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Development Cooperation Review

**Special Issue on
Financing for Development**

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Development Cooperation Review

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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.

Experimental Multilateralism and Variable Geometries

Stefano Manservigi and Mario Pezzini*

Abstract: This paper argues in favour of a reinvention of multilateral cooperation in response to the growing criticism of traditional international governance structures. Against the backdrop of mounting crises - including climate change, inequality, global health challenges, and the erosion of trust in institutions - the paper outlines key junctures for rethinking multilateralism. It emphasises the need to reform not only the actors and decision-making mechanisms, but also the goals and operational models of cooperation. The paper proposes a move away from rigid, top-down paradigms towards a more flexible, inclusive and functional multilateralism. This approach is based on joint analyses, regional experimentation and pragmatic, task-oriented cooperation. It argues for the integration of existing multilateral institutions with emerging models that better reflect the realities and aspirations of the Global South, while including non-state actors and enabling peer-to-peer learning. In this way, it presents a vision of multilateralism that is more equitable, participatory and responsive to the complexity of today's interconnected challenges.

Keywords: Variable Geometry Cooperation, Development Cooperation, Multilateralism, Experimentalism, Global Public Goods, Global South, Public Policy Capacity, Development Finance.

1. Multilateralism, Where Is It?

The cruelty of current international conflicts often masks a deeper, more pervasive phenomenon: a growing sense of discontent spreading across societies both in the North and in the South. This discontent may appear as apathy or erupt as open hostility. It often takes the form of rejection of institutions increasingly viewed with suspicion amidst a wave of populism that demands quick fixes to complex issues - poverty, inequality, marginalisation and a lack of prospects. Support or resignation

for coups d'état or authoritarian regimes can be seen as a symptom of this broader malaise. This reality is often rooted in domestic causes but is also fuelled by the frustration of not being able to act effectively in the face of the supposedly external dynamics that are generally attributed to globalisation. Conflict and dissatisfaction thus reinforce one another, feeding a dangerous spiral where multilateralism itself comes under strain.

No doubt, there is an urgent need to rethink the present multilateral system and reimagine international

* Adjunct Professor at the EUI School of Transnational Governance and at Sciences-Po/Paris School for International Affairs, Paris. Former official of European commission.

** Economist and Former Director of the OECD Development Centre, Paris, France. Views are personal.

cooperation. Trust in global settings, once providing at least financial assistance, is eroding. The many climate summits and declarations have yielded little compared to the devastation already unfolding. The hypocrisy of “vaccine nationalism” that emerged during the Covid crisis has left its mark, and the deepening post-pandemic economic disparities, have further undermined confidence. Trade and capital flow rules are contested and are currently undergoing a thorough overhaul. New protectionist trends in the U.S., across both parties, are dimming faiths that globalisation might lift middle classes and help the poorer segments of society out of poverty. Meanwhile, China is accused of sidestepping multilateral rules, while the WTO is seen as ineffective.

However, the need to strengthen cooperation and reform its institutions have often been satisfied with provisional solutions: transactional realism centred on national interests, power and pacts, where everything becomes a subject of negotiation, or goodwill, especially from civil society. Today’s complexity arguably exceeds any precedent (consider the UN’s attempt to renew itself through the proposed Pact for the Future). A rising tide, bolstered by nationalist movements, challenges multilateralism outright, portraying it as a threat to sovereignty and a vehicle for decisions at odds with national interests. This critique goes beyond inefficiency; it questions the system’s very legitimacy.¹ Short-sightedness, antagonism and sovereignty become the yardstick for

everything. Cooperation becomes the exception. Mistrust prevails, especially when cooperation entails even minimal supranational decision-making. In this climate, bilateralism among ‘like-minded friends’ tends to prevail, constrained by the logic of contingent convenience.

2. Some Junctures of a Reinvention

The concerns raised above must be taken seriously. Multilateral cooperation remains the only viable arena capable of addressing some defining global challenges of our time: preserving and developing global public goods, advancing sustainable and just peace, supporting development efforts in countries, and revitalising the relationship between the North/West and the Global South. Therefore, what are the most important junctures to focus on in order to reorient and revitalise multilateralism?

2.1 The Actors

One critical juncture for rethinking multilateralism concerns the very actors who shape it. The credibility - and, increasingly, the legitimacy - of the multilateral system is openly questioned. While many countries of the Global South still support the UN and key financial and trade institutions, and even occasionally engage with selective forums like the G7, they often regard these venues as platforms for advocacy rather than actual tables for their contribution to decision-making. Their longstanding critique centres on governance structures that remain uncooperative and non-

inclusive - even when decisions taken in these spaces have profound consequences for the Global South.

The critique extends beyond the composition of the UN Security Council to encompass institutions responsible for shaping the purpose, scope, and priorities of development cooperation.² Important forums are mainly chaired and attended by traditional donors - primarily Western countries - with little or no structured representation from the South, despite the fact that the South is the primary stakeholder of assistance policies. This imbalance is counterintuitive: policymaking, monitoring, and evaluation should include those most directly affected to ensure relevance, effectiveness, and legitimacy as well as to capture diverse experiences and needs.³ Frustration is further exacerbated by the significant shift in focus from cooperation to funding, which has increasingly become a metonym for cooperation itself - as if funding were its only dimension or concern. Discussions increasingly revolve around financing allocations - often with limited success - while collaborative efforts to design and experiment concrete solutions to shared challenges have become marginal. Even the exchange of knowledge and innovations - particularly those developed and tested in the South - has been sidelined.

Over the past 25 years, the power asymmetry has become more acute and visible. The growing economic and geopolitical weight of emerging economies has transformed their role and cannot be ignored in the multilateral

discussions. Therefore, there must be increasing recognition that countries in the South bring essential, context-specific knowledge about their own development pathways.⁴ However, unable to influence decision-making within traditional multilateral bodies, these countries are creating parallel institutions where they expect to be better represented and heard - or at least shielded from chronic exclusion. This proliferation of new platforms reflects, in part, the broader geopolitical rivalry between the United States and China. While this diversification may offer the Global South more options, it does not necessarily strengthen international cooperation, in particular for global public goods. In fact, it often contributes to a deepening polarisation.

The crisis of legitimacy in multilateralism is not limited to the divide between North/West and South. It also concerns the role of non-state actors - cities, local and regional governments, NGOs, trade unions, and businesses. These actors are vital not only for crafting solutions to global challenges such as climate change, but also as connectors to local realities and communities. Their inclusion can help reduce fragmentation, foster genuine participation, and address the root causes of dissatisfaction: disempowerment and marginalisation.

2.2 The Goals

A second critical juncture in the reorientation of multilateralism lies in the evolution of its goals. What, after all, did structural adjustment policies

achieve, if not the prioritisation of fiscal consolidation and the reduction of national economies to the narrow lens of prevailing neoliberal theory? These approaches largely overlooked the complex structural challenges faced by countries of the Global South.

Today, multilateral action should be guided by the logic underpinning 2030 Agenda. First, the preservation and enhancement of global public goods must be a central objective. Second, development must be seen as something that is linked to, but not synonymous with, growth. Third, multilateralism must embrace the diversity of development trajectories and harness the unique opportunities each country offers.

At the same, international cooperation should address the persistent 'development traps' that entrench structural and social disadvantages - both within and across countries. The poverty trap is the most visible, but others also obstruct progress, even in so-called middle-income countries. These traps fuel vicious cycles, deepen social discontent, and demand coordinated public policies to disrupt their perpetuation. For example, dependence on low-value-added natural resources deteriorates terms of trade, heightens exposure to price fluctuations, and hinders industrial diversification. Moreover, the weak diffusion of innovation to small enterprises or marginalised regions contributes to underemployment, depressed wages, precarious working conditions, and the exodus of skilled professionals. Additionally, the limited mobilisation of domestic resources,

compounded by multinational tax avoidance and the high cost of credit, constrains public investment, escalates debt burdens, and fosters a widespread sense of resignation.

There remains significant work to align multilateralism with the spirit of the 2030 Agenda. A key shift is to move beyond GDP-based metrics in development cooperation. Aid and funding are still overwhelmingly tied to GDP or gross national income - indicators that fail to capture the multidimensional nature of well-being. Alternative indicators,⁵ aligned with the 2030 Agenda and developed by organisations such as the UNDP and OECD, are available and actionable. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres has pointed out, these metrics allow us to 'measure what we care about'. Yet their adoption remains limited. The continued dominance of outdated metrics reflects bureaucratic inertia, resistance to change, and entrenched interests, alongside an overemphasis on financial flows as the sole determinant of development.

This bias distorts development strategies. Rather than adapting to the specific contexts of countries and regions, too many strategies, when they even exist, follow predetermined pathways dictated by an increasingly obsolete economic orthodoxy that claims universality. Terms such as 'differentiation' and 'ownership' often amount to rhetorical flourishes, lacking substantive application - particularly in contexts marked by distributional conflict and fragile social cohesion. From the perspective of the

Global South, this perpetuates a sense of stasis and intensifies the legitimacy crisis facing both development policy and multilateral institutions.

Lastly, for too long multilateral action has fallen short in fostering large-scale initiatives for sustainable investment. While there are signs of progress today - with renewed attention to industrial policy in the North/West and in the Global South - still a clearer recognition of strategic investment needs and opportunities is lacking. The same for policy dialogue: a dialogue that must facilitate mutual learning, alignment of priorities, and the identification of potential joint investment efforts within a multilateral framework.

2.3 The Modalities

A third critical juncture concerns the 'how' of international cooperation.

Increasing development funding is undoubtedly part of the answer. Public finance is even more indispensable today than in the past - to support social inclusion, redistributive policies, and the transition to climate resilience.⁶ Private investment also plays a crucial role, and rightly so. It is essential for catalysing employment and productivity, particularly in contexts where public capacity is limited.

However, scaling up funding alone is not sufficient. Too little attention has been paid to strengthening the capacity of states to formulate and implement public policies that can channel and complement private investment. These include ensuring access to quality healthcare and education, decent employment,

and equitable territorial development in areas where inequalities remain stark and deeply rooted. Only by reinforcing the ability of public institutions to deliver can we address discontent, rebuild trust in governance, and avoid falling into persistent development traps.

This raises a fundamental question: what modalities should be adopted to effectively strengthen states' capacities? A renewed multilateralism should not primarily be about imposing conditionalities or standardised criteria for accessing funding. Instead, it should promote continuous dialogue, joint experimentation, and peer-to-peer learning.⁷ Through these interactions, cooperation can move from a strictly normative framework to one that supports the co-construction of missions aimed at advancing common goods.

This kind of cooperation is still difficult to achieve within many existing multilateral institutions. Developing countries often remain subject to external decisions, grounded in frameworks and categories set by others. This remains true not only for traditional multilateralism - where Northern countries dominate - but also for newer forms of cooperation led by the Global South. Even in more recent arrangements, such as those developed under the Belt and Road Initiative, a normative logic may resurface over time, despite early pledges of equality and experimentation. Nonetheless, these newer forms of cooperation continue to appeal, in part because they appear more open and symmetrical than their predecessors.

3. How Do we Reinvent Multilateralism?

In summary, the complexity of today's challenges requires no less, but rather unprecedented levels of cooperation. Domestic tensions and global issues often call for a renewed commitment to building transnational 'roads' that serve the collective interest. Yet multilateralism is increasingly fragmented. On the one hand, global institutions have lost significant influence, fail to reflect the realities of Global South countries, and are struggling to respond effectively and in a timely manner to systemic challenges such as climate instability, widening economic disparities, and global health risks. On the other hand, alternative forms of multilateralism are emerging with potential, but remain underdefined and, in some cases, are still susceptible to many of the shortcomings that have affected traditional cooperation frameworks. Amid all this, transactional short-term realism is rapidly gaining ground.

How can we rebuild meaningful dialogue in such turbulent times? In a mid/long term perspective, we should of course integrate the strengths of both traditional and emerging multilateral approaches, rethinking their foundations to overcome outdated models, and building a renewed cooperation framework. This integration cannot be based on extending old North/West standards to the Global South, perpetuating a view of these countries as rule takers. Rather, it must rest on new proposals and a bold reimagining of governance that is representative, participatory, and balanced. A framework

that amplifies the voices of the South and of civil society, fosters mutual understanding and trust, and collectively redefines principles of long-term global sustainability.

In the short term, however, a full overhaul of multilateralism may not be realistic. What is possible—and urgently needed—is the launch of a 'functional' multilateralism based on Experimentalism. This would consist of practical, goal-oriented experiments that are flexible, adaptable, and free from unnecessary bureaucratic constraints. Such a variable-geometry multilateralism would be built around coalitions of actors that change according to the issue at hand, aligning capacities and energy toward clearly defined objectives. This approach offers a pragmatic way forward, enabling progress even amid systemic inertia and political fragmentation.

This functional approach would:

1. Build inclusive and representative dialogue platforms, specific for each new cooperation initiative. These platforms should go beyond normative logic and adopt an approach aimed at fostering a shared understanding of priorities and strategies. Dialogue should begin with mutual exchange and validation of data - ensuring reliability, relevance, and comparability - and proceed through joint interpretation as well as the elaboration of a consensual language. Cooperation should prioritise actor dialogue over the creation of centralised administrations with regulatory power. This is still rare in international governance structures, particularly among the so-called 'knowledge banks'

that continue to follow intrusive legacy paradigms. Some new platforms could be exceptionally hosted within existing multilateral bodies,⁸ provided they enjoy sufficient autonomy and purpose-built governance.

2. Identify the specific 'Common Goods or Bads' to be addressed through a shared diagnosis. They should be turned into targeted, concrete missions - rather than vague, overarching objectives. Discussions may take place on a global scale but should more often be regional,⁹ and anyhow reflecting the geography of impact. For example, instead of generic goals like 'Global Health' or 'Education for All', cooperation could focus on eliminating malaria in Mercosur or promoting sustainable diets in specific regions. Historical functional initiatives, such as Danube navigation and international rail coordination, offer valuable lessons that can be revisited to meet today's needs.
3. Define the missions and modes of action collaboratively with diverse stakeholders - governments, local authorities, businesses, trade unions, and civil society organisations - to pool resources and knowledge. Avoid centralised, bureaucratic approaches. Foster voluntary, open agreements with light governance that maintain flexibility and agility in decision-making. A minimalist approach to management could improve the speed of intervention and cut bureaucratic costs, enabling a better response to specific project needs. Incentives and sanctions to reduce opportunistic behaviour and maintain commitment could be defined collectively.

4. Create continuous cycles of experimentation, monitoring, and learning. Participant experiences and knowledge should be valued. These cycles can identify what works, where, and under what conditions. They should also inform whether general objectives should be revised and which rules must be adapted to local realities. Shared monitoring fosters transparency, mutual accountability, and the cross-fertilisation of ideas.
5. Bridge short-term action with long-term vision. Lessons from these initiatives should feed into shaping the future of multilateralism. They can guide which strategies are sustainable, which objectives need recalibrating, and how cooperation frameworks might evolve. Ongoing monitoring is essential - not just for evaluating progress, but for building coherence and adaptive governance over time.

4. Conclusions

In times of profound uncertainty such as the present, it is essential to embrace a form of multilateralism that is grounded in practical objectives and enriched by the experimental experiences of all participants. Such an approach should not only foster inclusive dialogue, but also prioritise tangible outcomes. Public policies must be adaptable - constantly refined in light of feedback and emerging evidence from on-the-ground experimentation. Governments, in turn, should favour flexible organisational models capable of adjusting to shifting priorities. Multilateral institutions have a crucial role to play: they must help to

legitimise bottom-up multilateralism and support experimentation by enabling innovative methods and solutions. This functional and adaptive approach could prove instrumental in addressing today's pressing global challenges and in shaping a more effective, equitable, and representative system of international cooperation.

Endnotes

¹ For example, it denies or underestimates the needs for the preservation and development of global public goods.

² One of the best-known tables in this context is the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), which is responsible for setting guidelines, international standards and governance of official development assistance (ODA) as well as for the regular publication of statistics on the contributions of its members. The DAC has 31 members, including many of the world's richest countries, such as the United States, Japan, Germany, France, the United Kingdom and the European Union, but no countries in the South. The DAC represents a coordinated effort by traditional donors to ensure that the amount of aid is consistent with the commitments made by the traditional donors themselves, which is not the case. Over time, however, it has also tended to see itself as the place where not only funding but also development policy is discussed. That is, about the what and how of cooperation. It has created networks in which the effectiveness of cooperation programmes, transparent governance, gender equality, etc. are to be discussed. In short, on topics where the knowledge of the countries of the South should be at least as important as that of the countries of the North. But the South is not part of the DAC.

³ This is a point often made by Dennis Snower, President of the Global Solutions

Initiative and Fellow at Brookings and Oxford.

⁴ Consider by way of example the African Agenda 2063.

⁵ Although there are multiple feasible proposals for alternative measures of well-being, for example from organisations such as UNDP and OECD, and calls from several countries such as India to adopt them, we remain constrained in a path dependency where metrics such as GDP continue to dominate public decision-making. Undoubtedly this reflects a mix of bureaucratic inertia, obstacles to the perception of change, an almost exclusive emphasis on financial resources for development, and vested interests.

⁶ The rationale is widely understood: climate change disproportionately impacts the poorest populations - those who have contributed least to the crisis, yet bear its heaviest burdens. These communities not only suffer from worsening climate conditions but also face a compounded threat from rising levels of infectious disease and deepening poverty. Many of these countries are trapped in debt, which further constrains their capacity to invest in climate transition efforts. In light of these realities, the global community must step up with stronger, more consistent financial support. Least Developed Countries (LDCs) receive only minimal assistance, while numerous middle-income countries - despite being caught in severe development traps - are systematically excluded from aid mechanisms. This is not merely a question of moral responsibility; it is a matter of strategic necessity. The effects of climate change, and the economic instability they bring, do not respect national borders. They threaten global resilience and demand a truly collective response.

⁷ See the extremely fertile and helpful work of Charles Sabel and his idea of experimentalism in public policies and multilateralism.

⁸ The secretariat of international organisations includes, in several cases,

valuable experts and technicians. However, it is also important to take into account the context and culture in which the talents operate: the institutional structures, conventions (written and informal), work organisation, career conditions and institutional memory in which the experts work. Now this context can have a strong inertia and be particularly resistant to change, complicating the adaptation to the new objectives and modalities of multilateral experimentation, not to mention the legitimacy of the existing bodies in the eyes of the actors of the South.

⁹ In the absence of systemic convergence, geographical proximity can sometimes facilitate cooperation between countries that follow similar development paths and have similar preferences, as seems to be the case in Africa and less so in Latin America. This may imply trade agreements, harmonisation of legislation, but also, and above all, knowledge sharing on public policies. But how to build it? Europe could play a role, but not by closing in on its privileges and the memory of its former powers, but rather by enhancing its experience of regional integration.

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Time for ‘Frugal Multilateralism’ With A Single Doctrine: Delivery

David McNair*

Abstract: This paper argues for ‘frugal multilateralism,’ focused less on major pronouncements, declarations, and summits; instead on effective approaches to solve specific problems, built around norms and multi-stakeholder coalitions that deliver results. This requires stepping outside of an intellectual paradigm in which institutions and legal frameworks are the source of legitimacy and power, and instead consider networks, influence and trust and the key currency through which goals are achieved.

Key Words: Development Cooperation, Multilateralism, Experimentalism, Global Public Goods, Global South, Public Policy Capacity, Development Finance.

1. Multilateralism in a Moment of Fragmentation

Eighty years since the creation of the United Nations and the Bretton Woods Institutions, principally the IMF and World Bank, these architectures have come to an inflection point. Funding cuts from traditional donors – particularly the United States – are forcing significant staffing cuts and long running debates about restructuring UN Agencies are quickly shifting to operational plans, layoffs,¹ and a proposal from the UN80 Taskforce² to consolidate significant parts of the UN system to address “*increased mandates, often without clear exit strategies, and complexities [that] have led to significant overlaps, inefficiencies and increased costs.*” A growing call from global majority countries for reform

of the Bretton Woods Institutions has helped shape the World Bank’s ‘evolution roadmap’ process to update its mission and operating model and the G20 has led a process for better leveraging the Multilateral Development Bank system.

These events, and the response of major institutions to them, are largely symptoms of a series of broader trends driving the need for reform of our vision for multilateralism – not just multilateral institutions.

