CHAPTER 2

PRINCIPLES AND RELEVANCE OF THE NEW GLOBAL JUSTICE FRAMEWORK FOR COOPERATION

International Cooperation for Global Justice Report 2023

OXFAM Intermón

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INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION FOR GLOBAL JUSTICE

Oxfam Intermón Report 2023

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CHAPTER 2: PRINCIPLES AND RELEVANCE OF THE NEW GLOBAL JUSTICE FRAMEWORK FOR COOPERATION

INTRODUCTION: PRESSING AND PROFOUND CHANGE

Taking international cooperation seriously today implies addressing it with the critical mindset that the decline of the developmentalist paradigm dictates and with the urgency that global challenges require. In last year's report, Oxfam Intermón committed to looking to the future with the aim of helping build a new systemic, feminist and decolonial international cooperation system (Oxfam, 2022). It involves continuing along a long, arduous path, amidst discourse and public actions laden with complacency and resignation in equal measure: complacency towards an international cooperation system that persistently shows its limits and shortfalls, if not contradictions, and resignation at seeing the impacts and relevance of cooperation actions continuing to be downplayed as charity by those in charge of geostrategic, foreign and domestic security actions and, as of late, energy independence actions.

To this end, the need to profoundly renew the cooperation system is justified by its crisis of performance and legitimacy, which have made it irrelevant, and the absolute need to build coordinated collective responses that instil justice in solutions to global challenges. As explained in the previous chapter, we are facing a political challenge of planetary magnitude. We therefore need to reimagine an international cooperation system centred on tackling inequalities by accounting for their multiple dimensions and causes. This includes reviewing the system's foundations and practices by analysing the power relations that shape it.[1]

Accordingly the aim is to help establish a new framework that maintains, refocuses and overcomes the long-standing fixation that sees international cooperation as aid from countries with higher per capita income to lower-income countries. It encompasses a new framework of analysis and collective political action for democratic governance and needs for global justice that are imposed on us by the changes happening around the world.

This chapter puts forward some principles and guidelines to develop this new framework. This can only be possible if we include and listen to other people with different perspectives, particularly those with a different political position from our own. After all, that position is one of an organization engaged in power redistribution processes to recognize, restore and repair the top-down, colonial relations that have from the outset shaped the international cooperation system of which we are a part.

WE SUGGEST THREE BASIC PRINCIPLES TO RETHINK COOPERATION: JUSTICE AS A BASIC AIM OF THE CHANGES BEING SOUGHT, THE COMPREHENSIVENESS OF THE OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS AS A RESPONSE TO INTERDEPENDENCIES, AND COHERENCE IN DESIGNING POLICY ACTIONS

FOUNDATIONS AND PRINCIPLES TO RENEW COOPERATION

Cooperation that accepts inequalities as the focus of its purpose requires much more than merely adding one more objective to the traditional ones to carry on with the usual practices that have characterized it. The need to rethink the cooperation system's pillars, borders and instruments in light of the dynamics that create and reproduce inequalities is essential to overcome the shortcomings that the very international cooperation system recognizes.[2] In this sense, based on considering inequalities as a problem, we suggest three basic principles to rethink cooperation: justice as a basic aim of the changes being sought, the comprehensiveness of the objectives and actions as a response to interdependencies, and coherence in designing policy actions.

INEQUALITIES AS A PROBLEM AND JUSTICE AS A PRINCIPLE

For more than a decade, reducing inequality has been one of Oxfam's strategic and institutional priorities; its efforts include tackling inequalities as part of cooperation policy objectives. In recent years, the main international cooperation policy objectives, which previously only focused on reducing poverty, have begun considering including work on reducing inequalities. This shift in thinking within the international community was solidified in one of the resounding differences between the Millennium Declaration[3] in 2000 and the 2030 Agenda[4] approved in 2015, which includes a Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) specifically committed to reducing inequalities.

Recognizing inequalities as a problem that requires policies explicitly aimed at reducing them is an idea and a step in the opposite direction to what mainstream development stakeholders had followed during the neoliberal boom of the 1980s. It involves recognizing that trickle-down theories were unsuited to reality, which instead proved how inequalities were not only growing but also distanced millions of people from the possibilities and hopes of overcoming poverty. Despite having reduced extreme poverty in global terms, inequalities in countries explain processes of impoverishment, precariousness and the expulsion of millions of people. Indeed, accepting inequalities as a problem – not only as a collateral effect of economic growth processes – provides an opportunity to move away from the linear view of progress, in which those lagging have to follow those ahead of them, and understand that, in general, the relationships between them influence and act to try to maintain and widen the distance between them.

Accepting inequalities as a cooperation policy objective means including power relations between people, collectives or countries, proposing their transformation and positioning the principle of justice at the forefront of policy action. Reducing inequalities requires understanding how they are reproduced and acting on the dynamics that strengthen them, according to their different dimensions and scales. Justice serves as a general principle to design and guide policy action aimed at reducing inequalities, as it encourages recognizing rights, protecting victims, redistributing responsibilities and compensating for and repairing harm.

JUSTICE SERVES AS A GENERAL PRINCIPLE TO DESIGN AND GUIDE POLICY ACTION AIMED AT REDUCING INEQUALITIES, AS IT ENCOURAGES RECOGNIZING RIGHTS, PROTECTING VICTIMS, REDISTRIBUTING RESPONSIBILITIES AND COMPENSATING FOR AND REPAIRING HARM

THE QUESTION OF LEVEL AND DIMENSIONS AND COMPREHENSIVENESS AS A PRINCIPLE

Two questions should be resolved before analysing inequalities. Firstly, no inequality – income, race, gender or any other matter – should be considered as a static or definite situation. All inequalities are the product of historical processes explained by their particular balance of power. Secondly, it is worth specifying the difference between inequality and diversity. Tackling inequalities should not be confused with homogenization projects or tackling diversities.

