Who is the IO?

IOs as Intermediaries in Aid Networks

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Abstract

International relations scholarship considers International Organizations (IO) as discrete entities, governed by the relationship between member states and the IO bureaucracy. Rationalist theories have analysed IO behaviour using principal-agent models, where the principal is the member state and the agent is the IO bureaucracy, while third-party actors have little authority over the organizations' priorities or performance (Hawkins et al. 2006), except as orchestrators of global policy agendas (Abbott et al. 2015). Constructivist scholarship has also focused on member state-bureaucracy interactions but argued that the bureaucracy has autonomy that is unaddressed by principal-agent models (Barnett and Finnemore 1999). We argue that IOs play an additional, and increasingly common, role as *intermediaries* in aid networks, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected states (OECD 2022). In these contexts, IOs are intermediaries in long aid delegation chains that disburse aid via contracts that involve other IOs, NGOs, and private contractors. We contend that these IO contracting procedures have given a new set of third-party actors—whether non-governmental organizations (NGOs), other IOs, civil society actors, or private companies—increasing influence over the performance of IOs, challenging assumptions. The IO is, thus, not limited only to member states and the bureaucracy, but is dependent on third-party actors that are outside of the IO's and its member states' direct control. We argue that the role of IOs as intermediaries in service delivery challenges both rationalist and constructivist explanations of IO behavior and call for a new research agenda on the broader implications of this role for conceptualizations of IOs and their behavior and performance. To make this argument, we use a new dataset on the United Nations (UN) Multi-Partner Trust Funds and network models to describe IOs' intermediary role.

Introduction

The landscape for International Organizations (IOs) has changed dramatically, particularly since the end of World War II. What began as a small but powerful set of IOs has grown into an environment populated by hundreds of international and regional bodies, ad hoc groupings, and other formal and informal cooperative arrangements (Kratochwil and Ruggie 1986). The breadth of IOs and their collaborators is particularly visible in contexts in which they are most densely clustered, such as within conflict-affected states. In these fragile contexts, the host government gives the IOs, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private contractors, and other states permission to deliver goods and services that the state is unwilling or unable to provide (Lake 2007; Matanock 2014; Risse 2021; Campbell and Matanock 2024). In these contexts, IOs enter into contracts with international and national NGOs, other IOs, private contractors, and other states to deliver goods and services throughout the country (Oestreich 2012; von Billerbeck 2017). These contracts are often comprised of long delegation chains (Nielson and Tierney 2003; Lake and McCubins 2006). For example, a group of IO member states may give funds to an IO at headquarters to disburse to other IOs, who obtains the consent of the host government to operate on its territory and then sub-contracts to a third-party actor (such as a International NGO—INGOs), who then sub-contract to a National NGO (NNGO), who then collaborates directly with a community partner, who engages directly with the community.

The IO scholarship broadly views IOs as composed of member states and the bureaucracy. We argue that particularly when IOs engage in service delivery in conflict-affected states, they rely on a range of other actors to implement the wishes of their member states. In these long delegation chains—from member states all the way to the population—IOs often play an intermediary role. They sub-contract to other actors to deliver the services, rather than doing it themselves. In other words, the IO is consistently relying on actors outside of the organization to deliver on its mandate from member states. Who, then, is the IO? Is it only the member states and the bureaucracy? Or, does the

IO's consistent dependence on third party actors to deliver on the preferences of member states require us to consider this interdependence as part of the structure of IO service delivery, and adjust our assumptions about IO performance and accountability to member states accordingly?

Existing scholarship presents two main ways to understand the IO-member state relationship. *Rationalist* scholarship conceives of IOs in principal-agent terms, where IOs are the bureaucratic "agents" of their member state "principals" (Hawkins et al. 2006). It has explored how member states design IOs (Koremenos, Lipson, and Snidal 2001); why and how they, as the principals, delegate or contract the fulfillment of their preferences to the IO bureaucracy (Abbott and Snidal 1998; Hawkins et al. 2006; Rittberger et al. 2012; Hooghe and Marks 2014; Hooghe et al. 2017); the conditions under which the IO bureaucracy disregards or diverges from the terms of the contract through slippage (reaching beyond principals' preferences) or shirking (refusing to carry out the principals' preferences) (Hawkins et al. 2006); and how member states can hold the agent accountable (Pollack 1997, Dijkstra 2015).

Constructivist IO scholarship, by contrast, focuses on the culture, routines, and pathologies of IO bureaucracies. It emphasizes the ways in which IOs acquire autonomy from their principals, cultivating their own institutional identities and preferences that are separate from those of the member states who establish them. It examines in detail how the potential divergence between member states and IOs affects the diffusion of IO norms and achievement of policy outcomes, potentially resulting in entrenched institutional pathologies and inefficiencies (Barnett and Finnemore 1999; Park 2018).

We argue that IOs' role as *intermediaries* in aid delegation chains goes beyond current conceptions of IOs as agents or orchestrators and calls for a reconceptualization of the role, and possibly the form, of IOs. Despite their epistemological and theoretical divergence, both rationalist and constructivist explanations for IO behavior argue that IOs are constituted by member states and

the bureaucracy. This understanding of the constitutive elements of IOs has rarely been revisited, and as such, IO scholarship has considered IOs to be discrete entities, with clear boundaries between who exists within them (i.e. member states and IO bureaucrats) and who is external (i.e. non-state actors, NGOs, and private companies). Second, they focus on agenda-setting as the main function of IOs, whereby the IO facilitates the adoption of new policy agendas by member states (Pollack 1997). Some scholarship has highlighted the role of external actors in these processes, whereby IOs act as "orchestrators" among member states, non-governmental actors, private industry (Abbott et al. 2015), and INGOs create greater accountability by participating in these agenda-setting processes or monitoring IOs' performance (Lake McCubins 2006; Tallberg, Dellmuth, Agné, and Dult 2015). But this scholarship remains focused on IO's agenda-setting role (Haggard and Simmons 1987).

We contend that current depictions of IOs do not fully reflect who contemporary IOs are and what they do. The dichotomous view of IOs as consisting of member states and bureaucracies and the assumption that they are exclusively, or at least primarily, involved in agenda-setting offer only a partial view of contemporary IOs and therefore limit our understanding of how these bodies function and contribute to both material and normative outcomes in the international system.

