ODA Debt:
WHEN PROMISES FADE

What the evidence reveals

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Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AfDB	African Development Bank
IATI	International Aid Transparency Initiative
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung)
EU	European Union
G7	Group of Seven
GNI	Gross National Income
IDA	International Development Association
JICA	Japan International Co-operation Agency
LDC	Least Developed Country
LMIC	Lower Middle Income Country
ODA	Official Development Aid
OECD DA-CCRS	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee's Creditor Reporting Sytem
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UMIC	Upper Middle Income Country
UN	United Nations

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About the Brief

This brief offers critical insights into the future of aid as the world navigates through 2025 and beyond. It presents analysis of aid project lifespans, disbursement gaps (the difference between committed and delivered funds), and delays (the time between commitment and actual disbursement), with a specific focus on Africa. Drawing on 20 years of data, it examines aid flows from the Group of Seven (G7) countries and selected multilateral donors to all African countries over the period 2005 to 2024.

About the data in this paper

IATI (International Aid Transparency Initiative) is a global initiative aimed at improving the transparency of development and humanitarian aid funding. It provides a common data standard that allows organisations, including governments, NGOs, and multilateral institutions, to publish and share information about their aid activities in a structured and accessible format IATI was chosen over the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee's Creditor Reporting System (OECD DAC- CRS) because donor reporting to IATI on project lifecycles was much more comprehensive than the CRS. While 98% of IATI activities have start date, end date, and transaction dates, over half (52%) of OECD DAC CRS activities are missing start dates. Because IATI is a voluntary initiative, not all donors or donor agencies report their activities to it. Among the donors selected, it is worth noting that only BMZ reports for Germany (where their Federal Foreign Office also gives ODA). Additionally, only JICA reports up-to-date information for Japan, where their Ministry of Foreign Affairs stopped reporting in 2018. IATI reporting from the US, Canada, IDA, UK, Germany, AfDB, ADB, and Italy correlates well with their reporting in the OECD DAC. Reporting from the EU, Japan and France is not well correlated, but was still used due to the completeness of date data. All gap and lag analyses are based on a sub-set of activities that reported both commitments and disbursements within the same project. Notably, 39% of all activities reported by these donors to IATI lacked either commitment or disbursement dates, limiting the completeness of the data-set. Among the 61% of data used in the analysis, 91.2% of projects indicate that all disbursements were made before the reported end date. However, it is important to note that donors have the option to retroactively modify the reported project end date, based on the transaction date, potentially obscuring actual delays in disbursement.

See more details on calculations in the Annex.

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1.0 Overview

Efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, (SDG) are falling short, just as the 2030 deadline nears and crises intensify. As this brief shows, aid projects to Africa, particularly since 2015, have become shorter in lifespan. Together with large disbursement gaps and lags, two decades of data on external financing reveal little sign of progress in delivering development finance grounded in global solidarity and historical responsibility.

At the same time, the broader aid landscape is shifting. While the 0.7% Official Development Assistance (ODA) target has long symbolized donor commitment to global development, it remains largely unmet. Only a few countries have consistently reached this benchmark. As donor priorities shift, often shaped by ideological leanings of political parties and electoral cycles, serious questions arise about the reliability and sufficiency of future aid flows. For African countries, the implications are serious. Shorter project cycles, unpredictable disbursements, a growing preference for debt instruments and declining aid quantum risk are derailing development progress.

1.1 Key findings

1.1.2 Aid projects life cycle

The analysis finds that G7 donors' aid provision, in terms of project life cycles, falls short of the full duration of African governments' development plans. Over the 20-year period from 2005 to 2024, the average aid project life cycle from G7 countries to Africa was 4.14 years. In contrast, multilateral donors demonstrated longer project life cycles, averaging 6.90 years. The combined average aid project life cycle from both G7 and the select multilateral donors is 4.36 years over 2005-2024 but has declined to an average of **3.18 years for 2015-2024**. We find in all cases a decline in the average project life cycle during the SDG period (2015–2024).

Our analysis finds that G7 aid projects are not only short-term and failing to align with the full cycle of national development plans, but also insufficiently responsive to country-specific contexts. For instance, findings reveal that those African countries with institutional and social fragility receive the shortest aid project life cycles, averaging 3.99 years compared to other categories by income level and conflict. The assessment also unveiled a clear disparity between funding modalities showing that aid projects provided as grants have a shorter average life cycle of 4.18 years, whereas concessional loans extend to 7.65 years, linked to the nature of projects under the two instruments.

1.1.3 Discrepancy between Commitment and Disbursement: Gap and Lag

The analysis on disbursement gaps finds that over the 20 years period, the total gap between what was committed and what was disbursed amounts to an estimated US$71.74 billion from the selected multilateral donors and G7 countries. At project level, the average gap between commitments and disbursements across all African countries over the 20-year period is estimated at US$4.33 million per project.

The assessment over the 20-year period also reveals that projects funded through concessional loans experience a gap between commitments and actual disbursements that is more than three times larger than that of grant-funded projects. This could be as a result of the nature of the projects under the two modalities.

