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In search of a narrative for Southern providers: the challenge of the emerging economies to the development cooperation agenda

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In Search of a Narrative for Southern Providers

The Challenge of the Emerging Economies to the Development Cooperation Agenda

Gerardo Bracho

Published in cooperation with:



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Abstract

The advent of the so-called Southern providers has profoundly disrupted the logic of the development cooperation agenda, based on a clear division between developed and developing, donor and recipient countries. During the post-war era, this agenda was informed by two paradigms: North-South (Truman's "point 4" in 1949) and South-South (Bandung in 1955). Neither, however, can make sense of this new third actor, the Southern provider: an emerging power that has become – or is on its way to becoming – an important donor of development assistance but which, at the same time, remains firmly rooted in the South, confronted with typical development challenges and retaining the right to receive official development assistance. Which countries should be included in this new constituency in the making? What codes and practices should they adopt? Most importantly, what (if any) responsibilities should they take on *vis-à-vis* other poorer Southern countries left behind by globalisation? And finally, where should these inquiries be legitimately settled and by whom?

Addressing these questions is crucial to incorporating the Southern providers constructively into the evolving aid architecture and the post-2015 development agenda. So far, there are no consensual answers but rather confusing and sometimes heated debates on these issues in multilateral fora, academia and cooperation agencies. Indeed, the battle to create a new narrative and a legitimate home for the Southern provider, which has gone on for more than a decade, has taken a bumpy road, both due to the mixed incentives that the different stakeholders face in this venture as well as the persistence of the North-South and South-South paradigms, which refuse to adapt to the times. The arrival of the Southern providers has brought more resources to the aid agenda and much needed intra-donor competition. But the lack of clear answers and agreements on their roles and responsibilities has also had adverse consequences. It has compromised the practices and narrative of the traditional donors at the expense of the neediest countries. It has also contributed to perpetuating a world divided into blocks, precisely when collective action is more necessary than ever. Mexico, as an actor that has both South and North affiliations, has had a mediating role in this agenda and should continue to do so.

This essay is intended to document some of the main episodes of the battle to generate a narrative for the Southern provider. It starts with a brief historical presentation of the North-South and South-South cooperation traditions. Next, the factors that destabilised this dual tradition and precipitated the current crisis are discussed – in particular, the role of the emerging Southern donor is examined. Then the slow and troubled gestation of a narrative that seeks to make sense of this new actor in the development cooperation agenda is described in more detail, as well as the efforts that have been made to give these actors an institutional home. Finally, reflections are offered on the negative impact of the stagnation of these processes on the emerging post-2015 development cooperation agenda and on the constructive role that Mexico has played (and in this author's opinion, should continue to play). The paper concludes by situating the challenge of the Southern providers in the larger context of an increasingly multipolar world.

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Contents

Abbreviations

1	Introduction	1
2	The making of the North-South cooperation tradition	3
3	The making of the South-South cooperation tradition	6
4	The dual North-South and South-South paradigm in motion	7
5	The new landscape of development cooperation	10
6	The Southern aid providers: A new “third actor” that challenges the North-South divide	12
7	The context and mixed incentives underpinning the battle for a new narrative for Southern cooperation providers	15
8	Episodes of the battle for a new narrative for Southern cooperation providers	17
8.1	Who are they?	17
8.2	How to define the development cooperation they provide?	18
8.3	Which responsibilities should they take on board?	21
8.4	Who should construct this narrative and in which fora?	24
8.4.1	The fora of the aid / development effectiveness agenda	25
8.4.2	The G-20 and the Heiligendamm experience	32
8.4.3	The Delhi process, the Core Group of Southern Partners and NEST	35
9	The development cooperation agenda in danger	38
10	The road to a good narrative for the Southern providers: The contribution of Mexico	42
11	Conclusion	44

Bibliography	47
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Boxes:

Box 1: On the historical roots of North-South responsibilities	2
Box 2: On burden-sharing and the development cooperation agenda	5
Box 3: The triumph and mainstreaming of Bandung	8
Box 4: The DAC list, the classification of developing countries and the concept of emerging donor	13
Box 5: On the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities	24

Abbreviations

AMEXCID	Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
CAITEC	Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation
CBDR	Common But Differentiated Responsibilities
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
DAG	Development Assistance Group
DCF	Development Cooperation Forum
DWG	Development Working Group
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council (UN)
GNI	Gross National Income
GPEDC	Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation
HLM	High Level Meeting
IDA	International Development Agency
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MOFCOM	Ministry of Commerce of the Government of the People's Republic of China
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NEST	Network of Southern Think Tanks
Non-DAC IWG	Informal Working Group of Non-DAC Providers of Development
NSC	North-South Cooperation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OEEC	Organisation for European Economic Cooperation
PBIG	Post Busan Interim Group
SEGIB	General Secretariat of the Ibero American Forum
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
TIKA	Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı / Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
US	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WP-EFF	Working Party on Aid Effectiveness and Donor Practices

1 Introduction

Development cooperation – understood as an industry or an agenda with two components, North-South and South-South – is going through a critical juncture.¹ Just a few years ago, both the North-South and the South-South cooperation traditions operated in a stable and consensual way on the basis of a number of organisations, codes of conduct, practices, policies and cooperation mechanisms, in short, of institutions (in the broadest sense of this term) that underpinned a quite stable system. The practices and narratives of these two traditions have of course evolved with the times. But despite the impact of deep geopolitical upheavals, including the end of the Cold War, these changes have been more of degree than of kind. Not anymore. What seems to be at stake today is the very core of the aid industry based on a dichotomous North-South division that no longer holds. As is the case with all complex historical phenomena, several factors helped to trigger the current crisis. But among them, one stands out: the emergence of China and other Southern powers as powerful *de facto* donors that challenge the coherence of an industry based on a clear division between donor and recipient countries, between North and South.

The essay starts with a brief historical presentation of the North-South and South-South cooperation traditions. It moves on to register the factors that destabilised this dual tradition and precipitated the current crisis, emphasising the role of a *sui generis* “third actor”: the emerging Southern donor. Further on, the slow and troubled gestation of a narrative that seeks to make sense of this new actor in the agenda on development cooperation is analysed in more detail. Then some of the efforts made to provide this actor with an institutional house are described. It ends with a reflection on the negative impact that the stagnation of this process generates on the post-2015 development cooperation agenda in the making, and on the role that, in this context, Mexico has played – and in this author’s opinion, should continue to play.

The general framework of the dual North-South and South-South paradigm

The development cooperation paradigm is based on a geo-economic typology of the world that distinguishes two types of countries: developed countries (North), with the *responsibility* to offer aid; and developing countries (South), with the *right* to receive it (Box 1). This typology is based on the premise that all countries seek development and that, eventually, Southern recipients will graduate and become donors, until all countries reach development and the aid industry withers away. At the same time, this typology suggests a number of questions: What is meant by “aid”? What divides the North from the South? How much aid should the North give to the South? How to split the aid burden between the countries of the North? What kind of aid should they give and under which rules? Answers to these and other questions began to take shape during the first decades of the post-war period, crystallising in a coherent paradigm of North-South cooperation, above all in two multilateral organisations: the World Bank, and especially so, the “club of donors” of the Western North, the Development Assistance Committee of the

1 For a good and sober overall survey of the challenges faced today by the development cooperation agenda, see Ashoff and Klingebiel (2014). For another survey, with a more optimistic view of where the aid industry is heading, see Kharas and Rogerson (2012). For insightful parallel treatments of both the North-South and South-South traditions along the lines presented in this paper, see Carey and Li (2014) and Besharati (2013a). For an insider’s perspective of the diplomatic endeavours to bring these two traditions together within the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, see Atwood (2012).

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD/DAC).² At around the same time, and under the same North-South divide logic, another body of ideas began to take shape – especially so in bodies of the United Nations (UN) – on the concomitant issue of cooperation between Southern nations, based not on a rights / responsibilities framework but on a contrasting one of “free will and solidarity”. Though, since then, this dual North-South / South-South paradigm has been adapting to the times; until recently, the core narrative has remained essentially the same. Yet, as argued in this paper, this core narrative is now being questioned.

Box 1: On the historical roots of North-South responsibilities

The idea of stronger nations having responsibilities towards weaker ones has a long history. In the Western tradition, the Spanish conquest of the Americas was justified as a mission to bring Civilization and Christianity to barbaric Indians. But the immediate ideological forerunner of the modern aid industry takes us to the First World War settlement and the League of Nations, where such an idea was codified with a new, fresh meaning (Mazower, 2009). At the League, the universal right to self-determination, championed by both President Woodrow Wilson and Vladimir Lenin, was temporarily denied to those nations that were deemed not ready to take care of their own affairs – which, at the time, included almost all non-European coloured nations (Macmillan, 2003). This vision allowed for a reconstruction of colonialism as a regime in which the metropolis had the responsibility to assist colonies in moving towards the self-determination that they were entitled to, in principle. The mandate system – by which the League entrusted colonial powers to take responsibility for colonial territories left orphaned, as their previous masters (Germany, Japan) had been defeated in war – was constructed on this logic. This neo-colonial narrative was taken over by some quarters into the early post-war era; thus, for example, the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC – the forerunner of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD) divided its members between those having responsibility for overseas territories (the colonial powers) and those without them (Schreurs, 1997). At the same time, and increasingly so, it was challenged by nationalist critics who put the League’s argument on its head and portrayed colonialism as an outright denial rather than a route towards self-determination; independence was a precondition to development and should not wait (Manela, 2007). As the Third World movement, which received a boost in Bandung in 1955, gathered strength, and the UN contingent of underdeveloped countries grew in pace with de-colonisation, the League’s neo-colonialist narrative lost force and legitimacy. If the League of Nations had sided with a new, enlightened colonialism (though colonialism all the same), its heir, the United Nations, became a driving force for de-colonisation (Mazower, 2012). But the issue of the responsibilities remained; though it was now reformulated as a collective responsibility of the rich nations of the North to help the poor ones of the South reach development. Having said this, such responsibility was simply assumed and became gradually embedded in the post-war political discourse (starting in the UN), though it was never formally codified. This was understandable, since such an attempt at codification would have led to a draining debate on the grounds for such responsibility (colonial exploitation – which left the United States and other developed countries out – moral stance, etc.), opening the danger of legal action to make it stick. As described later in the paper, these are indeed relevant issues in the post-2015 discussions over the common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) concept (see Box 4).

2 These are two different and quite complementary institutions: whereas the Bank channels resources (financial but also technical assistance) to developing countries, the DAC serves as a platform for norm-creation and donor coordination.

2 The making of the North-South cooperation tradition³

In January 1949, President Harry Truman launched the first American comprehensive development cooperation programme, the well-known “point 4” of his inaugural speech, which has come down in history as the founding act of the modern development aid industry (Truman, 1949; McGuire, 1952).⁴ A decade later, under the assumption that the Western emerging donors of the time (especially Germany) were not providing enough development aid, the United States, under the leadership of Undersecretary of State Douglass Dillon, proposed the creation of a so-called Development Assistance Group (DAG) as a tool to scale-up, coordinate and especially deal “more fairly” with the burden of aid among the Western powers. The main objectives were to promote development in Western terms and beat Moscow in the competing geopolitical race to prevail in the embryonic Third World – at a reasonable cost to US taxpayers and in a fair way for US companies.⁵ Although the burden-sharing agenda encountered resistance from other Western donors, it embedded itself in the genetics of the DAC and unleashed a process that eventually generated answers to several of the questions raised above. It thus helped to shape the North-South aid paradigm that is still very much with us today.

Firstly, to share the burden and better coordinate among members, the DAG had to come up with a clear concept of development aid. By the end of the 1950s, the terms “aid” and “contributions for development” – which included such disparate flows as direct and indirect private investment, exports credits and war reparations – were used indiscriminately. It was true that these financial flows contributed to the development of poor countries in some way or another. At the same time, they could hardly be rigorously bundled together under the concept of aid.⁶ A sound and consensual definition was needed. The problem was that each DAG member had an incentive to promote a definition

3 This section is based on a paper about the origins of the DAC based on primary sources and presented by the author in a special session held to celebrate the DAC’s 50th birthday at the OECD headquarters in December 2011 (Bracho, 2011). It should be noted that the DAC was originally named the Development Assistance Group, which transformed itself into the DAC when the OECD was founded in 1961.

4 The US Marshall Plan for Europe came a bit earlier and remains the most generous and one of the most successful aid programmes in history. But it was a plan for reconstruction rather than development – an altogether different and more complex objective. Nonetheless, due to its scope and impact, it became both a driver and a source of inspiration for the developmental aid industry. Since then, there have been many calls for developmental “Marshall Plans” that have never come to fruition (Grandin, 2013; Schreurs, 1997).

5 From its inception, the development aid industry was driven by a mix of motives, among which security played a crucial role. Speaking to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (10 April 1950), Secretary of State Dean Acheson presented the Act for International Development to implement “point 4” as: *“in a very real sense [...] a security measure. And as a security measure, it is an essential arm of our foreign policy. For our military and economic security is vitally dependent on the economic security of other peoples”* (McGuire, 1952, p. 343).

6 While constructing its first-ever table on aid statistics, the DAG used the terms “aid”, “contributions” and “help” interchangeably (Bracho, 2011). The first draft came out under the heading of “aid”. Yet, after some initial discussions, it became obvious that the use of the word “aid” in this context could not be too far away from its common meaning: that is, some sort of altruistic action that implied a burden on the entity that provides it. To be on the safe side, the DAG preferred to publish such a statistical exercise under the heading “The Flow of Financial Resources to Countries in Course of Economic Development 1956-1959” (Organisation for European Economic Co-operation [OEEC], 1961). This first statistical exercise came under the authorship of the OEEC, but it was actually discussed in, and cleared by, the DAG. The DAC came back wholeheartedly to the concept of aid when it defined ODA in 1969.

of aid that included the financial flows it supplied most.⁷ The battle to define “aid” began from the very inception of the DAG/DAC, and it was the Secretariat’s job – mediating between the political interests of member countries – to hammer out a consensus. Nearly a decade later, in 1969, the DAC adopted a coherent and consensual definition based on the original American vision: a flow of public resources with the express purpose of promoting development in poor countries, awarded on concessional terms and representing thus a burden, or real effort, to the country that generates it; on top, aid so defined was expected not to distort markets and to produce a starker developmental impact than other flows. Thus, the concept of “official development assistance”, or ODA – the pillar of the North-South paradigm, which, as explained later, is now being questioned – came into being.

Secondly, the burden-sharing agenda required clearly identifying the developing countries eligible for ODA. At first, the DAG generated an *ad hoc* list of recipient countries contaminated by politics, with no objective criteria.⁸ Later, with the Cold War over, the DAC adopted the World Bank’s criteria of gross national income (GNI) per capita, with a threshold that divided developed from developing countries, North from South. Today, the composition of the DAC list, and even the robustness of the GNI per capita indicator, are also being questioned.⁹

Thirdly, clear criteria were needed on how to share the aid burden among donor countries. Obviously, the United States should provide more than, for example, the Netherlands. But how much more? There was no response. In 1958 the World Council of Churches called on developed countries to give 1 per cent of their GNI as aid towards development (Führer, 1996). This casual demand had the merit of proposing a methodology – taken on board in subsequent proposals by the United States at the dawn of the DAG, the UN Conference on Trade and Development, the Assembly of the United Nations and the G-77 – requiring a precise percentage of the GNI of donor countries. Once adopted, the ODA concept served as a benchmark to express the burden-sharing commitment, which today has become a mantra of the development cooperation agenda: developed countries commit themselves to hand out 0.7 per cent of their GNI in ODA to developing countries appearing in the DAC list. This – another key pillar of the North-South paradigm – is also now being questioned (Box 2).

7 Thus Japan wanted to include war reparations (portraying punishment as virtue) and Germany wanted to include export credits in the aid concept (Bracho, 2011). No consensus was reached until the ODA concept was agreed.

8 See further details of these discussions in Box 3.

9 There is an ongoing discussion in the DAC about the need to best focus ODA in the countries that most need it; that is, least-developed countries and other low-income countries with special needs and/or challenges. There are also DAC members who argue that since most high-middle-income countries have access to other sources of finance, they should not be eligible to receive ODA anymore. As matters stand, DAC members will probably not arrive at a consensus on changing the structure of the DAC list in the short run; though they might well take a collective decision to focus more of their ODA on certain categories of low-income countries.

Box 2: On burden-sharing and the development cooperation agenda

The US initiative to create the DAG devised by Dillon had two components (Bracho, 2011). The first and foremost was to boost Western development aid and to better share its burden among allied countries. A second was to coordinate the Western effort to best achieve developmental, and especially political, results. These objectives were interconnected. Ideally, as *primus inter pares*, the United States would be in a position to mastermind the whole Western development aid effort, its volumes, relative shares and outlets; just as it was assumed that Moscow controlled the development aid flowing from the Sino-Soviet bloc (Rubin, 1965, p. 85). But if this ideal vision was exaggerated, even for communist aid, it was not going to materialise easily within a Western community that was integrated by much more robust sovereign nations. Germany resented an initiative that pushed it to the fore, and unjustly so, as Germany claimed to be supplying already much more aid than it was credited for – though, as explained, everything depended on what was counted as aid (Schmidt, 2003). Whereas France, now led by the assertive Charles de Gaulle, was all for coordination, but rather to keep the United States (and other possible competitors) out of – rather than in – the Francophone space (Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 1995, pp. 292-293, 768-769; De Gaulle, 1970). French and German scepticism, together with criticisms stemming from developing countries suspicious of a “donor club initiative” that was meant to bypass the UN, brought Dillon to water down his burden-sharing proposal at the meeting in which the DAG was created in 1960 (Bracho, 2011).

