SOUTHERN VOICE

The Future of International Development Cooperation

Insights from the Global South

This document[1] reflects the main priorities and related recommendations of three regional roundtables (Africa, Asia, and Latin America) hosted by Southern Voice, in partnership with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) between March 26 and 31, 2026. Additionally, the document includes insights from Southern Voice's Equity in Research for Development (ER4D) initiative. The regional roundtables were online exchanges organised as part of Southern Voice Global Development Initiative, contributing to the May 2026 OECD Conference and the upcoming flagship report on the Future of Development Co-operation. Each roundtable aimed to understand from experts across these regions 1) what the future of international development cooperation (IDC) should look like in terms of purpose, impact, priorities, and governance structure, and 2) what concrete mechanisms, reforms, or other actions can steer IDC towards this vision.

Agenda-setting agency and transforming systems of cooperation

Countries and regions of the Global South need **to be co-designers and co-deciders in IDC**, leaving behind hierarchical relationships, to progress towards those grounded in mutual interest. Shifting away from a donor-driven approach, IDC should instead emphasise sovereignty, regional priorities, and integration. As one participant in our exchanges stressed, it should move "from a system that works for countries, to a system that we build together with countries." This means challenging the frameworks that have guided IDC, like the notion of developed vs

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developing countries. IDC has also often left out of consideration the national reality and context of each country, it should create demand-driven strategic value, prioritize local knowledge over external assumptions and Global North methodologies, and end cycles of dependency. This new model of development cooperation should be built on a mutual understanding of objectives that enable benefits for all parties, which requires a stronger degree of transparency around incentives for cooperation in the design of IDC agendas. Furthermore, it requires Global South countries and regions to hold meaningful decision-making power.

Recommended areas for action:

- Investing in evidence impact hubs (e.g., Science Granting Councils in Kenya), which serve as "reverse marketplaces" where think tanks and civil society organizations jointly define agendas to present to governments and funders.
- Integrating parliaments and regional bodies in IDC by giving them the chance to contribute to the agenda and lead the implementation. For this, existing regional institutions, like the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, need to be reformed or strengthened.
- Allocating resources to regional financial platforms and Southern development banks that can facilitate accountability and decision-making. Some examples include the BRICS New Development Bank, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, African Development Bank, and Asian Development Bank.
- Increasing the representation of countries of the Global South in decision-making bodies, such as the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC). Recent examples highlighted include the African Union's permanent membership in the G20 and the addition of a third seat dedicated to Sub-Saharan Africa on the Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund.

Long-term transformations & alternative measures of impact

Across discussions, participants emphasised the need for IDC to shift from a short-term, project-based approach to one that supports long-term, structural transformations aligned with countries' own sustainable development ambitions. Project maturation was flagged as a key barrier to the strengthened impact of IDC. Moreover, participants noted that IDC should reinforce the conditions for countries to end dependency, rather than promoting its management. To this purpose, part of IDC's mission should be strengthening institutions, at all levels, which support the achievement of sustainable, inclusive development objectives in the long-term. It should also emphasise capacity building, such as through investments in industrialisation and human capital.

There should also be a shift to clearly distinguish between the independent, yet complementary, objectives of official development assistance (ODA) and IDC. While many countries in Latin America no longer receive ODA, aid is still required in multiple countries across Asia and Africa. A participant from Asia emphasized the importance of also distinguishing humanitarian assistance to avoid resources from existing financing portfolios being relabeled or rebranded to respond to emergencies.

Finally, alternative measures of the impact of IDC, beyond outputs and short-term results, should be developed to account for wealth creation through infrastructure and value chains, for strengthened governance and institutions, and the improvement of data systems. For this, knowledge learning systems are key for evidence to be routinely generated, openly discussed, and actively used; not only for accountability, but for learning. In such a way, long-term change trajectories could be created through learning by doing.

Recommended areas for action:

- Strengthening engagement with donors, so that cooperation models are based on local demand and project duration, structure, and scalability can be redefined to adopt long-term horizons.
- Supporting local governments with further direct, flexible, and long-term funding and capacity building.

- Ensuring the establishment of separate windows and conditionalities for humanitarian aid, so that responses to emergencies do not divert resources from necessary investments in health, education, etc.
- Building on good practices of South-South cooperation, including knowledge sharing, technology exchange, collaborative research on shared issues, and joint infrastructure projects. South-South and triangular cooperation are practical mechanisms for partnership that emphasize innovation and inclusive growth and can accelerate the implementation of sustainable development agendas.

Accelerating reforms of the global financial architecture

Structural concerns at the level of the global financial architecture remain a priority.

Across our conversations, unsustainable levels of debt were high on the agenda, as they significantly limit countries' ability to invest in sustainable, inclusive development priorities. Debt sustainability is a critical issue for IDC because it fundamentally shapes what Global South countries can and cannot achieve. To address this, new modalities for debt treatment need to be introduced urgently. Some examples include expanding debt-swaps mechanisms and improving the costs of credit. One participant also raised the importance of transparency to ensure accountability for countries engaging in reckless borrowing (without creating punitive effects on citizens).

The current global financial architecture and financing landscape is fragmented, insufficient, and not fit-for-purpose, limiting access for developing countries most in need. For this reason, it is a priority to simplify access to resources, scale up concessional finance, and strengthen the conditions for the mobilisation of additional private sector capital. International financial institutions should emphasise greater control and fewer conditionalities for recipient countries. In a context of limited resources, strengthened coordination is imperative to prevent competition and duplication, while optimising the use of resources.

Finally, resource misallocation was stressed as an urgent priority in our exchanges with experts in Africa. The continent faces considerable losses through illicit financial flows, for which countries need to align around proposals for strengthened international tax cooperation.

