



Official Symposium Summary

Preparing for the 2016 Development Cooperation Forum

DCF Belgium High-level Symposium
Rethinking development cooperation for the SDGs:
Country-level perspectives and lessons

6-8 April 2016 | Egmont Palace | Brussels | Belgium

Background

The Development Cooperation Forum High-Level Symposium from 6-8 April in Brussels was co-organized by UNDESA and the Government of the Kingdom of Belgium. The Symposium focused on rethinking development cooperation for the Sustainable Development Goals in three areas: (i) the importance of national institutions in all

countries for implementing the 2030

Agenda; (ii) special challenges to implementation for least developed countries (LDCs) and in other vulnerable contexts; and (iii) how to make international institutions more fit for the SDG era. Discussions among the 130 high-level participants centered around country-level experiences, including the distinctive role of development cooperation in key areas such as: strengthening domestic resource mobilization; responding to challenges of climate change; and supporting policy coherence for sustainable development and integrated approaches towards SDG achievement.



The Symposium will feed the preparations for the 2016 High-level Meeting of the DCF, to be convened at UN Headquarters in New York from 21-22 July 2016, as well as the mid-term review of the Istanbul Programme of Action for LDCs. Its key messages and policy recommendations will also inform other functions of the UN Economic and Social Council, which has a major role in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and Addis Ababa Action Agenda at global level.

Summary of Discussions

The key role of development cooperation in achieving the 2030 Agenda and making the world a safer place

- **The global sustainable development agenda reflects the new reality: We are all developing countries, though at different stages.** At any stage of development, sustainability, inequality, vulnerability and, fundamentally, poverty eradication, concern us all.
- **The breadth and ambition of the 2030 Agenda may present real tensions when it comes to decisions on allocation and use of ODA.** Given the core purpose of Official Development

“The Agenda 2030 is an ambitious agenda, but one humanity owes to itself.”

Assistance, and its potential to be even more specialized to benefit the poorest and most vulnerable people and contexts, efforts to reverse the decrease of ODA to LDCs should be intensified. Special attention should be given to new challenges, such as climate change financing and refugee spending, which could exacerbate the current negative trend in ODA to LDCs. In this regard, the complementary statistical methodologies of Total Official Support for Sustainable Development (TOSSD) should be discussed inclusively.

- **The best way to make the world safer is to focus on ending extreme poverty and leaving no one behind in the transition to sustainable development.** In the coming years, extreme poverty will be increasingly concentrated in states affected by conflict and fragility that are often among the group of LDCs and vice versa. These states are most affected by the challenges at the nexus of peace, security, human rights and sustainable development. To fight radical extremism in particular, inclusive youth policies and partnerships are key.

Reversing negative trends in development cooperation

- **Good practice in development cooperation needs to become prevalent.** Resources must be spent better, with emphasis on country and local ownership, along with politically smart, longer-term and results-oriented approaches. Improved risk management and accountability, as well as better coordination and coherence among international support mechanisms, are also needed.
- **Developing countries, at all levels of income, are in need of longer-term investment and cooperation.** Blended cooperation, including well-thought impact investing, has a potential to increase long-term financial viability and sustainability, although further evidence on this is still needed. There is a strong case for a new multilateralism in development cooperation, with the capacity to take on and spread risks, focus on longer-term results and perspectives, and be less politicised and more selective and predictable.
- **The recent trend away from programme-based approaches, including budget support, is concerning and can be partly attributed to an over-emphasis on short-term results.** This has led in the civil service to increased use of staff time to manage partners rather than outputs and risks undermining the important progress made in the development effectiveness agenda, including on country ownership, alignment, harmonization and reduction in fragmentation and transaction costs.
- **Development cooperation has become more transparent and accountable in various ways in recent years, progress in the use of country systems remains slow.** The importance of taking more flexible approaches, at both political and technical levels, and building genuine trust among countries and their development cooperation partners, were highlighted. Also, the importance of domestic accountability and the key role of national parliaments, civil society, and local governments were highlighted.

