused for-profit consultancy sector has shaped its expertise to the requirements. They have transformed themselves from simply providing primarily technical development experts to provide a much broader set of managerial skills – which when not found within the traditional suppliers of services, would be drawn from skills outside the development specialist teams (for large multi-sector professional service firms) or would be brought in.

Consequently, we suggest that DFID and its market of suppliers were mutually constituted, the one shaping the other.

While the strategic alignment of the offering of for-profit consultancies and the needs of DFID/FCDO goes far in explaining the allure of development's new delivery partner, a second (closely connected) set of factors also comes into play. Here, we argue, the alignment between development and for-profit consultants and contractors may be entangled within more profound shifts in the relationship between 'big D' and 'little d' development.

Intermediaries to global finance and the private sector turn

A second key element is the broader reorientation of UK and wider aid agendas towards (global and local) markets. During the early 2000s, New Labour had nominated the recipient state as the key 'owner' of aid, as part of its commitment to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. Amongst other things, ~~they~~New Labour increased volumes of budget support (from £268 million to £461 2003–2008: NAO, 2008: 1), and rejected British interests as a relevant consideration in aid delivery. Within Whitehall, Clare Short insisted that poverty reduction was the primary purpose of aid, and vigorously protected the aid budget from other interests, most significantly those of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and commercial priorities (Barder, 2005: 11; Vereker, 2002: 135). This autonomy was enacted in law through the introduction of the poverty focus and proofed against budget cuts by the commitment to 0.7% of GDP in aid spending (Townsend, 2010).[12] However, post-2010 Conservative governments have brought an end both to these commitments and to the state-centric focus in aid spending as part of an ideological centre-right programme, described by Justine Greening as a "radical shift" that saw the private sector as the crucial driver of development (cited in Mawdsley, 2015 at p.339). In little over a decade, a private sector turn has come to characterise a large part of the UK's aid spend.

This has necessitated the pursuit of new forms of business and financial expertise by DFID (and more recently by the new integrated Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

[12] Although originally drafted by Labour, the commitment to 0.7% of GDP in aid spending was supported by all the major parties and appeared in the Conservatives' election manifesto for 2009, before being brought into law by the coalition government in 2015. In 2021, soon after DFID's absorption into the newly-created FCDO, this commitment was cut to 0.5% of GDP.

(FCDO), into which DFID was absorbed in 2020). In 2010, Andrew Mitchell (2010a) made no bones of his intention to infuse DFID with new private sector know-how, stating in a speech on wealth creation to the London School of Economics that:

> It is my intention to recast DFID as a government department that understands the private sector, that has at its disposal the right tools to deliver and that is equipped to support a vibrant, resilient and growing business sector in the poorest countries. To do this we will need to add new types of people with different skills ... I want DFID to learn from business … to inject new, business-savvy DNA into the department.

Shortly after the election of the coalition government, Mitchell (2010b) announced the creation of a new 'Private Sector Development cadre' at DFID, which has since grown to become one of the department's largest professional cadres. The new mantra was 'making markets work for the poor', focussing on microfinance and access to finance, business regulation reform, productive infrastructure and trade connectivity (DFID, 2011a; ICAI, 2014). The following decade saw the growth and consolidation of the role of the private sector as both contributor to and recipient of UK aid (DFID, 2020: 13).

~~Central to these processes~~ Over the last decade, development's 'private sector turn' ~~-~~has been accompanied by a~~the turn~~n appeal to ~~mainstream~~ financial markets as a source of development financing at scale.[13] Ostensible attempts ~~The last decade has been characterised by attempts~~ to boost available development funds through private financing have brought about the financialization of the international development sector,~~, in a shift~~ representing a move away from the Washington Consensus towards what Gabor (2021) has termed the 'Wall Street Consensus' (Gabor & Brooks, 2017; Jafri, 2019; Mawdsley, 2018a, 2018b; Soederberg, 2013). DFID/FCDO increased annual spending on banking and financial services from £155.6m to £392.6m between 2012 and 2016; on services in support of business from £30.8 to £89.8m; and on support to production sectors as a whole £269.2m to £521.0m over the same time (DFID, 2018: 160). Financialization has seen the reconfiguration of the financing and design of many activities implemented under the banner of 'Big-D Development' (Hart, 2010, see above), and new trends "aimed explicitly at deepening and

[13] How successful the UK and other multilateral and DAC bilateral actors have been in this effort is another question.

