

Engaging the Rising Powers in the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation: A Framing Paper

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1. Introduction

This paper has been written in response to a request from the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). It provides a framing for a more in-depth discussion with the policy advisory team supporting the Netherlands Co-Chair of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC). The paper will highlight potential ways for the GPEDC to engage with the BRICS – with a particular focus on China – in the context of the Post-2015 process. The paper also explores possible links between the development effectiveness agenda and the BRICS’ agendas vis-à-vis development cooperation, and outlines potential strategies to overcome past and current obstacles and strengthen engagement in the near future, within the framework of the GPEDC. The Framing Paper draws on the research, networks and expertise of the [Rising Powers in International Development programme](#), hosted by the [Centre for Rising Powers and Global Development](#) (CRPD) at the Institute of Development Studies.¹

The Fourth High-Level Forum (HLF) on Aid Effectiveness in Busan, where the Global Partnership was created, is said to have marked a turning point in the engagement of DAC-member donor countries with a broader range of actors, both in reaching beyond government aid agencies and in engaging with governments from rising power countries such as the BRICS.² The Global Partnership builds on a range of previous agreements and declarations led by the DAC, including the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005), and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008), which among other goals had sought to strengthen the incorporation of developing country perspectives into international aid policy.

However, it is precisely this genesis that has contributed to the GPEDC’s difficulties in cementing itself as a truly global partnership. While developing-country participation as a whole has grown, several key rising powers – including China, India and Brazil – have signalled that they identify the GPEDC with Northern interests and a continuation of the Paris agenda. This perception has persisted despite the commitment made at Busan to broaden its base and recognise the importance of South-South development cooperation, the engagement of Nigerian and Indonesian co-chairs alongside the UK in the initial composition of the GPEDC and the leadership shown by Mexico in hosting the 2014 High-Level Meeting.

Although they have different positions on many aspects of development cooperation, the BRICS and many other rising powers tend to adhere to the view that for all the efforts made, the GPEDC has not yet adequately addressed their concerns on three issues: political legitimacy, attribution of responsibilities and agenda definition.

¹ We are grateful to Sarah Hardus (International Institute of Social Studies) for her insightful comments to this paper, and to Richard Manning (IDS Centre for Rising Powers and Global Development, University of Oxford Blavatnik School of Government) for his analysis of the Rising Powers in International Development State of the Debate studies, summarised here.

² See Eyben, R. and L. Savage (2012) ‘Emerging and Submerging Powers: Imagined Geographies in the New Development Partnership at the Busan Fourth High Level Forum’ *Journal of Development Studies*, 49 (4) p.457-69, and Shankland, A. and J. Constantine (2014) ‘Beyond lip service on mutual learning: the potential of CSO and think-tank partnerships for transforming Rising Powers’ contributions to sustainable development’ in *The Reality of Aid 2014: Rethinking Partnerships in a Post-2015 World – Towards Equitable, Inclusive and Sustainable Development*, ed. B. Tomlinson. Quezon City: IBON International.

On the issue of **political legitimacy**, the rising powers argue that the GPEDC is not an appropriate forum for agreeing binding commitments on international development cooperation. They insist that this role belongs to the UN, which has its own structures for deliberation on international development cooperation policy, such as the Development Cooperation Forum and the High-Level Political Forum.

On the issue of **attribution of responsibilities**, the rising powers fear that participation in the GPEDC may increase the pressure on them to increase aid in order to relieve the burden on DAC member countries. They insist that it is not their role to relieve the North of its historically-derived responsibilities, and that respect for the key principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) is needed to reflect the fact that despite their growing influence the rising powers are still struggling with their own development challenges.

On the issue of **agenda definition**, the rising powers argue that the shift from aid effectiveness to development effectiveness has yet to be adequately reflected in the GPEDC's agenda. They see this as continuing to reflect DAC donor framings of aid as being essentially about concessional financial flows, which they argue pays insufficient attention to key aspects of South-South Cooperation, such as the importance of mutual economic benefit and the central role played by development knowledge and in particular the direct sharing of countries' own development experiences.

Beyond these specific issues, there is a general challenge for the GPEDC when it seeks to engage with the rising powers: **trust**. Rising powers of the South such as China, India and Brazil – as well as Russia, their partner in the BRICS grouping – fear that the established powers of the North and West are determined to thwart their rise. They are increasingly likely to resent attempts to influence their domestic development debates – for example by supporting civil society groups who are critical of government policy – as an assault on their sovereignty. They are also very conscious of their growing power in the world, and increasingly ready to take offence when they perceive that they have been treated with insufficient respect.

China in particular is much less willing to tolerate perceived criticism, interference or lack of respect than in the recent past, and increasingly believes that it should set the terms of international engagement, rather than simply agreeing to adhere to terms set by others. The GPEDC does have one advantage here, which is that development cooperation policy has more potential for constructive dialogue than other international issues. As two Chinese academics wrote in a recent note on the potential for China's engagement with the GPEDC, "the governance of international development cooperation is a crucial part of the global governance structure... [in which] China has much fewer fundamental disagreements with other countries".³

However, it is clear that the attitude of the rising powers, including China, to the GPEDC has often been coloured by their generalised distrust of Northern-dominated processes. They suspect that when Northern countries offer to bring them in to such global processes they are in fact seeking to maintain control by neutralising the rising powers' challenge to the legitimacy of the way these processes have been conducted. This distrust is due in part to the geopolitical tensions that are inevitable at a time of global power shifts. However, it has been reinforced by the rising powers' discontent with what they see as a refusal to act decisively and in good faith on issues such as reform of the Bretton Woods institutions. As we discuss in this paper, the way in which the GPEDC itself has operated has not always been the most helpful for overcoming deep-rooted issues of mistrust.

³ Li, X. and Y. Wang (2014) 'On China's Participation in the "Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation"', *Policy Recommendations 1* (Beijing: Research Centre of International Development), p.2.

Rising powers' mistrust of and frustration with Northern-dominated development institutions and processes has contributed to a recent growth in the establishment of 'minilateral' institutions and processes of their own. These range from exchange and collaboration processes such as the intergovernmental India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Forum established in 2003 and the more recent academic Network of Southern Think-Tanks (NeST) to major new institutions such as the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) and the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Any meaningful dialogue process on international development cooperation policy will need to take account of the substantial investments that rising powers are already making in these institutions and processes.

In addition to trust issues deriving from the general geopolitical context and from tensions over the reform of existing development policy institutions, there is a further aspect that affects the GPEDC's engagement with the rising powers: **capacity**, and in particular their wariness of engaging with better-resourced interlocutors in the aid policy debate. Despite the long history of South-South Cooperation and the rapidly-growing volume of development cooperation flows that rising power governments are managing, their agencies and policy communities are often recently-established and under-staffed when compared to their Northern counterparts. They therefore feel that they are placed at a disadvantage when discussing aid policy and systems, and forced by default to accept technical parameters for the discussion that are set unilaterally by the North. As a result, instead of engaging on the technical content of discussions, where they lack the depth of bureaucratic resources and the broad-based aid policy communities of DAC-member donor countries, they often default to emphasising political positioning, where they feel that their clear principles and longstanding alliances with groupings such as the G77 give them an advantage.

