

Chapter 6

Donors and International Organisations

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter the authors examine the response of the international development community to Blockchain and frontier technologies. It considers multilateral, bilateral organisations, and non-government organisations, and their role in curating the design and implementation of these technologies. The authors conclude that the global development community need to be active regarding the digital future. International development organisations have a key role to play in building the evidence on how technology can contribute to making development co-operation more effective, impactful, and inclusive. There is a widespread view that Blockchain and frontier technologies offer an important opportunity to accelerate progress towards the SDGs. It is time for international development organisations to lean in and help shape the new technologies as they rapidly accelerate and galvanise a more systematic and joined up international development approach to the digital future.

INTRODUCTION

In the decentralised, anti-government, anti-bank, libertarian conceptualisation of Blockchain, global institutions were not front and centre in thinking nor engagement. However, as the technology matures, and there become an increasing array of use cases relevant to international development, broad scale implementation of Blockchain for social impact will be slower and quite possibly less than optimal without the support of the international development community. Broadly speaking, the international development ecosystem institutions currently includes the UN system, global development banks, other multilaterals such as OECD, bilateral donors, global funds, academia and international civil society

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organisations (CSO). These are powerful institutions and can accelerate, ignore or slow the large-scale execution of digitisation for social impact. They also have an important role to play in education and production and dissemination of evidence of effectiveness. Therefore, it is important to review where major global players sit in relation to digitisation and social impact.

Given that these technologies are new, the public discourse has largely been shaped by social media and blogs. While there are now peer reviewed journals emerging such as *Journal of the British Blockchain Association* and *Frontiers in Blockchain*, most of the public narrative to date has been shaped by social media. Devex, the largest global platform for development practitioners is a good place to start. It is often seen as the place to go for the latest breakthroughs in international development. In 2016, Devex published a blog on Blockchain and its potential for international development (Mendoza, 2016) highlighting that “With potential to change the trajectory of crises, such as famines or the spread of diseases, the innovative use of data will drive a new era for global development.” This has been followed by a series of posts further elaborating on the applications of Blockchain for international development. Thomason (2017) posted on Devex, 7 ways to use Blockchain for international development (Thomason, 2017), in this post she profiles financial services, remittances, peer to peer energy trading, supply chain, land registry, identity and funds tracking. She concluded: “The international development community needs to start thinking about the ways Blockchain technology can transform how we do our work” In 2018, Devex further posted on what development practitioners need to know about Blockchain (Arkin, 2018), the five key points highlighted were: charities are accepting digital currencies as donations; payments and money transfers are the fastest moving sectors; the Bermuda approval of first crypto currency regulations; China is exploring as part of its ‘One Belt One Road’ initiative; and financial inclusion is a real opportunity.

Increasingly, universities and academia are also engaging in Blockchain, universities such as Nicosia, Princeton, Universidad Europea Madrid, Duke, UCLA and Oxford offering courses on Blockchain. Carla LaPoint (Pointe, 2017) has produced an ethical framework for the implementation of Blockchain. Stanford University (2017) has produced a report on Blockchain and social impact, which concluded that early data suggest that Blockchain can provide incremental (65% of initiatives) or transformative (25% of initiatives) solutions to the world’s toughest challenges.

The British Blockchain Association has been a leader in trying to galvanise the academic community to build the scientific evidence base for Blockchain, by launching a peer reviewed journal the *Journal of the British Blockchain Association*, which includes articles on all aspects of Blockchain. The British Blockchain Association is also convening the first scientific conference on Blockchain in London in 2019. Another peer reviewed journal, *Frontiers in Blockchain* (www.frontiersin.org/Blockchain#, n.d.) was launched in 2018, and has a specialty section for Blockchain for Good. This academic and scientific work is important to build legitimacy and the evidence base and provide a reference point amidst the hype.

MULTILATERAL ORGANISATIONS AND REGIONAL BODIES

From among the international development institutions leadership seems to be emerging from the OECD and the World Bank. The section below summarises the publicly available information on the work of international organisations.

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