

**AID EFFECTIVENESS IN SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES:
THE CASE OF VANUATU**

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NOTE: As per the University of Ottawa's Academic Regulation II-7 on Theses, I declare that I am the sole author of the present research. I am grateful for the advice provided by many people along the way that led to this dissertation, but the mistakes are my own. Prior to its beginning, this research project was approved by my thesis committee as well as by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board of the University of Ottawa, file number S-05-20-5508. It was also approved by the Vanuatu Cultural Centre in Port-Vila, Vanuatu that issued a research permit.

Abstracts

This section contains a summary of my research in three languages: English (EN), French (FR), and Bislama (BIS). Each summary is meant as a comprehensive substitute for the short thesis abstract.

Abstract (EN)

In 2005, aid donor and recipient states signed the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, a major step in creating a global framework based on more equal relations between these countries. It is based on three interrelated core principles: ownership (recipient countries define their own development policies), alignment (donors support these strategies) and harmonization (donors coordinate among themselves). However, more than 15 years later, the implementation of these principles has been globally disappointing. The aid effectiveness agenda and the Global Partnership for effective development cooperation (GPEDC) are facing a legitimacy and relevancy crisis at a time when aid effectiveness is crucial to face increased development and humanitarian challenges in low- and middle- income countries. Faced with this puzzle, this thesis responds to the question: To what extent are the Paris Declaration principles pertinent?

While the Paris Declaration and the GPEDC provide for quantitative monitoring, it appears inadequate for a deep understanding of implementation difficulties, which requires qualitative analyses that consider the perspectives of donors and the recipient country simultaneously. Furthermore, despite scholars and practitioners calling for the establishment of a *humanitarian-development nexus* to enhance aid effectiveness, and recurring disasters in many low- and middle-income countries, long-term development aid and short-term humanitarian action largely remain separate, including at the level of management principles. Finally, despite the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic that started in 2020, COVID-19 represented an opportunity for aid actors to advance the aid effectiveness agenda, especially regarding ownership, as many borders were closed to prevent the virus from spreading. However, case studies are needed to explore the extent to which this opportunity materialized in practice. Each of these three interrelated contexts led to a corresponding research sub-question: Why do various aid actors circumvent or misapply the three core principles of the Paris Declaration? What are the obstacles that hinder the reconciliation between humanitarian and development aid, and how can

they be overcome? How did the COVID-19 pandemic hamper or accelerate the implementation of the Paris Declaration principles?

The existing literature points to three main factors explaining the implementation of non-binding agreements such as the Paris Declaration, or lack thereof: political will, state capacities, and incentives. While political will relates to an aid actor's inner desire, intention or plan, incentives refer to external influences according to which aid actors make decisions and act. Incentives operate at the individual, organizational (including the state), and global levels. In general, these factors appear in the literature as follows: political will is rarely explained, state capacities tend to focus on the capacities of recipient states, and incentives are documented as numerous and diverse. Moreover, scholars have either focused on the study of aid effectiveness principles or on the study of humanitarian principles and standards in a separate manner. Finally, although it was catastrophic, the global situation caused by COVID-19 sparked some hope among observers that massive repatriations and international travel restrictions would accelerate the implementation of aid ownership and localization. Case studies are needed to analyze which factors are at play and to what extent in different contexts to explain the disappointing results of the Paris Declaration, to explain and overcome the mere coexistence of development and humanitarian assistance, and to assess whether the hope of more ownership and localization has materialized.

Faced with these gaps, this thesis contributes to the qualitative literature on the implementation of the Paris Declaration principles by conducting a case study of Vanuatu, an aid-dependent country in the Pacific Ocean. First, I analyze to what extent this non-binding international aid framework, the aid effectiveness principles, are applied and why. Second, I analyze the links between aid effectiveness principles, that are mainly focused on long-term, development aid, and the management principles of humanitarian aid. In doing so, I bring an original contribution to the literature on the humanitarian-development nexus and I uncover obstacles and identify potential avenues for reconciliation of these “two solitudes”. Third, I specifically offer a case study on the impacts of COVID-19 on the implementation of the aid effectiveness principles at the country level. Fourth, by choosing Vanuatu, a Small Island

Developing State (SIDS)¹ and a Pacific Island Country (PIC)², for the case study, I contribute to the literature by bringing complexity into the analyses of SIDS that combats narrow conceptions of islands and islanders.

Based primarily on the data collected through a literature review, interviews, and observations, in answer to the first sub-question, I argue that the presence of four counterincentives led to the Paris Declaration principles being applied only superficially in Vanuatu. First, the government sought to maximize access to donor funding through overambitious strategies that accommodated donors' spending obligations and priorities, and that often excluded the voice of the broader civil society. Second, accountability to domestic constituencies prevented donors from aligning with Vanuatu's national priorities and procedures. Third, geopolitical competition between "traditional" donors and China undermined harmonization. Fourth, Vanuatu's history and experience with aid, especially related with disasters, also undermined harmonization.

In response to the second sub-question, I show humanitarian aid and development aid positively and negatively impacted each other in various ways, and they presented similar major challenges. The main explanation for why these two types of aid merely co-exist is two-fold. First, the availability and attractiveness of humanitarian aid for both aid donors and recipients, and second, the historical separation of these two forms of assistance. More flexible funding and valuing long-term partnerships and programmes that fully integrate local knowledge and practices would be needed to bridge the gap between humanitarian aid and development assistance—while respecting the leadership of the recipient country and local organizations. A first step would be to end the artificial division between the management principles of humanitarian aid and those of development assistance.

In response to the third sub-question, I argue that by causing massive repatriations of foreign diplomats, experts and staff, the COVID-19 pandemic created space for Vanuatu, an aid

¹ The list of SIDS as established by the United Nations (UN) includes 39 UN members and 18 associate members of UN regional commissions; SIDS are countries and territories "that face unique social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities" (UN, n.d., para. 1).

² The list of PICs as established by the UN includes "the 14 countries and territories of Cook Islands, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu" (UN Pacific, 2023).

recipient country, and local organizations to take a greater part in the humanitarian response and recovery phases that followed Tropical Cyclone (TC) Harold and the threat of COVID-19 in 2020. However, the response was slow, slower than if international actors had been on Vanuatu's soil according to some interviewees, but the counterfactual situation cannot be analyzed. Despite the country's lack of logistical capacities and human resources, there is a general sense among interviewees that it was ultimately better that the country led its own response and recovery process. Donors still provided financial, material, and technical support from afar.

Keywords: foreign aid, aid effectiveness, international development, humanitarian aid, Vanuatu

Résumé (FR)

En 2005, États donateurs et récipiendaires d'aide ont signé la Déclaration de Paris sur l'efficacité de l'aide au développement, étape majeure dans la création d'un cadre mondial fondé sur des relations plus équitables entre ces pays. Elle repose sur trois principes fondamentaux interreliés : l'appropriation (les pays bénéficiaires définissent leurs propres politiques de développement), l'alignement (les bailleurs soutiennent ces stratégies) et l'harmonisation (les bailleurs se coordonnent entre eux). Cependant, plus de 15 ans plus tard, la mise en œuvre de ces principes a été globalement décevante. L'agenda de l'efficacité de l'aide et le Partenariat mondial pour une coopération efficace au développement (GPEDC) sont confrontés à une crise de légitimité et de pertinence à un moment où l'efficacité de l'aide est cruciale pour faire face aux défis humanitaires et de développement qui se multiplient dans les pays à revenu faible et moyen. Partant de cette problématique, cette thèse répond à la question suivante : Dans quelles mesures les principes de la Déclaration de Paris (et leurs héritiers, les principes du GPEDC) sont-ils pertinents ?

Si la Déclaration de Paris et le GPEDC prévoient un suivi quantitatif, celui-ci semble inadapté à une compréhension approfondie des difficultés de mise en œuvre des principes, qui nécessite des analyses qualitatives prenant en compte simultanément les perspectives des bailleurs et du pays récipiendaire. En outre, l'aide au développement à long terme et l'aide humanitaire à court terme restent largement séparées, y compris au niveau de leurs principes de gestion, malgré les appels des universitaires et des praticien·ne·s à l'établissement d'un *nexus*

humanitaire-développement pour améliorer l'efficacité de l'aide, et les catastrophes récurrentes dans de nombreux pays à revenu faible et intermédiaire. Enfin, la pandémie de COVID-19 qui a débuté en 2020 a représenté une opportunité pour les acteurs de l'aide de faire progresser l'agenda d'efficacité de l'aide, en particulier en ce qui concerne l'appropriation, étant donné que de nombreuses frontières ont été fermées pour empêcher le virus de se propager. Toutefois, des études de cas sont nécessaires pour déterminer dans quelle mesure cette opportunité s'est concrétisée en pratique. Chacun de ces trois enjeux interdépendants a donné lieu à une sous-question de recherche correspondante : Pourquoi les différents acteurs de l'aide contournent-ils ou appliquent-ils mal les trois principes fondamentaux de la Déclaration de Paris ? Quels sont les obstacles à la réconciliation entre l'aide humanitaire et l'aide au développement, et comment les surmonter ? Comment la pandémie de COVID-19 a-t-elle entravé ou accéléré la mise en œuvre des principes de la Déclaration de Paris ?

La littérature existante met en évidence trois facteurs principaux expliquant la mise en œuvre ou l'absence de mise en œuvre d'accords non contraignants tels que la Déclaration de Paris : la volonté politique, les capacités des États et les incitatifs. Alors que la volonté politique se rapporte au désir, à l'intention ou au plan de chaque acteur de l'aide, les incitatifs se réfèrent aux influences externes en fonction desquelles chaque acteur prend des décisions et agit. Ils agissent aux niveaux individuel, organisationnel (y compris étatique), et mondial. Cependant, la volonté politique est rarement expliquée, la question des capacités étatiques tend à se concentrer sur les capacités des États bénéficiaires, et les incitatifs sont nombreux et divers. En outre, les chercheurs et chercheuses se sont concentrées soit sur l'étude des principes d'efficacité de l'aide, soit sur les principes et normes humanitaires de manière distincte. Enfin, bien que catastrophique, la situation mondiale provoquée par le COVID-19 a fait naître chez les observatrices et observateurs l'espoir que les rapatriements massifs et les restrictions des voyages internationaux accéléreraient la mise en œuvre du principe d'appropriation et la localisation de l'aide. Des études de cas sont nécessaires pour analyser quels facteurs sont en jeu et dans quelle mesure dans différents contextes pour expliquer les résultats décevants de la Déclaration de Paris, pour expliquer et surmonter la simple coexistence de l'aide au développement et de l'assistance humanitaire, et pour évaluer si l'espoir d'une appropriation et d'une localisation accrues de l'aide s'est concrétisé.

Face à ces lacunes, cette thèse contribue à la littérature qualitative sur la mise en œuvre des principes en menant une étude de cas sur le Vanuatu, un pays du Pacifique dépendant de l'aide. Premièrement, j'analyse dans quelle mesure ce cadre international non contraignant, les principes d'efficacité de l'aide, est appliqué et pourquoi. Deuxièmement, cette recherche apporte une contribution originale en analysant les liens entre les principes d'efficacité de l'aide, principalement axés sur l'aide au développement à long terme, et les principes de gestion de l'aide humanitaire. Ce faisant, je contribue à la réflexion sur le nexus humanitaire-développement, je mets à jour des obstacles et j'identifie des pistes potentielles pour réconcilier ces « deux solitudes ». Troisièmement, je propose une étude de cas spécifique pour identifier les impacts de COVID-19 sur la mise en œuvre des principes d'efficacité de l'aide au niveau national. Quatrièmement, en choisissant le Vanuatu comme étude de cas, qui est à la fois un petit État insulaire en développement (PEID)³ et un État insulaire du Pacifique (PIC)⁴, je contribue à introduire de la complexité dans les analyses des PEID et à combattre les conceptions étroites des îles et des insulaires.

En me basant principalement sur les données recueillies par le biais d'une analyse documentaire, d'entretiens et d'observations, je montre, en réponse à la première sous-question, que la présence de quatre incitatifs majeurs a conduit à ce que les principes ne soient appliqués que superficiellement au Vanuatu. Premièrement, le gouvernement a cherché à maximiser l'accès aux financements des bailleurs par le biais de stratégies trop ambitieuses qui s'adaptaient aux contraintes et aux priorités des donateurs en matière d'attribution des fonds et qui excluaient souvent la voix de la société civile au sens large. Deuxièmement, les bailleurs ont donné la priorité à la redevabilité envers leurs citoyen·ne·s plutôt que de s'aligner sur les priorités et les procédures nationales du Vanuatu. Troisièmement, la concurrence géopolitique entre les bailleurs « traditionnels » et la Chine a nui à l'harmonisation. Quatrièmement, l'histoire et l'expérience du Vanuatu en matière d'aide, en particulier en ce qui concerne les catastrophes naturelles, a également nui à l'harmonisation.

³ La liste des PEID telle qu'établie par les Nations unies inclut 39 membres des Nations unies et 18 membres associés de commissions régionales des Nations unies ; les PEID sont des États et territoires « qui sont exposés à des risques sociaux, économiques et environnementaux particuliers » (UN, n.d., para. 1).

⁴ La liste des PICs telle qu'établie par les Nations Unies inclut les 14 pays et territoires suivants: Îles Cook, Fiji, États Fédérés de Micronésie, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, et Vanuatu (UN Pacific, 2023).

En réponse à la deuxième sous-question, je montre que l'aide humanitaire et l'aide au développement s'impactent mutuellement de manières positives et négatives de diverses manières, et qu'elles font face à des défis similaires. Les explications principales à la simple coexistence de ces deux types d'aide sont la disponibilité et l'attrait de l'aide humanitaire, tant pour les bailleurs que pour les bénéficiaires, et la séparation historique de ces deux formes d'assistance. Un financement plus flexible et la valorisation de partenariats et de programmes à long terme qui intègrent pleinement les connaissances et les pratiques locales seraient nécessaires pour combler le fossé entre l'aide humanitaire et l'aide au développement—tout en respectant le leadership du pays bénéficiaire et des organisations locales. Pour ce faire, il faudrait commencer par mettre fin à la division artificielle entre les principes de gestion de l'aide humanitaire et ceux de l'aide au développement.

En réponse à la troisième sous-question, je montre qu'en provoquant des rapatriements massifs de diplomates, d'experts et d'expertes étrangères et de personnel étranger, la pandémie de COVID-19 a permis au Vanuatu, pays bénéficiaire d'aide, et aux organisations locales d'occuper davantage un rôle de premier plan dans les phases de réponse humanitaire et de relèvement qui ont suivi le cyclone Harold et la menace de la COVID-19 en 2020. Cependant, la réponse a été lente, plus lente que si les acteurs internationaux avaient été sur le sol du Vanuatu selon certaines personnes interviewées, mais la situation contrefactuelle ne peut pas être analysée. Malgré le manque de capacités logistiques et de ressources humaines du Vanuatu, les personnes interviewées ont généralement le sentiment qu'il était préférable que le pays gère la réponse et le relèvement. Les bailleurs ont continué à fournir un soutien financier, matériel et technique à distance.

Mots-clefs: aide au développement, efficacité de l'aide, développement international, aide humanitaire, Vanuatu

Samari (BIS)

Long yia 2005 ol kantri mo okanaesesen we oli save givhan long ol kaen sapot olsem mane mo wokman long wan narafala kantri, oli kolem sapot ia *official development assistance (ODA)* (ofisol developmen asistens) mo ol kantri we oli nidim sapot ia oli bin saenem wan agrimen nem blong hem *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness* (Deklaresen blong Paris blong

mekem se sapot i kasem ol gol blong hem). Deklaresen ia hemi blong mekem se kantri we oli nokat tumas mane o risos oli kat moa pawa. Deklaresen ia i kat tri *principles* (prinsipol) olsem tri rul we kantri oli mas rispektem. Nambawan hemi *ownership* (onasip) i minim se kantri we i risivim sapot i setemap ol praeoriti blong hem insaed long wan o severol *strategy* (strateji) o polisi o plan blong divelopmen. Nambatu hemi *alignment* (alaenmen) i minim se ol patna blong kantri we i risivim sapot olsem narafala kantri mo okanaesesesen oli sapotem ol praeoriti blong kantri ia mo oli yusum ol *process* (proses) blong kantri ia. Nambatri hemi *harmonization* (hamonaeseses) i minim se ol patna blong kantri oli toktok blong mekem se oli kat semak *procedures* (prosija) mo oli wok tugeta blong mekem se ol praeoriti mo ol ples oli kat sapot mo kavman blong kantri ia no mas folem fulap difren *procedures*.

Be 15 yia i pas, ol okanaeseses mo kantri oli no rispektem prinsipol ia oltaem. Tedei, okanaeseses we i mas mekem se ol kantri oli rispektem ol prinsipol ia, nem blong hem *Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (GPEDC)* (Globol patnasip blong efektif divelopmen koperesen), hemi fesem wan kraesis long saed long *legitimacy* (legitimesi) mo *relevance* (relevens) blong hem. Be sapot hemi impoten tedei from i kat fulap emejensi mo problem long saed long divelopmen long kantri we i nokat fulat mane olsem *low- and middle-income countries* (loa- mo midel- inkam kantri). Mekem se risej mo pepa wok ia nem blong hem *thesis o dissertation* (tesis o disetesen) i anserem kwesten ia: From wanem yumi mas kipim o lego o jenjem ol prinsipol blong Deklaresen blong Paris (mo ol prinsipol blong GPEDC we i bin kam afta)?

I kat wan okanaeseses nem blong hem *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* (Okanaeseses blong Koperesen long saed long Ekonomi mo Divelopmen) hemi bin folem ol *progress* blong Deklaresen blong Paris be hemi luk ol namba nomo. Okanaeseses ia i no askem kwesten o mekem risej blong save from wanem nao ol kantri mo okanaeseses oli no rispektem ol prinsipol. Mekem se yumi no kasem stret ol samting we i mekem se ol kantri mo okanaeseses oli no rispektem Deklaresen blong Paris. Blong kasem ol *challenges* (jalenj) ia, yumi mas mekem *qualitative research* (kwalitativ risej) wan kaen risej we riseja oli askem from wanem samting ia i bin apen mo risej ia i no luk ol namba nomo. Ol pipol we oli mekem risej oli mas toktok wetem pipol long saed long kantri we i nidim sapot mo long saed long ol patna we oli

kivim sapot mo oli mas ridim pepa blong kavman mo okanaesesen we oli risivim sapot mo pepa blong patna we oli kivim sapot blong mekem se evriwan oli save talem tingting blong olgeta.

Litereja i talem se i kat sapot blong emejensi long wan saed mo sapot blong developmen long wan nara saed mo tufala kaen sapot ia oli nokat semak prinsipol. Be ol man mo woman we oli wok long saed long emejensi mo developmen mo risej oli talem se emejensi mo developmen oli mas wok tugeta blong mekem se sapot i wok. Emejensi mo developmen oli mas mekem wan *humanitarian-development nexus* i minim se oli wok tugeta oltaem. Emejensi mo developmen oli mas wok tugeta from i kat fulap disasta long ol kantri we i nokat fulap mane mo narafala risoses.

COVID-19 disis i bin stat long 2020 mo ol boda oli klos blong mekem se sik ia i no kasem sam kantri. I kat fulap woman mo man we oli blong wan nara kantri mo oli stap wok long saed long developmen oli ko bak long kantri blong olgeta long 2020. Hemia i mekem se i bin kat wan opotuniti blong rispektem ol prinsipol blong Deklaresen blong Paris olsem *ownership*. Be yumi mas mekem risej blong faenemaot sapos kantri mo okanaesesen oli rispektem ol prinsipol afta COVID-19 i hapen mo hemi tabu blong travel.

Mi askem tri kwesten from i kat tri *problem* mi tokbaot bifo: From wanem ol kantri mo okanaesesen we oli wok long saed blong sapot (*ODA*) oli no rispektem ol prinsipol oltaem? From wanem emejensi mo developmen oli no wok tugeta mo hao nao bae yumi save mekem blong oli wok tugeta? COVID-19 i mekem se ol kantri mo okanaesesen oli rispektem o oli no rispektem ol prinsipol blong Deklaresen blong Paris?

Litereja i talem se i kat tri *factors* (fakta) we oli explenem sapos ol kantri mo okanaesesen we oli wok long saed blong sapot (*ODA*) oli rispektem ol agrimen olsem Deklaresen blong Paris we hemi wan agrimen sapos yu no rispektem agrimen ia, i no kat wan bigfala samting bae i apen olsem wan faen we i sas. Nambawan *factor* hemi *political will* (politikol wil, wanem ol representativ blong kantri mo okanaesesen oli wantem mo mekem). Nambatu hemi *state capacities* (stet kapasiti, wanem ol kantri mo okanesesen oli save mekem wetem ol risoses blong olgeta). Nambatri hemi *incentives* (insentiv, ol samting we i mekem se wan kavman o wan okanaesesen o wan man bae i mekem wan samting o bae i no mekem).

Political will i minim se wan man o okanaesesen o kavman i wantem mekem wan samting o i mekem wan plan. Be *incentives* i no semak. I minim se i kat fulap samting we i no dipen long wan man o okanaesesen o kavman. Be ol samting ia nem blong olgeta *incentives* oli mekem se wan man o okanaesesen o kavman i disaed wan samting o i mekem wan samting. Ol *incentives* oli save kasem man mo okanaesesen olsem kavman mo difren kaen grup. Fulap taem pipol oli no raetem wanem oli minim taem oli raetem *political will* mo oli tokbaot *capacities* blong ol kantri we oli risivim sapot nomo mo i kat fulap difren *incentives*. Mo ol riseja oli bin raetem long saed long prinsipol blong developmen long wan saed mo long saed long prinsipol blong emejensi long wan nara saed. Mo fulap pipol we oli bin luk mo raetem abaot COVID-19 oli bin hop se i kat wan jens blong mekem se ol kantri mo okanaesesen long saed long sapot (*ODA*) bae oli rispektem ol prinsipol olsem prinsipol blong *ownership* from fulap man oli no save travel. Be yumi nidim niufala risej long wanwan kantri blong faenemaot wanem *factors* oli mekem se ol kantri mo okanaesesen oli no rispektem Deklaresen blong Paris mo faenemaot from wanem developmen mo emejensi oli no wok tugeta mo hao nao yumi save mekem se oli wok tugeta mo faenemaot sapos hop blong pipol we oli bin ting se COVID-19 bae i mekem se i kat moa *ownership* i apen.

Thesis ia hemi mekem se i kat moa *qualitative* litereja abaot hao nao mo from wanem ol kantri mo okanaesesen oli rispektem ol prinsipol o no rispektem. Blong mekem risej ia mi luk long wan *case study* (kes stadi) we hemi wan spesel eria o situesen. Mi luk wanem i apen long Vanuatu, wan kantri long Pasifik rijen. Kantri ia i risivim fulap sapot i kam long ol okanaesesen mo kantri olsem *Australia*. Nambawan mi luk sapos ol kantri mo okanaesesen oli rispektem trifala bigfala prinsipol blong Deklaresen blong Paris mo from wanem oli rispektem o no rispektem ol prinsipol ia. Nambatu mi mekem wan niufala risej from mi stadi ol prinsipol blong sapot blong developmen mo ol prinsipol blong sapot taem i kat wan emejensi sapos oli semak o oli no semak mo hao nao situesen ia i apen. Mi ademap risej long saed long *humanitarian-development nexus* mo mi faenemaot ol *challenges* mo mi faenemaot tu hao nao yumi save mekem se *nexus* ia i apen long fiuja. Nambatri mi luk long wan *case study* blong faenemaot ol *impacts* blong COVID-19 sapos i mekem se ol kantri mo okanaesesen oli rispektem ol prinsipol o no rispektem long wan kantri olsem Vanuatu. Nambafo mi jusum Vanuatu we hemi wan *Small Island Developing State (SIDS)*⁵ (Smol Aelan Dvelopin Stet) mo hemi wan *Pacific Island*

⁵ United Nations (UN) oli mekem wan list blong *SIDS* mo insaed long list ia i kat 39 memba we oli pat blong UN mo i kat 18 memba we oli pat blong UN *regional commissions* (rijonol komisen); ol kantri mo teritri insaed long grup

*Country (PIC)*⁶ (Pasifik Aelan Kantri) from i kat fulap samting blong stadi long ol kantri olsem be i nokat fulap risej long evri *discipline* (disiplin).

Blong mekem risej ia mi luk ol difren kaen pepa we kavman mo okanaesesen mo kantri we oli wok long saed long sapot taem i kat wan emejensi o blong impruvum laef blong sitisen blong Vanuatu oli raetem. Mi toktok wetem man mo woman we oli bin wok long saed blong sapot olsem. Mo mi luk nomo wanem i apen long Vanuatu mo long wan *meeting* (miting) mo long wan *conference* (konfrens). Blong anserem fes kwesten mi faenemaot se i kat *incentives* mekem se fulap taem ol kavman mo okanaesesen oli no rispektem ol prinsipol. Sapos yumi luk wan taem nomo yumi ting se oli rispektem ol prinsipol be taem yumi mekem risej yumi faenemaot se fulap taem oli no rispektem. Nambawan - kavman we i risivim sapot hemi traem blong mekem se fulap sapot i kam mo blong mekem hemia kavman hemi setemap *strategy* blong developmen we i kat tumas samting olsem praeoriti insaed long hem. Sapos i kat wan *strategy* olsem ol okanaesesen mo kantri we oli kivim sapot oli save jusum praeoriti mo oli save spendem mane blong olgeta we oli mas spendem. Mo i kat sam sitisen we oli no save talem wanem oli wantem putum insaed long *strategy* mo sam sitisen o grup oli talem praeoriti blong olgeta be kavman o donor oli no akt long hem. Nambatu - ol patna blong Vanuatu oli folem praeoriti mo *procedures* blong olgeta. Nambatri - i kat *competition* (kompetisen) from patna we oli stap long Vanuatu longtaem oli luk se China hemi wan patna blong Vanuatu naoia. Mekem se ol patna oli no wok tugeta plente wetem China mo China hemi no wok tumas wetem olgeta. Nambafoa - long histri mo expiriens blong Vanuatu long saed blong givhand o sapot mo long saed blong disasta i mekem se kavman i no wantem se ol patna oli wok tugeta plente oltaem.

Blong anserem kwesten nambatu mi faenemaot se sapot blong rispond long wan emejensi i kat negatif mo positif impact long sapot blong developmen. Mo sapot blong developmen i kat negatif mo positif impact long sapot blong emejensi. Mo tufala kaen sapot oli fesem sem kaen *challenges*. Be tufala kaen sapot fulap taem oli no wok tugeta mo risej ia i talem se hemi from ikat moa sapot blong emejensi mo yusum kaen sapot ia hemi isi bitim narafala kaen sapot. Mo

blong *SIDS* oli fesem spesol kaen *vulnerability* (velnerebiliti) long saed long sosol laef mo ekonomi mo envaeronmen blong olgeta (UN, n.d., para. 1).

⁶ UN oli mekem wan list blo *PICs* mo insaed long list ia i kat 14 kantri mo teritri nem blong olgeta Cook Islands, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu mo Vanuatu (UN Pacific, 2023).

tufala kaen sapot oli no wok tugeta long taem mekem se i had blong mekem se oli wok tugeta naolia. Mi faenemaot se i gud sapos ol kantri mo okanaeseses we oli kivim sapot oli mekem se sapot ia hemi *flexible* (flexibel) minim se kavman mo okanaeseses we oli risivim sapot oli save yusum sapot blong mekem difren samting sapos wan sekta i nidim sapot mo i nokat fulap had *process* blong jenjem praeoriti olsem. Mo i gud sapos ol kantri mo okanaeseses we oli kivim o risivim sapot oli bildimap strong *partnerships* (patnasip) mo oli mekem *programmes* (program) we oli stap longtaem mo we oli harem mo yusum ol save blong man mo woman Vanuatu. Mi faenemaot se tufala samting ia bambae oli mekem se sapot blong emenjenci mo sapot blong developmen oli wok tugeta moa. Be hemi gud sapos kantri mo okanaeseses we oli risivim sapot oli talem ol *strategy* mo praeoriti blong olgeta mo kantri mo okanaeseses we oli kivim sapot oli mas lisen. Mo blong mekem se sapot blong emenjenci mo sapot blong developmen oli wok tugeta bambae i gud sapos ol kantri mo okanaeseses oli kat semak rul o prinsipol.

Blong anserem nambatri kwesten mi faenemaot se COVID-19 i mekem se Vanuatu olsem wan kantri we i risivim sapot mo lokol okanaeseses long Vanuatu oli kat moa speis mo oli save jusum hao nao blong sapotem Vanuatu sitisen mo givhan long olgeta long taem blong rispons mo *recovery* (rikavari) afta TC Harold mo COVID-19 long 2020. From COVID-19 i mekem se fulap woman mo man blong narafala kantri we oli wok long saed blong sapot long Vanuatu oli kobak long kantri blong olgeta. Be rispons i tekem fulap taem mo sam man mo woman we mi bin toktok wetem olgeta, oli talem se sapos man mo woman blong narafala kantri oli stap rispons i fas. Be yumi neva save from situesen ia i no apen. Mo wan impoten samting hemi se fulap woman mo man mi bin toktok wetem oli talem se i gud Vanuatu i bin handelem rispons mo *recovery*. Oli talem se sapos rispons mo *recovery* ia i no gud tumas from Vanuatu i nokat fulap boat mo plen mo trak mo man mo woman blong wok long saed long sapot i oraet from hemi moa impoten blong handelem situesen ia long kantri nomo. Ol patna oli sapotem rispons mo *recovery* taem oli stap long kantri blong olgeta. Oli sendem mane mo materiel mo oli helpem long saed long rispons mo *recovery*.

Wod we oli impoten insaed long risej ia: foreign aid, aid effectiveness, international development, humanitarian aid, Vanuatu

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Acronyms

ADB – Asian Development Bank

Australian DFAT – Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

CHS – Core Humanitarian Standard

CSO – Civil Society Organization

DRM – Disaster Risk Management

DSPPAC – Department of Strategic Policy, Planning and Aid Coordination

ECHO – European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations Directorate of the European Commission

GCF – Green Climate Fund

GGGI – Global Green Growth Institute

GHD – Good Humanitarian Donorship

GPEDC – Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation

HAG – Humanitarian Advisory Group

IASC – Inter-Agency Standing Committee

IATI – International Aid Transparency Initiative

KoBLE – Kolisen Blong Leftemap Edukesen

NDMO – National Disaster Management Office

NSDP – National Sustainable Development Plan (The People's Plan)

NZ MFAT – New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade

OCHA – United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

ODA – Official Development Assistance

OECD – Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

PD – Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness

PIC – Pacific Island Country

PIF – Pacific Islands Forum

PIFS – Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat

SDG – Sustainable Development Goal

SIDS – Small Island Developing States

TC – Tropical Cyclone

UN – United Nations

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund

VANGO – Vanuatu Association of Non-Government Organizations

WHO – World Health Organization

Dedication and Acknowledgments

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*J'aime les gens qui doutent
Les gens qui trop écoutent
Leur cœur se balancer
J'aime les gens qui disent
Et qui se contredisent
Et sans se dénoncer*

...

*J'aime les gens qui doutent
Mais voudraient qu'on leur foute
La paix de temps en temps
Et qu'on ne les malmène
Jamais quand ils promènent
Leurs automnes au printemps*

—Anne Sylvestre, *Les gens qui doutent*

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Introduction

The effectiveness of foreign aid is one of the major concerns that animates the development community. Faced with disappointing socioeconomic results in low-income countries that had been mainly attributed to recipient countries, donors acknowledged their share of responsibility for this outcome (Brown, 2020). In 2005, donor and recipient countries signed the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (the Paris Declaration or PD) to redefine ways of working together that would rebalance power relationships and make aid more effective. The cornerstone of the Paris Declaration, the principle of ownership, meant that recipient countries would decide on their own development strategies and priorities based on consultations, and that donors would support this process and follow their leadership. The principles of alignment and harmonization, also included in the Paris Declaration, derive from the ownership principle. They mean respectively that donors should align with the recipient country's priorities, procedures, and systems, and that they should coordinate their agendas and procedures among themselves to support the implementation of recipient countries' priorities. Although the principles are not a panacea, because for instance as Brown (2017) suggests they do not consider the quality of development strategies, they do, however, establish that recipient countries are ideally placed to identify their own needs, conceive of appropriate strategies, and implement them.

Despite donors' and recipient countries' engagement to implement the Paris principles, results rapidly proved to be disappointing (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2012a). In 2011, at the Fourth High Level Forum on aid effectiveness held in Busan, South Korea, the *aid* effectiveness agenda broadened and became the *development* effectiveness agenda. This reflected a changing development landscape where some countries had become both aid donors and recipients, and where development finance comprised more than foreign aid (Mawdsley et al., 2014). The Global Partnership for the Effectiveness of Development Cooperation (GPEDC) was created in Busan to address these changes. Its mandate was to promote and monitor the implementation of the new development effectiveness principles. Notwithstanding, ownership remained an important principle along with a focus on results, inclusive partnerships, and transparency and accountability (GPEDC, 2021). However, OECD-United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) joint quantitative monitoring continued to reveal disappointing progress, with some indicators even declining (OECD, 2012a;

OECD/UNDP, 2014; OECD/UNDP, 2016; OECD/UNDP, 2019). Based on qualitative studies of specific country cases, scholars also concluded that overall, the Paris Declaration principles were either not implemented, partially implemented and/or superficially implemented (e.g., Brown, 2017). Weak support from emerging donors, China⁷, in particular, a discrepancy between GPEDC indicators and the content of the principles, as well as the aid effectiveness agenda's disappointing implementation results, often because donors overlook each country's specific context and do not explore nor capitalize on the causes of the agenda's failure, resulted in a legitimacy and relevancy crisis for the GPEDC and aid effectiveness principles (Brown 2016b, 2020a; Gisselquist et al., 2023a). Yet, aid effectiveness is crucial in a world where inequalities are on the rise, conflicts rage, millions of people are forced to migrate, and climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic have had a disastrous impact on the most vulnerable.

* * *

As an intern at the French Red Cross headquarters in Paris in 2015, I worked at the Asia-Pacific Desk that was responsible for strategic positioning and supporting all French Red Cross delegations and projects in the region, in collaboration with other relevant departments. In January 2016, I joined the French Red Cross team based in Port-Vila, the capital of Vanuatu, as the Assistant to the Head of Delegation, for 18 months. The French Red Cross operated under the leadership of the Vanuatu Red Cross Society, following the Red Cross's fundamental principle of unity. Thanks to these experiences, I had a valuable opportunity to deepen my knowledge of the development and humanitarian systems in terms of actors, roles, responsibilities, funding, ways of working and challenges. I became familiar with the bureaucracy associated with development and humanitarian projects, especially related to funding and reporting—tasks to which practitioners devote considerable amounts of time.

Challenges related to aid effectiveness resonate in SIDS, and in PICs in particular. Indeed, despite relatively important amounts of aid allocated to PICs, and to Vanuatu in particular, the socioeconomic development of these countries remains disappointing (Aiafi, 2017; Hochet,

⁷ I use the term “donor” in this thesis, because I often rely on aid data from the Pacific Aid Map (Lowy Institute, n.d.), that considers that some Chinese funding can be counted as ODA. However, China usually does not call itself a “donor” nor use the term “aid”, preferring terms like “provider of development cooperation” or “international economic cooperation” to cover its official, semi-official and private flows to other countries.

2015). However, from my experience and my engagement with aid literature, I noticed that although scholars and practitioners had recognized the importance of ownership and localization as enablers to increase aid effectiveness, national and local concerns seldom formed the basis of development organizations' and donors' decision-making in terms of aid allocation and management. Moreover, SIDS and PICs suffer disproportionately from the impacts of climate change; they require aid from wealthier countries for adaptation and to respond to climate-related disasters. In particular, PICs declared climate change “the region’s single greatest threat to security” as they regularly face devastating extreme climate events (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat [PIFS], 2022b, p. 21). For instance, in March 2023, Vanuatu was hit by two back-to-back intense tropical cyclones within 48 hours.

Thus, this thesis arose from three paradoxes I observed both personally and in the literature. The first was the legitimacy and relevancy crisis of aid effectiveness principles despite the need to make aid as effective as possible; the second was poor results in Pacific countries despite high volumes of aid per capita; and the third was the persistent disregard of national and local priorities despite a consensus recognizing recipient countries' unique position for understanding and formulating strategies to tackle their own challenges. Vanuatu was the perfect choice for a case study both because of its relevance and because I had experience and connections in the country which increased the feasibility of the research project.

Before moving on to the next section, I wish to situate myself a little further within this research because my social identities, I believe, had an impact on the research process in multiple ways. I do not mention nor analyze them all here, but acknowledging my position as a white French woman and reflecting on what that means, especially in the Pacific and in Vanuatu, is essential. I lived, studied, and worked in France, Australia, Vanuatu, and Canada, where I was based for my entire doctoral studies. I have experience as a practitioner in the fields of international development and humanitarian action, which are both marked by unequal power relations and enduring colonial legacies. France and Great Britain were Vanuatu’s colonial rulers from 1906 until 1980 through a jointly administered condominium arrangement. Colonial times have had long-lasting effects on the country, that for instance inherited a dual education system and two official colonial languages. I entered the research process aware that my positionality had the potential of creating limitations and challenges for me in terms of access to participants

and building trust with them. I regarded my awareness of these potential realities as a first step towards mitigating them.

To that end, my methodology privileged each participant's perceptions through open discussions in one of the three official languages of Vanuatu (Bislama, English and French), in the form of interviews or *storian*, "story" in Bislama, unstructured discussions particularly adapted to the Pacific context, at a time and location convenient to them. To respect the will and agency of participants, interviewees chose whether they wished to be cited or wished to remain anonymous. If an individual participant chose to be cited, they decided how.

After each interview, I would reflect critically on how it went, and on what could be improved to further ensure I was not perpetuating unequal dynamics. To gather information not accessible through interviews, I also conducted observations during fieldwork and at two relevant events. I based the arguments presented in Chapters 4 to 9 primarily on the new empirical data collected, and I frequently returned to interview transcripts to ensure I stayed true to what the participants shared.

The rest of the introduction is structured as follows: in the next section, I identify the main knowledge gaps and how this research contributes to the existing literature, before presenting the research questions and objectives, briefly outlining my theoretical and conceptual framework, research design and methods, and finally presenting the dissertation's structure.

Knowledge Gaps and Contributions

There is a plethora of literature on foreign aid. Aid effectiveness is but one sub-topic of research in this wider literature that has largely focused on trying to determine whether aid works, that is, whether it is effectively contributing to improved socioeconomic conditions in recipient countries, and on the other purposes aid serves from either the perspective of donors or recipients (Borter & Malik, 2023). Although there is a growing literature that considers simultaneously the perspectives of donors and the recipient country simultaneously in terms of how effectiveness principles are implemented at the national level, other qualitative studies are necessary to identify the obstacles to the implementation of the principles, and potentially contribute to improve the effectiveness of foreign aid (Brown, 2017). Further, OECD-UNDP's

quantitative monitoring process does not appear to be able to explain the lack of implementation of the Paris Declaration principles and to formulate recommendations on the way forward (Brown, 2017; Hochet, 2015). Thus, while the volume of aid literature is significant, more case studies are necessary to assess the extent to which principles are applied in practice in specific countries, why they are or why they are not, and what it reveals about their relevance.

This dissertation is one of these case studies. Like other scholars, such as Borter and Malik (2023), I do not analyze whether aid works, as many studies do, but rather to what extent this non-binding international framework, the aid effectiveness principles, is applied and why. Ultimately, this research also contributes to advancing an understanding of the legitimacy and relevancy crisis faced by the GPEDC, a relatively recent issue on which literature remains scarce (e.g., Brown, 2020a; Gulrajani, 2022; Taggart, 2022).

This research also makes an original contribution by analyzing the links between aid effectiveness principles, that are mainly focused on long-term development aid, and the management principles of humanitarian aid. So far, scholars have focused either on the study of aid effectiveness principles or humanitarian principles and standards separately. For the first time in the literature, as I could not find similar research, I study how these two sets of principles have evolved separately over time but present many similarities both conceptually and in terms of implementation challenges. I uncover obstacles and identify potential avenues on how to reconcile these “two solitudes” (Audet, 2015, p. 118). In doing so, I contribute to reflections around the development of a humanitarian-development nexus (to which some scholars and practitioners add a peace component), a concept that would see the integration of development and humanitarian assistance to improve their effectiveness.

When COVID-19 struck at the start of my data collection, it became relevant to study its implications for aid for several reasons, including the following: COVID-19 had a disproportionate impact on the world’s most marginalized people that foreign aid is supposed to support; COVID-19 triggered new global cooperation initiatives and new funding, and some existing funds were redirected to fight the virus; and COVID-19 focused research participants’ efforts on the emergency at hand and/or managing its associated risks. Moreover, although it was catastrophic, the global situation caused by the pandemic sparked some hope among observers that massive repatriations and international travel restrictions would accelerate the

implementation of aid ownership and localization principles (Barbelet et al., 2020; Cornish, 2020c; Flint et al., 2021; Keen & Sanderson, 2020; Roche et al., 2020b; Savard et al., 2020). Case studies are needed to analyze whether that hope materialized. In this dissertation, I specifically offer a case study that considers the impact of COVID-19 on the implementation of the aid effectiveness principles at the country level.

Finally, SIDS and PICs remain understudied, including in the disciplines of political science and economics. They also tend to be pictured as paradise, or victims or puppets of greater forces and powers (Baldacchino, 2023a; Mohamed-Gaillard, 2012; Taylor, 2019). In choosing Vanuatu as a case study, which is both a SIDS and a PIC, and by acknowledging the agency of national and local actors, together with hearing the voices of actors on both sides of the aid relationship, I contribute to filling the gap in the literature on SIDS. Importantly, my research aims to embrace complexity and to combat narrow conceptions of islands and islanders. In the next section, I present the questions and objectives that guided my reflections and this research.

Research Questions and Objectives

The overarching question this research aims to answer is the following: To what extent are the Paris Declaration principles pertinent? I divided this research question into three sub-questions:

1. Why do various aid actors circumvent or misapply the three core principles of the Paris Declaration: ownership, alignment, and harmonization?
2. What are the obstacles that hinder the reconciliation between humanitarian and development aid, and how can they be overcome?
3. How did the COVID-19 pandemic hamper or accelerate the implementation of the Paris Declaration principles?

By answering these research questions, this dissertation aims to fulfill three main objectives. First, it seeks to produce a detailed and nuanced analysis of foreign aid in Vanuatu, including its design, funding, management, the power relationships involved, the incentives at work, the impact of disasters, and in particular, the interplay between local, national and

international actors. Second, it aims to advance understandings of the causes underlying the shortcomings in the implementation of the Paris Declaration principles, and of the obstacles that hinder the reconciliation of humanitarian and development aid. Third, it seeks to help the various aid actors make informed decisions about the policies and strategies aimed to improve the impact of aid. In doing so, this research could have a positive impact on the lives of Vanuatu citizens and on the lives of citizens from other countries experiencing similar conditions where the results can be applied, such as other low-income countries exposed to natural hazards, especially other SIDS. In the next section, I outline the theoretical approach and the key concepts used in this dissertation that influenced and structured the arguments presented in response to the research questions.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The academic literature available on Vanuatu and aid effectiveness, Vanuatu and the humanitarian-development nexus and the impact of the pandemic on aid in Vanuatu, or literature that could be directly applied to conditions in Vanuatu on these topics, is few. Fewer still is the literature adopting an in-depth approach to these topics. Thus, my initial approach was inductive to allow me to discover factors preventing the implementation of the Paris Declaration principles, identify obstacles preventing the reconciliation of humanitarian action and development aid, and assess the impacts of COVID-19 not yet documented in the literature. Towards this end, I relied on the data collected to formulate my arguments (see Chapters 4 to 9). Using an interpretive approach, I prioritized the perceptions of actors and how they made sense of lived realities from their various positions in the aid system. Because actor perceptions can differ greatly, as Dijkzeul and Wakenge (2010) point out, this approach allowed me to develop a more complete understanding of aid-related issues in Vanuatu.

Nonetheless, my literature review revealed that analysts frequently associate the lack of implementation of the Paris Declaration to one or more of the following factors: political will, state capacities, and incentives. Thus, when analyzing the data collected, I drew on the existing literature on the key concepts of political will and state capacities, and on the theoretical foundations of the Paris Declaration and the notion of incentives. Indeed, the Paris Declaration established principles that had the potential to reduce uncertainty between actors and to reduce transaction costs by setting rules according to which aid actors should behave. The reasoning of

Paris Declaration authors followed a neo-institutionalist logic where the establishment of adequate institutions, that is, “rules of the game”, facilitates exchanges between players (North, 1991). However, when formal institutions are not aligned with informal rules, it favours political instability (North, 1990). Moreover, institutions, including dysfunctional ones, tend to resist change: this is North’s path dependency argument.

Thus, neo-institutionalism puts great emphasis on history, context, formal and informal norms, and the incentives for diverse actors. This allows me to think beyond a realist *versus* altruist dichotomy and state-centered analyses when investigating why aid actors implement or overlook non-binding agreements in total or in part. Despite the various meta-theories that try to explain why some countries present better socioeconomic indicators than others, the multiplicity and the complexity of global, national, and local situations requires in-depth analyses, fine-tuned recommendations, and experimentations (Haslam, 2014). In line with this view of aid research, I acknowledge that I am also influenced by “*new pragmatism*”. New pragmatism is an approach that consists of using the most relevant and adapted theoretical and methodological tools to solve the problem at hand from “a relatively nonideological stance” (Kacou et al., 2022, p. 226). Consistent with this approach, my research considered the specific context of Vanuatu and based its findings primarily on an analysis of the data collected, as explained in the next section.

Research Design and Methods

Past research showed that case study research was well suited for developing an in-depth understanding of complex issues in a specific context (Dahl et al., 2014). To analyze aid at the country level, and for the reasons explained above, I chose to analyze the case of Vanuatu. My research ethics were informed by the shared pan-Pacific values of respect, reciprocity, and relationships, and a desire to avoid reproducing colonial dynamics as described by Naepi (2019). To honor these values, I gave priority to the rich knowledge and experiences of participants by using methods such as interviews and storian. I conducted 50 semi-structured interviews and storian with key informants. To ensure that various perspectives were represented, participants were identified as belonging mainly to one of four groups: donors, the government, NGOs/development agencies, and foreign consultants. I used complementary data sources, mainly academic and non-academic *grey literature*, especially from NGOs, the press (mainly Vanuatu’s most-read newspaper), but also observational data and experiential knowledge gained

while I was a resident of Vanuatu for 18 months working with the Red Cross. I felt privileged to be able to bring those experiences to bear in my research. My observation data consisted of observations made during two public events, during the fieldwork, as well as notes made after each interview on non-verbal elements of the discussion. The use of diversified data sources also allowed for data triangulation which helped me to identify recurring themes and formulate robust arguments. This methodology placed an emphasis on the analysis of aid and development strategies, and on perceptions and discourses. It gave voice to the perceptions and experiences of participants, rather than privileging a set of assessment indicators on whether aid was effective or not, or whether aid effectiveness principles were respected or not.

Interviews form the main source of data for this research and I conducted most of them remotely between January 2021 and August 2022. COVID-19 prevented me from travelling to Vanuatu between March 2020 and July 2022 to conduct in-person interviews. That said, I had, from the outset, planned to conduct some interviews remotely because some participants were based outside Vanuatu. This modality presented both advantages and challenges for both me, the researcher, and the participants, as detailed in Chapter 3. The main advantage was that several participants explicitly or implicitly expressed they were more comfortable with the interview taking place remotely for confidentiality or anonymity reasons. Conducting interviews remotely also allowed for greater flexibility in terms of time and place. I conducted research in Vanuatu for one month during August-September 2022 to complete my data collection. In the following section, I provide a summary of the main arguments developed in the thesis.

Summary of Findings

Because my dissertation is structured around three research sub-questions, this section provides a summary of my answer to each sub-question, in turn. It ends with a summary of my answer to the overarching research question guiding this research, that is based on the arguments developed in response to the three research sub-questions.

In answer to the first sub-question—why do various aid actors circumvent or misapply the three core principles of the Paris Declaration: ownership, alignment, and harmonization?—, I argue that the presence of four counterincentives led to the Paris Declaration principles being applied only superficially in Vanuatu. First, the government sought to maximize access to donor

funding through overambitious strategies that accommodated donors' spending obligations and priorities, and that often excluded the voice of the broader civil society. Second, accountability to domestic constituencies prevented donors from aligning with Vanuatu's national priorities and procedures. Third, geopolitical competition between "traditional" donors and China undermined harmonization. Fourth, Vanuatu's history and experience with aid, especially related with disasters, also undermined harmonization. In addition, the principles sometimes clash. For instance, donor harmonization clashed with Vanuatu's preference and best interest to negotiate with donors bilaterally.

In response to the second sub-question—what are the obstacles that hinder the reconciliation between humanitarian and development aid, and how can they be overcome?—, I show humanitarian aid and development aid positively and negatively impacted each other in various ways, and they presented similar major challenges. The main explanation for why these two types of aid merely co-exist is two-fold. First, the availability and attractiveness of humanitarian aid for both aid donors and recipients, and second, the historical separation of these two forms of assistance. More flexible funding and valuing long-term partnerships and programmes that fully integrate local knowledge and practices would be needed to bridge the gap between humanitarian aid and development assistance—while respecting the leadership of the recipient country and local organizations. A first step would be to end the artificial division between the management principles of humanitarian aid and those of development assistance.

In response to the third sub-question—how did the COVID-19 pandemic hamper or accelerate the implementation of the Paris Declaration principles?—, I argue that by causing massive repatriations of foreign diplomats, experts and staff, the COVID-19 pandemic created space for Vanuatu, an aid recipient country, and local organizations to take a greater part in the humanitarian response and recovery phases that followed Tropical Cyclone (TC) Harold and the threat of COVID-19 in 2020. However, the response was slow, slower than if international actors had been on Vanuatu's soil according to some interviewees, but the counterfactual situation cannot be analyzed. Despite the country's lack of logistical capacities and human resources, there is a general sense among interviewees that it was ultimately better that the country led its own response and recovery process. Donors still provided financial, material, and technical support from afar.

Overall, I conclude in response to the overarching research question—to what extent are the Paris Declaration principles pertinent?—that the principles themselves are still relevant and laudable. In line with other scholars, I found that donors and recipients share responsibility for their lack of implementation, as aid and aid relationships are negotiated and evolve based on diverse factors and incentives. Aid actors conceive of or revamp development and humanitarian principles and concepts, but their way of tackling inequalities and of monitoring progress remains mainly technical and ineffective. By doing so, they, and especially donors who still hold disproportionate power, continue to overlook power imbalances and avoid sensitive political discussions. To remain relevant, aid actors need to incorporate the lessons learnt from almost two decades of research on the obstacles to implementation of the aid effectiveness agenda, a body of literature to which this thesis contributes. In the final section of this introduction, I provide a general outline of the dissertation's overall logic and structure, followed by a brief description of the role of each chapter.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is structured to first provide the context in which this research was conducted in terms of existing knowledge and gaps, theoretical and conceptual framing, and methodology and methods. Second, the results and arguments are presented to answer the three research sub-questions in turn. My answer to the first sub-question is divided into four chapters. I then present my answers to the second and third sub-questions in separate chapters. Third, a conclusion summarizes the main arguments and contributions, explains how the arguments contribute to answering the overarching research question, provides key takeaways, and suggests avenues for future research.

Chapter 1 provides a literature review on the determinants and relevance of the implementation of the aid effectiveness principles. It also reviews the literature on the links between development aid and humanitarian aid. In particular, it retraces the parallel evolution of the management principles governing humanitarian aid and the development effectiveness principles, and it uncovers their similarities and common challenges. Finally, it contextualizes aid and aid effectiveness in the case of SIDS, PICs, and Vanuatu, more specifically. I identify the gaps in these respective literatures throughout the chapter and how this research contributes to these different bodies of knowledge.

Based on the literature review, Chapter 2 unpacks the main factors analysts attribute to the lack of implementation of the aid effectiveness agenda, namely political will, state capacities and multidimensional incentives weighing on aid donors and recipients. It introduces and explores these central concepts and the theoretical approach adopted in this research. In it, I briefly review the notions of development aid and humanitarian aid, discuss the Paris Declaration as a way of improving aid effectiveness, and identify the management principles governing humanitarian aid. Next, I elaborate on the reasons for compliance or non-compliance with non-binding international agreements, and aid effectiveness principles more specifically, in conceptual and theoretical terms.

Chapter 3 explains the approach I used and the methods I adopted for this research based on the gaps identified in the literature, on the nature of the research questions, and on the theoretical and conceptual framework of this research. In particular, I explain how conducting an in-depth case study and using a variety of qualitative data collection methods is well suited to advancing an understanding of aid in Vanuatu and, more broadly, to answer my research questions. I also describe these methods used and how I analyzed the data.

Chapters 4 to 7 are dedicated to answering the first research sub-question: Why do various aid actors circumvent or misapply the three core principles of the Paris Declaration? Chapter 4 compares the commitment of donors and the Vanuatu government to respecting the Paris Declaration principles with actual results to assess their respective political will. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 focus respectively on the extent to which the principles of ownership, alignment and harmonization are implemented in Vanuatu, and why.

In Chapter 8, I answer the second research sub-question: What are the obstacles that hinder the reconciliation between humanitarian and development aid, and how can they be overcome? I underline the similarities of the distinct sets of management principles governing these two types of aid before explaining the positive and negative impacts of humanitarian aid on development in Vanuatu. I identify the main obstacles to the reconciliation of these two types of aid, and I formulate avenues to reconcile them.

Chapter 9 answers the third research sub-question: How did the COVID-19 pandemic hamper or accelerate the implementation of the Paris Declaration principles? The pandemic

caused massive repatriations of foreign personnel and halted international travel, thus creating an opportunity for the humanitarian and development international community to make rapid progress towards the implementation of the aid effectiveness and localization agendas. In this chapter, I examine if this happened by analyzing the response and early-recovery phases after TC Harold through the lens of ownership, alignment and harmonization. TC Harold hit Vanuatu in April 2020, days after the country's borders were closed to prevent the virus from reaching its shores.

Finally, I conclude this dissertation by addressing the overarching research question: To what extent are the Paris Declaration principles pertinent? I also summarize the arguments and contributions of my research. In addition, the conclusion provides key takeaways for recipient states and donors, and outlines potential avenues for future research.

Chapter 1 – Literature Review: Assessing the Literature on the Relevance of Aid Effectiveness Principles and the Determinants of their Application

In this chapter, I briefly retrace the history of the aid effectiveness agenda and its implementation since the early 2000s, including criticisms of it. Indeed, although concerns around aid effectiveness arose several decades earlier, they culminated with the signing of the Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness in 2005. Next, I explore the links between development and humanitarian aid, in particular their respective principles, before turning to the specific case of SIDS and Vanuatu in relation with development and aid.

The Aid Effectiveness Agenda

Aid effectiveness has been the topic of a plethora of literature. In the early 2000s, Burnside and Dollar (2000) argued that aid would only be effective in countries with good economic policies. However, other researchers have shown that factors such as conflict, the quality of institutions and political stability also play important roles in aid effectiveness (Zürcher, 2012). Furthermore, given the mixed results of official development assistance (ODA), the neoliberal vision of development, centred on donors, was strongly criticized (Easterly, 2005). The perverse effects of aid were also highlighted, such as the financing of authoritarian regimes or the “Dutch disease” phenomenon. Despite the complexity and diversity of country situations, there was still a global consensus on the need to combat poverty. Researchers and practitioners, therefore, sought to establish the optimal conditions for managing and implementing aid (Riddell, 2014). This desire to radically transform the way in which aid had been allocated began by recognising the role of recipient countries in identifying their development priorities and defining and implementing relevant policies. The idea was to establish broad principles that would engage both donor and recipient countries⁸ to ensure development aid would have a large-scale positive impact.

In 2002, the OECD held its first high-level forum on aid effectiveness in Rome, which was attended only by donor institutions. It was not until 2005 with the Paris Declaration that a

⁸ Like Brown (2017), I use this formulation—contested because it conveys the image of passive recipient countries at the mercy of the goodwill of donors—so as not to mask the existing power relationships between these two groups of actors, which would be invisible if I used a formulation such as “development partners”. I do, however, recognize the agency, capacity, and resources of countries eligible for official development assistance.

radical change to the way aid had previously been conceived of was formalised. From this point forward, donors and aid recipients committed to respecting five principles, linked to objectives and indicators. The first is ownership, where recipient countries define their development policies. The second is alignment, where donors support these strategies. The third is harmonization, where donors coordinate their actions among themselves. The fourth is results-based management, and the fifth is donor and recipient mutual accountability (OECD, 2005). Applying the principle of ownership leads to respecting the principles of alignment and harmonization. Together, these three formed the fundamental guiding principles of the Paris Declaration. Indeed, if a recipient country does not have ownership of its development priorities, how can donors align with them or harmonize their actions to achieve them (Brown, 2017)? The other two principles were concerned with measuring results rather than changing the entire approach to aid relations, management, and delivery.

These principles were reaffirmed in the Accra Agenda for Action in 2008 and the Busan Partnership in 2011, but in these subsequent agreements increasing importance was given to civil society⁹, the private sector, and emerging donors. Busan marked a shift in the use of the phrase away from *aid* effectiveness towards *development* effectiveness (Glennie & Summer, 2014), which the GPEDC set out to encourage and monitor. However, the evolution of the “Paris Agenda” from Busan to the present day, via the GPEDC high-level meetings in Mexico in 2014, in Nairobi in 2016, and in Geneva in 2022, reflects a move away from the original, potentially transformative, principles and objectives of the Paris Declaration. In addition to the evolution of the GPEDC’s governance structure, these changes appear to reflect shifts in power and changes in the way aid and its role are viewed at the global level (Eyben & Savage, 2013; Mawdsley et al., 2014). Overall, Brown (2020a) showed that aid effectiveness as a norm “was only feebly internalized” by donors and has ultimately declined as a result of the dilution of its objectives to include a wider range of actors, including emerging donors (p. 1230). He attributes the lack of application of the principles to:

⁹ When I use the term civil society, it is to distinguish this group from the government, donors, and the private sector. It refers to citizens and residents, civil society organisations (CSOs), including local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international NGOs (INGOs), as well as the media.

a lack of political will and significant incentives of various types on all sides to maintain the status quo, including donors' desires to achieve self-interested goals and recipients' desire to maximize financial inflows and maintain policy space while manifesting agreement with the principles and performing compliance. (Brown, 2020a, p. 1245)

This research explores this statement further through the study of a specific case, that of Vanuatu. Indeed, the failure to consider the interests and incentives weighing on aid actors is one of the reasons invoked by the critics to explain the shortcomings in the implementation of the PD principles.

The Criticisms

From its inception, the Paris Declaration was criticized. For Rogerson (2005), the PD's focus on the state level overlooks systemic issues such as aid allocations across countries and conditionality. At a conceptual level, scholars questioned the terms and concepts and their usefulness, in particular the principles of ownership and harmonization (Buiter, 2007; Pirnia, 2016; Raffinot, 2010; Saliba-Couture, 2011). Saliba-Couture (2011) argued that ownership was a catch-all, hermetic, and ambiguous concept. Buiter (2007) fiercely rejected it because, given the diversity of the stakeholders involved and their interests, he believed it was impossible to envisage national ownership. In the same vein, harmonization was questioned, in particular by Sjöstedt and Sundström (2017) who wondered, in view of the political and ideological differences underlying policies, whether the calls for harmonization were "naïve and premature" (p. O76).

Furthermore, the scope for understanding and interpreting the principles is quite wide in the PD, which gives those in positions of power the opportunity to interpret it to their own advantage. For example, some scholars thought there was confusion between ownership objectives and ownership aims (Booth, 2012; Faust, 2010; Hyden, 2008). Thus, for Booth (2012), ownership should be clearly presented as an objective for donors and not as a condition for aid effectiveness. The principles of ownership and harmonization are also used in different ways, particularly by donors and the national elites of recipient countries. Over time and throughout debates, a number of terms and adjectives have been applied to ownership, such as, "country

ownership”, “progressive ownership” (Hayman, 2009), “democratic ownership” (Brown, 2020b), “collective ownership” (Bhattacharya et al., 2023), the criticized “donor-driven ownership” (Saliba-Couture 2011), “joint ownership” (Hayman, 2009), “formal ownership”, and “national” or “local ownership”. This semantic diversity indicates that quality and willingness matter as much as, if not more than, the mere presence of development strategies (Brown, 2017). Similarly, according to Woll (2008), donors seem to be taking advantage of flaws in the PD to opt for easier harmonization of *agendas*, rather than striving for the harmonization of *procedures* (Woll, 2008).

In order to use concepts such as ownership, alignment and harmonization consciously, one must recognize the qualities and shortcomings of these concepts, put them into perspective, and contextualize them (Brown, 2017; Dijkstra, 2011). Despite their imperfections, I maintain, like Jacquemot (2007), that the PD and its associated principles “[répondent] à de saines préoccupations” by seeking to rebalance power between donors and recipient countries (p. 187). In this respect, the principles are valid as guidelines to create the conditions for greater aid effectiveness (Brown, 2017).

Continuing with major criticisms, the PD has been frequently criticized for its technical and standardizing vision of aid effectiveness. Jacquemot (2007) immediately remarked that there was too much emphasis placed on aid management rather than on an approach based on a detailed understanding of contexts, and he raised a number of questions which were subsequently taken up by other scholars concerning the interests of actors, the technical approach, the lack of strategic reflection, the lack of theoretical framework, and the weakness of the premises. Indeed, the agenda seems to favour a managerial, technical approach that overshadows any political dimension. This approach is marked by the omnipresence of results-based management and a focus on processes, with stakeholders committed to an obligation of means rather than ends (Saliba-Couture, 2011; Samy & Aksli, 2015). Brown (2017) even called into question the notion of how the term effectiveness is used, because the principles of the PD are more concerned with the organization of aid than with its actual content. The idea for donors seems to be to maximize the available resources (efficiency) through commonly agreed processes rather than to achieve the goals by all necessary means (Brown, 2017; Samy & Aksli, 2015).

Moreover, for some scholars, the PD includes assumptions wrongly taken for granted by its authors, such as the fact that recipient countries are already making development their priority,

a dynamic that donors should not hinder (Booth, 2012; Saliba-Couture, 2011), or that donors can reach agreements and act collectively (Bourguignon & Platteau, 2015; Koch et al., 2017). Looking beyond the assumptions, some analysts saw that the causal mechanisms underlying each of the principles, the links between the declaration's targets and their benefits for development, and the relevance of the instruments (such as, budget support), were not sufficiently justified (Rogerson, 2005; Glennie & Summer, 2014). For example, the idea that policies decided locally are necessarily preferable to policies decided externally was questioned by Raffinot (2010) and Booth (2012). The PD seems to assume that the downstream effects of implementing the principles would be invariably positive, but it seems unlikely that the effects would be similar or invariably positive, given the variety of contexts (Dijkstra, 2011). Some scholars even argued that implementing the principles may prove contradictory in practice (Hyden, 2008; Saliba-Couture 2011; Sjöstedt & Sundström, 2017). For instance, on the recipient side, particularly where the state has few resources, the requirements associated with the application of the principles of ownership and alignment can weigh heavily on the state and paradoxically increase its dependence on aid, and even compromise country sovereignty (Overton et al., 2018).

The potential and actual benefits of harmonization have been particularly contested for several reasons (Eyben, 2007; Gehring et al., 2017; Sjöstedt & Sundström, 2017), including Rogerson's (2005) and Woll's (2008) that certain forms of competition could be beneficial for recipient countries in terms of bargaining power and ownership. Early on, Eyben (2007) also warned of the potential perverse effect of harmonization. Under the guise of efficiency, donor harmonization could turn into an exclusive dialogue with the government thus marginalizing other players. In the same vein, Bourguignon and Platteau (2015) and Sjöstedt and Sundström (2017) found that coordination between donors has its limitations for two different reasons. For Bourguignon and Platteau (2015), the optimal level of coordination for donors (in political terms) does not match the actual level to be achieved, and these "optimal" levels differ from one donor to another. Sjöstedt and Sundström (2017) wondered whether the desire for harmonization was realistic to begin with, given political and ideological differences. They give the example of fisheries where fundamentally different visions clash between donors where one focused on protecting the environment and the other favoured income generation.

At a more political level, the PD is also criticized for implying country and organization leaders have the political will to change their ways of working, which is not always evident in reality (Riddell, 2014). Analysts have also criticized it for underestimating power plays (Hyden, 2008), institutional challenges (Ampaire et al., 2017), visibility issues (Vollmer, 2014), and organizational factors in donor institutions (Gulrajani, 2014). Indeed, the effectiveness of cooperation is shaped by the interactions between a multitude of factors and actors—beyond traditional donors—whose influence, will, and agency need to be acknowledged and observed to understand the development dynamics of a given context. These factors and actors include the roles and practices of civil society, the private sector, and new development actors, the heterogeneity of a recipient state where the dominant group may not always represent the population as a whole, state capacities, political will, and the existence of incentives that can play against the implementation of the PD principles (Brown 2014, 2015, 2017, 2020a). Thus, the criticisms raised place aid actors at the heart of the explanation for the disappointing results regarding the implementation of the principles.

Implementation Shortcomings of the Principles in Practice

Indeed, the results regarding the implementation of the PD principles, since 2005, have been mixed. OECD's 2011 survey on aid effectiveness stated that “at the global level, only one out of the 13 targets established for 2010 ... has been met”: only the technical coordination of donors was satisfactory (OECD, 2012a, p. 15). Nunnenkamp et al. (2013) concluded that “aid fragmentation persisted after the Paris Declaration and coordination among donors [had] even weakened” (p. 537). Three years later, Nunnenkamp et al. (2016) came to the same conclusion concerning implementation at the sub-national level, in the case of Malawi (Nunnenkamp et al., 2016). On the donor side, Samy and Aksli (2015) found that “while several donors improved their performance from 2005 to 2010, many ... did not meet their targets” (p. 517). In Ethiopia, Teshome and Hoebink (2018) found that donor commitment to the DP was essential in achieving good results in the health sector, although challenges remained, such as donor fragmentation and civil society inclusion. In 2019, the GPEDC monitoring report revealed that, compared with 2016, recipient countries were gradually adopting development plans, but that overall, donors aligned less with national priorities, statistical and monitoring systems, and national results. Aid disbursements were less predictable, civil society faced a hostile environment, and results

concerning transparency and accountability were mixed (OECD/UNDP, 2019). Based on OECD's Creditor Reporting System, Ritchie et al. (2022) calculated that in 2020, "only 32 percent of aid funds [were] managed by partner country governments, private sector firms and NGOs combined" with the quasi-totality of these funds going to recipient governments (para. 11). Remaining aid funds were implemented by donor countries, private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) based in donor countries, and multilateral agencies (Ritchie et al., 2022).

This said, OECD monitoring did not identify the causes of these shortcomings nor did it assess the quality of the meagre progress made (Brown, 2017). For instance, it did not address the quality of implementation, in terms of inclusiveness, feasibility, or relevance of national development strategies, beyond their mere adoption or presence in recipient countries. Critical scholars have since carried out case studies which showed that the actors concerned were at the root of the shortcomings, in particular because they failed to take into account context and because of incentives that ran counter to the application of the principles.

The Reasons Behind Implementation Shortcomings

An important reason is that the interests, motivations and incentives of donors and recipients, and within these entities, are multiple and diverse, in particular for political and ideological reasons (Andersen & Therkildsen, 2007; Dietrich, 2016; Koch et al., 2017; Nunnenkamp et al., 2013; Saliba-Couture, 2011; Zürcher, 2012). Summarizing the results of seven articles on ownership, Keijzer and Black (2020) argue aid actors are increasingly seeking their own interest, thereby undermining ownership. These diverse interests, motivations and incentives can lead to a lack of harmonization between donors (Sjöstedt & Sundström, 2017) and inconsistencies between policies within a country, such as, development cooperation policies and trade policies. Decisions made by the various aid actors are motivated by calculations to minimize risk, particularly political risk (Bourguignon & Platteau, 2015). For instance, donors, who are accountable to their national taxpayers, tend to opt for aid delivery through a "project approach" that has the potential of yielding visible short-term results, rather than choosing budget support, which poses the problem of aid fungibility (Nunnenkamp et al., 2013; Vollmer, 2014). Similarly, Dercon (2022) found that if local elites in recipient countries do not share the vision that working towards long-term development, that is, the improvement of socioeconomic conditions for the entire population, serves their own interests of staying in power, it is unlikely

they will coordinate and that development will happen; rather, they will keep adopting short-term strategies and approaches to the benefit of a few. Thus, beyond political will, various incentives are at play to explain the implementations shortcomings of the PD, a point further elaborated below.

Of course, aid actors do not operate in isolation: they operate within a system of power relations in which donors, from their privileged position, make disbursements, are involved in public policy definition in recipient countries, and form a powerful negotiation front (Eyben, 2007; Hayman, 2009; Hyden, 2008; Saliba-Couture, 2011). In Rwanda, for example, Hayman (2009) showed that donors only partially ceded control of aid to the recipient country, leading to “joint ownership” which was contrary to recipient country ownership as defined in the PD. Scholars attribute the persistence of forms of conditionality to the lack of trust on both sides of the aid relationship based on historical precedents, such as rent-seeking by recipient countries, unpredictability of payments and attempts to influence policies on the donor side (Dijkstra, 2013; Faust et al., 2012; Hyden, 2008; Rogerson, 2005; Saliba-Couture, 2011).

Insufficient knowledge of the context of national and local contexts on the part of donors, and a lack of inclusion of a plurality of local actors in the definition of agendas—beyond governments and development “experts”—are also part of the recurring problems affecting the implementation of the aid effectiveness principles (Brown, 2020b; Faust, 2010; Jacquemot, 2007; Riddell, 2014; Zürcher, 2012). Resolution of these problems is necessary to define inclusive and appropriate solutions. Indeed, the PD principles are not a universal set of instructions, rather they are sensitive to the context in which they are applied. This point is stressed in the PD itself: “We recognise that commitments need to be interpreted in the light of the specific situation of each partner country” (OECD, 2005, p. 3). For instance, the use of national systems by donors can increase the cost of aid in the short term and not necessarily improve ownership by the recipient country, as was the case in Mozambique (Batley, 2005). Dijkstra (2011) also showed that in Bolivia, Honduras and Nicaragua, the establishment of national strategies did not have the expected results in terms of aid ownership and even had harmful consequences. These strategies were elaborated at the request of donors and did not appear to be the product of a credible consultation process. Donors practiced “business-as-usual” and the poverty reduction strategy approach had consequences for political stability in Bolivia (Dijkstra, 2011). In Nicaragua,

budget support had positive effects, but donor priorities had a negative impact on poverty reduction (Dijkstra, 2013).

Indeed, applying the principles of aid effectiveness is not always a priority for donors and recipients, who are driven by other incentives. Jerve (2002) explained, for instance, that recipient organisations had an incentive to maximize the amounts of aid they received while donors were under pressure to spend aid, thus both sides prioritized quantity over quality. Also linking domestic issues and international aid, Vollmer (2014) interpreted donors' lack of focus on aid effectiveness as a quest for visibility to justify their actions in the eyes of their taxpayers. He suggests that this quest often leads to a lack of coordination, to omissions, and to duplication. In the same vein, Dietrich (2016) suggests that some donors continue to bypass recipient governments based on the foundations of their own national political economy, that privileges the market rather than state management for specific services. Over the long term, this bias can undermine efforts towards strengthening the state in the recipient country. Similarly, based on the monitoring results of the PD in 2011, Samy and Aksli (2015) showed that “[donor] countries’ compliance ... depends on domestic values and considerations, and sometimes on self-interest insofar as these align with the objectives of the global campaign” (p. 531).

