Development, complexity & evolution

Owen Barder
www.owen.org
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Development is complex

Some problems are so complex that you have to be highly intelligent and well informed just to be undecided about them.

Laurence J. Peter

From Ben Ramalingam [www.aidontheedge.info]
Definition of “wicked problems”

- Difficult to define clearly.
- Many interdependencies, multi-causal.
- Unforeseen consequences.
- Often not stable.
- No clear solution.
- Socially complex.
- Not the responsibility of any single organization.
- Involve changing behaviour.

Original idea: Rittel, Webber (1973 – urban planning); this definition: Australian Public Service Commission (2007)
All successful complex systems are the result of evolution.
Steve Jones, evolutionary biologist
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“Almost impossible problems” are solved by evolution not design
Evolution requires variation and selection
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Development is a “wicked problem”

Wicked problems are solved by evolution not design.

Evolution requires variation and selection.
Aid projects in Ethiopia

About 12% of the projects are for between $1m and $10m. These make up 41% of aid to Ethiopia.

Less than 2% of the projects are for more than $10m. These make up 42% of the aid to Ethiopia.

86% of the donor projects in Ethiopia are for less than $1m. These projects amount to less than 17% of aid to Ethiopia.

More than half the official aid projects in Ethiopia have a total project value of less than $100K.

Source: DAC CRS Database May 2010; figures are for 2008

2176 projects reported
Short and long route accountability

Citizens / clients

Coalitions / inclusion

Nonpoor

Poor

Providers

Management

Frontline

Organisations

The state

Politicians

Policymakers

Client power

short route accountability

Services

Voice

Compact

Long route accountability
Very long route of aid accountability

Donors
- Taxpayers
- Aid agencies

Recipient governments
- Politicians
- Officials

Citizens / clients
- Nonpoor
- Poor

Providers
- Frontline
- Organisations

Influencing

Voice

Coalitions / inclusion

Contracts

Evaluation

Client power

Services

Management

Compact
The power of information
Power to the people

- Randomised trial
- NGO report cards & public meetings
- Good results:
  - Waiting time decreased
  - Doctor and nurse absenteeism plummeted
  - Clinics got cleaner; fewer drugs stolen
  - 40-50% more children vaccinated
  - 33% fewer children died under the age of five
  - Saved 550 lives (in area of 55,000 households).
As change-makers we should not try to design a better world. We should make better feedback loops.