To understand the role of IOs as intermediaries, we use a new dataset on the networks of aid actors who receive pooled funding that is managed by the United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Funds (MPTF) (Braithwaite, Bruens, Campbell, Zayed 2024). These pooled funds are created by UN member states and managed by the UN Secretariat, which distributes the funding to IO within the UN System, INGOs, NNGOs, private companies, and states. Pooled funds enable UN member states to give funds quickly to high-risk environments.[1] Like pooled sovereignty, they distribute risk among member

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[1] The United Nations defines an inter-agency pooled fund as having three characteristics: 1) it is focused on a specific thematic or geographic purpose and the financing is co-mingled, not earmarked, providing flexibility; 2) the decision on the allocation of the fund is made by a UN-led governance mechanism, not solely by the individual contributors to the fund; and 3) the UN and non-UN organizations that receive the fund assume the programmatic and financial accountability

states at the same time as they, by definition, reduce each individual member state's ability to control the IO's behavior (Hawkins et al. 2006). We analyze these data within the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the largest country in which the UN implements MPTF-supported activities and a context in which there is a high diversity of UN and other actors implementing these activities. The MPTF in DRC thus represents a most likely case for observing longer delegation chains and the intermediary role played by IOs. At the same time, we expect a similar dynamic to exist in other cases, including different country settings, other IOs, and other sectors. We use descriptive network statistics, Exponential Random Graph Models (ERGMs), a multinomial logistic regression, and block modeling to demonstrate IOs' consistent role as an intermediary and how this varies by sector.

This conceptualization of IOs as intermediaries has important implications for both the rationalist and constructivist understandings of IO behavior. First, IOs as intermediaries challenges the assumption of *control* embedded in principal-agent models of IO behavior. Although current scholarship considers the potential implications of longer-delegation chains, it does not examine theoretically or empirically the implications of delegation chains that extend to actors beyond the IO, such as INGOs or NNGOs (Lake and McCubines 2006; Lake 2007).

While IO member states may endorse the sub-contracting of frontline service provision, they do not control or govern the INGOs, NNGOs, or others to whom the IO sub-contracts, further reducing the information that principals receive from these agents and their ability to control agent slippage or shirking. Their controls are limited to the terms of the contract, the oversight of which member states have already delegated to the IO, which becomes the principal to these new third-party agents, facing similar information problems as their own principals. In contexts where the third party could achieve the member state's goals simply by implementing the contract without any necessary

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for the resources received. See "The importance of pooled funds," United Nations MPTF Office Partners Gateway, https://mptfportal.dev.undp.org/basic-page/what-pooled-fund [Accessed: March 7, 2024].

political adjustments, this contractual mechanism may still enable the principals' preferences to be fulfilled (Cooley and Ron 2002). But, in dynamic conflict-affected contexts where development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding activities support complex behavior change, some degree of adaptation (entailing potential shirking or slippage) by the agent is likely to be necessary for performance (Campbell 2018). Furthermore, third-party actors have their own organizational objectives and interests, which may diverge from those of member states or the IO but over which member states and the IO have little control.

Second, and paradoxically, the intermediary function of IOs also suggests a *loss* of normative control for IOs. As discussed, constructivists highlight the norm diffusion role for IOs, demonstrating how they develop preferences and objectives beyond those originally envisioned by their founding member states that help to set standards for appropriate behavior in the international system. Yet where IOs sub-contract a large proportion of their work, they give up the ability to directly pursue these normative agendas via these contracts. One could argue that sub-contract enables the diffusion of norms to other actors beyond the organization but, in reality, the IO does not train those who receive the sub-contracts.[2] Instead, it selects third-party actors who have the fiduciary capacity to manage the sub-contract, not necessarily those who are best suited to diffuse the IO norms. Indeed, the priority for the actors to whom they sub-contract is the fulfillment of the contract—that is, the completion of the specified tasks on time and on budget—and broader normative objectives come second to that, an effect that is likely to be exacerbated the longer the delegation chain. In this regard, by playing the role of an intermediary in service-delivery contracts, IO may weaken their ability to develop norms, uphold principles, or call out inappropriate behavior in international relations, a core function of IOs that constructivist scholars emphasize.

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[2] Interview with UN Official, June 2020; Standard Memorandum of Understanding for MPTF Using Pass-Through Fund Management, November 2019, United Nations.

In sum, if IOs systematically delegate through sub-contracts the tasks they are mandated by their member states, then it is not clear how member states retain their authority over the behavior of the IO. If third party organizations—whether other IOs, non-governmental organizations, or states—are actually delivering services to target populations, it is not clear how the IO is able to diffuse its norms or set a broader global agenda.

IOs Beyond Member States and the Bureaucracy?

Most research on IOs conceptualizes them as organizations founded by at least three states to pursue collective aims that they could not or would struggle to achieve alone. Formal IOs are "official interstate arrangements legalized through a charter or international treaty, and coordinated by a permanent secretariat, staff, or headquarters" (Vabulas and Snidal 2013, 194). This view of IOs as constituted by member states on the one hand and an administrative bureaucracy on the other has underpinned most academic research on IOs, much of which explores the relationship between them.

For example, rationalist scholars have examined how member states design IOs as well as why and how they, as the organization's "principals," delegate the fulfillment of their preferences to the IO bureaucracy, or the "agent" (Abbott and Snidal 1998; Hawkins et al. 2006; Rittberger et al. 2012; Hooghe and Marks 2014; Hooghe et al. 2017). Principal-agent theory holds that states establish and act collectively through IOs by delegating the implementation of certain tasks to the organization. They do this through delegation contracts (usually referred to as mandates), which specify what the IO is expected to deliver, the resources that member states will provide to the IO for this purpose, and consequences of not doing so (Hawkins et al. 2006; Pollack 2003; Gutner 2005; etc.). States then periodically monitor the delivery of the contract in order to ensure that instructions are being followed and to uncover any agency slack by IO bureaucracies. Slack may entail either shirking, which involves IOs exerting too little effort to deliver the contract, or slippage, which involves redirecting IO activities

away from member state instructions towards IO officials' own preferences (Pollack 1997; Hawkins et al. 2006; Dijkstra 2015). Constructivist IO scholarship approaches this relationship from a different angle, focusing on the culture, routines, and pathologies of IO bureaucracies and how they can undermine the ability of the organization to achieve member state preferences (Barnett and Finnemore 1999; Park 2018).

Despite their differences, both accounts of IO behavior imagine the IO as constituted by two primary parties: member states and the bureaucracy. Indeed, this understanding of the constitutive elements of IOs has rarely been revisited, and as such, IO scholarship has considered IOs to be discrete entities, with clear boundaries between who exists within them (i.e. member states and IO bureaucrats) and who is external (i.e. non-state actors, NGOs, and private companies). Scholars have also examined the ways in which IOs govern with third-party actors (Abbott et. al. 2021). In particular, orchestration theory sees the IO as an "orchestrator," where it sets the agenda of what needs to be done, then finds a third-party actor or "intermediary" with shared goals and grants the execution of the agenda-setting process to that actor, which it then implements voluntarily without the IO's control (Abbott et. al. 2021). When "orchestrating," the IO intentionally releases its control over the outcome, which is different from the IO's intermediary role in service delivery, where it claims to be able to use third party actors over which it exercises contractual control to achieve specific aims.

