

SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION

A Solution for the Post-COVID-19 World

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Abstract

The whole world now is challenged by the expansion of the COVID-19. The World Bank estimates that COVID-19 will cause the first increase in global poverty since 1998 and the United Nations estimates that the crisis generated by the new virus could aggravate already high levels of inequality within and between countries. So, the International Development Cooperation (IDC) is an irrevocable task despite the problems that each country faces as a consequence of the global outbreak. This article explores how South-South Cooperation (SSC) could be an important factor of cooperation in the post-pandemic world. So, this article analyzes the challenges IDC generated by coronavirus

Origin of COVID-19

On 31 December 2019, the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission reported an outbreak of twenty-seven atypical pneumonia patients. Apparently, the origin of the contagion was the Huanan Seafood Market. That same day, the Chinese authorities alerted the World Health Organization (WHO) about this unexpected situation. On 5 January 2020, scientists discovered that the cause of the disease was a new type of Coronavirus, other than seasonal influenza, SARS, or MERS. Days later, the Chinese government announced the first death occasioned by the new virus and the number of people infected elevated to forty-one. Due to the spread of the new virus, as of 23 January, the city of Wuhan began a severe quarantine. Consequently, over the next 48 hours, this quarantine was extended to all cities of the Hubei province. On January 30, the WHO declared a global emergency. On 11 February, the WHO named the new virus, COVID-19, a short formula for Coronavirus disease 2019. (Kantis, Kiernan and Bardi, 2020).

The outbreak of the pandemic has posed a profound challenge to the whole world. The expansion of the COVID-19 has uncovered three simultaneous crises with varying degrees of intensity around the planet. First, a health crisis. Second, an economic crisis. Third, a political crisis. The last crisis impacts the models of governance. In this way, this crisis is affecting both the political structures within each nation state regarding the management of the crisis and the actions to overcome it. Furthermore, the political crisis in the international area has questioned the international order. Similarly, this crisis is sharpening the trends that were previously present in the international system, such as the return to protectionism and the break of the multilateral system (Linn, 2018). As Richard Haass (2020) affirms, this pandemic, rather than reconfiguring the world, is accelerating history. So, the pandemic and the response to it has revealed and reinforced the fundamental characteristics of geopolitics today.

The challenges due the emergence of COVID-19 impact different aspects in the international scenario. In this context, one of the most critical element is to determine how the pandemic will alter the models and practices of International Development Cooperation (IDC). This pandemic will have a profound impact on the possibilities of achieving the Millennium Development

Goals (SDGs). The United Nations (2020) estimates that the crisis generated by Covid-19 could reverse decades of progress in the fight against poverty and exacerbate already high levels of inequality within and between countries. Volatility, combined in some countries with market manipulation and storage, is beginning to affect food prices, with detrimental effects on the nutrition of the most vulnerable and the disruptions imposed by the pandemic, and the measures adopted to suppress the viruses will dramatically worsen the situation. This is especially important in less developed countries, where the degree of complexity of the crisis is likely to be exacerbated by the significant size of the vulnerable population and the size of the informal sector. Faced with the dark panorama for the impact of Covid-19, IDC becomes more important than ever.

Challenges to International Development Cooperation

Although the world has not yet overcome the new disease caused by the SAR-VOC: 2 viruses and there is still a long way to go, the impacts of the pandemic can be observed everywhere. The pandemic is changing economic activities, learnings models, hygiene habits, and social practices. Furthermore, this pandemic is affecting the international order and the IDC regime.

The World Bank estimates that COVID-19 will cause the first increase in global poverty since 1998 -when the Asian Financial Crisis shook the world. So, the global poverty—the share of the world’s population living on less than USD 1.90 per day—is projected to increase from 8.2 percent in 2019 to 8.6 percent in 2020 - from 632 million people to 665 million people (Mahler, Lakner, Aguilar & Wu, 2020). Even more, as the new coronavirus moves to low-income countries and water-scarce regions, its worst impact could be among vulnerable populations with no access to basic water services. As Chartes (2020) has warned, several of the world’s poor do not have access to water and soap, the first line of protection against COVID-19. In the current extraordinary circumstances, to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe, aid must be well used. However, on other occasions, international cooperation has not always fulfilled its goals and that, at times it has been “misguided, misused, wasted, or even stolen” (Loayza, 2020). On the road to recovery from the Covid-19 crisis will require international aid; Covid-19 emphasizes the need to aid countries to

address the drivers of fragility holistically and for long-term engagement (OECD, 2020a).