From a democratic, human rights-based view, it is important to distinguish between inequalities that are a product of structures and dynamics that create injustice from those that are more a sign of abundance and plurality. The former are related to the opportunities, background situations and historical dynamics that have spread or reproduced injustices. The latter are often related to identities, mindsets and fundamental liberties that, throughout history, have also vied for recognition. The latter are also a product of historical processes that therefore may be susceptible to being among the former depending on the political context in a given place. In other words, inequalities and recognizing diversity depend on multidimensional processes that take place at the territory level, intersected by dynamics that produce more civic spaces and better opportunities for equality or the contrary.

The next point concerns the different ways that inequalities can be understood, explained and conceptualized. In recent decades, inequality studies based on monetary parameters have increased dramatically – such is the pre-eminence of quantitative studies in the social sciences and monetary studies in economic science to date. As a result, inequality measured by income disparities has been the subject of much research and, consequently, several policy actions. A progressive tax policy agenda that allows for a better redistribution of resources is therefore important.

More recently, we have witnessed the emergence of inequality patterns and concepts that draw attention to different aspects. For example, the unequal access to rights, benefits and opportunities on the basis of being a woman, having a disability, belonging to an Indigenous community or collective, being Black or dealing with other conditions and situations that can determine these limitations to access goods and services. Some gender studies have shown how these inequalities can be compounded, leading to the intersectional nature of discrimination and injustices.

Thirdly, both types of inequalities are expressed differently depending on the territories and communities, given that the institutional, legal and judicial, social and cultural factors, among others, that differentiate countries from each other are basic elements that foster or hinder dynamics and reproduce inequalities. One's birthplace can be a determining factor given how it can affect a person's life. For example, the experience of being a woman is not the same in all places, although we can and must analyse and bring to light the dynamics that affect women everywhere.

Fourth, the situation of national factors influencing each country is not static or independent from that of other countries. All these institutional, legal and cultural factors interact, influencing and being influenced by other countries. Factors and conditions that may or may not favour the growth of inequalities are variable and evolving, presenting a kind of combination of their own determinants with international or global ones. For example, when an anti-abortion movement appears across several states of the United States, it not only affects women's rights in those states but influences and strengthens a transnational current in the same regressive direction. Likewise, the resistance and political action of groups against this regression encourage other collectives and organizations beyond a given country. Such are the interdependencies that are also present in policy action learning.

In short, from a broad, comprehensive perspective that prevents us from simplistic reductionism, inequalities and their evolution refer to a complex set of elements that interact with each other in a constant yet variable way. This complexity requires analysis of the inequalities by level and combining their different dimensions to provide comprehensive responses to tackle inequalities. In that regard, we can explain what the patriarchy is, what it means and how it works as a discursive and historical structure of inequality or we can combine income inequality data with obstacles to undertake tax reforms to broaden and improve taxation of capital. We can also call for and design political measures that recognize rights and redistribute power between disempowered people and groups.

Rethinking cooperation to include this multidimensional, inclusive view of inequalities among its main objectives allows us to represent the world based on interactions between local and global levels. Everything that happens and what people experience at the territorial level cannot be explained solely as a consequence of local issues or exclusively as the result of global dynamics. The two impact one another and are interrelated.

When taking a holistic view of how inequalities are produced and reproduced at different levels and scopes, cooperation can develop a set of collective responses based on the principle of justice. Such responses, led and driven by the territories and affected people, require support to also reach levels of influence in deciding about global dynamics. Such responses must also account for the historical perspective of the issues and their evolution by identifying colonial and patriarchal values and influences that hinder their implementation, paying particular attention to consolidated power relations to question them from a decolonial, feminist perspective. Ultimately, such responses will support a radically transformation of the pillars of the patriarchal system that continues to underpin what people can and should do or not do according to the gender they are assigned.

INEQUALITIES AND THEIR EVOLUTION REFER TO A COMPLEX SET OF ELEMENTS THAT INTERACT WITH EACH OTHER IN A CONSTANT YET VARIABLE WAY. THIS COMPLEXITY REQUIRES ANALYSIS OF THE INEQUALITIES BY LEVEL AND COMBINING THEIR DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS TO PROVIDE COMPREHENSIVE RESPONSES TO TACKLE INEQUALITIES

COMPLEXITY AND INTERSECTIONALITY AS CHALLENGES AND COHERENCE AS A PRINCIPLE

THE 2030 AGENDA STEPS AWAY FROM THE LOGIC STEPPED AWAY FROM THE LOGIC OF 'SILOS' OR 'NICHES', WHICH REFER TO THE TRADITIONAL ONE-DIMENSIONAL SECTORAL VISION THAT HAS SHAPED POLICY ENDEAVOURS IN RECENT DECADES

A shift is now under way in the way policy actions are designed and implemented. There is a greater understanding of the imbalance created between sectoral-based policies – education, economy, environment, etc. – and the growing evidence that reality and its problems are multidimensional. For international cooperation actors, this shift was clearly illustrated with the move from an international agenda approved in 2000 to a 2030 Agenda created and approved 15 years later in 2015. From a somewhat superficial viewpoint, this shift merely updated the international development goals that would serve as a guide for all cooperation policies, reflected in the replacement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in many policy documents. Concerns were voiced about extending the number of goals – like SDG 10 to reduce inequality, several on ecosystem conservation and sustainability, or SDG 11 on urban issues – given that, from a project-based perspective of the international agenda, the SDG targets were becoming harder to manage and therefore ran a greater risk of being ineffective.

