DECENTRALISED COOPERATION AND THE 2030 AGENDA

**Innovating Development Policy
in view of the SDGs**

CREDITS

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ODA   Official Development Aid

DAC   Development Assistance Committee

CIB   UCLG's Capacity and Institution Building working group

UCLG   United Cities and Local Governments

PCSD   Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development

ECOSOC   United Nations Economic and Social Council

DCF   Development Cooperation Forum

NUA   New Urban Agenda

OECD   Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

SDG   Sustainable Development Goal

EU   European Union

FOREWORD BY PETER KNIP

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the very expression of the challenges and the commitment to joint collaboration of today: global in character, and at the same time as local as can be. Local governments play an important role in achieving the seventeen SDGs, which together define the social, ecological and economic elements of the integrated sustainability agenda.

Local and regional governments contribute to all goals and targets, through the local implementation of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. They do so in their own territory, region and country, but also internationally, through various types of development cooperation action, including decentralized cooperation.

The international agendas which have been adopted in recent years have clearly impacted the development sector. The world has become more complex and interconnected; this called for new frameworks which introduced new narratives, values, rules and goals. The Agenda 2030 loudly calls for universality and for integrated solutions – based on the lessons learned from the Millennium Agenda, which was focused on the North helping the South. The 2015 Paris climate agreement calls for worldwide commitment to slow down climate change and aims to strengthen the ability of countries to deal with the impacts of climate change. The New Urban Agenda represents a shared vision for a better and more sustainable future. If well-planned and well-managed, urbanization can be a powerful tool for sustainable development for both developing and developed countries.

Actors working in local government development cooperation have familiarized themselves with the ins and outs of these agendas in the first five years of implementation and innovated their capacity building programmes accordingly, where possible. Now that the international donor community and national governments are gearing up with regard to the international agendas, it is important to show them what has been achieved already on the one hand and to step up our efforts to further incorporate the agendas and help achieve them, at home and abroad, on the other hand.

Since we are all learning by doing, academic research on the interlinkages between the decentralised cooperation and the SDGs (and other international agendas) is welcomed and of crucial importance. This vast publication, coordinated and financed by the Region of Catalonia, one of CIB's core partners, discusses how the international scene and international cooperation have evolved and how decentralised cooperation can (continue to) contribute to the implementation of the SDGs. It also gives an insight in the practice and experience of decentralised cooperation under transformation. A lot of food for thought for the practitioners working on capacity building programmes of local and regional governments and their associations.

This book is published in times of COVID-19. It is undeniable that local governments play a crucial role in organizing the response to the COVID-19 crisis and will play a crucial role in the recovery afterwards. In the response and the recovery we should not loose our attention for our objectives of sustainable development. On the contrary, the crisis might even provide new opportunities for innovative extra efforts. I do hope this publication is a source of inspiration for your continued or even increased contribution to the global sustainability agenda. Because the challenges are enormous and urgent. Accelerated action is needed everywhere, on all continents, and by all, including local and regional governments.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Knip
Director of VNG International
Chair of UCLG's CIB Working Group

FOREWORD BY MANEL VILA

The Ministry for Foreign Action, Institutional Relations and Transparency set off an analysis and discussion process in 2018 to revise Catalonia's contribution to global development within the 2030 Agenda framework. The wide consultation process "2030 Vision. The Catalan contribution to global development" was so launched with three main goals: firstly, identifying the lines of action along which Catalan cooperation could contribute in a meaningful way; secondly, establishing more and better connections and opportunities for joint work; and thirdly, guiding both the 2019-2022 Director Plan and any subsequent plans, adding a longer term perspective based on results and shared interests by all actors and partners.

The results of the consultation process, gathered in a synthesis document, and the Plan itself meant a leap forward for the Catalan development cooperation policy. On the one hand, the gender and human rights based perspective was consolidated, becoming a crucial tool to guarantee the transformative capacity of all programmes within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals, the SDGs. On the other hand, the importance of establishing complementarity, coordination and collaboration relationships was underlined, as well as strong alliances that help us reach a bigger impact in a more innovative and sustainable way. A wider view is needed, one in which new partnerships are created, with new instruments to face the complexity of global challenges in a thorough but flexible way too.

All this progress has allowed us to fit the new Director Plan and the 2030 Vision in the National Plan for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Catalonia. Thus, development cooperation lies in a key position for the internal reform of the Government's policies as a whole. Furthermore, it can help in the direction of the much needed change in roles and habits in society as a whole for the promotion of sustainable development.

In our experience, the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda embody a true transformation programme. The document we hereby present is an insightful exploration into how such a programme is already shaping decentralized cooperation and into which adaptations, at the normative and operational level, are needed to turn it into key policy for sustainable development.

Moreover, we celebrate our partnership with VNG-International, which allows us to work jointly in the Capacity and Institution Building Working Group (CGLU-CIB), an exchange mechanism at the heart of which this study came to life. We hope it will contribute to the advancement and the reflection on how to deal with the shared global challenges.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and decentralized cooperation responds to a commission carried out by the General Directorate for Development Cooperation of the Generalitat de Catalunya, as part of its activity in the Capacity and Institution Building (CIB) Working Group of UCLG. The research approach takes into account the new global and multilevel framework, inspired by several interrelated international development agendas: among others, the New Urban Agenda (NUA), the climate change agenda and the 2030 Agenda.

The objective of the work is to offer a useful analysis framework to recap and systematize the main changes that decentralized cooperation policies are exploring to renew and redefine themselves in light of the SDGs. To do this, it carries out an exhaustive analysis of the academic and institutional literature, establishing a framework that relates the origin and historical evolution of decentralized cooperation with the current context, in which interdependencies and the trans nationalization of development challenges are more evident. The study also has an empirical dimension, aimed at identifying the visions and the state of changes already underway, as well as the potential to address them from decentralized cooperation. For this, a questionnaire was designed that was presented to and discussed with the UCLG's CIB working group, and disseminated among various associations of local and regional authorities, as well as by the "Platforma" project. The questionnaire, answered by fifteen members of the mentioned networks, was followed by semi-structured interviews with some of the key actors.

The research analyses the new international context of development, more complex and interconnected, marked by the interdependence of challenges that transcend the usual sectoral and interstate rationales, bringing out a new paradigm marked by the integrality and multidimensionality of the processes, and by the transnationality of development factors. The 2030 Agenda — in which the set of development-related agendas is synthesized — is, to a large extent, the result of those profound transformations that modify the foundations of local and global development. This work understands the 2030 Agenda as a program for an in-depth change in development policies, promoted from all territorial areas. Its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) require new instruments and tools for a proper understanding and consistent political action, which is up to the new challenges. A more conventional approach to the 2030 Agenda (which, for example, assumed the principles of sectorality and policy autonomy) would deny the possibilities of transformation that this new global framework of development results advocates.

It is in this changing context that the international development cooperation system operates, which is presented based on an historical analysis of its foundations, its challenges and its evolution. Its evolution is limited, however, by the intrinsic nature of the system, its anchorage in national optics, and its excessive fragmentation, dispersion and discretion. Its nature has hindered the response of development cooperation to the voices that, from the studies themselves, had pointed out the need to move toward better regulations and praxis, warning of the need to re-politicize the analyses, to avoid the split between theory and practice, or to think of a development other than simple economic growth. This system also includes decentralized cooperation, a specific form of work used by territorial governments to mutually support their development efforts, which receives a strong boost from the processes of decentralization and regional integration and illustrates the increasingly important emergence of territorial actors.

In decentralized cooperation, different interests and drives coexist: the internationalism of local authorities, mutual support and capacity building in a demanding and interdependent context; solidarity, also rooted in relations with civil society...decentralized cooperation is carried out through multiple modalities and instruments, and presents a picture of great diversity.

Beyond this, its analysts have also pointed out some shared elements, which this study specifies in five areas: a) reciprocity and horizontality in relationships, overcoming the notion of "donor-recipient", and replacing it with an interaction of mutual benefit; b) proximity and participation and dialogue with territorial actors based on participation processes; c) multi-actor and multi-level territorial governance, and the search for collaboration, consultation and joint decision between decentralized governments and non-state actors; d) territorial alliances from logics of exchange, mutual learning and comprehensiveness, aimed at supporting a common political agenda and comprehensive, integral objectives; and e) greater possibilities to carry out solidarity action, despite the difference in the capacity for action between the different local and sub-state governments, due to the lower incidence of other factors (diplomatic, commercial, etc.) that may be detrimental to cooperation.

The international development cooperation system, and especially decentralized cooperation, have great potential to make the 2030 Agenda a reality. A crucial potential to influence structures that promote and reproduce inequalities and put the sustainability of life at risk, and which the study concretizes in some key capacities: to attend to the most vulnerable populations; to deploy multi-stakeholder alliances that make the intersectoral and cross-cutting approaches possible; or to strengthen the capacities of governments to improve the connection of their priorities with their national and local strategies for sustainable development. Internally, development cooperation should take the lead of programming integrated policies, and support the processes guided by the policy coherence approach for sustainable development (CPDS), the most appropriate and powerful one that incorporates a transnational and multidimensional perspective of the SDGs.

For decentralized cooperation, the challenge is to review and renew the foundations of their strategies and interventions in light of a new development paradigm, which involves not only finding ways to make them more appropriate and effective in their practices, but also to expand significantly its outlines, to explore new alliances, objectives and mechanisms that allow decentralized cooperation to make a differential and relevant contribution to global collective action. The study organizes the potential of decentralized cooperation from what has been called a "double movement": a movement that guides changes within the traditional contour of cooperation, and a simultaneous movement outside the same policy.

Undertaking changes and adapting a policy such as decentralized cooperation is not an objective without difficulties, and this study identifies at least two that are very notable. First, the uncertainty derived from the need to undertake transitions and transformations of a development model that has been consolidated in recent decades, and which is now finally evident as unsustainable and unjust. An appreciation of the need to undertake profound changes is appreciated even when we do not know the form and the effect that these changes will have on the dynamics that shape societies, which is expressed in a certain aversion to the risk inherent in states of uncertainty. Secondly, like any other policy with a certain degree of consolidation, there is some resistance to change explained by path dependency approaches and based on bureaucratic and administrative inertias, which decentralized cooperation must be able to identify and overcome.

It is not a matter of starting from scratch, but rather a deep review of the experience to make the changes in the proper orientation. The diversity and heterogeneity that decentralized cooperation brings together has made it difficult to have a complete and satisfactory definition of it; however, the common principles of work, shared — at least in aspirational terms — by all experiences, constitute a good foundation for the construction and recognition of their differential value. This specific and differential task of decentralized cooperation would constitute the nucleus of its recognition and, at the same time, the basis for its renewal. From them it

will also be more feasible to undertake those changes that decentralized cooperation must incorporate, so as to maximize their contribution to the new global development framework. Significant changes, which point to far-reaching transformations, and which can begin to be identified in the practices of decentralized agents – although incipiently and unevenly – and which the study organizes in five fundamental areas of public policy: standards, planning, multi-stakeholder dialogue, capacity building and instruments.

First, at the level of standards, the study observes that decentralized cooperation has not generally undertaken a profound renewal of its legal frameworks and regulations; on the contrary, an incorporation of the language and narratives of the SDGs has prevailed, which has focused on the territorial implementation processes of the Agenda - or localization - with the participation of cooperation in them. Some experiences show that the opportunity to do so may be based on broadening the scope of decentralized cooperation at the regulatory level: redefining its objectives as contributions in a framework of global justice, or proposing new impulses and renewals of territorial approaches and processes of decentralization. It is precisely the territorial approaches that have the adequate potential to lead new multi-actor and multi-level articulations; in this respect, decentralized cooperation can be inspired by numerous experiences of coordination and complementarity that have managed to consolidate schemes of shared but differentiated responsibility between levels of administration, for example, in transport in certain metropolitan areas or in communications management. The ecological transition, the commitment to proximity value chains, or the management of migration processes require these new articulations on which decentralized cooperation can offer highly relevant experiences and learning.

Secondly, in terms of strategies, the study observes that the SDGs are gradually being integrated into cooperation strategies, although at the moment a superficial assumption of the new framework prevails: new references have been incorporated, but cooperation plans have not been substantially modified. On the other hand, cooperation is not managing to integrate systematically and with a relevant role in the implementation or localization strategies of the SDGs, within the local governments themselves. The opportunity to carry out a deep strategic renewal from postulates anchored in the dialogue between multiple actors and with the transnational and multilevel perspective of the problems, as suggested by more flexible mechanisms, would permit the overcoming of strategic schemes based on priorities established from the top down, whether for state diplomatic reasons or for initiatives of international or multilateral institutions. The study proposes the notion of strategic areas as spaces where the interdependencies of economic, social and environmental dynamics are expressed, and which constitute an opportunity to overcome the rigidities presented by planning methods focused on sectoral and geographic priorities. It would be a more open and flexible planning framework, more permeable to dialogue between the actors in the territory, and more capable of relating the intersectoral and transnational keys to the problems that are intended to be solved.

Thirdly, the study analyses different mechanisms that are being used to incorporate territorial actors, in a more systematic way, into political dialogue. Spaces such as intersectoral advisory councils, which involve diverse actors in actions designed from the economic, social and environmental aspects, which are being implemented in various places. On their journey and their ability to make the different policies progressively more consistent with the principles of sustainability and equity, it will depend on whether these alliances are consolidated.

The study does not avoid the need to approach the analysis of the role of the private sector in development, and presents as an opportunity the generation of value chains in the territory and in its vicinity. Chains that link sustainable production and consumption models with the extension of labour rights and the redistribution of benefits, and that can be promoted in

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each territory especially by small- and medium-sized companies. The study also observes that the mechanisms available today for decentralized cooperation are still insufficient to involve certain actors, especially those who would allow, through agreements that establish differentiated responsibilities, to modify the most unsustainable and inequitable dynamics in the current processes of development.

Fourthly, the strengthening of capacities for decentralized cooperation has before it a renewed and expanded program with which to face the agenda of change that the SDGs represent. In the light of these, numerous training initiatives have taken place, focused on raising awareness of new challenges and beginning to explore the links between the dimensions of development processes. Also others aimed at improving the understanding of these processes, facilitating the incorporation of indicators and gauges of the intended transformations, with a multidimensional approach, at the different levels of the territory. There is still a training path to design and explore, to strengthen the capacities of staff and institutions to overcome the inertias of work in silos or sectors. The need to reinforce capacities for political innovation is pointed out so that the enormous potential of the territorial approach for intersectoral work is translated into concrete political actions based on a holistic view of the development processes in the territory and its anchorages in interdependencies that are regional, transnational and global.

Finally, in the scope of instruments, the predominance of the project as a unit of intervention and its well-established administrative and methodological criteria seem difficult to overcome yet. Starting from the idea of strategic areas, a methodological level begins to be developed to reverse the logic of cooperative work, so that it is the strategic objectives in each of these areas and in each particular territory that determine which instruments are the most appropriate for each intervention.

INTRODUCTION

This research on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and decentralized cooperation responds to a commission carried out by the General Directorate for Development Cooperation of the Generalitat de Catalunya in the framework of their joint activity in the Capacity and Institution Building working group of United Cities and Local Governments (CIB-UCLG). The Catalonia region is a member of the UCLG's CIB working group, and also of the Platforma project, funded by the European Commission. From these two spaces, it was considered a priority, in the 2019 programming, to strengthen support for the implementation of the SDGs from the perspective of decentralized cooperation; the present work fits into those priorities.

The research approach takes into account **the new global and multilevel framework**, inspired by several interrelated international development agendas: among others, the New Urban Agenda (NUA), the climate change agenda and the 2030 Agenda. This work refers to the latter and to the 17 SDGs to touch on, in a synthetic way, the set of challenges and transformations that this new global framework represents for sustainable development policies.

Thus, a series of shared principles, more than a closed definition of decentralized cooperation, are established as a proposal to recognize the common substratum and the contour of decentralized cooperation, while ambitiously expanding the enormous potential that this type of cooperation not only has to contribute to the implementation of the SDGs, but to participate decisively, based on their differential value, in solving the main problems posed by global challenges.

Its **objectives** are, on the one hand, from various sources — academic, institutional, policy orientations, etc. — to establish a state of the art on the potential and meaning that the SDGs have for development policies and strategies; and on the other hand, to explore the existence of a growing diversity of proposals and practices with which decentralized cooperation is linking to the new paradigm represented by the SDGs. With this, the research aims to offer a useful analysis framework to recap and systematize the main changes that decentralized cooperation policies are exploring to renew and redefine themselves in light of the SDGs.