The assessment also finds that by the fifth year mark, 32.96% of the committed funds remain undelivered, despite the average aid project life span is 4.36 years, raising concerns about the reliability and predictability of donor pledges. Based on transaction data, France has the longest average disbursement lag among G7 countries, taking 7.81 years to fulfill its commitments. Among the selected multilateral donors, IDA records the longest disbursement time, averaging 5.50 years.

2.0 Introduction

2.1 The 0.7% Target

In 1970 the UN General Assembly passed the 0.7% Official Development Target resolution, as a way to promote equitable economic development and welfare in developing countries. Endorsed by the UN General Assembly it urged donor countries to reach the 0.7% level "as soon as possible."

This 0.7% ODA target remains a symbol of global commitment, but decades on, it remains largely unmet. The UN 0.7% target for ODA Assistance has long served as a benchmark for developed countries to support global development efforts. It refers to the commitment by economically advanced countries to allocate 0.7% of their Gross National Income (GNI) toward ODA to support developing countries. The target aimed to promote global economic equity and strengthen efforts to reduce poverty and foster sustainable development._ The commitment was reaffirmed during the 2002 Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development and later incorporated into the framework for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 - further underscoring its continued relevance as a cornerstone of international development finance.

Despite widespread endorsement, many high-income countries still fall short of the 0.7% target for ODA. Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Luxembourg have consistently met or exceeded the target, with Germany joining them for the first time in 2016. In contrast, major economies such as the United States and Japan continue to contribute only between 0.2% and 0.3% of their gross national income to aid. France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, once strong performers, have not met the target in recent years. The European Union's collective pledge in 2005 to reach the 0.7% target by 2015 has also largely fallen short[i]. The United Kingdom met the 0.7% benchmark annually from 2013 to 2021, before reducing aid levels in subsequent years[ii].

2.2 Uncharted Territory: the fate of Development Aid from 2025

The year 2025 marks a retreat from the long-standing 0.7% ODA target. Several major donor countries have already announced significant reductions to their aid budgets, raising serious concerns about the future of global development cooperation. France, which passed a law in 2021 committing to reach the 0.7% GNI target by 2025, now risks falling short if its proposed 40% cut to development aid is approved- bringing its ODA down to approximately 0.45% of GNI, a level last recorded seven years ago[ii]. The US has implemented a 90-day freeze on foreign aid, leading to the suspension of critical projects in development and climate interventions, as well as heightened uncertainty over life-saving humanitarian assistance. Belgium has announced a cut of 25%i[v]. Meanwhile, Germany, the second largest ODA provider, is in the midst of snap elections with early signals suggesting that development aid may be among the first areas to face cuts, potentially pushing it below the 0.7% threshold[v]. These widespread cuts in ODA budgets are anticipated to have far-reaching consequences for global development efforts, potentially hindering progress in poverty alleviation, health initiatives, humanitarian assistance worldwide and further slow the progress towards the achievement of SDGs.

2.3 SDGs amidst Crisis in Development Aid

Efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are seriously off track, with profound implications for Africa. According to the UN's 2024 progress report, only 17% of SDG targets globally are on track, while more than one-third show either stagnation (18%) or even regression (17%)[vi].

This worrying trend is particularly visible in African countries, where rising poverty, food insecurity and vulnerability to external shocks remain acute. Yet, as this brief shows, donor responses have not matched the scale of need. Aid projects to Africa have grown shorter in lifespan, even as disbursement gaps and delays persist.

Our analysis of 20 years of aid data from G7 and key multilateral donors reveals a disconnect between political commitments to global solidarity and the actual delivery of development finance.

With the 2030 deadline approaching, development co-operation must shift from rhetoric to delivery urgently and decisively,at both national and global levels. Smarter, more responsive and context-specific humanitarian, development interventions are needed. They should be focused on reducing poverty, gender and other inequalities. The enormity and urgency, of the task has to be register by all actors at the national and global level. This requires a change in the mindset; one that moves the narrative from charity to justice as well as reclaiming the role of international development co-operation.

2.4 Methodology

To better understand these dynamics and their implications for Africa, this brief draws on two decades of aid data reported to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), by key multilateral and G7 donors. The multilateral institutions analysed include the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), EU Institutions, and the International Development Association (IDA). The bilateral donors assessed are the G7 countries: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States (US). Our analysis focuses on aid to all African countries between 2005 and 2024, with an emphasis on project lifespans, disbursement gaps and funding delays. These indicators are critical to assessing not only the volume of aid flows but also their reliability and effectiveness in meeting Africa's long-term development priorities.

2.5 The characteristics of aid project life cycle in Africa

The duration of aid projects can serve as a proxy for the depth of donor commitment and the strategic value placed on development outcomes. When projects are short-lived, fragmented, or prematurely terminated, they limit the ability of African governments to plan effectively, scale interventions, or build lasting capacity.

Shorter lifespans also signal increasing volatility in aid delivery, reflecting shifting donor priorities, budget constraints, or political uncertainty. In the context of this brief, which highlights a fragile and uneven flow of aid over the past two decades, project lifespan trends help explain why many African countries remain vulnerable to disbursement shocks and why the future of development cooperation remains uncertain from 2025.