In reality, the new agenda reflected an approach with a larger scope and more depth than simply broadening the themes and goals. The declaration itself gives numerous guidelines on the need to understand the agenda and its 17 SDGs in a new way, focusing on its comprehensiveness and the interactions between social, economic and environmental matters. Furthermore, it stepped away from the logic of 'silos' or 'niches', which refer to the traditional one-dimensional sectoral vision that has shaped policy endeavours in recent decades.

Since then, policy action movements in this direction have been constant and frequent. Inter-ministerial or inter-sectoral research and government commissions have multiplied, ministries and departments have been renamed and several actions have been taken to address the problems from a more complex and multidimensional perspective. The importance of mainstreaming feminism is often overlooked, even as gender mainstreaming was called for in all policies as the movement's most recent practical precursor, which, in short, aims to mainstream this complex, multidimensional view of sustainable development processes in all policies.

Social organizations have followed suit, refocusing their strategies to address multidimensional issues, as can be observed from the strategies to address migration, gender inequalities, the right to food or any other matter trying to tackle diverse levels of action and different dimensions. It is still an ongoing adaptation process, which will probably culminate in completely redefining the policies, their goals and ways of approaching what we still know.

There are various limitations and obstacles preventing these political renewal processes from moving forward. First are the tensions stemming from the inertia of the public administrations still set on their predominantly sectoral (and often even corporate) incentives and aims. Second, the historical and complex view of reality requires understanding and designing approaches to

issues that require long-term transformation, which clashes head-on with the political system's electoral periods, which often dictate a certain short-termism in speeches often loaded with a very simplistic solutionism. In this regard, strong demands are emerging to include long-term views that take into account future generations, as the Brundtland Report's (1987) original definition of sustainable development read:[5] 'Sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

The commitment to transforming the interwoven dynamics that are driven and reproduced by complex inequalities and the intersectionality with which they are expressed in people's lives call for strategic changes to broaden the approach of public policies. To this end, several terms such as climate justice, multidimensional poverty, mobility with rights, and just transitions, among many others, illustrate the need to link policies that were once considered one-dimensionally.

These terms are widespread in discourse and policy documents in the area of international cooperation. It is with good reason that, at the end of last century, international cooperation started to observe in territories, often quite dramatically, how the effects of their policies aimed at reducing poverty, empowering people and creating new opportunities clashed with the effects of other trade, security or foreign affairs policies that affected the same beneficiary groups but in the opposite way. As part of the aid effectiveness and quality agenda, the first studies undertaken covered policy coherence,[6] with a view to promoting the refocusing of those other policies so that they would acknowledge the effects they produced in the communities and territories.

In addition to shifting towards a more complex understanding of the multidimensionally defined development processes, the policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD) approach,[7] with a methodology approved by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries in 2019,[8] emerged forcefully with close ties with other institutional commitments in the same vein as the UNDP, the EU and others of a regional nature. This is also the case in financial areas, as shown by impact investing initiatives and efforts to agree conditions on standards and thresholds for measuring and regulating different impacts.

Also, in the area of human rights, some international processes have tried to provide criteria and standards that would regulate the impacts that large infrastructures and companies' multinational activity have on lives, territories and rights. Suffice it to mention the John Ruggie principles (2008) here, which were approved by the United Nations Human Rights Council[9] to protect, respect and remedy rights by focusing on businesses' activity and responsibilities.

The policy coherence principle aims to include this multidimensional perspective in all public policies. This perspective takes into account the impact analysis on several dimensions (social, economic, environmental) in the countries where the policies are developed as well as elsewhere in the future. Tools and mechanisms are being developed to allow political stakeholders to systematically achieve these impacts, including cross-border, intergenerational or long-term impacts.[10]

THE POLICY COHERENCE PRINCIPLE AIMS TO INCLUDE THIS MULTIDIMENSIONAL PERSPECTIVE IN ALL PUBLIC POLICIES. THIS PERSPECTIVE TAKES INTO ACCOUNT THE IMPACT ANALYSIS ON SEVERAL DIMENSIONS (SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, ENVIRONMENTAL) IN THE COUNTRIES WHERE THE POLICIES ARE DEVELOPED AS WELL AS ELSEWHERE IN THE FUTURE

THE MULTIPLE IMPACTS OF THE DIGITALIZATION PROCESS

The mainstream nature of the digitalization process makes it difficult to gauge the impact it has had on people's lives. More and more areas in our everyday lives are influenced by digital tools and technologies, from searching for a job to personal relationships, from activism to entertainment, and from social participation to accessing the most basic services. Despite the differences that we find in different regions of the world, digitalization is unquestionably a global process and, precisely because of these differences, it is a fact that this process is the main space for many of today's inequalities and more so for those yet to come. This is why, in recent years, concerns about securing rights in the digital environment have grown.

According to sources, between 2.54 and 3.21 billion people – approximately a third of the world's population – still do not have access to the internet. That is the first level of inequality. If we take a look at the regional internet usage rates, we get a glimpse of the imbalance between the Global North and South, with particularly marked differences across the central part of Africa (including West, Central and Regional Africa), South Asia and the Caribbean. However, the internet access gap is much more complex and exacerbates differences between urban and rural areas, for example, between social classes, and even between age groups, forming a system of centres and peripheries that are not only determined by geographical location. The centrality of the digitalization process means that even the lives of more than three billion unconnected people are affected by the consequences of this phenomenon.