Sometimes, the application of the principles is only superficial. This is the case, for instance, when donors harmonize their *agendas* and not their *procedures*, despite the latter being the crucial issue (Woll, 2008). Hayman (2009) showed that in Rwanda, despite apparent progress, in practice, the implementation of the principles was difficult due to several factors, in particular donor involvement in and control over the definition of strategies and policies and ultimately the allocation of funds. This led to “joint ownership”, which was not the original aim of the PD. Echoing Hayman’s (2009) research, Brown (2017) showed in the cases of Mali and Ghana that even when the principles of ownership and alignment seem to be applied in form, they may not be applied in substance. The national development plans conceived by the recipient countries were too numerous and too broad in scope, and the lack of hierarchy between them created confusion in establishing priorities and in the division of responsibilities, all of which, in the end, hampered their implementation. Also, the alignment principle was only artificially respected because in practice, recipients aligned with donor priorities so that they could maximize their access to funding, and donors lacked confidence in the financial management systems of

recipient countries (Brown, 2016a; Brown, 2017). In line with Dijkstra (2011), Brown (2020b) showed that actors could adopt a narrow conception of ownership that was at odds with the PD by excluding the poor from the consultation processes, as was the case with Canadian aid in support of the mining sector in Peru. Similarly, Hasselskog et al. (2023) found that although government ownership is strong in Rwanda and Cambodia, local participation remains superficial.

These authors focus on the *understanding(s)* and *relevance* of the principles, as well as on *quality* and *incentives* behind the quantitative results. Indeed, while the implementation of principles can have positive effects, it can also lead to counter-intuitive or even harmful consequences that go against the initial objectives. The context is, therefore, crucial, because the ill-considered application of the principles, particularly, harmonization and alignment, can have negative consequences, especially in fragile states (Andersen & Therkildsen, 2007; Zürcher, 2012).

Thus, while the intentions of the Paris Declaration seem laudable, OECD reports, criticisms and case studies suggest that the principles have seldomly or superficially landed in practice, which cannot be explained by purely quantitative monitoring. Thus, “more case studies and comparative work are required to test the generalizability of findings, trace evolving practices, as well as explain inter-country and inter-regional differences” (Brown, 2017, p. 341). The present study is one such study. It examines the application of the three principles that form the pillars of aid effectiveness in Vanuatu and unveils whether the challenges are similar to previous analyses. It touches on the link between development and humanitarian aid in a context marked by natural hazards and the COVID-19 pandemic, and it also touches on the debates surrounding aid itself.

Indeed, beyond “traditional” aid, low- and middle-income countries are turning to South-South cooperation (SSC) and public-private partnerships with varying degrees of success (Bekelynk, 2017; Cortés Zea & Lécuyer, 2018). There are various forms of SSC. These forms are influenced by a multitude of factors which, without ruling out the altruism and solidarity of emerging donors, may include these emerging donors’ own development trajectories, national interests, and ideological inclinations (Baranyi, 2015). Different contexts also shape SSC outcomes. In Zambia, Kragelund (2014) showed that the alternatives offered by emerging powers

allowed the state to assert itself, while in Haiti, considered a fragile state, emerging donors tended to reproduce the mistakes of traditional donors. In Haiti, for instance, emerging donors bypassed government bodies and neglected accountability and the strengthening of state capacities. Case studies, such as the one proposed in this thesis, are still needed. In this respect, China's development role as a non-traditional donor in the Pacific and in Vanuatu is an integral part of this research.

The UN has encouraged the development of SSC and public-private partnerships to reach Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, for some analysts, the technocratic nature underlying the supranational framework of the SDGs makes it impossible to meet the challenges of development. On the contrary, they argue, this framework puts undue pressure on the states with the least capacity and contributes to maintaining a profoundly unequal status quo (Egil, 2015; Saliba-Couture, 2016; Weber, 2017). From a more nuanced perspective, Rahman and Baranyi (2017) proved that fruitful cooperation is possible on the ground between donors and recipients. This result calls for innovative and creative solutions to move beyond the debate between aid supporters and those for whom aid is vain. Indeed, for multiple reasons including ethical, economic, humanitarian, and developmental reasons, as well as security reasons, aid flows are not likely to dry up any time soon and are likely to remain significant for some regions, such as the Pacific (Dornan & Pryke, 2017). Works, such as the one presented here, can enrich the aid debates by providing concrete case studies that further a better understanding of the issues at stake and that contribute to improving the use of aid.

In particular, aid, including humanitarian aid, continues to flow into fragile, conflict-ridden and/or hazard-prone countries. This is the case in Vanuatu, which frequently experiences climatic and geological hazards due to its geographical location and climate change. The following section explores the link between humanitarian aid and development aid, which are still often considered separately but deserve to be considered together, as proposed in this research.

Humanitarian Aid and Development Aid

In the literature, development aid and humanitarian aid are often treated separately, whereas in reality, it is difficult to differentiate between them (Centre d'étude et de coopération

internationale, 2017; Lie, 2020; Olivier de Sardan, 2011). For instance, a branch of literature has developed specifically around aid in cases of disaster, also known as disaster aid. Disaster aid literature analyzes aid amounts and distribution, the motivations of government and donors behind post-disaster aid, and the economic impact of disasters in low- and middle- income countries (Becerra et al., 2014; Klomp & Valckx, 2014; Mogge et al., 2023; Noy & Nualsri, 2011; Sawada & Takasaki, 2017; Toya & Skidmore, 2006). Strömberg (2007) concluded, for example, that the amount of aid received after a disaster depends, among other things, on the severity of the disaster, the income level of the affected country, its colonial history, its geographical distance from donors, its language, and on the media coverage of the disaster. In the same vein, Nelson (2012) found that the aid provided was based on humanitarian needs, but that political considerations, such as commercial and military links, were also at work. Similarly, Olsen et al. (2003) found that donor security interests and the capacity of country-based NGOs played an important role in explaining varying amounts of aid. Seck (2007) suggests that donors, who are responsive to media coverage, seek to enjoy a good reputation on the world stage as altruistic actors and as a result, are less inclined to invest in more discreet risk reduction actions. Because donors provide visible humanitarian aid, leaders of disaster-affected countries have political incentives for not investing in long-term risk reduction. Moreover, sometimes the quality of aid is unsatisfactory because of the competition for funding between and among NGOs and multilateral organizations (Seck, 2007). On the contrary, Becerra et al. (2014) did not find that political and strategic considerations played a role in the allocation of post-disaster aid.

The Humanitarian-Development Nexus

In practice, emergency aid and long-term aid are entangled, which has led to the concept of humanitarian-development nexus. Donors and international agencies have been interested in establishing a better link between humanitarian aid and development since the 1970s and 80s (Mosel & Levine, 2014; Paul, 2019). However, it was only since the 1990s when the frequency of disasters increased and questions were raised about the effectiveness of aid that the issue gained importance, particularly in the cases of natural hazards (Harmer & Macrae, 2004). At that time, the results of humanitarian aid were heavily criticized and donors were blamed for the poorly coordinated and fragmented management of aid, which was not always driven by the interests of the affected populations (Audet, 2014). Under the impetus of the United Nations

(UN) and NGOs, practitioners started to think in terms of a *humanitarian-development continuum*. A first underlying idea was that humanitarian action must also take into account, and prepare for, recovery and long-term development phases (Harmer & Macrae, 2004). Part of the rationale was also a second idea according to which separating humanitarian aid from development was seen as detrimental to the effectiveness of action (Steets, 2011). However, this linear conception was replaced by the *contiguum* in the 1990s to emphasize that a two-way relationship had to be established (Mosel & Levine, 2014). Indeed, donors and cooperation agencies argued that disasters were holding back the development of many countries in the Global South, and that development programmes should therefore take disaster risk into account (Paul, 2019). International cooperation agencies therefore developed their own approaches in a relatively compartmentalised manner (Osa & Hanatani, 2018), and there is no agreed specific definition of the nexus (Cochrane & Wilson, 2023).

Today, the terminology adopted by the UN seems to favour the humanitarian-development nexus, based on “a shared moral imperative of preventing crises and sustainably reducing people’s levels of humanitarian need, a task that requires the pursuit of collective outcomes across silos” (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], 2017, p. 4). In other terms, the aim is to meet immediate needs while reducing risk and vulnerability to future crises. This requires collaboration at all stages of the action, first, to analyze the situation, next, for programming and planning, then, for acting in partnership with all actors, particularly national and local ones, and finally, for having access to adequate, flexible, and predictable funding (OCHA, 2017). In short, responsibilities are shared between the two “worlds” (Harmer & Macrae, 2004). According to Steets (2011), a humanitarian-development nexus would operate by:

- (1) applying development principles early on in emergency settings to ensure the ground for development is prepared;
- (2) ensuring a smooth transition as well as continuity and coordination between interventions on the ground; and
- (3) using development cooperation to support prevention and disaster risk reduction. (p. 3)

Led by the UN, the *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030* (the Sendai Framework) is a key high-level initiative that encourages all actors, in a coherent, whole-of-society approach, to identify, understand, prevent and prepare for risks, as well as to “build back better” after disasters (UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2015, p. 14). The general expected outcome is “the substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health and in the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities and countries” (UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2015, p. 12). Assessing the implementation of the Sendai Framework, another specific non-binding international agreement, in practice, is beyond the scope of this thesis, which focuses on the concept of nexus more generally. I could not have done justice to such an analysis in this doctoral project, but studying the application of the Sendai Framework at the national level could be an avenue for future research.

However, the nexus has been debated, particularly among academics. By far the main criticism centres around the fact that the concept has been considered in a technical rather than political way (Harmer & Macrae, 2004; Mosel & Levine, 2014; Otto & Weingärtner, 2013). Once again in the frame of international cooperation, the interests of the different groups of actors and the complexity of their relationships, their agency, power relations, and the contexts in which the programmes take place are often overlooked (Wairimu et al., 2016). For instance, Cochrane and Wilson (2023) explain that, if envisaged as yet another donor requirement, the nexus has the potential to perpetuate unequal power relations; more broadly, there are few references to key initiatives aimed at rebalancing decision-making in favour of aid recipient countries and organizations, such as the PD, across the nexus literature. The concept of nexus is also criticized for being ill-suited to the complex and protracted nature of current crises (Audet, 2015). In the field, from the point of view of end recipients of aid, there is often a very blurry line between humanitarian aid and development aid, which contributes to questioning the usefulness of the concept (Lie, 2017; Olivier de Sardan, 2011; Stamnes, 2016). This blurriness also leads to questioning about the semantic division between humanitarian and development aid, which may rather serve to define and legitimize certain undertakings than to have transformative effects (Lie, 2017). For example, Olivier de Sardan (2011) recognized the need to link humanitarian aid and development in the case of the structural food crises in Niger, but stressed that humanitarian aid is only one type of aid, and that, like other types of aid, it is subject to rents, misappropriation,

and injustice, dynamics that are often ignored by international and national organizations providing support. Moreover, aid was not any more a decisive factor than the “coping strategies” of Nigeriens (Olivier de Sardan, 2011). The boundary between humanitarian and development aid is increasingly blurred when a country that has been receiving development aid for many years receives an influx of humanitarian aid following a disaster. “Traditional” donors take “exceptional” measures, while other players step in, temporarily or permanently, out of necessity and/or for strategic reasons. Keerthiratne and Tol (2018) showed that disasters can lead to an increase in the number of donors and forms of aid both in the short term and in the long term. However, the questions of “the exact mechanisms through which natural disasters influence aid concentration” (p. 23) as well as the consequences in different contexts, remain open.

Also on the subject of the limited transformative potential of the nexus concept, Mosel and Levine (2014) noted that the humanitarian-development nexus focuses on “how ‘we’ organise ‘our’ aid” to the detriment of an approach centered on people affected by crises (p. 5). Lallau et al. (2018) fear that the adoption of a new buzzword, resilience, that links humanitarian aid and development, is not sufficient in itself to transform aid practices. Worse still, Mercer (2010) and Quenault (2015) suggested that a focus on adaptation and resilience efforts could overshadow the root causes of vulnerability, such as, inequality. If the root causes are not correctly identified, then the fundamental economic and societal transformations needed to achieve mitigation objectives might not be addressed. Some scholars, such as, Revêt (2009), criticized the highly technical and apolitical approach used by international organizations to comprehend and deal with disasters, risk, and vulnerability, even though it is essential to understand the social, economic, and political dimensions underlying these issues before acting on them. According to Revêt (2009), international organizations participate in institutionalizing and internationalizing disaster management, also standardize specific interpretation of concepts such as vulnerability and risk, and in doing so they privilege a single interpretation and ignore other forms of knowledge. However, while the concept of nexus should be used with caution for the reasons given already, it foregrounds the need to link humanitarian aid and development aid for a greater, positive impact for affected populations.

In practice, scholars and practitioners also found several shortcomings and barriers to the implementation of nexus. While they identified factors favourable to the operationalization of the

nexus, Hanatani et al. (2018) pointed out that several obstacles exist, such as, linear approaches to nexus implementation, the presence of a humanitarian dilemma in conflict situations, silo funding, the politicization of aid, the lack of local leadership and capacity, and complex and costly coordination. However, the lack of clear guidelines leading to heterogeneous approaches is one of the main criticisms. For instance, while OCHA adopted the New Way of Working strategy, which focused on the pursuit of “collective outcomes” for humanitarian and development actors (OCHA, 2017), Oxfam committed to improving the coordination of the distribution of its emergency aid and strengthening people’s resilience in the event of a future crisis using a participatory approach (Oxfam, 2013), and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) set up a new fund accessible on the basis of available information on an imminent threat in order to better anticipate emergency situations (IFRC, 2019).

A second major criticism is the difficulty a nexus implementation poses in applying principles such as capacity building, respect for local leadership, or inclusiveness in complex, politicised, and diverse contexts—be it, in particular, a crisis due to conflict or a natural hazard (Hanatani et al., 2018). Indeed, it is essential that nexus implementation takes into account the specific socio-economic, political, cultural, and environmental context, and that it involves local stakeholders; it also implies a close collaboration between humanitarian and development actors (Moatty et al., 2017). Babister (2020) went a step further saying that in addition to adaptation to context, the principle of ownership, not simply involvement or participation, must be applied during each humanitarian crisis. However, applying this principle has also been difficult. For example, the response to Cyclone Winston in Fiji revealed that, unlike international actors, “local NGOs and the private sector are not privy to regular consultations on matters pertaining to DRM [Disaster Risk Management] [by the government]” (Fijian Government, 2016, p. 114). Funding often remains inflexible because it is allocated in silos (Care Self Report, 2019; Hanatani et al., 2018). Many organizations shared their challenges in operating this transformation and INGO ActionAid’s challenges are representative of many others:

The donors, UN and INGO still have not a common approach on how to achieve this transformation. It is probably very related to the context of each response. ... The discussions and solutions on this transformation have been

designed at Northern capitals and UN hubs (Geneva, New York). More discussion and solutions need to be designed at national and regional level. There is also the role of the state in this transformation, which needs more discussion: it can promote a shift of power (Nepal, Indonesia) or constitute a challenge when its policies or practices are part of the root cause of a humanitarian crisis. (ActionAid Self-Report, 2019)

For Mosel and Levine (2014), the key challenge at the root of difficulties to implement the nexus is “reconciling the fundamentally different institutional cultures, assumptions, values, structures and ways of working that characterise the ‘humanitarian’ and the ‘development’ ‘communities’” (pp. 6–7). For example, the latter has traditionally sought to strengthen governments while the former often bypasses them, and the institutional arrangements that govern them often operate separately, such as at the UN with UNDP and OCHA, and on a smaller scale with NGOs specializing either in humanitarian relief or development. In all cases, governments are key players because of the political stakes involved in crises, such as in Uganda (Lie, 2017). Without their contribution, operations are often bound to be less effective and less sustainable (Attina, 2012; Hendriks & Boersma, 2019). Indeed, failure to consider the interplay of multiple interests often means a project is doomed. Humanitarian agencies read and respond to complex situations differently from each other and from development organizations (Harmer & Macrae, 2004; Lie, 2017). Furthermore, humanitarian principles can be a source of disagreement between and within the two communities. Humanitarian action aims to be neutral and independent of political agendas, so state involvement is understood by some as being at odds with this aim (Otto & Weingärtner, 2013).

Thus, qualitative case studies are still needed to shed light on the type of link between humanitarian action and development in practice, and to test the generalisability of these findings. The implementation of the humanitarian-development nexus, and its associated literature, is still in its infancy. Studying the case of Vanuatu will help to deepen our understanding of the type of links between humanitarian and long-term aid that could potentially improve practice. Despite the differences mentioned above between these two kinds of aid, the challenges encountered by both, including the causes for these challenges, are similar to each other. They include a lack of ownership and a lack of consideration of the context which includes the interplay of actors and

the incentives that weigh on them. As a result, the management principles of humanitarian aid and development aid evolved separately to become quite similar, as the following sections show.

The Main Normative Frameworks of Humanitarian Aid

Humanitarian aid has its own principles and recommended good practices. Overall, humanitarian action is governed by the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence, which form the basis of international humanitarian law (UN, 1991, 2004). Several initiatives were born out of these principles, such as in 2003 when 17 major donor countries (42 in August 2023) adopted 23 principles and good practices for humanitarian aid, several of which emphasized the link between humanitarian aid and development (Good Humanitarian Donorship [GHD], 2003). Recently, in a bid to bring these initiatives together, the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) proposed a document describing “the essential elements of principled, accountable and high-quality humanitarian action” (CHS, 2014, p. 2). Aimed at organizations and individuals engaged in humanitarian action, the CHS on Quality and Accountability is based on a broad international consultation process and is inspired by several reference initiatives, such as, the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and red Crescent Movement, the Humanitarian Charter and the essential standards of the Sphere Handbook, the Development Assistance Committee’s (DAC) evaluation criteria for humanitarian assistance and development, and the commitments of the heads of the United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) (CHS, 2014, p. 3).

The latter, established in 1991 within the UN and whose members include the main UN agencies, is responsible for coordinating inter-agency humanitarian assistance (IASC, n.d.). In 2011, its leaders launched the Initiative for Accountability to Affected Populations, which aimed to increase the accountability of humanitarian actors towards people affected by disasters. They committed to improving their practices in five areas: leadership/governance, transparency, feedback and complaints, participation, and design, monitoring and evaluation (IASC, 2013). In 2017, the IASC reorganized and reduced its commitments to four areas: leadership; participation and partnership; information, feedback, and action; and results. The IASC made these changes, they said, “to reflect essential developments”, including the commitments made by aid actors at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, following which the Grand Bargain, a pact on the financing of humanitarian action, was launched (IASC, 2017a, p. 2).

Based on the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) and aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian aid, the Grand Bargain has more than 60 signatories, including donor countries and major humanitarian organizations. It aimed to achieve 10 objectives, including greater transparency, a revolution in participation, harmonized and simplified reporting requirements, and greater engagement between humanitarian and development actors (Agenda for Humanity, n.d.). The framework of the updated Grand Bargain 2.0 version, published in July 2021, showed less ambition. The priorities were reduced to two, generally related to the quality of funding and localization. Specifically, the text reads:

(i) A critical mass of quality funding is reached that allows an effective and efficient response, ensuring visibility and accountability (ii) Greater support is provided for the leadership, delivery and capacity of local responders and the participation of affected communities in addressing humanitarian needs. (IASC, 2021, p. 1)

Four outcomes are associated with these two priorities: “1) Flexibility, predictability, transparency, and tracking, 2) Equitable and principled partnerships, 3) Accountability and inclusion, 4) Prioritisation and coordination” (IASC, 2021, p. 2). These priorities and outcomes echo the PD principles of ownership, alignment, harmonization, managing for results, and mutual accountability. Both sets of principles have evolved to emphasize a “partnership approach” between various actors including the private sector, with uncertain benefits, rather than a transformative approach that would equalize power relations between actors. This leads me to explore the link between the PD principles and humanitarian aid in the next section.

The Paris Declaration Principles and Humanitarian Aid

While the PD principles seem to apply more generally to long-term aid, harmonization between emergency aid and development aid is encouraged. The Paris Declaration called for the harmonization of humanitarian aid and development assistance (OECD, 2005), and the Accra Agenda for Action went as far as to differentiate between “humanitarian, recovery and longer-term development phases” (OECD, 2008, p. 5). There is no mention of humanitarian aid in the Busan outcome document, which does, however, contain several references to disasters and the efforts needed to build resilience and reduce the vulnerability of populations exposed to risks

(OECD, 2011). Humanitarian aid is largely absent from the 2016 survey on aid effectiveness, in which the Central Emergency Response Fund does however appear among the development partners (OECD/UNDP, 2016). The idea of linking humanitarian aid and development resurfaced at the GPEDC high-level meeting in Nairobi in 2016 where participants concluded that collaboration and harmonization between humanitarian and development actors should take place “with respect for humanitarian principles” and that there was a “need for development finance to leverage humanitarian support” (GPEDC, 2016, p. 24). Thus, except for IATI, humanitarian aid is not explicitly part of these normative frameworks, and the relationship between humanitarian aid and development aid, when addressed, is rather vague. Only in the outcome document of GPEDC’s third high-level meeting that took place in Geneva in 2022 GPEDC stakeholders committed to follow a humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach (GPEDC, 2022).

Yet, there are important similarities between the objectives of the Grand Bargain and the PD principles, as outlined in the previous section. In keeping with this resemblance, Audet (2014) identifies the keys to “humanitaire durable” in five conditions: participation and ownership, sufficient financial resources, the removal of political interference, coordination, and an exit strategy (pp. 326–328). The two sets of principles also present similar limitations and challenges. In line with Brown’s (2017) assessment of the PD principles, these objectives seem to relate more to the management and implementation of humanitarian aid than to its content. Furthermore, at a conceptual level, the priorities of the Grand Bargain are subject to debate, as are the principles of the PD. This is particularly true of the principle of localization: while some actors in the aid system, notably donors, see localization as a way of limiting transaction costs which would result in considerable efficiency gains that could be invested in aid delivery (IASC, 2017b), others see localization as an opportunity to shift the balance of power and refocus aid on those who need it most (Barbelet et al, 2021; Vielajus & Charancle, 2019). Ways of defining “local” versus “international” are also debated in both the context of the PD and the Grand Bargain (Roepstorff, 2020; Rosier & Savard, 2022).

In practice, the results and challenges encountered in operationalizing the priorities or conditions for the effectiveness of humanitarian aid present similarities with the results and challenges encountered in operationalizing the PD principles. For instance, Duclos et al (2019) found that the geographical, linguistic, and cultural proximity of local actors to people affected

by crisis facilitates access to these people and leads to a more efficient response than when foreign teams are deployed. For other analysts, affected people themselves must be at the centre of recovery strategies to ensure their success (Babister, 2020; Moatty et al., 2017). Yet, the Grand Bargain objective of transferring 25% of funds “as directly as possible” to local and national actors in the Global South by 2020 is far from being achieved. In 2020, only 2.8% of humanitarian aid was provided directly to these actors and only 1.2% in the two following years (Development Initiatives, 2023). However, the report does not explain the reasons behind this failure to achieve the objective. Similarly, non-earmarked funds represented only 17% of total allocated funds and multi-year funding represented less than half of total funding in 2021 (Development Initiatives, 2021). These realities prevent local and national actors from taking ownership of aid. The independent report on the implementation of the Grand Bargain five years on indicated some progress with more cash assistance, better access for local actors to pooled funds, and the creation of common frameworks for needs assessment and reporting, but there has been no “revolution” in terms of participation or a reduction in duplication and in management costs (Metcalf-Hough et al., 2021). According to the 2023 independent report, signatories made progress in terms of long-term, flexible funding, leadership by national and local actors, and the use of cash assistance, but “there was no concrete progress towards a more demand- rather than supply-driven humanitarian response; there is an ongoing failure to substantively increase funding to local and national actors; and quality funding is still insufficient” (Development Initiatives, 2023, p. 13). Further studies are needed at the meso- rather than macro- level, and from a qualitative perspective, to confirm or refute these findings in specific cases.

The underlying reasons for this relative failure are similar to those identified by analysts to explain the PD’s shortcomings. In particular, analysts suggest a lack of clarity in the commitments and a lack of political will from signatories, and that a technical approach is not enough in the face of “essentially political barriers to change” (Metcalf-Hough et al., 2021, p. 6; see also Novovic, 2021). For instance, aid delivery is still donor-driven and donor requirements, at each stage, from application to evaluation, are too burdensome for local actors (Metcalf-Hough et al., 2021; Rao, 2023). The literature also points to the existence of strong, contradictory incentives that prevent achievement of the localization agenda (Barbelet et al., 2021; Metcalf-Hough et al., 2021). Rosier and Savard (2022), suggest that this lack of achievement is a result of a failure to consider the local context. Still others argue that Northern donors and other powerful

actors use the localization discourse and take advantage of localization's conceptual flaws in such ways that it prevents localization from realizing its full transformative potential (Barbelet et al, 2021; Rosier & Savard, 2022; Savard, 2023). Barbelet et al. (2021) also suggest, more generally, that there is a lack of evidence concerning the effects of localization on the quality and impact of humanitarian aid. This thesis, therefore, seeks to fill this gap in the literature by studying aid ownership, alignment, and donor harmonization in depth in the case of Vanuatu. It hopes to contribute to building the generalizability of the results and to offer explanations for the relative double failure of the implementation of the PD and the Grand Bargain. In doing this, this thesis seeks to deepen understandings of the aid system as it concerns the relevance of its principles.

Therefore, the normative frameworks governing humanitarian aid are distinct from those governing development aid. Yet, similarities with the PD principles and their challenges have emerged from my review of the literature on recent initiatives. These observations, coupled with the fact that in practice it is difficult to separate humanitarian aid and development aid, suggest that it would be useful to think about a common framework. In 2018, UN resolution 73/136 encouraged the coordination of efforts between humanitarian and development actors and a participatory dynamic (UN, 2019). In an OECD publication in preparation for the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, Scott (2014) explicitly suggested drawing on the PD to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian aid. It should be noted, however, that the PD belongs to soft law, a group of legally non-binding agreements, unlike international humanitarian law that enshrines certain obligations and principles as hard law. The latter, if ignored, provide for sanctions against the perpetrator. Therefore, hard law a priori creates a greater incentive for actors to respect it. Thinking these two types of aid together is a complex issue, but nonetheless one of the aims of this thesis, which is based on the case study of Vanuatu, a country designated a SIDS. SIDS face specific challenges and have a special place in the international aid system, which is the subject of the following section.

SIDS and Aid

According to the UN, SIDS are a group of island countries and territories that share common characteristics and vulnerabilities, such as, “their small size, remoteness, narrow resource and export base, and exposure to global environmental challenges and external economic shocks, including to a large range of impacts from climate change and potentially more

frequent and intense natural disasters” (UN, 2012, para. 178). For Briguglio et al. (2020), common characteristics also include “behaviour associated with excessive informality and personalism, limited political accountability and clientelism, ... economic constraints associated with high overhead costs of administration, limited capacity, and a small population pool from which to draw specialised expertise” (p. 2) that lead to governance issues. However, small populations and the resulting tight social fabric can also lead to more accountability from political leaders (Carment et al., 2020). Indeed, belonging to this group should not obscure the assets, strengths, specificities, and differences of individual SIDS (UN, 2023). Their strengths include, for example, tight and solid social networks and a great capacity to adapt to changes of all kinds (Le Masson & Kelman, 2010). The UN criteria for a SIDS designation, has been questioned by some observers who argue some SIDS are not islands, such as Guyana; some SIDS have a high GDP, such as Bahrain and Singapore; some SIDS have a large area, such as Papua New Guinea; and some are not sovereign, such as New Caledonia (Le Masson & Kelman, 2010). Similarly, the performance of small states varies in terms of various indicators related, for instance, to governance, environment, poverty, conflict, capability, and legitimacy, that determine their degree of fragility (Carment et al., 2020). Dehoorne (2014) suggests it is also important to go beyond a simplistic “paradisiacal” conception of SIDS that would “[faire] abstraction des dynamiques intrinsèques, des ressources humaines propres à l’île”, the territory, its mode of governance, and the projects of its inhabitants (para. 2). In the media and in the literature, island states and their inhabitants are also still often seen solely as victims of climate change, which denies their agency and immemorial capacity to adapt, as in Vanuatu (Ruehr, 2021). Conceptions of islanders as “hardy, resilient, and adaptable” who “are expected to cope with the impact of climate change” are equally simplistic (Baldacchino, 2023a, p. 26). Such conceptions overlook the contributions of some SIDS themselves to climate change, or the progress some SIDS still have to make to fully implement their own domestic environmental policies (Ramessur, 2020; Simonelli, 2020).

Researchers need to look at SIDS not only from anthropological, linguistic, or environmental science perspectives, but also from political science, economic, development studies, and international relations perspectives, because these types of research, especially by islanders, are still underdeveloped in many SIDS. This lack of research reflects a bias on the part of the academic community, and a reductive, sometimes colonial vision of these island territories

(Baldacchino & Stratford, 2023). My research hopes to help changing that by contributing to fill this gap and by helping transform this perception. Moreover, according to Le Masson and Kelman (2010), although local knowledge is increasingly integrated into scientific literature, “les articles scientifiques ne reflètent pas toujours le contexte local et la compréhension profonde de l’environnement que possèdent les communautés habitant le territoire depuis des décennies” (para. 19). This risk is mitigated in this research by my lived experience in Vanuatu and by the interviews conducted with Ni-Vanuatu citizens and long-term residents. Further, I recognize from the outset the heterogeneity and diversity within SIDS, which as a group is sometimes approached as a homogeneous whole that ignores local dynamics. Case studies, such as the one documented here, help highlight SIDS’ similarities and differences, and their potential for mutual enrichment.

Although the international community has been discussing the challenges facing small island states since the 1970s and the UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, SIDS were not recognized as a group until the 1992 Rio Conference, where participants stressed the importance of holding a dedicated conference. The UN Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of SIDS was held two years later and the Barbados Programme of Action was adopted. It identified priority areas and measures needed to address the specific challenges facing these countries, including, climate change, natural hazards, weak national institutions and administrative capacity, and financing needs. A few years later, progress was uneven and SIDS still lacked financial resources (UN, 2000). In 2005, the Mauritius Declaration reaffirmed the commitments made in Barbados and added five new areas to focus on: trade, sustainable production and consumption, health, knowledge management, culture and graduation from the group of least developed countries. However, the Conference of Samoa in 2014 concluded that

in spite of the considerable efforts of small island developing States and the mobilization of their limited resources, their progress in the attainment of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, and in implementing the Barbados Programme of Action and the Mauritius Strategy has been uneven, and some have regressed economically. (UN, 2014, para. 14)

The main reasons for this were attributed to the lack of financial resources and the complexity of the procedures for accessing available funds.

The 2014 SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway therefore decided on an approach based on building “strong, genuine and durable partnerships” with a wide range of stakeholders from the Global North and the Global South (UN, 2014, para. 21). The mid-term review of the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway was held in 2019. Despite efforts at supranational and national levels, progress was still uneven between and within regions according to documents such as the Outcome Document for the Atlantic, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean and South China Sea Region (2018). According to these and other outcome documents produced in the frame of the 2019 review, the problems and challenges raised over the last 20 years, especially the lack of financial resources, the lack of international recognition, and the failure of the international community, especially major polluters, to prioritize the fight against climate change, continued to persist. In some cases, these problems and challenges cancelled out development gains, or caused the situation to worsen. Regarding the lack of funding, the decline in the attention and resources allocated to SIDS at the UN, insufficient volumes of aid, complex procedures for accessing funds, the lack of institutional capacity of recipient states, and the graduation of some SIDS from the group of least developed countries, which deprived them of access to certain types of funding, were all blamed. Yet the OECD (2018a) recognized that aid was essential for these countries. It insisted on the need for aid to be predictable, for donor coordination, ownership, streamlined procedures for applying for funding, and for capacity building. Yet, according to the same report, SIDS still faced “a lack of a more programmatic and predictable stream of funds to address the underlying determinants of vulnerability”, including “a long trail of small projects from multiple sources, which strains already-stretched institutional resources” (OECD, 2018a, p. 5). A UN-DESA report also deplored conflicting policy decisions that can undermine projects, marginalization of the private sector and the youth, worsening debt, and increasing climate change impacts leading to severe environmental problems (Risse, 2018). These remarks echo the concerns addressed by the PD principles, particularly that of ownership and harmonization. These elements relating to the PD principles, humanitarian assistance, and natural hazards aggravated by climate change reinforce the relevance of the proposed research.

Indeed, the effects of climate change are a major issue for SIDS and are an absolute priority in their national and regional development strategies. While they are the smallest emitters of greenhouse gases, they bear the full brunt of the effects of global warming, such as ocean acidification, rising sea levels, and extreme climate events (UN, 2015). The violence, number and consequences of extreme weather events prompted international mobilization, including financial mobilization. Post-disaster aid and development aid have continued to flow in, while the ways in which climate change-related aid is allocated has been debated by scholars (Weikmans, 2018; Weiler et al., 2018). Collectively, SIDS bear witness to the increasingly frequent and violent extreme events they face. By forming a united front on the global stage, they aim, and sometimes succeed, to influence global policies, in particular using the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) (Betzold et al., 2012; Klöck, 2020; Rasheed, 2021).

Despite the need for a heightened awareness of the effects of climate change, Gay (2014) denounces the use of islands by NGOs and the media as an instrument for raising funds to fight against climate change. This, he suggests, risks overshadowing, for instance, the responsibilities of some SIDS in contributing to climate change and other development issues faced by SIDS, leading to a depoliticization of the discussion. The question at risk of not being answered is “*why* [emphasis added] SIDS peoples often do not have the resources to resolve climate change and other development challenges themselves, on their own terms” (Kelman, 2014, p. 126). My research also investigates this question by deciphering the relationships between different aid actors and exploring the links between aid effectiveness and disasters.

In fine, the aim is to understand the paradox whereby aid, which is supposed to strengthen state capacity and civil society participation to increase ownership, may in practice contribute to diminishing state sovereignty (Overton et al., 2018). Betzold (2015) also raised the issue of the lack of funding, as well as the dependence of SIDS on aid related to climate change. She confirmed the fears of Saliba-Couture (2011), Mawdsley (2007) and Brown (2017) by showing that “aid may provide disincentives for action and lead to a focus on donor priorities and preferences” (p. 486). This donor focus often leads to short-term, ill-adapted projects, such as building dykes (Betzold, 2015). She also noted the lack of research and comparative analyses on this topic, which again justifies my research.

In quantitative terms, despite the challenges affecting them, the 33 SIDS on the OECD-DAC list account for just 3.5% of total development aid (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, 2021), with remittances from migrants working abroad constituting the largest external source of income (OECD, 2020). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic declared in March 2020 had a singular impact on SIDS, sometimes directly but mainly indirectly by reducing the movement of people and goods on which the economies of many SIDS such as Vanuatu are based, via agricultural exports, seasonal work in the region, and tourism (OECD, 2021a). Bilateral and multilateral donors increased their aid to SIDS and showed some flexibility by redirecting funds, but this was not enough (OECD, 2021a). In 2023, “SIDS stand at a critical juncture in financing and addressing the acute challenges and development needs, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic” (UN, 2023, p. 4). The Pacific region, where more than a third of SIDS are located, was hard hit by the pandemic, directly as with Papua New Guinea and Fiji, but also indirectly as with Vanuatu. The region has its own colonial history and regional dynamics that shape relations between states and territories, in particular aid relations, and regionalism has developed driven by the Pacific Islands Forum and other groupings (Leslie & Prinsen, 2018; Overton et al., 2018). The next section looks at aid and its effectiveness in the region.

Aid to Pacific Islands Countries

At a regional policy level, the Pacific Aid Effectiveness Principles adopted in 2007 and the Forum Compact on Strengthening Development Coordination in the Pacific (Cairns Compact) adopted in 2009 demonstrate a desire from Pacific countries to adapt and implement the PD principles, thereby disseminating and promoting ideas and policies related to aid effectiveness (Overton et al., 2018). The Forum Compact brought together the members of the Pacific Islands Forum, including Australia and New Zealand, and provided for a system of peer review evaluations by aid donors and recipients (Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [Australian DFAT], 2009). While the balance of power remained unequal and the impact of evaluations uncertain, a peer-review process involving both recipient and donor countries is symbolically strong in terms of implementing the principle of mutual accountability (Overton et al., 2018).

Despite these commitments, Dornan and Pryke (2017) found that since the 2000s, “improvement has been mixed in areas identified as a concern by the aid effectiveness agenda,

with high levels of volatility and lack of predictability particularly problematic” (p. 16). Donor harmonization and the move towards a programme approach rather than the existing short-term project approach did not particularly improve, and foreign “technical experts” were still very much present (Dornan & Pryke, 2017). In the same vein, Wood and Nicholls (2021) found aid volatility particularly worrying in the Pacific. They went further on the issue of aid fragmentation and showed that “while fragmentation between donors is less in the Pacific, project fragmentation is worse” but that “fragmentation across donors is increasing” (Wood & Nicholls, 2021, p. 114). However, neither study explores or explains *why* the principles of aid effectiveness are not being respected, although Wood and Nicholls (2021) mention geostrategic competition among donors. Dame Meg Taylor, who served as Secretary General of the PIF from 2014 to 2021, suggested that donor economic and financial power, compared to PICs, allowed them to greatly influence priority-setting, and that the remaining presence of former colonial power in regional organizations undermined regional ownership (Taylor, 2023). In another piece, she and her co-author suggested that aid to the Pacific region has been “more politicized, privatized, and contested” because donors are driven by two main incentives (Taylor & Middleby, 2023, p. 5). First, donors want “to tighten power and control over aid”; second, they want “to look good, rather than do or be good” (p. 5). As a consequence, the intermediaries in charge of managing aid programmes strive to please donors by all means. They must also compete for donor funds, which hinders cooperation and coordination. In a more nuanced way, Roche et al. (2020a) argue that donors in the Pacific still insufficiently support locally-led change despite commitments—such as the Paris Declaration and the localization agenda— “due to a number of well-rehearsed reasons related to the political economy of the aid sector” and “the tendency for organisational practices to endure despite their limitations” (p. 142). According to them, in the Pacific, donors tend to overlook “local understandings of leadership, preferences for informal ways of working, holistic ways of thinking, the importance placed upon maintaining good relationships and collective deliberation” (p. 136).

Aid plays a major role at the regional level, with Pacific SIDS or Pacific Island Countries (PICs) comprising the countries that receive the most aid per capita in the world—even though aid to the region remains modest compared with other regions of the globe, and country aid amounts are unevenly distributed within the region (Dornan & Pryke, 2017). Aid to the Pacific has attracted the attention of researchers who are puzzled why despite large amounts of aid to the

region, its dependence on aid corresponds to ineffective development projects (Wood et al., 2022) and very relative economic progress (Connell, 2013). At the meso level, Aiafi (2017) offered an explanation and suggested that society's disconnection from the national and regional policy-making processes, coupled with the great influence of donors, were at the root of the relative failure to implement them. These plans are rather designed to please donors and flatter politicians (Aiafi, 2017). In the same vein, Dornan and Brant (2014) showed that despite the existence of political processes to ensure aid effectiveness, they were not necessarily respected depending on a country's culture and political system, all the more so when they were "parachuted" in by donors or regional bodies. At the micro level, Wood et al. (2022) found that the isolation of many countries in the region and their small populations were the major explanatory factors for the ineffectiveness of projects, which suggests that donors need to adapt to these constraints, in particular by allowing a high degree of flexibility in project management.

In 2019, of the main donors in the Pacific, Australia was by far the largest, contributing 36% of total aid. Australia was followed by New Zealand (10%), Japan (7%), the Asian Development Bank (7%), China (4%), even though China is not a member of the DAC. There was a multitude of smaller donors such as the World Bank, the United States, the United Nations, the European Union (EU), France, Taiwan, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and the United Kingdom (Lowy Institute, n.d.). After slightly decreasing between 2011 and 2016, then increasing a little in 2017 and 2018, aid to the Pacific slightly decreased again in 2019, which can be explained by the fact that large multilateral and bilateral disbursements coincided in 2018 (Dayant & Pryke, 2021). Between 2018 and 2019, the majority of the largest donors reduced their amounts of aid to the Pacific, in particular China by 31% (Dayant & Pryke, 2021) and the United States by 25% (Lowy Institute, n.d.). Aid increased again significantly in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Lowy Institute, n.d.). The aid policies of major bilateral donors, the geopolitical issues surrounding security including fishing zones, and the competition among "traditional" donors and between the traditional and "emerging" donors, such as China, in the region, are all widely discussed in the literature (Day & Wells, 2021a; Dornan & Brant, 2014; Fache et al., 2021; Hawksley, 2009; Hualupmomi, 2021; Ratuva, 2019; Schmaljohann & Prizzon, 2015; Spratt & Wood, 2018; Tarte, 2022). However, analyses by and on the major regional powers, namely, China, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States are

often predominant (Mohamed-Gaillard, 2012), and this research aims to adopt a more balanced perspective to counter this tendency.

Continuing with donor-recipient relations, several authors denounced the neo-colonial dimension of aid in the Pacific, which often overlooks local knowledge, experience, and preferences (Ahluwalia & Millet, 2021; Roche et al., 2020a). This neo-colonial dynamic did not reverse despite the restrictions of movement imposed by COVID-19, that nonetheless forced donors to take a step back in recipient countries (Roche & Tarpey, 2020; Rosier & Savard, 2022). Policies, not sufficiently anchored in the context and issues identified by Pacific societies themselves, are often influenced by political elites and outsiders, including donors (Aiafi, 2017; Dornan & Brant, 2014). Moreover, political participation is still poorly understood in the Pacific. Baker & Barbara (2020) suggest, for example, that citizens in Melanesia engage in local, informal representative structures rather than national representative structures. Yet local expertise is particularly relevant in the fight against climate change and adaptation to it, in particular, but still requires major investment and support from the international community in the region (Bolesta, 2020; Fouad et al., 2021). Thus, aid, geopolitical considerations and the fight against climate change are inextricably linked in the Pacific (Ahluwalia & Miller, 2021). The interrelations of these challenges were particularly apparent in the management of the dual crisis of COVID-19 and TC Harold in Vanuatu in 2020 (UN, 2020a), discussed in the following section.

Aid to Vanuatu

Vanuatu is one of the highest aid recipients per capita in the world. At US\$429 per capita in 2019, it is slightly above the average for PICs, but still lags far behind other countries in the region such as Tonga, Tuvalu, and Nauru (World Bank, n.d.a). In 2019, Australia was by far the largest donor with US\$51 million representing 34% of total aid (Lowy Institute, n.d.). The picture is slightly different at the regional level. The World Bank provided 26% of aid, closely followed by New Zealand (11%) and China (8%). Japan, the Asian Development Bank, France, the United Nations, the European Union, the United States, and the United Kingdom are among the smaller donors (Lowy Institute, n.d.). Bucking the regional trend, overall, aid volumes in Vanuatu have increased over the past 10 years. They rose from US\$114m in 2010 to US\$170m in 2019, with a peak in 2015 following TC Pam (Lowy Institute, n.d.). Excluding Pam, the share of aid in

national income fluctuated between 12% and 17% over the same period (World Bank, n.d.b). In 2019, more than half of aid was allocated in the form of grants, and on a bilateral basis (Lowy Institute, n.d.). Like many SIDS and PICs, Vanuatu is indebted and its economy relies, in part, on tourism, a sector that was severely damaged by travel restriction imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The government also earns money by granting citizenship to foreigners, as its passports are in demand because they give citizens of Vanuatu access to the European Union, but the EU raised concerns about the weakness of background checks conducted as part of the passport issuing process (Ward & Lyons, 2021). Despite the devastation wrought by cyclones Pam and Harold in 2015 and 2020, the fragility of its economy, its poor performance in terms of human development (UN, 2020b), and being ranked first among countries exposed to natural hazards, Vanuatu graduated from the UN's list of "least developed countries" at the end of 2020 (Brien, 2019; UN, 2020c). In the medium term, being taken off this list will limit Vanuatu's access to some types of aid only accessible by countries considered "least developed".

Indeed, for several years, Vanuatu has been considered the most at-risk country in the world in terms of exposure to natural hazards (Aleksandrova et al., 2021). These include climate-related events such as cyclones, floods, and droughts, as well as earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, and ash rains, as experienced on the islands of Ambae and Tanna. These events undermine the environment, the economy, including tourism and export crops, but also the livelihoods and food security of Ni-Vanuatu, which is largely based on family farming (Dornan & Newton Cain, 2015; Savage et al., 2021; Saverimuttu & Varua, 2016; Vanuatu Department of Agriculture and Rural Development [DARD], n.d.). The people of Vanuatu have always responded and adapted to natural hazards, but today, due to their increased intensity and frequency, they represent an exceptional challenge for the people and the government, as was the case with TC Pam in 2015, and require international assistance (Marto et al., 2018; Nalau et al., 2017; Saverimuttu & Varua, 2016). The government is committed to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction through a number of policies, plans, and response mechanisms—emergency and development are thus linked (Nalau et al., 2017). However, it has to contend with the country's geography, with its numerous and scattered islands, as well as a lack of capacity particularly in terms of human and financial resources, differing perceptions of priorities between NGOs and the government, enduring control over the funds allocated by donors, international

actors bypassing the government, and the marginalization of those affected by crises (Barber, 2015; Calandra, 2021; Nalau et al., 2017; Rosier & Savard, 2022; Wentworth, 2020).

Indeed, regarding development planning the government wishes to maintain its leadership role and to continue to assert the independence it gained from the French and the British in 1980. To this end, the latest national strategy, *Vanuatu 2030 The People's Plan*, was published in 2016. Priorities were organized around three pillars: social, environmental and economic (Government of Vanuatu, 2016a). Declared to be the result of extensive national consultations, it demonstrates a strong commitment to ownership. Similarly, the 2018 *National Aid Management Policy* asserted the importance of “ownership of development priorities by developing countries” (Government of Vanuatu, 2018a, p. 4). Despite a political life agitated by scandals, particularly corruption scandals, and marked by instability and the absence of women in Parliament, the situation is relatively stable (Veenendal, 2021).

However, the results regarding aid effectiveness are very mixed. The 2011 survey revealed that little data was available, and that only three targets, related to public financial management systems, coordination of technical support, and untying of aid, were met (OECD, 2012b, p. 1). Faced with these results, Pirnia (2016) and Hochet (2015) offered explanations that focused on the level of participation of civil society and based on a lack of local ownership of aid. Hochet (2015) denounced the imposition or attempted imposition by donors of certain norms, forms of knowledge or ways of operating. Similarly, Spring (2017) highlighted the influence of Australian and Chinese donors in Vanuatu's development. Geary Nichol (2014) also found that there was little ownership of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, although the government was making an effort to force donors to align their demands and harmonize. She stressed the importance of the local context and of building solid relationships between the government, donors and NGOs. Indeed, although donors influence or try to influence development policies and practices in Vanuatu, state bodies such as the national Cultural Centre do not hesitate to oppose projects deemed too intrusive (Hochet, 2015). Civil society also plays a role in discussions on development strategies, even though it is not fully integrated in decision-making processes, a flaw attributed in particular to a lack of resources and state capacity (Vachette, 2016). Aiafi (2017) and Dornan and Pryke (2014) attributed this lack of integration rather to a top-down conception of policy in Vanuatu, largely influenced by external donors and national

political elites who bypass the processes in place and lack transparency, thus nuancing the opposition in the literature between donors and government. In 2018, data on the implementation of the Paris principles was still lacking and some indicators had regressed compared to 2016, particularly regarding alignment and inclusiveness (GPEDC, 2020b).

By analyzing the disaster response system during TC Pam in 2015, Vachette (2016) also provided clues about the links between disasters and aid effectiveness. She highlighted the harmful relational imbalances generated by a massive influx of actors unfamiliar to the national context. Among other things, the Ni-Vanuatu deplored “the loss of ownership of the disaster governance system activated during the emergency period” and worried about the risk of aid dependency (p. 214). Moreover, drawing on Barber (2015), Vachette discussed the relationship between emergency aid and long-term aid. She noted the importance of well-established organizations and their knowledge of the context, the tensions between expatriates and foreign staff propelled into the field for emergency purposes, and the difficulty for national actors to distinguish between these two types of aid. In a complementary way, Hallwright and Handmer (2019) praised the transparency of financial flows during the response phase, which contrasted with the opacity of these flows during the recovery phase. Overall, they deplored a lack of accountability to the affected populations regarding the results and impacts of aid. Thus, these studies provide valuable avenues for reflection, particularly in terms of the operationalization of the ownership principle and the links between humanitarian aid and development aid. Their observations suggest that aid implementation often runs counter to the PD principles and international humanitarian commitments. This research goes further by exploring the reasons behind this discrepancy, the links between humanitarian aid and development, and by analyzing both issues in light of recent events.

In 2020, Vanuatu faced a dual crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the passage of TC Harold, category-5 cyclone, the highest on the Saffir-Simpson scale. In Vanuatu and elsewhere in the Global North and South, these combined risks and the associated multiple crises created and will continue to create dilemmas, trade-offs, and opportunities that need to be studied to better manage them (Ashraf, 2021; Phillips et al., 2020; Quigley et al., 2020; Simonovic et al., 2021). For instance, evacuations to emergency centres during cyclones or floods compromised physical distancing protocols to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (Ashraf, 2021). Several authors

have, therefore, called for development, humanitarian aid, and disaster risk management to be linked by giving a central role to local players (Ashraf, 2021; Donkor, 2021; Ishiwatari et al., 2020). Although Vanuatu successfully kept the virus at its border for two years after the pandemic started, the country was affected because the virus caused interruptions of tourist flows. Indeed, Vanuatu like other PICs, particularly those with fragile health structures, quickly decided to close its borders. March 20, 2020 was the date of the last incoming flight. Flights did not resume until 1 July 2022. Between March 2020 and July 2022, only repatriation flights were authorized (Tapo et al., 2021).

On the negative side, the hotel industry, as well as craft and food markets, where many women work, small and medium-sized businesses, self-employed and informal workers in the city, such as bus drivers, tour operators, bars and restaurants, were particularly affected, raising concerns about an over-reliance on a fragile sector for long-term development (Connell, 2021; Connell & Taulealo, 2021; Noy et al., 2022; Scheyvens & Movono, 2020). Faced with the combined effects of COVID-19 and TC Harold, many Ni-Vanuatu lost income and returned to their villages. This return exerted demographic and environmental pressure on rural communities, and the remotest villages suffered from food shortages (Steenbergen et al., 2020). On the positive side, Scheyvens et al. (2023) found the “mental, social, physical, spiritual and environmental wellbeing” of communities reliant on tourism in Samoa, Fiji, Vanuatu, and the Cooks Islands “had improved in many cases” during border closures (p. 59). Above all, with borders closed and repatriations of foreign workers, for many observers the pandemic was an ideal opportunity to achieve the localization agenda, promised for many years by humanitarian actors, particularly in the Pacific and in Vanuatu (Barbelet et al., 2020; Cornish, 2020c; Flint et al., 2021; Keen & Sanderson, 2020; Roche et al., 2020b; Savard et al., 2020). Relatedly, ownership, as long-promoted by development actors, was expected to make significant progress.

However, despite aid being allocated more directly and leadership becoming, to some extent, more local, Rosier and Savard (2022) still identified barriers to localization in post-Harold Vanuatu. They found that the vagueness of the concept, the lack of state capacity, and the failure to consider local power games to be responsible for this lack of achievement. Yet, Farran and Smith (2021) highlighted the importance of faith and community, the capacities of states, that are used to dealing with crises, and inter-actor collaboration, as PICs’ strengths. Furthermore,

geopolitical considerations and competition between donors emerged in the management of the dual crisis in Vanuatu, particularly between China and other donors, as demonstrated by an incident in which an Australian army plane delivering humanitarian aid was unable to land in Vanuatu because it was blocked by a plane from China parked on the runway (Wallis & McNeill, 2021). Competition also raged between China and traditional bilateral and multilateral donors for the supply of personal protective equipment and vaccines against COVID-19 (Weber et al., 2021), against the backdrop of the failure of the multilateral vaccine procurement and distribution mechanism, COVAX. Thus, literature is still scarce on the effects of the pandemic on localization in specific cases and on the implementation of the PD principles in an a priori favourable context. This thesis contributes to building this literature and assessing the relevance of the PD principles in the light of this context.

Conclusion

The Paris Declaration suffers from a lack of interest, even though its transformative potential has not been truly exploited and its failure has not been fully explained. In addition to the fact that the Paris Declaration is a non-binding agreement, and that international cooperation is challenging, several factors hinder its application. In particular, the literature points to a lack of political will, weak capacities, and counterincentives on both sides of the aid relationship. For instance, an overall trend towards the pursuit of self-interest, particularly economic, by donors, instead of a focus on the initial objectives of poverty reduction and socio-economic development of aid in recipient countries does not bode well for reducing global inequalities (Mawdsley et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the PD framework was designed almost completely separate from the frameworks governing humanitarian aid, even though, as in the case of Vanuatu where crises are recurrent, short- and long-term aid seem inextricably linked. Although the literature deals extensively with the integration of humanitarian aid and development in practice, particularly through the operationalization of the nexus, I make an original contribution by analyzing the links between humanitarian aid and development at a level which has been less discussed and explored in depth: that of principles. To what extent are they similar or different, and why? What framework would be more relevant and desirable?

Finally, COVID-19 has accentuated existing issues and trends in the aid system that have yet to be examined in specific cases. For instance, Brown (2021) showed that the tendency for donors to seek their own interests rather than selflessly contribute to international solidarity has increased, but that the localization agenda has also advanced to some extent. Closely related to the concept of ownership, the implementation of localization also faces challenges, particularly in conflict-ridden contexts (Clark & Alberti, 2021). To what extent are these trends valid in the case of Vanuatu, and when observed under the prism of the PD principles? In a world where the pandemic and its effects are here to stay, the amount and quality of aid could decline due to the economic pressure donors are facing domestically, and it is essential to think about how to use resources more effectively, which is what this thesis proposes.

Chapter 2 – Theoretical Framework: Explaining the (Lack of) Implementation of Non-Binding International Agreements – The Paris Declaration

The literature discussed in the previous chapter revealed number of factors that influence the implementation of the principles of the Paris Declaration, a non-binding international normative framework. These factors can be broadly categorized into three groups. The first group is a set of factors related to political will; the second group are factors related to state capacity; and the third group of factors is associated with multidimensional incentives that influence donor and recipient countries as well as other aid actors. Together, the factors in the three groups influence the extent to which the PD principles are applied when looking at official development assistance, including the sub-category of humanitarian aid. However, the latter has its own management principles, as highlighted in the previous chapter. Humanitarian assistance is also closely linked to development aid, in theory and in practice, although the two types of aid have complex links which are explored in this research. The relationships described in this paragraph are summarized in Figure 1.

Initially, I adopted an inductive approach due to the original character of this research. This approach would allow me to discover factors that were not raised in the literature, which remains scarce on this topic and with this approach in Vanuatu. I prioritized the data collected to formulate the arguments presented in Chapters 4 through 9. Nonetheless, I did draw on existing literature, particularly those that associated with the theoretical foundations of PD and the notion of incentives, and on the other main concepts raised in the literature review, to analyze the data I collected.

This chapter aims to introduce and explore the central concepts of this research and its theoretical approach. I start by briefly reviewing the notions of development aid and humanitarian aid discussed and used in this thesis (see the right-hand side of Figure 1). I then turn to the Paris Declaration and its core principles as a way of improving the effectiveness of aid, and I highlight the similarities between the principles governing development aid and those governing humanitarian aid. I conclude this chapter by elaborating on the reasons given in the literature for the implementation of aid effectiveness principles, or lack thereof, in conceptual and theoretical terms (see the left-hand side of Figure 1).

Defining Aid: Development Aid and Humanitarian Aid

Official development assistance, as defined by the OECD, is aid provided by governments for the express purpose of promoting economic development and improving living conditions in developing countries (OECD, 2021b, p. 1). Moreover,

Official development assistance flows are defined as those flows to countries and territories on the DAC List of ODA Recipients and to multilateral development institutions which are: (i) provided by official agencies, including state and local governments, or by their executive agencies; and (ii) each transaction of which ... is concessional in character. (OECD, n.d.a).

According to this definition, a large part of development assistance, in a broader sense, is not accounted for, including that from private sources, and in particular the amounts corresponding to remittances from migrants to their countries of origin, as well as those committed by private philanthropic foundations. Private contributions in 2021 were 254 billion dollars, compared to 186 billion dollars of ODA in the same year (OECD, 2023a, 2023b). This said, ODA remains an important source of development funding that must respect strict criteria in favour of recipient countries. As such, it deserves attention, as does its effectiveness. In Vanuatu, ODA represented 50% of government expenditure and 12% of gross national income in 2019 (World Bank, n.d.b, n.d.c.). This aid is the focus in my research, although I also take into account the major development actors in Vanuatu who are not members of the OECD-DAC, such as China.

In all cases, military aid, unless it is used to deliver humanitarian aid, along with almost all peacekeeping expenses, expenditure on military nuclear power, and cultural expenditure for the benefit of donor countries cannot be counted as ODA (OECD, n.d.). A minima, this ensures that theoretically the sole objective of supporting the socio-economic development of recipient countries is maintained, which is not the case for other types of assistance. Donors are thus subject to common monitoring procedures via the OECD, which ensures some degree of accountability to the citizens of both donor and recipient countries.

Here again, humanitarian aid and development aid definitions are closely linked. Development aid is associated with the long term and the promotion of economic and social

development, while humanitarian aid is a sub-category of development aid associated with the short term, and its aim is to save lives when a disaster or a conflict occurs. However, as protracted crises multiply, the boundary between humanitarian and development aid has become less distinct and it is more difficult to define and circumscribe humanitarian action (Audet et al., 2019). To ensure greater effectiveness and complementarity, the concept of humanitarian-development(-peace) nexus has been increasingly used in recent decades, as explained in the previous chapter.

In the context of Vanuatu, which, like many SIDS, does not suffer from chronic conflict-related issues (Carment et al., 2020), humanitarian or emergency aid is often financial, technical, material, and human aid provided for up to six months after an extreme climatic, geological, or man-made event (chemical, biological, industrial, etc.). The aim of this emergency aid is to meet the basic needs of the people affected by the crisis in terms of supplying first aid, food, water, and shelter. The emergency phase is followed by a recovery phase lasting from six months to several years, depending on the scale of the disaster, to meet medium- to long-term needs. This second phase often involves rebuilding private and public buildings, such as schools, hospitals, markets, and town halls, repairing water supply systems, restoring means of transport and communications, and resuming agricultural activities to ensure a minimum degree of food security in the medium to long term.

To ensure that aid achieves its objective of promoting “the economic development and welfare of developing countries” (OECD, n.d.), donors and aid recipients established the Paris Declaration principles on aid effectiveness. Based on 60 years of experience with aid, lessons learnt and failures, the principles reflected a strong desire to make better use of aid and to build more equal relationships between countries.

How to Improve Its Effectiveness: The Paris Declaration Principles

The Paris Declaration is based on three fundamental principles, explored in the literature review: ownership, alignment, and harmonization. These concepts, and the debates they have inspired, form an integral part of the conceptual framework of this thesis:

- › Ownership, means the definition and implementation by aid recipient countries of their own development strategies and priorities, developed through an extensive consultation process with national and local actors;
- › Alignment, means donor support to implement the priorities of recipient countries and donor use of national systems and procedures.
- › Harmonization, means donor coordination regarding agendas and procedures to provide complementary aid and alleviate the burden placed on recipient countries so they do not have to deal with diverse procedures.

The parties associated the principles with indicators to measure their progress. However, these indicators are quantitative and do not allow for qualitative monitoring. For instance, the principle of ownership is assessed by whether or not a recipient country has a national development strategy, without taking into account the quality of the strategies or their operationalization. Although indicators have evolved since 2005, the repeatedly disappointing results revealed by OECD and then GPEDC monitoring suggest that these quantitative measures do not make it possible to identify the causes of these failures in a learning dynamic.

Another gap in the aid effectiveness literature, that some authors have already signalled, suggests that the role of actors, such as the private sector and informal institutions, and the role of factors, such as natural hazards, is often overlooked. Yet, natural hazards have become a pervasive and threatening reality in many SIDS and other low- and middle-income countries because of climate change. Moreover, the Paris Declaration considers the state as the main driver of change, even though it may have limited capacities and resources, and downplays the role of other actors, such as civil society and the media, as well as the relationships and interactions between these actors. This thesis proposes to go further than the monitoring envisaged initially, and to analyze the relationships between and among these actors and factors.

In contrast to development aid practices, the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of humanitarian management principles involves more qualitative indicators. This is the case, for instance, with the CHS, which includes indicators such as “communities and people affected by crises consider that the response takes account of their specific needs and culture” (CHS, 2015, p. 5). They are more micro- than meso-level considerations, even if these

indicators, in some cases, can be used as proxies to measure ownership. Nonetheless, these considerations relate more to the effectiveness of the implementation of humanitarian aid itself and less to its management or the definition of the implementation strategy. This focus on effectiveness contrast with the PD's focus on efficiency.

The management principles of humanitarian aid and development aid could therefore benefit from mutual enrichment and learning. However, while there are works on the links in practice between humanitarian assistance and development (e.g., Olivier de Sardan, 2011), as noted in the previous chapter, there is a gap in the literature on the more theoretical and conceptual links between these principles. This thesis is also an attempt to address this gap, starting by exploring these links further in the following sub-section.

The Links Between the Paris Declaration Principles and the Management Principles Governing Humanitarian Aid

Humanitarian aid and development aid are often considered separately, notably because of their different relationships with the state and local authorities. Development has traditionally included the state, which was seen initially as a key partner and a pivotal actor in carrying out reforms. With the Paris Declaration, the state took on an even more important role as it was charged with leading development efforts, including by identifying priorities and implementing development strategies. In contrast, the humanitarian community is committed to the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence, which imply that humanitarian actors can and must intervene to provide immediate relief, without necessarily requiring authorizations from the state or other authorities who may be party to a conflict. To a certain extent, these principles protect humanitarian actors in difficult and politically charged situations, and ensure access to humanitarian aid for people affected by crisis without discrimination.

However, humanitarian principles are widely contested, including from within the humanitarian system. Some humanitarian workers denounce the need to maintain neutrality when a party commits atrocities. Some even claim a duty to speak out against these atrocities and denounce humanitarian workers if needed. This is the case, for instance, with the *mouvement sans-frontiériste*. That said, some development actors, such as more “developmentalist” NGOs, also bypass the state when they work on issues that are overlooked, neglected, or even completely

ignored by the state system, such as issues relating to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics. The debates and criticisms around humanitarian principles are beyond the scope of this thesis, but in acknowledging their existence and touching on the debates they generate, I start showing that development and humanitarian aid are linked on more theoretical grounds and issues. Above all, mentioning them allows me to distinguish them from the *management* principles of humanitarian aid.

Indeed, as with the Paris principles, standards and principles for the management of humanitarian aid have emerged over time in an attempt to improve the effectiveness and accountability of humanitarian aid, as described in the literature review. The “two solitudes” of development and humanitarian aid (Audet, 2015, p. 118) have also evolved separately in terms of principles. Based on the main normative frameworks governing humanitarian aid (see Table 1), I have concluded that these frameworks share the following principles:

- Leadership by local actors for aid that is both adapted and effective;
- Coordination of actors to avoid duplication and to ensure complementarity;
- Accountability towards people who receive aid as well as towards donors, thanks to monitoring and evaluation processes designed to continuously improve aid delivery in a learning process.

These principles are very close to the Paris principles of ownership, alignment, harmonization, mutual accountability, and managing for results. This illustrates the potential of thinking about the link between humanitarian aid and development beyond practice and the nexus, at the level of concepts and principles.

This is even more relevant in the case of Vanuatu, which is a country at risk from natural hazards. Since the consequences of these hazards often require humanitarian aid, this provides me with an ideal opportunity to explore these links and interactions between humanitarian aid and development. Indeed, the literature review allowed me to identify natural hazards, which are frequent and violent in Vanuatu, as a potentially destabilizing factor in the implementation of the Paris principles. Particularly in the case of aid recipient countries exposed to natural hazards, these hazards would therefore be part of a group of incentives influencing the implementation of

the principles (see Figure 1). For instance, a disaster can lead to an increase in the number of donors and more generally of foreign actors wishing to provide aid in the affected country. These actors are often unaware of the context and sometimes bypass national systems and procedures, thus running counter to the Paris principles. The notion of incentive is omnipresent in the neo-institutionalist approach that influences this research and developed in the following section.

Table 1*The Management Principles of Humanitarian Aid in the Main Normative Frameworks*

Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS)	Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)	Grand Bargain (GB)
Nine quality criteria:	› Leadership: Demonstrate their commitment to Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) by enforcing, institutionalising and integrating AAP approaches in the Humanitarian Program Cycle and strategic planning processes, at country level and by establishing appropriate management systems to solicit, hear and act upon the voices and priorities of affected people in a coordinated manner, including for SEA, before, during and after an emergency. › Participation and partnership: Adopt agency mechanisms that feed into and support collective/coordinated people-centred approaches that enable women, girls, boys, men, including the most marginalised and at-risk people among affected communities, to participate in and play an active role in decisions that will impact their lives, well-being, dignity and protection. Adopt and sustain equitable partnerships with local actors to build upon their long-term relationships and trust with communities. › Information, feedback, and action: Adopt agency mechanisms that feed into and support collective and participatory approaches that inform and listen to communities, address feedback and lead to corrective action. Establish and support the implementation of appropriate mechanisms for reporting and handling of SEA-related complaints. Plan, design and manage protection and assistance programmes that are responsive to the diversity and expressed views of affected communities. › Results: Measure AAP and PSEA related results at the agency and collective level, including through standards such as the Core Humanitarian Standard and the Minimum Operating Standards on PSEA; the Best Practice Guide to establish Inter-Agency Community-Based Complaint Mechanisms (CBCM) and its accompanying Standard Operating Procedures.	Two enabling priorities: › A critical mass of quality funding is reached that allows an effective and efficient response, ensuring visibility and accountability; › Greater support is provided for the leadership, delivery and capacity of local responders and the participation of affected communities in addressing humanitarian needs. Four outcome pillars: › Flexibility, predictability, transparency, and tracking › Equitable and principled partnerships › Accountability and inclusion › Prioritisation and coordination

Note. Compiled by the author from CHS (2015, p. 4), IASC (2017a), and IASC (2021, pp. 1–2) respectively.

How to Theorize the Implementation, or Lack Thereof, of the Paris Declaration

While breaking the law entails precise judicial and legal procedures and consequences, if a state or an organization neglects or ignores an international declaration, the consequences are less codified. Consequences can take various forms such as “moral sanctions, exclusions, and granting or withholding of benefits” (Shelton, 2009, p. 69). The PD thus belongs to “soft law”, “a type of social rather than legal norm. ... [that] usually refers to any written international instrument, other than a treaty, containing principles, norms, standards, or other statements of expected behavior” (Shelton, 2009, p. 69). This type of norm exists alongside the legal system, which provides for sanctions that go beyond political consequences for states, which therefore perceive them as more severe. States and other actors thus consciously choose whether or not to make binding commitments (Shelton, 2009). In the case of the PD, which is a non-binding commitment, governments risk no legal consequences for failing to apply the principles. The PD does not provide for any other form of sanction. Beyond the declarations of intent by political leaders, which could give states that commit to more effective support for low-income countries a positive image on the world and domestic stages, the incentives for states to implement or not implement the principles therefore go beyond legal considerations and coercive measures. In other words, there are increased chances of observing gaps between, or decoupling of, policy and practice (Swiss & Ilonze, 2021).

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, my conceptual framework and theoretical approach derive from my literature review, which pointed to different motivations for aid and to three main factors influencing the application of the principles: incentives, political will, and state capacities. It also revealed that researchers should consider important elements when studying aid, such as history, context, different actors and scales, and informal norms. The neo-institutionalist approach is best able to take these various motivations, factors and elements into account. This is how and why I adopted this approach to study how aid is designed, managed, delivered and why, including the dynamics between various actors that underpin it. Thus, I begin by briefly presenting the neo-institutionalist approach, in which the notion of incentives is central. I also situate this approach in relation to the opposition between realists and altruists in international relations. I then explore the notions of political will and state capacity, and how I consider them in my research.

Neo-Institutionalism and Incentives

Defined as the guarantee of “formal rules (constitutions, laws, property rights)” and the imposition of “informal constraints (sanctions, taboos, customs, traditions, and codes of conduct)”, institutions are distinct from organizations (North, 1991, p. 97). Organizations are endowed with various resources, develop consequently to the establishment of the institutional framework, and they are considered part of the “game”. They are varied in nature and include

political bodies (political parties, the Senate, a city council, a regulatory agency), economic bodies (firms, trade unions, family farms, cooperatives), social bodies (churches, clubs, athletic associations), and educational bodies (schools, universities, vocational training centers). They are groups of individuals bound by some common purpose to achieve objectives. (North, 1990, p. 5).

Institutions are essential and they “define and limit the set of choices of individuals” through control mechanisms (North, 1990, p. 4). By reducing the uncertainty inherent to exchanges and interactions, they improve predictability and confidence, and limit transaction and production costs for economic agents. This enables the latter to hope to generate potential gains from commercial exchanges, which they are, therefore, encouraged to engage in. Incentives, defined as what actors hope to gain from complying or not complying with institutions, or “payoffs”, are at the heart of the neo-institutionalist approach. They shape the choices actors make and the creation of institutions. They vary enormously depending on the actors and the time periods concerned (North, 1990). The Paris Declaration, that was designed to make development aid more effective, implicitly draws on this neo-institutionalist approach. By creating institutions, that is, “rules of the game” (North, 1990, p. 3), designed to reduce the transaction costs afflicting aid implementation and to improve predictability, the aim was to improve the impact of aid (Rogerson, 2005).

While establishing rules to improve aid effectiveness is laudable, essential elements have been neglected, such as contextualization, capacities, political will, or the quality of reforms. These neglected elements would continue to undermine the PD’s implementation. In other words, the focus has been on formal institutions, in particular, the state, and a view of the state as a

homogeneous block, while, at the same time, underestimating a multitude of incentives (legal constraints or mere recommendations, attractiveness of funds, power relations, non-aid policies), informal norms, and actors, such as civil society, the private sector, emerging donors, and philanthropic organizations. Indeed, the multiplication of state and non-state actors as well as power shifts have made international cooperation increasingly challenging (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni & Westerwinter, 2022; Hale & al., 2013). Moreover, Parker and Karlsson (2014) identify four obstacles to international cooperation: first, the complexity of issues; second, the difficulty for actors to collectively define the issues and agree on the adequate solutions; third, the domestic constraints countries face, that determine their preferences in getting involved or not in global cooperation mechanisms; fourth, the fear of countries that the solutions will not work or that the other stakeholders will not respect their engagement. In the case of the PD, the literature review revealed that, overall, aid actors agreed on the problems and on the solutions to improve aid effectiveness. However, they overlooked the complexity and the causes of these problems, they adopted technical solutions to solve political issues, the concepts were vague, the declaration was state-centred, and it was unclear how and with which resources countries would implement the PD. Various counterincentives weigh on countries, such as the need to be accountable to their citizens, leading to disappointing implementation results. Indeed, the wider context and environment in which actors operate are crucial (North, 1990). Thus, my aim is to observe the explanatory potential of these actors and factors in the application or non-application of the PD principles in the case of Vanuatu.