expanding financial markets and logics in the name of development" (Mawdsley, 2018a: 265) have transformed the development sector into an emerging marketplace for speculative investment capital. ~~This shift has~~These trends have ~~seen foreign aid repurposed as a mechanism for de-risking private investment, accompanied by~~ seen a ~~deepening~~n expansion of the structural role of external private sector actors across the development sector~~in development~~, including ~~mainstream~~ investors and investment banks, venture capitalists, impact investing fund managers and philanthrocapitalists. Importantly, they have also increasingly- seen foreign aid repurposed as a mechanism for de-risking private investment. In the UK's development sector, these shifts have been evidenced in moves to bring the CDC Group (the UK's development finance institution, which had maintained a low profile throughout the New Labour era) ~~was brought~~ to the centre of the UK aid delivery apparatus. Drawing on £4.3 billion of ODA funds allocated to it for the period 2014–~~-~~2026 (PwC, 2020: 9), the CDC group – recently renamed British International Investment - has spearheaded a host of new global financing mechanisms in its provision of 'catalytic development capital' designed to 'reduce risks and enable investors to invest more profitably in developing markets' (ibid.).

As these shifts have taken hold, the need for business and financial expertise to support ~~these shifts has~~ them has also grown. Recognising that for-profit consultancies are uniquely positioned at the boundary between the global corporate, financial and development sectors (reflecting a role undertaken by for-profit consultancies more broadly, see e.g. Roitman, 2021)by them more broadly, see e.g. Roitman, 2021).~~,~~ the UK~~the~~ government has relied heavily on consultancies to help implement reforms to its development financing practices. While we do not suggest that the impetus for the financialization of development can be traced directly to the work of for-profit consultants, we do contend that consultants have been key actors in providing *the conditions of possibility* for these shifts. In other words, consultants have facilitated the practical implementation of financializing reforms across the UK's development agenda. ~~increasingly turned to those best placed to provide it: for-profit consultancies are uniquely positioned at the boundary between the global corporate and development sectors~~ (reflecting a role undertaken by for-profit consultancies more broadly, see e.g. Roitman, 2021). ~~-~~While for-profit consultancies are not present in all areas of contemporary development programming and delivery, one of the areas in which ~~-~~their presence has thus become significant ~~in those areas in~~ is that in which the UK government is most vigorously driving development's financializing and broader private sector turn. FCDO's IMPACT Programme (Investment Mobilisation for Prosperity and Catalytic Transformation), for example, was launched in 2013 to build impact investing market infrastructure across Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. It is managed by global development consultancy Palladium and impact investing advisory firm The Good Economy. Meanwhile,~~, while~~ the UK aid-funded Centre for Disaster Protection, which promotes ~~(promoting~~ government adoption of 'risk financing' tools such as insurance and contingent credit in response to natural disasters and climate change in the Global South,~~)~~ was initially managed by Oxford Policy Management (OPM), before DAI Global UK took over as its managing agent in 2021. In a further example, ~~Meanwhile,~~ the Global Head of Infrastructure at KPMG was appointed to Alok Sharma's ~~2019~~ International Development Infrastructure Commission, established in August 2019 "with a mandate to make recommendations on boosting private capital investment into sustainable infrastructure" ~~designed to develop infrastructure~~ across the Global South (HMG, 2020: 2, 37)~~(HMG 2020: 2, 37)~~.[14]

~~Across these programmes and initiatives, government is rapidly cementing its dependence on consultants and contractors for the provision of both epistemic and skills-based expertise for the management, evaluation and audit of financialized and businesses-orientated aid.~~ Consultancies are also central to the incorporation of impact investing and social finance technologies by the UK government ~~across these initiatives~~. The design of development impact bonds (DIBs),[15] vaccine bonds, climate finance and other blended finance

[14] To illustrate with examples of two firms who specialise in this field: in addition to the work on IMPACT (worth £17.0m) PwC won contracts as managing agent for programmes including: the Flexible Facility for the Private Sector Development Programme in the Democratic Republic of Congo (£35.0m); the Accelerating Investment and Infrastructure in Nepal programme (£19.1m); the Work and Opportunities for Women programme (£10.2m); the Financial Sector Stability Programme (£3.4m); the Investment Climate Facility of UK Specialist Expertise (£3.0m) as well as multiple smaller contracts. In addition to work on the Centre for Disaster Protection (worth £30m), DAI won contracts as a managing agent for: Market Development in Northern Ghana (£14.3m); Economic Growth in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, (£19.0m); energy and financial services under the Mexico Programme (£24.2 and £9.5m respectively); the Arab Women's Enterprise Fund (£9.6m). Each of these involves the provision of flexibly directed expert services and expertise to outcomes intended for the promotion of private sector growth or financial services specifically.