The norms and values embedded in the rules-based international order are increasingly under attack by major powers that seek instead to bypass norms through unilateral action, bi-lateral deals or informal coalitions.

The multipolar and fragmented world we live in today is not one that would be recognizable to the founders of the

* Executive Director, The ONE Campaign, Brussels. Views are personal.

multilateral system and its institutions, who designed them for a world where a relatively small number of states held the majority of power and resources and could assume responsibility and capability for averting conflict, leveraging the power of capital markets and trade to build prosperity, and use formal intergovernmental processes to establish norms that would be respected and enforced by members.

We now live in a world where power is disbursed (though unequally) between countries, businesses, social movements; where coalitions form and dissipate rapidly; where politics is polarised and polarisation is amplified by technological innovation that is rapidly accelerating; where trust in institutions of all forms has been declining consistently for a decade, and that collapse of trust is fuelling extremist and populist politics. A politics that is, in turn, fuelling the weakening of the multilateral system.³

The UN and Bretton Woods system is clearly ill equipped to act on today's challenges. Arresting the atrophying trust requires delivering well on a core mandate. But that in itself requires institutions and member states to ask fundamental questions about what that core mandate should be in today's world. Then to articulate that renewed mandate and deliver on it.

Instead, the response of institutions has been to take on more within the existing framework. As the world becomes more complex, and competing challenges interrelate, the official mandate bestowed on these institutions creates incentives to assume a central role in designing

solutions; whether through establishing norms, implementing programs, or providing a moral voice.

It is, in the words of Peter Drucker, "acting with yesterday's logic" which he characterised as the greatest risk during facing leaders during turbulent times.⁴

The temptation to 'boil the ocean' is strong but the lack of focus and horizontal consensus-based approaches lead to lowest common denominator positions which are uninspiring, hard to communicate and impossible to enforce. This is compounded by institutional competition for funding and power with leads of escalation and mission creep.

These dynamics have been evident in the negotiation and creation of the Sustainable Development Goals which laudably sought to codify the a large range of human and environmental issues and interests into an overarching framework of 17 Goals and 169 targets.⁵ The UN's 'Pact for the Future,'⁶ a 60 page document included 56 'actions' covering everything from building and sustaining peace to the 'exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes.' Yet the realpolitik decisions impacting on these issues largely happens outside of the UN system with little regard for these negotiating texts.

As a result, rather than the United Nations being a central coordinator for development and enforcing norms, it is increasingly in competition with new coalitions and institutions which have emerged to respond to this changing world such as regional development banks; the BRICS, G7 and G20 and OECD; regional and subregional groups such as the EU, AU and ASEAN.

These dynamics are not new, nor exclusively driven by western powers. For example, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), founded in 1961 by leaders such as Nehru, Nasser, and Nkrumah, was a pivotal multilateral initiative led by countries in the Global South which sought to chart a course independent of both the Western and Soviet blocs, rooted in principles of sovereignty, non-interference, and solidarity against colonialism. The G77 remains a powerful grouping that articulates key concerns of the South. Yet the proliferation of coalitions acting outside of the UN offer an alternative and often competing theatre. These coalitions often succeed because they can focus, move faster and deliver impact, but lack the scale and legitimacy of a truly global body.

2. The State of Multilateralism in Today's World

Much of the debate, including the recommendations of the UN80 Taskforce, has focused largely on institutional restructuring and consolidation; the logical outcome of this way of thinking is similar approaches and ways of working at a smaller scale delivering less impact.

Yet the challenges we face demand action on a greater scale, at a faster pace and delivering more impact. This moment requires going back to first principles and considering the purpose of multilateralism and considering the development of a set of tools allowing the most appropriate approach to be deployed to the specific challenge at hand.

An effective approach to supporting international 'order' requires a degree

of legitimacy for the norms, rules and institutions mandated to steward them. Yet, on almost every dimension we see a crisis of legitimacy and effectiveness and an inability of multilateral institutions to resolve these challenges.

For example, NATO's war in Kosovo in 1999, the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and 2022, have been accompanied by an increasing paralysis of the Council highlight the lack of legitimacy and respect for the norms promoting peaceful co-existence.⁷

The World Trade Organization has reached few significant agreements beyond accords on trade facilitation (2013) and fisheries subsidies (2022) highlighting a lack of effectiveness in facilitating economic exchange and prosperity.⁸ Efforts by the G20 to provide a framework for orderly debt restructuring in a complex creditor environment have largely failed due to an inability to incentivize a combination of public and private creditors to act together. Meanwhile the increasing interdependence and interconnectedness of economic systems and trading regimes have led to the weaponization of economic and health policy in achieving broader geo-political objectives.⁹

The hope that agreements to safeguard critical global public goods from these conflicts seems increasingly distant following the dynamics regarding vaccine deployment during COVID,¹⁰ the deployment of economic sanctions following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the US administration's pullback from the Paris Climate Agreement, World Health Organization and actions

on Environmental Social and Governance investment programs.

It is easy to highlight examples of the failure of these norms and institutions without considering counterfactual scenarios for where their absence would lead to more disruption and conflict. But it is also critical to consider the risk that, in a world of fragmentation, the effectiveness of these approaches may wane further.

As we look ahead, we can imagine international governance could play out based on two axes: Interests and Power.

- *Polarised vs Collective Interests:* On one axis we could see increasing polarization and fragmentation as states and non-state actors disregard long established norms and act unilaterally in their self-interest, or we could see a return to focus on norms and principles that protect people and planet.
- *Centralised vs Distributed Power:* On another axis, we could see these dynamics play out in a centralised way with elite in business, governments and other institutions

Table 1: Polarised vs Collective Interests and Centralised vs Distributed Power

| | Centralised | Distributed |
|------------------------|--|--|
| Polarised / Fragmented | Driven by oligarchic power, surveillance capitalism, likely corrupt and promoting division and xenophobia nationally and internationally. Unlikely to resolve collective action challenges such as climate and pandemics except where economic or political interests are aligned. | Chaotic but innovative approaches by local actors that solve immediate problems have local impact but limited coordination on collective action fails to ladder up to a resolution of major challenges or reach scale. |
| Collective | States driven by generous norms seek to solve collective action problems but are ill equipped to do so because institutions are slow-moving, and approaches lack innovation. Local communities have little agency as decisions are centralised around big institutions. | Local action is shaped by international norms that are agreed in an inclusive way and provide ‘north star’ approaches. Outcomes are focused on function rather than form, on learning and ideas that are contagious and adopted by billions of people acting in their own and collective interest, rather than institutions with official mandates acting for ‘others.’ |

Source: Author’s compilation.

consolidating and centralizing power; or alternatively, power could be distributed with actors at every level taking action on problems within their own context.¹¹

And these two axes could interrelate to create a series of scenarios laid out below:

At present, the politics of many major powers (and their bilateral interactions) is centralized and polarized. Elites consolidate power nationally and act in their own interest through 'might makes right' politics. These states are influential members of the current multilateral system embodied in the UN and Bretton Woods Institutions which are acting in a centralized and collective manner; seeking consensus through state led negotiation processes and traditional governance structures which are increasingly held captive by 'centralised polarisers.' They fail to deliver and therefore lose legitimacy and relevance.

As a result, the logical approach for those seeking positive action on social challenges whether in civil society, business or philanthropy is to bypass multilateral processes and norms and instead pursue a distributed model which is effective on its own terms, but highly fragmented. This is evident in many philanthropic activities and the social innovation movement which promotes solutions to individual problems but suffers from an inability to systematically learn, scale and ladder up to tackling global collective challenges. In today's world a Collective / Distributed model is much more likely to succeed for most of the challenges where multilateralism plays a critical role.

3. Frugal Multilateralism: A Toolkit for Tackling Today's Challenges

Moving towards the Collective /Distributed scenario requires a fundamental shift on two fronts that require ecosystem, networked thinking:

First, there is need to build consensus and secure agreement on purpose: the unique areas where multilateralism should focus: that it does (and only does) what no other systems or institutions can do.

Second, there is a need to develop an agile structure: a toolkit which applies the most appropriate model to the problems at hand.

The overall purpose of multilateralism can be codified into five themes:¹²

1. **Promote Basic Stability and Peaceful Coexistence:** norms and agreements aimed at reducing the likelihood of conflict and maintaining international peace.
2. **Facilitate Economic Exchange and Prosperity:** frameworks that govern international economic interactions, trade, and financial systems.
3. **Promote Cooperation on Transnational and Planetary Challenges:** collective efforts to tackle global issues such as climate change, pandemics, and the regulation of emerging technologies.
4. **Embed Liberal Values in the International Sphere:** the promotion and protection of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.
5. **Supporting National Development Strategies:** Helping countries to define and pursue their own development

paths and promoting learning between countries and regions.

But the level of focus needs to change. Reforms should be built on the principle of subsidiarity, which posits that social and political issues should be addressed at the most immediate level of governance.¹³

For example, there are clearly some challenges where the enforcement of norms is critical; such as respect for territorial integrity, the use of certain form of weapons, and the preservation of macro-economic stability; the forum to agree those norms must be maintained, even if the bodies to enforce those norms are not successful in every case.

Yet for shared global challenges, such as poverty, climate and preventable diseases, the goldilocks scenario is one of collective action on agreed norms pursued through distributed power. Here the focus should be less on enforcement and implementation (through UN agencies and international Non-Governmental Organizations, for example) and more on agreement around the challenges and shared goals, communication of compelling and contagious ideas based on shared values that can be replicated at scale to deliver significant impact.

In this scenario, individuals and communities at all scales become inspired, equipped and resourced as agents of change in their own context, rather than recipients of a system designed to protect or help those in vulnerable positions from a centralized position of power.

Stewart Patrick of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace lays out four approaches for state-led multilateralism which could be pursued:¹⁴

1. **Charter Model:** Focuses on the United Nations and other encompassing treaty-based bodies based on the core virtue of legitimacy. This can enhance cooperation through global membership and builds on legal foundations and binding commitments but is vulnerable to institutional sclerosis and lowest-common-denominator outcomes. The reaffirmation of the universal values codified in the UN Charter could be updated for the reality of today's world, through invoking Article 109.
2. **Club Model:** Seeks to rally established democracies as the basis for cooperation, based on the core virtue of solidarity. This allows democracies to define and defend principles and rules of an open world. However, it is vulnerable to electoral shifts among members, and global problems don't align neatly by regime type. This could support the development of norms and the facilitation of economic exchange and prosperity among states that have shared values and norms.
3. **Concert Model:** Aims for joint action to manage strategic rivalry among major powers that are not aligned in terms of approach or values but based on capability. This requires consensus on basic rules of conduct and collective crisis management. This could be applied to thorny issues that need cooperation of states to avoid dangerous escalation over nuclear proliferation or Artificial Intelligence.

4. Coalition Model: Builds ad hoc arrangements tailored to specific global challenges. An à la carte approach, with a shifting constellation of actors which adapts to each challenge, but increases transaction costs and may lack enforcement, legitimacy, and accountability. This could be developed to solve specific problems that don't necessarily require agreed rules of the game but simply require those with the right incentives to work together to solve problems. Here initiatives on global health such as Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, The Global Fund on AIDS, TB and Malaria provide powerful examples of effective action, though they have been criticised for undermining national health systems.

Yet this approach, if focused on the state and the central actor, only goes so far as trust in states and their legitimacy and capability to solve major problems wanes, and non-state actors increase their power and influence

In 2000, Elinor Ostrom proposed applying the idea of polycentric governance to climate change,¹⁵ arguing that dynamic forms of governing complex challenges such as climate change were not just possible but were already emerging spontaneously from the bottom up.¹⁶ Norms could be agreed at the international level but then the ownership and implementation of these principles could be devolved to the subnational and local level.

Devolving decision making and action, she argued, is more likely to build trust, tap into local motivations, unlock energy

and ideas that don't require the same level of public financial investment. Action at the local level enables, innovation, rapid course correction and learning; learning which can then be shared with other actors to strengthen the ecosystem.

The Paris Climate Agreement, in some respects, seeks to embody these principles; global negotiated goals are pursued through states pledging to make emission reductions, then gradually ratchet them up as part of a process of ongoing assessment and review; non-state and sub-national actors are incentivised to act in line with the global framework.

Despite the complexity of the challenge, action of climate brings great clarity: based on imperative to reduce carbon emissions in the atmosphere by a series of deadlines past which the warming of the climate creates destabilizing effects. A molecule of carbon cannot be fudged as part of a political negotiation. Yet for many other challenges, establishing a clear 'north-star' goal and measuring progress against it is much more challenging.

Yet if multilateral institutions like the UN were to focus their energy on a limited number of on core 'missions' on issues where norm-setting and consensus building could create 'north star' goals which then shape and empower local communities to act, share learning and scale up approaches to an international level using the power of technology and storytelling, this frugal approach could help deliver tangible results and begin to restore trust that delivery and impact is not only possible, but the norm.

Part of this refocusing must involve tough decisions on what not to do.

Development programmes currently account for roughly 75 per cent of total UN funding (\$26bn), two-thirds of its staff (50,000), and more than 1,000 offices.¹⁷ Yet, much of this work could arguably be devolved to the local level and conducted more efficiently by non-state actors in a more inclusive way.

Shehara Natalie Samarasinghe proposes two fundamental shifts.¹⁸ First a four-way governance structure in all UN funds, programmes and agencies which brings together states, businesses, NGOs and young people. This would build on the experience of the International Labour Organisation, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, The Global Fund on AIDS, TB and Malaria, and the UN Global Compact.

Second, a global capacity-building drive that sees the UN transfer the bulk of its development-related tasks to non-state stakeholders, who would bid competitively for contracts.

A similar approach could be applied beyond development agencies to cover knowledge creation, data and analysis and a more effective division of labour between regional and informal coalitions and regional UN entities.

4. Conclusions: Principles for Reinvention

Applying the principle of subsidiarity, a toolbox approach, and the idea polycentric governance could lead to a segmentation of activities, which could then facilitate a level of agreement build around the idea of from 'Frugal From – To' shifts:

1. From Institution to Influence:

Ultimately the value of multilateral institutions in the future will lie

less in their centralised operational function and more in their ability to credibly influence actors to prioritize action at the local level. Action which then ladders up to global impact, rooted in universal values. Involving moral leaders, artist and story tellers in designing solutions and ideas which can inspire action among others will be critical. All actions for reform should focus on building influence and credibility.

2. From Mandate to Mission: Select a limited series of timebound measurable 'missions' which the UN and other multilateral entities can coalesce around and convene non-state actors to support.

3. From Contributor to Catalyst: Take steps to move away from operations and agencies that deliver products and services on the ground and instead focus on inspiring action and promoting solidarity and learning among change makers and involving those changemakers in the core governance and decision making of institutions.

4. From Fuzziness to Focus: As the multilateral system consolidates, the core actions and activities of multilateral institutions should focus on what they can uniquely do. This means selecting core areas where coordination and norm setting can help shape the actions of other actors in the system.

5. From Concentration to Collective: Where global agreements are negotiated the process for agreement should be devolved from the state being the central arbiter of power, to being one locus of power, along-

side expert groups and citizens. The use of technology to poll globally representative views of issues, global citizens assemblies and selection

of input through a form of global jury service could be piloted as new forms of inclusive governance.

Table 2: Five Purposes of Multilateralism

| | Charter | Club / Concert | De-centralized / Coalition |
|---|--|---|--|
| Promote Basic Stability and Peaceful Coexistence | Updated UN Charter and global enforcement mechanism, e.g. Security Council. | Peer review of implementation of norms. Coordination to create economies of scale. | Knowledge production, inspiration, learning and coordination around local action in support of north star goals. |
| Facilitate Economic Exchange and Prosperity | Norms of trade, taxation and the spillovers of economic activity. | Peer review of implementation. Multilateral financing of initiatives. | |
| Promote Cooperation on Transnational and Planetary Challenges | North star agreements on governance climate change, pandemics and critical technologies. | Peer review of implementation. Multilateral financing of initiatives. | |
| Embed Liberal Values in the International Sphere | Norms on governance of Oceans and Outer Space. | Peer review of implementation. Knowledge production, coordination and financing. | Local implementation. |
| Support National Development Strategies | No role | Multilateral financing of initiatives. Learning, coordination and knowledge production | |

Source: Author’s compilation.

These shifts could then be filtered through the five purposes of multilateralism (Table 2) to yield a framework for mapping the ecosystem of relevant actors, and identifying areas where the United Nations, regional and informal bodies should be active and areas where new capabilities are required.

Ultimately, this frugal approach to multilateralism focused on building evidence bases, establishing norms, and then empowering others on a specific set of challenges to act at local levels will increase the influence and credibility of the multilateral system within a highly fragmented world where trust is a valuable and critical currency of change.

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International Development Cooperation Amid Great Transformations: What Latin America Brings to the Seville Conference?

Bernabé Malacalza* and Carla Morasso**

Abstract: This paper examines Latin America's engagement with the FfD4 process and the Seville Conference, set against a turbulent global landscape marked by five "Great Transformations": the Global Hegemonic Dispute, Great Financialization, Algorithmic Revolution, Age of Entropy, and Age of Inequalities. These shifts are profoundly reshaping International Development Cooperation (IDC), contributing to the unravelling of the 2030 Agenda in Latin America, a region facing challenges such as Official Development Assistance (ODA) discrimination against its predominantly middle-income countries. The paper highlights Latin America's institutional strengths, its innovative experiences in South-South and Triangular Cooperation, and its call for development metrics that go beyond GDP per capita. The region advocates for a reformed IDC architecture that prioritises social and environmental justice, science, technology, and innovation, while safeguarding the Global South's agency in shaping its own development pathways amid growing geopolitical pressures and the risk of reducing cooperation to self-serving Northern donor financing.

Keywords: International Development Cooperation, Development Metrics Beyond GDP, South-South and Triangular Cooperation, Latin America's Development, Global Hegemonic Dispute, Social and Environmental Justice.

1. Introduction

The Financing for Development (FfD) process, launched at the beginning of the 21st century, aims to foster global debate on the economic and financial system, mobilise resources, and unite the international community to support the development

priorities of developing countries. Unique in its inclusive approach, the FfD process brings together UN agencies, members, the World Trade Organization (WTO), International Financial Institutions (IFIs), civil society, and the private sector. For the Global South, FfD offers an opportunity to influence policies and

* Researcher at the National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET) and the National University of Quilmes (UNQ), Argentina.

** Professor and Researcher at the National University of Rosario (UNR) Argentina. Views are personal.

to engage on more equitable and non-discriminatory terms with developed nations, in contrast to exclusive forums like the G8 or G20, favoured by great powers.

The first International Conference on FfD in 2002 resulted in the “Monterrey Consensus” - in which Latin America played a significant role - committing to increased Official Development Assistance (ODA) and reforms in IFI governance. The subsequent conferences—Doha (2008) and Addis Ababa in (2015)—addressed issues such as gender, the environment, national development strategies, and establishment of new financing frameworks for sustainable development. However, as FfD4 approaches in Seville, Spain, the global context has become more complex than ever. With the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) still far from being achieved, rising geopolitical tensions, and a weakened alignment between private and official financing, development financing is under threat. This paper will focus on Latin America’s position within the FfD4 process, examining the global and regional development landscapes, their strengths and weaknesses, and the challenges that international development cooperation (IDC) faces in this shifting global order.

2. Great Transformations and International Development Cooperation

The contemporary global scenario and the architecture of IDC are being profoundly reshaped by five “Great Transformations”, configuring a novel

global scenario. The term “Great Transformations” deliberately echoes the concept introduced by Karl Polanyi in *The Great Transformation* (1944), which described a radical shift - particularly during the 19th century and the rise of the First Industrial Revolution - whereby the social sphere was subordinated to economic imperatives, generating deep social tensions and triggering protective responses from dominant segments of society.

The first of these current transformations is the emergence of a Global Hegemonic Dispute, marked by tectonic geopolitical shifts and the erosion of Western hegemony, potentially inaugurating a prolonged interregnum in global order. Second is the Great Financialization - or Financial Globalization - , defined by the ascendancy of private finance and the growing reliance on blended finance models, which increasingly reconfigure development funding landscapes. Third, the Algorithmic Revolution - or Fourth Industrial Revolution - driven by artificial intelligence, digital platforms, and the data economy, is radically reshaping the architecture of knowledge, labour, and power. Fourth, the Age of Entropy signals the multiplication of systemic global risks and interlinked planetary crises, which challenge linear development paradigms and call into question the viability of the development project itself. Finally, the Age of Inequalities is characterised by extreme socio-economic polarisation, the rise of techno-plutocracies coexisting with an expanding “precariat” - digitally mediated, precariously employed platform

workers - and the deepening of horizontal inequalities across gender, race, and geography.