"If you want to do things differently, don't come with an answer. Come with a question and let's find the solution together."



- **Participants expected the DCF Mutual Accountability Survey to continue to monitor, review and assess the latest trends**, including on the use of budget support and country systems and other relevant accountability and transparency parameters.
- **In advancing the effectiveness of development cooperation, the DCF and the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation can play complementary roles, as stated in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.** The two processes should remain well focused on their respective strengths and mandates.



Building capacities for integrated and coherent approaches to SDG implementation in LDCs and other vulnerable contexts

- **New approaches to capacity building in LDCs are assisting communities to become change agents.** Two ways of accomplishing this are: enhancing community resilience through strengthening the capacities of local institutions; and addressing short-term needs (crisis response) together with long-term needs (development) in focus.
- **Special international support measures for LDCs exist, however, lack of awareness, absence of frameworks and other institutional constraints in LDCs limit effective access to and utilization of such measures.** Communication gaps between public and private actors further impede access and use of support measures. These gaps can be addressed by: (1) establishing fora for communication with all stakeholders including local producers and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); (2) enhancing coordination and exchange between the private sector and local authorities as well as amongst donors; and (3) strengthening of capacities of these actors including through regional integration and harmonization of standards.

“We should move from doing business as usual to doing business for purpose.”

- **To ensure increased ODA flows to LDCs and other vulnerable contexts, it is vital to mobilize civil society and create positive incentives, including by making some changes in the way ODA is measured to recognize a greater grant element in LDCs.** In this context, the reform of ODA and ongoing discussions around TOSSD were welcomed. The importance of reaching the poorest communities with ODA and related interventions by providing access not only to services but also to markets and micro credit was highlighted.
- “Development cooperation should drive both public and private resources to where needs are greatest and capacities weakest.”*
- **Development cooperation should support developing countries, including middle-income countries, in leveraging other resources** and facilitating the consolidation of experiences, including through South-South cooperation. When a country graduates into middle-income status, it should not be abandoned by the international community.
 - **South-South Cooperation can be an even more important element in implementing the 2030 Agenda.** Many actors are working on establishing how South-South complements other forms of cooperation, in order to strengthen its role in the emerging architecture for SDG implementation. Also the interesting possibilities of South-North cooperation were emphasised in the discussion.

Development cooperation for domestic resource mobilization (DRM) in LDCs

- **Development cooperation can play an important role in DRM through various modalities (ODA, South-South, triangular cooperation), with potentially high rates of return on the upfront investment.** With the Addis Tax Initiative, donors are preparing to scale up technical cooperation for taxation capacity of developing countries. DRM involves not only strengthening tax systems but also curbing tax avoidance and illicit financial flows, enhancing human capital, creating an enabling environment through an adequate mix of trade and investment policies, sustaining and increasing the fight against corruption, and broadening and diversifying the economic base. A broad approach to DRM should be taken to promote sustained economic growth as well as sustainable revenue/expenditure.
- “Do we have an institution to run after the hedge funds, Panamas and Cayman Islands?”*
- **Development cooperation for DRM needs to support country ownership and also include policy change at global and regional levels targeting the systemic issues that affect DRM.** Development cooperation needs to support countries to identify what types of combined means would work best under varied country contexts. In some cases, sharing of technology and innovation and targeted capacity building for strengthening financial systems have proven effective. In areas where capacities are weakest, DRM projects are embedded in much broader capacity building projects. The international enabling environment for DRM is improving with various initiatives. Yet, further action is needed across a range of areas to strengthen policy coherence for development. One specific proposal made in this context was to refrain from requesting tax exemptions for bilateral and multilateral ODA.
- “We will need trillions and not billions if we are serious about the 2030 Agenda.”*
- **More transparent reporting on development cooperation flows for DRM should facilitate a stronger focus on results and provide a basis for knowledge sharing on what works.** There is at present insufficient information on the volume and impact of development cooperation for DRM.