In this paper we argue that this represents a particularly serious missed opportunity for the GPEDC, which claims to be about the 'how' of achieving international development aims such as the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Given the breadth of issues that the SDGs cover and the expectation that they will have universal applicability, achieving them will require establishing the best possible synergies between **development cooperation**, international policies in '**beyond aid**' fields and **domestic development policies**. The GPEDC is not well-placed to intervene in most areas of 'beyond aid' debate, which are dominated by minilateral and multilateral negotiations over contentious issues such as trade, migration and climate change. It does, however, have considerable potential as a space for connecting the other two elements: development cooperation and national development strategies. In this paper, we argue that it should focus on developing this potential as an entry point in seeking to engage with the rising powers, and that it should pursue this by emphasising **knowledge exchange** rather than focusing on financial flows.

In order to support this argument, we first outline some key characteristics of rising power development cooperation providers, focusing on the BRICS countries and particularly on China. We then provide an overview of how the international development policy community responded to these countries' (re)emergence as providers, including the process that culminated in the establishment of the GPEDC. We go on to draw lessons on the legacy for engagement with rising powers of that process and of the first phase of the GPEDC, up to and including the Mexico HLM. We then highlight the emergence of some trends that suggest a way forward for the GPEDC in overcoming the negative aspects of this legacy. We suggest that in particular it has succeeded in creating some promising spaces for dialogue beyond government to government negotiations, particularly in the area of knowledge exchange with actors such as civil society organisations and think-tanks from the BRICS. We discuss the value of this experience in relation to the current discussion on the 'how' of achieving the SDGs, and in particular the potential for the GPEDC to play a distinct and complementary role in relation to the Financing For Development process.

Such a role could potentially make significant contributions to the development agenda in a post-2015 era, where the principle of universality will challenge donor-recipient dichotomies and where knowledge exchange will be as important as financial flows in achieving effective development cooperation. We conclude by outlining the scope for the GPEDC to position itself more clearly as a successful platform for mutual learning on the 'how' of development cooperation.

2. The BRICS as Development Cooperation providers

2.1 The BRICS and other rising powers

The BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) are not the only rising powers to play a significant role in international development cooperation. Other large countries such as Mexico, Indonesia and Turkey have established a significant presence in international debates, while smaller players such as Colombia and Thailand have demonstrated considerable capacity for policy entrepreneurship in development cooperation at the regional and/or global levels. Non-DAC donor countries from the Arab world and Eastern Europe are also influential in specific regional and/or sectoral cooperation processes.

However, the BRICS have a unique combination of (1) regional and global influence, (2) scale in their own right as individual development cooperation providers and (3) an emerging collective institutional capacity, thanks to the BRICS Summit process and now the establishment of the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) and the New Development Bank (NDB). They have also been the most reluctant of the major rising powers to engage with the GPEDC, in contrast to the roles played by (for example) Mexico and Indonesia.

In this section, we briefly review the key characteristics of this group of countries as development cooperation providers and their points of similarity and difference, including a summary of the principles of South-South Cooperation that have been very important in framing how some of the BRICS (particularly India and Brazil) define themselves as development cooperation providers. We then focus on China, as the largest BRICS development cooperation provider and a leading player in the establishment of new development finance institutions.

2.2 The State of the Debate on development cooperation in the BRICS

The BRICS have diverse perspectives on development cooperation, but converge on aid being part of foreign policy, and thus inseparable from the geopolitics of each country's near- and far-abroad. The term 'aid' has only recently been used by China in its last White Paper on China's Foreign Aid (2014), and the country has only just launched its 'ChinaAid' logo (seen recently in Yerevan, Armenia). Other countries apply the term to humanitarian assistance rather than other financial flows – this is the case for Russia and Brazil, for example – and their legal-political frameworks often constrain the BRICS from classing such flows as aid. This is particularly visible in Brazil, where significant legislative change would be required for Brazil formally to become a 'donor'.

The BRICS tend to engage in aid-like activities which are either related to or arranged around other key policy activities under the umbrella of foreign policy, such as trade and foreign direct investment (FDI). South-South Cooperation (SSC) is used as a tool for strengthening relations between Southern countries, and often positioned in direct opposition to the development cooperation provided by Northern countries and other regional hegemony. In addition to the BRICS, other groupings such as IBSA and BASIC also illustrate the trend of establishing alternative policy spaces in response to the lack of reform in global governance institutions, dominated by Northern countries.

Historical legacies of colonialism, aid, and the effects of top-down programmes such as Structural Adjustment Plans, all influence the rising powers' perception of aid relations. This is further complicated by the dichotomisation of DAC versus non-DAC donors, and the power aid relations have tended to give to donors vis-à-vis recipients. In contrast, the attractiveness of the BRICS is attributed to the perception that they are partners in a more horizontal relationship where financial flows may be tied to commercial or diplomatic interests but not to political conditionalities. The benefit is mutual, if not necessarily equal. Thus, understanding BRICS as development actors means understanding not only the logic of geopolitical and global economic interests but also history, imaginaries and domestic drivers, which are in continuous flux and should not be seen as fixed policy positions.

Motivations in development cooperation tend to vary across the BRICS, and whilst politics, economics and self-interest underpin much of what is done, a commitment to solidarity also exists. When querying (re)emerging donors' motives, these dual motivations should be read as parallel but equally valid – similarly to DAC donor countries, the BRICS' development cooperation policies have a broad range of drivers and should not be taken *a priori* as representing only one set of interests.

The BRICS – like other countries practicing SSC – stress the importance of demand-driven cooperation. This has led some of them to have difficulty in responding to the volume of demand from other countries – as has been the case with the number of African countries expressing interest in learning from Brazil's experience at a time when Brazilian development cooperation is facing severe budget constraints. The exact nature of the demand (particularly whose demand it actually represents) in demand-driven cooperation may be hard to establish given the frequent mixing of finance with knowledge flows, but there is clearly significant interest from Low Income Countries (LICs) keen to engage in development cooperation with the BRICS, whose development successes are important 'pull factors'.

Triangular Development Cooperation

Equally, demand for collaboration also comes from established donors ('submerging powers'), who are interested in applying learning from the BRICS' experience to their development cooperation programmes through triangular or trilateral development cooperation (TDC)⁴. This trend was originally hailed as one of the ways forward for more horizontal relations between DAC and non-DAC countries, where the lines between recipient and donor were blurred in an attempt to focus on development outcomes rather than the politics of aid.

However, TDC has proved to be problematic, and research shows that the balance of power among the three countries involved still tends to be unequal, with the country holding the purse strings not always seeing the knowledge provider (or indeed the recipient) as an equal partner. Nonetheless, TDC remains a potential entry point for discussion of the BRICS' role as 'donors' and/or development cooperation partners. For example, the German and Japanese development agencies – GIZ and JICA – are long-standing TDC partners in the global south, and their approach has generally been successful. In the last 5 years DFID has also engaged in trilateral cooperation, albeit with mixed results.⁵

⁴ The term 'submerging powers' comes from Eyben and Savage (2012).

⁵ TDC has been a long-standing element of the G77 mission to make global governance, politics and development more inclusive of the Global South; but it is gaining greater popularity in the global North. The Accra Agenda for Action called for further development of triangular co-operation (Article 19b, 2008), and ECOSOC, the G8, UNDP and the OECD-DAC have all held international conferences on South-South and Triangular Development Cooperation in the last few years. (Constantine, J. [2010, unpublished], *Social Policy – Brazil's newest export?* Working paper.)

The BRICS as recipients of aid

Their experience as aid recipients has left a legacy in the BRICS that is both political (as in Russia's resentment of the way it was treated when receiving aid in the 1990s) and institutional (as in Brazil's legal framework for development cooperation, which is designed with the assumption that the country would operate as a recipient rather than a provider).

