

CHAPTER 1

A PARADIGM SHIFT THAT REQUIRES A COOPERATION OVERHAUL

International Cooperation for Global
Justice Report 2023



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CHAPTER 1: A PARADIGM SHIFT THAT REQUIRES A COOPERATION OVERHAUL

INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM IS DEVELOPMENT, YOU FOOLS

The world is experiencing a fundamental systemic crisis. All dimensions of the so-called development processes are intertwined and interrelated, creating multiple, diverse and complex impacts in an equally interrelated and systemic way.

We are witnessing a civilizational crisis, as planetary boundaries keep being breached,¹ inequalities continue to grow² and alarming political proposals resurface that challenge the equal rights of all people, regardless of their background, race, class, gender or condition.

These trends share many interrelated causes: dynamics that are responsible for the processes that degrade and deteriorate the conditions that make a just and healthy world possible. The stress to which the planetary boundaries are subject³ seriously threatens the chances of sustaining the enlightened desire for universality that has been embodied in the development paradigm for all people and territories for the last 70 years.

In last year's report,⁴ we devoted two chapters to the main trends of change that we observed. The aim was to reflect on the opportunities offered by the turbulent international context and the threats to the sustainability of life for international cooperation in the context of global justice.

The international development cooperation system, and with it related public policies and private initiatives, is currently experiencing a profound paradigm crisis, falling somewhere between irrelevance and underperformance.

The last decade has brought to light the changes in reality and the growing knowledge capacity to understand them. As such, the foundations of the international cooperation system must be reconsidered, starting by questioning an idea of development that has finally shown its limitations:



in its colonial, extractivist nature, in its foundation based on the primacy of economic reductionism – leading to ecological suicide – and in its roots in an insufficiently recognized and criticized patriarchal society.

THE DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM CRISIS

While there is no doubt that, at least in Western societies, progress has been made in terms of access to basic rights (education, health, social protection, etc.), it could be said that no country in the world is sufficiently developed, not even those considered to be the most advanced or to have the highest quality of life.

Environmental impacts, planetary boundaries, impacts on gender or vulnerable collectives or bodies or territories were not considered. Now, the consequences of ecosystem depletion and growing inequalities are emerging as threats across the world, finally showing that the sustainability of life depends on ecosystems. The development paradigm that has guided countries for the past seven decades can no longer hide its limitations and contradictions. That is why experts from various fields have declared that we are facing a paradigm shift – a shift that is our last chance.

Climate change, biodiversity loss, and air, land and water pollution are part of the public debate. The fight to reverse these problems is a focus of a wide range of public policies and private initiatives. But the progress that has been achieved is not enough. Environmental problems are only increasing and we have more evidence of their severity: the Horn of Africa is suffering its worst drought in 40 years; wildfires are increasing around the world; marine pollution from plastic waste and dumped fossil fuels is on the rise; energy sources are dwindling as prices skyrocket; the connection between biodiversity loss and the transmission of zoonotic viruses to humans is threatening global health; our river basins are drying up.

EARTH SYSTEM BOUNDARIES EMERGENCY

Studies warning that we are dangerously close to the planet's material limits became globally relevant with the publication of the Club of Rome report in 1972.⁵ In 1987, the Brundtland Report⁶ challenged the notions based on economic development and introduced the concept of sustainable development as a call to examine their limits. The Earth Summit in 1992 launched the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) publications, which after its creation in 1987 began to warn the international policy community of the risks of climate inaction. Studies published in the 2000s by the Stockholm Resilience Centre, which first described the relevant planetary boundaries and set thresholds that should not be crossed, updated the evidence in a way that is hard to dispute.⁷ The new approach seeks to understand the preconditions for human development based on maintaining planetary boundaries within the limits that have ensured the stability of Earth ecosystems for 11,700 years, i.e. during the Holocene epoch. By the end of 2021, six boundaries show data exceeding the thresholds, which continued to rise in 2023.