This digitalization process has affected the lives of people all over the world in many different ways. A particular impact is seen in the spaces where people exercise their fundamental rights, the consolidation of conventional inequality mechanisms and the appearance of new ones, the obstacles to accessing social guarantees, and democratic quality and the narrowing of civic space.

Firstly, big tech companies are interfering with access to this digital space, which favours a market-based approach over a rights-based approach. Many states have shown their inability to build critical digital infrastructures, causing a pattern of dependence on other international actors, be they big transnational tech companies, other Global North states or international institutions. From submarine cables to satellite networks and data centres, digitalization involves costly infrastructures that compromise the respective local sovereignties.

Meanwhile, public debate driven by the opinion-building media focuses on generative artificial intelligence – all the applications and features that can create content – and shifts the discussion primarily to the area of data and more specifically intellectual property rights. However, other developments of this same technology go more unnoticed, such as those used on borders, for automated decision-making in the area of social guarantees or aid provided to particularly vulnerable groups, such as refugees.

Similarly, disinformation has become the main threat to democracy as we know it. Electoral processes around the world, both in the Global North and Global South, have fallen under suspicion due to the medium-term impact this has on institutions' legitimacy and credibility. Despite being a phenomenon as old as time, contemporary occurrences of disinformation are inevitably underpinned by the digitalization process. This is apparent in the far-reaching ability to disseminate manipulated discourse and new actors' ability to take part in these processes and even in the production mechanisms of the materials that support such propaganda and influence campaigns with spurious interests. Similarly, the possibilities that digital tools offer to monitor, spy on and repress critical voices give a new dimension to the dynamics of closing civic spaces, which undoubtedly represents the second biggest threat to democratic systems.

Moreover, the right to a decent job is being seriously affected by the digital and platform economy's possibilities. New labour relationships require a new approach and reinterpretation of the legal framework, while in the meantime, inequalities are worsening and precariousness is growing. Some of what the platform economy offers is disguised as 'new opportunities', which complicates the issue of the exploitation mechanisms they are bringing back. Moreover, the ease of offshoring some of the processes associated with this digital economy is reproducing unequal relationships between transnational corporations, albeit primarily based in the Global North, and workers located in Global South countries. This is just one of the imbalances, which has already become known as digital colonialism or digital extractivism, depending on the case.

Lastly, to narrow down the influences, digitalization's impact on the environment is apparent. This process does not question the production-based development model, and in fact accelerates the take–make–use–dispose sequence to produce even more attractive and ever more quickly discarded innovations. Beyond the proposals and initiatives based on rationality, sustainability, reusing and repairing, technological innovation feeds into the produce–consume cycle. Digitalization increases the need to exploit specific resources, particularly rare-earth elements. Their scarcity, limitation, and in some cases, the need for complex, costly and polluting processing to render them usable have already made these elements a key part of a new geostrategy. However, they are also novel by-products in terms of mining, partnerships and control of the global supply chains. Lithium is another in-demand resource: closely linked to the energy

transition that goes hand in hand with the digital transition, efforts to secure the metal is leading to unrest in the area known as the 'Lithium Triangle' in South America. In addition to this demand for raw materials is the difficulty of handling discarded devices, which has also caused controversial dynamics of offshoring the processing and disposal of electronic waste.

In reality, all these facets of the impact digitalization has on the lives of people and many others that have not been mentioned also offer tremendous opportunities. From creating employment and improving quality of life to political participation experiences, as well as using technological innovations to defend the environment or tackle climate change – just to name a few – they all show how these threats have another side to them, which is digitalization contributing to the well-being of people, communities and the planet. A critical approach to the phenomenon and special attention to designing the model being imposed – from regulation and education – is needed to promote this positive side and minimize the negative impact. That is the key challenge that is opening up – not in the future – but right now.

Carlos Bajo. *Oxfam Intermón.*

GLOBAL JUSTICE AS THE FRAMEWORK FOR COOPERATION RENEWAL

Bearing in mind the growing complexity of the issues, their interdependencies and the transnational and multidimensional nature of development processes, cooperation policy cannot afford to keep being based on sectoral goals and a view of cooperation relationships between developed countries and those on the way to becoming so. Accordingly, the world of cooperation has been introducing ideas and proposals in the area of political discourse, such as using the 2030 Agenda and SDGs as a new general benchmark for action, including mentions of environmental sustainability, policy coherence and intersectionality and declaring the policy's feminist aim while reiterating commitment to human rights.

This effort to change the discourse has not gone so far as to question the developmentalist paradigm or draft a roadmap to decidedly transform the North–South logic that permeates the history and structure of international cooperation. Nor have decisive steps been taken to design and implement changes in policy strategies or instruments. This systematically reproduces the sectoral and geographic strategic priorities – thus giving precedence to sectoral and inter-state visions – and uses the project as a main tool, thereby encouraging significant limitations to transformation processes and prioritizing donors' needs.

Working to completely renew cooperation policy as is truly needed is not an easy task, especially if stakeholders think they can change the discourse without expecting those changes to affect the areas that determine everyday practices in policy. To this end, global justice should become the new framework for cooperation, as it comprehensively combines the principles of justice, comprehensiveness and coherence outlined above.

Global justice provides an alternative framework to the limitations to the developmentalist paradigm. It strives to focus on reducing inequalities from a human rights-based approach while going beyond the North–South logic between countries. Naturally, inequalities are also reproduced between groups and territories beyond their administrative and political divides.