The drop in aid given by DAC donors to Middle Income Countries has affected the BRICS countries, as well as other key rising powers such as Mexico. Whilst aid is marginal for all of the BRICS, in absolute terms if not as a share of their GDP flows are still large for China and India. In some cases it is still perceived by some actors (particularly civil society organisations but also some government agencies) in those countries as valuable in key areas such as social sectors, environment, and even governance. However, while aid is often important for local CSOs, this often leads it to be viewed with suspicion by the BRICS' governments.

Principles of South-South Cooperation (SSC)

As set out by the Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA), South-South Development Cooperation is a mode of development cooperation between two 'southern' countries, which shares the stated objectives of 'North-South cooperation [...] to contribute to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals' (G77, 2003).

Importantly, South-South cooperation is not always monetary, and can include trade, investment, other commercial relationships, technology transfers, joint research and person to person cultural exchanges. In addition to government cooperation agencies, assistance is also provided through development banks and Foreign Direct Investment. Its unique selling point is affirmed to be its commitment to 'the tremendous force of solidarity, with which [the G77] can overcome even the biggest challenges' (2003). South-South Cooperation is framed as a horizontal relationship, which rejects 'donor-recipient' asymmetries. Whilst there is some variation among different countries' versions, a common emphasis can frequently be found on the following principles:

- Non-interference (although this is now becoming increasingly problematic for some of the BRICS)
- Mutual benefit (but not necessarily equal)
- Demand-led cooperation
- Direct sharing of experiences

Points of similarity and difference between the BRICS' approaches to development cooperation

Points of similarity	Points of difference
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• South-South vision (Russia a partial exception); North-South cooperation is seen as fundamentally different, as negotiated in the Busan declaration• Mutual benefit, differentiated conditionalities• Importance of non-concessional and semi-concessional finance• Importance of infrastructure gaps and tools to address this i.e. national and regional development finance banks and institutions• Coping with rapid expansion of cooperation activities and more muscular foreign policy• Debate on how to manage international cooperation• Growing tendency to consult with civil society and/or academia on policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emerging debate around type of cooperation (e.g. balance of commercial and development motivation) - less of an issue in China and not an issue in Russia• Balance of bilateral and multilateral cooperation• Balance of 'near abroad' versus global reach• Degree of centralisation of bilateral cooperation• Degree of close planning with private sector and SOEs• Extent of increase of cooperation (expansion of BRICS inter-governmental spaces, including New Development Bank)• Views on tied versus untied aid, donor coordination, prioritisation of economic development over political freedoms

The influence of SSC principles can also be seen in BRICS countries' approach to learning exchanges with DAC countries, whose experience is often of interest to them, particularly at the technical level. Learning exchanges between Southern and Northern countries are often informal, and this is particularly true in the case of the DAC, given the political sensitivity in these countries of working with a structure seen as one of the bastions of 'Aidland'.

If DAC donors' goal is to share good practices (which may eventually become institutionalised), they may have to accept that the framework for enabling this learning process with the BRICS will not take place through wide-ranging formal agreements – particularly if these agreements imply that DAC donors are the ones to set the standards by which BRICS countries' development cooperation will be assessed. However, informal learning spaces can allow for very productive discussions on good practices which can go beyond North and South to include both North-South and South-South Cooperation, building trust at the same time as they enhance mutual understanding on technical issues.

2.3 Focus on China

China's approach to development is intricately tied to its own development, history and its position in the international arena, and it is expected that those who view China from the outside, through Western lenses, might fail to see the complexities and interdependencies, judging the situation through their own historical experience. As a recent IDS Policy Brief discusses, Chinese policies on international development have been very different approaches from Western standardised ones. Whereas the Western model is economic as well as ideological (human rights, social welfare, democracy, etc.), the Chinese emphasise 'a wider remit of economic relations'. There should be no assumption, however, that the Chinese now are not ideology-driven.⁶

In China, four agencies are central to foreign aid policy and implementation, namely the State Council, the Ministry of Finance (MOF), the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). The State Council seems to be the body that oversees all aid programmes by China, while MOFCOM is the leading agency that coordinates China's foreign policy, such as reviewing requests that come from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) that require approval, conducting feasibility studies for aid projects, choosing aid implementers and conducting project reviews.

Officials from MOFCOM often have complaints on several issues. The department lacks the capacity and personnel to manage existing aid projects. Thus mobilising human resources for MOFCOM has been an institutional challenge. MOFCOM officials have also expressed concerns that, compared with Western actors, China's foreign aid lacks long-term strategy. One MOFCOM official argued that China's aid is not as complicated as the West cares to believe, arguing that aid projects for recipients are generally allocated according to budgetary motivations. Complaints about limited funding have also been voiced from the Chinese EximBank.

Overall, Chinese foreign aid is more political rather than developmental in nature. Although under the impact of the Western development discourse China has begun to use the term 'international development cooperation', most people still think about aid as being primarily political. It is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs rather than MOFCOM that deals with China's strategic plan and foreign policies, which has created tensions between the two ministries due to overlaps and conflicts in their jurisdiction in this area. Recently, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs established its new Department of International Economy, blurring the overlap

⁶ See Gu, J., Y. Chen and Y. Zhang (2014) 'Understanding China's Approaches to International Development', *IDS Policy Briefing* 75. Brighton: IDS.

between the two ministries in terms of responsibility for international aid. This domestic institutional dilemma remains, and it will be interesting to see how it is resolved.

China's own development experiences, particularly those of the reform era, have resulted in China committing to a practical approach towards development. The very nature of Chinese "development" policy is that it is predominantly responsive to demands from state authorities within the developing world. In its engagement for the purpose of development, China has mostly taken a bilateral (state-to-state) demand-driven approach. China provides projects and services as they are demanded by individual governments, for which process Chinese embassies in recipient countries are central, as they hold regular consultations with national agencies for needs assessment.

China's approach to aid significantly differs from that of Western donors and is still evolving, and awareness of differences in ideologies behind aid and development remains key to future successful aid cooperation. The institutional context of China's development cooperation is complex. Western donors and external partners must take these differentiated political roles into consideration in order to effectively pursue initiatives such as trilateral development cooperation.

In the case of the GPEDC, for example, there is a need for it to clarify its identity so that the right interlocutor among the Chinese Ministries can be identified to engage with it. A clear agenda and objectives are also needed, in order to signal a "no nonsense" approach. Development cooperation with China is definitely not simply a bilateral issue, and effective dialogues will need to be based on concrete issues rather than seeking a common framework or general convergence of different approaches.

On the potential for Chinese cooperation with traditional donors, especially the form of trilateral cooperation, there are some key issues that one needs to be aware of.

Understanding the linkages between China's development policy and its internal affairs

China currently is in the process of deepening reform and taking steps to strengthen its power regionally and globally, as seen in the establishment of the AIIB and the "One Road One Belt" initiative. Such actions have caught the attention of Western analysts, but they are usually analysed in isolation from China's domestic situation through the lenses of foreign policy and development aid.

There is need for a more dynamic and relational approach that would allow China's external policies and activities to be analysed in relation to its internal affairs and politics. The linkages between China's internal development and its international/external activity need to be more thoroughly investigated, which would require the 'insider' views of Chinese academics, scholars, practitioners and policymakers. Obtaining these views will require establishing a platform of trust, where the Chinese side would feel equal to Western academics in the 'making' of knowledge.