An integral part of the context and environment for Vanuatu, other PICs, and many SIDS is their exposure to natural hazards and the multiple challenges it poses (Carment et al., 2020; Petzold, 2020). I take this essential characteristic into account in my analysis, especially as the literature points to the destabilizing effect of disasters on the application of the PD principles. In doing so, my research could contribute to answering questions beyond the strict scope of this thesis, such as: in what ways do the characteristics of SIDS or aid recipient countries exposed to natural hazards play a role in the superficial implementation of the principles? To what extent are these characteristics overlooked in the PD, which nonetheless deals for instance with fragile states, and in the analysis of its relative failure? The COVID-19 pandemic, declared in early 2020, is also an integral part of the new “context” for SIDS and for development and humanitarian actors at the global level, and is linked to the deterioration of the natural

environment. Intuitively, one would think that movement restrictions caused by the pandemic would encourage ownership, alignment, and harmonization. In particular, one might expect that the massive withdrawal of foreign staff from embassies, high commissions, INGOs, and other humanitarian and development organizations and agencies in aid recipient countries would leave more space for national and local actors. This situation carried the potential of rebalancing power relations between donors and recipients, international and local actors, because donors and foreign “experts” were less present in decision-making spaces, and they were forced to align with the strategies and procedures of national and local actors. However, case studies are needed to verify these expectations. My case study research is specific to Vanuatu, but my findings around the relevance of the PD principles, the link between humanitarian aid and development, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic might have a more general application. Because Vanuatu shares context characteristics with other countries, in particular, SIDS, I would expect my findings to particularly resonate in these countries.

Returning to the neo-institutionalist approach, the emergence of institutions is not straightforward, nor is it automatic. The path dependency argument suggests that institutional change depends on the existing institutional context, on the historical, economic, political, social, cultural, and ideological dynamics at work. As Lecours (2002) explains, “cette approche met l’accent sur la reproduction institutionnelle en insistant sur les mécanismes de renforcement (*positive feedback*) générés par les institutions” (p. 12). In other words, “les institutions reflètent et cristallisent [sic] des rapports de pouvoir qui assurent leur survie. Elles forcent aussi les acteurs à s’adapter à elles, ce qui leur confère une légitimité qui s’accumule et s’accroît dans le temps” (Lecours, 2002, pp. 12–13). The path dependency argument explains why some practices endure despite their flaws, including in the aid sector (Roche et al., 2020a). So, how do the so-called “good” institutions emerge, the ones that produce the right incentives, the ones that lead to a virtuous cycle? Although it is difficult to break out of the vicious cycle created by institutions that often benefit the few and do not create favourable conditions for exchanges, this approach suggests that the conditions for institutional change are often found at the heart of a specific context of multidimensional tensions, in phenomena or events that may seem anodyne but can produce the conditions for change and to which the agents of that change are attentive. This is in keeping with the view that institutions and agents continually influence each other in a dynamic manner.

According to Schorch and Pascht (2017), such a change-eliciting phenomenon or event constitutes a decisive moment or critical juncture that “entails choices that are, or must be, made as a range of forces come to bear on local groups and communities” (p. 115). This concept of critical juncture can be used “to analyse a range of macro- or micro-institutional developments by focusing on critical moments at which a range of paths is possible, as opposed to subsequently determined or path-dependent patterns of change” (Schorch & Pascht, 2017, pp. 115–116). For a key moment to be considered a critical juncture, the following conditions must be met:

first, a crisis or critical moment, which can be of short or lengthy duration;
second, ideational change resulting from the crisis or moment; and third, policy change resulting from the ideational change that realigns the direction in which the society or polity is heading. Regardless of the time period involved, there needs to be evidence of ideational and policy change for it to be considered a critical juncture. (Hogan & Doyle, 2009, p. 6 in Schorch & Pascht, 2017, p. 116).

While North does not provide a clear answer and recommends vigilance with regard to the causes of institutional change for the better (i.e., there is no miracle recipe, each situation must be examined on its own merits), he notes that when informal constraints are conducive to change in formal rules, as opposed to when formal rules are imposed and inconsistent with the informal system, the transition to stable political institutions is more likely (North, 1990). In other words, the imposition of an institutional system from outside is doomed to failure (Swiss & Ilonze, 2021).

Indeed, “l’action publique se construit aussi au cœur des interactions sociales entre des acteurs publics mais aussi privés et non plus seulement au sommet de l’État” (Commaille, 2019, p. 580). According to this approach, the focus of the PD on the state does not allow it readily to take into account the plurality of actors and scales at work in the construction of public action, including the nature of social interactions between these actors. The PD tends to adopt a top-down approach that goes against the negotiated reality of public action which gives rise to more “legitimate” rules. It also ignores the fact that the state is a complex apparatus that can produce contradictions. However, aid actors are still bound by the PD and responsible for implementing it in an adequate way, despite the various factors that inhibit implementation.

Thus, the aim of my research in Vanuatu is to study in detail how and why the actors embrace, reject, resist, and modify the project promoted by the PD or the public policies in line with it, based on factors such as their interests and resources. This implies observing the relationships between the micro (individual, community), meso (organizational, state), and macro (system, global) levels, and to pay particular attention to the agency and capacities of actors. In doing this, my research follows on the works of scholars who seek to reintegrate complexity into the realist versus altruist debate by considering multiple actors and factors influencing aid effectiveness and cooperation more broadly, by using, in particular, comparative case studies (Baranyi et al., 2015; Brown, 2017; Swiss, 2017).

Realists, Altruists, and Neo-institutionalists

Altruism, realism and neo-institutionalism each have contributed to explaining and understanding the dynamics of international cooperation. In other words, none of these schools of thought has fully explained them, which is why I adhere to new pragmatism. Nonetheless, neo-institutionalism was the approach that best reflected what I found in my review of the existing literature to examine aid effectiveness, the application of the principles, and their subtleties. For instance, it was best aligned with what authors considered most important when studying aid: to acknowledge that various actors, formal and informal norms, and incentives at different levels, play a major role.

According to some critics, such as van der Veen (2011), realist and altruist approaches are ill-suited to understand how foreign policy works because they consider actors' preferences to be fixed in time and reductive. The realist school, for instance, tends to view the state as a homogeneous block and to overlook the fact that ideas and preferences are constructed through debates, particularly at the sub-national level. This conception is at odds with the literature, which points to disagreements and divergences within government and civil society, and which indicates that reality is perpetually negotiated. In contrast, neo-institutionalism emphasizes the importance of perceptions, ideas, beliefs and political will, and how they impact institutions (North, 2005). The neo-institutionalist approach stresses the need to consider the plurality of actors beyond the government, which is itself heterogeneous, their interests and incentives, particularly regarding their compliance, or not, with formal and informal rules. It also insists on the importance of taking into account the debates between these different actors and their agency.

Finally, it emphasizes change and movement in the overall context, in beliefs and ideas, and in the sense that institutions evolve.

A neo-institutionalist approach thus not only makes it possible to move beyond the debate that pits altruists against realists, but it is also better aligned with the field of foreign aid and better positioned to answer my research questions. Indeed, without being naïve, it adopts a more optimistic view than the realists, so to understand why and how international institutions emerge and evolve, why states comply or not with these rules, and ultimately how and why cooperation happens or not (Spindler, 2013, pp. 149–150). While realists consider that each state pursues its own interests in all circumstances, neo-institutionalists consider that states may be driven by other motives (Spindler, 2013). Moreover, Arbia and Carbonnier (2016) note that “the assumption of a utilitarian moral worldview within liberalism and realism is at odds with several findings in other disciplines about individual morality” (p. 321).

Nevertheless, the notion of power is important in both neo-institutionalist and realist approaches. While realists regard the exercise and expansion of power and influence as the only state motivations, this is not the case for those adopting a neo-institutionalist approach, even though these interests still remain important (Spindler, 2013). The notion of power, and in particular, power games and unequal power relations, is now a crucial piece in many theoretical approaches, particularly in postcolonial feminist studies. This notion is important as aid implies asymmetrical relationships. Even a more idealistic or altruistic approach implies that the “stronger” helps the “weaker”, which inherently refers to unequal power relations, regardless of intention or reciprocity. However, this approach is more focused on norms, which are also omnipresent in the neo-institutionalist approach. The latter considers both power and norms, whereas realists are focused on power, and idealists on moral values. I particularly acknowledge and take account of intra- and inter-state power relations in this research, as well as how actors with different levels of power can shape practices and norms, especially considering the post-colonial context of Vanuatu.

Idealists share the optimism of neo-institutionalism—which nevertheless explains the difficulty of improving institutional systems—and their consideration that actors other than states have an influence on international relations. But they struggle to explain the polarization of the world and the many failures of international organizations, such as the failure of COVAX, the

multilateral mechanism designed to ensure an equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines. For while resources and power determine the expansion and exercise of state power to some extent, the latter also depend on the intentions of states (Heinze & Jollif, 2011), a notion close to the concept of political will, discussed in the next section.

In practice, several researchers have discussed this debate specifically in relation to aid, the amounts of which have not decreased over time despite being fiercely criticized (Arbia & Carbonnier, 2016). The reasons relate sometimes exclusively to self-interest from a realist perspective (Marchesin, 2021), sometimes exclusively to altruism, particularly in the case of aid in the form of grants from multilateral agencies (Hattori, 2003), and often to a mixture of the two. Lancaster (2006), for example, found that:

Diplomatic and developmental goals, evident in the history of aid, have long been among the most prominent of aid's purposes. However, there have been others: humanitarian relief, commerce, culture, and, after the end of the Cold War, promoting democracy, supporting economic and social transitions, addressing global problems, and preventing and mitigating conflict. (pp. 5–6)

These objectives differ from country to country, and even differ between governments in power within countries. In the same vein, van der Veen (2011) identified seven aid objectives for policymakers, summarized in Table 2. For Arbia and Carbonnier (2016), altruism, that is part of human nature, explains in great part why many countries continue to allocate funds for aid and have done so for so long despite the criticism. Without discrediting them, these more nuanced analyses weaken the more extreme proposals.

Table 2

The Seven Broad Frames Relevant to Aid Policy

Frame	Goals for aid
Security	Increase donor's physical security: support allies, oppose Communism, etc.
Power/influence	Pursue power: increase leverage over others, win allies and positions of influence in international fora

Frame	Goals for aid
Wealth/economic self-interest	Further economic interests of donor economy; support export industries
Enlightened self-interest	Pursue global public goods: peace, stability, environmental health, population control, etc.
Reputation/self-affirmation	Establish and express a certain identity in international relations; improve international status and reputation
Obligation/duty	Fulfil obligations, whether historical or associated with position in international system
Humanitarianism	Promote the well-being of the poorest groups worldwide; provide humanitarian relief

Note. From van der Veen (2011, p. 10).

Thus, by emphasizing the importance of considering the context and a multitude of factors in a broad way, a neo-institutionalist approach enables consideration of the various reasons highlighted by many authors and aid actors, such as, the search for visibility, the interests and various incentives of parties, without viewing the actors as exclusively selfish. This approach also values interdependence, which “enhances the need for international cooperation” (Spindler, 2013, p. 153). Taking into account interdependence is particularly relevant in a global context marked by climate change and pandemics that have profoundly impacted Vanuatu and other states. The consequences of these global issues have been accentuated by unequal power relations between states. As Spindler (2013) noted,

Mutual dependencies in issue areas are not necessarily symmetrical.

Asymmetrical interdependence therefore constitutes an important source of power and enhances the state’s scope for less dependent action. ... However, levels of uncertainty can inhibit the evolution of cooperation; information that reduces uncertainty thus constitutes an important factor in world politics. (pp. 152–153)

The Paris Declaration was an initiative designed to reduce such levels of uncertainty. As mentioned above, it was inspired primarily by a neo-institutionalist approach: its aim was to

“reduce transaction costs” in aid management and delivery to make it more effective (OECD, 2005, p. 6). By establishing clear principles, the organizations and agents of aid, who are primarily donors and recipient states in the context of the PD, face less uncertainty about their respective aid management activities. Moreover, the neo-institutionalist approach is also a relevant and useful prism through which to observe the management principles of humanitarian aid, a framework that was also developed to deliver more appropriate, inclusive, and efficient emergency aid.

I therefore consider that aid organizations and actors are influenced by the environment and the context, and influenced at different levels, macro, meso, and micro, to act and make decisions about whether or not to implement the Paris Declaration. Their motivations may be varied, and not exclusively altruistic or based on self-interest. The micro level means the sub-national, community, and individual level; the meso level means the state/national level; and the macro level means the global level. In the next section, I explore a factor raised in the neo-institutionalist approach and that other analysts and observers have mentioned as one of the main reasons why states fail to honour their commitments: political will.

Political Will

The notion of political will often features in analyses as a major cause for the stagnation of certain issues and the non-implementation of certain commitments or policies by states, yet it is rarely defined or explained. North (2005) considers political will an essential element in understanding institutional change. According to him, “the key to understanding the process of change is the intentionality of the players enacting institutional change and their comprehension of the issues” (North, 2005, p. 3).

In order to better observe political will in my case study, I refer to the work of Post et al. (2010) who unpacked, defined, and operationalized this concept while recognizing that it must be contextualized and that it remains dynamic (see Table 3). According to them, “political will is the extent of committed support among key decision makers for a particular policy solution to a particular problem” (p. 659). Their work does not explore the reasons behind the existence or lack of political will, but they suggest power relations may help explain it, saying “the identities and resources of probable opponents ... are examples of prominent disincentives” (Post et al.,

2010, p. 659). In the case of aid, this may refer to intra-state relations, but also to relations between the aid recipient country and donors, or between civil society organizations and governments and/or donors.

Table 3

Analyzing Political Will

Definition Component	Operationalization	Assessment Targets
(1) Sufficient set of decision makers	Sets of actors capable of approving, implementing, and enforcing public policies	• Institutions and factions.
(2) With a common understanding of a particular problem on the formal agenda	(a) Use of similar frame and terminology; (b) Status as “problem” on formal agenda	(a) Commonality and convergence in statements of decision makers with regard to problem; (b) Importance and prominence of decision makers discussing problem; volume of discussion.
(3) Is committed to supporting	Distribution and strength of specific decision-maker preferences	• Incentives and disincentives for political actors (institutional, electoral, and others); • Allocation of analytical resources; • Credibility and obligation of statements (based on reputational costs); • Positions of key constituencies (domestic and international) and accountability relationships; • Bargaining mechanisms; • Cultural characteristics and constraints.
(4) A commonly perceived, potentially effective policy solution	(a) Use of similar frame and terminology; (b) Avoidance of known sources of ineffectiveness; (c) Capacity for policy effectiveness.	(a) Commonality and convergence in statements of decision makers with regard to proposed solution; (b) Nonuse of short-term “fixes,” knowingly ineffective policies, and diversionary tactics; (c) Funding commitment; (d) Inclusion of potentially effective sanctions and enforcement mechanisms; (e) Implementation resources and support of implementers.

Note. From (Post et al., 2010, p. 660).

Nevertheless, the idea is not to measure all the indicators, indeed, the authors do not recommend doing so, but their definition and operationalization provide a guide for this research. Moreover, while the authors include capacity issues in their conceptualization of political will, I consider them separately although I agree that they are linked (see Figure 1). Since a lack of capacities is often a reason given by both donors and recipient countries and organizations to justify the lack of, partial, or superficial implementation of the Paris principles, especially with regard to ownership and alignment, my study decouples capacity issues from political will to better understand how each is operating. The last section examines the issue of state capacities.

State Capacities

Indeed, the lack of capacity of aid recipient states is often cited by aid actors and observers as a major reason behind the lack of application of the principles. For instance, donors consider the recipient country's financial system opaque and control measures insufficient, or evoke the scarcity of qualified human resources to produce development strategies. However, some authors criticize the fact that donors confuse the *conditions* with the *objectives* of aid in terms of recipient state capacities (Booth, 2012). Indeed, the Paris Declaration considers the weak capacities of recipient states and donors of different kinds as a cause of aid ineffectiveness, and as a reason for adding a capacity-strengthening dimension to the aid effectiveness principles; it does not suggest that strong capacity is a precondition for implementing the principles.

Following this logic, the literature often takes a negative stance towards state capacity, defining it in terms of what the state does not have or is unable to achieve, instead of defining it in terms of what a state is capable of undertaking. For example, this is the case with the literature on failed or fragile states, that Rice and Patrick (2008) define as

countries that lack the essential capacity and/or will to fulfill four sets of critical government responsibilities: fostering an environment conducive to sustainable and equitable economic growth; establishing and maintaining legitimate, transparent, and accountable political institutions; securing their populations from violent conflict and controlling their territory; and meeting the basic human needs of their population. (p. 3)

Looking at organizations, in general, rather than at the state, specifically, Andrews et al. (2017) similarly argue that “organizations with weak capability for policy implementation are those that cannot equip their agents with the capacity, resources, and motivation to take actions that promote the organization’s stated objectives” (p. 83). Many authors link this lack of capacity to development issues, such as, the prevalence of conflict, lack of respect for human rights, deficiencies in the health system, and economic growth (Badie, 1998; Dhillon & Philips, 2015; Englehart, 2009; Knutsen, 2013; Silve & Verdier, 2018). There is a risk, however, in associating state capacities with state fragility because it is difficult to determine if the state is fragile *because* its capacities are limited, or if the state is fragile *thus* limiting its capacities. Even when considered a driver of fragility, Carment and Samy (2023) showed that (the lack of) capacity does not even play such a major role in explaining why some states are trapped in fragility, compared with legitimacy and authority issues. Moreover, although countries need basic financial, administrative, and democratic capacities, global issues cannot be solved by individual countries (Hackenesch et al., 2022). Although a characteristic of SIDS is reportedly their relative lack of capacity, I remain vigilant with these issues related to the understandings and roles of capacities in my research.

Indeed, although the notion of state capacity is widespread in the literature, it is rarely defined. When it is, it is often multi-faceted and is therefore the subject of multiple operationalizations and measurements (Akbar & Ostermann, 2015; Cingolani, 2013; Matthews, 2012). For instance, Carment and Samy (2023) defined capacity as “the extent to which a state can mobilize and utilize resources toward productive ends, that is, service delivery” (p. 164). Nonetheless, Cingolani (2018) conducted a large-scale review of the literature that referenced this notion and identified a relatively consensual conceptualization: “the state’s ability to credibly implement official goals against potential resistance, by means of taxation, the bureaucracy, the military, the legislature, and the courts, and throughout its entire domains” (p. 106). She identified five dimensions that compose state capacity: “In general, the focus is on one or a combination of the following aspects of state capacity: (a) coercive or military; (b) fiscal; (c) administrative; (d) legal; (e) infrastructural” (Cingolani, 2018, p. 103).

Because of this variety of facets, a crucial question to ask when studying state capacity is, the “capability to do what?” (Andrews et al., 2017, p. 99) to which I add the following: “whose

capacity?”. In this research, I look at the state’s capacity to take ownership of its own development strategy, that is, to formulate its strategies and priorities, as well as to implement them. I also pay particular attention to the capacities of donor states, which is generally neglected in the literature, and of other actors, such as civil society organizations. These issues tie in mainly with the political and administrative dimensions described by Cingolani (2013). As Matthews (2012) summarized, “in terms of its administrative capacity, state capacity can be defined as the capacity of the state to effectively achieve its chosen policy outcomes, wherein the exercise of power and deployment of resources ... are key” (p. 281).

Given the multiple facets of this concept, the idea is to keep an open mind for all the indications of capacity or lack of capacity, starting with the data collected. As Akbar and Ostermann (2015) advise:

a state’s capacity to accomplish the goals it sets for itself can be grounded in a number of different and even surprising sources and ... those scholars who recognize this and take a holistic approach to measuring state capacity will be rewarded with rich empirical findings. (p. 855)

Indeed, Cingolani (2013) aptly noted that assessing capacity is a challenge because “any capacity is the potential of doing something rather than a realization” (p. 39). She compiled the various propositions for operationalizing and measuring capacity found in the literature, which corresponded to each researcher’s needs in terms of the specific topic studied and the research questions. To meet this challenge in this thesis, I drew on diverse data sources that I triangulated, as explained in the next chapter.

Specifically, the concept of state capacity has been used in aid studies, notably by Pritchett et al. (2013). These authors argued that the reasons why the capacities, particularly administrative capacities, of recipient states and donors are still weak despite decades of aid are linked to incentives that run counter to capacity strengthening. In their view, aid recipient countries are encouraged to set up administrative systems that please donors but in practice are dysfunctional and do not allow for profound, systemic transformations that would lead to the emergence of a state that is better adapted to their own contexts and needs. This logic of “isomorphic mimicry” also benefits donors who can “measure their success as either inputs

provided, training sessions held, or ‘reforms’ undertaken and in process-compliance in project implementation” (Pritchett et al., 2013, p. 14). There is a confusion between means and ends. This logic, and focus on inputs and processes, also suit donors’ aversion to risk and need to be accountable to their domestic constituencies, to the detriment of iterative learning.

Finally, Börzel et al. (2018) made three important points about state capacities. First, states which “command more or less sufficient domestic sovereignty over most of the territory, in most policy areas most of the time” represent a small minority, and not only in the Global South (p. 7). This ties in with my desire in this thesis to avoid portraying low- and middle-income states, particularly SIDS and PICs, as weak, incapable, or victims, or as a homogeneous block. I recognize that depending on the point of view adopted, what might be perceived on the one hand as a lack of capacity, can also be perceived on the other as a burden emanating from internal or external actors and factors and/or incentives. Second, state capacity also corresponds to “the capacity to cast a ‘shadow of hierarchy’, that is, to incentivize other actors to provide governance in order to avoid hierarchical coordination by the state” (p. 10). Third, in line with Booth (2012), the authors pointed out that “states with enough capacity to enforce decisions are sometimes part of the problem, rather than the solution” (p. 16), as in the case of authoritarian regimes. The distinction is sometimes subtle, which I take into account in this thesis.

Conclusion

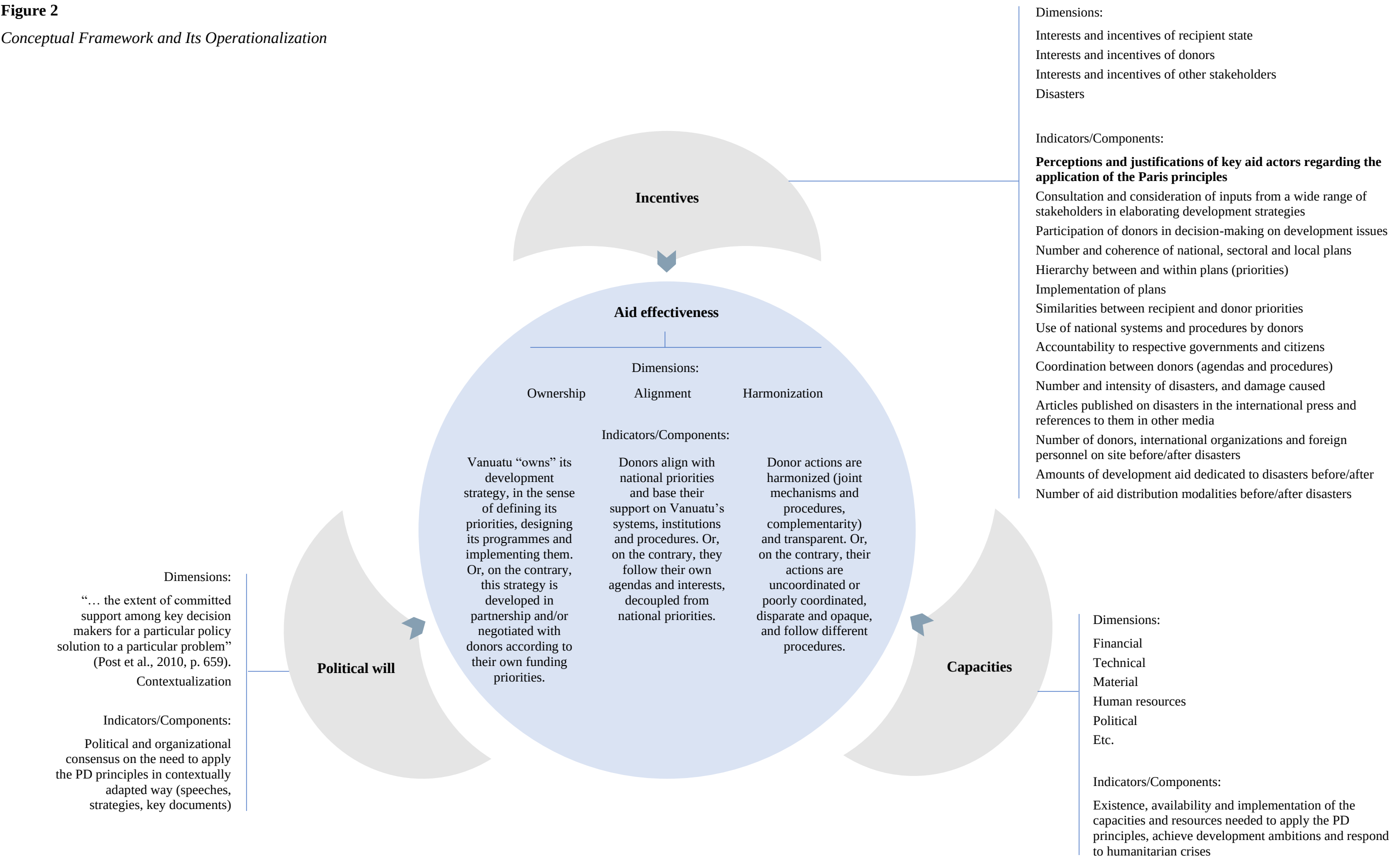
As summarized in Figure 1, this dissertation’s conceptual framework is based on several key concepts: official development assistance and its effectiveness including the dimensions of ownership, alignment, and harmonization, as well as political will, state capacities and resources, and incentives. The three groups of factors I identified in the literature review and that influence the implementation of non-binding agreements, especially the Paris Declaration, namely, political will, state capacities, and incentives, echo the three factors identified by Swiss and Ilonze (2021), namely, commitment, capacity, and context. Indeed, the literature reveals that incentives play a distinctive role in explaining whether or not the principles of the 2005 Paris Declaration are implemented, and to what degree they are, if implemented.

In emphasizing the importance of the multidimensional context in which actors evolve and make decisions, as well as the incentives weighing on them, the neo-institutionalist approach

is particularly relevant for analyzing the disappointing application of the aid effectiveness principles contained in the PD, which is a non-binding international agreement. This approach provides a framework for me to examine the motives of actors and organizations in all their complexity, and to move away from a binary vision of international cooperation. I conducted this research in line with that approach. I am interested in how this aid is designed, managed and delivered, and why, as well as in how the interactions between different actors shape cooperation and aid dynamics. Therefore, my thesis does not focus on the motives of actors for giving aid, but rather on what happens when they have already decided to provide aid. Above all, my contribution to the advancement of knowledge is empirical and based on the in-depth case study of Vanuatu. This theoretical and conceptual framework is intended to be flexible, as I prioritize the data gathered from the literature, key individuals, and observations. Figure 2 reflects this intention and illustrates the operationalization of this framework by identifying the main indicators/elements that I initially planned to study in this research, without limiting myself to them.

This chapter plays a pivotal role. It stems from the literature review carried out in the previous chapter, which led to the development of this conceptual and theoretical framework. From the latter derives in turn the methodology and research methods presented in the following chapter, and thus the data, research results, and arguments presented in Chapters 4 to 9.

Figure 2
Conceptual Framework and Its Operationalization



Chapter 3 – Research Design and Methods: Case Study and Qualitative Analysis

As mentioned in previous chapters, this research stems from several observations. First, overall, the Paris Declaration has not been implemented, or has been applied only partially or superficially, and purely quantitative monitoring is unable to explain the causes for this failure. Second, despite the large amounts of per capita aid allocated to low- and middle-income countries in the Pacific, and to Vanuatu in particular, the socio-economic development of these countries remains disappointing, even when a national development strategy and plans designed locally exist. Third, based on my experience in a humanitarian and development organization and on the literature, donors and other development organizations still often overlook national and local concerns when making decisions on the allocation and management of aid. Yet, scholars and practitioners have increasingly recognized that placing aid recipients at the centre of decision-making and implementation is necessary not only because it may be ethically correct to do so, but because it is a key driver of aid effectiveness; and international donors committed to providing aid according to the national priorities of recipient countries (Glennie & Rabinowitz, 2013; OECD, 2017). In this research, I examine the reasons behind these three observations. My approach, therefore, follows a logic based on observed phenomena whose causes I question.

In the remainder of this chapter, I present the methodology adopted in this research in greater detail. I start with an explanation for my choice in using a single case study. I then present *process tracing* as an approach well suited to the context and nature of this research as it focuses on chains of events, causal relations, and allows for both inductive and deductive moments. Next, I explain how I operationalized the research questions to delineate the type of data to be collected. This is followed by a section on the methods used for data collection. Finally, I describe how I analyzed the data to formulate the arguments contained in my thesis.

Using a Single Case Study

Although comparative research enhances robustness and potential for generalizability, the variables, their complexity, and the resulting number of actors to consider in my research justify a single case study, especially since case study research on aid effectiveness is scant for Vanuatu (e.g., Hochet, 2015). A case study is particularly relevant to examine complex situations in depth, thus to reveal the inter-actor dynamics at work and to question causes (Dahl et al., 2014), which

my research questions require. Indeed, studying the causes underlying the observations identified above requires me to consider the groups of actors most directly concerned, those being, donors, government, NGOs, and development agencies. Considering them means comprehensively exploring the perspectives of individuals within these groups by gathering their views and by studying the policy and strategy documents that they, or their respective organizations, produce.

Furthermore, given the multiplicity and complexity of situations, and despite the publication of meta-analyses that attempt to assess aid effectiveness, researchers and practitioners often conclude that case-by-case analysis based on the local context is the best way to proceed. My approach is consistent with an approach that Haslam (2014) and Kacou et al. (2022) call “new pragmatism”. This approach involves “consistently [searching] for practical standards to solve the problems of the day with a relatively nonideological stance, ... embrac[ing], not reduc[ing], the complexity of the world, and seek[ing] to reconcile polar opposites such as ... high-level abstractions and down-to-earth considerations” (Kacou et al., 2022, p. 226). The generalizability or replicability of the recommendations and solutions resulting from research is not the ultimate objective of this approach, even when some of the findings could be relevant for, or some recommendations adapted to, other contexts. Studying the case of Vanuatu makes it possible to observe and analyze, in depth, the implementation of aid effectiveness principles at the meso or state level, within a specific geographical, temporal, economic, social, political, and cultural framework and from the perspectives of multiple relevant actors. I triangulate data sources, in particular the perceptions of various stakeholders, within the frame of a case study, to better understand aid dynamics. Indeed, how local actors perceive development projects can clash with how implementers perceive themselves and their actions (Dijkzeul & Wakenge, 2010), thus justifying the need to adopt a qualitative approach and to engage with a plurality of actors.

Finally, using a case study corresponds to the dual nature of the research which is both confirmatory and exploratory. It is confirmatory particularly when looking at the factors affecting aid effectiveness. It is also exploratory when investigating the links between the principles governing development aid and the management principles of humanitarian aid, as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on aid. Due to the original nature of this research, I favoured and looked for the emergence of unexpected results from the data. So, my initial approach was rather inductive, which is particularly adapted “to allow research findings to emerge from the

frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies” (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). Because I anticipated both inductive and deductive moments in my research, I used *process tracing*, a method to accommodate both, that I describe briefly in the next section.

Process Tracing

Process tracing is “une méthode intégrative, articulant induction et déduction par ajustements successifs” (Maillet & Mayaux, 2018, p. 1067). In other words, it is a method that privileges a back-and-forth between theory and results in a transparent way, to explain complex and interrelated situations and chains of events. As required by this research, this method focuses on causal mechanisms. The researcher’s task is to consider different scenarios that could have led to the observed outcome and to determine the most plausible, convincing one based on the evidence. As Bennett and Checkel (2015) summarized, it consists of “the analysis of evidence on processes, sequences, and conjunctures of events within a case for the purposes of either developing or testing hypotheses about causal mechanisms that might causally explain the case” (p. 7).

However, my goal was not to establish direct and immutable causal mechanisms, but rather to produce a fine-grained analysis of the dynamics at work in the complex context described above. The aim was to analyze and understand all kinds of motivations, interests, and incentives that underpin the management of aid and international cooperation in Vanuatu. In the following section, I explain how I operationalized my research questions, a step aimed at clarifying the type of information I needed to collect and analyze to ultimately answer the research questions.

Operationalizing the Research Questions

One of the challenges of my research was that I sought to observe, analyze, and find the causes for situations and processes that are often intangible and do not correspond to an event precisely located in time, such as the passing of a law, whose origin one could trace. For example, how to observe the application of the principles of ownership, alignment, and harmonization? Moreover, I placed an emphasis on the perceptions of these situations and

processes by different actors. In the following sections, I explain how I broke down, when needed, and how I operationalized each of my research sub-questions.

Why Do Various Aid Actors Circumvent or Misapply the Three Core Principles of the Paris Declaration: Ownership, Alignment and Harmonization?

To operationalize the first research sub-question, I broke it down into three parts corresponding to the three principles in question: to what extent does Vanuatu “own” its development strategy, in the sense of defining its priorities, conceiving its programmes, and implementing them, or to what extent is this strategy developed in partnership (or negotiated) with donors according to their own funding priorities? To what extent do donors align with national priorities and base their support on Vanuatu’s systems/institutions and procedures, or to what extent do they act according to their own agendas and interests that are decoupled from national priorities? To what extent are the actions of donors harmonized (common systems and procedures, complementarity) and transparent, or to what extent are they uncoordinated or poorly coordinated, disparate, opaque, and follow different procedures?

First, I therefore needed information on the definition of development priorities, on the conception of the national development strategy, programmes and their implementation, and on the respective roles of aid actors, in particular of the government, donors, and civil society. Second, I needed data on the priorities of Vanuatu and donors. I also needed data on how aid is delivered and used, and whether donors use the national systems and procedures that govern the allocation and implementation of aid. Third, I needed information on the actions of donors and their coordination mechanisms.

What Are the Obstacles that hinder the Reconciliation Between Humanitarian and Development Aid, and How Can They Be Overcome?

The second research sub-question involves focusing, on one hand, on humanitarian aid and long-term considerations within this type of aid, and, on the other hand, on development aid and short-term considerations within that type of aid. In both cases, doing so involves determining to what extent and how these two types of aid are intertwined at the conceptual, strategic, operational, institutional, and financial levels. Moreover, the question implies assessing

the opportunities and difficulties involved in reconciling these two types of aid, as well as identifying potential avenues for improvement.

Therefore, I needed information on the strategies adopted by different actors for linking these two types of aid, and on the frameworks they promoted and envisaged for their management. Ultimately, I needed data on the ways in which the actions of various aid actors reconcile humanitarian aid and development in practice, and on the challenges preventing reconciliation.

How Did the COVID-19 Pandemic Hamper or Accelerate the Implementation of the Paris Declaration Principles?

Answering the third research sub-question entails gathering data on aid and cooperation in the context of COVID-19 to see its effects on ownership, alignment, and harmonization. As with the first sub-question, the aim is to explore to what extent each aid effectiveness principle is applied and to identify the factors influencing the outcomes, in the pandemic context, and considering the arguments developed in response to the previous questions.

Thus, I needed data on emergency and early-recovery assistance provided to face TC Harold and COVID-19 in Vanuatu. In particular, I needed to gather information on strategy planning, cooperation and coordination, financial, technical, and in-kind aid, management of operations, and activity implementation.

The answers to these three sub-questions will make it possible to assess the current relevance of the principles. Assessing their relevance is particularly timely, as many observers and analysts hoped for significant advancement in the application of the principles and the localization agenda because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of borders. Operationalizing my research questions allowed me to determine the data sources I needed and the qualitative methods I should use for data collection, which I identify and explain in the next section.

Research Methods

This project was approved by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board of the University of Ottawa and the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, which is the body responsible for preserving and promoting the country's culture, including by overseeing research conducted in the country. These approvals formalized my commitment to conducting ethical research and, in particular, to the free, prior, and informed consent of research participants and their well-being throughout the research, as well as compliance with their requirements in terms of confidentiality and anonymity. The project was underpinned by the shared pan-Pacific core values of respect, relationships, and to a lesser extent reciprocity, to avoid reproducing colonial dynamics (Naepi, 2019). In the following sections, I justify and explain the data collection methods I used in this research: a review of academic and grey literature, as well as press monitoring, interviews with key informants, and participant and non-participant observations.

Literature Review

This research is at the intersection of several disciplines and fields of study, in particular, political science, international relations, small island states, Oceania and Pacific studies, development studies, and humanitarian studies. I drew on academic publications related to aid effectiveness and the multidimensional links between development and humanitarian assistance in all these disciplines and fields. I also drew on contributions from grey literature on these subjects, particularly on documents and reports developed by UN agencies and INGOs, including some working in the Pacific and Vanuatu. Drawing on grey literature was particularly useful for developing an understanding of recent events on which relatively little academic literature had yet been produced. This literature included post-disaster reports and early analyses of the localization process in the context of COVID-19. For the same reason, I monitored media regarding aid and cooperation issues in Vanuatu generally, and on Harold and COVID-19, in particular, from January 2020 to October 2022. I focused primarily on the country's national, independent and most widely read daily newspaper, the *Vanuatu Daily Post*.

I also delved into the socio-economic, political, and historical context of Vanuatu, reading reference works on the country while paying particular attention to development and humanitarian aid issues as they arose (see for instance, Fizin & Angleviel, 2016; Natuman, 1995;

Siméoni, 2009). I sought to include publications by Pacific people in particular. These readings gave me an overview of contemporary issues in Vanuatu and the broader historical, social, and political context in which aid dynamics had been unfolding. I also selected the most relevant government documents for my research, including Vanuatu's *National Sustainable Development Plan 2016-2030 (The People's Plan)*, the 2018 *National Aid Management Policy*, the 2019 *National Disaster Risk Management Act*, the 2020 *Tropical Cyclone Harold Lessons Learned Workshop Report*, the 2020 *TC Harold and COVID-19 Post-Disaster Needs Assessment*, as well as information about aid available on government websites. For donors, international agencies, and NGOs, the sources of data include country strategies and documents relating to the programmes and projects implemented. This information is available online on the websites of the various entities.

The document review consisted of gathering, classifying and reading the documents, as well as summarizing the most relevant ones. The document review gave me a solid understanding of the content of development, disaster risk management and emergency management strategies, as well as of the mechanisms in place for their design and implementation. I also developed my knowledge of donor strategies and activities related to emergencies, recovery, and development. The scholarly literature, reports and the press provided information on the successes, challenges, and recommendations as perceived and identified by various aid actors. I compared this information with the data gathered through interviews and observations. Indeed, a document review is appropriate for an in-depth research and is useful for making comparisons among documents, and between documents and interviews (Dépelteau, 2000).

Based on this review, I formulated initial ideas and arguments concerning the application of aid effectiveness principles, the reconciliation of development and humanitarian aid, and the impacts of COVID-19 on aid in Vanuatu. To this end, I identified the relevant passages relating to these topics in the documents. I also consulted aid data generated, for example, by the government of Vanuatu, donors (from websites), the OECD (using the Creditor Reporting Systems), the World Bank, and the Lowy Institute (through the Pacific Aid Map). They were useful complementary sources to further triangulate the data from the documentary review, interviews, and observations. For example, the share of aid actually allocated by sector provides information on donor priorities which can be compared with their official strategies. To gather

the perceptions of different actors on aid in Vanuatu beyond the publicly available literature, discourses, and numbers, I conducted interviews with key informants.

Interviews

In addition to the documentary analysis, I conducted semi-structured individual interviews or *storian* with key actors and observers of international development cooperation and humanitarian aid in the country. *Storian* are unstructured discussions close to *talanoa*, a Pacific methodology and method that involves “creating or strengthening relationships and coming to reach a state of understanding between those involved” (Naepi, 2019, p. 11). This method is well suited to the context of Vanuatu where people, especially men, gather at the *nakamal* and discuss (*storian*) various topics. For the sake of conciseness, *nakamals* consist basically of *kava* bars where adults in Vanuatu, traditionally men, meet at the end of the day to discuss and consume *kava*, a drink made of water and wild pepper root. However, the symbolic, cultural, social, political, economic roles of *nakamals* and *kava* as well as their evolution over time go far beyond this narrow conception and description, as many researchers have shown (see, for instance, Chanteraud & David, 2011).

The one-on-one interview format without a strict time limit provides a privileged setting for participants to elaborate in depth on the research topics at stake. It is also in line with my choice to address the issue of aid effectiveness in a qualitative way, by striving to achieve a nuanced understanding of this issue and the related challenges. Individual interviews allow respondents to express themselves confidentially and anonymously if they wish so. Such interviews encourage a free flow of thought and allow respondents and the researcher a certain degree of freedom, for instance, to diverge from scripted questions. It is a method that is flexible, relatively easy to use, and can serve several purposes (Dépelteau, 2000). In particular, it is conducive to the identification and follow-up of new, neglected or forgotten lines of enquiry, and is therefore particularly well suited to the exploratory dimension of this research.

Conducting interviews had several additional advantages. First, it was a way to try and give a voice to individuals from the media and the private sector, who are often neglected in development research, but are nevertheless involved in development, respond to disasters, and are affected by them. Second, the nature of some of the recent events studied in this research, namely

TC Harold and COVID-19, meant that literature on the subject was only emerging. Interviewees provided me with valuable information I could not have access to otherwise. Third, because the local press usually focuses on isolated episodes, commenting on a donor, a programme, or a decision without analyzing aid as a broader topic, interviews provided the participants with an opportunity to give their perspectives on the bigger aid picture. Also, because the local press often serves as a platform for the government to thank donors and for donors to promote their actions in the country, or for virulent critics of cooperation as a whole, coverage is rarely nuanced and does not usually offer profound analyses of the issues surrounding cooperation and aid. This is even more the case with topics such as the implementation of the PD principles, the relationship between humanitarian aid and development, or the impact of COVID-19. Where they do exist, these analyses are for a large part relayed from blogs written by foreign development researchers or experts rather than by local journalists, although many are based in the region. Moreover, at the start of the pandemic and for the two-year state of emergency, the Vanuatu government required to preapprove every publication about COVID-19. Conducting interviews constituted an opportunity to gather perspectives that would otherwise be inaccessible because they would have been censored or self-censored. Fourth, and in the same vein, interviews could provide information on the dynamics at work between actors not documented in official documents and reports. While they are important and play a role in every context, interpersonal relationships and links are of particular importance in Vanuatu and in the Pacific more broadly (e.g., Lloyd et al., 2020; Vachette, 2016)—to the point where “personal relations between politicians constitute the basis of government formation” (Veenendaal & Corbett, 2020, p. 30). Furthermore, using interviews could allow nuances to emerge *within* heterogeneous groups of actors (donors, government, etc.) beyond official reports and communications.

To select the participants, I relied on my existing network, on the document review, and on snowball sampling as the research progressed. I used purposive sampling, focusing recruitment on individuals closest to aid management initially from five groups of actors: government/state system, donors, NGOs/agencies, the private sector, and the media. Potential government participants included officials involved or with experience in aid policy and strategy definition, in aid planning, management and coordination, in disaster management and response, and in creating and maintaining partnerships with other local, national, and international aid actors. I followed the same logic with donors by contacting high-ranking representatives with

access to strategies and decision-making power, such as officials responsible for international cooperation in embassies. I also targeted senior officials, managers and strategic advisors in NGOs, development agencies, and regional organizations, such as, country directors. These people have an overall view of the strategy and of the activities carried out by their respective organizations in the country and in the region, and they are in charge of creating and nurturing partnerships with other aid actors. As far as the private sector is concerned, I oriented my recruitment efforts towards members of the Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI), in particular the President of the VCCI and those representing key sectors for development, but also for emergency assistance, such as transport and communications. In the media sector, I sought to interview the editor-in-chief of the *Daily Post*, as well as journalists familiar with political and international affairs.

Because I recruited participants based on their knowledge of, and role in, development cooperation in the country, I did not focus on other aspects of their profile, such as, gender, age, economic status or education. This said, from what I observed, there were no clear differences in participants' understandings and insights about aid effectiveness principles along gender lines, for example. However, it is reasonable to consider that the general lack of female representation in decision-making spaces influences all spheres of society, and in the case of the aid effectiveness principles, undermines ownership. Other aspects of people's identity influence their perceptions of international cooperation. For instance, in Vanuatu, there are people of Melanesian origin, people from other Pacific countries who may or may not be citizens of Vanuatu, people of Asian or European origin who have been living in the country for generations, and (usually white) people from Australia, New Zealand and France who are there for the short or medium term, some of whom end up becoming citizens. There are also Ni-Vanuatu citizens who study abroad and return after a few years, or not, and make up the diaspora. However, the participants' access to cooperation in practice remained crucial to expressing their views on the topic of this research. There were also clear differences in perceptions between people who had a theoretical and meta understanding of aid debates, and who had participated in international forums to discuss international orientations on the topic, versus practice-based perspectives from people who had not. I strongly suspect that these differences have their roots in differences in social background and levels of education. Nonetheless, for this project, I focused on the place of potential participants in the development and humanitarian spheres in the country.

Throughout the research, I kept a table of potential participants listing their names, positions, and contact details. I aimed to conduct five to 10 interviews per group of actors, but the actual number would only be determined during data collection as I had planned to rely on the principle of saturation and my knowledge of the context to end this form of data collection. In fact, in social sciences the saturation point is meant to vary according to the research (Dahl et al., 2014). The most important consideration in this research was to have access to key informants, thus prioritizing quality over quantity of information or statistical representativeness. I established initial contact with participants directly by email (Appendix A).

Between January 2021 and September 2022, I conducted 50 interviews or storian and collected written responses from three people. The final breakdown by group of actors is available in Table 4 below. Three participants preferred to answer questions in writing due to lack of time or other constraints; I treated this data as interview data. I conducted 37 interviews primarily in English and 16 primarily in French, often alternating with Bislama during the interview, and sometimes between French and English.

Table 4

Participants by Group of Actors

Government/ state system	Donors	NGOs/ agencies	Private sector	The media	Foreign consultants and experts	Other
7	14	21	2	0	7	5

In total, 56 individuals participated in interviews; on two occasions I conducted the interview with more than one person at the same time. Interviews were conducted with people at the heart of the aid system, who, based on their former or current positions and/or experience at the time of the research, were involved in or had insights into aid-related strategies and policies, management, and operationalization. Given the limited number of potential participants because Vanuatu is a small country and the local aid world is even smaller, and the potential reticence to participate in research on aid associated with this context (Baldacchino, 2023b), as well as the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, I considered my recruitment sufficient, in terms of numbers and quality, to yield robust results. As the figures in Table 4 reveal, I encountered difficulty in recruiting participants from the media and the private sector. I attribute this to the

fact that I had a less developed network in these sectors prior to the research, as well as to the difficulty in identifying and contacting relevant people remotely, especially in the Pacific. However, there are various other reasons why journalists and businesspeople may have been reluctant to discuss their work, experience, and insights on aid, development, and cooperation with a foreign researcher, such as mistrust related to how their views could be distorted or instrumentalized or fear of government reprisals for criticizing it. However, although including these sectors would have helped diversify perspectives further, their participation was not essential to adequately answering my research questions. I used the interviews with actors in the private sector as complementary perspectives in my analysis. Some of the participants belonged to more than one sector or group. In these cases, I assigned each of them to a group based on the nature and duration of their experience in different roles. I added a new group during data collection for “consultants and experts” when I noticed a significant number of participants fell into this category.

Initially, I had planned to carry out most of the interviews in person. In-person interviews reduce barriers, such as access to a computer and/or the internet, changes in telephone numbers, email addresses, and positions that are often missing or out of date on websites, which are all challenges in Vanuatu. Other advantages of in-person interviews and research include being able to be reactive and rapidly meet with participants when they are available, and to grasp more non-verbal messages during the interview. Being physically in the country also allows to immerse oneself in the local context and issues. As mentioned above, relationships are important in the Pacific and in Vanuatu, and I had planned face-to-face interviews to build these relationships and trust. However, the COVID-19 pandemic led to the closure of many borders, including Vanuatu’s in March 2020. Taking into account the consequences of the pandemic for people in the Global South and for international development research (Barei-Guyot, 2021), the specific considerations related to online research (Braun et. al., 2020), and the relevance of conducting online interviews involving participants mainly from the elite, I adapted my research methods by conducting online interviews until it was possible to travel again. However, not all online interviews took place remotely because of the COVID-19 pandemic; some participants were based outside Vanuatu, for instance, and I had planned to conduct interviews remotely, if needed, before the pandemic started. In total, I conducted 38 online interviews.

While online interviews were not a central part of my original research design, they had some advantages for the research, for the participants, and for me as a researcher. They allowed for great discretion, an important consideration for participants, who could take part in the interview in the privacy of their office or their home. This was possible because many participants belonged to the elite. Being seen with a researcher can be prejudicial to participants, especially to those who usually need clearance from their organizations to speak with researchers, or for those who wish to further protect their anonymity. Online interviews also allowed for great flexibility in terms of time and place. Nevertheless, establishing or maintaining contact was sometimes difficult. Indeed, when the initial contact is based solely on virtual exchanges, answers and follow-up requests are easier to ignore. Finally, there were well-known challenges with the quality of the internet connection, which often meant that the video had to be switched off and sometimes the sound quality was suboptimal. Overall, it was easy to communicate with the participants interviewed online, who had the adequate material resources and knowledge. Indeed, the participants were relatively well-off, educated, used to international collaboration and communication, and they had quickly adapted to the COVID-19 situation. Whether or not to use video during the interview was left to the choice of participants.

On 1 July 2022, Vanuatu reopened its borders to non-residents when approximately 40% of its population had been vaccinated against COVID-19. I spent a month in Vanuatu during the months of August and September 2022. While there, I conducted 12 interviews or stories in person, held follow-up discussions with participants I had met online, and took field notes. The interviews took place in public places (cafés, nakamals) or at the workplaces of participants. The choice of location and time of the interview was left completely open to the participant. Being present, in person, and being available and reachable by phone improved my snowball recruitment ability and accelerated the pace of data collection. In-person interviews facilitated non-verbal exchanges and enabled me to establish a rapid connection with the participants. Many participants deduced that I had a good knowledge of the Vanuatu context even though I was a foreigner because I spoke Bislama and was physically there. Thus, interviewing participants in person, using the *lingua franca*, as well as introducing myself and my background, helped to quickly establish a climate of trust.

All the participants gave their consent to be part of the research either verbally, by email or both. A large majority wished to provide at least some information on their identity, and many people wished to be identified in detail. A total of 46 people fell into these two categories. The fact that many participants chose to provide identification details was surprising given that development and humanitarian actors form a small community in Vanuatu. Perhaps this small community characteristic, as well as the relatively privileged position of most participants, made them feel comfortable expressing themselves. Those who requested anonymity for all or part of the interview did so for various reasons, including to avoid the bureaucratic internal clearance processes required by their organizations. Other reasons included the need to remain discrete because what they had to say was critical of the government or organizations and they wished to preserve good working relationships. Where necessary, I edited the quotes for readability and to ensure anonymity. The shortest interview lasted 30 minutes and the longest, more than two hours. On several occasions, I followed up with participants on one or more specific points raised in the interview, either online, in writing, or in person. The interviews were conducted using the online platform chosen by the participant (Microsoft Teams, Zoom, WhatsApp or Messenger), or via Microsoft Teams when no preference was expressed. I had prepared a series of questions for each group of actors to guide the discussion (Appendix B). Above all, I wanted to leave a lot of space for participants to express themselves on aid, international cooperation, development, and humanitarian action in Vanuatu. The list of questions helped me refocus the discussion when necessary. To complement the data collected through the document review and the interviews, I conducted observations to grasp unspoken elements and dynamics around aid in the country, a process I explain in the next section.

Observations

Observations provide access to information that would not otherwise be available, particularly on sensitive subjects, interactions between different actors and power games, topics which research participants might not discuss openly for various reasons. When conducting observations, the researcher is interested in their own perceptions, in a way that complements the perceptions of the participants (Dépelteau, 2000). This method was particularly relevant for my research on international aid which is embedded in a multi-stakeholder context involving unequal power relations.

The observation components took place at three moments in this research. The first was in August 2020 during the meeting that brought together the government and international partners where the government presented the results of the *Post-Disaster Needs Assessment* and the *National Recovery Strategy* produced in the wake of COVID-19 and TC Harold. The meeting was filmed and broadcasted online (covert non-participant observation). The second was during my month-long research visit to Vanuatu as I discussed aid, development, and humanitarian issues with a wide range of people (e.g., contemporary concerns, political life), followed the latest news reports on these subjects (e.g., press, official visits), and observed the socioeconomic situation and changes in the country since 2017, and the place of donors and international organizations in the urban landscape (e.g., new embassies) (overt participant observation). The third moment was during my participation in the International Research Conference on the Effectiveness of Development Cooperation, held in Brussels in November 2022 (covert participant observation). I had planned to conduct observations at relevant national or regional meetings; however, many of them were cancelled or postponed in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19, including meetings of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), the main regional political organization.

The first observation moment took place early in the data collection process. Thus, I adopted an inductive approach by taking notes of all elements that related to the research topic in a broad way, both in the government's presentations and interventions and in the interventions of other participants in the meeting. My notetaking during the in-person observation phase was influenced by the recurring themes I had already identified from the literature, the first observation phase, and online interviews. However, I also wrote down anything relevant to aid based on everyday life in Port-Vila and on discussions with the people I met. Finally, I used an observation grid to guide the analysis of the conference on aid effectiveness in Brussels, which is available in Appendix C. Nonetheless, observations did not strictly start at the beginning of the research project. The observations and reflections I nurtured during my 18-month stay in Vanuatu working from 2016 to 2017 with the Red Cross, an organization designing and implementing development projects and responding to emergencies, greatly influenced this research from its inception to the results. As a practitioner, I became familiar with the inner workings of the aid system and its flaws at the level of a national organization, and I developed a network of colleagues and friends working in international cooperation. I also got acquainted with life in

Vanuatu, the culture, some of the languages and burning issues. As modest as this experience remains, it constitutes an integral part of this research project.

In the last section of this chapter, I briefly explain how I analyzed the data gathered using the methods described above. I selected an approach that favours the emergence and exploration all lines of inquiry and ensures the robustness of results and arguments through data triangulation.

Data Analysis

The approach I adopted is similar to the one explained by Blais and Martineau (2006), inspired by Thomas (2006). They described the stages of a general inductive analysis as preparing raw data, reading of this data carefully and in-depth, identifying and describing the first categories, and revising and refining the categories (Blais & Martineau, 2006, pp. 7–8). More specifically, I carried out a conventional content analysis in the sense of Hsieh and Shannon (2005). In this type of analysis, the researcher starts from the observed data to establish a number of categories, which can be themes, issues, or trends. This type of analysis allows the researcher to remain open to all avenues of reflection rather than restricting observations to issues pre-established by a theoretical model.

Content analysis is well suited to this research as it allows to isolate passages linked to the themes studied—aid effectiveness principles, the relationship between humanitarian aid and development, and the various factors influencing them—in the documentary review, interviews, and observations. This method, therefore, is well suited to the information sought as well as to the confirmatory and exploratory nature of this research. Based on the data collected, the aim was to analyze the importance that different actors attribute to certain themes, to find the links between these themes, and to determine their nature. Thus, it is possible to observe the divergences and similarities within and between the different groups of actors, and within and between the principles considered.

In practice, I transcribed the handwritten notes taken during each interview within 48 hours of the interview. In a different format from the interview notes or in square brackets, I took additional notes on non-verbal aspects of the interview, such as the atmosphere, the tone of the participants or technical problems, and indicated contextual details when necessary. I then read

the interviews several times and triangulated them with each other, with the literature review, and with notes from observations to extract trends both according to the research questions and themes studied (ownership, alignment, harmonization, humanitarian-development, impact of COVID-19 on aid, other recurring themes if any) and according to groups of actors. Reading interviews transcripts, documents and notes several times, and triangulating these data sources with each other, also allowed me to determine if and what was *missing* from them.

Using a table, I confirmed each trend or issue using at least one other source, be that another interview, observation notes, or one or more publications. In most cases, more than 10 sources converged towards a trend/issue. This triangulation added robustness to the results which I used in the following chapters to build my arguments. During the writing process, I frequently returned to the documents, observation notes, and interview transcripts to ensure I remained true to the information gathered.

Chapter 4 – Political Will: The Road to Hell Is Paved With Good Intentions

The GPEDC, the main international body in charge of the aid effectiveness agenda, and aid effectiveness principles face a legitimacy and relevancy crisis. The main reasons include weak support from emerging donors and China in particular, a discrepancy between GPEDC indicators and the content of the principles - despite the role of GPEDC being very much reduced to a monitoring one -, and aid effectiveness agenda's disappointing implementation results, often because donors overlook each country's specific context and do not explore nor capitalize on the causes of the agenda's failure (Brown, 2016b, 2020a; Gisselquist et al., 2022). In particular, the context of fragile and conflict-affected states demands specific attention and a closer articulation of humanitarian and long-term aid actors, strategies, activities, and funding. Moreover, international development frameworks can clash, such as when Agenda 2030 promises to "leave no one behind" on one hand, and when the principles of ownership and alignment of the aid effectiveness agenda require donors to respect a country's leadership even if this country's government discriminates against minority groups, on the other hand (Brown, forthcoming). All these reasons triggered the crisis for the aid effectiveness agenda, while aid actors recognize that aid effectiveness is crucial in a world where inequalities are on the rise, there are ongoing conflicts and forced migration, and climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic have had a disastrous impact on the most vulnerable.

The Paris Declaration was a major step in creating a global framework based on more equal relations between aid donors and recipient states. It is based on three interrelated core principles: ownership (recipient countries define their own development policies), alignment (donors support these strategies) and harmonization (donors coordinate among themselves). However, as mentioned in the literature review (Chapter 1), more than 15 years later the implementation of these principles has been globally disappointing. While the Paris Declaration, the OECD and the GPEDC provide for quantitative monitoring, it appears inadequate for a deep understanding of implementation difficulties, which requires qualitative analyses (e.g., Brown, 2017). Such analyses consider the specific national or local context in which aid is delivered, and the actors and incentives at work.

This chapter and the following three chapters, as well as the broader thesis, contribute to the qualitative literature on implementation of the principles by conducting a case study. More

specifically, in Chapters 4 to 7, I analyze the application of the three interrelated core principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness of 2005, the ancestors of GPEDC principles, in the case of Vanuatu, an aid recipient country in the South Pacific. In the region, state representatives recognized that when it comes to aid effectiveness “much of what is reported is a ‘thin veil of truth’ with much more to be done to make sure what is planned is funded, and when funds are allocated, programmes are actually delivered” (UN, 2018, para. 105). Thus, I ask the following question: Why do various aid actors circumvent or misapply the three core principles of the Paris Declaration? I am particularly interested in the incentives weighing on actors that would help explain those disappointing results.

Based on the data collected and analyzed as described in Chapter 3, I argue that the presence of four major counterincentives leads to the principles being applied only superficially in Vanuatu: First, the government’s desire to maximize access to donor funding for Vanuatu, which aligns with donors’ spending obligations; second, Vanuatu and donor governments’ accountability towards their respective domestic constituencies; third, geopolitical competition between traditional donors and China; fourth, Vanuatu’s history and experience with aid, especially related to disasters. Overall, the mismatch between a technical approach to aid by donors, the recipient government and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and aid’s developmental and political dimensions ensures the maintenance of a status quo detrimental to the local civil society and the poor.

The four chapters dedicated to answering the first research question are organized as follows: first, in this chapter, I examine Vanuatu and main donors’ political will to respect the Paris principles; second, in Chapters 5–7, I turn to each of the three core principles of ownership, alignment, and harmonization and analyze to what extent they are being applied in Vanuatu and why.

* * *

Overall, recipient and donor states have lacked political will and faced powerful disincentives to implement the aid effectiveness agenda (Brown, 2020a). Post et al. (2010) defined political will as “the extent of committed support among key decision makers for a particular policy solution to a particular problem” (p. 659). States and multilateral donors express

their understanding of development cooperation issues and convey their support to specific solutions through diverse media such as public statements and speeches by high-level politicians or organization representatives, as well as publicly available documents and strategies, that I use in this chapter to assess Vanuatu and donors' political will to respect the Paris principles. As it is the case throughout the thesis, I also base my analysis on semi-structured interviews with key actors in Vanuatu as well as on observations conducted as a volunteer and a researcher in Vanuatu.

In this chapter, I argue that both the Government of Vanuatu and donors are inclined to respect the Paris principles based on their public declarations and major aid- and development-related strategies. They have expressed their will to respect and implement the Paris principles to improve aid effectiveness. However, monitoring exercises have revealed disappointing results at the global, regional and country level in Vanuatu.

This chapter is structured as follows: first, I analyze in turn Vanuatu and donors' public commitment to the aid/development effectiveness agenda, and second, I contrast their apparent willingness to respect the principles with actual results, uncovering discrepancies that reveal weak political will and suggest other factors and incentives are at play, that will be further explored in the following three chapters.

Vanuatu: Strategies With Shortcomings in Implementation and Feasibility Planning

Vanuatu has expressed its willingness to support and implement the aid effectiveness agenda, even if allocating resources to the implementation of aid policies has sometimes been challenging. Jean-Pierre Nirua, former director of the Vanuatu Planning Office (now the Department of Strategic Planning, Policy and Aid Coordination [DSPPAC] located within the Prime Minister's Office), remembered the enthusiasm created by the aid effectiveness agenda as soon as in the 1980s:

La Déclaration de Paris était une très bonne stratégie pour faciliter l'aide internationale. ... En 1985-86, on a décidé au gouvernement de coordonner l'aide entre tous, agences, bailleurs, ONG ... car ils avaient des modalités de financement différentes, des temporalités différentes sur un an ou par exemple

cinq ans, des années fiscales différentes selon les bailleurs, de janvier à décembre ou de juin à mai... Toute cette salade était difficile pour un jeune pays comme nous. J’ai pu lier ça à la Déclaration de Paris à ce moment-là ; la Déclaration a été très bien reçue ! ... La première étape a été de développer un plan pour pouvoir aligner l’aide, que les bailleurs de fonds puissent s’aligner. Il y a eu trois plans quinquennaux, puis d’autres formes de stratégie, planification.¹⁰

Indeed, Vanuatu is a signatory of both the 2005 Paris Declaration and the 2009 Cairns Compact—an agreement between PIF countries that reasserts development cooperation effectiveness principles—and is a member of the GPEDC. As early as 2006, just after the Paris Declaration, the Government of Vanuatu released its *Priorities and Action Agenda 2006–2015* (PAA), a high-level strategy to guide its national development efforts and donor countries’ support, or, in other terms, “a set of overarching national strategic priorities [that] can be identified for the allocation of development resources, as well as policy initiatives and implementation action” (Government of Vanuatu, 2006, p. 1). The PAA also stressed the importance of having a strategy that the people of Vanuatu would adhere to, thanks to prior consultations: “Representatives of key stakeholders to the workshop included the government, NGOs, church groups, private sector and the civil society” (Government of Vanuatu, 2006, p. i). However, the OECD questioned feasibility and implementation as “the PAA is not costed, nor is there a medium-term fiscal framework or medium-term expenditure framework”, as well as monitoring (OECD, 2012b, p. 3).

Although the language of the Paris Declaration was not used and the Paris principles were not explicitly mobilized in the PAA, this changed with the subsequent strategy, the *National Sustainable Development Plan 2016–2030* (NSDP) also called *The People’s Plan*. The government undertook a three-year consultation with a variety of stakeholders. It called for “collective ownership of the plan” and for development partners “to ensure their programmes are aligned to the national vision, goals and policy objectives in this plan” (Government of Vanuatu, 2016a, Foreword), directly referring to the principles of ownership and alignment. Policy

¹⁰ Interview with Jean-Pierre Nirua, former Director of the National Planning Office, now Chancellor of Vanuatu National University, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

objective 6.8 under the plan's social pillar is "Coordinate donor resources to align with national priorities", manages to refer to the three core principles at once (Government of Vanuatu, 2016a, p. 12). The government recognizes the Plan's implementation "requires strong coordination of the partnerships with business, civil society, development agencies and donors, aligning their contributions to national priorities and ensuring programme delivery takes place through national systems"—another clear reference to alignment and harmonization (Government of Vanuatu, 2016a, p. 20).

The government's commitment to aid effectiveness is most visible and explicit in its 2018 *Aid Management Policy* where it refers to global and regional frameworks:

The Policy and Strategy are based on the international framework and principles of effective development cooperation. These include the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005), the Accra Agenda for Action (2008), and the Busan Global Partnership for Effective Development (2011). The documents also respond to the Pacific Island Forum (Cairns) Compact for Effective Development Cooperation (2009). Most important, the documents recognize the four main components of the Busan agreement: 1) ownership of development priorities by developing countries; 2) focus on results; 3) inclusive development partnerships; and 4) transparency and accountability between countries and development partners. (Government of Vanuatu, 2018a, p. 4)

The government committed to leading effectiveness efforts and to support alignment and harmonization by donors (Government of Vanuatu, 2018a, p. 9). In the *Aid Management Policy's Implementation Strategy*, the government of Vanuatu even included commitments from development partners who should "respect the Government's leadership and contribute to further strengthening its capacity to exercise it", "align with the Government's strategies and priorities", "increasingly use strengthened country systems and procedures", "implement arrangements and simplified procedures", and "share annually information on their programs and where feasible conclude multi-year agreements with the Government to enhance the accounting, planning and predictability of development assistance" (Government of Vanuatu, 2018b, pp. 21–22). Here again, the government used the language of the development effectiveness agenda and the Paris principles.

The government has called on donors to respect the country's priorities and reminded them to adjust to Vanuatu's limited capacities and resources in terms of procedures and demands in other instances. In 2020, as Vanuatu was planning for recovery following TC Harold and COVID-19, the government requested that recovery programmes and activities matched government's priorities as they were listed in the *National Recovery Strategy* (Daily Post, 2020u). Ownership, capacity-building and speed of delivery are priorities in terms of aid management and delivery for several PICs, including Vanuatu (Schmaljohann and Prizzon, 2015), which also "have developed a preference for national direct-access accreditation [for global funds] allowing them to develop and manage the projects themselves" (Fouad et al., 2021, p. 29). Two interviewees working in the development field in Vanuatu confirmed the government had been taking the Paris principles into account at the national and regional levels:

Pre-COVID, there was a review of those frames like the Cairns Compact—which is very much an Australian construct—and they are all based on the Paris principles. The Paris Declaration and subsequent engagements at Accra, Busan, etc. are still the base of aid coordination policy, it's still the baseline.¹¹

[In the 2000s] the alignment with the Paris Declaration was really driven by DSPPAC, their sector analysts for the aid coordination part they would assure it was respected.¹²

Another interviewee confirmed tables were turning: "donors said 'you can do that', and DGs [Directors General] said 'Yes'. But now [DGs] want to do their own things, which is one of the reasons why things are tense now [between those high-level civil servants tasked with implementing government policies, and donors]"¹³. Thus, at first glance, there is an agreement among policymakers in Vanuatu, based on nationwide, diverse consultations, that tackling aid ineffectiveness necessitates government ownership of aid priorities, the alignment of donors to these national priorities and to government systems, and coordination among donors to reduce pressure on limited government resources and capacities. This description matches part of Post et

¹¹ Interview with an international development professional based in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online.

¹² Interview with Anna Naupa, an experienced development professional in the Pacific and in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online.

¹³ Interview with consultant in Community Development and Planning with 11 years in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

al.'s (2010) conceptualization of political will according to which “a sufficient set of decision makers intends to support a particular initiative” (p. 653) and “key decision makers” agree on “a particular policy solution to a particular problem” (p. 659).

However, as these authors also imply in their definition, assessing political will based solely on commitments towards the principles in Vanuatu's high-level development and aid policies, even if backed by several testimonies, is giving lots of credit to political promises. Nonetheless, it provides a useful idea about the extent to which the principles have reached the national level, are understood and considered important. Yet, declarations of intent and the sole presence of strategies ignore the quality and feasibility of these strategies. Indeed, there are no proposed budget or financial estimates in the NSDP (Brien, 2019; GPEDC, 2020b). The plan acknowledges the government's limited capacities and mentions that “this plan will strengthen the link between [medium-term strategies, corporate plans and business plans] and the long-term national vision, which in turn will guide annual budget allocations” (Government of Vanuatu, 2016a, p. 19). Thus, NSDP's feasibility and implementation depend on other strategies and plans, and lower government levels.

Although the NSDP promised an *Implementation and Monitoring Framework* (Government of Vanuatu, 2017a), this framework lacks the implementation component. It was developed to assess Vanuatu's progress against NSDP's objectives using almost exclusively quantitative indicators. Nonetheless, the government produced *Annual Development Reports* and conducted a review of NSDP's implementation progress five years on (Government of Vanuatu, 2023a, 2023b). Moreover, according to my review of national and sectoral policies, strategies and plans in Vanuatu, a large majority of these strategies include implementation and financial considerations, which confirms the aspirational aspect of NSDP that should guide other policies, corporate and business plans as explained in the *National Planning Framework* (Government of Vanuatu, 2018c). It also confirms the hierarchy between plans with the NSDP at the top; the government considers it the ultimate reference in other strategies and plans. However, there is no explicit hierarchy between sectoral strategies and plans.

The *2018 Aid Management Policy's Implementation Strategy* defines roles and responsibilities of Vanuatu's main aid and development actors, lists commitments from the government as well as donors, and describes some of the government procedures that donors

should align with. However, it does not mention or plan for the resources needed to implement the policy: for example, what does it mean in terms of staff requirements at DSPPAC, and their technical skills? This mismatch between strategies and resources will be further explored in the following sections.

In sum, the government of Vanuatu has expressed its commitment to respecting the Paris principles both through its political leaders, its national development plan and its aid management policy. However, how the two main high-level development and aid policies were to be implemented, especially in terms of financial and human resources, remained unclear. The lower policy level and the corporate and business levels give more importance to implementation and financial considerations.

I now turn to donors as financial power holders who have a crucial role in shifting aid dynamics. They have also expressed their willingness to implement the Paris principles, in general and in Vanuatu.

Donors' Support to the Development Effectiveness Agenda

Vanuatu's main donors, namely Australia, the World Bank, China, New Zealand and Japan, have committed to respecting Vanuatu's leadership and have publicly supported the aid effectiveness agenda notably through the endorsement of all or some of the following initiatives: the Paris Declaration, the Accra Agenda for Action and the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation. Australia considers itself "a strong supporter of the GPEDC and continues to engage in its global monitoring activities and high-level meetings" (Australian DFAT, n.d.a, para. 4). The World Bank declared it "has been at the forefront in implementing global commitments on aid effectiveness at the country and institutional levels since the 2005 Paris Declaration" (World Bank, 2012). A UN official in Vanuatu also confirmed their organization's activities were aligned with the NSDP¹⁴. New Zealand, via its *Vanuatu Four-Year Plan*, asserted that it delivered

effective development outcomes by: working through Vanuatu Government systems and with Vanuatu Government-led designs where possible; aligning

¹⁴ Interview with a UN official, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

our reporting with Vanuatu Government frameworks; maintaining flexibility to respond to changing needs (especially as a result of natural disasters); and regularly evaluating and monitoring progress to ensure our approach is working. ... Sustained development enables lasting progress and is locally owned to uphold results in the long term. (New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade [NZ MFAT], 2021, p. 11)

Japan is particularly committed to advancing donor coordination, as stated in its *Country Assistance Policy for the Republic of Vanuatu*, “to avoid duplication of support and to produce a synergistic effect with respect to each aid [sic]” (Government of Japan, 2012, p. 2). It also bases its rolling plan on Vanuatu’s development priorities and national plan (Government of Japan, 2016). Thus, on the donors’ side as well, there is a recognition of aid management flaws and of the need to respect and implement the Paris Declaration as a way to increase aid effectiveness, showing a certain degree of political will. The creation and the existence of the aid effectiveness agenda itself is evidence of the consensus, albeit relative and fragile, on the understanding of the system’s flaws and possible solutions.