This section presents findings on the characteristics of aid project life-cycles in Africa from 2005 to 2024, using data from selected multilateral institutions and G7 countries. The analysis examines typical project life spans and includes comparisons by income level, region, donor country, recipient African countries, temporal trends and aid instruments over the two-decade period.

2.6 Average duration of aid project life cycle in Africa

The average duration of a typical project funded by G7 donors is 4.14 years. However, this average decreases to 2.97 years when considering the period since 2015, marking the start of the SDGs implementation. In contrast, the average duration of a typical aid project funded by multilateral donors is approximately 6.90 years, still exhibiting a slight decline in life cycle to 6.03 years since 2015.

The combined average aid project life cycle from both G7 and the select multilateral donors is 4.36 years for the period between 2005 and 2024. The typical aid project life cycle further shortens to an average of 3.18 years for 2015-2024. This fails to align with the typical 5-year cycle of national development plans in African countries. The challenge is even more pronounced for countries with longer-term strategies, such as Ethiopia's 10-Year Development Plan (2021–2030).

Although multilateral donors, with their relatively longer project cycles, are better positioned to support strategic development goals, bilateral donors' shorter timelines often leave critical gaps. This underscores the need for greater coordination and adaptability to ensure external financing aligns more effectively with the priorities and planning horizons of recipient countries.

2.7 Aid project life cycle comparison by income level across the world

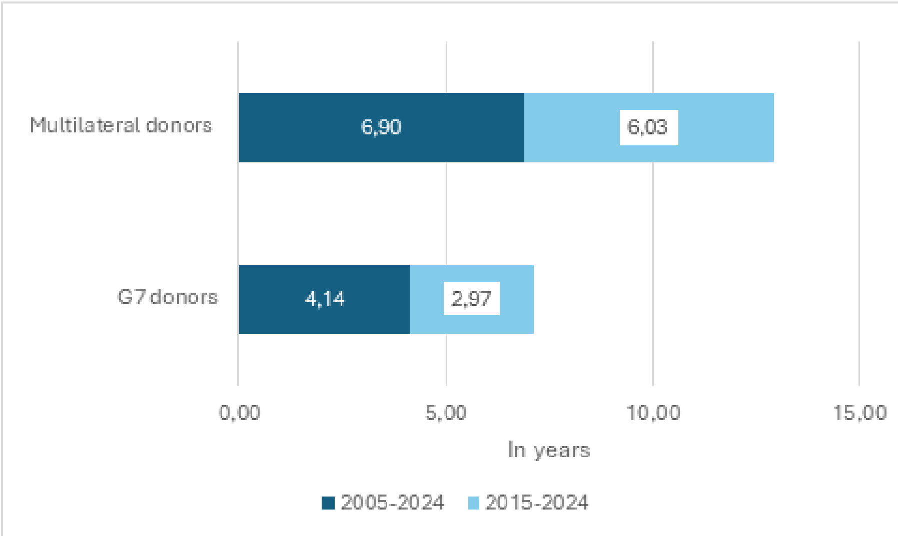


Figure 1 Average project life-cycle in years by donor type, 2005-2024 and since SDG

Comparison of project life-cycles by income group that is, least developed countries (LDCs), lower middle-income countries (LMICs), and upper middle-income countries (UMICs) across the world, shows that the average project life cycle for LDCs is shorter than aid projects of LMICs.

This finding is particularly relevant for Africa, where nearly three-quarters of LDCs (32 out of 44 countries) are located.

The analysis reveals that the average project life cycle for LDCs is 4.35 years, shorter than 4.56 years for LMICs. We find that UMICs are provided aid projects with 3.62 years life span.

The fact that LDCs that are provided shorter projects in terms of life span in comparison to LMICs raises important questions about whether aid modalities are adequately aligned with the unique needs of the most vulnerable nations.