Methodologically, the research began from an exhaustive analysis of the academic and institutional literature, to establish a framework that relates the origin and historical evolution of decentralized cooperation with the current context in which interdependencies and the trans nationalization of challenges of development became more evident. The proposed framework of analysis has been presented and debated before UCLG and Platforma members at various international events. To establish the visions and status of the changes underway, as well as the potential to address them from decentralized cooperation, an online questionnaire was designed that was answered by 15 members of the aforementioned networks, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with some of the key actors. Taking into account the diversity and heterogeneity of the visions and practices that characterize decentralized cooperation, the reflective and proactive nature of the research has been reinforced with the analysis of narratives and practices that are closer to the daily evolution of policies.

This final report structures its analysis into three parts. The first establishes the new international **context**, marked by the recognition of a more complex and interconnected world, in which development challenges are presented interdependently and both their causes and expressions require a transnational perspective for their proper understanding. The current

context of the international development cooperation system is also established based on a historical analysis of its foundations, its evolution and its challenges, which include as intrinsic motivations for change the structural limitations of a system anchored in a gaze dominated by methodologically national visions that were excessively fragmented, dispersed and discretionary. This first part ends with the description of the **evolution of decentralized development cooperation**, which has presented a relevant dynamism that has provided high diversity and heterogeneity to its visions and interventions.

In the **second** part, we begin by establishing the implications that the **adoption of the SDGs** has for the international development cooperation system as a whole, given that if they are taken in a manner consistent with the transformations they demand, they constitute a new paradigm that affects the knowledge, vision and practice of the set of public policies. Likewise, **the Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development approach** is presented as the most appropriate and powerful to incorporate a transnational and multidimensional perspective of the SDGs, while contemplating the inescapably multilevel and multi-actor nature of the responses. Finally, the potential of decentralized cooperation is examined based on what has been called "a double movement," from which to examine the changes that this cooperation can undertake to achieve an effective and decisive response to the SDGs: a movement that guides changes within the traditional contour of cooperation, and a simultaneous movement outside of the same policy.

The **third** and final part addresses the changes that decentralized cooperation should incorporate, giving continuity to the described evolution, in order to maximize its contribution to the new global development framework. Significant changes, which point to far-reaching **transformations**, which will allow establishing a new framework of practices on which to legitimize the actions of renewed decentralized development cooperation. These changes, which can already begin to be identified in the practices of decentralized agents - albeit incipient and uneven - are presented for five fundamental areas of public policy: norms, planning, dialogue with multiple actors, capacity building and instruments. It is also these five areas that serve to collect the main research findings in a final section of **conclusions**.

The research has been carried out under the close and constant collaboration of the General Directorate for Development Cooperation of the region of Catalonia, and has had the participation of numerous actors. It is essential to thank the willingness and participation of the members of the aforementioned networks in the research process, particularly the involvement of those responsible for cooperation policy in the region of Catalonia, as well as all those who took the time to respond to the questionnaire and were interviewed. The authors also wish to thank Rocío Rodríguez and Raffaela Galante for their valuable comments and contributions to the text.

PART I:

ANALYSIS OF CHANGE IN THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

1   A more complex, interconnected and diverse world

Our current global context is characterised by far-reaching changes that are altering the very structure of our civilization based on powerful transfigurations in all their dimensions. The current moment in history is one of the most paradoxical. On one hand, over the last decade, the world has seen virtually unequalled progress in science and technology along with the material gains they bring. Yet despite this accumulation of knowledge, progress and material gains, the long-sought human emancipation remains far out of reach. Instead, we face a crisis of historical dimensions given the real risk posed to our planet's sustainability.

Several different analyses point to the fact that, despite the social, political and economic advances (United Nations 2015a; 2015b; Unceta 2017), we find ourselves facing what has been termed "new geographies of poverty and inequality" (Sanahuja 2013; Unceta 2009; La Mundial and AIETI 2017; Martínez 2019). These new geographies of poverty and inequality are characterised by the renewal and transformation of so-called "development problems" becoming chronic, fed to a large extent by the dynamics of transnationalisation and interdependency.

These problems owe increasingly to structural and systemic problems related to the prevailing development model. They also increasingly owe to global dynamics and structures that have broken through the more traditional geographical boundaries. Lastly, changes in the nature of the problems, both due to the size and depth with which they threaten some of the most basic aspects that sustain life on the planet—life with conditions of well-being and dignity, in which the human rights of all people are guaranteed—now place us in a scenario of extreme gravity.

This multifaceted change in the nature of problems allows us to speak, as Jürgen Habermas (2000) and Ulrich Beck (Beck 2002) already have, about a society that has moved backwards from one aspiring to share well-being to one aspiring to share global risks.

As we make inroads into what has been called "the paradoxes of globalisation" (Rodrik 2012) the solutions to this grave situation seem farther out of reach. If not a paradox, we at least stand at a crossroads. As globalising dynamics and their consequences take shape in the form of new problems, the sustainability of life is threatened and the will and possibilities to build shared, cooperative frameworks to address these challenges seem to evaporate.

In order to understand it in its full complexity, this paradox must be seen against a backdrop of significant reconfiguration of power as the players vie for control over resources in an asymmetrical international order engendered by transnationalisation. The asymmetry is affected as much by the different spheres of power (Strange 2001) as it is—in relatively undemocratic terms—by the spread and shift of power among players in international society (Martínez Osés and Martínez 2016).

All of these ingredients brew a superimposed, multi-dimensional (environmental, economic, social and political) "perfect storm" that calls into question the current social and economic model and international order that spawned it.

In environmental terms, the current crisis is reflected by a transition from the Holocene to the "Anthropocene" (Fernández Durán 2011; Steffen et al. 2011; Prats 2016; Gil and Millán, 2018) triggering far—reaching changes in ecosystems due, for the first time in history, to human activity. Some of the manifestations of these changes include climate change and its grave consequences for life: the loss of biodiversity, degradation of ecosystems and global warming (Masson—Delmotte et al. 2018).

Economically speaking, the neoliberal paradigm has taken hold as a framework of economic regulation (Unceta, Acosta, and Martínez 2014). Its emphasis on liberalising and deregulating has amplified the international capital markets' weight in the economic system (Alonso, 2018) and driven the financialization of the economy (Álvarez 2012; Medialdea and Sanabria 2013). This has all taken place in a global context of technological advances with significant implications for job creation and labour reorganisation (International Labour Organisation, 2018; Sanahuja, 2018a) all giving rise to an increasingly vigorous need for new frameworks for economic regulation, production and consumption. This observation has triggered a debate about building a new global social contract that accounts for the planet's biophysical limitations reflected in the notion of a Global Green New Deal (Barbier 2010; Tejero and Santiago 2019).

Also in the social sphere there are elements that reflect this crisis, as seen with the process of commodification of human relations (Gudynas 2014; Unceta 2015; 2017b), the increase in human vulnerability suffered in very different contexts by important sectors of the world population (World Migration Report 2018), or the increase in inequalities not only for economic, income or wealth reasons (Milanovic 2011; 2012; Pikkety 2014), but also reflected in the membership in certain social groups, or to the adoption of certain political, cultural, religious or sexual identity-related options, and in a very marked way due to gender issues (Gálvez and Rodríguez, 2012; Zabala, 2005)

In a more political dimension, and in relation to the globalizing trends that have pushed in recent years toward the configuration of a post-state space, contradictory processes are currently observed, with the economic opening and deregulation characteristic of the last three decades on the one hand, and with a sort of return to an intra-border retreat and a reaffirmation of responses oriented from the "national interest" to global problems on the other (Rodrik 2011). Partly explained by the above, we also add the fact that political institutions and actors in many latitudes face a crisis of representation, and a threat of the rise of the extreme right, racism and xenophobia as political options that deny rights of global citizenship from a cosmopolitan perspective (Sanahuja 2018).

Thus, at the same time that a multidimensional crisis of deep social, political, economic and environmental reach is taking shape, the possible political responses in the multilateral and intergovernmental spheres are being weakened. In this context, the demand arises for a greater degree of political cooperation and the articulation of joint responses, in which international cooperation and the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development are called to play a relevant role in containing the "perfect storm" and in contributing to the transformation of both its causes and responses. This is true because both the 2030 Agenda and international cooperation have the potential to articulate collective action around a development paradigm that confronts the development model that has generated the conditions for the deepening of this "perfect storm."

However, the 2030 Agenda must be attentively read and analysed for it to be translated into policies coherent with sustainable development and the overhaul of the cooperation system and its stakeholders. As this report will argue, both of these issues are – or should be – closely linked.

2 Looking with hindsight at the international cooperation system: limitations, new approaches and challenges ahead

As has already been pointed out, international cooperation is a field of action with great potential to promote the transformations proposed by international agendas and to contribute to responding to society's problems that demand collective action. Section four will address this issue in greater detail.

Before addressing these elements of transformation, however, it is necessary to focus on some of the limitations that international cooperation faces and which are increasingly evident in the current context. They are pointed out here because the basis for the renewal of international cooperation depends on overcoming these limitations, since all of them respond to a structural nature.

2.1 Obsolescence of the foundations of the cooperation system

One of the first observed limitations of international cooperation is the divorce between theory and practice (Unceta and Gutiérrez 2018). International cooperation suffers both from the erosion of its theoretical anchoring present since its advent as well as from the lack of a new explanatory framework with standards and regulations to address the deep—seated transformations that have taken place over the last thirty years in international society. An explanatory and regulatory framework would need to rebuild cooperation's identity in a world that no longer looks like the one in which it was born. At the same time, the framework must be able to guide global collective action to respond to society's problems with a cooperative paradigm (Martínez 2019).

Also, international cooperation traditionally has been questioned regarding its ability to generate development impact and results. This development efficiency debate has been ongoing for quite some time and at the turn of the century resulted in the so— called Aid Efficiency Agenda.

The truth is that international cooperation has never managed to escape a certain crisis of results that has been extensively analysed with conclusions of a very different nature (Abdel-Malek 2015; Burnside and Dollar 2000; Alonso 2005; Sachs 2006; Easterly 2006; Moyo 2009; Unceta 2013). This questioning of results has accompanied international cooperation practically since its inception. And the call to review the practices of the Aid Effectiveness Agenda also fails to resolve this debate.

Fragmentation, discretion and wilfulness

Among the noteworthy elements that debilitate international development both in terms of its system and practice and which was not sufficiently addressed by the Aid Efficiency Agenda involves its very nature and the system of aid around which it hinges.

Here, reference must be made to the fact that international cooperation is voluntary, deregulated, and fragmented. This poses obvious limitations both in terms of how it is conceived and how it is practised. Its nature can be explained to a large extent by the fact that it became institutionalised starting in the 1960s, hinging around the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC/OECD), a body exclusively composed of donors. This circumstance consolidated the aid nature of cooperation and generated rigidity, hampering its evolution toward new paradigms while taking new considerations into account. As Severino and Ray indicate, it is this nature that explains how both aid and the DAC became lodged in a sort of "nutshell" whose basic elements have remained unaltered while the world outside has undergone major changes (2009, 16).

Thus, this nature is decisive in the definition of aid and in the transfer of resources as elements that support cooperative relations and that limit the possibilities of expanding the objectives, practices, relations and instruments of international cooperation. As a result, international cooperation's ability to adapt to changes and the dynamics of development have been stymied.

The quality of aid and attempts to overcome verticality in the aid chain

After three decades of sustained growth in international cooperation, the 1990s saw a crisis in Official Development Aid (ODA) known as "aid fatigue." The stagnation recorded during that decade had two causes: first, there was a lack of evidence that these contributions actually fostered development; and also, there was a lack of incentives for donors to use aid instrumentally as a result of cooperation's loss of strategic weight in the new post—Cold War scenario (Martínez 2019, 115).

Attentive reading of the Aid Efficiency Agenda's principles and practice in line with these principles sheds light on how to compensate for some of the imbalances stemming from the

very nature of aid, i.e. asymmetry, discretion and rigidity in the face of diversity. However, the prevailing readings of the Aid Efficiency Agenda overlooked the potential of some of the most politically charged of these principles, such as ownership, alignment and mutual responsibility, and therefore failed to question thevery nature of aid. Contrarily, the focus was placed on principles, such as harmonisation and results—based management, that are more directly linked to technical, procedural issues (Schulz 2009). Thus, once again, correcting these shortcomings depends on this agenda's framework and the voluntary basis of participation in the aid system, particularly on the part of the donors (Martínez 2019, 115).

The Aid Effectiveness Agenda has met with different types of criticism for both its approach and its limited results (Martínez 2011; Ayllón Pino 2013; OECD and UNDP 2014; OECD and UNDP 2017). One of its most criticised aspects is its excessive focus on practices and results, making it more of an "aid management" agenda. Although the agenda did indeed give rise to interesting contributions in this regard, particularly regarding the regeneration of cooperation tools, it was unable to overhaul the nature of the aid system and therefore unable to alter one of its most constraining traits.

The weakness of the Aid Efficiency Agenda lies in the lack of questioning of the very nature of aid and its problems, i.e., verticality, fragmentation, dependency, asymmetry, rigidity, and so forth. As necessary as these contributions are, international cooperation's problems cannot be solved through more rational, effective, and horizontal management. Instead, an overhaul of practices, rules and the underpinning of the system must be implemented (Martínez 2019, 116). Furthermore, today, given the greater complexity and severity of the problems, this crisis in results seems to have become exacerbated.

On another order of things, the main meaning of the final result of the quality of aid for decentralised cooperation was the recognition of the role played by local and regional governments' cooperation in the resolution that gave rise to formulating cooperation effectiveness in Busan in 2011. Although certainly, each type of decentralised cooperation relates differently to the cooperation efficiency principles established in Busan. For decades, vertical cooperation thwarted development, reproduced fragmentation, and led to a lack of dialogue, coordination and complementarity. It therefore generated scant impact and results, excessive assistance, clientelism, and so forth. Now, beyond these vertical forms of cooperation, there are emerging models – territorial associations, agencies and networks – that have proven to be more efficient and provide a greater and more sustained impact on development.

2.2   Emerging new approaches

The difficulty in effectively incorporating the theoretical input from development debates, clearly related to the divorce between theory and practice, stands as another element reflecting the obsolescence of the foundations of the international cooperation system.

Over the last two decades of the twentieth century, the focus on human development, sustainable development, and development with a gender and a human rights perspective, to cite some of the most influential approaches, all gained steam and had a bearing on steering the

evaluation of development and served as a means of comparison between different countries and their states of development. All were explicitly critical of the traditional approach associating development with the goal of attaining higher per capita income. This critical aspect, incorporated in the previously mentioned approached, stems from a vindication of development's multidimensional nature, which in turn necessarily leads to new cooperation requirements. Yet all of these revisions and new perspectives in the development debate are hard to accommodate in a cooperation system which, far from reconsidering its orientation in the face of this criticism, attempts to take an eminently technical approach by including new tools, new narratives and new methodologies for formulating projects and programmes, but without actually overhauling its practices in depth (Martínez 2019, 112).

Consequently, this issue brings to light two of the previously indicated elements that significantly constrain the international development system. First, there is the separateness of theory and practice. In the face of increasing interdependence and complexity, this seems even more necessary and urgent to resolve. Secondly, there are rigidity and difficulties in adapting to approaches that question the basis of aid and its very nature. At the end of the day, this rigidity is what accounts for the resistance to change.

International cooperation has encountered even more difficulties in accommodating for so—called "alternatives to development" that call into question the conception of development. Nevertheless, partly because of their nature and partly because of their perspectives, several types of practice and actors in the international cooperation system have proven more open and versatile. They have greater potential in this regard as they are more critical of and question to a larger extent the traditional view of development. Decentralised cooperation fits this description, as will be discussed later.

2.3 Current challenges for a weak system and policies risking irrelevance

As a result of the two elements discussed above – the obsolescence of cooperation foundations and practices in a profoundly transformed reality and the emergence of new approaches – there are new challenges for international cooperation. These challenges have led international cooperation to consider certain elements that shape it and give it meaning, such as the need to echo the changes and dynamics of international society in light of a more complex and plural system that has given rise to new players, instruments and funding flows. New objectives have been explored, broader than international cooperation's original ones, and have been assumed collectively. Therefore, in order to build a collective, global response to international society's problems and challenges, cooperation's role must be revised.