Recommended areas for action:

- Addressing concerns on disproportionately high borrowing costs due to biased credit ratings and exploitative foreign currency-denominated debt. As well, grounding credit rating capacity on local and regional data, and challenging rating methodologies that systematically undervalue creditworthiness.
- Focusing on the next Global Development Compact on how to ensure transparency and accountability in terms of government borrowing, while providing a minimum "cushion" to enable continued investment in sustainable, inclusive development.
- Increasing financing with more flexible approaches, without conditionalities, and providing greater ownership to recipient countries, as seen in the BRICS New Development Bank. In such a way, these financial institutions can complement the role of traditional multilateral development banks rather than replacing them.
- Promoting democratic governance in which all countries have a voice in determining priorities and allocating funds. For example, the Global Public Investment (GPI) framework is an alternative to the traditional donor-recipient model.

The role of multistakeholder approaches

In terms of decision-making, IDC needs to strengthen the inclusion of non-governmental actors. This means creating meaningful spaces for the participation of more diverse stakeholders such as civil society, academia, the private sector, and citizens. By recognizing these groups not only as beneficiaries, but also as strategic partners, IDC can rebuild trust. Young people across Asia, for example, are demanding accountability in terms of better governance and more opportunities. In Latin America, participants noted that IDC has failed in bringing historically vulnerable groups, diverse populations, demographics, and human differences into the process of cooperation—sidelining the agenda of women, ethnic groups, and racial groups in decision-making. Meanwhile, experts from Africa emphasized the importance of meaningfully engaging the private sector in IDC to mobilize capital for economic development and job creation.

Recommended areas for action:

- Revising the rules, methods, standards, and pathways for multistakeholder engagement in official IDC decision-making processes. For example, one participant suggested that civil society organizations and the private sector should have voting rights on cooperation packages.
- Building on the Conference of the Parties' (COP) model of two-tier multilateralism—where one "universal" tier focuses on broad consensus-based agreements, while the other "action" tier involves a "coalition of the willing" to implement action.
- Cooperating through networks rather than as isolated institutions, with rules for inclusion (e.g. quotas for inclusion) that guarantee effective participation. As well, strengthening the diversity in grassroot representation in global forums like COP.
- Increasing youth representation and engagement in IDC as representatives of the next generation's governance interests—recognizing young people as the next generation of IDC leaders and increasing their opportunities for training, knowledge exchange, and access to global fora.
- Supporting the development of equitable knowledge systems that can ensure that the evidence informing decisions is consistently relevant to the needs of the context. This includes strengthening research institutions in the Global South and changing funders' practices on ways to partner.

Insights on sustainable development priorities

While countries and regions' specific agendas for sustainable, inclusive development differ based on the context, the paragraphs below highlight some of the priority areas of focus for international development cooperation that were raised in our exchanges.

- **Climate action and sustainability**: Stronger support, in both financing and technology transfer, is necessary to address the impacts of climate change in countries of the Global South. In addition, IDC should drive green development pathways, which includes creating employment opportunities for young people, in order to generate self-reinforcing greener cycles of development and sustainability that lead to stronger economies. IDC should focus on how emerging economies can grow using renewable energy, establishing better alignment between development, climate, and investment.

- **Economic cooperation:** In the coming years, IDC needs to emphasise building stronger economic relationships and economic resilience in a global, interdependent world. This includes strengthening the development of fair, sustainable value chains, and economic resilience. Strengthening access to capital for SMEs was one proposed approach in our roundtable with researchers from Asia. Our exchanges with African experts emphasised that harnessing the economic benefits of natural resources also requires stronger regional integration, and a co-investment approach to upscaling industrialisation and localizing production of minerals, where all money creates a measurable and lasting value locally. Fairer trade arrangements, particularly in relation to critical mineral agreements, are necessary to shift away from extractive relationships, for which reforms of the World Trade Organisation are needed. Further, reforms of existing copyright and intellectual property regimes, and investor states dispute settlement were highlighted as critical to enable low-income developing countries to depart from commodity dependence.

- **Digitalisation and artificial intelligence**: Digital equity is critical for the future of sustainable, inclusive global development. For this, the gap in digital inclusion and governance, enhanced by the acceleration of artificial intelligence deployment, needs to be addressed. Global South countries should be both co-designers, and beneficiaries of new technologies, which requires expanding technology transfer. Further, IDC should strengthen data sovereignty, security, and privacy; towards this, South-South Cooperation can support the development of improved protocols on Global South data utilisation. In addition, IDC can support the creation of local data observatories to strengthen the collection of local data and evidence.

- **Peace, democracy and human rights:** Experts in Latin America, particularly, highlighted the endangerment of democratic processes and civil space as a key concern. IDC should emphasise strengthening the institutions that can guarantee the respect of human rights and the rule of law. Additionally, experts in Africa highlighted peace and security as a condition for long-term sustainable and inclusive development, emphasising that beyond post-conflict recovery, IDC should prioritize conflict prevention and strengthening state capacity.

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About Southern Voice

Southern Voice is a global organisation that brings together 71 members from 35 countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean, working to advance the development agenda. Our mission is to enrich global development debates by addressing power imbalances and amplifying underrepresented voices. We bring fresh perspectives and bold ideas, while ensuring that countries and regions from the Global South have real influence in shaping global policy. We do this by producing actionable, policy-relevant knowledge; influencing global policy and shaping a common Global South agenda; and positioning locally led research to inform and transform the development system. Our current efforts focus on climate change, finance for development, governance and institutional strengthening, poverty and inequalities, technology and AI, and future thinking beyond the 2030 Agenda. https://southernvoice.org/