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Back to the future: the new Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation should be part of the UN

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Bonn, 21 May 2012. In Paris today the final negotiations will be held on the form the new "Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation" should take. In November 2011 it was decided at the Busan High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness that this new body should be set up by June 2012. While the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) form the basic programme for global development cooperation, this partnership focuses on how they are to be achieved, the principles having been agreed by a coalition of over 150 countries. The way in which development cooperation is conducted has been proved to influence its effectiveness. What influence the Global Partnership for Development has will be determined not least by its institutional home. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in which the roots of the Global Partnership lie, has ceased to be regarded as an option. As the club of the rich countries, the OECD cannot guarantee meetings between industrialised countries, emerging economies and developing countries "on an equal footing"; the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) symbolises the traditional North-South development paradigm. It is imperative, however, that everyone should be on equal footing, because such countries as China, India and Brazil are to be crucial members of the Partnership. After all, having long been solely recipients of development aid, they are now among the providers. But the programmer countries, too, are calling for a forum that embodies the idea of partnership.

Not another club ...

Current plans provide for the Global Partnership to have a light organisational superstructure. The highest decision-making level will be formed by ministerial meetings to be held every 18 to 24 months and three co-chairs representing the donors, non-traditional donors and recipient countries. They will be joined by a 14-member representative steering committee. A secretariat is to be appointed jointly by the OECD-DAC and the

UN Development Programme (UNDP). Independent thematic working groups (building blocks) will seek to advance the debate on such aspects as climate finance and fragile states. With a structure like this, the Global Partnership for Development will have much the same features as other global governance actors known as clubs, of which the G20 is currently the most prominent representative. Clubs are informal or barely institutionalised cooperative mechanisms with a limited number of members. They are said to be able to solve global problems more efficiently and effectively, because they assemble the necessary actors at one table with little fuss. However, clubs depend heavily on the willingness of their members to work together. It is precisely in this respect that the Global Partnership for Development is at greatest risk: the support from the emerging economies, and especially China and India, is rather lukewarm at the moment. Unless this changes in the next few months, industrialised nations, too, may soon lose interest. This would be to miss an opportunity to create a worldwide partnership for development in which old and new powers work together and adopt a common set of rules.

Not another organisation ...

One of the main problems with development cooperation is the large number and wide variety of governmental and non-governmental actors often operating independently or even in ignorance of each other and so not only posing major coordination challenges for partner countries but also, in extreme cases, acting inconsistently. The Global Partnership has set itself the goal of reducing this fragmentation of the development landscape. For that reason it must on no account make the mistake of establishing a separate, new international organisation. Instead, the Partnership must be carefully integrated into the existing system.

A global partnership should be part of the United Nations

At a time of a major global crisis states established

the UN with a view to addressing global problems together through international cooperation. Inefficiencies that have accumulated over the years weigh heavily on the world organisation; its international negotiations are characterised by a schematic North-South divide, which has long since become more differentiated with the rise of new powers and no longer conforms to the old pattern. But as all the world's countries are members of the UN with formally the same rights, it has a unique legitimacy to lay down universal rules and norms. As the example of the MDGs shows, this enables sustainable changes to be induced on a global scale. If the Busan principles were similarly to influence the framing of global development policy, a major step forward in worldwide poverty alleviation and development could be taken. In the medium term this will make it necessary for the Global Partnership to be absorbed into the United Nations, in whose Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) a suitable, though hitherto inadequately used, body already exists.

At present, some 150 of the 193 UN member states have joined the Global Partnership. It will now be essential to convince the remaining outsiders that a global partnership for development belongs in the UN, despite its "birth defect" - its OECD origin, which is deemed illegitimate. And the OECD countries must recall the strengths of the United Nations. It should be possible to

achieve the transfer to the DCF if the majority of the countries that signed the Busan document speak with one voice. The industrialised countries would thus show that they are serious about turning away from development aid and towards development partnership and that they are prepared to put their policy to the test in a body where the votes are not stacked in their favour. The emerging economies, which are currently tending to adopt a wait-and-see attitude, must be constructive in bearing their share of responsibility for global poverty alleviation. And the poorer developing countries must seize the opportunity to demand a better quality of cooperation from all donors. What applies to all countries, finally, is that, at times of global crisis such as these, they should together face up to the global challenges as united nations. That is something the leaders of the negotiations in Paris should also bear in mind.

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