Thus, the development cooperation system faces the need to overhaul itself as new narratives, stakeholders and modalities have arisen making the internationalsystem and its challenges more complex and diverse. Because the world in transformation has proven itself far more complex to understand and generate political action that attends to its myriad of interlinked challenges, both the international cooperation system and its stakeholders and policies are called upon to echo this complexity and plurality (ECOSOC 2018b, 22).

Against this backdrop, the current international cooperation system's traditional principles, mechanisms and practices have spilled beyond its limits, partly due to the emergence of local and regional players becoming cooperation actors who have developed practices that fall outside the conventional box.

But it is not only the increasing presence of decentralised cooperation actors that reflects the growing diversity and plurality of the international cooperation system. Along with local and regional actors, actors from civil society and the private business world have also been increasingly incorporated, as well as universities, unions and very diverse expressions of an increasingly global society (Martínez 2019; Alonso, Aguirre y Santander 2019).

Hand in hand with this phenomenon, very different types of cooperation have been developed over recent decades, due to a large extent to the appearance of new players with different organizational cultures, ways of working, objectives and interests.

This increasing plurality and diversity in the international cooperation system's structure cannot be dissociated from the necessary widening of objectives. Given the previously described context entailing both the increasing complexity that interdependence and transnationalisation bring, as well as the enhanced diversity in cooperation, its players are called upon to broaden their international cooperation goals. This assertion is based on two key concepts.

First, global threats and shared problems point more now than at any other time in history to the need to define and pursue shared goals that provide global solutions to global problems. Providing global public goods and combating global problems – though their impacts may differ with respect to geographies, groups and communities involved – are a clear example of this issue, which, although not completely new, requires renewed impetus.

Secondly, systemic and structural problems require systemic and structural solutions, meaning broader cooperation approaches. This translates not only into broadening capabilities to provide a response to more complex problems, but also to placing more emphasis on objectives tied to structural transformation. A certain tendency to set reactive objectives therefore must be overcome.

Interdependence, transnationalisation, complexity and problem severity thus make collective cooperative action a more significant political imperative to solve the problems of our times. In an international context characterised by weak global governance frameworks and structures, international cooperation's role becomes crucial for building the architecture of the necessary collective, global, multi-level response (Severino and Ray 2009; Martínez 2019, 130).

There have been plenty of vindications and demands to progress toward a framework that questions both the conventional vision of development and the verticality and asymmetry of cooperation relations, both of which rest on and reinforce the so—called North—South paradigm (Belda Miquel, Boni Aristizábal, and Sañudo Pazos 2016; Domínguez Martín and Lucatello 2018; Fernández, Piris, and Ramiro 2013; 2010 Open Forum of CSO Development Effectiveness; Surasky 2013). Very gradually however, with their difficulties, these vindications are permeating the various practices and structures across the international cooperation system. It can therefore be said that these changes are already underway and are disputing the North—South paradigm in the international cooperation policy system (Martínez 2019, 136).

In short, building a more democratic international cooperation system that is better able to respond to the problems of an increasingly globalised society requires translating the mandate for collective, multi-level action into a more open, plural and heterogeneous architecture of cooperation players and tools. This situation places those that have not traditionally played a

central role in international relations and the global development agenda – such as local actors and civil society – in a significant position to shape joint responses to global problems (Martínez 2019, 140). Analysing the role that local authorities' cooperation can play in this context is the main purpose of this study, which begins in this paper's next section concerning the potential of decentralised development cooperation.

3 The evolution and potential of decentralised development cooperation

Globalisation has given rise to significant decentralisation and regional dynamics, fostering a significant emergence of local and regional actors. As these processes became more accentuated and the dynamics of international society changed, local and regional actors have been displaying greater activity in the international arena. More specifically, cooperation has been one of the areas of the international system that has been most echoed by the presence of sub-state governments (Aldecoa Luzarraga and Keating 2001; Labaien 2014; Martínez and Sanahuja 2009; 2012; Ugalde 2005).

3.1 From its origins to new narratives

Two main factors explain decentralised cooperation's origins and subsequent increasing significance: local and regional authorities' internationalist affinities and the support for decentralisation processes (Martínez 2019, 154). This internationalist bent might be based on solidarity – in line with political or ideological convictions or citizens' demands or on instrumental interests – potentially tied to other interests such as international projection, though it might have nothing directly to do with the cooperation goals themselves. Also, an increasingly well—knit fabric of interdependence woven by local governments around the world has lent itself to establishing architectures that accompany, support and fund decentralisation and perform capacity building in numerous non-central governments (Martínez and Sanahuja 2009; del Campo 2012; Smith 2013).

After its origin, decentralised cooperation evolved significantly through the 1980s and 1990s (Del Huerto 2005; Labaien 2014; Martínez and Sanahuja 2009; OECD 2005; 2018b; Unceta et al. 2013) both in quantitative terms, expressed in the increase of funding to support development and accompany cooperation partners in a North—South logic, and in discursive terms. Discursively speaking, progress in decentralised cooperation rested on two elements that fostered its emergence and momentum: a commitment to solidarity and the quest for added value.

With these developments, twinning, which had been the early formula for cooperation between cities, ceased to be local governments' main cooperation tool. Two basic avenues for cooperation displaced twinning over time and gave decentralised cooperation a boost. One is

direct cooperation, with a higher degree of specialisation and programming than twinning, and also with more resources geared toward adding value. Another is indirect cooperation, with civil society taking on a central role in managing decentralised cooperation, mainly through development NGOs but also through other players such as universities, trade unions or other private sector agents.

To a large extent thanks to the push by the European Union that focused on these two pillars, the 1990s were very important to decentralised cooperation. Not only was decentralised co-operation incorporated by the EU into the Fourth Lomé Convention, but it also recognised this form of cooperation in a significant document that highlighted it and defined it as "a new ap-proach to cooperation relations seeking to establish direct relationships with local representa-tion bodies and to stimulate their own capabilities for planning and implementing development initiatives with the direct participation of the stakeholders taking their interests and points of view on development into account" (Del Huerto 2005).

Decentralised cooperation has evolved lately with the emergence of local authorities in inter-national community fora. Municipalism, decentralisation, and, to a lesser extent, offices for international action have all played a central role.

3.2 The territorial approach and networks

Decentralised cooperation evolved from a territorial approach toward the establishment of agencies and specialized networks of local and regional governments[1]. With these changes, decentralised cooperation also evolved from a North—South rationale toward a more level rationale focusing on global affairs from a local perspective.

Over the last few years, innovative action has been undertaken based on a territorial approach and mutual learning between peers (Fernández de Losada 2017), while international networks of local governments in development cooperation have gained significance (Sánchez Cano 2016). Here, an important idea that seems to be surfacing with greater clarity as decentral-ised cooperation has evolved is that progress has been made toward greater reciprocity and symmetry between cooperation partners and away from the traditional "donor—recipient" relations (Malé 2008; OECD 2018b) that were determined to a great extent by asymmetries and discretion in aid. Also, clearly linked to this, there is a gradual shift away from conceiving problems with a North—South mindset and more toward one of reciprocity, partnership and mutual learning. This has permeated a fair amount of the decentralised cooperation narratives (OECD 2018b).

For its part, the OECD points to four shared elements whose evolution has defined the gener-al practice of decentralised cooperation (OECD 2018b, 27). Serving perhaps as a concise list for this heading, these four elements are: the shift from verticality to a variety of directions (South—South, triangular and North—South); the shift from a donor— recipient approach toward a multi-stakeholder approach based on geography; aid effectiveness as a guidelines for development effectiveness; and a shift from a relationship focused on aid — particularly based on funding – toward one characterized by non—financial partnerships.

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1   For an in—depth analysis of local development cooperation based on a territorial approach structuring decentralised cooperation, see Directorate—General for International Cooperation and Development, European Com-mission (2016).

Diversity and plurality of players and types of decentralised cooperation

As mentioned, there is no established or shared definition for decentralised cooperation either in research or in practice. Although the European Commission provided in 1996 an interesting conceptualisation advocating a specific model of decentralised cooperation, this proposal does not encompass all visions of decentralised cooperation. In a combination of theoretical reflection and recognition of this type of cooperation, the European Commission2 (Commission of the European Communities 1996), indicates the existence of three distinct "schools" of decentralised cooperation involving different cooperation notions and practices: a) integration of "a horizontal model of decentralised cooperation" based on the experience of European integration; b) a participatory model of decentralised cooperation with its origins in traditional development aid; and c) a "substitute model" in countries where official cooperation has been suspended. Over the years, these models put forward by the EC have become intertwined and often co—exist within a single local or regional actor.

Nor does there seem to be any consensus with decentralised cooperation practice either, as evidenced by the fact that many different definitions coexist even among European Union countries and that the different definitions describe the type of decentralised cooperation promoted by each of them. Specifically, seven countries have their own official definitions: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden (Copsey and Rowe 2012; OECD 2018b).

A high degree of heterogeneity is also seen in the various programmes and quantitative data. According to recent research, of the 26 EU member states analysed, only 7 have specific decentralised development cooperation programs, many have different definitions, and in 5 of them, local governments can obtain funding from the national budget. In 12 there are no such specific programmes (Vermeer 2019, 4).

Another way of distinguishing between forms of decentralised cooperation is by the specialisation according to areas of work. The European Commission identifies four priorities for EU support of local and regional governments and their partner countries: a) support for decentralisation processes; b) capacity building for local authorities; c) sustainable urban planning; and d) promoting partnerships between local authorities (Vermeer 2019, 9). There is a clear relationship between the priorities of the European Commission and the areas of work of decentralized cooperation carried out by the member states, given that it reflects a high degree of overlap in the topics being addressed. All of them agree on the commitment to strengthen local government structures and support decentralisation and democratization processes. Issues such as local economic development, transparency and efficient administration, citizen participation, social stability and equality appear in virtually all of the programmes. Furthermore, most have actually placed facilitating SDG implementation at the centre of focus. This thematic coincidence accentuates the unique position that local governments have in their cooperation projects due to the specific experience they have to offer (Vermeer 2019, 22).

With respect to the various types of intervention, efforts have been made to categorise them without ignoring the diversity of decentralised cooperation (Fernández de Losada 2017). Direct and indirect cooperation, awareness raising, development education, delegated cooperation, budgetary support and scholarships constitute a comprehensive taxonomy, although humanitarian aid and multilateral cooperation should also be included together with other types of direct interventions involved in decentralised cooperation. While these classification efforts have been made, heterogeneity has become one of decentralised cooperation's main features

and should be recognised as a strength, particularly when one of its common practices has been geared toward platforms for mutual learning and collaboration that are now considerably less fragmented than they have been. All this has contributed to placing decentralised cooperation in a salient position to explore and accelerate the required transformation in international cooperation.

Significant heterogeneity in behaviour can also be observed in terms of funding. Among the countries systematically reporting to the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), Spain – along with Germany, Austria and Canada – continues to be among the countries whose sub—national entities make the largest ODA contributions (OECD 2018b), although Spain's model differs from the rest due to civil society's relative weight in implementing decentralised cooperation policies (Pérez 2018).

Table 1:
Development of decentralised ODA 2005—2015 (millions of euros, 2015 prices)

	2005	2010	2015	Growth Rate 2005-2015 (%)
AUSTRIA	36,8	22,7	169,5	+360
BELGIUM	74	97,6	85,8	+16
CANADA	-	90,8	253,9	+180
CZECH REPUBLIC	-	-	0,3	-
FRANCE	-	69,6	63,6	-9
GERMANY	1012,90	933,4	975,5	-4
GREECE	0,8	-	0	-100
ITALY	19,9	26,4	27,7	+39
JAPAN	6,2	3,7	3,3	-46
PORTUGAL	4,7	0,6	0,3	-95
SPAIN	473,6	570,1	209,6	+44
SWITZERLAND	-	10,6	14,2	+34
SWEDEN	43,4	48,9	62,6	+44
UNITED KINGDOM	-	-	18,5	-
Total	1.672,30	1.874,40	1.884,70	+13

Source: OECD (2018)

As the data reflect, there is currently a resurgence of decentralised cooperation (Pérez 2018), following the effects 2008 financial crisis and the shift in discourse regarding decentralized governments' role in the agenda. Nevertheless, attentive observation of the various stakeholders reveals there are many nuances to the general narrative of decentralised cooperation evolution and its future according to their varying degree of breadth and depth (Martínez 2019, 162).

In the heat of the varying views and expressions of decentralised cooperation, and also of decentralised ODA data, the qualitative significance of this type of cooperation should be stressed. It is a cooperation that, to a large extent, contributes primarily to the transfer and exchange of experience and knowledge rather than a transfer of resources. This holds all the more true considering that most resources are almost exclusively associated with ODA (OECD 2005; Martínez 2019).

3.4 Broadening the conceptualisation of decentralised cooperation

The breadth and richness and forms of expression of decentralized cooperation make it difficult to conceptualize. Its heterogeneity reflects the difficulties in sharply defining it.

In order to better understand the phenomenon, it does seem advisable however to characterise it by identifying some principles common to the diverse and heterogeneous forms of decentralized cooperation.

More than a definition, some shared principles

Despite the diversity, based on all the definitions and various modalities of decentralised cooperation explored by local and regional actors, certain shared principles can be put forward, as explained by Martínez (2019), to define the bulk of decentralised cooperation found among the various normative and discursive approaches in decentralised cooperation systems. At least in aspirational terms, a common base can be put forward, namely: reciprocity between cooperation partners; the fact that decentralised governments are closer to their citizens, thus placing them in a better position to be familiar with the local situation and to be able to dialogue with citizens and citizens' groups; and the strengthening of the government and alliances based on geography.

Table 2:
Decentralised development cooperation: principles shared by different notions and conceptualisation

Reciprocity and horizontal relationships: Reciprocity ensures that relationships between the cooperation partners are horizontal and thus mutually beneficial in decentralised cooperation. This breaks through the conventional constraining "donor—recipient" relationships. The fact that both parties have their own local governments fosters greater symmetry and respect between the cooperation partners in the international cooperation system hinging around ODA guidelines.

....

Proximity and participation: This principle is based on the notion of "subsidiarity" asserting that local governments and stakeholders are in a better position to address certain issues given that the communities affected are closer to the problems being solved. Therefore, particularly when there is dialogue with territorial actors in participatory processes, decentralised cooperation reflects significant proximity and openness to participation.

....

Multi-stakeholder, multi-level territorial governance: According to this principle, the central goal and long—term impact expected from decentralised cooperation is to improve local governance by mobilizing the local authorities and stakeholders in question. Collaboration, consultation and joint decision making between decentralized governments and non-state actors are essential to achieve this aspiration. For all these reasons, it is a fundamental contribution to more democratic territorial governance.

....

Territorial alliance based on exchange, mutual learning and comprehensiveness: This is one of the most important principles that sets decentralised cooperation apart from conventional state—driven cooperation. Decentralised cooperation is based on partnerships between decentralised governments in the North and decentralised governments in the South. These alliances are devoted to supporting shared political agendas and shared, comprehensive goals facilitating both ownership and results.

....

Greater possibilities for solidarity: Although situations do vary given the variety of local and sub—state-level governments and their different capacities for action, generally speaking, there are potentially fewer diplomatic and/or trade—type limitations when conceptualising and implementing this type of cooperation.

Source: (Martínez 2019, 164).

From added value to differential value

The belief that decentralised cooperation adds value compared to the international cooperation implemented by other agents gave it a discursive boost with knock—on, consolidating effects. Also, importantly, it transformed decentralised cooperation.

Based on the notion of added value – supported by that fact that there are specific areas where local and regional actors could offer specific capabilities based on their experience – strategies were developed in decentralised cooperation that not only affected the type of actors that were to participate but also produced a sector—based sharpening of the focus. All of this was further reinforced against the backdrop of the Aid Effectiveness Agenda in which international cooperation in general, and decentralised cooperation in particular, were questioned in terms of efficacy.

Particularly over the last decade, in parallel to the discourse and doctrinal framework's recognition of decentralised governments' role in international cooperation, basically because of its differential value, there is broader recognition of the significance of local and regional players in managing global problems linked to the development agenda (Martínez 2015; Unceta and Labaien 2017). The OECD has gone beyond considering decentralised governments as "mere implementers" of national policies or global commitments (OECD 2018b, 18). It has indicated that they may promote sustainable development and policy coherence given their wide range of competences and their role as "observers" in the various geographies. The approval of the 2030 Agenda has reinforced these considerations.