[15] The design of DIBs is an area in which the two trends driving the turn towards for-profit consultancy identified in this article converge. The emergence of payment-by-results ~~(PbR)~~ modalities during the 2000s/2010s was a feature of DFID's emerging audit and results-based management framework, as discussed above. From the 2010s, new DIBs and vaccine bonds, growing in popularity

arrangements (in which public and/or philanthropic funds underwrite and thus 'de-risk' investment; see Hughes-Mclure & Mawdsley, 2022; Sklair & Gilbert, 2022) requires complex financial and legal expertise and facilitation between different private and public sector actors – further services that for-profit consultancies are well placed to provide. The Climate Finance Accelerator programme, for example, designed by the UK government's Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to develop investible low-carbon projects across the Global South, is a multi-partner initiative led by PwC (Ricardo Energy & Environment & PwC, 2017). Across these programmes and initiatives, government is rapidly cementing its dependence on consultants and contractors for the provision of both epistemic and skills-based expertise for the management, evaluation and audit of financialized and businesses-orientated aid.

Discussion

The role of consultants and contractors in UK aid delivery has transformed in both substance and significance. They are no longer simply providing technical services which are state-~~oriented, and~~oriented and ordered within projects. Rather, they are increasingly central to the FCDO's functions of audit, management and knowledge management; further, they provide expertise and intermediary functions linking aid processes to the broader for-profit and financial sectors. These roles are central conditions for the ability to ~~to~~ operationalise the politicised aid paradigm that has emerged under successive Conservative governments (although with precursors in pre-2010 Labour governments). They signify a turn to the private sector as an engine of growth and private sector managerial logics and calculative practices as the main domain governing how aid will be given.

This shift in focus is evidence of a deepening in the relationship between the 'Development industry' – that Gillian Hart labels 'Big-D Development' - and 'development' as a global drive towards the expansion of capitalism (Hart, 2001, 2010). Analytically, Hart's argument focuses on how the changing discourses, practices and ideologies of Development shed light on and often serve global capitalism. As Mawdsley and Taggart (2022) argue: 'going beyond 'containment', Development is ever more deeply inhabited by (capitalist) development'. We

across the financializing international development sector, drew inspiration from these earlier payment-by-results~~PbR~~ models.

suggest that the role of for-profit consultancies is an expression of a deeper entanglement of Development processes with prominent actors in global capitalist processes: as key intermediaries facilitating engagement with other important actors within global capitalism; and as interests in their own right, since they are critiqued as forming a growing 'consultocracy' with their own interests (Sturdy, Kirkpatrick, Reguera, Blanco-Oliver, & Veronesi, 2020; Ylönen & Kuusela, 2019) and tendency to produce homogenised global institutions (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2017).

~~In the first place, f~~For-profit consultancies act as intermediaries to the logics of global finance and capital which are central to contemporary 'little d' development processes (Gabor, 2021; Pistor, 2019). The Development industry is drawn into the discursive framings and ideologies thus introduced. Hindman observed already ten years ago that 'the aid industry continues to borrow from the corporate world even as it decries it' (Hindman, 2010: 185). The administrative expertise, insulation and autonomy that had characterised DFID has been breached, necessitating a reconfiguration and creation of new assemblages of expertise in which for-profit expertise is crucial. In this respect, the reconfiguration of aid may be expected to reconfigure its geographies: the key reference points and performances of aid's legitimacy move from state ministries and meeting rooms and towards the spaces of a globally mobile private sector.

Second, for-profit consultancies are themselves central to small-d development processes, and their deepening role as managers of 'Development' processes may be expected to have an impact. After all, while the anthropology of development literature has typically characterised development as ~~being depoliticising~~ foreclosing debate through the deployment of technical argument (Behrends et al., 2014: 69–72; Ferguson, 1996 [1990]; Murray Li, 2007: 7), the project arena is never fully closed, representing instead 'the permanent provocation between the will to govern and strategies of struggle, the points at which an opening became a closure, before the next reversal' (Murray Li, 2007: 273). That is to say, the application of universal technical logics demands a process of translation and application into specific contexts, wherein new hybrid forms can be produced (Gal, Kowalski, & Moore, 2015) and where contestation is possible. The logics and interests of those seeking to govern these processes therefore matter.