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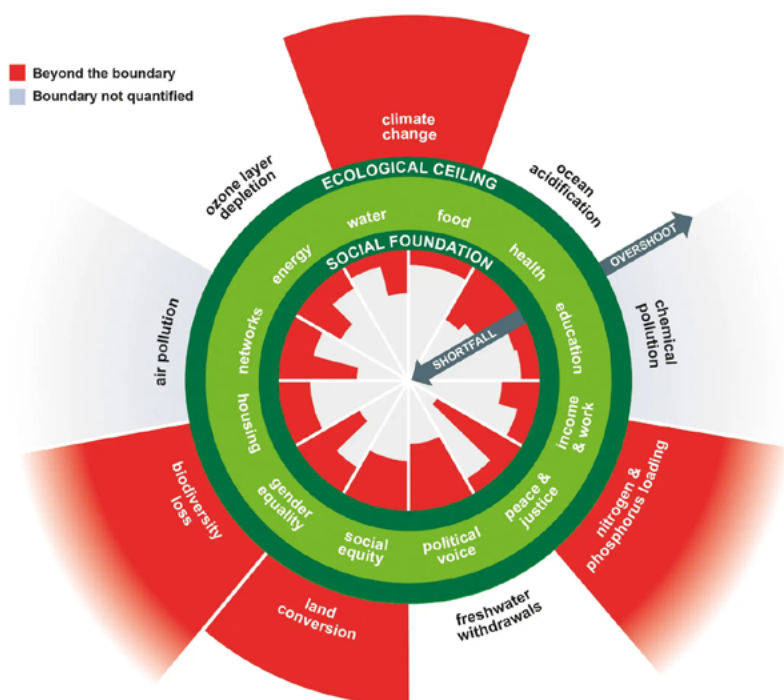


To explain the novel nature of these transgressions, the era that began in the 1950s has been called the *Great Acceleration*⁸: a period in which the Earth's ecosystems have changed faster and more profoundly than at any other time. In 2000, Paul J. Crutzen, the 1995 Nobel laureate in Chemistry, popularized the term 'Anthropocene' to emphasize that human activity is the main cause of the changes in the Earth's ecosystems.⁹

Planetary boundaries have become an urgent element to include in the analysis and study of various processes we have been calling development. Accordingly, the British economist Kate Raworth¹⁰ had moderate success in academic and institutional spheres with her proposal of the doughnut diagram, which marked out a safe and just space for humanity. It consisted of a series of social minimums bounded by thresholds representing the nine planetary boundaries. The studies that describe this *safe and just space for humanity* start with the suggested indicators for measuring the planetary boundaries and seek to meet the challenge of quantifying them so that they can be combined with the magnitudes used by the sciences to measure social relations.

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FIGURE 1. PLANETARY BIOCAPACITY



Source: K. Raworth (2017). *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist*. White River Junction, Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing.



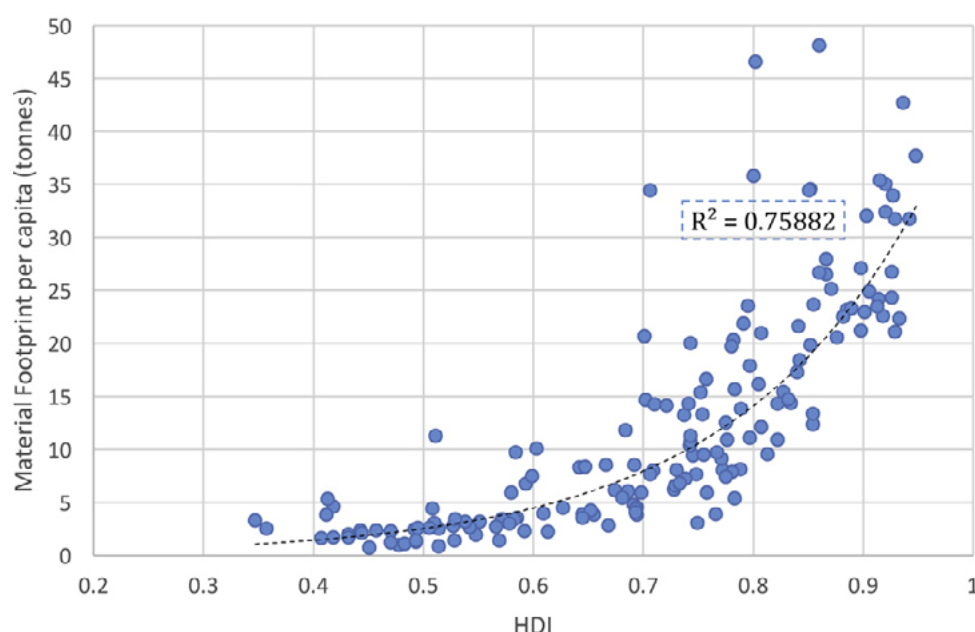
THE CURSED RELATIONSHIP: DEVELOPMENT AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT

The problem before us is easy to explain: the more successful societies and countries are considered to be, the greater the impacts and responsibility of their transgression of planetary boundaries that have endangered the sustainability of life and reduced the safe limits for humanity.

The safe space for humanity, as defined by the planet's biocapacity threshold, is not static; it narrows or widens depending on the interactions between the impacts produced within the planetary boundaries.¹¹ This means that the nine planetary boundaries cannot be understood or modified by operating within them in isolation or independently.

