

**The outcome of the 2nd High Level Meeting
of the Global Partnership for Effective Development
Co-operation and why it matters**

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The [Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation](#) (here just the Global Partnership) held its second High-Level Meeting in Nairobi, Kenya on 30 November - 1 December 2016. Dozens of preparatory gatherings and side events complemented a programme focused on the contribution of development co-operation to Agenda 2030.¹ This paper provides an assessment of what the meeting accomplished, what challenges emerged and how the development co-operation community can tackle them.

WHAT THE MEETING ACCOMPLISHED

Inclusiveness at work

Compared to previous similar conferences, participation in this High-Level Meeting was massive – about 4,600 people from 158 countries and all the main constituencies, from Kenya’s President Kenyatta to representatives from youths, migrants and women farmers’ associations, from governments to trade unions to parliamentarians. This level of diversity allowed for a healthy mix of views that spurred some frank conversations and challenging questions, particularly at the side events.

The Global Partnership is a uniquely inclusive global initiative in which non-state actors play a direct and full role, alongside governments, in its governance and outcomes. The fact that such a diverse policy-making community is able not just to hold complex discussions about development co-operation, poverty and inequality, but also agree on a [final outcome document](#) shows the potential of the Global Partnership model, where all relevant constituencies come together on equal footing. While it may take years before this kind of governance is even considered in the broader context of Agenda 2030 implementation, the Global Partnership meeting in Nairobi effectively demonstrated inclusiveness at work, in a process that should become the norm for other development fora.

Stronger linkages with Agenda 2030

Another major accomplishment coming out of Nairobi is a deeper understanding of how the Global Partnership can contribute to implementing Agenda 2030. Put simply, development co-operation alone cannot achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, but it can help ensure no-one is left behind.²

Development assistance, from a growing diversity of providing countries, is a resource that can be fully devoted to achieving the SDGs. Rhetoric apart, the Nairobi meeting highlighted how development co-operation will continue to be essential for any developing country to escape poverty and reduce inequality, even when other kinds of development resources come into play. This clarification is important as it allows the Global Partnership to retain a focus within Agenda 2030 and strive for greater impact in favour of those populations that need help the most.

¹ Agenda 2030 refers to the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) approved by the United Nations in September 2015 and set to expire in 2030.

² See para. 13 of the Nairobi outcome document. You can find an excellent detailed analysis of the outcome document by Aidwatch Canada [here](#).

Recognising the importance of monitoring the quality of development co-operation

Another distinctive trait of the Global Partnership that came out strongly, both in the outcome document and at the Nairobi meeting itself, is its role in monitoring the quality of development co-operation against commitments for reform made in Busan (2011), Mexico City (2014) and now Nairobi (2016) by countries and actors that identify with the Global Partnership. Through a set of [ten indicators](#), the Global Partnership measures progress on traditional aid, like aid predictability or the use of developing country procurement systems, as well as progress on other important dimensions of development co-operation, such as tracking budget allocations to promote gender equality and an enabling environment for civil society organisations.

After two rounds of monitoring since Busan in 2011, reiterating the importance of investing in this work was no small feat. The Global Partnership’s monitoring framework is one the few tools available to hold each other to account in development co-operation today. Despite multiple calls in the lead up to the High-Level Meeting to downplay accountability in favour of less committal ‘learning exchanges’, the monitoring framework received widespread support in Nairobi, where it was the topic of a dedicated, full-day workshop. A revised framework was recognised in the outcome document as a “unique instrument for mutual accountability,” which will contribute directly to the monitoring of the means to achieve the SDGs in the coming years.³

A few concrete opportunities to improve effectiveness

Nairobi marked a victory for those developing countries and civil society organisations denouncing the lack of continued progress on the so-called ‘unfinished business’ – the unfulfilled aid effectiveness commitments from previous High Level political Fora in Paris (2005) and Accra (2008), which some traditional donors were keen to dismiss. As essential elements of the principle of country ownership, these commitments relate to the use of country systems by aid providers, improved transparency in aid transactions, and the untying of aid, among others. Last-minute negotiations led to an agreement to “develop time-bound action plans”⁴ that would put a target date back on many of those commitments. It was a concrete step forward to save an agenda that is still considered important by traditional aid recipients.

After a hard-fought battle, civil society organisations also succeeded in defending past Global Partnership pledges to support an ‘enabling environment’ in which CSOs can operate. At a time when restrictions against organised civil society have reached record-high levels around the world,⁵ a commitment in the outcome document to maximise civic space is an accomplishment in itself. In the lead-up to the Meeting, CSOs faced resistance from a number of developing country governments to remove these commitments from the Nairobi outcome document. Civil society went even farther in Nairobi and managed to achieve a new forward-looking commitment to “reverse the trend of shrinking of civic space wherever it is taking

³ See in particular para. 5 and 30-32 of the Nairobi outcome document.