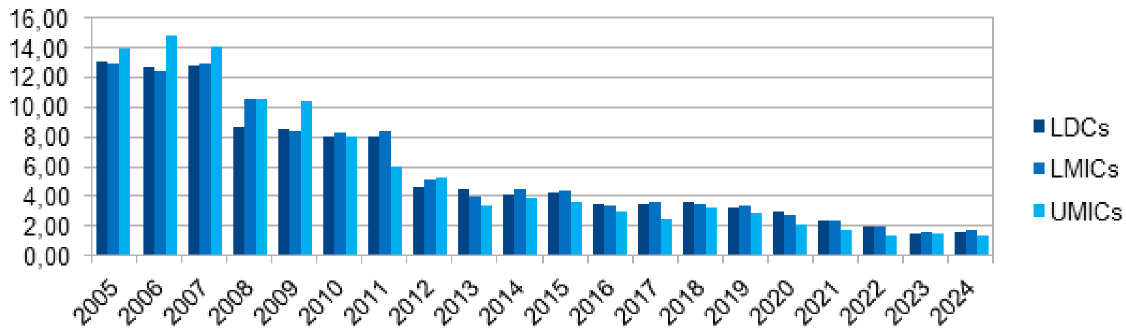


Figure 2: Aid project life cycle income group, 2005-2024

2.8 Regional comparison of aid projects life cycle

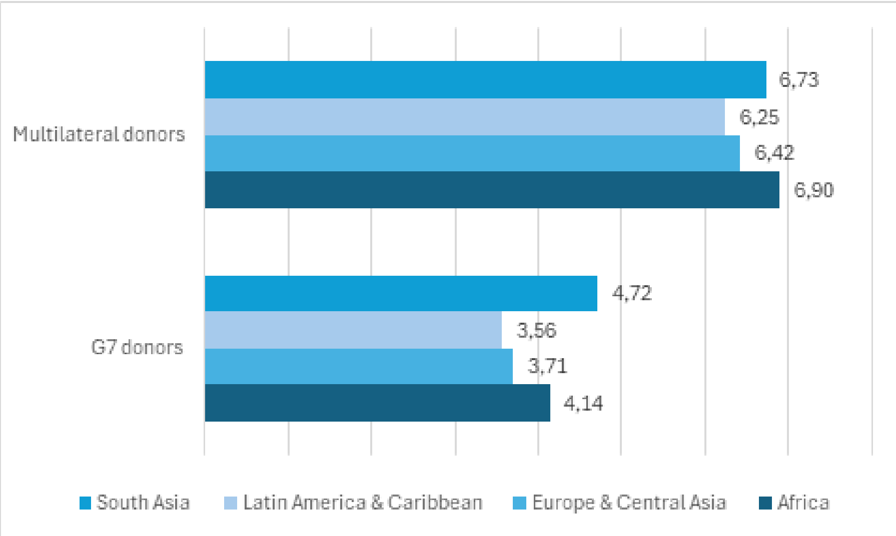


Figure 3: Average aid project life cycle by donor type and region, 2005-2024

Note: Seychelles, as a high income country in Africa, is excluded from these averages

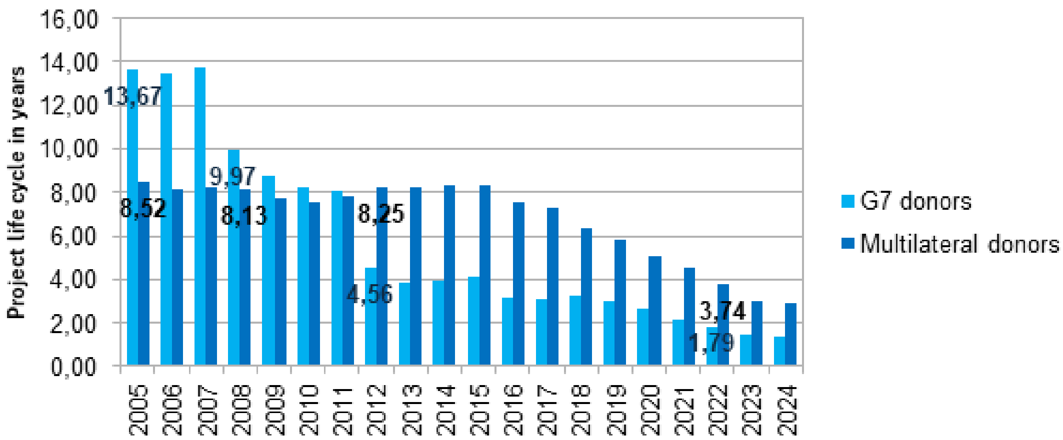


Figure 4: Average project life cycle by context of African countries, 2005-2024

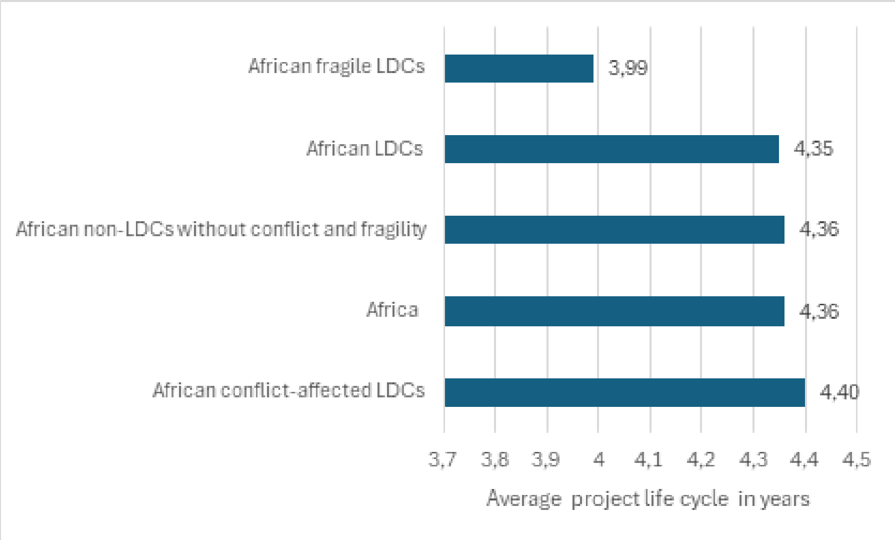
Note1: The list of African LDCs according to the UN classification, includes Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Togo, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.

Note 2: Conflict affected African countries, according to the World Bank's 2024 list, include Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo (Democratic Republic of), Ethiopia ,Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan.