These are dynamic systems (ecosystems, to be precise) in the same way that the so-called development processes – regardless of whether we are talking about economic, human or social development – need to be redefined in terms of their participation in an Earth system and the effects that these activities have on life. A general understanding of the relationship between policy-based development processes – including international cooperation policies – and their impacts on planetary boundaries has been vital. Observation suggests that we are faced with a *cursed relationship*, as the more advanced societies and countries become, the greater the impact and responsibility for exceeding planetary boundaries. Generally speaking, it is useful to examine the correlation between countries' levels of development and their environmental footprints, as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)¹² and research centres¹³ have been showing for some years.

GRTABLE 2. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX AND MATERIAL FOOTPRINT



Source: J. Hickel. (2020). 'The sustainable development index: Measuring the ecological efficiency of human development in the Anthropocene'. *Ecological Economics*, Volume 167.



Using their own methodology based on similar data, the Coordinadora de Organizaciones para el Desarrollo (Spanish Development NGO Coordinator), Red Española de Estudios del Desarrollo (REEDES) (Spanish Network of Development Studies) and the multi-stakeholder platform Futuro en Común recently published a tool that compares the policy coherence of 153 countries with this multidimensional development framework, including the sustainability of life. The index is called INDICO.¹⁴

Based on the above, we must draw some basic conclusions in order to set out the framework within which we need to consider development today. First, we need a dose of epistemological and political humility, given that the ways countries have historically developed have led to exceeding planetary boundaries that threaten the sustainability of life. Calling for sustainable development as an idea and policy goal has value in terms of communication, but it does not solve the issue of implementation because we do not really know how to develop societies sustainably. In any case, we have not been able to do so with the current distribution of power within the framework of the liberal or neoliberal economic model.

In other words, it is no longer a question of undertaking transitions for production, consumption and energy models because they are already under way. To date, transitions have been accompanied by a dramatic increase in inequalities and growing political polarization, expressed by the narrowing of civic space, the co-optation of political power by a transnational economic power, and a surge in racist, antidemocratic social organization proposals.

Secondly, if what we see is a world that is increasingly interdependent and radically ecodependent, then any consideration of development should focus on and expand knowledge of how those interdependencies work. This is due to the constant interactions between the planetary boundaries themselves, and between the planetary boundaries and social, economic and political dimensions, which requires dealing with uncertainties and scenarios that cannot be described as static situations or isolated goals to be achieved. Without looking any further, the economic decarbonization goals adopted by the European Union and Spain, as well as many other countries, are more than reasonable – they are urgent. But at the same time, these goals should not be adopted by making the same mistake that has been made for decades of pursuing economic growth without considering how it affects planetary boundaries or social impacts, for example, in terms of growing inequalities or human rights violations.

THE POLITICAL DIMENSION OF ANTHROPOGENIC EMISSIONS AND THEIR EFFECTS

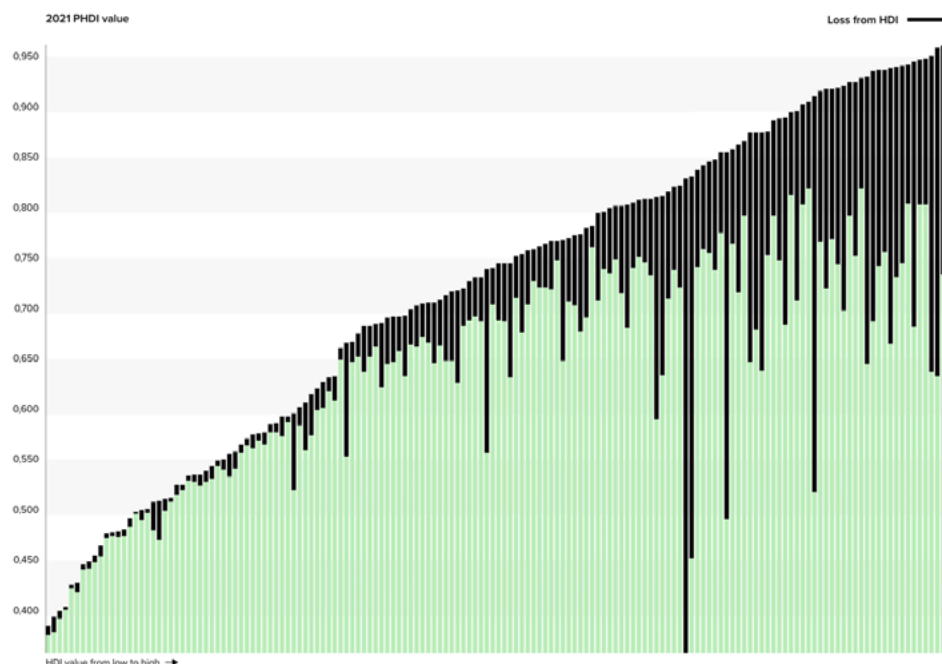
In 2020, the UNDP finally published its first planetary pressures-adjusted Human Development Index (PHDI). This measurement takes into account the carbon dioxide emissions calculated for each country's production and the material footprint per capita, which are the indicators of exceeding the planetary boundaries. To date, it is the most suitable way to consider each country's responsibility for these transgressions. This adjustment factor clearly shows that some of the countries that are historically better placed on the HDI rank much lower on the PHDI.¹⁵ Figure 3 shows that the countries

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furthest beyond their planetary boundaries and national biocapacity levels per capita also have the highest HDI. Not only does this show an undeniable relationship between the development processes of recent decades and the planetary transgressions, but almost 78% of greenhouse gas emissions are caused by G20 countries.¹⁶

FIGURE 3. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PHDI AND HDI



Source: United Nations Development Programme (2022).

