

Editorial

Seville and Beyond: Future through a Renewed Multilateralism

The Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD-4), will take place in Seville, from 30 June to 3 July 2025. It comes at a time of deep tension and profound transition. The legitimacy and effectiveness of the multilateral system is at stake, and the Seville Conference will be a key test of whether it is still possible to build credible, inclusive, and reform-oriented global cooperation. This issue of Development Cooperation Review reflects that urgency. We hope it helps decision-makers, practitioners, and citizens to approach Seville not with fatigue or cynicism, but with strategic intent. Reforming multilateralism is not an institutional exercise, it is the precondition for delivering on our shared promises to people and planet.

While originally dedicated to financing for development, the contributions overwhelmingly converge on a broader theme: the future of multilateralism. This is not a diversion from the main question. It is a necessary reorientation. As the authors in this volume show, financing is not just about how much is mobilised, but about who decides, what gets funded, and how cooperation is governed. Multilateralism is not a separate policy domain—it is the condition for relevance, equity, and delivery in development. This editorial explores the key insights that emerge from the nine articles in the issue, and offers guidance on how their messages can help frame the strategic choices to be made in Seville.

A Multilateral System Under Strain—Yet More Necessary Than Ever

The erosion of trust in multilateral institutions, sharpened by global crises and rising inequalities, has exposed the limits of current governance models. Despite this disillusionment, the need for multilateral action is more urgent than ever. Institutions built to coordinate across borders now struggle to adapt to a world that is increasingly fragmented and interdependent. Several contributions in this issue stress that multilateral renewal depends on reconnecting institutions with their constituencies and with the ethical imperative to serve global public goods. Multilateralism must not only link states, but also support cross-sectoral and intergenerational commitments. That requires rethinking how decisions are made, how knowledge circulates, and how results are measured.

What emerges from this issue is a call to reimagine multilateralism not as an abstract principle but as a functional response to specific challenges. Cooperation must shift from rigid, universal frameworks to flexible and mission-oriented formats. Instead of top-down frameworks, effective governance should be built around precise goals, via joint diagnostics, and coalitions of the willing. In this view, legitimacy is no longer derived solely from formal mandates, but from the ability to deliver concrete outcomes. This perspective is developed, in different ways, by Stefano Manservigi and Mario Pezzini (“Experimental multilateralism and variable geometries”) and by David McNair (“Frugal multilateralism”).

Multilateralism must also overcome the legitimacy deficit that arises from asymmetric power relations. The inclusion of diverse actors—including governments from the Global South, local authorities, and civil society—is essential for rebuilding trust. A more experimental and adaptive approach to cooperation, based on “variable geometry” can foster accountability and participation without sacrificing scale or ambition. This shift is not just desirable; it is indispensable to making development finance credible and responsive.

Gabriela Ramos, candidate of the Mexican President for the position of Director-General of UNESCO, reinforces this message by insisting on the ethical dimension of cooperation. In her interview, she proposes a more humanistic and values-based multilateralism, capable of mobilizing cultural and educational levers and open to issue-based “adaptive coalitions of the willing.”

The Global South Speaks—and Waits for a Response

The current moment is also marked by increasing assertiveness from countries and regions of the Global South. With diverse but converging demands: for more voice, fairer criteria, stronger alignment with national strategies, and more equitable partnerships.

Latin America, as analysed in this issue (Malacalza and Morasso), presents itself not as a passive recipient but as a region with concrete contributions to make: horizontal cooperation, regional public goods, and alternative approaches to metrics and partnership. Five “great transformations” — geopolitical, financial, digital, environmental, and social — are reshaping development challenges and expectations. From this perspective, middle-income status does not imply low vulnerability or reduced need for support. On the contrary, it reveals the limits of income-based allocation and calls for a shift toward multidimensional indicators.

African agency, too, is evolving in diverse ways (Scialoja). It expresses itself through continental coordination, converging national postures, and sovereign diplomacy. What matters is that African engagement is no longer limited to symbolic presence; it increasingly shapes the agenda. But fragmentation, underrepresentation in global institutions, and externally defined priorities continue to hinder ownership. Inclusive governance must respond not only to who sits at the table, but to how priorities are set and how partnerships are built.