But this amounted to a tactical retreat. A year later, the new Kennedy administration (in which Dillon stayed on, exceptionally so, as Secretary of the Treasury), wholly committed to development, revived the burden-sharing agenda with force. At the fourth DAG meeting in March 1961, the United States pushed the adoption of one of the DAG’s earliest and more important documents to this day: the “Resolution on the Common Aid Effort”, which states the need for more and better aid. Then, at the fifth and last DAG meeting a few months later, it presented a memorandum outlining a formula by which each DAG member would contribute with a certain level of aid in order to arrive at a collective level of 1 per cent of GNI for all of them together (Bracho, 2011). This formula was meant to capture a number of variables, including GNI per capita and level of reserves, so that each member of the DAG would contribute to the aid effort with a fair share according to its means and conditions. The proposal did not and could not be implemented at the time: there was no agreement of what should be counted as aid and, in addition, the United States made the blunder of including military aid in the equation – a proposal, not surprisingly, rejected by most DAG members. Nonetheless, the DAC took over the burden-sharing agenda and created a specific subsidiary body to deal with it. Later on, the discussion on this agenda within the DAC died out, as it moved to UN bodies, where the developing countries were now strongly pushing donors to assume clear aid commitments. An agenda that was at first seriously considered as an inter-donor issue had transformed itself by the mid-1960s into a major ingredient of North-South conflicting relations. The irony is that the United States – its original driver within an inter-donor setting – became its main critic in a UN North-South divide context. Up to this day, the United States is one of the few DAC members that has not publicly assumed (or rather ratified) the 0.7 per cent commitment – a commitment which, in today’s fluid context, is coming under heavy criticism in many donor capitals (Ashoff & Klingebiel, 2014). In sum, though the burden-sharing question was never pursued to its logical conclusions within the DAC, it played a crucial role in shaping its overall agenda: from the need for a definition of “aid”, to the impact and effectiveness of aid and the responsibilities and accountability of donors. Today, as argued in this paper, the always politically charged burden-sharing agenda – driven by the impact of the new Southern cooperation providers in the aid architecture – is back with a vengeance and at the centre of the debates on a post-2015 development cooperation framework.

The creation of the DAG triggered the need to define aid and to determine how much should be given and to which countries. It also fed the agenda on the impact and effectiveness of aid. The more effective it was, the better that ODA could meet its strategic (take advantage in the Cold War) and moral (development) objectives, and the better it could be justified to taxpayers. Early on, the DAG/DAC began to extract best practices among its members and to generate recommendations that, though not legally binding, were subject to peer pressure on issues as diverse as aid evaluation, coordination

between donors, the role of technical cooperation, the impact of different types of aid and others. Much of this conceptual body came to be embodied in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005). As explained below, important pieces of this narrative and its relevance to the tradition of South-South cooperation are now being questioned. It is on this other tradition of cooperation that we now focus our attention.

3 The making of the South-South cooperation tradition

The South-South cooperation tradition is rooted on the same developed / developing countries' dichotomy and covers another aspect of it – namely, the relations between developing countries of the South (Chaturvedi, 2012). Consistent with this divide, it pictures cooperation between South entities as voluntary and based on solidarity, and thus not subject to the rights / responsibilities framework of North-South cooperation. Without the accountability drive that stems from commitments or responsibilities, and with quite modest volumes to speak off, the South-South cooperation tradition advanced little in rationalising its narrative, that is, in generating precise definitions and distilling best practices and rules. Thus, in contrast to the North-South narrative, it developed an overall political discourse with limited technical content (Ocampo & Gómez Arteaga, 2014).

The South-South tradition was launched at the first Afro-Asian summit in Bandung, Indonesia, in April 1955 (Prashad, 2007; Tan & Acharya, 2008). The summit in Bandung is considered the cradle of the Third World movement – the moment when the peoples of Asia and Africa appeared on the world stage as a new, independent force to be reckoned with (Westad, 2013; Lee, 2010). The summit's agenda comprised: a condemnation of colonialism, neo-colonialism and racism; and on the constructive side, a call for world peace and the end of Cold War bipolarity; for wide-range cooperation among Southern countries and an incipient call for a fairer world economic order (Conte, 1965). All participants, even those set at the right of the political spectrum, basically agreed on all these points. Beyond the moderate wording of its outcome document, the summit in Bandung generated an enduring spirit that would animate the Third World collective projects with more concrete agendas that came later: the Non-Aligned Movement (Lawrence, 2013), the struggle for a “new international economic order” (Bettati, 1983), and, of course, the South-South cooperation agenda, among others. This spirit embodies a critical narrative of oppressive North-South relations, in which the North is identified above all with the West (Ziegler, 2008)¹⁰ – a narrative that amounts to a call to start

10 Twenty-nine countries were represented in Bandung, though only three were from sub-Saharan Africa, where decolonisation had barely started. Stark differences in their international political alignments divided them: there was a pro American / Western block (Japan, Turkey, Philippines, Siam, Pakistan and Ceylon among them), a neutralist one (India, Egypt, Indonesia) and a communist one with China and North Vietnam. The political differences of the Cold War divide came out strongly in the discussions, and neither side was spared from criticism (Conte, 1965; Guitard, 1965). To keep everyone happy, the final communiqué coupled with its 10 principles was in the end relatively soft. It avoided to shame any power by name (most notably so, France, by then still hanging on to its Empire) and directed explicit criticisms only to minor players: the Netherlands (on Indonesia), Israel (on Palestine) and South Africa (on its racist regime). Nonetheless, though the outcome document was not the anti-Western tirade that many feared – not least the US State Department – the Bandung summit embodied a powerful criticism of the West. Besides being a boost for India's non-alignment policies and for communist China's stand

deconstructing a world built (in economic, cultural and political terms) by the North, though, in a complex and conflicting manner, implicating the North itself as an ally in the task. Indeed, while denouncing North-South oppression, Bandung recognised the need of Northern resources and technology, that is, the aid of the North. The Bandung spirit is one of demand in the both senses of the word: as a complaint and as a claim. Both are linked: the oppression is denounced and the compensation claimed (aid) is supported.

In contrast, to these complex relations of dependency and oppression between North and South, which were ultimately reprehensible, Bandung proposed new, simple, exemplary relations between the countries of the South. These relations would later underpin the principles of concessionary South-South cooperation flows as they are known today: horizontality among equals (in contrast to the North-South vertical relationships between unequal partners); sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs (as opposed to their violation by colonial or neo-colonial powers); non-conditionality (as opposed to the conditions imposed by the North); mutual advantage (in contrast with the paternalism of the North); and voluntary cooperation (as opposed to the responsibilities of the North). Instilling its spirit in a world built on a centre / periphery logic, in which ties between the South were conspicuous due to their absence, Bandung promoted all kinds of relations between countries of the South: political, economic, cultural. Regardless of their substance, character, motivation or their eventual concessional character (or absence thereof), these links were conceptualised as cooperation that helped to strengthen a collective and fraternizing South against the North. In this spirit, and sponsored by UN bodies, in which developing countries had gathered a large majority, the agendas of technical (Buenos Aires Action Plan 1978) and economic cooperation (Caracas Action Plan 1981) between countries of the South took shape. In 1974, a special autonomous unit to promote technical cooperation among developing countries was created within the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). From 1991 onwards, this unit acquired the mandate to take a broader perspective and include not only the agenda on technical cooperation but that of other types of links between the South as well. This unit was upgraded to the UN office for South-South Cooperation in 2012 (Weinlich, 2014). Today, this unit remains the main UN body specialised in this topic. As explained later, the tradition of South-South cooperation also faces the enormous challenge of adapting its narrative to today's world.

4 The dual North-South and South-South paradigm in motion

The development cooperation traditions forged during the first decades of the post-war period managed to survive and adapt to the vast political upheavals that took place in the following decades. Thus, in the early 1980s, the onslaught of the Washington Consensus market paradigm precipitated the collapse of the statist's Third World project (Westad, 2013). Though if some of its agendas – such as the new international economic order – vanished outright, the South-South cooperation agenda would languish. The end of the Cold War produced drastic changes at all levels. But the North-South paradigm not only adapted, it acquired a new impetus. The end of communism led to the reallocation of old and new countries in the donor-recipient categories, but the North-South logic was not

in the world, Bandung generated a spirit with a North-South conflicting divide at its heart that very much influences international politics to this day.

questioned (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/Development Assistance Committee [OECD/DAC], 1993).¹¹

On the other hand, the end of the Cold War opened the door to a less grossly politicized and a more rational and generous development cooperation agenda that crystallised in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). With the MDGs, for the first time, the whole international community engaged in a common project to support development. A few years later, the Monterrey Consensus (2002), which focussed on the financial resources needed to achieve the MDGs (including ODA and its 0.7 per cent commitment), and the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) would serve to complement the MDG agenda. The Paris Declaration, in particular, synthesises many years of reflection within the donor community on how and under which principles development cooperation should be supplied. Though not questioning the North-South dichotomy, the Paris Declaration implies a sea change about the kinds of relationships that should prevail between the North and the South. Indeed, though it is not acknowledged often in the literature, the North-South paradigm ended up assuming and/or adapting some of the principles and the narrative of the South-South tradition. Indeed, the North could not evolve towards applying the key principles of Paris, such as ownership and alignment (in good measure equivalent, but not identical, to the principles of sovereignty, non-interference and no conditionality of the South) because, as rightly denounced at the time of the Bandung summit, it continued to openly question – through racist and/or paternalistic views – the capacity of the South to govern itself. Indeed, at the level of principles and political narrative, Paris sealed the historic triumph of Bandung in the development cooperation agenda; though today, as described below, the Bandung spirit that underpins the programmatic narrative on South-South cooperation also needs to adapt to the times (Box 3).

Box 3: The triumph and mainstreaming of Bandung

Almost 65 years later, one might argue that the summit at Bandung has left a mixed legacy. On the one hand, as argued later in the paper, there is little doubt that its programme of South-South solidarity and cohesiveness proved to be too idealistic. Even at the height of the Third World movement, the South failed to show strong political cohesiveness. Later, globalisation pulled Southern countries apart, eroding further their sense of shared common destiny and interests in empathy with the Bandung spirit. On top, the failure of many newly independent developing countries to create viable and sustainable states has also been seen by many as contradicting such a spirit (Lee, 2010; Westad, 2013). On the other hand, however, the denunciation of North-South hierarchical and paternalistic relations at Bandung has been incorporated into the mainstream discourse of international relations – though not enough in its practices. In this important sense, the Bandung spirit has triumphed, and the narrative of North-South cooperation has moved towards the more inclusive discourse of the South.

The Bandung summit was about very real Northern grievances at the time. Colonialism was still widespread, mainly in Africa (Droz, 2006); and those that had left it behind (the majority of the countries represented in the conference) could not take their hard-won sovereignty for granted – and rightly so, since neo-colonialism was a reality for some and loomed on the horizon for others.¹² Racism was still a

11 After spending a few years in the conceptual limbo of “transition countries”, the Czech Republic, Poland and other East European countries reappeared as donors and later joined the DAC, whereas countries such as Kyrgyzstan and Georgia were rapidly integrated into the list of DAC countries with the right to ODA.

12 Take as an example the following interchange between Charles de Gaulle and Dwight Eisenhower in Paris on 4 September 1959. De Gaulle assures Eisenhower that France will indeed join the International Development Agency (IDA), an American initiative to create a concessional window at the World Bank. But he is worried that this new multilateral organisation will encroach into Francophone (independent) territory without explicit French blessing. Eisenhower not only understands but shares de Gaulle’s

part of the mindset of the Northern elites and even instilled in the political and institutional fabric of none other than the United States. Even the call for creating all types of links within the South portrayed the North as the presumed culprit of severing those ancient cultural relations through colonialism. The North was the West, and in spite of US allies' efforts, the Bandung summit basically spared the Soviet Union. Indeed, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), though offended at not being invited to the conference in spite of being a Euro-Asian power, welcomed the anti-imperialist narrative and the politics that stemmed from Bandung. Stalin and his bipolar, dogmatic view of the world as being divided between communism and capitalism, friends and foes, were gone by then. A new foreign policy that reflected a willingness to cooperate with and support non-communist progressive and nationalist movements was in the making, and the Bandung summit fit in perfectly (Ulam, 1968).¹³

In contrast, though relieved that it had not gone to extremes, most Western voices were uneasy about Bandung. They resented the unevenness in relation to the USSR and its pro-neutralist stand that played, in their view, into Soviets hands (Aron, 1990; Conte, 1965). But a minority of Western voices, capable of looking beyond the Cold War prism that obsessed them at the time, were more receptive to the deeper message of the summit. Thus, Paul Henri Spaak, the Belgian foreign minister who was to play a leading role in European reconstruction and who would become Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), recognised that Bandung *"was full of messages and lessons that we (Europeans) should do well to ponder"*. He went on, suggesting that in the aftermath, the West should take the opportunity to reconstruct its relations with Africa and Asia, but he warned that to do so *"we should abandon once and for all, all sentiment of racial superiority and all will of unjust domination"* (Conte, 1965, pp. 284-285). In truth, the West took time to fully take these messages on board. The North-South aid paradigm took off with Northern donors operating in the framework that Spaak deplored; whereas the Civil Rights movement in the United States did not bear major fruit until a decade after the Bandung summit, which is now widely recognised, with anti-colonialism more broadly, as one of its sources of inspiration (Anderson, 2013). Indeed, it would not be until the end of the Cold War that the North-South aid paradigm really bought into the partnership business model, in which all stakeholders of the aid industry – starting with the recipient countries – sit, discuss and negotiate at the same table as equals. It was not until then that Northern donors fully incorporated concepts such as ownership and alignment to better guide their supply of effective aid. These principles are largely equivalent – though not identical – to the principles of sovereignty, non-interference and non-conditionality enshrined in the Bandung spirit from the very inception of the South-South tradition.¹⁴ In the same vein, though more recently so, Northern donors seem nowadays to be taking over much of the narrative of the South. They do not want

perspective and adds: *"it would not be conceivable that [...] IDA would directly supply aid to Puerto Rico without passing through the mediation of Washington"* (Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 1995, p. 284). This interchange speaks volumes on both leaders' conceptions of sovereignty at the time.

13 The conference's anti-colonial agenda already had *in nuce* such an outcome. As Nehru insisted, the USSR could not fit easily into the same colonial bag. Russia had not had an overseas empire, whereas the Bolshevik revolution pictured itself as having liberated the Fatherland from Imperialism and creating in its stead a multinational state with equal rights for its federal republics and peoples – including the Asian ones (Ulam, 1968). In any case, as Nehru argued against those who wanted a more clear reference to red imperialism, the "Soviet empire" was a European affaire and Bandung was about Africa and Asia. In any case, UN members could not be considered colonies (Conte, 1965; Guitard, 1965). In the end, as Western uneasiness proves, the compromising sentence that made its way into the communiqué, – *"a rejection of colonialism in all its forms"* – did not really do the trick

14 The concepts of partnerships and ownership were introduced earlier in the development cooperation field. Indeed, one of the first grand reports on development cooperation – the Pearson report of 1969 – was labelled "Partners in Development" – though it was more about presenting development as a joint venture of poor and rich countries rather than about a complex, inclusive business model (Herman, 2013; Pearson, 1969). Indeed, the DAC introduced the partnership business model into its own working methods until it launched the aid effectiveness agenda in the early 2000s. It should also be noticed that the road towards a more inclusive North-South development cooperation paradigm has not been linear. It is safe to say that developing countries had more ownership on their own routes towards development during the 1960s and 1970s than during the 1980s, which was the high time of the Washington Consensus era of heavily conditioned loans attached to the implementation of "structural adjustment programs" with quite questionable results (Glennie, 2008).

to be called “donors” anymore, but “cooperation providers”. They want to eliminate the concepts of “aid” and “assistance” and use “development cooperation”. They even want to take on board the mutual benefit motive, typical of the South.

It is true that the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness is a programmatic document largely negotiated by Northern donors. But this has been taken too hastily as proof that it is entirely alien to the South-South tradition. True, parties to this tradition should not be uncritical in taking an agenda from a different paradigm on board. But they should not overlook the fact that key concepts of such an agenda are indeed rephrasing old Southern principles and demands. There is perhaps no better token of the historical triumph of Bandung than finding some of its main ideas incorporated into a Northern document such as the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

One would say that at the beginning of the 21st century, with the MDGs, the Monterrey Consensus and the Paris Declaration, the North-South cooperation paradigm achieved its peak, providing direct answers to the most relevant questions – Who to whom? How much? How should ODA be provided? – and framing all of them in the framework of the North-South division. However, a closer look would reveal a number of events and processes that were already brewing in the development architecture and agenda of today and that challenge the very foundation of the dual North-South / South-South paradigm of international cooperation for development as it has worked for decades.