Considering inequalities firstly as injustices enables us to understand actions aimed at reducing inequalities as predominately political actions that target and seek to transform the power relations that underpin and reproduce those inequalities.

Secondly, considering inequalities in their multiple forms, levels and dimensions enables us to understand the interdependencies – between social and economic processes, as well as between the latter and ecosystem life cycles – and the transnational character of the main dynamics that pervade territories and bodies, consolidating the imposition of an unjust distribution of power and reproducing exclusions, expulsions and rights violations. Countries and their politics are, of course, an important part of these unbalanced power relations but they are not the only or, at times, the most important factors.

To this end, the emergence of the global justice paradigm enables us to synthesize a comprehensive perspective on the conflicts that characterize the times in which we are living, highlighting their political, multidimensional nature. From assessments and strategies that stem from socioeconomic, gender and climate justice and just transitions, the responses to the crises will examine the causes of inequalities and act against injustices.

Recognizing the interdependencies between countries and the dimensions of the social, economic and environmental processes enables us to understand that the promoted solutions cannot be limited to a national methodological approach. In other words, nothing a single country and its government does can serve as a solution to challenges and issues that go beyond the effective competencies and capacities that nation states have.

Moreover, this approach enables us to understand international power relations as dynamic relations that are not merely focused on countries or international institutions but also other private actors: multinational companies, economic operators, investment funds, credit rating agencies, tax service departments, corporate and industrial lobbies, as well as social organizations' transnational networks, foundations, etc.

In short, analysing and assessing the international reality shows us the limits of an international cooperation policy essentially handled as the transfer of knowledge, rules and resources from rich countries to poor countries, while overlooking the interdependencies and dynamics that operate between them, as well as the economic, social and environmental impacts that development processes create and appear intersectionally in people's lives.

The main challenge lies in imagining and designing courses of action for cooperation that move away from deeply rooted national and other interests to reverse the international power imbalance by creating spaces of democratic governance built on common challenges. Development models must be established that are not driven by monetary profitability over justice and sustainability, and which effectively extend the human rights framework across the world.

ANALYSING AND ASSESSING THE INTERNATIONAL REALITY SHOWS US THE LIMITS OF AN INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION POLICY ESSENTIALLY HANDLED AS THE TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE, RULES AND RESOURCES FROM RICH COUNTRIES TO POOR COUNTRIES, WHILE OVERLOOKING THE INTERDEPENDENCIES AND DYNAMICS THAT OPERATE BETWEEN THEM, AS WELL AS THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS THAT DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES CREATE AND APPEAR INTERSECTIONALLY IN PEOPLE'S LIVES

A BAD TIME FOR POETRY?

'Inside me contend
Delight at the apple tree in blossom
And horror at the house-painter's speeches'
(Bertolt Brecht)

An idea that spread like wildfire at the end of the last century, with more of a performative than diagnostic purpose (and less naive than it may seem), argued that the world was more ready than ever for global governance. It was indeed the optimistic 1990s, undoubtedly the moment in history that humankind was the closest it has been to achieving the Kantian ideal of a constitutionalized, democratic world society.

We all already know how that story ended (or rather, didn't). Since that cosmopolitan momentum was lost – disrupted by the emergence of new global threats (some material, others discursively constructed) as well as the hegemonization of the security paradigm and deep shifts in the geopolitical order – a future in which the glimpse of possibly achieving a more democratic, fairer and more sustainable framework for global coexistence faded away.

However, a significant contradiction cannot be denied: the forces that helped shape society's problems as global problems to be solved collectively have only increased, even as cosmopolitan optimism dissipated.

We are currently reaping the fruits of this contradiction. On the one hand, it is becoming increasingly clear how, upon entering the Anthropocene, we are experiencing a global-scale systemic crisis. On the other, we observe how broad-brush speeches are fuelled (bigotry, negationism, 'every person for themselves' rhetoric, etc.), taking us farther away from the political conditions required to handle the crisis. And meanwhile, civilization is headed for an abyss. This crossroads brings us to an ultimatum rather than creating new momentum. Let us accept it and, as Marina Garcés proposes, let us show disobedience for the posthumous condition.

But how do we tackle a crisis in the Anthropocene, and how do we do it while strengthening democracy? That is, how can we as a civilization avoid the abyss and do so in a fair, sustainable way in universal and intergenerational terms in an interdependent, ecodependent society? What is certain is that, century after century, the threats are becoming more severe, and we have double the work to do.

It seems clear that no democratic response is possible without accepting the challenge that transnationalization and environmental (and also social) unsustainability pose to global co-existence. This inevitably means rethinking democracy and many of the ideas and concepts that underpin it. Focusing on just a few important ideas, and following on from Daniel Innerarity, it seems necessary to review the idea of sovereignty, and accept that a 'sovereignty of control' must give way to a 'sovereignty of responsibility'. This means responsibility for what is communal, for what is collective, which is becoming less and less compatible with the idea of nation and national interests or the interests of a specific political community due to interdependence and transnationalization, yes, but also due to ecodependence. Let us not forget that.

Indeed, in the current return to geopolitics, ultranationalist plans and the emergence of the reactionary politics on which this shift rides, the approaches advocating to move past both political realism and methodological nationalism are branded naive or, at best, rhetorically or even poetically idealist. But the paradox is that they hold the options for supporting collective action capable of addressing the political challenges of our century: the death of democracies, the deepening of extreme inequality or the climate emergency, to name what are undoubtedly three of the most relevant. All are challenges of a planetary scale which, if not addressed (i.e. 'business as usual', with the same formulae, policies, interests and ideas that have led us here), sketch out a rapidly approaching dystopian future.