Note 3: African countries with institutional and social fragility, according to the World Bank's 2024 list, include Burundi, Chad, Comoros, Congo (Republic of), Eritrea, Guinea-Bissau, Libya, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Zimbabwe. Among G7-funded projects, South Asia has the longest average aid project life cycle at 4.72 years. In contrast, multilateral donors fund their longest-running projects in Africa, with an average duration of 6.90 years.

The relatively small difference in project life cycles between Africa and other regions; namely, Latin America & the Caribbean, Europe & Central Asia and South Asia, indicates that aid duration is not significantly tailored to the unique development needs of each region. In other words, the aid modality fails to address the distinct challenges and long-term development priorities, particularly in Africa, where sustained financing is crucial for achieving national development plans.

Figure 5 Trends in aid average project life cycle in Africa by donor type, 2005-2024



2.9 Aid project life cycle by African groups

Assessment of aid project life cycles by country context shows there is limited differentiation. African LDCs with institutional and social fragility receive the shortest aid project life cycle (3.99 years) compared to the average African LDCs project life cycle (4.35). There is minimal variation in project life cycles across different contexts; LDCs, conflict affected LDCs (4.40 years) compared to Africa's average (4.36 years) or African non-LDCs without conflict and fragility (4.36 years).

The insignificant difference among these categories suggests that aid project timelines are not sufficiently tailored to the varying contexts of African countries particularly to those that need long-term support for recovery and building resilience.

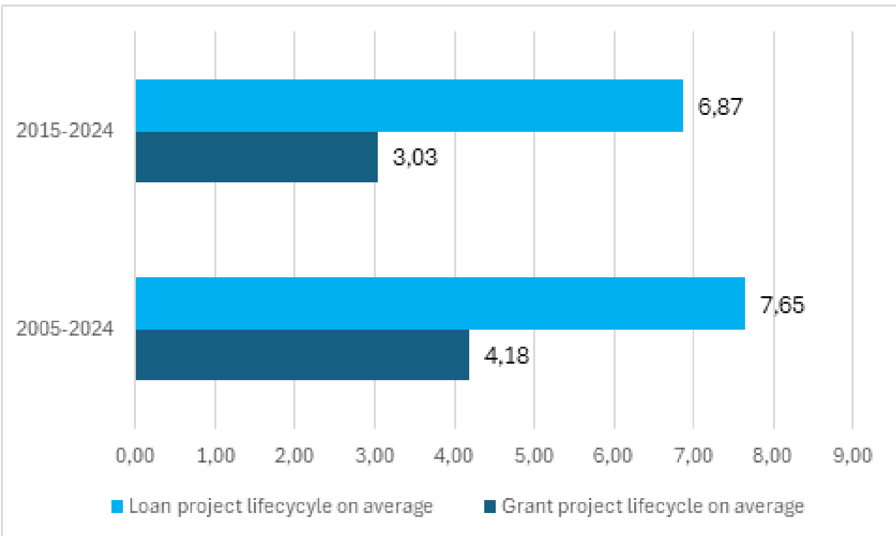
To better meet the needs of vulnerable countries, aid provisions should focus on extending project life cycle in LDCs, fragile, and conflict-affected states, ensuring that aid aligns with the unique challenges faced by countries with specific contexts.

2.10 Trends in aid project life cycle

Project life cycles have declined significantly over the past 20 years, particularly among G7 donors, with a notable drop following the 2008 global financial crisis. In 2012, project cycles saw a sharp 43% decrease, falling from 8.07 years to 4.56 years, and have not exceeded this level since.

Figure 6. Average project life cycle in Africa by aid modality, 2005-2024 and since SDGs (2015-2024)

Over the past 20 years, the most substantial reduction which occurred in 2012, is linked to a decrease in overall aid volumes in the aftermath of the financial crisis[vii]. Similarly, multilateral donors have also shown a consistent reduction in project life cycles particularly since 2015.



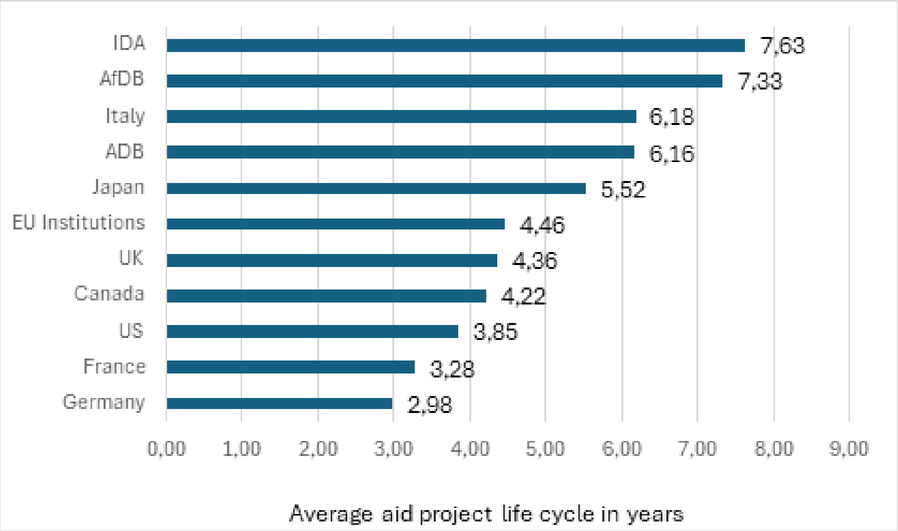
2.11 Projects life cycle by aid instruments

When aid is provided to African countries in the form of loans, the project life cycle tends to be longer, averaging 7.65 years, compared to grants, which average 4.18 years. However, during the SDG era, the average life cycle of grant-funded projects has declined further to 3.03 years, while projects funded through concessional loans dropped slightly to an average life cycle of 6.87 years since 2015.

