

# LOOKING FOR DDC PRACTICES TO TRANSFORMATIVE PATHWAYS

## Brief starting point to research (September the 9th, 2019)

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RESEARCH PROPOSAL ON SDGs AND DECENTRALISED COOPERATION  
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### **INITIAL METHODOLOGICAL NOTE**

This brief report exposes the main issues of the ongoing research, which focus on the way Decentralized Development Cooperation (DDC) policies and systems are facing the new international development agendas. It presents in a synthetic way the approach, scope and expectations of the study. It contains and summarizes all the elements that will be expanded and developed through research and gathered the final report. It also provides a starting point for next methodological steps, that is the questionnaire and the interviews, as it includes an appropriate justification of selected questions and matters on which it inquires.

Preparation of this initial report has lead the research team to go through to relevant literature and to assume major documented findings about the context, evolution and challenges of DDC. Main references will be cited, expanded, specified and detailed for the final report.

Researchers have chosen a very synthetic style to expose main arguments in this initial brief, in order to facilitate understanding and to open discussions when necessary. All of these arguments will be detailed and develop with nuances and precisions during the writing of final report, after field work has served to contrast them and findings have been revealed.

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## NEW INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENDAS SHOW TRUE REALITY BETTER

We all are speaking about the new framework inspired by several and integrated new international development agendas: 2030 Agenda, New Urban Agenda (NUA), Climate Change agenda, etc. This new framework is characterized by multidimensionality, interdependency and trans-nationalization of the sustainable development process. These characteristics tell us that reality is constantly reconfigured, and reveals the gap between reality and the policies we use to face it.

In fact, policies are not only are facing these new world trends, but also and continuously contributing to shape reality as it is. Therefore, policies not only have to try to improve their performance: they also have to change their foundations and practices too, so that they are more consistent and coherent with the characteristics of the processes that configure reality.

That is why the agendas offer us a normative proposal, in the sense of how our policies should be to adapt to reality. Multidimensionality, interdependence and trans-nationalization of reality mean that we should try to make policies in a different way, a way that is more appropriate this new vision of development process. In this sense, these global frameworks talk to us about universality, integrality and global considerations for policies should try to assume.

New international development (ID) agendas are not created out of nothing. Rather, they stem from an effort for action by the international community in a dramatic and alarming situation. Main international actors have had to make a call to transformation because they cannot do the transformation themselves. This fact shows the enormous relevance and the political dimension –distribution of power and global governance issues– that are linked to transforming the development process.

The new agendas established call on us not keep doing business as usual. This also works for politics, including cooperation policies. But we do not have start from scratch either. That is why we need to combine transformative discourses and practices with transitions from current situation, starting by how to achieve more transformative DDC practices.

## THE EVOLUTION ID COOPERATION: LIMITS AND PERSPECTIVES

Reflecting on the origin and evolution of international cooperation system (and decentralized subsystem related) is one first point that will reveal possibilities and risks for the transformations required.

ID cooperation foundations rests in a cold war context and in an economic development vision, based on neoclassic postulates, and with income and productivity as the main (if not exclusive) issues. For that reason, a national logic and economic growth had imposed over other approaches for several decades. Consistently, the aid system created focused on monetary international transfers from countries in the North to those in the South, giving rise to ODA as a system articulator concept. The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) created in the 60s has established the system's main principles, and cataloging countries' cooperation based on graduation.

From the 80s to the present day, the national/economic approach has expanded, and also being contested from several perspectives. Theories of Human Development and Sustainable Development introduce an early multidimensional approach; the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness principles opened the discussion on the vertical model of the aid chain and, consistently, about governance system issues which remain still open; the appearance of new actors, new instruments and new financing flows set up a more complex and pluralistic system.

Most actors have resorted to technical solutions, in order to adapt to criticism and questioning. This has involved new project methodologies and new discourses. However, practices have not been transformed in depth. This may owe to structural limitations: despite criticisms and demands to expand visions, objectives, practices and actors, the system remains unchanged in its foundations, as in a nutshell inside of which nothing changes as the reality outside undergoes profound transformation. For that reason, practices of ID cooperation remain usually characterized by dispersion, fragmentation, discretion and willfulness.

In summary, ID cooperation has lost its initial theoretical anchoring during last decades. Today there is an absence of an explanatory framework strong enough to explain and to face the deep changes of international development issues pointed by new ID agendas. However, ID cooperation is more necessary than ever, precisely when the global context shows by the weakness of its governance frameworks and structures, since the role of cooperation becomes essential to build a collective, global and multilevel contribution.

The challenge is big and deep. ID cooperation needs to overcome voluntarism and excessive pragmatism. It needs to avoid a technocratic logic, and to achieve more horizontal and transformative practices. Many actors –including those in decentralized cooperation field – have made and are making remarkable efforts in this sense. These efforts must be reviewed to serve as pillars for transitions demanded.

