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Unrequited love: What is the legacy of the first *Global Partnership* summit?

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Unrequited love: What is the legacy of the first Global Partnership summit?

Bonn, Mexico City, 17 April 2014. It has finally taken place: the first high-level meeting of the *Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation* (GPEDC). The Mexican government has hosted the most important conference on development co-operation (DC) issues since the Busan meeting at the end of 2011. Opened by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and the Mexican president, the meeting was accorded a high-ranking significance.

Busan still symbolised the old effectiveness agenda of the traditional donors, which although capable of effecting tangible improvements in the quality of the DC had seen a loss of acceptance amongst the dynamic middle-income states with the approaches to south-south co-operation. Mexico was to be the start of a new era of equality between traditional and new donors and partner states with regard to development co-operation.

The Mexico meeting failed to fulfil these expectations, instead relativising the consensus reached in Busan. On the one hand, international NGOs and the private sector are co-operating even more intensively in the new partnership. However, ultimately the transformation of the old DC architecture has failed to be achieved – whether this will be possible in the coming years remains highly uncertain. China and India did not even attend, the Brazilian representative came to Mexico but made it more than clear that the process was merely being observed. This was joined by the fact that the claim of the Global Partnership to be a global partnership found little acceptance with the UN processes underway more or less at the same time – here the GPEDC is also referred to as the "Busan Partnership". As a consequence, the number of committed GPEDC allies remained relatively small.

To date, the three co-chairs – Indonesia, Nigeria and Great Britain – were the driving force, each of them providing ministers to prepare for the Mexico meeting. The attempt by Great Britain's DFID head Justine Greening to lead and mould the DC debates failed to win over all those present.

The reasons for the snubbing of the Mexico meeting by the three major donors of the south, China, India and Brazil, are the lack of legitimacy of the GPEDC and the limited personnel available for such discursive and yet typically unfruitful processes. Before the meeting took place there were already disputes regarding formulations in the final communiqué. Southern governments criticised the fact that the

independent nature of the south-south co-operation was not adequately expressed. Many continue to regard the GPEDC as a process dominated by the OECD-DAC, lacking the openness required for mutual learning processes.

South-south co-operation represented a central theme at the Mexico conference. All parties acknowledged the development of valid methods of accounting and the increasing of transparency as paramount tasks. Representatives of the low-income states insisted in turn that their interests and perspectives should also form the focal point of south-south co-operation. Amongst other issues, this referred to the operational nature of impact measurement of projects and programmes. The role of south-south co-operation in the realisation of the post-2015 agenda met with broad interest. It remained unclear as to which obligations the southern donors wish to enter into here.

The ongoing differences in perception regarding the subject of south-south co-operation were clearly evident. The establishment of an empirically-supported basis for this must firstly be undertaken by actors in the south in order for it to find acceptance there. With this goal a broad alliance of think tanks from emerging and developing states used the Mexico meeting to establish a new network aimed at achieving dialogue and the exchange of experiences with northern partners.

As far as the involvement of the three major donors from the south – China, India and Brazil – was concerned, the conference represented a clear setback. What are the consequences of this for the future of the GPEDC? Should the platform continue to strive for worldwide support or could an institutional realignment – such as towards the UN system – rectify the lack of legitimacy and acceptance of Busan? The second option is the better path to follow. With the establishment of new structures for the implementation of the post-2015 agenda GPEDC could reconstitute itself as an operational platform for international co-operation under the aegis of the new *High Level Political Forum* at the United Nations. This would complete the conclusive departure from the OECD-DAC structure and place political control in the hands of the UN. For many observers, this would come at the cost of less effective discussion processes. Nevertheless, there are practically no alternatives to such a process if the targeted partnership is to have the desired global character.