Over the past two decades, IOs have increasingly engaged in service-delivery, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected countries, undertaking tasks that range from education and health projects, to the provision of security and reform of the security sector, to the delivery of humanitarian and development aid (OECD 2022). However, because IOs often have the expertise but not sufficient capacity for implementation, nor can they easily expand to meet the demand, they have often engaged third-party actors to support this delivery (Denney et al. 2015). This has led them to enter into sub-contracts with a range of non-governmental and sometimes for-profit private actors. These

contractual relationships go beyond simply coordinating for agenda-setting and policy-making but constitute substantive relationships in which these third-party actors actually "do" the work of the IO on its behalf. These actors are not officially part of IO bureaucracies, nor are they directly controlled by member states, but they play substantive and intrusive roles in IO work, shaping what they do, how they do it, and what they achieve. In addition, IOs often turn to the same external actors repeatedly to undertake these tasks, suggesting a quasi-permanent role for them within the IO (Andonova 2017).

The literature on INGOs has largely focused on their external role as advocacy organizations that serve an agenda-setting role within IOs, acting as lobbyists might, but do not support or directly collaborate with the IO to implement these policies (Grigorescu 2007; Stroup and Wong 2017; Greg Tallberg et al. 2018; Nie 2023). Literature on NNGOs views these actors as connected to IOs primarily through the transnational advocacy efforts of INGOs, without considering the potential direct connections between IOs and NNGOs in the implementation of these policies (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Hall et al. 2020; Cheng et al. 2021). The scholarship that does consider the service delivery role of INGOs and NNGOs largely views them as distinct from IOs, operating instead with financing from member states, and largely under the control of these more powerful sovereign actors (Cooley and Ron 2002; Campbell et al 2019). Instead, INGOs and NNGOs often operate as third-party contractors and are central to IOs' delivery of goods and services, particularly in conflict-affected contests.

We argue that the collaboration of IOs with INGOs, NNGOs, private contractors, and host government ministries has blurred the lines of who is 'in' and who is 'out' of the IO. To deliver goods and services, particularly in conflict-affected contexts, IOs have become the middleman between their mandating member states and INGOs, NNGOs, and private contractors that deliver the services directly to the population. Accounting for IOs' role as intermediaries between third-party actors and

IO member states, and their related interdependence, challenges existing explanations of IO behavior and performance.

Research Design

Uncovering the true position(s) of IOs in the process of delivering goods and services within a broader network of actors requires new data that fully captures the myriad organizations active in these spaces, as well as their relationships with one another. To this end, we leverage information from the Networks of Influence and Support in Peace Operations (NOI) dataset, which uses project-level information to convey the thousands of IOs, IGOs, donors, INGOs, national NGOs, government agencies, and civil society actors involved in peacebuilding, humanitarian, and development projects alongside UN peace operations from 2005-2021 (Braithwaite, Bruens, Campbell, Zayed 2024). These data are drawn from project documents in the OECD Creditor Reporting System, the International Aid Transparency Initiative, the UN Multi-Partner Trust Funds (MPTF), and reports regarding the UN Cluster System. The NOI data allow us to identify and highlight the positionality of IOs relative to other actors in these spaces—specifically, the ways in which IOs commonly act as *intermediaries* between different actors in the delivery network.

Our analysis focuses solely on the DRC to allow for detailed within-network analysis that cannot easily be accomplished through cross-country comparisons. The DRC represents a most likely case because of the size of the country and the scale of intervention there, as well as the variation in the type of UN peacebuilding program deployed over time, enabling us to capture a wide range of network relationships within a single country context. The sheer size of the DRC and the high demand for risk-tolerant funding makes it a most-likely case for the existence of diverse IO networks. Since the aim of this paper is to demonstrate that these networks exist and that they challenge the literature's

assumptions about the role of the IO, a most-likely case with a high diversity of actors provides the detail necessary to develop and test our theory.

Data on UN Aid Networks

To test this theory, we employ a component of the NOI dataset derived from the United Nations' Multi-Partner Trust Funds (MPTF). MPTFs are pooled funds managed by the United Nations but funded primarily by UN Member States. Multilateral pooled funds offer at least two advantages to bilateral donors: 1) they are flexible funds that circumvent bilateral donors' heavy aid administration, and 2) they allow donors to mitigate the risks of giving aid in unstable contexts.[3] These funds are focused on responding to specific issues including humanitarian, peacebuilding, crisis recovery, and development projects. Importantly, these are a particular instance in which member states delegate authority to the UN bureaucracy, similar in nature to UN peacekeeping missions and other operations by large IOs. Once bilateral donors allocate resources to the pooled fund, the funds are dispersed to a range of UN agencies, recipient government ministries, international and domestic non-governmental organizations, and private contractors.[4] The NOI dataset is the first of its kind to record these transactions for each project to understand how, and through which actors,[5] the money is diffusing to complete its objective. By analyzing the networks present in pooled funds, we are able to

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[3] The United Nations defines an inter-agency pooled fund as having three characteristics: 1) it is focused on a specific thematic or geographic purpose and the financing is co-mingled, not earmarked, providing flexibility; 2) the decision on the allocation of the fund is made by a UN-led governance mechanism, not solely by the individual contributors to the fund; and 3) the UN and non-UN organizations that receive the fund assume the programmatic and financial accountability for the resources received. See ``The importance of pooled funds,'' United Nations MPTF Office Partners Gateway, https://mptfportal.dev.undp.org/basic-page/what-pooled-fund [Accessed: March 7, 2024].
[4] "What is an inter-agency pooled fund," United Nations MPTF Office: Partners Gateway, https://mptf.undp.org/basic-page/what-pooled-fund [accessed: November 16, 2023].
[5] The NOI dataset identifies and captures relationships among eight types of actors: IOs/IGOs, pooled funds, bilateral donors, INGOs, national NGOs (NNGOs), host government offices, government signatories involved in approving projects, and civil society organizations.

understand the range of partnerships involved in UN humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding, and crisis recovery efforts.

In the network of MPTF funds in the DRC, there are 203 unique organizations that have 688 connections, commonly referred to as ties or edges. We code a range of organization types, including the MPTFs, IGOs, NNGOs, INGOs, national and international civil society organizations, host government agencies that receive the funds, host government agencies that serve as signatories that approve projects, and bilateral actors. These ties are project contracts that outline how much money is being allocated to these actors for development, humanitarian, peacebuilding, and early recovery projects and what types of activities they will carry out. We will refer to the ties in a number of ways. They are indeed transfers of funds but more generally represent partnerships between organizations to make sure the service is delivered, codified by a contract.

Because of the nature of these contracts, where money is flowing from one organization to the service provider, we create a directed network that displays where the resources are coming from and to whom they are going. Each project includes information on its timeframe, the name of the government signatory on the project, and the project sector. In our MPTF DRC population, the average contract lasts around 3.5 years. Of the 688 ties in these data, 148 of them occur between organizations that have previously worked together.