The implications of these “Great Transformations” for IDC are manifested in different ways. The Global Hegemonic Dispute is characterised by a renewed emphasis on geopolitics and the repoliticisation of financing, wherein ODA becomes increasingly tied to political conditionalities. UNCTAD’s Trade and Development Report 2024 describes this moment as one of geoeconomic fracturing, in which a growing number of developing countries face shrinking policy space due to increased fragmentation of trade, finance, and investment regimes (UNCTAD, 2024). An emergent hegemonic dispute is evident in the geopolitical contestation between the United States and China, exemplified by major initiatives such as the G7’s Build Back Better World (B3W) - and the European Union’s Global Gateway - versus the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

In parallel, the second Trump administration swiftly scaled back U.S. foreign commitments, drastically downsizing agencies like USAID, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, the Development Finance Corporation, and the State Department. USAID alone saw 86 per cent of its programmes cut, its headquarters closed, and nearly 10,000 staff dismissed. This retrenchment mirrors a broader trend: in 2024, eight of the OECD’s top ten donors also slashed aid budgets and moved to align development programs more directly with their national interests (Usman,

2025). This repoliticisation of financing is accompanied by a process of securitisation of aid, primarily directed towards fragile states and addressing the financial burdens associated with refugee crises. Aid is also becoming increasingly securitized, with over 30 per cent of bilateral ODA now allocated to “fragile and conflict-affected states” - a controversial concept often politically used by traditional donors to focus ODA efforts in areas where specific security interests are at stake - often tied to refugee management and migration control. These include the counting of expenditures related to refugee hosting as ODA, when, in fact, this is a more complex issue. Hosting refugees is not merely an expense, but rather a contribution to national development and even to tax revenue generation (OECD DAC, 2024).

Meanwhile, the Great Financialization is unfolding as private finance dominates, while ODA stagnates in relative terms, with the graduation of many middle-income countries (MICs) from ODA eligibility. This trend is accompanied by increasing diversification and privatisation of financing, often leading to higher indebtedness for developing countries. The annual SDG financing gap has widened to an estimated \$4 trillion, while global foreign direct investment flows declined to \$1.3 trillion in 2023. At the same time, over 60 per cent of low-income countries are now in or at high risk of debt distress, and more than 30 countries have graduated from ODA eligibility since 2000, pressuring the global system to adopt increasingly complex and risk-

prone financing instruments, including blended finance and non-concessional loans led by multilateral development banks (UN DESA, 2025). In this context, philanthropic flows and microcredit mechanisms - once peripheral - have become central to financing the 2030 Agenda, while IDC is increasingly mediated by private actors and digital platforms.

The Algorithmic Revolution, or Fourth Industrial Revolution, underscores the growing importance of IDC in science and technology. This is particularly evident in vaccine development, biotechnology, the digitalization of IDC processes, and the rise of fintech—digital finance. These shifts are reshaping economic and social interactions while redefining IDC modalities, with fintech ecosystems and digital public infrastructure emerging as key areas for South–South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC). However, the benefits of digital transformation are unevenly distributed: 74 per cent of individuals in the lowest-income quintile residing in rural areas did not have internet access in 2022, underscoring the persistent digital divide in the region (ECLAC, 2024).

On the other hand, the Age of Entropy demands a strong commitment to global public goods and enhanced multilateral cooperation, with a particular emphasis on climate finance, multi-stakeholder partnerships, and strengthening SSTC frameworks. As systemic global risks - such as climate emergencies, pandemics, food insecurity, and energy volatility - intensify, they challenge traditional development strategies and underscore

the urgent need for collective action. The UN's Climate Finance Report (2023) estimates that developing countries require over \$2.4 trillion annually to meet basic adaptation and mitigation targets, yet current climate finance commitments remain vastly inadequate and fragmented. This evolving landscape also signals a crisis of legitimacy in prevailing multilateral and development models, potentially marking the onset of a post-development era.

Finally, the Age of Inequalities demands that IDC interventions scale up, become more cross-cutting, and focus more precisely on territories to tackle growing disparities. UNCTAD (2023) notes that global economic slowdown continues to hit the poorest regions hardest, while ECLAC (2023) shows that Latin America's richest 10 per cent captures over 55 per cent of total income, deepening exclusion and structural vulnerability. This reality is starkly embodied in the emergence of a global elite - often referred to as "techno-plutocracies" - that coexists with vast "precariats" across the Global South. Yet these dynamics unfold within an IDC architecture still rooted in outdated, donor-centric logics, misaligned with the principles and ambitions of the 2030 Agenda.

3. Latin America Facing the Implosion of the 2030 Agenda in an Era of Oda Decline

Latin America is facing the implosion of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda - an outcome rooted in a cumulative crisis that began well before the COVID-19

pandemic. The region was already undergoing its worst economic crisis in nearly a century. According to ECLAC (2021), the 2014 - 2019 period marked one of the weakest growth phases on record - comparable only to those affected by World War I or the Great Depression. During those six years, average annual growth was just 0.3%, with negative per capita growth. As a result, the pandemic hit Latin America under the worst possible conditions, triggering the region's most severe GDP contraction since 1900 and producing the poorest performance among all developing regions. This prolonged stagnation made Latin America especially vulnerable to the pandemic's shocks. In 2020, the economy contracted by 6.9 per cent. The health crisis was equally dramatic: by January 2023, South America had recorded over 1.34 million COVID-19 deaths - around 25.3 per cent of the global total - despite representing just 5.5 per cent of the world's population (Statista, 2023). This stark disproportionality highlights the region's deep structural vulnerabilities and reinforces the urgent need to advance resilient, inclusive, and equitable development pathways.

This scenario paints a bleak picture: Latin America is navigating an increasingly complex and deteriorating development landscape. Persistent inequality, fiscal fragility, limited access to concessional finance, and deep-rooted structural vulnerabilities have all been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the cascading effects of new global "polycrises." Despite official commitments to the SDGs, many

countries in the region are struggling to finance their implementation in the face of overlapping challenges - rising sovereign debt, acute climate risks, and slow technological transformation. At the same time, a crisis of social cohesion and political representation has given rise to new governments and leaders who openly reject the 2030 Agenda, multilateralism, and the United Nations itself. Reforms to the global financial architecture have failed to keep pace with the urgency of current challenges, while geopolitical tensions have fragmented multilateral cooperation, undermining both the predictability and ambition of IDC.

Meanwhile, between 2015 and 2022, ODA to lower middle-income countries (LMICs) rose sharply from USD 27.4 billion to USD 47.1 billion, while aid to upper middle-income countries (UMICs) grew more modestly from USD 10.2 billion to USD 13.1 billion (OECD, 2025). This disparity signals a trend of relative exclusion of UMICs from the ODA system, driven by multiple dynamics. First, the uneven growth—72 per cent for LMICs versus only 28 per cent for UMICs - suggests a deliberate prioritisation of the former within the middle-income group. Second, it reflects the progressive application of income-based graduation criteria, widely criticized for ignoring the multidimensional vulnerabilities that persist in many UMICs. Third, this pattern clashes with structural realities in the Global South, where many UMICs continue to grapple with extreme inequality, climate fragility, and institutional weakness, despite being labeled "too rich" for concessional

support. Finally, the shift in flows reveals an underlying political trend: growing pressure from Northern donors and policy circles to phase out ODA to UMICs under the assumption they can self-finance or tap markets – an assumption that overlooks the complex development traps still faced by these countries, and one that undermines the universality of the 2030 Agenda's pledge to leave no one behind. Notably, nearly 30 per cent of all MICs in the world are located in Latin America and the Caribbean, a region overwhelmingly composed of UMICs. This structural composition makes Latin America the most systematically discriminated region in the global ODA architecture.

However, the region also possesses valuable – though insufficient – institutional capacities and innovative experiences in IDC. Latin America has developed diverse modalities, such as SSTC, and decentralised cooperation, offering bottom-up, demand-driven, and context-sensitive responses to development challenges. Institutions like the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB) and, notably, its Ibero-American Program for the Strengthening of South-South Cooperation (PIFCSS) have played a key role in systematizing practices, promoting regional ownership, and fostering shared principles of horizontality and solidarity. Since 2007, the annual Report on SSTC in Ibero-America has documented the region's activities, using a methodology defined by the participating countries.

In recent years, Latin America has emerged as the most actively engaged region in triangular cooperation,

accounting for half of the reported triangular cooperation projects worldwide (SEGIB, 2023). Countries such as Mexico, Uruguay, and Chile have launched or expanded mixed funding mechanisms, while Brazil, together with India and South Africa, has promoted the IBSA Fund Trust, demonstrating the region's capacity to advance South-South development cooperation even under fiscal constraints.

Additionally, Latin American countries have made significant strides in institutionalising SSTC within their bureaucratic frameworks, incorporating them into their rhetoric and practices in international politics, regardless of their differing ideological and political profiles. For instance, Chile, Colombia, Brazil, Mexico, Uruguay, and Peru have established agencies that have been operational for over a decade. Furthermore, the expansion of Triangular modalities and multi-stakeholder partnerships – including the involvement of local governments, civil society, and private actors – has increased despite various constraints.

Still, one of the most pressing challenges lies in aligning Latin America's institutional capacities with new financial flows and emerging global initiatives. The region must deepen its engagement with development banks, non-concessional funding platforms, and multilateral and regional mechanisms focused on digital, technological, and green transitions. This is particularly relevant because, while grants, concessional loans, and contributions to international organisations and funds remain the main

channels of ODA, in most middle-income Latin American countries, South-South cooperation is primarily implemented through bilateral technical assistance projects and programmes with limited scope and scale.

According to ECLAC (2025a), accelerating progress toward the 2030 Agenda requires breaking free from three persistent development traps: the low-growth trap; the inequality and poverty trap, with 180 million people living in poverty and the weakest job creation since the 1950s; and the institutional fragility trap, marked by weak governance and limited state capacity. However, regional priorities - such as infrastructure development, digital connectivity, and technological innovation - demand robust, inclusive financing frameworks capable of scaling up regional value chains. Yet regional development banks often lack the necessary financial capital to respond adequately to MICs' demands. At the same time, global platforms are frequently shaped by the geopolitical and private sector interests of their promoters, whether from Western donors or China.

In this context, Latin America has repeatedly called on the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) to rethink both the narrow concept of "development" it employs and the metrics used to measure it. Per capita income is a deeply inadequate metric to capture the diverse development trajectories of Latin American countries. Development must be understood through a broader justice lens: social justice, economic justice, gender justice, intercultural justice, and environmental

justice. In line with this vision, Latin American countries are increasingly advocating in multilateral spaces for a deeper, more inclusive debate on how development is measured - beyond GDP per capita.

Finally, Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) have become a central pillar of the renewed IDC architecture. Latin American actors increasingly recognise that achieving structural transformation depends on leveraging STI for inclusive and sustainable development. As highlighted by Mexico, Brasil, Colombia, and others in their inputs for FfD4, cooperation mechanisms in STI must not only provide funding but also facilitate knowledge exchange, research collaboration, and capacity-building in strategic sectors. Strengthening STI ecosystems - through policy coordination, regional platforms, and public-private collaboration - will be essential to ensure Latin America's meaningful integration into global and regional value chains and its resilience to future crises.

The Seville Conference presents a timely opportunity to seriously revisit a fundamental question: what do we mean when we talk about development? It also offers a space to confront the reality of an outdated ODA architecture - one that is undergoing a slow and silent decline, increasingly failing to respond to the needs of Latin America's MICs, and in some cases, appearing to abandon them altogether. As the 2030 Agenda unravels in the region, demands are rising in the wake of the Algorithmic Revolution to scale up investment - particularly in

STI - and to forge a renewed vision of partnership that respects the development aspirations and sovereignty of Latin American countries.

4. What Latin America Brings to the Seville Conference

The importance of the FfD4 Conference for Latin America has been consistently underscored in recent intergovernmental meetings convened by ECLAC. It was highlighted during the First Session of the Regional Conference on South-South Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2023, and reaffirmed in the Dialogue of Foreign Ministers and High-Level Authorities held during the opening day of ECLAC's Fortieth Session in 2024. Most recently, the conclusions of the Eighth Meeting of the Forum of Latin American and Caribbean Countries on Sustainable Development expressed that governments are “looking forward” to the conference and emphasised the need to address the specific and diverse challenges faced by countries that have recently crossed - or are on the verge of crossing - the UMIC threshold. In particular, they stressed the inadequacy of GDP as the sole criterion for measuring development and the importance of rethinking IDC accordingly (ECLAC, 2025b). This position was also echoed by individual Latin American states in the FfD4 process.

During the preparatory sessions of the FfD4 Conference (PrepCom) the contributions of Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico to the Elements Paper reflected a shared vision on key aspects of international cooperation. These

included the need to move beyond the prevailing per capita income metric and adopt more effective and nuanced criteria that reflect the complexity and diversity of developing countries' realities; the prioritisation of SSTC, as well as multi-stakeholder partnerships, to scale up resources and enrich development processes through knowledge and innovation; the critical role of Multilateral and National Development Banks in catalysing transformative investments; and the reiterated call for developed countries to fulfill their long-standing commitment to allocate at least 0.7 per cent of their GNI to ODA and to increase the share of aid that is effectively disbursed in developing countries. These countries also reaffirmed the relevance of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. Similar positions were expressed by representatives of Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Honduras during the second and third PrepCom sessions.¹

Likewise, it is worth highlighting that the G77 + China - which includes the majority of Latin American and Caribbean countries² - reflected positions in its proposed contribution to the Conference final document that align with several of the key points raised by Latin American states. Among its main messages, the G77 + China called for a shift away from the current overreliance on concessional loans, advocating instead for a more balanced approach that prioritises grant-based financing and reduces the debt burden faced by developing countries, thereby helping to prevent unsustainable financial trajectories. In the same vein, ECLAC

- together with the other UN Regional Commissions - stressed in their joint submission that debt relief should not be discounted or construed as ODA flows, inasmuch as ODA should remain concessional with evident grant elements.

Although the region did not present a fully unified voice throughout the process, a basic consensus exists within the Ibero-American Community. During the fourth session of the PrepCom, Spain emphasized that Ibero-American cooperation serves as a benchmark for effective development cooperation - grounded in the core principles of South-South Cooperation: inclusive participation, consensus-based decision-making, and horizontality among its members. Beyond the SEGIB and PIFCSS frameworks, a common regional position can also be identified within the ECLAC's institutional network. This was reaffirmed during the 2025 Forum of Latin American and Caribbean Countries on Sustainable Development, where governments emphasized the urgent need to reform the IDC architecture. Key priorities include adopting multidimensional metrics to define development, revising resource allocation criteria, and creating transparent and effective instruments to support countries in addressing inequality and social injustice, and in advancing transitions toward sustainable development.

If discussions on the multilateral agenda primarily focus on how funds are mobilised - prioritizing how actions are financed over what development is

financed - Latin America risks facing a scenario where the political agency of the Global South is diluted in shaping its own development narratives. In this case, international cooperation could be reduced to merely a financing tool, rather than a means to strengthen autonomy and capacity-building. Given the substantial gap between the North and South, along with the persistent social challenges posed by inequality both within and between nations, it is crucial to frame development as an ongoing process - shared in responsibility by both North and South - rather than a fixed end point. To amplify its voice and shape its own development trajectory, Latin America must strengthen institutional capacities and ensure coordinated action across decision-making levels. Yet significant uncertainties remain, particularly as reactionary political forces and governments hostile to solidarity, regional cooperation, and the foundational values of the 2030 Agenda continue to gain ground.

Endnote

¹ The first PrepCom was held in Addis Ababa in July 2024; in October 2024, the Multi-stakeholder partnership took place in New York; the second PrepCom was in New York in December 2024; and the third and fourth Prep Com were held in February and April. It is worth mentioning that the FfD Forum took place along with the fourth PrepCom.

² Such as Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

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Rethinking Multilateralism Through the Lenses of the EU-LAC Partnership

The Global Gateway as a Functional Multilateral Experiment

Rita da Costa*

1. Introduction

The global landscape is undergoing profound transformations. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate shocks, geopolitical tensions, and worsening inequalities, traditional multilateralism appears increasingly inadequate. While the need for enhanced international cooperation is widely acknowledged, the capacity of traditional institutions to deliver effective, legitimate, and context-sensitive responses remains contested. Moreover, official Development Assistance (ODA) is facing mounting pressures, and is being redirected to addressing strategic interests, challenging the credibility of long-standing commitments.

A new model of international cooperation is needed - one that is more flexible, inclusive, and rooted in shared objectives. As argued by Pezzini and Manservigi¹ in this issue of the Development Cooperation Review, what is required is not the extension of

existing standards, rules and norms from a specific region to the rest of the world, but rather the construction of a new governance architecture between peers: one that is representative, participatory, and capable of adapting to complex realities. In this context, the partnership between the European Union (EU) and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) offers an important test case for redefining North-South cooperation in the 21st century.

With the relaunch of the bi-regional dialogue at the 2023 EU-CELAC Summit, both regions have signalled an intention to move beyond outdated donor - recipient models and to consolidate a new framework of relations based on shared agendas and mutual interests. Key instruments - such as the Global Gateway Investment Agenda (GGIA) and the Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs) - have been introduced to operationalise this ambition through a blend of public and private resources, aligned with the

* Senior Counsellor and Head of Unit at the OECD Development Centre, Paris. Views are personal.

imperatives of the green and digital - and more recently- social transitions. While promising and better adapted to current realities, the extent to which these instruments will represent a structural shift remains an open question.

This paper critically² examines the emerging EU-LAC partnership framework, arguing that its transformative potential depends less on the scale of investment than on the quality of governance, ownership, and alignment with development outcomes. Notably, it explores whether the GGIA and related instruments can serve not only Europe's strategic repositioning, but also the structural needs of LAC countries-many of which remain caught in persistent development traps despite their upper-middle-income status. By addressing these tensions, the article seeks to contribute to a broader reflection on the conditions under which bi-regional cooperation can act as a catalyst for multilateral innovation.

The paper proceeds in five sections. Section 1 outlines the shifting global context and the strategic rationale for EU-LAC cooperation. Section 2 describes the evolution of EU cooperation instruments, including NDICI-Global Europe and the Team Europe Initiatives. Section 3 analyses the GGIA as a flagship initiative and practical case of functional multilateralism. Section 4 discusses key governance and ownership challenges. Section 5 offers policy recommendations to strengthen the EU-LAC partnership as a model of inclusive, responsive cooperation in a multipolar world.

2. A Shifting Global Context and the Strategic Rationale for EU-LAC Cooperation

The last decade has exposed the vulnerability of the global development architecture. The COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with the war in Ukraine, food and energy price volatility, climate disruptions, and rising debt levels, has generated a crisis that transcends borders. In this context, traditional modes of international cooperation-largely built around donor-recipient models and rigid eligibility criteria-have proven insufficient. The need for renewed, more symmetrical partnerships is increasingly evident.

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), despite being a region rich in resources and human capital, has been severely affected by these overlapping shocks. It remains the most unequal region in the world, with a large informal sector and slow productivity growth. At the same time, most LAC countries are classified as middle-income, rendering their access to concessional finance more limited and sidelining them gradually from traditional aid flows. This paradox-high vulnerability despite middle-income status-highlights the limits of existing global frameworks.

The European Union, in turn, is redefining its external action. The ambition to achieve "strategic autonomy," respond to global power competition, and deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is prompting a shift toward more pragmatic and interest-based cooperation. In this perspective, the

LAC region is not only a natural partner due to its long-term relations, but also a strategic interlocutor in key domains such as green and digital transitions, social cohesion, and multilateral reform.

The EU-LAC partnership is, therefore, being reimagined. No longer limited to development assistance, it is increasingly seen as a bi-regional alliance grounded in mutual interest. The relaunch of the EU-CELAC Summit in 2023—after an eight-year hiatus—signalled a renewed political will to deepen the relationship and explore new forms of engagement. The LAC region, in turn, is asserting a more autonomous and collective voice in global affairs, positioning itself not as a passive recipient but as a co-shaper of international norms.