New ID agendas require a new proposal on strategy and means, among which the role of the market, the social and physical limits of growth, the role of institutions and the

basic requirements of global governance stand out. These elements affect directly the role of ID cooperation as a driver for transformation, since they can drive design of their transformative practices.

It seems clear that it is necessary to consider a vision of development that is marked by multidimensionality, in which more plural perspectives can be integrated and can operate more horizontally, incorporating a transnational look in their responses and responsibilities. The main aim of this research is to guide changes in decentralized development cooperation actors so that those criteria are incorporated into their practices.

## DECENTRALIZED DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION: EVOLUTION IN PROGRESS

In certain aspects, for the good and the bad, DDC is a subsystem of the ID cooperation system. Yet, at the same time, some its practices of that have indeed had an impact onto the larger development system. DDC and ID have a close relationship, but it is not unidirectional, and therefore to explain definitions and evolutions of DDC we need to examine its relationship inside the ID cooperation system in the light of other own dynamics.

Therefore, at the origins of the DDC, we find a solidarity inspiration modeled by the international cooperation system and simultaneously one motivated by the aim of strengthening decentralization processes and local government capacities. The first had developed practices linked with projects, national cooperation policies and ODA criteria, while the second had focused on networking and technical exchanges for capacity building.

The DDC significantly evolved in the 80s and the 90s, both narratively and quantitatively. For Europeans, the European Commission was an early promoter of DDC, with progressive recognition through several published reports and resolutions, which have established some definitions and have analyzed some practices over the years. The main definitions contain the two ideas mentioned above: if DDC links to the ID cooperation field and, its specific added value is based on fostering decentralization processes, and on strengthening LRGs capacity and institutional building for this purpose.

However, although there is not a comprehensive definition for all discourses and practices due the great diversity of experiences –for instance seven EU countries have their own official definitions, not counting the great diversity in other regions–, five common principles arise to define every DDC system, as a common substrate at least for aspirational and normative purposes. They are: a) reciprocity between cooperation partners and horizontally relationships, b) proximity to citizenship and participation, c) multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance, d) territorial partnerships based on exchanges, mutual learning, and e) solidarity as the main value for political actions, instead of other foreign policy interests.

Besides, worth of local and territorial focus for development processes has been renewed as shows the more recent growing political importance of Local and Regional

Governments (LRGs) in international communities bodies. Not in vain, in the context of globalization significant decentralization process have been developed, and regional dynamism has been fostered. It is important to recognize that the new multi-dimensional approach includes the need for multilevel and multi-stakeholder political action, which are still mostly undeveloped, but has contributed to raise the LRGs presence in the international arena.

Many authors observe that DDC has evolved from more vertical to more horizontal relationships, achieving better reciprocity and symmetric relations instead of the traditional donor-recipient logic. This shift is due to the growing prevalence of territorial approaches, and to the fact that current prevalent types of action include territorial partnerships and networks of LRGs sharing a common vision about their DDC. Shifting is in progress, first because DDC is still not a widespread phenomenon in all countries. And second, because this kind of shifts usually goes from aspirational sphere to discourse and normative documents, and later sometimes from discourse to new practices. The aim of this study is to analyze the bottlenecks and opportunities to extend and to deep these changes to achieve more transformative DDC practices.

## NEW AGENDAS AND DDC: POTENCIAL AND EXPERIENCE TO FOSTER CHANGES DEMANDED

There is a broad recognition by the international community about the LRGs' pivotal role in implementing the new ID agendas. But saying it is not enough to know how LGRs can fulfill these responsibilities. In this sense, a recent report about the local dimension of six major international agreements concludes that, while all six agreements recognize the importance of LRGs in implementation, there is little clarity on how much the achievement of goals and commitments is the responsibility of governments in the subnational levels.

In recent years, we have witnessed the rise of numerous proposals by local governments regarding the implementation of the great global challenges in their territories. Notable efforts have been made to address the implementation processes in subnational areas, using various strategies that seek to make local government programs and policies compatible with the framework defined by global agendas. Either by converging its policies with the general principles of sustainability, equity and participation derived from the international agendas, or by selecting those goals from the global agendas that were most easily applicable to its competence and capacity frameworks.

The work developed by international networks of local governments, including the elaboration of manuals and specific training, has provided useful guidance to align local policies with the goals of the global agendas. Which does not prevent we find different results, with a wide range of solutions, ranging from the most superficial ones that barely adopted speeches and communication actions, to those that have undertaken transformations of different depth, in their way of understanding, designing and implement their public policies.

Obviously, specific differences are determined for multiple reasons, such as, between others, ideological vision, territorial and demographic characteristics, the degree of local consequences of global pressures, the relative position with respect to national governments, the will of political leaders, citizen participation and decentralization status that usually determines capabilities, budget and administrative powers they provide. But beyond particularities, the most relevant thing is to check to what extent governments are incorporating links between their policies and the transnationalization processes of sustainable development issues. At least in two directions: how the dynamics that exceed their territories and policies affect their territorial constituencies and the lives of their citizens, and secondly, how their local policies impact global dynamics.