NB: The countries with a higher HDI are those on the right-hand side of the figure, which, as can be seen, also accumulate the highest number of environmental pressures. From right to left, the first 12 countries are Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, Australia, Denmark, Sweden, Ireland, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland, Singapore and New Zealand. Spain ranks 25th on the HDI; when its planetary pressure calculation is taken into account, it drops 24 spots. Other countries with the highest planetary pressures are Australia, Luxembourg and Iceland, whose rankings fell by around 80 spots. However, some Arab countries have the highest pressures and biggest ranking losses – over 100 places – such as the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Brunei.

The imbalance between responsibility for emissions and their impacts shows that we are witnessing a political crisis of planetary proportions. The countries that have been considered exemplary in development and cooperation policies for decades – Switzerland, Sweden, Australia and Finland – bear the greatest responsibility for planetary biocapacity transgressions, as they are the main drivers of the threat to the sustainability of life. They now share this responsibility with countries that are more dynamic in terms of the global financial economy, such as the United Arab Emirates and Qatar. This situation is, at the very least, a threat to the sustainability of human life, as the IPCC's report reminds us, given that anthropogenic emissions are the main problematic feature of the Anthropocene.

Sharing responsibility for environmental impacts according to each country's relative HDI is a political problem, as countries with more power in the international arena – the 'developed' countries – know that radically decarbonizing their economies and development models could damage their competitiveness while the rules of the game do not change for everyone.

THE IMBALANCE BETWEEN RESPONSIBILITY FOR EMISSIONS AND THEIR IMPACTS SHOWS THAT WE ARE WITNESSING A POLITICAL CRISIS OF PLANETARY PROPORTIONS. THE COUNTRIES THAT HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED EXEMPLARY IN DEVELOPMENT AND COOPERATION POLICIES FOR DECADES – SWITZERLAND, SWEDEN, AUSTRALIA AND FINLAND – BEAR THE GREATEST RESPONSIBILITY FOR PLANETARY BIOCAPACITY TRANSGRESSIONS



There is still a lot of uncertainty and debate about how we humans can drastically reduce these emissions in time – technically, ethically, equitably and economically. And there is no doubt that this represents an enormous regulatory, political and institutional challenge.¹⁷ The underlying issue is whether decarbonization targets can be met without modifying the current distribution of international power. In this scenario, the most vulnerable territories and people in this distribution of power can only wait for the Global North countries to abandon their inaction in the fight against climate change and the rest of the planetary boundary transgressions. This inaction means that the current development models are still operating in an ecocidal and extractivist manner. The richest 1% produced twice the emissions of the poorest half of the world's population.

IMPACTS ON INEQUALITIES AND CONSEQUENCES FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION SYSTEM

Let us pause for a moment to consider the environmental impacts which, like emission sources, vary from one territory to another. Sometimes inaccurate statements are made about climate change, which is said to have indiscriminate effects around the world. However, what cannot be ignored from these comments is that climate change impacts – very much like the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic – are shaped by pre-existing structures of power and privilege, as well as governments' discriminatory politics. Throughout the world, people were unequally exposed to the pandemic and its social and economic impacts, including unequal access to health services and work security.¹⁸

This same is true of climate change: not only is it the result of anthropogenic emissions – especially those from the developed world – but its effects and the ability to adapt to or combat them depend on pre-existing structures of inequality. Inequality lies at the heart of the climate crisis: the world's richest 1% has a carbon footprint per capita 30 times higher than the global per capita level compatible with the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C target.¹⁹ Meanwhile, the poorest half of the global population has a much smaller footprint, while they suffer the worst climate change consequences.²⁰

This has created new challenges, while reinforcing and reformulating the existing ones.²¹ While government action to protect citizens from the pandemic has shown that public policies can make a crucial contribution to protecting and helping people, we have also seen the limits of these policies, which fail to address the deepening inequalities. This is demonstrated by the tentative, meagre progress made, for example, on international taxation of capital gains²² or on increasing multilateral cooperation funds for the global governance of protection systems,²³ to name but two global redistribution policies. There is robust data and trends showing the rising inequality and the inability of policy to reverse this trend in recent decades: between 1995 and 2021, the richest 1% captured 38% of all new wealth created, while only 2% of this new wealth went to the world's poorest 50%.²⁴