- Even with strengthened and more effective DRM, the poorest countries will continue to face large financing gaps compared to the investments needed to achieve the SDGs. While the SDGs require a shift from an 'aid' to an 'all resources' agenda, there is no substitute for meeting the existing commitments on ODA, including to the LDCs, and for the broader global partnership for sustainable development.

How can LDCs harness the transformative power of the digital age?

- **The 2030 Agenda recognizes the power of new technologies to accelerate human progress, bridge the digital divide and develop knowledge societies; the international community must do everything to support states in reaching these goals**, especially in developing countries and in particular LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS. There is not a single SDG without a digital component that can be used to reach it. The digital dimensions should be identified as a cross-cutting issue in all development cooperation efforts.
- **To unleash the transformative power of digital for LDCs, stronger efforts are needed by governments and all actors to ensure access, use and affordability.** These efforts include investment in infrastructure, especially in LDCs where the vast majority of people are still without Internet connectivity. Also other barriers, such as regulation, should be addressed. Emphasis must also be put on promoting gender equity in ICT access, skills and use.
- **To reach scale and lasting impact, development cooperation actors must bring the business sector to the table** at global, regional, national and local levels and support the creation of a favourable environment for investors and a robust and innovative business case beyond philanthropy for promoting poverty eradication and sustainable development.

"Technology is not lacking, but the enabling environment is."

Making development cooperation a catalyst to address global vulnerabilities – focus on climate change

- **A development cooperation perspective can strengthen the links between climate financing and development financing, bridging the two agendas and work streams.** Policy fora that address development cooperation and climate finance should work together at both technical and political levels, so that they can benefit from each other's work and avoid duplication, while promoting knowledge sharing and mutual learning.

"What use is there for climate change adaptation if there is not a living soul on Earth anymore?"

- **Addressing climate change requires intensified focus at country and local levels.** Climate change should be put on national development agendas, and national climate change response strategies should be set to achieve real progress, with better engagement of local governments and private sector in these efforts from the outset. Climate change affects already vulnerable countries. More money needs to move down to the country and local levels: ODA needs to reinforce national systems, and it needs to be predictable. ODA should also help the world to move to a low-carbon resilient society.
- **Adaptation and mitigation are two sides of the same coin, and a more balanced discussion is taking shape.** Participants showed hope with regard to the outcome of the Paris COP21 conference. Questions were also raised on the relevance of clinically separating ‘new and additional’ climate financing from development assistance in the integrated paradigm of the SDG era and how to measure progress in addressing climate change challenges in different ways.
- **Participants welcomed recent initiatives to increase the overall volume of climate-related South-South cooperation** and encouraged further efforts of Southern partners to help other developing countries fight climate change.

Providing multi-sectoral, coherent and integrated policy responses

- **The SDGs demand increased coherence and new forms of development cooperation.** Achievement of the SDGs relies on the contributions of all stakeholders, who also have to adapt and change their ways of working together. The 2030 Agenda demands a change of mind-set from all development cooperation actors. It inspires us to look closely at the inter-linkages between sectors and requires us to break down the silos that stop us from working together. Ultimately, we need not just a whole of government approach but a whole of society approach.



- **South-South cooperation is a powerful modality to increase coherence.** Horizontal dialogue and South-South cooperation, especially when focused on ownership and mutual benefit, are complementary and valuable modalities that can increase coherence among development cooperation actors and strategies in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. There remains much untapped potential in this area. At national level, institutions must be further strengthened to

articulate countries' own and coordinate South-South and triangular development agenda. At the same time, the different modalities of international development cooperation need to become still more complementary. Ongoing efforts to develop metrics and reporting standards for South-South Cooperation will be helpful in this regard.

“We promote South-South cooperation but would like to challenge the whole international community towards horizontal cooperation.”

- **Shared successful experiences included a two-fold approach to enhancing coherence in development cooperation policy.** First, there needs to be a clear results-oriented vision for the development cooperation strategy, based on inclusive multi-stakeholder consultations and the new 2030 Agenda. This vision should be mainstreamed into the broader foreign policy through review mechanisms that bring different partners across ministries on board. Second, and at the same time, there should be a clear set of basic principles, such as empowerment of women and human rights, that shape all aspects of the development cooperation framework and activities to ensure further coherence at all levels.

