

Editorial

WHY DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION MATTERS

By Susanna Moorehead, Chair, Development Assistance Committee and Jorge Moreira da Silva, Director, Development Co-operation Directorate, OECD

The world has seen remarkable progress in the past decades: extreme poverty and child mortality rates have plummeted while literacy and girls' education are on the rise. At the same time, the international community has failed to live up to its commitments in far too many areas. All forms of inequality and the stubborn persistence of poverty, violent conflict, state fragility and mass displacement run counter to the sense of progress. Most profoundly, the climate crisis threatens to both overshadow all other development challenges and to overturn hard-won gains.

As we approach 2030, the target year for both the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on climate change, all actors involved in sustainable development need to confront the urgency of the moment. It's not enough to respond to crises as they arise. Firefighting, while necessary at times, will not create a fairer, greener and safer world. To do that, all nations of the world must act rather than react. The development

community must be two steps ahead of looming problems, while remembering to step back to look at what we are doing right and where we need to improve.

Governments and all other development actors need to ask themselves if they are adapting effectively. Development co-operation is different now compared to decades ago. Wealthy western nations no longer dominate the global agenda. The rapid transformations of many developing countries into geopolitical powerhouses mean that the old ways of dividing countries into categories such as donor and recipient, developed and developing, rich and poor, no longer apply.

Yet, we often keep on looking at international development co-operation through these outdated lenses. We continue to tell stories that fail to resonate with the public and engage citizens in a meaningful way. We need a new narrative. To inspire hope and stronger action, this narrative should focus on development co-operation's strengths while being honest about its shortcomings. A narrative that explains how development co-operation is intricately tied to the world's challenges and is well positioned to address those challenges. One that demonstrates how development co-operation that benefits everyone, also advances national interests. A narrative that focuses on

the protection of global public goods, while preserving national sovereignty.

This new narrative should also speak to persistent myths and perceptions. It should speak more openly and forcefully about development co-operation's strong accountability systems that catch and crack down on corruption and share stories about innovative solutions. Look, for example, at how international co-operation helps countries make significant strides in eliminating corporate tax evasion and boosting domestic resources for development.

Changing the narrative will not be easy. It is difficult for positive development news stories to gain traction when the media focuses almost exclusively on what's going wrong. It's no wonder that our publics often question the value of development co-operation. We can choose to view this questioning as a crisis of legitimacy or as an opportunity. Because at the same time that our citizens – especially youth – are frustrated about what they perceive as a lack of action, they are creating their own narratives about sustainable development. This provides an opportunity for governments to channel the grassroots energy of the people we serve.

We can promote a modern story that inspires hope, especially for the next generation. We have to demonstrate that development co-operation is a means of making our shared world a safer, healthier and cleaner place to live. The new narrative must respond to the millions of people who have taken to the streets to demand action on the climate crisis and inequalities. We already have a noble clarion call: our pledge to “leave no one behind”. But this commitment itself must be updated to include future generations, who will be left behind if we do not act now.

Development co-operation has a unique role to play in building a better future because it has the power to provide a helping hand up to countries that are on different development pathways and to the poorest and most marginalised people on the planet. It lends expertise, financing and support to

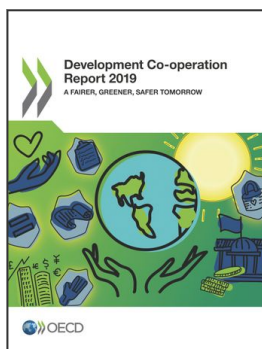
local actors so that they can chart their own course to a good life. However, development co-operation is not the only solution to the world's problems. Of course not. While we have decades of evidence and a trove of inspiring stories to show the benefits of development-co-operation, we need to demonstrate how working internationally responds to what people care about: climate, health, basic human needs and justice.

Changing the narrative of development co-operation will not be enough. To reflect new realities, we cannot just change the way we talk about development co-operation. We must also change the way we go about it. OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) governments and development agencies need to show in deeds not just in words that development co-operation is fit for 21st century challenges and be open to new ways of working with diverse actors.

The impressive progress made by many countries over the past decade, has reshaped the development landscape. Countries that not so long ago were themselves poor are now major players in reducing poverty elsewhere, along with civil society, the private sector and philanthropic foundations. OECD DAC members welcome these new players, while upholding, updating and promoting the high standards, expertise and good practices which we apply to our work and encouraging others to draw on evidence of what works. We must reignite the spirit of effective development co-operation by working imaginatively with these actors, while retaining our shared values.

Today's complex, digitally connected world requires governments to make a better case for development co-operation, and more effectively explain why it matters. We must be honest about the myriad challenges it faces and demonstrate that despite its flaws, development co-operation can help create a better world. By playing to our unique strengths and being nimble enough to respond to inevitable changes, we will ensure that development co-operation remains vital and effective in building a better future for all.





From:
Development Co-operation Report 2019
A Fairer, Greener, Safer Tomorrow

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9a58c83f-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2019), "Editorial", in *Development Co-operation Report 2019: A Fairer, Greener, Safer Tomorrow*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/04617903-en>

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document, as well as any data and map included herein, are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area. Extracts from publications may be subject to additional disclaimers, which are set out in the complete version of the publication, available at the link provided.

The use of this work, whether digital or print, is governed by the Terms and Conditions to be found at <http://www.oecd.org/termsandconditions>.