It would not do to romanticise the bottom-up or emancipatory structures and practices of either INGOs or recipient developing country states – two of the other main aid recipients and managers. The former's responsiveness to grassroots or bottom-up structures has been heavily questioned (Banks, Hulme, & Edwards, 2015). Upwards accountability processes and practices tend to dominate (Agyemang, O'Dwyer, Unerman, & Awumbila, 2017), as they have remade their own internal processes to fit deliberate audit processes, hollowed out by the same contractual formulations and practices that the for-profit consultancies have seized upon (Boomsma & O'Dwyer, 2019; Cazenave & Morales, 2021; Duval, Gendron, & Roux-Dufort, 2015). Nevertheless, for all the flaws of INGOs, they do retain claims to multi-vocal accountability and an emancipatory and community-orientation (Agyemang, O'Dwyer, & Unerman, 2019). These claims offer space for contestation (Girei, 2016; Winthereik & Jensen, 2017; Yasmin & Ghafran, 2019) and form an important part of their staff's felt responsibility (Agyemang et al., 2017), despite the symbolic violence done to these commitments by the wider discourse (Kuruppu & Lodhia, 2019). It need hardly be said that for any deficiencies in their governance, developing country governments are more politically embedded in their societies than global for-profit consultancies.

Yet there are differences between these actors and the for-profit consultancies. The growing attention toward global for-profit consultancies or professional services firms as actors in their own right highlights their interests in pushing 'an institutionalization of new transnational regimes' (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2017), as they seek to extend their own technical fields of expertise within a forming global landscape (Suddaby et al., 2007: 356). They do so through a variety of active strategies (Boussebaa & Faulconbridge, 2019)~~(Boussebou & Faulconbridge, 2019; G. Morgan, 2009; G. Morgan & Quack, 2005)~~. Ian Harper's account provocatively juxtaposes the segregated, literally gated-and-walled-in global health professionals in Nepal with the migrant Nepali health workers who fluidly navigate social settings in their work in health systems in the UK and the USA (Harper, 2011; Mosse, 2011a). The logics of the local environment are excluded, sometimes literally walled off, as their focus is towards a travelling expertise. For-profit consultancies' own structures reproduce the core-periphery dynamics of global capitalism, with a cosmopolitan elite recruited from elite universities, with headquarters in key sites of global capitalism at the core, and a periphery of localised, territorially constrained offices (Clegg, Geppert, & Hollinshead, 2018)~~(Clegg, Geppert and Hollinshead, 2018)~~. One may conclude that the growing reliance on for-profit consultancies may be expected to insulate the UK government apparatus further from its primary interlocutors, as possibilities for resistance, contestation and the brokering and translation of other voices in the development sphere may be further restricted.

Conclusions

The growing presence and influence of for-profit consultancies in the aid landscape raises questions for critical development scholars. Whilst there has always been an important role for for-profit consultancies in development, we have shown that since 2010 their role has been supercharged by a politically and ideologically driven development paradigm. We suggest that for-profit consultancies themselves acted as essential prior conditions of formation for this role: their availability has permitted the emergence of a particular conjunction in which the role of consultants has shifted from a primarily technical, fragmented and state-oriented contribution, to the current position where for-profit consultancies sit in influential management, audit and intermediary positions, located between public sector aid donors and the private sector. Each of these roles is necessary to the ongoing enactment of UK aid's current configuration: firms' technical roles as evaluators and audit contractors; their role as managers of aid delivery; their capabilities and positioning as credible intermediaries in portfolio or fund management; and their existing global networks and positioning as actors in infrastructure and financialized spaces. We have further suggested that the shift to increased placement of private sector organisations in key positions has contributed to the reconfiguration of aid relations, reorienting development away from the state and towards the needs of private capital.

The UK government's 2022 'Strategy for International Development' (FCDO, 2022) points to the expansion of the FCDO's engagement with the private sector through the search for ~~mainstream~~ development finance, furthering the use of UK aid to de-risk ~~mainstream~~ investment in development. Of the four priorities laid out in the 2022 Strategy, the first is to 'deliver honest and reliable investment, building on the UK's financial expertise and the strengths of the City of London' (ibid: 5). Plans to achieve this goal include working 'with capital markets to share risk and remove barriers to investment to mobilise finance for development at scale' (ibid: 9), leading to mobilisation of 'up to £8 billion of UK-backed financing a year by 2025 including from the private sector, targeting the main barriers to investment' (ibid: 8). We might expect, therefore, to see a parallel entrenchment over the coming years of the reliance on for-profit consultancies that has enabled the initiation of this trend over the last decade.

While the search for ~~mainstream~~ development financing appears to be a growing trend, however, it is not clear whether the reliance on audit and evaluation technologies outlined above will continue to rise. Recent events on both the global and domestic stage – most significantly the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine – have sent shockwaves across the UK's international development landscape, making it difficult to predict how the role of for-profit consultancies in the design and delivery of aid will evolve. We do know that consultants and contractors are adept at reshaping their offerings to meet emerging demands. Regardless of these uncertainties, however, the shifts in the role and significance of these firms in the recent spending of the UK aid budget that we have outlined above certainly merit further investigation. As the UK government embarks on a new era of development design and spending, critical development scholars would do well to stay attuned to its engagement with for-profit consultancies.

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