5 The new landscape of development cooperation

It goes without saying that the world today is substantially different than it was during the early post-war period, when the North-South and South-South development cooperation traditions were created. Changes have been incubating for a long time. But in recent decades, they have yielded a qualitatively new landscape that demands new ideas and political agreements in the context of a new post-2015 development agenda. The commonly listed building blocks of this new landscape are:

- *A very different profile of the financial resources available to developing countries.* In the first statistical table produced by the DAC in 1961, the financial flows, which would count as ODA today, represented about 60 per cent of the total. But ODA now accounts for a small fraction of a portfolio dominated by private resources: direct and indirect investment and remittances. This new profile raises questions on the role ODA should play, the relationship it has with other flows (catalyst?) and where it should be focussed. Some even question its relevance and *raison d'être*. On the other hand, the definition of ODA has changed little since its inception and is now grossly outdated and needs to be modernised.¹⁵ What role must ODA play in the context of these other flows? How

¹⁵ After serving well for decades, the ODA concept is now outdated (Vanheukelom, Migliorisi, Herrero Cangas, Keijzer, & Spierings, 2012; Klingebiel, 2014; OECD/DAC, 2012; Hynes & Scott, 2013). Recognising this, and as part of its ongoing efforts to adapt to the times, the DAC agreed to revisit the whole issue of development finance during its 2012 High Level meeting (HLM), and in this context reform the ODA concept. On the one hand, a new, clear updated definition of concessionality was needed. The old one, established at a time of much higher real interest rates, was of no use anymore. Indeed, during the last years, some donors were obtaining profits with ODA operations without bending the numerical rules. Although by doing this, they were going against the essence of a definition that considers ODA as a flow that should be development-oriented and represent a budgetary burden. In addition, the practice of counting as ODA the entire amount of the loan (and not only its concessional part) when disbursed, and then subtracting that same amount when paid back creates a number of problems – not least, that it tends to

should the ODA definition be updated? These are lingering questions in today's agenda (OECD/DAC, 2014; Greenhill, Prizzon, & Rogerson, 2013).

- *A different view of development and the role of development cooperation.* Initially, development was identified with industrialisation fostered by the state, and ODA was largely channelled to major infrastructure projects. From the 1990s, and as a corollary of the “return to the market” fostered by the Washington Consensus, development was mostly identified with overcoming poverty, and ODA was accordingly directed to social sectors, such as health and education. In both cases, ODA was meant to combat identifiable national or regional gaps that impeded the development of countries. Now, and increasingly so in the foreseeable future, the development of all nations is being jeopardized by global “bads”, such as international terrorism and especially climate change (Dervis & Puritz Milsom, 2011; Sachs, 2008; Collier, 2010). Thus, today, in many cases, the aid recipient is not the only or the main beneficiary of ODA, because it benefits from aid supplied to other countries (Kaul, 2000). The current cooperation paradigm is not well-suited to generate the global public goods needed. Today, it is not only the way in which ODA is distributed that is being questioned (productive sectors are back in vogue), but its own definition needs to take on board this new agenda of growing importance. How to combine the agenda on global goods with development cooperation (the subject of the Sustainable Development Goals launched in Rio+20)? Who must generate those global goods? These are challenging and open questions (Kharas & Rogerson, 2012).
- *A very different portfolio of development cooperation providers.* At the dawn of the aid industry there was a limited universe of cooperation suppliers. There were relatively small and closed groups of official Western and communist donors, while concessional South-South cooperation added little. Development cooperation from private sources or from non-executive levels of government was virtually non-existent. In this regard the current landscape is again very different. Starting with this last factor, today there are a large number of non-state actors and non-executive state actors that provide increasing amounts of developmental aid: from civil society organisations (CSOs), to foundations, private companies (with goals other than the profit motive in view), trade unions, as well as local and regional governments and parliaments (Worthington & Pipa, 2011). New multilateral windows have also proliferated – from funds to deal with specific issues (e.g. GAVI) up to new development banks, such as the one just created by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) (Carey & Li, 2014). A very important set of new actors must be added to these: the new emerging powers of the South that have qualitatively increased and diversified the concessional South-South cooperation they offer (Mawdsley, 2012; Brautigam, 2009; Walz & Ramachandran, 2011; Ayllón Pino, 2012; Chaturvedi, Fues, & Sidiropoulos, 2012). What kind of cooperation does each of these new actors offer? To whom? How much? And how should they channel it? How to match / coordinate their practices so that they do not interfere with each other, but achieve instead greater collective impact? This is in addition to other open questions with no obvious answers.

distort the picture of a donor's efforts in any given year via its lending policies of the past. On the other hand, there were growing doubts about the legitimacy of including and excluding certain official flows from the realm of ODA. The DAC HLM, held in December 2014, arrived at some important agreements on the issue of concessionality, advancing thus the wider reform agenda of the ODA concept.

It can be argued that the North-South post-war paradigm could accommodate all these new elements and questions, except one: the exceptional growth of the Southern providers, or so-called emerging donors. They are, firstly, the BRICS, which have growing economic and political power and, in different ways, destabilise all international agendas today, including development cooperation.¹⁶ But other high-middle-income countries, such as Venezuela, Turkey, Thailand, Chile, Indonesia and Mexico, could also be included – though, as explained below, establishing the frontiers of this group is a contentious issue.¹⁷ The point is that the North-South post-war paradigm simply cannot make sense of them. But it is not clear what, if anything, will take its place, and when.

6 The Southern aid providers: A new “third actor” that challenges the North-South divide

Neither of the two traditions of development cooperation that took shape in the post-war era adequately capture the phenomenon of the emerging donors of the South. As mentioned above, the North-South paradigm rests on the logic by which recipient countries eventually graduate, achieve development and join the donor community. Thus, a country could be a member of the DAC with the responsibility of providing ODA, or it could belong to the DAC list of recipient countries with the right to ODA. It could not be in both positions at the same time. At various times, Spain, Greece, Portugal and Korea were considered developing countries eligible for ODA. Today, they are members of the DAC that have assumed all their responsibilities as donors (Bracho & García-López, 2009).

However, large Southern donors do not fit this logic: they have become (or are on track to becoming) important donors in practice: without having graduated, without losing their right to ODA, without leaving the South behind. Their growing economic power, which translates into political influence, has brought them closer to the North while distancing them from weaker and poorer Southern countries, often their geographical and/or cultural neighbours, which lag far behind. At the same time, with a gross domestic product per capita that is still relatively modest and conceals greater backwardness due to high levels of inequality, these cooperation providers still face the typical problems of the South. They have thus become – or are on route to become – a kind of third actor: they have the resources and ability to cooperate with the North but they face the development challenges of the South (Box 4).

16 China certainly plays a very special role in this agenda. To a certain extent, it can be argued that: China is, in fact, the only real emerging donor; the rest free-ride on China's actions; and without China we would not have this agenda at all. Accepting that China is indeed very special, we would still argue for the validity of the emerging donor agenda and for grouping China in the global South. Both China's power and wealth but also its poverty are very much based on its dense demography, whereby a huge gross national income (GNI) is accompanied by a still modest GNI per capita. One must also consider the existence of major differences among Northern players, between, say, the United States at one extreme and Luxemburg at the other. The point here is not that the North / South paradigm has become completely irrelevant, but that it is by no means enough to make sense of our complex world, even in the realm of the development cooperation agenda.

17 For convenience, I use here and throughout the paper the BRICS acronym. In fact, however, Russia does not fall into the category of a Southern provider. It has historically not been part of the South, but until the end of the USSR, it was considered part of the North. It is not, and has never been, in the DAC list of recipient countries, and it faces different, specific challenges, due to both a flawed economic model under socialism and a catastrophic transition to capitalism (Bracho & López, 2005).

Box 4: The DAC list, the classification of developing countries and the concept of emerging donor

The North-South divide has been with us since the early post-war years. Up to this day, it plays a role in a number of international agendas, including trade, climate change and other environmental issues, and, of course, development cooperation (Pauw, Bauer, Richerzhagen, Brandi, & Schmöle, 2014). It is also instrumental in many multilateral organisations: either in the ways in which they assign their membership fees and/or in defining the services they provide. The role of the North-South divide in each of these agendas and organisations is basically the same: to offer developing countries certain privileges to compensate for their starting-point disadvantages, and thus contribute to a level international playing field. Of course, throughout all these years and up to this day, the effectiveness, sincerity, soundness and scope of these Northern efforts have been challenged with a variety of more or less solid arguments.

The North-South divide implies the existence of a frontier between these two groups of countries. But how to identify the border between North and South? Between developed and developing countries? There is no universal definition of what constitutes a developing country (Tezanos Vázquez & Sumner, 2013). Each of the mentioned agendas and multilateral organisations have their own definition, though there is much borrowing and overlapping between them. In the early post-war era, no objective criteria were used in the aid realm: developing countries entitled to aid were identified by rule of thumb, using common sense with regards to which countries were classified poor or non-industrialised (practically synonyms at the time), with a bit of politics added. When in 1956/1957 the UN constructed its first-ever statistical table of volumes of “international economic aid to underdeveloped countries”, it came with a very simplistic formula: *“underdeveloped countries were defined to include all countries of Africa, North and South America and Asia, except the Union of South Africa, Canada, the United States and Japan”* (United Nations, 1957, p. 447). This *ad hoc* definition brought in all colonies and excluded all of Europe. When the DAG came into being in 1960, it constructed its first list of developing countries listing those that were entitled to receive (Western) aid; it used the same UN logic and added two criteria: it excluded the so-called Sino-Soviet bloc, leaving out – for political reasons – clear-cut developing countries such as China, North Korea and North Vietnam, while adding a small number of European countries considered underdeveloped by the OEEC, though excluding equally poor Portugal for being a colonial power and, as such, a member of the DAG (OEEC, 1961). The DAC carried on with such a rule-of-thumb list of developing countries for almost three decades. On the other hand, in contrast with the DAC, which only needed to identify countries that were entitled to receive developmental aid (and later on, more strictly speaking, ODA), the World Bank required a more objective and disaggregated classification of countries to better tailor its lending policies. In 1978, the bank re-casted its country-loan-gear typology into a less technical and more comprehensive classification that grouped countries on the basis of income per capita into low-income, middle-income and high-income countries, thereby establishing the frontier between developing and developed and the border between second and third categories (Tezanos Vázquez & Sumner, 2013).

The end of the Cold War shocked the established aid architecture. In the midst of the turmoil, the DAC took the opportunity to reconstruct its developing-country list and took on board the World Bank’s country classification. By adopting income per capita as a clear-cut criterion for identifying developing countries entitled to aid, the DAC put the aid industry on firmer ground (OECD/DAC, 1993). But over the years, as developing countries have followed increasingly unequal development paths, the original World Bank / DAC classification has been subjected to mounting criticism. Three related criticisms have been made. First, and more generally speaking, the broad category of developing countries makes no sense any more. As Zoellick puts it, the Third World, insofar as it ever existed, just withered away (Zoellick, 2010). Second, the internal subdivisions of the developing-country category (low- and middle income, the latter divided in turn into low-middle-income- and high-middle-income countries) do not capture the growing complexity and diversity of countries deemed to be developing (Tezanos Vázquez & Sumner, 2012; Tezanos Vázquez & Sumner, 2013). Third, the national income per capita indicator is, on its own, unable to account for such complexity (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe [CEPAL] & United Nations [UN], 2012). In the context of aid, the message emerging from such criticisms is clear: such World Bank / DAC classification does not capture the real challenges faced by different types of developing countries, and thus the type and amount of foreign aid they need.

It is in response to these types of criticism that, in the last decades, a number of sub-categories of developing countries have emerged that take on board other indicators beyond GNI per capita. There are now least-developed countries, heavily indebted poor countries, landlocked developing countries, small

island developing states, and fragile and conflict-affected states. There is also an ongoing debate over the inadequacy of the concept of middle-income countries and their special needs. The argument is of a similar vein – that the income per capita criterion is not enough to capture the very different development challenges faced by these countries (CEPAL & UN, 2012; Glennie, 2013). Over the years, these categories and their agendas, promoted by solid champions, have made their way into UN formal programmes and meetings. All of them consider developing countries to be “recipients of aid”, thus falling neatly within the North-South paradigm.

But what has been lacking so far is a well-defined sub-category of those developing countries that distinguish themselves in the development cooperation agenda – not by the particular development challenges that they face (which do exist), but rather by their capacities and willingness to help other, poorer developing countries and to make special contributions to the provisioning of global public goods. This is a sub-category that is situated not at the bottom but at the top of the developing-country spectrum, in which these countries appear not as recipients but mainly as providers of development cooperation. It must be stressed that, by any definition, these countries are still developing and contain a large proportion of the world’s poor. In other agendas, these countries are identified as “emerging economies”, “emerging powers” and “emerging markets”, but in the development cooperation agenda, the corresponding term of “emerging donor” was not well-received by the targeted countries and did not really take off. The reason is simple. The former categories carry an unmitigated, positive message: they point to these countries’ rising power and wealth and to their increasing attractiveness as political and economic partners as well as recipients of investment and trade flows. In contrast, the message of the latter category, “emerging donors”, is mixed. It too highlights their increasing wealth and power, but it couples it with a reference to a responsibility that should accompany them: that of aiding less-fortunate countries. But the notion of responsibility is problematic, as explained in more detail in Box 5. What types of responsibility are we talking about? The targeted countries do not want to be perceived as donors – and with good reason, given the responsibilities and practices that this concept entails in the North-South tradition. They would thus need their own conceptual space and narrative to define their own. But as argued later, it will take time – and much political dialogue – to emerge.

As with all other OECD committees, the DAC has always shown interest in what non-member countries do in its field. Thus, in different moments, it monitored closely the activities of the Soviet bloc and Arab donors and explored ways of collaborating with them (Hynes & Trzeciak-Duval, 2014; Carroll & Hynes, 2013). By the same token, the DAC has always been aware that many Southern countries cooperate with each other. But with the exception of China, it paid little attention, as the amount of their concessional flows were quite limited and offered almost all as technical cooperation.¹⁸ With few communicating vessels with the South-South cooperation tradition, the DAC showed no great interest in these donors or in their rhetoric. But they have now become one of the DAC’s central concerns, as they question the paradigm it has operated with for decades.

The South-South cooperation tradition was not better placed to capture the novelty of the Southern emerging donors. Of course, the extraordinary economic expansion of these players revived the South-South cooperation agenda, which had been dormant since the end of the 1970s. At first glance, it looked as if such expansion materialised, at least partially, the old objective of consolidating a strong South intertwined with copious economic, political and cultural ties. But this vision is misleading. The South did not strengthen due to a new international economic order that never came. It did so because some of its members managed to insert themselves advantageously into a process of very

¹⁸ By its nature, technical cooperation mobilises few resources and occupies a secondary place in the portfolio of DAC cooperation mechanisms. But it was, and for most Southern countries it still is, the main mechanism of South-South cooperation. Infrastructure projects with strong political motivation funded by China in Africa during the 1960s and 1970s were the exception to this rule.

unequal globalisation, largely orchestrated by the North. The result was not a strong and homogeneous South, as craved for at the Bandung summit (Westad, 2013), but one that was more divided than ever between winners and losers of globalisation: the emerging donors of the South and the Southern countries that have been left behind and which the former now assist in a substantive way.¹⁹ This presents a reality that the South-South cooperation tradition, imbued in the Bandung summit's horizontal spirit, has serious difficulties in capturing.

In sum, neither of these cooperation traditions capture this new “third official actor”. This actor is the donor of the emerging South that would seem to require new concepts, ideas and narrative to substantiate which practices and rules it should follow, which responsibilities it should take on board and how it should integrate into the development cooperation agenda. This narrative should mainly stem from the South and lead to agreements with Northern donors under the critical eye of recipient countries (Chaturvedi, 2012; Besharati, 2013a). This narrative needs not only to come about through a rational dialogue among the parties involved. This is necessary but not sufficient. Political interests usually hide behind concepts and arguments, so political agreements, which do not come easily, should underpin such a narrative. The political and conceptual battle to define it has been taking place for several years in multiple fora and has now intermingled with the post-2015 MDG agenda, where it occupies a central place (Hackenesch & Janus, 2013). Indeed, the success of this agenda largely depends on the type of agreement that traditional and emerging donors will reach, if any.

7 The context and mixed incentives underpinning the battle for a new narrative for Southern cooperation providers²⁰

As explained above, when the DAC emerged as the forum for Western donors, it faced the task of finding answers to several questions: Which countries should form part of the group? Which definition of aid should they take? Which countries should they give aid to? How would they share the aid burden? Which practices and which kinds of responsibilities should they assume? Likewise, if the Southern cooperation providers were to consolidate into a new constituency of *sui generis* donors, they would have to find their own answers to the same types of questions. Even under very favourable conditions – a powerful advocate (the United States), a limited and coherent membership (the developed Western countries), a tangible enemy (the USSR) – the DAC took much effort and time to answer these questions (Bracho, 2011; Hynes & Scott, 2013). In contrast, the conditions to consolidate a coherent body of Southern providers are, from any standpoint, more complex and less favourable.

To start with, it is not obvious that these countries have a clear incentive to create an image and a narrative for themselves as donors. In fact, it is argued here that this is not the case, but rather that the incentives they face in this terrain are mixed. On the one hand,

¹⁹ For a description and analysis of those who have been left behind, see the classic book of Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion* (Collier, 2007).

