

Executive Summary

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted a critical need for all global actors to cooperate to tackle the complex, transnational challenges which define today's development landscape. Calls for more global cooperation are occurring in the context of an increasingly multi-polar world, where economic convergence between the global “North” and “South” have driven development engagements from a broader and more diverse range of actors, including from countries beyond the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC). Against the backdrop of the universal commitments made by all countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, some have argued that the “traditional” model of cooperation – based on a vision of development as the transfer of resources from a “rich North” towards a “poor South” – is not only insufficient for meeting Agenda 2030, but also fails to reflect current realities. In this context, COVID-19 presents a key juncture to accelerate the realisation of the “global” development paradigm, where all countries have a role to play in supporting global development outcomes.

Our paper tests whether international responses to COVID-19 – from both DAC and non-DAC members – have accelerated the shift towards a more “global” development paradigm in practice. Given that COVID-19 presented an acute and global challenge, we consider it a litmus test for the viability of a global development paradigm and the impetus for cooperation during times of shared crisis. To do so, we map the scale and scope of such responses across a range of modalities, including development finance, in-kind transfers including knowledge-sharing, and broader policy responses to identify key trends in how DAC and non-DAC countries cooperated in response to COVID-19.

Our analysis shows that while a diversity of actors contributed to international COVID-19 responses, the transition towards a global development paradigm has yet to materialize. On one hand, our review showed that a diverse range of actors contributed resources, demonstrating the “global” nature of the COVID-19 response. Our review further highlighted evidence of “multi-directional” transfers that flowed from the global South to the North, showing the reality that the “North-South” development model is no longer sufficient. Additionally, responses from non-DAC actors – including in assuming leadership for spearheading new multilateral initiatives designed to increase access to COVID-19 tools, and investing in local vaccine production capacities within lower- and middle-income countries– signal their willingness and ability to participate in, and indeed shape, the global development paradigm. On the other hand, collaboration *between* DAC and non-DAC actors has been relatively thin. Indeed, beyond joint support for some multilateral appeals – to which non-DAC contributions were relatively limited – and the G20 DSSI, cooperation between DAC and non-DAC actors as part of the COVID-19 response appeared limited, with both groups prioritising bilateral approaches. At the same time, we also find that Northern countries mostly failed to participate in key Southern-led multilateral initiatives, raising questions as to the ability of current global institutions to accommodate the diverging interests of all global actors.

At the mid-way point to the SDGs, and in an era defined by global challenges and the need for a collective response, there remain questions as to whether, and how, the transition towards a global cooperation paradigm can be deepened. We describe three possible paths forward. The first path involves a continuation of current “international” cooperation trajectory. Under this path, countries prioritize bilateral action, including when faced with global crises that could benefit from coordinated engagement where bilateral approaches and national interest remain dominant. The second path involves a strengthened cooperation platform between Southern actors as a challenge to the failure of richer countries to do more to overcome inequalities and support global development outcomes. The third path involves a re-think and internalization of the narratives of self-interest from the perspective of a global development paradigm, which understands that cooperation on global development challenges is in the interests of all countries. Under this path, the imperative for cooperation would require the creation of new coalition of countries, spaces for collaboration, and ways to pool and allocate resources in response to future crises. While the path forward has not yet been chosen, there remain significant questions and barriers to deeper cooperation that must be overcome to support collaborative, joint-up approaches, in which all actors can find equitable and efficient ways to pool and allocate resources for both current and future crises. This paper provides a starting point for further research, which will explore such barriers to cooperation in more detail.