Understanding China's interest, influence and potential in 'making' development-related knowledge

As is evident from the previous sections, there has been a gradual shift in paradigms where aid is concerned. This shift reflects how Western societies have historically evolved their thinking around aid. The latest reconceptualization of the state as a 'developmental state', the new focus of 'traditional' aid on fragile and conflict states, and the investment of knowledge-making and provision in the rest of the developing countries are all elements of the West reconceptualising itself for the sake of staying legitimate and relevant.⁷

⁷ A problem observed by Marcelo Giugale in his book *Economic Development: What Everyone Needs To Know* (2013)

China has become aware of this shift, and this is reflected in the current Chinese emphasis in knowledge-sharing, and also in its role as intermediary in conflicts such as the one in Sudan. There also a proliferation of Chinese academic interest in international development, reflected in the rising number of articles on the Web in either Chinese or English written by Chinese authors. Such parallels may create space for cooperation between North and China, but also competition in the global market for ‘aid as knowledge.’ Policy researchers will therefore need to focus on how China understands the importance of locally produced knowledge, in relation to its future role as provider of technical learning in developing countries.

A fascinating question – particularly in relation to the post-2015 debate on technology transfer – is whether and how China’s varied provision of aid could expand into providing techno-scientific contributions beyond the infrastructure-focussed engineering know-how that has now become a traditional feature of Chinese cooperation. This then begs the question of what influence Chinese epistemic communities have in ‘making’ knowledge for the development/aid industry, and whether Chinese academia could define new conceptualizations of development based on such knowledge. Exploring this potential certainly opens a possible way forward in the new phase of the GPEDC, which we discuss in Section 4.

3. Rising Powers and International Development Cooperation Policy

3.1 The road to Busan

The (re)emergence of rising powers such as the BRICS as actors in development cooperation over the last decade should be understood in the context of broader global power shifts. Asian economic growth and the associated commodity boom of the mid-2000s greatly strengthened emerging economies, and it was partly on this basis that various country configurations such as IBSA, BASIC and BRICS gained greater prominence. Fast-paced economic growth was coupled with a host of progressive policies aimed at tackling the challenges of inequality and poverty, as well as fomenting greater innovation designed to mitigate the effects of rapid change. This attracted global interest, with southern countries in particular calling for technical cooperation exchanges embedded in the principles of solidarity-based South-South cooperation (SSC). In the case of many countries SSC was also part of growing commercial relationships, as the BRICS looked for commodities and new export markets.

The rise of large and globally influential southern economies – such as China, India and Brazil – contributed to DAC countries’ rethinking of their own development cooperation policies, with many countries scaling down their aid to middle-income countries (MICs). This is a complex issue, and this paper will not explore issues around the definition of the low- and middle-income country categories – which is hotly contested by countries like Mexico. However, the combination of the MICs’ growth, DAC countries’ waning influence and growing financial austerity after the 2008 financial crisis made it harder to justify providing aid to large middle-income countries, leading to an acceleration of the scaling back of flows to countries like India and Brazil in favour of low-income countries, mostly in Africa and Asia.

The (re)emergence of development cooperation agencies in all of the BRICS (as well as Mexico, Turkey and other MICs) also bolstered a more muscular presence in global policy spaces, where the BRICS’ calls for global governance reform were supported by their growing roles as development cooperation providers rather than mere recipients. They responded to suggestions that they were ‘new donors’ by insisting that their development cooperation activities were part of a long-established tradition of South-South Cooperation, as well as by transparently recognising that development cooperation supported foreign policy goals (as it does for much of the Global North, though without this necessarily being recognised).

After Paris, the increase in participation in aid effectiveness policy debates by recipient countries, civil society and other actors in Accra paved the way for a shift in relations between donors and recipients, bolstered by the broader geopolitical shifts happening globally. This marked a change in North-South relations, which was celebrated with the new language of ‘development effectiveness’ and a growing interest in engaging with the BRICS in development cooperation, which produced an intensification of efforts to promote triangular development cooperation and the emergence of initiatives such as the China-DAC Study Group. Having initially been treated with some suspicion by the countries who traditionally dominated the business of aid and development, the BRICS found themselves being courted by OECD-DAC members, who entreated them to participate on (more) equal terms in global development policy spaces, and – more problematically – to shoulder more of the financial burdens of development cooperation. This shift was crystallised in the 2011 Busan High-Level Forum.

3.2 The legacy of Busan

Busan was meant to cement this change, and was burdened with high expectations from a diverse group of stakeholders that it would offer different terms of engagement, marking a break with the old ways of doing development, and bringing about real change in the politics of development cooperation. It succeeded in consolidating the transition from ‘aid effectiveness’ to ‘effective development cooperation’, a success for the global South at a time when the appetite for policy agendas made in the North was wearing thin.⁸ The change from aid to development effectiveness and recognition of the rise of the South was welcomed by rising powers, while the announcement of a ‘global partnership for effective development cooperation’ to take forward the implementation of the principles agreed at Busan was greeted with euphoria in many Northern development agencies. However, the expectation that this would bring (greater) equality between northern and southern development cooperation providers was not wholly met.

Despite the apparent broad agreement on the content of the Busan outcome document, it soon became clear that there was no shared understanding of what this agreement actually signified. DAC member countries insisted that they had ‘signed up’ the rising powers to a particular approach to development cooperation, whereas the BRICS insisted that they had merely signalled their agreement with some general principles on a non-binding basis. When the GPEDC became operational, it was with a Steering Committee that was very obviously being led by its DAC member co-chair (the UK), a secretariat that was shared between UNDP and the OECD but clearly reliant on the latter’s resources and ways of doing things, and a focus on implementation that seemed to give most emphasis to issues that had already been on the DAC’s agenda before Busan.

This suggested to the rising powers that the GPEDC was moving forward in a spirit of ‘business as usual’ for the DAC, which was not questioning its own approaches, policies and practices or reflecting – for example – on their compatibility with the principles of South-South Cooperation. DAC donors seemed interested only in recruiting additional adherents to their way of doing things, not to initiating a genuine process of mutual learning. The result was that the rising powers’ perception of the GPEDC was tainted by a perception of Busan as an example of a process where the promise of a horizontal relationship which went beyond the boundaries of ‘North’ and ‘South’ did not materialize, and thus represents a divergence between discourse and practice. This perception of a broken promise, and the associated perception that the DAC was trying to bind them to the outcomes of what they had seen as a non-binding process, served to undermine the BRICS’ trust in the GPEDC.

⁸ Lesser, Ian O. (2010) *Southern Atlanticism Geopolitics and strategy for the other half of the Atlantic Rim*, Brussels Forum Paper Series, March 2010. The German Marshall Fund of the United States: Washington, D.C.

The BRICS have long been part of discussions on aid effectiveness, not only in their capacity as aid recipients, but also as emerging partners in development cooperation and policy-making. Research shows that there is interest at the technical level in learning about the DAC's experience in promoting aid effectiveness, particularly as the BRICS expand their development cooperation activities. Indeed, Russia was on its way to becoming a DAC member before the process was frozen due to the political fallout from the annexation of Crimea. At the political level, however, the alignment of national policies and programmes to the OECD DAC is seen as problematic, given its perceived identity as a Northern, rich-country donor club.