Although traditional donors support the GPEDC, at least rhetorically, China has had a less straightforward relationship with the GPEDC group which it considers led by OECD countries (Brown, 2020a). China endorsed the Busan Agreement but was absent from the two following GPEDC meetings in Mexico and Nairobi (Li & Qi, 2021). Nonetheless, Chinese diplomats and politicians in Vanuatu have expressed their support of national leadership and their willingness to align their assistance with national priorities on multiple occasions. For instance, China has committed to “Strengthen policy alignment: The Vanuatu government has released its policy directions for the next four years. China will keep close communication and increase policy coordination with Vanuatu over post-COVID-19 era pragmatic cooperation” (*Daily Post*, 2020r). The country’s commitment to harmonization, however, is less clear, as explained in Chapter 7.

In discourse, donors have also expressed their will to respect the Paris principles. However, these promises have been broken in practice, with overall disappointing results regarding the implementation of the principles according to OECD, GPEDC, and other monitoring frameworks and studies.

Disappointing Results

At the global level, in 2011 only one out of 13 quantitative targets had been reached, and broader civil society was still largely excluded from development processes in recipient countries (OECD, 2012a). The 2014 progress report concluded it was too soon to evaluate progress in terms of ownership of development strategies (OECD/UNDP, 2014). In 2016, almost all recipient countries had national strategies in place but implementation was a challenge (OECD/UNDP, 2016); and in 2018, only 64% of countries had a high-quality national strategy, with other indicators, such as alignment of donors on recipient countries' priorities, declining (OECD/UNDP, 2019).

The Pacific has been at the heart of concerns in terms of aid effectiveness for several decades, leading observers to coin the term “Pacific Paradox” to express the fact that despite considerable amounts of aid, development indicators have remained stagnant (Pollard, 2020). According to regional reports, including from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the main causes comprise “inadequate initial diagnostics and project design, insufficient implementation support and monitoring, weak government ownership, and thin capacity of implementing agencies” (Pollard, 2020, para. 2). Other analysts consider PICs' geographical isolation and demographics as major impediments to aid project effectiveness (Wood et al., 2022). These causes, which suggest that the lack of ownership, of alignment, and the geographical characteristics of the countries play a role in the success or failure of development initiatives in the region, were echoed by research participants.

In the Pacific and in Vanuatu, regional and global reporting mechanisms on the Paris principles have revealed a lack of data and that the principles have only partially landed in practice. First, the lack of data and limited capacities to measure aid effectiveness against GPEDC indicators have been enduring problems in the Pacific at least since the Millennium Development Goals (UN, 2018). Vanuatu has also struggled to collect data throughout the years (GPEDC, 2020b), and the government recognizes it is a major challenge in most of its strategies, plans, reports and evaluations.

Second, the available data reveals limited progress had been made in the region. In 2018, the UN concluded that:

In many cases, the relevant policy documents are in place and the ownership, results based systems and inclusive approaches are understood. However, in deeper analysis, much of what is reported is a ‘thin veil of truth’ with much more to be done to make sure what is planned is funded, and when funds are allocated, programmes are actually delivered. It is also apparent that while most development partner policies and processes are considered to be in line with the GPEDC Framework and the Forum Compact itself, the reality is often less encouraging. Some development partners still prefer to operate quite independently of the national planning and budget processes, or continue to not respect attempts by countries to define more clearly an engagement or reporting process for partners. (UN, 2018, p. 23)

In an article she co-authored in 2023, Dame Meg Taylor, who served as Secretary General of the PIF from 2014 to 2021, fiercely criticized aid to the Pacific as it is currently delivered. She and her coauthor argue that Australia, the biggest bilateral donor in the Pacific region, has increasingly delivered its aid based on its own interests, and that aid to the region has been increasingly delivered through big private corporations, to the detriment of local Pacific actors (Taylor & Middleby, 2023). The interviews I conducted in Vanuatu confirmed that aid actors, and especially donors, are not putting their money where their mouth is:

... after Pam donors did their things, and the government gave up! They said: “we do our things separately”.¹⁵

[Gouvernement et secteur privé] évoluent souvent parallèlement.¹⁶

... dans la pratique chacun veut maintenir son agenda, ses procédures, chacun a ses normes et veut garder ses propres modalités. ... Il y a eu une évolution chez les bailleurs de leurs politiques d’aide internationale, avec de la bonne volonté

¹⁵ Interview with an independent consultant in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

¹⁶ Interview with Marc-Antoine Morel, President of V-Lab, a charitable association focused on enhancing entrepreneurship in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

politique dans cette Déclaration [de Paris], mais il y a un écart entre dire et faire.¹⁷

It is difficult to estimate the resources that states dedicate to the advancement of the aid effectiveness agenda. They contribute in diverse ways through their participation in working groups and meetings on specific issues, their contribution to multilateral organizations whose mandates include the advancement of the aid effectiveness agenda, and their allocation of resources to the progress of aid effectiveness domestically. Regionally, however, from 2017 to 2021 Vanuatu's main bilateral donors (Australia, New Zealand and China) were absent from the list of donors to UNDP's Global Project for Managing Development Cooperation Effectively, which supports GPEDC's work (UNDP, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021).

At the country level, the government of Vanuatu has made efforts to encourage donors to align to their national priorities and to coordinate (Geary Nichol, 2014). These efforts are exemplified by the adoption of the NSDP and the *Aid Management Policy*. However, Vanuatu performed poorly according to the five-year review of the Mauritius Strategy of Implementation dedicated to the sustainable development of SIDS, that concluded “all Actors including Government, the Private Sector and the Civil Society Sector are lagging behind in developing Sustainable Development Policies. When it comes to implementation actions, the situation is dire” (*Vanuatu National Assessment Report*, 2010, p. 7). Indeed, when the government develops plans and strategies, the latter do not always translate into activities and/or allocated resources, as it is the case with the NSDP (UN, 2018; UNDP, 2012).

As results are disappointing with regard to the aid effectiveness agenda in the Pacific and in Vanuatu, unequal power relationships and imbalances are at play within countries (UN, 2018), between donors and aid recipient governments, and among donors. These relationships shape incentives in favour or against the implementation of the Paris principles on aid effectiveness by aid actors.

¹⁷ Interview with Jean-Pierre Nirua, former Director of the National Planning Office, now Chancellor of Vanuatu National University, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

Conclusion

Donors and the government of Vanuatu have repeatedly asserted their commitment to the Paris Declaration and the implementation of the principles, revealing a certain degree of consensus and political will around the aid effectiveness agenda in the sense of Post et al. (2010). However, these commitments have only partially translated into practice and results have been disappointing. On Vanuatu's side, there is an overarching development strategy in place, but there is a lack of feasibility and implementation planning at the highest level. The NSDP has a primarily aspirational role, while ministries are responsible for developing policies, plans and budgets aligned with the national plan. On the donors' side, high-level declarations have neither translated into significantly better alignment with country systems and procedures, nor harmonization of agendas and procedures. These poor results reflect a lack of political will on both sides of the aid relationship as donors are not significantly changing their behaviours and Vanuatu does not have a fully actionable national strategy backed by funding and translated into a clear implementation plan.

In addition to this lack of political will, this chapter has begun to uncover other factors weighing on aid actors such as the geography of SIDS, limited capacity, self-interest, as well as differences between donors. In the next three chapters, I analyze in turn the degree of implementation of the ownership, alignment and ownership principles in Vanuatu and barriers to their application.

Chapter 5 – “Government”, “Joint” or “Negotiated” Ownership

According to the ownership principle, recipient countries “exercise effective leadership over their development policies, and strategies and co-ordinate development actions” (OECD, 2005, p. 3). After obtaining its independence in 1980, the government of Vanuatu has been vocal about its will to fulfill its leadership role in development, and even more so following TC Pam in 2015. Indeed, the emergency and recovery response to TC Pam was chaotic as many international actors followed their own priorities and bypassed government systems. The government’s eagerness to define its own priorities has materialized in its discourse and through the publication of key documents, in particular the NSDP in 2016 and the *Aid Management Policy* in 2018. The country has also witnessed a proliferation of sectoral plans, with tailored versions at the provincial level. As a participant stated: “Aujourd’hui, le Vanuatu choisit ses points de vue, ses priorités. Rien ne se fait sans l’accord du gouvernement”¹⁸. Vanuatu is one of the many countries that have a national development plan in place and that contribute to the re-emergence of national development planning globally since the early 2000s (Chimhowu et al., 2019). These plans vary in terms of duration, content, commitment to the SDGs and global public goods, and who produces, implements and funds them. Overall, they tend to adopt a more collaborative approach and to be more evidence-based than their predecessors (Chimhowu et al., 2019).

Vanuatu has put an emphasis on consultations to confer more legitimacy to overarching strategies and plans, in line with the ownership principle. A vast majority of the policy documents reviewed in the frame of this research (i.e., published in the last 10–15 years) include consultations of a variety of stakeholders. This is the case for the NSDP that was “informed by the priorities voiced by our people, their community and elected representatives, the private sector and civil society over the course of a three-year consultation programme undertaken across the whole country” (Government of Vanuatu, 2016a, Foreword). This consultation process is documented in a consultation report. DSPPAC also meets with NGOs on an annual basis, and the

¹⁸ Interview with Georges Cumbo, Elected representative for French citizens living in Vanuatu, September 2021, French, online.

government organizes targeted public consultations on specific issues such as deep-sea mining and grant-writing¹⁹.

These dialogues constitute positive advances towards the respect of the ownership principle. In this context, I ask: to what extent does Vanuatu “own” its development strategy, in the sense of defining its priorities, conceiving its programmes, and implementing them, or to what extent is this strategy developed in partnership (or negotiated) with donors according to their own funding priorities? I argue that donors still occupy strategy definition spaces in Vanuatu and that the state often only superficially includes civil society in development policy. As explained in greater detail below, donors are omnipresent in Vanuatu, there is a lack of meaningful consultation or a lack of focus on, and follow-up with, civil society’s recommendations, a lack of donor and state support to civil society organizations (CSOs), and a lack of unified voice for CSOs. NSDP’s broadness allows the government to align with the global development agenda, to acknowledge its citizens’ concerns and to maximize donor funding.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, I explain the omnipresence of donors in Vanuatu. Second, I uncover consultation challenges. Third, I retrace the evolution of an increased sense of national pride in the country. Fourth, I analyze Vanuatu’s development priorities (quantity, hierarchy, definition). Fifth, I elaborate on the reasons why the ownership principle is only applied superficially. A short conclusion summarizes the chapter.

The Omnipresence of Donors

As per the literature review, my experience, fieldwork and interviews, donors are omnipresent in Vanuatu: from highly visible, costly premises in the heart of Port-Vila to ground-breakings, cultural events, high-level discussions, logos on project signs and cars in every province, press articles and social media²⁰. Unsurprisingly, donors and more generally development partners also occupy the national development agenda and priority-setting space, often in the form of foreign technical advisors (TAs) working in (or close to) the state apparatus.

¹⁹ Interview with Georges Cumbo, Elected representative for French citizens living in Vanuatu, September 2021, French, online; Interview with Dr. Astrid Kersten, Executive Director, Human Capacity Development Int. (HCDI), March 2021, English, online.

²⁰ Interview with Ralph Regenvanu, Deputy, Leader of the Opposition, April 2021, English, online; Interview with Nancy Wells, ADB Senior Country Coordination Officer in Vanuatu, ADB Extended Mission - Vanuatu, Joint ADB-World Bank Liaison Office in Vanuatu, June 2022, English and Bislama, online.

Cox et al. (2007) noted those advisors “have been highly instrumental in the development of the Vanuatu state and the formulation of its development policies. ... Much of the legislation was drafted by foreigners, and pushed through without any real scrutiny or understanding from national counterparts” (p. 53). For instance, the first monitoring round of the implementation of Paris principles revealed the programme-based approaches process was largely donor-led in Vanuatu (OECD, 2012b). In the area of climate change in PICs, Barnett and Campbell (2010) concluded “the direction of policy responses, many of which thus far can be characterized as ‘top-down’, by which we mean their local manifestations (if any) are shaped by the expectations and resources of actors operating at larger scales” (p. 176). Indeed, in Vanuatu donors and/or development agencies such as the UN and regional entities financed the development of most national strategies and plans that I reviewed. They also usually provide technical assistance to draft these strategies and ultimately have a major role in funding and implementing them.

Donors’ involvement in and influence over development policy has continued at least to some extent (Aiafi, 2017; Hochet, 2016). For instance, in the energy sector, the World Bank and the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI) revised *Vanuatu’s National Energy Road Map 2013–2030*, which they are also implementing (GGGI, 2016, p. 21). In another instance, the Japanese cooperation agency (JICA) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Environment Programme co-developed the National Disaster Waste Contingency Plan with the government of Vanuatu by “conducting a workshop ... with key government agencies and other stakeholders” (*Daily Post*, 2021w, para. 3). At the national level, despite the NSDP being allegedly based on wide national consultations, the three pillars of the strategy are the same ones the International Union for the Conservation of Nature presented at NSDP’s initial consultations (NSDP Consultation Report, 2016), which makes me doubt their adoption through broad, representative civil society consultations and ultimately on the purpose of the consultation process. Several participants on both the government and donor sides described donors’ involvement in high-level decision making in the country:

We get to influence some sectors like WASH [water, sanitation and hygiene], agriculture...²¹

²¹ Interview with European Union aid official, May 2021, English, online.

... there were talks that there was a plan but that it had been “piloted by an agency” ...²²

Dans mon expérience, les consultants étrangers élaborent les plans. Le support ... avec lequel je travaillais était venu de l’extérieur. Il faut se poser la question : qui est autour de la table de négociations ? Quels sont les rapports de pouvoir ? [...] Dans mon expérience, une personne fidjienne avait élaboré le plan, et un autre, je l’avais fait avec une personne de DSPPAC. ... Ce qui m’a le plus choquée, c’est la manière dont on se réfère à des « guides de bonne conduite » ou « de bonnes pratiques » pensés ailleurs, par exemple les « vouchers », ou il y a une « recommandation de l’OMS » donc on l’applique... Il y a l’influence des Australiens, des Néo-Zélandais et « Fidji en force » avec le siège [régional] des Nations Unies là-bas...²³

All bilateral and multilateral partners are already embedded in national systems in one way or another ...²⁴

Ces deux étudiants [étrangers, du Nord global] dictaient tout, ils étaient les conseillers du ministre ! Tous les Ni-Vanuatu ne disaient jamais rien.²⁵

On n’a pas réussi à développer un plan de développement des ressources humaines de mon temps car les experts australiens, français, etc. ne se mettaient pas d’accord !²⁶

An independent consultant in Vanuatu as well as an employee working in the government system raised even more serious concerns. According to the first one, donors greatly influenced the design of the 2018 *Aid Management Policy* for it to be vague enough to facilitate donor projects’ approval. This participant also invoked donors’ pressure to spend their funds in a limited

²² Interview with a UN official based in the Pacific region for 4 years, February 2022, English, online.

²³ Interview with a consultant in Vanuatu, July 2022, French, online.

²⁴ Interview with INGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila

²⁵ Interview with an anonymous source, September 2022, French, online.

²⁶ Interview with Jean-Pierre Nirua, former Director of the National Planning Office, now Chancellor of Vanuatu National University, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

timeframe, regardless of economic indicators in Vanuatu²⁷. According to the second interviewee, donors are delivering projects in the form of in-kind assistance that pays for TAs working with Members of Parliament—at the heart of the country’s decision-making system—behind the back of the national entity in charge of approving projects, DSPPAC²⁸. For some observers, donor funds in the government’s budget fuels neocolonial dynamics, putting Vanuatu at the mercy of donors²⁹ (Ahluwalia & Miller, 2021).

The government holds annual development cooperation partnership meetings with donor and development agency representatives to present its annual priorities, budget, and progress on major initiatives for donors to align on its priorities. The government and donors also hold annual high-level meetings to jointly assess the progress and relevance of ongoing donor-funded programmes and projects and to make decisions to adjust them accordingly. However, what should be spaces for the government to communicate its priorities and let donors know about new directions is often a negotiation between the government and the donor to determine priorities donors will agree to fund. For instance, under the *Vanuatu-Australia Aid Partnership Arrangement* “the partners have jointly determined four strategic priorities to guide development cooperation under the Partnership” in line with both Australia and Vanuatu’s priorities (Australian Government & Government of Vanuatu, n.d., p. 2). Similarly, at the 2021 Vanuatu-Australia High Level Consultations “An Outcome Statement was agreed, which sets out priority areas of work between Australia and Vanuatu for the next 12 months” (*Daily Post*, 2021x, para. 6). In the same vein, U.S. Ambassador to Vanuatu explained that “experts from multiple U.S. government agencies meet with host country government, business, and civil society stakeholders, listen to the challenges they face, and then create a mutually agreed upon action plan that takes everyone into account” (McKee, 2021, para. 6). Writing on a high-level consultation between New Zealand and Vanuatu, New Zealand High-Commissioner to Vanuatu also stressed the joint definition of priorities: “it’s a two-week programme where we will shape up an agreement about what we are planning to do over the next year” (Tokona, 2020a, para. 16). The government of Vanuatu itself in its *Aid Management Policy* states that it “will negotiate the design of development initiatives with individual or coalitions of development partners”

²⁷ Interview with an independent consultant in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

²⁸ Interview with an employee working in the government system, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

²⁹ Interview with a development and humanitarian practitioner, March 2021, English, online.

(Government of Vanuatu, 2018b, p. 20). Interviewees mentioned this joint elaboration of strategies. In particular, an employee working at a multilateral institution in Vanuatu mentioned that

there are consultations by [the donor] before launching a project, there needs to be alignment with NSDP and government priorities, but donors also have their own agendas and strategies and projects have also to fit in there. The [donor-government strategy] is jointly elaborated with the government.³⁰

Yet, even when the government and donors meet, interviewees raised concerns about exchanges being at best superficial:

L'aide australienne travaille à développer des stratégies sectorielles (éducation, WASH, genre...) avec des consultations avec les *development partners* et le gouvernement mais ça ne marche pas vraiment. C'est plutôt pour remplir les exigences de consultation qu'ils ont. Pour la remplir, ils doivent juste avoir envoyé un email au partenaire en demandant ce qu'il en pense, c'est tout. Cela ne veut pas dire que ça va être pris en compte.³¹

There are all these roundtables, but nothing really strategic seems to come out from there, except saying “we do this, we do that...” It doesn't seem to make everything more effective.³²

According to these testimonies, donors tend to “tick the consultation box” to fulfill their own requirements rather than engaging in more meaningful conversations and consultations. However, conflict aversion is a widespread Melanesian cultural trait, and even if government representatives accept some of the donors' requests on the spot, it does not mean they will be fulfilled in the future.

The process by which donor and recipient discuss and agree on the priorities resembles “joint ownership” or “negotiated ownership” previously described in the literature, rather than

³⁰ Interview with an employee working in a multilateral institution in Vanuatu, August 2022, English, Port-Vila.

³¹ Interview with an anonymous source, French.

³² Interview with consultant in Community Development and Planning with 11 years in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

“national ownership”. Analysts nonetheless observe nuances among donors, with the government of Vanuatu valuing Chinese aid that is delivered quickly and is nationally owned but praising traditional donors for investing in capacity building and the transparency of negotiations (Schmaljohann & Prizzon, 2015). Moreover, if the government does consult civil society for policymaking and development programming, it often fails to include marginalized groups or remote communities and to consider outcomes from consultations.

Consultation Challenges

As mentioned above, the NSDP was reportedly the fruit of extensive consultations throughout the country. The development of many sectoral plans, development programmes and projects also included consultations of diverse actors, which is also in line with the government’s decentralization strategy³³ (*Daily Post*, 2020u; *Daily Post*, 2020ac; *Daily Post*, 2021g; Transparency International, 2021). But the NSDP is still broad enough to encompass concerns from civil society, without the government necessarily prioritizing them. The government had expressed its willingness to include the wider population into national development decision-making as early as 1978 (ADB, 1982). However, it has struggled since then to meaningfully involve the public and to distribute funds and benefits equally among the country’s provinces (Cox et al., 2007; Government of Vanuatu & PIFS, 2011; World Trade Organization, 2007).

Although it should contribute to solving these issues, the recent decentralization policy is yet to bear fruit according to ADB Senior Country Coordination Officer in Vanuatu Nancy Wells:

the lowest level is the area council, but there are no mechanisms in place to bring their needs up and include them in policies. ... Having a clear document saying “here are the government priorities and it consulted people from Torba to Tafea”, this is what happened for the economic sector. We should have it for all sectors, like social, health, education... The Prime Minister’s Office [PMO] should say the same thing as the Minister of Education, and it needs to come from bottom-up. For instance, in Waisisi [community], ADB found out the

³³ Interview with Dr. Astrid Kersten, Executive Director, HCIDI, March 2021, English, online.

people wanted something different from what the PMO was saying. ... If it's not owned by the people, it's not sustainable.³⁴

In 2017, an ADB brief on civil society in Vanuatu concluded that “civil society participation in government policy-making has been limited, and the opportunities that are available have been underutilized” (ADB, 2017, p. 4). In particular, the government did not sufficiently engage with custom chiefs. As a result, “some have described the relationship between the government and NGOs as distrustful, ‘fractious’, and ‘somewhat strained’” (ADB, 2017, p. 4). Several interviewees from civil society raised this issue of lack of consultation on major decisions. For instance, the former Secretary General of the Vanuatu Red Cross Society mentioned that “on doit sans arrêt rappeler au gouvernement le statut de la Croix-Rouge, et qu’il est inscrit dans une décision du Parlement. ... L’échange [avec le gouvernement], il n’y en a pas ! Il faut le créer”³⁵. Similarly, the Chief Executive Officer and Founder of Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition mentioned that

people are not involved in decisions made by VNPF [Vanuatu National Provident Fund]. For example, they want to apply a 10,000 vatus deduction from each VNPF’s member savings to constitute a kind of social security system. But there is no trust by members that it will not be politicized and used for other purposes! I hope they will consult people on that.³⁶

Therefore, the following conclusion in the field of climate reflects a more general trend: “whilst these [civil society] groups are often capable of finding highly innovative and sustainable solutions to complex challenges, their voices and their experiences insufficiently filter through to inform National or Global climate change decision-making forums” (Green Climate Fund [GCF], 2018, p. 57). I identified three important challenges related to meaningful consultation in Vanuatu, which are developed in the following sub-sections: the lack of funding for CSOs, the

³⁴ Interview with Nancy Wells, ADB Senior Country Coordination Officer in Vanuatu, ADB Extended Mission - Vanuatu, Joint ADB-World Bank Liaison Office in Vanuatu, June 2022, English and Bislama, online.

³⁵ Interview with Jacqueline Deroin de Gaillande, Secretary General of the Vanuatu Red Cross Society for 13 years (2008–2021), March 2021, French, online.

³⁶ Interview with Anne Pakoa, Chief Executive Officer and Founder of Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition, March 2021, English, online.

lack of inclusion of remote communities and marginalized groups, and the lack of follow-up with consultations.

Lack of Funding for National and Local CSOs

The government of Vanuatu and donors do not adequately fund national and local CSOs, therefore the latter must compete for funds with larger, more powerful foreign INGOs³⁷ (ADB, 2017). It is particularly difficult for local CSOs to get funding to strengthen their institutional structure and meet their administrative and human resource costs³⁸, and there is little collaboration between NGOs as they are primarily competitors³⁹ (ADB, 2017). Joint funding is what brings them together, as a participant explained, “and even then it’s difficult. They are competitors, and they need visibility”⁴⁰. There are other factors influencing the lack of collaboration among CSOs, such as language (in particular when foreigners in leadership positions do not speak Bislama) and interpersonal relations⁴¹ (Fouad et al., 2021; Geary Nichol, 2014; Gero et al., 2013; Roche et al., 2020a; Vachette et al., 2017). A representative from a foreign organization in Vanuatu explained that organizational features and cultures can also play a role:

En ce qui concerne les ONG, on ne travaille pas du tout avec les grosses ONG, c’est peut-être lié au fait qu’elles fonctionnent sur financement australien et qu’elles sont toutes rattachées à leurs sièges... Peut-être aussi par corporatisme ou par culture du travail... Nous, on demande un cofinancement, ce qui est différent. En tous cas le partenariat avec les ONGI n’est pas « établi ».⁴²

³⁷ Interview with Flora Vano, ActionAid Country Director in Vanuatu, April 2021, English, online; Interview with Shirley Abraham, National Coordinator of the KoBLE, VANGO Vice-President, May 2021, English, online; Interview with an anonymous source, August 2021, English, online.

³⁸ Interview with Jacqueline Deroin de Gaillande, Secretary General of the Vanuatu Red Cross Society for 13 years (2008–2021), March 2021, French, online; Interview with Shirley Abraham, National Coordinator of the KoBLE, VANGO Vice-President, May 2021, English, online.

³⁹ Interview with Senior technical advisor and consultant in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila; Interview with an international NGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

⁴⁰ Interview with Senior technical advisor and consultant in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

⁴¹ Interview with Flora Vano, ActionAid Country Director in Vanuatu, April 2021, English, online; Interview with a consultant in Vanuatu, July 2022, French, online.

⁴² Interview with Lucie Vigier, Representative of France Volontaires in Vanuatu, June 2021, French, online.

Moreover, according to six participants, VANGO, the national association of NGOs, is dysfunctional. A major reason is because VANGO lacks funding to build its institutional capacity and relies on unpaid representatives, despite the government's expressed willingness to include civil society in decision-making. VANGO also struggles to bring CSOs together and still suffers from corruption scandals that undermine its legitimacy⁴³. In addition, relations between CSOs, especially foreign NGOs, and the government are still being rebuilt after TC Pam: "After Pam, government-NGO relations really, really suffered... and they have not completely recovered. Because trucks were running around everywhere, but the government did not know where the money came from"⁴⁴.

As a result, Vanuatu civil society does not have a powerful, clear, unified voice to influence national priorities⁴⁵ (GCF, 2018). Reflecting the power asymmetries described above, when consultations take place, the voices of small, local CSOs, remote communities and traditionally marginalized groups often remain unheard, as explained in the next section.

Reaching Remote Communities and Marginalized Groups

Remote communities and marginalized groups as well as the private sector often remain excluded from government and INGO consultations⁴⁶. For instance, for climate change funds, "smaller agencies, based in remote islands may have limited opportunities to meaningfully engage and contribute to Green Climate Fund project design and implementation" (GCF, 2018, p. 57). Indeed, the Vanuatu context presents challenges shared by a number of island states, including a population spread across many islands scattered across national waters, which makes consultations logistically difficult for a state with limited resources and capacities (ADB, 2017; Edwards & Obeyesekere, 2016; OECD, 2018a; Utz, 2021; Vachette, 2016; Wood et al., 2022; World Bank, 2017).

⁴³ Interview with Luke Ebbs, Country Director Save the Children Vanuatu, March 2021, English, online; Interview with Jacqueline Deroin de Gaillande, Secretary General of the Vanuatu Red Cross Society for 13 years (2008–2021), March 2021, French, online; Interview with an anonymous source, August 2021, English, online.

⁴⁴ Interview with a Disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific, April 2022, English, online.

⁴⁵ Interview with an anonymous source, August 2021, English, online.

⁴⁶ Interview with Anne Pakoa, Chief Executive Officer and Founder of Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition, March 2021, English, online; Interview with Flora Vano, ActionAid Country Director in Vanuatu, April 2021, English, online; Interview with a professional working in the tourism sector in Vanuatu, March 2022, English, online.

At the implementation level, development programmes and projects tend to benefit primarily urban centers and politicians' constituencies. As the ADB noted, "the distribution of the benefits of Vanuatu's development remains a cause for concern. These benefits do not reach most of the 80% of the country's population that lives in rural areas" (ADB, 2019, p. 1). A participant confirmed money still has to trickle down to rural areas, not just main cities⁴⁷. Torba, the most remote and northern province, is particularly challenging to work in and to work with⁴⁸. Moreover, politicians tend to favor their localities of origin, as this participant explained:

big infrastructure projects are conducted where the popular politicians are from. For example, Erromango in the province of Tafea is full of resources that could constitute an economic advantage. But all efforts are on Tanna! Because our Prime Minister is from Tanna. It's the same for Pentecost, where in some areas children have never seen a car! But in others we build roads because the Deputy Prime Minister is from there. Budgets must be based on priorities but not on popularity.⁴⁹

The voices of people belonging to marginalized groups are even less present in decision-making processes. According to the SAMOA Pathway mid-term review for the Pacific, people with disabilities "are generally excluded from or underrepresented in community life, including in national decision-making" (UN, 2018, p. 8). Moreover, for 14 years Vanuatu was one of the only countries in the world where there were no women sitting in the national parliament, making it hard to have their voices heard at the highest level (*Daily Post*, 2022c). A representative from Vanuatu civil society was outraged about the lack of consideration for women, and the lack of women representation in high-level decision-making:

Recently, there has been the plan to replace the Ministry of Justice by a Ministry of Fisheries: there was no consultation on this! Even if the Ministry of Justice looks after women, youth, etc. Plus, there was the removal of the only

⁴⁷ Interview with Shirley Abraham, National Coordinator of the KoBLE, VANGO Vice-President, May 2021, English, online.

⁴⁸ Interview with Australian aid official, October 2021, online; Interview with a UN official, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

⁴⁹ Interview with Anne Pakoa, Chief Executive Officer and Founder of Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition, March 2021, English, online.

female Director General [the Justice DG]. It shows masculinism is in place in Vanuatu! I hope the Council of Ministers will be confronted by the UN on this matter. We are confronting them but it's not enough! The government doesn't understand the importance of women in decision-making.⁵⁰

In the Pacific, the lack of engagement with structures such as chiefly systems and churches as well as other “informal community structures”, and the use of a centralized decision-making are major impediments to equitable representation⁵¹ (ADB, 2017; Utz, 2021). A participant gave the example of a project where the donor was reluctant to work with chiefs, which would likely impact the project's potential to succeed⁵². Another participant gave the example of a neglected slow-onset disaster happening in a remote part of Tanna Island in the southern province of Tafea, where residents were not adequately involved, and “modern and *kastom* [traditional/customary] governance” were not well articulated, leading to neglect and poor response from aid actors⁵³.

Finally, the private sector often remains at the margins of the aid system in general in Vanuatu⁵⁴. Reports have repeatedly called for clear institutional arrangements for the private sector and civil society to be engaged in policy, priority and programme design, implementation and monitoring (PIFS, 2018; UN, 2018). For instance, in Vanuatu, the national private sector is not fully part of decision-making spaces on climate change issues which “leads to a lost opportunity to harmonize efforts, avoid duplication and competing initiatives, and build coalitions” (personal communication, 2017). In the tourism sector, the government's vision sometimes clashes with the tourism market and the tourism industry expectations, which can create tensions⁵⁵. There are also inequalities within the private sector itself, with small and medium enterprises usually owned by Ni-Vanuatu even less listened to by the government

⁵⁰ Interview with Anne Pakoa, Chief Executive Officer and Founder of Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition, March 2021, English, online.

⁵¹ Interview with Luke Ebbs, Country Director Save the Children Vanuatu, March 2021, English, online.

⁵² Interview with an anonymous source, English, online.

⁵³ Interview with Anne Pakoa, Chief Executive Officer and Founder of Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition, March 2021, English, online.

⁵⁴ Interview with Glen Craig of Pacific Advisory, January 2021, English, online; Interview with consultant in Community Development and Planning with 11 years in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila; Interview with Marc-Antoine Morel, President of V-Lab, a charitable association focused on enhancing entrepreneurship in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

⁵⁵ Interview with a professional working in the tourism sector in Vanuatu, March 2022, English, online.

compared with large companies mostly owned by foreigners or non-Indigenous Ni-Vanuatu⁵⁶. Nonetheless, as I explain in the next section, consultation is only the first step and is meaningless if decision-makers do not take inputs into account nor implement concrete actions.

Taking Consultation Results Into Account

Even when the private sector and civil society groups are consulted, participants mentioned that their input was often not considered in decision-making processes or not implemented, especially when they were critical of the government or of a donor, as the following examples illustrate:

I made recommendations, but it was watered down by the Australian government because it was judged to be too critical of the Vanuatu government and ministries. ... The donor partners ignore the local advice. When you're dealing in the Pacific, Fiji, Australia, New Zealand, they call themselves this big "Pacific family", but in a family you should be able to speak freely.⁵⁷

An example of this is the consultation that happened in 2020 on a big EU grant for civil society strengthening. There was a consultation, and then nothing for almost two years. We had prepared a plan following the guidelines, using a coalition and focusing on organizational strengthening. Then one day, a document was issued, the focus on civil society strengthening completely disappeared, and NGOs had five days to apply [for the grant]. It's very frustrating.⁵⁸

Because we had so many things rehandled, watered down because of political issues. There are a lot of NGOs, there is a lot of this evaluation/monitoring going nowhere. People in Vanuatu say: "Switch on, switch off, finis nao [it's over now]!"⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Interview with an anonymous source, Port-Vila.

⁵⁷ Interview with Glen Craig of Pacific Advisory, January 2021, English, online.

⁵⁸ Interview with Dr. Astrid Kersten, Executive Director, HCDI, March 2021, English, online.

⁵⁹ Interview with an anonymous source, April 2021, English, online.

Especially mid-term and final evaluations: it's a ticked box, and it's not fed back to the donor [by implementing organizations]. There is ultimate secrecy, it does not go to the government. Communications are sanitized. And no one reads the evaluations.⁶⁰

As a consequence, donor-funded government priorities or programmes and INGO programmes are still often ill-designed and disconnected from community needs⁶¹ (Cornish, 2020a; Utz, 2021). As a report by VANGO, the Pacific Association of NGOs (PIANGO) and the Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) noted: “There is limited evidence of changed practice in community participation; There is limited to some evidence that policies better reflect the priorities of national and local civil society actors due to their increased engagement in policy and advocacy” (VANGO et al., 2019, p. 4). Moreover, going through government approval processes for NGOs, which on paper is a mechanism to improve ownership and localization of aid, is not a panacea to capture community needs, which can differ from government priorities; communities need to be involved from the project design phase or the project will most likely fail⁶².

At the time of the research in 2020–2022, the government was clearly prioritizing infrastructure for its development (*Daily Post*, 2020y; Ligo, 2020a; World Bank, 2022a). Giant projects were underway such as the roads on the islands of Tanna and Pentecost. The Minister of Finance and Economic Management Mr. Koanapo declared “The Vanuatu Government, with the support of donor partners is committed to securing funds for essential infrastructure projects” (Roberts, 2021d). Participants from civil society were feeling the impact of this prioritization on the ground, to the detriment of other areas in need such as gender equality and child protection⁶³.

Overall, projects and programs tend to fail, to be unsustainable when communities and other groups are not consulted and involved in project designs in Vanuatu by project funders and

⁶⁰ Interview with Senior technical advisor and consultant in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

⁶¹ Interview with Anne Pakoa, Chief Executive Officer and Founder of Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition, March 2021, English, online; Interview with Flora Vano, ActionAid Country Director in Vanuatu, April 2021, English, online.

⁶² Interview with Flora Vano, ActionAid Country Director in Vanuatu, April 2021, English, online.

⁶³ Interview with Anne Pakoa, Chief Executive Officer and Founder of Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition, March 2021, English, online; Interview with an anonymous source, August 2021, English, online; Interview with an anonymous source, English, online.

implementers⁶⁴, an intuitive result that reinforces the wider literature on project and program sustainability. Despite the government and donors' commitments to increase stakeholder consultation on development issues, and some progress made, donors and NGOs still often neglect the voice of civil society when designing major policies and programmes. To cite two participants who summed up the situation: foreign aid should be about “collaborating, not delivering”⁶⁵, “travailler *avec*” et non pas “travailler *pour*”⁶⁶. In Vanuatu, a country that receives among the highest amount of aid per capita in the world, the reach and inclusiveness of consultations show flaws which does not result in broad “national ownership”. This confirms several studies on the topic showing that development policies and strategies are often “elite-owned” in the Pacific and in Vanuatu (Aiafi, 2017; Baker & Barbara, 2020; Gero et al., 2013; Vachette, 2016; Wood, 2018). In addition to consultation challenges, the data reveals there has been an increased sense of national pride in Vanuatu that relates to the concept of ownership, an unexpected result I unpack in the next section.

An Increased Sense of National Pride

Beyond government ownership, several foreign nationals among participants mentioned a heightened sense of national pride in the country since TC Pam in 2015, creating a hostile environment for foreign NGOs, foreign nationals, and the local media. The NGO Policy adopted in 2018 allows the government to have more oversight on what NGOs implement in the country as each project or programme must go through an approval process, which should guarantee more ownership. Rather, CSOs and other actors see it as a way to control the issues CSOs are working on in a coercive way⁶⁷. As a participant explained, the policy is a double-edged sword as it was conceived by the state as a tool to enhance localization through the establishment of structured processes but ends up being an instrument of control to civil society's disadvantage⁶⁸. Following TC Pam as well as an incident a few years later when the government saw Oxfam's vocal

⁶⁴ Interview with a UN official, September 2022, English, Port-Vila; Interview with Anne-Sophie Vivier, a professional with 19 years of experience in cooperation in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila; Interview with an international NGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

⁶⁵ Interview with Senior technical advisor and consultant in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

⁶⁶ Interview with Anne-Sophie Vivier, a professional with 19 years of experience in cooperation in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

⁶⁷ Interview with an anonymous source, April 2021, English, online; Interview with Ralph Regenvanu, Deputy, Leader of the Opposition, April 2021, English, online.

⁶⁸ Interview with Shirley Abraham, National Coordinator of the KoBLE, VANGO Vice-President, May 2021, English, online.

advocacy for increasing women's representation in politics as foreign influence, participants evoked a shrinking space for CSOs and an anti-INGO sentiment driven by a few people at the government⁶⁹. The wave of donor funded INGOs bypassing government processes after TC Pam “resulted in a somewhat draconian NGO policy by way of backlash”⁷⁰.

The sound, local push for ownership and localization of aid is thus at risk of turning into “us” against “them”⁷¹. This polarization confirms the fears of some analysts working on the localization concept (Bonis-Charancle & Vielajus, 2020), and tends to gloss over existing inequalities among non-Indigenous Ni-Vanuatu and among Indigenous Ni-Vanuatu⁷². Indeed, some current and former politicians are taking a radical position to the point where they make non-Indigenous Ni-Vanuatu and foreign nationals unwelcome (e.g., Morris, 2022). Some non-Indigenous Ni-Vanuatu participants expressed their disappointment and worry: “I am Ni-Vanuatu—but it’s not really my country, if you know what I mean”⁷³; “expats are not feeling safe anymore [about their jobs and their safety]”⁷⁴. Inside and outside of the development industry, it has become harder to obtain visas to work in Vanuatu and organizations have to thoroughly justify why a Ni-Vanuatu cannot fill the position. Rosier and Savard (2022) noted that the law now restricts the number of years a foreigner can hold a position in Vanuatu. While policies that favour employment of the local workforce are in place in many countries, the private sector and the civil service need qualified human resources that are still lacking in Vanuatu, as these participants explained:

The private sector is trying to tell the government diplomatically that they need to bring people in, but the government can get stubborn about some issues. We want to employ Ni-Vanuatu, but sometimes there simply is not the qualified people businesses need.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Interview with an anonymous source, 2021, English, online; Interview with an anonymous source, April 2021, English, online; Interview with an anonymous source, August 2021, English, online.

⁷⁰ Interview with an independent consultant in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

⁷¹ Interview with a development and humanitarian practitioner, March 2021, English, online.

⁷² Interview with a development and humanitarian practitioner, March 2021, English, online.

⁷³ Interview with INGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

⁷⁴ Interview with a development and humanitarian practitioner, March 2021, English, online.

⁷⁵ Interview with Glen Craig of Pacific Advisory, January 2021, English, online.

Also, there is not a huge pool of people to hire civil servants, between fruit pickers, people employed in the formal private sector, the elderly and the young... So sometimes there is a “no expats” discourse but you know, there aren’t many people.⁷⁶

Il faut des cadres, des administrateurs, des comptables, des ingénieurs civils... tout ce qui est middle- et senior- management. Il faut des experts—versus des généralistes—dans tous les domaines, y compris dans l’enseignement du primaire jusqu’au niveau universitaire. Nous avons besoin de techniciens dans tous les domaines.⁷⁷

A participant implicitly linked this hostility to foreigners in the private sector with Vanuatu’s colonial history, explaining that the government fears foreign, white nationals might control the country’s economy by owning and/or running some of its biggest companies⁷⁸. It is an understandable fear, as in the Pacific during colonial times “Europeans ... monopolised economic and political power. ... European expatriates, many long-term residents, owned most of the mines and plantations, managed banks and trading companies, staffed the administration and wielded great influence as missionaries and teachers” and elites wished to retain this power at independence (Aldrich, 2000, pp. 175–176). A reluctance to collaborate with traditional donors was visible in an emergency context after TC Harold in 2020, when the government’s discourse was “we can do it ourselves”⁷⁹ and the Director of the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) preferred to welcome a medical surge team from the Solomon Islands rather than one from Australia or New Zealand⁸⁰. The government also remarkably threatened media freedom in 2020 by forbidding any publication on COVID-19 unless it had been pre-approved by the government for the duration of the State of Emergency⁸¹ (Aualiitia, 2020). A participant from a

⁷⁶ Interview with consultant in Community Development and Planning with 11 years in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

⁷⁷ Interview with Jean-Pierre Nirua, former Director of the National Planning Office, now Chancellor of Vanuatu National University, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

⁷⁸ Interview with an anonymous source, September 2022, Port-Vila.

⁷⁹ Interview with consultant in Community Development and Planning with 11 years in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

⁸⁰ Interview with UN official, September 2022, Port-Vila.

⁸¹ Interview with an anonymous source, April 2021, English, online.

CSO deplored the rise of an authoritarian, male-dominated political landscape that is especially detrimental to women⁸².

The government misapplies the ownership principle here, as ownership or localization does not mean authoritarianism or nationalism. Neither was a nationalist, culturalist trend the vision of independence leaders forty years ago⁸³. However, this tendency must not obscure the fact that patronizing attitudes and racism from “skilled”, mainly white foreign workers towards Indigenous Ni-Vanuatu is still very much present including in the development sector, as expressed by five participants including four Ni-Vanuatu. In many instances, these dynamics prevent indigenous Ni-Vanuatu from speaking up or render their voices inaudible. In the next section, I examine Vanuatu’s development priorities, which are numerous and lack a clear hierarchy between them, thus ultimately hampering ownership.

Too Many Priorities

Hierarchy and Quantity

There is a hierarchy between plans as the NSDP is the ultimate reference for sectoral plans as well as ministerial corporate plans. Indeed, the NSDP is referred to in other plans and strategies as the overarching strategy all plans must be aligned with. For instance, the *NDMO Strategic Plan 2016–2020* (Government of Vanuatu, 2015) claims to be aligned with the NSDP and the Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy, both national frameworks, and with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, a global framework. As a government worker explained, “our priorities are developed in the NSDP. ... appraisal of projects and programmes are based on that, plus on the National Recovery Policy [if any], plus on Sectoral Policies”⁸⁴. However, sectoral policies and plans are numerous and encompass many priorities, objectives, or goals.

Above all, the NSDP is ambitious given Vanuatu’s limited resources and capacities: it has three pillars (society, environment, and economy), 15 goals, 98 policy objectives, 196 indicators

⁸² Interview with Anne Pakoa, Chief Executive Officer and Founder of Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition, March 2021, English, online.

⁸³ Interview with an anonymous source, April 2021, English, online.

⁸⁴ Interview with a Vanuatu government worker, October 2021, English, online.

and 205 targets. The government's own five-year review acknowledged the plan contained "so many indicators and targets" (Government of Vanuatu, 2023b, p. 17). Priorities are unclear as there is no explicit hierarchy between the pillars, the goals or the objectives. A participant was positively astonished to see how holistically development is understood in the NSDP⁸⁵, which allows it to include virtually each Ni-Vanuatu citizen's or organization's priorities and harness assistance from all sources; however, the plan's lack of focus is not in line with the ownership principle and does not bode well for implementation and alignment by donors. Indeed, implementation would require enormous capacities and resources, and the existence of many priorities renders the alignment principle meaningless as any donor funding can easily match at least one of the numerous priorities in the plan.

Beyond difficulties of implementation itself given the ambitious task, it has proven arduous for the government to monitor the plan's implementation. In 2018, only "44 indicators (22.2%) [were] observed as making overall positive progress" and "85 indicators (42.9%) either did not have sufficient data to measure effectively or were not reported on" (Government of Vanuatu, 2019c, p. 8). Two participants also mentioned the lack of effective monitoring by the government: "Reporting back to their cabinet and say: we spent this amount of money, and we managed to have maternal health to decrease by X%... the government is not even able to do that!"⁸⁶; "right now the government does not have an effective way of monitoring what projects bring towards the completion of the NSDP. Plus the indicators are pretty large..."⁸⁷.

The NSDP, with many priorities and no associated budget, is rather aspirational like its predecessor the PAA that was described as "a broad brush set of prescriptions which is unlikely to provoke political or community challenge" (Government of Vanuatu & PIFS, 2011, p. 3). As an international development professional working in Vanuatu confirmed, "there is the NSDP they are so proud of, but it's very ambitious, vague, big—it's made for like, Singapore! But all national plans are like this, they're meant to be aspirational..."⁸⁸. Indeed, previous literature indicates recipient states can adopt a broad national development agenda to please donors and

⁸⁵ Interview with Sandra Uwantege Hart, Consultant with 4 years experience in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, online.

⁸⁶ Interview with an international development professional based in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online.

⁸⁷ Interview with an employee working in a multilateral institution in Vanuatu, August 2022, English, Port-Vila.

⁸⁸ Interview with an international development professional based in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online.

harness funds (Brown, 2017). Related to the existence of many priorities, the government of Vanuatu encounters challenges in formulating its priorities to various aid actors.

Formulating Priorities

Indeed, more generally, the government has difficulty to formulate its priorities to donors and partners⁸⁹ (Schmaljohann & Prizzon, 2015)—and then to maintain and follow-up with these priorities. A foreign organization’s representative in Vanuatu explained their difficulties to understand national priorities and needs:

The first question I ask when meeting a partner is: “what do you need?” And it’s difficult to know their needs. This has been my biggest challenge this year, to build missions with almost no visibility, despite the enthusiasm... it’s very hard to get [our partners] involved and have them write down [their needs], in particular.⁹⁰

Internal struggles seem to make it arduous for the state to formulate clear priorities. According to Ralph Regenvanu, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, former Leader of the Opposition and current Minister of Climate Change, the government’s difficulty to formulate, maintain and follow up with their priorities is due to a lack of coordination between different ministries, a lack of political will from key ministers, and a lack of human resources with a few people being overloaded with work⁹¹. State employees in key positions also lack technical and negotiation skills to engage with donors⁹². As Regenvanu also noted, the lack of coordination across government ministries and departments is not new, which was confirmed by several sources (Cox et al., 2007; GGGI, 2016; Government of Vanuatu, 2017b; Government of Vanuatu & PIFS, 2011; King, 2007; Schmaljohann & Prizzon, 2015; World Bank, 2022a). Director General Niptik explained: “In the past different ministries have followed different plans, planning as individual

⁸⁹ Interview with Ralph Regenvanu, Deputy, Leader of the Opposition, April 2021, English, online; Interview with an international development professional based in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online; Interview with Nancy Wells, ADB Senior Country Coordination Officer in Vanuatu, ADB Extended Mission - Vanuatu, Joint ADB-World Bank Liaison Office in Vanuatu, June 2022, English and Bislama, online; Interview with UN official, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

⁹⁰ Interview with a representative of a foreign organization in Vanuatu, June 2021, online.

⁹¹ Interview with Ralph Regenvanu, Deputy, Leader of the Opposition, April 2021, English, online.

⁹² Interview with Anna Naupa, an experienced development professional in the Pacific and in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online.

ministries rather than as one body of governance” (Tarianga, 2021). For instance, at the sectoral level, a professional working in the tourism sector in Vanuatu mentioned tough negotiations between the vision of tourism held by the Ministry of Tourism on one hand, and the one held by the Vanuatu Tourism Office on the other hand. In the same vein, another participant encouraged sector ministries and the PMO to convey similar priorities and messages for more clarity⁹³.

Leadership, personal relations and networking are essential to overcome these coordination and communication barriers, not only at the government level but also between all aid actors. They are essential to reach agreements on priorities, and ultimately achieve more aid effectiveness in Vanuatu. Several participants mentioned the importance of maintaining good working relationships through formal and informal channels to achieve better results:

Progress depends very much on leadership and on talking about it. We have to build relationships with the government, drink a coffee with the Prime Minister... It’s very important, it helps. Even a 30-minutes meeting, because he thinks about what we said, he asks the DGs to take action.⁹⁴

I was given that latitude because personal relations allowed me, and because the program design from the beginning was allowing latitude and flexibility.⁹⁵

I soon understood my job was having dinners, coffees, kavas... I was not drinking kava before. I had to change my work schedule to drink kava, create and maintain relationships. At the government, you can meet people around kava versus during the day... Sometimes it’s not win-win but we have to maintain relationships ...⁹⁶

[Government department X] has a very good relationship with the said partners above, however it also depends on the leadership [because] different Directors

⁹³ Interview with Nancy Wells, ADB Senior Country Coordination Officer in Vanuatu, ADB Extended Mission - Vanuatu, Joint ADB-World Bank Liaison Office in Vanuatu, June 2022, English and Bislama, online.

⁹⁴ Interview with Vivian Obed, General Manager of Further Arts Vanuatu, English, October 2021, online.

⁹⁵ Interview with Anna Naupa, an experienced development professional in the Pacific and in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online.

⁹⁶ Interview with a professional working in the tourism sector in Vanuatu, March 2022, English, online.

have different ways to cooperate with them and this will determine the relationship approach in terms of meeting to share ideas and request what [Government department X] think they need from partners.⁹⁷

The Japanese, the Chinese, I could see they were more present, they drop by the PMO's office, contrary to Australia and New Zealand who were rarely seen outside of official meetings. It's not the same relationship. I was surprised how it actually impacted the work.⁹⁸

Quand les systèmes ne sont pas en place, c'est une question de personnes.⁹⁹

Il faut les [le gouvernement] solliciter au niveau personnel. Encore une fois, cela revient au niveau personnel.¹⁰⁰

[Donor 1] is very easy to work with. It is more formal with [Donor 2] and [Donor 3]. [Donor 4] is pretty good, very open. Mr. [X] is good. For the UN it depends on which agency. ... Overall, it depends on people.¹⁰¹

The importance of developing and nurturing relationships confirms what previous research has found on the importance of social networks and informal institutions in the Pacific where “state institutions are not the only institutions which fulfill functions that, in the model Western state, are clearly state obligations”; instead, “locally-rooted social entities (e.g. extended families, clans, tribes and village communities) and traditional authorities (e.g. village elders, chiefs, healers, ‘big men’ and religious leaders), determine the everyday social reality of large parts of the population” (Ernst, 2016, pp. 616–617).

North (1990) warned that ignoring informal institutions or setting up rules that do not match them would most likely mean implementation would fail. In that vein, longstanding

⁹⁷ Interview with an anonymous source, June 2022, English, written answers.

⁹⁸ Interview with consultant in Community Development and Planning with 11 years in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

⁹⁹ Interview with UN official, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Anne-Sophie Vivier, a professional with 19 years of experience in cooperation in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

¹⁰¹ Interview with an employee working in the government system, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

relations between donors, NGOs, and other partners, made possible by the presence of the same department director for several years, as well as a clear strategy and leadership seem to contribute to a clear formulation of priorities in the WASH sector. Indeed, across the documents consulted and interviews, the WASH sector is an exception in terms of need definition, coordination, and implementation. Even if maintenance by community water committees and sustainability remain a challenge¹⁰², Lucie Vigier, who represents a foreign organization in Vanuatu, explained that “le département de l’Eau est assez articulé, il dit qu’il faut aider à financer telle ou telle chose, ils ont une structure, etc. Franchement, c’est impressionnant. C’est un secteur structuré par rapport à où se situent leurs besoins”¹⁰³. The last sub-section on priority-setting challenges emphasizes the frequent changes in priorities in Vanuatu.

Changing Priorities

Priorities tend to change on a short-term basis as a consequence of frequent disasters and a political landscape marked by instability and clientelism¹⁰⁴ (Baker & Barbara, 2020; GPEDC, 2020a; Veenendaal & Corbett 2020; Wood, 2021a). First, Vanuatu’s political landscape is characterized by fragmented party politics, frequent government changes, and strong ties between politicians and voters. Moreover, “governments are formed more as a matter of convenience and political expediency, rather than on clear-cut policies” as politicians often disagree on policy directions (Manassah, 2022, para. 19).

Second, Nancy Wells, ADB Senior Country Coordination Officer in Vanuatu, explained how disasters impact priority-setting and policy implementation:

When there is a disaster, government programmes shift to response programmes, it is more reactive than proactive. Natural disasters are shaping the development context in Vanuatu. ... With the many disasters such as TC Pam, volcano eruptions on Ambae, TC Harold... Suddenly all resources go to response and reconstruction, but are they responding to the national strategy?

¹⁰² Interview with an international NGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

¹⁰³ Interview with Lucie Vigier, Representative of France Volontaires in Vanuatu, June 2021, French, online.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Jonathan Kings, Deputy Secretary, Pacific and Development Group, NZ MFAT, July 2021, English, online; Interview with Nancy Wells, ADB Senior Country Coordination Officer in Vanuatu, ADB Extended Mission - Vanuatu, Joint ADB-World Bank Liaison Office in Vanuatu, June 2022, English and Bislama, online.

It's difficult to tell. ... During disasters, everything is thrown out of the window. Government is focusing on recovery and nothing else matters.

Moreover, frequent disasters tend to disorganize pre-existing structures and priorities through an influx of foreign funds, actors, and organizations, just like after TC Pam (Barber, 2015; Vachette, 2016). For a disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific,

the influx of foreigners after TC Pam was almost like a second cyclone for us! For traditional partners with established offices and programmes, they got overlapped by these new players who were going directly to politicians, bypassing actual systems. The lack of coordination reached a point where it began hindering the response. For example, I remember walking into the National Disaster Meeting and there were only foreigners. National staff had to ask for separate meetings because they had no space.¹⁰⁵

A broad national development strategy such as the NSDP also allows for these frequent changes due to political instability and disasters. In the last section below, I emphasize how, above all, designing a broad national strategy allows Vanuatu to maximize donor support, often to the detriment of context-based, locally adapted aid.

Quantity Versus Quality Funding

The ownership principle of the Paris Declaration is only partially respected by donors and the government. Diverse reasons explain this lack of ownership. In Vanuatu, a fragmented political landscape and frequent disasters disorganize decision-making structures and affect priorities. Vanuatu's geographical context, combined with government and civil society's limited resources and capacities, represent a challenge to formulate priorities and reach inclusive ownership. CSOs compete for funds and lack a united voice to weigh on national priorities. Some participants suggested donors and the government should directly support the community level, in line with the government's decentralization strategy. However, it presents the risk for local CSOs to lose some degree of independence to the government, and programmes running on

¹⁰⁵ Interview with a Disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific, April 2022, English, online.

donor funds such as cash-for-work or cash transfers create expectations and could pose sustainability issues¹⁰⁶.

Above all, the government defines broad strategies, policies and plans that encompass virtually any development challenge, which allows it to tap into all available donor funds—both by just having a strategy, a requirement from most donors, and by defining priorities and goals so broadly as to hardly exclude any. Designing an ambitious development plan also conveys the message that the government is in charge after 40 years of independence and the difficult memory of TC Pam when the government was bypassed by many international actors, a reminiscence of colonial times. The ambitious NSDP, other sectoral plans and cross-cutting strategies thus have the threefold advantage of allowing the government to include many issues raised by Ni-Vanuatu citizens through consultations—and issues arising from disasters, of aligning with international frameworks such as the SDGs and guiding funding, and ultimately of maximizing the funds received from donors which constitutes a strong incentive (Brien, 2019; Jerve, 2002). This tendency is not new, as Cox et al. (2007) explained:

Given government's tendency to accept any assistance offered, donors need to prioritise their efforts, focusing on areas where there is a genuine political opening for change. ... [They need to] assist government to identify and focus on a limited number of development priorities, to provide a basis for medium-term budget planning. (p. vi)

A participant gave an example of how it was playing out at the project level: “Je rencontre le directeur [du département gouvernemental] et je lui suggère un projet auquel il répond ‘oui oui’. Mais en discutant avec nos partenaires, je me suis rendu compte qu’ils développaient la même chose...”¹⁰⁷.

Moreover, donor priorities tend to change for diverse reasons, such as changes in governments and international development policies, politicians or diplomats’ personal thematic

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Shirley Abraham, National Coordinator of the KoBLE, VANGO Vice-President, May 2021, English, online; Interview with an anonymous source, May 2021, English, online; Interview with an independent consultant in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila; Interview with consultant in Community Development and Planning with 11 years’ experience in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with an anonymous participant, French.

interests, domestic preoccupations, and regional and global issues. Having a broad national strategy allows recipient countries to harness the funds regardless of those moving focuses. For instance, in the area of climate change, “given the fact that climate change impacts in countries such as Vanuatu now have the potential to attract significant funds from donor partners, environmental problems, no matter what the real cause, are often blamed on climate change” (Gero et al., 2013, p. 112). Hochet (2016) observed the same dynamics as “[la lutte contre le changement climatique] permet surtout à de nombreuses institutions publiques locales de trouver des fonds supplémentaires [et l’attention que lui portent] les organisations locales est ainsi avant tout motivée par les sommes investies dans ce domaine” (p. 215). A participant confirmed the government of Vanuatu and CSOs adopted opportunistic attitudes to match donor priorities on the topic of climate change, and framed their issues and priorities in a strategic way¹⁰⁸.

Donors also follow incentives linked to their national priorities and interests, which are closely related to heightened geopolitical competition in the Pacific between traditional donors and China and explain a regained focus on security. Their aid strategies are defined at home, and they must spend their funds in a set amount of time (Jerve, 2002), which pushes them to influence the prioritized areas for assistance. Several participants, across the different groups of actors, mentioned or implied that international funds were not an issue in Vanuatu as donors were willing to spend in the country. These incentives are developed further in the next chapters.

These results start to uncover the importance of incentives on both sides of the aid relationship in implementing non constraining international frameworks such as the Paris Declaration. In the area of aid ownership in Vanuatu, the technical approach to aid does not match its profoundly developmental and political dimensions¹⁰⁹ (Cornish, 2020a; Overton et al., 2018; Pollard, 2020; Soni, 2012). Some donors such as Australia and ADB have tried to understand Vanuatu’s political economy to adjust their aid strategies (Cox et al., 2007; Hayden et al., 2015). However, it does not seem to materialize in practice with better aid (Cornish, 2020a). Participants deplored enduring technical, “copy-paste”, inappropriate approaches and practices

¹⁰⁸ Interview with an anonymous participant, French.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Eric Durpaire, Chief of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Field Office, UN Joint Presence Vanuatu, February 2021, French, online; Interview with an anonymous source, April 2021, English, online; Interview with an anonymous source, August 2021, English, online; Interview with a participant from the Francophonie network, November 2021, French, online; Interview with Anna Naupa, an experienced development professional in the Pacific and in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online.

which are decoupled from the country's specific context and from the complex and political nature of development and aid issues¹¹⁰.

As a dozen interviewees and my experience confirmed, this lack of political understanding of aid comes with a recruitment and qualification issue for people designing, leading, and evaluating development projects and programmes in Vanuatu. They often have little or no knowledge of the context and culture, lack specific technical, intercultural or language skills, have little knowledge of the country beyond the main islands, and they are mainly but not exclusively foreign staff and TAs (Barnett & Campbell, 2010; OECD, 2018b; Savage et al., 2021; Vachette et al., 2017). Indeed, international expertise usually comes in the form of TAs and consultants in Vanuatu. When insufficiently or inappropriately trained and informed about the context, this expertise was deemed expensive, weak or useless by several participants. Participants described and condemned culturally inappropriate approaches, particularly in the area of gender¹¹¹. A participant explained, for instance, that

the participatory toolkit [used by an INGO] was totally inappropriate... But [the INGO was] winning awards. They tried to make it really participatory, to locally adapt, but for example they would publicly ask during an activity if people had been sexually assaulted... There was no confidentiality. ... A problem is that the [development] industry supports lots of individuals who have degrees but do not know gender specifically. And they become the big fishes and drive projects. The industry is not scrutinizing people enough. There is none of that technical capacity (knowledge of the literature, feminism, restorative approaches, etc.) but people become gender experts.¹¹²

A major concern flowing from this lack of knowledge, negligence of the context and/or lack of development expertise, expressed by several participants, is project sustainability. According to

¹¹⁰ Interview with Eric Durpaire, Chief of UNICEF Field Office, UN Joint Presence Vanuatu, February 2021, French, online; Interview with an anonymous source, April 2021, English, online; Interview with an anonymous source, September 2022, French, online; Interview with Anna Naupa, an experienced development professional in the Pacific and in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online.

¹¹¹ Interview with Jacqueline Deroin de Gaillande, Secretary General of the Vanuatu Red Cross Society for 13 years (2008-2021), March 2021, French, online; Interview with Vivian Obed, General Manager of Further Arts Vanuatu, English, October 2021, online; Interview with Anna Naupa, an experienced development professional in the Pacific and in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online.

¹¹² Interview with an anonymous source, April 2021, English, online.

many interviewees and in my experience, high staff turnover in NGOs, INGOs, embassies, high commissions and at the government worsens the situation by not allowing actors to forge deep, trustful working relationships, to capitalize on lessons learned from projects and programs, to set up and follow up with decisions and procedures, to build organizational memory, and to develop expertise and skills (Cox et al., 2007). For instance, the former Secretary General of the Red Cross for 13 years Jacqueline Deroin de Gaillande deplored that “les gens au gouvernement changent tout le temps”.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I asked to what extent Vanuatu defined and implemented its own development priorities. I argued that although strategies are in place and allegedly the result of broad consultations, donors occupy the strategy definition space and rarely allocate funds for local CSOs to strengthen their organizational structure. The government organizes consultations with civil society even if not systematically, but remote communities and marginalized groups tend to be excluded from debates. Even when civil society groups are consulted, participants mentioned that the government and donors often did not consider their input in decision-making processes or did not follow up with their concerns by taking concrete action, especially when these groups were critical of the government or of a donor. Generally, government-NGO relations, and especially government-INGO relations, remain tense five to seven years after TC Pam. As a result, there is some degree of government ownership of development and aid strategies that does not fully extend to the broader civil society. Indeed, the NSDP entails so many goals, objectives and targets that are not clearly hierarchized that it is difficult to identify achievable, monitorable priorities.

In a country where needs are numerous, maximizing aid is a major incentive for the government. Having many priorities allows the government to consider various citizens' concerns, to align with international frameworks and to guide funding, and above all to maximize funding received from donors, whose priorities change for various reasons. However, focusing on aid quantity has meant overlooking the quality of aid implementation. In particular, the people in charge of development programmes and projects in Vanuatu, including many foreign staff and TAs, often have superficial knowledge of the context and lack key skills to ensure the programmes' success.

As I argue in the next chapter, partial ownership leads to superficial alignment, as donors can cherry pick the priorities they wish to fund among dozens of objectives and the government can reorganize priorities as the political situation changes or when a disaster strikes. Furthermore, donors justify their lack of alignment to country systems by invoking weak government capacities, which they have failed to support, and the need for accountability primarily to their home countries.

Chapter 6 – Donors Under Pressure (Not) to Align: Limited Capacities and Resources, and Accountability

In line with the alignment principle, “donors base their overall support on partner countries’ national development strategies, institutions and procedures” (OECD, 2005, p. 3). Both the government of Vanuatu and donors have expressed their will to follow the alignment principle in discourse. Mr. Nirua, the former Director of the Planning Office whom I already quoted above, remembered the enthusiasm the Paris Declaration triggered at the government in the hope donors would align on Vanuatu’s preferences. He highlighted how the Paris Declaration was very well received at the government level and how it constituted a formal basis on which the government could ask donors, NGOs and development agencies to align with the country’s preferred funding modalities and timeframes, and to consider the country’s fiscal year¹¹³. In particular since TC Pam, the government has made efforts and developed policies for donors to align on the country’s priorities and processes, as well as to approve and to map ongoing projects and programmes, and to monitor aid funds, ultimately increasing accountability to the state¹¹⁴.

These policies include the NSDP, the *Vanuatu Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy*, the *Monitoring and Evaluation Policy*, the *Aid Management Policy*, and the *NGO Policy*. There have been iterative improvements and adjustments of the aid normative framework over time, powered by lessons learnt from disasters and disaster responses after TC Pam in 2015 and the Ambae volcano eruptions in 2017–2018 (Government of Vanuatu, 2018a; Keen et al., 2021). The 2018 *Aid Management Policy* was reviewed in light of lessons learnt in the frame of 4 years, including after TC Harold and COVID-19, and an updated version was released in May 2023. In the area of climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction, Savage et al. (2020) found that “the national government demonstrates progressive leadership and political will ... with a strong policy environment and institutional structures” (p. 163). The legal framework has also evolved, for instance with the *Public Finance and Economic Management Act* which precises how and when aid should be disbursed. However, ownership and alignment

¹¹³ Interview with Jean-Pierre Nirua, former Director of the National Planning Office, now Chancellor of Vanuatu National University, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

¹¹⁴ Interview with an independent consultant in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila; Interview with consultant in Community Development and Planning with 11 years in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila; Interview with Anne-Sophie Vivier, a professional with 19 years of experience in cooperation in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila; Interview with an anonymous source, March 2022, English, online.

do not seem fully applied by donors, mainly for accountability reasons, as “all money received by way of donor aid shall be placed into a separate bank account of the implementing ministry or government agency and used for the purpose agreed with the donor and accounted for by the ministry or agency” (World Bank, 2022a, p. 97).

Several research participants acknowledged this overall positive evolution, including donor or former donor representatives. The creation of an Aid Coordination Unit that became DSPPAC, a department dedicated to aid policy and coordination, in the early 2000s, was a major step to improve government ownership and donor alignment¹¹⁵ (*Daily Post*, 2020u; *Daily Post*, 2021d). DSPPAC is composed of five units: the Disaster Recovery Coordination Unit, the Aid Coordination and Negotiation Unit, the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, the Policy Unit, and the Right to Information Unit. A government worker explained the process in place to ensure alignment:

Aid Coordination and Policy Units work closely together, they review all projects. The process is the following: a sector/a ministry fills a form, sometimes donor funding is already identified, sometimes not. Then DSPPAC checks the alignment of the proposal with the NSDP as well as with corporate and business plans. At DSPPAC, there is a database of all projects since 2013, with more details since 2016. DSPPAC also checks for thematic and geographic duplication when a project is proposed. They advise [the sector/ministry] and the latter reviews the proposal. DSPPAC also checks if the project has an agreement attached to it. There can be an agreement that oversees several projects, such as the agreement with Australia.¹¹⁶

The government also sets up donor-government meetings to convey government priorities to donors¹¹⁷. This evolution echoes a larger, regional one observed by Overton et al. (2018) where

¹¹⁵ Interview with a development and humanitarian practitioner, March 2021, English, online; Interview with an international development professional based in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online; Interview with Anna Naupa, an experienced development professional in the Pacific and in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online.

¹¹⁶ Interview with an employee working in the government system, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Nancy Wells, ADB Senior Country Coordination Officer in Vanuatu, ADB Extended Mission - Vanuatu, Joint ADB-World Bank Liaison Office in Vanuatu, June 2022, English and Bislama, online.

Pacific actors use both formal and informal “local strategies and practices which reassert local control and power”, including “the formulation of local policy documents” (p. 280).

In parallel, donors systematically refer to the NSDP and relevant sectoral plans in their partnership strategies with Vanuatu, available publicly on their respective websites. For instance, ADB Senior Country Coordination Officer in Vanuatu Nancy Wells claimed that “at ADB, we try our best, with the Pacific Approach, the Country Operations Business Plan is a try to coordinate better and meet the needs of the government. We believe we are contributing to the national strategy, the NSDP”¹¹⁸. New Zealand’s *Vanuatu Four-Year Plan* reads “we work closely with the Vanuatu Government to ensure that our development cooperation aligns with Vanuatu’s development priorities. Our strategic goals ... fit well within the three pillars of Vanuatu 2030: The People’s Plan” (NZ MFAT, 2021, p. 8). A participant working in a multilateral organization in Vanuatu also confirmed that “there are consultations by [donor X] before launching a project, there needs to be alignment with NSDP and government priorities”¹¹⁹.

Considering the above apparent commitment from the government and donors to alignment, I ask: To what extent do donors align with national priorities and base their support on Vanuatu’s systems/institutions and procedures, or to what extent do they act according to their own agendas and interests that are decoupled from national priorities? In this chapter, I argue that in practice, donors still largely impose their thematic priorities and aid modalities and alignment remains superficial. First, I examine in which multiple ways donors impose their priorities and modalities. Second, I show that in addition to a lack of political will to initiate transformational change, donors face major, interrelated disincentives: the need to be accountable to their domestic constituencies combined with limited national and local capacities in Vanuatu, that donors have been failing to strengthen.

Donors’ Imposition of Their Priorities and Modalities

Despite some efforts and progress from the government of Vanuatu and donors, aid fragmentation, donors’ low use of government systems and aid volatility remained important

¹¹⁸ Interview with Nancy Wells, ADB Senior Country Coordination Officer in Vanuatu, ADB Extended Mission - Vanuatu, Joint ADB-World Bank Liaison Office in Vanuatu, June 2022, English and Bislama, online.

¹¹⁹ Interview with an employee working in a multilateral institution in Vanuatu, August 2022, English, Port-Vila.

challenges five years into the Paris Declaration (Cox et al. 2007; Geary Nichol, 2014; Government of Vanuatu & PIFS, 2011; OECD, 2012b). Indeed, the government produced sectoral plans, organised regular meetings, and started discussions on their preferred aid modalities (program-based approaches and budget support), providing donors with clearer expectations (Government of Vanuatu & PIFS, 2011). However, “just under 30% of aid for the government sector used national budget execution, reporting and audit procedures in 2010, and the same proportion used national procurement procedures” (Government of Vanuatu & PIFS, 2011, p. 8), leaving great room to improve donor use of country systems. Aid fragmentation on a project-by-project basis was a major issue, creating adverse incentives as ministries sought to directly access donor funds they would control independently (Cox et al., 2007; Government of Vanuatu & PIFS, 2011). There was then an incentive for risk-averse donors to set up and use parallel systems to deliver aid, an approach that has been reinforced throughout the years¹²⁰ (Government of Vanuatu & PIFS, 2011). Geary Nichol (2014) also found that ownership of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms by the government of Vanuatu was weak.

If looked at from afar, the recent picture is slightly brighter from GPEDC’s point of view with 76% of alignment to national objectives and a “use of country PFM systems [that] increased from 48% in 2016 to 65% in 2018” by donors (GPEDC, 2020b, p. 2). The five-year review of NSDP implementation revealed that donor and NGO priorities were aligned with the NSDP (Government of Vanuatu, 2023b). However, if there was a general sense among research participants that Vanuatu has made huge progress in defining policies and priorities, and in planning for implementation, they also made clear that donors were still imposing their aid priorities and modalities, as well as monitoring and evaluation requirements. For Pal Ahluwalia, Vice-Chancellor of the University of the South Pacific, and Toby Miller, Professor in Cultural Policy Studies, the Pacific is “at the mercy of its aid donors” (Ahluwalia & Miller, 2021, p. 1). Interviewees raised the problematic approach of aid by donors who “deliver” instead of “collaborate”¹²¹. Mr. Nirua, former Director of the Planning Office, pointed to the gap between theory and implementation: “La Déclaration de Paris était une très bonne stratégie pour faciliter

¹²⁰ Interview with an anonymous source, April 2021, English, online.