The women who started demanding universal suffrage at the start of the 19th century were idealist and utopian. The 19th- and 20th-century labour movement that defended the rights of the working classes was idealist and somewhat less poetic. In the 20th century, such efforts included the fight for independence and decolonization on several continents, human rights movements, Indigenous people's movements, movements to defend nature and its rights, the international solidarity movement, and so many other achievements that, despite the considerable difficulties and resistance (also in the realm of common sense and the dispute for hegemony) were won and included in national constitutionalism and international agendas.

So, let us not give up on the idea that the shift from geopolitical calculation to collective and cooperative action is an essential milestone in curbing our self-destructive decline. It undoubtedly will not be enough. We need epistemological changes that let us open up to new ways of knowing that are now inaccessible because they are currently inconceivable. We need to open up new work agendas, strengthen and coordinate collective subjects, transform our policies, broaden and democratize institutions, etc. – that is, deepen democracy to transform it in transnational, intergenerational and decolonial terms. All of this is essential to show disobedience for the posthumous condition.

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COURSES OF ACTION FOR GLOBAL JUSTICE AVAILABLE TO COOPERATION

Besides adopting general principles to renew cooperation, there is an urgent need to start exploring the courses of action that should be considered. Focusing on inequalities as a problem and adopting the global justice framework are not simply a matter of paying lip service to them or adding them to the preambles for regulations and strategies that continue to follow old frameworks and traditional practices. Renewed cooperation has to be based on a clear commitment to reduce the gap between discourse and practice: efforts must be made to move away from the dazzling declarations on paper to focus on the drudgery of implementation where conflicts and contradictions are an everyday matter.

CONSIDERING TO WHAT EXTENT COOPERATION IS PART OF THE PROBLEM RATHER THAN THE SOLUTION IS POSSIBLY THE HARDEST TASK. IN OTHER WORDS, IF COOPERATION DOES NOT QUESTION ONE OF ITS MAIN ASSUMPTIONS, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT IT WILL BE ABLE TO RENEW ITSELF TO RESPOND TO TODAY'S CHALLENGES

DISSECTING COOPERATION: DECOLONIZING AND DEPATRIARCHALIZING PRACTICE

Considering to what extent cooperation is part of the problem rather than the solution is possibly the hardest task. In other words, if cooperation does not question one of its main assumptions, it is unlikely that it will be able to renew itself to respond to today's challenges. More specifically, this refers to the inherent assumption that cooperation operates neutrally regarding the issues it aims to resolve.[11] Indeed, cooperation usually acts as if it were not part of the reality in which it is involved in historical and geographic terms. Adopting a discourse that intentionally covers all the social and political demands of dignity and rights is instrumental in cooperation being positioned as a neutral actor with respect to the historical and geopolitical causes that have contributed to communities and territories experiencing situations of injustice. Moreover, cooperation does not only assume its neutrality concerning the root cause of the conflicts in which it intends to be involved but also that the affected communities and territories lack the capacities and resources to resolve them. So the only way for them to be acquired is to pass them on from abroad. It is a kind of structural racism that pervades cooperation relations and is systematically reproduced in language, goals, strategies and instruments (see Figure 1).

As such, the task ahead for cooperation if it were to consider decolonizing its practices is immense, fraught with risks and resistance and, often seemingly unattainable. The challenge is such that it requires confronting historically entrenched conflicts of interests, reproduced systematically by a group of privileged actors in the cooperation system. Based on the reflections and recommendations expressed by Global South actors,[12] the first recommendation is to recognize the situation of who is speaking and acting. This means recognizing that cooperation is not a horizontal system removed from the power relations that have historically and geographically shaped the world, but an intrinsic part of them. This system comprises actors that are positioned at one end of these power relations and therefore, depending on that situation, have more or less resources to set goals, allocate funds,

hire staff or set accountability deadlines and mechanisms than other actors, positioned at the other end of these power relations. This lopsided situation is exacerbated when intersected by the deeply rooted sexism at both poles of the cooperation system.

For example, without going into significant detail, a Spanish organization that is part of a group of social, political and institutional actors that shape the Spanish cooperation policy has a very different situation to a Bolivian women's organization that receives cooperation funds to promote economic and political empowerment in High Andean communities.

HOW STRUCTURAL RACISM SHOWS UP IN THE SECTOR

Source: Peacedirect.org

Recognizing the situation in the cooperation system as a system of power relations potentially has multiple practical consequences. But they are not automatic. Recognizing a situation of privilege in an unequal system does not change the system's relations in any way unless that privilege stops being wielded. Moving away from discursive neutrality is undoubtedly a first step, as it strips away a mask that serves to justify the need for cooperation from the perspective of the privileged and conceals power relations and structural racism. This step may explain the resistance that cooperation has to stop presenting itself as a politically neutral action.

