

# Cooperación internacional para el desarrollo: gobierno, economía y sociedad. Evolución de las políticas y escenarios futuros

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Carlo Tassara's book<sup>1</sup> is full of insights into the policies that guided development assistance over the last decades. The author analyses the historical evolution of development policies from the World War II era to our times. Further to the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Agenda (2000), a road map from Monterey (Mexico, 2002) to Addis Ababa (Ethiopia, 2015) leads to the 2030 Agenda, including 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

As the author points out, the roadmap to the SDGs will require stronger aid harmonization, centrality of ownership, shifting from aid effectiveness to development effectiveness, and a strong impact of policy quality, and coherence on development processes. Some changes of perspective from the MDGs to the SDGs agenda, which deserve some attention from scholars, policy makers, and development practitioners are comprehensively analysed in this book. The 2000-2015 MDGs agenda was almost exclusively inspired by a solidarity approach, in the wake of the Willy Brandt Report on "North South," written twenty years ago, and focused on the responsibility rich countries have with poorer ones.

The new agenda endorses a universalistic approach, as evidenced by its very first goal: *To end poverty in all its forms, everywhere*, not only in low but also in upper-middle income countries. The new agenda highlights – much more precisely than before – the need for a multilateral governance system. While the MDGs were inspired by the logic of alignment and by the

ownership principle in which shared goals and targets are established, and each State is left to pursue them; the sustainable development goals or, at least, some of them will require multilaterally coordinated strategies.

Finally, the new agenda and the international debate preceding it focused more on issues such as the social cohesion and social inclusion. SDG's effectiveness will be measured upon environmental, social and economic indicators. Economic growth models producing wealth in absolute terms but widening the gap of inequality are neither fair nor sustainable since they inevitably end up undermining the very stability of a society.

*"Cooperación internacional para el desarrollo: gobierno, economía y sociedad. Evolución de las políticas y escenarios futuros"* allows a deep understanding of the paradigms of the international development assistance from a historical perspective. That is to say that development assistance policies cannot be understood without considering the political and economic contexts under which they have been conceived. After analysing the contexts in which the Bretton Woods Conference was originated, the United Nations System, the decolonisation process in Asia, and the beginning of the Cold War, Carlo Tassara reflects on the Marshall Plan, considered as the very first antecedent to future humanitarian and relief strategies in the world.

The author suggests that the huge effort made by the US administration, which invested 17 billion dollars in the reconstruction of 18 European countries right after World War II, was instrumental to reinforce its political and economic hegemony over the continent and, at the same time, to prevent the growth of soviet influence over it. In the 1950s, the economic growth and development were intrinsically as-

<sup>1</sup> See <http://ebooks.lasalle.edu.co/product/cooperacin-internacional-para-el-desarrollo> & [https://www.academia.edu/30742176/Cooperaci%C3%B3n\\_internacional\\_para\\_el\\_desarrollo\\_gobierno\\_econom%C3%ADa\\_y\\_sociedad.\\_Evoluci%C3%B3n\\_de\\_las\\_pol%C3%ADticas\\_y\\_escenarios\\_futuros](https://www.academia.edu/30742176/Cooperaci%C3%B3n_internacional_para_el_desarrollo_gobierno_econom%C3%ADa_y_sociedad._Evoluci%C3%B3n_de_las_pol%C3%ADticas_y_escenarios_futuros)

sociated. The author refers to several scholars of that time such as Rostow (1952, 1959), for instance, who identified development as the outcome of many unchangeable steps. We were of course very far, as documented in the book, from the development approaches that emerged decades later. Without summarising here all the historical events analysed by the book, it is worth mentioning that, as the author suggests, the 1960s marked a number of significant “points of no return”.

The monolithic hegemony of the “West” starts being questioned, not only – and to some extents not primarily – due to the competing soviet bloc, but in the light of structural changes in the world politics and economy. Just to mention a couple of them: the 1960s African decolonisation years (with the only exception of the countries under Portuguese rule), and the birth in 1961 of the alliance of non-aligned countries, with the strong leadership of the Yugoslavian Republic. Although the international political and military context was still adhering to the Yalta balances, the world started to appear much more diversified than in the immediate post-war years, with the two super powers challenged in their hegemony by other capitalist or socialist forces.