²⁰ This and the following sections (for which few written sources exist) draw heavily on this author's own diplomatic experiences while participating in these agendas; recalling, of course, that these are personal opinions and do not necessarily represent those of the Mexican Foreign Ministry.

they should feel comfortable with the present South-South narrative, with some minor adjustments being made at best. As argued earlier, this discourse is increasingly at odds with reality, but it allows them to shun responsibilities, avoid entering into the burden-sharing game and maintain flexibility. At a political level, this discourse allows them to portray their traditional role as leaders of a presumably homogeneous South in fora such as the G-77 (Weinlich, 2014). Though it is not clear that the typical poor Southern country would not rather prefer them to take more responsibilities as cooperation providers. On the other hand, however, in this – as well as in many other agendas – these Southern players have a clear interest in asserting themselves in the international arena as the emerging powers they are, or are becoming. If they want more say and rights according to their new status and power, they should also be ready to shoulder more costs and responsibilities. But, as argued above, they would be right to adapt these responsibilities to their own circumstances and histories – thus, the need to create a new narrative for themselves as Southern cooperation providers and not to import *tout court* that of the traditional donors. Even at a shallow impressionistic level, one can see these mixed incentives at play. Take China as an example. China adopts conservative South-South positions within the G-77 at deliberations in the UN (including the post-2015 agenda), but at the same time publishes white papers on the plentiful aid it provides and organises huge China-Africa summits, in which China appears clearly as a benevolent donor. One could find also mixed signals from other Southern players, such as Turkey, India, Brazil and even Mexico, which has made the assumption of “global responsibilities” the cornerstone of its foreign policies. To complicate the picture further, even if one can argue that these Southern players face common incentives (negative and positive) in the development cooperation agenda, this agenda is a relatively minor element of a much wider and complex international setting, in which their roles and interests often do not coincide. In this wider picture – in which these Southern players find themselves in different alliances and bodies, such as the BRICS and the OECD – eventual agreements among heads of development agencies and development cooperation departments can be vetoed easily by higher levels of government with other priorities. In short, this wider political setting also tends to militate against the emergence of a new, distinctive narrative for all Southern providers.

It might be added that the other bilateral actors in the development cooperation agenda also face mixed incentives in relation to the emergence of such a narrative. As explained later, traditional donors would rather prefer Southern players to buy into their narrative and are uneasy with the concept of differentiated responsibilities. But it is hoped that they settle for this approach rather than nothing at all, whereas recipient countries would want both: for Southern providers to be more committed and transparent as suppliers, but at the same time to keep them separate from the traditional donors in order to play them against each other, as was the case during the Cold War – for good reasons (gain from the comparative advantages of both) and not-so-good ones (avoid sometimes needed discipline).

These mixed signals coming from the bilateral players of the development cooperation agenda filter into the multilateral bodies that they underpin and fund – the DAC and a number of UN bodies, which function as the churches of the North-South and the South-South cooperation traditions. It is thus not surprising that their incentives – in relation to the emergence of a new narrative for Southern players – are also mixed. As claimed earlier, none of these traditions make coherent sense of these new actors. Yet, faced with the challenge that they entail, these multilateral bodies have sought to adapt their discourse and policies, but conservatively, aiming to change as little as possible. From opposite

perspectives, these bodies have been intermittently undermining the emergence of a conceptual space for this third actor: whereas the DAC tends to treat it as another member of a homogeneous family of donors, different UN bodies tend to treat it as a member of the large homogenous family of the South. In each case, the specificity of this new actor is diluted under the inertia of these two narratives that resist change. This said, in various multilateral fora, there have been a number of attempts to advance a proper narrative for this new third actor. These have been coupled by initiatives and attempts to create a special space or forum to generate it. Some of them are outlined below. The intricacies of the battle for a new narrative, which is indeed unfolding but has produced few tangible results yet and has no end in sight, illustrates well the complex context of mixed incentives outlined above.

8 Episodes of the battle for a new narrative for Southern cooperation providers

8.1 Who are they?

If a distinctive narrative for this third bilateral actor in development cooperation was to emerge, the starting point would be: How to define this new constituency? How to establish the borders of the Southern providers? Who should be included? The big emerging powers are widely known, but how far should the group extend? For starters, the question itself goes against the Bandung spirit of a homogeneous South, in which all countries cooperate with each other on equal terms. But it must be recognised that this view remains accurate for describing much of what happens among Southern countries in the realm of development cooperation. In fact, most developing countries offer development cooperation to each other within the traditional horizontal framework of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action on technical cooperation – and most of them will hardly consolidate themselves in the foreseeable future as solid suppliers with a more sophisticated portfolio of instruments. They claim to be South-South cooperation players, just as the emerging powers, but as argued, the differences between them are substantial and bound to increase in the foreseeable future. Certainly there is no perfect typology, and even if the reality of growing inequality within the South carries the day, the contours of the constituencies of Southern providers are not obvious, and it is not clear who should draw them. The criterion that each country should describe itself as it wishes tends to impose itself in practice. But this leads to an unstable and unsatisfactory result. In this context, it has been indeed difficult to move forward.

In early 2013 India conveyed a meeting of South-South cooperation providers. Officials and CSO delegates from the expected countries, including Mexico, were invited. It was a bold and promising initiative aimed at kick-starting a process to produce a narrative for this new player, known today as the “Delhi process”, which is explored in more detail below (Besharati, 2013a; Research and Informing System for Developing Countries [RIS], India Ministry of External Affairs [MEA], & United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UNDESA], 2013). But at its first inaugural session, a UN senior official questioned the very same title of the meeting, arguing that the term “providers” should not be used – which already implies a differentiation (some provide; others receive) – but rather “partners”. The formula “South-South cooperation providers”, which has been

borrowed in this essay, seemed to be both politically acceptable (eschewing the tainted concepts of donors and aid) and to properly reflect today's realities. It is a concept that would allow the agenda to advance in defining this new third actor – a first essential step in providing it with a proper narrative.

Indeed, keeping both concepts – “South-South provider” and “South-South partner” – might seem a good compromise for moving forward. As said, most Southern countries, even extremely poor ones, share knowledge and provide technical cooperation to each other within the traditional South-South paradigm and in the Bandung spirit.²¹ In this capacity, all of these Southern countries function as “Southern partners” in the development cooperation agenda. At the same time, due to their increasing wealth and/or capacities, a number of Southern players that at least implicitly have taken on board global responsibilities and are providing increasing amounts of development cooperation (much of it in new ways) should be properly recognised as “Southern providers”. The organisers of the Delhi meeting seemed to have been indeed thinking of this second type, but ideological conservatism shut the door from the outset. Seemingly on form, but actually on substance, the whole Delhi process seemed to have been at least temporarily derailed even before it had properly begun. The banner of the Delhi process was soon taken up by the so-called Core Group of South Cooperation Partners, run by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). But by adopting such a lax definition of “Southern partners” (which literally points to all players from the South), the group put itself in a difficult starting position – though not hopeless, as shown later – to come up with a narrative that makes sense for current challenges.

8.2 How to define the development cooperation they provide?

A second task is to clearly define South-South cooperation and how it should be quantified. To start with, there is no useful and consensual definition. In practice, in most multilateral and academic fora, people refer to flows or activities of a *concessional* character when referring to South-South cooperation – and in this sense as equivalent to ODA or activities within the Policy Coherence for Development agenda. This is quite natural, since, in common speech, cooperating is akin to aiding or assisting, which entails some kind of effort, and thus links to the financial notion of concessionality. It is with this interpretation in mind that – whether as a response to internal and/or external factors – various Southern providers publish figures on the *cooperation* they offer. In any case, each one uses its own methodology, so the resulting figures are not comparable. The fact that more and more countries generate their own data shows the growing importance of this constituency. But it is not enough. A consensual definition is required. Yet nailing it down has not proven to be an easy task.

In 2005 the United Nations Economic and Social Council launched a discussion forum inviting all member countries and other entities to an ongoing dialogue on the increasingly complex development cooperation architecture and agenda: the Development Cooperation

21 In a recent workshop it was reported that Timor Leste, a member of the G7+ countries in a state of fragility, had been sharing knowledge with countries with similar backgrounds on natural resource management and electoral processes (Abdel-Malek, 2014).

Forum (DCF).²² The DCF, which meets every two years, considered South-South cooperation to be a priority issue from the outset. At the first and second rounds of the DCF, in 2008 and 2010, the UN Secretariat endorsed and presented discussion reports that proposed a definition of South-South cooperation as a concessional flow (United Nations Economic and Social Council [UN ECOSOC], 2009). They were technically complex documents that built on the ODA concept and arrived at a definition of South-South cooperation that was both South-specific and comparable to ODA – excellent items for a rational and productive discussion.

But there was little progress. The DCF revealed itself to be an inadequate forum for the dialogue and negotiations required by this technically complex and politically charged topic.²³ On substance, the mentioned reports entered dangerous waters by bluntly contradicting the broad traditional definition of South-South cooperation, which, embedded in the Bandung spirit, encompasses all kinds of ties between the South: from private investments and trade to public flows. As mentioned, although rarely used in practice and of no help to make sense of today's reality, this broad concept is still the official definition utilised by the South-South cooperation Unit hosted at UNDP, which has “formally” the last word on this topic within the UN system. Though as these reports illustrate, such definitions are not consistently used throughout the organisation. In fact, the United Nations deplores that even in-house there is no consensual working definition of South-South cooperation. But attempts to arrive at such a definition have so far failed.²⁴ Having said this, a compromise solution is on the table: to differentiate South-South cooperation, which, as always, would imply all types of Southern links, from South-South *development* cooperation, which would only comprise concessional flows (and actions) (UNDESA, 2013, p. 1). But this differentiation is not likely to stick, and not only because of awkward wording. Adding the word “development” to South-South cooperation adds little. The real obstacle is the use of the concept of “cooperation” to denote normal economic links as trade and investment. During the time of the Bandung summit, denoting the economic links between Mexico and Ecuador (against all odds and historical trends) as “cooperation” between the South made sense, and not only in political terms. Today, it makes no sense to say that Mexican multinationals such as Cemex or America Movil are somehow *cooperating* with the countries they invest in – and if it is good for Cemex, why not Apple? Using the word “cooperation” in this context devalues the meaning of the word and muddles understanding of the development agenda. Indeed, one can easily sense the devaluation of such a concept if one pretends to portray the billions of Chinese exports (or Mexican or Brazilian) to other Southern countries as “cooperation” flowing from China to these countries, as should be done if the broad – and still very much alive – concept of

22 In September 2010 the UN General Assembly recognised the DCF as “*the focal point within the UN system for carrying on a holistic consideration of issues related to international cooperation with the participation of all stakeholders*” (UN ECOSOC, 2013, p. 2).

23 The DCF is an open, multi-stakeholder forum. Its membership is too large, too unstable and too informal to tackle the technical issues at hand, on top of the issue of how South-South cooperation should be discussed and settled by the Southern providers themselves in a Southern fora. But where? This question is explored later on.

24 The Joint Inspection Unit, with the objective to enhance the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations system, has tackled the issues of South-South and Triangular Cooperation within this system a few times. Each time it has come across the problem of a lack of common understanding within the UN itself, and this in spite of the fact that the Special Unit on South-South Cooperation attached to the UNDP is supposed to have the last word on this issue. See Mounir Zahran, Roman-Morey, and Inomata (2011).

South-South cooperation is to be taken seriously. The language and concepts need to be adapted to the times in order to move forward.

These reports probably made another political mistake: they overstressed the relationship of their proposal with ODA, which for decades has been seen as an exclusive North-South flow, not comparable to South-South cooperation. This is indeed the case if one departs from the traditional, broad definition of the latter. But matters change if, following the DCF reports, one opts for a constrained concept of South-South cooperation as a “concessional flow”, as the term is commonly used in practice. True, many observers, especially in Latin America, believe that, even under a more narrow “concessional” definition, ODA is somehow genetically different from South-South cooperation. They argue that technical cooperation (or “knowledge-sharing”, as it is now commonly framed) is an exclusive or typical instrument of the South and/or that in a Southern context, its operational mechanism and/or its impact is substantially different. But differences are at most of grade and not of substance. This thesis does not hold up, and not just because the North has been giving technical cooperation to the South all along, as President Truman’s famous “point 4” illustrates. In fact, speaking broadly, there are better and more internally consistent or worse definitions of what should count as development assistance or cooperation that, in principle, are valid for both Northern and Southern donors. As mentioned earlier, the DAC is now in the midst of revising its ODA definition, which has aged and now shows many inconsistencies. Thus, putting politics aside, Southern providers should probably not take the ODA definition as it now stands as the starting point for arriving at their own definition of South-South cooperation²⁵ – though not because it comes from the North, but rather because it is outdated and has important flaws.

But admittedly so, it is difficult to put politics aside in these matters. In April 2011, the DAC issued a statement to promote the dialogue with Southern cooperation providers without preconditions (Atwood, 2012; OECD/DAC, 2011). Among other points, it bluntly stated that the ODA definition is “neutral” and could (and should) be adopted by Southern donors. This is true, and in fact several of these players, politically close to the West, have had no problems in reporting their cooperation volumes to the DAC on the basis of the ODA definition. However, it was illusory to think that the BRICS – by far the most important Southern players in this agenda – would adopt a politically loaded concept whose design they had not helped to develop. Ideally, the Southern providers themselves should adopt a consensual definition of the South-South cooperation they provide, rooted in *concessional* flows, thus making it easily comparable to ODA – in other words, to succeed where the DCF reports failed; the Delhi process might still be the place to go for this.²⁶ With such a consensual definition in place, it would create better conditions to advance the agendas of responsibilities, accountability, effectiveness and others.

25 Mexico did precisely this. In early 2014, while designing its own methodology to calculate the monetary value of the cooperation it provides, Mexico refused to take on board the formula that the DAC used to count loans as ODA and which the DAC itself just recently changed (see above footnote 15). Mexico thus decided to move ahead and count only the concessional part of the loans as development cooperation proper – a fairer and internally more robust method to do it. In this important respect, Mexico took a step forward. As explained, DAC members followed suit in their last HLM, which took place in December 2014.

26 In fact, the Core Group of Southern Partners, which is carrying over the Delhi process, is in the middle of such an attempt. The idea is to apply the experience of the reporting system of South-South Cooperation at a global level among Latin American countries hosted at the General Secretariat of the Ibero American

8.3 Which responsibilities should they take on board?

A third task consists of defining which responsibilities the Southern development providers should take in the development agenda. As explained earlier, the post-war paradigm is based on the idea that rich countries have a responsibility to assist poor countries. On this basis, DAC members today have a plethora of responsibilities on their shoulders over how much aid they should be giving (Monterrey Consensus) and under which rules (Paris Declaration). If the Southern providers have taken off, leaving other poorer countries far behind, and have in practice become important donors – or are on their way to become so – must they also assume responsibilities in the realm of development cooperation? And if so, which ones? The North-South and South-South paradigms offer no answer. Or rather, as is explained below, the answers they offer are again based on denying the specificities of this new third actor.

In contrast, this essay suggests that Southern providers should take responsibilities, but tailored to their own history and circumstances, that is, *differentiated responsibilities* in relation to those assumed by the traditional donors of the North. Thus, for example, it goes without saying that the Southern providers would not be in a position to assume the responsibility of providing 0.7 per cent of their GNI as development cooperation – the bulwark of North-South historical responsibilities that even crucial Northern players fail to consistently assume. In fact, they might not be in a position to commit to any specific target in terms of volumes, though they might agree on a formula by which they commit, under favourable conditions, to increase their cooperation gradually over time.²⁷ Meaningful commitments in terms of volumes are likely to encounter obstacles in at least three areas: the availability of limited resources; the opportunity costs involved in deploying them (given these countries own development challenges); and the problems of communicating such targets to poor populations. Having said this, it should be underlined that, in certain cases, strong cooperation programmes to support conflictive and poorer neighbours should be seen as part and parcel of successful domestic development strategies, and thus easier to communicate and sell internally. But if responsibilities in terms of volumes are hard, though not impossible, to shoulder, it should be easier for Southern providers to assume clear and differentiated responsibilities in terms of quality and practices – the kind of issues that are dealt with in the effectiveness cooperation agenda in fora such as the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC) and the DCF. They would thus be in a better position to: commit to schemes of consultations / coordination with other providers; to align – as they already mostly do, by the way – to the demands and leadership of recipient countries; to be more transparent and

Forum (SEGIB) (Xalma, 2014). The initiative is of course welcome. However the SEGIB system is rooted in the Latin American experience of interchanging technical cooperation and of using the number of “projects” as the unit of account without any serious attempt to calculate costs. As it is, it has limited value to offer account of what the main Southern providers are doing – and are set to do more of in the near future. In this respect, it would seem rather like a step backwards in relation to the ECOSOC reports mentioned above. But work is in progress, and it is too early to judge its outcome.

27 Other authors are more forthcoming on the need for encouraging Southern providers to make strong commitments in terms of volumes of development cooperation. In a recent preliminary proposal on sources of finance for sustainable development in the context of the post-2015 agenda, Jeffrey Sachs floated the proposal that although developed countries should stick to their 0.7 per cent target for ODA, high-middle-income countries should adopt a 0.1 per cent target of development aid (Sachs & Schmidt-Traub, 2014).

provide more information on what they do; to arrive at common definitions of what should count as development cooperation, contributing thus to a more coherent and transparent global system, etc. At the same time, they might not be in a position to commit to untying their aid (it should be remembered that the traditional donors took decades to advance in this terrain) nor – given their mostly regional standing – to commit to targeting their cooperation to certain types of developing countries (i.e the UN target of 0.15 per cent of GNI to least-developed countries). Though they should be willing to commit in a more clear fashion to contribute to the provisioning of global public goods (especially in the environmental terrain), which are now part and parcel of the development agenda enshrined in the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals in the making.