The first and most obvious of these changes caused by the pandemic is the restriction of financing for development. Certainly, a similar impression occurred after the 2008 financial crisis. However, after that crisis, development aid grew. So, Official Development Assistance (ODA) disbursed by so-called traditional donors - the member countries of the OECD Development Assistance Committee- increased by 25 percent in constant terms; that is, at a rate of 2.26 percent per year (Olive, 2020). Data showed a rise in ODA in 2019, particularly to the poorest countries. Concerning ODA from members of the DAC totaled USD 152.8 billion in 2019, a rise of 1.4 percent in real terms from 2018. Specifically, bilateral ODA to Africa and least-developed countries rose by 1.3 percent and 2.6 percent respectively. So, ODA rose by 1.7 percent in real terms (OECD, 2020b).

The past ten years have been a period in which emerging and non-traditional donors - China, among many others - have consolidated their positions in the international aid system, increasing disbursements at a rate of 16 percent per year. A similar situation has occurred with private donors - mainly large foundations- whose contributions grew at a rate of 13 percent per year (Olive, 2020). However, because this recession is deeper and has stopped economic activity and global value chains, it is possible to think that recovering levels of development financing will be slower. The global growth projection is very pessimistic in this regard. The International Monetary Fund foresees that, as a result of the pandemic, the global economy will contract sharply by - 3 percent in 2020, much worse than during the 2008–09 financial crisis (International Monetary Fund, 2020). In this context, it is not surprising that traditional donor countries will prioritize their own internal needs before providing international aid to other countries of the world.

Even the international community can mobilize financial resources to support the recovery caused by COVID-19. But the response can not only be thought in the economic dimension. It will require much more than finance. As the Joint Statement by the DAC establishes: “It needs sustained action by many actors to address the immediate public health and humanitarian crisis and simultaneous

support for economic, environmental and social resilience. The response must take account of the role of women and girls, children, youth and vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities and the elderly, and aim to reduce inequalities and protect human rights and freedoms” (OECD, 2020c: 1).

But the second consequence has a longer-term impact. This consequence is about the way that we think about the international cooperation. The current coronavirus crisis challenges our mental models of aid, cooperation, and development. In consequence, it is necessary to think that other models of cooperation are possible. Jean Van Wetter, CEO at Enabel, -the Belgian development agency, suggests that the North-South paradigm is definitely over. He said: “The monopoly that traditional “development actors” have had in the last 40 years will quickly erode. China and South Korea used to be aid recipients until not so long ago. Now they are helping the World Health Organization, Italy, and other European countries to cope with the crisis. Chinese charities are distributing masks to European governments, as Europe and the United States have been doing in developing countries for years. Some of the largest hospitals in Europe are now calling for donations from the public. Doctors without Borders - MSF - known for its international operations in conflict and poor areas, is now deploying medical camps in the center of Brussels!” (Igoe and Chadwick, 2020).

If we accept that this pandemic is accelerating the history, as Haass (2020) suggests, the new global disease could accelerate the changes inside the regime of IDC. However, for these changes to be positive we must overcome our limited visions of cooperation and we must appropriate other forms of shared resources, knowledge, and opportunities. In other words, only a new mental approximation to cooperation and development can build the appropriate society to face the post-covid world. In this sense, a good option could be inspiring us in the South-South Cooperation paradigm.

South-South Cooperation and Post-COVID-19 World

The International Development Cooperation (IDC) was born with the Cold War (White, 1974: 11). In a world that was built under the logic of a bipolar system, IDC emerged as a foreign policy instrument whose objective was to

expand the areas of influence of the capitalist and socialist bloc (Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen, 2003: 8). The IDC's antecedent was the Marshall Plan designed to rebuild Europe. Thus, the countries devastated by the war participated in the creation of the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OCEE) to establish a dialogue mechanism to decide how to use the financial support offered by the United States (Cini, 2001: 13- 14). On the other hand, the Soviet Union, looking suspiciously at the US initiative, promoted its cooperation program that included both backward countries of the Soviet bloc and other underdeveloped countries (Lancaster, 2006: 31-32).