Given this background, the recurrent references to the rising powers having 'signed up' to the Busan agenda led the BRICS to suspect that they were being pushed into abiding by it as if they had agreed to a binding framework, rather than a vague statement that signalled their general goodwill towards the idea of collaboration. This misunderstanding began to breed mistrust, as the BRICS were repeatedly urged to make commitments without receiving reciprocal offers from DAC members to change their way of doing things. The BRICS' reluctance to engage in anything resembling a process designed to lead to binding commitments outside the framework of the UN was greeted with perplexity on the part of the DAC donors, who had assumed that they were already 'on board' and questioned their motives when rising powers expressed interest in participating in the GPEDC as observers rather than full members. This was compounded by the dismissiveness of some DAC members towards the UN structures that the BRICS considered to be more legitimate spaces for discussions on cooperation policy, such as the Development Cooperation Forum.

In the lead-up to the first GPEDC High-Level Meeting in Mexico, this was exacerbated by the insistence on agreeing a communiqué, which is the type of outcome more associated with a formal intergovernmental process than an informal exchange of ideas and experiences. This raised concerns among rising powers that they would be pushed into signing up to binding commitments whose political legitimacy they questioned (given that GPEDC was not a UN process) and whose technical implications they had not had sufficient opportunity to examine in the light of their own policies and principles. The result was limited participation by BRICS governments in the Mexico City HLM, where Brazil's head of cooperation was the highest-level representative from a BRICS country present, but spent most of his time at the HLM reaffirming that Brazil would not be joining the GPEDC.

3.3 The Rising Powers and the Post-2015 process

The lack of UN legitimacy is one reason for the difference in the BRICS' engagement with the Paris Declaration and the GPEDC in relation to the MDGs, RIO+20, the UNFCCC and the SDGs. Nevertheless, engagement with the rising powers in the post-2015 process as a whole has also proved difficult. Simultaneous global negotiations on climate, development and financing for development make the Post 2015 process a complex one, further complicated by geopolitical tensions and economic challenges. In some cases, the BRICS have been accused of playing a disruptive role. However, accusations of disruption that are based on the BRICS' confrontational style of diplomacy on issues such as non-interference and sovereignty should be read as an assertive affirmation of long-standing principles, not a tactical manoeuvre designed to obstruct. A more systematic effort is needed on the part of DAC member countries to understand the origins of these principles (which in some cases have been established for decades and relate to key events such as the 1955 Bandung Conference and 1977 Buenos Aires Conference) and their importance to Southern development cooperation providers. This will make it easier to distinguish situations where the BRICS are only seeking tactical advantage from those where they are maintaining a vital point of principle.

Above all, the North needs to show that it understands that it does not have a monopoly of public-spirited action on global challenges, and to give due recognition to the actions that have already been undertaken by the rising powers. Recent research by the Institute of Development Studies and the World Centre for Sustainable Development (RIO+) has shown that the positions sometimes held during global policy negotiations do not reflect a lack of commitment to sustainable development on the part of BRICS policy elites.⁹ There is evidence that they are already making significant contributions at both the domestic and international policy levels.

At the international level, insufficient recognition is often given to the constructive roles that have been played by BRICS countries. In addition to its participation in a plurality of governance spaces beyond the scope of the DAC and the UN, such as the BRICS and the AIIB, China has been an active and often constructive participant in the OWG and in other global governance spaces. Brazil invested heavily in brokering agreement in the process that led up to the definition of the SDGs, even if this was not always understood by Northern observers. For example, Brazilian policymakers involved in the Rio+20 process concluded that avoiding deadlock equalled success, even if this was at the risk of producing what Northern observers criticised as a watered-down voluntary commitment to “The Future we Want”. At other times, rising powers have avoided binding multilateral processes where they felt they are at a disadvantage but then made significant commitments in processes where they are better able to define the terms of engagement. For example, having been criticised for compromising the Copenhagen climate negotiations (COP15), China has since made progress on this front on its own terms, including striking a bilateral agreement with the USA (another country that often prefers not to be bound by the outcomes of UN processes that it feels it does not control).

Perhaps most importantly, countries’ domestic development approaches should be seen as the basis for engagement, rather than what is seen in policy spaces like New York, which is often conditioned by oppositional bloc-based UN politics and differs from what is discussed in capital cities. Countries like Brazil and China are making rapid and real progress on incorporating the different Post 2015 processes (SDGs, Climate Policy, FFD) into their national frameworks. For example, Brazil’s Inter-Ministerial Working Group on the SDGs has already mainstreamed the draft SDG framework into the government’s Multi-Year Planning Framework, in order to ensure that future policy is aligned to the framework and its results can be measured. This builds on these countries’ already impressive track records on poverty reduction in the era of the MDGs; for example, one of the biggest contributions to global poverty reduction in the period to 2015 was made by the China Western Development Project, which draws limited attention from international development policy analysts, but has been the testing ground for a raft of successful poverty-reduction policies.

Productive dialogue can therefore be achieved through a more nuanced understanding of the BRICS’ positions, which takes into consideration their historical political positions whilst recognising practical action on development issues at country-level. Despite some reservations on specific issues, the SDGs do in fact enjoy broad support among rising powers, due above all to two factors: their voluntary nature, which gives countries like the BRICS the space to show leadership in their own terms by making ambitious domestic commitments where they feel able to do so, and their adoption of a universal framework.

⁹ See Constantine, J. and M. Pontual (2015) ‘Understanding the Rising Powers’ Contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals’, *IDS Rapid Response Briefing* 9. Brighton and Rio de Janeiro: Institute of Development Studies and RIO+ Centre.

The global commitment towards a universal development framework is in and of itself a revolutionary concept in the context of development, which has traditionally been perceived as a top-down project, from rich north to poor south, from former colonisers to the formerly colonised. Universal Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) pave the way for a different *modus operandi*, which could offer a significant opportunity for the GPEDC to promote a more productive process of engagement with the BRICS. Under a universal framework mutual learning is essential, since the principle is established that every country needs to look to its own domestic as well as international policies and commitments.

This can help to create the symbolic equality that has been lacking in the GPEDC, given its origins in a period when richer donor countries defined what development meant and how it should be pursued by poorer recipient countries. This symbolic equality, coupled with recognition of the value of harnessing the BRICS' strong domestic development policy capacity for international mutual learning processes, can in turn make it more politically acceptable for them to seek inputs from DAC member countries in areas where they feel they are weaker, particularly in relation to the management of international development cooperation.

This process may reveal that there is less divergence between the two sides than frequently stated. Common misconceptions regarding the BRICS' perceived lack of policy frameworks addressing debt sustainability or social and environmental impact have hampered dialogue and effective cooperation for development. However, once sustained technical dialogue is established with BRICS' bilateral and multilateral development cooperation institutions – including the New Development Bank – it will become clear that they are already focusing on the need to strengthen such frameworks and the related management processes, but that they wish to do this in a way that reflects their established development cooperation principles (such as non-interference) and the learning from their domestic development experiences (for example in employment generation, social protection or universal health care). The GPEDC has the potential to play a brokering role in this process, drawing on its proclaimed focus on the “how” of achieving the SDGs rather than the “what” of their content, targets and indicators.

3.4 Financing for Development and the GPEDC – a division of labour?

In order to realise this potential, however, it is essential for the GPEDC to focus on the technical and learning side of the “how” of development cooperation. The other side is of course the financial: the volume and nature of financial flows. However, this paper proposes that the added value of the GPEDC lies in the role it can play as a broker of knowledge exchanges on innovative approaches to the how of development and development cooperation, which should be distinguished from discussions on the financing of these activities. While it is not possible to ensure a complete separation between knowledge exchange and financial flows, the GPEDC should avoid becoming caught up in an argument about financial burden-sharing.