As one an example from the data, the UN Peacebuilding Fund takes contributions from 19 countries to constitute the fund, which it then redistributes. Specifically, member states delegate to the UN Peacebuilding Fund and its bureaucratic arm, the UN Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) in the UN Secretariat, to manage the fund and oversee its implementation. Then, the PBSO establishes sub-contracts with other UN organizations—such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Health Organization (WHO), or UN Development Program (UNDP)—who then often sub-contract INGOs, who often sub-contract NNGOs to deliver goods and services

directly to the population. In some cases, the PBSO can sub-contract directly with large INGOs, such as World Vision. Figure 1 traces one specific project of the UN Peacebuilding Fund that began in 2021 and focused on creating youth development groups to promote peace in the DRC. As depicted, the PBSO (i.e., the manager of the Peacebuilding Fund) acts as an intermediary between the member states and the IOs that receive the PBF Funding (i.e., UNHCR and OHCHR), which then serve as intermediaries between the PBF and the local organizations that, ultimately, implement the project. The NOI data, thus, allow us to capture the flow of money from the PBF to the recipient IO and then to its implementing partners. This is the first data of its kind that can show the relationships among a large range of UN agencies, funds, programs, and offices and their partners on the ground.

Figure 1: Single Project from Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) Peacebuilding Fund

DRC Project 00125913: Promoting Social Cohesion in Youth
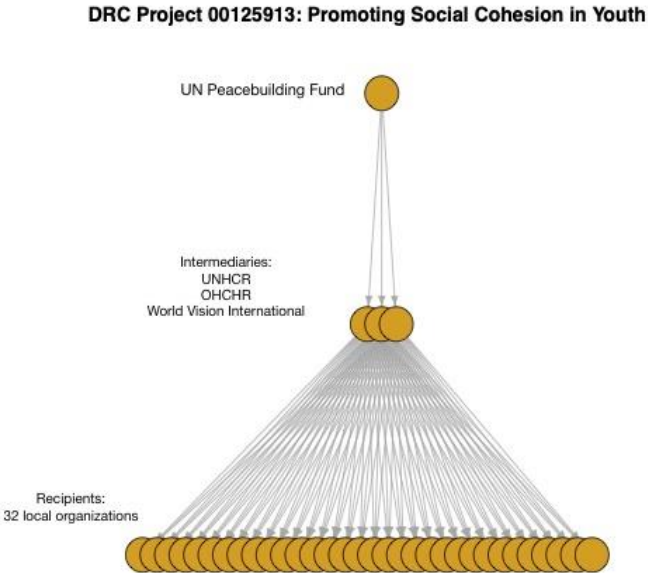
When we expand this network to the totality of MPTF-supported projects in the DRC, we see the large dispersion of the funds among organizations.[6] Figure 2 represents two depictions of the flow

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[6] The MPTF data related to the DRC spans projects from 2005 to 2021.

of all MPTF funds in the DRC with the blue nodes representing the MPTFs. Both figures show the same network in two visualizations. First as a classic network (Figure 2a) and then in a tree format (Figure 2b). Especially in Figure 2b, we can see the blue nodes as MPTFs giving to a variety of organizations, which in turn give to others. Using these data, we will describe the extent to which IOs are relying on other actors to deliver goods and services—whether other IOs, INGOs, NNGOs, other UN organizations, or governmental ministries—and use network analysis to probe when and how these relationships occur.

Figure 2: Two Depictions of the Totality of MPTF Projects in the DRC
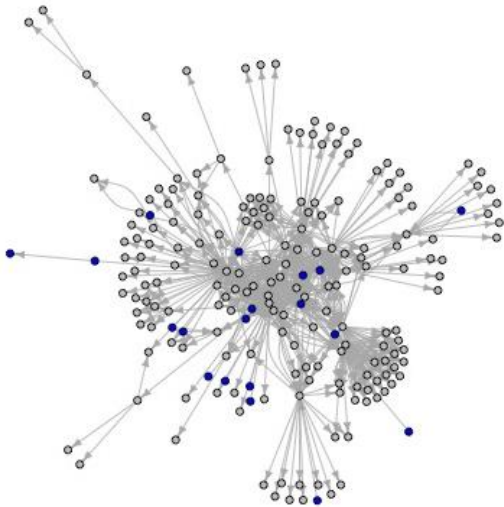Note: Blue nodes represent MPTF Funds
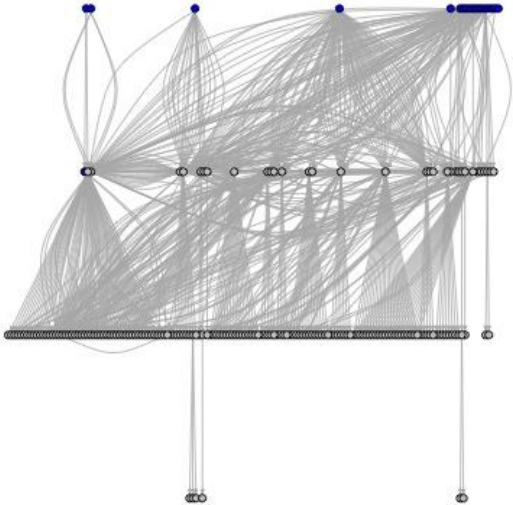

Figure 2A: Classic Network   Figure 2B: Network as a Tree

Empirical Analyses

The NOI dataset is structured for social network analysis techniques, which facilitates consideration not only of the presence and activities of certain types of actors, but also of the relationships among these actors and their positions relative to one another. This enables us to uncover what roles are

played by IOs within the broader network of actors involved in delivering goods and services in conflict-affected countries.

We rely on multiple techniques within network analysis to examine the structure of UN aid networks and, specifically, the roles of IOs within them. First, we discuss core features of our networks that allow us to begin painting a picture of where IOs are positioned in these delegation chains. An interesting statistic in network analysis is referred to as in-degree and out-degree. In-degree refers to the number of ties going to a node, or (in our particular context) the contracts that entity is given, while out-degree refers to the number of contracts an entity is giving to others. We see this as crucial to the idea of the IO as the intermediary because, if we are correct, we would expect IOs to have a balance of in and out-degree or a larger number of out-degrees. This would indicate that the IOs are using their placement in the network to redirect funds to their service providers. Whereas, if an organization had a high level of in-degrees, they would tend to be a service provider because they are taking on contracts and not disbursing them on to other actors. In- and out-degree is used to provide an initial examination of our argument that IOs act as intermediaries in the UN aid network.

Second, we analyze the main network factors with an Exponential Random Graph Model (ERGM) to show the likelihood of ties. ERGMs are used to analyze the structure of networks by modeling the probability that the nodes (actors) are linked to one another through ties or edges (the connections between actors), which allows us to gain insights into the underlying relationships and processes that shape the structure of our network.

Third, we look at a model of structural equivalence to define the position IOs hold within our network and whether it is similar across different IOs. For this, we employ a blockmodel, which allows us to define actors in our network that are structurally similar. This type of analysis does not depend on our IOs contracting out to the same partners to identify the IOs as intermediaries. An illustrative example of structural equivalence is of a network defining and distinguishing teachers from students.

The teachers do not have to have the same students to be structurally equivalent; rather, the patterns of their interactions can indicate their status. Thus, IOs that funnel resources from their member states to actors on the ground who undertake service delivery will be identified as similar to other IOs acting in the same way.

