

**The Future of International Development Co-operation
Regional Roundtable: Latin America¹**

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This discussion was one 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), as background research for the OECD Conference on the Future of Development Co-operation: Charting Strategic Directions and the [Southern Voice Global Development Initiative](#). Each roundtable asked regional experts: 1) what the future of international development co-operation should look like in its purpose, impact, priorities and governance structure; and 2) what concrete mechanisms, reforms or other actions can steer co-operation towards this vision. Common takeaways across the three regional discussions were:

- Global South countries should play a central role in agenda setting, as co-creators and co-deciders of an equitable, inclusive future for international development co-operation.
- International development co-operation should emphasise investment in long-term change and the institutions that can drive it, over short-term projects.
- Domestic resources can be unlocked by accelerating reforms of the international financial architecture – with debt an urgent priority across contexts.
- Transparent partnerships should be grounded in an open dialogue around co-operation objectives to strengthen trust and enable the development of mutually beneficial pathways.
- Globally shared thematic priorities include economic transformation and just energy transitions, while other priorities are region specific.

This roundtable of Latin American think tanks highlighted the importance of a co-designed future for development co-operation, with demand-driven approaches that reflect local realities. Co-operation should build the foundations for sustainable, inclusive development, including by improving cross-actor co-ordination, knowledge sharing and long-term financing. Rebuilding trust and meaningfully including historically marginalised groups are also essential to making multilateralism relevant and effective.

Agenda-setting agency and sensitivity to contextual differences

The Global South should be a co-designer with decision making power, not a consultant to the Global North. Experts stressed expanding the participation of developing countries in the Development Assistance Committee, which remains overwhelmingly composed of developed economies. Co-operation for and by the Global South would recognise that “one size fits all” is an improper approach when countries have divergent realities, contexts and regulatory frameworks.

¹ Roundtables were organised and notes drafted by Margarita Gomez, Tracy Mamoun and Valeria Colunga of Southern Voice. OECD input was provided by Ida Mc Donnell and Eleanor Carey of the Development Co-operation Directorate.

Development co-operation needs to transition into demand-driven models that prioritise impact definitions defined locally, rather than relying on Global North methodologies. Participatory approaches were recommended, such as evidence impact hubs modelled on the Science Granting Councils in Kenya. These serve as a “reverse marketplace” where think tanks and civil society organisations define agendas to present to governments and funders.

Reforming global governance and redefining aid to support locally-led development pathways

Development co-operation’s core purpose should be advancing global governance and reforming financial architecture to respond to the needs of developing countries. International financial institutions should be strengthened and adapted to expand use of development-oriented instruments, such as debt-swap mechanisms, and improve access to long-term finance. The [New Development Bank](#) was highlighted as an example of how financial institutions could provide financing more flexibly with emphasis on country ownership, complementing traditional multilateral development banks. According to a participant, Latin America and the Caribbean are “too rich to receive development aid and, on the other hand, too risky for [foreign] investment”, pointing to mismatches between eligibility criteria, risk perception and needs.

Strong consensus formed around the importance of redefining the duration, structure and scalability of financing towards systemic transformation rather than short-term projects. Donors need to engage and trade concepts of assistance and charity for solidarity, justice, self-determination, wellness and local paths to development. A broader concept of development co-operation should be adopted so that it is less restricted to the traditional concept of official development assistance and more aligned with horizontal, equitable and mutual-benefit principles. Impact should be measured beyond outputs, through the betterment of governance and data systems and the ability of institutions to steer development. Co-operation should prioritise socio-economic benefits (e.g. equity between and within countries, climate stability, stronger institutions, improved technology) instead of delivering based on financial incentives.

Moving from competition to co-ordination

International development co-operation should co-ordinate action across countries, donors and actors in order to build synergies instead of competing. Improved co-ordination would ensure greater alignment, broader reach and stronger impact. In a context of limited resources, improved communication and co-ordination would optimise funding and knowledge transfer, with a focus on sustainable and social-justice-based development. This could prevent competition and duplication, while fostering complementarity, coherence, effectiveness and cost efficiency.

Generating knowledge learning systems should be a key priority for international development co-operation actors. Currently, policymaking operates through fragmented knowledge and quantitative indicators, many of which are not shared and do not form a common evidence base. Development co-operation should embrace qualitative mechanisms that make possible an understanding of change in governance, participation and trust. It was pointed out that development co-operation needs to progress into a culture of evaluation, where evidence is routinely generated – not only on projects and outputs, but also on long-term change trajectories – through learning by doing. This evidence should be openly discussed and actively used for accountability and evidence-informed decision making.

Trust and inclusive multistakeholder approaches

Development co-operation must rebuild trust with entire populations, especially on democratic processes and multilateralism. It must see citizens as strategic components of co-operation, not just beneficiaries. For development co-operation to be tangible to citizens, its rules, methods, standards and pathways for civil society engagement need revising. One participant suggested that the region should co-operate through networks rather than as isolated institutions, with inclusive rules such as quotas for participation. Another referred to the Conference of the Parties' two-tier multilateralism as an interesting model, where a "universal" tier focusses on consensus while an "action" tier mobilises a "coalition of the willing".

Participants called for a shift from top-down approaches to bottom-up strategies that recognise country-level realities. They stressed that development co-operation has failed at meaningfully bringing in historically vulnerable groups and diverse populations, and emphasised the importance of not leaving the agendas of women, ethnic groups and racial groups out of decision making. Reaffirming multilateralism as the foundation of any model of co-operation, they agreed on the need to build alliances with non-traditional actors, address the withdrawal of traditional actors, and combine South-South co-operation with broader partnerships. To strengthen locally driven, inclusive development processes, greater financial certainty and resource stability should be provided to vulnerable and impacted populations.

Priority issues: Greener pathways for growth and stronger institutions

There is a need to create greener pathways for wealth and employment opportunities for young people, generating self-reinforcing cycles of development and sustainability. Participants called for climate justice, a just energy transition and natural disaster foresight. Furthermore, institutional capacities are key to guaranteeing the rule of law and respect for human rights, with participants stressing security, transparency, public trust, judicial independence, public sector professionalism and civic participation. A high priority is the reinforcement of mechanisms related to democracy and participatory governance, as there is a worldwide endangerment of democracy and of the enabling conditions for sustainable and just development. The life-threatening risks faced by environmental and land defenders in the region were especially acknowledged, with a call to guarantee stronger civic spaces and the safety of defenders.

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