Development assistance starts to be channelled through specialised agencies and, in 1960, 20 industrialised countries created the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The idea that development is the outcome of unavoidable and mechanic dynamics is no longer accepted universally. It is evidenced, as Carlo Tassara suggests, by the popularisation of the dependency theory in many Latin American countries. We will not discuss such a theory here, but it is interesting to quote the author’s analysis when he underlines

its impact on the elaboration of national economic policies in the sub-continent.

During the 1970s, the growth of inequalities among countries and continents became a matter of public and international concern. It is in this “macro” context that the author places the VI Extraordinary Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, which approved the Declaration and the Plan of Action for the establishment of a new international economic order, with a strong emphasis on two concepts: the national sovereignty of each State, implying their right to define their own development policy and the need for stronger and more effective multilateral governance mechanisms. In the mid-1970s (1975) the European Economic Community (EEC) and 71 African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries signed the first global convention in Lomé (Togo). In principle, this act was oriented to formalise a new paradigm for the relations between Europe and some of its former colonies, based on mutual interests and partnership.

Analysing the paradigms of development assistance in the 1980s, Tassara highlights two documents destined to have a strong influence over future choices. In 1977, the United Nations created an Independent Commission, led by Willy Brandt, to study world poverty. Brandt was concerned that the prevailing economic system was the cause of immense poverty, suffering and degradation. His “North South Report”, presented in 1980, proposed to tackle the deep underlying causes of this situation, the main one being an unjust economic system which favoured the first world to the detriment of the third one. In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development, also known as Brundtland Commission, published “Our Common Future,” which emphasizes the concept of

environmentally sustainable development.

The 1980s ended with the falling of the Berlin wall and the subsequent years disappointed the expectations that the world was going to gain stability and peace with the end of the cold war. Two authentic tragedies of the early nineties demonstrated the above-mentioned: the war in the former Yugoslavia and the genocide in the Great Lakes Region. Finally, in the 1990s the equation economic growth equals development was strongly challenged, both conceptually and operationally.

In 1990, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) published its first report on human development, which led to globally “re-think” the policies and strategies of development assistance. Poverty started to be seen in its multidimensional reality, as a deprivation with many interrelated aspects. This being the case, poverty reduction measures have to tackle various aspects: human capital, social capital, infrastructures, individual freedoms sphere, and so on. The idea of the MDGs, endorsed in the year 2000 by the international community, originated from this new theoretical approach.

Regarding the strategic changes from MDGs to SDGs, the author suggested three possible “post-2015” scenarios or levels of implementation of the new agenda. The first one is the “minimalist” approach where the SDGs are considered as an updated version of the MDGs with priority given to the reduction of extreme poverty and hunger, and to the satisfaction of basic needs. So, the greater efforts would be primarily – if not exclusively – addressed to Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern and Eastern Southern Asia, while areas such as Latin America and the Caribbean, where only Haiti is classified as a low-income country, would not be intensively addressed.

The second scenario is defined as a “security approach”. In this case, development assistance would be primarily conceived as a mean to facilitate governance – or prevention – of global phenomena concerning policy makers and western public opinions, such as the fight against terrorism and migration flows. At the same time, Latin America and Caribbean countries would not be given a real priority, with the exceptions, according to Tassara, of Haiti, Honduras, and Guatemala.

Finally, a third scenario is classified as the “holistic approach”. In this case, the SDGs agenda would be entirely and effectively implemented, taking into account poverty and inequalities everywhere, and reinforcing the multilateral mechanisms to ensure an effective development. Most probably, the three scenarios will co-exist and, I am inclined to suggest, the shifting from one to another will greatly depend on the evolution of international dynamics that are hardly predictable in the long term.

A last consideration on the structure of the book is that it merges for each historical period the contextual analysis with the widening of the new paradigms (and actors) of international development assistance. This method appears very effective and helps the reader to understand the rationale of the development policies elaborated over the years.