The "blockmodel" algorithm adopts an iterative process to define nodes that have similar roles in the network. The algorithm randomly selects a pair of nodes, *a* and *b*, and finds other nodes that behave in a similar way to *a* and *b*. For instance, if *a* sends to *m* and *b* sends to *n,* then the algorithm will mark *m* and *n* as similar. This continues for all possible pairs of nodes. Once this is completed, the process occurs two more times over all sets of pairs to maximize the similarity of any two nodes. The final result is a matrix of every node in the network and their similarity to any other node based on their position in the system. This matrix is used to optimize, or divide, the network into groups of similar nodes. In our case, we divide our network into three possible groups: senders, intermediaries, and receivers. Because of the complex computing power required, for now, we have run the algorithm on 2010 and 2019 separately to compare the results (See Figures A1 and A2 in the Appendix).

Empirical Results

Using the MPTF data in DRC from the NOI dataset, we map the related networks from 2005 to 2021. We use this network for two main types of analyses to determine the position and role of IGOs in the network: an ERGM to show the likelihood of ties, and a model of structural equivalence to highlight the position(s) of IOs within our network. Before delving into those analyses, though, we present initial network statistics capturing the actors with the greatest number of incoming (in-degree) and outgoing (out-degree) ties with other actors in the aid network. This helps us to begin establishing which actors are intermediaries versus final destinations for project funds.

Taking into consideration these directed network relationships between nodes in our aid network, we can begin to reveal the positionality of IOs by considering the in-degree and out-degree of the actors in the network. Table 1 shows the entities in our network that have the most incoming projects (in-degree) and their organization type. The two organizations with the highest in-degree are the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the government of the DRC.

Table 1: Organizations with the Most Incoming Projects

Entity	Outgoing	Ingoing	Organization Type
United Nations Development Program	80	55	IGO
Democratic Republic of Congo Government	0	53	GOV
United Nations Children's Fund	9	24	IGO
United Nations Population Fund	26	23	IGO
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	43	15	IGO
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	46	15	IGO
International Organization for Migration	33	14	IGO
World Food Program	11	12	IGO
United Nations Office for Project Services	9	10	IGO
Caritas Internationalis	0	8	INGO

Both UNDP's and the DRC Government's in-degree are illuminating in comparison to their out-degree. The DRC government has zero outgoing projects, meaning that they are the final destination for the funds in this system as they do not give these funds to any other organization. This makes sense because the MPTF funds are managed by the UN, not by the DRC Government. But this also points to the crucial role of the host government in partnering in the IOs service delivery activities. In other words, the role of UN member states is not solely via UN headquarters governance structures, such as the Security Council or the General Assembly, but also via their role as the primary partner of many IO service delivery efforts in country as well as the legal authority who can grant or withdraw permission for the IO to operate on its territory. Member states' position as actors within

the delegation chain, and potential veto players, has not yet been considered in principal-agent theories about IO behavior.

UNDP has the highest out-degree in the network, greater than its in-degree, meaning it has more outgoing contracts than incoming. This means that UNDP is one of the primary distributors of MPTFs and is serving a central role as an intermediary actor that primarily works via other organizations, not as an IO that implements services on its own. This follows with our theoretical expectation of the IO working as a distributor in the system. The other IOs in Table 1 also have more outgoing connections than ingoing, following the same pattern.

Table 2: Organizations with the Most Outgoing Projects

Entity	Outgoing	Ingoing	Organization Type
United Nations Development Program	80	55	IGO
Democratic Republic of Congo Humanitarian Fund	78	0	FUND
UN Peacebuilding Fund	63	0	FUND
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	46	15	IGO
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	43	15	IGO
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights	41	6	IGO
International Organization for Migration	33	14	IGO
World Vision International	31	3	INGO
DRC Stabilization Coherence Fund	29	0	FUND
United Nations Population Fund	26	23	IGO

Table 2 presents the organizations with the highest out-degree in the network. Again, we see UNDP topping the list. However, a new organization type appears in Table 2 as compared to Table 1. The MPTF funds (FUND) that begin our delegation chain rank highly in out-degree with no incoming contracts as we do not include the original bilateral donors to the MPTF in our sample. The general pattern of greater out-degree than in-degree continues to hold with World Vision International, the only INGO to make the list of the top ten organizations that allocates resources to

other implementing agencies. This directly relates to the single project depicted in Figure 1, where World Vision was an intermediary to around 30 local organizations for a project related to the social cohesion of youth.

This network measure of in- and out-degree helps to illustrate the intermediary role that we contend is played by IOs. While the IO literature focuses on agenda-setting and norm development by the IOs, the description of the in- and out-degree of IOs in the MPTF data show that they are also playing an important *intermediary* role in service delivery in conflict-affected countries.

We now use an Exponential Random Graph Model (ERGM) model to test the likelihood of ties within our network. ERGM models test the likelihood of ties based on all the ties that were possible in the system. We run a simple directed model to estimate the likelihood of a tie based on the organization type of the sender and receiver as shown in Table 3. The baseline probability represents the network density, or the likelihood of a tie in our network if we have no information about any two nodes. However, while accounting for this baseline, we can see the probability of a tie when it is an IO sending, dependent on the receiver type. IOs are less likely to send to other IOs and are most likely to send to government actors. IOs are also more likely to send to NNGOs than to INGOs. This reinforces the importance of considering the role of host government's within the delegation chain and as a recipient of funds via an IO, and the central role that INGOs play in delivering goods and services for IOs.

Table 3: Likelihood of Ties

	Dependent variable:	
	ergmnet2	
	Estimate	Probability
Baseline Probability	-4.895***	0.7%
IO -> IO	1.181***	2.4%
IO -> NNGO	1.940***	4.9%
IO -> Government	3.16***	14.9%

IO -> INGO	2.122***	5.88%

Akaike Inf. Crit.	4,185.004
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	4,320.541

*Note:* Baseline is NNGO to NNGO *p**p***p<0.01

Given these descriptive statistics, we see a general pattern that IOs are sending and receiving and when they are sending, they are most likely to send to government and NGO actors. However, the descriptive statistics cannot establish whether this is consistent across IOs or if the biggest actors, like UNDP, are dominating the analysis. To overcome this issue, we turn to our final empirical approach described in the previous section, involving a model of structural equivalence—specifically, a blockmodel, which allows us to define actors in our network that are structurally similar.

Our findings from the structural equivalence models match our expectations (See Figure A1 and A2 in Appendix).[7] The algorithm divides the network into three groups, the first of which contains all of the MPTF funds, which only send resources. The intermediary group is dominated by IOs. Of the ten nodes selected for that category, nine are IOs. In the receiver category, the organizations are primarily domestic, with many government offices within the DRC and national NGOs and civil society. However, in this receiving category there are also eight IOs, demonstrating that in some cases IOs are also engaged in direct service delivery.

[7] See the appendix for the full blockmodel matrix.