This quickly gathered rule-of-thumb list of how the concept of “differentiated responsibilities” (or commitments) could work in practice in the realm of development cooperation might suggest that a consensus on the issue is not difficult to achieve. But such inference would be misleading. The issue of responsibilities is, by its nature, political and controversial. In addition, the way it is framed in one agenda might easily contaminate others. It should then not be too surprising that the concept of CBDR, formally brought for the first time into the multilateral environmental negotiations, is struggling to make its way into the development cooperation agenda. Both, the South-South cooperation and the North-South cooperation traditions do not seem to be too comfortable with it. At the first meeting of the Delhi process, some delegates took the orthodox view that South-South cooperation did not imply any responsibility. True, some of them would seem ready to agree with the report of the meeting, which argued that *“the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) continues to guide the South’s engagement in global affairs”* (RIS, MEA, & UNDESA, 2013, p. 2). They could agree with these two seemingly contradictory statements by equating CBDR with *no responsibilities* – as it is unfortunately often done in climate change negotiations. At the same time, other delegates at Delhi argued that capable South-South cooperation providers should assume the responsibility of helping poorer countries according to their own capacities and circumstances.²⁸ In this vein, at the initiative of Mexico (backed by Brazil), the Busan outcome document (2011) states that, due to their circumstances as developing countries, those actors recognised as Southern cooperation providers participate in the effective development cooperation agenda on the basis of “differential commitments”.²⁹ This was the first time that an explicit recognition of substantial differences among official bilateral donors was formally introduced into a major document of the development cooperation agenda. However, since then, these actors have shied away from specifying which commitments, however differentiated, they would be willing to undertake to make their

28 The Official Conference Report presented the discussion in the following way. *“SSC represents a different paradigm from North-South Cooperation (NSC). While NSC is seen as a historical responsibility, which should be continued and expanded further as a mechanism in its own right filling a specific niche, SSC should be viewed as a voluntary partnership, which has now developed into a more matured platform transcending the initial foundations of political solidarity [...]. The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities continues to guide the South’s engagement in global affairs. While recognizing the tremendous domestic challenges, some participants also felt that the more advanced developing countries, e.g. those with higher GNI per capita, should assume responsibilities that are appropriate to their capacity”* (RIS, MEA, & UNDESA, 2013, p. 2).

29 The Busan outcome document struggled to find a name for these new players. As the concept of “emerging donor” was not approved and that of “Southern cooperation provider” was still not in the public domain, the alternative was to identify them indirectly.

development cooperation more effective.³⁰ In sum, if some Southern cooperation providers are still anchored in the old discourse of zero responsibilities (with or without endorsing CBDR), others accept them as differentiated, but have hardly begun to identify them.

On their part, many traditional donors, among them the United States, the European Union and Japan, do not appreciate the concept. In Busan they agreed to insert it only at the last minute and under the above somehow strange quoted formula of “differential commitments”; this, in order to dissociate it as much as possible from its standard CBDR form, which has run into difficulties in the climate change negotiations (Box 5). More recently, due to the pressure exerted, the disputed concept, even in this proxy-type formulation, disappeared from the Mexican Communiqué of the first meeting of the GPEDC – though it implicitly remained in the document as part of the reiterated Busan principles.³¹ Inconsistently so, traditional donors have also resisted assuming the idea of “differentiated responsibilities” within the realm of the DAC itself. On the one hand – as they clearly stipulated in the unilateral statement (April 2011) mentioned above – they claim to recognise the Southern providers as a specific type of “donor”. But on the other, traditional donors aim to co-opt them within the committee without opening any special space for them; that is, without recognising that these Southern providers are indeed *sui generis*, and thus lack the ability and willingness to assume the same responsibilities taken by the established members – further proof of the difficulties that the North-South cooperation tradition has had in adapting to the times.

30 At the request of Brazil, the communiqué that emanated from the first meeting of the GPEDC (Mexico 2014) registered the commitment of Southern providers to generate more public information about their cooperation activities. This was an important first step to fill the concept of differential commitments with some content, but still quite a modest one.

31 In Busan, Mexico and Brazil preferred the CBDR concept, but under tough negotiations they agreed to settle for the proxy formula of differential commitments as a second-best alternative. As should be expected in these types of multilateral negotiations, this proxy formula reappeared in the first drafts of the Mexican communiqué of the GPEDC. Later in the process, Brazil made another attempt to go back to the original CBDR principle (in the very first paragraph of the communiqué), but it was squarely rejected by a number of important traditional donors: the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union among them. In last-minute negotiations in Mexico, a seemingly strange compromise was arrived at: both the CBDR and the differential commitments formula should go – though on the understanding that the latter implicitly remain in the document as part of the reiterated Busan principles. As it happened, some Southern providers preferred nothing at all if the original concept was not available, whereas, understandably enough, the donors were quite happy to get rid of even the proxy itself. This gambit seemed to be motivated by the fear that the proxy could contaminate the post-2015 negotiations, as during the first phases of the discussion there was a strong effort by the South and the UN Secretariat to bring the CBDR concept into the new Sustainable Development Goals framework (see below). In my personal view, the Mexican communiqué was weakened by the elimination of any reference to the concept of differentiated responsibilities or commitments. Though given the circumstances, I hope that the gambit pays off in the end.

Box 5: On the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which emerged from Rio in 1992, adopted the concept of CBDR to distinguish the contributions that different types of countries should undertake to tackle global environmental degradation (Pauw et al., 2014; Deleuil, 2012). To this effect, as in other multilateral agendas, the Convention quite naturally divided countries on the basis of a North-South typology (see Box 3). On the one hand, it distinguished the “developed” (or industrialised) “annex countries”, which could be grouped either under Annex 1 countries (OECD members), or under Annex 2 countries (“transition countries”, i.e. developed ex-communist countries). This subdivision shows how, at the end of the Cold War, ex-communist countries were just reshuffled between North and South rather than questioning this typology. On the other hand, it grouped together all the “other” developing “non-annex” countries. The message of CBDR, to which the nuanced phrase “respective capabilities” was soon added, is in itself clear and almost self-explanatory. Whereas all countries have the common objective of curbing climate change (and adapting to it), they have had neither the same responsibilities in generating climate change nor do they have similar capacities to address its challenges. As the greenhouse gas emissions that have induced climate change are directly correlated with economic activity, developed countries are the main historical contributors to the problem. But on top of being more responsible, due precisely to development they have achieved, they are also in a better position to contribute to its solution, as the North-South paradigm implies. Having said this, the adjectives “common” and “differentiated” clearly denote that CBDR is not about exempting anybody from responsibilities or actions. It is about creating a framework that should seem fair, equitable and legitimate for all and, thus, a good basis to start serious negotiations on who should do what and why to effectively address the major collective action challenge of our time. Indeed, in the early 1990s, CBDR was a major factor in putting the climate change agenda on its feet. But many years have passed since then, and in the context of a protracted and complicated negotiating process, during which the playing field has changed considerably, CBDR – subjected to very different interpretations – has become for many part of the problem rather than the solution.

At least three issues are hindering CBDR from consolidating itself as a clear and legitimate concept in the climate change agenda. First, since this agenda aims at introducing legally binding actions, developed countries feel uneasy assuming “responsibilities” (moreover, linked to past actions that occurred when their consequences were not known), under which they could be brought to account for in court. Second, some developing countries have taken CBDR as a *carte blanche* for exempting them from taking any responsibility and/or action in the climate change agenda. Third, the world has changed considerably since 1992, especially due to the strength of emerging powers, so that the rough division between “annex” and “non-annex” countries linked to CBDR has lost legitimacy – thus China, an economic power, and today the world’s main source of carbon emissions, is lumped together in the “non-annex” country list with small pacific islands states, which are quite powerless, and the main victims of climate change. But whatever the problems might be that the CBDR concept has run into, it does carry the main correct message: developed countries and developing ones (including emerging economies) can and should contribute in an appropriate and differentiated way towards the battle against climate change.

In the same vein, there should be no doubt that CBDR expresses the right framework to bring the emerging powers into the development cooperation agenda as cooperation providers in a legitimate and fair way. In addition, although it was in Busan that first steps in this direction were made, the UN system in the post-2015 agenda context has tried to follow suit but now seems to have retreated. Though given the difficulties that this concept has had, the proxy formula of “differential commitments” adopted in Busan, even if awkward and less precise (commitments should stem from a previous and more fundamental adoption of responsibilities, even if they are not legally binding ones), might still prove to be a decent and less politically charged alternative.

8.4 Who should construct this narrative and in which fora?

Finally, the ongoing battle to create a new narrative for Southern providers of development cooperation has not only been one about substance, but also one on form and process. Where should this narrative be designed, negotiated and adopted, and by whom?

Thus far, the ideological battles to create such a narrative have taken place in different fora (the GPEDC, the DCF, the Delhi process), but as these conversations take place and move forwards or backwards, there has always been an open question lingering in the background: Is this the right place with the right actors to achieve a legitimate consensus around these issues? And the most honest answer is usually: no. But whereas the narrative of the North-South tradition crystallised in the DAC and the South-South narrative launched in Bandung through UN bodies, where should the narrative of this particular group of Southern bilateral actors emerge? Some authors have floated the idea of creating a sort of DAC of the South (Ayala Martínez & Pérez Pineda, 2010; Besharati, 2013b). In principle this would be an ideal solution. Just as the Western donors came together to develop a common set of principles and best practices, this new constituency of Southern providers would create its own forum with similar purposes. These two fora could then get together with legitimate representatives of recipient countries to dialogue and hammer agreements in a structured and legitimate way on the main issues of the development cooperation agenda and architecture. If something of the sort existed, the discussions and negotiations for a post-2015 agenda in the much broader and messier UN setting would quite likely achieve faster and better results.

But all this is easier said than done. In the current circumstances, a clear-cut and legitimate forum of Southern providers of development cooperation is unlikely to appear anytime soon. The obstacles that such an initiative faces are similar but, if anything, starker than those encountered by the conversations around the substantive items (membership, core definitions and responsibilities) mentioned above: on the one hand, a big picture of a divided South in different blocs; on the other, the two North-South and South-South traditions that resist change. The DAC would rather expand itself and bring the main Southern providers under its umbrella than witness the emergence of a rival body. Indeed, as mentioned, its present outreach policy aims at co-opting these players without changing much in the process. On their part, the relevant UN bodies face an uphill struggle as always to go beyond the foundational idea of an homogeneous global South – though the UNDESA-sponsored Core Group of Southern Partners, which with its limitations, is so far the most promising and politically feasible initiative on offer to push forward this agenda. Having said this, in the last decade there have been a number of attempts to create more formal or informal fora to tackle the issue of Southern providers or emerging donors, as originally labelled. These attempts confirm the widely perceived need for such fora, although the limited accomplishments that they have produced so far certify the scale of the obstacles in play just described. We will now focus on some episodes of this particular battle.³²

8.4.1 The fora of the aid / development effectiveness agenda

The need to make space for the new emerging donor from the South was acutely felt, probably for the first time, in the aid effectiveness agenda that crystallised in the Paris Declaration, adopted in 2005 by dozens of countries and multilateral organisations. This was an agenda promoted by the DAC and constructed within the logic of the North-South divide on the basis of two bilateral actors – donor and recipient countries – each of them

32 This list of “battles” around the issue of creating an *ad hoc* forum for Southern providers is not meant to be exhaustive. Though it includes both very important episodes of this battle (probably the main ones) and those in which the author participated directly in one way or another.

assuming a number of specific compromises to increase the overall effectiveness of ODA. At the same time, all the then so-called emerging donors – actual or in the making, including the main ones coming from the South, namely China, India, Brazil, Mexico, Turkey, Thailand and others – appeared as signatories of the Paris Declaration. Sooner rather than later, the inevitable question posed itself: From which point of view of the bipolar donor / recipient divide had these countries endorsed the declaration? The DAC, naively or shrewdly, presumed that they had all joined as the donors they were – or were in route to become. This assumption was valid for those non-developing countries (i.e. not in the DAC list) that were strengthening their donor profiles but had still not joined the DAC, such as Russia, Israel, the eastern Europeans countries and, of course, the quite special case of the Arab donors.³³ But it was not so for the Southern players, which were led by China and happened to be the most enticing ones. Thus, not too surprisingly, some of these players quietly (others more openly) refused to endorse the Paris Declaration from a donor perspective. Because they did not see themselves, and rightly so, as typical members of the recipient community – or out of pride, political instinct, honesty or even practical considerations – these countries saw little merit in actively endorsing the Paris Declaration from a recipient perspective. So most of them appeared in Paris, but just failed to engage in any form.³⁴

Such confusion clearly showed that the Paris Declaration just lacked a space for these new bilateral *sui generis* donors. If the aid effectiveness agenda wanted to have a real inclusive character and engage them, it had to create a proper space for them. A similar challenge was also posed by the mounting development cooperation activities of other “new” non-state actors. Since then, the effectiveness agenda has done much to tackle these challenges. Indeed, to an important extent, its evolution from Paris to Accra to Busan, and finally to the first meeting of the GPEDC in Mexico City, has been driven by efforts to open itself and try to bring all these new actors under its umbrella.

Three years after Paris, the Accra Agenda for Action (2008), though still built on a dual donor / recipient logic, welcomed “all development actors”, particularly those engaged in South-South cooperation, encouraging them to use the Paris Declaration principles “as a reference” to increase the effectiveness of their development cooperation (AAA paragraph 19). Using this logic, after Accra, the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness and Donor

33 Russia, the main non-DAC donor during the Cold War, was then not only returning as a donor but openly campaigning to join the OECD. The east European countries, now members of the European Union or on route to become so, were also recovering their donor status. In any case, they had no choice, because one of the many obligations of European membership is precisely to perform as donors and under the Western DAC paradigm. Finally, the Arab donors have been openly operating as donors since the 1970s but, due to geopolitics, had never pretended to join the Western North.

34 Brazil suspected something strange and adopted the Paris principles on the provision of a ratification that never came. India joined later, but it clarified that it had joined exclusively as a recipient. Mexico – as an OECD member and DAC observer and (with the exception of Turkey) the only Southern player present in the committee’s daily deliberations – assumed the task of struggling to create a proper space for itself and for the other Southern providers in the effectiveness agenda (Bracho & García-López, 2011). Others just refused to engage and play ball. Thailand seemed to be an exception. In late 2006 it organised an international workshop, designed – as its concept note argued – “*as a forum for dialogue between key national and international partners on Thailand’s role as an emerging donor, on the challenges of the implementation of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (henceforth referred to as the Paris Declaration), and on how the different partners could work together on this endeavour*” (Thailand International Development Cooperation Agency, 2006).

Practices (WP-EFF), the multilateral body that administered the agenda, incorporated a new “third bilateral actor” in its formal structure that it labelled, for lack of a better name, “donor / recipient” or “dual countries”.³⁵ Though this label recognised that these countries were still developing and had the right to receive ODA, it was meant to apply to those countries whose supply operations already were, or were on route to becoming, much more important, namely to Southern providers.

After Accra, the providers of South-South cooperation had a place at the discussion table of the effectiveness agenda, and a privileged one at that. But which countries were to occupy this place, and what were they supposed to say? There were no obvious answers. This new third bilateral actor was in principle properly recognised, but it lacked both clearly defined borders (Which countries should be counted as members?) and a proper narrative. To help close these gaps, the WP-EFF created two *ad hoc* bodies with the idea of offering Southern providers a proper space to discuss these issues. For these initiatives to succeed, two conditions were needed. First, they should be able to actively engage the main countries concerned. Second, once at the table, these actors should agree to assume themselves to be the *sui generis* donors they had become, that is, as essentially, though not necessarily exclusively, Southern cooperation providers. Facing mixed incentives, most of these players hesitated at the time to recognise themselves clearly as such. So sometimes they put on the cap of emerging Southern *providers*, while other times they portrayed themselves as they had been doing for decades – as any other South-South cooperation *partner*. But even if they had taken a definitive up-to-date stance on their identity in the development cooperation agenda (which, even at the time of writing, they have not entirely done) – though again, sending mixed signals – they ultimately failed to recognise the OECD-anchored WP-EFF as a legitimate body to host discussions on these Southern issues. No wonder both initiatives produced good work and discussions but ultimately failed.

