

Competing Visions of Global Development

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Rising geopolitical competition and domestic political pressures have led to diverging approaches to development cooperation. The Trump administration has significantly undermined the concept of sustainable development in multiple ways. We develop **four scenarios for the global development architecture in 2030:**

1. Aid retrenchment and nationalist conditionality

In this scenario, development cooperation increasingly loses its independent normative claim and becomes systematically embedded in the geopolitical goals of powerful states. It is no longer an independent policy area, but is fully absorbed into foreign, interior and trade policy strategies. It is implemented primarily bilaterally and follows a transactional logic. Furthermore, support is strictly geared towards the self-interest of donor countries, such as controlling migration or the political orientation of partner states. As a result, multilateral institutions are significantly losing importance, which is reflected by cuts in official development assistance (ODA) and funding for central UN organisations. Issues such as climate, gender and human rights protection, as well as the targeted promotion of the poorest countries, are taking a back seat and being replaced by more restrictive forms of conditionality. Overall, in this scenario, development cooperation hardly serves as an instrument of collective global engagement anymore, but primarily as a means of political influence.

2. Strategic/Functionalist multilateralism

In this scenario, multilateralism remains fundamentally intact, but undergoes a realignment towards a more defensive focus. Multilateral development banks retain their central role, but concentrate more strongly on stability, crisis response and risk mitigation. In addition,

concessional financing is limited to selected geostrategic partner countries. The focus of development goals increasingly moves to migration management and macroeconomic stability, while comprehensive sustainability goals are deprioritised. At the same time, the influence of civil society declines. Although development cooperation remains formally organised on a multilateral basis, security, financial and border issues are clearly prioritised over universal development goals.

3. Pluralist development cooperation

This scenario is characterised by the absence of a uniform global system of development cooperation. Instead, several overlapping regimes coexist. South-South partnerships, regional banks and alternative sources of finance are gaining in importance. Recipient countries operate in a highly competitive market offering various cooperation options and choose between them in a targeted manner ('aid shopping'). Although this increases flexibility, it also leads to greater differences in standards – particularly in the environmental and social spheres – and fragmented coordination. As a result, recipient countries benefit from greater scope for action, while the coherence of development cooperation and its ability to tackle global challenges is significantly reduced.

4. Global solidarity 2.0:

In this scenario, joint international action to tackle global risks undergoes a fundamental revitalisation. Development cooperation is no longer primarily understood as an expression of charity, but as an instrument for ensuring collective security and shared prosperity. Traditional and new donors assume joint responsibility and overcome the classic donor/recipient logic. The United Nations plays a key role in this, supported by more inclusive decision-making

structures. Collective financing mechanisms for key global tasks such as climate protection, health and systemic resilience are moving to the centre of the global development architecture.

Conclusions

The future of the global development architecture will be defined by choices made among competing visions already present today. A turn toward nationalist and transactional approaches risks further fragmentation and diminished support for the most vulnerable countries. More selective forms of multilateralism may preserve existing institutions while narrowing their ambition. Pluralist cooperation offers flexibility but weakens coherence and shared standards. A renewed emphasis on global solidarity would strengthen collective capacity to address global public goods, but requires sustained political commitment and institutional reform.

In order to remain compatible with the various scenarios in the restructuring of the global development architecture, organisational flexibility is essential for development policy actors. Legitimacy and additionality are becoming key guiding principles for decisions. At the same time, clear mechanisms are needed to ensure that own standards, such as sustainability, are upheld even under pressure from geopolitical conditionality or transactional financing interests. ■