INEQUALITY LIES AT THE HEART OF THE CLIMATE CRISIS: THE WORLD'S RICHEST 1% HAS A CARBON FOOTPRINT PER CAPITA 30 TIMES HIGHER THAN THE GLOBAL PER CAPITA LEVEL COMPATIBLE WITH THE PARIS AGREEMENT'S 1.5°C TARGET. 19 MEANWHILE, THE POOREST HALF OF THE GLOBAL POPULATION HAS A MUCH SMALLER FOOTPRINT, WHILE THEY SUFFER THE WORST CLIMATE CHANGE CONSEQUENCES



As we warned at the beginning of this report, these pre-existing inequalities are not static situations but point to a dynamic that evolves as it interacts with other dimensions and phenomena. It is therefore crucial to understand how inequalities have evolved in recent years, following the pandemic, the latest wars and the geostrategic shift. For example, in terms of global income inequality, Oxfam has analysed the growth in wealth in the hands of a few as the main driver of inequality, which has accelerated in the two years after the pandemic.²⁵ It is a clear sign that the structures of power and privilege are not only in perfect working order but are also strengthened in these critical situations.

There is a need to understand the dynamics that replicate this structure of income inequality as a transnational phenomenon, and how they operate and interact with each other and with the Earth's system. A new paradigm to consider the future of societies will seek to systematically address a wide range of transnational dynamics that highlight a more interdependent reality by exposing the seams into which global injustices and inequalities are woven. This effort requires a research programme that includes different lines and perspectives to produce new knowledge in order to create forms of governance that align with the current planetary challenges. International cooperation policies must provide an essential framework for collective action, regardless of whether governance challenges extend to other policies.

**THERE ARE THREE
INTERRELATED DYNAMICS:
THE FINANCIALIZATION OF
THE GLOBAL ECONOMY,
THE PATRIARCHY, AND
THE COLONIAL AND
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OF KNOWLEDGE AND,
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DYNAMICS THAT REPLICATE THE UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF POWER

We have observed that the triad of exceeding planetary boundaries, growing inequalities and changes in the nature and distribution of international power are essential and dynamic elements that explain the current context of uncertainties, insecurities and risks that define the world in a time of paradigm shift. The systemic character of these three dynamics is reflected in the way they interact, across territories and bodies around the world and transcending political and administrative borders.

We begin by highlighting some of the dynamics underpinning the exhausted development paradigm as a proposal for opening a new research and advocacy agenda for international cooperation. There are three interrelated dynamics: the financialization of the global economy, the patriarchy, and the colonial and racist character of knowledge and, consequently, of institutional and policy frameworks. These dynamics are mirrored in the international cooperation system and its practices, and are therefore gateways to redefining the system in line with the times.



THE POWER OF TRANSNATIONAL FINANCIAL CAPITAL TO AVOID REGULATION

The structure of inequality that exists today means that fewer and fewer people hold most of the world's wealth, which leads to situations of economic violence against more and more people. This structure of inequality is perpetuated by policies and regulations designed to preserve this particular, unfair distribution of privilege and power. Recent decades have seen the consolidation of an economic *financialization* process (Medialdea et al., 2015), which has encouraged the expansion of transnational financial interests through progressive international deregulation. In this process of financial capital globalization, financial markets, their motives, elites and institutions have become the main players in the world economy, affecting it completely from production to consumption.²⁶ They work to create the conditions to facilitate the free movement of financial capital, supported by the information technology revolution and the digitalization of processes, by maintaining and extending clear concessions for tax avoidance and evasion, in the absence of requirements that impact capital investments.

The result is a new distribution of transnational power where transnational capital interests, represented by financial entities and operators (banks, rating agencies, risk analysts, fund managers and other corporations in the sector), have an enormous capacity to determine the political and regulatory actions of states and institutions. The latter then face the challenge of returning the accumulated wealth generated by transnational capital to the real economy.²⁷ They must do this through fiscal policies that not only increase government revenue but also begin to rebalance international power in favour of the general public by discouraging the current race into the abyss where the insufficient, challenging efforts to tax capital income is leading us.

The crucial commitment to a more progressive international fiscal governance must account for how capital interacts with planetary boundaries. Integrating financial capital into the real economy during the Anthropocene is not only urgent but also requires special attention to the interaction between capital accumulation and the transgression of planetary boundaries. All efforts to regulate capital flows in line with their environmental impact and human rights are moving in the same direction.

Some cooperation system voices have drawn attention to the close ties between capital accumulation processes and their environmental impact. They note the existence of processes that are at odds from a development perspective, involving open conflicts over available material resources due to a predominant extractivist logic adopted by transnational capital powers that is often legitimized by public and government actors.