In this shifting context, the EU-LAC partnership has the potential to become a proving-ground for new approaches to cooperation: functional, flexible, and jointly owned. It offers a promising space to test and develop mechanisms that could later inform broader multilateral efforts, especially if grounded in respect, reciprocity, and shared agency.

3. Evolving EU Instruments for a New Development Paradigm

Over the past decade, the European Union has progressively reshaped its development cooperation instruments in response to new global challenges and a changing geopolitical landscape. This shift reflects the growing understanding that development policy must go beyond aid, integrating foreign policy, investment efforts and trade, climate action, policy

dialogue on social transformation and economic diplomacy. It also acknowledges the need to engage with a more diverse set of partners—including middle-income countries—through more flexible, demand-driven, and partnership-based approaches.

A key milestone in this evolution was the 2017 European Consensus on Development, which established a unified framework linking development cooperation with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This consensus placed renewed emphasis on tailored partnerships, country ownership, and policy coherence across EU actions, particularly in the context of green and digital transitions.

Building on this foundation, the NDICI-Global Europe instrument (Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument) was launched in 2021. NDICI consolidated several previously fragmented funding channels into a single, more strategic and adaptable tool, with a budget of over €9,5 billion for 2021–2027. It allows the EU to operate beyond traditional Official Development Assistance (ODA) constraints, with geographic and thematic windows, and greater capacity to respond to emerging needs, including in upper-middle-income countries like those in LAC.

In parallel, the EU introduced the Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs). These initiatives aim to improve the coherence and visibility of European external action by aligning the efforts of EU institutions, Member States, development finance institutions, and implementing agencies

under a common strategy. TEIs have been deployed to support key priority areas such as health, education, climate resilience, and sustainable finance, and are designed to foster synergies and avoid duplication.

Both NDICI and TEIs are central to the EU's ambition to transition from a donor model to that of a strategic partner. This shift is particularly relevant in Latin America and the Caribbean, where most countries no longer qualify for concessional finance, but still face high levels of inequality and vulnerability. The new instruments allow for a broader toolbox-combining grants, guarantees, technical assistance, and blended finance-to engage with complex development needs while aligning with EU foreign policy goals.

These reforms culminate in the Global Gateway strategy, and more specifically the Global Gateway Investment Agenda (GGIA) for Latin America and the Caribbean, which will be analysed in the next section. The GGIA represents the EU's attempt to translate these institutional innovations into a concrete platform for partnership and investment, and to project a distinct European model of cooperation - one that is rules-based, sustainability-oriented, and geopolitically aware.

4. The Global Gateway Investment Agenda: A Flagship Initiative

The Global Gateway Investment Agenda (GGIA) is the European Union's flagship initiative to boost sustainable and strategic investments in partner countries. Launched in 2021, it aims

to mobilise up to €00 billion by 2027 to support infrastructure and human development across five priority sectors: digital, climate and energy, transport, health, and education. The strategy seeks to offer an alternative to other global investment initiatives – such as China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) – by promoting democratic values, transparency, and sustainability.

In Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), the EU unveiled the LAC-EU Global Gateway Investment Agenda during the EU-CELAC Summit in July 2023. It foresees €45 billion in investments, including through Team Europe Initiatives, development banks, and private sector mobilisation. The agenda prioritises clean energy, critical raw materials, digital connectivity, healthcare systems, sustainable food production, and higher education.

Beyond its financial dimension, the GGIA is also a geopolitical instrument. It reflects the EU's ambition to combine development cooperation with its strategic interest in global influence, particularly as it competes for partnerships in regions where China and the US are already present. The GGIA explicitly aims to support “trusted connectivity” and “value-driven investments,” offering long-term engagement based on mutual interest, rather than conditionality or an extractive logic.

One of the GGIA's defining features is its use of blended finance and de-risking instruments. Through tools like the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+), the EU aims to catalyse private investment by

providing guarantees, equity, and technical assistance. This approach acknowledges that public resources alone are insufficient to close infrastructure gaps, especially in sectors like energy and digital technology. It also underlines the importance of aligning investment flows with broader development goals, such as decent jobs, gender equality, and environmental protection.

However, the GGIA's implementation raises important challenges. Its complexity – stemming from the multiplicity of actors, financing modalities, and accountability structures – can risk diluting ownership on the partner side. To succeed, the GGIA must avoid becoming a top-down, Brussels-driven initiative. Instead, it should embody the principles of co-creation, transparency, and alignment with national and regional priorities.

In that sense, the GGIA can be seen as a test case for “variable geometry multilateralism”. It assembles different constellations of actors – governments, financial institutions, companies, and civil society – around concrete goals, under flexible but strategic frameworks. Its emphasis on regional connectivity and cross-border cooperation offers the potential to reinforce bi-regional integration and open new pathways for functional, pragmatic multilateralism.

5. From Funding to Impact: Governance and Institutional Innovation

While the Global Gateway Investment Agenda (GGIA) signals a bold shift in the EU's external action, its success will depend less on the volume of funding

mobilised and more on the quality of its governance. Without inclusive, transparent, and responsive institutional mechanisms, the GGIA risks replicating past development models that lacked local ownership and yielded limited long-term impact.

One of the first challenges is ensuring shared ownership and alignment with partner priorities. Many LAC governments and stakeholders still perceive EU development initiatives as overly supply-driven and administratively complex. To address this, project selection and design must involve local actors from the start – including national and subnational governments, civil society organisations, local businesses, and academia. Co-programming and co-financing arrangements can enhance legitimacy and ensure that initiatives respond to real development needs.

Another critical area is the internal coordination of Team Europe. While the initiative aims to streamline efforts across EU institutions and Member States, fragmentation remains an issue. Roles and responsibilities among implementing agencies, financial institutions, and diplomatic services must be clearly defined. More agile and decentralised decision-making could help overcome the delays and duplication that often undermine EU credibility on the ground.

Moreover, the emphasis on private sector mobilisation – a central tenet of the GGIA – raises important concerns about accountability and inclusivity. While blended finance and de-risking instruments (e.g. via EFSD+) are essential to leverage

investment, they must be accompanied by clear social, environmental, and governance safeguards. There is a risk that commercially bankable projects receive preference over those with higher development impact but lower financial return. Impact measurement frameworks need to go beyond input and output indicators and assess outcomes such as job quality, community empowerment, gender equity, and institutional strengthening.

To ensure transparency and effectiveness, the GGIA should be supported by joint monitoring and evaluation systems, peer-learning platforms, and open access to project data. Periodic reviews involving stakeholders from both regions could create a culture of mutual accountability and continuous improvement. These mechanisms are not only technical tools but also vehicles for trust-building.

Finally, there is a need to institutionalise multi-actor governance platforms that accompany the investment agenda. Inspired by functional multilateralism, these platforms could serve as semi-permanent “dialogue tables” where priorities, standards, and cooperation modalities are discussed and refined over time. This would allow for experimentation, local adaptation, and gradual institutionalisation of new models of partnership.

The idea of a “Team LAC” – a coordinated voice of Latin American and Caribbean actors engaging with the EU – could complement Team Europe and help rebalance the relationship. Such a structure, if designed with sufficient

autonomy and flexibility, could facilitate the articulation of regional priorities and strengthen the agency of LAC partners in shaping cooperation agendas.

To unlock the full potential of the Global Gateway and to consolidate the EU–LAC relationship as a platform for renewed multilateralism, a number of strategic policy directions must be pursued. These recommendations aim to align the initiative more closely with the principles of inclusiveness, impact, and mutual accountability that underpin a functional and responsive approach to cooperation.

First, the EU and LAC should co-define a shared strategic agenda, and investment partnership, with clear priorities, expected outcomes, and performance indicators. Moving from a project-based to a mission-oriented logic would allow for better alignment between long-term development goals and investment flows. This agenda should reflect LAC countries’ own development plans and incorporate regional visions such as ECLAC’s structural change approach and CELAC’s integration aspirations.

Second, institutional mechanisms for joint governance and participation must be strengthened. Investment dialogues should be regularised, and permanent platforms for exchange established – not only between public authorities but also with civil society, indigenous communities, trade unions, and the private sector. Involving a broader range of stakeholders enhances ownership and ensures that the cooperation agenda reflects social as well as economic needs.

Third, the EU should invest in enabling environments that ensure the sustainability and inclusiveness of investments in a more systemic manner. This includes support for regulatory reform, policy coherence, capacity-building, and education systems that match the evolving demands of green and digital economies. Development cooperation must also help countries manage transitions in a just and equitable way – particularly those related to energy, land use, and labour markets.

Fourth, the Global Gateway must embed robust mechanisms for monitoring, transparency, and accountability. Public access to project information, impact assessments, and performance data is critical. Moreover, continuous feedback loops – with mid-term reviews and participatory evaluations—should be integrated to adjust strategies as contexts evolve.

Fifth, a “Team LAC” structure could be piloted to mirror the Team Europe approach. It would serve as a regional coordination mechanism, facilitating dialogue and co-decision-making, while respecting the diversity of political and institutional configurations across the LAC region. The emergence of such a platform would contribute to a more balanced and symmetrical partnership.

Finally, the EU-LAC relationship should be recognised as a testing ground for multilateral innovation. If successful, it could offer a replicable model for cooperation with other regions of the Global South. The principles of flexibility, functionality, and shared responsibility embodied in the GGIA have the potential

to inform a broader rethinking of how international cooperation is structured in the 21st century.

6. Conclusion: Towards a Next-Generation Bi-Regional Compact, Strategic Convergence and Developmental Impact

The EU-LAC partnership can evolve from a pragmatic alignment of interests into a strategic alliance for multilateral renewal. The shift that is undergoing – and its projection through instruments such as the GGIA – presents both an opportunity and a risk. The opportunity lies in redefining development cooperation as a space of mutual agency and joint investment in public goods. The risk, however, is that the shift towards geopolitically informed cooperation results in a dilution of development effectiveness principles, reinforcing asymmetries in agenda-setting and reducing space for inclusive policymaking.

For the EU-LAC partnership to gain coherence, credibility, and impact, it must be anchored in shared political commitments, functional governance arrangements, and development-sensitive implementation modalities. This requires, *inter alia*, the co-design of investment priorities with national and local stakeholders, enhanced transparency in the use of blended finance and guarantees, and systematic monitoring of social, environmental, and institutional outcomes.

Moreover, the GGIA should be assessed not merely as a portfolio of investment projects, but as a lever to

reshape productive structures and support a just, green, and digital transition in both regions. The coupling of infrastructure finance with policy dialogue – particularly around industrial transformation, energy sovereignty, and social equity – will not only respond to the demands of the European private sector but will be also essential to avoid reproducing extractive logics or technological dependency. If successful, this renewed compact could constitute a replicable model for broader South–North cooperation, rooted in differentiated responsibilities, mutual benefit, and multilevel participation.

As the European Union prepares for the forthcoming EU-CELAC Summit to be held in Colombia, there is a timely opportunity to demonstrate tangible progress in advancing a renewed model of cooperation and investment partnerships for development. One that reflects and echoes the regions' evolving

priorities, shows the value and impact of the European offer, and reinforces a partnership of equals between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean. In an era of fragmentation and uncertainty, building such alliances is not only desirable – it is necessary. The EU and LAC, by acting together, can help shape a more equitable, inclusive, and resilient global order.

Endnotes

- ¹ See in this issue: S.Manservigi and M.Pezzini, “Experimental Multilateralism and Variable Geometries”.
- ² This article draws on selected elements from a more extensive version published in da Costa, R. (2025). *The EU-LAC Alliance in a Changing Global Landscape: Toward a Mutual Self-interest Partnership*. In: Sanahuja, J.A., Domínguez, R. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of EU-Latin American Relations*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-80216-4_22

“African Agency” Revisited

Sofia Scialoja*

Abstract: This paper examines the evolving and contested concept of “African agency” in international relations, challenging traditional power-based theories. It explores how African agency manifests through collective continental action, converging state behaviours, and sovereign national strategies. Through case studies – including AU diplomacy, multilateral negotiations, foreign policy trends, and individual state actions – it unpacks how African actors influence global affairs despite material constraints. Arguing for a plural understanding of “African agencies,” the paper highlights the continent’s strategic engagement, growing assertiveness, and resistance to being framed solely as passive or peripheral. It calls for contextual sensitivity in assessing African agency’s diverse expressions and impacts.

Key words: Africa, Agency, Cooperation, African Union, foreign policy, diplomacy, multilateral organisations, bilateral negotiations, collective agency, power.

1. Introduction

In recent years, a growing body of both academic and public literature started to revolve around the concept of “African agency” (Brown, 2021; Brown & Harman, 2013; Chipaike & Knowledge, 2018; Warner & Shaw, 2018; Coffie & Tiky, 2021; Bischoff, 2020). Yet, its meaning and the object to which it refers are still difficult to define.

“Agency” is a theoretically contested concept. At its core, it refers to the capacity to act – understood as purposeful, meaningful, and self-reflective action— or more broadly as the ability to exert influence or power (Buzan, Jones & Little, 1993; Hill, 2003; Chabal, 2009; Bischoff, 2020). In international relations,

however, the link between agency and power is somehow problematic. In particular when applied to African states. How can countries with relatively limited economic and military capabilities – key indicators of power in conventional IR theory – exercise meaningful agency on the global stage? This raises the broader question of whether agency necessarily requires material power, or whether it can take alternative forms.¹

According to Bischoff (2020), African agency can be seen in the actions of leaders, institutions, and decision-makers who respond – individually or collectively – to shifting domestic, regional, and international contexts. The concept is, therefore, adaptable, varying

*PhD researcher at Scuola Normale Superiore and Scuola Sant’Anna di Pisa, Italy. Views are personal.

according to the arena in which it is applied. The volume edited by William Brown and Sophie Harman (2013) showcases a range of perspectives on how African actors exercise agency in different policy fields and institutional settings.

Without delving into the complex question of the ontology of Africa as a unified actor, this paper examines how African agency manifests across different domains: multilateral negotiations, bilateral relations with external partners, intra-African cooperation, and transnational or sub-state political action. A key question is: who exactly exercises agency in each of these settings?² In this article, African agency is interpreted in three complementary ways:

1. As the collective agency of a group of African states, which – legitimately or not – claim to speak for the continent as a whole, or act through institutions like the African Union,³ where all 55 member states are represented.
2. As convergent actions by individual African countries, which may not be coordinated in advance, but nonetheless reflect shared positions or interests—creating a perception of bloc-like behaviour.
3. As the agency of individual African states, understood as sovereign actors pursuing national interests – thus suggesting the need to speak of African agencies in the plural.

These understandings are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they overlap and interact, depending on context. In the following sections, we explore these dimensions through concrete examples,

in order to unpack the multifaceted nature of African agency.

2. African Collective Agency

African collective agency is commonly associated to the agency exercised by a Pan-African body such as the African Union and/or by a group of African states – as the Africa Group or a more restrictive one – acting as representatives of the rest of the continent. In this sense, “agency” can be mostly understood as “the ability to exert influence in international relations and global affairs” (Zondi, 2013). One of the most significant examples of successful African diplomacy in recent years is the African Union becoming the twenty-first member of the G20.

In major global multilateral arenas such as the United Nations, Africa accounts for over a quarter of the total membership. This gives the Africa Group significant numerical weight, making it the largest of the five regional groupings through which UN negotiations are structured (Zondi, 2013). Beyond the General Assembly, African countries also hold three rotating non-permanent seats on the UN Security Council (the so-called “A3”), as well as 13 seats on the Human Rights Council and 14 on the Economic and Social Council.

Scholars have paid close attention to Africa’s efforts to coordinate common positions and voting patterns, particularly within the UN General Assembly and the Security Council. Among the most prominent examples of a coordinated African position is the Ezulwini Consensus, adopted in 2005, which

calls for reform of the Security Council to include two permanent and three additional non-permanent seats for African states. This demand reflects a broader critique of the current global governance architecture, which many view as outdated and rooted in post-colonial hierarchies (Zondi, 2013).⁴ Another notable example is the strong support expressed by African countries for the Responsibility to Protect principle at the 2005 UN World Summit (Cilliers, Gumede&Mbadlanyana, 2009).

With regard to the A3, Malte Brosig and Markus Lecki (2022) find evidence of increasing coordination among the three African countries temporarily sitting on the Security Council. However, this coordination has only partially translated into measurable influence. Efforts to build African agency at the Security Council are closely linked to the development of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and the establishment of the AU Peace and Security Council in 2004. In many cases, issues raised at the UN Security Council are first discussed within AU frameworks, and the AU's Permanent Observer Mission to the UN has played a growing role in articulating and advancing African positions – sometimes overlapping with, or even surpassing, the work of the Africa Group itself.

Common African Positions (CAPs) are, in principle, a prerogative of the African Union. The AU Constitutive Act explicitly mandates the promotion and articulation of common African positions on issues of continental interest. Key examples include the creation of AUDA-

NEPAD and the drafting of Agenda 2063. Beyond the Ezulwini Consensus, other CAPs relevant to the UN include:

- the African Consensus on Development Effectiveness (2011);
- the CAP on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2014), which guided Africa's contribution to the SDG negotiations;
- the CAPs on Humanitarian Effectiveness and on the World Drug Problem (2016);
- the CAP on the Global Compact for Migration (2017); and
- the CAP on Asset Recovery (2020) (Bankole, 2020).

African CAPs are also present in other multilateral forums, such as the UNFCCC COPs, where African states have consistently called for a just energy transition, equitable climate finance, and compensation for climate-related loss and damage. These demands often align with broader Global South coalitions, but they are rooted in Africa's distinct vulnerabilities and development priorities.

Nevertheless, the proliferation of African positions and growing institutional participation does not automatically translate into influence. As UeliStaeger (2024) notes, it is important to distinguish between the aspiration for representation – having a seat at the table – and the aspiration for reform – effectively shaping outcomes at that table. Alternatively, drawing on the terminology of SiphamandlaZondi,

African agency at the collective level should be further disaggregated into two dimensions: the “posture” – that is, the unified stance adopted by the collective entity, which relates directly to the question of African continental integration—and the actions, i.e. the concrete policy proposals and initiatives that are actually put on the table.⁵ However, many African demands, including the Ezulwini Consensus, have yet to be meaningfully addressed by global institutions.

In parallel to formal CAPs, African states and regional groupings have also put forward a variety of claims in multilateral forums that, although not officially sanctioned by the AU, reflect shared interests and recurring themes. These include calls to shift relations with the Global North from a donor-recipient model to one of strategic economic partnership (“from aid to trade”); demands for the reform of international credit rating systems and investment risk assessments; the push for more equitable representation within international financial institutions (IFIs); and advocacy for global debt restructuring mechanisms (Scialoja&Strazzari, 2024). While not always articulated within a unified continental framework, such positions may nonetheless be considered expressions of African agency—depending on the actor promoting them and the context in which they emerge. As will be further explored below, several of these claims have featured prominently in the agenda of South Africa’s G20 presidency in 2025, underscoring how national leadership can act as a vector for broader continental aspirations.

3. Common Trends in African Foreign Policy Behaviour

Beyond formal collective action, several observable trends in the international behaviour of African states – though often uncoordinated – can be interpreted as expressions of African agency. Among these are the diversification of diplomatic and economic partnerships, and a growing tendency toward non-alignment or multi-alignment in response to major global issues. These patterns reflect a broader repositioning within an increasingly multipolar and tense geopolitical landscape (Scialoja&Strazzari, 2024), particularly since the return of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency.

One salient example of this diversification is the proliferation of Africa+1 Summits,⁶ which signal the rising diplomatic engagement of African states with a wide array of external partners (Soulé-Kohndou, 2020). As Soulé-Kohndou argues, the renewed international interest in Africa should not be understood through the lens of a “new scramble for Africa” – a narrative that frames the continent as a passive arena for great power competition. Instead, such a view should be replaced with one that recognizes the strategic agency of African states, which have demonstrated increasing ability to leverage a diversified menu of partnerships to their advantage (Scialoja&Strazzari, 2024).