Figure 4: DRC Network Reduced to Only Health

DRC Projects in Health Sector of MPTF Networks
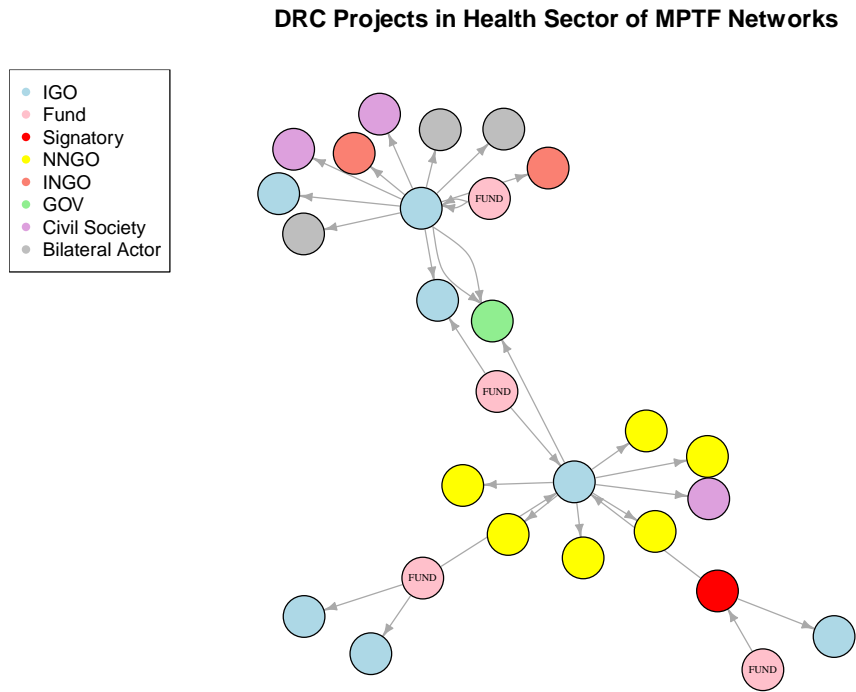
Exploration of variation by sector helps us to unpack these differences. Given that our data are project based, each of which fits within a broader sector, we can reduce the larger network to a smaller network depicting only certain sectors. We will focus on two distinct sectors—health and security—to show the similarities and differences among the networks within each sector. The health sector projects focus on the improvement of the health infrastructure or are related to specific events like Ebola or COVID-19. Generally, health projects focus on community-level interventions or direct support to the health infrastructure of the state. Security projects, on the other hand, focus on reforming the security institutions of the state and less on engaging directly with communities.

In Figure 4, we see a health network in which IOs receive money from the MPTF funds and then disperse these funds primarily to different INGOs or NNGOs. This figure includes the host government's role as a signatory to the contract, which refers to the host government's role in approving aid projects implemented on its territory not as a direct recipient of aid. In this case, we can see that different clusters emerge. One IO delegates overwhelmingly to NNGOs (in yellow), while others IO contract to civil society (purple), INGOs, bilateral actors, and to the government. This could indicate that the IOs have preferences as to which actors will most successfully complete the project or relationships with a prior set of actors with whom they repeatedly work.

Figure 5: DRC Network Related Only to Security

DRC Projects in Security Sector of MPTF Networks
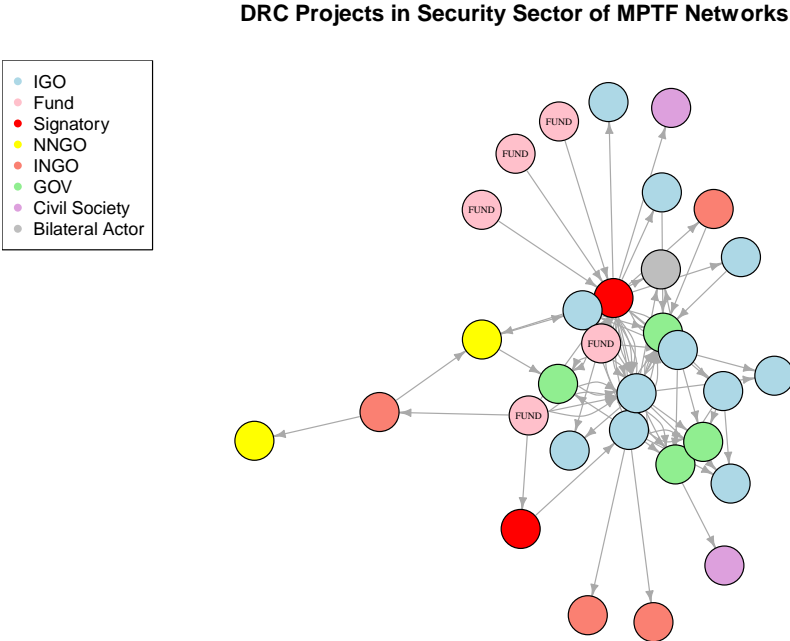
The security sector (Figure 5) includes a broad number of projects related to peacekeeping, security sector reform, and arms control. These types of projects focus more on direct relationships with the government and are more likely to be directly implemented by IOs, with fewer widespread community-engagement efforts. In the resulting reduced network, we see a few interesting differences from the health network. First, we see a much more densely connected network that has more

organizations with multiple connections. Second, we see a greater government presence, with both federal and provincial governments represented as well as the national police. Third, we see a larger proportion of IOs with less delegation to NNGOs. This means that the intermediary role of IOs can diverge in important ways among sectors, pointing to the need for more nuanced explanations of how these differences may shape member state control, IO performance, and norm diffusion.

This comparison is even more evident when the networks are visualized as trees in Figure 6. Figure 6A shows the health network, while Figure 6B shows the security sector. This helps to visualize the stages that the projects go through until their final implementer. In the security sector (Figure 6B), the majority of projects are implemented by IOs, and the government plays a more important role as the signatory of MPTF contracts and an implementer, demonstrating the host government's influence within the security sector in particular. Figure 6A, focused on the health sector, shows a clearer example of the impact of additional actors as almost all the implementing actors are not IOs. The dominant pattern in the health sector is MPTF fund to IO to NNGO or civil society actor.

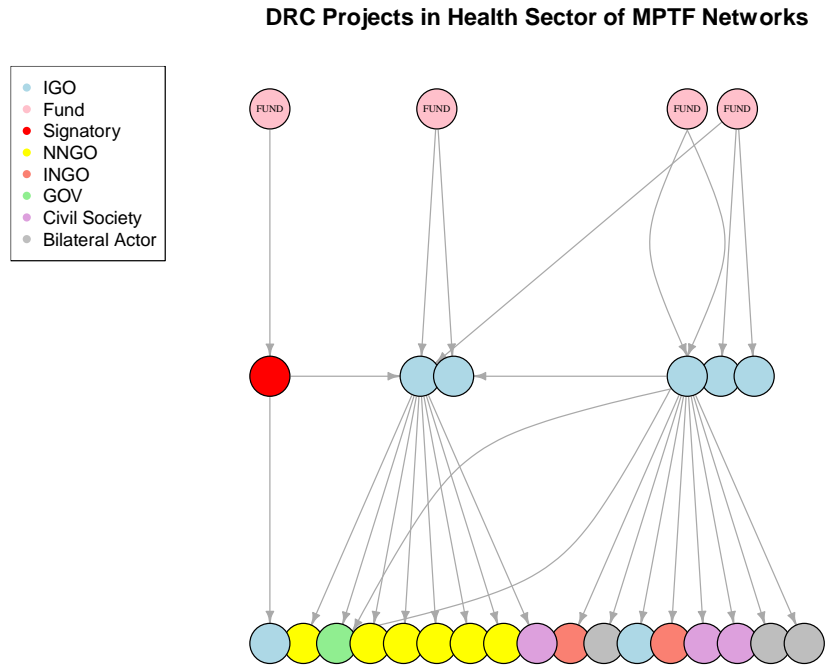Figure 6: Comparison of Health and Security Projects as a Tree