⁴ See para. 35.

⁵ See for example CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness, [GPEDC Indicator Two. Civil society operates in an environment that maximizes its engagement in and contribution to development. An assessment of evidence](#), June 2016.

place.”⁶ It will fall largely on civil society to make sure these promises turn into action, but the final text turned out to be a lot better than feared.

In addition, the Nairobi meeting marked progress on the governance of the Global Partnership. While non-state actors have played a major role on its Steering Committee, the Partnership has been led by three Ministers as Co-Chairs (currently Germany, Bangladesh and Uganda). However, for the first time the Global Partnership will now formally consider appointing a ‘non-executive Co-Chair’ representing civil society organisations, trade unions, local authorities, parliamentarians, philanthropic organisations and business. These constituencies have been asked to put together a concrete proposal in the coming months on how they envisage working together⁷ – quite a challenge given the differences among some of these actors. Adding a non-executive Co-Chair is nonetheless a rare opportunity for stakeholders other than governments to shape the development co-operation agenda from a position of leadership. It is a clear sign that the time has come to bring the principles of inclusiveness at the top of the alliance too. It remains to be seen how non-executive stakeholders will plan to work in collaboration with the other Co-Chairs, where there may be political differences, to maximise the impact of the Global Partnership in the coming years.

EMERGING CHALLENGES

Few Ministers in sight

The most glaring, and worrying, shortcoming of the second High-Level Meeting was the low number of high-level Ministers from donor countries attending. Only three Ministers came from Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden. Other donor delegations were led by lower-ranking officials. Unlike in Busan in 2011 and Mexico City in 2014, the UN Secretary-General did not participate.

As delegates, we heard two basic reasons for this trend: 1) Despite rhetorical identification with the SDGs, the Global Partnership does not make strong enough a case to attract political decision-makers; and 2) In the context of the need for diverse funding sources for the SDGs, the Global Partnership’s focus on development cooperation is losing relevance in the international development arena. These factors seem to have been mutually reinforcing, both of them drawing from a Global Partnership narrative that is still perceived as too vague and too rooted in an aid paradigm (despite the acknowledged continued importance of traditional aid for achieving the SDGs). Not surprisingly, media coverage of the meeting was also very low.

⁶ See para. 18.

⁷ See para. 22 ff. of Annex 1 to the Nairobi outcome document.

Minimal representation from the BRICS

Global Partnership skeptics have been quick to notice the absence of high-level representatives from BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) in Nairobi⁸. Historically, these countries have raised concerns about the legitimacy of the Global Partnership, which is not a UN forum, although it brings together 161 countries and 56 organisations that identify with the principles for effective development co-operation, and is supported jointly by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Other institutions from the South, such as the [Network of Southern Think Tanks](#), claim the Global Partnership reflects an outdated world order that cannot fully capture the complexity of South-South Co-operation in today's development discourse.

Lots of commitments without a date

Out of the 23-page final outcome document there is **only one commitment with an explicit deadline** attached: Reducing the transaction cost of migrant remittances to less than three percent and ensuring that no remittance corridor requires charges higher than five per cent by 2030.⁹ In the absence of other clear targets, or even agreed plans for implementation in areas where a time-specific target may be problematic, operationalising what is already a voluntary agreement will be left to subjective interpretation.

A robust monitoring framework, implemented at global and country level, can assist in promoting attention to important areas in the global commitments, but in itself, no monitoring framework can substitute for the political will to work together to develop new approaches and practices consistent with the principles for effective development co-operation.

The obvious question that comes to mind is whether the absence of explicit deadlines and/or plans for implementation was deliberate. Perhaps it was the result of constituencies sitting on the fence, waiting for someone else to start, but also the complexity of defining what various commitments mean in the practice of development co-operation. How does one, for example, give a time-specific target for required “behaviour change” by development stakeholders who have agreed to achieve country ownership? In other areas, such as tied aid, time-bound targets are more possible. We are missing a long-overdue conversation around these important implementation issues.

What role for the private sector in future development co-operation?

The outcome document also features ambiguous statements that potentially undermine the original purpose of development co-operation, particularly when it comes to private finance. One such example is the mention that Official Development Assistance can be used to “unlock additional finance” to support

⁸ According to the German Development Institute Russia attended the Nairobi meeting. See related article [here](#). According to other sources, the BRICS were represented by lower-ranking government officials and other stakeholder groups, particularly at the side events on South-South Co-operation.