¹²¹ Interview with Anne-Sophie Vivier, a professional with 19 years of experience in cooperation in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila; Interview with Senior technical advisor and consultant in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

l'aide internationale, mais dans la pratique chacun veut maintenir son agenda, ses procédures, chacun a ses normes et veut garder ses propres modalités"¹²². In the next sub-sections, I develop more specific alignment issues arising from interviews, the literature and the press.

Few Spaces for Dialogue and Pre-Eminence of Donor Priorities

There are few spaces dedicated to coordination and dialogue at the national level for NGOs, donors, and NGO-donor exchanges. Even when those spaces do exist, Indigenous Ni-Vanuatu participants mentioned feeling the predominance of international actors¹²³, and that the existence of these spaces did not always guarantee quality, impactful, or strategic discussions¹²⁴ (Government of Vanuatu & PIFS, 2011). This finding is in accordance with donors' omnipresence in decision-making spaces noted in relation with ownership in Chapter 5. Nonetheless, there is evidence of successful resistance to donor- or INGO-driven initiatives or approaches by the government¹²⁵ and NGOs¹²⁶ who judge them inappropriate or intrusive (Hochet, 2016). For instance, an Australian aid official explained that "[INGO X] wanted to do something they considered interesting back then, but the government refused their proposal because it was not in line with their plans"¹²⁷. Indeed, the main issue is that NGOs and donors already have their own strategies and plans for several years, which complicates alignment to government priorities¹²⁸. The ultimate reference for these organizations is their own strategic plan and vision, their own priorities, and for donors, their domestic governments and taxpayers, not Vanuatu's¹²⁹.

¹²² Interview with Jean-Pierre Nirua, former Director of the National Planning Office, now Chancellor of Vanuatu National University, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

¹²³ Interview with Flora Vano, ActionAid Country Director in Vanuatu, April 2021, English, online; Interview with an anonymous source, May 2021, English, online.

¹²⁴ Interview with consultant in Community Development and Planning with 11 years in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

¹²⁵ Interview with an anonymous source, May 2021, English, online; Interview with Australian aid official, October 2021, online.

¹²⁶ Interview with Vivian Obed, General Manager of Further Arts Vanuatu, English, October 2021, online; Interview with INGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

¹²⁷ Interview with Australian aid official, October 2021, online.

¹²⁸ Interview with a UN official, September 2022, English, Port-Vila; Interview with an international NGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

¹²⁹ Interview with an anonymous source, French, online; Interview with an employee working in a multilateral institution in Vanuatu, August 2022, English, Port-Vila; Interview with an anonymous source, September 2022, French, online.

Although “enlightened self-interest” as proposed in van der Veen’s (2011) typology of aid can be an avenue to eliminate poverty and increase people’s socioeconomic wellbeing as per ODA’s official definition, the line is thin between this vision and pure self-interest. Vanuatu’s biggest official aid donor, Australia, explicitly framed its foreign policy as a way to serve its own interests (Australian Government, 2017; OECD, 2018b; van der Veen, 2011). Some critics warn Australia’s behaviour in the Pacific flirts with neocolonialism (Holtz, 2016). As pictured in the Vanuatu media, Australian aid should at least equally serve Australia and Vanuatu’s mutual interests (*Daily Post*, 2021h). Australia focuses on infrastructure and security issues as well as education, and makes them highly visible in the media (Cornish, 2019; *Daily Post*, 2020aa; *Daily Post*, 2021s), to the detriment of climate change-related issues that Pacific leaders have repeatedly expressed to consider the highest threat to their development (PIFS, 2022a; Wood, 2021b). China promotes a “win-win” approach and focuses on infrastructure projects (e.g., *Daily Post*, 2021z) as well as education, including the teaching of Chinese in local schools. However, its “all-inclusive” projects are often criticized locally for not creating enough opportunities, and not including enough capacity building, for Vanuatu workers¹³⁰. Other donors, such as the World Bank, ADB, New Zealand, France and the U.S., also have their own strategies and plans superseding or at least being equally important as Vanuatu’s priorities¹³¹ by aiming to work on “shared”, “mutual”, “common” interests (Abel, 2020; ADB, 2013, 2021a; *Daily Post*, 2021j; *Daily Post*, 2021r; NZ MFAT, 2021).

Many Priorities, Objectives, and Targets

Vanuatu’s NSDP encompasses so many priorities, objectives and targets it makes it easy for donors (and other international organizations such as INGOs and UN agencies) to identify an area where their own priorities can fit in, making donors, at the end of the day, the main development priority setters. Brown (2017) already noted the “over-inclusiveness” of development plans as an issue in the cases of Mali and Ghana (p. 346). As explained in Chapter 5, the NSDP has three pillars—social, environmental, and economic—, 15 goals, 98 objectives,

¹³⁰ Interview with an anonymous source, March 2022, English, online; Interview with Jean-Pierre Nirua, former Director of the National Planning Office, now Chancellor of Vanuatu National University, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

¹³¹ Interview with an employee working in a multilateral institution in Vanuatu, August 2022, English, Port-Vila; Interview with an anonymous source, September 2022, French, online.

196 indicators and 205 targets (Government of Vanuatu, 2016a; Government of Vanuatu, 2017a). There is no clear hierarchy between these components, as it is the case for almost all sectoral plans reviewed in the frame of this research. Priorities and sectoral plans are numerous and there is no hierarchy among them, which renders priorities unclear (GCF, 2018; UN, 2018). Several donor and INGO representatives interviewed mentioned their actions were aligned with the NSDP, but many also mentioned it was easy to connect their own priorities with a priority or an objective contained in the NSDP because it is extremely broad. This issue is not new, as an ADB report noted in relation with early national plans: “The Plan was rather ambitious” and later about the following plan: “it is still not clear how these three objectives will be treated in relative priority” (ADB, 1982, p. 29). These issues were also raised in the Vanuatu peer review on aid effectiveness in 2011 (Government of Vanuatu & PIFS, 2011).

The broadness of a plan makes it easy for donors to “align”, to chose which sectors they wish to support, and to justify their assistance—sometimes in vague terms. For instance, to justify France’s funding to a project in higher education, one can read in the newspaper that “the project addresses the main objectives of the People’s Plan 2016–2030. ... Therefore, it fully responds to the country’s priorities by supporting a quality bilingual vocational training offer with a high potential of employment” (*Daily Post*, 2021k, para. 5). At the launch of a project aimed at building barracks for Vanuatu Police Force [VPF] the Deputy High Commissioner for Australia in Vanuatu said

The infrastructures will support the VPF to grow sustainably and build the Force’s capacity to deliver critical services and keep the people of Vanuatu safe and secure, in accordance with the National Sustainable Development Plan and the National Security Strategy of Vanuatu. (Nicky, 2022a, para. 8)

As a result, during the period 2017 to 2020, international support was mainly directed towards infrastructure, transport in particular, as well as government and civil society, a sector that includes security-related projects such as the Australia-Pacific Security College (Lowy Institute, n.d.). For donors, initiatives in these sectors often have the advantage of being highly visible. These sectors are also priorities for the government of Vanuatu and important in terms of development, but highly visible, concrete projects are also a way to leave one’s mark, fuel national pride, secure votes and maintain politicians’ statuses and networks. They follow a short-

term logic and do not replace investment in other deep, structural development issues (UN, 2018).

Additionally, according to a few participants, the government tends to accept any assistance even if there is redundancy, and to tolerate low-quality assistance in the sense that it is attached to conditionalities, specific modalities, that programmes are badly designed and/or not adapted to the context. An interviewee from a foreign organization spoke of opportunistic behaviour to tap into all available funds¹³², a behaviour that has been encouraged by some of the multilateral donors (Fouad et al., 2021; GCF, 2018; King, 2007). The National University of Vanuatu's Chancellor at the time of my fieldwork said he would "take any form of assistance [my translation]"¹³³. This reinforces the argument that maximizing donor funding is a strong incentive to have a broad national plan in place in Vanuatu. At the governmental level, the sole presence of a plan is a requirement by donors and the international community (Fouad et al., 2021; GCF, 2018). In that sense, "Vanuatu 2030 has been enacted to contextualize the international 2030 Agenda and the 17 global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), providing the basis for mobilizing and managing domestic resources, and directing international support" (Brien, 2019, p. 5); and the primary objective of Vanuatu's *Aid Management Policy* is "to improve the attraction and effective utilization of external resources to support national development objectives as envisioned in the NSDP to benefit the improvement of living standards for the people of Vanuatu" (Government of Vanuatu, 2018a, p. 9). Both documents were designed to attract funding. NGO representatives among participants mentioned they as well must either align with donor priorities or find other funding sources in order to survive (ADB, 2017; Gero et al., 2013; UNDP, 2012).

This search for aid maximization is even more visible in this research as I observed a clear gap between donors' positive image and government's praise of donor support reflected in the press on one hand, and the less ideal relations depicted by civil servants, donors and CSOs during interviews on the other hand. Indeed, interviewees mentioned relations were often challenging and sometimes tense due to conflicting agendas or interests, and that donors often wished to

¹³² Interview with an anonymous participant, French.

¹³³ Interview with Jean-Pierre Nirua, former Director of the National Planning Office, now Chancellor of Vanuatu National University, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

impose their aid priorities, modalities and ways of working. In the end, the government rarely refuses any funding. On the other side of the equation, donors have an incentive to spend their funds within a limited timeframe imposed by their home countries or organizations (Jerve, 2002), an important constraint raised by participants from all groups of actors. They also have a visibility and reputational interest to show they respect their international commitments such as the Paris Declaration, GPEDC principles, and Agenda 2030, for instance by declaring their projects align with the NSDP (Government of Vanuatu, 2018c).

Bypassing the State Apparatus

Donors are sometimes purely and simply bypassing the state apparatus regarding projects and procedures. In general, there is much room for improvement for bilateral donors, especially for traditional ones, to use country frameworks, as shown in Table 5. In the Pacific, there is 46% donor use of country systems (PIFS, 2018). The use of country systems and national procurement systems remains low in PICs, “reflecting the fact that this is generally an area of recurring concern in development partners’ risk management strategies” (Schuster, 2023).

In Vanuatu, donor use of country public finance management systems was measured at 65% in 2018 (GPEDC, 2020b). The performances of Vanuatu’s four major bilateral donors against some of the commitments for effective development cooperation are unequal, but eight out of 12 indicators declined between 2016 and 2018, and China outperformed traditional partners in two out of three categories in 2018, as shown in Table 5:

Table 5

Performance Against Commitments for Effective Development Co-Operation of Vanuatu's Four Major Bilateral Partners

	Alignment and ownership by partner country (%)											
	SDG 17.15 Use of country-led results frameworks				Funding recorded in countries' national budgets				Funding through countries' systems			
	Australia	New Zealand	Japan	China	Australia	New Zealand	Japan	China	Australia	New Zealand	Japan	China
2016 Round	72	58	76	89	50	92	83	73	33	51	68	43
2018 Round	53	39	64	83	79	79	71	80	41	47	74	33
Trend	∨	∨	∨	∨	∧	∨	∨	∧	∧	∨	∧	∨

Note. Compiled by the author from the GPEDC Dashboard (GPEDC, n.d.).

In Vanuatu, a consultant raised the issue that the country's main bilateral partners, Australia and New Zealand, had no overarching cooperation agreement with the government of Vanuatu, and that they did not respect the process by which the government approves major projects, meaning those projects at the time of data collection were not approved by the Council of Ministers before being sent to development partners, which is a requirement by law—an issue raised in the 2023 review of the *Aid Management Policy*¹³⁴. Two interviewees mentioned the government or civil servants randomly discovered ongoing projects they were not aware of: “par exemple, ils ont amené des machines à coudre et le ministre n’était même pas au courant”¹³⁵; “[DSPPAC] discovered that [organization X] had a project with Parliament ... but [organization X] was not forthcoming with the information! ... For this Parliament project, they did not go through the GIP [Government Investment Programme] process”¹³⁶. An anonymous participant asserted that donors also bypass the government to work directly with the private sector: “beaucoup de projets ne passent plus par DSPPAC, les bailleurs ne passent même plus par eux. Par exemple, il y a un programme sur [secteur X] mais DSPPAC n’était même pas au courant !”¹³⁷.

In the sector of climate change, which is of particular importance to the Pacific, the *Vanuatu Climate Change Finance Review* found that 58% of the finance flows were “off budget” and not tracked through government financial management information systems (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit et al., 2018). It is unknown how much finance was spent through civil society, private sector, or other specific stakeholder groups. In the health sector, “much of the [Australian DFAT] funding, the largest share of support, is channeled through separate bank accounts” (World Bank & Australian Aid, 2018, p. viii). Interviewees confirmed donors had a tendency to bypass country systems by not aligning with country-produced data when available¹³⁸, not aligning with Vanuatu’s procurement procedures¹³⁹, and by rarely filling out the government’s reporting form for aid-funded projects¹⁴⁰. Some participants

¹³⁴ Interview with an independent consultant in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

¹³⁵ Interview with an anonymous source, September 2022, French, online.

¹³⁶ Interview with an employee working in the government system, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

¹³⁷ Interview with an anonymous participant, French.

¹³⁸ Interview with an international development professional based in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online.

¹³⁹ Interview with Nancy Wells, ADB Senior Country Coordination Officer in Vanuatu, ADB Extended Mission - Vanuatu, Joint ADB-World Bank Liaison Office in Vanuatu, June 2022, English and Bislama, online.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Anne-Sophie Vivier, a professional with 19 years of experience in cooperation in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

even denounced donor attempts to influence Vanuatu’s systems and to impose their own procedures, pointing to multilateral organizations as “the worst students”¹⁴¹.

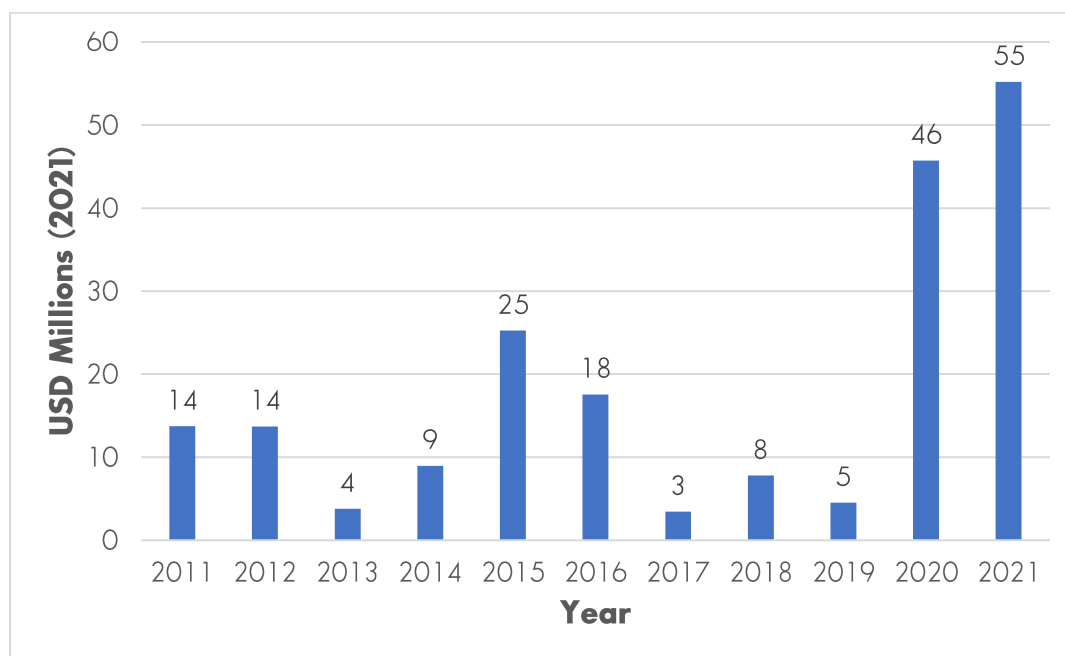
In addition, donors tend to hire private or public contractors to implement their largest projects and programs rather than working through the government¹⁴², a preference discussed below. Using their own, separate modalities has the benefit of being more visible, instead of their support becoming indistinguishable from national and other donors’ financial resources when merged with Vanuatu’s annual budget. It can also be more efficient compared to the time and resources needed from recipient countries (potentially with donor help) to obtain direct access—but PICs still prefer direct access as this modality gives them more ownership (Fouad et al., 2021). Indeed, the share of aid delivered off-budget is still large in the Pacific (UN, 2018), and in Vanuatu as well according to my calculations based on data available on OECD’s Creditor Reporting System (see Figures 5 and 6). This issue is not new and has been raised several times in reports and in the press in Vanuatu throughout the years (Government of Vanuatu, 2019a; Government of Vanuatu & PIFS, 2011). Donors still shun budget support despite the government of Vanuatu’s explicit preference for this modality, as expressed in the *Aid Management Policy*. Some observers hoped that budget support would become a preferred modality for donors, especially since the latter were constrained by the COVID-19 pandemic to increase budget support levels (see Figures 5 and 6), particularly multilaterals (ADB and WB) and Australia (Letman, 2022; OECD, 2018a). Although budget support can be one of the best ways to put aid recipient countries “in the driver’s seat” as, among other things, it facilitates national budget planning and allows governments to choose their priorities, the use of this modality often results from negotiations between donors and the recipient country, and it can lead to donors acquiring *more* influence (Dornan, 2017; Swedlund & Lieri, 2019).

¹⁴¹ Interview with a Vanuatu government worker, October 2021, English, online; Interview with Nancy Wells, ADB Senior Country Coordination Officer in Vanuatu, ADB Extended Mission - Vanuatu, Joint ADB-World Bank Liaison Office in Vanuatu, June 2022, English and Bislama, online.

¹⁴² Interview with Luke Ebbs, Country Director Save the Children Vanuatu, March 2021, English, online; Interview with an anonymous source, April 2021, English, online.

Figure 3

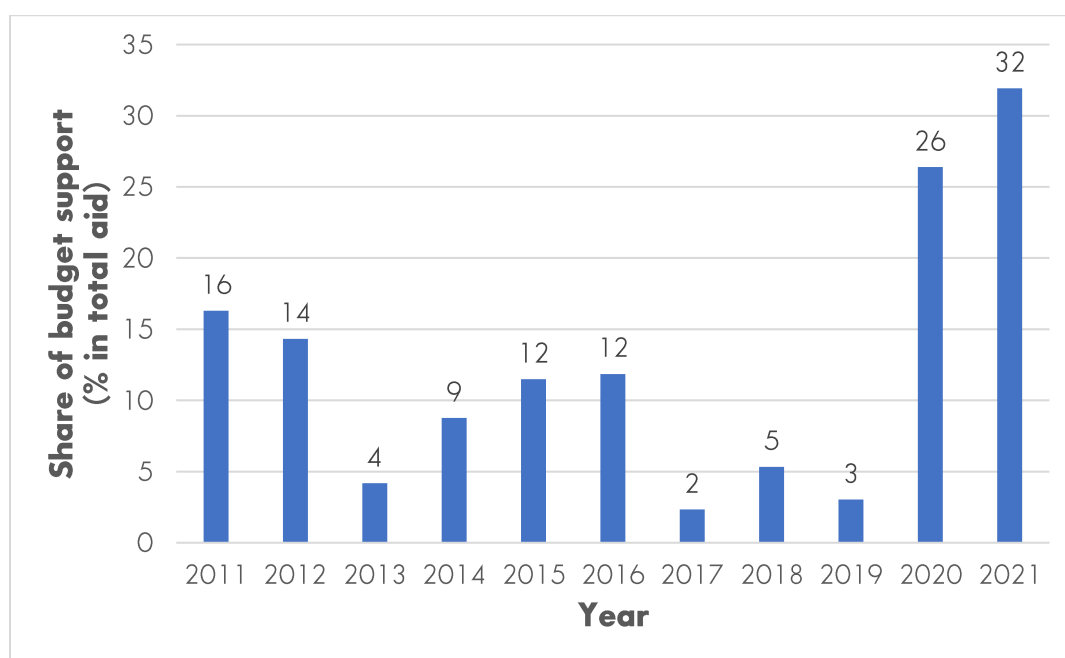
Budget Support to Vanuatu from Official Donors 2011–2021 (USD, Millions, 2021)



Note. Calculated by the author based on OECD (2023d).

Figure 4

Share of Budget Support in Total Aid from Official Donors to Vanuatu 2011–2021 (%)



Note. Calculated by the author based on OECD (2023d).

To a certain extent, it can be considered positive that not all aid come in the form of budget support, especially in countries where state resources and capacities are limited and corruption is an issue (Kukutschka, 2021). NGOs and the private sector represent other avenues to reach people most in need within countries, and to work on issues neglected by the government, a point discussed below. Yet, I observed that little funding is being delivered as budget support to the government of Vanuatu, except in 2020 and 2021 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Whether this tendency will endure is yet to be seen. In the meantime, donors' procedures weigh heavily on the government and CSOs.

Donors' Burdensome Procedures

Donors, UN agencies and INGOs' bureaucracy, application and reporting requirements are too burdensome for Vanuatu's government system and local CSOs, a problem common to many recipient countries, including SIDS and PICs (Donback, 2020; Murray & Overton, 2011; OECD, 2018a; Schmaljohann & Prizzon, 2015). Donors, whose "relatively small number of people who work at development agencies human resources are under enormous pressure to move money quickly", tend to use "mega awards" that are costly to apply for and to manage, thus that favour large INGOs and contractors and disadvantage small states and CSOs (Kerr et al., 2022, p. 5). From the proposal stage to access funds to regular monitoring to endline programme evaluations, donor requirements exert strong pressure on the scarce human resources in Vanuatu, who are not always proficient either in donors' preferred language or in each of their approval, monitoring and evaluation systems.

In particular, several participants from civil society and the private sector mentioned the impassable obstacle of funding application. According to one of them, "grant writing is one of the biggest challenges here. There are funds available, from multiple sources. But the process is horrendous, especially for small organizations. So the money goes to the big INGOs and very little trickles down"¹⁴³. Application forms, especially from multilateral or regional donors, are usually several-dozen page long, which constitutes an insurmountable obstacle for small CSOs or

¹⁴³ Interview with Dr. Astrid Kersten, Executive Director, HCDI, March 2021, English, online.

individual farmers¹⁴⁴. In the climate change sector, PICs’ highest concern, “securing direct access to the GCF through a national accredited entity is a lengthy journey even for relatively high-capacity PICs—typically two to five years” (Fouad et al., 2021, p. 24). Moreover, donors’ internal bureaucratic processes cause an important delay between funding announcements, approval, actual disbursements, and implementation, which creates frustration on Vanuatu’s side with funding that often arrives a few years after needs were expressed to donors¹⁴⁵.

Beyond demanding application processes, implementers, especially the government and small CSOs, are then crushed by reporting requirements, as several participants explained¹⁴⁶. For instance, a government worker mentioned “there is lots of bureaucracy. We have to follow both our own requirements and donor requirements”¹⁴⁷. In particular, a participant mentioned that the country’s largest bilateral donor, “[the Australian] DFAT, and thus government, set strict financial rules for lower levels to access funds” which “[squeezes] lower-level officers but not senior levels. We need how many signatures just to access funds to implement one activity! We have to spend time to chase finance guys at the government to sign...”¹⁴⁸. Sometimes, the anticipated reporting pressure is such that some organizations prefer not applying for certain funds altogether¹⁴⁹. Squeezing national and local structures with complex reporting participates to what Overton et al. (2018) called the “inverse sovereignty effect” in PICs by which processes initially set up to improve aid effectiveness actually undermine states’ sovereignty. However, former Vanuatu Ministry of Foreign Affairs and current Minister of Climate Change and Adaptation Ralph Regenvanu noted that China was the exception as it imposed “less stringent processes” for its infrastructure projects (Regenvanu, 2021, p. ix).

A number of issues arise from these burdensome application and reporting requirements from donors. The system benefits international organizations with robust capacities rather than

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Anne Pakoa, Chief Executive Officer and Founder of Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition, March 2021, English, online; Interview with Marc-Antoine Morel, President of V-Lab, a charitable association focused on enhancing entrepreneurship in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with UN official, September 2022, French, Port-Vila; Interview with an international NGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila; Interview with an employee working in the government system, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with an anonymous source, April 2021, English, online.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with a Vanuatu government worker, October 2021, English, online.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with a UN official, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Anne-Sophie Vivier, a professional with 19 years of experience in cooperation in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

smaller ones in recipient countries (Fouad et al., 2021). Accessing funds requires the government and local organizations to rely on international expertise, often from donors themselves, creating a system that sustains itself¹⁵⁰. Indeed, for at least five participants from civil society a conflict of interests exists as donors—and to a lesser extent the recipient government—fund aid programmes and projects but also define reporting standards and fund evaluation reports, an issue that has been repeatedly raised by analysts (e.g., Ridde & Olivier de Sardan, 2022). For instance, three participants complained about a report that was funded by the Australian Government and produced by the HAG and VANGO on localization that was not representative of what happened on the ground and of what they had told interviewers¹⁵¹. According to them, it only contributed to the politicization of the localization agenda to send a message to the world that Vanuatu had responded to TC Harold with no external support, when in reality the country benefitted from external technical and material support even as borders were closed because of COVID-19. Other participants mentioned it was frequent practice that donors asked reports to be watered down—or that reports be uncritical from the beginning—to please themselves and/or the government¹⁵². Indeed, for six participants of which three are consultants, one is from the private sector, one is a former minister and one is a donor official, evaluations and research are just about ticking boxes for donors—and sometimes for the government—, who just wish to spend their funds and do not capitalize on lessons learnt. During a storian, a former development and humanitarian professional told me that they had not attended a fruitful lessons-learnt workshop or session in years, and that they were generally just spaces dedicated to self-congratulation and not to critical thinking¹⁵³.

Procedures also entail the possibilities, or not, for donors to provide flexible funding. Unsurprisingly, visions on flexibility and adaptability of spending rules and reallocation of funds to adjust to context from donors and agencies on one side, and the government and CSOs on the other side, are contradictory. In interviews, donors and agencies praised their flexibility or at least

¹⁵⁰ Interview with a Vanuatu government worker, October 2021, English, online; Interview with Marc-Antoine Morel, President of V-Lab, a charitable association focused on enhancing entrepreneurship in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

¹⁵¹ Interview with an anonymous source, August 2021, English, online; Interview with an international development professional based in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online; Interview with INGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

¹⁵² Interview with Glen Craig of Pacific Advisory, January 2021, English, online; Interview with Senior technical advisor and consultant in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

¹⁵³ Interview with a former development and humanitarian professional, August 2022, Port-Vila.

some degree of progress, whereas CSOs and the government/civil servants complained about the rigidity of rules attached to funding. Major donors did reallocate some funding for COVID-19 preparedness in Vanuatu, but decisions were made at higher, political levels and concerned large amounts. Micromanagement of funds and sometimes incompatibility with the context remain recurring issues that require time and human resources from small CSOs to justify each expense. This participant from a local CSO explained:

For example, a donor said there was a conflict of interest because one of our projects involved renting a boat, but my brother was the only one who had a boat! So, what do we do? They said it was a fraud... We tried to explain it to the donor, we have to write reports in a language that pleases the donor. But even if donors I know hate it, they have to learn if they want to work here. They need to adjust to context.¹⁵⁴

During a storian, a former development and humanitarian professional also told me they would spend more time justifying why they would buy screw X versus screw Y—also considering there are few providers in Vanuatu—than actually work on project implementation¹⁵⁵. This example matches my own experience where considerable human resources, especially project managers in Vanuatu but also support staff based in organizations' headquarters, were dedicated to, and often overwhelmed by, diverse reporting requirements that forced them to work overtime to meet different deadlines from multiple donors.

Finally, accountability from donors to the government of Vanuatu remains inexistant or extremely limited according to some interviewees¹⁵⁶. Moreover, accountability from the government towards Ni-Vanuatu citizens remains limited as the government sometimes lacks self-reflection¹⁵⁷ and keeps reporting either scarce and quantitative with annual DSPPAC reports to Parliament, or partial, with press articles relaying accomplishments in discrete projects. The

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Vivian Obed, General Manager of Further Arts Vanuatu, English, October 2021, online.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with a former development and humanitarian professional, August 2022, Port-Vila.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Senior technical advisor and consultant in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila; Interview with an international NGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Marc-Antoine Morel, President of V-Lab, a charitable association focused on enhancing entrepreneurship in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila; Interview with Jean-Pierre Nirua, former Director of the National Planning Office, now Chancellor of Vanuatu National University, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

World Bank identified improving monitoring and reporting requirements as key for Vanuatu to harness more international funding to accomplish its NSDP (Brien, 2019), which confirms the importance donors give to accountability.

Earmarked Funding, Aid Volatility and Conditionalities

Beyond imposing stringent reporting requirements, donors also impose the thematic issues they wish to fund to the government and CSOs by earmarking funds, as mentioned by seven participants mainly from civil society. In particular, donors often earmark their funding to CSOs, which as noted in Chapter 5 prevents them from building their institutional capacities. It also prevents countries from working on their own priorities, as a civil servant and a CSO representative explained:

Our traditional partners focus on certain sectors only: education, health, WASH, gender. They will only give money on that. It's a challenge, because some other sectors need finances such as infrastructure—those are huge amounts—and agriculture. ... Most partners' programs have been determined in their countries, you know. ... There is lots of disagreement between priorities, but we have to find common ground.¹⁵⁸

Nous [the Vanuatu Red Cross Society] recevons aussi des petits financements très modestes directement de gouvernements. Nous recevons par exemple des petits financements du Japon et des États-Unis, ainsi que des petits montants très ciblés de la part par exemple de la Turquie ou du Qatar. En ce moment, ces petits montants sont très souvent ciblés sur le *gender* par exemple.¹⁵⁹

Another example is France, a donor that focuses on projects dedicated to promoting the Francophonie as well as higher education (Gouvernement de la Nouvelle-Calédonie, 2021)¹⁶⁰.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with a Vanuatu government worker, October 2021, English, online.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Jacqueline Deroin de Gaillande, Secretary General of the Vanuatu Red Cross Society for 13 years (2008–2021), March 2021, French, online.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Georges Cumbo, Elected representative for French citizens living in Vanuatu, September 2021, French, online; Interview with Australian aid official, October 2021, online; Interview with Marc-Antoine Morel, President of V-Lab, a charitable association focused on enhancing entrepreneurship in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

Thus, some groups and sectors are being neglected, such as non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and riskier climate change projects (UN, 2018). In the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, donor funds were directly channelled to local actors—as recommended in the Grand Bargain and the localization agenda—who could use it to cover organizational fees (*Daily Post*, 2021t; Kalsakau, 2021). However, it remains to be seen if this kind of practice will generalize, endure and whether COVID-19 and the closure of borders were the only incentives behind these exceptions.

Aid also remains highly volatile in SIDS, usually driven by geopolitical considerations and above all environmental shocks (OECD, 2018a). A donor representative acknowledged that although their available funding for initiatives in the Pacific “has gone up and down in the last years”, it is increasing overall as “for a while, the Pacific was not a priority, but it’s coming back. [Funding] is seen as a useful tool”¹⁶¹. Although Wood and Nicholls (2021) noted that aid was comparatively less volatile in Vanuatu than in other PICs, aid to the country remains volatile. This volatility is notably linked to extreme weather events, such as TC Pam in 2015 and TC Harold in 2020, as well as massive volcanic eruptions and ash falls that hit Vanuatu in recent years. CSO and state-related participants complained about the unpredictable nature of aid in the country that, combined with the fact that short-term projects were privileged despite government preferences for programmatic approaches and budget support, created a situation where there was again little funding for long term capacity building for the government and CSOs¹⁶² (ADB, 2017; Dornan & Pryke, 2017; Wood & Nicholls, 2021).

Traditional donors also more or less blatantly impose conditionalities on aid recipients, be they the government of Vanuatu or CSOs, as four participants from these groups and a consultant mentioned (Aiafi, 2017; Australian Government & Government of Vanuatu, n.d.; Brien, 2019; Scott, 2021). The OECD raised this issue encountered in many SIDS: “Attention should be paid to the new ‘conditionalities’ attached to budget support, to ensure that SIDS governments preserve ownership” (OECD, 2018a, p. 5). This is the case even if ODA from major bilateral

¹⁶¹ Interview with a representative of a donor country, June 2021, English, online.

¹⁶² Interview with Jacqueline Deroin de Gaillande, Secretary General of the Vanuatu Red Cross Society for 13 years (2008–2021), March 2021, French, online; Interview with Shirley Abraham, National Coordinator of the KoBLE, VANGO Vice-President, May 2021, English, online; Interview with a UN official, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

donors (Australia, New Zealand) is almost 100% untied, although Japan stands out (63.5%) (OECD, 2023c). For instance, Australia sees its increased use of country systems as an opportunity to influence national reforms and priorities (Australian DFAT, 2019; OECD, 2018b). Similarly to Australian aid used to remunerate Australian contractors or Chinese aid spent on Chinese materials and workers, France uses its foreign aid to hire French companies to deliver projects in Vanuatu¹⁶³ (*Daily Post*, 2022b; Massing, 2020b), thus supporting its own economy along the way.

In a few instances, the government of Vanuatu imposed its own conditions in terms of ways of working or partnerships, and donors still maintained their presence and funding to the country¹⁶⁴ (Hochet, 2016) which shows their willingness to stay and spend funds as well as Vanuatu's bargaining power. As opposed to traditional donors, China publicly adopts a "no-strings attached" position (Roberts, 2021c). However, a participant explained "it's not transparent, we never know what the promises are. They use the oral way of doing things. There are also conditions from China: they bring their staff, their material, everything". Chinese loans raise questions around debt sovereignty and geopolitical competition in the Pacific among others, yet China is answering development needs in PICs; it is also seen by governments as a partner that neither imposes specific reforms nor is as disconnected as Australia or New Zealand from Melanesian culture¹⁶⁵ (Cornish, 2020a; Cox et al. 2007; McDougall, 2016; Regenvanu, 2021).

Technical Solutions and High Turnover

Another impediment to alignment is donors' technical solutions that often clash with the complexity of Vanuatu's context, which makes projects inadequate and/or not sustainable. Some strategies and projects are inspired or completely designed outside of Vanuatu, in, and by, donor countries¹⁶⁶ (Barnett & Campbell, 2010; Killen, 2018). A former consultant explained a

¹⁶³ Interview with an anonymous source, September 2022, French, online.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Australian aid official, October 2021, online.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with consultant in Community Development and Planning with 11 years in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila; Interview with an anonymous source, March 2022, English, online.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with a participant from the Francophonie network, November 2021, French, online; Interview with Anna Naupa, an experienced development professional in the Pacific and in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online; Interview with a consultant in Vanuatu, July 2022, French, online.

programme they worked on was piloted from Fiji, where UNDP is based, with little space from local actors in Vanuatu to decide on priorities¹⁶⁷.

In addition, bilateral donors tend to hire foreign contractors, TAs and INGOs to manage and implement projects in Vanuatu rather than state entities, local experts or local CSOs, as noted by four participants (Australian DFAT, 2019; Barnett & Campbell, 2010; *Daily Post*, 2021g; Hochet, 2015). However, recruitment processes are often opaque, technical experts are seldomly development experts, and even less trained to the context of the Pacific or Vanuatu or in specific areas such as gender¹⁶⁸. Hochet (2016), who conducted his doctoral research on aid in Vanuatu in 2012, noted that the very “project management methodology” was not conducive to experts taking into account local realities. This methodology includes short-term “missions” by consultants that usually last a few days or weeks and that do not allow these consultants to grasp the specific context of project or programme implementation (Hochet, 2016, p. 213).

For some observers, donors lack political will and choose the easy way in the face of challenges like corruption in Vanuatu by bypassing the government, and they have relied on technical expertise rather than tried to understand how social change happens¹⁶⁹ (Soni, 2012). According to participants from the private sector, NGO/agencies, and the government, this technical approach leads to projects that are badly designed and unsustainable (ADB, 2018; Tokona, 2022). Even TAs or former TAs who have spent years in Vanuatu themselves denounce this pointless ballet of foreign advisors following a “fly-in fly-out” logic¹⁷⁰ (UN, 2018). Four participants working in the government system and local CSOs mentioned some foreign nationals working as advisors or in INGOs in Vanuatu have tried to impose their ideas and ways of working, and that there were issues of racism.

In my experience and observations, and as expressed by some participants, some of the former or current TAs are praised by government workers for their understanding of the context,

¹⁶⁷ Interview with a consultant in Vanuatu, July 2022, French, online.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Australian aid official, October 2021, online; Interview with an anonymous source, April 2021, English, online; Interview with Anna Naupa, an experienced development professional in the Pacific and in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Anna Gibert, Team Leader, Vanuatu Skills Partnership from 2009 to 2015 and Consultant (2021), notably for the Australian DFAT, December 2021, English, online.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with an anonymous source, September 2022, French, online; Interview with Anne-Sophie Vivier, a professional with 19 years of experience in cooperation in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila; Interview with Senior technical advisor and consultant in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

their valuable skills and their alignment to Vanuatu's priorities. Indeed, in the Pacific, "technical assistance is also likely to be more effective to the extent that it is problem-based, aligned with government demand and priorities, and closely-integrated with other aid modalities" (Edwards & Obeyesekere, 2016, p. xii). However, as explained in the previous section, donors also tend to fund one specific area at a time such as climate adaptation thus creating incentives to work in silos, an approach that does not allow for multidimensional, integrated development projects (Barnett & Campbell, 2010).

Related to the topic of human resources, the high staff turnover at the government, in donor agencies, in INGOs and other development agencies poses great challenges in terms of alignment. For instance, the implementation of the U.S.-funded Vanuatu Closed Compact was hampered by "frequent government and ministerial changes, lack of adequate road maintenance plant and equipment, insufficient government funding, unqualified engineers, high turnover, limited institutional capacity and policy reforms, and poor management and planning" (Millennium Challenge Corporation, 2020, pp. 16–17). As noted in Chapter 5, significant turnover prevents individuals from developing trustful, long-lasting relationships despite their importance in the Pacific and in Vanuatu, and it leads to weak understanding of context, processes and procedures, changing priorities, poorly designed programmes and projects, loss of organizational memory, lack of capitalization on projects and lessons learnt, and implementation challenges. Of particular importance for alignment, a participant noted high turnover meant it took more time for foreign organizations to integrate national aid procedures.

Relatedly, fruitful collaboration and the advancement of development objectives depends on leadership and above all on *individuals* engaged in relationships, as raised by several participants across groups during interviews and storians at nakamals. Participants, especially from civil society, UN agencies and development professionals, insisted that those networks, individual relations and initiatives were particularly important in Vanuatu compared to other places because many processes are not institutionalized, and social relations constitute the heart of Ni-Vanuatu's social capital. Effective implementation of emergency responses and development programs as well as effective coordination are based on whether the diverse actors involved cultivate good relationships. This micro, personal level is crucial. The fact that the turnover is often high in government, among high-level civil servants, in foreign representations,

in NGOs, in donor representations, in development agencies hampers stability, fluidity, collaboration, and coordination between actors, and ultimately alignment, harmonization, and aid effectiveness. It also leads to many decisions being negotiated and taken at the political level with little delegation to the lower levels, since individuals, often in place for a short period of time, try to move their agendas forward as quickly as possible. Yet, when the Government's agenda neglects some sectors, donors and other foreign actors face a dilemma (Cox et al., 2007).

Gaps in National Priorities

Vanuatu CSOs identify clear gaps in national priorities. While donors “align” to a certain extent with NSDP “priorities” such as infrastructure, security, governance and education that match their own interest, these priorities ignore what CSOs see as crucial issues in the country and in the Pacific more broadly such as environmental issues, gender inequality, child protection, culture, psychosocial support, NCDs, the youth, and people with disabilities, as four interviewees mentioned (*Daily Post*, 2021o; *Daily Post*, 2021u; Gero et al., 2013; King, 2007; Nicky, 2022b; PIFS, 2018; UN, 2018). These are not at the top of the government's list—despite being included in the NSDP—but CSOs are trying to address them, which the government can sometimes view as interference, can cause public backlash and a deterioration of relations: this was the case when the government of Vanuatu threatened to revoke Oxfam's right to work in the country when the organization conducted a campaign to encourage women's participation in politics (Baker, 2019). Beyond just having national strategies in place, the gap described here between priorities as perceived by the government *versus* CSOs illustrates the importance of representativity, quality and inclusivity when conducting governmental consultations and designing strategies, for the latter to include concerns from CSOs.

In addition, why align with a strategy, even if “owned” by the government, which marginalizes entire issues and parts of the population? Rana and Koch (2021) already raised this issue in the case of Rwanda, as did Brown (2023) by questioning the coexistence of the potentially conflicting development norms of “leave no one behind” *versus* “national ownership” in the case of development assistance to defend the rights of LGBTQI+ people in hostile environments. The very principle of alignment is questionable here, and representativity and inclusion are at the heart of this dilemma. Since some issues concern minorities and the majority may never vote to improve the living conditions of a minority, then structurally, mechanically,

the minority may never have any weight. Potential avenues for reflection include the construction of allyships for minorities or for donors to adopt a portfolio approach (Brown, forthcoming). In the meantime, this dilemma reveals alignment with state priorities only is not always relevant since they are not always representative. Funding to CSOs defending neglected causes, especially to local CSOs, must be not only maintained but increased.

Overall, I showed in this section that donors do not respect the alignment principle in practice and still impose their aid priorities, modalities, and ways of working in many ways. In addition to a lack of political will to initiate transformational change, I argue in the next sections that they face major, interrelated disincentives: the need to be accountable to their domestic constituencies combined with limited national and local capacities in Vanuatu, that donors have been failing to strengthen. First, I analyze Vanuatu's lack of capacities, a concept that is based on western standards. Second, I describe how the lack of available data hampers priority definition and thus alignment by donors. Finally, I explain how the pressure of accountability to domestic audiences on both sides of the aid relationship constitutes a major counterincentive to alignment.

Limited State and Local CSO Capacities and Resources

According to Wood et al. (2022), the weak level of governance is not the cause of the ineffectiveness of aid projects in the Pacific. Isolation and small populations are the main challenges facing project implementation, requiring donors to adapt to the specific context of PICs (ADB, 2021; Wood et al., 2022). Indeed, this geographic specificity is a challenge for Pacific states and CSOs with stretched resources and capacities. Limited resources, especially qualified human resources, and capacities at the government and in local CSOs are challenges recognized across all actors and sectors in the Pacific and in Vanuatu, and the issue was raised by 14 participants (ADB, 2017; Fouad et al., 2021; GCF 2018; GGGI, 2016; NZ MFAT, 2021; Tiedemann et al., 2021; UN, 2018; World Bank, 2017; World Bank, 2022a; World Bank & Australian Aid, 2018). The government mentions its lack of capacities and resources in almost every development strategy and plan, as well as reports. For instance, the Vanuatu *Voluntary National Review* reads:

the Government continues to face numerous challenges to implementing various human rights commitments including understanding the content of the

human rights treaties. Some of these challenges include limited resources both financial and human resources. With a very small public sector, the Government is the biggest employer. (Government of Vanuatu, 2019a, p. 15)

This human resource challenge has been raised in several reports, such as in OECD's first survey report on aid effectiveness in 2011: "The lack of experienced staff in all sectors is a serious constraint on the development of Vanuatu" (OECD, 2012b, p. 7; see also ADB, 1982; Government of Vanuatu & PIFS, 2011). Besides, qualified staff are hard to retain at the government as salaries are more attractive in INGOs and the private sector¹⁷¹ (ADB, 2017). As noted in Chapter 5, the WASH sector stands out as a better structured and more functional sector compared to the others, where partnerships between actors are more fluid, an exception that could be investigated deeper beyond this thesis¹⁷² (Gero et al., 2013; Government of Vanuatu, 2020a). Why are capacities and resources lacking despite more than 40 years of foreign assistance to the country? The answer is not straightforward, and there are a multitude of reasons. The neo-institutionalist approach admits institutional change is hard to explain, and attributes the persistence of sometimes dysfunctional institutions to the phenomenon of path dependency (North, 1990). Several elements stood out in the data I collected.

First, although donors invest in capacity strengthening activities, they often consider them secondary and adopt an approach that is disconnected from the context, leading to poor results on the long term. Donors now consider capacity strengthening as part of the objective rather than a prerequisite for effective aid¹⁷³ (ADB, 2018; *Daily Post*, 2020v; Fouad et al., 2021), which is in line with the alignment principle of the Paris Declaration. For instance, New Zealand's aid to the Pacific has not been based on requirements of good governance (Akhtaruzzaman, 2022). Indeed, Booth (2012) warned about the fact that strong state capacity is often considered by donors as a condition for aid, whereas the Paris Declaration preconizes adapting to each context, including to

¹⁷¹ Interview with a professional working in the tourism sector in Vanuatu, March 2022, English, online.

¹⁷² Interview with Lucie Vigier, Representative of France Volontaires in Vanuatu, June 2021, French, online; Interview with an international NGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

¹⁷³ Interview with a participant from the Francophonie network, November 2021, French, online; Interview with the person in charge of the Asia-Pacific region at the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations Directorate of the European Commission (ECHO), March 2022, French, online. Their comments are made in their own name and do not necessarily represent the views of the European Commission or ECHO; Interview with an anonymous source, September 2022, French, online.

a country's existing capacities, and capacity strengthening. Generally, donors do not consider strong capacities as a precondition for aid in Vanuatu. However, even if they have included capacity building components into projects and programme, according to government documents as well as to interviewees, these initiatives remain unsuccessful, thus discrediting their relevance and quality. Participants from across groups criticized one-shot and/or poorly designed and/or overlapping trainings, the lack of knowledge and skills transmission between TAs and local human resources and the lack of training availability for Ni-Vanuatu citizens alongside project implementation. We could hypothesize there is no incentive for donors to improve the government and CSOs' capacities and skills, especially negotiation skills that five participants (but no donor representative) noted were crucial but often lacking at the government level. Vanuatu is torn between maximizing funding by accepting aid in all its forms in the face of needs and trying to negotiate for *high-quality* funding through its preferred modalities, as this participant explained: "Sometimes it's not win-win but we have to maintain relationships ... if I don't do that there is no funding..."¹⁷⁴. As development finance is not matching the pace of growing needs globally, this unbalanced dynamic is likely to persist.

Second, several participants recognized there was an increasing pool of qualified human resources in Vanuatu; yet, donor representatives as well as other actors interviewed admitted that complex processes to access funds and poor project design in the sense of overambitious or inadequate planning by the government and donors was the flip side of limited state and CSO capacities (ADB, 2018; Fouad et al., 2021; Haque et al., 2015; Murray & Overton, 2011; Nimbtik, 2016; OECD, 2018a; Tiedemann et al., 2021). As noted in Chapter 2, what is perceived on the one hand as a lack of capacity can be perceived on the other hand as a burden emanating from internal or external actors and factors and/or incentives, and earlier in this chapter I mentioned donors' burdensome procedures in Vanuatu. For instance, the ADB (2018) recognized that "upstream design work on projects has sometimes failed to incorporate lessons from previous implementations, and designs have remained complex and overly ambitious, with difficulties in tendering processes" (p. 3). Again, this issue is not new and hinders the implementation and monitoring of development policies, strategies, plans, and projects given limited state and CSO capacities and resources in Vanuatu¹⁷⁵ (Cox et al., 2007; King, 2007; The Pacific Community,

¹⁷⁴ Interview with a professional working in the tourism sector in Vanuatu, March 2022, English, online.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with an international NGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

2016; *Vanuatu National Assessment Report*, 2010). Cox et al. (2007) established the link between donors' behaviour and the low level of ownership by the government of Vanuatu:

A second problem with aid practices in Vanuatu has been the tendency of donors to bombard government with more initiatives than it has the capacity to absorb. ... In these circumstances [of stretched national human resources], the tendency of senior figures in government is to accept any initiative proposed by donors, without careful scrutiny. This keeps aid flowing into the institutions, while at the same time keeping the donors happy. It also accords with a cultural reluctance to give a direct refusal. The consequence is that initiatives become led by donors and foreign technical advisers, without sufficient ownership by government to ensure their continuity and lasting impact. (p. 53)

As mentioned above, donors have time constraints to spend their funds that do not always allow them to consider and adjust to the government or CSOs' workload at a precise point in time in Vanuatu. On the government side, the NSDP, and the many sectoral plans, are ambitious for the country's means. This broadness renders implementation difficult, and monitoring has been inconsistent: an annual report is supposed to be released every year, but the last one available online is from 2018. A five-year review of NSDP implementation was conducted and released in 2023, revealing mixed results and a lack of data (Government of Vanuatu, 2023a, 2023b). A revised version of the NSDP should be released in the coming years: will it be based on large consultations with civil society, integrate their preoccupations, be realistic, achievable, budgeted, implemented, and monitored?

Third, donors lack trust in, and thus bypass, government systems because of their valid fear of corruption, an issue acknowledged by eight participants (most of them donors and INGOs/agencies) and regularly denounced in the press and by CSOs (*Daily Post*, 2021b; Kukutschka, 2021; Soni, 2012; Transparency International, 2021). There is a fear that when injected into the national budget, aid primarily benefits government elites and their constituents, who have no incentive in changing the system, an issue the government has recognized (Cox et al., 2007; Government of Vanuatu, 2020a; Government of Vanuatu, 2016a). On the contrary, concrete aid projects such as building schools have the double advantage of helping politicians secure votes and keeping donors happy by making their support visible to all (Cox et al., 2007).

In OECD's 2023 Development Co-operation Report, Schuster (2023) argued that in PICs, donor use of country systems does not depend on the system's quality but rather on "sector practice, the overall level of trust between the PIC government and the development co-operation provider, and the provider's degree of risk tolerance". In other words, capacity is not as important a prerequisite for the use of country systems by donors, but accountability pressure is a strong incentive, as explained below.

Finally, Vanuatu as an independent country inherited 43 years ago of a dual administrative system from former colonial powers, France and Great Britain, with "two resident commissioners, two flags, two currencies and a stateless native population" (Aldrich, 2000, p. 180). It has since been a challenge for the state to reconcile those systems and to build its institutions. Former colonisers became donors, and financial power still lies in their hands as well as in other regional donors' such as Australia, New Zealand, China and Japan. Challenges facing Vanuatu today in terms of capacities and resources cannot be considered separately from this painful and recent colonial history (see for example Pfalzgraf, 2021). Australia's attitude towards PICs, including through its development policy, is sometimes perceived by analysts as neocolonial (Holtz, 2016) and its use of expressions such as "Pacific family", problematic because it glosses over power asymmetries and gaps between Pacific concerns, especially regarding climate change, and Australia's priorities (Hunt, 2022). Additionally, as noted in Chapter 2 and by a participant, the very term "capacity/capacities" is questionable: the Vanuatu government and local CSOs already have diverse, strong capacities, but these are just not tailored to international (mainly Western) actors' expectations¹⁷⁶. Yet, those actors themselves define and impose the meaning of capacities as well as norms and requirements linked to aid¹⁷⁷. According to Nimbtik (2016), this is "the clash between traditional ways of doing things and the expectations of international institutions about how things ought to be done [that] creates a gap in which corrupt practices emerge" (p. vii). In other words, the imposition of western standards on actors and organizations who obey different rules, or institutions, is failing in the country.

¹⁷⁶ Interview with a consultant in Vanuatu, July 2022, French, online.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Senior technical advisor and consultant in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

The lack of capacities and resources of the government and small CSOs renders data collection and analysis difficult in Vanuatu. However, this is not the only cause of the lack of data.

Lack of Data

A lack of data, especially from outer islands, and of local research has also posed challenges in terms of priority setting and project design in Vanuatu¹⁷⁸ (GCF, 2018; GGGI, 2016; Government of Vanuatu, 2020a; Millenium Challenge Corporation, 2020; The Pacific Community, 2016; Tiedemann et al., 2021; UN, 2018; *Vanuatu National Assessment Report*, 2010; World Trade Organization, 2007). It is systematically raised as an issue in government strategies, plans, reports, and evaluations. Ultimately, it is thus difficult for the government to define priorities, produce strategies, and for donors to align with the country's priorities. Causes are diverse and include the logistical difficulty of gathering data across all the country's inhabited islands, that are scattered across the vast ocean; the lack of capacities and resources in terms of transport means, staff trained in data collection, funding, data processing skills, etc.; and the lack of knowledge sharing of organizations, especially INGOs, international agencies, donors, between themselves and with the government of Vanuatu. Indeed, organizations, especially INGOs and UN agencies, have both the capacity and funding to collect data and are well placed as they work closely with communities and travel to remote parts of the country. However, INGOs (as well as local CSOs) remain competitors for funding which acts as a counterincentive to share data and results. According to my experience working for a development and humanitarian organization in the country, there is a missed opportunity there to build robust state databases on many topics and improve alignment to the needs of Vanuatu citizens.

Overall, donors and the government of Vanuatu acknowledged the lack of state and CSO capacities as well as the data gap, which hamper the effective implementation of development policy. However, this lack of capacity and data also results from poor efforts in capacity strengthening from donors—who themselves lack capacity to learn and adjust from past errors in programme design and implementation, including capacity-building components. Based on the

¹⁷⁸ Interview with an international development professional based in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online; Interview with Nancy Wells, ADB Senior Country Coordination Officer in Vanuatu, ADB Extended Mission - Vanuatu, Joint ADB-World Bank Liaison Office in Vanuatu, June 2022, English and Bislama, online.

previous sections, I explain next that the government of Vanuatu and donors are under pressure to satisfy their domestic constituencies, which constitutes a strong incentive not to respect the alignment principle.

Accountability Pressure

Donors' accountability requirements to satisfy their domestic constituencies, or shareholders for multilaterals, put pressure on individuals working in NGOs, agencies, and in donor and government structures. First, the Vanuatu government is primarily accountable to its domestic constituency to fulfill its promises, follow its development priorities and report back to citizens and taxpayers. To accomplish this, it needs to mobilize development assistance and donors to use national reporting systems instead of several donor systems that weigh disproportionately on public servants. To maximize donor funding, the government—and to a lesser extent, NGOs—define broad and/or numerous priorities that include local civil society demands and priorities (in accordance with international commitments such as the Paris Declaration) and easily match (changing) donor priorities; they produce policies aimed at improving financial management (GCF, 2018; Brien, 2019); they accept many aid modalities and conditionalities; and they show high tolerance towards redundant or badly designed projects and sometimes incompetent TAs¹⁷⁹. Mr. Nirua, former Director of the National Planning Office and Minister of Education now Chancellor of Vanuatu National University confirmed that “quand on est au bout du fil de l'aide, on accepte tout”¹⁸⁰.

As mentioned above, donors (and in-country donor representatives) and national politicians have a shared incentive of implementing concrete, relatively short-term, highly visible projects to prove their legitimacy, sometimes boost their careers, and, for Ni-Vanuatu politicians at least, to secure votes as well as to fulfill their duty to protect and provide for their communities (Cox et al. 2007). Investments in certain sectors, such as agriculture, also touch politicians' voting bases¹⁸¹. In terms of reporting mechanisms to the public, DSPPAC reports to the

¹⁷⁹ Interview with a representative of a foreign organization in Vanuatu, June 2021, online; Interview with an international NGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila; Interview with Jean-Pierre Nirua, former Director of the National Planning Office, now Chancellor of Vanuatu National University, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Jean-Pierre Nirua, former Director of the National Planning Office, now Chancellor of Vanuatu National University, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

¹⁸¹ Interview with an international development professional based in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online.

Parliament on an annual basis, but mainly on financial matters, monitoring donor promises *versus* actual disbursements. Sometimes complying with donor requirements to have a direct access to funds is too heavy, complex and expensive for SIDS who have to rely on an intermediary, which is what happens when SIDS try to access GCF funds (Fouad et al., 2021). Finally, in times of disasters such as TC Harold, the government of Vanuatu wishes to show its constituents and the world that it can respond: there are political incentives to prove the government's capability to respond to domestic needs and assert its legitimacy, and donors wish to show they respond in line with their international commitments to ownership, localization, and alignment—an argument I develop further in Chapter 9.

Second, and in an opposite dynamic, donors are responsible primarily *vis-à-vis* their home government and constituencies. This pressure trickles down to implementing partners who have unequal capacities and resources: contractors, the government, INGOs and local CSOs. Donors have an incentive to match the aid priorities defined at their national and/or organizational levels¹⁸². For instance, a participant mentioned with regards to Chinese aid that “[the Chinese] answer back to the Communist Party, not to anyone else, they are not accountable to anyone in the development world but just to themselves and a little to the Vanuatu government”¹⁸³. In 2022, announcing additional development assistance to the Pacific, the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs Ms. Penny Wong said these funds were aimed at “making Australia stronger and more influential” (Wong, 2022), asserting the pursuit of Australia's own interests through foreign aid to their domestic audience. Donors also prefer using their own monitoring and evaluation processes or similar “effective” ones that match their strategies, their broader government system, and their standards, not the recipient government's (Government of Vanuatu & PIFS, 2011; GCF, 2018). It is also cheaper and easier for donors not to adapt to each recipient country's system.

If donors also have an incentive to show they deliver effective aid, with, in my experience, in-country aid managers and diplomats who genuinely care about having a positive impact, the pressure is less about long-term capacity building and do-no-harm than effective means, meeting targets, pleasing superiors and/or and diplomats as well as their domestic

¹⁸² Interview with an anonymous source, April 2021, English, online; Interview with an employee working in a multilateral institution in Vanuatu, August 2022, English, Port-Vila; Interview with an anonymous source, September 2022, French, online.

¹⁸³ Interview with an anonymous source, March 2022, English, online.

government and constituencies by adopting a highly risk-averse behaviour¹⁸⁴ (Soni, 2012; Williams et al., 2020). Indeed, according to Simone Dietrich (2016), neoliberal political economies such as Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, who are some of Vanuatu's major donors, tend to provide less development assistance through recipient states because domestically, public services are also for a great part outsourced, which they sometimes perceive is more effective and complementary. If outsourcing is more effective and positively impacts Vanuatu communities through effective public service delivery, why align to Vanuatu's preferences and use budget support? The alignment principle is presented with a dilemma. In the end, however, according to the ownership principle, country preferences in terms of procedures and processes should be respected, which reinforces the primary importance of (questioning) this principle.

As further explained in the next chapter, in addition to not aligning their aid priorities, modalities and procedures *with Vanuatu's*, donors tend to harmonize their agendas but not their procedures *among themselves*. It weighs on Vanuatu's limited capacities and human resources and reinforces the argument for accountability to domestic constituencies and self-interest as major incentives, in a context of increased geopolitical tensions in the region.

Conclusion

Despite donors' commitments to following the government's lead and priorities enshrined in the NSDP, the alignment principle is only superficially respected in Vanuatu. Donors still impose their priorities, modalities, conditions, and ways of working in diverse ways. Both the government and donors recognize the lack of state and local CSOs capacities can be an impediment to alignment. However, donors have failed to strengthen these capacities through development assistance, and the lack of national and local capacities only partly explains why donors follow their own agendas and procedures. The government's need for funds, to satisfy both donor requirements and citizens' diverse priorities, as well as to face donors' and its own changing priorities pushed it to create a wide-ranging national development strategy from which donors can cherry-pick issues they wish to fund. The pressure of accountability towards their

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Glen Craig of Pacific Advisory, January 2021, English, online; Interview with an anonymous source, April 2021, English, online; Interview with Marc-Antoine Morel, President of V-Lab, a charitable association focused on enhancing entrepreneurship in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

home government and constituencies for bilateral donors, or organization for multilateral donors, is a strong incentive for them not to align to the recipient's systems, procedures, and processes.

Indeed, donor and recipient governments are ultimately accountable to their own state structures and domestic constituencies. It does not mean they do not care for increased aid effectiveness and positive impacts for people in recipient countries. Research participants, who work at the heart of international aid and cooperation in Vanuatu, work tirelessly to listen and respond to people's expressed needs in the best, contextualized, sustainable way, while being perfectly aware of the system's flaws. However, in practice, accountability pressure mainly from donors is stronger than these high-level political will and individual convictions. If some discrete projects are successful or parts of projects make a difference, overall, this pressure results in overwhelming application and reporting requirements, in technical approaches often disconnected from Vanuatu's context to the detriment of the country's citizens, and ultimately it creates a space where "corrupt practices emerge" (Nimbtik, 2016) or endure.

Recipients of donor funding set up plans, systems and processes that allow them to maximize funding and satisfy donors who focus on *means* through heavy accountability requirements but less on *impacts and results* for citizens in recipient countries. This bargain resembles "isomorphic mimicry, which allows organisations (and states) to maintain legitimacy by adopting the forms of successful organisations and states even without their functions" and "premature load bearing, which allows failure to exist while creating the illusion of implementing developmental policies" described by Pritchett et al. (2013, pp. 14–15) as attractive techniques both to the recipient state and donors. Indeed, the latter can

measure their success as either inputs provided, training sessions held, or 'reforms' undertaken and in process-compliance in project implementation; all of these laudable activities that can be readily justified and attractively presented at year's end, yet can lead to zero actual improvement in a system's demonstrated performance. (Pritchett et al., 2013, p. 14)

It disadvantages Vanuatu's broader society by mobilizing large resources for little results and hindering iterative learning.

Moreover, donors face a dilemma when a recipient government's plans or priorities ignore what local CSOs or INGOs consider important issues: for donors, funding non-state actors outside of government systems can therefore be a necessity, which goes against the alignment principle. Indeed, as recommended in the Paris Declaration, the principles have to be adapted to each context, not applied indifferently.

As argued in the next chapter, the pressure for accountability also plays a large role in explaining the lack of harmonization between donors, along with geopolitical tensions in the region and Vanuatu's own preferred collaboration modalities. Just as the ownership and alignment principles can clash and be questioned, I observed similar issues with regards to the harmonization principle.

Chapter 7 – Harmonizing agendas without China

According to the harmonization principle, “donors’ actions are more harmonised, transparent and collectively effective” through a coordination of their agendas, actions and procedures (OECD, 2005, p. 6). Indeed, partnerships and coordination lead to a more holistic and effective approach to development that have better chances to make positive impacts in SIDS (Goransson et al., 2019). Thus, I ask: To what extent are the actions of donors harmonized (common systems and procedures, complementarity) and transparent, or to what extent are they uncoordinated or poorly coordinated, disparate, opaque, and follow different procedures?

In Vanuatu, there are no official platforms for dialogue between donors beyond the annual meeting/roundtable with the government. Donors and the government meet bilaterally more frequently: there are annual high-level bilateral meetings, and often more bilateral meetings during the year, as well as technical and sectoral meetings. Some donors meet more frequently with the government than others, and meetings are more or less formal depending on the donor. Donors discuss and exchange among themselves in an informal way, through emails, phone calls, meetings, and at the nakamal, as eight donor and development agency representatives explained in interviews. They are conscious that Vanuatu is a small country with many international development actors, thus discussion is unavoidable and necessary, including to avoid duplication¹⁸⁵. The FRANZ partnership regrouping France, Australia and New Zealand to prepare and respond to disasters in the region also provides regular platforms for dialogue, although the various other donors are not present¹⁸⁶ (Pacific Humanitarian Team & Government of Vanuatu, 2017).

However, as explained in the next sections, if donors harmonize their agendas to a certain extent through formal and informal meetings, coordination remains weak, China remains absent from many exchanges, and donors do not harmonize their procedures which weighs on Vanuatu’s stretched capacities and resources. The reasons I identify are competition for funds, geopolitical

¹⁸⁵ Interview with Sandra Uwantege Hart, Consultant with 4 years experience in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, online.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with a Disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific, April 2022, English, online; Interview with consultant in Community Development and Planning with 11 years in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

competition, accountability pressure, and Vanuatu's own preferences linked to its colonial and more recent past as well as its needs for funds.

The chapter is structured as follows: first, I uncover the weak coordination among donors in Vanuatu; second, I focus more specifically on how China is both excluded by traditional donors of coordination spaces and purposefully maintains a distance from them; third, I explain how donors still have different procedures Vanuatu needs to adapt to; fourth, I analyze how geopolitical competition as well as Vanuatu's colonial past and experience with aid impede harmonization; fifth, I examine how the pressure of accountability towards their respective constituencies constitutes a significant counter-incentive for donors.

Weak Coordination

Traditional donors coordinate mainly via informal channels to keep one another updated about their activities and make sure they do not overlap geographically or thematically. For instance, when a donor wishes to launch a project in the education or WASH sector, they get in touch with their counterparts working in the same sector and discuss their intentions¹⁸⁷. A donor representative indicated communication “is more informal, and also we can just walk into [the Australian] DFAT”¹⁸⁸. This informal way to communicate and coordinate can lead to complementary actions towards the improvement of a whole sector such as in the WASH sector¹⁸⁹ or in the tourism sector as a professional explains:

A bilateral agreement was signed to say New Zealand is Vanuatu's focal donor for tourism: each year, there is a grant and technical assistance. As of 2016, post-Pam, Australia stepped in to support VTO [Vanuatu Tourism Office]. Until 2019, they provided funding support for recovery. Japan supports our capacity building, especially with trainings in Japan and a volunteer to translate documents to Japanese language. China, they fund a capacity building program, with economic and cultural exchanges in China. Pre-COVID, four staff went to China. There is also support from the French government to promote us on the

¹⁸⁷ Interview with donor representative, July 2021, English, online.

¹⁸⁸ Interview with a representative of a donor country, June 2021, English, online.

¹⁸⁹ Interview with an international NGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

French market, especially New Caledonia. It comprises translation to French and the week of Ni-Vanuatu consumer trade show each year. It's through the French Embassy.¹⁹⁰

However, this coordination system remains quite unstructured and informal, with each donor often knowing only part of the story. It is not the vision embodied in the Paris Declaration that donors should systematically coordinate their actions and share information. If it works for certain sectors though, existing arrangements and practices could form the basis for improvement.

Moreover, despite rhetorical engagement, there is still not enough coordination among donors overall, and they even compete for global funds and activity implementation in the Pacific and in Vanuatu, as five participants from across groups explained (Ahluwalia & Miller, 2021; Dornan & Pryke, 2017; Gero et al., 2013). Donors still separately follow their own agendas and implement their activities, and communication and coordination are even more limited between traditional and emerging donors (Nalau et al., 2017; Schmaljohann & Prizzon, 2015). As a result, activities sometimes overlap geographically or thematically. According to research participants from INGOs and development agencies, pooling funds or receiving common funding is the strongest incentive for donors, agencies and CSOs to collaborate¹⁹¹. The more funds there are, the greater the necessity to coordinate and harmonize. However, the pooling of funds remains rare. For donors, this modality poses the problem of aid fungibility and donor invisibility as it becomes harder to link each donor's financial contributions to activities and results on the ground, and ultimately to report back to domestic and international audiences.

For some actors, setting up sectoral partnerships and holding sectoral group meetings is an appropriate and advantageous modality¹⁹². However, they can be difficult to maintain on the long term in Vanuatu as major disasters regularly perturb existing coordinating structures and organizations reorganize their funds and activities towards response and recovery¹⁹³. Politicians,

¹⁹⁰ Interview with a professional working in the tourism sector in Vanuatu, March 2022, English, online.

¹⁹¹ Interview with UN official, September 2022, French, Port-Vila; Interview with INGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila; Interview with a UN official, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

¹⁹² Interview with Marc-Antoine Morel, President of V-Lab, a charitable association focused on enhancing entrepreneurship in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila; Interview with an anonymous source, September 2022, French, online; Interview with an international NGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

¹⁹³ Interview with UN official, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

diplomats or high-level civil servants from donor countries also have personal interests and preferences in terms of sectors, which means there is not necessarily continuity in terms of thematic focus when these people rotate every three or four years¹⁹⁴ (Kalsakau, 2021). Besides, the government of Vanuatu has shown its preference for bilateral discussions with donors despite the harmonization principle (Schmaljohann & Prizzon, 2015). For instance, after TC Harold, the government organized a livestreamed meeting with all international partners where it announced it would hold bilateral meetings to discuss and negotiate their alignment to the country's current priorities and preferred aid modalities outlined in the PDNA (*Daily Post*, 2020w; Aid Coordination and Negotiation Unit, 2020). Here, the ownership principle clashes with the harmonization principle, as the country's preferred way of working does not involve a preliminary harmonization of donors' agendas.

In the same vein, there is no specific, official platform for coordination between donors and development agencies and NGOs. They recognized the benefits of such spaces and declared being in favour of more coordination in interviews¹⁹⁵. Yet, coordination between these actors raises questions and challenges. First, UN agencies, INGOs and local CSOs have different resources, capacities, thus unequal power, and they often have diverging or competing interests, as explained in Chapter 5. Second, a participant explained that someone suggested a meeting of international partners to coordinate their responses after TC Harold as the government had interrupted the dialogue, but partners ruled it out as they feared it could anger the government. Indeed, such a meeting could have been seen by the government to bypass government systems, to undermine government ownership and to be reminiscent of colonial times. Incentives work against more coordination in such a case, as donors do not wish to damage their relationship with the government. The ownership and alignment principles as well as the localization agenda clash with the harmonization principle. At the same time, international partners, including donors, were faced with a dilemma as remote communities affected by the cyclone needed immediate relief supplies that they could provide and the state's response was slow (Rosier & Savard, 2022).

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Anne-Sophie Vivier, a professional with 19 years of experience in cooperation in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Australian aid official, October 2021, online; Interview with a Disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific, April 2022, English, online; Interview with a UN official, September 2022, English, Port-Vila; Interview with an international NGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

(Self-)Exclusion of China

A second reason rendering harmonization superficial in Vanuatu is the absence of China from this network of exchanges among traditional bilateral donors, because China was one of the country's major bilateral donors at the time of the research. I was not able to speak with a representative of China's cooperation because they never replied to my requests to meet. Traditional donors very rarely mentioned China spontaneously during interviews when speaking of other donors and partners, or they only alluded to it, unless I brought up the topic, making China the elephant in the room. Representatives of traditional donors mentioned communication and collaboration as a group and with one another, although to different extents: Australia and New Zealand form a tight pair whereas other partners such as Japan, France, Germany gravitate around them and work rather independently from one another, except for discrete projects. A representative of a traditional donor explained how Western bilateral donors formed a tight group of "friends":

Australia and New Zealand are great partners, they share information, on for example an organization, the priorities in the country... We rely on them, every time we need advice or information... They're incredibly collaborative. ... I would say the UK as well. ... It is also great with the U.S. We rely on our friends, and we also have contacts with the Japanese, but it is more formal.¹⁹⁶

According to six participants from foreign organizations, China does not wish to participate in these donor exchanges at the national level, despite solicitations from counterparts, and is absent from regional coordination meetings. For instance, a participant mentioned that "il y a des réunions de concertation par secteur entre les bailleurs et le gouvernement. Le seul pays qui a tendance à ne pas participer à cette coordination multilatérale, c'est la Chine"¹⁹⁷. The Chinese have a different way of delivering development assistance, characterized by turnkey projects and a preference to work directly with political leaders, in an often opaque way (Dreher et al., 2022; Fullilove & Pryke, 2019), as explained by these participants:

¹⁹⁶ Interview with a representative of a donor country, June 2021, English, online.

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Georges Cumbo, Elected representative for French citizens living in Vanuatu, September 2021, French, online.

China does not have a cooperation programme per se. There are projects, notably roads, financed by loans. There are also scholarships to study in China, and short-term training for Ni-Vanuatu civil servants in China.¹⁹⁸

Ils font des choses mais pas comme les autres ambassades qui mènent des projets, font des communications dans les médias sur l'ouverture d'une école, etc. Ce n'est pas le même fonctionnement.¹⁹⁹

China is very clever in that way. They work with leaders to get what they want.²⁰⁰

La Chine fonctionne très différemment des principes de la Déclaration de Paris, ne s'y conforme pas du tout. Ils font leur truc en direct avec le gouvernement, ce n'est pas transparent du tout.²⁰¹

Indeed, China is largely absent from the network of informal communications between donors but sends representatives to meetings organized by the government, which demonstrates its preference to work with the government and state entities in Vanuatu.