The ongoing debates about what principles should underpin the financing of development cooperation are complex, and are expected to come to a head at the upcoming Financing for Development Conference in Addis Ababa. In this section, we examine the background to this process, before going on to outline a way forward for the GPEDC in the post-Addis period. The 2002 Monterrey Consensus was meant to mark “a new era of cooperation, bridging the old North-South divide”, as UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon stated, adding the caveat that the Conference’s vision had to be “faithfully implemented [in order to be] a path out of our current predicament.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Ki-Moon, Ban (2008) UN Secretary General’s Remarks to the Opening of the Follow-Up International Conference on Financing for Development, Doha, Qatar, 29 November 2008 <http://www.un.org/sg/statements/?nid=3569>

More than a decade later, the date of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa is fast approaching, with fears that the promise of Monterrey will not be fulfilled. The First International Conference on Financing for Development (FFD) was held in Mexico, close to two years after the Millennium Summit which launched the Millennium Development Goals and a call to halve world poverty by 2015. The Monterrey Consensus was signed by over 170 countries who committed to “eradicate poverty, achieve sustained economic growth and promote sustainable development” in the world’s poorest countries.

As the final text for the new Sustainable Development Goals is negotiated, the pessimism surrounding the upcoming Addis conference is mired in the broader debates about FFD – who should pay for what, for whom, and why? The sometimes fierce debates in the SDG negotiations are echoed in those around FFD, with developing countries accusing developed countries of shirking their responsibilities for the burden of development, developed countries suggesting that the burden be shared without making firm commitments as to how this will be calculated and implemented, whilst ignoring the concept of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), which emerged during the climate change negotiations and has also been adopted as a guiding principle for the implementation of the SDG framework.

It is worth remembering some of the factors which made Monterrey so special (and Doha 2008 so disappointing by contrast): the UN conference had the unprecedented and active participation of the Bretton Woods Institutions – the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organisation, as well as NGOs, who were invited to provide inputs to the drafting of the Consensus document, which was being prepared in New York in the months preceding the conference. The Consensus was designed as the cementing of a new partnership between North and South, where the North committed itself to increasing its financing of development, debt relief and opening its markets, paving the way for the 0.7% commitment of GDP. The South in turn committed itself to democracy, good governance, the tackling of corruption and also to the opening of markets.¹¹ The language used by world leaders to herald a new future for the partnership between North and South has not yet been heard in the context of the FFD conference in Addis. Indeed, one diplomat from a large emerging economy recently interviewed by the authors stated that starting the conversation six months before Addis sent the wrong message as to how committed some countries were to the future of development cooperation.

The insistence from developed countries on suggesting that burden-sharing is the way forward aggravates the situation not because developing countries are not willing to contribute to development financing – they already do, albeit outside of the DAC framework – but rather that CBDR is not sufficiently referenced (if at all). Brazil proposed a model of “concentric differentiation” as part of the Lima climate change talks, which was designed to operationalise CBDR and could have been adapted to the SDG and FFD discussions. This achieved little traction in the negotiations, but it should be noted how proactive Brazil was in suggesting a system which would ensure burden-sharing as agreed in the shaping of the SDGs.

It is unlikely that developed countries will succeed in securing support for the position that burden-sharing is the way forward, and observers hope that a way can be found to ensure that Addis does not stall the post-2015 process through lack of leadership and commitment from developed and developing countries alike.

¹¹ Morrissey, Dorothy (2002) The Monterrey Consensus. *The Courier ACP-EU* May-June 2002. European Commission: Brussels http://ec.europa.eu/development/body/publications/courier/courier192/en/en_007.pdf

However, as far as the GPEDC Steering Committee is concerned, given that the FFD conference focuses on money and is likely to reinforce the existing North-South divide, the moment of the Addis conference provides an opportunity for the GPEDC process to be reframed to emphasise not development finance but policy- and practice-oriented mutual learning, and so offer a way forward.

The FFD conference should also be seen as a learning opportunity, helping the GPEDC to identify the entry points for playing a new role in the period after Addis in supporting learning on the best way to ensure that financing for development is spent effectively, sustainably, and inclusively. Addis is a chance for the GPEDC to highlight that while the time for big statements of principle made outside the UN framework – such as the Paris Declaration – has passed, the time for effective learning about what works in the effort to achieve sustainable development is here. The GPEDC has the potential to emerge as the right initiative and space for supporting efforts to make this happen, convening high-quality technical and policy-oriented exchanges on issues ranging from how to promote inclusive infrastructure development in LICs where both BRICS and DAC donors are investing to how to link development cooperation commitments with national policy frameworks in the context of the SDGs' principle of universality.

4. A Way Forward

4.1 Knowledge sharing and the GPEDC: deconstructing and reframing the debate

In his speech at the opening of the Mexico HLM, President Enrique Peña Nieto stated that “not all countries have the financial resources to support other nations, but all have experiences and successful policy examples that they could share beyond their borders”. This could usefully serve as a motto for the GPEDC in the new phase of global development cooperation policy that is likely to emerge after the sequence of events that includes the Addis conference, the formal adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris COP. In this phase the focus will shift to the means of implementation, and increased attention will be given to the role of technology transfer and knowledge sharing rather than finance, which provides a significant window of opportunity for the GPEDC. At the same time, the new universal framing of sustainable development will highlight the importance of mutual learning across North and South.

Thus far the development industry – including the GPEDC – has not made much progress with establishing effective platforms and processes for mutual learning, despite all the attention and resources that have been devoted to knowledge sharing initiatives (which have often been centralised in and controlled by established development industry players such as the World Bank). The reasons for this limited progress go beyond the scope of this paper, but as we argue elsewhere (Bloom, Shankland and Constantine forthcoming) they are political and cultural in nature as well as technical. The GPEDC cannot overcome this deficit single-handedly, but with skilful positioning it can achieve a new legitimacy as a convenor and enabler of mutual learning processes.

In an era in which development knowledge is increasingly recognised as the essential complement to development finance, knowledge exchanges and mutual learning offer a way forward for countries who may have otherwise reached an impasse in how to work together, and it is here that the GPEDC can really make a difference. However, to capitalise on this opportunity the GPEDC will need to face the challenge highlighted in Section 1: moving beyond its current emphasis on aid relations to position itself as having a broader role in helping to achieve the best possible synergies between **development cooperation**, **'beyond aid'** issues and **domestic development policies** – and in particular in strengthening knowledge sharing as a link between development cooperation and domestic policy.

The rationale for the GPEDC to incorporate a focus on connecting development cooperation and national development strategies is twofold. Firstly, it is consistent with the GPEDC's own principles (such as the emphasis on country systems and ownership) and its recent focus on agendas such as domestic resource mobilisation. Secondly, it represents a potential 'win-win' for DAC member countries and rising powers. This 'win-win' potential stems from the complementarity in expertise between DAC member countries and rising powers. As noted in Section 1, the former have a comparative advantage in discussing technical aspects of development cooperation policy, due to their depth of bureaucratic resources and the broad-based aid policy communities. However, when it comes to development policy innovation (as distinct from development cooperation), the comparative advantage belongs to rising powers, who have both high levels of capacity and the credibility that comes from direct experience. In fact, the BRICS are among the world's leading policy innovators, and the desire of other developing countries to benefit from their experience as well as their investments has been one of the key drivers behind the recent resurgence of South-South Cooperation.