“We always talk about what each country or institution is doing. We should talk more about what we could do together to achieve policy coherence for sustainable development.”

- **Coordination efforts should be stepped up at the national level, while recognizing the difficulties of achieving coherence among many different entities and actors.** There are opportunities to support more integrated planning, coordination and alignment tools – such as national development cooperation policies (NDCPs) and country results frameworks (CRFs). If developed in an inclusive and participatory manner, these tools can promote a whole of government approach and multi-stakeholder engagement or even whole of society approach in the entire development process.

- **Localizing the SDGs and being mindful of the needs and rights of local communities can build more coherent approaches from the bottom up.** The SDGs have to be fully integrated into local authorities’ policies in order to

deliver on their promise. Local governments’ capacities need to be strengthened to allow them to play their role in delivering the global goals, including in monitoring and review of progress.

- **Three drivers demand a repositioning of the UN development system:** the new development agenda, which is broader in scope, more ambitious and universal; the diversification of actors and modalities in development cooperation; and unprecedented funding requirements that go beyond what ODA alone can deliver.



- **The SDGs and 2030 Agenda change the game for the UN development system, as they require more than coordination and collaboration between UN entities.** In order to effectively support Member States, the system must become a system, including moving towards a single UN framework, with common analysis, planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and review and an increased focus on working towards common thematic platforms to attain specific goals.
- **Differentiated approaches tailored to country contexts, needs and capacities and anchored in solid country ownership are essential.** New typologies that move beyond income-based categories, a strengthened Resident Coordination system, and strong leadership at all levels will be also be key to ensure the UN development system supports the delivery of the 2030 agenda.
- **Greater coherence and integration by the UN development system also requires efforts by Member States** to provide consistent mandates across funds and agencies, and to lessen earmarking of their funding.
- **The DCF can contribute to context-specific development cooperation policies and innovations** grow out of exchange of views for political correctness.
- **The DCF offers a unique platform for exchanging ideas and good practices in a polarized setting.** It is important that the centres of decision-making. Participants innovative and transformative nature of of knowledge exchange and mutual

and vulnerability-sensitive actions in the SDG era. Policy that are not necessarily sanitized

example-setting and for non-ideological and non-DCF voice is being heard at all highly valued the free, the discussions in the true spirit learning.



2016 DCF Policy Briefs – Background Documents for DCF Belgium Symposium

“What is development cooperation?” - This policy brief presents a conceptual framing for development cooperation that captures the array of agents and instruments oriented towards deliberately supporting developing country efforts towards inclusive and sustainable development.

“ODA allocation and other trends in development cooperation in LDCs and vulnerable contexts” - Being concessional, stable and non-profit seeking, ODA can target specific areas of need and reach the poorest and most vulnerable people. In the SDG era, its allocation could benefit from moving beyond a state-based model to one focused on sub-national measures of need and vulnerability.

“Making development cooperation on climate change sensitive to the most vulnerable countries” - This policy brief looks at the role of development cooperation in the SDG era in enhancing the interlinkages of agendas and work streams of climate and development financing and bringing more focused attention to the special needs of the poorest and most vulnerable countries.

“New forms of cooperation and increased coherence to implement the SDGs” - To facilitate an integrated approach to the SDGs, more evidence is needed on the suitability in different contexts of the different modalities of development cooperation as well as concrete measures to strengthen policy coherence for sustainable development at all levels.

“Re-engineering development cooperation institutions to deliver on the 2030 Agenda” - Effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda, will require, of all development actors, institutional changes for the effective mobilization, allocation and management of development cooperation.

“Aiding Domestic Resource Mobilisation” - [Briefing paper by Development Initiatives] Through transparent reporting systems and greater focus on results, development cooperation can make a valuable contribution to facilitate sustainable domestic revenue mobilisation.



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