DRC Projects in Health Sector of MPTF Networks

Figure 6A: Health
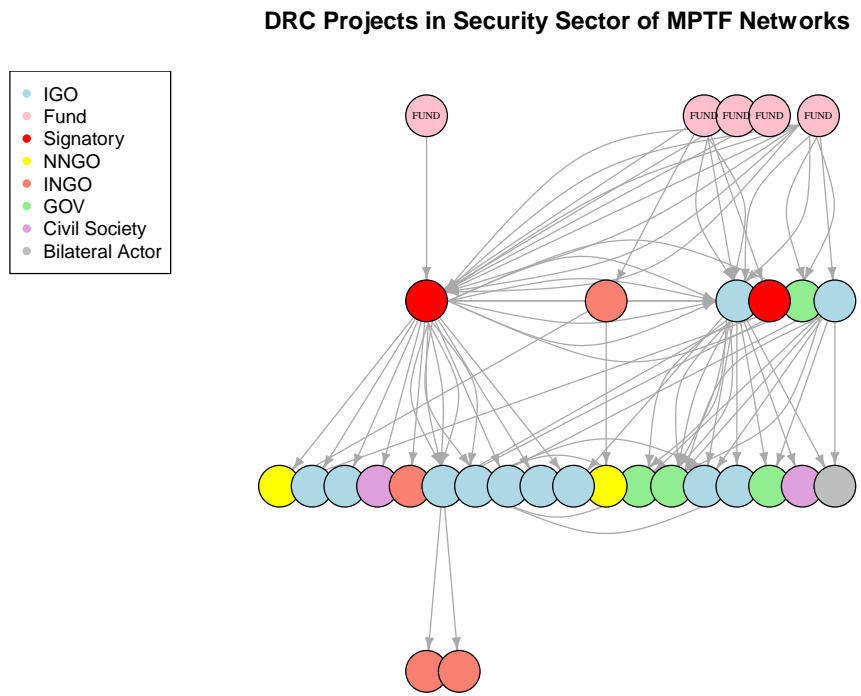
DRC Projects in Security Sector of MPTF Networks

Figure 6B: Security

Alternative Modeling Strategy

Network analysis helps us to predict ties based on all the other entities in the network but cannot help us to distinguish the flow of money to its final destination. The previous analysis views every tie as equal when in practice, for our theory, funds that end at the IO are different than those that are delegated to an INGO, NNGO, host government, or civil society actor. Consequently, we also offer an alternative modeling strategy using a multinomial logit. The logit uses the same MPTF data at the project level to predict which type of organization is most likely to be the final implementor of a given project, while allowing us to control for various factors like the number of years the project is planned for and whether the organizations involved have worked together before. The unit of analysis for this model is at the final organization-project level.

The multinomial logistic regression predicts different specifications for each type of organization that could be the final implementing organization. Our main dependent variable is a binary indicator of whether the project has an intermediary (i.e., an organization in the delegation chain between the MPTF fund and the final implementing organization) or whether there is only a final implementing organization.[8] We control for whether the organizations have partnered before, the number of years planned in the contract and, whether there is a government signatory. We also control for whether a sector of the project is development-focused or human security-focused as well as a year trend variable. Table 4 presents the first logistic regression with the binary intermediary variable and, for ease of interpretation, Table 5 presents the associated predicted probabilities based on the means and modes of the data with variation in intermediary presence. From these tables, we see that the most likely final destination without an intermediary is an IO. However, when there is an intermediary, the final entities are much more likely to be domestic actors like the government or a

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[8] Additionally, we run the same model disaggregated to intermediary type and find results consistent with our ERGM.

national NNGO or, to a lesser degree, INGOs. All of these findings are statistically significant at the

99% level.

Table 4: Multinomial Logistic Regression Predicting Final Organization Type Based on Intermediary

	Dependent variable:							
	Company (international)	Company (national)	GOV	IO	INGO	International civil society	National civil society	NNGO
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Intermediary Present	-2.903	26.211***	3.608**	-3.276***	0.746	-0.513	98.783***	68.882***
	(2.079)	(4.502)	(1.481)	(1.145)	(1.272)	(1.718)	(1.570)	(1.131)
Number of Years Proposed	0.900	-6.132	0.079	0.032	0.118	-0.160	0.122	-0.213
	(0.793)	(4.611)	(0.345)	(0.340)	(0.317)	(0.514)	(0.393)	(0.333)
Previous Partnership	-9.498	89.418***	103.308***	100.916***	100.449***	100.337***	97.886***	98.958***
		(0.00001)	(0.358)	(0.543)	(0.419)	(1.021)	(0.889)	(0.528)
Government Signatory	-3.044*	-53.952	0.495	-2.413***	-2.244***	-1.395	-1.430*	-1.915***
	(1.762)		(0.812)	(0.771)	(0.707)	(1.177)	(0.861)	(0.733)
Year Trend	1.412*	-5.911	-0.002	-0.003	0.142*	0.049	0.608***	0.216**
	(0.852)	(4.555)	(0.082)	(0.091)	(0.086)	(0.141)	(0.147)	(0.087)
Development Issue	-2.872	-61.411***	-3.450***	-3.974***	-2.986***	-2.576**	-3.794***	-4.736***
	(1.765)	(0.000)	(0.716)	(0.832)	(0.660)	(1.168)	(0.780)	(0.743)
Human Security Issue	-3.537	-27.220***	-4.069***	-3.118**	-2.212*	-2.776	-2.710	-4.295***
	(2.402)	(4.502)	(1.337)	(1.351)	(1.317)	(1.913)	(1.714)	(1.394)
Constant	-17.317	50.808***	1.508	8.811***	2.982	3.602	-101.820***	-62.424***
	(13.945)	(0.035)	(2.403)	(2.318)	(2.247)	(3.303)	(1.570)	(1.131)
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,279.944	1,279.944	1,279.944	1,279.944	1,279.944	1,279.944	1,279.944	1,279.944

Note: *p**p***p<0.01

Table 5: Predicted Probabilities Based on Models in Table 4

	Bilateral	Company Int.	Company Nat.	GOV	IO	INGO	Int. Civil Society	Nat. Civil Society	NNGO
No Intermediary	5.95%	3.30%	0.00%	2.17%	77.79%	7.20%	3.59%	0.00%	0.00%
Intermediary	4.35%	0.33%	0.00%	56.60%	2.14%	11.39%	1.46%	5.37%	18.36%

Conclusion: A New Research Agenda

In this paper, we have argued that current theories about the behavior of IOs, which focus on the relationship between member states and IO secretariats, and which focus on their agenda-setting activities, overlook both their growing service-delivery role, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected states, and the scope for the involvement of other actors in their activities. More specifically, we contend that IOs increasingly play a key *intermediary* role, in which they act as middlemen between member states and a range of other actors who actually implement programs in target countries. The IO is thus no longer only the agent of member state principals who contract it to undertake certain tasks, it is also and simultaneously the principal for a number of other agents to whom it subcontracts those tasks. In other words, the IO is not limited only to member states and the bureaucracy, but is dependent on third-party actors that are outside of the IO's and its member states' direct control.