Although this recognition is important, because of the role of local and regional governments, there is an even greater need to extend decentralised cooperation because multi-level governance helps respond to global problems and transform the situations in which these problems occur. All of this requires a multi-level approach which, by reconfiguring power and heeding the principle of shared but differentiated responsibilities, will give rise to a new role, beyond mere added value, for decentralised governments to play in international cooperation.

All of the elements of progress that are increasingly found in decentralised cooperation's discursive framework configure a theoretical base (at times reflecting progress in practice) for action with significant potential in terms of "differential value." The same elements that inspire the notion of differential value place decentralised cooperation in a very good position to address the elements of transformation needed for collective, cooperative action to solve systemic, structural and global problems and to impact the current system of global interaction[1].

In order for this step to be taken, decentralised cooperation would need to take a leap and not only assume the tenets of international solidarity and added value – and build its practice based on these tenets — it would need to move further toward "differential value," which would involve assuming collective, multi-level action for global, democratic governance based on the principle of shared but differentiated responsibilities. The solidarity—imbued notion of decentralised cooperation is based on its commitment to the ethical imperative of global justice as well as the notion of "added value" resting on the division of labour, highly associated with specialisation linked to competences. Yet, introducing the notion of "differential value" falls more in line with a political imperative pointing to the necessary division – in light of an interdependent and transnational world – of responsibilities in managing and transforming it (Martínez 2019, 166).

In short, although decentralised cooperation presents a wide range of interventions, it still has a long road ahead to develop its full potential breadth and depth (Martínez 2019). Its breadth can be expanded because decentralised cooperation has not yet become widespread in all countries (Copsey and Rowe 2012; Vermeer 2019) and nor does it encompass the same spheres of action in all situations. Its depth can be extended given the opportunities posed by the cur-

....
1 The concept "system of global interaction" as a notion to replace the international cooperation system's notion of development is addressed in Martínez (2019).

rent global horizon of changes and the approval of the 2030 Agenda. It seems very clear that non—ODA aspects (knowledge transfer, a host of horizontal alliances, territorial approaches, new multi-level architectures) should spur joint action pursuing more and better options for solving problems and confronting the transformation this requires. All this can bolster decentralised cooperation's contribution to fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda. These issues will be addressed in detail in the second half of this report.

PART 2:

DECENTRALISED COOPERATION'S POTENTIAL FOR IMPLEMENTING THE SDGs

4   ## The demands of international development agendas

A significant milestone was reached in 2015 when the international development agenda was renewed. The Millennium Development Goal period came to an end and the perceived dark shadows looming over compliance gave rise to the approval of several more ambitious and therefore tremendously significant agreements.

A certain paradox is inevitably seen: in the face of partial non—compliance with a minimum common denominator agenda, the new agenda proposed was not merely one of continuity, but rather took a quantitative leap (in terms of the number of goals) and a qualitative leap (in terms of the approach involving a transformation of the development model). However, this fact is not intrinsically contradictory. On the contrary, the groundwork for this change can be explained by the need (if there is a true will to properly tackle the problems inherent to an unsustainable development model) to step up ambition in the transformation objectives. A minimal agenda of "enhanced MDGs" would be unable to drive the substantial changes needed for the current model.

Like the 2030 Agenda, the other instruments in the international development model promoted in 2015 – the Paris Agreement, the Addis Ababa Agenda for Action, the Sendai Framework, the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, the New Urban Agenda – have all pooled from the previously existing corpus of doctrine on development and its implications. They systematised and established a more self-critical diagnosis of the current development model as explicitly and concisely stated in the 2030 Agenda (United Nations 2015b, #14) summarising the tremendous global challenges that our world faces. We therefore stand before an agenda that translates this corpus of doctrine and this diagnosis in a collective mandate, an operative proposal taking the form of goals.

Nevertheless, in order to evaluate the dimension of this international development agenda and its possibilities for transformation, one must first analyse the extent this agreement for collective action constitutes an appropriate framework for confronting problems and steering action to do so. In other words, in order to enact the will for transformation expressed both explicitly and implicitly by the agenda, we must interpret the mandate of the profound transformations proposed by these international agendas. In doing so, we can explore the extent to which they are an adequate framework to address the problems of societies and to guide actions that meet the challenges.

4.1 The SDGs as a comprehensive response to the severity and urgency of overlapping crises

If, as suggested, we stand before a tremendous crisis deeply rooted in the current development model, it seems pertinent to assert the need to act forcefully and urgently to tackle problems threatening the sustainability of life. This is what the 2030 Agenda states when it asserts the need to take urgent action "to shift the world onto a sustainable path" (United Nations 2015b, Preamble SDG 13).

Taking vigorous, urgent action to confront the severity of the problems should not, however, lead to overlooking strategy, which is required to solve problems engendered by an interdependent, global world. The 2030 Agenda reflects this change in the nature of problems (and of reality itself) through a proposal of 17 SDGs as a comprehensive response to the crisis.

The importance of having a broad agenda with multi-dimensional, indivisible, comprehensive objectives has often been noted. At least in aspirational terms, this is one of the main contributions made by an agenda that puts forward 17 goals, each with its targets and indicators, that can only be met comprehensively (OECD 2016; Verschaeve, Delputte, and Orbie 2016; UNDP 2016; VVAA 2017; Martínez Osés and Gil Payno 2017) by taking multi-level, multi-stakeholder action.

To the extent that it presents a diagnosis of problems factoring interdependence into its analysis, it also includes significant challenges for political action – be it local, national or international. This action traditionally had been fragmented into silos by sector and by geographic hierarchy. In this asymmetric division of responsibilities and potential for transformation, given the increasingly extemporaneous nation—state— centred view of the world, local actors have traditionally been sidelined from the most strategic positions. Also, generally speaking, local administrations have not had competences in the 'hardest' issues on the political agenda, i.e., security, migrations, defence, economy, etc. meaning their actual capabilities for impact in these development issues was limited.

Likewise, these silos have been produced by and at the same time have contributed to a system of knowledge, design and implementation of public policies. This was because expert knowledge was excessively compartmentalized by discipline or sector (SDSN Australia/Pacific 2017; SDSN/REDS 2017). Meanwhile, the actual trend was toward increasing interdependence.

In this sense, the 2030 Agenda's main demand is to revise traditional views of development in order to contribute to building a new paradigm that solves the need for integration. It poses the double difficulty of challenging both the knowledge and the political activity of the stakeholders.

Multidimensionality and comprehensiveness, challenges and the importance of multi-disciplinary knowledge

The 2030 Agenda's main demand should be understood as a call for overhaul. This starts by understanding both the new paradigm at the heart of development and its comprehensive, multi-dimensional nature, and then by exploring all of the policies being implemented by different geographies toward that end. The very multi-dimensional nature and comprehensiveness enshrined in the SDGs requires new devices and instruments to properly understand and consistently implement policies. A sector—based, autonomous approach would preclude the possibilities for transformation advocated by the 2030 Agenda.

In response to the 2030 Agenda, mindful of the need for a change in paradigm, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2016) posits two critical steps to avoid splintering the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their 169 targets. First, in any policy analysis endeavour, a multidimensional approach must be taken in measuring the indicators over time in terms of their trajectories for change. To this end, over the last few years, several measurement and policy proposals have been produced focusing on multi-dimensional, structural transformation over the long term (OECD 2011a; UNDP 2016; Donald 2015; Martínez Osés and Gil Payno 2019; SDSN and Bertelsman Stiftung 2019). This could be taken as a starting point for local or territorial work on the 2030 Agenda. Secondly, a bridge needs to be built between multidimensional measurements and intersectoral policies in order for like targets to be clustered around the strategic goals set by each country's authorities. Otherwise, the global agendas would simply be piled on top of national (or geographical) priorities, thus dooming both to fail.
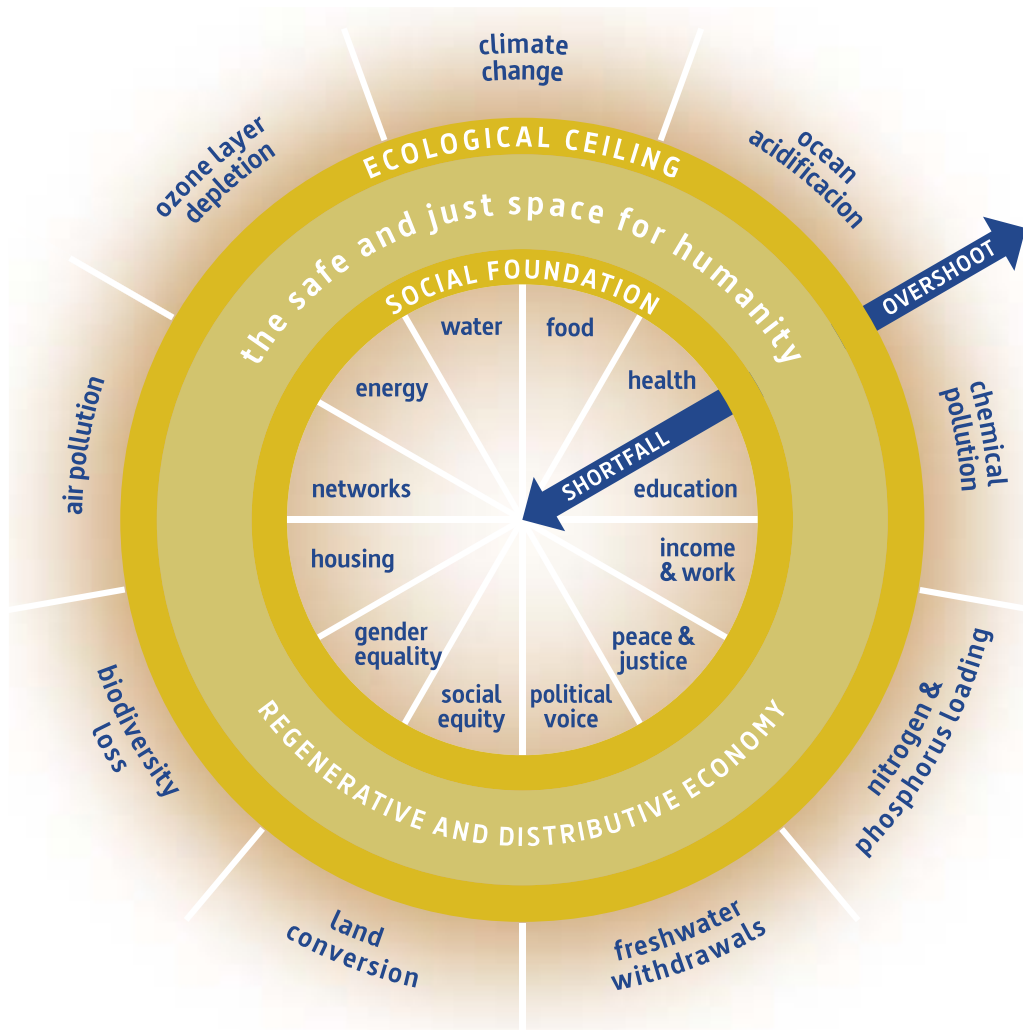
Problems that require new ways of understanding and interacting must be tackled both politically and socially in order to guide the necessary transition. This must be done with the necessary vigour and depth, meaning that more attention must be paid to the link between knowledge and praxis. This is particularly significant given the complex world situation whose implications involve both science (i.e. the composition of its community, its strengths, its orientations, and so forth), the relationship between the generation and transfer of knowledge in the social and political spheres, and the research's permeability to knowledge generated by social and political praxis.

Knowledge generation and management must contribute to several changes that, looking to the future, are uncertain. The changes (such as ecological, technological and energy transitions) required by the current global situation place before us the challenge of building new development paradigms that test new proposals and multidimensional dynamics. In turn, this triggers a need to re—conceptualise and seek new outlooks and procedures in scientific knowledge and connect them to development cooperation and sub— national governments' political decision making.

All of this points to the imperative of first adopting a theoretical outlook that embraces multi-dimensionality and is able to break with the economics—based outlook of development based on the accumulation of wealth as the fundamental way to ensure the sustainability of life. Secondly, it points to breaking with the Western notion of progress and the development—based logic as the only way to bring about dignified living and well—being. Different world views must be included in the definition of a life worth living, and there must be dialogue among actors holding knowledge in order to solve shared problems (Martínez 2019, 148).

The need to share programmes of multidisciplinary research delving into the links between social, economic, environmental and political spheres has been recognised. New ways of understanding sustainable development that can be considered a safe space for humanity with rights and stewarding the sustainability of life must emerge (Raworth 2017).

Table 3:
Raworth's "Doughnut economics" model

climate change

ozone layer depletion

ocean acidificacion

ECOLOGICAL CEILING

the safe and just space for humanity

SOCIAL FOUNDATION

OVERSHOOT

air pollution

water   food

energy   health

SHORTFALL

chemical pollution

networks   education

housing   income & work

gender equality   peace & justice

social equity   political voice

nitrogen & phosphorus loading

REGENERATIVE AND DISTRIBUTIVE ECONOMY

biodiversity loss

land conversion

freshwater withdrawals

4.3 Local/global architectures and the multi-level challenge

Just as it is important to progress in terms of a comprehensive response to multidimensionality in development, the 2030 Agenda takes on the challenge of changing the paradigm by incorporating various levels of government directly with calls for relationships and responsibilities of actors with different ties to the geography.

This directly affects local actors who, intrinsically, have capabilities and ties with their geographies and the stakeholders there. They perceive themselves to be a necessary part of the multi-level action confronting global problems. In short, they are seen as an increasingly significant force in facing global challenges. A greater role should therefore be assigned to decentralised governments and local actors in the collective, multi-level, multi-stakeholder action put forward by the 2030 Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (Martínez 2019, 153).

Some voices indicate how the recognition and significance of local and regional governments in implementing the agenda has spread. However, there is far less clarity about whether meeting the agenda's targets and commitments is the responsibility of sub—national governments (Dellas et al. 2018). The recognition of the essential role played by local governments in development cooperation is indeed greatly important because the challenges posed by a rapidly changing world – including climate change, mass urbanisation, health and human safety challenges, water and food supply, education, economic and social confusion and insecurity – are more intensely perceived locally. This places a heavy burden on local and regional governments. Therefore, it seems evident that while these problems are characterised globally, they cannot be solved without action on the local level (Vermeer 2019).

Meanwhile, there is indeed also evidence that the responsibility of decentralised governments for development has not always come hand in hand with the proper degree of capabilities, funding, and participation in global decision-making fora. This shows that local and regional governments have not yet been fully empowered by decentralisation to the extent that would be necessary in order to face these challenges.

Activating just and universal transitions

One of the most heated debates in building the 2030 Agenda that had the greatest impact on its final version hinged around the diagnosis of the situation at the time the negotiations began and the agenda was designed. This debate was key in establishing the agenda's ambition, nature and content not only in terms of results, but also in terms of the process and means of implementation. The problems threatening the sustainability of life (United Nations 2015a, #14) are caused by a development model that has proven itself incompatible with the notion of sustainability, and it is the model itself – and therefore the systemic elements and policies configuring it – that must be transformed.

Although the reading of the final version adopted may give rise to scepticism because the depth of the problems and the need for deep transformation would have warranted a more ambitious agenda, the 2030 Agenda points to a necessary transition to a development model that is compatible with the sustainability of life, which can only occur given far—reaching change based on the idea of "transitions." Here, the call for "transitions" intended to show that strides had to be made in adapting to the far— reaching changes already underway, and at the same time, insufficient proposals based on minor corrections, the incorporation of nuances, or quests for avenues complementary to the rationale and action involved in the current development model had to be ruled out.

Quite the contrary, the transitions in very different spheres affect all dimensions of sustainable development, and this must be confronted. One clear example of a transition underway is the

trend toward digitization that poses challenges in employment and has a knock—on effect on social relations and more broadly on policies. Likewise, another example is the "great transition," referring to the radical shift toward globalization of essential models of production, sales, distribution and consumption of goods and services. Both are explicitly alluded to in the 2030 Agenda noting widespread consensus that in order to guide these transitions toward an equitable, sustainable future, that is to say, in order to bring about fair transitions, the means of implementation put forward are clearly insufficient.