ACCEPTING THE HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE NORTH'S POWERS IN THE SHAPING OF CONFLICTS MAY HELP RECOGNIZE THAT THE COOPERATION SYSTEM'S MAIN TASK IS INDEED TO HELP REPAIR WHAT THOSE IMPLICATIONS HAVE CAUSED

However, by recognizing the situation, many important opportunities for renewing cooperation could be opened up. Accepting the historical and geographic implications of the North's powers in the shaping of conflicts may help recognize that the cooperation system's main task is indeed to help repair what those implications have caused. Understanding the cooperation system as a system for reparations would be more appropriate from a decolonizing perspective of cooperation.[13] As the decolonial, feminist thinking warns, this understanding of reparations that social movements promote struggles for acknowledgement, expiation and compensation through lasting structural changes and towards our political and economic systems that emerged directly from colonialism's legacy and slavery, and which persist today. More specifically, the pending climate justice reparations in response to past and current harm require democratic governance in the delivery and use of aid as well as a clear distinction from aid flows.[14]

The course of action that the decolonial perspective opens up for cooperation presents potential actions in many areas and has consequences that are not easily predictable. One may be foreseeable: the relative power that the privileged actors within the system will have to relinquish to less privileged actors. Discourse and intentions alone will not make the transition from a vertical to a horizontal approach a reality: the shift can only happen as resources and powers are redistributed in such a way that the predominant interests and values are rebalanced.

This sort of power shift cannot occur with an approach based exclusively on the actors who accumulate the most power or are in a more privileged position. It is in itself a challenge for dialogue and the progressive inclusion of diverse points of view, which seek effective access to policy decisions in all areas of populations and communities that have limited access. Thus, the work to open access routes to representing, funding and defending their interests is already a clear pathway where there is a constant risk of extractivism of ideas and viewpoints, as it is not a question of maintaining the current lopsided relations by drawing on outside perspectives. Decolonial, feminist work focuses on transforming said imbalances by accepting the situation and thereby contributing to generating a global reparations system.

REPOLITICIZING COOPERATION: COLLECTIVE ACTION FOR THE COMMON INTEREST

Repoliticization is another course of action to renew cooperation. It aims to bring the work on cooperation back to the political space, which, for several reasons, has been moving towards seemingly more technocratic environments, consequently creating language and proposals that non-specialists find difficult to understand. Generally, depoliticized narratives are constructed from the problems that cooperation intends to resolve as a neutral action. It seems like a normal consequence of this shift that cooperation has lost its appeal for social mobilization.

REPOLITICIZATION WILL SERVE TO UPHOLD THE NECESSARY TENSION BETWEEN ACTORS, CONTENT AND POLICY OUTCOMES, SO AS TO BALANCE THE ACTION AS A WHOLE. THE INTENDED TENSION COULD BE DEFINED AS 'RETURNING COOPERATION TO POLITICS', AS THE DEFINITION OF A SHIFT THAT INTENDS TO REVERSE THE DEPOLITICIZATION OF POLITICS

If considering the situation as we suggested in the previous section has an obvious consequence, it is precisely that of repoliticization, since being positioned on the continuum of a power relationship justifies not only the perspective from which problems are addressed but can also motivate the intentions of transformative action from that position. Injustices can be described from an outside position, which avoids showing the extent to which the structures and power relations from which cooperation takes place have played a part in them. But injustices and their associated problems can also be described by showing the interests, dynamics and actions that give rise to them, to then take sides in effectively overcoming said injustices. Cooperation has persisted in appearing as an independent action that is politically removed from conflicts and problems' causes.

Repoliticizing cooperation addresses several core aspects of today's most common practices, namely actors' actions, structures, strategies and content or the outcomes of cooperation policy. Repoliticization will serve to uphold the necessary tension between actors, content and policy outcomes, so as to balance the action as a whole. The intended tension could be defined as 'returning cooperation to politics', as the definition of a shift that intends to reverse the depoliticization of politics.

- **Depoliticizing the actors involved,** those who no longer settle their differences in arguments that promote social mobilization in the public sphere, but reduce them to nuances of a common language, used in documents and discursive resolutions, which are generally unknown by the general public. To this end, cooperation actors understand each other in a language that is inaccessible and incomprehensible to those who are not part of the conversation. In doing so, they unintentionally remove the debate regarding the orientation and functioning of cooperation policy from the public sphere and reproduce its technocratic imaginary. The aim is to maintain the status quo in terms of subrogating and subsidising much of policy implementation, which defines the boundaries of what is debatable and negotiable.

- **Depoliticizing policy content,** which is constant and unchanging in its strategic and instrumental aspects over time. This can be achieved by vesting the transformative power that is expected of public policy to procedural and technical matters that determine and sanction what can and cannot be done. Cooperation is therefore underpinned by the

permanent upholding of its purpose, which justifies its need for regulatory and discursive aspects that simply state what is more difficult for impact assessments and historical learnings to show. One of its defining characteristics over time is the huge gap between policy discourse and the practices that are implemented.

- **Depoliticizing policy outcomes,** although cooperation offers undeniable outcomes (just ask the millions of people whose conditions have been alleviated or whose possibilities broadened thanks to cooperation actions). These outcomes – and the way they are reported – mention nothing about whether they succeed in reversing the causes of inequalities to prevent them from happening again. To this end, cooperation and its outcomes seem to be on the sidelines of politics, removed from the dynamics that create or reverse inequalities, confined to the space of welfare and humanitarian care, which hardly compensate for the more dramatic effects that policies have on some people's lives.

In view of the above, we propose a new approach to society and its actors, to cooperation policy content and outcomes, which includes the political nature of the whole system and its actions. Such an approach must consider citizens as policy stakeholders defined by their position in power relations, which is based on reducing inequalities as avoidable, reversible injustices, and which compares and ensures that said power relations can be effectively transformed.