While IATI does not show sector data, a quick review of the OECD DAC-CRS data shows the typical grant support is provided to immediate, short-term objectives such as relief assistance, higher education, human rights, Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) control; while loans are often provided to longer-term investments with objectives such as road transport, electric power transmission and distribution, social projection and multi-hazard response preparedness, among others.

The focus particularly on short-term investments hinders the ability of African recipient countries to implement and sustain comprehensive development strategies, particularly those requiring extended timeframes for impact realisation. The declining project life cycle of grant-based aid during the SDG period underscores the need to revisit aid modalities to ensure they align more effectively with the strategic priorities and longer-term development plans of recipient countries.

Figure 7 Average aid project life cycle in Africa by donor, 2005-2024



2.12 Typical aid projects life cycle by donor

Among the G7 countries, Italy funds aid projects with the longest average life cycle at 6.18 years, while Germany has the shortest at 2.98 years.

In contrast, almost all multilateral donors, except EU Institutions generally fund projects with longer life cycles, with more than 6 years, IDA leading at 7.63 years followed by the AfDB at an average project life cycle of 7.33 years.

Only two bilateral G7 donors; Italy and Japan provide projects with an average duration of at least 5 years. Shorter project life cycles particularly with Germany and most of the G7 countries providing less than five years on average which indicates a preference for short-term interventions rather than sustained development support. Meanwhile, multilateral donors, with longer project cycles, are better positioned to support longer-term development planning and infrastructure projects, with the exception of EU institutions (4.6 years) that tends to behave similarly to G7's bilateral aid.

3.0 Discrepancy between commitment and disbursement

Advanced economies often fail to deliver the aid they have committed – referred to as **ODA debt**. This gap between promises and actual transfers raises serious concerns about donor accountability as well as the credibility of international aid frameworks. *ODA commitments* and *disbursements* are two key indicators used to track donors' intentions and actual aid delivery. A *commitment* refers to the total amount a donor country or organisation formally pledges to a recipient country or project, often spanning multiple years. A *disbursement*, on the other hand, reflects the actual transfer of funds or resources, indicating the real flow of aid that reaches intended recipients. Disbursement data is therefore essential for assessing whether commitments translate into tangible support. The magnitude of the gap between commitments and disbursements has become a growing area of concern, particularly in the context of today's development finance crisis.

This section analysizes the gap and lag between commitments and disbursements for aid projects for the period 2005 to 2024 from selected donors (a subset of multilateral institutions and G7 countries). The analysis is based only on activities where both commitments and disbursements were reported within the same project. It is important to note that this accounts for 61% of all activities reported by these donors to IATI, providing a relatively robust data-set for analysis.

1. African countries received US$292 billion, equivalent to 83% of the total commitments made by selected multilateral donors and G7 countries during the period of analysis. While the absolute gap between commitments and disbursements may seem relatively small, the real concern lies in the delay in delivering these committed funds, which requires closer examination.
2. Over the twenty years period between 2005 and 2024, African countries were promised more funding than they actually received. The total shortfall which is the difference between what was committed and what was disbursed, amounts to an estimated US$71.74 billion from the selected multilateral donors and G7 countries

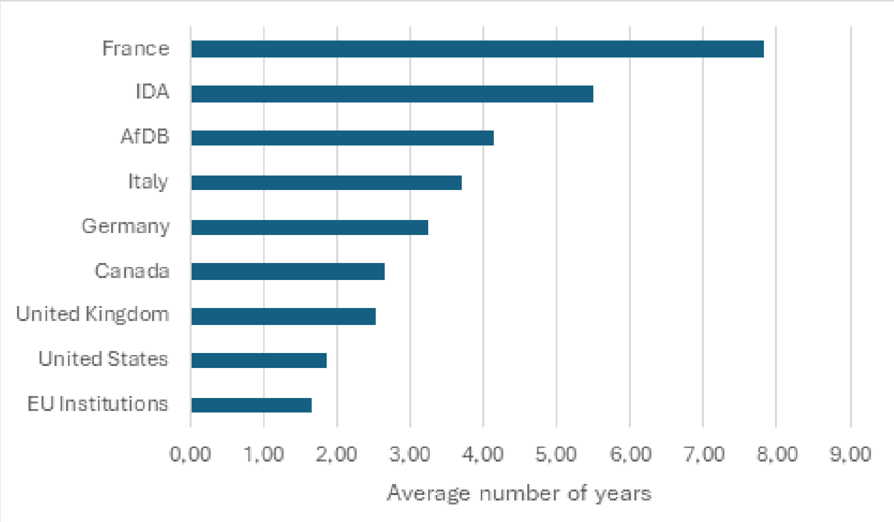


Figure 8: Average number of years between the first commitment and the last disbursement to Africa, 2005-2024