To speak of fair technological and ecological transitions necessarily involves taking a worldwide perspective. No one is unaware that the roots and pillars of the current development models in energy, the production of goods, and technology can only be explained from a transnational perspective. Great power and complex dynamics are what best explain the "wheels and cogs" that reproduce the current production, consumption, information and communication models at a dizzying pace. New technology's penetration in the sphere of labour and so—called collaborative economy platforms are reproduced as quickly and generate the same feeling of irreversibility as the mechanisms of the financial economy did some years ago, just as the exponential increase in the consumption of increasingly obsolescent goods did, and just as the habit of having plastic—wrapped food produced several thousands of kilometres away in our homes did.

The proposed transitions involve everyday action reconfiguring the groundwork of the systems of relations that define our era. As they are everyday acts, they are perceived nearby, in our local communities. Yet they are presented to us as consolidated, irreversible and globalised. The issue of scale becomes fundamental in interpreting and understanding the equitable, just transition away from our current development models. Thinking of a local scale as something opposed to a global scale can be paralysing though. It is better to use a dual lens and see on one hand how local actions impact global dynamics and on the other how these global dynamics can be addressed from a local perspective based on experience and lessons learned about how they impact specific geographies.

The most inspiring examples of how to open up the possibilities of just transitions can thus be observed on a community scale where innovative types of production, trade, and proximity—based sale of goods occur. The key to recognizing this innovation resides in the multidimensionality of the proposals. The principles of responsibility that best suit the drivers of transition that will inevitably guide action more aligned with the 2030 Agenda will be recognised to the extent they integrate knowledge and relationships based on awareness of social, environmental, economic and political impact.

4.4   The cooperation system vis-à-vis the 2030 Agenda

At the beginning of this report, mention was made of the paradox of globalization as one of the major threats of our time. This paradox is at least partly characterized on one hand by the deepening of globalization's causes and consequences and on the other by countries' turning markedly inward within their own borders when configuring policy responses to problems requiring collective global action. The potential of the 2030 Agenda and the cooperation system

and its actors as part of the necessary response in the face of this paradox was also mentioned as they institutionally and substantively constitute fields of strategic action to bring about collective, cooperative action placing sustainability at its heart.

The more general implications of the 2030 Agenda have already been addressed, but not those specifically relating to international cooperation. The need to address an international cooperation transition process as merely another just and universal transition should be emphasized.

Like the other transitions that must be brought about in order to change the development model, an international cooperation transition should not come into contradiction with aspiring to address this change comprehensively and in depth. For a long time, several different diagnoses have pointed to this change (Kharas 2007; Severino and Ray 2009; K. Unceta 2013; OECD and UNDP 2017; Alonso, Aguirre, and Santander 2019; Martínez 2019).

All of these diagnoses are either currently complemented by a context of global change and systemic crisis, or else they mirror it. There is a demand for a regenerated cooperative response that could rest on a restructured international cooperation system. This, however, would require the rationale behind cooperation to take centre stage in cooperation doctrine, norms, and instruments. And this is not ensured by the current system hinging around the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and around Official Development Assistance (Sogge 2015; Martínez 2019).

Furthermore, the need to regenerate, far from sprouting from the analysis of the current juncture, has been alluded to for decades as the system's legitimacy has eroded and been undermined. The previously mentioned changes of context have come to amplify the need for regeneration as the current situation has moved far beyond the international cooperation system's capacity to address it.

Thus, both the approval of the 2030 Agenda and the changes in the international context place development cooperation at an existential crossroads of transformation both of its narratives and its practices (Alonso, Aguirre, and Santander 2019, 19). The idea that the 2030 Agenda itself can replace the international cooperation system's need to regenerate its conceptual framework is exceedingly pragmatic and will—based. The fact that the Agenda puts forward transformative goals which can potentially generate an architecture of collective action to respond to problems does not mean it must not be complemented by greater analysis and further explanations of the problems and their causes as a prerequisite for tackling them (Martínez 2019, 114). Stated otherwise, the fact that the 2030 Agenda poses far—reaching changes in all policy areas does not necessarily mean that all of the changes demanded and required of international cooperation will have been made.

Furthermore, the Agenda requires a clearer proposal for the so—called means of implementation, and particularly the need to address the role of the market, the social and physical limitations of growth, the role of institutions, and the basic prerequisites for global governance. Depending on how these issues are interpreted and resolved, international development cooperation will steer the modifications in its system and practices.

In short, the international development cooperation system needs to be overhauled in order to realize its full potential to properly implement the 2030 Agenda. And this potential will be crucial for attending to the most vulnerable, leading comprehensive policy programming, supporting Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD), deploying alliances among a host of stakeholders to enable cross—cutting and inter— sectoral approaches, and for bolstering governments' capabilities to improve the connection between their national and local sustainable development strategies (ECOSOC 2018b).

Along these same lines, the Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) instated by ECOSOC underscores "the tremendous potential of development cooperation, broadly defined, as a lever for effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda" (ECOSOC 2016a, 2). This implicitly entails a quest to stray from the more limited ODA—based outlook. A shift can thus be observed in the 2030 Agenda from more strictly ODA and technical and financial assistance perspectives – closely tied to the OECD's DAC in the development assistance system – toward a more political and systemic view of international development cooperation (ECOSOC 2016a). This reflects how the 2030 Agenda reinforces the notion of the cooperation's necessary overhaul and in turn leads the institutional perspectives within the United Nations to be closer to those that are more political and systemic. For a long time, this has been called for by many different voices in academia, civil society and South—South cooperation (Severino and Ray 2009; Unceta 2013; Santander 2016; Surasky 2017).

Along these lines, given the urgency and severity of the previously mentioned problems, international cooperation and its actors must firmly and promptly tackle the overhaul of their system. This holds true even more so considering the current juncture of opportunity. The need for a strategic revision stands in the face of the risk generated by the 2030 Agenda that international cooperation – including decentralised cooperation – may become irrelevant.

Among these changes, an opening up to several other perspectives whose outlooks and composition better represent international society should be stressed. Civil society, for instance, can play a more central role in the cooperation system which would then incorporate perspectives from the South and non—state actors, such as local and regional governments. In turn, these local and regional governments need to ensure that decentralised cooperation is up to the present challenges, as we will see in the next section.

5 Decentralised cooperation as a leverage for transition

Providing continuity with the previously mentioned documents, communications and statements, the "New European Consensus on Development" recognises the role of local and regional governments in furthering the 2030 Agenda and meeting the SDGs. Both the comprehensive approach to development taken by local actors and decentralised cooperation play an important role.

The European Union is indeed quite clear about the participation of local and regional governments in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Not only does it mention the important role of local implementation, it also stresses the idea that in order to meet most of the SDGs and successfully implement the 2030 Agenda, the member states must actively involve local and regional authorities and use decentralised cooperation as a tool to bolster their cooperation with other subnational authorities in partner countries (European Council, European Parliament, and European Commission 2017; Vermeer 2019). There are those who quantify and establish that at least 65% of the SDGs will be at risk if there is no clear mandate setting forth the roles and responsibilities involved in local and regional government implementation (Dellas et al. 2018).

Through its various specific reports on decentralised governments, the OECD has also pointed to the significant role played by decentralised cooperation and its increasing significance in the current global context that requires multi-level action to respond to society's problems (OECD 2005; 2018b).

The key is to ascertain the conditions and changes that decentralised cooperation should tackle in order to truly serve as leverage for the transitions that must be addressed and directed. However, given its potential, in order to makes strides toward regenerated decentralised cooperation, which includes capabilities for multidimensional, multi-actor and multi-level work, not only additional outlooks, objectives and interventions, but also a critical review of its postulates and inertia must be undertaken. The next section examines these two avenues for regeneration and begins by discussing how the Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development approach is the most appropriate for comprehensively guiding this change.

5.1 The Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development approach

The role of decentralised cooperation, regenerated in light of the global changes and new international development agendas, requires an approach that considers problems in development to stem from long—standing processes of systemic dimensions. This breaks with the "underdevelopment—development" narrative and frames the question in a global policy matrix. In line with this, progressing toward linking cooperation to Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development places the comprehensiveness of action at the heart of international cooperation while devoting increased attention to not merely responding but instead to reconfiguring the system of global interaction (Martínez 2019) that seeks to impact the issues that produce and reproduce these problems.

According to the most recent literature, the PCSD both requires and enables progress to be made toward a transformative understanding of the 2030 Agenda (Gutiérrez Goiria, Millán, and Martínez 2017; Martínez Osés and Gil Payno 2017). It calls for the establishment of specific mechanisms requiring political will and leadership, manages political action in order to anticipate, detect and resolve political conflicts, responds to specific factors that may either contribute to or thwart development in each political context and, finally, it considers the impact of current welfare policies including their cross—border and intergenerational impacts (ECOSOC 2016b). For a time, the notion of coherence was limited to promoting coordination among and between policies while overlooking the impact that regional and local actors and policies have on development (Unceta and Labaien 2017, 171). Now the time has come to recognise and endorse the innovative effect that the PCSD can have in local and regional public policy practice.

Many different voices in the international community, including the DCF, believe that international cooperation should gear itself more to comprehensive aspects with a significant potential to impact other public policies and multi-level and crosscutting action. Gender equity from a whole-of-government approach, addressing the needs of the most vulnerable groups from a human rights perspective, and attaching importance to cooperation on climate issues (ECOSOC 2018a) all stand as examples. The universality of the 2030 Agenda and the more holistic nature of the development results set forth in the SDGs have expanded the reach of the PCSD, making it of concern to all countries regardless of their level of development. All

policies impact not only basic needs but also sustainable development in all of its dimensions, and this should be taken into consideration. While policy coherence for development initially aimed to avoid donor policies that might clash with development goals, Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development covers a broad range of actors responsible for promoting and ensuring coherence and also covers a broad range of policies to be considered, analysed and, when applicable, reoriented (ECOSOC 2016b).

Particularly because it enables a multi-dimensional, multi-stakeholder and multi-level perspective, the PCSD emerges as the most appropriate approach to steer changes that governments at any level should implement when transforming their development models.
Over the last few years there has been a noteworthy increase in the number of proposals, made both by governments and social actors, that give rise to new ways of measuring progress and development. They go beyond evaluations and orientations of public policies vis—à—vis the 2030 Agenda and make a decisive contribution to understanding development processes in order to make them truly multidimensional (OECD 2011b; SDSN 2019; Martínez Osés and Gil Payno 2019).

Below, we shall analyse some of the initiatives in each of the policy areas with special emphasis placed on those that most significantly contribute to transformation from a policy coherence standpoint.

Cooperation as a precursor of the current challenges

The approval of the SDGs in 2015 was preceded by three years of debates, dialogues and proposals for the post-2015 Agenda. Begun in 2011 with the establishment of a joint UNDP and UNDESA task force, initially intended to provide continuity to and enhance the Millennium Development Agenda that had constituted the main focus of international aid agencies during the period concluding in 2015 (Martínez Osés 2013). This explains why, until it was actually approved, it was known as the post-2015 Agenda. From the outset, in cooperation spheres, the expectation was that the new agenda would basically serve, as the previous one did, to guide international cooperation.

In terms of its universality and collaboration, the cooperation system felt ownership of the new international agenda for commitments because it reflected one of their main premises: cooperative action should be marshalled to even out access to services and opportunities across the globe.

Bearing this in mind, it comes as no surprise that in many countries, the departments in charge of international cooperation were the first to take on the new goals and promote their incorporation into their respective governments' policies. After all, the eradication of poverty around the world, provision of basic services to the most vulnerable and promotion of access to health and education had been at the heart of their international cooperation activities.

This early reaction triggered two early diverging phenomena. On the positive side, cooperation has often met with greater recognition as a source of authority when leaders of governments on all levels interpret and attempt to incorporate the SDGs into their plans. In many cases, the new agenda enabled cooperation to begin to coordinate with other government areas and de-

partments. On the more negative side entailing risk, cooperation took on the role of promoting the new agenda among its government colleagues without having sufficiently taken on board the far—reaching changes involved in the foundations and practices of prior decades.

The local/global dimension of geography—based development

Specifically insofar as decentralised development cooperation is concerned, there is broad consensus as to its significance in promoting dialogue and cooperation among peers, thus affording the implementation of the 2030 Agenda tremendous potential not only to develop specific territorial approaches and public policy comprehensiveness, but also to build a novel, multi-level architecture demanded by the new Agenda (OECD 2018b).

The territorial approach could serve as an important groundwork for regenerated decentralised cooperation. Because decentralized cooperation generally tends to prefer the territorial approach that requires multidimensionality and comprehensiveness, it has been suggested that it play a significant, specific role in implementation. The approach is firmly anchored in policy coherence for development that factors in the coordination and complementarity needed between the various levels of government operating in any given geography. This approach cannot truly be implemented without the coordination of all levels of government and including all of their contributions. It also requires the involvement and configuration of all of the different stakeholders in a given geography.

At times, however, considerations relating to issues such as reciprocity, proximity, governance in a given geography, and territorial alliances permeate discourse more than actual praxis, where wilfulness, deregulation and discretion are most deeply rooted in international cooperation. This openly clashes with the principle of policy coherence to the extent it is based on the responsibilities of the various actors rather than the shared challenges of sustainable development.

The quest for a truly transformative implementation of the SDGs

The normative nature of the 2030 Agenda's declaration should not eclipse its explicitly transformative aim. Cooperation therefore must be able to interpret its transformative implications. Through the DCF, ECOSOC is quite clear when asserting that the key will be both to overcome the compartmentalisation that thwarts more coherent, comprehensive responses and to adapt cooperation institutions and policies to all levels (ECOSOC 2016b). The DCF incorporates some examples of this broadening when it calls for bolstering a series of work areas where it considers there to be gaps and obstacles hampering central transformations. Examples are cooperation geared toward mobilizing domestic resources, where close attention is paid to taxation, cooperation geared to bolstering national statistical systems that aim to close the gap in data generation and processing and statistical processing, and scientific and technological cooperation and innovation (ECOSOC 2018a).

In short, decentralised cooperation must participate in defining and pursuing the goals of: asserting commitment to global problems; enhancing capabilities to respond to society's problems, mindful of their structural, interdependent and global nature; and impacting the system of global interaction to place the sustainability of life at its heart. However, achieving this, in turn, requires breaking through the current notion of cooperation that normally recognises local and regional actors and their capability to effectively manage the needs of citizens close to them and to implement action in the policy areas over which they have competences must be asserted.

Without denying that decentralised governments have these central, distinctive traits, from a global perspective, opening and regenerating decentralised cooperation to make it more transformative requires subnational governments to act in such a way that they impact areas outside their direct competence. In order to discuss what regenerated, redefined decentralised cooperation means – involving capabilities enabling active participation in the transformations imposed by global challenges – the changes that cooperation should make should be analysed from a twofold perspective. Firstly, there should be an analysis of the changes necessary within decentralised cooperation itself in order to be able to tackle this new local/transnational duplicity, and secondly of the changes necessary to achieve active participation in implementing development comprehensively, multi-dimensionally and systemically. The following sections analyse both. This dual inward/outward policy movement must consistently steer the regeneration of decentralised development cooperation.

5.2 Inward policy demands: what is changing in decentralised cooperation

Now that one-third of the period for meeting the 2030 Agenda goals has elapsed, it is an appropriate time to take stock of the extent to which its approval has served as inspiration to relaunch decentralised cooperation, and also to share thoughts and practices contributing to demands for regenerating and reforming development cooperation frameworks (OECD 2018a). The international agendas over the last few years have given rise to many demands for regeneration and even redefinition of aspects key to decentralised development cooperation. Reflections on the matter have led to various approaches asserting that both the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda must be recognised as a new roadmap for decentralised development cooperation to incorporate them. Doing so currently stands as the main challenge.

The exact policies to be redefined and regenerated and the best ways to go about doing so remain less clear. The transformation of "local" brought about by transnationalisation and interdependence is one of the factors thwarting this clarity.

Indeed, the significance of local players' roles in configuring collective, multi-level action to respond to the major challenges faced by international society (Zurbano, Gainza, and Bidaurratzaga 2014) must be recognised. Interdependence and transnationalalisation mean that "local" can no longer be understood as linked to a specific geography, exclusively determined by physical characteristics and the social, political and economic actors residing there. Therefore, "local" can no longer be conceived as a reality separate from other geographies, nor can it be conceived as the main result of the interaction of elements present within its own boundaries.

Contrarily, transnationalisation has disrupted the very nature of "local," and, together with de—territorialisation and re— location, it has turned local, national and international compartmentalisation upside down and made it extemporaneous. Therefore, it must be replaced by a multi-level logic conceiving all players, regardless of where they are based, to be interdependent, transnational actors (Martínez 2019, 141).