Moreover, the notion of “the local” cannot be understood today like something exclusively linked with a specific territory and determinate exclusively by its physical characteristics and by its social, political and economic actors which are living there, because of interdependence and transnational dynamics. Speaking about local perspective today requires avoiding think about a reality separate from other territories, as if determined level of development of a territory were the result exclusively of the interaction of elements present in the territory itself. The nature of “the local” has been deeply transformed by current transnationalization processes.

Indeed, the traditional fragmented analysis logic between the local, the state, and the international cannot explain more current transnational phenomena on territories. That vision needs to become an analysis multilevel logic, which conceives all actors — independently of its territorial anchorage— as transnational actors. Precisely the alternative to think adequately local processes and its opportunities is denominated the multilevel approach, but based on intergovernmental cooperation and the assumption of the principle of common but differentiate responsibilities, instead of on hierarchical subordination.

The framework presented above must be fostered and developed by LRGs, and for this DDC might be the most fitting policy: DDC has had to face similar challenges in different territories, having a privileged perspective to understand interdependences and to establish transnational links. This does not mean that DDC does not have to change—all policies do. It just means that it can use its experience to understand and promote the changes needed.

The 2030 agenda has opened a space of pertinence and opportunity for DDC to renew itself, due to the recognition of its potentially important role for various reasons —such as territorial and specific impacts of the transnational dynamics that are felt most pressingly at the local level, its proximity of people needs and demands and, its unique position that specific expertise on several issues like local economic development, transparent governance, citizen participation and effective administration—.

To assess and evaluate different *localization* process it is crucial to take a look at changes in some policies areas. We have to consider not only the new policies but, more

importantly, the changes that have been introduced into the traditional policies. To what extent public policies are incorporating a multidimensional and inter-sectoral approach, getting involve stakeholders and citizens in new multi-stakeholders' frame and, last but not least how are LRGs addressing the new multilevel approach demanded. This kind of questions must be posed to DDC policies as well if we are to find out whether the DDC policy is also included as a policy like others in implementation processes.

## LOOKING FOR TRANSFORMATIVE KEYS: WHY THE “DOUBLE MOVEMENT” ANALYSIS?

The study intends to gather the best experiences and proposals in DDC transformation in times of the 2030 Agenda. To achieve this is needed to look for the main transformative keys that are being incorporated in the renewed DDC, considering some criteria mentioned in reflections above.

DDC policies needs to address several crucial transformations, some already initiated, which aim to review and expand its foundations, its characteristics and instruments, to overcome practices based on a "developed-undeveloped" continuum to place them in a global political matrix. The policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD) approach will be useful for this purpose, since it focuses the integrality of actions as its central element. In this way, DDC should progressively devote more attention to influence directly on those matters who produce and reproduce issues, better than limit to responding them.

It must be underscored that “transformations” refer to practices, rather than to discourse. Normative issues are important too, but these can be listed and analyzed by consulting published papers and regulations. Furthermore, new approaches usually permeate in speeches more easily than in practices.

Transformative practices can be analyzed by its orientation and intention (new goals), by the changes made in its designs and implements (new inputs), by its innovative funding and focus (new tools), and by the new outcomes expected and achieved. These changes not always are achieved together due transformative policies have much of experimentation.

The criteria for examining the news incorporated must be consistent with the principles of the sustainable development agenda, so the transformative keys must include contributions to improve the global governance of development challenges, develop truly social and environmental production and consumption patterns, democratize and improve institutions to address the demands of citizenship and foster social relations based on the empowerment of citizenship, equality and a framework of rights guaranteed.

Other criteria must be consistent with interlinkages between structures, dynamics, policies and actors which set up together all development processes, whereby multidimensionality, integrality, multilevel and multi-stakeholder approaches are the

new mandate that will help to expand cooperation culture and to articulate new relations and networking.

Obviously, all the transformative horizons pointed by new ID agendas and summarized above require LRGs action beyond their direct administrative competences. When we want talk about transformations in the areas of taxation, trade, employment, environment, migrations, etc., we need to talk about structural and transnational issues, so that is needed to explore its participation in multilevel decision spaces.

As we have argued, transforming DDC to face more consistently and efficiently sustainable development challenges requires looking inside and outside the own policy contour, but from a new perspective that assumes all actors are in fact transnational actors and all policies are in fact *intermestic* (international and domestic) policies. A perspective, fostered by PCSD approach, which pursues integrality and consistently between both looks.

For reasons expressed above we are talking about a “double movement” to analyze DDC changes. Because DDC needs to review its own foundations and practices considering its traditional policy contours (administrative competences, funding, actors, tools, and so on). But the challenge is to make these changes enlarging this traditional policy contour with more actors, tools and goals, such as multilevel coordination, political incidence at regional and global spaces of decision making, linking local and international causes of the issues, and so on. DDC should evolve *inward* and *outward* simultaneously and consistently.