In recent years, discourse on cooperation has shifted motivations from concerns about improving the quality and effectiveness of cooperation towards including donor countries' political and economic interests. Expressions like 'mutual benefit' and 'win-win' are increasingly common to explain and justify cooperation actions,[15] not so much as a matter of justice or solidarity with foreign territories or people, but as another item on national political agendas.[16] This discursive movement represents a notable difference regarding the discourse traditionally adopted by official development assistance (ODA) based on the needs of partner or beneficiary countries. This discursive shift is part of the responses with which countries address the governance crisis in which the field of international development cooperation is immersed,[17] and of which ODA's budgetary impasse is also a part. It is important to highlight the political nature of this shift of discourse motivations, as it originates in the attempt to react to the emergence of rightist populisms and question both global agendas and cooperation in a framework of aporophobia and xenophobia that is instrumental to the re-nationalization proposals typical of such populist rhetoric. As a result, many governments have portrayed cooperation incentives as a way to reduce migration to Europe. In this regard, we echo the conclusions from a recent Oxfam study[18] on the European Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI – Global Europe) that presents the considerable risks of official European aid being misused in African countries by directing it towards European border interests and dissuading migratory movements – a notable example of the incoherence between the EU's migration and development policies.[19]

The above is an example of the repoliticization that is under way in the area of cooperation and global agendas. In view of such, it seems strange that there is no clear response from the cooperation sector's social actors. These actors have generally been characterized by political anomie, having maintained a discourse that avoids describing the conflicts and finds it difficult to act politically outside of the framework imposed by the illiberal right's new populism and the government institutions that explain cooperation in terms of national objectives. Such responses are no small matter, insofar as they distract from renewed cooperation being a collective, global policy action to reduce inequalities.

THERE IS A NEED TO CREATE SPACES TO REFLECT ON THE COMMON AND SHARED INTERESTS BETWEEN THE TERRITORIES AND PEOPLE INVOLVED IN COOPERATION IN A WORLD SHAPED BY INTERDEPENDENCIES AND GLOBAL CHALLENGES

The lack of proposals that overcome this limited framework, a mix of electoral short-termism and continued technocratic and conservative inertia, restricts advocacy action to somewhat formal spaces and dialogue charged with administrative technicalities and procedures. Besides using up enormous amounts of resources and time from social organizations, such procedures can only offer results at the discursive level: they introduce nuances, statements and aspirations that are hardly reflected in political practice, caught in the same framework. More than ever, cooperation is held prisoner to national interests.[20]

As occurs with the decolonial course of action proposed above, the repoliticization required for cooperation to address the political nature of the problems must also accept the need to think from outside. In this case, this means from outside the political and administrative pressures that outline national interests and requirements that impose cooperation practices because both support the persisting imbalances within the cooperation system. Accordingly, there is a need to create spaces to reflect on the common and shared interests between the territories and people involved in cooperation in a world shaped by interdependencies and global challenges.

THE GLOBAL JUSTICE POLITICAL AGENDA

For some years, the political agenda for cooperation has started to respond to the multidimensional nature of the challenges and their interdependencies by trying to coherently combine multisectoral actions aimed towards the different scales at which inequalities are reproduced. They are strategic frameworks that include complex political agendas to focus on the dynamics of reproducing inequality that best define current problems. To this end, 'justice' as a point of view applied to climate change, gender inequality and socioeconomic differences is the pragmatic theme of the political agenda for global justice.

Establishing a strategy for climate justice, gender justice and socioeconomic justice is of utmost importance for renewing cooperation. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, it allows us to present politicized assessments of the issues, stressing that climate change, for example, besides being a global problem, is expressed and reproduced unfairly, affecting the most vulnerable territories and bodies. Secondly, it allows us to direct cooperation actions to include political actions in different sectoral issues and at different levels in a coherent way, such as by linking taxation, employment, care and equality to achieve objectives related to socioeconomic justice with a feminist approach.

THE POWER OF THOSE AT THE BOTTOM: DEMOCRACY AND POWERS TO DECOLONIZE COOPERATION

THERE IS THE NEED TO INCLUDE PERSPECTIVES AND VOICES THAT FACE CHALLENGES BEING HEARD IN THE COOPERATION SYSTEM, EITHER BECAUSE THEY ARE EITHER IN A SUBORDINATE POSITION OR BECAUSE THEY ARE RADICALLY CRITICAL OF THE CURRENT FRAMEWORK

According to the global justice framework, cooperation poses political and strategic challenges that cannot be addressed without reflecting on the distribution of power within the cooperation system itself. At least two aspects must be explored. First, there is the need to commit to a cooperation system whose structure and architecture represent an undisputed example of democratic governance. In other words, cooperation must be developed and coordinated based on a logic that takes into account the issues raised by actors who have historically played the least important roles in the system. Accordingly, proposals put forward in recent years that try to connect the governance of cooperation with more representative and political spaces like the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Partnership Forum,[21] to the detriment of the more restrictive and technocratic profile of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), indicate a hopeful path towards a more open, more democratic and more pluralistic system. However, an analysis of the limitations of progress, as well as the main obstacles, is essential.

Secondly, there is the need to include perspectives and voices that face challenges being heard in the cooperation system, either because they are either in a subordinate position or because they are radically critical of the current framework. However, cooperation still has a long way to go if it is serious about reversing the structural frameworks that shape the system's current imbalances. Naturally, this is not limited to involving representatives from Global South territories and people, but challenges the very concept of power. As such, the agenda of policy research, dialogue and work that creates an opportunity to transform cooperation involves the need to understand new and different forms of power, which are also expressed by different forms of exercising power. Feminist thinking has helped understand it – particularly indigenous, situated feminism – when highlighting the importance of resistance, dignity and the assertive yet composed call for the non-negotiable principles of justice and truth.

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