There is no need to start from scratch. Just as local and regional governments have emerged as players in their own right in the international community, subnational governments' development cooperation has evolved from a cooperation between municipalities approach to a paradigm linking a host of different players from civil society, companies, universities and so forth. Meanwhile, less vertical relationships have been developed that to a certain extent break through the donor—recipient mindset (OECD 2018b).

There is now a need to generate and manage a host of alliances between the different actors and move beyond a mere appeal for them to participate. To do so, the power relationships between them must be analysed, distinct responsibilities must be drawn, distinct capabilities must be established, and criteria must be put forward to exercise leadership and establish agreements. As the UNDP openly recognises, if the 2030 Agenda poses multidimensional problems, they require multidimensional solutions (UNDP 2016), including the need to very significantly improve governance. The relationships between the players must be revisited in light of a multidimensional conception of development – as do the power relations between their different responsibilities and capabilities in the framework of development alliances (Martínez Osés and Martínez 2016).

Although decentralised cooperation has evolved to a certain extent toward less vertical relations, the risk should not be underestimated that the partners' current asymmetries in their cooperation relationships may be constraining and make them prone to the vertical nature inherent in aid—centred relationships. This would reproduce the supremacy of the partner with the higher level of development. The fulfilment of the principles of efficiency and quality are constrained by the traditional vertical cooperation model determined by the assistance chain (Martínez 2019) where the donor determines the main element of the cooperation.

5.3 Outward policy demands: the role of decentralised cooperation

Decentralised cooperation has welcomed the implementation of localisation, as it is most often called, aware that a good deal of the challenges put forward by the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs have been factored into cooperation policies. We have already analysed the extent to which international cooperation might feel itself to be a forerunner of a good part if not all of the SDGs' content. Generally, decentralised cooperation (OECD 2018b; Vermeer 2019) has followed the steps indicating a specific inherent logic. First, their strategy focused on gaining recognition of how crucial local policies are to the 2030 Agenda. Then, given that decentralised cooperation is mainly defined as cooperation between local and regional governments, they reached the conclusion that decentralised cooperation should be considered a key policy for implementation.

This explains the profusion of documents and analysis that focus on the significance of the SDGs locally. Many argue that SDG 11 proves how important the local scale is in the 2030 Agenda. This goal is actually devoted to urban sustainability and not so much to the local scale itself, encompassed in the Agenda's challenges for local rural issues and the relationship between urban and rural as one of the streams for addressing transitions. This line of analysis is being developed in the sphere of urban studies (Parnell 2016; Caprotti et al. 2017; Dellas et al. 2018; Pipa 2019), and is naturally much more closely linked to the New Urban Agenda (UN—HABITAT 2016).

The close relationship between urban challenges and the local scale of global challenges cannot be denied. But in all likelihood, the former does not overshadow the latter. This matters because one of the pillars of decentralised cooperation has traditionally been the local scale of global challenges. This is illustrated in attempts made to define the ambit of decentralised cooperation, because it is recognised that "there is already widespread activity among local and regional governments in the field called decentralised development cooperation, referring to partnerships between local governments in the field of official aid" (Vermeer 2019, 8—9).

Cooperation's potential to reveal the transnational nature of localisation

Lately, international cooperation has been relatively successful in highlighting that justice and sustainability have a marked transnational nature. In other words, they go beyond the jurisdictions where they have traditionally been addressed owing to the competences and administrative scope of states. To illustrate this, we can take promotion of fair trade as an example. Though fair trade arose from international cooperation as an alternative to conventional trade that was generating inequalities, it has given rise to initiatives that transform the relationship between producers and consumers across all geographies, well beyond those that the cooperation in question is aimed at, and these initiatives promote fairer trade relations. This is a contribution made not only from the territorial perspective where there is such a pressing need for local commerce to transform current production and consumption models. It is also made from a more political perspective to the extent the need is understood to establish direct connections between producers and consumers and to keep the links on the chain of intermediary players to a minimum.

Yet these enormously valuable lessons still do not suffice to solidly transform the models of relationships between production, distribution and consumption systems. In the textile industry, for instance, while awareness has increased the need to regulate and safeguard the labour rights of those working in relocated factories, it is equally true that there are still those who prefer to make contributions to development assistance organizations than to pay a fair – and generally higher – price for the clothes they consume (VVSG 2016, 9).

Following along with the example, local and regional governments' regulatory potential is crucial to incorporating sustainability and global justice criteria in public procurement of their goods and services and in dealings with their suppliers. Decentralised cooperation's role here has yet to be explored and could well afford both pertinent information and awareness raising and advocacy to gradually adjust the criteria to be included in regulation for government consumption.

Although it does present certain problems in properly responding to the SDGs' mandate for a new multi-level configuration, the multi-level governance approach, which developed due to European integration, stands as the most precise theoretical development in this regard. The very development of the concept suggests the need to make distinctions between the possibilities that multi-level governance offers for various sectoral policies. For instance, in the area of environmental sustainability, the existence of global plans, envisaged from a local perspective, such as Agenda 21, undoubtedly served to lead local experiences and policies to converge around shared global objectives.

Some analysis of decentralised cooperation points to its scarce penetration in the multi- level governance mechanisms regulating the global system of international development cooperation. The Busan Agreement's ambivalent recognition of decentralised cooperation in 2011 did not serve to consolidate clear recognition of the specific value it can offer. Despite its efforts over the last few years, particularly those made to build transnational networks of local governments and their partnerships in an attempt to configure cooperation as a sphere of multi-level global governance in which it participates, decentralised cooperation still has a way to go to obtain due recognition and build nexuses suited to its capabilities and potential (Sánchez Cano 2016, 124).

In any event, much has yet to be done to effectively generate opportunities for multi- level configuration. The main challenge, it should be remembered, is to achieve configurations based on intergovernmental cooperation mechanisms instead of those established merely on hierarchical subordination.

5.4 Decentralised cooperation and global governance

Again, in the context of far-reaching change, the role of local and regional players is experiencing a significant transformation resulting from greater shares of power and responsibility vis-à-vis global affairs. The ECOSOC Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) has mentioned the significance of non-state actors and civil society not just as mere issuers or recipients of international cooperation, but, as empowered actors fundamental for participating in decision making. This, specifies the DCF, includes applying, monitoring and evaluating international cooperation policies (ECOSOC 2016a; 2018a).

Significantly, non-state actors are perceived as more than mere agents for coordination and complementarity vis-à-vis traditional state action. This is the role that decentralised and civil society actors have traditionally played in cooperation policies, particularly in light of the Aid Efficiency Agenda (Hombrado 2008). The issue posed is the co-responsibility of national, local and regional governments, multilateral organisations and development banks, the private sector, parliaments and civil society, among others (ECOSOC 2018a). This co-responsibility would enable the principle of shared but distinct responsibilities to be incorporated, as demanded, into multi-level and multi-actor configurations.

In short, the idea is to ascertain whether international development cooperation gears its priorities to taking on the right approach to play a more critical role in global governance as a "political lever" in building a more inclusive system of global interaction able to safeguard the sustainability of life. In this light, the DCF's call not only upon South-South cooperation actors but also upon parliaments and civil society to strategically participate in a sort of whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach is not surprising (ECOSOC 2018a, 11).

The idea then is to regenerate decentralised cooperation based on action that factors in participation in multi-level fora deciding systemic matters such as taxation, debt, trade, human mobility, human rights and climate change, to name a few. These are the elements that most impact our current system of global interaction whose transformation requires structural change. While decentralised governments do not necessarily have competences in these matters, because they are systemic, they are where decisions are taken that directly impact the geographies in question and significantly shape their day-to-day experience (Martínez 2019, 168).

Decentralised cooperation finds a source of inspiration in its experience with paradiplomacy (Sánchez Cano 2016), understood as subnational entities' foreign relations. Paradiplomacy has been marked by movements ranging from the demand for representation before the international community to effective partnership for shared action, which may in turn range from having one's own voice in the international community to responsible participation in systems of government (Sánchez Cano 2016, 114).

PRACTICE AND EXPERIENCES OF DECENTRALISED COOPERATION UNDER TRANSFORMATION

6   Analysing changes in five policy areas

As this report has described, and as the following paragraphs aim to explain, decentralised cooperation needs to address various major transformations, some of which are already underway. These transformations point to the revision and expansion of several of decentralised cooperation's foundations, traits, and instrumental elements. This in turn will change the very nature of international cooperation implemented by local and regional authorities. In principle, these are not minor changes, but instead veritable overhauls enabling a new framework of practice to be established and to legitimate action in regenerated decentralised development cooperation.

As previously analysed, while decentralised cooperation cannot be easily boiled down to a comprehensive definition encompassing all of its diversity and homogeneity, it can at least be concluded that there are a series of shared principles representing a set of shared values. These principles, set forth under heading 3.d. (Broadening the conceptualisation of decentralised cooperation), also constitute its core potential to tackle the changes that the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs demand. The breadth and depth of these changes can be explored through these principles.

We have established that all of the different conceptualisations of decentralised cooperation share the notions of reciprocity and horizontal relations, proximity and participation, multi-stakeholder, multi-level territorial governance, alliances built on exchanges, mutual learning and comprehensiveness, and the implementation of solidarity-driven action. Now, a dual challenge must be examined: the extent to which these shared principles go beyond mere discourse and tangibly write themselves into rules, and whether any of these principles is being expanded to accommodate for the SDGs.

As established in the previous section, the aim is to observe the novelties in this "dual movement," including opportunities for innovation, which, concurrently through interaction, allows the duplicity required by changes in decentralised cooperation to be defined.

The first step is to analyse the main changes brought about by decentralised cooperation in each of the five elements that define and circumscribe any public policy, i.e., rules, plans, dialogue, capabilities and tools. Next comes an analysis of the extent to which these changes are enabling decentralised cooperation to become consequential in tackling the processes of change that outstrip its own sphere and competences both in terms of government action coherence and of the structuring of transnational dynamics. Stated otherwise, the "outward" implementation of decentralised cooperation, beyond its conventional confines must be analysed.

Finally, there are two elements linked to the transformations that should be properly adjusted in terms of their size and incisiveness. First, decentralised cooperation's current dilemma – involving the same risk as that of state cooperation – is to choose to either conduct business as usual or run the risks that an overhaul entails. The issue is not one about becoming irrelevant or denaturalised (Alonso, Aguirre, and Santander 2019). Irrelevance has never been dismissible in the first place and an overhaul does not necessarily lead to denaturalisation. The notion of "dual movement" explains precisely that there is no need to start from scratch or lose the wealth of lessons learned. Instead, the policies need be to regenerated and redefined through a revision of decentralised cooperation's nature while expanding its conceptualisation.

This dilemma is inextricable from the difficulties in pinpointing the transformations needed to regenerate and expand the concept of decentralised cooperation. In the final instance, these transformations must be taken on as a political mandate that truly reshapes policy in practice. There is not only an aversion to risk in the face of transformations that are indeed not free of uncertainty. There is also a strong resistance to change that, as in any other field of political action, has been explained by the path dependency approach. Any attempt to bring about change in decentralised cooperation will have to contend with the power of inertia coupled with resistance to change and uncertainty about what this change will bring.

In general terms, those interviewed agree that over the last few years, new narratives and ideas have emerged geared mainly toward disseminating the most challenging aspects posed by the SDGs' demands. However, although a certain degree of success has been achieved as certain local organisations have gained international recognition, the feeling is shared that the 2030 Agenda understood as an agenda for change critical of the prevailing model remains an unfulfilled promise.

With all of these elements in mind, in the first part of this report we established how decentralised cooperation's five shared principles – reciprocity, proximity, multi- stakeholder and multi-level governance, territorial alliances and solidarity—driven action – can be used to examine and understand its potential for regeneration and redefinition based on its differential value. We now move on to put forward elements, guided by these shared principles, for each of the five **policy areas** in the hope they may inspire change and contribute to redefining and regenerating decentralised cooperation.

Values, regulations and norms: Have they been adapted to the SDGs?

....

Policy planning (strategies and programs): Do they include a multi-level and multi-dimensional approach? Is DDC involved in SDG localization strategies?

....

Dialogue and multi-stakeholder participation: What about non-traditional development actors? Are they involved in local/global issues?

....

Institutional capacity building: How are we improving the capacity of teams and institutions to manage local/global connections?

....

Instruments and mechanisms in DDC: Are the tools and funding mechanisms sufficient to face the current challenges?

Source: (Martínez 2019, 164).

6.1 Incorporating new narratives, values and rules

To begin, we suggest examining how decentralised cooperation perceives the need to transform the most intrinsically discursive policy elements. In other words, the extent to which discourse and rules contribute to regulating decentralised cooperation policy are being regenerated in light of the current context marked by new international development agendas. As we have indicated, we will do so addressing dual movement, meaning that we will first see whether the SDGs are modifying regulatory frameworks and then go on to examine how they impact the conceptions and rules that regulate the multi-level architecture.

The SDGs in decentralised cooperation's regulatory frameworks

There is general evidence that decentralised cooperation has embraced the 2030 Agenda in its discourse and has made reference to the SDGs as steering its activity. Yet continuity has prevailed in cooperation practice. It is often cautioned that the SDGs, taken literally as stipulated in their targets, are not very innovative as they merely attempt to respond to problems and

needs that have persisted for a long time. This has been interpreted as an opportunity for the experiences considered successful to inspire new ways for local and regional governments to cooperate with each other in the process of localising SDGs (Fernández de Losada, 2017 13). In certain cases, decentralised cooperation already implements what can be considered innovative practice if applied to the relationship between local and regional governments in the process of localisation. This is because in several countries, the departments or persons in charge of cooperation have been influential in implementing localisation processes. However, based on this experience, rather than the SDGs being observed as an opportunity to regenerate their own decentralised cooperation practices, they are usually interpreted as an opportunity to highlight what is already being done locally. This type of argument has prevailed, as seen by the fact that few rules and regulations have been amended in decentralised cooperation.

For the most part, decentralised cooperation regulations have been considered sufficiently suitable, or at least not too restrictive, to perform the transformative action that the 2030 Agenda demands. Noteworthy examples of substantial modifications in the regulatory frameworks for decentralised development cooperation boils down to very few: some new regional legislation providing for more autonomous policies and programming whereas conventionally this action was subsidiary to national cooperation (La Mundial and AIETI 2017); redefinition in one local government (Barcelona City Council 2018) in terms of global justice policies; and a broader revision process that addresses regeneration of the national decentralisation strategy, as reported by Madagascar's Institut National de la Décentralisation et du Développement Local.

Novel rules for new multi-level configuration

Given that one of the 2030 Agenda's most significant demands for regeneration is the configuration of multi-level fora for interlocution and work, this would seem to be where the most novel initiatives arise. This demand requires rules and regulations clarifying the various roles, competences, and resources available at each level of government so that role allocations are as faithfully suited as possible to the interdependent, multidimensional nature of development on different territorial scales. It has become increasingly evident that this breaks with the current allocations of competences and political boundaries. A proper starting point in this exercise could also be to establish the main responsibilities – together with roles, competences and resources. Some responses to the questionnaires point in this direction. The inclusion of the principle of shared but differentiated responsibilities may significantly inspire novel approaches.

For this to happen, a dual acknowledgement must be made: 1) shared responsibilities mean that no level of government can, on its own, renege on its own competences, and 2) each member has different responsibilities vis-à-vis shared challenges.

Thus far, the SDGs main value has been observed in the host of calls for enhancing multi- level configurations. These calls have been reiterated in different studies, resolutions and political guidelines for implementing the SDGs. Nevertheless, they are bound within the current legal structure establishing competences in each country. And this means they can do no more than request greater coordination and complementarity among the various levels of government. The appeals become even more intense, even more urgent, when made by local governments because, sufficient evidence shows, they are the weakest of the tiers of government, particularly when it comes to funding. In certain cases, the lack of recognition of how crucial local governments' policies are has been observed as the main obstacle to exploring new multi-level configurations.

Without slighting the previously mentioned improvements in coordination and complementarity, from the standpoint of modifying legislation, new regulations should be tested that also cover the "incumbencies" or shared responsibilities that should be reflected in new multi-level configurations.