This shift – from privileged bilateral relationships to a more fluid and competitive diplomatic landscape – has been referred to as participation in a “geopolitical marketplace” or even as the “art of summitry” (Faleg, 2024; Ragazzi, 2022). African governments

use these summits to advance a range of objectives: attracting foreign investment through forum shopping, pitting old and new partners against one another in order to secure better deals (often for infrastructure projects); diversifying their economies to reduce dependency on any single actor; and gaining symbolic capital – status, visibility, and insurance against diplomatic isolation. These efforts often serve domestic political ends as well, helping leaders consolidate support through promises of development and modernization (Soulé-Kohndou, 2020).

A second, closely related trend concerns African countries' political positioning on major global issues, most notably the war in Ukraine. Voting behaviour at the UN General Assembly reveals a clear tendency toward "strategic non-alignment". During the 2 March 2022, resolution condemning Russia's invasion, 28 African states voted in favour, 25 either abstained or were absent, and only one (Eritrea) voted against. Despite pressure from both Western and Russian diplomats, many African states opted for a middle path – prompting debate among scholars about whether such behaviour constitutes "non-alignment," "active non-alignment," or "multi-alignment".⁷ In the same vein, the resolutions were also seen as a Western issue and criticized for reflecting double standards.⁸

The notion of non-alignment draws on the legacy of the Non-Aligned Movement (established in 1961), but in today's multipolar context, its meaning has evolved. South African officials and scholars, for instance, often prefer terms such as "strategic non-alignment",

reflecting a posture that seeks to maintain dialogue between opposing blocs while avoiding direct condemnation or the imposition of sanctions – no African country, to date, has adopted unilateral sanctions against Russia.

The concept of multi-alignment, on the other hand, is inspired by India's foreign policy approach, which balances relations with multiple global powers. While appealing, this strategy may be less feasible for smaller or more vulnerable states. In any case, these positions must be clearly distinguished from neutrality in the legal sense, which remains a fixed and formal status under international law (e.g. Switzerland). African strategic non-alignment is better understood as a pragmatic and flexible approach, consistent with the logic behind diversified partnerships (Scialoja & Strazzari, 2024).

Subsequent UNGA votes highlighted further nuance. On 7 April 2022, when the Assembly voted to suspend Russia from the UN Human Rights Council, several African countries changed their positions. Again, on 12 October 2022, many voted in favour of condemning Russia's "referenda" in occupied Ukrainian regions. Importantly, these shifts were not necessarily indicative of alignment with the West, but rather a concern with upholding the principle of territorial integrity – a particularly sensitive issue for African states, many of which face internal conflicts and secessionist movements.⁹

As of early 2025, voting patterns in the UNGA show even greater divergence between African states and Western countries.¹⁰ This trend, however, may

reflect confusion or disillusionment with shifting U.S. foreign policy rather than any deeper alignment with Russia.

It is also important to underscore that almost half of African countries have consistently voted in support of Western-backed resolutions – underscoring the heterogeneity of African responses, which are often driven by strategic calculations, historical ties, or domestic political considerations. Nevertheless, whether aligned or not, a common denominator emerges: a shared reluctance to enter into binding alliances in a world where flexibility and autonomy are seen as strategic assets (Faleg, 2024; Scialoja&Strazzari, 2024). The 2022 UNGA votes served as a catalyst for renewed engagement from external powers – most notably the United States (under President Biden), the European Union, and Russia – marked by a surge in high-level visits to African capitals.

4. African State Agency

The third and final dimension of African agency addressed in this article concerns the agency of individual African states—that is, their capacity to act as sovereign actors in the international system. This form of agency can be defined as “the ability of states, as the primary actors in the international system, to generate and deploy a range of capabilities (hard and soft) in the pursuit of their national interest” (Andreasson, 2013). While clearly grounded in the national realm, the actions of certain African states can – at times and under specific conditions – be interpreted, rightly or wrongly, as expressions of African agency writ

large. This ambiguity raises important conceptual and political questions.

A relevant case is the recent accession of Ethiopia and Egypt to the BRICS group, joining South Africa, which has been a member since 2010. Although the enlargement involved two African countries, the move reflects primarily national diplomatic strategies, rooted in distinct geopolitical calculations. Framing this development as a manifestation of collective African agency would be misleading, as there is no coordinated continental stance behind their BRICS membership. This example points to the need for greater conceptual precision and suggests that, in such cases, it may be more appropriate to speak of “African agencies” in the plural.

South Africa, in particular, provides several high-profile examples of state-level agency with global resonance. A notable instance is its decision to bring a case before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on 29 December 2023, accusing Israel of violating the Genocide Convention in Gaza. This move placed South Africa at the forefront of international legal and moral discourse, positioning it as a defender of global justice and a vocal critic of Western “double standards.” Given the country’s historical legacy as a symbol of anti-apartheid struggle, this action has been widely interpreted as a continuation of its tradition of principled foreign policy (Scialoja&Strazzari, 2024). However, it also reflects the specific orientation of South African state agency, rather than a broader continental consensus.

South Africa’s current presidency of the G20 in 2025 offers another

window into its international posture. The country has used this platform to promote issues such as debt sustainability, the cost of capital, and the creation of African credit rating agencies—priorities that resonate with many developing countries, including several across Africa. Nonetheless, these positions are largely articulated through a national lens, even when they align with broader continental or Southern concerns. Moreover, tensions with the U.S. administration under President Trump have complicated Pretoria's efforts to play a bridging role between global North and South.

This raises a critical question: to what extent is South Africa pursuing its own national agenda, and to what extent is it acting as a representative of African interests? While many of its initiatives may be welcomed or shared by other African states—and sometimes even coordinated with the African Union—South Africa is (increasingly?)¹¹ seen as pursuing autonomous leadership, rather than collective representation. This perception is reinforced by the growing reluctance of other African states to endorse South Africa's self-ascribed role as a continental leader. The idea of a hierarchical “big brother” no longer resonates with a generation of African leaders intent on asserting their own agency.¹²

In this sense, the category of African state agency highlights both the diversity and the fragmentation of African international engagement. It underscores the importance of recognizing national interests and trajectories, even when they intersect with broader continental

narratives. While individual African states may advance proposals that echo collective concerns, the attribution of “African agency” to these actions must be assessed with caution and contextual sensitivity.

5. Conclusion

The meanings that can be attributed to the concept of “African agency” are multiple and depend first and foremost on the ontological sense attributed to it, and, as a consequence, on the actors exercising it and the relationships between them. Given the questionable nature – from a political perspective – of “Africa” as a single entity acting in a coordinated and homogeneous manner in international relations, the concept of “African agency” could – or should – often be declined in the plural, as “African agencies”. In all cases, the current African behaviour(s) in IR continues to contradict the (Western) image of a colonised, impotent continent (Hegel, 1837; Morgenthau, 1985; Waltz, 1979). Despite its peripheral position in the world economic system (Wallerstein, 1974; Arrighi, 1994), African countries seem to exercise their agency, relevance and proactive role in today's global scene – something not new, but with roots in the global history (Bayart, 1999; Dunn & Shaw, 2001; Engel & Olsen, 2005).

Endnotes

- ¹ The reflection on the difference between “agency” and “power” entails significant developments, which cannot be addressed in this article. For example, “power” can be defined as “the ability to control others, to get others to do what they otherwise would not do” (Dahl, 1957; Nye, 1990); something almost impossible for most of

the African countries. As argued by Brown and Harman (2013): “African agency is different from other forms of agency, because of the nature of its structural constraints”.

² This paper’s analysis focuses specifically on the distinction between collective agency and state agency, with the state considered as the minimal unit of analysis. While this approach is analytically useful, it is important to acknowledge that the concept of agency can be further disaggregated to examine the internal actors within the state apparatus – such as political leaders, government ministries, and associated institutions including elements of civil society. Moreover, it is essential to recognise the presence of other forms of “African agency” that differ fundamentally from state-based actors. These include civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), individual actors, and the private sector.

³ In his work on African agency seen as stemming from the African Union, Ueli Staeger (2023) states that “African agency is about recognizing and boosting Africa’s ability to shape the international system in which it operates”.

⁴ In fact, only four of the UN’s 50 founding members were African: Egypt, Ethiopia, Liberia, and (then white-ruled) South Africa.

⁵ Insights come from a discussion between the author and S. Zondi in Pretoria, April 2025.

⁶ Among them: the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), with nine editions (first in 2000 and last in 2024); the U.S.-Africa Summit, with two editions (2014 and 2022); the Russia-Africa Summit, with two editions (2019 and 2023); the longest-running, the Sommet Afrique-France, with twenty-eight editions (first in 1973 and last in 2021); the European Union – African Union (UE-UA) Summit, with seven editions, (first in 2000; last in 2022; the next in 2025); the Tokyo International Conference on African Development – TICAD, with eight editions, (first in 1993 and last in 2022; the next in 2025);

the German Compact with Africa, a series of several events launched in 2017; the UK-Africa Investment Summit, with a first edition in 2020 (the second edition in 2024 has been postponed); the Turkey-Africa Summit, with three editions (first in 2008, last in 2021; next in 2026); the Italy-Africa Ministerial Conference, with two editions (2016 and 2018), that became the high level Italy - Africa Summit in 2024; the India-Africa Partnership Summit, with three editions (first in 2008 and last in 2015 (the forth should follow); the Budapest Africa Forum, with three editions (first in 2013 and last in 2018); and the Africa-Ireland Economic Forum, with seven editions (first in 2010 and last in 2022)....

⁷ This draft reflection on the distinction between “neutral”, “(active) non-alignment,” and “multi-alignment” draws on the author’s discussions with various South Africa’s based scholars and researchers in Johannesburg and Pretoria, March/April 2025 – in particular, Gustavo de Carvalho (South African Institute of International Affairs - SAIIA), Priyal Singh (Institute for Security Studies - ISS), and Professor Malte Brosig (Witwatersrand University). See also Sidiropoulos & de Carvalho (2023).

⁸ Compared to other conflicts, in Africans’ eyes the war in Ukraine received disproportionate attention from Western governments, with extensive media coverage. The incidents of racial discrimination against African refugees fleeing Ukraine through the Polish border at the beginning of the conflict should also be taken into consideration (Scialoja & Strazzari).

⁹ See: Scialoja, S. (2022). Positioning “Africa”: extraverted agency amidst global (dis)order, Security Praxis. Available: <https://www.securitypraxis.eu/positioning-africa-extraverted-agency-amidst-global-dis-order/>

¹⁰ In the February 24, 2025, resolution 11/7, primarily proposed by European countries and rejected by the US, only 13 African countries voted in favor. Meanwhile, 33 abstained or were absent,

and 8 voted against. The 8 countries that opposed the resolution included Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Mali, Niger and Sudan.

¹¹ Analyses of South Africa's role as a continental leader in Africa are often marked by divergence among scholars and experts. Some interpret South Africa continental foreign policy since the Mandela era, with the partial exception of the Mbeki administration as pursuing a strategy of "quiet diplomacy". This approach has been notably evident in South Africa's involvement in mediation and negotiation efforts in various African conflicts, such as those in Burundi, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo during the 2000s, where South Africa played a significant role as mediator (insights from various conversations with former South African ambassadors, Pretoria, April 2025).

¹² Insights on South Africa and the G20 arose from conversations with the South African Institute for International Affairs' researchers (SAIIA). SAIIA is one of the main South African think tanks organizing the T20.

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The Global Imperative to Deliver Ambitious Outcomes in Seville: A New Constructive Multilateralism and Concrete Steps Forward on Financing

Piera Tortora*

Constructive Multilateralism

The Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD-4) to be held from June 30 to July 3, 2025, in Seville provides a unique opportunity to reform the international financial architecture and address financing challenges preventing the investment push urgently needed for achieving the SDGs. And yet, this conference takes place at a time of increasingly turbulent international relations, growing uncertainty and geopolitical tensions, aid budget cuts in many countries and upheavals in multilateralism – which all challenge the achievement of a consensus around the ambitious financing framework and strong reform agenda that would need to be delivered in Seville.

Spain - the hosting country of the Conference - and the United Nations are doing exactly the right thing to navigate this situation and boost the chances of delivering positive results in Seville. While they continue to negotiate the Seville outcome document with the 193 United Nations' Member States, they

are also creating a space where groups of countries, or coalitions of the willing, can announce and launch new initiatives to move forward specific elements of the financing for development agenda. This space is called the Seville Platform for Action (SPA).

This approach - giving space to coalitions of the willing that bring together like-minded partners rather than focusing solely on moving the whole international community at the same time – may be the only viable path in the geopolitical context that has been emerging since the start of this year with the significant shift in the international stance of the United States. But it may also be a necessary step in the journey of the global community towards new, more inclusive and effective forms of multilateralism and, as Pezzini and Manservigi argue in their paper in this same issue, a necessary phase of experimentation in the transition of the Bretton Woods institutions and of multilateralism more at large to become more representative of the global community and fit to address

* Head of Secretariat of the Pact for Prosperity, People and the Planet, Paris. Views are personal.

the new challenges and realities of the 21st century – the importance of which has become apparent much earlier than January this year.

Indeed, world leaders crystallised the need to reform the international financial architecture during the Summit for a New Financial Pact (NFP) called by France in June 2023, where they created the Paris Pact for People and the Planet, or 4P (recently renamed as Pact for Prosperity, People and the Planet to emphasize its global membership) with the aim to overcome historical divides and accelerate joint efforts in this direction. The 4P builds on several other calls to action, like the Bridgetown Initiative developed under the powerful leadership of the Prime Minister of Barbados Mia Mottley, who voiced with unprecedented volition the aspirations for a comprehensive reform of the financing mechanisms for global development and the fight against climate change. The creation of the 4P had the value of effectively bringing together the so-called Global North and Global South on this agenda, and of doing so in a very action-oriented fashion and by enabling agile forms of co-operation.

The 4P Community – which today comprises 73 countries, more than double the number of countries who had joined at the NFP – partners up in a flexible and voluntary manner, including through operational coalitions bringing together varying geometries of countries to move the needle on specific aspects of the international financial architecture reform. These coalitions include for instance: the Expert Review on Debt, Nature and Climate led by Colombia, Kenya, France

and Germany; the Global Solidarity Levies Task Force led by Barbados, Kenya and France; the Coalition on Climate Resilient Debt Clauses; the Global Roadmap on Biodiversity Credits; the Capacity for Climate Action Alliance (C3A), and more.

Through its inclusive and voluntary platform and its coalitions, the 4P provides an innovative laboratory for constructive multilateralism and a tangible example of the effectiveness of the coalitions-of-the-willing model for advancing specific aspects of the reform agenda. In Seville, the international community can capitalise on these positive examples and will need to double down on efforts to strengthen forms of constructive multilateralism to chart a positive way forward.

Financing Priorities for Seville

Tackling Debt Challenges

But what are the main substantive elements on financing that need to be delivered in Seville?

While the list is long, I will focus on five main priorities.

First, a critical issue, and one on which agreement in the FfD-4 negotiations is lagging behind, is certainly around debt.

The debt challenges facing many developing countries are reaching new heights: the latest figures point to interest payments exceeding 10 per cent of government revenue in 56 developing countries – nearly double the number from a decade ago. In 2023 developing economies' total external debt servicing reached a record USD 1.4 trillion.

The final report of the Expert Review on Debt, Nature and Climate can offer some helpful insights on this matter. The report was produced by an independent group of over 20 experts co-chaired by Vera Songwe, former UN Assistant Secretary General, and Moritz Kraemer, former Chief Ratings Officer at S&P Global.¹ In a context where the impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss are becoming more severe and responses to climate and natural disaster shocks can weigh heavily on vulnerable countries' public budgets and their ability to repay debt and continue investing in drivers of future growth, the report sheds light on the interlinkages between debt vulnerabilities and climate/nature vulnerabilities. One of the key recommendations of the report is around the need to better integrate the risks and opportunities linked to climate impacts and nature loss in macroeconomic and fiscal frameworks, and in particular to integrate them in the IMF Debt Sustainability Analysis framework currently under review.

The report also calls on expanding the offer and use of contingent-borrowing instruments, such as debt-pause clauses. These instruments can effectively help create fiscal space in the event of natural disasters and other shocks by enabling an automatic postponement of debt repayments in the event of the pre-identified shock(s). At the political level, debt pause clauses have been strongly advocated for by the Bridgetown Initiative launched by the Prime Minister of Barbados Mia Mottley, and a Call to

Action to propel their offer was launched at the Summit for a New Global Financial pact that originated the 4P. While a few bilateral and multilateral official lenders now offer debt pause clauses, their uptake remains overall limited. In the current context of widespread budget cuts, it seems non-sensical that the international community does not do more to scale-up these instruments, which bear no additional cost for the lender and can in turn make a real difference to borrowers in the event of shocks. It is therefore, commendable that under the leadership of Spain, the Seville Platform for Action will include a debt pause clause alliance to further efforts in this area. The 4P and its members and partners, especially UK and the Inter-American Development Bank, will contribute to this work with a concrete implementation actions aimed at broadening the offer of debt pause clauses including from private lenders; fostering the adoption of good practices to ensure terms and conditions are not penalising for borrowing countries; and exploring the integration of insurance products to move from debt repayment suspension to risk transfer.

Private Investment

It is also essential that Seville delivers actions to ensure that more private capital is invested for development, climate, and nature in developing countries. To reach carbon neutrality and the SDGs by 2050, USD 2 trillion will need to be invested in developing countries. And yet, while there is no shortage of capital in the system, in 2023, net

financial flows to many developing countries became negative, implying a net transfer of resources from developing economies to developed countries. Unlocking more private investments in developing countries will hinge on a plethora of factors. Some are domestic, and, therefore, in Seville the international community has a role to play for instance to help strengthen the domestic enabling environment – including enhanced transparency, good governance, anti-corruption measures – as well as efforts to accelerate the development of domestic financial sectors, building a domestic savings base and strengthening the domestic banking sector.

But enhancing the flow of private finance to developing countries ultimately requires a better alignment of global economic and financial incentives to the global objectives on sustainable development, climate and nature. It also requires an assessment of how systemic issues and global financial frameworks may be impacting developing countries. For instance, recent research suggests that prudential and **financial regulations** designed with the intent to promote stability and sustainability in the global financial system may be unintentionally restricting investment flows to EMDEs may be unintentionally restricting investment flows to EMDEs. Under both banking and insurance regulatory standards, treatment of EMDE exposures and the use of risk mitigation instruments provided by multilateral institutions may not accurately reflect actual risk profiles. This may be having an impact on financing in critical sectors

like infrastructure, green energy, and technology. International progress in strengthening the global regulatory architecture has made the financial system safer and more resilient. And preserving and protecting global financial stability must remain a fundamental priority for financial regulation. However, if investments in EMDEs have a prudential treatment which exceeds the underlying level risk this could cut across policy objectives to increase private capital mobilization in EMDEs and wider climate objectives without providing necessary increases in microprudential or macroprudential resilience. Therefore, building on the 4P G20 discussion paper, and the B20 report on finance and infrastructure which recommended updates to prudential capital requirements for banks, insurance companies and pension funds to better reflect risk of investment in EMDEs – it seems necessary to further investigate these issues. It is positive that the current draft of the FfD-4 outcome documents includes a reference to this issue. To concretely advance this agenda, the 4P aims to launch in Seville a 4P Expert Commission – which will include experts from central bankers, regulators, insurers and investors – to conduct a comprehensive review of barriers to investments in EMDEs with a focus on potential unintended consequences of financial and prudential regulations on investments in EMDEs. The Expert Commission will provide recommendations to inform the G20, work in individual jurisdictions, and the Baku to Belem Roadmap for COP30.

High Costs of Capital

Addressing high costs of capital in developing countries and possible misalignments between real and perceived investment risks is also an issue requiring concrete advancements in Seville. The current FfD-4 outcome document encourages credit ratings to be more transparent, accurate, objective, and oriented towards the long term. Indeed, ratings issued by credit rating agencies, export credit agencies and ESG providers are a major driver of cross-border capital flows. A negative rating can have profound repercussions for a country's ability to invest in development, climate and nature. This is why in 2024 the 4P contributed to raise awareness on these issues and provided evidence and recommendations to enhance the transparency and accuracy of credit ratings and country risk assessments in a 4P discussion paper for the G20, which contributed to a commitment by the G20 to increase the transparency of credit ratings and country risk assessments (G20 Rio de Janeiro Leaders Declaration, para #45; and G20 Task Force CLIMA outcome document and Ministerial Statement, para #15). This result built on the 4P Leaders Communiqué endorsed in September 2024, where 17 4P Heads of States and government affirmed the need to develop a roadmap and establish a constructive dialogue with regulators, credit rating agencies, private investors, governments, local and regional development banks and other players to enhance the transparency and accuracy of credit ratings and country risk assessments. In 2025, the 4P is continuing

to work on the implementation of this commitment, and aims to launch in Seville a 4P Dialogue on Export Credits and Country Risk Assessments intended to provide a space for exchange and mutual learning bringing together export credits beneficiary countries, OECD countries and export credit agencies, and other relevant partners to identify concrete measures to enhance the transparency of country risk assessments and enhance the impact of export credits for development, climate and Nature in EMDEs.