Native indigenous communities and earth rights defender groups suffer the most intense and dramatic expressions of these conflicts in their territories and their bodies. Food security and sovereignty systems are also threatened by the replication of the capital-life conflict. Millions of people continue to face difficulties in accessing sufficient nutrients, while fertile cropland dedicated to extensive monoculture plantations for industrial cattle farming or cosmetics production led by multinational companies continues to increase. Once again, capital finds reasons and incentives to invest in

INTEGRATING FINANCIAL CAPITAL INTO THE REAL ECONOMY DURING THE ANTHROPOCENE IS NOT ONLY URGENT BUT ALSO REQUIRES SPECIAL ATTENTION TO THE INTERACTION BETWEEN CAPITAL ACCUMULATION AND THE TRANSGRESSION OF PLANETARY BOUNDARIES



the production of consumer goods for an irrational transnational consumer market, without calculating or including in its profit and loss accounts the impacts on water, air and land quality, on planetary boundaries, or on the most vulnerable people. This means that the chances of creating food systems based on productive diversification, respect for biodiversity, proximity and the environmental sustainability of agriculture, and the right to a decent livelihood are diminishing.

Spatial inequality between territories and people is another phenomenon linked to the extractivist logic of a development model based on capital income accumulation. The rise in land grabbing processes creates a dynamic of exclusion that promotes displacement and climate migration. Land grabbing and speculation are closely connected in international financial futures markets.²⁸ This shows once again the prominence of speculative and financial interests over a potential

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THE PATRIARCHY IS A SYSTEM THAT OBSTRUCTS EFFORTS TO IMPROVE REPRODUCTIVE AND CAREGIVING POLICIES

Not only has this real economy been replicated as an extractivist system of common resources to be enjoyed by a privileged few, but it has also done so based on a system that oppresses women – half of the world's population.²⁹ Feminism has shed light on how the patriarchy has created narratives and social beliefs based on the subordination of women, and how the construction of gender roles has led to an approach to economic and political science centred on invisibility and non-recognition of care. Care work, mainly undertaken by women, is the essential subsystem on which the so-called real economy depends and which has systematically obstructed the realization of women's rights. Unpaid care work accounts for 45% of total weekly hours worked worldwide, and makes up 65% of women's working hours. These calculations are invisible even in hegemonic progress metrics, such as gross national income³⁰, which suggests not only a calculation error but also the deeply ideological character of the indicator, which reproduces the patriarchy.³¹

Current economic and financial practices that operate in a unregulated market and an opaque environment have exacerbated the sexist violence that women worldwide face. The increase in sexual violence and exploitation worldwide or the rise in neoconservative groups with ample resources and influence that challenge gender equality achievements, especially in relation to sexual and reproductive rights, are some examples of the current challenges to women's rights.

The patriarchy prevents societies from evolving towards views that are more focused on reproductive rights and caregiving – a vision that the Anthropocene demands. Instead, those views are sidelined by productivist and monetarist approaches rooted in the patriarchal perspective of what works, is useful and produces wealth. Today's economy does business at the expense of lives (human and non-human). It creates a division between the private and the public, leaving to the former the caregiving tasks that the



economic system itself attacks.³² As such, 'contributions from the critical thinking of feminism and ecologism offer us the chance to address not only the domination of women in the patriarchal society, but also an ideology and structure of domination of nature linked to the patriarchal paradigm of the male master and warrior'³³ (Puleo, 2018).

THE COLONIALITY OF KNOWLEDGE AND COOPERATION

Following Underhill-Sem's (2022) reflections, which draw on and elaborate on her condition as an indigenous Māori woman, we are witnessing a revolution in development studies to address the uncertainties arising from the exhaustion of the classical development paradigm. Forms of injustice and long-standing traumas related to racism, sexism and intolerance, resulting from imperialism and colonization, are issues that must be addressed. Decolonial research and teachings (especially decolonial feminist research) increasingly offer intentional epistemic practices and agile intellectual approaches that tackle injustice and trauma in all their intersectional complexity.

The learnings from feminist, decolonial research and teaching work can support the emergence of different forms and practices of development. The first challenge therefore requires a dual objective: resisting the erasure of diversity inherent to colonial, patriarchal thinking, while also finding epistemic strength in each individual's partial views. From a perspective of thinking based on traditional Western pillars, Marina Garcés (2017) proposes the idea of 'reciprocal universals' as a response to the same dual effort. The decolonial, feminist perspective insists on the need to focus on the diversity of localized and contingent experiences, and to encourage those traditionally not considered political subjects to play a more active role in participating equally in the symbolic creation of a new framework of justice and coexistence.