In certain public policy spheres, these enhanced coordination mechanisms have already been functioning successfully for some years and could serve as inspiration. There are several experiences of this kind in metropolitan, regional and international transportation and communications. Issues such as the ecological and energy transitions, changes in models of production and consumption, generating sustainable businesses that provide decent jobs, safeguarding migrants' rights, are just some examples of transnational dynamics where it is urgent and imperative to establish rules of functioning for this type of specific, enhanced mechanism that reflect shared responsibilities.

When, for whatever reason, mechanisms that generate political configurations reflecting the holistic approach (as suggested by the SDGs) cannot be addressed, a good starting point is to detect the links between different sizes and sectors for action in order to properly adapt policy formulations to each geography's skills and scales.

6.2 The transformative revision of strategic planning

Strategic planning tools are a key resource for beginning to examine how policy translates its discursive principles and values into action. Decentralised cooperation is challenged to incorporate visions and orientations stemming from the new SDG paradigm. They must be reflected both in its strategic plans and in its ability to participate in and influence not only national SDG implementation plans, but also more generally national and regional sustainability strategies.

The SDGs in strategic plans for cooperation

Generally speaking, decentralised cooperation's strategic planning documents have served to set goals and priorities. Because the approval of the SDGs significantly broadened the sustainable development goals, a significant revision of the strategic planning framework can be reasonably expected to adapt to this new international agenda. While this has indeed been the case on certain occasions, strategic regeneration cannot be said to be widespread.

Where a regeneration of planning tools has been undertaken, one can observe that the 2030 Agenda and SDGs have been added among these plans' strategic goals and priorities. Yet generally, this addition has not substantially modified previous planning. In other words, generic reference is made to the new international agenda as inspiring and orienting decentralised cooperation's intervention, but this does not mean that any major strategic modifications have been made to it either in terms of resources or strategic orientation implementation.

The main reasons put forward by those local governments that have not updated their strategic plans in light of the SDGs can be placed in one of two categories. One is encompassed by the notion that SDGs are merely a new expression of an agenda.

Whose purpose had already been taken on board by decentralised cooperation, and was systematically included in its previous planning. Here the understanding is that the SDGs' approval is more of a legitimation of changes that were previously identified and included in their plans as goals. The other reflects a more critical or self—critical school of thought suggesting the futility of merely cosmetic adaptation of plans in the form of sweeping generalizations or mere discursive mentions of the new agenda. Here, in contrast to the first category, the SDGs are believed to comport a strategy overhaul and the conditions to tackle it sufficiently in depth are thought to be lacking.

In short, it could be asserted that those considering the SDGs to involve an inevitable and deep strategic overhaul are not clear about how it is to be brought about. Nonetheless, certain general orientations that could serve the task of strategic revision can be inferred. As we have seen, it would involve more than just adaption to international agendas, and would pose a significant opportunity to regenerate legitimacy, and, by doing so, enhance decentralised cooperation's relevance.

Because these general orientations tie into more comprehensive work based on a territorial approach, they afford an itinerary for exploring strategies to connect different municipal services and link local governments in different geographies. This opens up a significant opportunity to address local and regional government action from a Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development standpoint. Experience in intersectoral work integrating various services or policies therefore may be particularly pertinent in this regard.

Decentralised cooperation in state sustainability plans

Implementing the 2030 Agenda has often required the establishment of new strategies and programmes, particularly nationally led ones, in sustainability and sustainable development. Some decentralised development cooperation has considered this as a positive opportunity for them to actively participate in national strategic designs. Although this participation cannot be considered widespread, it stands as an opportunity for relevance enabling decentralised cooperation to strategically broaden its intervention in areas where it can earn recognition for its experience.

The sessions organized by the ECOSOC's High-Level Panel for the presentation of National Voluntary Reports, held in July of each of the last few years (UCLG 2018; UCLG 2019) have served as a forum and opportunity for exchanges. Representatives of local and regional governments can interact with their national peers, and decentralised cooperation has been able to tie into national strategies linked to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. In certain instances, cooperation representatives have worked directly on national accountability reports while in others, these reports have not incorporated international cooperation systems.

Whatever the case, the relationship has been more in terms of influence and consultancy and national implementation strategies, occasionally including localisation to sub-national levels, but in general has not given decentralised cooperation a strategically relevant role in these strategies. While the notion is fairly widespread that SDGs have been integrated into strategic cooperation strategies in the previously mentioned terms, there has been no case yet where local, regional or national government cooperation has been integrated into implementation or localisation strategies.

This is striking given that international cooperation is one of the means of implementing the 2030 Agenda. The situation is widespread, although some nuances must be described. In certain cases, decentralised cooperation has not been integrated into new localisation strategies because of a lack of clarity regarding who would be responsible for doing so. In some instances, the prevailing idea is that national entities must be the ones to compile all decentralised cooperation, i.e. local government associations and other similar actors. In others, the difficulties in doing so are recognised as strategies for implementing the 2030 Agenda that can only be applied "at home." This means they are confined to either national or local bounds depending on the case. A certain paradox has arisen in that while the decentralised cooperation structures have taken a central role in furthering and motivating the adoption and interpretation of the 2030 Agenda in each geography, the jurisdiction over that cooperation is considered to lie elsewhere. This is tantamount to an implicit recognition that its role is limited to pushing for and promoting the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and its incorporation into government strategies, devoid of any strategic participation in developing content.

In light of both the difficulties in orienting cooperation strategies to face the new challenges posed by the current juncture and by the 2030 Agenda, and the lack of a significant role for decentralised cooperation to play in national and international sustainable development strategies, policy coherence, and the 2030 Agenda, we find ourselves confronting the need to develop new strategic frameworks that overcome the constraints that have become evident over the last few years.

Revising strategic planning frameworks to adapt them to both the 2030 Agenda and the major transformations imposed by current situation requiring enhanced new action from international cooperation and decentralised cooperation in particular is therefore important. And the 2030 Agenda provides an opportunity to do so.

Broader, more flexible strategic frameworks must be developed that enable the actual situation to be better grasped and more transformative action to be taken. A break must be made with planning modes constrained by short-term vision, limited instruments, and an exceedingly geographic or sectoral focus. Too often, priorities are established ex ante for policies that, while necessary, preclude many avenues for strategic orientations. To a large extent, this paradox is generated by difficulties in incorporating lessons learned and multi-stakeholder dialogue when defining and implementing strategy.

Given the complexity and interdependence of the current situation, these common traits in planning finally constrain strategic capacity. Progress must therefore be made toward planning that: 1) is more open and flexible; 2) is more permeable to dialogue and knowledge generation; and 3) incorporates a trans-sectoral, transnational approach in order to factor in governance, structural needs and significant spheres in the configuration of power. What explains both the configuration of those problems and their potential solutions lies in these "spheres of reality." Decentralised cooperation could thus put forward a proposal with "strategic spheres" for each intervention[1].

....
1   Because of the significant implications on instrument choice, this will be further discussed under the heading "New instruments." For a more in-depth analysis see Martínez 2017; La Mundial and AIETI 2017.

Although their depth and degree of centrality vis-à-vis their overall policies differ, there are two decentralised cooperation initiatives that have adopted the notion of strategic spheres as frameworks for their cooperation policy action and planning. The regional government of Extremadura (Junta de Extremadura) and the Basque Regional Government (Gobierno Vasco) have identified and incorporated various strategic spheres[2] into their planning frameworks. The Extremadura regional government's entire strategy for change, opening and planning of their cooperation policy hinges around the implementation and development of Strategic Spheres. Three have been identified, defined and implemented by the ensemble of Extremadura's cooperation actors: 1) a model of development safeguarding the sustainability of life; 2) Feminisms and Inequalities; and 3) Human Mobility and Migrations.

Meanwhile, in its most recent cooperation plan, the Basque development cooperation agency has identified two Strategic Spheres to serve as a pilot experience throughout the period covered: 1) conflict transformation and peace building; and 2) economic solidarity model. Along similar lines, there are some other practices promoted by local and regional governments that show the role that decentralised cooperation's services can play in promoting multi-dimensional, transnational development. Examples can be found in the proposals made by some Flemish municipalities that have taken local world policy on board in their cooperation approaches through three spheres of activity to enhance their policy coherence and its contribution to international justice: 1) adaptation of internal administrative procedures (procurement, for instance); 2) mainstreaming SDGs as an underlying framework into the objectives of all municipal management plans; and 3) the inclusion of justice in the municipal vision and mission (VVSG 2016, 14).

The Catalan government's experience in drawing up its 2019-2022 Master Plan for cooperation can serve as a thought-provoking starting point for addressing new strategic planning more in line with the 2030 Agenda. Strategies for meeting the SDGs both domestically and internationally were mainstreamed into the entire Catalan system. The Plan, which explicitly set forth participation in the pending transformations of systemic issues, came hand in hand with a strategic document known as "Visió 2030" which was to underpin three four-year Master Plans. This effort was preceded in 2015 by the decision to include a gender and human rights-based approach (known in Catalan by the acronym EGBiDH). Undoubtedly, this opened up the possibility of mainstreaming into public policy.

In short, a long road lies ahead in order for decentralised cooperation's foundations to be revised, for coherent strategic action to be taken in accordance with the SDGs' comprehensive, multidimensional mandate, and for decentralised cooperation to play a strategic role in multi-level fora where it can drive a territorial approach and ensure that local/global connections and interdependencies are factored into national governments' strategies.

....

2 See the Basque Regional Government's "IV Plan Director de Cooperación para el Desarrollo 2018—2021" and the Extremadura Regional Government's "Plan General de Cooperación Extremeña 2018—2021", In addition, the Madrid City Council, after having dismantled its international cooperation policies between 2010 and 2016, recovered and revitalized its cooperation policy in 2016. One of the elements underpinning this reconfiguration was the participative elaboration and approval of the Madrid City Assembly's strategic framework that also hinged around strategic spheres to guide its international cooperation. It specifically included: 1) building a global society based on the defence of democracy, gender equality and respect for cultural diversity; 2) promoting a culture of peace and solidarity and prevention of violence and defence of human rights; 3) furthering the building of sustainable cities and communities; and 4) further advancing a socially and economically sustainable model. After the change of government in 2019, the actual development of this plan remains to be seen.

Dialogue with more diverse and plural actors: experiences and obstacles

The call made by the 2030 Agenda explicitly mentions multi-stakeholder alliances for sustainable development and is what most attracts local and regional governments. Decentralised cooperation has been recognised for its proximity to social and political stakeholders and its ongoing participation in generating international alliances and networks. Both of these factors give it enormous potential to understand and develop the demand for creating and enhancing multi-stakeholder alliances.

Cooperation's perspective on global issues

Generally speaking, decentralised cooperation has demonstrated active participation in institutional fora for dialogue. At times these fora are designed and specifically dedicated to conventional decentralised cooperation issues, nearly always from a sectoral and technically specialised perspective-water and sanitation, farm production and rural development, health, and so forth. Yet seldom have these fora shown a certain degree of engagement with systemic or structural issues. Only lately can certain instances be mentioned where issues such as migration, climate change or gender equality are addressed somewhat substantially in systemic terms. These are global issues that highlight very clear interdependency and transnationality. Incorporating these issues into multi-stakeholder, multi-level dialogue contributes to spreading the idea – and the need – to develop innovative mechanisms for allocating shared responsibilities.

In the opinion of several persons interviewed, decentralised cooperation should continue to familiarise itself with the stakeholders in each geography, because, generally speaking, they believe the task of integrating civil society into any given geography is the responsibility of other stakeholders or institutions. These interviewees also recognise that, where there is strict separation between what occurs abroad, where the focus of cooperation lies, and what occurs locally, there is considerable inertia in certain practices involving dialogue, and that the 2030 Agenda stands as an opportunity to establish more integrated communication and dialogue.

Here, decentralised cooperation's role is closely tied to its awareness-raising strategies and intervention. It seems evident that the principles stemming from citizen and civil society participation and the protection of human rights are its main assets in effectively engaging in this dialogue with a host of stakeholders. Both these attributes encapsulate decentralised cooperation's perspective vis-à-vis this structured dialogue that seeks shared solutions to the global challenges put forward by the SDGs. This perspective, for instance, allows for the analysis of the impact of production and consumption models on human rights (AVCD 2018), giving rise to a significant multidimensional approach to transforming them. Global justice serves as a pillar for communication and public awareness-raising initiatives that promote the idea of global citizenship.

Along these lines, with the purpose of establishing municipal sustainable development policies, the cooperation authorities in the Flemish municipality of Herent, Belgium, organised a general council to bring together all of the municipal advisory boards to examine the theme of sustainability. Also in Belgium, in the municipality of Izegem, town councillors and advisory boards on agriculture, environment and development cooperation organized a major fair trade breakfast with local meat products (VVSG 2016, 14). These initiatives illustrate decentralised

cooperation's potential to innovate for advocacy and citizens' awareness and to guide the transformations that the SDGs demand, adhering to the logic of sustainable development's multidimensionality and transnationality.

Generating innovative opportunities for political dialogue to reorient public policy along the lines of shared but differentiated responsibilities not only takes a certain amount of time but also a clear will to sustain them over time. Instruments need to be generated with the implicit purpose of changing the social and political stakeholders' ideas regarding dialogue and participation. In 2016, the Madrid City Council established the open, flexible, and dynamic multi-stakeholder Foro Madrid Solidario forum to review and reorient the city's cooperation policies in light of the new agendas. A host of stakeholders from civil society and representatives from all areas of municipal government – in line with the SDGs's comprehensiveness – participated. Through a participative process, the forum achieved a strategic revision of decentralised cooperation policy, and began the debate on the Madrid City Council's localisation strategy for the SDGs.

The 2030 Agenda also explicitly recognises South-South cooperation as an innovative type of relationship between cooperation players. While this is far from the only type of alliance to be promoted in the context of the new Agenda, its affinity with subnational governments and development cooperation's recent experiences suggests that, considering the origins of this type of cooperation, approaches to new agreements such as the BAPA+40 (UN-SG 2019), arrived at during the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Buenos Aires Action Plan, may be useful in the debate.

In other regions there have been other initiatives in this same South-South vein where transnational cooperation has been based on greater social, economic and institutional affinity. One is The Partnership for Democratic Local Governance in Southeast-Asia, DELGOSEA. This initiative, however, is not particularly focused on generating decentralised cooperation systems, but rather on transnational exchange of experiences and best practice. Another is CITYNET, a similar platform in the Asia-Pacific region, and finally another example is the initiative of the UCLG-Africa holding an event known as Africités for local governments to be able to exchange experiences.

One of the first multidimensional interpretations of the SDGs came from a transnational movement for world food production. Via Campesina, advocating food sovereignty[1], brought together a host of farm producers and fisherfolk from across the globe around a political agenda and made significant inroads into public debate. Just a month after the SDGs were approved, they forged the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, signed and recognised by the United Nations Secretary General on World Food Day. On that day, 116 cities from all continents around the world signed this commitment to renew their urban food policies based on six areas of action that underscore local producer participation, healthy and safe diets, social and economic equity, holistic production and planning, low environmental impact distribution, and waste reduction adaptation.

While the pact is envisaged for major cities and their relationships with their metropolitan areas, it may inspire other actors, particularly in the intermediate governmental tier, to establish alliances with a host of stakeholders. From a multidimensional perspective of food systems, these cities may be able to contribute to transforming the current parameters of a global model responsible for many harmful emissions and consequential unsustainability.

....
1 Food sovereignty is tied to the human right to food and includes a significant component of social and economic justice and the sustainability of food production models. This is what makes it multi- dimensional. For more detailed information see https://viacampesina.org/es/quignificasoberanalimentaria/

Widening the circle of stakeholders and conflict resolution

The process of incorporating different actors in fora for dialogue to generate more plural alliances for sustainable development has been very gradual and uneven across the various geographies. Generally speaking, it is recognised that the main challenges hinge around including actors from the private business sphere and those linked to generating and managing knowledge, in addition to others that have not conventionally been associated with international cooperation. Much has yet to be done on both counts to fully bring these actors on board and make a global commitment to the sustainable development goals. From the SDGs' comprehensive perspective, the previously indicated far-reaching transformations cannot be achieved without commitment from all actors.

Generally speaking, we run the risk of merely superficially complying with the 2030 Agenda unless the underlying political conflicts inherent to the transformation that it demands are understood. Understanding the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs as a roadmap requiring only lip service is the best guarantee for limiting its transformative potential. Such an acritical approach would allow all interests and practices to be incorporated under the assumption that their potential negative impact on certain geographies or persons' living conditions is merely due to a lack of knowledge of the Agenda on the part of those responsible for implementing it, and not to a lack of political will. This approach is ingenuous both in that it attempts to avoid unveiling both political conflict and the vested interests that reproduce the very problems the 2030 Agenda aims to tackle.