Global Solidarity Levies the array of financing sources for sustainable development needs to grow. In Seville, the international community has an opportunity to scale up innovative sources of financing. In this context, there is an emerging consensus that a key area of reform to generate new and additional resources for international climate and development finance relates to new forms of taxation known as solidarity levies. Levies on polluting yet undertaxed sectors of the economy and sectors benefiting hugely from globalisation – such as fossil fuels, maritime shipping, international aviation and financial services, among others – have enormous potential to mobilise new, additional, predictable and adequate financial resources without worsening existing debt burdens. The Global Solidarity Levies Task Force under the 4P umbrella led by Barbados, Kenya, and France points that many options for solidarity levies could easily generate more than USD 100 bn per year, with the cumulative revenue generation from a set

of solidarity levies could exceed USD 500 bn per year in a high scenario. In Seville, coalitions will be launched to spearhead efforts on specific individual levies.

Finally, Seville will also offer an opportunity for a renewal in how concessional finance is provided and allocated. A critical aspect will be ensuring vulnerabilities can be better taken into account in the allocation of official development assistance (ODA), beyond considerations on gross national income alone which may hide important fragilities and risks. The recognition of multidimensional vulnerabilities in concessional allocations has been a long-standing demand of Small Islands Developing States (SIDS), as they are especially vulnerable to natural and climate disasters, disruptions of global trade and supply chains. Vulnerability to exogenous shocks often comes together with a limited capacity to build resilience in an already fragile economic context. The Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) Vision Statement supported by 52 partners from the 2023 Summit for a New Global Financial Pact, and in the presence of 12 major international and financial institutions, called on MDBs to explore eligibility to concessional finance for the most vulnerable countries

with a multidimensional approach to vulnerability, encompassing economic, environmental and social dimensions. Building on this proposal and on the Bridgetown initiative (now Bridgetown 3.0), the Pact for Prosperity, People and the Planet (4P) aims to launch as part of the Seville Platform for action a Dialogue on a Tailored Approach to Multidimensional Vulnerabilities that may explore convergent definitions of vulnerability, building on the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI) and lead to the adoption of tailored approaches for taking vulnerability into account in the allocation of concessional finance.

Two years after the Summit for a New Global Financial Pact, the international community needs to uphold its commitment to forging a financial architecture that delivers for people and the planet and affirm a reinvigorated spirit of constructive multilateralism to face current hurdles and achieve inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development. Seville is a unique opportunity to do so.

Endnote

- ¹ ODI, ECLAC and Development Finance Lab provided a Secretariat to the Expert Review, which was launched under the 4P umbrella.

Interview with Gabriela Ramos

Gabriela Ramos*

DCR: UNESCO plays a unique role as a convener of both knowledge and dialogue in today's particularly polarized world. How can these functions be enhanced to promote mutual understanding and constructive cooperation across regions and sectors?

Gabriela Ramos (GR): You are right. UNESCO has a powerful mandate that is needed more than ever. I have good understanding of international organisations having spent two decades at the OECD on hard core economic issues, investment, trade, macroeconomics. Another powerful institution that sets standards. UNESCO, on the other hand, has the most humanistic mandate of the whole UN System. UNESCO was created to promote peace through education, science, and culture. After having spent five wonderful years inside UNESCO, and being candidate of Mexico for the Director General, I've seen the power of these three pillars – when they are used well. This is why I have developed a vision consisting on three “I”s, inclusion, innovation and impact, to increase its positive footprint.

Education, science, and culture are not only assets to help people fulfil their potential, but also incredible bridge-builders.

Culture, for example, connects us through shared heritage – both tangible and intangible. It's not just about World Heritage sites being listed and treat this as a competition. On the contrary, it is about recognising and celebrating what makes us human. Understanding the different dimensions that bring us together, and the importance of our social relations. Humans are not just consumers or producers, and we cannot measure our progress only through GDP metrics. We care for each other, we have hopes, ambitions and dreams. We are people. We all enjoy music, we all enjoy learning about each other. If we can connect people through these dimensions, then maybe we can reconnect with the idea of our shared humanity.

Science is also critical – though under pressure these days. There are powerful interests that sometimes reject science when it doesn't align with their worldview. But science helps us understand the world and our societies. And education, when

* Assistant Director-General for Social and Human Sciences UNESCO, Paris. Views are personal.

deployed for peace and compassion and not just to compete in the labour market, is a powerful force.

This is a moment for a deeper reflection on what it means to be human. We have perhaps gotten it wrong if we think it's all about material well-being and about competition. It's about the full set of elements that define us – and UNESCO is the right place to foster those.

DCR: So how is UNESCO comparatively positioned in today's rapidly evolving international landscape? Why is it the right institution to help lead these reforms or this rethinking?

GR: First and foremost, we work with governments, of course. But we are also deeply grounded in communities. Civil society, local initiatives – that's where UNESCO also lives. I was impressed to see how recognisable UNESCO is, a multilateral institution that people are familiar with. I worked at the OECD, and while it's highly respected in policy circles, it's not known by wider audiences. UNESCO, on the other hand, is a household name. People remember, for instance, the symbolic concert UNESCO organised on the bridge between Bosnia and Serbia after the war – where a Serbian violinist and a Muslim pianist came together to perform. UNESCO has that emotional power.

It's also an organisation that recognises and rewards excellence – like the L'Oréal-UNESCO Prize for Women in Science, the Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize, the Youth Grant

Scheme recognising youth initiatives across the globe. When UNESCO puts its stamp on something – be it artists, scientists, or journalists – it opens doors. That comes with responsibility, of course. But it's also what makes UNESCO such a powerful convener of different stakeholders. UNESCO is also universal and puts more emphasis in supporting countries from the global south to achieve their objectives.

DCR: Which brings me to the growing mistrust toward multilateralism globally. From your perspective, what are the most urgent reforms needed to restore legitimacy and trust in global cooperation?

GR: That's a big and important question. We are witnessing some unfortunate global trends: the rise of populist and dogmatic leadership, increasing polarisation, and ideologies that promote the idea that “the system doesn't work.” This narrative has taken root in part because many people genuinely feel that the system hasn't delivered for them. We have to acknowledge that disappointment and that reality.

There is also the impact of disinformation and digital disruption, which further fuels polarization. But the root issue is this: many people feel left behind. Inequality, precarity, unemployment – especially among youth – are real, and so is the resulting loss of trust in institutions.

That said, it's unfair to blanket all institutions as ineffective or irrelevant. Yes, there is waste. Yes, we need better

impact metrics. But we also have powerful examples of impact. When I worked on telecom reform in Mexico, we achieved a 70 per cent decrease in prices of mobile telephony – that’s real impact. We also helped the Minister for Women in Tunisia to repeal laws that forced rape victims to marry their attackers. That changed lives. We influence policy, set global standards, and drive evidence-based reform. But we need to be better at showing that impact and communicating it. For example, in our work on AI ethics, Chile’s minister used our readiness assessment and realised they had significant gaps in their data privacy laws. Thanks to that process, they reformed them. This is massive, as it impacts positively the millions. But how do we communicate that success to the public? People whose data is now better protected don’t always know UNESCO played a role.

Equally, we need internal reform at UNESCO: more efficient financial tracking, better talent recruitment and management, improved inter-agency collaboration. With the Global Digital Compact, for instance, we coordinated closely with the ITU and UNDP. Instead of duplicating efforts, we streamlined action and demonstrated our relevance. We didn’t just host conferences – we showed results. Now, those institutions are being tasked to implement the Compact. That’s what reform should look like.

We also need a change in narrative, to reconnect with what people cares about. Addressing the major challenges, climate, inequalities, digital transformation, considering the specific needs of people.

DCR: Given your experience at UNESCO and the OECD – and your lifelong dedication to development cooperation – do you see a need for more issue-based coalitions or experimental platforms?

GR: By all means – absolutely. In the current context, it’s an illusion to think you can broker universal, consensual agreements keeping a high level of ambition if major players are not supportive. Fully universal agreements may not be happening at the rate we need them – at least not now. I hope we can aim for that in the next stage of the Sustainable Development Goals. Because the issues themselves haven’t changed. It’s not about the headline – it’s about the content. That’s what we need to focus on.

I’m convinced that international cooperation today has to be issue-based, and it has to be driven by alliances of people who are truly committed. You cannot force global actors – governments, institutions – to do what they don’t want to do. But you also can’t let them stop others from achieving progress. They shouldn’t be allowed to block it. And there are so many countries that do want to move forward. The problem is that the headlines are all negative, but I can tell you from experience: more governments want to continue engaging with the multilateral system than not.

There are already big-ticket items that have been defined. Take climate change, for example. The Paris Agreement is in place. Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), adaptation policies, the Loss and Damage Fund, even

financial system reforms – they’re aligning with the transition away from fossil fuels. And companies are adapting, too. Many have made significant progress on carbon footprint reduction.

I’m not naïve. If major countries choose not to participate, then of course, the outcomes won’t be global. But we need to keep moving forward. The same applies to gender equality. I believe many more countries want to advance that agenda than those who resist it. So, we should go ahead and do what we can. This also connects with the idea of “variable geometry” – we shouldn’t be afraid of that, when the rough times comes, hoping we can universalize the outcomes when the environment is more favourable.

As long as we create traction around specific issues, that’s already a win. Take, for example, the work we are doing on the ethics of AI. We now have 70 countries conducting diagnostics and building national governance frameworks. Maybe we’re not yet governing the big global platforms – but UNESCO has created solid guidelines, and we’re working with many of those platforms. Some of them genuinely want to engage, to better understand the rules of the game, and to help shape a transparent and stable environment.

I’ve worked on very delicate topics as well – like racism and discrimination. I took a firm position: I didn’t want to document wrongdoings country by country as that doesn’t help and can turn into a finger pointing exercise. Rather look at legal frameworks and level of commitment to address this problem. Do countries have the right

laws? Do they have the institutions and the systems to enforce them? Are they investing in awareness and education? Let’s measure that – effort and intention, not just quantity of harm. In the end, that approach gave birth to the Global Forum Against Racism and Discrimination – an annual gathering of many stakeholders and 80 participating countries. We also had a network of 25 incredibly committed public officials. I wish we could count 194 countries, but we move forward with those countries on board.

This also build the basis for meaningful partners to join the effort. The Ford Foundation supported us to produce a global outlook on racism and discrimination using artificial intelligence to analyse the global media coverage of the problem. The findings were powerful. Of all the cases of discrimination reported in the media, 38% were based on race, 33 per cent on gender, and 20 per cent on ethnic origin. Eighteen per cent of the cases involved physical violence. That’s already a striking picture. But the most revealing point? Sixty percent of those incidents were committed by individuals – meaning they were already illegal and punishable under law. But 40 per cent were systemic, institutionalized.

That’s where institutions play a key role – understanding the context, surfacing the real problems, and working with committed champions in issue-based coalitions, or what you called “adaptive coalitions.” Interestingly, people don’t often ask these questions. Who sets the agenda? Who steps up? Sometimes it’s a journalist like you. Sometimes it’s an academic, like Nicholas Stern with

climate economics or an international organisation that provide a vital service – documenting truthfully, even when the findings are uncomfortable. For me personally, addressing problems that touches directly people's life is a must. Violence against women, for example, is the ultimate reflection of a world gone wrong. It's about integrity. If your dignity isn't protected by the people who live with you – then what else do you have?

DCR: Can UNESCO help design or host such mechanisms within the UN system? How can established institutions like UNESCO support bottom-up, adaptive coalitions without stifling their flexibility?

GR: We most definitely should. I draw from my experience at the OECD, where I launched the Business for Inclusive Growth platform – 50 multinationals committed to going beyond responsible business conduct to redress inequality, to invest in communities in new ways. We did it with the ethics of AI too at UNESCO, adopting the most universal and ambitious global standard. Now we have 70 countries doing 'readiness assessments' to know where they are in the AI journey and compare to the benchmarks and learning from each other. The global forum on AI ethics wasn't mandatory – but everyone came. That's powerful.

These are powerful examples of multilateralism that delivers. In my vision for UNESCO, I want us to go deeper into education and culture. Education, because globally we've focused mainly

on preparing youth for the labour market – skills for individual success. We must educate for compassion, empathy, critical thinking, living in peace – with each other and with the environment. We need to build consciousness, civic responsibility at school. Kids must graduate not just with academic skills, but with a sense of their role in shaping the world for good.

UNESCO is the global lead in education, especially basic education. The OECD does excellent work with PISA, and I'm proud that in 2019 we reformed it to include global competencies – tolerance, openness, awareness. But UNESCO also sets standards for education for peace. And we need that: education for understanding, outreach, and openness. UNESCO launched a powerful education coalition during COVID. We should transform it – to rethink what we educate for.

Then, there's culture. UNESCO identifies and recognises cultural heritage. But that's become an end in itself. Originally, it was a mean – to help us appreciate each other's cultures and promote peaceful relationships. We need to foster this view and bring culture to build bridges. UNESCO can really bring people together – through education, culture but also science—especially the ethics of emerging technologies. UNESCO is now a global leader in ethics of AI, synthetic biology, quantum computing, geoengineering. These technologies demand ethical grounding. Ethics means asking: Who wins? Who loses? Is it inclusive? Does it enhance human rights? UNESCO can and should become a moral compass. That's what the world needs right now.

DCR: From your work with the Inclusive Policy Lab and MOST programme, have you seen effective models of peer-to-peer learning or South-South exchanges that could be scaled up?

GR: Absolutely. What we've learned through the Inclusive Policy Lab and the MOST Programme is that peer-to-peer learning is not just a nice concept – it's an essential mechanism for real, grounded change. One of the most promising aspects is that these exchanges aren't top-down. They're about mutual respect, shared experiences, and practical solutions that are exchanged. But it is also the place where we foster the science policy nexus that is also being questioned nowadays in many places.

In fact, in our AI ethics work, we've seen countries use our readiness assessments to identify gaps and learn directly from others facing similar challenges. Seventy countries are engaged in that work, and they're exchanging strategies – not from a place of hierarchy, but of solidarity. South-South cooperation, in particular, is powerful because it avoids the legacy baggage that sometimes accompanies North-South models. These are governments and civil societies working together on equal footing – sharing legal frameworks, policy designs, education reforms, and even cultural preservation tools.

We've had real success hosting forums where ministers from countries like Chile, Kenya, Mozambique or Cambodia learn from each other's reforms. That's the kind of coalition-building we need more of. And yes, it's scalable – if we invest in the

right platforms and trust in the power of shared learning.

The MOST programme, that aims to support countries manage social transformations, is also a place to learn. Through its Inclusive Policy Lab we bring thought leaders to share their views on contemporary issues. In the podcast, we have benefited from hearing the likes of Phumzile Mlambo-Nguka, Vilas Dhar, Nadia Calvino, among others. The Lab also fosters collaborations and there is a community of 4000 experts co-producing think pieces. We also launched the Alan Hirshman Lecture to learn from the best scholars. In fact, it was Daron Acemoglu who launched the first lecture, before he became the Nobel Prize in Economics. We are conducting research trying to overcome common places, in collaboration with Fundacion La Caixa, and our Category II Center, trying to advance a framework that includes equality and sustainability on equal footing with efficiency in economic policy decisions. We also produced a report on the distributional impact of climate policies. The best part is to serve countries like the DRC and Brazil to address youth violence, or the European Union look at the best way, with nine participating countries, to enhance analytical capacities of governments.

DCR: Looking ahead, what is your vision for international cooperation in the next decade, and what key shifts must occur for it to remain relevant and effective?

GR: In today's world, issue-based coalitions – where those who are willing,

move forward – are our best path. That’s not fragmentation. That’s agility and experimentalism. International cooperation must move away from traditional multilateralism. We need to be impact-driven, transparent, and emotionally intelligent. Trust is low – but we rebuild it not with slogans, but with results that people can feel in their lives. We need to tackle issues with the most committed countries and individuals to achieve a “race to the top”, even if this is through “variable geometry” that at the start does not include all the member countries. We should not be afraid of this. On the contrary, it may help us to

deliver and entice others to join. If 25 countries are ready to tackle racism in their legal frameworks, let’s move with those 25. If 70 want to reform AI ethics, let’s support them now and prove useful and agile. Most importantly, we must infuse cooperation with moral clarity. Institutions like UNESCO can – and must – serve as ethical compasses. We need to ask: Are we protecting human dignity? Are we reducing inequality? Are we elevating our shared humanity? That’s the shift. From power politics to purpose and from abstract declarations to real, measurable, human-centred progress.

Financing For Development: Finding the Right Local Balance

Nicholas Westcott*

Sometimes the history of human development seems to accelerate, sometimes to stagnate; and occasionally it even seems to go backwards. As we pass the first quarter of the 21st century, the pace of change is accelerating, but the risk of human development going backwards is rising.

This Ambassador's Perspective looks at the change from the perspective of a donor in Africa. What policies were adopted, what programmes designed, what steps taken to help African countries develop their economies, reduce poverty and deliver improved livelihoods and better services. Was the money spent effectively, and can progress be sustained?

From 1982 to 2018 I was a British diplomat. For twelve of those years, I worked largely in or on Africa, including time spent in East and West Africa, in London when the Department for International Development (DFID) was set up, and in Brussels when the EU's aid programmes were being reorganised after 2011.

Throughout these years I have been struck by the immense value of regular

exchanges with local African governments and close coordination between donors on the spot. In Ghana this helped deliver major improvements to education and economic policy-making, and in Tanzania to more efficient markets and improved governance. Often small, targeted interventions proved more effective than larger but less focused ones.

Development aid itself has been through a constant cycle of policy changes in the last 100 years: from simply providing infrastructure to stimulate private sector growth, to bringing large areas of economic activity under state control, and state provision of basic social services, through structural adjustment and privatisation, back to reinforcing health and education efforts and reforming governance, to a renewed focus on infrastructure and private sector growth. All the while, there has been an ever-growing demand for humanitarian aid in response to natural and man-made disasters.

Despite all the changes, and independent of the absolute volume of aid, I have been struck that three things have made a significant difference: the nature

* Professor of Practice in Diplomacy at SOAS University of London and a former British High Commissioner to Ghana and Ambassador to a number of African countries. Views are personal.

of relations between host governments and donors, where this worked well, and led to a genuine dialogue; secondly the degree of coordination between donors themselves; and thirdly, the ability to respond to lessons learnt in the field and adjust policies and practices to make aid most effective.

Where these were present, it was possible to make constructive contributions to help communities, reduce poverty, improve livelihoods and accelerate growth, and avoid failed efforts that bred resentment more than hope or progress.

1. Relations

The relations between a donor and recipient are inherently unequal, and distinct from normal diplomatic relations between two independent sovereign states. As an ambassador, you have to navigate both. You are the representative of your national government responsible for the full range of bilateral and international issues that you discuss with the host government; and you and your team are equally responsible for ensuring the proper use and good value of bilateral aid donated to the host country. Getting the balance right helps ensure the partnership is genuine, the objectives are shared, and prescriptions are the result of discussion not presumption. Bringing experience from other countries is valuable, but it is equally important to understand the local background to domestic priorities.

In both Tanzania and Ghana, relations between the UK as a major donor and the host governments were open, friendly and

fruitful. Tanzania had a more Nyerere-ite scepticism about western aid prescriptions and a fiercely independent non-aligned position internationally. But bilateral relations were good, and the government welcomed development assistance and long-term investments from the CDC (now BII), the British government's private sector development finance arm, as long as there was no unreasonable conditionality attached. We worked closely with the relevant ministries to ensure British development programmes fitted with Tanzania's overall development strategy.