Thus, China's isolation results both from an apparent lack of engagement by other donors who are strategic "friends", and self-exclusion to distance itself from traditional donors and their ways of working. In that sense, China has been framing its assistance as one from a developing country to other developing countries that is mutually beneficial (Napwatt, 2019; Willie, 2022). As a participant explained, the Chinese "play with this status they have of receivers of aid and also donors"²⁰². China has looked to increase its influence in the world, in the Pacific and in Vanuatu, including through its development assistance, which has nonetheless been decreasing since 2018 in the region (Pryke & Dayant, 2021). However, nuanced analyses reject some bilateral donors' and observers' demonization of Chinese strategic use of assistance. For instance, Dreher et al. (2022) relevantly noted that "Western donors ... have used foreign aid to reward

¹⁹⁸ Interview with Australian aid official, October 2021, online.

¹⁹⁹ Interview with a participant from the Francophonie network, November 2021, French, online.

²⁰⁰ Interview with Anna Gibert, Team Leader, Vanuatu Skills Partnership from 2009 to 2015 and Consultant, notably for the Australian DFAT, December 2021, English, online.

²⁰¹ Interview with UN official, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

²⁰² Interview with an anonymous source, March 2022, English, online.

allies, punish enemies, build coalitions, buy votes, and shape public sentiment in recipient countries since the end of World War II” (pp. 129–130). Other major donors have political and geopolitical objectives in the region and in Vanuatu that have an impact on harmonization, an issue discussed below. In the next section, I demonstrate further in which ways donor coordination is superficial in the country as donors do not harmonize their procedures.

The Cacophony of Procedures

According to participants across groups, the relatively high number of donors and partners in Vanuatu who all have different procedures and an important turnover of diplomats and sometimes staff, challenges harmonization (Gero et al., 2013; Wood & Nicholls, 2021). If, as explained above, donors harmonize their agendas to a certain extent, they do not harmonize their procedures which weighs on the government’s limited resources, an issue donor representatives admitted and government workers complained about in interviews (Government of Vanuatu, 2018a; Government of Vanuatu, 2020a; Government of Vanuatu & PIFS, 2011; Pryke & Myatt, 2020). Yet, it is a key element of the harmonization principle to ensure the recipient’s civil servants are not overwhelmed by having to follow diverse donor procedures. Nancy Wells, ADB Senior Country Coordination Officer in Vanuatu, condemned this situation whereby even inside the joint ADB-WB Office in Vanuatu, procedures differ:

On harmonization, when ADB-WB established an office, it was done in the spirit of the Paris Declaration and coordination. Then the UN came... and others. Over time it became difficult because ADB and the WB have different delivery mechanisms and policies. Politically, we look good, but practically we don’t. ADB and the World Bank haven’t used Vanuatu procurement systems! There is fatigue at the government because they have to adjust to ADB and the World Bank. We are not where our mouth is. And then some projects take 10 years rather than two years to be implemented...²⁰³

The representative of a bilateral donor and a Vanuatu government worker confirmed that multilateral partners were particularly difficult to work with because “they always want to

²⁰³ Interview with Nancy Wells, ADB Senior Country Coordination Officer in Vanuatu, ADB Extended Mission - Vanuatu, Joint ADB-World Bank Liaison Office in Vanuatu, June 2022, English and Bislama, online.

implement their own processes national governments don't have time and resources to meet"²⁰⁴. Flora Kalsaria, who was the National Coordinator at the Office of the Prime Minister of Vanuatu during GPEDC's 2016 monitoring round, raised

issues with mission duplication and some development partners – particularly multi-lateral partners – going directly to line ministries, but, overall, they are making an effort to lessen mission burden. ... The Aid Coordination Unit and Finance Department still struggle with some of the complex and changing requirements of development partner reporting. This is particularly the case with EU reporting, especially since the EU office moved to the Solomon Islands. (GPEDC, 2020a, p. 4)

Two participants also mentioned the government has had to juggle different donor fiscal years for the disbursements of funds and reporting²⁰⁵. Donors have different reporting procedures, and ultimately project evaluations are often more about ticking boxes than learning and adapting²⁰⁶. In some cases, evaluations from donors such as China and the EU are not publicly available or difficult to access (Pryke & Myatt, 2020). This culture of secrecy hinders accountability to recipient and donor countries.

As mentioned above, in some cases donors collaborate as a result of participating in pooled funds at the regional or country level. This is the case with the Direct Funding Agreement, a tool Australia and New Zealand use to fund the education sector through the government of Vanuatu²⁰⁷; several donors fund the KIWA project in the Pacific for which partners harmonize their procedures²⁰⁸; and a pooled fund exists in the water sector which is “un exemple de bonne pratique. Le plan du gouvernement est précis, les financements de tous les bailleurs sont regroupés dans un package et distribués de manière aussi transparente que possible. Mais c'est

²⁰⁴ Interview with a Vanuatu government worker, October 2021, English, online.

²⁰⁵ Interview with Jean-Pierre Nirua, former Director of the National Planning Office, now Chancellor of Vanuatu National University, September 2022, French, Port-Vila; Interview with an employee working in the government system, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

²⁰⁶ Interview with a Vanuatu government worker, October 2021, English, online; Interview with Senior technical advisor and consultant in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila; Interview with an international NGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

²⁰⁷ Interview with Australian aid official, October 2021, online.

²⁰⁸ Interview with an anonymous source, September 2022, French, online.

difficile de passer à l'échelle"²⁰⁹. Indeed, based on more than 10 interviews, mainly with INGO and development agency representatives, the lack of a coordinated, systemic, long-term approach to development through multi-year funding associated with regular impact assessments does not allow the realization of Vanuatu's long term development ambitions. For instance, the following participants explained:

Le problème dans le développement c'est la perspective de temps. ... Le développement d'un pays s' imagine sur 20 ou 30 ans *versus* des programmes annuels et des financements pour des programmes d'un ou deux ans. Il existe une déconnexion entre le rythme du développement (amélioration de la malnutrition, de la mortalité infantile, etc.) et la durée de ces programmes et financements.²¹⁰

Right now, there are lots of funds for climate change, but we see no results, no outcomes! So what is the point? Do you see people adapting? It's because development partners just do discrete projects. There is no integrated approach linking gender with schools, agriculture, health, etc.²¹¹

Now we are trying [at the government level] to have a five-year horizon with the corporate plan and the budget, to identify gaps in financing. We try to encourage donors to do programmes with projects so that it lasts longer.²¹²

These shortcomings in the implementation of the harmonization principle have several causes. Donors find it complicated to harmonize given the region's geographical context and the spread of donor and agency representatives across the region: there are representatives and decision-makers in Vanuatu, in Fiji which is the regional hub for the UN, the EU, the Red Cross and others, but also in Noumea, in Sydney, in Canberra or even Kuala Lumpur. Thus, many actors and especially donors are not based in Port-Vila, and those who are do not always have the same level of responsibility which makes communication and coordination difficult, as

²⁰⁹ Interview with an international NGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

²¹⁰ Interview with Eric Durpaire, Chief of UNICEF Field Office, UN Joint Presence Vanuatu, February 2021, French, online.

²¹¹ Interview with an international development professional based in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online.

²¹² Interview with an employee working in the government system, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

mentioned by three donor representatives and a UN official—again considering the importance of face-to-face interactions in the Pacific to build trust. However, beyond geography, I identify the main causes are geopolitical competition between donors as well as the vivid memory of colonialism in Vanuatu, and the pressure of accountability to home governments and constituencies for donors, which I develop in turn in the last two sections.

Geopolitical Competition

“L’aide au développement est politique ; les bailleurs donnent pour certains objectifs” said a participant. As reflected in nearly 10 interviews, donors as well as the government of Vanuatu and INGO/agencies strongly feel the impacts of geopolitical competition between traditional donors and China in the Pacific region and in Vanuatu (Smith & Wesley-Smith, 2021). Australia, New Zealand, the United States, the UK, Indonesia, and France all recently adopted new, Pacific-focused policies to counter China’s growing influence in the region. Australia adopted its “Pacific Step-Up”, New Zealand its “Pacific Reset”, the U.S. its “Pacific Pledge”, the UK its “Pacific Uplift”, Indonesia its “Pacific Elevation” to face China’s Belt and Road Initiative, among others. These strategies include increased physical presence of countries in the region, including in Vanuatu, as well as financial commitments (Day & Wells, 2021a; Ewart, 2019; Foreign and Commonwealth Office & Clarke, 2019; Pryke & Dayant, 2020).

This competition has had a direct impact on donor priorities and on (the lack of) coordination and collaboration for development in many sectors, as participants explained:

The big change is the competition, with lots and lots of tension between [traditional] donors and China. ... With China, it’s very special, very political. By acting in this way, it is pushing the [traditional] donors to be very political, they are emphasizing security issues. [This competition] has a direct impact on our day-to-day work.²¹³

The PD and subsequent engagements at Accra, Busan, etc. are still the base of aid coordination policy, it’s still the baseline. But it’s a failure in the sense that development partners still do not coordinate, aid is geopolitically motivated,

²¹³ Interview with Australian aid official, October 2021, online.

etc. It's the case here in Vanuatu with aid from Australia, New Zealand, Japan, France... it's to counter the Chinese presence here.²¹⁴

Australia, New Zealand had a lot of strings, conditions, but not China and the government is really deep into it. It challenges the traditional development partners. As a consequence, there is more engagement in security. China challenged them to get out of their comfort zones. The U.S. opened an embassy in the Solomon Islands. They [Australia] opened a security centre in Vila. China shifted its diplomacy and it challenged traditional partners. The Chinese embassy in Vila is the largest in the southern hemisphere.²¹⁵

As competition shapes thematic priorities in the country, donors move away from aid's primary objective of improving people's socioeconomic conditions. Competition also has the potential to shift aid modalities and conditionalities, and in all cases is antithetical to collaboration. As discussed in Chapter 9, the COVID-19 crisis exacerbated donor competition as China stayed out of coordination mechanisms and pooled funds organized by traditional donors to help Vanuatu access vaccines through the multilateral vaccine procurement and distribution mechanism COVAX. China organized its own deliveries, but Australia also used parallel mechanisms by pushing the Vanuatu government to accept bilateral vaccine donations²¹⁶ (*Daily Post*, 2021i).

Beyond the potential and actual negative impacts of competition between China on one side and traditional donors on the other side, competition is an opportunity for the government of Vanuatu—and other Pacific governments—to exercise its agency (Jacobs, 2023; Regenvanu, 2021; Taylor, 2021). Indeed, as mentioned above, the government has shown its preference for bilateral, government-to-government discussions on several occasions, including with China (Abel, 2020; Cox et al., 2007; *Daily Post*, 2020ag; OECD, 2012b; Schmaljohann & Prizzon, 2015). This preference can be explained by Vanuatu's will to assert its independence *vis-à-vis* former colonial powers *and* regional powers that have grown in importance and influence in the

²¹⁴ Interview with an international development professional based in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online.

²¹⁵ Interview with an anonymous source, March 2022, English, online.

²¹⁶ Interview with Australian aid official, October 2021, online; Interview with an anonymous source, March 2022, English, online; Interview with UN official, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

country and the region after 1980²¹⁷, as well as to benefit from more bargaining power to maximize funding and negotiate other aspects of aid more easily than when facing a united donor front.

Asserting Independence

First, Vanuatu has been an independent country for forty years and any sign of former colonial powers undermining the government authority or diminishing Pacific countries' agency is taken very seriously by the government (Bule, 2021c; Taylor, 2021). In 2023, the shadow of a security agreement with Australia fed political unrest (Needham, 2023). Participants stressed the traumatic experience of TC Pam in 2015 for the country, both in terms of the human and material disaster it caused and of the disorganized, overwhelming influx of financial, material, and technical foreign assistance that followed. A participant remembered:

In the past back way to 2015 during TC Pam, a lot of aid coming in was not aligned with the priority needs we identified during that time. People did not need them therefore it became a waste ... and we had to find storage, and the storage of items also was not managed very well, people just came in to take what they could see and took it away for some other use...²¹⁸

Since then, the government has been working even more on asserting its leadership with donors and other foreign partners, including with the *Aid Management Policy* and the *NGO Policy*. Similarly, when studying two other PICs, namely Samoa and Kiribati, O'Neill (personal presentation, July 24, 2023) found that the history of relations with external partners mattered a lot in understanding current relations.

Second, the government of Vanuatu does not necessarily benefit from facing a united, highly coordinated, powerful donor front. As documented in the literature, the harmonization principle is not always in accordance with recipient countries' preferences, thus clashing with the ownership principle, and donor unity is not always to the advantage of the recipient country (e.g., Woll, 2008). Indeed, "Oceanian states already appear to be astutely playing-off perceived

²¹⁷ Interview with an anonymous source, April 2021, English, online; Interview with donor representative, July 2021, English, online; Interview with an independent consultant in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

²¹⁸ Interview with an anonymous source, June 2022, English, written answers.

Chinese and American competition in order to access increased development assistance, concessional loans, military support and international influence” (Wallis, 2016, p. 39). Dealing bilaterally with donors allows the Vanuatu government and CSOs to create competition between them, to gain bargaining power and to maximize funding, as these participants explained:

Only in that space [cluster meetings] we can tell donors in their face we do not agree. And that if they’re not happy we can go and look somewhere else.²¹⁹

Le gouvernement n’a qu’à se tourner vers la Chine si l’Australie et la Nouvelle-Zélande veulent plus de rapports à un moment donné.²²⁰

if these are the areas New Zealand wants to fund, Australia will agree to fund the other things they don’t cover...²²¹

on ne pèse pas dans le pays avec au mieux 3 millions d’euros, tandis que JICA [Japan International Cooperation Agency] peut dire « on peut financer un port demain ». ²²²

Swiss and Ilonze (2021) refer to “decoupling of means and ends” in such as situation where an international policy produces effects that go against the intended objective. In Vanuatu, the harmonization principle often seems incompatible with the ownership principle.

Therefore, even if more coordination would be needed among donors (and donors and CSOs), a participant explained none of them is ready to take the lead in organizing donor meetings without the government of Vanuatu out of fear that the government would consider it as a move to undermine its authority by creating a parallel mechanism, regardless of its benefits in terms of aid effectiveness²²³. In addition, donors and other international partners who benefit from cordial interpersonal relationships with the Vanuatu government and/or civil servants may prefer meeting bilaterally to negotiate. Indeed, several research participants mentioned it was crucial to forge trustful relations in Vanuatu to get past quite formal exchanges and advance

²¹⁹ Interview with Vivian Obed, General Manager of Further Arts Vanuatu, English, October 2021, online.

²²⁰ Interview with a participant from the Francophonie network, November 2021, French, online.

²²¹ Interview with a professional working in the tourism sector in Vanuatu, March 2022, English, online.

²²² Interview with an anonymous source, September 2022, French, online.

²²³ Interview with an anonymous source, French, online.

development agendas. Eight participants across groups referred to what could be called the “Vanuatu way”, a way of working based on “one-to-one” interpersonal relationships forged over the long term, and/or based on cultural similarities, to build trust. This trust will still take time to build with former colonizers, it was broken with many international actors after TC Pam, and it is difficult to build as aid still often operates following an “in-and-out” logic. Furthermore, a characteristic that Vanuatu shares with other islands and archipelagos is that the pool of staff working in development employed in INGOs, high commissions, embassies, and in government is quite small, and everyone knows, and is often related to, everyone else (Baldacchino & Stratford, 2023). This network of personal relations of people who navigate the international cooperation domain could be a good avenue to explore to facilitate communication and coordination between different entities in Vanuatu²²⁴. Nonetheless, the existence of these social networks does not guarantee harmony, peace, or cooperation, including because in an island context “out of [social intimacy] develops ... managed intimacy” aimed at preventing social exclusion (Baldacchino & Stratford, 2023, p. 142).

In any case, the above reasons do not entirely explain why donors do not harmonize their procedures to stop the cacophony that weigh on the government’s system and limited human resources. In the last section, I examine how the pressure of being accountable to their home country and citizens is paramount for donors.

Accountability Pressure

Donors seem torn between accountability to their domestic government and constituencies, their obligation to spend funds in a specific timeframe, and the willingness deliver aid in an effective way. For donors in Vanuatu, the need for accountability to domestic constituencies justifies the use of their own procedures and reporting mechanisms. They spontaneously admit their processes are heavy, but do not systematically and considerably simplify them nor harmonize their procedures, as explained by the following donor representatives:

²²⁴ Interview with a consultant in Vanuatu, July 2022, French, online.

And our application forms are tricky, but we need accountability for [our] taxpayers... We tried to make the application process easier with one-pagers to demystify the process.²²⁵

Coordination is important, but we need to implement as well. The government knows what we spend and where. The biggest challenge for the government would be the UN and multilaterals.²²⁶

There is fatigue at the government because they have to adjust to ADB and the World Bank. ... for multilaterals we are rules-based and it is hard to have flexible policies. The Paris Declaration is good, aspirational but when you try to get institutions to implement it, it's another story. It's all very political.²²⁷

On travaille pour le gouvernement [du pays bailleur] et on a des comptes à rendre à l'État. ... Pour l'harmonisation, le [projet X] est un bon exemple, il y a une harmonisation des procédures avec différents bailleurs, mais sinon non. [Nous avons] des procédures lourdes.²²⁸

Thus, unsurprisingly, the need for accountability to donors' home countries is a strong counterincentive to the harmonization of procedures, as it is to the alignment with the recipient government's procedures and processes (see Chapter 6).

Besides, as noted in the previous section, the importance of personal relationships and networks, notably built for men at nakamals, also results in a preference for separate interactions between donor or INGO/agency representatives and government representatives rather than harmonization. Privileged, trustful relationships have sometimes been forged over several years between individuals at the decision-making or operational levels, from which both sides benefit and that can result in increased aid effectiveness through increased fluidity in exchanges. When they do exist, donors do not wish to give up or jeopardize these privileged relationships, and vice versa ministries can maintain some degree of agency and autonomy from centralized

²²⁵ Interview with representative of a donor country, June 2021, English, online.

²²⁶ Interview with donor representative, July 2021, English, online.

²²⁷ Interview with Nancy Wells, ADB Senior Country Coordination Officer in Vanuatu, ADB Extended Mission - Vanuatu, Joint ADB-World Bank Liaison Office in Vanuatu, June 2022, English and Bislama, online.

²²⁸ Interview with an anonymous source, September 2022, French, online.

mechanisms. Both Vanuatu and donors can then report increased results and accountability to their respective constituencies. There are challenges and limitations to this micro-level approach: in terms of sustainability, in a context where turnover is high it is hard to build and maintain these relationships, and in terms of scale, as country development happens at a much larger scale, needs a holistic vision, and collaboration.

Conclusion

There is only partial harmonization among donors: they focus on agendas, but they rarely harmonize their procedures. Thus, Vanuatu's administration must unwillingly adapt to each donor's procedures, which weighs on its stretched human resources. Traditional donors tend to coordinate more, especially Australia and New Zealand, but China is both excluded and self-excluded from exchanges as it positions itself strategically on the aid exchequer as a donor from the Global South offering a "win-win" approach, distancing itself from traditional donors' poor results in the last decades. Heightened geopolitical competition in the region and the pressure of accountability to home governments and constituencies, combined with a challenging geographical context each partly explains this lack of collaboration and coordination. Another important factor is the recipient government's interest and preference to deal separately with donors to exercise its leadership and to maximize its funding, by playing donors against one another. Here, the harmonization principle clashes with the ownership principle: a government can decide the best way to proceed is for donors not to harmonize, at least at the strategic level.

* * *

At the International Research Conference on the Effectiveness of Development Cooperation co-hosted by GPEDC in November 2022, researchers agreed that in theory, the Paris Declaration principles and subsequent GPEDC ones were still relevant and laudable. They still constitute a valid ideal if they are adapted, tailored to each context. However, they do not pass the test of practice, and several barriers prevent their implementation that is measured primarily in quantitative terms. Thus, I asked: why do diverse aid actors circumvent or misapply the three core principles of the Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness of 2005? In Chapters 4–7, I argued that the principles of ownership, alignment and harmonization were only implemented superficially by the government and donors in Vanuatu. While factors often identified in previous

literature on aid and SIDS undoubtedly play a role, such as weak political will, political instability and turnover, weak government capacities, recurring disasters, and the challenging geographical context, poor results are mainly explained by four powerful disincentives: accountability towards domestic constituencies for both donor countries and the government of Vanuatu, maximizing access to donor funding for the government of Vanuatu—and ensuring allocated funds are spent for donor countries—, geopolitical competition among donor countries, and Vanuatu’s history and experience with aid.

In particular, I found that these incentives were more important than political will. Indeed, it emerged from the data that, in terms of relative importance, a lack of capacity did not play such an important role in understanding the extent to which the Paris principles were applied, contrary to what Hochet (2015) concluded. According to the local actors I interviewed, donors should adapt to and strengthen existing national and local capacities. In that sense, there cannot be “a lack of capacities” or “inadequate capacities”. Moreover, a country or organization’s capacity level is often assessed in relation to criteria established by donors and that are not adapted to the context. Political will is needed, and I showed in Chapter 4 that it is lacking on both sides of the aid relationship. However, respect for principles does not depend on a desire, an intrinsic intention alone. I found that the four major incentives cited above play a predominant role. Because it is difficult to measure political will, capacity and incentives empirically, I adopted an interpretivist approach and prioritized the perceptions and experiences of the participants. I focused on understanding the problem rather than trying to establish causality or a firm hierarchy between the factors. This methodological choice implies that the researcher’s interpretation plays a significant role. However, based on the in-depth study that I conducted, I do not expect another researcher to reach radically different conclusions.

Overall, the technical approach to aid adopted by donors, the recipient government, and NGOs, but also the Paris Declaration and the GPEDC, is often at odds with aid’s developmental and political dimensions. For instance, the research confirmed the importance of social networks and building interpersonal trust in realizing aid’s full potential in Vanuatu beyond formal institutions. Geopolitical dimensions also play an important role as observed with the changing role of China, who tries to differentiate itself from traditional donors in various ways. This mismatch between a technical approach and aid’s developmental and political dimensions

ensures the maintenance of a status quo favorable to government elites and their constituencies, as well as traditional and emerging powers in the region, to the detriment of the local civil society and the poor. As a participant summarized, “les outils du business sont utilisés dans ce secteur, ce qui a fait accélérer notre *travail* mais pas les *résultats* [emphasis added]”²²⁹.

The Paris Declaration was designed to reduce uncertainty, transaction costs, and improve the impact of aid. In view of Vanuatu’s case, parties neglected structural and specific incentives weighing on aid actors. Incentives are a level at which reflection, action and framing can take place to improve aid effectiveness as dictating but actionable forces, rather than on a pure technical level. Some incentives are deeply contextual, but others relate to the aid system more generally and to how it is both constructed by and itself creates incentives for aid actors. On a positive note, it means the situation is neither immutable (levers of action exist at the level of incentives) nor can donors’ pursuit of self-interest solely explain it, but that it is embedded in a broader system of incentives that operate at different levels (individual, organizational and national, global).

Moreover, although the Chinese public is not enthusiastic for their government to provide foreign aid, in Australia and New Zealand, which are the main providers of ODA to Vanuatu, the public is favourable to aid (Lowy Institute, 2022; NZ MFAT, 2019; Wang & Cooper, 2022). In Australia, the public is also increasingly pro-development and specific information has an impact on citizens’ support to aid (Wood, 2022). Combined with the fact that accountability to home constituencies is a major counterincentive to the respect of principles raised by donors, there is a need to better educate and inform these very constituencies about best aid management practices, so they understand how “trop d’*accountability* tue l’*accountability*. ... C’est comme s’il fallait décrire tout ce qui se passe au niveau de votre corps en même temps que vous êtes en train de marcher”²³⁰.

Donors might be hiding behind the need for accountability to taxpayers at home to avoid engaging in long, deep, hard and costly reforms to respect the Paris principles, because even if they say they strive for reporting and transparency, my research shows reports and evaluations

²²⁹ Interview with an anonymous source, French, online.

²³⁰ Interview with an anonymous source, French, online.

are not the basis of a learning process. The government of Vanuatu and donor partners need to improve accountability to Ni-Vanuatu citizens and to citizens in donor countries, not only with regards to impacts and results but also their capacity to learn. There is indeed a lack of political will at the country level in Vanuatu on both sides of the aid relationship, as well as by countries at the GPEDC level to recognize a technical approach to development and to aid effectiveness principles is not adapted to learning and to the deeply political dimension of development. First the OECD and then the GPEDC have buried their heads in the sand and ignored the causes of the shortcomings of the implementation of the principles, including by not significantly adapting their monitoring to include qualitative data and analysis.

Finally, as observable throughout the chapters, an important characteristic of Vanuatu and several other SIDS is its vulnerability to natural hazards, which directly impacts the government, donors and NGOs. Government priorities change when a disaster strikes, donors reallocate part of their funding, and NGOs redirect their resources towards response and recovery activities. These recurring, sudden changes affect the management and delivery of long-term development projects and programs, into which development actors have increasingly included disaster preparedness activities. They also affect disaster- and aid-related government policies through an iterative learning process to improve the effectiveness of aid delivery. In that sense, TC Pam in Vanuatu constituted a breaking point, a critical juncture that triggered aid and INGO policy changes as well as attitudinal change towards foreign development and humanitarian actors. The COVID-19 pandemic, a health crisis, also created an opportunity for states and donors to re-commit to the aid effectiveness agenda, including by inducing border closures, as explained in Chapter 9. Thus, understanding aid effectiveness in Vanuatu is indissociable from the links between short-term humanitarian action and long-term development activities, two types of aid that must be articulated with each other to be more impactful and form a humanitarian-development nexus. However, the principles governing the management of these two types of aid have emerged and evolved separately.

The next chapter emphasizes the similarities between the management principles of humanitarian aid and the Paris principles. Then, it shows how humanitarian and development assistance impact one another in Vanuatu, how and why they still work in silos, and offers suggestions on how to overcome the obstacles to their reconciliation.

Chapter 8 – Explaining Relations Between Humanitarian and Development Worlds in Vanuatu

According to supporters of the humanitarian-development nexus, linking humanitarian action and development at the strategic and operational levels should lead to increased efficiency and effectiveness in meeting people's needs. Humanitarian action would be better geared to prepare people for future emergencies, while development programmes would include disaster and emergency preparedness to lower the negative impact of future emergencies. In the case of protracted crises such as those caused by conflict or climate change, it is unclear where humanitarian action begins and development ends, thus linking these “solitudes” appears both inevitable and necessary. However, the implementation of the nexus on the ground has been laborious. According to the 2022 report on the state of the humanitarian system, three quarters of surveyed practitioners said nexus progress was only ‘fair’ or ‘poor’ (Obrecht et al., 2022).

In light of these results, I ask: What are the obstacles that hinder the reconciliation between humanitarian and development aid, and how can they be overcome? Vanuatu constitutes a relevant case study in several aspects. While the country is among top receivers of aid per capita, it was also considered by far the country most exposed to disasters several years in a row (Aleksandrova et al., 2021; Behlert et al., 2020; Day et al., 2019). Several extreme natural events struck the country from 2015 to 2020 such as TC Pam, volcanic eruptions on the island of Ambae, ash falls on the island of Tanna, and TC Harold, that prompted international actors to contribute financially, technically and materially to humanitarian responses. These actors, as well as national and local ones, interrupted and adjusted development programmes, they reallocated some development funding towards humanitarian activities, and they developed multiple-year recovery programmes. After each disaster, Vanuatu faces increased aid flows channelled through various structures including the government, NGOs, development agencies, and contractors.

Extreme climate-related events are likely to increase in intensity and frequency on a global and regional scale in the Pacific as a consequence of climate change, which constitutes a challenge for all Ni-Vanuatu and local, national and international aid actors including NGOs, the private and public sectors in the country. In particular, the key public entities in charge in terms of disasters are the National Disaster Committee, whose roles include “to advise to the government agencies on disaster risk management including planning, preparation, preparedness

and response” and “to advise the Minister [responsible for Meteorology, Geological Hazards and Climate Change] on the need to request international assistance”, and the NDMO whose roles are “to facilitate the development and implementation of integrated disaster management” and “to coordinate disaster preparedness, including facilitation of international humanitarian assistance” (Government of Vanuatu, 2019b, pp. 10–12). Thus, the NDMO has a crucial role in case of disaster, especially regarding needs assessment as well as the coordination of technical and in-kind aid.

Based on the case of Vanuatu, I argue short-term, humanitarian aid on one hand and middle- to long-term development aid on the other hand still mostly coexist as “two solitudes” to the detriment of people in need. They remain largely separate despite great similarities between the management principles of these two types of assistance, and their obvious, but complex, links in practice. This mere coexistence is due to a lack of political will as well as incentives to show results on the short-term from donors and the government, and relatedly to the greater accessibility and appeal of humanitarian assistance than long-term development aid. Encouraging flexibility, privileging long-term partnerships and programming, relying on local knowledge and practices, and thinking both sets of management principles together could help reconcile these two types of aid.

First, I further uncover the similarities between the management principles of development aid (namely the Paris principles) and their implementation challenges on one hand, and the management principles governing humanitarian aid (namely the IASC’s outcome pillars and the Grand Bargain’s original goals) and their implementation challenges, on the other hand. Doing so, I contribute to the literature on the need to operate a humanitarian-development nexus from a more conceptual standpoint. Second, I examine the links between humanitarian aid and development in practice in Vanuatu where they are intertwined “for better or for worse”: humanitarian action can trigger positive changes for development aid, policy and practice, and vice versa, but they can also affect one another negatively. TC Pam constituted a critical juncture in the sense that it provoked significant policy and attitudinal changes in the country in terms of foreign assistance. Third, I analyze the obstacles to integration based on the case of Vanuatu, which reveals humanitarian and development aid still mostly operate in silos and privilege short-term actions. Fourth, I explore how humanitarian and development aid actors could potentially

increase their efficiency and effectiveness by privileging flexibility and adopting a long-term vision that better includes local knowledge and practices. At the framework level, thinking about development effectiveness and humanitarian aid management principles together could form the basis of reconciliation. A conclusion sums up the results and argument and introduces the next chapter.

Comparing the Management Principles of Humanitarian Aid and Development Aid

Similar Principles

Even though humanitarian aid is a subcategory of foreign aid, analysts have considered these two types of assistance as separate based on various criteria such as their timeframe and their object (Audet et al., 2019) as well as their relations to the state. Humanitarian aid is associated with short timeframes and the primary objective of saving lives, whereas development is associated with long-term programmes aimed at improving people's socio-economic conditions. Development-oriented organizations tend to work hand-in-hand with recipient states, while humanitarian organizations often bypass the state to pursue their primary goal of saving lives, in line with the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, independence, and neutrality. Yet, as explained in Chapter 1, development initiatives and humanitarian aid have faced similar criticism such as ignoring or overlooking local contexts and demands, and lacking sustainability and effectiveness. Audet et al. (2019) consider that key humanitarian reforms were born out of the reflections on aid effectiveness in the 1990s and the Paris Declaration, but the development and humanitarian spheres have then evolved rather separately regarding their management principles. The Paris Declaration and its successors make only vague references to humanitarian aid, and the latter has benefitted from its own high-level meetings and agenda including the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016.

This parallel evolution led to quite similar results in terms of management principles. On the side of humanitarian assistance, as explained in Chapter 2, the following principles have emerged from the international fora: (i) Leadership by local actors for aid that is both adapted and effective, (ii) Coordination of actors to avoid duplication and ensure complementarity, (iii) Accountability towards people who receive aid as well as donors thanks to monitoring and evaluation to continuously improve aid delivery in a learning process. On the development side,

the Paris Declaration principles focus on ownership by recipient countries, alignment on national priorities, harmonization among donors, mutual responsibility, and results-based management. Its evolution led to the GPEDC principles of “country ownership”, “a focus on results”, “inclusive development partnerships”, and “transparency and mutual accountability” (GPEDC, 2021). Both frameworks emphasize the need for more ownership by national and local actors, more transparency and accountability from aid actors, as well as more coordination for increased efficiency and effectiveness. They also present similar conceptual and implementation challenges, as explained in the next section.

Similar Challenges

First, ownership, the cornerstone principle of the Paris Declaration, and localization, a concept rather born in the humanitarian world, both face controversy and challenges linked to their vagueness in terms of how transformative they are (or should be), and thus how they must be implemented in practice. While some see ownership and localization as potentially transformative concepts and principles to initiate a power shift from international to national and local actors, others focus on their potential to render aid more efficient by limiting transaction costs as local actors are the best placed to identify priorities and act upon them. Diverse interpretations and mainly quantitative approaches to monitoring in both cases opened the door to multiple options for operationalization among which power holders, namely donors and elites, can pick according to their interests. In both cases, these principles represent ideals rather than perfect recipes for efficient aid delivery and as such, must be tailored to each specific context.

Second, the monitoring results of the implementation of both sets of principles have been highly disappointing. In 2021, the share of humanitarian funding going directly to national and local actors was a derisory 1.2%, falling from 3% in 2020 after an increase from 1.8% in 2019 (Urquhart et al., 2022). This is very far from the Grand Bargain’s target of 25%. Moreover, unearmarked funds only represented 13% of total funding and multi-year funding remained insufficient, which does not allow recipient countries to be “in the driver’s seat” (Urquhart et al., 2022). The 2022 independent review of the Grand Bargain noted that “we are still far from realising several key Grand Bargain goals: on quality funding, localisation and participation” (Metcalf-Hough et al., 2022, p. 4). In particular, “what quality funding is available from government donors is not allocated equitably across actors, with multilateral organizations

receiving the lion's share and local actors reporting that they receive little if any quality humanitarian funding" (Metcalf-Hough et al., 2022, p. 13). The 2023 review points to the same flaws (Metcalf-Hough et al., 2023, p. 13).

Third, like in the development sphere with the Paris principles, in the humanitarian sphere donors tend to blame recipient organizations for this lack of progress instead of questioning their own ways of operating. Their criticisms include:

contradictions inherent in organisations' fundraising practices (i.e., annual, country-specific appeals) and their demand for more multi-year and flexible funding; what some donors consider to be insufficient efforts to increase the visibility of donor contributions; inadequate transparency of and accountability for funds received; and a failure by some larger aid organisations to cascade quality funding to frontline, particularly local, responders. (Metcalf-Hough et al., 2022, p. 13)

However, recipient organizations in turn blame donors for the lack of quality funding and its unpredictability, while defending some progress on transparency and accountability fronts (Metcalf-Hough et al., 2022). Overall, the responsibility lies primarily with donors: they demand greater visibility and accountability to satisfy their own domestic audiences, and presumably for prestige and soft-power purposes; they set up crushing, uniformizing expectations in terms of transparency and accountability rather than focusing on strengthening recipient's capacities and on contextualized monitoring and evaluation practices; they provide short-term, unpredictable funding mainly to intermediaries and not to national and local actors.

Finally, humanitarian aid is plagued by similar flaws as development aid by being often supply- and cost-driven, context-blind, and sometimes instrumentalized by donors despite its sound management principles. As it is the case with the Paris principles, donors face counterincentives and lack political will to change the system. Even though evidence of the positive impact of localization on the ground is still lacking (Barbelet et al., 2021), it does not discredit the principle that recipient countries should make decisions for themselves. Yet, donors are risk-averse, driven primarily by accountability to their domestic constituencies and thus would not rely on local actors' "weak" capacities (Fast & Bennett, 2020 in Barbelet et al., 2021,

p. 61). Moreover, they lack “a coherent strategy ... to create the right incentives for change” (Barbelet et al., 2021, p. 61). Instead, they support *technical* approaches that continue placing international actors at the centre “to overcome what are essentially *political* barriers to change [emphasis added]” (Metcalf-Hough et al., 2021, p. 6; see also Barbelet et al., 2021).

In sum, the normative frameworks shaping humanitarian assistance have evolved and now exist rather distinctively from the ones governing long-term foreign aid. Yet, they present similarities both conceptually and with regards to their implementation challenges. Additionally, in practice humanitarian aid and development aid are often hard to differentiate, especially in conflict zones and disaster-prone areas (e.g., Olivier de Sardan, 2011). To bring coherence, a common framework could be developed. Furthermore, the double failure so far of the implementation of the Paris principles and of the Grand Bargain, in other words of ownership and localization, their respective cornerstones, has yet to be explored and explained in depth through case studies to improve aid effectiveness. This thesis contributes to this research endeavour by studying the case of Vanuatu, where, as I show in the next section, humanitarian assistance and development aid impact one another both in positive and negative ways.

In Practice, Complex Links Between Humanitarian Aid and Development Aid

In Vanuatu, humanitarian aid and long-term aid are linked in several ways. First, humanitarian and development donors and organizations (and more broadly, actors) are often the same ones. For instance, after TC Pam the main donors were “development donors” such as the World Bank (Crossley et al., 2021). As I experienced and observed firsthand, in case of an emergency, international and local NGOs as well as the Red Cross interrupt their development activities to focus on the response through first-aid care, the distribution of water, food and essential non-food items. Multilateral and bilateral donors mobilize financial, technical, and material resources towards supporting the national response. The NDMO also switches from long-term disaster preparedness activities to aid and response coordination. At the broader government level, elected representatives and civil servants turn their attention to emergency response and recovery activities.

Second, humanitarian aid and development aid are not clearly separated in the *Aid Management Policy* and in governmental structures. Nonetheless, in case of disaster, the

legislation includes provisions for an increased role of the NDMO and the National Disaster Committee, in collaboration with DSPPAC, as well as for the establishment of a specific emergency fund to which the government and other actors can contribute (Government of Vanuatu, 2019b). Vanuatu calls for the respect of similar principles by humanitarian and development assistance providers:

Similar development cooperation principles apply, such as ownership, leadership and use of existing systems. Cooperative and collaboration efforts are required to respond [to disasters]. The use of the established frameworks is encouraged, such as that of the Ministry of Climate Change Adaptation, Meteorology, Geo-Hazards, Environment and Energy along with the National Advisory Board on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction and National Disaster Committee. (Government of Vanuatu, 2018a, p. 14)

Third, in practice humanitarian action and development assistance are inseparable in Vanuatu as natural events are frequent and intense (Behlert et al., 2020), and Ni-Vanuatu have been living with these for generations (Mochizuki et al., 2019; Zuñiga, 2003). As a disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific explained:

you have six months of cyclone season, you can have back-to-back cyclones! It compounds the issues, you go from cyclone A to cyclone B to cyclone C... ... We have been living with cyclones for a long time, it did not start a few years ago, so we know what happens. ... *We are resilient, you [emphasis in original] are the ones undermining resilience.*²³¹

Moreover, the frequency and intensity of climate-related disasters are likely to increase as consequences of climate change, which means aid inflows will most probably continue in the near future and aid needs to be effective (Edwards & Obeyesekere, 2016; OECD, 2018a; Saverimuttu & Varua, 2016; UN, 2018).

²³¹ Interview with a Disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific, April 2022, English, online.

Finally, humanitarian aid and development assistance are intimately linked because development actors usually consider shocks and ensuing humanitarian emergencies to be disruptive of development activities, for the worse. The logic behind their planning is to design long term strategies that can, and will, eventually, be put off-track by an emergency. Moreover, when a disaster strikes Vanuatu, many donors' and INGOs' resolutions regarding country ownership and coordination go up in smoke²³². Thus, in the next sections, I explore the impact of disasters on long-term foreign aid in Vanuatu in greater depth. The situation is a little more complex: emergencies destabilize both “for better and for worse”. For instance, in the past, the influx of emergency funds forced actors to coordinate but there was a multiplication of actors in the country that challenged existing structures and relationships, development activities were interrupted, human resources in the civil service were stretched, and some donors, agencies and INGOs bypassed the government and local organizations. According to a disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific, international actors tend to bypass government systems because they need to act fast (often within 72 hours) to respect their own policies²³³. While the need for humanitarian assistance impacts long-term development at the strategic and operational levels, this is a two-way relationship where development impacts humanitarian aid—in line with the literature mobilized by nexus supporters. In the next section, I explain in which ways humanitarian aid positively impacted development.

Positive Impacts of Humanitarian Aid on Development

There are different ways in which humanitarian aid can have a positive impact on development assistance. In Vanuatu, the data pointed to three main ways: additional funding, enhanced collaboration, and iterative learning.

Unlocking Development Funding. Humanitarian funding following emergencies allowed some aid actors to secure development funding in Vanuatu. Since TC Pam, after each disaster donors have usually allocated funding for longer-term programmes, for instance to INGOs (Bamforth, 2020). A respondent explained how disasters opened the doors to long-term

²³² Interview with Nancy Wells, ADB Senior Country Coordination Officer in Vanuatu, ADB Extended Mission - Vanuatu, Joint ADB-World Bank Liaison Office in Vanuatu, June 2022, English and Bislama, online; Interview with a Disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific, April 2022, English, online; Interview with an independent consultant in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

²³³ Interview with a disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific, April 2022, English, online.

funding on crucial issues donors were not interested in before 2015, such as gender and food security²³⁴. Moreover, emergencies drew attention to Vanuatu and new donors became susceptible to provide development funding²³⁵. That said, donors were more likely to provide development funding if they had a positive experience with organizations they gave emergency funding to²³⁶. However, some respondents highlighted the fact that these long-term programmes tended to focus also on disasters and climate change in an isolated manner, sometimes to the detriment of other issues such as education, environment, or health²³⁷. Therefore, humanitarian needs and the recovery phase can last several years and monopolize resources.

Enhanced Collaboration. Emergencies, and in particular the need for/the availability of large funding, lead NGOs, development agencies and donors to collaborate more according to six participants (five from INGOs/agencies and a government worker). As an INGO official in Vanuatu explained, “we have a platform for disasters because the funding keeps up together, but there is not the same kind of funding for development”²³⁸. Eric Durpaire, Chief of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) field office in Vanuatu, confirmed: “on collabore donc davantage [avec les ONGI] lorsqu’il y a une urgence ... aussi parce que l’argent est moteur. Lorsqu’il y a une urgence et donc beaucoup de financements disponibles d’un seul coup, on est plus amenés à collaborer”²³⁹. The same incentive was at play when major donors (except China) pooled funds to support Vanuatu in purchasing COVID-19 vaccines from the multilateral mechanism COVAX. Another well-established partnership between France, Australia and New Zealand (FRANZ) is activated by partners when a disaster strikes, providing a well-coordinated

²³⁴ Interview with an anonymous source, August 2021, English, online.

²³⁵ Interview with Jacqueline Deroin de Gaillande, Secretary General of the Vanuatu Red Cross Society for 13 years (2008-2021), March 2021, French, online; Interview with Shirley Abraham, National Coordinator of the KoBLE, VANGO Vice-President, May 2021, English, online; Interview with Lucie Vigier, Representative of France Volontaires in Vanuatu, June 2021, French, online; Interview with an anonymous source, August 2021, English, online.

²³⁶ Interview with Shirley Abraham, National Coordinator of the KoBLE, VANGO Vice-President, May 2021, English, online; Interview with an anonymous source, August 2021, English, online.

²³⁷ Interview with Jacqueline Deroin de Gaillande, Secretary General of the Vanuatu Red Cross Society for 13 years (2008-2021), March 2021, French, online; Interview with Shirley Abraham, National Coordinator of the KoBLE, VANGO Vice-President, May 2021, English, online; Interview with an anonymous source, March 2022, English, online; Interview with an international development professional based in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online.

²³⁸ Interview with INGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

²³⁹ Interview with Eric Durpaire, Chief of UNICEF Field Office, UN Joint Presence Vanuatu, February 2021, French, online.

assistance to the Vanuatu government²⁴⁰. Similarly, development actors (donors, NGOs, agencies) are encouraged to collaborate when funds are pooled, such as in the water and health sectors²⁴¹.

Learning From Crises. Vanuatu and particularly the government has been learning from disaster responses and adjusting in an iterative manner to operate more efficiently both in times of crisis and for development (Keen et al., 2021). In particular, interviews showed TC Pam in 2015 and the ensuing response occupies a peculiar place in the collective memory of aid actors in Vanuatu. This extreme climate-related event constituted a “critical juncture” as it provoked policy, institutional and attitudinal changes in the country with regards to foreign aid and foreign aid actors. As explained in Chapter 5, the debacle of TC Pam’s response, which involved many new foreign actors in a disorganized way with many bypassing government structures, generated discontent among national and local aid actors as well as well-established foreign organizations. A participant remembered the situation back then, and the pressure exerted by multilaterals on the government:

The country had matured, with more mature systems, with an added level of responsibilities. But there had not been any event to test it so far. TC Pam was this event, and no government staff had the experience. The UN came in saying “You have to do this and this...” Then the World Bank was saying “If you want these funds you have to do this...” There is always this tension between the donor requirements and what the government wants to do.²⁴²

As a consequence, the government revised the aid management policy and the National Disaster Risk Management Act (the DRM Act) and developed an NGO policy, all of which contain institutional arrangements on how foreign assistance should be managed and each actor’s roles and responsibilities. Several participants explicitly mentioned these shifts as a consequence, a

²⁴⁰ Interview with a disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific, April 2022, English, online; Interview with consultant in Community Development and Planning with 11 years in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

²⁴¹ Interview with a UN official, September 2022, English, Port-Vila; Interview with an international NGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

²⁴² Interview with a Disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific, April 2022, English, online.

reaction, a lesson learnt by the government²⁴³, even a “backlash”²⁴⁴ against donors and NGOs who bypassed the state in 2015. The following participants explained roles, responsibilities and processes became clearer:

In 2016, the government was concerned with INGOs flowing in. So now, there is a whole process for projects to be accepted and it can be really long. DSPPAC are very good but there are not many of them. There are trying to understand what’s going in.²⁴⁵

it was the consequence of TC Pam... Since TC Pam... all partners responded based on their experience. Now the government coordinates more the humanitarian response. It’s their way to harmonize things and make aid more effective. It’s now all under the Disaster Management Strategy, with the structure comprising the National Disaster Committee, then at the provincial level, etc. The government manages the whole humanitarian response and recovery process. There is a division between, the NDMO and the National Response Committee.²⁴⁶

According to the DRM Act, the government has to tell us what to do and where. Because they know us and everyone knows where everyone is working, they assign us to areas we are already working in. This process can slow down the response, but we have to follow it by law.²⁴⁷

Similarly, Shirley Abraham, National Coordinator of the Kolisen Blong Leftemap Edukesen (KoBLE) and VANGO Vice-President explained the government set up new arrangements for aid management in reaction to TC Pam to better monitor the use of incoming funds and to make sure they are not mainly absorbed by foreign organizations; instead, provincial governments and local civil society should have better access to funds.

²⁴³ Interview with an anonymous source, French, online.

²⁴⁴ Interview with an independent consultant in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

²⁴⁵ Interview with donor representative, July 2021, English, online.

²⁴⁶ Interview with an anonymous source, March 2022, English, online.

²⁴⁷ Interview with INGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

The volcanic eruptions on the island of Ambae and TC Harold in 2020 (coupled with the COVID-19 crisis) also triggered some changes. After the eruptions that caused the evacuation of the entire population of Ambae in 2017–2018, UN regional offices “were leading to develop guidelines on relocation”²⁴⁸. Yet, this must not eclipse the fact that the response itself was largely managed and implemented by national and local actors, with the support of international actors (Government of Vanuatu, 2018d; McGarry, 2017). Due to the closure of borders caused by COVID-19 and policy changes, the response to TC Harold was even more locally led²⁴⁹, and the international actors involved had been present in the country for several years. Vanuatu learnt from previous experiences and “during TC Harold Category 5, NDMO ... prioritized aid coming in [that] must suit what people really need in terms of material items and human resources”²⁵⁰. A UN official explained how a combination of Vanuatu’s experience with disaster responses, the particular situation created by COVID-19, and institutional changes impacted the response to TC Harold:

Post-Pam, il y a eu un accroissement de l’appropriation, et encore plus avec le COVID et TC Harold, dont la réponse conjointe n’a pas été pire que s’il y avait eu du personnel international. Le *Health Emergency Operations Centre* était déjà en place pour le COVID, puis il y a eu Harold donc il y a juste eu un *shift* à faire et le staff expatrié et Ni-Vanuatu était déjà là. Il y a aussi eu un peu de recrutement au niveau local, la connaissance du contexte est importante. Les directeurs généraux ont été bien leaders, ce qui a beaucoup aidé, car ils sont respectés, ce sont des leaders. ... Le NDMO avait appris avec Pam, notamment au niveau coordination, il y a aussi eu un renforcement du niveau provincial. Ça a été encore plus le cas avec Harold et le COVID, avec le développement des *Provincial Emergency Operations Centre*, etc.²⁵¹

Thus, after TC Harold aid was more directed towards national and local actors, namely government organizations and NGOs/agencies with an established local presence. According to

²⁴⁸ Interview with a UN official based in the Pacific region for four years, February 2022, English, online.

²⁴⁹ Interview with an anonymous source, March 2022, English, online; Interview with an anonymous source, June 2022, English, written answers; Interview with UN official, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

²⁵⁰ Interview with an anonymous source, June 2022, English, written answers.

²⁵¹ Interview with UN official, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

the criteria set up by the Grand Bargain, aid was more localized. Moreover, despite pressure from some INGO and international organization representatives, the government limited their access to strategic national meetings²⁵².

However, as developed in Chapter 9, this increased ownership of emergency assistance did not necessarily include smaller, local civil society actors (Keen et al., 2021). This limitation is similar to the one mentioned in Chapter 5 regarding ownership of development assistance. Indeed, TC Pam did not engender exclusively positive shifts in policy and practice. The government of Vanuatu increased its control over NGOs and their activities, some participants mentioned an increasingly hostile environment to foreigners, and the state was reluctant to communicate with traditional development “partners” after TC Harold at the expense of a swifter response. According to an independent consultant, the 2018 *Aid Management Policy* resulted from the institutionalization of emergency procedures followed during TC Pam that gave great latitude to donors:

the sheer scale [of TC Pam] basically drove a huge wedge into an already fractured system. Luckily there were emergency provisions that essentially allowed donors a huge degree of freedom to do what they wanted. ... However, and this is crucial, the new aid policy was written during this time by folk with no technical knowledge—so essentially they transcribed what they thought were the processes at that time which were actually only emergency processes for Pam, hence did not actually reflect the law (which was not changed during Pam). These new processes essentially meant you needed ZERO approval from Government, a note from DSPPAC was nice especially for tax purposes but that was all ...²⁵³

With TC Harold, the government became aware of the *Aid Management Policy*’s flaws, as a participant mentioned: “le directeur du NDMO a compris le problème. S’il arrive à clarifier les rôles [des différents acteurs de l’aide], ce serait super”²⁵⁴. In May 2023, the government launched

²⁵² Interview with an anonymous source, May 2021, English, online.

²⁵³ Interview with an independent consultant in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

²⁵⁴ Interview with Jacqueline Deroin de Gaillande, Secretary General of the Vanuatu Red Cross Society for 13 years (2008–2021), March 2021, French, online.

a revised policy, in particular to clarify definitions, roles and responsibilities as well as national project approval processes, and to reconcile them with the national law. With this updated policy, Vanuatu has the potential to reaffirm its ownership of aid.

In sum, humanitarian funding can help raise long-term development funding if donors are satisfied with the emergency response and its management. It can encourage NGOs, aid agencies and donors to collaborate to access, or to provide, large humanitarian funding. Finally, extreme events or crises triggering humanitarian assistance can contribute to an iterative learning process in terms of policy and practice and thus more ownership. Yet, opportunistic behaviour from the government or donors sometimes tarnishes this ideal picture. Indeed, as developed in the next section, in Vanuatu disasters also had negative effects among which a multiplication of aid actors in the country that challenged existing structures and relationships, a focus on humanitarian assistance to the detriment of long-term development programmes, and increased ownership mainly by the government.

Negative Impacts of Humanitarian Assistance on Development

A World Bank report found that in a worst-case scenario “natural disasters have the potential to increase Vanuatu’s public debt by 13 percentage points, or roughly US\$230 million, in comparison to a scenario where Vanuatu is fully disaster-resilient; risking vital, and hard-fought, development gains” (World Bank, 2022b, para. 2). Beyond numbers, humanitarian assistance that is poorly designed, managed and delivered can exacerbate pre-disaster inequality, exclusion, and vulnerability.

The Importance of Contextual Knowledge. In Vanuatu like in many other contexts, a lack of contextual knowledge (especially by international actors) and relatedly, a lack of data availability, lead to poor responses (Le Dé et al., 2018; Nalau et al., 2017). A disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific also raised the issue of *how* data is sometimes not properly used by aid actors:

Another challenge is that there are lots of data collected by lots of actors, but there is no system to store it and analyze it! This continues to be a problem. We have been living with cyclones for a long time, it did not start a few years ago,

so we know what happens. But we [government, NGOs, and agencies] still ask questions: an NGO goes in and ask questions, and another one... there is a kind of fatigue, and no consideration of mental health. They want food, tools for gardening... Does all this data actually make a difference? After TC Pam, the government just ended up deciding to do blanket distributions to calm the unrest. I was in Mele, and every day I had a delivery of food and other items, but I had enough... How did they miss the most vulnerable in the data? There are some crazy stats! After Pam, just 20% of the data was used...²⁵⁵

The inability to analyze and use the data adequately creates blind spots and causes the most vulnerable to be overlooked in emergency responses. On the more positive side, relationships based on trust and pre-existing partnerships established over the long term, for instance between INGOs and local partners, greatly contribute to the response's success (Australian Red Cross et al., 2020; Barber, 2015; Mochizuki et al., 2019; Roche et al., 2020b; Vachette et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2020). At least some disaster risk management programmes had a positive impact on recent emergency responses in Vanuatu, in particular the creation of Community Disaster and Climate Change Committees (CDCCCs) in charge of disaster preparedness and response at the village level across the country (Alrenze, 2022b; Bamforth et al., 2020; Mochizuki et al., 2019; Water, Sanitation and Hygiene [WASH] Cluster, 2020; Williams et al., 2020). Indeed, having institutions and clear measures in place before an emergency makes the response more fluid (Edwards & Obeyesekere, 2016; Government of Vanuatu, 2018d; UNICEF, 2020; UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2020a, 2020b).

Just as “development” issues (e.g., linked to the acquisition and adequate use of contextual knowledge and data) can positively or negatively impact emergency responses, in turn, humanitarian responses can create future dependency if they ignore local needs, capacities and resources (*Daily Post*, 2020c). For instance, the distribution of rice, an imported food supply, had a negative impact on long-term food security in the country and a potentially negative impact on health by contributing to the aggravation and spread of non-communicable diseases (Coca, 2021; *Daily Post*, 2020f; Savage et al., 2021). Indeed, disasters impact people's health in the long term in the Pacific (UN, 2018). The management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Vanuatu caused

²⁵⁵ Interview with a disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific, April 2022, English, online.

deleterious long-term effects on health because regular immunization programmes were interrupted because of a lack of human resources, as explained by two UN officials²⁵⁶. The response to TC Harold and COVID-19 also involved the distribution of cash as part of controversial programmes. While some consider this aid delivery channel promotes recipient agency, stimulates the local market and includes the private sector²⁵⁷, others accuse donors and INGOs of ignoring the government's disapproval of the programmes²⁵⁸. There are fears about the project's sustainability in terms of available stocks, the erosion of community structures and resilience, and the government not being able to meet future expectations from recipients when the next disaster strikes²⁵⁹. Indeed, back-to-back emergencies and responses form an integral part of Vanuatu's context.

The Endless Cycle of Disaster-Recovery-Development. The country was struck by major events between 2015 and 2023 that caused extensive environmental and economic damage, leaving very little respite to the population, the government and other aid actors. These back-to-back events include TC Pam in 2015, TC Winston in 2016, the eruptions of the Lombenben volcano on Ambae Island in 2017–2018, ashfalls on Tanna Island, TC Harold and COVID-19 in 2020–2022, and TC Judy and Kevin in the same week in March 2023. The country has no time to recover and frequent climate events gradually increase people's vulnerability²⁶⁰ (Ebi & Bowen, 2016 in Savage et al., 2021). A participant explained how these disasters are intertwined as another emergency strikes while recovery is still underway:

[There was TC Pam] Then we had TC Harold, another category 5 cyclone, and COVID. ... I didn't mention but there was another emergency, Ambae volcano, for example. People were evacuated from Ambae to Santo, but the capacity of

²⁵⁶ Interview with UN official, September 2022, French, Port-Vila; Interview with a UN official, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

²⁵⁷ Interview with Sandra Uwantege Hart, Consultant with four years experience in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, online; Interview with an anonymous source, June 2022, English, written answers; Interview with Flora Vano, ActionAid Country Director in Vanuatu, April 2021, English, online.

²⁵⁸ Interview with an independent consultant in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila; Interview with consultant in Community Development and Planning with 11 years in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

²⁵⁹ Interview with Nancy Wells, ADB Senior Country Coordination Officer in Vanuatu, ADB Extended Mission - Vanuatu, Joint ADB-World Bank Liaison Office in Vanuatu, June 2022, English and Bislama, online; Interview with INGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila; Interview with Shirley Abraham, National Coordinator of the KoBLE, VANGO Vice-President, May 2021, English, online; Interview with an anonymous source, May 2021, English, online.

²⁶⁰ Interview with a Disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific, April 2022, English, online.

the classes there was not enough. People are still studying in tents! But providing safety and protection is essential! But now they are still in emergency mode [in March 2022]. There are still buildings destroyed after Pam, and in Santo and Pentecost after Harold... Response is quicker in humanitarian action, but development it's longer, that's the link...²⁶¹

Communities, the government and international aid partners have limited time to formulate and integrate lessons learnt from the previous disaster before another one strikes. Besides, Vanuatu also faces protracted disasters, emergencies that transform into longer-term crises, such as ashfalls and the evacuation and reinstallation of Ambae island's inhabitants.

Given the government's lack of resources and sometimes capacities, the never-ending need to respond and "recover" from disasters inevitably keeps taking precedence over development priorities. For instance, as mentioned in the previous section, during the COVID-19 crisis the government suspended some of its regular health programmes due to a lack of human resources and consequently the country suffered an increase in malaria cases²⁶². Development programmes are constantly interrupted or slowed down significantly as aid actors turn on the "emergency mode". Priorities, funding, and human resources operate a shift towards emergency response. This shift impacts development as "resources are redirected towards humanitarian action. So there are [shortfalls] for development work. It affects normal delivery. I'm sure it's the same for other ... agencies and other organizations. ... And our development partners landscape is pretty limited"²⁶³.

Indeed, donors and government adjust their short-, medium- and long-term development priorities and strategies following disasters and humanitarian responses. For instance, "external events" like TC Pam impacted the energy agenda by shaping "how energy sector policies and priorities are conceived" (Government of Vanuatu, 2016b, p. 3). Similarly, after the "double disaster" caused by TC Harold and COVID-19 in 2020 "and the subsequent humanitarian response activities, priorities of the Government were realigned, which caused a disruption in their normal processes" (Government of Vanuatu, 2020b, p. 18). Donors also had to adjust their

²⁶¹ Interview with an anonymous source, March 2022, English, online.

²⁶² Interview with UN official, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

²⁶³ Interview with an anonymous source, March 2022, English, online.

priorities accordingly, as explained by then New Zealand High Commissioner Jonathan Schwass who said “things planned in the aid program two years ago may not be so important today as COVID-19 and Cyclone Harold have changed a lot of priorities” (Hakwa, 2020, para. 6). Another donor representatives explained:

The government has new priorities after every disaster. Before TC Harold, with the government and [another bilateral donor] we were to build schools, work on curriculum, etc. After, some schools will wait in some places because urgent help needed elsewhere. We are working in the same sectors (agriculture, tourism, WASH), but there is less funding for tourism in the near future because of COVID-19.²⁶⁴

Nancy Wells, ADB Senior Country Coordination Officer in Vanuatu, expressed her frustration towards the government’s lack of accountability regarding the contribution of the response and recovery activities to the broader National Sustainable Development Plan:

In terms of policy implementation, the natural disasters impact it. When there is a disaster, government programmes shift to response programmes, it is more reactive than proactive. Natural disasters are shaping the development context in Vanuatu. ... With the many disasters such as TC Pam, volcano eruptions on Ambae, TC Harold... Suddenly all resources go to response and reconstruction, but are they responding to the national strategy? It’s difficult to tell. ... During disasters, everything is thrown out of the window. Government is focusing on recovery and nothing else matters.²⁶⁵

Planning is difficult for aid actors when priorities change frequently as Jonathan Kings, Deputy Secretary for the Pacific and Development Group at the NZ MFAT, explained: “A challenge is the long-term willingness *versus* events and emergencies. We are constantly balancing wanting to be long-term *versus* answering to emergency”²⁶⁶. As a consequence of

²⁶⁴ Interview with a donor representative, July 2021, English, online.

²⁶⁵ Interview with Nancy Wells, ADB Senior Country Coordination Officer in Vanuatu, ADB Extended Mission - Vanuatu, Joint ADB-World Bank Liaison Office in Vanuatu, June 2022, English and Bislama, online.

²⁶⁶ Interview with Jonathan Kings, Deputy Secretary, Pacific and Development Group, NZ MFAT, July 2021, English, online.

frequent extreme natural events, a characteristic Vanuatu shares with many PICs and SIDS, the focus tends to be on the short-term rather than the long-term. Yet, efforts from donors, NGOs and the government are needed to address short-term needs while embracing a long-term vision. This is to avoid unsustainable practices and negative impacts of humanitarian responses such as increased food insecurity or disease outbreaks. Unfortunately, this section has shown how the state's limited resources and donor options as well as recurring disasters hinder the establishment of a much-needed link between humanitarian assistance and development. These challenges also cripple development programmes. As explained in the next section, in Vanuatu development programmes have increasingly adopted the same modes of action as humanitarian assistance, putting much emphasis on the short-term.

Similar Modes of Action. As a consequence of recurring disasters, and the incentive for donors, the government and other aid implementers to quickly deliver visible results, the humanitarian mode of action has influenced development assistance. Donors and agencies still implement long-term programmes and provide budget support, but NGOs' rapid and targeted interventions that have traditionally characterized humanitarian action are at risk of becoming the norm in development assistance²⁶⁷. A participant, who has experience with a major donor in Vanuatu, explained:

Donors follow that model: flying in and fixing things for you. It's the international community's responsibility at some point like after a huge disaster, but using it as a model is counterproductive. Local NGOs get weakened by INGOs and this model because they now adopt the same model. INGOs take a lot of space and their funding model is based on showing "how great they are": it's dangerous to do that in a neocolonial context. It reinforces that dependency. There is a conflation between the humanitarian and emergency model [on one side], and effective development cooperation [on the

²⁶⁷ Interview with Eric Durpaire, Chief of UNICEF Field Office, UN Joint Presence Vanuatu, February 2021, French, online; Interview with Flora Vano, ActionAid Country Director in Vanuatu, April 2021, English, online; Interview with Anna Gibert, Team Leader, Vanuatu Skills Partnership from 2009 to 2015 and Consultant (2021), notably for the Australian DFAT, December 2021, English, online.

other side]. ... The modality is just technical expertise and come and fix. The theory of change is so flawed.²⁶⁸

Thus, in Vanuatu as in many other contexts, there is a discrepancy between ambitious development objectives, on one hand, and short programme and project timeframes, on the other hand.

The reduced length of programmes proves unrealistic to reach long-term development goals, as several participants condemned²⁶⁹. A participant, for instance, called out to development partners to reduce bureaucracy and provide funds on the longer term because “le développement d’un pays s’imagine sur 20 ou 30 ans, *versus* des programmes annuels et des financements pour des programmes d’un ou deux ans”²⁷⁰. Concurrently, in a context where disasters are frequent, humanitarian projects can last several years, which blurs the line between humanitarian assistance and development. For instance, the European Commission now accepts proposals for projects with a duration of several years to operationalize their country Humanitarian Implementation Plans²⁷¹. In Vanuatu, participants mentioned several projects launched in the aftermath of TC Pam in 2015 and Ambae volcano eruptions in 2017–2018 were still underway when TC Harold struck in 2020²⁷². A broader study could reveal whether there is a global trend towards relative homogenization of the length of aid initiatives, especially given the increasing number of protracted environmental and health crises as well as conflicts around the world.

Finally, humanitarian projects also sometimes destabilize community structures, which can negatively impact future development and emergency responses²⁷³. Indeed, new international staff deployed in Vanuatu after disasters are seldomly country experts who can appreciate

²⁶⁸ Interview with Anna Gibert, Team Leader, Vanuatu Skills Partnership from 2009 to 2015 and Consultant (2021), notably for the Australian DFAT, December 2021, English, online.

²⁶⁹ Interview with Jacqueline Deroin de Gaillande, Secretary General of the Vanuatu Red Cross Society for 13 years (2008–2021), March 2021, French, online; Interview with Flora Vano, ActionAid Country Director in Vanuatu, April 2021, English, online.

²⁷⁰ Interview with an anonymous source, online.

²⁷¹ Interview with the person in charge of the Asia-Pacific region at ECHO, March 2022, French, online. Their comments are made in their own name and do not necessarily represent the views of the European Commission or ECHO.

²⁷² Interview with an international development professional based in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online; Interview with an anonymous source, March 2022, English, online.

²⁷³ Interview with Shirley Abraham, National Coordinator of the KoBLE, VANGO Vice-President, May 2021, English, online; Interview with Vivian Obed, General Manager of Further Arts Vanuatu, English, October 2021, online.

contextual nuances and formulate and implement adequate response options, as explained in the next section.

Multiplication of Actors. Disasters have traditionally triggered a large influx of often poorly qualified and ill-informed foreign humanitarian personnel in the country that challenges existing structures and relationships. This dynamic reached its apogee with TC Pam in 2015 (Barber, 2015). Similar to the criticisms formulated against development staff, well-established regional, national and local aid actors as well as the broader population blame new, incoming (usually foreign, white) humanitarian workers and “experts” for their lack of knowledge of the country’s context, culture, and procedures (Le Dé et al., 2018; Vachette et al., 2017). They hold them responsible for the lack of national and local ownership of emergency responses, including by bypassing government structures and setting their own priorities, ultimately eroding trust between actors (Le Dé et al., 2018; Nalau et al., 2017)²⁷⁴. Participants remembered:

The influx of foreigners after TC Pam was almost like a second cyclone for us! For traditional partners with established offices and programmes, they got overlapped by these new players who were going directly to politicians, bypassing actual systems. The lack of coordination reached a point where it began hindering the response. For example, I remember walking into the National Disaster Meeting and there were only foreigners. National staff had to ask for separate meetings because they had no space.²⁷⁵

[We, a local branch of an INGO] inherited bad reputation from other [I]NGOs who came through communities. ... Compared with them, we want to be apolitical. Because we have seen so much aid captured by political parties and distributed only to their voters, when some people have never seen any aid coming. It was the case especially after Pam.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ Interview with a Disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific, April 2022, English, online; Interview with an independent consultant in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila; Interview with consultant in Community Development and Planning with 11 years in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

²⁷⁵ Interview with a disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific, April 2022, English, online.

²⁷⁶ Interview with Flora Vano, ActionAid Country Director in Vanuatu, April 2021, English, online.

International actors were present and empowered because donors preferred to fund UN agencies and INGOs rather than national and local actors (Hallwright & Handmer, 2019; Mochizuki et al., 2019). The same happened after TC Harold in 2020, as explained in Chapter 9. Humanitarian aid was thus more fragmented among donors and projects after TC Pam (Mochizuki et al., 2019), a tendency that persisted over the long-term as since 2015 many INGOs stayed to work in the country²⁷⁷. This result partially supports Keerthiratne and Tol's (2018) finding that "natural disasters lead to a diversification of types of aid received and a diversification of the number of donors" (p. 1). Wood and Nicholls (2021) also found donor fragmentation to be relatively high in Vanuatu.

As argued in Chapter 7, harmonization and coordination are a challenge for donors and other actors when there is no disaster within sight. Although, as explained in the previous section, donors, agencies and INGOs are sometimes able to join forces when large funding is needed to face a disaster, the multiplication of actors inevitably complicates the government's coordinating role (Mochizuki et al., 2019). Moreover, disasters tend to weaken existing donor coordination mechanisms over the long term. A UN official explained how it happened after TC Harold: "Il existe un Partnership Working Group pour essayer de se coordonner entre bailleurs, organisé par le gouvernement, mais ça s'est étiolé car les urgences régulières mobilisent tout le monde pendant plusieurs mois et ensuite la dynamique a du mal à repartir"²⁷⁸. Since TC Pam, humanitarian and development actors are supposed to coordinate under the leadership of relevant government agencies in different sectoral groups, or clusters, at all times, but in practice it has been the case unequally across sectors.

Overall, the cluster system has been relatively and increasingly effective and inclusive in times of crisis according to eight participants across groups (Keen et al., 2021). This is the case despite recurring issues such as a lack of communication and coordination (and even competition or conflict) among clusters, organizations, and actors in general, unclear roles and responsibilities, underrepresentation of local civil society, lack of data sharing, and in some cases actual leadership by cluster co-leads (INGO, UN agency or the Red Cross) rather than

²⁷⁷ Interview with Shirley Abraham, National Coordinator of the KoBLE, VANGO Vice-President, May 2021, English, online.

²⁷⁸ Interview with UN official, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

government departments, all these issues ultimately creating frustration (Keen et al., 2021; Government of Vanuatu, 2017c; Government of Vanuatu, 2018d; Government of Vanuatu, 2020a)²⁷⁹. For instance, a participant explained how some organizations, especially INGOs, tried to access national disaster management decision-making spaces, an attitude that goes contrary to the ownership principle and localization²⁸⁰.

However, NGOs, agencies and donors tend to forsake clusters when the immediate response phase is over and funds become scarcer²⁸¹. Thus, well-resourced clusters such as the WASH or education clusters are more active outside of response phases than other under-resourced clusters, as this participant explained: “Some clusters have dedicated capacities to advance their work like WASH, gender, education... But it is more difficult for clusters with no dedicated capacities during peacetime, like [those with only] one representative...”²⁸². Moreover, even if all clusters were always highly functional, the system is based on sectoral silos that prevent actors from tackling issues in an integrated, holistic manner rather than in a purely technical way (Keen & Sanderson, 2020). This system also arbitrarily excludes sectors that constitute blind spots²⁸³ “like employment or culture, sectors really important in Vanuatu, especially with the [COVID-19] pandemic regarding employment”²⁸⁴.

In sum, in Vanuatu humanitarian assistance has affected established pre-disaster development coordination mechanisms and relationships, notably through the multiplication of aid actors and their narrow focus on, and approach to, emergencies. This section also started uncovering the incentives behind donors, agencies and INGOs’ apparent reluctance to (re)engage with development arenas and agendas: siloed sectors and the availability and attractiveness of

²⁷⁹ Interview with Jacqueline Deroine de Gaillande, Secretary General of the Vanuatu Red Cross Society for 13 years (2008-2021), March 2021, French, online; Interview with Anne Pakoa, Chief Executive Officer and Founder of Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition, March 2021, English, online.

²⁸⁰ Interview with an anonymous source, May 2021, English, online.

²⁸¹ Interview with Eric Durpaire, Chief of UNICEF Field Office, UN Joint Presence Vanuatu, February 2021, French, online; Interview with an anonymous source, May 2021, English, online; Interview with Lucie Vigier, Representative of France Volontaires in Vanuatu, June 2021, French, online.

²⁸² Interview with Malcolm Dalesa, Disaster Recovery Consultant following TC Harold and Covid-19, PDNA Coordinator, May 2021, English, online.

²⁸³ Interview with Malcolm Dalesa, Disaster Recovery Consultant following TC Harold and Covid-19, PDNA Coordinator, May 2021, English, online; Interview with Vivian Obed, General Manager of Further Arts Vanuatu, English, October 2021, online.