This is especially relevant given the universal framing of the SDGs, which will necessarily require a stronger connection between development cooperation and domestic policy learning. This gives an opportunity to signal a new beginning in the dialogue between DAC donors and rising powers. A genuine commitment to mutual learning in development cooperation would show that developed countries are acquiring greater humility, while a commitment to mutual learning on applying policy lessons to their own domestic contexts would show that they are taking the SDG principle of universality seriously – and would also have genuine benefits, given that as austerity takes hold in the developed world, there is much that can usefully be learnt from policy innovations that rising powers have developed in their own relatively resource-scarce contexts.

Less-developed countries (LDCs) can also benefit from a more systematised approach to mutual learning. Firstly, because its results should improve the relevance and effectiveness of the knowledge sharing initiatives that they receive from SSC providers and DAC donors alike. Secondly, because such an approach should result in better-designed and more useful triangular cooperation programmes in which DAC donors and rising powers cooperate for the benefit of LDCs. Thirdly, because a Global Partnership based on a foundation that prizes genuinely multi-directional knowledge exchange could create scope for supporting LDCs' initiatives to share their own experiences, though processes such as the 'fragile-to-fragile cooperation' exchanges which have been developed by G7+ member countries like Timor Leste and Guinea-Bissau.

In order to operationalise this new approach, the GPEDC will need to enable change on two levels: among its DAC donor members in how they engage with individual rising power countries, and among the Steering Committee and GPEDC membership as a whole in how its processes – and in particular its High-Level Meetings – are designed and organised. In the final two sections of this paper we outline some suggested approaches for these two levels.

4.2 Operationalising the new approach: engaging with individual rising powers

As the balance of power changes globally, international policy negotiations in coming years are increasingly likely to be characterised by messiness. This will require established donors to develop greater flexibility and adaptability. Currently, policy-makers from the rising powers seem more comfortable with this uncertain context than their developed country counterparts. As one senior policy-maker from a BRICS country stated during a recent interview with the authors, "the paradox is that countries with high technical capacity for aid delivery are less comfortable operating in the current context of rapidly shifting global development".

One area where ‘submerging powers’ will need to show adaptability is that of engagement with the new institutions created by rising power countries acting together. The large number of European donors signing up for the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) suggests that this learning process is already under way. When the New Development Bank becomes operational after the Russia BRICS Summit in July 2015, it will potentially offer further opportunities for practical exchange and joint technical learning, especially on infrastructure finance for developing countries.

However, as we have shown in Section 2, the rising powers have differences as well as similarities, and do not always act together. In the current fragmented policy landscape they will need to be engaged with individually as well as collectively. Here, the GPEDC will need to act not as a coordinator or framework-developer but rather as a broker and supporter of (often informal) bilateral, trilateral or minilateral engagements to build trust and support mutual learning. Mexico and Indonesia, as rising powers who are current and former GPEDC co-chairs, and also other middle-income countries who have shown interest in engaging with the GPEDC (such as Peru), can help to provide guidance to DAC member countries on engaging with individual BRICS countries, with whom they themselves often have longstanding relationships and whose perspectives on development issues they often share, even if these perspectives are shared in a less geopolitically-charged way.

Each of the BRICS countries offers specific opportunities and challenges for engagement. In general, though, a strategy focused on knowledge sharing – and in particular on supporting technical exchange among development policymakers and practitioners and academic exchange among development policy analysts and theorists – offers the greatest potential for progress. As an example, we review some of the features that should form part of such an approach in the case of China.

Knowledge sharing as a way forward: focus on China

China is changing the landscape of international development and the new global development architecture. It is therefore imperative to understand the logic of Chinese policy, both because of China’s bilateral activities and because of its multilateral roles. China’s role in the New Development Bank and the newly-launched Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) shows that it – like other BRICS countries – is increasingly influential outside its immediate geographic sphere of influence.

China is becoming more powerful and assertive in its pathways to doing development, yet it does not explicitly want or aim to circumvent cooperation with the North; in fact, the opposite might hold true. What should be recognised is that within China policymakers are themselves increasingly uncertain on how to position the newly empowered country in the international scene. While this might compound existing intricate relationships it also represents an opportunity for engagement, since China is increasingly open to exploring different options for its future development cooperation strategies. As recognised by a prominent Chinese scholar, “Chinese development cooperation now faces new challenges... as China moves from its previous, marginal status to being one of the central powers in the global system, it needs to have more multilateral perspectives for its development cooperation program, rather than sticking to bilateral channels... China needs to incorporate the provision of global public goods into its development cooperation programme, rather than primarily focusing on its own economic interests.”¹² However, in order to position themselves to take advantage of this opportunity, DAC donor countries and the GPEDC itself need to think about the relevance of what they can offer from a Chinese perspective. This includes asking how this offer could contribute to China’s new international development thinking and its critical path, whose current roadmap centres on the Silk Road Fund and ‘One Belt One Road’ initiative.

¹² Author’s interview, May 2015.

Part of the challenge for this is positioning and communication. As far as China is concerned, the DAC appears to be doing business as usual, even if the discourse has shifted from aid effectiveness to effective development cooperation. There is clearly a need for improved communication about current DAC thinking and the new approaches that DAC members, rising powers and LDCs together are developing through the GPEDC. However, this communication must be designed with greater awareness than has been shown to date of the priorities, perspectives and sensitivities of rising power countries, or it risks triggering renewed concerns about attempts to push China and other BRICS in a particular direction.

In addition, there is an issue that willingness to engage in genuine mutual learning with China may be compromised by the prevalence of a 'China threat' narrative among policymakers in many GPEDC member countries. This means that openness to learning from Chinese-led development at home and abroad is compromised by disapproval of the Chinese Communist Party's stance on political freedom and human rights. It is imperative that the GPEDC develops a strong alternative narrative on the value of mutual learning on development challenges even where clear political differences remain (potentially a narrative that acknowledges the SSC principle of non-interference) if it is to engage meaningfully with China and other BRICS countries.

Despite these challenges, there are several potential entry points for an engagement strategy focused on knowledge-sharing in relation to development cooperation. One such potential entry point is the standards that China currently uses to evaluate its development interventions abroad. As discussed in Section 2, it is highly unlikely that China will adopt the conventional standards used in the North to monitor and evaluate its development impact. This would suggest that perhaps a more effective approach would be for Western and Chinese academics and practitioners to work together to identify what kind of criteria and specific mechanisms could be put in place to ensure more transparency, efficacy and effectiveness in this changing environment of aid provision.

A priority for the present and the future would then be to engage with Chinese policymakers and academics to develop these new standards, specific and relevant to Chinese foreign policy priorities, beliefs and values, but also to apply them to Western donors. This would be an opportunity for Western donors to admit with humility that they too must learn, reconsider, and renew knowledges, and learning with China might be the best way to secure cooperation.

The mutual understanding and trust developed through this type of initiative could in turn help to convince China of the value of triangular cooperation with bilateral and multilateral agencies. At the moment, China is very careful about any form of triangular cooperation. It normally undertakes it only if recipient countries are clearly playing a leading role in the proposals it receives. The GPEDC could help its DAC member countries to engage with China by brokering contacts with third countries, especially those within China's near-abroad and its SSC sphere of influence. In particular this could include the Central Asian republics, given the focus of the new Chinese development roadmap on the 'New Silk Road'.

4.3 Operationalising the new approach: GPEDC processes

In addition to supporting bilateral, trilateral or minilateral engagements, the GPEDC has a key role to play in convening larger processes, including Task Teams, Voluntary Initiatives and thematic events, and above all its High-Level Meetings. Ultimately, its ability to engage effectively with rising powers will be determined by how well it manages these processes as enabling platforms for mutual learning. In order to achieve this, given that the issue of formalizing membership of the Global Partnership through signature has been a key stumbling block to active participation in the GPEDC by Brazil, India and China, it will first need to signal a

definitive break with the emphasis on binding commitments that characterised its predecessor processes, by emphasising that it is no longer focused on signing countries up and agreeing declarations.