In Ghana, British development staff worked closely with the lead sector ministries, particularly education and health, to ensure British aid was directed into the Ghanaian government's priority areas. The problem was often that the ministry's capacity was not up to the demands its own government put on it, and aid did not always reach the intended end user – such as regional schools. Though we could be sure that the finance provided was in line with Ghana's priorities and delivered through the ministry, not independently, it was sometimes hard to provide assurance that the funding had delivered the desired outcome or impact.

In other countries, where relations with the host government were strained, or there was a risk of aid being diverted to other ends, it could be delivered through civil society organisations that provided it direct to the intended beneficiaries. In circumstances where there was no effective government, relief agencies would go to extraordinary lengths to get support

directly to those most in need, despite the danger.

As aid budgets shrink, the partnership with host governments becomes more, not less, important, to ensure that assistance goes where it can deliver most value. Where there is a shift from aid to private sector or state-led investment, relations are different again, and greater onus rests on the host government to ensure the terms of the deal are fair and the implementation efficient and compatible with its overall development objectives. Often the local diplomatic mission only gets sight of the project or its details at a late stage, and its influence can be minimal.

2. Coordination

Coordination among donors themselves has always been important to avoid duplication, dispersion of host government efforts, or contradictory policies being pursued. With all donors demanding time and coordination with host governments, some ministers had little time to focus on managing their ministries and delivering nationally. In all countries where I worked, donor-only coordination meetings, often chaired or co-chaired by the multilateral agencies, would take place to share information. We also held collective meetings with the government to avoid the multiplication of separate bilateral ones. Smaller sectoral groups of donors on health, infrastructure, agriculture or energy would also meet, often with the government ministry concerned. As long as they were transparent, they helped ensure the coherence of external support, and the best value for the host country.

Such coordination, however, is becoming more difficult. The diversification of external supporters, and kinds of support to include not just traditional aid, but trade financing, commercial loans, infrastructure deals, security and so on, has fragmented the support networks. Many new external actors will act only bilaterally, and some refuse to coordinate at all. In Ghana in 2010, China was persuaded to join the donor coordination meetings, not so much to speak (they said little), but for them to hear the wider economic assessment of what the country needed and what others were doing. Amongst the new actors ('non-traditional donors'), such as China, the Gulf states, Turkey, India and others, some offer only what they want to give, others what the local political leaders want, neither of which is necessarily part of a coherent development plan. With more external support coming from these sources, there is a greater risk of finance going astray or being used unproductively.

Several international coalitions have been assembled to target specific development goals, such as GAVI for vaccinations and the Global Fund to fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, which incorporate major non-governmental trusts, foundations and other donors. Though they have sometimes operated independently of traditional donor coordination mechanisms, they have had considerable success, particularly in mobilising major new resources for the campaigns.

In many ways, I found that local coordination was more effective than that between capitals or in multilateral

institutions, provided local representatives were well-informed about what their HQ was doing. The trusted personal relations between the individuals concerned, both in the local government and the donor agencies, enabled honest conversations to take place which helped ensure an effective programme. Where that trust did not exist, local coordination made little difference.

3. Lessons

Following major agreements reached in Paris in 2005 and Accra in 2008, a greater emphasis has been put on achieving aid effectiveness. This draws heavily on the lessons learnt from the many development failures of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. With inspiration from DFID, which following its founding in 1997 assembled some of the most talented development specialists of all nationalities, the multilateral agencies including the World Bank, African Development Bank, EU and others have

become much more effective at using aid to deliver good outcomes for poor communities. The same applies to GAVI and the Global Fund, which have applied lessons from previous health projects and adopted global best practices.

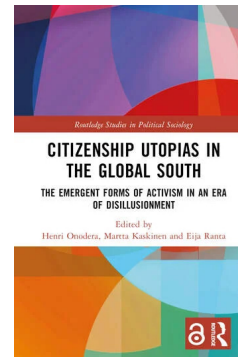
With the diversification of donors, and more finance passing through bilateral rather than multilateral channels, there is a higher risk of these lessons from the past being forgotten and programmes being launched which fail because they repeat mistakes that have happened before. This would be to everyone's detriment.

All development, like all politics, is local. Though the macroeconomic situation and the government's probity, efficiency and good policies are always essential for economic growth and improved livelihoods, it is the difference made in individual communities for individual people that matters. And the local perspective on that will help even smaller amounts have a bigger impact.

Citizenship Utopias in the Global South

Henri Onodera, MarttaKaskinen, and
EijaRanta (eds.)

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Eleanor Legge-Bourke *

Abstract: This review critically engages with *Citizenship Utopias in the Global South: The Emergent Forms of Activism in an Era of Disillusionment*, edited by Henri Onodera, MarttaKaskinen, and EijaRanta. The volume offers a timely and rich exploration of grassroots activism across Africa, Asia, and Latin America in the face of democratic erosion and postcolonial state fragility. The editors and contributors reposition citizenship as a dynamic process of claim-making and dissent, particularly in contexts marked by civic disillusionment.

Organised into three thematic sections - activism in times of disillusionment, decolonising the state, and reimagining citizenships - the volume blends empirical depth with theoretical innovation. Drawing from ethnographic research and activist collaborations, the chapters analyse diverse movements, from student protests and anti-racism campaigns to feminist and LGBTQ+ organising. This review evaluates the book's contributions to critical development studies, political sociology, and decolonial theory, highlighting its strengths in methodological pluralism, intellectual humility, and epistemic decentralisation. It also addresses minor limitations, including thematic dispersion and the need for deeper transnational institutional analysis. Ultimately, the volume affirms the political salience of imagination and dignity in struggles for more inclusive and pluralistic futures across the Global South.

1. Introduction

In a political climate marked by democratic recession, persistent inequalities, and the entrenchment of authoritarian populism, *Citizenship Utopias in the Global South* emerges as both a timely and necessary scholarly intervention. Edited by Henri Onodera,

MarttaKaskinen, and EijaRanta, this volume investigates the reimaginings of citizenship from below – where formal rights have often failed to deliver substantive equality, dignity, or recognition.

Rather than framing citizenship purely as a legal status, the contributors

* Managing Editor, Press Report House, UK. Views are personal.

foreground its performative, everyday, and aspirational dimensions. These are the “citizenship utopias” – envisioned and enacted alternatives to the existing socio-political orders in contexts ranging from Tunisia to Chile, India to South Africa. These utopias, however modest or ephemeral, constitute the political imagination of marginalised communities responding to systemic exclusion.

2. Disillusionment and the Persistence of Hope

The book opens with a powerful introduction that captures the contradictory dynamics of the contemporary moment. While the last decade has witnessed widespread civic mobilisation – from the Arab Spring to Black Lives Matter and feminist movements – the simultaneous rise of exclusionary nationalisms and democratic erosion has generated a profound disillusionment. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed and exacerbated longstanding inequities, particularly in the Global South.

Against this backdrop, the editors argue that utopia must be rethought not as a grand systemic overhaul but as a critical method for imagining possible futures. Drawing on thinkers such as Ruth Levitas and Ernst Bloch, they frame “citizenship utopias” as grounded, situated, and pragmatic – emerging in existing systems’ cracks, not in opposition to all order but in search of more just ones. Citizenship here is understood less as a status conferred by the state and more as a claim made by those historically excluded from its promises.

3. Structure and Contributions

The book is divided into three thematic parts, each focusing on different scales and registers of civic engagement:

1. Activism in Times of Disillusionment
2. Decolonising the State
3. Re-imagining Citizenships

Each part brings empirical and theoretical depth to specific struggles while also offering insights into broader dynamics of resistance, imagination, and political transformation.

Part I: Activism in Times of Disillusionment

This section highlights the tension between civic disillusionment and creative forms of engagement.

- **Yahia Benyamina’s** chapter on Algeria presents a generation of youth who, faced with the futility and danger of formal political activism, retreat into voluntary groups and informal solidarities. These may lack radical posturing but foster meaningful collective practices and mutual support.
- **Angela Chukunzira**, reflecting on activism during the pandemic in Johannesburg, provides a rare insider account of how digital technologies became vital tools in the absence of state action. Her piece foregrounds the concept of “wired citizenship” and demonstrates the political possibilities of online spaces for community survival.
- **Geoffrey Pleyers** expands the lens in Chapter 5, situating Chile’s

2019 uprising within global protest ecologies. He categorises contemporary movements by their hybrid forms: expressive, intersectional, reticular, and often ambivalent toward institutional politics. His analysis offers a sober reminder that social change is neither linear nor guaranteed but filled with reversals and contradictions.

These chapters collectively show how disillusionment does not preclude action. On the contrary, it often catalyses imaginative strategies for survival and resistance.

Part II: Decolonising the State

The second part engages more explicitly with institutional reform, state contestation, and the limits of liberal multiculturalism.

- **Sarah Radcliffe's** study of Cotacachi county in Ecuador examines how the Indigenous-led implementation of *buenvivir* – rooted in the Quechua philosophy of *sumakkawsay* – challenged colonial hierarchies through participatory governance and interculturalism. She presents Cotacachi as a site of “everyday citizenship,” where the state becomes a terrain of both contestation and co-creation.
- **Rodríguez Malagón and Ranta** turn to Cuba, where official narratives of racial equality have masked persistent discrimination against Afro-Cuban populations. Through a Black feminist lens, they document how grassroots movements contest the myth of

a raceless society and demand recognition within – and against – the socialist utopian horizon.

- **Tony Nyundu and Hamed Hosseini**, in their study of the Fees Must Fall (FMF) movement in South Africa, show how student protests confronted not only the neo liberalisation of higher education but also racial and class exclusions deeply embedded in the post-apartheid state. Their detailed thematic analysis based on interviews with 21 student activists underscores the movement's internal complexities – particularly around race, gender, and political alignment.
- **Henri Onodera and Reem Garfi** explore racial justice movements in Tunisia, highlighting the tenuous relationship between legal reforms and cultural attitudes. Even after anti-racism laws were passed post-revolution, Black Tunisians – including migrants – continued to face systemic marginalisation. Yet activists persisted, challenging normative assumptions about national identity and belonging.

This section complicates simplistic binaries of state vs. movement. It shows how activists both contest and engage state structures, working within and beyond formal mechanisms to articulate pluralistic and decolonised visions of citizenship.

Part III: Re-Imagining Citizenships

The final section turns to the affective and imaginative dimensions of civic identity.

- **Karim Zakhour's** chapter on interior Tunisia is an exemplary piece of ethnographic analysis. Drawing from fieldwork in Gafsa and Kasserine, he unpacks how young men in marginalised regions construct their understanding of citizenship through narratives of state corruption. Rather than withdrawing, they remain civically engaged through a language of critique and desire – what Lauren Berlant would call “clusters of promises” tied to a still-imagined future.
- **Karim Maïche**, writing on Algeria's Hirak movement, focuses on autonomous trade unionists whose “acts of citizenship” subvert state-sponsored performances of national unity. He emphasizes the performativity of protest, where citizenship is claimed in the streets rather than bestowed by the state.
- **Le and Nicolaisen's** analysis of Vietnam explores the pedagogy of the state – how moral conduct, national loyalty, and digital surveillance define acceptable forms of civic expression. In contrast to mass protest, resistance here emerges quietly, through small acts of care and subversion among marginalised groups during the pandemic.
- Finally, **Banhishikha Ghosh** offers a complex and timely account of queer activism in India. She illustrates how some members of gender non-conforming communities have found partial recognition within Hindu nationalist circles – a troubling but important example

of how utopian aspirations can be co-opted or constrained by illiberal forces.

4. Conclusion

The book refuses to romanticise activism – it does not view social movements through a nostalgic or idealist lens. Instead, it presents them as fraught, contingent, and deeply shaped by historical and structural inequalities. Moreover, the focus on the Global South is not merely symbolic – the editors and contributors insist on theorising from the South, resisting the cognitive dominance of Euro-American scholarship.

The ethnographic richness of many chapters – particularly those on Tunisia, Ecuador, and South Africa – lends the volume an immediacy and authenticity often missing in comparative political theory. Contributors engage seriously with activists' voices without flattening them into archetypes or instruments of theory.

However, the diversity of cases and methodologies does pose a challenge to coherence. Readers seeking a unified theoretical framework or consistent methodological approach may find the book diffuse. While the editors' introduction attempts to offer conceptual cohesion through the lens of “citizenship utopias,” some chapters remain more descriptive than analytical.

Another limitation is the relative lack of engagement with transnational institutions. While digital activism and global solidarity networks are noted, a sequel could include a systematic analysis of how international law, funding, and discourse shape local movements.

The Future of Foreign Aid: A Way Forward for the Global South

Sushil Kumar*

Abstract: In 2023, DAC (Development Assistance Committee) members provided a total of USD 216.48 billion in Official Development Assistance (ODA), which represented just 0.37 per cent of their Gross National Income (GNI). If these countries had met their commitment to allocate 0.7 per cent of GNI to aid, an additional USD 203 billion could have been available for the Global South. However, following recent announcements of aid cuts by DAC members, including the United States, this amount is expected to decline to approximately USD 135 billion in 2025, representing only 0.22 per cent of their GNI. This reduction would result in a shortfall of USD 81 billion in ODA for 2025 as compared to the ODA figure of 2024. As ODA from traditional donors declines, emerging economies, the private sector, multilateral institutions, and stronger South-South platforms should take a larger role in global development.

1. Introduction

The global system of international development cooperation has been undergoing significant changes, particularly with recent announcements from Development Assistance Committee (DAC) member countries regarding cuts to their foreign aid budgets. Notably, the United States has announced a drastic 90 per cent reduction in its aid similarly, the United Kingdom has declared plans to reduce its international aid budget from 0.5 per cent to 0.3 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2027. The UK and USA are not the only country to make such cuts; several European countries have recently announced significant

reductions in their official development assistance (ODA) budgets, signalling a shift in their approach to international aid. The Netherlands, for instance, is set to cut € billion (USD 8.64 billion) from its aid budget over the next four years, alongside a € billion (USD 1.08 billion) reduction in civil society funding between 2025 and 2030 a trend also echoed by the European Union's proposed € billion (USD 2.16 billion) reduction in aid over the next two years. Germany, Finland, Switzerland, and Norway have similarly signaled budgetary cuts, with Germany reducing its aid by nearly € billion (USD 2.16 billion), Finland trimming ODA by a quarter between 2024 and 2027, and Switzerland slashing USD 282 million.

* Assistant Professor, RIS. Views are personal.

Norway, meanwhile, has proposed a USD 460 million reduction in its 2024 budget . However, the reduction in aid raises concerns about the future of global development cooperation, particularly in global south countries that rely heavily on external assistance for poverty alleviation, health care, education, and sustainable development. In light of these shifts, it is essential to analyse the potential impacts these cuts may have on the Global South that are most reliant on foreign aid for economic development. It is also crucial to assess the current trends in international aid provided by DAC countries, as these trends influence the overall trajectory of global development efforts.

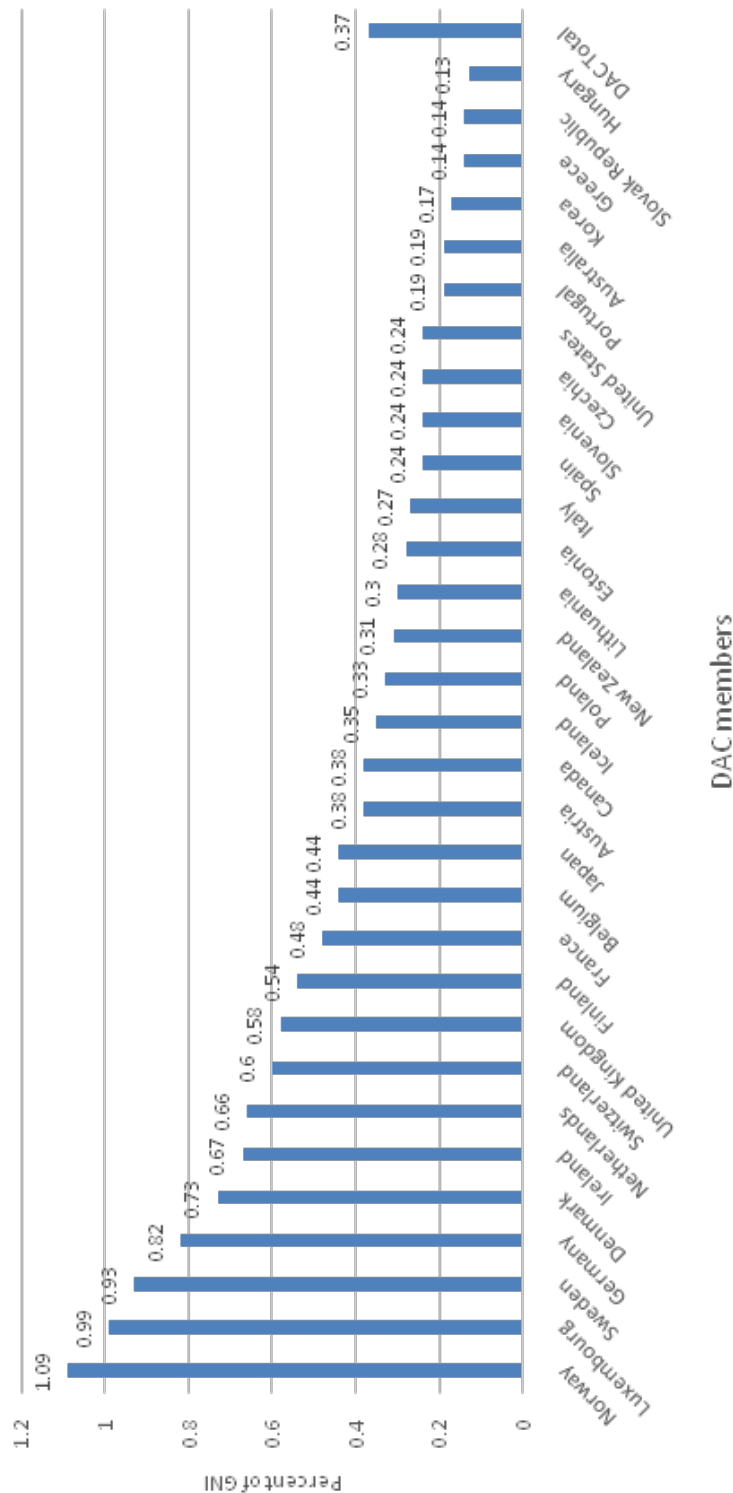
Before exploring these contemporary changes, it is important to trace the historical evolution of foreign aid. The roots of modern foreign aid can be traced back to the colonial powers' development activities in their overseas territories. Some scholars argue that the roots of foreign aid lie in the colonial era, where the development of colonies was seen as an extension of European powers' interests. In the post-World War II era, the United States initiated several key foreign aid programs, such as the Point Four Assistance Programme (1949), which marked the beginning of U.S. government assistance aimed at helping underdeveloped nations. The Mutual Security Agency (1952) and the PL480 programme (1954), which provided a legal basis for food aid, further solidified the U.S. role in global development. In parallel, international mechanisms were established to assist developing countries,

such as the United Nations' Expanded Programme for Technical Assistance (1950) and the European Development Fund (1957), which contributed to the formation of the European Economic Community. These initiatives formed the foundation of modern international aid structures and frameworks, helping to shape the flow of resources from developed to developing nations (Malek, 2015). This write-up argues that, given the growing shifts in international development cooperation, it is crucial to consider who will fill the gap left by traditional donors. Additionally, it explores the options available to countries in the Global South, many of which remain heavily dependent on international aid.

2. The 0.7 Per cent Target: A Longstanding Commitment in Question

The concept of allocating a specific percentage of national income to foreign aid has been a longstanding debate. The World Council of Churches proposed a target of 1 per cent of developed countries' Gross National Product (GNP) to be directed towards aid in the late 1950s. This idea was later formalised by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), which supported the goal, and the Pearson Commission's report (1969) proposed the target be set at 0.7 per cent of GNP. This target was endorsed by the United Nations through a formal resolution in October 1970, which set the goal to be reached by 1980. However, despite these

Figure 1: ODA as Percent of GNI in 2023, DAC Members



Sources: OECD (2024).

international commitments, the 0.7 per cent target has not been met by most developed countries. As of 2023, only five DAC members - Norway, Luxembourg, Sweden, Germany and Denmark, - have consistently met or exceeded the 0.7 per cent target (see Figure 1). “In recognition of the special importance of the role which can be fulfilled only by official development assistance, a major part of financial resource transfers to the developing countries should be provided in the form of official development assistance. Each economically advanced country will progressively increase its official development assistance to the developing countries and will exert its best efforts to reach a minimum net amount of 0.7 per cent of its gross national product at market prices by the middle of the Decade.” – UN General Assembly Resolution 2626 (XXV), 24 October 1970, paragraph 43.