²⁸⁴ Interview with Malcolm Dalesa, Disaster Recovery Consultant following TC Harold and Covid-19, PDNA Coordinator, May 2021, English, online.

humanitarian funding. Before unpacking these obstacles, in the next section I examine other challenges shared by humanitarian aid and development assistance.

Other Challenges in Common

Development assistance and humanitarian aid present other similarities in the challenges they face in Vanuatu. First, if TC Harold's response was more nationally owned than TC Pam's, control was centralized by the government and even at the level of a single under-resourced body: the NDMO (and to a lesser extent the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and DSPPAC under the Prime Minister's Office). During a storian, two participants working for a UN agency at the time explained to me that the NDMO controlled everything at the decision-making and process levels: its approval was needed for virtually everything, slowing down the response. Within the NDMO itself, decisions were very centralized at the level of the Director. According to them, the NDMO had skills, but not enough capacity. Moreover, it had to manage COVID-19, a health emergency, when it usually manages climate-induced and geological disasters. An international development professional based in Vanuatu shared their analysis: "It's very tough for NGOs and the Red Cross because they need to go through the NDMO for everything, they have the capacity to react quickly, the Red Cross has volunteers in all of Vanuatu, the NGOs have projects in several islands... But the NDMO says: 'No, no, no...'"²⁸⁵. Thus, there was more ownership in the context of TC Harold's response, which was positive from the government's side, but it sometimes slowed down the response and was a little extreme from external organizations' point of view. Besides, highly centralized control leaves little space for civil society actors that could work on issues neglected by the state²⁸⁶. This tendency continued and had repercussions on development activities and on other sectors in the medium term. For instance, the government and donors sometimes marginalized the private sector and did not fully recognize its contributions during the response, a criticism also valid for development activities more generally, as explained in Chapter 5.

Second, priorities set by the government after disasters are often too numerous and not hierarchized among themselves, just as it is the case with the National Sustainable Development

²⁸⁵ Interview with an international development professional based in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online.

²⁸⁶ Interview with an anonymous source, August 2021, English, online.

Plan (NSDP). For instance, after TC Harold the government asked donors and agencies to align on the priorities identified in the Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA). However, the assessment encompassed many needs making it easy for donors to contribute to the priorities most aligned with their own strategies, undermining both ownership of the response and alignment. Moreover, a participant working in the state system criticized the PDNA process for being a donor requirement, too complex and burdensome for Vanuatu's limited capacities²⁸⁷.

Third, the government preferred negotiating with donors bilaterally after the release of the PDNA following TC Harold, a practice a priori contrary to the harmonization principle but in line with the ownership principle as the recipient government can adopt its own strategies, thus further undermining the principles. Moreover, as mentioned in the previous section, donors, agencies and NGOs tend to end their collaboration as soon as the response (and sometimes recovery) phase is over and return to individual initiatives. Interviews, reports and the press revealed that across several emergency operations since TC Pam, the government thanked international partners and praised strategic and operational coordination. INGO and donor representatives usually mentioned good operational cooperation, but the unstable political environment is a challenge and they are sometimes instrumentalized by politicians.

Fourth, donors usually fund (or co-fund) the post-disaster lessons-learned workshops and reports, which creates a conflict of interest as they participated in financing and sometimes implementing the response. A similar issue exists for development programmes, as explained in Chapter 6. For instance, a representative from the private sector complained that his remarks were watered down by Australia for being too critical of the government in a report post-TC Harold²⁸⁸. Two participants from INGOs and an international development professional based in Vanuatu mentioned the discrepancy between several reports praising the locally led response on one side, and the actual slow, under-resourced response they observed on the other side²⁸⁹. One of them even called the response “a disaster”²⁹⁰. INGOs could be fighting for their own survival by criticizing those reports, but the three participants have long-term experience in Vanuatu, and

²⁸⁷ Interview with a Vanuatu government worker, October 2021, English, online.

²⁸⁸ Interview with Glen Craig of Pacific Advisory, January 2021, English, online.

²⁸⁹ Interview with an anonymous source, August 2021, English, online; Interview with an international development professional based in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online; Interview with INGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

²⁹⁰ Interview with an international development professional based in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online.

the slowness of the response was also reported in the local press. In these instances, shared interests between the government and donors bridged otherwise sometimes tense relations: the government could show “it could do it”, and donors could show off their success in terms of localization, satisfy and please the government. In reality, the government of Vanuatu needed (and received some) external assistance to speed up the response, and donors were more constrained to let go of some control rather than encouraging it in a proactive manner. Reports distorting reality and overlooking challenges are problematic in the sense that, if anyone uses them, they can hinder aid actors’ learning process to make aid more effective. As the potential basis for making future decisions, elaborating reforms and policies, and defining priorities, they can influence where and how future development aid funding will be spent and have a far-reaching impact.

For better or for worse, humanitarian assistance and development have been intimately linked in Vanuatu. Like many SIDS, and PICs in particular, the country increasingly faces the consequences of climate change while its emissions are among the lowest in the world. Meanwhile, other development issues need attention beyond disaster preparedness, response and recovery. However, humanitarian assistance and development still mainly coexist in the work of the government, donors, agencies, and NGOs, who mostly work in silos and value short-term assistance.

The Main Obstacles: Short-Term Vision and Siloed Work

Donors, agencies, NGOs and the government support the need to consider long-term development while designing and operationalizing emergency responses, as well as the need to consider disaster preparedness in development activities, in the media and in interviews. Gero et al. (2013) already found a “key perception of risk amongst most interviewees was the need to focus on risk reduction and preparedness, rather than with a reactive approach to response only” (p. 111). After the responses to Ambae and TC Hola emergencies in 2017–2018, NDMO reports stated, “it is only appropriate that recovery and reconstruction are implemented in a way that it contributes to the resilience of the communities, reflected in its economy, social cohesion and governance” (Government of Vanuatu, 2018e, p. 17; Government of Vanuatu, 2018f, p. 19).

Government representatives and civil servants repeatedly emphasized the negative impact of TC Harold and COVID-19 on development and the need to tackle both emergencies in a sustainable manner. For instance, the President stated “COVID-19 is not only a health emergency issue but it is also a severe economic and social crisis which causes a global inequality. COVID-19 also threatens our progress towards the achievement of our sustainable development goals” (Bule, 2021b, para. 8–9). In the agricultural sector, the Director General “confirmed that local food will also be included in the relief supplies during the first response program. ... The next stage of the relief program is to help farmers with the replanting program” (Malsungai, 2020, para. 7). At the provincial level, the Controller of the Emergency Operations Centre declared “that it is not just about immediate relief supplies but also the long-term response where we support smarter development to take our province forward. Therefore, our future plans must reflect this thinking” (*Daily Post*, 2020k, para. 9–10). A UN official based in the Pacific for four years confirmed that “the disaster agency understands disaster is a development challenge, as well as humanitarian. They put the emphasis on disaster management. This emphasis shows proactive attitude and should be applauded”²⁹¹. However, the timeframe for the humanitarian and development phases remains unclear in Vanuatu’s legislation²⁹².

Similarly, donors and agencies have recognized the relevance of linking these two types of assistance. For instance, Japan’s Ambassador asserted that “in addition to emergency response to protect lives and minimise socio-economic impacts, Japan thinks that it is necessary to strengthen health systems with a medium to long-term perspective” (*Daily Post*, 2020t, para. 10). Participants mentioned “we have to stop separating [disaster aid and development]”²⁹³, that “[it] is simply a continuum between humanitarian action and development”²⁹⁴. However, the link between those two types of aid remains “a debate”²⁹⁵, “a struggle”²⁹⁶, a challenge governments and donors are making efforts to overcome. A major donor like Australia already has some flexibility to redirect funding from development to humanitarian assistance²⁹⁷. Some donors, such

²⁹¹ Interview with a UN official based in the Pacific region for four years, February 2022, English, online.

²⁹² Interview with an employee working in the government system, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

²⁹³ Interview with an international development professional based in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online.

²⁹⁴ Interview with a UN official based in the Pacific region for four years, February 2022, English, online.

²⁹⁵ Interview with the person in charge of the Asia-Pacific region at ECHO, March 2022, French, online. Their comments are made in their own name and do not necessarily represent the views of the European Commission or ECHO.

²⁹⁶ Interview with an anonymous source, March 2022, English, online.

²⁹⁷ Interview with Australian aid official, October 2021, online.

as Australia and New Zealand, actually redirected development funds towards the response to TC Harold and COVID-19 and/or provided additional funding²⁹⁸.

Finally, VANGO called for collaboration between foreign and local actors to avoid overlaps in the distribution of assistance and to build local capabilities in a long-term perspective (*Daily Post*, 2020c). INGOs reaffirmed their commitment to project sustainability. For instance, Save the Children declared it “remain[ed] committed to working with the national, provincial and local government authorities and communities to promote local community led projects which ensures better sustainability of the development and humanitarian programs” (*Daily Post*, 2020ab, para. 9). Two other INGO officials in Vanuatu described their ongoing efforts to integrate emergency and development activities:

Au niveau du lien humanitaire-développement, [dans notre ONGI] il y a une utilisation d’une catastrophe comme une opportunité. Il y a eu le développement de *guidelines* pour que nos actions en phase d’urgence soient durables, mais cela n’a pas encore été testé. Il y a aussi un focus sur la *preparedness* et le changement Climatique qui est un *slow-onset disaster*.²⁹⁹

we prioritize response in areas where we do long-term development programming. Because there is trust and understanding. We are sometimes asked by the government to go to places we do not work in, but then we ask [the government] to lead and to manage expectations.³⁰⁰

In sum, many aid actors recognize the need to link humanitarian aid and development assistance and express their willingness to operationalize it. However, in practice, these two types of assistance mainly remain separate, with a focus on short-term funding. The main obstacles I identify to more synergy is the availability and attractiveness of humanitarian funding and enduring siloed work.

²⁹⁸ Interview with Australian aid official, October 2021, online; Interview with Jonathan Kings, Deputy Secretary for the Pacific and Development Group, NZ MFAT, July 2021, English, online; Interview with a representative of a donor country, June 2021, English, online.

²⁹⁹ Interview with an international NGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

³⁰⁰ Interview with INGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

Availability and Attractiveness of Humanitarian and Disaster-Related Funding

Many participants expressed, in different ways, that precedence was given to humanitarian and disaster-related activities over development in Vanuatu. According to them, donors and the government focus their attention and funding on response and recovery, for which more funds are available, to the detriment of a long-term vision³⁰¹. For instance, an anonymous participant declared “[the] biggest challenge is the funding. There are often no resources to fund programmes after humanitarian support and recovery...”³⁰². Another participant deplored other pressing and enduring issues were being overlooked by donors such as youth-related concerns around education and drug use³⁰³. In the same vein, when COVID-19 hit, health resources were massively redirected towards fighting this disease and the government put other routine vaccination and prevention campaigns on hold, which caused a resurgence of other diseases which were under control before the pandemic³⁰⁴. Some local organizations got funding after TC Harold, but it did not cover reporting activities, which can pose accountability issues³⁰⁵. Indeed, the quality and management of funding, as well as possible trade-offs, matter beyond quantity.

More broadly, there is very little interest in Vanuatu at the global level in terms of aid, especially beyond disaster-related crises and preparedness³⁰⁶. Humanitarian aid to Vanuatu peaked in 2015 after TC Pam, but between 2010 and 2020 humanitarian aid did not represent a large share of aid compared with aid to infrastructure and government and civil society sectors, and, to a lesser extent, aid for education and health (Lowy Institute, n.d.). A priori, this longer-term trend clashes with perceptions by participants that aid is mainly targeted to disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. However, because disaster risk management and humanitarian aid include, respectively, strengthening and rebuilding infrastructures, government

³⁰¹ Interview with Jacqueline Deroin de Gaillande, Secretary General of the Vanuatu Red Cross Society for 13 years (2008–2021), March 2021, French, online; Interview with Nancy Wells, ADB Senior Country Coordination Officer in Vanuatu, ADB Extended Mission - Vanuatu, Joint ADB-World Bank Liaison Office in Vanuatu, June 2022, English and Bislama, online; Interview with Sandra Uwantege Hart, Consultant with four years experience in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, online.

³⁰² Interview with an anonymous source, March 2022, English, online.

³⁰³ Interview with Shirley Abraham, National Coordinator of the KoBLE, VANGO Vice-President, May 2021, English, online.

³⁰⁴ Interview with UN official, September 2022, French, Port-Vila; Interview with a UN official, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

³⁰⁵ Interview with Anna Naupa, an experienced development professional in the Pacific and in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online. Do not use name if controversial.

³⁰⁶ Interview with an anonymous source, August 2021, English, online.

structures, civil society capacities, education and health systems, an explanation may be that donors, the government, NGOs, and other aid implementers commonly portray aid to these sectors as aid for disaster management and climate change adaptation. Although there seems to be little debate about climate change being a major issue in Vanuatu, several participants mentioned this sector was the one presenting the most funding opportunities. A regional study revealed that in 2020 disaster management and climate change were the priority sectors for Pacific NGOs. NGO priorities were aligned with donor priorities, for which funding was available, with some participants suggesting that NGO priorities were thus donor driven (Pacific Resilience Partnership, 2021).

When looking at 2021 data, there is relatively limited donor interest in the Pacific region (OECD, 2023d). The Pacific also occupies a limited place in donors' overall insufficient humanitarian budget, as a participant working at the humanitarian branch of the European Commission admitted:

D'abord, je dois commencer par dire que le budget que nous avons est fort limité par rapport aux besoins présents dans le monde. Cela fait qu'on doit travailler par ordre de priorités. On n'intervient que dans les « vraies » crises. Je travaille pour le Pacifique depuis cinq ans et je n'ai jamais vu de l'aide humanitaire pour le Pacifique. ... Maintenant, on intervient [dans le Pacifique] de manière complètement ad-hoc avec les fonds d'urgence, comme on le fait aussi dans tous les pays.³⁰⁷

While the EU also provides long-term funding to the country, humanitarian funding is provided by a separate structure and in an additional, ad-hoc manner. Other donors, such as Australia and New Zealand, have been able to reallocate funds approved from the annual budget to humanitarian activities. They anticipate TC Harold and COVID-19 will have long-term impacts in terms of priorities and funding, as Jonathan Kings, Deputy Secretary for the Pacific and Development Group at the NZ MFAT, explained:

³⁰⁷ Interview with the person in charge of the Asia-Pacific region at ECHO, March 2022, French, online. Their comments are made in their own name and do not necessarily represent the views of the European Commission or ECHO.

30% of the resources were diverted to both economic support for the government, and vaccines because it's critical for reopening. COVID economic impacts are going to be long-lasting, five to 10 years. So a diversion of resources will be needed for that period of time. The closure of borders had impact on the capacity to deliver. But for now, there are extensions of timelines rather than cancellations, for example for activities needing technical assistance. We used and thought of creative ways that may encourage localization, using local resources and it works really well. Vanuatu is tourism-dependent and the private sector was hit, so people are using their savings... We're only at the beginning of seeing the impact on our programs, in terms of social consequences, etc. With TC Harold, the emergency response diverted resources from long-term initiatives, but still it will last two-three years, versus COVID impacts that will last for five to 10 years.³⁰⁸

In fine, humanitarian and disaster-related assistance often takes prevalence over development aid in Vanuatu for different reasons. Its availability plays a role as well as its attractiveness, including because certain donors attach less stringent processes to these funds to speed up the response³⁰⁹, the government and other aid implementers lack resources, and it gives the government and donors short-term visibility in a context of high turnover. Indeed, at the national level, government leadership and civil servants change frequently³¹⁰; this political instability can negatively impact emergency responses as leadership adopt a short-term vision or is distracted from their duties by political struggles (McGarry & Mason Nunn, 2020; Palatino, 2023; Transparency International, 2021). Turnover is also high in donor representations, agencies and INGOs as this consultant in Vanuatu explained:

The consistency, stability in international organizations is a challenge. People stay for three, four years if lucky, with a big impact on the organization. I am

³⁰⁸ Interview with Jonathan Kings, Deputy Secretary, Pacific and Development Group, NZ MFAT, July 2021, English, online.

³⁰⁹ According to my own experience and to a storian with a former development and humanitarian professional, August 2022, Port-Vila, who participated in the response to TC Harold.

³¹⁰ Interview with Jacqueline Derooin de Gaillande, Secretary General of the Vanuatu Red Cross Society for 13 years (2008–2021), March 2021, French, online.

talking about country directors and key manager positions. Those who have localization as a main goal are not enough. Lower-, middle-, upper-management positions are not enough filled by Ni-Vanuatu.³¹¹

High-level government officials, such as Ministers of Foreign Affairs or International Development, also change frequently in donor countries as a result of elections and cabinet reshuffles, and High Commissioners and Ambassadors typically serve a three-year term. According to several participants, this constant instability hinders relationship and trust building, and pushes individuals to set up short-term, visible projects within the limited time there are in charge. Additional to these incentives, historically siloed work and frameworks constitute a major barrier to further coordination between humanitarian assistance and development.

Siloed Work and Frameworks

At the country level in Vanuatu, humanitarian work and development work still largely operate in silos, with great communication and coordination difficulties between the two “worlds”³¹². At the financial level, humanitarian aid is separate from development funding at the state level as “the door changes for funding when there is an emergency”³¹³. Government ministries and departments still often work separately despite the need for programmatic action and for an integration of both humanitarian and development considerations, while coordination with other actors such as NGOs and communities is also challenging (e.g., Abel, 2022; Alrenze, 2022a; *Daily Post*, 2021c; *Daily Post*, 2021y; Government of Vanuatu, 2017c). Interviewees confirmed these difficulties:

There are two critical issues in Vanuatu: climate change and NCDs [non-communicable diseases]. But NCDs is about human behaviour, it’s not about health only but about education, agriculture! For example, after Pam there was distribution of rice and noodle for two years! But we need cassava and taro, but

³¹¹ Interview with Senior technical advisor and consultant in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

³¹² Interview with the person in charge of the Asia-Pacific region ECHO, March 2022, French, online. Their comments are made in their own name and do not necessarily represent the views of the European Commission or ECHO; Interview with a Disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific, April 2022, English, online; Interview with Jean-Pierre Nirua, former Director of the National Planning Office, now Chancellor of Vanuatu National University, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

³¹³ Interview with an employee working in the government system, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

even there the quality of the soil is decreasing so produce is less nutritious. And then we see diabetes and exceptionally high numbers of amputations here. There is a need for programmatic action, not project. But there are still four or five silos in ministries.³¹⁴

Also, responsibility lies with the NDMO for an emergency, but lies with another department for recovery. They have to communicate better. For TC Harold, the NDMO was asked to also gather and provide data for recovery but they said “no, no, we do not deal with that”. So there were contentions about that.³¹⁵

Moreover, there is a gap in the legislation that causes confusion, as it does not clearly define and distinguish between emergency, recovery, and development phases³¹⁶.

At the donor level, humanitarian aid is often considered as a sector (e.g., by the Australian DFAT) alongside education or health, budgeted and reported on separately. Multilateral institutions such as the UN and the EU have separate agencies or directorates for humanitarian assistance and development work respectively. Representatives from these institutions expressed how objectives, timeframes, ways of working and organizational cultures greatly differed between humanitarian assistance and development:

In humanitarian action ... you are focused on saving lives, there is pressure, decisions have to be made quicker. ... it also comes down to organizational culture and the individual regarding action. The Red Cross and humanitarian actors, they are more emotional, practical... versus intellectual [the development side]. Contrary to humanitarian action, development is having more perspective.³¹⁷

Au niveau de la Commission [européenne], ce sont deux services différents, c'est difficile de se coordonner. Mais on fait beaucoup de progrès, il faut mieux

³¹⁴ Interview with an international development professional based in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online.

³¹⁵ Interview with an employee working in a multilateral institution in Vanuatu, August 2022, English, Port-Vila.

³¹⁶ Interview with an employee working in a multilateral institution in Vanuatu, August 2022, English, Port-Vila; Interview with an employee working in the government system, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

³¹⁷ Interview with a UN official based in the Pacific region for four years, February 2022, English, online.

se coordonner, il y a des séries de mesures mises en place... Mais le problème, c'est que nous fonctionnons en quelque sorte sur deux planètes différentes : pour le financement, le mode d'action, le *timing*... C'est comme si deux personnes se parlaient dans deux langues différentes. Par exemple, on travaille sur des *timings* différents, le développement c'est plus long, aussi parce qu'ils dépendent des pays, contrairement à ECHO [European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations Directorate of the European Commission] où nous ne travaillons pas avec les pays. Enfin, ce n'est pas que nous ne travaillons pas avec les pays, mais nous ne sommes pas dépendants d'eux, même si nous travaillons avec eux... On ne dépend pas de signatures. Donc nos fonds vont beaucoup plus vite, c'est un grand obstacle avec eux [le côté développement]. Ils nous disent : « On ne sait pas quand ce sera signé, etc. », c'est très difficile de se coordonner. ... L'aide humanitaire est plus flexible car elle doit être plus rapide aussi...³¹⁸

Although there is some degree of funding flexibility, for instance when donors quickly provided new humanitarian funds after TC Pam (Crossley et al., 2021) or when donors redirected development funding towards the management and consequences of COVID-19, donors are usually not well prepared to quickly switch back and forth between humanitarian and development funding and activities³¹⁹ (Edwards & Obeyesekere, 2016; Gero et al., 2013). Moreover, redirecting funds towards emergency responses can mean (even if temporarily) sacrificing other development issues³²⁰.

In practice, a siloed division between humanitarian assistance development also means foreign and local staff, initially recruited to support development programmes, are seldomly qualified or knowledgeable to lead or participate in an emergency response, an issue I observed in my own experience (Government of Vanuatu, 2020a; Mochizuki et al., 2019). Moreover,

³¹⁸ Interview with the person in charge of the Asia-Pacific region at ECHO, March 2022, French, online. Their comments are made in their own name and do not necessarily represent the views of the European Commission or ECHO.

³¹⁹ Interview with an anonymous source, online; Interview with Sandra Uwantege Hart, Consultant with four years of experience in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, online; Interview with an international NGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

³²⁰ Interview with an anonymous source, March 2022, English, online; Interview with Jonathan Kings, Deputy Secretary for the Pacific and Development Group, NZ MFAT, July 2021, English, online.

foreign, incoming humanitarian technical advisors often do not have a sufficient knowledge of the context, processes, and culture of the country to provide relevant advice³²¹ (Savage et al., 2021; Vachette et al., 2017). Two participants mentioned that before requesting and providing international assistance, donors and the state should allow some time and space to national and local actors to set up the response³²². Ni-Vanuatu have been facing natural hazards for many years, and although their scale, frequency and intensity have increased and justified the need for international support, traditional and local knowledge and ways of responding are still often overlooked in development programmes and disaster responses. Calls by international, regional, national and local actors to increasingly consider traditional knowledge and practices have multiplied (e.g., *Daily Post*, 2020c; McGarry, 2017; Movono et al., 2021; Secretariat of the Pacific Environment Programme, 2020; Tokona, 2020b). A disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific expressed their support for these calls:

Why do you think there are such few deaths? They [international actors] talk about traditional knowledge, but no one even looks at traditional knowledge. For example, animals behave differently before a disaster, but these things are not being documented. We talk, we do not write. So you have to ask people. After Pam, there was this reflection on “How do we incorporate traditional knowledge in education, schools, etc.?”

In the same vein, Niroa and Nakamura (2022) noted that government strategies to respond to the eruptions on Ambae in 2017-2018 did not adequately integrate future preparedness and local communities’ ontologies.

Finally, as explained in the first section of this chapter, the international frameworks governing humanitarian assistance and development aid have evolved separately. According to representatives of donor agencies, it is arduous to implement aid effectiveness principles in a humanitarian context where actors implement such one-off, concrete activities³²³. Nonetheless,

³²¹ Interview with an anonymous source, May 2021, English, online.

³²² Interview with an international development professional based in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online; Interview with a Disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific, April 2022, English, online.

³²³ Interview with a UN official based in the Pacific region for four years, February 2022, English, online; Interview with the person in charge of the Asia-Pacific region at ECHO, March 2022, French, online. Their comments are made in their own name and do not necessarily represent the views of the European Commission or ECHO.

Vanuatu's *Aid Management Policy* calls for donors to respect the same principles for humanitarian aid delivery than for development aid (Government of Vanuatu, 2018a, p. 14).

Overall, transforming the aid system for donors (and the larger aid system) to build bridges between humanitarian and development worlds would be expensive, complicated, and long. It would at least need strong political will and a clear path of action to break from this specific form of path dependency (North, 1990). Sandra Uwantege Hart, a consultant with four years' experience in Vanuatu, considers "aid actors are not prepared to switch systems and to transition from one to the other and implement the nexus", and that there is "very little learning" between the two worlds³²⁴. Similarly, a UN official admitted the Paris principles tend to be overlooked in humanitarian contexts because the focus is on "saving lives, there is pressure, decisions have to be made quicker. You don't abandon [the principles], but let's say it is easier said than done. But there's room to embrace them a little more than we have done"³²⁵. Flexibility of funding, long-term perspective and the integration of local knowledge are key avenues to reconcile the two solitudes of humanitarian assistance and development.

The Keys to Reconciliation: Flexibility and Valuing the Long Term

In terms of funding, there is a need for more flexibility and fluidity as well as to favour long-term initiatives and partnerships. Australia, the main bilateral donor, already has arrangements in place to be able to switch quickly from development to humanitarian work:

We have a lot of flexibility, even with planned funds, programmed for one year. For example, for TC Harold the Ministry of Education needed funds, so we redirected funds which had already been approved. We also had additional funds, which we gave to the ministry through our Direct Funding Agreement for school reconstruction. ... If you read the fine print of the Australian aid, you realize there is flexibility to redirect funds. In the contract with the company, there is a clause that says you can move amounts between budget lines just by exchanging emails [with the Ministry of Education, etc.] as opposed to

³²⁴ Interview with Sandra Uwantege Hart, Consultant with four years experience in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, online.

³²⁵ Interview with a UN official based in the Pacific region for four years, February 2022, English, online.

amendments! This was very useful for COVID, for example: some of the lines earmarked for the payment of short-term experts soon became obsolete, and we were able to reallocate the money...³²⁶

New Zealand also adjusts its plan every year and can be flexible in case a disaster strikes or priorities change³²⁷. However, as explained in Chapter 6, donor funds are often earmarked for specific sectors which reduces the space for national and local decision-making as well as capacity building. More flexibility and core funding would likely improve ownership of strategies by the government of Vanuatu and CSOs.

Indeed, although Ni-Vanuatu have lived with extreme climate and geological events for generations, their expertise is seldomly recognized and considered by international aid actors for the design and implementation of aid programmes. Beyond overlooking this expertise, “coping strategies introduced into these societies, following the granting of aid, may have inadvertently deterred traditional responses. However, some of the modern challenges may also be outside the capacities of these communities to manage” (Saverimuttu & Varua, 2016, p. 841). To mitigate this risk, humanitarian actors need a fine-grained knowledge of the context, including of local response mechanisms and how to strengthen them (Ensor, 2016).

Moreover, as explained in the previous section, disasters are still considered a “disturbance” for development programmes by donors, INGOs, and the government. The latter consider disasters as sudden events we must “reply to” in an ad-hoc manner, rather than fully considering and integrating this reality into development programmes. VANGO Vice-President Shirley Abraham suggested including funding for humanitarian action in each development programme’s budget, and that aid programmes do not exclusively focus on disaster preparedness but also on long-term development pillars as listed under the NSDP. In the same vein, an international development professional based in Vanuatu stated that “all assistance needs to have a disaster focus, we have to stop separating! Because in Vanuatu there is always going to be a disaster, either a tropical cyclone, a volcanic eruption...”³²⁸. These actors call for more financial

³²⁶ Interview with Australian aid official, October 2021, online.

³²⁷ Interview with donor representative, July 2021, English, online.

³²⁸ Interview with an international development professional based in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online.

and operational integration of humanitarian assistance and development, as well as steady, core funding to build their organizational capacities.

Given the importance of, and successes associated to, establishing relationships based on trust in Vanuatu, and the need for more emphasis on the long term, this integration means building long-term partnerships among donors, agencies, NGOs, the government, and the broader civil society. The cluster system could be an avenue to establish those partnerships, but high turnover and competition among organizations need to be overcome. For recipient, implementing organizations in Vanuatu, privileging collaboration with high-level civil servants that are less subject to change than politicians could be strategic. As noted above in the “In Practice” section, the availability of large funding creates an incentive for collaboration, and pooled funds create an obligation for partners to coordinate and collaborate³²⁹. Donors could pool funds and set up a requirement that receiving organizations coordinate to access them. However, it would mean donors are ready to relinquish some visibility, and this system must not signify more complex reporting requirements for recipients. The FRANZ partnership arrangement seems to be a valued mechanism both by donors and the government as it offers a coordinating platform for donors and a single door for the government of Vanuatu; it thus constitutes a well-oiled mechanism able to respond quickly to disasters³³⁰. Other international aid actors in Vanuatu could learn from this mechanism to enhance coordination, harmonization, and ownership during disasters and beyond.

Finally, thinking the management principles of humanitarian aid and development assistance together could be the first step towards more effective aid in Vanuatu. The country itself calls for the respect of the same ownership, alignment and harmonization principles in its national *Aid Management Policy*. Addressing the discrepancy between the intertwining of these two types of aid in practice and the separation of their normative frameworks would be the basis for more coherence and synergies.

³²⁹ Interview with a UN official, September 2022, English, Port-Vila; Interview with an international NGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

³³⁰ Interview with a Disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific, April 2022, English, online; Interview with consultant in Community Development and Planning with 11 years in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila; Interview with UN official, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, I asked what the obstacles to the reconciliation of humanitarian aid and development aid were, and how to integrate these two types of aid. I showed these two types of assistance were linked both “in theory” and “in practice” in Vanuatu. They positively and negatively impact each other in various ways. They also present similar major challenges: for instance, donors cherry-pick priorities from ambitious national strategies, and local actors are often marginalized at the decision-making level. Overall, the ownership/localization principle is not respected by the government and donors.

Before answering *how* to reconcile these two types of aid, I tried to uncover the reasons behind their mere coexistence. The first obstacle is the availability and attractiveness of humanitarian aid for both aid donors and recipients. Short-term, visible assistance with lighter associated reporting requirements constitutes a powerful incentive for these actors, although accountability remains important. The second obstacle is these two forms of assistance have traditionally been separated and suffered from path dependency, which means management principles, funding, strategies, implementation and sometimes funding structures are distinct. More flexible funding and valuing long-term partnerships and programmes that fully integrate local knowledge and practices would be needed to bridge the gap between humanitarian aid and development assistance, while respecting the recipient country’s leadership. To do so, a first step would be to end the artificial division between the management principles of humanitarian aid and those of development assistance.

As argued in this chapter, natural hazards are a source of disruption and iterative change in terms of aid management and attitudes towards aid in Vanuatu, the most important of them being TC Pam in 2015 that constituted a critical juncture. In 2020, the humanitarian response to TC Harold amid the COVID-19 pandemic was exceptional as borders were closed, and analysts expected or hoped to observe increased ownership of aid by recipient countries, including in Vanuatu. In the following chapter, I analyze the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the respect of the Paris principles of ownership, alignment and harmonization in the two years following TC Harold in April 2020 to assess the extent to which these hopes materialized. In line with this chapter’s results, I approach the following one by thinking short-term and long-term aid together.

Chapter 9 – The Impact of COVID-19 on the Paris Declaration Principles

From the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, the restrictions of movements of people and goods imposed by states worldwide to prevent the spread of the virus represented an opportunity to accelerate the implementation of both the aid effectiveness and localization agendas. In the short term, the physical and political space left by donors and other international actors, whose foreign representatives, staff and advisors massively returned to their respective home countries, could lead to more ownership and locally-led assistance in recipient countries, yet long-term, systemic transformations that would survive the crisis were uncertain (Vielajus & Bonis-Charancle, 2020). In Vanuatu, the HAG and VANGO rapidly stated that they expected “no turning back” from the increased national and local leadership of the humanitarian response to TC Harold that hit the country in April 2020, just after Vanuatu had closed its borders (VANGO & HAG, 2020).

However, at the global level, the impact of COVID-19 was very modest and short-lived in the area of aid localization and ownership. As mentioned in Chapter 8, only 1.2% of total international humanitarian assistance went directly to local and national actors in 2021 (Urquhart et al., 2022). Similarly, the share of unearmarked funding to several UN agencies declined, thus reducing their ability to adjust to changing recipients’ priorities in an agile way (Urquhart et al., 2022). Beyond funding, national and local actors were still insufficiently included in decision-making processes according to OCHA (2022). However, the situation was certainly worse than the one OCHA described. Indeed, OCHA assessed the inclusion of national and local actors in those processes by considering their sole presence in decision-making spaces, which is a highly imperfect measure as it does not take into account whether their voices are heard. Indeed, unequal power dynamics are at play in those spaces to the disadvantage of national and local actors. Moreover, donors tended to frame their aid as mutually beneficial as all countries would profit from the eradication of the virus, but “focusing too much on COVID-19’s short-term threat to donor countries can reinforce instrumentalist views of foreign aid and mobilize support that will evaporate after the threat has abated” (Brown, 2021, p. 48). That said, total ODA from OECD countries has been rising since 2019 (OECD, 2023e).

There is a growing literature on the multidimensional impacts of COVID-19 at the global level and at the national level on aid recipient countries, including in the Pacific (e.g., Connell,

2021; Steenbergen et al., 2021). Literature is also emerging on the pandemic's impacts on foreign aid globally (Brown, 2021; Jakupiec et al., 2023) and in the Pacific (Australian Red Cross et al., 2020). Yet, beyond grey literature, global and regional data, more academic case studies are still needed to understand the short- and medium-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on aid relations and the advancement of the aid effectiveness agenda at the national level.

Understanding whether COVID-19 drove change or prevented it, and to what extent, would help further understand the multidimensional obstacles to the implementation of the aid effectiveness agenda and point to potential avenues for more transformative change. Thus, I ask in this chapter: How did the COVID-19 pandemic hamper or accelerate the implementation of the Paris Declaration principles? In doing so, I wish to uncover the extent to which and how COVID-19 helped overcome or reinforced the challenges, or counterincentives, to the realization of the aid effectiveness agenda identified in Chapters 4–7, to further assess the principles' relevance. I study the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cooperation and on the management of the emergency response to the “dual crisis” of TC Harold and COVID-19 to unveil to what extent COVID-19 constituted a powerful incentive and a critical juncture in favor or against the application of the Paris principles in the short and medium term.

I argue COVID-19 did not constitute a disruptor powerful enough to overcome previously identified major incentives that discouraged donors and the government of Vanuatu to respect the Paris principles, namely maximizing funds (and complying with spending targets for donors), accountability to domestic constituencies (and avoiding risks), geopolitical tensions, as well as Vanuatu's historical legacies, including with aid and past disasters. Although there was some improvement in respecting the three core principles, progress was limited and efforts, short-lived. First, the pandemic indirectly reinforced ownership by national and local actors in Vanuatu, but progress was superficial and did not lead to a better response. This modest progress was mainly due to increased awareness of national and local capacities among international, national, and local actors, and to limited access to outside support as borders were closed to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the country. Almost three years after the pandemic started, there were some signs that everything was going back to “business-as-usual” in terms of aid ownership. Second, although Vanuatu produced a needs assessment after TC Harold and had processes in place to approve aid-funded projects, and although donors showed some flexibility to adjust to changing national priorities, Vanuatu's strategy was too broad, government and donor processes were too

lengthy, and donor support was mainly directed to the government and INGOs to the detriment of national and local NGOs. Third, geopolitics and Vanuatu's preference to deal bilaterally with donors to assert its leadership prevailed over harmonization. Donor coordination did not involve China, especially on the issue of providing access to COVID-19 vaccines to Vanuatu. Overall, COVID-19 and the closure of borders did not trigger substantive change in the way foreign aid is managed in Vanuatu, and as such did not constitute a critical juncture. Rather, it exposed, and sometimes exacerbated, existing problems and trends.

The chapter is structured as follows: I examine in turn the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, declared in January 2020, on the respect of the three core principles of the Paris Declaration—ownership, alignment, and harmonization—from the aftermath of TC Harold in April 2020 until December 2022. A conclusion sums up my argument.

Ownership: Increased Awareness of Local Capacities and Forced Localization

The closure of borders and the repatriation of many foreign representatives, staff, and advisors by their home countries enlarged the space for national and local actors and put a spotlight on Vanuatu's existing resources and capacities, thus reinforced ownership. However, rather than following an established strategy, international actors were forced to relinquish some degree of control, and the government of Vanuatu and international organizations remained the main decision-making power holders and recipients of donor funds. Moreover, despite a modest increase in national ownership, the response to and recovery from both TC Harold and COVID-19 were slow.

Border Closures and Increased Awareness of Local Resources and Capacities

By cutting off Vanuatu from the rest of the world, COVID-19 increased awareness among all actors of the availability and relevance of local resources and capacities. Overall, it led to more nationally and locally led initiatives in response to TC Harold and COVID-19, which research participants from all groups viewed positively. For instance, Anne Pakoa, the CEO and Founder of Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition, mentioned “[we] used local resources instead of overlooking [them], as it was done in the past. We realized we had resources: human resources,

etc. I hope it will continue that way”³³¹. Similarly, an employee working in the government system acknowledged that “COVID has made people, especially at the government, forced to rely more on what was available at the time instead of bringing TAs in. And TAs who were here stayed and helped”³³². Interestingly, and in line with Ni-Vanuatu’s familiarity with weather and geological events, three participants who are not originally from Vanuatu noted that individuals and organizations from Vanuatu displayed more flexibility and adaptive capacity in the face of this unprecedented double crisis compared to the expatriate community. People from Vanuatu got organized quite quickly, for instance some of the urban residents went back to their communities of origin in the countryside, if possible, to benefit from community or family solidarity (Steenbergen et al., 2020).

Although Vanuatu benefitted from regional and international support in the form of financial, technical, logistical, and material assistance, the movement of people and goods was drastically reduced when TC Harold hit and important restrictions remained in place for the two subsequent years. Thus, the Vanuatu government organized and rolled out the response to TC Harold locally, relying mostly on local human resources and products (Coca, 2021; *Daily Post*, 2020e; Flint et al., 2021; Government of Vanuatu, 2020a; Ives, 2022; Keen & Sanderson, 2020; Movono et al., 2021; Osborne et al., 2020; Roche et al., 2020b; Rosier & Savard, 2022; Savard et al., 2020). Local organizations and communities responded to TC Harold at the local level using traditional knowledge, without necessarily waiting for government interventions (Bamforth et al., 2020; Kenni & Wijewickrama, 2020; Pierce & Hemstock, 2022; Staff Reporter, 2021; Steenbergen et al., 2020; VANGO & HAG, 2020). The government, VANGO, and representatives from the private sector pleaded for a locally led, adapted response from international actors. In particular, it meant food and non-food items should be sourced nationally as much as possible, taking into account people’s preferences in terms of emergency shelter supplies, prioritizing locally grown, fresh food products, and collaborating with the local civil society and the private sector (*Daily Post*, 2020c; *Daily Post*, 2020g; Roberts, 2020a).

³³¹ Interview with Anne Pakoa, Chief Executive Officer and Founder of Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition, March 2021, English, online.

³³² Interview with an employee working in the government system, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

Meanwhile, the closing of borders delayed the spread of COVID-19 to the country and allowed Vanuatu to remain COVID-free for two years after the pandemic started. This was the source of great pride for the government, as illustrated in the following declaration by the Prime Minister Bob Laughman in December 2020, who mentioned the country's 40th independence anniversary celebrated the same year:

Our committed hard work has proven our advancement and how we are mature enough to say, yes 'yumi 40!' ['We are 40!'] This achievement has also proven that our country has the capacity and resource to successfully contain a COVID-19 case and prevent it from spreading. (*Daily Post*, 2020ad, para. 6–7)

A research participant also mentioned “NDMO is proud, and even the Prime Minister is proud. We worked with our capacities and didn't rely on outside assistance. It's an eye-opener for us, sometimes we overlook our in-country resources we can utilize”³³³. At the provincial level, the Secretary General of Sanma province Albert Ruddley, the highest government representative of the province most affected by TC Harold, also praised the national government's support and inter-island solidarity that demonstrated the country's self-reliance (Staff Reporter, 2021, para. 11).

International actors praised the government for its effective management of border cases (*Daily Post*, 2021a; Ligo, 2020b). For instance, UN Resident Coordinator Sanaka Samarasina, based in Fiji, “stated that ‘Vanuatu and a number of countries in the Pacific need to be recognized and congratulated for taking early action to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the region’” (*Daily Post*, 2020m, para. 2). Yet, if the effectiveness of government measures cannot be understated, there were breaches in travel and quarantine protocols, to the point where a research participant admitted Vanuatu also “got lucky” that COVID-19 did not cross its borders for such a long period of time³³⁴ (*ABC News Australia*, 2022; Roberts, 2022c; Roberts, 2022e). Entry restrictions and heavy sanitary protocols also delayed TC Harold relief efforts (Ishiwatari et al., 2020; Schultz et al., 2020).

³³³ Interview with an anonymous source, May 2021, English, online.

³³⁴ Interview with a participant from the Francophonie network, November 2021, French, online.

Overall, according to many participants across groups of actors, COVID-19 to some extent allowed more ownership of the double response, especially by the government and local communities, simply because borders were closed and there were few foreign diplomats, advisors, and staff. Although it may not be representative of the entire private sector or the entire tourism sector, the Havannah Resort reported “the [tourism] industry’s deep knowledge and experience [informed] policy and [shaped] the way forward” via the participation of representatives in public-private committees (Naupa et al., 2021, p. 242). In particular, the private sector and the government collaborated to develop the *Vanuatu Guidelines for Safe Operations* (Naupa et al., 2021). A participant who is a disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific welcomed this positive effect of COVID-19 restrictions that “restricted international partners to flood into countries after disasters like TC Harold” and hoped that it would pave the way for more nationally owned, responses and development in the future, even if these responses are not perfect³³⁵.

The post-disaster needs assessment study was conducted by the government of Vanuatu for the first time, with support from regional and international partners, and later Vanuatu produced a recovery strategy to guide medium- and long-term recovery efforts. A participant explained how the state and in particular two government entities oversaw the design and implementation of the response and recovery phases:

Now for COVID, it was first NDMO then the Ministry of Health who was responsible for managing the COVID response. There were differences between TC Pam and TC Harold. TC Harold was just after COVID measures were implemented and borders were closed. The Post Disaster Needs Assessment was fully conducted by the government, with no international help. But in terms of development help... For recovery, there is the Recovery Framework with costing, and development partners were asked to participate in this [to fund it]. It’s also a way to harmonize.³³⁶

³³⁵ Interview with a Disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific, April 2022, English, online.

³³⁶ Interview with an anonymous source, March 2022, English, online.

In this context of reduced foreign presence and increased government ownership, the Ni-Vanuatu felt more comfortable to step up³³⁷, to participate and express their ideas during meetings in which Bislama was more widely used, and meetings were generally less formal, even if there was still room for progress³³⁸ (Rosier & Savard, 2022; VANGO & HAG, 2020). Indeed, as I show in the next section, international actors were forced to relinquish some control over strategies and operations and they mostly viewed border closures as challenges to be overcome. Thus, more than two years later, there were signs COVID-19 did not trigger substantial, long-term change in the way aid is managed.

Forced Localization, and Slow Response and Recovery

Instead of resulting from a planned, intentional strategy by international actors to devolve more power to national and local actors, the higher degree of national and local ownership of the response to TC Harold and COVID-19 aid that actors observed in Vanuatu was the consequence of closed borders and was perceived by international actors as imposed on them. For instance, a consultant for an INGO in Vanuatu mentioned “at the time of COVID the response *had to be* localized [emphasis added], with the help of anyone who would talk to us on Zoom”³³⁹, and the World Health Organization (WHO) described “the localization of humanitarian responses” as “an imperative due to these operational realities” in the Pacific (WHO, 2023, p. 94). Some analysts denounced this forced localization/ownership which they coined “une localisation de dernier recours” or last resort localization (Savard et al., 2020). International actors, working remotely at first, provided the country with much needed financial, logistical and technical assistance (McGarry & Mason Nunn, 2020). For instance, a participant explained that “during COVID, New Zealand and China gave budget and in-kind assistance. In-kind assistance was especially directed to health but also the police”³⁴⁰. An INGO official in Vanuatu also remembered:

There was a lot of support from afar, with some people working mad hours remotely to support the response. There was a lack of those people who are able to translate program into implementation. For [our INGO], it made little

³³⁷ Interview with an anonymous source, May 2021, English, online.

³³⁸ Interview with Flora Vano, ActionAid Country Director in Vanuatu, April 2021, English, online.

³³⁹ Interview with Sandra Uwantege Hart, Consultant with four years experience in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, online.

³⁴⁰ Interview with an employee working in the government system, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

difference for our staff in Santo, they had lost their houses, they worked for themselves... So there were less white faces, but not less advisers who were working from afar. Some advisers who were already here were also recruited at that time, for instance the Vanuatu Skills Partnership had technical advisers who shifted and supported the response...³⁴¹

It is impossible to know for certain whether the physical presence of international actors in Vanuatu would have speeded up the response in the face of these unprecedented, combined crises, and it is unclear from the interviews whether overall this response was considered of better quality than the one after TC Pam. However, there is a consensus among participants from across groups that the response was too slow, a critique I unpack in the next sub-sections.

Designing and managing the response. Although the government of Vanuatu was primarily in charge of identifying response and recovery priorities, coordinating and implementing activities, TC Harold hit the country in the aftermath of general elections and a government had yet to be formed. The country's political leadership was focused on personal political success, which ultimately prejudiced the efficiency and effectiveness of the response (Kenni & Wijewickrama, 2020; McGarry & Mason Nunn, 2020). Moreover, by causing disruption, disasters such as the dual TC Harold/COVID-19 crisis exacerbate the risk of corruption of political elites in Vanuatu (Transparency International, 2021). A participant mentioned double standards were applied by state authorities at a time when international travel was restricted to rare repatriation flights: "if there is a guy from Parliament in the plane, the plane can land in Vanuatu. You will see there is corruption, privileges, etc."³⁴², an issue relayed in the local media. There were also suspicions of quarantine breaches and unjustified reduced quarantine for high-level government representatives (Roberts, 2022c, 2022d). Politics also led to unfair distributions of relief items after TC Harold as some politicians provided "food [aid] only to their voters"³⁴³ (Government of Vanuatu, 2020a).

³⁴¹ Interview with INGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

³⁴² Interview with an anonymous participant, 2021, online.

³⁴³ Interview with Anne Pakoa, Chief Executive Officer and Founder of Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition, March 2021, English, online.

At the same time, and explained in part also by the electoral and then post-electoral contexts, COVID-19 reinforced the “national pride” evoked in Chapter 5 and triggered a “nationalist reflex” that saw the government shutting off from international partners immediately after TC Harold (Bamforth, 2020; Kenni & Wijewickrama, 2020). After TC Pam in 2015, the UN took over emergency operations which offended the state and dispossessed it from its leadership role. As a result, after TC Harold the government refused to request a flash appeal for funds from the multilateral organization. Indeed, participants explained the government’s attitude was both a consequence of TC Pam and the pursuit of a political agenda by Vanuatu political elites who wished to prove Vanuatu could respond to the crisis with minimal external support³⁴⁴. For instance, an anonymous participant analyzed the government’s reluctance to fully collaborate with the UN after TC Harold:

Le gouvernement a eu un tel choc après Pam que la réaction a été extrême [après TC Harold]. Cette situation a eu des conséquences catastrophiques parce que par exemple les Nations unies voulaient établir un plan, mais il était impossible d’avoir l’avis du gouvernement, qu’il soit approuvé par le gouvernement. Le partage d’informations se faisait ad-hoc, du gouvernement vers les partenaires.³⁴⁵

Thus, COVID-19 strengthened the government’s position in favour of nationally led development and humanitarian response management. Final decision-making and operational control were concentrated in one governmental agency, the National Disaster Management Office, that is not specialized in health crisis management but rather in climate-induced and geological disaster management, and ultimately in the hands of one person, the Director. That way of working was sub-optimal as it delayed decisions and put pressure, even if only temporarily, on a single entity and one person. Furthermore, the structure of the decision-making process it entailed was not collaborative, or even just inclusive. Moreover, during COVID-19 the government restricted freedom of expression and of the press: nothing could be published on COVID-19 without the state’s permission, according to the state emergency acts (Graue, 2020). Those restrictions

³⁴⁴ Interview with an anonymous source, August 2021, English, online; Interview with an anonymous source, 2021, online; Interview with UN official, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

³⁴⁵ Interview with an anonymous source, French, online.

contributed to rendering the decision-making process exclusionary by censoring potential criticisms of how the government was responding to the dual crisis. This nationalist reflex observed in Vanuatu after TC Harold and COVID-19 did not match the conception of ownership entailed in the Paris Declaration that emphasizes the importance of inclusive and collaborative decision-making.

In line with its willingness to own the response, Vanuatu led the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) process. Although the PDNA provided some guidance on each sector's needs, a government worker explained that this type of assessment designed by multilateral institutions was not adapted to Vanuatu as it was very bureaucratic and costly to conduct (*Daily Post*, 2021d):

the PDNA was “sold”, advocated by the World Bank and ADB... but Vanuatu doesn't have the resources, monetary and technical, to do that. ... We were told donors needed a PDNA so that they could fund better, so that we would collect more funds, etc. But traditional partners do not need a PDNA, but reliable data. This is what I realized by comparing Pam and Harold. The PDNA was designed to be done by developed countries but is not adapted to Vanuatu. The money we got out from Harold's PDNA was less than we put in, for example. It was designed by the World Bank to get a loan, with lots of details... So, what is beneficial...?³⁴⁶

Moreover, the PDNA was extremely large and encompassed many sectors, without clear priorities and indications on which actors would fund which needs³⁴⁷ (Government of Vanuatu, 2020b). Some important sectors, such as employment and culture, were left out of this standardized assessment and fell outside the cluster reporting system³⁴⁸. The issues with the PDNA are similar to the issues observed during “peace time” with the broader national strategy, the NSDP.

³⁴⁶ Interview with a Vanuatu government worker, October 2021, English, online.

³⁴⁷ Malcolm Dalesa, Disaster Recovery Consultant following TC Harold and Covid-19, PDNA Coordinator, May 2021, English, online.

³⁴⁸ Malcolm Dalesa, Disaster Recovery Consultant following TC Harold and Covid-19, PDNA Coordinator, May 2021, English, online.

The similarity does not end there. Beyond support to the government, donors provided little funding to local organizations, with INGOs receiving more funds (Australian Red Cross et al., 2020; Flint et al., 2021; Osborne et al., 2020; Rosier & Savard, 2022). In that sense, COVID-19 sometimes had the opposite effect of what analysts expected in terms of increased ownership and localization: in a situation of high uncertainty, donors preferred to rely on international organizations rather than on local ones (*Daily Post*, 2020a; *Daily Post*, 2020af; Kenni & Wijewickrama, 2020; Roberts, 2020c; Roche et al., 2020b). For instance, a participant explained how the European Commission preferred funding (the national branches of) established international partners:

There was a response from ECHO, the humanitarian arm of the European Commission. They channeled money to the Red Cross and to CARE. ... From here, [the EU] followed up and promptly provided funding to the same partners as they were used to receive such funds.³⁴⁹

Another representative of a donor country admitted that “in COVID times, it’s good to have partners like Save the Children, you know they can deliver. There is definitely a tension there, between available capacities to respond to emergency, versus funding or partnering with a local organization”³⁵⁰. Again, NGOs, and especially local NGOs and INGOs, were competitors instead of collaborators³⁵¹. Accountability was more important for donors, who preferred INGOs because they were used to receiving and managing such funds, and because donors had already worked with some of them. Closed borders were not enough to massively start collaborating with local organizations for donors, who circumvented the problem to suit their priority.

In the same vein, despite the government’s “nationally-led, participatory process” to elaborate the PDNA, which “involved local story-telling” (Government of Vanuatu, 2020b, p. v) and discussions with NGOs (*Daily Post*, 2020s), the local population was not systematically or meaningfully consulted by the government and donors, Ni-Vanuatu were still under-represented in meetings, and some clusters were only superficially led by national actors but rather by

³⁴⁹ Interview with an anonymous source, March 2021, English, online.

³⁵⁰ Interview with a representative of a donor country, June 2021, English, online.

³⁵¹ Interview with Anne Pakoa, Chief Executive Officer and Founder of Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition, March 2021, English, online.

international organizations, which led to ill-adapted responses³⁵² (Bule, 2021a; *Daily Post*, 2020d; *Daily Post*, 2021e; *Daily Post*, 2022f; Roberts, 2021a; Tokona, 2021). According to a participant, foreign actors sometimes attempted to impose their presence in national meetings:

When we [government agency/department X] send invites to come to [national] meetings, the clusters have to send the cluster lead and co-lead, but not everyone. The space is small, and we want to keep the meeting short. We assume the leads will tell their cluster [what was said in the national coordination meeting] during their own meetings. But people [working for the Red Cross, INGOs] came to the meeting! I remember someone from the PMO [Prime Minister's Office] ousting a white guy out for speaking out of turn. When it comes to decision-making, it's better to have Ni-Vanuatu stepping up. But people said "Director [of government agency/department X] is aggressive, etc." But you wait for your turn, you do not speak at the national meeting.³⁵³

According to two participants from the private sector as well as a disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific, donors and the government also marginalized or at least did not create incentives for the local private sector to take part in the response³⁵⁴. Strong partnerships and coordination between the government, the private sector, and donors to respond remain rare, although they materialized in a few instances in the face of COVID-19 (*Daily Post*, 2021a; *Daily Post*, 2021e; Government of Vanuatu, 2020a; Pechan, 2021). The priorities of the government, the private sector, and the broader civil society were not necessarily aligned. For instance, representatives of the private sector, especially big actors of the hospitality business, quickly advocated for mass mandatory vaccination and border reopening to revive the economy, while a significant part of the population was hesitant to take the vaccine or rush the country's reopening³⁵⁵ (*Daily Post*, 2022a; Kalsakau, 2022; VCCI, 2021). Some resorts even organized "vaccination parties" (Tarianga & Sam, 2021). Instead of prioritizing tourism, the government

³⁵² Interview with Flora Vano, ActionAid Country Director in Vanuatu, April 2021, English, online; Interview with an anonymous source, February 2022, English, online.

³⁵³ Interview with an anonymous source, May 2021, English, online.

³⁵⁴ Interview with Glen Craig of Pacific Advisory, January 2021, English, online; Interview with a Disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific, April 2022, English, online; Interview with consultant in Community Development and Planning with 11 years in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

³⁵⁵ Interview with a participant from the Francophonie network, November 2021, French, online.

was more willing to focus on economic diversification and the revival of agriculture (Naupa et al., 2021).

In sum, the response to TC Harold in a pandemic context was much more locally owned than previous humanitarian responses of similar scale in Vanuatu. However, donors were “forced” to take a step back and give more space to national and local actors because borders were closed (Bamforth, 2020). A participant mentioned some donors’ opportunistic behavior as they conveniently justified pulling out of the country was part of their commitment towards localizing humanitarian responses when all flights had just been cancelled³⁵⁶. International actors still played an essential role after TC Harold in terms of remote technical support and funding. Protecting Ni-Vanuatu from COVID-19 was also strategic and in donors’ interest as the virus needs to be under control everywhere so that ultimately everyone is protected³⁵⁷. However, the risk is that donors lose interest after the crisis is over (Brown, 2021). The design of the response to TC Harold and COVID-19 and of the NSDP present similar flaws and were characterized for instance by broad strategies, ill-adapted tools imposed by donors and a lack of funding for local CSOs.

Indeed, in an unprecedented context, donors prioritized funding to international organizations and their national branches to ensure accountability, despite discourses favourable to localization. This shows the limits of “forced” localization and the aid system’s resilience to change (Laissus-Benoist & Lallau, 2017). These flaws constitute impediments to national ownership understood in the sense of the Paris Declaration. Increased national pride and “the nationalist reflex” reveal that the ownership principle does not encompass all the meanings that national and local actors give to ownership. As Savard and I showed elsewhere in the case of Vanuatu, and O’Neill in the case of Kiribati, there is a gap between ownership and localization as it is understood on the global stage, often dominated by actors from the Global North, and how local and national actors understand these concepts (O’Neill, personal presentation, July 24, 2023; Rosier & Savard, 2022). Indeed, a certain form of localization was already underway in

³⁵⁶ Interview with Anna Gibert, Team Leader, Vanuatu Skills Partnership from 2009 to 2015 and Consultant (2021), notably for Australian DFAT, December 2021, English, online.

³⁵⁷ Interview with the person in charge of the Asia-Pacific region at ECHO, March 2022, French, online. Their comments are made in their own name and do not necessarily represent the views of the European Commission or ECHO.

Vanuatu before TC Harold and COVID-19³⁵⁸ (Rosier & Savard, 2022). Although this particular response was more nationally and locally owned, I show in the next section that actors' roles and responsibilities remained unclear and the response and recovery operations were slow.

Assessing the response. Overall, participants perceived increased national ownership of the response and recovery positively, even if there was still room for improvement. As a participant summarized, “[COVID-19 restrictions] forced partners to rely on national actors, even if the response was not perfect”³⁵⁹. Specifically, despite the great need for outside help and a flawed response, they considered it was best that the country had more control and ownership of the response and recovery. In this case, the fact that the response and recovery were more locally led and implemented made a significant symbolic difference, but more ownership did not mean more efficiency and effectiveness. Indeed, roles and responsibilities were unclear, and response and recovery were slow.

First, when it came to implementing existing institutional arrangements, the roles and responsibilities of actors remained vague, and this was an impediment to the quality of the response (Bamforth et al., 2020; Government of Vanuatu, 2020a; Kalsakau & Roberts, 2021; *Daily Post*, 2020i; *Daily Post*, 2020n; *Daily Post*, 2021v; WASH Cluster, 2020). In particular, participants explained how the roles of clusters and the different emergency operations centers were unclear³⁶⁰. There was also a lack of coordination among NGOs and uncertainty around roles at the community level for the response and recovery phases³⁶¹. However, according to interviews, the roles and responsibilities of various entities involved in the response were clearer for people working in the government system, which reveals a lack of clear communication to, and/or understanding from, other aid actors of formal arrangements³⁶², which could be improved in the future. According to two participants, roles and responsibilities as well as coordination

³⁵⁸ Interview with a development and humanitarian practitioner, March 2021, English, online; Interview with Anna Gibert, Team Leader, Vanuatu Skills Partnership from 2009 to 2015 and Consultant (2021), notably for the Australian DFAT, December 2021, English, online.

³⁵⁹ Interview with a Disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific, April 2022, English, online.

³⁶⁰ Interview with Jacqueline Deroin de Gaillande, Secretary General of the Vanuatu Red Cross Society for 13 years (2008–2021), March 2021, French, online; Interview with an anonymous source, February 2022, English, online.

³⁶¹ Interview with Anne Pakoa, Chief Executive Officer and Founder of Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition, March 2021, English, online; Interview with a participant from the Francophonie network, November 2021, French, online.

³⁶² Interview with an anonymous source, May 2021, English, online; Interview with Malcolm Dalesa, Disaster Recovery Consultant following TC Harold and Covid-19, PDNA Coordinator, May 2021, English, online; Interview with a Vanuatu government worker, October 2021, English, online.

were quite fluid in the health sector³⁶³—possibly because the number of major actors is limited to the government, Australia, and UNICEF—from which other sectors could possibly learn to improve communication, collaboration, and ultimately increase implementation effectiveness.

Second, according to participants across groups and the literature, the implementation of the response and recovery phases after TC Harold was too slow (Flint et al., 2021; Kenni & Wijewickrama, 2020; *Daily Post*, 2020d; *Daily Post*, 2021d; McGarry, 2020; Roberts, 2021f; Robinson-Drawbridge, 2020; Rosier & Savard, 2022). Beyond constraints posed by COVID-19 in terms of supply shortages, delays in deliveries and lengthy sanitary measures upon arrival in Vanuatu, the response and recovery were slow for several reasons. As mentioned above, political leaders were distracted and there was political favoritism³⁶⁴ (*Daily Post*, 2020h; *Daily Post*, 2020j; McGarry & Mason-Nunn, 2020; Tarianga & Kalsakau, 2022). There were also concomitant disasters at the global, regional and national levels, such as floods in Indonesia and ash falls on Tanna Island in Vanuatu, that required simultaneous emergency responses and mobilized the attention and resources of humanitarian actors (UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2020b). Processes to access funds from donors were lengthy and government funds often did not reach the ground level³⁶⁵ (Government of Vanuatu, 2020a; Roberts, 2022a; WASH Cluster, 2020). There was a lack of coordination and communication (Government of Vanuatu, 2020a; *Daily Post*, 2020o), a lack of local resources in many sectors especially regarding financial, logistics and human resources, and to a lesser extent a lack of capacities³⁶⁶ (e.g., Bamforth, 2020; *Daily Post*, 2021f; Roberts, 2022b). In particular, the country lacked health workers, which became a major issue to prepare and deal with COVID-19 prevention and later vaccination. An additional reason behind the slow recovery is that the government was still in the process of formalizing how recovery should be organized after a disaster *in general* at the institutional level when the dual crisis hit³⁶⁷. Moreover, institutional arrangements and processes

³⁶³ Interview with Jacqueline Deroin de Gaillande, Secretary General of the Vanuatu Red Cross Society for 13 years (2008–2021), March 2021, French, online; Interview with UN official, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

³⁶⁴ Interview with Anne Pakoa, Chief Executive Officer and Founder of Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition, March 2021, English, online.

³⁶⁵ Interview with a participant from the Francophonie network, November 2021, French, online; Interview with an anonymous source, February 2022, English, online.

³⁶⁶ Interview with a development and humanitarian practitioner, March 2021, English, online; Interview with a Disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific, April 2022, English, online.

³⁶⁷ Interview with Malcolm Dalesa, Disaster Recovery Consultant following TC Harold and Covid-19, PDNA Coordinator, May 2021, English, online; Interview with a Vanuatu government worker, October 2021, English, online.

to manage a health emergency were still unclear compared with climate-induced and geological disaster management³⁶⁸. Some participants deplored the discrepancy between the localization discourse by the government, donors and NGOs on one side, and the slow response they observed in practice on the other side. According to them, these actors instrumentalized localization for political purposes, as this participant explained:

Because the response was managed without any international assistance, it will drive a certain political discourse: “We can do it, localization is good, etc.” But the response was so bad and so slow, it was shockingly bad in terms of the rights of people affected by the cyclone. It’s not against localization, it’s about localization driving and managing international assistance. But the international is absolutely necessary after a disaster like that. From the point of view of affected people, it was unacceptably slow and bad. Of course, COVID-19 had to do with that, causing the closure of borders, supply chain interruptions, etc. There were also government hold-ups... I don’t want it to be an example!! It’s off the mark.³⁶⁹

Thus, although the residents of Vanuatu have been facing cyclones and epidemics for generations and the country has many resources and capacities, the intensity of TC Harold and the unprecedented health crisis triggered by COVID-19 served as a reality check: all actors realized the weakness of the national health system (e.g., Pryke, 2020b; Roberts, 2020b) and the unsustainable—although relative, as many people live from the land—reliance of the country’s economy on international tourism and temporary migration to Australia and New Zealand³⁷⁰. The direct and indirect effects of the double crisis exacerbated these pre-existent socioeconomic vulnerabilities and inequalities as they did in many countries around the world in the Global North and the Global South. Moreover, as discussed throughout the thesis, disasters have had impacts on development policies, strategies, and activities in Vanuatu. The dual crisis of TC Harold and COVID-19 triggered changes in national priorities: the Prime Minister expressed his

³⁶⁸ Interview with Anna Naupa, an experienced development professional in the Pacific and in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online.

³⁶⁹ Interview with an anonymous source, August 2021, English, online.

³⁷⁰ Interview with a professional working in the tourism sector in Vanuatu, March 2022, English, online; Interview with Sandra Uwantege Hart, Consultant with four years experience in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, online.

will to shift from tourism to agriculture so that the country would be able to better face external shocks and reduce its reliance on imported food (Bule, 2022; World Bank, 2022a). However, changing national priorities after each disaster does not provide the country with clear long-term goals that donors can align with.

In sum, for the management of the dual TC Harold/COVID-19 crisis, the lack of national capacities and resources was an important factor explaining why the response and recovery were slow. However, donors also need to show their will, and strengthen their capacities, to speed up aid disbursements to national and local actors, as well as to support the local civil society, that could better hold the government accountable to fight corruption and clientelism denounced by several participants. Solid partnerships that exist prior to an emergency are favorable to collaboration during the emergency phase³⁷¹ (Gero et al., 2013). Moreover, more ownership meant the response and early recovery were often less timely, but it made an important difference at the symbolic level: the country owned both successes and flaws and could learn from them. Indeed, the most important question remains: “which model best represents the interests of those most affected by the cyclone or other disasters?” (Nalau et al., 2017). Policymakers at the international and national levels should design the best tools to address people’s needs by taking the context into consideration, instead of developing generic tools inspired by metatheories: this is a way forward inspired by the “new pragmatism” approach (Kacou et al., 2022). In the case of Vanuatu, for instance, to what extent is the alignment principle still relevant when national authorities impose restrictions to freedom of expression and the press? How is it relevant for donors to align with procedures/decisions that lead to a slow response and negatively affect people in need, even if “nationally owned”? These are some of the questions I consider when assessing the respect of the alignment principle by donors in the next section.

Superficial Alignment

COVID-19 provoked positive changes in terms of alignment: Vanuatu adapted its disaster risk management legal framework to clarify roles and responsibilities in case of a health emergency, donors and NGOs became more accountable to the state and adapted to its funding priorities, and international actors acknowledged the importance of building strong relationships.

³⁷¹ Interview with an anonymous source, March 2021, English, online.

However, Vanuatu's strategy was too broad and allowed donors to pick priority areas according to their own interests, and government and donor processes were too lengthy. Moreover, donor support remained mainly directed to the government and INGOs to the detriment of local organizations. By favouring accountability to their domestic constituencies, donors resisted change towards more localized and locally owned aid, despite closed borders. In the next sub-sections, I unpack these results in turn to show that, overall, alignment was only superficial for the response and early recovery phases of the TC Harold and COVID-19 crisis in Vanuatu.

A Focus on Disasters

Right after TC Harold hit, as mentioned above, the government of Vanuatu was no longer in communication with international partners, especially INGOs and multilaterals, who were waiting for directions. Without clear indications of the government's priorities, alignment was arduous for international actors. Dealing with a disaster while preventing a pandemic to reach its shores was new to Vanuatu—even though its experience with climate-induced and geological disasters helped the country to deal with the dual emergency (UNICEF, 2020)—which partly explains this standstill. When COVID-19 was spreading on the world stage, disaster risk reduction in the country was focused on climate change and climate-induced and geological disasters to the detriment of other risks, as exemplified by the *National Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Policy* and the *Disaster Risk Management Act*. The national entity in charge of disaster risk reduction and response, the NDMO, did not have any experience in managing a pandemic or a disaster response in the context of a pandemic. Nonetheless, it had the mandate to do so before the management of COVID-19 was handed over to the Ministry of Health two years later in 2022. Similarly, Pacific health systems had been “tried and tested in response to natural disasters” (Elliott, 2020, para. 1) but were neither tested nor equipped to face a global pandemic. Indeed, Vanuatu's health policy included other risks such as “road accidents” and “infectious disease epidemic”, but “the question [remained] whether there has been sufficient training and preparation to be able to execute the emergency provisions of the Health Policy” (*Vanuatu National Assessment Report*, 2010, p.15).

The focus on natural hazards reflects the country's characteristics in terms of its exposure to this type of disaster and, as explained in Chapter 5, it is also a way for Vanuatu to maximize access to increased available funding on the global stage to fight the multidimensional effects of

climate change. However, the relative lack of consideration of other risks or disasters demonstrates and perpetuates a narrow perception of island countries as only vulnerable to natural and climate change-related hazards and as the ones responsible for facing the effects of climate change, for which they are not responsible. Indeed, risk reduction is often reduced to natural hazards in the region: Cook and Gong (2021a) concluded that “understandings of humanitarianism in the Asia-Pacific are shaped by the dominance of natural hazards and national culture and tradition” (p. 5), and in the broader region “the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted that although significant progress was made in disaster management in Southeast Asia it was largely limited to natural hazards” (Cook & Gong, 2021b, p. 92). Aid actors still largely perceive and respond to issues in a siloed manner, separating climate change and disaster risk reduction from health issues.

In a learning dynamic like the one evoked in Chapter 8, the need to respond to COVID-19 and TC Harold triggered changes in the *Disaster Risk Management Act* to define roles and responsibilities between the NDMO and the Ministry of Health in such a situation. As a participant explained,

[The Disaster Act] was reviewed to include health emergency to give the power to the Director General [DG] of Health. So that there is a split responsibility between DG of Health and NDMO Director. But the decision[-making] power remains with the DG of Health.³⁷²

The iterative learning process based on Vanuatu’s experience with emergencies continued with TC Harold and COVID-19. For instance, a participant mentioned “COVID helped the country mature in responding to a humanitarian emergency, like with the cluster system, etc. People are more aware of process, needs, roles and responsibilities...”³⁷³. Concrete policy and attitudinal changes are characteristic of a critical juncture. It is early to firmly determine whether this dual crisis and particularly COVID-19 constituted such a critical juncture, but the modification of the DRM Act is a minor, ad-hoc adjustment on the division of roles rather than a substantial change.

³⁷² Interview with an anonymous source, May 2021, English, online.

³⁷³ Interview with an anonymous source, March 2022, English, online.

A Broad Assessment and Recovery Strategy

Along with these legal and institutional developments, after TC Harold hit, the government of Vanuatu quickly launched the elaboration of the PDNA, but it took several months before it was presented to international partners and priorities remained unclear. Indeed, just like the NSDP, the PDNA and the subsequent *Recovery Strategy 2020–2023* are both broad and ambitious. The government asked partners to align with the PDNA, but in practice the assessment comprised almost all existing sectors, from housing to gender equality, which again allowed donors to cherry-pick the priorities they wished to fund (Government of Vanuatu, 2020b). Moreover, as a participant explained, where the funding would come from was uncertain as there was no government budget for recovery from disasters, which meant the success of this phase relied solely on donor support: “PDNAs usually have a section with what the government funds and what donors fund, but we do not have that in our PDNA, there were just overall needs...”³⁷⁴.

The *Recovery Strategy* is articulated around three objectives, broken down into 12 sub-objectives (linked to NSDP goals) and 36 outcomes, for which the government designated lead agencies. However, there are no indicators, and it remains unclear which outcomes and geographical areas are considered priorities given the limited financial and human resources at the state’s disposal. Outcomes are quite vague, and it will most likely take much longer to reach some of them than the three-year timeframe of the strategy, such as “3.3.2 Environmental governance and protections including enhanced and/or expanded resource restrictions and traditional tabu areas” (Government of Vanuatu, 2020c, p. 12). Thus, it became easy for donors to justify their actions through alignment with the Recovery Strategy (see for example, *Daily Post*, 2020x; *Daily Post*, 2020ae; *Daily Post*, 2021l; *Daily Post*, 2021m; Roberts, 2021e).

Lengthy Procedures

In terms of procedures, the government of Vanuatu asked partners to use the government system (*Daily Post*, 2021n) and imposed strict sanitary protocols from the onset of the response, which delayed the arrival of humanitarian supplies in the country and in affected areas (OECD,

³⁷⁴ Interview with Malcolm Dalesa, Disaster Recovery Consultant following TC Harold and Covid-19, PDNA Coordinator, May 2021, English, online.