The IDC is a complex regime in which material interests, expectations, norms, ideas, and capacities interact with each other determining the behavior of the actors, but that, in turn, modifies the regime by the action of the actors (Santa Cruz, 2007: 110-118). In the 1960s IDC had become an international norm. By then, it included the establishment of an institutional framework in which states and civil societies participated (Santa Cruz, 2007: 120). Gradually IDC ceased to be a practice exclusive to wealthy countries. Under the auspices of the United Nations, new actors joined not only the dynamics of cooperation but also the political competition through cooperation practices (Sogge, 2009: 189). The Japanese case shows how a State joined to aid the regime as a donor, due to the prestige that this fact implies, even though at that time Japan had not yet achieved high economic development (Santa Cruz, 2007: 136-138).

The norms of international cooperation also spread rapidly among the countries of the Global South. The Bandung Conference was the first step to generate an alternative scenario in the bipolar world. In this way, the idea that solidarity should be expressed mainly through cooperation was born (Berger, 2004: 10). At the same time, the establishment of the group of 77 in 1964, became an institutional platform that strengthened the construction of a regime in which IDC was considered a fundamental element of coexistence in an increasingly dangerous world due to nuclear competition from superpowers (The Group 77, 2014: one).

A fundamental transformation of the IDC regime occurred with the end of the Cold War. This episode generated the greatest changes in the norms and the functioning of the IDC. Beginning in the 1990s, the end of the ideological

struggle, the new priorities of the United States in the international arena, and the dismantling of the Soviet Union generated a profound change in the world, including IDC regime (Lancaster, 2006: 48). At the same time, the demand for more efficient development financing increased; consequently, the new standards for IDC sought to make traditional donors commit to increasing the effectiveness and transparency of development resources (CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness, 2014).

However, the traditional IDC regime based on the principles and practices proposed by DAC countries has been shaken by the emergence of non-traditional donors. These donors have spread their visions on how international cooperation should be understood and how it should be carried out. This group is made up of countries as diverse as Saudi Arabia, Russia, Brazil, China, Kuwait and India. The approaches of this group of actors are plural and divergent. Likewise, the cooperation models, the scope, the interests and the projections of these countries are different. However, these groups of countries, particularly those that are grouped in the BRICS bloc, agree in their demand to generate new cooperation schemes based on the principles of South-South Cooperation (SSC), challenging the approaches of the traditional donors (Woods, 2008: 1205).

In BRICS, there is growing activism aimed to transform the traditional IDC regime. This fact is not a coincidence. The greater participation that these countries seek to achieve is proportional to the formidable economic rise they have achieved over the last decades. Consequently, the “rules of the game” have begun to change those in the field of cooperation (Woods, 2008: 1205). These models of cooperation are based on some of the ideas that originated in the framework of SSC (Bracho, 2009: 293). The key idea of SSC is the principle that collaboration arises between countries that are on a plane of sovereign equality. This fact prevents cooperation from becoming a new instrument of neocolonial intervention. Thus, SSC is conceived as an association between countries based on similar historical trajectories and common values, as well as the search for a strategic position in the world, respecting the principles of sovereignty and equality and placing at the center of the analysis the gap that exists between developed and developing countries (Dehart, 2012: 1367).

On the other hand, it is not surprising that the countries of the Global South are suspicious of dialogue and collaboration with the DAC countries. Basically, there are three reasons why these countries are suspicious. Firstly, this is because the DAC proposals reflect the OECD's vision. This vision promotes public policies that might be appropriate for developed countries, but have not necessarily worked in the case of underdeveloped countries. The second reason being, that developing countries should not and cannot assume the same commitments as OECD member countries on matters related to global governance, such as combating climate change and stabilizing exchange rate regimes, since they occupy a different place to that of developed countries in the international structure. Third, the current international scenario inherited from the post Second World War period endowed developed countries with certain privileges, which do not correspond to the new realities derived from the economic rise of nations such as China (Bracho, 2009: 294 and 295).

Beyond their genuine aid intentions, the IDC is also a tool of increasing the regional and international presence of donors. The major donors in the South aspire to be regional or global powers - China, India, Brazil, and South Africa. At the same time, these emerging donors hope to be recognized by international communities as representatives of their region in global affairs. At the end of the day, cooperation has become a way to gain friends and to obtain their support in intentions to reformulate a new international order. For example, Brazil and India aspire to acquire a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council, and eventually, cooperation may be an important means of gaining support for their demands from a group of countries that have benefited from their aid. (Walz and Ramachandran, 2011: 16).