3. On a project level, the average gap between commitments and disbursements across all African countries over the 20-year period is estimated at US$4.33 million per project. This suggests that while the overall shortfall is significant, the delays and inconsistencies in aid delivery also affect projects at a more granular level, potentially impacting implementation and effectiveness.
4. An assessment by aid modality reveals that the gap between total commitments and actual disbursements for loan-based projects from selected multilateral and G7 donors is more than three times larger than for grant-based projects. Specifically, the shortfall for grants amounted to approximately $17.71 billion, while for loans, it was significantly higher at $54.03 billion. This indicates that a substantial portion of both pledged grants and loans did not materialize as actual disbursements, with loan commitments facing a much greater discrepancy.

5. A significant portion of the pledged funds remains undisbursed. Specifically, given that the typical aid project life cycle is 4.36 years, one would expect most of the committed funds to be delivered within that period. However, even when taking a five year mark, we find that 32.96% of the committed funds would still not be disbursed. By the third year mark, this discrepancy is higher, 38.29%. This raises concerns about the reliability and predictability of pledges.
6. Transaction data reveals significant variations in disbursement lags among donors. France has the longest average disbursement time among G7 countries, taking 7.81 years to fulfil its commitments. Among multilateral donors, IDA exhibits the longest disbursement period, averaging 5.50 years.

4.0 Conclusion

As the world moves closer to the 2030 deadline, the SDGs are in peril. Efforts to meet the global goals are undermined not only by mounting global crises but also by the now shaken fragile state of international development cooperation. The longstanding 0.7% ODA target, once a symbol of global solidarity, remains unmet by most donor countries. Now, in a rapidly shifting aid landscape, major donors are rolling back their commitments, with some proposing drastic aid cuts or freezes to their aid budgets. These shifts have direct consequences for Africa, where findings reveal persistent inefficiencies in aid delivery ranging from shortened project life cycles to significant disbursement gaps and delays. Against this backdrop, the credibility of global development cooperation is at stake. Reversing course will require more than reaffirming old targets; it calls for a re-imagined aid system grounded in justice, obligation, and long-term partnership.

The findings in this analysis underscore critical inefficiencies in aid delivery to African countries, particularly regarding shortened project life cycles, disbursement gaps, and lags. Over the past two decades, aid project life-spans have declined significantly, particularly among G7 donors, whose projects average 4.14 years, failing to align with the typical five-year national development planning cycle of many African countries. The trend is even more pronounced in the SDG era (2015–2024), where project life cycles have further shortened to 3.18 years. This misalignment raises concerns about the ability of aid to support long-term development strategies, especially in countries with institutional fragility and protracted crises, where sustained financing is crucial for recovery and resilience-building.

In addition to shortened project life cycles, gaps between commitments and disbursements persist, undermining aid predictability and effectiveness. Over the 20-year period, the total funding shortfall—the difference between what was committed and what was actually disbursed—amounts to US$71.74 billion, with an average project-level gap of US$4.33 million per project. The discrepancy is particularly striking for loan-based projects, where the funding gap is more than three times larger than that for grants.

Even beyond the typical aid project duration, substantial portions of committed funds remain undelivered—by the fifth year, 32.96% of the committed funds are still unpaid, and when looking at a three-year time-frame, this increases to 38.29%. These findings highlight not only the unpredictability of aid flows, but also the types of development projects that often experience delays in financing.

Moreover, disbursement lags vary widely across donors. France has the longest average disbursement delay among G7 countries (7.81 years), while among multilateral donors, IDA has the longest delay (5.50 years). These long lags significantly hinder the timely implementation of aid projects and further weaken the developmental impact of external assistance.

Taken together, these insights suggest a pressing need for reforming aid modalities to ensure greater alignment with national development priorities, improved reliability of funding, and more predictable disbursements. Extending project life-cycles particularly for fragile and conflict-affected states, would help bridge the gap between short-term interventions and long-term development needs. Addressing funding shortfalls and disbursement lags would also enhance the effectiveness of aid, allowing recipient countries to plan and implement projects more efficiently.

5.0 Recommendations

5.1 Reframe aid as a tool of justice, not charity

Development co-operation should be guided by principles of global justice, historical responsibility, and equitable redistribution, moving beyond the current narrative of aid as merely catalytic or voluntary. Reversing Africa's stalled progress on global goals requires more than renewed commitments; it demands structural shifts in how aid is planned, delivered, and monitored.

Our findings reinforce the urgency of this shift. Shortening aid project lifespans, deep disbursement gaps, and delays in fund delivery not only erode trust but also constrain the capacity of African governments to plan effectively. This is more urgent particularly for African LDCs, some of which receive ODA equivalent to more than one third of their GDP[viii]. A justice-oriented approach to aid , which reclaims the role of development cooperation as a tool of redistribution and reparative action is needed, not a discretionary act of charity.