A concrete example of functional multilateralism is offered by the EU-LAC relationship. As discussed in this issue (da Costa), the Global Gateway Investment Agenda shows potential for a new form of cooperation built on shared missions, co-financing, and joint accountability. But that potential will remain unfulfilled unless it is backed by transparency, regional ownership, and coherent instruments.

The message from the Global South is not ambiguous. Seville will be judged by its capacity to respond to concrete demands: greater fiscal space, fairer debt instruments, stronger development banks, real alignment with local strategies, climate justice, and access to technology. The credibility of international cooperation now depends on the ability to deliver not more promises, but better terms of engagement.

Rethinking Multilateralism: Not Just the Institutions, But the Logic

The diagnosis offered by these different papers converges on a deeper insight: multilateralism must be rethought not just as an institutional configuration, but as a logic of cooperation. This logic must evolve from norms and declarations to missions, delivery and learning by monitoring experiments. From a universalism that masks power asymmetries to a functionalism that makes space for coalitions of the willing. As Ramos notes, issue-based coalitions, adaptive learning, and inclusive governance are not temporary fixes — they are building blocks of a new multilateral architecture. Similarly, da Costa and Tortora emphasise that experimental initiatives such as “The Global Gateway and the 4P Platform” can provide valuable lessons for broader reforms.

Finance for Development: Not Just How Much, But How and Why

Only two of the contributions — by Piera Tortora and Sushil Kumar — focus directly on financial flows. But all nine papers point to the need to redefine the purpose, principles, and priorities of development finance.

Piera Tortora, in her strategic overview of Seville, outlines five reform priorities: (1) debt pause clauses and climate-resilient debt instruments; (2) mobilisation of private capital through regulatory alignment; (3) transparency and reform of credit rating systems; (4) solidarity levies on under-taxed sectors; and (5) integrating multidimensional vulnerability into concessional finance. She stresses the importance of the Seville Platform for Action as a flexible vehicle for implementing these proposals through coalitions of the willing.

Sushil Kumar provides a stark warning: aid budgets are collapsing. The United States, United Kingdom, and many European donors are cutting ODA drastically. The 0.7 per cent target is no longer a shared aspiration, but a broken promise. Kumar calls for developing countries to develop alternative strategies: domestic resource mobilisation, better engagement with development banks, and stronger South-South platforms. But his core message is clear: without renewed commitments from donors, the very legitimacy of the FfD process is at risk.

In a complementary perspective, Nicholas Westcott, drawing on decades of diplomatic experience, reminds us that development finance must not be measured only by volume. He emphasises the enduring value of dialogue, donor coordination, and learning from the ground. His perspective reinforces the argument that delivery and trust must be at the centre of both financing and multilateralism.

From Diagnosis to Action: What Seville Must Deliver

Across the issue, five strategic priorities for Seville seems to emerge:

1. Reform global governance structures to reflect a more inclusive and equitable distribution of voice and influence.
2. Adopt new metrics and allocation criteria beyond GDP so to reflect multidimensional vulnerability and structural constraints.
3. Empower coalitions of the willing through flexible mandates, joint platforms, and light but effective governance.
4. Ensure transparency and accountability in both public and private development finance, especially blended finance and guarantees.
5. Build trust through delivery, not declarations: experiment, show results, document impact, learn from monitoring and adapt.

If Seville delivers only a consensus document, it may fail to meet the moment. But if it enables real experimentation, coalitions, and policy learning then it may lay the foundation for a new phase of global cooperation.

Conclusion: Seizing the Opportunity for Strategic Renewal

The contributions to this issue of the Development Cooperation Review do more than analyse problems. They offer a coherent, plural, and forward-looking vision of what development cooperation can become. They remind us that multilateralism is not obsolete, but unfinished. That financing is not only a question of quantity, but of legitimacy and purpose. And that Seville is not just another meeting—it is an opportunity to begin again, with more courage, clarity, and care.