In contrast with normative principles and declarations – which tend to be seen as either unhelpfully vague or unacceptably intrusive – engagement around substantive technical issues is much more likely to generate interest and commitment from rising powers. The fact that this is unlikely to translate into formalised GPEDC membership should be seen as an advantage rather than a failure, since it is precisely this kind of “Track 2” collaboration that is needed to overcome the current low levels of trust.

One important area of technical content that the GPEDC should develop is the discussion on how best to link national development policy learning with international development cooperation. If it can do this successfully, the GPEDC could benefit very significantly from repositioning itself as a platform for mutual learning that places development cooperation policy in the context of a universal approach to development. Assuming that the GPEDC can secure the necessary political support from SC members’ governments for this reshaping of its role, the field is open for this repositioning. There is currently no major international forum that focuses specifically on the best ways to place the knowledge accumulated through processes of domestic policy innovation in one country at the service of development challenges in another country.

Initiatives in key new areas such as this can be launched by the Co-Chairs and secretariat, and piloted on a modest scale initially by interested Steering Committee members. However, in order to achieve significant international policy traction they will need to be showcased at major events such as the next HLM. In the next section, we briefly review some of the lessons from the Mexico City HLM to see how this might best be done.

Learning from the Mexico HLM

The Mexico City HLM was a paradox: widely regarded as a political failure because it did not deliver a breakthrough in relations with the rising powers, it nevertheless was highly rated by a diverse range of participants for the quality of the networking and learning opportunities it provided – including with those same rising powers that were refusing to adhere formally to the GPEDC process. It is very significant that at the same time as the delegation from India’s development cooperation agency was conspicuous by its absence and that the head of Brazil’s development cooperation agency was insisting in HLM plenary sessions that his country was not a member of the GPEDC, representatives of key government think-tanks from India and Brazil were using the HLM as the launch-pad for an ambitious new initiative to strengthen BRICS countries’ thinking on development cooperation policy and practice.¹³

In addition to this think-tank presence, there was significant engagement by civil society organisations from the rising powers, which have played a key role in developing and spreading those countries’ development innovations.¹⁴ In fact, it could be argued that the Mexico HLM’s failure to cement the GPEDC as space for government-to-government negotiations and binding global policy commitments may in fact have proved to be a plus, by inadvertently highlighting its real comparative advantage: creating a very valuable space for non-binding, multi-directional technical knowledge exchange and multi-stakeholder partnerships involving

¹³ The Network of Southern Think-Tanks (NeST), led by RIS (India), IPEA (Brazil), SAIIA and the Wits School of Governance (South Africa), and China Agricultural University (China), which was subsequently recorded as a Voluntary Initiative in the HLM communiqué.

¹⁴ See Poskitt, A. and A. Shankland (2014) 'Innovation, solidarity and South-South learning: the role of civil society from middle-income countries in effective development cooperation'. Brighton, New Delhi and São Paulo: IDS / PRIA / Articulação SUL.

state and non-state actors in development cooperation, in which there is a much more dynamic sense of progress than in the intergovernmental debates.

Whilst there are clearly challenges in reconciling the diversity of views amongst different GPEDC Steering Committee members, it seems that the SC is already aware of some of the lessons learnt during the Mexico HLM, where not all members were in favour of pushing for agreements – binding or otherwise. This spirit of critical reflection could also be extended to looking more carefully at issues around the representativeness of the multi-stakeholder presence in Mexico City (addressing questions such as who was invited and how, and what shape discussions took). This could include, for example, an examination of the very significant role given to corporations headquartered in the global North in the HLM discussions on the role of the private sector, while missing an opportunity to showcase the roles of companies from the rising powers – whether Indian firms promoting access to ‘affordable, adaptable and appropriate’ technology, Brazilian firms developing the skills base of the labour force in Mozambique and Angola, South African firms changing the face of retail across Africa or Chinese and Turkish firms working in investment-hungry conflict-affected contexts that have been shunned by Western corporations.

The most important lesson, however, is that instead of being a mostly unsuccessful formal intergovernmental process, the GPEDC should concentrate on being a very successful informal multi-stakeholder process. For a model of what it could achieve, it could look not to the OECD or the UN but rather to a different kind of institution: the World Economic Forum (WEF). Even without an intergovernmental mandate, the WEF attracts very senior decision makers from governments and non-state actors in Northern and Southern countries alike. They are invited to discuss what are nominally economic issues, although the remit is in fact far broader, and often encompasses development issues.

The WEF has no formal agreements or communiqués: ideas and initiatives are shared, announced or proposed, but there are no binding outcomes. Its principal attractions are the quality of the ideas on offer and the quality of the networking opportunities it affords. If it could be re-imagined as a kind of ‘World Development Forum’, the GPEDC HLM would have an entirely different appeal to the BRICS and other rising powers: instead of a non-UN intergovernmental process of dubious legitimacy where they are likely to be pressured into accepting other countries’ agendas, they would see it as a strategic space for both showcasing their development innovations and learning from others, in which high-quality networking and access to cutting-edge thinking replaced laborious negotiations over binding commitments. Such a forum would provide an opportunity for countries like Brazil and China who have shown a strong appetite for technical learning from DAC donors to pursue such learning opportunities in a way that did not place them either at a disadvantage or in a politically compromising position.

The GPEDC is, of course, mandated by governments and thus does not have the same freedom of action as an organisation like the WEF. However, this does not mean that it should necessarily function as a political or negotiating space, rather than as one for technical exchange. The GPEDC defines itself as a multi-stakeholder partnership, which leaves considerable scope for promoting engagement with actors such as think-tanks, businesses and civil society groups who can shape policy and promote innovative thinking without implicating their governments in any binding decisions. There are also important precedents for intergovernmental structures that promote informal learning opportunities rather than binding agreements – including much of the work of the OECD. In fact, the BRICS themselves have produced a precedent: their inter-ministerial spaces have gained considerable momentum in certain areas (such as the struggle against

multi-drug resistant TB and AIDS) where the countries feel they have a common set of challenges and the potential to learn from one another in tackling them.

The focus in the more successful of the BRICS inter-ministerial spaces is all about process – how to communicate regularly, work together and put differences aside without denying them (which would in any case be impossible, given the scale of these differences among the BRICS countries and their often conflicting interests) in order to create effective opportunities for mutual learning, exchange and benefit. This is an example from which the GPEDC could profitably learn.

In conclusion, the GPEDC has a substantial set of challenges to overcome, but also some very significant opportunities. The challenges lie in the need to build trust by demonstrating that it understands both the importance of mutual learning and the need for this to be based on mutual respect, which in turn requires both more humility and a deeper understanding of the complex drivers of rising powers' development cooperation engagements. The opportunities lie in the particular moment of the post-2015 process, the demand that exists among rising powers for high-quality enabling spaces for mutual learning on domestic development innovations and the role of development cooperation in sharing them, and the fact that as a non-UN multi-stakeholder process the GPEDC has the potential to promote such spaces in a non-binding, flexible and innovative way. The period between the Addis Conference and the next HLM will determine whether the GPEDC is able to step up to meet this demand, or whether it will have to give way to others in the search for the right platform to support effective mutual learning for sustainable development in an age of universal goals.