

**Think Tank Exchange**  
**Future of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation**

*February 2017*

**Key Takeaways**

**Background**

This note summarizes key takeaways of an exchange among researchers about the “future of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (GPEDC)”. The exchange took place at the margins of the “T20 meets Africa” conference on 2 February 2017, 6-8.30pm. Participants came from Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa and Zimbabwe (full list in the annex). The purpose of the meeting was an informal, frank and open exchange of views. Participants were asked to explore commonalities and differences, and to explore common ground in the perspectives on the current state of affairs and potential future trajectories of the GPEDC. Meeting convenor was the German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE). “Chatham House” rules applied and we ask for their strict observance.

**Executive Summary of Discussions**

**State of Affairs**

Think tank participants unanimously agree that the current global context is not amenable for convergence on common narratives and principles for development cooperation. GPEDC is perceived as one arena for, and instrument of, “great power politics”. The emergence of China in Africa challenged the Western “monopoly” on aid, and perceptions continue to linger that OECD-DAC uses GPEDC as an instrument to regain its dominant position. In this context, the absence of any tangible incentives for emerging economies to join GPEDC is seen as the major obstacle for them to take an active role.

**Future of the GPEDC**

Momentum of traditional donors on aid effectiveness agenda was lost in bogged attempt at inclusiveness in Busan. Today, GPEDC has become the “Davos” of the development realm – a “talk-shop” of global development professionals which lacks the legitimacy that continues to reside within UN-DCF, which however is burdened by inefficiency.

Future trajectories for the GPEDC are seen as follows:

- “Big bang” scenario of abandoning GPEDC in its current form and rebuilding it from scratch: *favorable but not likely for institutional persistence reasons*
- Hybrid and parallel platforms resting on innovative working arrangements based on hindsight that emerging economies are not going to join partnership in medium term; traditional donors should maintain focus on the aid effectiveness agenda to sustain support from developing countries: *Most realistic and gainful under current conditions*
- Incremental rapprochement between GPEDC and UN-DCF based on continued dialogue between traditional donors and emerging economies which may eventually lead to one global platform: *Long-term scenario*

**Policy Recommendations to German Co-Chair**

- Clarify relationship with UN-DCF with urgency, using 2030 Agenda to “bridge” between platforms
- Explore new ways of partnering with and engaging emerging economies beyond the confining narrative of “membership” and “presence” - emphasize mutuality and learning in non-confrontational atmosphere
- Initiate high-level (ministerial) outreach to China directly, or via partner countries (i.e. Korean MFA) for future prospects

**Origins of the development agenda**

- USA is seen as having been at the helm of establishing the concept of “development” through the Marshall plan, which eventually became institutionalized in the DAC housed in the OECD. The DAC is therefore perceived among emerging economies as a quintessential “political agenda”
- In 1996, the DAC members introduced the accountability principle and the fundamental Paris Agenda principles around the monitoring of aid efforts to that political agenda

**Competing “narratives” for development**

- The aid effectiveness agenda exemplified by the Paris Declaration rested on a traditional “dual” conception of development (“donors” and “recipients”)
- GPEDC setup conserves outdated DAC concepts – the key indicator being the tripartite chairmanship of developing, developed and developing/developed country representatives
- The formative period of a “third category” (SSC, trilateral cooperation) fully emerged in parallel to Paris process. The idea of the “three categories” was central to the Busan conference and reflected a new consensus at the time. However, in aftermath of Busan, perceptions strengthened that DAC is trying to renew its “old” narrative
- The perception of the aid effectiveness agenda among emerging economies was one of a fully established and exclusive (Western) agenda
- Most importantly: There were and to this day are no incentives for emerging economies to join such an agenda. As a result, many emerging economies abstained; and those that did join did so for political (allegiance) reasons

**Emergence of China in Africa**

- Consensus view: The emergence of China in Africa challenged the “monopoly” of the Western Donors development agenda and was perceived as such by them, resulting in an attempt to co-opt emerging economies and bring them under the same agenda
- The concept of “Trilateral Cooperation” was in particular seen as an attempt of co-optation, and emerging economies have always been skeptical of this “hidden agenda”
- Perception in Africa and among emerging economies: The West and China are in a “power struggle” and fierce competition over control of the “development narrative”

**Need for a global platform?**

- There is broad consensus that in principle, there is a need for a single global platform for development cooperation that is (truly) inclusive; at the same time, the emergence of such a platform is seen as rather unlikely in the current global climate
- With respect to the likelihood of effective global governance on development norms and standards, there is a feeling that 1945 was a unique moment in time for global governance and that now this window is closing or has already closed. Quite possibly, the world has peaked a few years ago in its capacity to agree on such principles (another example: International Criminal Court)
- Overall, the global state of affairs seems to be characterized by more global divergence, not convergence; accordingly, the world is seen to be at a particular juncture in history
- The GPEDC is still seen by several actors as being “under the realm of DAC” and accordingly lacking legitimacy which resides, in the view of several participants, in the UN-DCF only