To demonstrate this, we have drawn on MPTF data in DRC and used network analyses to show that IOs rarely work alone but instead pass on the funds and mandates given to them by member states to a variety of other actors—including other IOs, government ministries, NNGOs, INGOs, and civil society organizations. In addition to showing that delegation chains do not end with IOs but in fact can extend much longer, we have also shown how IO sub-contracting varies by sector, with security sector projects focused more on IO-government contracts and health sector projects focused more on IO-NNGO contracts.

Taken together, these findings have important implications for how we can understand the behavior, authority, and functions of IOs, which in turn open multiple new avenues for future research. First, conceptualizing IOs as intermediaries challenges assumptions about power and control that exist in both the rationalist and constructivist IO literature. As mentioned in the introduction, the intermediary role of IOs paradoxically both increases and decreases their power. On the one hand,

IOs, rather than member states, act as principals in their relationships with implementing partners, giving them greater authority than is usually attributed to them by rationalist scholarship. While member states may be aware of IO sub-contracting, they are not involved in establishing contract terms or monitoring of individual contract holders, leaving this to the discretion of the IO. On the other hand, by sub-contracting away much of their work, IOs also relinquish some of their ability to pursue their normative agendas as emphasized by constructivist scholarship, since sub-contracted actors will be focused primarily on delivering specific outputs included in the terms of the contract, rather than on broader and more diffuse goals relating to norms and values in the international system.

These effects are likely to vary depending on the degree to which the preferences of IOs and their sub-contracted actors align or diverge and the longevity of contractual relationships—that is, whether an IO sub-contracts to a particular actor once only or has done so on a repeated basis over a long period. Future research could help to study these effects, in particular by further theorizing the intermediary role, including typologizing different types of intermediaries; measuring the degree of preference alignment between actors in these delegation chains and the implications of more cooperative or more competitive relationships; analyzing whether IOs repeatedly sub-contract to the same actors or whether there is an "open field" for contracts and what this means for path dependency, innovation, or stasis; examining the salience of IOs' normative roles in an era of increased service delivery and implementation work; and examining how member states try to maintain or regain control over IOs where delegation has diffused authority.

Second, our analysis also raises important questions about IO performance and effectiveness, and consequently, about accountability for success and failure. On the one hand, sub-contracting is logical since IOs frequently have the expertise but not the capacity to undertake implementation, at least not at the scale demanded by member states. At the same time, as our empirical analysis has shown, IOs frequently delegate to multiple actors simultaneously, which creates complex coordination

and logistical challenges. These in turn are likely to render performance monitoring time-consuming and overall oversight diffuse, making it difficult to both ascribe success and pinpoint problems, errors, or misbehavior by sub-contracted actors accurately. In this way, these longer delegation chains are a case of inefficient delegation, an effect that is likely to be exacerbated both over time and via longer delegation chains. Future research could explore this more, in particular the ability of IOs to enforce their sub-contracts and to punish implementation partners that diverge from the terms of the contract through shirking or slippage, and the reactions of member states who may be dissatisfied with what they view as under-performance.

Third, our empirical analysis has shown that how delegation works varies by sector, suggesting that both IOs and subcontracted actors have strong views on who should be allowed to do what in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. In particular, the fact that security-related tasks appear to be subject to relatively short delegation chains that stop with host governments suggests that the latter are unwilling to allow non-governmental actors to take part in certain particularly sensitive activities, but that they are less particular about who undertakes more developmental or humanitarian tasks, which may be seen as less critical for political elites in unstable settings. Indeed, while IOs can delegate to INGOs, NNGOs, and civil society organizations, states hosting these activities must sign off on them, and thus it may be that they are exercising a "veto" on contracts in particular areas. Further research should probe this by breaking down contracts by sector to identify patterns and to understand the process of selecting, vetting, and restricting implementing agents.

In addition to these three major avenues for future research, scholars should also extend our concept of IOs as intermediaries to other country contexts, to different (types of) organizations, and to development settings. While the data we presented focused on DRC as a most likely case for developing our theoretical propositions, we contend that our findings are likely to hold in other settings, including those with smaller IO mandates, fewer projects and actors, and less political

instability and insecurity. Our findings should also hold for other operational IOs. There is, thus, scope for significant empirical contributions, which in turn will help to further develop and refine both our theoretical contributions and existing scholarly understandings of IOs.

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Appendix
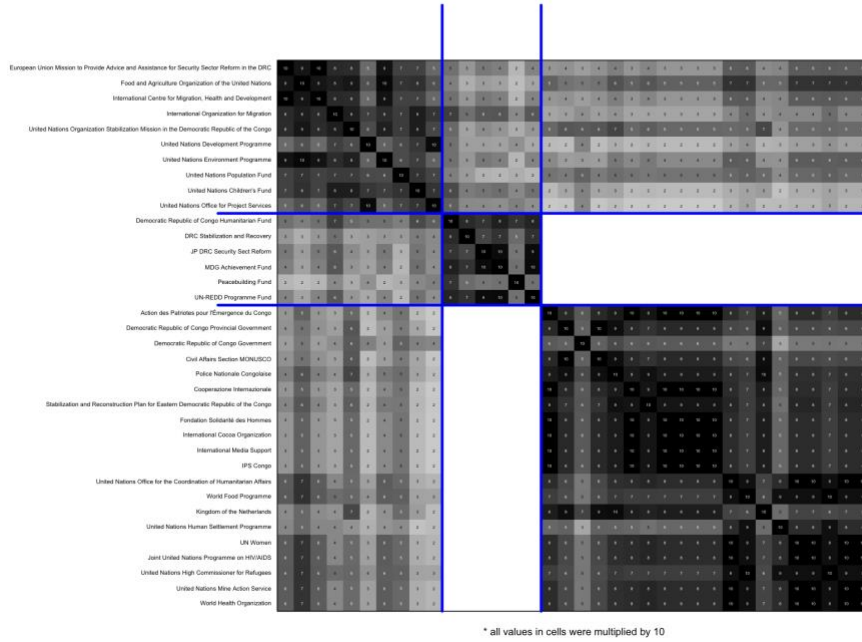
Figure A1: Full blockmodel of 2010 DRC

* all values in cells were multiplied by 10

Figure A2: Color Coded blockmodel of 2010 DRC

* all values in cells were multiplied by 10