⁹ See para. 40 of the outcome document. This commitment was originally made at the third International Conference on Financing for Development in 2015 (see para. 54 of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda).

initiatives for private sector development and infrastructure.¹⁰ It is no secret that donors are struggling to find additional resources to fund public goods, and that they are increasingly turning to using development co-operation funds as a lever that can generate private funding.

In promoting such leveraging, the Nairobi outcome document uncritically suggests that the incentive of the profit motive for private sector initiatives will result in leaving no-one behind in the achievement of the SDGs,¹¹ despite a wealth of evidence to the contrary. Unlike other stakeholders in development, the private sector is never called upon to address the development impact of these initiatives on the reduction of poverty and inequalities. However, subsequent paragraphs do reference important accountability frameworks for the business sector, in terms of transparency about its operations, and “giving respect to freedom of association and collective bargaining, and engaging in social dialogue.”¹²

What these commitments mean for the accountability of the business sector remains unclear at best. The renewed mandate of the Global Partnership raises concerns when it says that current effectiveness commitments, which include those relating to transparency and accountability, “relate mainly to public partners.”¹³ This statement contradicts the shared principles of effective development co-operation – country ownership, focus on development results, transparency and mutual accountability – on which the Global Partnership has been founded. It suggests that, in practice, business needs not be transparent or accountable.

Translating global commitments to country and institutional practices

The perennial challenge of the Global Partnership – and its predecessor, the pre-Busan Working Party on Aid Effectiveness - has been how to ensure that global commitments in a voluntary process not only lead to changes in development co-operation practices at the country level, but also contribute to the ultimate goal of eradicating poverty, reducing inequalities and advancing the rights of those affected by poverty, particularly women and girls. Unfortunately in several critical areas for country ownership, the [Second Progress Report](#), prepared for the High Level Meeting, indicated that progress has been very limited since the Busan agreement in 2011 (e.g. predictability of aid flows, use of country systems or untying aid).

Without specific opportunities for donors, recipient governments and non-state actors to participate in institutionalised spaces for dialogue at country level on the ways that more effective development co-operation can support the priorities of a given country, implementation may just remain an empty word. These fora need to be closely integrated into country-level inclusive strategies for implementing the SDG country priorities.

Yet, despite rhetorical emphasis on the centrality of the SDGs for the future of the Global Partnership, the section of the outcome document on transparency and accountability only calls on recipient countries to “update existing arrangements for mutual accountability at country level,” but with no accompanying commitments by donors to effectively engage with these fora.¹⁴ Some ten years after the Paris Declaration, the Second Progress Report points out that less than half of the 80 countries participating in

¹⁰ See para. 23 of the outcome document.

¹¹ See para 61.

¹² See paras 81, 79a and 79b.

¹³ See para. 11 of Annex 1 to the outcome document.

¹⁴ See paras 71-81, in particular para. 75(g).

the monitoring exercise implemented mutual reviews to track progress.¹⁵

Accountability is not only an issue for governments. As an inclusive partnership, non-state actors are equally called to be accountable and transparent. As noted above, such commitments for the private sector as a development actor are rather weakly expressed, with worrying implications for the future of development co-operation. CSOs were also challenged in the negotiations for the outcome document to describe in greater detail their commitments to improve their effectiveness as development actors, drawing from the eight [Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness](#).¹⁶ The fact that CSO commitments are now spelled out in this outcome document may require greater attention by CSOs in documenting progress in all of these areas in future monitoring rounds, not just on accountability mechanisms, as was the case in the second monitoring round in 2016.

WHAT THE DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION COMMUNITY CAN DO NOW

Bringing more clarity

There are several ways the Global Partnership can deliver after the Nairobi meeting, despite some of the challenges above. In the five years since its inception, the Global Partnership has developed a promising monitoring framework, to be refined this year. The Partnership has produced a credible [Theory of Change](#), which is one of its best contributions to global development discussions and deserves much more attention. There is an agreement to carry out periodical evaluations of its work. These steps are essential to bring more clarity about what the Global Partnership has accomplished over the past five years. Importantly, they will inform what more the Partnership can do to promote behaviour and policy change in development co-operation in the context of Agenda 2030.