Being part of decolonial, feminist practices in development studies means gathering, coordinating and including ways of producing knowledge. It also means practising good citizenship, guided by emerging values based on each individual's situated experience, with the ambition of reimagining visions, knowledge, structures and processes so that they are recognized as valid ways of thinking and practice in international cooperation. One way to achieve this is to use mainstream knowledge-producing practices, but to dismantle their hegemonic scope and knowledge canons, starting with places that are meaningful to marginalized people, as critical schools of thought have been doing. The best example of this is undoubtedly the emergence of postcolonial, feminist studies and other critical studies, as well as schools of thought on political ecology and ecological economy that emerge from dissidence but also from within academia.

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CONCLUSION: A NEW POLICY AGENDA FOR COOPERATION

When reshaping the development paradigm and development policies, we must consider that we are living in a new era which requires new ways of understanding the world and organizing human activity. Our era is different because, for the first time, human history and the geological era have aligned (Chakrabarty, 2021). This means accepting the need to recast values and aspirations in a new territory (Latour, 2021), restricted by planetary boundaries and the interactions that explain what it really means to be human on Earth (Chakrabarty and Latour, 2020). The challenge is thus not only environmental but points to the need for a thorough review of the entire modern era, characterized by anthropocentrism and its understanding of society, economy and politics. Naturally, this includes ideas about progress, development and well-being.

Not all is lost as long as we can take action to reduce harmful emissions that cause climate change in this decade because they will largely determine the planet's climate situation, not just for the next decade but for the next hundreds or thousands of years (IPCC, 2023). Without urgent, effective and equitable mitigation and adaptation action, climate change will further threaten the world's ecosystems and biodiversity as well as the livelihoods, health and well-being of current and future generations. Without global policy action – which can provide effective, efficient decarbonization proposals for economies and social and human relations – it will be extremely difficult to prevent the suffering from continuing to befall the same people and territories as always. Without a change in the current distribution of global power, the foreseeable future will exacerbate the current dynamics of injustice and inequality. In turn, this will compromise the very ideas of universality, democracy and human rights that have sought to connect the history of thought for more than two centuries.

The time is ripe for a paradigm shift. Beyond the ongoing debate about the appropriateness of the concept of development itself – its colonial, Westernocratic nature, its modernizing, civilizationary bias or its fixation on economics and reductionism – the sector is experiencing a credibility crisis (in addition to its clear performance crisis) with the emerging evidence on planetary boundaries. Development, as we still understand and promote it, continues to generate an unacceptable ecological footprint that is extractive and exploitative of the territories and their people, and especially women. This ecological footprint is objectively ecocidal, and very likely, suicidal at some point. Any new paradigm cannot be limited to technological or technocratic promises given the predominately political character of the conflicts that emerge and are worsened in the current context, reflected in different aspects of inequalities such as income, gender and race. Developing new desirable paradigms that can be extended to the entire world therefore requires addressing complex intersectional issues to bring to light and transform the dynamics that cause common problems.

In short, the question of development depends on the subjectivity of what constitutes a good life and what well-being is. As such, it is a controversial issue, situated in power relations that privilege some perspectives and voices



and silence others. Until recently, international development was a term used mainly to describe the efforts – usually made by Western countries – to bring about ‘positive change’ in countries around the world. As with any complex term, international development is interpreted in many ways, but it also always has some commonly accepted attributes. For example, it revolves around on international aid and interstate relations, support for international development institutions (especially multilateral banks and governance institutions and non-governmental organizations) and – perhaps most importantly – the idea that development implies that high-income countries ‘from the North’ that provide aid are also limiting countries in the Global South that are still ‘catching up’. Debates surrounding international development go much further and are harshly critical of each of these issues, as shown by the tentative steps taken in changing the official language used by cooperation system institutions (e.g. replacing ‘recipient countries’ with ‘partner countries’, or rejecting the terms ‘underdevelopment’ or ‘backwardness’ in favour of euphemisms such as ‘developing country’). But terminology changes alone do not constitute narrative changes if the practices continue to reproduce the underlying conceptions of the actual distribution of power.

Knowledge about development and the international cooperation system comprising all institutions and their practices cannot escape the challenge posed by the paradigm shift. It seems unreasonable to look the other way and continue to reproduce language, narratives and practices without critically examining how they are situated in terms of power. For this reason, it seems vital to engage in a systematic opening up of research and action in a sensible and modest way to gain new insights into how the interactions between transnational dynamics and social process dimensions can cause persistent global injustices. In other words, rethinking and renewing cooperation requires placing the principle of justice at the core of these dynamics as the axis around which renewed actions and analyses revolve. This proposal for global justice must be able to overcome anthropocentrism, sexism, racism and colonial legacies by redistributing both material and symbolic powers.