The first forum crystallised in the run-up to Accra as an “Informal Working Group of non-DAC Providers of Development Assistance and Aid Effectiveness” (Non-DAC IWG) was led by Japan and Russia. The composition, title and approach of this first body clearly show that the DAC was still far from grasping the specificity of the Southern provider at the time. By opening one space for all non-DAC providers, this working group easily managed to attract those developed-country players that had already assumed themselves to be normal donors in the making, and who, as such, had no major problems with the Paris Declaration; or at most, one of capacity to comply with its precepts. Most of them considered themselves as DAC pupils and many of them have since then joined the DAC. At the same time, and by the same token, this approach kept even sympathetic Southern players away – the majority of them did not consider themselves to be donors, and less so with the non-DAC prefix attached. Even if they had no problem with the venue (which they did), they could not see themselves discussing in parity with countries such as Poland and the Czech Republic, which they considered as being truly non-DAC donors heading

35 The WP-EFF was formed after the DAC sponsored the first HLF on Harmonization (of donor practices) in Rome in 2003. Created to administer the effectiveness agenda, the WP-EFF evolved from a normal subsidiary body of the DAC into a real partnership with other actors sitting at the table, including recipient countries, multilateral agencies, civil society representatives, and not least, dual recipient / donor countries. After Accra, the WP-EFF was co-chaired by a recipient and a donor country and in its very last track, as two successive representatives of the latter stepped down, singlehandedly chaired by an Egyptian official: Talaat Abdel-Malek, who did a truly excellent job. As explained below, the WP-EFF closed down in 2012 to give way to the GPEDC.

towards the DAC. This group met formally two times and closed shop on the eve of Accra without much to show for it.³⁶

The second initiative, which materialised after Accra, was the Task Team of South-South cooperation, another sub-group of the WP-EFF. This was now a group focussed on Southern players in tune with the new governing structure of the WP-EFF with its special place for this third actor: the recipient / provider. In this sense, it was a step forward from the Non-DAC IWG, though the Northern non-DAC donors felt themselves to be somehow disfranchised. Still unhappy about the legitimacy of the WP-EFF to host such a Southern body, the large Southern providers failed once again to engage. The void was then filled by other types of Southern players, particularly Colombia, which invested much political capital in the effectiveness agenda in the run-up to Accra down to Busan and took the leading role of the Task Force. By then, Colombia was still by far (and remains) a net-recipient country – one of the largest in GNI and GNI per capita in Latin America – which had participated as such in the WP-EFF. Indeed, during the run-up to Accra, it played a leading role in the caucus of recipient countries while shunning the meetings of the Non-DAC IWG, so that, contrary to expectations, the link with this last body was lost. At the same time, as with so many other middle-income countries, Colombia engaged in piecemeal South-South technical cooperation. In short, in terms of our previous discussions, Colombia had a profile of a Southern partner rather than of a provider. But Colombia could legitimately occupy the place reserved in principle for the second, since the large historic umbrella of the South-South cooperation tradition did not differentiate between the two, and, if anything, fit the former rather than the latter, which in fact required a new narrative.³⁷

As should be expected, it was on the basis of its identity that Colombia approached the work of the Task Team. From this partner perspective, the narrative of South-South cooperation was already there and needed, at most, some minor adjustments to adapt to the Paris paradigm. Accordingly, in tune with a Latin American fixation and the Buenos Aires Action Plan (see above), the Task Team narrowed down the universe of South-South cooperation to technical cooperation – leaving out, of course, all the major stuff that the big Southern players, such as China, India, Brazil and Turkey, were doing or starting to do

36 The decision to create the Non-DAC IWG was taken on 27 November 2007 at the fringes of a WP-EFF meeting in a “special session with Non-DAC providers of development assistance” conveyed by Japan (Development Cooperation Directorate/Development Assistance Committee [DCD/DAC], 2007). The mandate of this informal group was to contribute towards tackling the challenges faced by these actors in the effectiveness agenda in the run-up to Accra. The Non-DAC IWG met at the fringes of other WP-EFF meetings in February and July of 2008, and was led by two co-chairs, Japan and Russia. Though it was an open group, it had a number of so-called permanent members, which, apart from the co-chairs, included, Mexico, the Czech Republic, Korea, Italy, the United Kingdom, the World Bank and the UNDP – all of which were OECD members; just Mexico came from the South. The Non-DAC IWG was more effective in gathering Non-DAC Northern countries than Southern providers. At the first meeting, it had seven of the former and only two of the latter, Mexico and Turkey, both OECD members. In July officials from Thailand, India, China and Brazil joined the discussions but generally kept a low profile. The Non-DAC IWG expected to reappear in some new form after Accra. But as is explained below, a very different group, the Task Team on South-South Cooperation, took its place, both in its composition and perspective.

37 As I suggested above, one might argue for the need to somehow separate these two agendas: one for Southern partners, still rooted in Bandung and Buenos Aires; another for Southern providers that need a fundamentally new narrative, though of course with links to the South-South tradition and its founding documents.

in Africa and elsewhere (Task Team on South-South Cooperation, 2009). From its perspective, there was no need for a narrative of a third actor because this third actor was simply not on its horizon. It is true, however, that this Task Team did a good job within its own terms. It even made a relevant contribution towards adapting the idea of technical cooperation to our present times, in which information technology makes it much easier to exchange knowledge – the quite novel (at least in the development cooperation domain) knowledge-sharing agenda that took off around the same time in the Task Team and other fora, with strong intellectual support from the World Bank and institutional support from Korea. This work was relevant to the development cooperation agenda but failed to capture the spirit of the third actor of Southern providers and made no significant contribution to its narrative. Thus, for example, the question of responsibilities, which is at the heart of such an agenda, remained completely outside its realm.³⁸

In sum, on format, both the Non-DAC IWG and the Task Team shared a common weakness. Hosted at the OECD and with the presence of Northern countries, they suffered from a legitimate deficit as Southern bodies. Regarding content, their approach was grounded, from contrasting – one would say opposing – points of view, but they came to the same result. They bypassed the Southern provider. At the Non-DAC IWG, this new third actor was diluted in the universe of northern Non-DAC donors, which rather fit within the logic of the North-South paradigm. Whereas at the Task Team, this third actor was diluted in the universe of Southern partners, the subjects of the traditional South-South cooperation tradition. Partly as a cause and partly as a consequence of this state of affairs, neither of these bodies managed to actively engage the major Southern providers, which was their supposed main target. However, this does not imply that these actors were completely absent from these bodies or from the effectiveness agenda in general. Suspicious of the OECD but with mixed incentives, they did appear from time to time in meetings, and sometimes participated quite actively in them (Brazil, for example). But they failed to do it in a systematic way or to make a commitment to lead or to take any responsibilities. Indeed, not long after the adoption of the Paris Declaration, a cat-and-mouse game developed that aimed to bring the Southern providers on board the effectiveness ship, with steps forwards, backwards and intermittently contradictory signals throughout, with the Non-DAC IWG and the Task Team being two goals in this game.

Deemed to take place three years after Accra, and just after the Paris commitments were due, the Busan summit portrayed itself as a watershed in the development cooperation

38 The Task Team on South-South Cooperation portrayed itself as a Southern-led initiative and was endorsed by the WP-EFF during its regular post-Accra meeting on 1 April 2009. It was originally a Mexican and Colombian initiative backed in the background by Spain – though Mexico took a step backwards in exchange for Colombian support to head another regional multilateral body in the development cooperation agenda. Colombia then took the lead, later joined by Indonesia as co-chair, thus aiming at a better regional balance. The Task Team met a number of times, the first time formally in Washington in September 2009. Among its valuable work, apart from its work on knowledge-sharing, it collected vast amounts of concrete experiences of South-South technical cooperation projects, with the aim of distilling recommendations and good practices. This work culminated in the organisation of a High Level Event on South-South Cooperation and Capacity Development in Bogota in March 2010 with the aim of feeding into the Busan summit. It says volumes about its character and limitations as a forum for Southern providers that an *ad hoc* Steering Committee to organise the Bogota summit was formed by a number of regional and multilateral organisations and the following countries: Colombia, Egypt, Thailand, Peru, Vietnam, Mozambique, Spain and Korea (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia, 2009).

agenda. Key ingredients of the new era were to be a new paradigm of “development effectiveness” – rather than the more narrowly focussed aid agenda of Paris – and a thorough inclusiveness that, building on previous efforts, deemed to bring all new relevant non-state and state actors on board. To facilitate the latter, Busan closed down the DAC-hosted WP-EFF and created a real self-standing global partnership, the GPEDC, in its stead. This new body was built as a broad alliance of constituencies from NGOs, the private sector, foundations, parliaments and others, most of them directly represented in a governing steering committee led by a troika of ministers, each from one of the three bilateral actors in play: donors, recipients and dual donor / recipient actors. In this scheme, a crucial test that soon became the main proof of the success of the whole venture was Busan’s capacity to finally catch the mouse and bring the emerging powers on board the effectiveness ship. But as the date of the summit approached and the failure of the Task Team to involve these players was fully realised, the *ad hoc* body that was created to finalise the negotiations of the Busan outcome document tried to engage them directly. China agreed to formally join this group, and late in the day, India and Brazil joined the discussions in the summit itself. In the midst of typical mixed signals and tense, last-minute negotiations, their participation allowed for a major success in terms of format – the major Southern players had endorsed the Busan outcome document as providers (rather than recipients) of development cooperation – and a modest but firm step forward in terms of content. These players would engage in the cooperation effectiveness agenda on a voluntary basis and, as mentioned earlier, would be guided by the principle of differential commitments (Atwood, 2012). Though this framework still needed to be filled with content, starting with the question of the differential commitments these actors would be ready to undertake in this presumed action-oriented agenda.

In the aftermath of Busan, the Task Team petered out among some acrimony (not unfounded from its point of view) that the agenda had “sold out” to the BRICS. Apparently, having learnt their lessons after the Non-DAC IWG and the Task Team experiences, traditional donors now restrained from fostering another Southern body. If anything, the initiative should come from and be sustained by the Southern providers themselves. But which of them, if any, should take the lead? The Busan summit barely managed to bring the large Southern players in, but as soon as the summit ended, the cat-and-mouse game was on again. The big three (China, India and Brazil) joined the Post Busan Interim Group (PBIG) – a body convened to tie up some loose ends left at the Busan summit, to which they were expressly invited – intermittently and only as observers.³⁹ Moreover, they failed to join the new governing structure of the GPEDC.⁴⁰ In

39 The PBIG was a rendering of the *ad hoc* body that negotiated the Busan outcome document, which was composed by delegates representing the different constituencies of the WP-EFF. Through the facilitating role of Korea, the host of the meeting, China, Mexico and South Africa stood for the constituency of donors / recipients – the three of them having good credentials to represent Southern providers. As the Busan meeting left a number of loose ends, both in substance and governance, the chair reconvened the core of the group with some additions, such as those of Brazil and India, who agreed to join but only as observers – a status that China also adopted for itself. Thus, the group now known as PBIG came into existence. It had a number of meetings before closing in June 2012, when the last meeting of the WP-EFF was held and the GPEDC was officially born.

40 The governing body of the GPEDC is a Steering Committee chaired by three ministers representing the three bilateral constituencies of the partnership: donors, recipients and donor / recipients. In its first appearance, the three ministers came from the United Kingdom (traditional donors), Nigeria (recipient countries) and Indonesia (donors / recipients), all three of them women. In addition, the donors / recipients had an extra seat at the Steering Committee taken by Peru. In contrast, the better-structured

their absence, the chairs of the recipient / donor constituency went once again to countries (Indonesia and Peru) that, due to their own internal profiles, were not ready to assume the admittedly confusing role of Southern providers, understandably enough. They were in no position to lead this undefined constituency, so they played it safe and stuck to the traditional South-South narrative – repeating the experience of the Task Team. Thus, when the time came to choose substantive themes to tackle at the first meeting of GPEDC, Indonesia, which was holding one of the three first co-presidencies of the partnership, opted for ... knowledge-sharing.

Once again, as the timetable to organise the first meeting of the GPEDC approached, there was no mechanism in place to engage the big Southern players. A last bet was to hope that Mexico, when invited to host such a meeting, would accepted the challenge and could perhaps succeed, given its profile (a Southern player but also an OECD member and DAC observer) and experience in the effectiveness agenda (Escanero & González Segura, 2014). As a first positive step, Mexico, now effectively part of the governing body of the GPEDC, brought the topic of knowledge-sharing within the larger umbrella of South-South cooperation. This sent a powerful message that South-South cooperation was much more than knowledge-sharing (or technical cooperation, in the traditional jargon), thereby aligning the first GPEDC meeting's agenda to the interests and practices of the Southern providers. But its second step was less steady. Macro-politics got in the way, and with the larger picture of its foreign relations in mind, Mexico decided not to invest the substantial amount of political capital that was required to succeed in the admittedly risky venture of bringing the Southern providers together in order to hammer out common positions at the GPEDC meeting.⁴¹ It then resorted to the practice of dealing with them individually within the framework of the effort to generate the Mexican communiqué of the meeting. It must be said that Mexico made targeted, substantial efforts to bring these players on board. As can be seen in the resulting text, the communiqué contains many of their contributions. In the end, however, macro-politics came into play again, but now from the side of the governments of China and India. At the last minute, the two Asian giants failed to appear in Mexico, apparently fearing that they would be endorsing a document that somehow would be pre-empt or contaminate some of the post-2015 discussions in the pipeline.⁴² So in this

constituencies of the traditional donors and the recipient countries had another three and five extra seats, respectively, at this Steering Committee.

41 A last-minute attempt to convey a meeting that, in principle, could play such a role came from a joint initiative of the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation (CAITEC – a think tank close to China's Commerce Ministry – MOFCOM) and UNDP China, presented as a "South-South Development Cooperation Providers Workshop: Preparations for the First Meeting of the Global Partnership in Mexico", which took place in Beijing 24-25 March 2014. It was a worthy initiative, but it came too late in the day (just two weeks before the meeting in Mexico), with an understandably too cautious agenda and only lukewarm support from MOFCOM to make a difference. It cautioned that it did not "*seek to promote any particular approach to or view of the Mexico HLM*". It aimed not at arriving at common positions from the Southern providers but at bringing "*together countries actively engaged in South-South cooperation to discuss their perspectives on the GP and provide information to inform their contribution to debates and key messages at the HLM*" (Davies, 2014). Nonetheless, there were good discussions in which the need to develop a proper narrative for the South-South providers (including the differentiated responsibilities issue) and an *ad hoc* platform to develop it were recognised. The meeting also produced an important institutional outcome, which is discussed later: the creation of the Network of Southern Think Tanks, or NEST (Davies, 2014).

42 The Asian giants also floated the excuse that the GPEDC continued to be a forum genetically attached to the OECD/DAC and dominated by traditional donors. But as argued above, the agenda has moved far from the OECD since the Paris Declaration. A closer connection with the OECD than the one that

respect, although the first GPEDC meeting took a modest step forward in terms of content (by registering a first explicit differential commitment of Southern providers), it took two steps backwards in terms of form, as these two crucial players shunned Mexico. The cat-and-mouse game was back again with no end in sight, and after many years, its protraction has contributed to the erosion of the agenda itself, as explained below. The conclusion of this compressed saga of “unrequited love”, as put by seasoned researchers on the topic, is that in order for Southern providers to really function as a proper constituency in the constituency-built GPEDC, the whole forum should move to the UN, or they should consolidate in another forum that is not organically attached to the GPEDC or its agenda (Fues & Klingebiel, 2014). But if so, in which?

8.4.2 The G-20 and the Heiligendamm experience

In 2010, the recently enhanced G-20 took on board the development agenda and created a Development Working Group (DWG) to carry it forward. Could this new body help to bring the Southern donors into the effectiveness agenda? Some observers thought the G-20 could and should play this kind of mediating role (Jones, 2010; Berensmann, Fues, & Volz, 2011). As a briefing paper of the German Development Institute argued at the time: *“one central function of the G20 could be to negotiate compromises between member countries [...] that would then be relayed to (other) multilateral institutions”* (Berensmann, Fues, & Volz, 2011, p. 3). But as the DGW of the G-20 was *“in fact an alliance between traditional donors and emerging powers in the benefit of poorer countries”* – as the 2012 Mexican Chairman of Group put it (Granguillhome, 2012, p. 28) – most such compromises were bound to not be among the DWG members in general, but among its two distinctive constituencies: traditional and emerging donors. These were precisely the types of compromises between the North and the South that could unblock many development agendas in fora such as the GPEDC and the UN. To engage in such conversation, it was critical that the emerging members of the G-20 collectively engage in the battle to create a narrative for themselves as Southern providers – and they were the legitimate group to do this.

There was a clear and immediate precedent for using the G-20 in such a two-constituencies format: the experience of the so-called Heiligendamm process, which took off during the 2007 German presidency of the G-8 as a dialogue mechanism between the G-8 and five emerging powers, namely: China, India, Brazil, South Africa and Mexico (Postel-Vinay, 2012). Heiligendamm was spurred by the conviction that the world was changing fast, that a restricted G-8 was not enough to govern it effectively, and that a number of emerging powers had to be taken on board to try to guide it better and in a more legitimate way. Its aim was to explore ways in which these two groups of countries could collaborate in certain areas, including development. The important question to remember here is that it took the form of a G8 + G5 dialogue, which was born as an outreach project of the G-8. Though it created expectations that the G-8 could transform itself into a full-fledged G-13 in the near future. This two-group format naturally gave rise to coordination meetings among the G-5 led by Mexico, fuelling expectations that such an informal group

prevails today did not prevent these countries from attending previous summits. The intromission of the post-2015 agenda was, in this author’s opinion, a more important factor, at least for China.

of emerging powers could consolidate as such (Aranda Bezaury & Díaz Ceballos Parada, 2010) – a side effect of Heiligendamm that, not surprisingly, the G-8 met with distrust.

In terms of substance, the Heiligendamm development agenda was wide open from the outset. Yet, in the spirit of the whole process, its format was bound to be a dialogue among traditional and emerging powers on how to support worldwide development and how to give a helping hand to poorer and less-capable countries – in other words, a conversation between traditional donors and emerging Southern providers, which would be the first such structured dialogue of its type between the main members of these two constituencies. As the emerging powers lacked any clear narrative about the *sui generis* donors there were or would be, the conversation was messy at first. Some G-5 members felt that they had fallen into a trap and almost refused to enter into a dialogue on development in such terms. They could very well play the role of emerging powers in other agendas (say the world economy, international finance or energy), but in the development agenda, where the Bandung spirit still shone more than in any other, they consider themselves still to be developing countries, with a right to ODA and a lack of willingness to pose as emerging powers at all. Not surprisingly, in this development field, coordination among G-5 members proved to be more difficult than in other Heiligendamm topics. Encouragingly, after a rough start, this iterative process started yielding some results a few meetings later. By late 2009 the Heiligendamm members had agreed on a number of issues, including principles of how to help fragile states and how to do and foster triangular cooperation – an agenda that was rightly identified as an ideal mechanism to promote practical collaboration and trust between traditional and emerging Southern donors (Soria Morales, 2011). But then, around the same time, as the worst economic crisis in decades settled in – and to help deal with it – the narrow focussed and practically unknown G-20 was substantially beefed up as an informal multilateral body that would meet at the highest level; the Heiligendamm process seemed to have lost its *raison d'être*. After months of incertitude and agony, in January 2010 its sponsors let it die quietly.

