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The Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation: What next for a global architecture?

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The Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation: What next for a global architecture?

Bonn, 8 May 2014. The Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC) was endorsed in December 2011 by 3500 delegates as a reaffirmation of their will to accelerate progress in improving development cooperation outcomes. The accord was to usher in a new era of more inclusive cooperation, a broader agenda, more active participation by civil society and parliaments, recognising fragile states' priority needs and the role of the private sector, and stronger developing country leadership. Many observers had expressed scepticism about the outcome, expecting the GPEDC to continue with "business as usual". These voices gave way to optimism and higher expectations about future progress. The GPEDC was to adopt a lean (global light and country heavy) structure replacing the OECD Working Party on Aid Effectiveness.

The GPEDC: Balance Sheet

The High Level meeting hosted by Mexico in April 2014 attracted 1500 senior delegates who reviewed progress and took stock of lessons learned. This turnout was a positive sign reaffirming strong interest in cooperation issues. However, the speaker-packed sessions unfortunately left little room for interventions from the floor, losing valuable feedback, as many delegates indicated privately.

First, the wide ranging agenda undermined the focus on issues of urgency to developing countries, particularly "unfinished business" such as use of country systems, capacity development, aid fragmentation and untying, and mutual accountability. Domestic resource mobilisation and the role of the private sector role are important issues. They were championed mainly by the UK, but not deemed by many to be as urgent as those dealing with bottlenecks to progress in implementing earlier commitments. *The question here is not how important the issues are but whose ownership they reflect.* Better balance could have been struck in setting agenda priorities to avoid including issues on technical merit alone. Meanwhile, attention to South-South Cooperation and the role of middle income countries was welcomed.

Second, China and India were absent, undermining the GPEDC's inclusive partnership goal. Surprisingly, Brazil announced it had not endorsed Busan, contradicting its earlier declaration and causing confusion and disappointment. China apparently withdrew its delegation after failing to influence the drafting of the Communiqué' – a diplomatically worded document that did not add much in terms of concrete commitments or fresh vision.

Third, the monitoring survey found that progress has been made on some issues but further improvements are needed. One wonders whether the

unfinished business has become "unfinishable". The non-binding nature of the GPEDC and earlier accords endorsed by a "coalition of the willing" is a major challenge. The GPEDC needs to mobilise more incentives to fuel needed changes in policy and process.

Fourth, the voluntary commitments annexed to the Mexico Communiqué' cover a wide range of issues. Most welcome are commitments by Arab development agencies and philanthropic foundations, adding to GPEDC inclusiveness, country dialogues to strengthen local systems and improve civil society organisations' enabling environment; and initiatives to manage diversity and reduce fragmentation. However, most commitments repeat earlier promises and fall short of expectations in terms of robust joint actions.

Fifth, the UN has been debating development cooperation for decades. Its active participation as a member of the GPEDC, through its Development Cooperation Forum and the UN Development Group served to dispel notions of conflict with and non-legitimacy of the GPEDC. But more should be done to consolidate these links and increase their complementarity through *joint* work and greater coordination of efforts.

What next?

The Mexico meeting highlighted issues requiring urgent attention. First, the boycott by China and India has to be addressed. The OECD needs to *take a back seat* and offer these two countries and Brazil space as *key players* in setting agendas and a co-chairing role. This may require actions at the G20 heads of government level. The three countries need to act according to the edict of "common goals, shared principles and differential commitments" they insisted on inserting in the Busan Document.

Second, engaging more with the UN is urgent, with an eye on the post-2015 agenda to which the GPEDC must be seen as an active contributor.

Third, GPEDC structure should be revisited to fill the "missing middle" by creating a post akin to the Working Party co-chairs, to manage day-to-day issues and keep the agenda alive, with Joint Support Team assistance.

Fourth, the two-year term for co-chairs and steering committee members is too short to ensure continuity. Rotating three-year terms might work better.

Finally, progress to-date has to be accelerated if the GP is not to lose credibility, relevance and the benefits of years of investment in advocating effective development cooperation. Given its rich potential, I uphold my guarded optimism about GPEDC's future.