International development is a term that carries a lot of baggage, and this baggage limits the possibilities for thinking about global justice as a renewed linchpin of international relations and politics. The interdependencies that characterize our world – made all the more evident after observing how many experienced the pandemic – are reflected in one of the aphorisms of our times: ‘No one is safe until everyone is safe’.

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OPINION FEMINISTIZING DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

It is not enough to slap a 'feminist' label on the development cooperation model and say it has been feministized. This is all the more true given that there is a historical suspicion that the development cooperation model's strategies, plans and programmes are orchestrated by governments, companies and states to distort its nature, and in their own interests, to impose a logic of subordination, subjugation and enrichment that is totally incompatible with the strategies of transformation and social justice that should prevail. In more than a few cases, it has been and still is development cooperation itself that sets itself up as the 'patriarchal authority', which, rather than eliminating inequalities, reproduces and perpetuates them with a neocolonialism in which women's lives and bodies are part of the wealth and resources of such 'third' countries.

Feministizing development cooperation foresees the same challenge proposed a few years ago in this same area, when it became necessary to create a stronger horizontal structure and give a more prominent role to actors from the Global South, so that proposals and changes do not come 'from above' or 'from outside', but 'from within' and 'from below'. For the same reason and rationale (avoiding verticality) as feminist cooperation, the concept itself needs to be deconstructed, because it is not about giving the lead role to women or supporting their organizations' initiatives. That approach alone reeks of colonialist paternalism. Giving? Supporting? One of the striking things about feminism as a liberation movement is that women are not asking for permission nor do they need to, and neither do African, Latin American or Asian women. No one has to 'give' them a space that is already theirs and to which they are entitled. This is one of the key points that those who want to make cooperation feminist need to keep in mind: it's about giving back what has been and is being taken from women and girls. Returning, not giving, what is theirs – their place. It is not about supporting but about repairing, restoring and ensuring that the oppressions and violence they have suffered simply because they are girls and women are never repeated.

Leaving behind the capitalist, racist, colonialist, paternalistic model that has guided and continues to guide most organizations involved in development cooperation requires undertaking an urgent exercise of self-examination and self-criticism based on human rights. It involves asking uncomfortable questions about how women's and girls' rights are respected inside and outside organizations. Feministizing development cooperation requires a radical transformation of its very model and accountability based on the principles of truth, justice and reparation, especially for those women who have suffered and continue to suffer multiple forms of inequality, invisibility, discrimination and violence. In cooperation, the 'feminist' label cannot be used to whitewash a model of sexist, misogynist, racist, colonialist, ableist, classist discourses, practices and power relations that, although they have evolved, were conceived in this political order we call patriarchy.

Based on this approach, one of the steps that must be taken to feministize development cooperation is to deconstruct the idea and understanding of the 'woman from the Global South' in order to distance it from the ethnocentric discursive monopoly of Western feminism. This is a version of feminism that universalizes the category of 'women' and excludes the voices, knowledge, practices and ways of thinking of African, Latin American and Asian feminisms. It also unilaterally establishes and imposes the gender approach on key universal issues – such as sexual and reproductive health – based on a non-existent cultural homogeneity, which affects women's ability to make decisions about their lives and their bodies simply because they come from different, impoverished countries. To make cooperation more feminist, the feminism that inspires feminist cooperation must be decolonialized.

Another key aspect of feministizing cooperation is the connection it must have with the feminist movement and feminist associations from third countries, even if this means politicizing its cooperation programmes and actions, both in Spain and in other countries. Feminist demands are political and inevitably involve challenging the existing power and gender hierarchies in current international and domestic policies and institutions. As a result, feminist cooperation must contribute to the anti-racist, decolonial feminist struggle, focusing on those international policies and structures that actively contribute to the violation of the human rights of women, girls and non-heteronormative people. For example, some Spanish and European Union policies promote and deepen inequality and lack of protection in key areas such as security, border control and foreign trade, and which have nothing to do with feminism. Feministizing cooperation also involves a different approach to foreign policy that challenges the patriarchal and technocratic rationales operating within it.

Feministizing cooperation means radically questioning the current idea of development and the way foreign policy is shaped (even if it calls itself feminist). There should be no fear of completely overhauling the model, as has occurred on other occasions, if what is really being sought is politically emancipatory and feminist cooperation. Nor should there be any resistance from within the organizations to forging partnerships and networks – from below and from within – with social movements and versions of feminism in Spain and abroad that take a critical, uncomfortable stance on situations of oppression, violence and discrimination experienced by women and girls. Situations with a global and international dimension, focusing on the economic, social, sexual and reproductive rights of women, girls and non-heteronormative individuals who are particularly under threat from ultraconservative and far-right groups. It is not about cooperation building on the legacy of feminist movements. Instead, it is about no longer being part of or complicit in an oppressive structure and becoming allies or members of that movement.

Violeta Assiego.

NOTAS

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