It is also important to note that if the UN (United Nations) target of 0.7 per cent of GNI for ODA had been achieved in 2023, USD 420 billion would have been available for development assistance, compared to USD 216.48 billion. Thus, there is an apparent shortfall of USD 203 billion from the accepted norm.

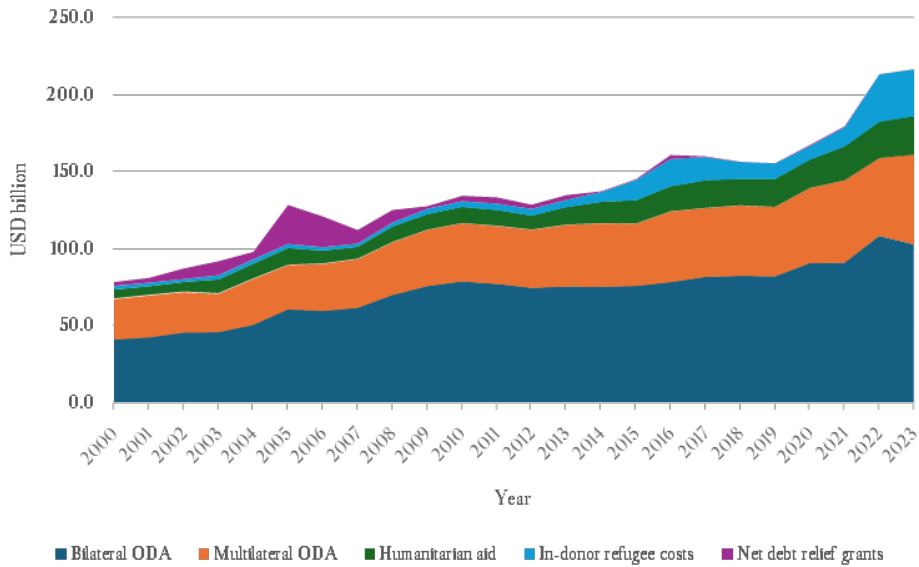
3. Official Development Assistance from DAC

The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) comprising 32 members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) keeps track of the flow of Official Development Assistance (ODA) to

the developing countries, and annually releases data on the same. As per data available from OECD The flow of ODA from DAC member countries to developing nations has seen fluctuating trends over the last two decades. In 2000, DAC countries disbursed approximately USD 77.78 billion in total aid, with 52.92 per cent of it being bilateral ODA. By 2023, the total aid flow from DAC members had increased to USD 216.48 billion, with bilateral aid constituting 47.38 per cent of this amount. Humanitarian aid and debt relief also became significant components of aid disbursements, especially during crises (see Figure 2). Over the years, the share of multilateral ODA has grown, reflecting the increased importance of collective international efforts through organisations like the UN and the World Bank. The figures for humanitarian aid and refugee costs have also risen, particularly during humanitarian crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The figure also reveals that bilateral aid from DAC (Development Assistance Committee) countries has more than doubled between 2000 to 2023. In 2023, the Official Development Assistance (ODA) allocated to donor refugee costs accounted for 14.09 per cent. The analysis estimates that, due to the recent announcements of aid cuts by DAC members, this amount may decline to USD 135 billion (assuming no further aid cuts by other DAC members in 2025) in 2025, representing approximately 0.22 per cent of their Gross National Income (GNI). This reduction would result in a shortfall of USD 81 billion.

Figure 2: Flow of Aid from DAC Member Countries to Developing Countries (USD billion), Constant Prices 2022



Source: OECD stat. (accessed on 31-03-2025)

4. USA Aid to Global South

The United States has been one of the largest contributors of foreign aid, particularly to developing countries. US aid flows have seen substantial increases over the years, reflecting the country's strategic and humanitarian interests. In 2000, the total US aid stood at USD 16.15 billion, with a major portion going to bilateral ODA. By 2023, this amount had grown to USD 62.23 billion (see Table 1), with 57.12 per cent allocated as bilateral assistance. The United States has consistently directed a significant share of its aid towards humanitarian support, particularly in response to crises, such as conflicts and natural disasters. In 2023, the United States allocated USD 14.52 billion in humanitarian aid. Of this, USD 11.36

billion was directed towards Ukraine (see Table 2 in the appendix). Notably, the U.S. accounted for approximately 28.75 per cent of total ODA of DAC. The recent decision by the U.S. to cut all foreign aid will significantly impact countries in the Global South. As shown in Table 2 (in the appendix), several countries heavily reliant on U.S. aid in 2023 include Ukraine, Ethiopia, Jordan, Afghanistan, Somalia, Nigeria, Syria, Kenya, Yemen, South Sudan, Uganda, and Mozambique. The majority of these nations are grappling with ongoing conflicts, highlighting the critical role U.S. humanitarian assistance plays in their stability and recovery.

In 2023, DAC (Development Assistance Committee) member countries failed to allocate the promised 0.7 per

**Table 1: Flow of USA aid to Developing Countries (USD billion),
Constant price 2022**

| Category | Bilateral ODA | Multilateral ODA | Humanitarian aid | In-donor refugee costs | Net debt relief grants | Total | Share of bilateral ODA in total (%) | Share of multilateral ODA in total (%) | Share in total DAC |
|----------|---------------|------------------|------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-------|-------------------------------------|--|--------------------|
| 2000 | 9.36 | 4.14 | 1.89 | 0.73 | 0.03 | 16.15 | 57.95 | 25.62 | 20.76 |
| 2001 | 10.71 | 4.99 | 1.73 | 0.66 | 0.04 | 18.13 | 59.04 | 27.52 | 22.54 |
| 2002 | 13.47 | 4.25 | 2.16 | 0.22 | 0.66 | 20.76 | 64.88 | 20.47 | 23.96 |
| 2003 | 15.59 | 2.54 | 4.32 | 0.53 | 2.01 | 25.00 | 62.37 | 10.18 | 27.36 |
| 2004 | 18.84 | 5.16 | 4.47 | 0.76 | 0.17 | 29.40 | 64.08 | 17.54 | 30.17 |
| 2005 | 25.44 | 3.40 | 4.91 | 0.76 | 5.90 | 40.41 | 62.96 | 8.42 | 31.56 |
| 2006 | 22.55 | 3.33 | 4.24 | 0.68 | 2.22 | 33.02 | 68.28 | 10.07 | 27.39 |
| 2007 | 21.06 | 3.94 | 4.09 | 0.62 | 0.06 | 29.77 | 70.76 | 13.25 | 26.64 |
| 2008 | 24.53 | 4.00 | 5.87 | 0.74 | 0.29 | 35.44 | 69.24 | 11.28 | 28.40 |
| 2009 | 26.48 | 4.87 | 5.83 | 0.99 | 0.24 | 38.41 | 68.95 | 12.69 | 30.19 |
| 2010 | 26.82 | 4.92 | 6.27 | 1.00 | 0.03 | 39.03 | 68.70 | 12.62 | 29.13 |
| 2011 | 27.41 | 4.74 | 5.51 | 0.94 | 1.33 | 39.93 | 68.65 | 11.86 | 30.02 |
| 2012 | 26.11 | 6.62 | 4.97 | 1.05 | 0.05 | 38.81 | 67.29 | 17.06 | 30.25 |
| 2013 | 25.28 | 6.11 | 6.10 | 1.22 | 0.22 | 38.92 | 64.95 | 15.69 | 28.94 |
| 2014 | 24.76 | 6.83 | 7.32 | 1.52 | 0.06 | 40.49 | 61.14 | 16.88 | 29.56 |
| 2015 | 23.39 | 5.25 | 7.45 | 1.46 | 0.01 | 37.56 | 62.28 | 13.98 | 25.93 |
| 2016 | 24.70 | 7.06 | 7.52 | 2.04 | 0.01 | 41.33 | 59.76 | 17.07 | 25.73 |
| 2017 | 25.43 | 5.58 | 8.23 | 1.72 | 0.02 | 40.97 | 62.07 | 13.61 | 25.64 |
| 2018 | 24.48 | 4.44 | 8.17 | 1.87 | 0.00 | 38.97 | 62.81 | 11.40 | 24.93 |
| 2019 | 21.28 | 4.73 | 9.26 | 2.13 | 0.00 | 37.41 | 56.89 | 12.63 | 24.09 |
| 2020 | 21.94 | 6.41 | 9.59 | 1.69 | 0.00 | 39.63 | 55.38 | 16.17 | 23.70 |
| 2021 | 22.71 | 9.95 | 13.13 | 5.08 | 0.00 | 50.87 | 44.65 | 19.56 | 28.36 |
| 2022 | 31.87 | 8.33 | 12.35 | 7.78 | 0.00 | 60.33 | 52.83 | 13.80 | 28.28 |
| 2023 | 35.55 | 5.47 | 14.52 | 6.70 | 0.00 | 62.23 | 57.12 | 8.78 | 28.75 |

Source: OECD stat. (accessed on 31-03-2025)

Table 2: USD Aid to Receiving Countries in 2023 (USD million)

| Country | USD aid USD million | Share in total (%) | Country | USD aid USD million | Share in total (%) | Country | USD aid USD million | Share in total (%) |
|-------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------------|------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Ukraine | 11362.43 | 18.29 | Moldova | 173.96 | 0.28 | Botswana | 52.11 | 0.08 |
| Ethiopia | 1553.70 | 2.50 | India | 173.66 | 0.28 | Uzbekistan | 49.93 | 0.08 |
| Jordan | 1206.81 | 1.94 | Rwanda | 172.42 | 0.28 | Melanesia | 49.80 | 0.08 |
| Afghanistan | 1135.49 | 1.83 | Turkey | 170.74 | 0.27 | Bosnia and Herzegovina | 49.62 | 0.08 |
| Somalia | 945.64 | 1.52 | Burkina Faso | 168.87 | 0.27 | Guinea | 46.75 | 0.08 |
| Nigeria | 900.59 | 1.45 | Madagascar | 165.36 | 0.27 | Panama | 46.38 | 0.07 |

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|----------------------|--------|------|---|--------|------|------------------|-------|------|
| Syrian Arab Republic | 799.54 | 1.29 | Indonesia | 156.19 | 0.25 | Serbia | 43.41 | 0.07 |
| Kenya | 791.82 | 1.27 | Cameroon | 155.63 | 0.25 | Jamaica | 43.28 | 0.07 |
| Yemen | 790.57 | 1.27 | Liberia | 153.68 | 0.25 | Costa Rica | 43.05 | 0.07 |
| South Sudan | 684.14 | 1.10 | El Salvador | 149.03 | 0.24 | Timor-Leste | 41.30 | 0.07 |
| Uganda | 658.42 | 1.06 | Benin | 145.75 | 0.23 | Papua New Guinea | 35.01 | 0.06 |
| Mozambique | 614.08 | 0.99 | Palestinian Authority or West Bank and Gaza Strip | 142.75 | 0.23 | Nicaragua | 32.86 | 0.05 |
| Colombia | 612.35 | 0.99 | Nepal | 133.96 | 0.22 | Mauritania | 31.09 | 0.05 |
| Tanzania | 586.65 | 0.94 | Morocco | 129.00 | 0.21 | Belarus | 30.43 | 0.05 |
| South Africa | 526.00 | 0.85 | Tunisia | 123.23 | 0.20 | Togo | 26.81 | 0.04 |
| Bangladesh | 433.50 | 0.70 | Cambodia | 116.21 | 0.19 | Djibouti | 23.16 | 0.04 |
| Sudan | 424.13 | 0.68 | Laos | 109.48 | 0.18 | Azerbaijan | 20.11 | 0.03 |
| Zambia | 417.97 | 0.67 | Central America unspecified | 102.41 | 0.16 | Albania | 19.97 | 0.03 |
| Malawi | 415.57 | 0.67 | Georgia | 100.96 | 0.16 | Paraguay | 17.27 | 0.03 |
| Lebanon | 385.75 | 0.62 | Sri Lanka | 97.77 | 0.16 | Kazakhstan | 15.23 | 0.02 |
| Haiti | 328.00 | 0.53 | Micronesia | 96.41 | 0.16 | Congo | 12.94 | 0.02 |
| Niger | 306.23 | 0.49 | Thailand | 95.08 | 0.15 | Gambia | 11.95 | 0.02 |
| Zimbabwe | 305.32 | 0.49 | Burundi | 84.00 | 0.14 | China | 9.81 | 0.02 |
| Iraq | 292.05 | 0.47 | Lesotho | 81.48 | 0.13 | Malaysia | 8.23 | 0.01 |
| Côte d'Ivoire | 268.83 | 0.43 | Namibia | 81.40 | 0.13 | Palau | 7.76 | 0.01 |
| Senegal | 240.50 | 0.39 | Marshall Islands | 79.99 | 0.13 | Cuba | 7.46 | 0.01 |
| Mali | 230.29 | 0.37 | Dominican Republic | 78.71 | 0.13 | Belize | 7.10 | 0.01 |
| Myanmar | 227.57 | 0.37 | Ecuador | 75.62 | 0.12 | Montenegro | 6.14 | 0.01 |
| Guatemala | 225.66 | 0.36 | Mongolia | 72.95 | 0.12 | Fiji | 6.07 | 0.01 |
| Mexico | 223.04 | 0.36 | Chad | 71.55 | 0.12 | Solomon Islands | 5.35 | 0.01 |
| Egypt | 210.05 | 0.34 | Tajikistan | 70.65 | 0.11 | Guinea-Bissau | 5.13 | 0.01 |
| Honduras | 209.43 | 0.34 | Kosovo | 62.73 | 0.10 | Turkmenistan | 4.39 | 0.01 |
| Peru | 204.68 | 0.33 | Libya | 60.42 | 0.10 | Argentina | 4.22 | 0.01 |
| Viet Nam | 204.25 | 0.33 | Sierra Leone | 60.13 | 0.10 | Polynesia | 4.13 | 0.01 |
| Philippines | 202.67 | 0.33 | Angola | 58.86 | 0.09 | Algeria | 3.72 | 0.01 |
| Pakistan | 195.37 | 0.31 | Eswatini | 58.79 | 0.09 | Vanuatu | 3.37 | 0.01 |
| Venezuela | 194.80 | 0.31 | Kyrgyzstan | 57.92 | 0.09 | Guyana | 3.21 | 0.01 |
| Ghana | 189.75 | 0.31 | Brazil | 55.56 | 0.09 | Other | 19.00 | 0.03 |
| Micronesia | 184.49 | 0.30 | Armenia | 54.58 | 0.09 | | | |

Source: OECD stat (2024)

cent of their Gross National Income (GNI) for official development assistance (ODA). The total ODA for the year was USD 216 billion, which represented just 0.37 per cent of their GNI. Had DAC countries met their commitment, an additional USD 220 billion could have been available to support development activities in the Global South. However, recent announcements from the USA, UK and EU member countries indicate cuts to their aid budgets, exacerbating the decline in international aid. This reduction poses a significant challenge for aid-dependent countries, whose national budgets heavily rely on foreign assistance.

The analysis estimates that, due to the recent announcements of aid cuts by DAC members including USA, this amount may decline to USD 135 billion in 2025, representing approximately 0.22 per cent of their Gross National Income (GNI). This reduction would result in a shortfall of USD 81 billion.

However, in the short term, countries in the Global South may face challenges in compensating for the reduction in official development assistance (ODA), particularly as weakened taxation systems hinder domestic resource mobilization.³ The withdrawal of USAID further exacerbates the decline in global development aid, potentially undermining trust between recipient countries in the Global South and traditional donor nations.⁴ To address these challenges, it is imperative that countries in the Global South pursue greater self-sufficiency in their development efforts, focusing on strengthening regional partnerships in

key sectors such as climate resilience, healthcare, and infrastructure. By fostering collaboration and enhancing regional alliances, the Global South can mitigate the impact of aid reductions and promote sustainable, long-term growth.⁵ Moreover, it is essential to recognize the role of triangular cooperation, which brings together donor countries, multilateral institutions, pivotal and recipient nations. Triangular cooperation can significantly enhance the flow of development assistance, ensuring that it is more flexible, targeted, and effective. The involvement of the private sector and civil society will also be crucial in compensating for the potential decline in aid from countries like the USA, UK and EU countries. The Global South must also explore alternative, more resilient sources of development finance.

Endnotes

- ¹ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/uk-to-reduce-aid-to-0-3-of-gross-national-income-from-2027/>
- ² Gulrajani, N., & Pudussery, J. (2025)
- ³ https://www.idos-research.de/fileadmin/user_upload/pdfs/veranstaltungen/2025/20250228_Development-Cooperation-after-USAID_Webinar-conference-synthesis.pdf
- ⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFVxt-Kf6HyY>
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3. Use 's' in '-ise' '-isation' words; e.g., 'civilise', 'organisation'. Use British spellings rather than American spellings. Thus, 'labour' not 'labor'. (2 per cent, 3 km, 36 years old, etc.). In general descriptions, numbers below 10 should be spelt out in words. Use thousands, millions, billions, not lakh and crore. Use fuller forms for numbers and dates— for example 1980-88, pp. 200-202 and pp. 178-84, for example, 'the eighties', 'the twentieth century', etc.

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About Development Cooperation Review

Development Cooperation Review (DCR) aspires to capture holistic narrative around global development cooperation and fill an important knowledge gap towards theorisation, empirical verification and documentation of Southern-led development cooperation processes. Despite growing volumes of development partnerships around the Southern world, there remains an absence of detailed information, analysis and its contribution to global development processes. Even though there have been sporadic efforts in documenting some of the activities, a continuous effort in chronicling the diverse experiences in South-South Cooperation (SSC) is still absent. RIS, in joint publication with GDI, FIDC and NeST has endeavoured to launch DCR, a quarterly periodical, to fill this gap.


About Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS)

RIS is a New Delhi-based autonomous policy research institute envisioned as a forum for fostering effective policy dialogue and capacity-building among developing countries on global and regional economic issues. The focus of the work programme of RIS is to promote South-South Cooperation and collaborate with developing countries in multilateral negotiations in various forums.  @RIS_NewDelhi


About Global Development Centre (GDC)

Established at RIS, the Global Development Centre (GDC) aims to institutionalise knowledge on India's development initiatives and promote their replication as part of knowledge sharing in Asia and Africa with the help of its institutional partners, including civil society organisations. It attempts to explore and articulate global development processes within a micro framework and works as a unique platform to collate and assimilate learning processes of other countries towards promotion of equity, sustainability and inclusively based on multi-disciplinary and multi-functional approach.

About Network of Southern Think Tanks (NeST)

Knowledge generated endogenously among the Southern partners can help in consolidation of stronger common issues at different global policy fora. Consequent to the consensus reached on many of these issues at the High-Level Conference of Southern Providers in Delhi (March 2013) and establishment of the subsequent Core Group on the SSC within the UNDCF (June 2013), the Network of Southern Think-Tanks (NeST) was formally launched at the Conference on the South-South Cooperation, held at New Delhi during 10-11 March 2016. The purpose of the NeST is to provide a global platform for Southern Think-Tanks for collaboratively generating, systematising, consolidating and sharing knowledge on SSC approaches for international development.  @NeST_SSC

About Forum for Indian Development Cooperation (FIDC)

FIDC aims to encourage detailed analysis of broad trends in South-South cooperation and contextualise Indian policies by facilitating discussions across various subject streams and stakeholders based on theoretical and empirical analysis, field work, perception surveys and capacity building needs.  @FIDC_NewDelhi

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विकासशील देशों की अनुसंधान एवं सूचना प्रणाली

Core IV-B, Fourth Floor, India Habitat Centre
Lodhi Road, New Delhi-110 003, India.

Ph. 91-11-24682177-80 Fax: 91-11-24682173-74-75

Email: dgooffice@ris.org.in Website: www.ris.org.in

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DCR is brought out by GDC as part of cross-learning and sharing of development cooperation practices in Global South.