At first glance, there were good reasons to expect that a renewed G-20 would deepen and broaden the Heiligendamm experience. If the G-20 had effectively superseded Heiligendamm, the corollary was that it might well do other things, but also perform its functions better and with more legitimacy. Otherwise, why shut it down? In terms of membership, the G-20 also looked like a beefed up Heiligendamm: the same 13 plus another 7 “systemically important” countries that were (or could be considered) either from the emerging or the developed camp. In short, at least in certain agendas, the G-20 might continue to perform as a forum for dialogue and negotiations between its two types of members, as Heiligendamm had done. The development agenda brought into the G-20 in 2010 appeared as a prime candidate for this approach. Those people close to Heiligendamm, starting with the small *ad hoc* secretariat that served it, certainly expected so (Soria Morales, 2011). This was clearly the expectation of Lourdes Aranda, the Mexican Sherpa who had led the G-5 and argued that Mexico should “*explore the possibility of creating a coordination mechanism among the emerging countries of the G-20*” (Aranda Bezaury & Díaz Ceballos Parada, 2010, p. 671). As the Busan summit approached and negotiations were stuck due precisely to a lack of agreement between emerging and traditional donors, it was with this logic that, at the outset of its 2012 presidency of the DWG, Mexico floated the idea of tackling the effectiveness issue at the G-20 to help unlock such a situation. The results were disappointing. Some crucial emerging players feared that Mexico was being “used” to bring a DAC agenda under the table. Whereas key developed countries feared

that Mexico was trying to resuscitate the G-5 experience and “divide the G-20”, since such discussions could not take place except in the format of a dialogue between traditional donors and emerging Southern providers and Mexico was quite open about this. Though, of course, those same developed countries that feared the division of the G-20 continue to meet regularly at the G-7 and G-8, which – contrary to some expectations – did not wither away with the rise of this larger body. Not surprisingly, given its role in this story, Germany was the only big player that openly welcomed Mexico’s suggestion. But the fact that this proposal was questioned by both sides of the G-20 divide clearly shows that it was entirely a Mexican initiative and a well-intentioned one, though Mexico did not pursue it further.

Having said this, it is true that, formally speaking, the G-20 is meant to be a forum of equals and not a continuation of a Heiligendamm dialogue between two types of members (Postel-Vinay, 2012). It is also understandable that its founders tried to be pragmatic and avoid at the outset “ideological discussions” that produce such bad blood and locked situations at UN fora. Important academic voices share the view that “*the G-20 is not an appropriate forum for such discussions*” (Kharas & Lombardi, 2012, p. 10). At the same time, at least in the context of the development agenda, the “pragmatism” admittedly needed to kick-start the process – coupled by a rigidity that could be avoided by an informal group such as the G-20 – is proving to be costly, not only due to the “lost opportunity” it entails, but also in its own terms. On the latter, without a frank soul-searching discussion on which basis and principles the development agenda should be approached (the ignored elephant in the room) by such a disparate group of developing and developed countries, the DWG began without a strong common sense of purpose and identity.⁴³ Not surprisingly, its results have been modest at best, and its usefulness and continuity have been contested almost from the beginning, and mostly by those members that should be more interested in development. Indeed, some developing countries of the G-20 have failed to make sense of what the DWG is really about, since they too are poor and in need of help. On the missed opportunity, building on the Heiligendamm experience, the G-20 should be the perfect group for unlocking a number of important international agendas that are stuck – climate change, development effectiveness, the post-2015 world, development finance – because the old dual North-South / South-South paradigm offers no clues about the roles and responsibilities that the new rising powers (Southern providers) should shoulder. The formal fora in which these agendas develop seem, by comparison, to be too large, unwieldy and suffused with confrontational ideology to be able to deconstruct such a paradigm and produce an alternative one.⁴⁴ In terms of this discussion, such development would have required the emerging powers of the G-20 to hammer common positions – as Aranda suggested – as they were beginning to do in the G-5. In so doing, they would generate a sort of DAC of the South *in nuce*, where a narrative for these

43 The so-called G-20 development principles, adopted in Seoul, avoid all difficult questions and are just enough to generate practical collaboration between members.

44 Following in Mexico’s steps, the Russian 2013 presidency proposed tackling the question of the post-2015 agenda in the G-20. But if it had had more luck, in the sense that such a proposal was at least formally accepted (though with little enthusiasm), it seems that it will produce no tangible results. Insofar as the G-20 fails to transform itself in a Heiligendamm fashion into a open dialogue between traditional donors and emerging providers – mimicking thus in a more amiable setting the North-South divide at the UN – such discussion will hardly advance. Contrary to appearances, keeping intact the “unity of the G-20” does not help to advance the thorniest issues of the development agenda. Tellingly, the programme of the Turkish presidency of the G-20, which began in January 2015, offers no room to discuss the post-2015 agenda.

new Southern development cooperation providers could legitimately start to emerge. So far, the emerging powers of the G-20 have avoided the risk, but they have also missed the opportunity to play this role, although they might take it on in the future.

8.4.3 The Delhi process, the Core Group of Southern Partners and NEST

The legitimacy of the GPEDC to provide a house for the South is still (rightly or wrongly) being questioned. The G-20 has proved to be too cautious. Both these experiences seem to point to one conclusion: to be on firmer ground, the new narrative of Southern providers should be more tightly rooted in the South. It should either stem from a leading Southern country (or group of countries) or from a UN body. The Delhi process came about from a combination of the two: an initiative from India with backing from UNDESA. Both in form and substance, the Delhi meeting of April 2013 seemed very promising. To start with, keeping with the Bandung tradition, the organisers made a strong point that the Delhi meeting was a gathering of the South entirely financed by the South (i.e. India) with some help from the UN, in contrast with the WP-EFF bodies. Second, the fact that India took the lead was also very important. India played a prominent role in the brewing of the South-South tradition, from co-conveying the Bandung summit to fostering the Non-Aligned Movement and the G-77. In addition it is still a quite poor country in per capita terms. For these reasons, it has had a natural inclination to defend the integrity of such traditions. Not surprisingly, it has proven to be among the hardest nuts to crack in discussions at Busan, Heiligendamm and other fora. So it was all the more encouraging that India took the lead and conveyed a meeting to update such a tradition. Third, the meeting was meant to be one of Southern providers. This was properly reflected in the title of the meeting and in the list of participants dominated by government officials from emerging countries. Fourth, and crucially, the meeting was conceived as the first step for both a process aimed at adapting the narrative of South-South cooperation to the times (or of creating a narrative for the Southern provider) and the creation of an adequate platform to do this.

In terms of substance, the first draft of the concept note and agenda was remarkable. It started with the effectiveness agenda, recognising that the DAC had moved on from being a narrowly conceived donor agenda in Paris to a wider and more inclusive one in Busan that encompassed a much larger portfolio of actors. Among the latter, the Busan summit singled out the emerging countries, which, as the note recognised, were providing increasingly more assistance but also disrupting the dynamics of the old South-South tradition, suggesting the need to adapt it to the times. In a critical twist, the note claimed that the post-Busan process was one of the North trying to impose its standards and practices on the South – an exaggerated but not completely groundless impression, as argued throughout the essay. But then, most importantly, it sent the correct message. The effectiveness agenda was not at all irrelevant to the Southern providers – on the contrary. But these players required their own narrative – that did not in fact exist – to participate productively, and the Delhi meeting was there to start covering for such a gap. In this way, the note confirmed both: the crucial role of the effectiveness agenda to bring this new actor to the fore, and its limited resources to properly equip it with a narrative and keep it firmly there.

But between the first draft concept note, the definitive documents of the meeting and the development of the meeting itself, something happened. Apparently, the organisers had second thoughts and preferred in the last moment to play more conservatively and water down the progressive elements and scope of the original design. So, in line with South-South orthodoxy, the providers were relabelled as partners at the meeting itself; the question of the (non-) responsibilities of Southern assistance was introduced; the broad definition of South-South cooperation – including trade and the like – was recalled; the development effectiveness agenda was brought out of the limelight; and an embryonic idea of creating a Southern DAC was rejected as a misnomer (correct) that would divide the South (wrong). Notwithstanding, the most important messages remained. First, a recognition of the need to make the South-South cooperation narrative up-to-date, though this stemmed not from a clear recognition of the emergence of a new actor – as was the case in the preliminary concept note (the Southern provider) – but rather from more South-South activity in general: an approach that allows seeing the whole project as one of making the South-South tradition up-to-date rather than one of creating a new narrative for the Southern cooperation provider. The second message was the need to deploy such a narrative in the effectiveness agenda in order to preserve a Southern perspective within it.⁴⁵ Third was the need to have a Southern platform to produce such a narrative.⁴⁶

One might speculate that the patent change in tone between the original design and the final outcome of Delhi reflected a late, full incorporation of the UNDESA secretariat in the process. This view gains credibility when it is considered that the Delhi process was taken over by UNDESA, which promoted the creation of the Core Group of Southern Partners with the aspiration of being the Southern platform that Delhi called for.⁴⁷ The migration to the UN carried a cost. As the church of the South-South tradition and the world's main all-inclusive legitimate forum, the UN could not easily promote a “heretic”

45 As the final concept note put it: “*Discussing openly the implications of the BGP (Busan Global Partnership GB) among Southern providers and formulating coordinated positions will be more beneficial than simply neglecting the BGP*” (RIS, MEA, & UNDESA, 2013, p. 2). Although the report is explicit on the need for Southern providers to have these coordinated positions “*before the next meeting of the Global Partnership*” (RIS, MEA, & UNDESA, 2013, p. 7). Unfortunately, as we saw, India and China failed to appear in the first GPEDC summit in Mexico, and there was no such coordinating meeting before such summit, whereas the belated workshop convened by CAITEC and UNDP China did not play such role.

46 The final report of the meeting expressed the issue of an *ad hoc* Southern platform as follows: “*The changing development landscape and global norm-setting increasingly calls on Southern partners to coordinate on strategy, policy and operations. Such coordination must be anchored on a proper platform. The platform must be credible and inclusive. Existing institutions, including OECD/DAC, IBSA [India, Brazil, South Africa] BRICS, etc, either lack credibility or inclusiveness: therefore they cannot be the option. It was cautioned that the concept of a ‘Southern DAC’ risks repeating the mistakes of the North in reaffirming a ‘give and take’ relationship. However, there is an urgent need for the South to develop such platform*” (RIS, MEA, & UNDESA, 2013, p. 5).

47 A few days before the Delhi meeting took place, UNDESA circulated an invitation to those selected countries summoned to Delhi (and probably others as well) to participate in a “follow-up” meeting of Southern Director Generals of development cooperation, to take place at the fringes of the DCF in Addis Ababa (5 June 2013). Tellingly so, this first invitation was directed to Southern *providers*, though, after what happened in Delhi, the final background note was addressed to Southern *partners* (see above) (UNDESA, 2013; United Nations Economic and Social Council & Development Cooperation Forum, 2013). The participants in Addis Ababa made the decision to formalise the group, baptised as the “Core Group of Southern partners”, which met formally for the first time in Istanbul in December 2013 (UNDESA & Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı [TIKA], 2013).

agenda for a distinctive group of Southern players bound to diverge with the South-South traditional narrative. In this interpretation, the final message from the Delhi meeting – as opposed to its original design – seemed to be that the agenda of creating a narrative for the Southern providers (and an *ad hoc* platform to develop it) would move forward, but that it would advance slowly and be shrouded in old language and concepts, in tune with UN jargon. That is, it would advance in a fashion too common in politics: keeping the same language, labels and slogans as a façade to facilitate a needed change in content.⁴⁸ With the group of emerging G-20 members failing to take this agenda head on, this is probably the only way to move forward in actual circumstances: a distinctive narrative of Southern providers might be arrived at slowly, one that is presented as a mere actualisation of the old South-South narrative, not as anything fundamentally new. It is not a bad deal if it performs the trick of incorporating these new players in a just and intelligent way into the development cooperation agenda and architecture. Though the obvious danger of taking this path is that the agenda will remain trapped in traditional jargon that will impede instead of facilitate the emergence of a proper narrative for the Southern provider. Indeed, with the mixed incentives they actually face with this agenda, some emerging powers might in the end just prefer to push for the rationalisation of the old South-South discourse. In short, this is not the most desirable route to take, and certainly not the fastest one, nor one that ensures a good outcome, but it is probably the only politically feasible one, at least for the time being.

A first and crucial indicator that the agenda is in fact moving forward, though dressed in old clothes, is the actual composition of this Core Group. Keeping with the soul of the Delhi process, its list of members, which has been shifting, is now overwhelmingly one of *providers* of South-South cooperation that dare not speak its name.⁴⁹ Moreover, on substance, the Core Group started by choosing the right subject. It is now in the middle of tackling the issue of how to account for South-South cooperation, though, as mentioned above, it seems to have fallen in the Latin American trap of equating, in practice, South-South cooperation with technical cooperation or knowledge-sharing. If it can emerge from this trap (and it should, given that many of its members deploy a much wider array of cooperation modalities), it could then move forward with firmer steps towards other technical themes (e.g. monitoring and evaluation issues) to finally, hopefully, arrive at the most politically important ones: responsibilities and commitments. In any case, one thing is certain: even if the Core Group manages to succeed, the process following such an oblique route will consume much time. Right now, it seems trapped by the macro-politics of the post-2015 agenda. Thus, though the Core Group has met formally and informally a number of times, country participation has been irregular and has met with difficulties in advancing on substance. Once the post-2015 agenda is out of the way, conditions to move forward will likely improve.

The Core Group is likely to get a helping hand from the Network of Southern Think Tanks (NEST). This network is also genetically attached to the Delhi process. One could argue

48 To put it provocatively: If the Chinese Communist Party was able to foster one of the most successful forms of capitalisms in history, why couldn't a core group of Southern partners of the UN produce a good narrative and foment good practices for the emerging Southern donors?

49 By late 2014 the Core Group consisted of 16 country members, with a number of them having yet nominated their delegates / contact points, namely: Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, China, India, Indonesia, Kuwait, Qatar, Turkey, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Uruguay and Venezuela – as can be seen, with few exceptions, it is a group of Southern providers with all the main players included.

that it should become something like its academic arm – though NEST came about with support from the UNDP, and coordination between UN agencies is not always easy.⁵⁰ In any case, the agenda of NEST is well-aligned to that of the Core Group. But it should have an edge. In principle, a network of academics should be much less restrained by ideology than a core group of countries hosted by UNDESA. In this sense NEST could advance further and quicker in the task of creating a narrative for the Southern provider. Indeed, NEST wants to be “evidence-based” and ensure that its discussions “*should not dwell too much on the traditional political rhetoric, but rather on empirical and methodological issues*” (Network of Southern Think Tanks [NEST], 2014). Though having said this, in spite of the independence it proclaims for itself, NEST is probably moving too cautiously, apparently for political reasons, and avoiding focussing explicitly on the Southern provider. Indeed, in tune with the Core Group, as a starting point, it continues to perceive the South as a coherent whole (even if admitting that there are “regional and national specificities”). It also sees the need for a new narrative, not as stemming from the *de facto* appearance of this new third Southern actor, but due to an increase of South-South cooperation activities in general and the need to rationalise its discourse. The difference is significant because the second approach could create a mere reformulation of the old South-South narrative, which, as argued previously, is not in tune with current times, including its confrontational tone with the North. It is also not in tune with the constructive narrative adapted to the history and circumstances of this new type of *sui generis* donor – that is, what the development agenda and architecture really need. One would think that a network of academics led by politically well-connected, first-class researchers from the emerging powers would be in a better position to take a more direct route to this second outcome, since, in fact, the leading members of NEST all come from emerging Southern countries, indeed all from the BRICS, which might become problematic as to legitimately represent a larger constituency. But then again, it will all depend on how the battle for this narrative evolves. In sum, as matters stand, the Core Group and NEST appear as the most legitimate actors to pursue such a battle.

9 The development cooperation agenda in danger

The emerging Southern donors are not so novel anymore. They appeared with gusto in the development cooperation agenda almost 10 years ago. However, as shown, even if there has been much noise and a number of diplomatic battles around these issues, neither the narrative nor the political agreements needed to incorporate them in this agenda have advanced much in a coherent and helpful way. They have been hampered both by the inertia of development cooperation traditions that fail to adapt their narratives to the times and by interests hidden behind concepts and arguments.

⁵⁰ The idea of creating such a network was floated at the first meeting of the Delhi process, and it was pushed forward by academics deeply involved with this process (RIS, MEA, & UNDESA, 2013, p. 8). The initiative took shape at the South-South providers’ Beijing meeting to prepare for the GPEDC summit in March 2014 (see below) with strong support from UNDP China. The official launching of NEST was sponsored by the Mexican Foreign Ministry and took place at the fringes of the first GPEDC. NEST was one of more than forty voluntary initiatives taken in Mexico to push the development effectiveness agenda – one of the few initiatives focussed on South-South cooperation. In Mexico, an executive group was formed with members from Brazil, China, India and South Africa, who met in Beijing in October 2014. A plenary of NEST is due to take place in Johannesburg in March 2015.

To start with, the lack of progress in this central piece of the development cooperation landscape seems to be upsetting (if not derailing) the post-2015 MDG negotiations, which to a large extent depends on a successful agreement between traditional and emerging powers. In March 2013, convinced that there was no better formula to carry these negotiations forwards, the UN Secretariat expected all countries to adopt explicit commitments “*in accordance with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities*” (United Nations System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, 2013, p. vi). As argued throughout the paper, this is indeed the only suitable rational formula for engaging such a diverse group of state actors to achieve common objectives. But as in climate change negotiations it took the perverse meaning of “no commitments”, important donors reject it. Today, the principle of CBDR (or a proxy such as the differential commitments coined in Busan), which should underpin the required political agreements between traditional donors and Southern providers, has unfortunately become another bone of contention. This is an absurd stalemate that could be overcome if, for example, the Southern providers proved with deeds that it can and should carry a positive message: a formula to buy into the responsibilities framework, not to shun it.