2021a). Remembering that time and the heavy measures applied to emergency supplies upon arrival, a participant described the supply process as “a nightmare”³⁷⁵. Although the situation was new and many if not all other countries were applying sanitary protocols, representatives of international organizations among research participants expressed frustration with the country’s very strict and lengthy measures (typically several days). Similarly, the government through DSPPAC set up a process to ensure that aid funds were aligned with the PDNA and recovery priorities.

However, aligning with government processes—considering Vanuatu has few human resources to implement and follow-up with procedures—and lengthy donor internal processes meant that disbursement and implementation were slow. In particular, bilateral partners’ processes are slow and projects began one or two years after the disaster³⁷⁶ or after the government’s request³⁷⁷. An employee working in the government system explained that the issue was also about the ability (or lack thereof) by sectoral representatives (from respective ministries and clusters) to translate general objectives into clear, actionable goals³⁷⁸. In the same vein, an INGO official observed “there was a lack of those people who are able to translate program into implementation”³⁷⁹. For some participants, alignment with government procedures may result in a very slow response that would deny the right of those affected to a rapid response³⁸⁰: What is the relevance of alignment with national procedures if it goes against “saving lives”, which is *the* basic humanitarian principle? The pandemic nonetheless increased the overall donor and NGO level of accountability to the state.

Increased Accountability to the State

Despite challenges, some interviewees mentioned COVID-19 made donors and NGOs more accountable to the government. Overall, they asserted that COVID-19 brought “more tools for effectiveness, to follow the ministerial corporate and business plans. There is more and more alignment with these plans, efforts to contribute to these plans, to refer to Vanuatu’s plans from

³⁷⁵ Interview with an anonymous source, online.

³⁷⁶ Interview with UN official, September 2022, French, Port-Vila; Interview with an employee working in the government system, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

³⁷⁷ Interview with an international NGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

³⁷⁸ Interview with an employee working in the government system, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

³⁷⁹ Interview with INGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

³⁸⁰ Interview with an anonymous source, August 2021, English, online.

partners”³⁸¹. Indeed, according to participants across groups, by keeping many foreign workers and diplomats out of the country and while many INGOs, development and donor agencies switched to online working, COVID-19 led INGOs and agencies (and to a lesser extent donors) to question their strategies, their relevance, their survival, their ways of working, of monitoring projects, and of maintaining work relationships. For instance, Jonathan Kings, Deputy Secretary of the Pacific and Development Group at the New Zealand MFAT, declared:

‘How we deliver’ will look a lot different. We are likely to rely much more than before on digitally-enabled ways of delivering aid projects. We will also need to strengthen coordination efforts with governments and other development partners so that collective response and recovery efforts are maximized. (Kings, 2020)

From afar and relying on their staff in Vanuatu, New Zealand, like other donors such as Australia, adapted by providing more budget support and by funding technology-based projects (*Daily Post*, 2021p; Howes & Surandiran, 2020a; Schwass, 2021). INGOs adapted too: for instance, Oxfam developed a flagship program in Vanuatu based on cash transfers with the aim that “every aid dollar is integrated into the community and has a multiplier effect”³⁸² (*Daily Post*, 2020z).

Above all, international actors realized they could and should support and rely more on national and local actors, as this INGO representative explained: “There are strong local actors who just need strengthening and capacitating. ... We should mobilize funds and pass it on to local actors, including the government. This is what we did after TC Harold, and it worked well”³⁸³. Others took the opportunity created by the interruption of activities caused by COVID-19 to rethink their strategies, their key documents, and to strengthen their partnerships with national and local actors to build more equal and inclusive relationships³⁸⁴. Fiona Tarpey, head of advocacy for international programs with the Australian Red Cross, explained how her

³⁸¹ Interview with an international NGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

³⁸² Interview with Sandra Uwantege Hart, Consultant with four years experience in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, online.

³⁸³ Interview with INGO representative, English, online.

³⁸⁴ Interview with Luke Ebbs, Country Director Save the Children Vanuatu, March 2021, English, online; Interview with Lucie Vigier, Representative of France Volontaires in Vanuatu, June 2021, French, online; Interview with an international NGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

organization adapted: “It has forced a significant change to the traditional modality of sending international technical advisers overseas to provide training - to very quickly using online and digital training methods by staff based at home” (cited in Cornish, 2020b, para. 15).

Although Vanuatu for a large part self-financed its domestic response to COVID-19 and provided safety nets and business support (Howes & Surandiran, 2020b, 2020c), donors provided assistance and showed some flexibility in terms of funding to adapt to the pandemic context and to the government of Vanuatu’s changing priorities. They redirected some already approved and available funding as well as provided additional funding to deal with the dual emergency caused by TC Harold and COVID-19 (*Daily Post*, 2020b; *Daily Post*, 2020h; *Daily Post*, 2020l; *Daily Post*, 2020p; *Daily Post*, 2020q; Rajah & Dayant, 2020; Rajah & Dayant, 2021; Roberts, 2020b). This funding came in the form of budget support, core funding for programs, grants, and technical and in-kind assistance. New Zealand, for instance, redirected 30% of its resources to support economic recovery and vaccinations against COVID-19 in Vanuatu, and redirected funds dedicated to long term programmes, whose deadlines were also extended, towards the emergency response to TC Harold³⁸⁵. The EU “redesigned budget support [to assist with the response to COVID-19]: money was given in advance, because this is something we could do quickly”³⁸⁶. On the humanitarian side, at the regional level, the EU

... a contribué via l’OMS pour renforcer les systèmes sanitaires, avoir du matériel... Il fallait aussi investir dans les capacités, par exemple dans des formations pour utiliser le matériel pour intuber... c’est un défi important. Nous avons aussi renforcé l’aide humanitaire en général pour les plus vulnérables, pour qu’ils soient couverts au minimum... Bien sûr c’est insuffisant. Mais il y a eu des efforts, les fonds disponibles ont augmenté de 10% avec la COVID. Sur le plan sanitaire, nous avons attribué du financement à des organisations spécialistes dans le secteur sanitaire.³⁸⁷

³⁸⁵ Interview with Jonathan Kings, Deputy Secretary, Pacific and Development Group, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, July 2021, English, online.

³⁸⁶ Interview with an anonymous source, March 2021, English, online.

³⁸⁷ Interview with the person in charge of the Asia-Pacific region at ECHO, March 2022, French, online. Their comments are made in their own name and do not necessarily represent the views of the European Commission or ECHO.

There was also flexibility at the sectoral level, for instance in the WASH sector where “donors agree for DoWR [Department of Water Resources] to redirect and utilize donor funds already sitting in the Ministry of Finance on emergency response” (WASH Cluster, 2020). Uncertainty remains as to whether donors will sustain their aid efforts beyond 2021, especially regarding budget support, which is the country’s preferred modality.

In the same vein, donors supported Vanuatu’s acquisition of COVID-19 vaccines when they became available. Vanuatu benefitted from the multilateral COVAX mechanism initially designed to ensure a fair and equitable access to vaccines around the world regardless of a country’s means. Traditional donors contributed to this mechanism, and China delivered doses of its vaccine Sinopharm to Vanuatu. However, donors justified their COVID-related support to Vanuatu in different ways, although often using friendship and family metaphors: Australia referred to its “Pacific family”, longstanding friendship/partnership, shared values and interest for a secure region, “payback” for Vanuatu after the country sent money after bushfires in Australia, being Vanuatu’s major partner, and people-to-people links (Australian DFAT, n.d.b). New Zealand wished to support its Pacific “neighbours” and to “thank Vanuatu” as a friend and partner, for regional stability and ultimately for New Zealand’s interests (Mahuta, 2020). China invoked the shared future of humankind, “payback” for Vanuatu caring for China, a “strong brotherhood”, a win-win relationship, a shared developing country status, a strong friendship, and the need to restore economic growth (*Daily Post*, 2020r). The various donors’ framing can be problematic and condescending (see for instance Hunt, 2022) and invoking regional security and self-interest potentially has limitations (Brown, 2021). Nonetheless, with COVID-19, foreign actors further realized that developing solid and trustful individual relations in the Pacific and in Vanuatu was essential to successful cooperation.

Realizing the Importance of Human Relations

COVID-19 and associated travel restrictions confirmed that establishing and maintaining face-to-face relationships was crucial for effective aid implementation in the Pacific and in Vanuatu. A UN official based in the Pacific region for four years confirmed:

COVID exposed the limitations of our business models. Unless we have very good relationships with partners on the ground, we can provide limited support.

It is important to travel and sit with people to establish relationships. ... In the Pacific in particular, people respond to direct interactions³⁸⁸.

Other donor representatives based outside Vanuatu mentioned in interviews their difficulties to contact and maintain relationships remotely with their Ni-Vanuatu colleagues: they experienced connection problems, and communication suffered from the lack of human resources at the government and in NGOs, especially local ones, with a few skilled people who became rapidly overwhelmed³⁸⁹. Just as in “peace time”, relationships matter, and working remotely was easier, more fluid with national and local partners with whom foreign organizations had built relationships and partnerships pre-TC Harold (Flint et al., 2021; Osborne et al., 2020). As Lloyd et al. (2020) explained in the specific case of humanitarian action in the Pacific:

This matter of building relationships is not merely incidental: It is a key enabler of effectiveness and success. Especially in smaller Pacific nations, the ability to connect with the correct person, and to be trusted by them to help support them in their functions and responsibilities can have a profound impact on mission effectiveness, and on building capacity and capability in these nations in support of their own self-identified development pathways. Once developed, these relationships have been empirically observed to greatly reduce delays during humanitarian responses, as well as aiding in improving alignment and coordination with the respective government departments. (p.738)

In INGOs, agencies, embassies and high commissions, staff members who stayed in Vanuatu after the closure of borders were under pressure as many employees and diplomats had been repatriated back to their countries of origin. Those who stayed had to work long hours to cover for the absence of their colleagues, responsibilities had to be redefined, which created stress³⁹⁰. Staff members from these organizations based outside Vanuatu also worked hard to provide adequate support³⁹¹. Foreign as well as national and local actors acknowledged the

³⁸⁸ Interview with a UN official based in the Pacific region for four years, February 2022, English, online.

³⁸⁹ Interview with a representative of a donor country, June 2021, English, online; Interview with a UN official based in the Pacific region for four years, February 2022, English, online.

³⁹⁰ Interview with Australian aid official, October 2021, online.

³⁹¹ Interview with INGO official in Vanuatu, September 2022, English, Port-Vila.

importance of more collaboration and coordination among actors at all levels. However, despite increased accountability to the state and donors realizing that building solid personal relations was essential, accountability to domestic constituencies remained paramount for donors—and the government of Vanuatu.

Accountability to Domestic Constituencies Remains Paramount

COVID-19 significantly helped to turn international actors' and national government actors' attention to national and local resources, skills, leadership and priorities in Vanuatu. It helped to further reveal the limits of the humanitarian system based on humanitarian actors flying in and out of affected countries, and the opportunities brought by technological innovations, especially in the field of telecommunications. However, several signs indicate there was no substantial change leading to more equitable power relationships. Except aid that went to the government, where skilled human resources are scarce, aid still largely went to international organizations rather than local ones, which maintains power imbalances (Australian Red Cross et al., 2020; Bamforth et al., 2020; HAG et al., 2022; VANGO et al., 2019; VANGO & HAG, 2020). Moreover, several interviewees mentioned that Oxfam's cash-transfer program was implemented despite the government's reticence, revealing a supply-driven logic rather than a locally owned initiative. Following a similar logic, Australia pressured the government of Vanuatu to accept Australian vaccines³⁹². This was only after wealthy states had abysmally failed to respect their multilateral commitments to a fair and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, leaving countries in the Global South, including Vanuatu, "at the mercy of its aid donors" (Ahluwalia & Miller, 2021, p. 1; see also Brown & Rosier, 2023).

Indeed, in a context of economic hardship and a health crisis, donors were under pressure to meet domestic expectations in terms of public measures and support. After TC Harold, "in contrast to other disasters in the Pacific, there was significantly less engagement with major international donor partners, who were internally focussed on COVID-19 and slow to adapt to a sudden onset disaster as well" (Bamforth et al., 2020, p. 6). As Wood (2020) summarized, "the need for [Australia's and New Zealand's] aid is about to rise a lot. At home, fiscal pressure will also grow as Australia and New Zealand engage in deficit spending to keep our economies

³⁹² Interview with UN official, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

afloat” (para. 3). However, domestic concerns would always come first, as politicians feared “a domestic backlash against the aid program in a time when many Australians were struggling with job cuts, lockdowns and COVID-19” (Day & Wells, 2021b, para. 9; see also Conroy, 2020 and Pryke, 2020a). Consequently, Vanuatu and Vanuatu-based NGOs received proportionately less support after TC Harold than they did after TC Pam five years earlier, even though the damages that Harold caused were similar or even superior to the ones caused by Pam³⁹³. As Brown and I argued elsewhere specifically regarding COVID-19 vaccines, “governments chose to act selfishly primarily because they answered above all to domestic constituencies” (Brown & Rosier, 2023, p. 14). The government of Vanuatu repeatedly mentioned that funds would be used wisely and transparently, reflecting donors’ high expectations in terms of monitoring and accountability (Massing, 2020a; Roberts, 2020c; Roberts, 2021b). Domestic accountability is also of prime importance: In its *Recovery Strategy*, Vanuatu insisted that “it must be clear to people how money allocated in the name of Vanuatu’s recovery has been spent” (Government of Vanuatu, 2020c, p. 14).

In line with results in Chapters 4–7, accountability to domestic audiences was a powerful incentive for bilateral donors and the government in the context of COVID-19. Donors committed to a fair and equal response to the COVID-19 crisis on the international stage in which they spent a few million dollars, whereas they invested billions in their own economic and health recovery and left behind the world’s poor (see for example in the case of Australia, Australian DFAT, n.d.c; Commonwealth of Australia, 2020).

In this chapter, I explore how cooperation in response to COVID-19 unfolded at the country level. In the next section, I show that in Vanuatu traditional donors collaborated and coordinated to some extent but without China, and the Vanuatu government preferred to deal bilaterally with donors. These results are in line with the ones presented in Chapter 7 according to which harmonization is only partial during “peace time”. The WHO and UNICEF assumed a preponderant role in the management of the dual crisis compared to traditionally powerful donors in the country, such as Australia, which constituted a novel development.

³⁹³ Interview with an anonymous source, online; Interview with an anonymous source, August 2021, English, online.

Harmonization: Broken Promises and Vanuatu's Preference for Bilateral Discussions

Donors recognized the need for increased communication and coordination to support Vanuatu's response to the dual crisis of TC Harold and COVID-19. Just as countries initially praised multilateralism as the best way to respond to the pandemic (Brown & Rosier, 2023), major donors in Vanuatu asserted that cooperation among donors as well as cooperation between donors, the government and other actors was key to face challenges in Vanuatu. For instance, a representative from New Zealand declared that his country "[needs] to strengthen coordination efforts with governments and other development partners so that collective response and recovery efforts are maximised" (Kings, 2020, para. 8). The EU, through its Ambassador for the Pacific, said it would "work with the countries and territories concerned, the international and regional organisations and other development partners to optimize this assistance" (*Daily Post*, 2020b, para. 3). Similarly, China committed to increased collaboration: "China is more than ready to work together with the international community in solidarity to support Vanuatu's efforts in post-disaster recovery and defeating COVID-19" (Roberts, 2020b, para. 5). Despite these declarations, harmonization remained partial because Vanuatu preferred holding bilateral discussions and geopolitical tensions between traditional partners and China hampered coordination. I unpack these impediments in the following two sub-sections.

Vanuatu's Enduring Preference for Bilateral Discussions

Vanuatu expressed its preference to interact bilaterally with international partners during the donor roundtable organized by DSPPAC to present the results of the PDNA in August 2020 and in the press (*Daily Post*, 2020w). Negotiations for COVID-19 vaccines also took place bilaterally (*Daily Post*, 2021q). This preference confirms analyses that criticize the harmonization principle which can clash with strategy ownership by the recipient government: the latter can benefit from competition between donors instead of facing a powerful donor cartel that could impose its decisions on the country (e.g., Woll, 2008).

Moreover, as mentioned above, immediately after the cyclone international agencies and NGOs decided not to organize a meeting and not to coordinate without the government as they

did not wish to jeopardize their relationship with the state³⁹⁴. In a postcolonial context where Vanuatu is asserting its leadership and ownership of development and humanitarian strategies and activities, these foreign actors considered it risky to establish a parallel coordination system and to bypass the government, thus risking a politico-diplomatic incident. Nonetheless, the government and international partners then coordinated at the operational level for rapid assessments and response. On the donor side, traditional donors collaborated but China followed its own, separate strategy.

Coordination and Collaboration Among Traditional Partners

In practice, coordination was stronger between traditional partners and, in particular, between France, Australia, and New Zealand through the FRANZ agreement, “a strong coordination mechanism, [that] allows the government to have one entry point into the three partners”³⁹⁵, which eases the work for the Vanuatu government. Although FRANZ played a role, the response to COVID-19 was mainly coordinated by the WHO, again involving traditional partners and the UN (*Daily Post*, 2022e). Indeed, the WHO, UNICEF and the Pacific Community in partnership with the Ministry of Health coordinated much of the COVID-19 preparation and response activities, as well as helped to develop national plans, thus temporarily shifting power relations in the country in the fight against COVID-19 as main bilateral partners took the back seat³⁹⁶ (*Daily Post*, 2022e; Government of Vanuatu & WHO, personal communication, March 12, 2020; Hakwa, 2021).

COVID-19 made geopolitical tensions between traditional donors and China even more visible in the region (Connell, 2021), especially on the topic of access to COVID-19 vaccines. It was also the case in Vanuatu³⁹⁷, where a participant mentioned “a real battle between AstraZeneca and Sinopharm [respectively the UK-Sweden vaccine and a Chinese vaccine]”³⁹⁸. This battle was visible in the media: while representatives from traditional partners including Australia, New Zealand, France, Japan and the UK appeared together to receive vaccines doses

³⁹⁴ Interview with an anonymous source, online.

³⁹⁵ Interview with a Disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific, April 2022, English, online.

³⁹⁶ Interview with Anna Naupa, an experienced development professional in the Pacific and in Vanuatu, February 2022, English, online.

³⁹⁷ Interview with UN official, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

³⁹⁸ Interview with Australian aid official, October 2021, online.

and make joint statements, China operated its own vaccine diplomacy³⁹⁹ (*Daily Post*, 2021i; *Daily Post*, 2022d). A participant described how the vaccine competition played out: “[vaccines] came through COVAX, and Australia, New Zealand, France, Japan, etc. pooled funds. And the government of China, separately, provided Sinopharm vaccines⁴⁰⁰. More generally, a participant explained China acted on its own regarding its support to COVID-19 in the country: “il y avait FRANZ qui coordonnait un peu, puis après le Royaume-Uni et le Japon se sont un peu joint... versus la Chine⁴⁰¹.”

Beyond regional and national competition, Vanuatu is a good example of the broader failure of global cooperation in the case of access to COVID-19 vaccines (Brown & Rosier, 2023). Vanuatu’s rich neighbors started to vaccinate their populations months before Vanuatu could, and while in March 2023 80% of people in Australia and New Zealand were fully vaccinated, less than half of the population was fully vaccinated in Vanuatu (Our World in Data, 2023). After vaccines had arrived, logistical challenges based on the archipelagic nature of the country, bad weather conditions, the lack of health staff to administer the vaccines, misinformation, contradictory messages from politicians and vaccine hesitancy delayed the vaccine rollout (Dayant, 2021; Doherty, 2020; Roberts, 2022d).

Beyond the donor level, there were good examples where the government and cluster members, which include regional and international agencies and NGOs, collaborated for needs assessments and distributions during the response (Governments of Vanuatu, 2020a, 2020b). However, overall, the PDNA and lessons learnt reports post-TC Harold and COVID-19 still mentioned coordination challenges, especially among NGOs, between NGOs and the government, and among government entities (Government of Vanuatu, 2020a, 2020b; WASH Cluster, 2020). The PDNA reported that “coordination between members of the same cluster, across the clusters, and between the NGOs/INGOs and the government of Vanuatu was encumbered” (Government of Vanuatu, 2020b, p. 15), and the TC Harold lessons learnt workshop report deplored issues regarding the cluster system and a lack of information sharing between actors:

³⁹⁹ Interview with UN official, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

⁴⁰⁰ Interview with an anonymous source, March 2022, English, online.

⁴⁰¹ Interview with UN official, September 2022, French, Port-Vila.

The coordination of Cluster response activities separately from the Provincial Emergency Operations Center [PEOC] planning unit activities although effective created other challenges such oversight, assessment gaps, communication challenge between responding agencies and affected communities. Clusters identified that the lack of information flow between responding agencies was an impediment during TC Harold relief efforts. ... The coordination, monitoring, reporting and management of stocks by responding agencies was a challenge as timely updates on available stocks where not provided back to coordinating unit (PEOC/[National]EOC). (Government of Vanuatu, 2020a, pp. 26–27)

Moreover, aid actors still used different procedures and tools, which complicated post-disaster assessments (Government of Vanuatu, 2020a).

In sum, as explained in Chapter 7 for long-term, development activities, traditional donors agreed that strong coordination and collaboration were needed to respond to TC Harold and COVID-19. However, geopolitical competition between China and traditional donors prevented full coordination. The government also preferred to negotiate bilaterally with donors. Moreover, except for the purchase of COVID-19 vaccine for which traditional donors pooled funds, and although they contributed to large-scale national support schemes and provided budget support, donors mainly used separate, existing procedures to deliver aid to Vanuatu for this dual crisis: they disbursed approved funds in advance, reoriented some funding towards the response, and provided additional funds and assistance. Thus, COVID-19 did not bring about significant changes in the way donors harmonized (or did not harmonize) in Vanuatu to respond to the dual emergency. Rather, it exacerbated pre-existing trends such as geopolitical tensions between China and western donors, and the desire of the government of Vanuatu to lead its emergency responses.

Conclusion

Many analysts and practitioners hoped that the COVID-19 pandemic could indirectly trigger a leap forward in aid ownership/localization in development and humanitarian terms respectively. Thus, I asked: How did the COVID-19 pandemic hamper or accelerate the

implementation of the Paris Declaration principles? By causing massive repatriations of embassy, high-commission, and INGO staff as well as foreign “experts”, it created space for Vanuatu, an aid recipient country, and in-country local organizations to take a greater part in the humanitarian response and recovery phases that followed TC Harold and the threat of COVID-19 in 2020. However, the response was slow, slower than if international actors had been on Vanuatu’s soil according to some interviewees, but the counterfactual situation cannot be analyzed. Despite the country’s lack of logistical capacities and human resources, there is a general sense among interviewees that it was ultimately better that the country led its own response and recovery process. This is in line with other voices from the Global South advocating for “policy independence [which] is, first and foremost, the freedom to experiment and learn from success and failure” (Oqubay, 2023, p. 6). Donors still provided financial, material, and technical support to Vanuatu from afar.

Thus, COVID-19 did not bring about the substantive, transformational change that many analysts and observers called and hoped for in terms of following the aid effectiveness principles. Instead, it entrenched and exacerbated existing problems with the respect of the Paris principles, and it is unlikely that it will provoke attitudinal and policy changes to the point where it would constitute a critical juncture the way TC Pam did. Ownership, alignment, and harmonization were only superficially respected in the response to the dual crisis of TC Harold and COVID-19, just as they had been since the principles were formally adopted in 2005. The main incentives were identical to the ones uncovered in Chapters 4–7. First, the broad assessment and strategy developed after TC Harold allowed the government to maximize the mobilization of funding from donors and allowed donors to spend their funds according to their own funding priorities. It also reflects the country’s diverse needs. Second, the pressure of accountability for donors to domestic constituencies was compounded by the increased health, economic and social hardships that their citizens faced due to COVID-19. Third, heightened geopolitical competition in the region between traditional donors and China was most visible during this dual crisis, especially regarding the access to COVID-19 vaccines. This failure to collaborate in Vanuatu is a reflection of how, on the world stage, states failed to provide access to COVID-19 vaccines in a fair and equitable way.

There was some short-term progress, but it was “forced” localization and alignment rather than the result of well thought-out donor strategies, and thus it was short-lived. Despite a participant’s hope that “decision makers at the top of government [will be given] a few weeks [after a disaster] to decide whether they need help, [and that] it will also bring respect from development partners”⁴⁰², I observed in September 2022 during my research trip that development cooperation in the country was getting back to business-as-usual, with a massive return of international and technical “experts”. An anonymous participant confirmed that:

Il y a eu Pam et une avalanche de coopérants, puis Harold et le COVID suite à quoi il y avait une volonté de faire face localement, et il n’y avait plus beaucoup de coopérants. Mais là on observe le retour d’un discours selon lequel « Vive les consultants ! », qui sont entrain de revenir en masse [après la réouverture des frontières le 1^{er} juillet 2022]. Un cycle s’est achevé et on voit un autre cycle commencer. On est passé de « On a nos priorités, on n’a pas besoin d’aide » à « vive les consultants ! » ... ça laisse songeur.⁴⁰³

The space indirectly opened by COVID-19 for national and local actors is closing. As a result of increasing needs and geopolitical competition, some donors have even reinforced their presence in the country. The U.S., for instance, announced its intention to open an embassy (U.S. Department of State, 2023). More broadly, Connell and Campbell (2021) concluded that in the Caribbean and Pacific islands, COVID-19 did not bring about significant reflections on, and changes in, government approaches related to equitable development, the environmental crisis, citizen involvement, fair wages, and overconsumption. Almost three years into the pandemic, Asia-Pacific Red Cross Societies still deplored insufficient funding for operating costs and earmarked funding (McMurray, 2022).

Faced with these results, I ask: When an unprecedented crisis such as COVID-19—coupled with the climate crisis that disproportionately affects PICs—did not trigger the expected changes regarding the Paris principles (and beyond, deep societal changes), what will? At the heart of this question again lies the issue of incentives. In the concluding chapter of my thesis, I

⁴⁰² Interview with a Disaster management practitioner working in the Pacific, April 2022, English, online.

⁴⁰³ Interview with an anonymous source.

question the relevance of the aid effectiveness principles considering the results and analysis I presented throughout the thesis. I also summarize the contributions of this dissertation and identify avenues for future research.

Conclusion

According to both quantitative and qualitative studies, aid donors and recipients have either not implemented, or only partially or superficially implemented the Paris Declaration principles on aid effectiveness that they agreed on in 2005, specifically, the principles of ownership, alignment, and harmonization. The enlargement of the “aid effectiveness” agenda that became the “development effectiveness” agenda to include emerging donors, especially China, and to recognize the role of diverse actors in advancing development goals, including the private sector, had the effect of diluting the agenda’s potentially transformative objectives. National and local actors often remain at the periphery of the aid system despite increased engagement by aid organizations and states towards ownership and localization. Thus, the aid effectiveness agenda and the GPEDC face a legitimacy and relevancy crisis, at a time when development actors and states are failing to deliver Agenda 2030 to “leave no one behind”.

Despite the adoption of global development goals, relatively high volumes of aid per capita, and the existence of national development strategies, socioeconomic development in many SIDS and in the Pacific, in particular, remains disappointing. These results are due to a combination of factors, including an economy based on tourism and agriculture, two sectors highly impacted by climate change, modifications in food consumption habits and lifestyles that have created perfect conditions for the proliferation of non-communicable diseases, political instability, neopatrimonialism, clientelism and corruption scandals, and a lack of state capacity and resources. Climate change, in particular, impacts PICs more than other countries, although their emissions of greenhouse gases are among the lowest. In addition to geological hazards, climate-related disasters such as tropical cyclones have been more frequent and intense and they have had long-lasting, multidimensional impacts on people’s socioeconomic conditions, health, the environment, as well as national strategies and policies. Pacific leaders identified climate change as “the region’s single greatest threat to security” (PIFS, 2022b, p. 21). Disasters trigger emergency responses from international donors and organizations that provide financial, technical, and in-kind aid, and the attention and resources of international, national and local actors shift from development to emergency assistance. Thus, humanitarian aid and development aid are tightly intertwined in those countries. However, the management principles of development aid and humanitarian aid have mainly evolved separately.

In January 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 a public health emergency of international concern, before characterizing it as a pandemic one month later. In aid recipient countries, it caused massive repatriations of foreign personnel working for diplomatic missions, development agencies, governments, and INGOs. Observers expected that it would allow national and local actors to take the lead on development priorities and emergency responses, and force international actors, especially donors, to relinquish a significant degree of control over strategy and operations in aid recipient countries. Case studies are needed to assess the extent to which this has materialized in practice.

Based on the case study of Vanuatu, a SIDS and a PIC, I asked in this dissertation: To what extent are the Paris Declaration principles pertinent? I divided this research question into three sub-questions: (i) Why do various aid actors circumvent or misapply the three core principles of the Paris Declaration: ownership, alignment, and harmonization? (ii) What are the obstacles that hinder the reconciliation between humanitarian and development aid, and how can they be overcome? (iii) How did the COVID-19 pandemic hamper or accelerate the implementation of the Paris Declaration principles?

Although my initial approach was inductive, I was inspired by the neo-institutionalist approach to answer these questions. Indeed, my literature review revealed that analysts frequently associate the lack of implementation of the Paris Declaration to one or more of the following factors: political will, state capacities, and incentives. Incentives, defined as what actors hope to gain from complying or not complying with the rules, are central to a neo-institutionalist approach. They shape the choices actors make and the creation of institutions. A neo-institutionalist approach considers how and why these institutions, defined as formal and informal norms, emerge and change. By emphasizing the importance of considering history, context and a multitude of factors in a broad way, a neo-institutionalist approach enables consideration of various reasons for why states give aid, and why they give it the way they do, without viewing them as exclusively selfish. The decisions by individuals and organizations other than the state, and thus, institutions, are also shaped by diverse incentives. I therefore considered that aid actors were influenced by the environment and the context, at different levels, to act and make decisions about whether or not to implement the Paris Declaration. While political will refers to an actor's desire or intention, incentives encompass a wider variety of factors. Nonetheless, an exploration

of the concepts of political will and states capacities, two factors that analysts have frequently mentioned as reasons why states fail to honour their commitment towards the implementation of the Paris Declaration, a non-binding international agreement, completed my theoretical framework.

The next section presents a summary of the arguments I developed in response to these questions. Because ownership has remained one of the four principles that have been promoted by the GPEDC since 2011, which also include references to alignment and harmonization, these arguments are also relevant to analyses of the GPEDC development effectiveness principles and their implementation. I then provide suggestions on how donors and recipients could potentially contribute to improving aid effectiveness. Next, I formulate an answer to the overarching research question. Finally, I summarize my contributions and identify avenues for future research.

Summary of Research Results

In general, there is a lack of incentives for aid donors and recipients to implement development and humanitarian aid effectiveness principles as they are not part of binding agreements and do not trigger any penalties for non-compliance. Moreover, aid has continued to flow, and amounts have even increased globally despite the lack of implementation of effectiveness principles and the lack of significant progress in terms of socioeconomic development in some countries, such as in PICs. Even though aid actors have been aware of the aid system's flaws and have tried to improve it, this system is highly resilient to change (Lallau et al., 2018; Sims, 2023). In specific contexts, case studies help to identify to what extent, how and why these dynamics unfold.

Based on the case of Vanuatu, I asked the three sub-questions mentioned above. The first was: Why do various aid actors circumvent or misapply the three core principles of the Paris Declaration? I observed differences between donors: the government and NGOs recognized some donors, such as New Zealand, place a particular emphasis on meaningful partnerships; some participants mentioned cultural similarities with donors such as China helped with communication and collaboration; and several participants, especially those working in the

government system, expressed that multilateral donors were the most difficult to work with because of their lack of flexibility and cumbersome procedures.

However, overall, I found that the principles of ownership, alignment, and harmonization were implemented only superficially by the government and donors in Vanuatu. Poor results are explained, for the most part, by four powerful disincentives. The first disincentive relates to the accountability of donors and recipient government towards their respective domestic constituencies instead of towards most marginalized people living in the recipient country⁴⁰⁴. The second disincentive relates to maximizing access to donor funding for the government of Vanuatu, and ensuring allocated funds are spent according to their own priorities and timelines for donors. The third disincentive relates to geopolitical competition among donor countries. The fourth disincentive relates to history between donors and the recipient country, especially in terms of whether donors and aid organizations have previously bypassed the government. Although I focused on understanding rather than developing or testing a theory in this research, the importance of incentives and the potential mismatch between a formal norm and the local context both echo the neo-institutionalist approach. The fact that states consider their own interests as paramount echoes the realist perspective on international relations.

To answer this first sub-question, I studied each principle in turn, and the following results emerged. First, the government of Vanuatu produced national and sectoral strategies and plans, showing political will to respect the ownership principle. However, national development policy- and decision-making often ignores the voice of the broader civil society. This is partly due the government's lack of capacities and resources, and to the geography of Vanuatu. Also responsible is the absence of a united voice for NGOs who must compete for donor funds. This need for competition is a powerful counterincentive to collaboration. That said, having produced a national development strategy does not necessarily signify a deep respect for the tenets of the ownership principle. Maximizing donor funding, and relatedly, recurrent disasters, also act as incentives for the government to produce development strategies at the national and sectoral levels that encompass lots of priorities. These ambitious plans exceed Vanuatu's resources but

⁴⁰⁴ For donors, accountability to domestic constituencies should be understood here as accountability to the state system through institutionalized procedures rather than to citizens per se, as the average share of GNI spent on aid by OECD donor countries is very small, 0.36% in 2022, and elected representatives and citizens in donor countries are generally more concerned with national issues (OECD, 2023b).

allow the country to maximize donor funding. They also allow donors to spend their funds and to cherry-pick the priorities they want to finance. While there is the appearance of compliance, this process runs contrary to the ownership principle envisioned in the PD according to which national strategies should reflect the outcomes of wide consultation processes, and priorities should be hierarchized.

Second, despite the policies and processes set up by the government for donors to align with Vanuatu's priorities and procedures, especially since TC Pam in 2015, donors, in large part, continue to impose their own priorities, conditions, and ways of working and delivering aid. That they do so is not surprising, as they can choose from numerous options in the national development strategy. Further, the government's and local NGOs' general lack of capacities and resources, regardless of whether donors are approaching "capacity" as a prerequisite or as an objective of aid, and donors' fears of feeding corruption act as counterincentives for them to align on national systems and procedures. Indeed, donors and the recipient government each face pressures of their own, specific accountability requirements towards their domestic constituencies that involve different processes and systems, an additional counterincentive preventing alignment. This said, donors have failed to strengthen Vanuatu's "capacities", thereby revealing their own lack of capacity.

Third, there is only partial harmonization among donors. While many donors usually make sure their activities and programmes do not overlap or even that they complement each other, they rarely harmonize their procedures with each other. Thus, Vanuatu's administration must adapt to each donor's procedures, which weighs on its already stretched human resources. Moreover, China is excluded from this harmonization process, both by China's own choice and because traditional donors keep their Chinese counterparts at distance. The main counterincentives behind harmonization shortfalls are threefold: (i) geopolitical competition in the region between China and traditional donors, (ii) Vanuatu's historical context and experience (especially with past disasters) that makes the government cautious of donors potentially bypassing the state or imposing their priorities and to negotiate bilaterally with donors, and (iii) donors' and the recipient's respective accountability requirements. Indeed, there seems to be a trade-off for donors between increased aid effectiveness through the harmonization of their procedures and the need to maintain a high level of accountability to their citizens.

As such, ultimately the principles are respected only superficially by the government and by donors. Disincentives that weigh aid actors play an important part beyond the lack of political will and weak government capacities. Overall, the technical approach to aid adopted by donors, the recipient government, and NGOs, but also the Paris Declaration and the GPEDC, is often at odds with aid's developmental and political dimensions. This mismatch ensures that the status quo remains favorable to government elites and their constituencies, as well as traditional and emerging powers in the region, to the detriment of the local civil society and the poor.

After drawing conclusions on the implementation of aid effectiveness principles during “peace time”, that is, not specifically during or immediately after an emergency, as an answer to the first sub-question, I argued that humanitarian assistance and development have to be studied in an integrated way as part of my answer to the second sub-question: What are the obstacles that hinder the reconciliation between humanitarian and development aid, and how can they be overcome? Indeed, these two types of assistance are linked both conceptually and in practice in Vanuatu. They positively and negatively impact each other in various ways, and they present similar challenges. For instance, TC Pam in 2015 constituted a critical juncture because it was a source of disruption and change in terms of aid management and attitudes towards aid. It led to the development of a new aid management policy and an NGO policy, and the government became wary of donors who had bypassed government processes. Yet, two main obstacles still prevent the reconciliation of development and humanitarian assistance. The first is the availability and attractiveness of humanitarian aid for both aid donors and recipients. The second is the long-time, traditional separation of these two forms of assistance which has meant that management principles, funding, strategies, implementation, and sometimes funding structures are distinct. More flexible funding and emphasis on long-term partnerships and programmes that fully integrate local knowledge and practices are needed to bridge the gap between humanitarian aid and development assistance, while respecting the recipient country's leadership. A first step in this direction would be to end the artificial division between the management principles of humanitarian aid and those of development assistance.

With the third sub-question, I focused on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic which started at the beginning of this research project: How did the COVID-19 pandemic hamper or accelerate the implementation of the Paris Declaration principles? When studying the impacts of

a specific dual crisis in the country, namely the COVID-19 pandemic and TC Harold that struck Vanuatu in April 2020, results were in line with what I found during “peace time” (Chapters 4–7) and when analyzing why humanitarian aid and development aid still operated as “two solitudes” (Chapter 8). When assessing whether aid effectiveness principles were applied in emergency contexts, I argued that the dual crisis accelerated pre-existing trends and incentives regarding (the lack of) ownership, alignment and harmonization. Many scholars, analysts and development practitioners hoped that the COVID-19 pandemic could indirectly trigger a leap forward in aid ownership/localization in development and humanitarian terms respectively. By causing massive repatriations of foreign staff, COVID-19 indeed created space for national and local actors to take a greater part in the humanitarian response and recovery phases that followed TC Harold and the threat of COVID-19. However, this “forced” localization and alignment led to modest and short-lived progress. For instance, in an unprecedented context, donors prioritized funding to international organizations and their national branches to ensure accountability on their own terms, despite rhetoric favourable to localization. Moreover, the response and early recovery were slow, even slower than if international actors had been present in Vanuatu, according to some interviewees. That said, the counterfactual situation cannot be analyzed. In other words, more ownership meant that the response and early recovery were often less timely. Nonetheless, the fact that the response relied on national and local responders and locally available means, however limited, made an important difference at the symbolic level: the country owned both successes and flaws and could learn from them. There was a general sense among interviewees that it was ultimately better that the country led its own response and recovery process, even though donors still provided financial, material, and technical support from afar. In the next section, I outline key takeaways for aid donors and recipients that stood out from the data.

Key Takeaways for Donors and Recipient States

Throughout the thesis, I identified several areas that donor and recipient states should pay more attention to when trying to improve aid effectiveness. First, it is important to fund local, grassroots organizations to allow them to strengthen their institutional capacity and advocate for solutions to issues they identify to their elected representatives. Funding should help cover organizational costs for multi-year periods to recruit and train staff, to formulate strategies and to implement them. However, funding recipient states and local organizations is not a panacea.

Indeed, these entities can design and implement strategies that can harm marginalized communities. If this happened, the ownership principle would clash with the overarching development principle of “leave no one behind” (Brown, forthcoming). Indeed, the case of Vanuatu confirms that national ownership is “a polite fiction” as in-country aid actors have multiple, and sometimes diverging, interests, values, and objectives (Brown, forthcoming). Funding diverse local and national actors could be a way to circumvent the question of whether it is the role of donors to try and influence recipient governments regarding the accountability towards their citizens and the fight against corruption, in other terms, a way to “bring politics back in” (Booth, 2012).

Second, regardless of the type of organization, it is important for donors and recipient states to provide long-term, predictable yet flexible funding so that in countries such as Vanuatu the state and organizations are able to implement long-term strategies adapted to development timeframes and to redirect funding when a disaster strikes. Disaster management and humanitarian action are not separate from development. Disaster management and humanitarian assistance policies and programmes should be fully integrated with development strategies and programmes to reflect their links in practice and provide more effective aid.

Third, the aid effectiveness agenda would benefit from donors and recipient states educating their own domestic constituencies about aid and especially how accountability requirements can represent an arduous task for some aid recipient governments and small organizations. They might argue that accountability requirements need to be lighter or common to several donors, to the benefit of aid effectiveness.

Fourth, the aid effectiveness agenda would benefit from donors and recipient states searching for better coherence among their strategies and policies. The objectives of donor trade policies and development policies, for instance, are sometimes contradictory. That said, many scholars are skeptical about the potential of integrating stand-alone donor development agencies into broader foreign affairs departments, as several donor countries chose to do in recent years (Calleja et al., 2016). Other avenues for increased coherence are yet to be explored.

Fifth, aid effectiveness would benefit from more investment from donors in long-term relations with national and local organizations. Face-to-face interactions and long-term

engagement are crucial for building trust and achieving meaningful, sustainable results in the Pacific and in other regions (e.g., Borter & Malik, 2023; Kiste, 1995). In aid recipient countries where political instability is high, donors should pay particular attention to building long-term partnerships at the technical and operational level with civil servants. For donors, building trust implies abandoning paternalistic attitudes and to stop considering PICs and SIDS solely as victims of various forces, including geopolitical forces dominated by regional powers. Collaboration also means that observers and analysts should monitor and analyze nationalist attitudes of some aid recipient states in order to avoid falling into the “us” versus “them” trap.

Finally, this research confirmed that actors other than the state have a crucial role to play in furthering the aid effectiveness agenda. State ownership is not a synonym for national ownership. Aid actors have diverse conceptions of ownership and incentives weigh on them at the individual and organizational levels, from small, grassroots organizations to large donor agencies. Focusing on the objective to “leave no one behind” and “emancipatory ownership” would be a way to de-centre thinking from the state, elites, and formal institutions to a diversity of actors and factors (Brown, forthcoming), and to unite humanitarian aid and development. Aid actors might reflect on how to apply the principle of “leave no one behind” in practice, based on lessons learnt from the implementation of the aid effectiveness agenda.

The above elements are not new, but they are worth noting as they confirm previous and emerging research and provide some avenues to improve the management of aid. Implementing them is not easy and requires political will and resources, including time, funding, and human resources. States, and donor states in particular, would need to relinquish some control over funding and decision-making, even if they ultimately remain accountable to their domestic constituencies. Citizens of donor countries might oppose looser or more flexible accountability mechanisms, especially in times of economic crisis. Nonetheless, the COVID-19 pandemic and the worsening climate crisis have brought attention to global public goods, such as the environment and public health, which encourages states and their citizens to think beyond national borders. Collaboration in the form of, for instance, transnational movements and activism, as well as joint initiatives between researchers, grassroots organizations and aid implementers, would also be key to bringing about positive change in how development funding is delivered by joining forces to develop a nuanced understanding of development issues and

advocate for best practices. In the next section, I discuss the relevance of the aid effectiveness principles based on the responses to the three research sub-questions.

Assessing the Relevance of the Aid Effectiveness Principles

Based on the literature, discussions with participants and observations presented in Chapters 4 to 9, the principles themselves are still relevant and laudable. That was also the main takeaway of the International Research Conference on Aid Effectiveness held in November 2022 where, for instance, Gisselquist et al. (2023a) presented a paper in which they concluded that “the main value of the effectiveness principles does not lie in whether global impact can be demonstrated empirically [but] in the establishment of key normative commitments to global partnerships in support of effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels” (Gisselquist et al., 2023b, para. 18). In other words, *how* various aid, development and humanitarian actors “do” development, cooperation and foreign aid is crucial. Similarly, a survey conducted by Calleja and Cichocka (2022) among donor and recipient countries revealed that participants find that the development effectiveness agenda is relevant. In that sense, the principles constitute a valid ideal but the failure of actors to implement them in a way that is contextually adapted and relevant is problematic.

Some scholars, however, argue that the Paris Declaration principles are not relevant in and of themselves because they have proven to be useless in triggering transformative change. For instance, they do not “help foment such things as ‘bottom-up’ policy-making” and “help improve mechanisms of developing authentic national development strategies” (Borter & Malik, 2023, p. 254). O’Neill (personal presentation, July 24, 2023) concluded that the ownership principle was the problem because it was based on two flawed assumptions: donor altruism and the fact that recipients have strong capacities. However, ultimately it is how aid actors apply the principles that has the potential for making a difference, not the existence of the principles themselves. Borter and Malik (2023) and O’Neill (personal presentation, July 24, 2023) agree that donors are mainly responsible for their lack of application. In line with other scholars, however, I found that donors and recipients share responsibility, as aid and aid relationships are negotiated and evolve based on diverse factors and incentives (Sims, 2023; Swedlund, 2017).

Nonetheless, power imbalances remain as donors possess the funds and local organizations struggle to survive. Moreover, as Sims (2023) argues,

the donor blithely assumes, since its intervention has been determined to be good for the country, that this should be sufficient motivation for everyone involved. That such an assumption might be wrong, and that poorly paid nationals, sensitive to foreign penetrations, have a whole other world of motivations driving their behavior, is rarely considered. (Sims, 2023, pp. 364–365).

As aid actors neglect these power imbalances and avoid political discussions, “new” development and humanitarian principles and concepts emerge but the way of tackling these inequalities and monitoring progress does not; it remains mainly technical. For instance, ownership, sovereignty, and localization all refer to the idea that national and local actors are the best placed to identify and respond to their challenges. In that sense, instead of regularly renaming these agendas and principles, more research is still needed to understand why the implementation of these agendas keep failing, to examine counterincentives and ultimately make progress on building more balanced relationships between development actors.

To remain relevant, the aid effectiveness agenda needs to incorporate the lessons learnt from decades of research on the obstacles to its implementation. These obstacles include the following: a lack of strong political will and leadership to implement the agenda and to place ownership back at the center, a lack of capacities and resources on both sides of the aid relationship, and strong incentives that weigh on aid actors, as explained in this research. Moreover, integrating reflections on the effectiveness of development and humanitarian aid should ultimately enhance effectiveness by promoting a holistic vision of aid. Yet, according to several analysts, the last GPEDC high-level meeting in December 2022 did not provide satisfactory answers to the barriers to change, including a lack of political commitment and counterincentives, nor did it set a clear action path to fully implement the development effectiveness agenda (Calleja, 2022; Casadevall Bellès & Calleja, 2023; Glennie, 2022). Indeed, the outcome document reaffirms the importance of the principles and overall suggests a

“business-as-usual” approach. In the final section, I summarize my contributions and I further identify paths for future research.

Contributions

At the theoretical level, this thesis proposed combining three concepts, political will, state capacity, and incentives, to analyze the application, or lack thereof, of non-binding international agreements such as the Paris Declaration. However, since each context is different and this research was both confirmatory and exploratory, I based my arguments primarily on the data collected instead of trying to validate or invalidate a theory or a hypothesis. The results unveiled that although political will, as well as donor and recipient state capacities, play a role in how aid effectiveness principles are implemented, a major obstacle to the application of the principles for aid actors is the existence of powerful counterincentives. This result confirms the importance of these incentives as highlighted in previous research (e.g., Borter & Malik, 2023; Brown, 2017; Jerve, 2002), and of considering the perspectives of recipient states and organizations and donors simultaneously (Borter & Malik, 2023). More broadly, it implies, as argued by many scholars, that the aid effectiveness principles need to be adapted to each context and unequal power relations undermine them. For instance, to what extent does a national development strategy represent the needs of the most marginalized, or instead represent the view of most powerful actors in the country (Brown, forthcoming)? The case of Vanuatu confirms that priorities as defined by the state do not always match priorities as identified by local organizations. More broadly, it confirms the need to keep questioning ownership in conceptual and practical terms.

Moreover, this thesis makes an original contribution by tracing the parallel evolution of aid effectiveness principles and the principles governing humanitarian aid. These two sets of principles have traditionally been studied separately, even after the emergence of the humanitarian-development nexus in research and practice. This thesis confirms that humanitarian aid and development are inseparable in practice as they impact one another in multiple ways, and from the perspective of end recipients they are sometimes indistinguishable (e.g., Olivier de Sardan, 2011). This justifies a nexus approach (Mosel & Levine, 2014; Paul, 2019). However, my research goes further by shedding light on the conceptual similarities between these two sets of principles and their common challenges. Conceptually, both humanitarian and development frameworks emphasize the need for ownership and leadership by national and local actors,

transparency and accountability from aid actors, as well as coordination, for increased efficiency and effectiveness. In terms of challenges, ownership and localization are vague concepts, both sets of principles place the emphasis on locally led decision-making processes and implementation but still a tiny fraction of funds reaches local actors, and unequal power relationships mean aid is often donor-driven. This thesis also suggests ways forward to reconcile these two types of aid. The first is by considering the management principles of long-term aid and humanitarian assistance together. The second is by providing flexible funding to recipient states and organizations. The third is by investing in long-term relationships. These contributions are relevant for global policymaking as well as future research in countries affected by sudden or protracted crises such as conflict or climate-induced disasters, including in SIDS.

At the methodological level, adopting an inductive approach allowed me to discover unexpected lines of enquiries, such as when several participants mentioned an increased sense of sometimes exclusive national pride in Vanuatu. This kind of unanticipated results confirms the relevance of keeping an open mind, especially at the beginning of a research project that has an exploratory dimension, to allow any relevant issue, theme, or trend to emerge on a topic of interest (Blais & Martineau, 2006). Studying a single case allowed me to produce an in-depth analysis that accounted for diverse perspectives. This research also offered reflections on methodology and methods in social sciences as it is based on a mix of interviews conducted remotely and in-person. In line with previous studies, I found that both present challenges and advantages, and their relevance depends on many factors, including whether interviewees have the technological means and knowledge to participate in an online interview, and whether the data needed requires face-to-face interaction (O'Connor & Madge, 2017). For instance, remote interviewing allows for great discretion for participants and allows the researcher to reduce their environmental footprint, which brings coherence to a research project focused on countries particularly vulnerable to climate change.

At the empirical level, this thesis contributes to advancing understandings of foreign aid in a specific context and follows a growing number of case studies (e.g., Bergamaschi et al., 2007; Borter & Malik, 2023; Brown, 2017; Dijkstra, 2011; Hasselskog et al., 2023; Ravaoharinirina, 2018; Teshome & Hoebink, 2018). It deepens an understanding of foreign aid dynamics at the national level, including how local, national, and international actors perceive

and interact with one another according to the respective incentives weighing on them. In particular, this research first confirms that foreign aid should not be considered in isolation from other contemporary, and even historical, issues (e.g., Borter and Malik, 2023). In the case of Vanuatu, the country's experience with foreign assistance, especially since TC Pam in 2015, has had a long-lasting impact on its relationship with donors and on national policies. Geostrategic competition between traditional donors and China has also had an impact on development and humanitarian action in the country. The latter result answers the call, and suggests the need, for pragmatism. There is a need, as Gulrajani (2023) wrote, for "tracking possible trade-offs, especially among development partners for whom development effectiveness ambitions have a twenty-year history and where formal commitments have previously been made" to ensure improving socioeconomic conditions of the most marginalized in an effective manner remains the ultimate objective of development (para. 8).

Second, this research confirms that aid effectiveness principles are sometimes only superficially respected by donors and recipient countries (Sims, 2023). It also confirms that obtaining such a result and understanding why this is so requires in-depth qualitative analyses. For instance, even though the governments of Mali, Ghana and Kenya had development strategies in place, they were too broad, and donors could choose to fund the priorities that suited their own agendas while knowing they would be able to easily justify alignment with the strategies (Borter & Malik, 2023; Brown, 2017). The principles can also clash (Borter & Malik, 2023; Sims, 2023; Woll, 2008). In Vanuatu, for instance, donor harmonization has not always been in the country's best interest. The country's strategy to play off donors to its advantage shows how the principle of ownership clashes with harmonization. Moreover, as demonstrated in this research, more ownership does not systematically mean aid is more effective. This is in line with other authors who question the underlying causal mechanisms of the Paris Declaration, which assumes that respecting the principles invariably leads to positive outcomes (e.g., Dijkstra, 2011). However, regardless of aid effectiveness, the fact that the country and local responders "own" the response, including its flaws and mistakes, was paramount for people interviewed in Vanuatu. This finding sheds a new light on the ownership principle. For Vanuatu, and perhaps other countries, ownership does not only mean owning its development strategies, but also means owning its mistakes and learning process.

Third, this research reveals that the restriction of movement of people and goods, like the ones caused by the COVID-19 crisis, are not constraints powerful enough to trigger a shift in how development cooperation and humanitarian action operate. Non-binding mechanisms, such as the Paris Declaration or the Grand Bargain, remain resistant to change, just like the aid system as a whole (Laissus-Benoist & Lallau, 2017). Contrary to what analysts had hoped for (e.g., Cornish, 2020c), even with closed borders there was no significant power rebalancing to the benefit of local actors. Although the pandemic created unprecedented opportunities and some local organizations received funding for the first time, overall donors were risk-averse and directed funds to international organizations that they had previously funded or that they perceived were able to manage large funding and fulfil the associated accountability requirements. Thus, I contribute to “exploring the systems of exclusion keeping local actors out of the global political economy of aid” (Scott, 2022, p. 185).

Finally, this research contributes to understanding aid and cooperation dynamics in Vanuatu. Previous research on international cooperation, development, and humanitarian action in the country had focused on aid and growth (Jayaraman & Ward, 2006), policy processes and the influence of donors and foreign development experts (Aiafi, 2017; Hochet, 2016), disaster risk reduction, management, response, and impacts (Bubb & Le Dé, 2022; Calandra, 2020; Dornan & Cain, 2015; Hallwright & Handmer, 2021; Le Dé et al., 2018; Marto et al., 2018; Moorehead, 2015; Nalau et al., 2017; Vachette, 2016), corruption (Nimbtik, 2016), and more recently on the impact of COVID-19 (Connell & Taulealo, 2021; Scheyvens & Movono, 2020; Steenbergen et al., 2020; Tapo et al., 2021). Other studies focused on development in one or more PICs or with a regional lens, especially on the topic of climate change and development (Lesa, 2020; Nand & Bardsley, 2020). Other scholars focused on the behaviour, aid policies and programming of the main regional donors, especially Australia and New Zealand (e.g., Taylor & Middleby, 2023; Wood & Nicholls, 2021). Much has been written as well about China in the Pacific, about geopolitical competition in the region and its impacts on development (Dornan & Brant, 2014; Fache et al., 2021; Jacobs, 2023; Mohamed-Gaillard, 2012; Schmaljohann & Prizzon, 2015; Smith, 2021; Tarte, 2022; Taylor, 2023; Zhang, 2022). By looking at aid effectiveness, this multidisciplinary research provides an original contribution to this existing literature on aid, development, cooperation, humanitarian action, politics, and geopolitics in Vanuatu and in the Pacific region.

Indeed, my research approached aid effectiveness in Vanuatu from the perspective of donors *and* recipient national and local entities. It considered how aid is closely related to domestic, regional, and global politics and issues. Aid issues are also embedded in historical and often postcolonial contexts, including in PICs. In particular, whereas Hochet (2015) argued that a lack of state capacity was the main problem for aid effectiveness in Vanuatu, I found this to be a major factor, but not as important as the existence of counterincentives. This result is in line with Taylor and Middleby's (2023) study of aid to the Pacific, in which they argue that donors are driven by two powerful incentives, namely, their desire for control over aid and for visibility. My research, however, argues that the superficial implementation of the aid effectiveness principles is primarily due to incentives on both sides of the aid relationship.

More broadly, this thesis contributes to the literature on aid, development cooperation, disasters, and the impacts of COVID-19 in PICs and SIDS. Indeed, although each PIC presents different political, socioeconomic, cultural, historical, and geographical characteristics, some of them share commonalities with Vanuatu, such as exposure to natural hazards and climate change, indebtedness, political instability, significant levels of ODA, complex relations with former colonizers and regional powers, and a marginal position on the global stage. Vanuatu is also considered a SIDS, and this group of countries has repeatedly reaffirmed their "inherent and particular vulnerabilities, including [their] small size, remoteness, narrow resource and export base, and exposure to exogenous economic, social and environmental shocks" (Governments of SIDS, 2023, para. 1). Thus, the results found in the case of Vanuatu could be carefully considered in other PICs or SIDS, or when studying the Pacific as a region, or, more broadly, when studying islands or archipelagos as part of the broader field of island studies. Beyond island countries and territories, Vanuatu shares characteristics with other aid recipient countries vulnerable to disasters. The present research also offers potentially useful results beyond the Global North/Global South vision of development by offering insights on incentives weighing on actors and how policies could be implemented more effectively in all countries, as summarized earlier in this conclusion.

Finally, at the global policy level, this research contributes to debates around the relevance of aid and the aid effectiveness agenda as they are currently conceived and implemented. Although many countries and aid organizations consider the aid effectiveness

principles relevant, the inability of actors to implement them raises fundamental questions about the enduring unequal power relationships and the need to rethink aid as but one means of “leaving no one behind”. Thus, this research feeds the debate on the future of aid and international aid and development policies, frameworks, and organizations. In the final section, I indicate the main limitations of this research, from which I derive avenues for future research, some of which are also outlined below.

Limitations and Future Research

This thesis does not, however, study aid effectiveness at the micro level, from the broader perspective of citizens of the aid recipient country. Nor does it examine the factors leading up to the success or failure of specific aid projects. These limitations could be addressed in future research endeavors. Literature on the increased use by donors of private contractors, usually based in donor countries, to manage and implement their long-term programmes is also quite scarce.

This research does not study the macro level either, especially the relevance of the joint UNDP-OECD collaboration underpinning GPEDC as the institution in charge of promoting aid effectiveness principles and monitoring their implementation. As Atwood et al. (2021) wrote, the GPEDC “is a model worthy of in-depth study. ... that requires the expenditure of great effort” (p. 383). In that sense, my research does not address concerns around the extent to which the GPEDC’s organizational structure benefits the aid effectiveness agenda. Nor does it address the extent to which it can support transformational change in terms of rebalancing power relationships. These questions could guide upcoming research efforts, as literature on this topic is incipient (e.g., Taggart, 2022).

Incentives could also be studied further and in other contexts to identify to what extent it is possible to shift them and how, at the individual and organizational levels, to achieve greater aid effectiveness. Indeed, if a global pandemic did not constitute an incentive powerful enough to shift aid management practices, it is hard to imagine what will. The pandemic proved that more coherence was needed between trade agendas and the global health and development agenda, a topic that is not new but deserves renewed attention. More coherence is also needed between immigration and development policies. For instance, in the Pacific more research is needed on

the consequences of seasonal worker programs for Pacific islanders set up by Australia and New Zealand, two major aid providers in the region, on economic and development benefits, on family structures and social structures in Pacific societies, and on available qualified human resources in Pacific countries.

As mentioned in the previous section, the results presented here could be applicable to other countries exposed to disasters, especially climate-related ones, including, but not limited to, other PICs and SIDS. That said, PICs and SIDS are diverse, and researchers might observe different results, for instance, in comparatively large, resource-rich countries like Papua New Guinea, or in fragile states such as Haiti. Like other SIDS and countries in general, Vanuatu is characterized by high political instability, which in some cases has undermined humanitarian assistance, recovery and development (Palatino, 2023; *Reuters*, 2023). Yet this instability has also allowed democracy to subsist (Veenendal & Corbett, 2020). Future research could explore how donors navigate this instability and how to best support a country where the government keeps changing.

Finally, PICs and SIDS have shown agency in a world where they have traditionally had little influence, and more research is still needed on these countries and by people from SIDS. Also, the “Indo-Pacific” as a region has garnered renewed attention from major regional and world powers since 2015. Although China’s aid to the region has declined since 2016 (Lowy Institute, n.d.), Kiste’s (1995) statement that China “is only a very minor aid donor and has no significant role in the area” is no longer accurate (p. 56). To counter China’s presence, the U.S. have launched several initiatives and hosted the first U.S.-Pacific Islands Summit in 2022 (Brown et al., 2022). And Australia placed statecraft and its own national interest at the heart of its 2023 international development policy (Wood, 2023); in the Pacific, it also refocused its aid on infrastructure and maintained budget support, although increasingly via loans (Dayant, 2023). How Pacific states and islanders perceive and use this attention, frame their identities, and advance their concerns, especially in relation with the region’s *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent* and the fight against climate change, would benefit from further research.

One of the platforms SIDS use to make their voices heard are the UN International Conferences on SIDS. The fourth one (SIDS4) will be held in May 2024 and it promises “a paradigm shift” (Praia Declaration, 2023, p. 5) and a new 10-year Programme of Action with “a

monitoring and evaluation framework, with clear targets and indicators” (Praia Declaration, 2023, p. 15). Research will be needed to analyze the outcome of this conference, the transformative potential of new commitments, and their implementation. The Pacific preparatory meeting ahead of SIDS4 revealed that despite their strengths and meagre progress in some areas, PICs face enduring challenges, including related to climate change, ocean preservation, non-communicable diseases, lack of data, debt, and accessibility and availability of funds (Nuku‘alofa Outcome Document, 2023). COVID-19 has constituted an additional challenge. The interregional preparatory meeting echoes the preoccupations of Pacific SIDS (Praia Declaration, 2023). Two important topics will also feature on the agenda. First, the establishment of a vulnerability index that would include criteria beyond income status for SIDS. A country’s access to low-cost funding would be based on this index. Second, the establishment of a loss and damage fund that would contribute to compensate low-emitting countries for the damages provoked by high-emitters. After arduous negotiations, especially on who would host the fund and who would contribute to it, the fund might become reality (Worley, 2023). Research will be needed to analyze these negotiations, these new strategies and mechanisms as well as how they contribute to environmental and social justice.

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Appendix A: Initial Contact Email

Dear [Interlocutor's name],

I am a doctoral student at the School of International Development and Global Studies at the University of Ottawa (Canada) and am currently conducting research on development assistance in Vanuatu. I am writing to ask if you would be willing to participate in an interview as part of this research on a voluntary basis.

Enclosed is a consent form that provides details about the project, including the purpose of the study, foreseen results, examples of questions I may ask you, and provisions to respect any confidentiality requirements you may have. The interview would normally last between 45 and 60 minutes and would take place at a time and place convenient for you, in accordance with the [essential protective measures against the novel coronavirus as set out by the World Health Organization](#) and the [guidelines of the Government of Vanuatu](#).

I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have about the research or the conduct of the interview. I am available by phone at [phone number] (Canada) / [phone number] (Vanuatu) or by email at [email address].

I look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,

Morgane Rosier

Candidate au doctorat | Ph.D. Candidate

École de développement international et mondialisation | School of International Development and Global Studies

Université d'Ottawa | University of Ottawa

[email address]

Tel: [phone number] (Canada) / [phone number] (Vanuatu)

[The introductory email was available in English, French and Bislama.]

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Government/state system

- The national development plan was adopted in 2016. How was this strategy designed? Which stakeholders were consulted and how?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the strategy and the implementation of development programs? What opportunities and challenges do you identify?

Ownership

- The country receives development assistance from its international partners. How would you qualify the relationship with these partners? How much influence do you think donors have on the definition of development priorities/policies?
- How is the national development strategy influenced by international organizations (OECD, UN, ...), civil society, external experts/consultants or research?

Alignment

- How do donor development priorities align with government priorities? How do you explain this?
- How does the aid received align with the identified needs in terms of quantity, nature of aid, etc.?

Harmonization

- How do you perceive the coordination efforts among donors to simplify their procedures or to be complementary in their objectives? Is this satisfactory for the Government?

Impact of Harold and COVID-19

- How did TC Harold and the COVID-19 pandemic affect the development strategy and/or its implementation?
- How have they affected the relationship with government partners (donors, civil society, private sector, etc.)?
- [Ownership] What role and place have donors had in setting priorities/policies for emergency/humanitarian response and recovery?
- [Ownership] How were other actors involved (international organizations, civil society, private sector, experts, research, ...)?
- [Alignment] How do donor priorities for response and recovery align with government priorities?
- [Alignment] How does the aid received align with the identified needs in terms of quantity, nature of aid, etc.?
- [Harmonization] You preferred to discuss bilaterally with donors following the needs assessment in terms of post-Harold and post-COVID-19 recovery: how do you explain this choice?
- [Harmonization] How do you perceive the coordination efforts among donors to simplify their procedures or to be complementary in their objectives? Is this satisfactory for the Government?

Humanitarian-Development Nexus

There are calls and initiatives around building a “humanitarian-development nexus” to bring these two worlds together. Notably, during a crisis, one seeks to integrate the notion of sustainability even during the emergency response and vice versa one seeks to reduce vulnerabilities during development actions: how did the government take this into account during the double response to Harold and COVID-19? What are the difficulties in implementing this “nexus”?

Additional questions

- Have you heard of the Global Partnership for effective development cooperation? Have you heard of the 2005 Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness?
- How unresolved problems could be addressed or minimized in the future?
- Are you aware of other pertinent issues that were not mentioned in this interview?
- Do you have an opinion about what areas of disasters will require further attention by practitioners in the future?

Donors

- How much funding does your organization receive, in what form (financial, material, technical), and how is it allocated?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the strategy and implementation of development programs? What opportunities and challenges do you identify?
- How would you characterize the working relationship your organization has with the government of Vanuatu and with other development partners (NGOs, development agencies, etc.)?

Ownership

- How does the definition of the national development strategy or other strategies (e.g., sectoral) incorporate your point of view? Involvement in NSDP
- How do you perceive the government’s development priorities?

Alignment

- How are your organization’s development priorities in Vanuatu defined?

Harmonization

- What platforms for dialogue with government and other development partners do you have? Are you satisfied with them?
- In particular, what platforms for dialogue with other donors do you have? Are you satisfied with them?
- How is coordination going with other donors and actors in terms of procedures, evaluations, resources, etc.?

Impact of Harold and COVID-19

- How have TC Harold and the COVID-19 pandemic affected your organization’s strategy and/or its implementation?
 - How have they affected the relationship with the government and other development partners?
 - [Ownership] What role and place have donors had in setting priorities/policies for emergency/humanitarian response and recovery?
-

-
- [Ownership] How were other actors involved (international organizations, civil society, private sector, experts, research, ...)?
 - [Alignment] How do donor and government priorities for response and recovery are articulated with each other/fit together?
 - [Harmonization] The government preferred to discuss bilaterally with donors following the needs assessment in terms of post-Harold and post-COVID-19 recovery: how did you experience it? Did it complicate coordination, or in the contrary did it help matching needs with resources, etc.?
 - [Harmonization] How did you perceive donor coordination? Have you agreed with other funders to simplify procedures, needs assessments, etc.? Have you coordinated with each other to complement each other in your objectives (sectoral, geographic, etc.)? Is this satisfactory?

Humanitarian-Development Nexus

There are calls and initiatives around building a “humanitarian-development nexus” to bring these two worlds together. Notably, during a crisis, one seeks to integrate the notion of sustainability even during the emergency response and vice versa one seeks to reduce vulnerabilities during development actions: how did your organization take this into account during the double response to Harold and COVID-19? What are the difficulties in implementing this “nexus”?

Additional questions

- Have you heard of the Global Partnership for effective development cooperation? Have you heard of the 2005 Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness?
- How unresolved problems could be addressed or minimized in the future?
- Are you aware of other pertinent issues that were not mentioned in this interview?
- Do you have an opinion about what areas of disasters will require further attention by practitioners in the future?

NGOs and Development Agencies

- What are your organization’s development priorities in Vanuatu? How are these priorities defined?
- What is your organization’s budget, in what form (financial, material, technical) and how are funds received/allocated?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the strategy and implementation of development programs? What opportunities and challenges do you identify?
- How would you characterize the working relationships your organization has with the government of Vanuatu and with other development partners (donors, other NGOs, etc.)?

Ownership

- What platforms for dialogue with the government and other development partners do you have? Are you satisfied with them?
- How does the definition of the national development strategy or other strategies (e.g., sectoral) incorporate your views?
- How do you perceive the government’s development priorities?

Alignment

- How do you perceive the priorities of donors versus government’s versus civil society’s?
-

How does the aid received align with the identified needs in terms of quantity, nature of aid, etc.?

Harmonization

How do you perceive donor coordination (in terms of procedures, joint evaluations, etc.)?

Impact of Harold and COVID-19

How have TC Harold and the COVID-19 pandemic affected your organization’s strategy and/or implementation?

How have they affected the relationship with the government and other development partners?

[Appropriation] How do you perceive the government’s priorities in terms of response?

[Appropriation] What role and place have NGOs/agencies had in setting priorities/policies for emergency/humanitarian response and recovery?

[Appropriation] How were other actors involved (international organizations, civil society, private sector, experts, research, ...)?

[Alignment] How does the aid received align with the identified needs in terms of quantity, nature of aid, etc.?

Humanitarian-Development Nexus

There are calls and initiatives around building a “humanitarian-development nexus” to bring these two worlds together. Notably, during a crisis, one seeks to integrate the notion of sustainability even during the emergency response and vice versa one seeks to reduce vulnerabilities during development actions: how did your organization take this into account during the double response to Harold and COVID-19? What are the difficulties in implementing this “nexus”?

Additional questions

Have you heard of the Global Partnership for effective development cooperation? Have you heard of the 2005 Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness?

How unresolved problems could be addressed or minimized in the future?

Are you aware of other pertinent issues that were not mentioned in this interview?

Do you have an opinion about what areas of disasters will require further attention by practitioners in the future?

Private Sector

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the strategy and implementation of development programs? What opportunities and challenges do you identify?

How would you characterize your organization’s working relationship with the government of Vanuatu?

What platforms for dialogue with the government and other development partners do you have? Are you satisfied with them?

Ownership

What place is reserved for the private sector in the definition and implementation of the country’s development strategies? What place or role do you think it should play?

How did you participate in the definition of the national development strategy or other strategies (e.g., sectoral)?

How do you perceive the government’s development priorities? Are the government’s development priorities consistent with your analysis?

Alignment

How does the aid received align with the identified needs in terms of quantity, nature of aid, etc.?

Impact of Harold and COVID-19

How have TC Harold and the Covid-19 pandemic affected your strategy and/or its implementation?

How have they affected your organization’s relationship with government?

[Ownership] What role and place has the private sector had in defining emergency/humanitarian response and recovery priorities/policies? What place or role do you think it should play?

[Ownership] Are the government’s priorities in terms of response consistent with your analysis?

[Ownership] How were other actors involved (international organizations, civil society, private sector, experts, research, ...)?

[Alignment] How does the aid received align with the identified needs in terms of quantity, nature of aid, etc.?

Humanitarian-Development Nexus

There are calls and initiatives around building a “humanitarian-development nexus” to bring these two worlds together. Notably, during a crisis, one seeks to integrate the notion of sustainability even during the emergency response and vice versa one seeks to reduce vulnerabilities during development actions: How was this taken into account in the dual response to Harold and COVID-19? What are the difficulties related to the implementation of this “nexus”?

Additional questions

How unresolved problems could be addressed or minimized in the future?

Are you aware of other pertinent issues that were not mentioned in this interview?

Do you have an opinion about what areas of disasters will require further attention by practitioners in the future?

[Interview questions were available in English, French and Bislama.]

Appendix C: Observation Grid

Type d'information	Questions utiles	Description/notes
Contenu	Contributions critiques ? Mention de la Déclaration de Paris, des <i>meetings</i> d'Accra, de Busan, de Mexico, de Nairobi ? Quels enjeux/sujets mis en avant ? Quelles barrières identifiées à l'efficacité de l'aide ? Mention de l'aide humanitaire ? Du lien humanitaire-développement ? Quel impact de la COVID-19 sur l'efficacité de l'aide ?	
Participant – non verbal	Qui est là, qui n'est pas là ? Quels groupes d'acteurs ? Qui fait quoi ? Qui est en retrait ?	
Participant – verbal	Qui parle de quoi ? Qui parle à qui et combien de temps ? Qui initie les interactions ? Quelles langues parlées ?	
Autres (par ex., but de la conférence)		