5.2 Make aid commitments binding

There are growing calls for a new global aid governance order, one with binding obligations, recognising the historical and moral debt owed to the Global South, particularly Africa. These calls emphasize that aid should not be left to shifting political will, but anchored in a framework of accountability, transparency, and inclusivity. Such a framework must institutionalize transparency, inclusivity, and regular performance monitoring, particularly on progress toward the 0.7% target. The delivery of aid must become an obligation, not an option.

5.3 Fix the aid architecture

Redesigning the delivery of aid must go beyond efficiency tweaks and incremental fixes. It requires confronting the structural disconnect between how aid is designed and how development actually happens in African countries. Our analysis reveals that G7-funded projects in Africa now last just 3.18 years on average; too short to align with national development plans, and too fragmented to support transformative change. By year five, a third of committed funds remain undrawn. These are not minor inefficiencies; they are symptoms of an aid architecture built around donor prioritization rather than recipient realities. Fixing this requires longer-term commitments, transparent disbursement timelines, and mechanisms that give African governments greater control over how and when aid is delivered. These recommendations reflect widely acknowledged principles within global aid effectiveness frameworks, including the Grand Bargain[ix] and the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative[x], which emphasize harmonization, transparency, and inclusive decision-making in development cooperation. Until this architecture is restructured to prioritize long-term national strategies over short-term donor cycles, aid will remain unreliable, and its impact limited.

5.4 Close the Commitment vs Disbursement Gap for Effective ODA Delivery

The gap between aid commitments and actual disbursements constrains fiscal space in many African countries, limiting their ability to finance national development plans and the SDGs. Addressing this gap could significantly increase the volume and impact of ODA flows, improve project completion rates, strengthen donor accountability and enhance development outcomes through more predictable and timely funding — moreso for those previously left behind.

Bridging this gap requires both strategic and political approaches, including stronger alignment between donor objectives and recipient country priorities to reduce delays and conflicts. The following measures are crucial:

5.5 Simplify approval processes

Donors should reduce excessive administrative complexity and streamline project approval. Conditionalities that delay disbursements, particularly overly rigid policy conditions which have to be re-evaluated and minimised.

5.6 Reform disbursement preconditions

Delays are often caused by onerous preconditions, such as lengthy checklists or mandatory commitment fees tied to undrawn funds. These fees increase debt service costs without delivering developmental value and should be eliminated.

5.7 Remove counterpart funding barriers

Some agreements require recipient governments to provide co-financing before external disbursement. Given fiscal constraints, this delays project implementation. Donors should explore bridge financing to cover funding gaps and ensure continuity.

5.8 Tackle documentation delays

Delays in issuing "No Objection" notices for fund utilization slow disbursement and reduce absorption. These delays also increase costs due to accumulating commitment fees. Improving donor responsiveness in these processes is essential.

6.0 Annex

Project life-cycle: This was calculated as the time elapsed between the reported activity-level start and end dates. If actual start and end dates were available, they were used in the calculation, otherwise the planned start and end dates were used. The IATI standard defines actual start, planned start, actual end, and planned end as so, but donor interpretations of the terms may vary as indicated in the table below.

Code	Name	Description
1	Planned start	The date on which the activity is planned to start, for example the date of the first planned disbursement or when physical activity starts.
2	Actual start	The actual date the activity starts, for example the date of the first disbursement or when physical activity starts.
3	Planned End	The date on which the activity is planned to end, for example the date of the last planned disbursement or when physical activity is complete.
4	Actual end	The actual date the activity ends, for example the date of the last disbursement or when physical activity is complete.

Source: IATI

Disbursement lag: This was calculated for each activity as the time elapsed between the date of the first commitment, and the date of the last disbursement for activities that contained both transaction types. Transaction type 2 was used for commitments, and Transaction type 3 and 4 were used for disbursements. The IATI standard defines transaction dates as "the date on which the transaction was made or (in the case of commitments) agreed" as indicated in the table below:

2	Outgoing Commitment	A firm, written obligation from a donor or provider to provide a specified amount of funds, under particular terms and conditions, for specific purposes, for the benefit of the recipient.
3	Disbursement	Outgoing funds that are placed at the disposal of a recipient government or organisation, or funds transferred between two separately reported activities.
4	Expenditure	Outgoing funds that are spent on goods and services for the activity.

Source: IATI

7.0 Glossary of Terms and definitions

7.1 Bilateral Donors

These are countries or governments that provide Official Development Assistance (ODA) directly to another country, in contrast to multilateral donors who provide aid through international organizations.

7.2 Multilateral donors

These are international organizations or bodies, like the World Bank or UN agencies, that receive funding from multiple countries or governments, which they then use to support development projects and programs in recipient states.

7.3 Completeness of Data

This refers to the extent to which a data-set contains all the necessary elements and observations for a given purpose or analysis.

8.0 Endnotes

i. The 0.7% ODA/GNI target - a history (2024)
ii. The 0.7% aid target (2024)
iii. France's proposed budget cuts set to slash overseas development aid (Feb 2025)
iv. Belgium to cut development cooperation funding by a quarter (Feb 2025)
v. Germany's coalition government still haggling over aid spending (March 2025)
vi. The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024
vii. See Aid Watch Report 2012
viii. INFFs and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) Guidance note (2023)
ix. https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain
x. https://www.ghdinitiative.org/ghd/gns/home-page.html