But as the conversation has advanced, with neither of these two major actors having moved on this issue, the UN Secretariat seems to be backtracking and has withdrawn the polemic concept from recent major documents. Already in its report to the DCF in May 2014, the Secretary-General shuns the CBDR concept, and where it makes a few references to “different responsibilities”, he does so in the context of non-state actors, leaving it ambiguous as to whether it applies to countries at all (UN, 2014a, pp. 65, 92). More recently, in his synthesis report on the post-2015 agenda, the Secretary-General only refers once to the CBDR concept – in the context of climate change, but not in context of the broader development cooperation agenda (UN, 2014b). In this same report, he commends the “*significant efforts of solidarity by emerging economies*” and – accordingly so with this sort of language – makes no hint that they too may have any responsibilities in the development cooperation agenda. In this context, one is inclined to think that, in order to somehow compensate this leniency towards the emerging powers, the UN is also being more lenient towards the traditional donors. Of course, the almost ritualised reference for the need of the developed countries to comply with the 0.7 per cent GNI ODA target is always present (see paragraph 98). But there is a sense throughout the document that the responsibilities of the North towards the South – a basic precept of the post-war paradigm – are now on their way out. In its stead there is, on the one hand, a so-called universal agenda in which all countries become responsible, and on the other, a transition from firm collective responsibilities to individual voluntary commitments.

On the first issue, the new round of Sustainable Development Goals will be applicable (with *ad hoc* targets, that is) to all developed and developing countries, since “*even in the richest countries, there can be destitution and exclusion*”, as the Secretary-General argues in his quoted synthesis report (paragraph 48). At first glance, the transition to universality in the SDG agenda seems commendable. It is true that all countries have problems. Moreover, such a formula appears to drastically transcend the old, outmoded, paternalistic North-South divide and herald the beginning of an international system in which all countries will really be equal and sovereign, with no group of countries having responsibilities for any other. But if the rush to universality has this bright side in narrative terms, it might not be a good idea for the health of the international system. The simple truth is that countries are not, in fact, nearly equal in power and wealth, and to pretend so

in a classical liberal view seems like a first step towards a system that will magnify, rather than reduce, such inequality, thereby mimicking a market system that, when left to itself, has proved to be a machine that reproduces inequality – as the impact of deregulation in the past decades has made clear. Though immersed in the Cold War, the aid system was brought in to help reduce this inequality. One would argue that, in a limited way, it has helped in doing so (aid does have some amazing stories, as its part in forging the Korean miracle shows) and still has much work to do. Not even in its best times did proponents of foreign aid picture it becoming the main input to development, which has always been seen, and correctly so, as the prime responsibility of each country. At the same time, the post-war international aid system put clear responsibilities on the shoulders of the most advanced countries to help the others left behind (and by so doing help themselves). Now that the collective “bads” are more dangerous than ever, there is no reason to water-down this message. The arrival of new donors should help reinforce and reform the aid system rather than undermine it.

A corresponding development is the silent transition from collective, constituency-based responsibilities to a system of country-specific voluntary commitments. If indeed the differences between North and South are blurred, what remains is a myriad of countries (or “partners”) that are quite different, with each posed to help the international system according to its own particular capacities and circumstances. That this is the direction the wind is blowing in can be sensed somehow in a number of paragraphs of the above-mentioned synthesis report of the Secretary-General of the UN. There is no ambiguity, however, in the case of the development cooperation effectiveness agenda. In previous summits in Paris, Accra and Busan, traditional donors competed among themselves to adopt new collective commitments. In contrast, in Mexico City, they all seemed to agree that no new commitments were needed; many also thought that the old ones were, if anything, now part of a much broader agenda, and not necessarily of the most important one. Instead, a large number of “voluntary commitments” of very different quality and meaning were adopted and attached as an annex to the summit’s communiqué.

As with the rush to universality, the transition from a framework of collective commitments to one of individual and voluntary commitments may not seem like a bad idea. To start with, the development cooperation agenda is not a binding agenda but rather an entirely voluntary one. In this sense, it would be a matter of matching form with substance. From a certain perspective, it would also seem fairer. Many Northern countries resent being put in the same basket. And they are right. There are significant differences among them not only in terms of income per capita but also capacities and internal challenges and – by the way, in spite of their DAC membership – in their development cooperation systems as well. Take Norway and Portugal, for example. Why should they both commit to the same target – say, the 0.7 per cent target? Indeed, if any typology of countries is found wanting for one reason or another, it might be wise to get rid of these arbitrary conceptual exercises altogether, or as much as possible. Finally, the record of compliance of Northern countries on both their quantitative and qualitative collective responsibilities in the development cooperation agenda is pretty poor. So not much would be lost if they were just eliminated.

Each of these arguments has a point. Nonetheless, a full transit from collective to individual and voluntary commitments would not be good news for the aid system. Even if compliance has been low, the framework of formal collective commitments – in which

actors have been operating for many years – in terms of quantity and quality of aid, serves as a benchmark to evaluate the performance of the whole system as well as of the individual countries that form part of it. The commitments also serve as banners for all stakeholders (recipient countries, CSOs, multilateral organisations, other donor countries) to praise the good performers and pressure the laggards to comply. Without them, the peer review system as it is known today would not really work. The point here is not to do away with collective responsibilities and commitments but to apply the framework flexibly, according to particular circumstances (as it has been working, in fact), and to bring “extra” voluntary commitments. Going back to the Mexican GPEDC summit: it was not a bad idea to promote a plethora of new voluntary commitments by individual stakeholders or *ad hoc* groups of them, which was a first in the effectiveness agenda. The problem is that they came in, quite conspicuously, to cover for the lack of enthusiasm for the hard collective commitments that had been the core of this agenda in the past. What is needed is for traditional donors to keep – and comply with – their responsibilities; for Southern providers to join the framework with their own differentiated ones; and for both to be applied flexibly and topped up with a plethora of always welcomed voluntary initiatives from individual countries, or *ad hoc* groups of them.

The stalemate on the narrative for Southern providers and their place in the development cooperation architecture not only affects the multilateral agenda but also the way Northern donors provide aid. As Southern providers fail to assume responsibilities, traditional donors feel less pressure to keep their own commitments. At the beginning of this essay, it was explained that there were several drivers behind the US initiative to set up the DAC. One of them was to help create a level playing field for inter-capitalist competition. Thus, for example, against the initial resistance of Germany and other donors, export subsidies were eventually excluded from the ODA concept. Nowadays, contrary to the DAC’s best practices, China and other Southern providers often use their development cooperation (just as Western emerging donors did decades ago) as a vehicle to advance their economic interests, whereas ODA only credits activities whose main objective is to support development. In this context, partly as an implicit response to this “disloyal competition”, a number of traditional donors have begun to relax the traditional donor standards, undermining the DAC-induced barrier between ODA and commercial activities. Thus, the governments of Australia, Canada, Holland and New Zealand have recently blended, in different ways, their cooperation agencies with institutions geared towards promoting their national economic interests (Fues, 2014). These institutional reforms go against the DAC’s best practices and towards those of China, where the Trade Ministry has been responsible for development cooperation for a long time now. As co-opting the Southern providers is clearly failing, “copying them” now seems a viable, respectable option. Moreover, these worrying trends are taking hold in a context in which the aid industry is being starkly criticised for being too rigid, and hypocritical as well for generating too few results and being too costly at a time of general fiscal difficulties in the North (Moyo, 2009). These critics argue that the emerging donors are doing the right thing and should be emulated not by need but by conviction.

The point here is not at all to argue that the Southern providers are spoiling the party of a faultless Western aid industry, as the pundit Moisés Naím once famously claimed (Naím, 2007). In fact, they have been doing a lot of good things and correcting some biases and inconsistencies that traditional donors had been carrying for years. They (especially China) brought back the real economy, infrastructure and agriculture into the aid system –

sectors that had been virtually abandoned by the traditional donors with their over-paternalistic approach. They apply the Paris principles of ownership and alignment more consistently than the traditional donors themselves, as a recent case study on Nicaragua clearly shows (Roussel, 2013). The resources and healthy competition that the Southern providers have brought to the system are indeed welcome – especially by the recipient countries themselves. What is problematic is that, due to a lack of agreement on how they fit into the aid architecture, they have been unintentionally undermining a system that took decades to build and has many good things to commend. For some years now, scholars have debated if the Southern providers would rather align with or change the international aid system (Cabral, Russo, & Weinstock, 2014): those advocating the latter have been clearly winning the discussion, though this change is not necessarily for the better.

10 The road to a good narrative for the Southern providers: The contribution of Mexico

Mexico has been offering development cooperation for many decades within the framework of the South-South paradigm (Figueroa Fischer, 2014). Though it has at times supplied other modalities of cooperation, as a typical Latin American country, Mexico's foreign assistance has largely taken the form of technical and cultural cooperation. Until recently, this was modest in volume, non-monetised and practically uncoordinated and unplanned. In 1994 Mexico joined two clubs of rich nations: the North American Free Trade Agreement and the OECD. This, of course, did not transform Mexico into a Northern developed country – if only it were as simple as that. But it did change its perspective on the world and its foreign policy. Once a champion of the Third World movement, Mexico became intrinsically interested in mediating between the North and the South. Taking advantage of its dual identities, Mexico has been successful in helping to arrive at common ground in a number of development agendas (Tripp & Vega, 2011). At the same time, in spite of joining the OECD and becoming an observer in the DAC at an early stage, Mexico did little to consolidate itself as an important provider of development cooperation. But this has changed in the past few years, thanks to three events that herald a new era of Mexico's profile as a Southern provider: firstly, the adoption in 2011 of a Law on International Development Cooperation; secondly, the creation in 2012 of the Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation (AMEXCID); and thirdly, the accession in 2013 of a new federal government with a willingness to assume global responsibilities (Bracho & Pérez Pineda, 2015; Borbolla Compean, 2014; Sánchez Gutiérrez, 2009).⁵¹

What role should Mexico play in the complex juncture that the development cooperation agenda is passing through that was just described? One could argue that a less rigid aid industry in terms of standards and responsibilities would not be against Mexico's interests. A looser system with no overarching accords between traditional donors and Southern providers would give Mexico more room to openly use development cooperation as a tool

51 Though we must recognise that, at the time of writing, two recent factors have considerably worsened the short-term prospects of Mexico's role as a provider of development cooperation: a sharp fall in oil prices, which has drastically dented the federal budget; and the tragic event of the murdered students in the state of Guerrero, which brought to the surface the large institutional challenges that the country still faces, which in turn reduce the ability that Mexico has to display its soft power in general, and through development cooperation in particular.

to promote its economic interests. Such a scenario seems to blend well with Mexico's relatively modest level of development and with AMEXCID, which has under its mandate and structure not only cooperation but also promotion activities (Bracho & Pérez Pineda, 2015).

But if these are solid arguments to ponder on, a looser international system might not turn out to be in Mexico's long-term interests. A serious relaxation of donors' responsibilities would translate into increasingly less-efficient ODA. There would be fewer resources for those countries that need them most (multiplying the aid orphans) and, more disturbingly so in Mexico's view, fewer resources to meet global ills. It would create a bad precedent for other agendas and would be another step towards a dangerous world of blocks with few global agreements at a time when they are most needed. In sum, Mexico's short-term and in any case limited economic gains would be outrun by long-term losses at the global economic and political levels.

In the present circumstances, Mexico should mobilise its diplomatic comparative advantages as a Southern provider and DAC observer to help prevent the corrosion of the global development agenda. Building on the positions it has taken in a number of multilateral fora, Mexico should contribute towards generating the narrative that the Southern cooperation providers need to operate properly in the post-2015 agenda and to seal the necessary agreements with the DAC donors under the vigilant eye of the recipient countries. There needs to be a modern narrative that avoids both the rhetoric of North-South confrontation (G-77) and also rhetoric that argues that the North-South divide has lost all meaning, so that somehow it turns out that all countries are equals (DAC). A modern narrative is needed that rests on two complementary elements: the first states that Southern cooperation providers distinguish themselves from traditional DAC donors less by what they do than on how they do it, and especially regarding the responsibilities they assume in relation to poorer countries. The concept of "differentiated responsibilities" is therefore key, and it is important to support the (admittedly failing) attempts to introduce it, in whatever form, in the post-2015 development framework and/or in the discussions that will follow. It is thus imperative to erase the bad image that the formula has acquired as a synonym for no responsibilities. Introducing this concept in its literal, positive meaning in the development agenda would allow Mexico and other Southern providers to: take commitments / responsibilities at the level of their circumstances and capabilities; conclude clear agreements with the traditional donors on burden-sharing; and have the moral stance to stand against the relaxation of the responsibilities of the traditional donors and the ODA system.

The second complementary pillar of this narrative asserts – contrary to what is frequently argued – that the North-South and South-South cooperation agendas are actually tending towards convergence, and that this convergence should be the basis for the dialogue and cooperation between these two traditions. On the one hand, in the wake of the more tolerant and multinational culture that has taken root in the West in the 21st century, the North-South paradigm has adopted principles such as "ownership" and "alignment", which have been concomitant (in their meaning rather than in their precise formulation) to the South-South cooperation tradition since its inception in Bandung. But unfortunately, this ultimate triumph of the spirit of Bandung is not properly recognised. Thus, for example, it is common to praise the South-South providers for not imposing conditions and attaching strings to the cooperation they offer – in contrast to common practices of the

North. But it is less common to acknowledge that in so doing, these providers are actually complying much more readily with the Paris principles than the traditional donors that designed them; of course, they can do so because these are rephrased principles from Bandung. Thus, to a large extent, the issue today is not (at least anymore) a matter of different principles between the two traditions of development cooperation, but rather of who applies them more consistently (Tortora, 2011).

On the other hand, as Southern cooperation providers increase their cooperation volumes and diversify their delivering mechanisms, their need to rationalise and streamline their practices – in areas such as evaluation, assessment, accounting and effectiveness – also rises. In other words, they are following a route traversed decades ago by the DAC donors, and they are quite willing to learn from them, understandably so. Thus, it should not be too surprising that though DAC donors and Southern cooperation providers have failed to arrive at meaningful political agreements, they do collaborate, and they tend to do it ever more often, at a technical level – bilaterally and multilaterally – not least through the DAC.

In sum, if at a conceptual philosophical level, the North has moved towards the (more politically correct) narrative of the South, at a technical level the South is advancing in the direction of the North – and learning from its experience. Convergence, not confrontation, should be the name of the game. When the Southern providers broke into the development agenda as “new actors” (or “emerging donors”, as they were called) at the beginning of the century, they came promising to bring more resources and new ideas and practices – that is, more cooperation and healthy competition on how to make it better. Mexico, through the AMEXCID, should continue contributing to make this promise come true.

11 Conclusion

This essay argues that the North-South paradigm that emerged in the early post-war era, co-existed with communism (and more importantly, East-West confrontation) and survived its demise does not hold any more. This does not mean that the difference between the North and the South, developed and developing countries, has lost all pertinence. It means that such a paradigm cannot make sense of a new, crucially important third actor – the emerging power that is neither entirely in the South nor in the North but has yet to be reckoned with. Indeed, the main issue in foreign relations at this time is how the international system will accommodate these emerging powers.

The task is not easy. In the aftermath of the collapse of the USSR and the first war in Iraq, with the United States at the height of its power, the 21st century seemed to be heading towards an American Century, with a confident hegemon in the driver's seat. Today the global scenario for the foreseeable future looks very different. We are rapidly heading towards a multipolar world, with a number of centres of power, in which the United States and its Western allies will not be able to reign alone (Sapir, 2008). This is already true in the former Soviet Union, in the Middle East and in North Asia. This more complex geopolitical setting comes at a time when the global challenges we face – with climate change being the most crucial, but clearly not the only one – need to be confronted with international collective action. In other words, although global agreements and successful global partnerships are needed more than ever, the geopolitical conditions to guarantee them are becoming ever harder. This widening gap between needs and the conditions to

satisfy them will have to be filled by diplomacy. Indeed, to ensure a decent future for our children (let alone a bright one), diplomats will have to work hard to reach those global agreements in a large number of areas: energy, rules of the financial system, trade, investment, natural resources, governance of the multilateral institutions, and many others, including development cooperation.

Admittedly, development cooperation does not figure among the most important areas in such a list. Development assistance flows are small in relation to other financial flows, and finance itself is one of many hot global topics to be dealt with. Budgets for development assistance continue to be relatively tiny, and their explicit aim relatively uncontroversial: reduce poverty and promote development abroad – while helping yourself in the process. One might think that with such an agenda, good global agreements and successful partnerships would be relatively easy to reach. But this essay – focussed on the ideological and institutional battles to create a narrative and a space for the emerging powers (posed in this agenda as Southern providers) in the international aid system – has documented that, on the contrary, the road to arriving at such global agreements and partnerships has been a very bumpy one, with few positive results and tangibly worrying side effects. In short, diplomats and international bureaucrats aided by and pressured by academics and other stakeholders still have much to do. If they succeed in arriving at good agreements and solid global partnerships, they will create a better aid system for the benefit of poor nations and poor people worldwide. No less important, they will generate positive spillover effects into other agendas, starting with climate change, to which the development agenda is increasingly linked by the move to a post-2015 framework for Sustainable Development Goals. If they do not, the poorest in the world will pay the direct price and we will all suffer from the further fragmentation of the world international system and the consolidation of dangerous confrontational blocs. Development cooperation is not an agenda that many world leaders have on their minds, but they should not underestimate the positive impact that good outcomes in this “soft” area of international relations could have on the future of our planet in these challenging and dangerous times.

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