However, although non-traditional donors have offered their partners a range of new development financing options, their overall contributions provided are still very low. They represent only eight percent of total official aid for development (Zimmerman and Smith, 2011: 731). However, the presence of these non-traditional donors challenges the power and status of traditional donors; the symbolic value that it grants is significant and the support that is provided is very visible since in most cases it is channeled to infrastructure works like construction of stadiums and hospitals (Kragelund, 2011: 603). Furthermore, although the aid provided boasts no political conditionalities, the assistance

provided by these types of countries, especially China and India, is frequently linked to the use of contractors, companies, and goods from donor countries (Walz and Ramachandran, 2011: 18).

The increasing flow of resources from non-traditional donors has been perceived with suspicion and concern by traditional donors. For some DAC members, the discourse on cooperation that non-traditional donors use in international forums is nothing more than an ideological evasion to avoid their responsibilities as emerging powers. Richard Manning referring to increased cooperation between two of the largest major non-traditional donors, China and India, expressed concern about the potential risks that these countries were taking. From their perspective, non-conditionality of aid could delay the necessary reforms that these countries required to advance in development and at the same time represented the risk of spending resources on non-productive investments (Kragelund, 2011: 587).

Walz and Ramachandran (2011: 1-6) have identified three concerns present among traditional donors regarding cooperation fostered by non-traditional donors. First, it highlights the fact that these types of countries could support rogue states, increase debt levels in underdeveloped countries, ignore environmental protections, focus on resource extraction, and undermine the best practices that have been carried out in the last decades to the current IDC regime. Second, the spectacular economic growth in many previously considered “Third World” countries, such as China, has shown that there can be a successful model that is not based on the formula of development proposed by the West. Third, the fact that there is a blatant absence of information from some of the largest and fastest-evolving donors generates opacity and uncertainty in their programs, as well as in the supposed successes they have achieved.

The paradigmatic example in this regard is China. Just as the government of that country has promoted a different development model, it also promotes development cooperation in a different way. This model of cooperation is particularly different and challenging, as Kjøllesdal and Welle-Strand (2010: 8-10) note. For example, the Asian giant has materialized its cooperation through the establishment of the China-Africa Cooperation Forum (FOCAC),

which held its first meeting in 2000 in Beijing, with the presence of 6 African Heads of State, 80 ministers of Commerce and Foreign Relations, 45 African States as well as representatives of 17 regional organizations. Among the topics highlighted at the conference was economic reform - with an emphasis on the Chinese model - (China-Africa Cooperation Forum, 2000). Since then, FOCAC has served as a platform to increase China's presence in Africa (Taylor, 2010). It is not surprising, therefore, that the differences in paradigms between traditional donors and emerging donors regarding the ICD have generated a significant distance between them

Conclusions

In a post-pandemic world, it will change many of our previous ideas about the nation-state, development, and international order. However, the ICD will continue to be essential to promote development throughout the whole world and build a stronger network to adequately face not only the challenges of the urgent economic, political and social recovery emanating from the effects of COVID-19 but also successfully overcome the emergence of new global challenges. Even though States will first have to deal with problems within their borders, they cannot abandon the practices of international cooperation.

However, our ICD mental models must change to be in tune with the changing times. This pandemic has reminded us that our world is fragile and some problems cannot be solved only by States. Therefore, it is necessary to build an international atmosphere based on trust and cooperation and which allows all actors in the international system to be prepared for the possible emerging challenges. For this reason, it is essential to broaden our mental horizons of what international cooperation is, what its foundations are, and what its rules and practices are. In this sense, the SSC can be an inspiration to enrich our ideas about international cooperation.

In this way, for SSC to become a guide for cooperation in the post-pandemic world, it must move away from confrontation with the DAC model of cooperation and recover the best of its proposals. In other words, it must insist that true cooperation must focus on a horizontal relationship that recognizes that both donors are on a plane of sovereign equality. Furthermore, the SCC

can advance the idea that any country and any community can contribute something to the international community. And expanding the world of aid beyond financing for development and technical and scientific cooperation, incorporating the practices of cooperation you know ancestral and cultural wealth that each region of the world has. Ultimately, we should think of cooperation as more than a generous act by a small club of rich countries and transform it into a practice of global solidarity in which all countries can participate.

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