- India, Brazil etc. have been engaged in development since 1950s, interest in it emerged only recently. DAC was not interested in including them; only recently when volumes enlarged interest heightened
- The Global Governance System is changing and evolving too fast for China and others to completely follow and engage in all processes, and there is also a feeling in China and elsewhere that maybe there is also no need for such a complex system
- With regard to the focus of the GPEDC, participants see its agenda as too complicated and not attractive (politically); in essence, they feel that GPEDC is no longer about a concrete agenda (i.e. the old “development cooperation effectiveness” agenda) but is now about a diluted “Development effectiveness” agenda more broadly

### Future of the GPEDC

- Some participants viewed the GPEDC project as having failed and needing to be abolished; others saw it “in crisis” because it is conceptually grounded in traditional concepts which would have to be fundamentally revised before emerging economies could join
- GPEDC, by its own name, wants to be inclusive; however, any concept or platform that divides the world into different groups was not seen as acceptable to emerging economies
- GPEDC has become a platform for “everything”, resembling the “Davos” meeting of global business professionals; the partnership has lost sight of the aid effectiveness agenda and the existing corpus of rules and good practices is dissolving (TOSSD concept is a case in point)
- Participants agree that there are different scenarios and trajectories for the future evolution of the GPEDC:
  - o “Big bang” scenario: Participants viewed the scenario of disbanding the GPEDC and a new global and creating a new and inclusive platform as unrealistic given political incentives and institutional persistence
  - o Hybrid option: Several participants voiced a preference for a hybrid global system whereby traditional donors (re-)focus on the “aid effectiveness” agenda (“keep old development cooperation effectiveness agenda”) together with broadened participation to include CSOs, private sector and others, while emerging donors create a parallel platform for their development activities, and both blocs work together on certain issues ad-hoc in the medium-term
  - o Incremental evolution of a global platform through continued dialogue between traditional donors and emerging economies towards ever closer ties between GPEDC and the UN-DCF and the eventual emergence of one global platform in the long-term
  - o The concept for GPEDC as a “Knowledge Hub” currently pursued by some traditional donors is not met with particular enthusiasm, as it is seen as a further step of the GPEDC evolving into the “Davos” for development (i.e. a talk shop not very concrete on standard setting)
  - o GPEDC as implementation platform for Paris and 2030 Agenda: Acknowledging that the global context for a common agenda and norm-setting is not favorable, under this scenario, GPEDC would focus on implementing the two main existing agendas which are the Paris Agenda and the SDGs (however some stakeholders also see the focus on accountability and indicator attainment inherent to the SDGs as an obstacle for wider participation)
  - o GPEDC as the “SDG17 forum”: Under this scenario, GPEDC and DCF could become the convening powers of an “SDG17 forum” meant to bridge between the “unlike-minded stakeholders” (traditional donors and emerging economies) in an attempt to “buy time” until a more conducive context emerges

**Outlook**

- There is broad consensus that the OECD-DAC and the aid effectiveness agenda was positive for keeping traditional donors accountable
- There is also broad consensus that convergence cannot be brought about by force (“We cannot force one to be the other (West and East); time would be wasted and you lose both agendas”), but that commonality has to emerge organically, and for this, dialogue is key
- Food for thought: If China will not adopt “Western” approach to aid and development, will the West move towards adopting China’s approach? Some indications: Recent emphasis on private sector engagement, which is already a cornerstone of China’s model
- What happens when some existing partners withdraw from the GPEDC (“GPEDCEXIT”)? Western partners and co-chairs need to be prepared for such a scenario

**Policy Recommendations**

- Relationship with DCF needs to be clarified. Germany already invested a lot in strengthening UN Development System (ECOSOC process), and now there is an opportunity to bring this momentum and forge closer partnership between GPEDC and UN (anchors for example, DESA, DCF etc.)
- There has never been a decisive attempt to outreach to China at the highest level (Minister to Minister). The GPEDC approach is technical, however in China and other countries it is perceived as a political agenda. Good approach: Korean Minister of Foreign Affairs could approach China.
- If Germany wants China to participate in discussions: Raise concrete issues with China’s Minister to incentivize participation. Apart from incentive to participate and the institutional home, there are fundamental issue with the nomenclature (“developing” and “developed” countries) as well as the scope of the GPEDC; once concrete suggestion would be to tabulate all divergences so that you identify innovative solutions to bridge the gaps and bring about some convergence
- Agenda 2030 could be used as “bridge” between GPEDC and UN (2030 Agenda mentions “Global Partnership (Not referring to GPEDC, but still!))
- GPEDC could increase efforts to include more local (African, Eastern) perspectives in research; there is a gap between international and national dialogue and researchers
- Outreach to emerging Economies is important, but quick results cannot be forced; we might be moving towards a “Post-Western World”
- Explore new ways of partnering beyond the confining focus of “membership” and “participation”. Several participants stressed the fact that attending GPEDC meetings does not (or should not) mean buying-into everything it stands for<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This debate is also reflected in dissenting view on whether India, China, South Africa, Brazil been part of GPEDC (all of which signed the Busan Outcome Document) and then left, or rather never “joined”

**Participants of the meeting**

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- Fanwell KENALA BOKOSI (Afrodad)
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**Observers**

- Azani TSCHABO and Rita WALRAF (both Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany / BMZ)
- Tshidi MOILWA (Managing Global Governance / MGG)

**Organizers**

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