In the coming months it will be critical that there be more explicit agreement on a basic set of parameters and common understanding among Global Partnership stakeholders – What is meant by development co-operation? Is effective development co-operation the same as development effectiveness? If not, how do they differ and support each other? This is a crucial discussion that has been long overdue, causing a fair amount of confusion on the scope and level of ambition of the Global Partnership.¹⁷ Working towards some common understanding on these questions among the Co-Chairs and in the Steering Committee would be time well spent. Such understanding will improve the monitoring framework but the result might also help shed some light on contentious issues, such as when and how development co-operation funds might be used to generate private investments for achieving specific SDGs.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 115 ff.

¹⁶ See paras 49, 57, 67, and 80.

¹⁷ On the definition of ‘development effectiveness’ see also Duncan Green’s blog post of 25 November 2016 [here](#).

Effective co-operation also means effective communication

The low turnout of Ministers from provider countries in Nairobi is an alarm bell that political interest in the Global Partnership may be waning. A more convincing narrative for the Global Partnership taking account current realities in global politics, including significant changes in particular donor countries such as the United States and the UK, will be essential going forward. A strong vision builds on a clear understanding of the role, scope and specific commitments – where the Global Partnership can contribute, and where it is not well positioned. A message that even busy politicians can quickly grasp, rooted in well-presented evidence of development co-operation’s importance for our shared national interests.

The principles for effective development co-operation need to guide the practice, but the Partnership also needs to bring the communicators into the policy discussion from the start, instead of just asking them to repackage someone else’s thoughts. Skilled communicators and policymakers should not be afraid to challenge each other more often to unpack complex messages together for the benefit of a broader audience. An exclusive aid effectiveness narrative may no longer reflect today’s complex development co-operation world, yet we can draw useful lessons from it to forge deeper and more effective messages on development co-operation.

Strategy, not just tactics

The Nairobi outcome document succeeded in providing a convincing vision of what the Global Partnership can do in the context of Agenda 2030. In many ways, the Partnership is in a stronger position than ever before, despite some of the challenges. Now is the time to turn the vision and commitments agreed in Nairobi into concrete action, but how?

Besides the steps described above, the Steering Committee should devise a concerted strategy around three main pillars:

1. **Agreeing on the scope, plans and timeline for implementing the commitments** shared by the overall Global Partnership community, as well as the pledges made by individual constituencies;
2. **Identifying options for structured dialogue with key development stakeholder groups**, reaching out to upper middle-income countries – including the BRICS, if they are willing – and facilitating consultation among recipient governments, perhaps through a mechanism similar to the pre-Busan Partner Country Caucus;
3. **Using the findings from the second Progress Report to guide future action, particularly in strengthened mutual accountability fora at country level.** Recipient governments should lead regular and meaningful dialogue with all development stakeholders on the monitoring findings (and development co-operation more broadly) in country. The outcomes of these discussions should feed into the national planning, follow-up and review mechanisms for SDG implementation.

Crucially, given the potential turmoil in global politics and its impact on development co-operation in the coming year, the Steering Committee needs to take a strategic, longer-term approach if it wants to see

real impact on development outcomes in the coming years. Implementing commitments requires action plans, or else the Global Partnership may lose credibility in the international development arena. Engaging upper middle income countries cannot just be a priority six months before High-Level Meetings. The monitoring framework should be used on an ongoing basis, not just around High-Level Meetings, and adapted to the nature of South-South Co-operation with input from countries such as Mexico, which contributed to the work of the Monitoring Advisory Group. There is an urgent need to **shift from efficient tactics to effective strategies**.

CONCLUSIONS

The global community is facing a year that may bring great uncertainty to multilateral efforts for development co-operation and the fight against climate change. In 2017, the new US administration, the Brexit negotiations, the outcomes of impending elections in Europe, and potential changing roles for China in global affairs will all bring heightened concern for the future of development co-operation.

The Global Partnership, as documented in the second Progress Report, has started to deliver in some areas after years of ambiguity. Its inclusive governance model, country-level support and accountability through effective monitoring, and its relevance to the SDG agenda, make a convincing case for its added value. These achievements now need to be sustained in the face of likely assaults on the values of multilateralism and international solidarity. It is all the more important for the Partnership to embrace clarity, vision, and strategy as its best allies going forward.

Focusing on those at risk of being left behind, those who have experienced the consequences of growing inequality from current paths to development, demands new thinking on the future of development assistance. But it also requires greater attention to the underlying reasons for persistent lack of progress in some areas important for meaningful country ownership. The Nairobi High Level Meeting reminds the global community that development co-operation has a clear job to do: focusing on the most vulnerable. And that can be done most effectively when state and non-state actors come together to work through constructive solutions. Now is the time for all those who adhere to the Global Partnership's principles, norms and commitments to step up their action, and step forward.