This does not mean that effort and resources must not be devoted to spreading the principles and goals advocated by the 2030 Agenda aiming to reveal one of the main consequences of the multidimensional development paradigm. All of our actions, be they as individuals or in groups, have economic, social and environmental impacts that must therefore be included in the analysis and the resulting engagement to transform this action toward patterns of comprehensive equity and sustainability.

Some authors have rightly signalled the inherent risks to multi-stakeholder dialogue, particularly when incorporating profit-seeking organisations. These include the risk of distorting the public agenda, loss of control over infrastructure and critical services, co- option of governments and civil society organisations, and the commodification of the commons (Fernández de Losada 2017, 35). Here, decentralised cooperation could do well to critically review the private sector alliance approach starting by enhancing the perceived value of locally-based small- and medium—sized enterprises, which are the main source of decent jobs and local consumption. It can do so by paying close attention and including social and solidarity economy businesses, collective projects and cooperatives guided by strict sustainability criteria in multi-stakeholder dialogue mechanisms. In short, by including private actors that have incorporated sustainability strategies not as a mere reputational ploy but rather into the core of their business cycles, as promoted by South—South cooperation in Latin America together with the ILO (Morin 2016).

It is openly recognised that generating multi-stakeholder alliances involves competition for resources and political interlocution. This in turn makes it more difficult to find clear strategies for opening up multi-stakeholder fora. There have been certain experiences fostered by international institutions and multilateral bodies taking a territorial approach to building alliances. The UNDP's territorial configuration in its work in Senegal and Colombia stands as an example. This is recognised as nascent work in progress that needs to be consolidated as it generally still depends greatly on views and political leadership that have yet to build a full, solid system.

In Latin America, it is recognised that most national efforts to configure multi-level fora are still made with a top-down approach reflecting governments' will or impositions. In certain European countries such as France and Italy, although they are highly centralised, there have recently been interesting movements in coordinating decentralised cooperation. Germany has placed support for municipalities on a ministerial level in order to integrate it in different processes. It has offered new alliances regarding the SDGs and has included new themes linking traditional solidarity-minded agendas with environmental issues (for instance, women working for solar energy and the effects of waste on the oceans). The extent to which these new alliances will be consolidated and transform social actors and their traditional agendas remains unknown. On the other hand, the increase in certain decentralised cooperation efforts driven by the German ministry is highly focused on scholarships and educational training, while new cooperation experiences in the partner countries have barely been addressed.

These various experiences show how difficult it is to generate these alliances through abstractly designed standard mechanisms because they are highly linked to the opportunities and challenges in each geography.

Even now, nearly five years after their approval, the SDGs come up against key actors who resist actively participating in dialogue and alliance-building to promote a revision of policy and business practice in light of these established goals.

6.4 Innovative capacity building for new challenges

The SDGs stand as a challenge for the capacity of public administrations in general and for the teams handling decentralised development cooperation in particular. The Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development approach involves some changes, not only in configuring and implementing action, but also in the administration's political culture, in government structures, in the mechanisms for coordinating and incorporating cross-cutting inter-sectoral approaches. Difficulties stemming from the inertia of long-standing consolidated sectoral work have long been recognised as significantly constraining potential interaction and linking various policies in everyday practice. Work in silos has also been recognised as one of the most significant issues to overcome. This will require specific strategies and institutional capacity building. Specialised knowledge and experience is important in and of itself, but without a multidimensional view of this knowledge and experience, a more complex understanding of development processes will fail to be factored in.

Specific training documents have been prepared and shared to increase knowledge and understanding of the SDGs. They are mostly geared toward cooperation in other sectors and to political responsibility that falls outside the sphere of cooperation per se. These materials provide a general outline of the main training and institution building challenges.

Generally speaking, over the last few years, decentralised cooperation has taken on a training role in capacity building to spread awareness about the 2030 Agenda and the consequences the SDGs have for the different administrations. This role, however, cannot be taken on in detriment to a close examination of the capabilities that it should regenerate in light of these agreements. Because decentralised cooperation is generally familiar with the issues included in

the agenda and is accustomed to working with international United Nations system references, its initial approach is guided by an understanding that the agenda falls within its remit.

However, ever since the SDGs' approval, certain issues have been flagged as significantly novel and require capabilities and learning that must pervade decentralised cooperation. These novelties are: references to the multidimensionality of development processes; links between territorial approaches and regional or global interdependence; the gradual inclusion of a policy coherence approach; and the huge challenge of establishing multi-stakeholder, multi-level alliances with innovative mechanisms to manage shared responsibilities. These novel elements must constitute the pillars of a widespread training programme that must encompass various political dimensions, i.e., from the very configuration of SDG polity to the consideration of politics in the underlying conflicts that mark transitions, to their expression in managing public policy. To refuse to analyse the political dimension with the argument that only policy management can offer concrete forms of action is tantamount to passing the buck of problem solving over to the technical side of policy, and more specifically to intervention. This habit is as widespread as it is insufficient to tackle the required transformations.

Some examples of exchanges and mutual learning materials are significant and warrant attention, not so much because they offer responses that can be extrapolated automatically, but rather because they provide food for thought regarding practical matters very much related to everyday intervention that decentralised development uses to solve a host of issues.

Generally, the following are already recognised: the importance of generating strategic alliances with research centres; the importance of generating knowledge with an eye toward incorporating the complexity; the demand for new ways to interpret multidimensional development processes; and the importance of measurement and evaluation. Also recognised are the challenges stemming from the need to build public policy-based development strictly tied to sustainability and participation.

To conclude and provide appropriate context, two considerations should be kept in mind when addressing the relationship between decentralised cooperation and the capabilities of local and regional actors – all the more so given the current need to regenerate and building capabilities.

First, the automatic relationship between decentralised cooperation and the capacity building of its actors should be revitalised. Although this report has indicated that decentralised cooperation's value rests in part on reciprocity and mutual learning, one should not lose sight of the fact that decentralised cooperation falls under international cooperation and its set of rules, values and interests. Decentralised cooperation therefore is no stranger to the top-down asymmetrical nature mentioned in section 2.1 (The obsolescence of the cooperation system's foundations). Therefore, it is no stranger to the restrictions within the assistance chain, particularly on the weakest partners. Actors with weaker institutional capability or greater dependence on cooperation may see their capabilities distorted by asymmetrical relationships.

Secondly, there is a heterogeneity of actors, local and regional governments that make up decentralized cooperation. Within this group we find large cities or regions that can be considered democratic, economic, political and cultural powers. But we also find small cities and towns with very different realities and capacities, so posing challenges and shared horizons for all of them can generate distortions in terms of capacities. Therefore, the general considerations in this report need to be adapted on a case-by-case basis according to their pertinence and advisability.

Necessary novel instruments

In terms of instruments, the main obstacle thwarting decentralisation's more effective multidimensional, transnational intervention is undoubtedly the current methodology where projects are units of intervention and required to obtain funding. This methodology also has certain rigidities in terms of its ties to sectoral priorities originally stemming from ODA and DAC's channelling flows of assistance by sector. The time frames imposed by donors' budgetary and administrative parameters pose difficulties because they are not in step with development processes. The constraints posed by a project-driven approach also affect international co-operation between states. However, perhaps due to their scale, some of the instruments are different and potentially more varied, meaning that the project-based restrictions can be more easily circumvented.

Also, particularly for partners in the South on the receiving end of the assistance, conditionality is one of the most constraining factors for integrating multidimensional priorities and objectives into their actions and for attaching priority to the given geography.

All of this points to the need to thoroughly re-examine the basic instrument, i.e., the project. Originally, the project as an intervention unit spread to facilitate rational planning of intervention. Over time, it has become cooperation's main constraint. It is even important to rethink certain interpretations that have recently been adopted in the context of enhanced quality and efficiency, i.e. results-based development. Otherwise, actors with no competences or access to key political levers to provide results may be called upon to be responsible for the impact and implementation of concrete solutions.

In this effort, new mechanisms must be incorporated to fit basic planning and accurate intervention with the need for accountability, all while providing an instrument for markedly multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder intervention emphasizing transformation— based results.

In certain countries such as Spain and Italy among others, the relationship between decentralised cooperation and civil society organisations has been particularly close. There, the cooperation model is indirect – particularly via NGOs – through public tenders to fund cooperation projects. The prevalence of this formula has its pros and cons. On the positive side, social actors and citizens are more involved in cooperation. As a result, though, cooperation becomes exceedingly splintered, dispersed and bureaucratised. In order to overcome this, it is advisable to establish a shared strategic vision of decentralised cooperation's renewed role as well as the roles of the various stakeholders involved. The system of projects and public calls for tenders established within specific geographical bounds – most often national, owing to the list of priority countries, and sectoral, generally adopting sectors established by the OECD's DAC – should be thoroughly revisited.

The central role of projects as decentralised cooperation's prevailing intervention instrument – be it through direct, city-to-city cooperation or indirect cooperation involving territorial actors- involves three basic issues that account for the main constraints identified. First, projects are too ends-based, that is, determined by the achievement of results defined ex ante. These results are difficult to foresee in a process-based approach. Next, the prevailing sectoral rationale in both single- and multi-sector interventions is also constraining. Thirdly, under the geographically driven approach, action tends to be based on the actors' sense of potential results rather than to the dynamics and structure of the problems themselves.

Once again, this is why strategic spheres should be stressed because they are broad, systemic and cut across sectors. But they also potentially serve as a methodology to identify and implement process-based work, dialogue and learning through new instruments to overcome constraints.

Doing so would turn around the basis for decision making when identifying and designing instruments through which cooperation policies are implemented. With strategic spheres, only after having collectively defined strategic orientations can decisions about implementation be articulately made. Only after defining the strategic objectives in each sphere and after identifying the various territorial actors with the greatest capabilities to contribute to meeting the objectives (institutions, civil society actors, stakeholders linked to knowledge, etc.), and after identifying the most appropriate ways to work, can the instruments needed to achieve these goals be identified and put into action (Martínez 2017; La Mundial and AIETI 2017)).

This would be the way to attempt to break with the chain of decisions where the definition of development instrument (incarnated pre-eminently in the development project) would determine the rest of the strategic orientations and policy decisions. As has been reiterated by the many sources consulted in producing this report, this is one of the roadblocks that must be removed in order for decentralised cooperation to evolve.

7 Synopsis and general conclusions

Decentralised cooperation is confronted with far-reaching changes in the world that are reshaping the fundamentals of local and global development alike. These changes have reached international cooperation, of which decentralised cooperation is a part. Its fundamentals, structure and practice are currently being revamped due to the present challenges. Not only do they trigger rupture with the conventional sectoral approach, they involve a markedly inter-state division of responsibilities and lead to a new development paradigm shaped by comprehensiveness and multidimensionality as well as by the need to build alliances with many different stakeholders and ensure multi-level cooperation to coherently meet goals. Another approach to the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda would be to limit its possibilities for transformation, thus denying that it is first and foremost an agenda calling for real change in the current, highly consolidated development model.

For decentralised cooperation, the challenge lies in revising and regenerating its strategy and intervention approaches in light of this new development paradigm. This involves not only finding avenues to become better suited to these changes and more efficient in terms of practice, but also to significantly broaden its scope and explore new alliances, objectives and mechanisms enabling it to make a difference with a contribution that is relevant to collective global action.

Difficulties certainly lie along the road to achieving this, two of which are particularly significant. First, there is uncertainty stemming from the need for transitions and transformations in

the development model that has taken hold over the last decades and has proven itself to be both unsustainable and unfair. The need for far-reaching changes is recognised, even though we still do not know how to make them or what effect they will have on our societies. All of this uncertainty generates a certain aversion to its inherent risks. Secondly, like any other relatively consolidated policy, bureaucratic and administrative uncertainties have generated a certain amount of resistance to change, which has been observed in path dependency approaches. Decentralised cooperation must be able not only to identify this resistance but to overcome it.

There is no need to start from scratch, but rather to thoroughly review existing experience in order to appropriately adjust decentralised cooperation's orientation. The diversity and hetero-geneousness of decentralised cooperation have made it hard to fully and satisfactorily define. This report establishes five fundamental underlying principles shared, at least in aspirational terms, by all of decentralised cooperation's experiences, upon which we can base recognition of its differential value: reciprocity, proximity, multi- stakeholder and multi-level governance, territorial alliances and solidarity-based action. This specific, differentiated work constitutes the core of decentralised cooperation's recognition as well as the basis for its regeneration. This report explores the still incipient modifications being tested in various decentralised cooperation experiences in various policy areas, i.e. regulations, strategies, political dialogue between and among stakeholders, capabilities and instruments.

In regulatory terms, decentralised cooperation has yet to undertake a general revamping of its legal framework and regulations. On the contrary, for the most part, SDG language and narratives has been incorporated into the heart of the Agenda's implementation – known on the local level as localisation – but decentralised cooperation's participation has not been par-ticularly active. Some experiences show that progress can be made through legal frameworks to expand this cooperation and make it more than a mere complement to state schemes. Its objectives could be redefined as contributions within a framework of global justice, with an eye toward regenerating and enhancing territorial approaches and decentralisation processes. It is precisely these territorial approaches that have the appropriate potential to champion new multi-stakeholder, multi-level configurations demanded by a world whose development prob-lems are largely interdependent. Here, for inspiration, decentralised cooperation can pool from numerous coordination and complementarity experiences that succeeded at achieving shared responsibilities, differentiated according to the level of government. Transport in certain metropolitan areas or management of communication are examples. The ecological transition, promotion of local value chains, and management of migration require these new configura-tions, and decentralised cooperation is in a position to offer relevant experience and learning in this regard.

In the area of strategic planning, decentralised cooperation has revamped its strategic docu-ments to include references to the SDGs and broaden its strategic objectives accordingly. A distinction should be made between the revamping that is tied to SDG implementation and the revamping shown in the specific cooperation strategies that acknowledge their superfici-ality because, although new references have been included, the cooperation plans themselves have not been substantially modified. In many instances, this is due to the very widespread perception that cooperation had already established its strategies backed by international development agendas and geared to the major global goals. On other occasions, difficulties in soundly interpreting the essential elements of the new development paradigm and meaningful-ly translating them into public policy strategies are acknowledged.

Decentralised cooperation has participated unevenly in developing new strategies for imple-menting the SDGs. However, these processes have been acknowledged as an extraordinary opportunity to broaden its focus in actual practice. The emergence of new planning based

on strategic spheres potentially expressing economic, social and environmental interdependence stand as an opportunity to overcome rigidities of sector- or geography-based planning methods. The strategic spheres provide a more open, flexible realm of planning that is more permeable to dialogue between territorial stakeholders and better able to link intersectoral and transnational solutions to the problems they aim to solve.

Put concisely, the SDGs are gradually being integrated into decentralised cooperation strategies, though still incipiently with room for further strategy revamping. Furthermore, this cooperation is as yet unable to play the significant role to systematically integrate implementation strategies. The opportunity to overhaul strategy based on multi-stakeholder dialogue reflecting a transnational, multi-level outlook regarding problems, as enabled by more flexible mechanisms, would help overcome strategic configurations based on top-down priority setting. Either state diplomacy or multilateral initiatives could be instrumental in this regard.

Generating mechanisms that allow for the systematic inclusion of political dialogue among many different stakeholders in the various geographies is considered crucial to enhancing the SDGs. Many initiatives are openly exploring various frameworks for participation and responsibility sharing. However, a long road lies ahead for some of the stakeholders to be included in these demands for transformation, particularly when calls for proposals ask for more than declarations of support and attempt to establish agreements allocating differentiated responsibilities that modify development's most unsustainable and unfair current dynamics. One example is intersectoral advisory boards. These boards are able explore multi-stakeholder political action and are planned from perspectives integrating economic, social and environmental affairs, and are being implemented in several places. Whether or not these alliances will take hold will depend on how they function in practice and on their ability to gradually bring about policies that are more coherent with sustainability and fairness.

There is also the challenge and risk of bringing the private sector on board. Meanwhile, the generation of value chains in and near the geography in question has been put forward as a source of inspiration. Sustainable production models would be linked to sustainable consumption and labour rights and the redistribution of profits would also be improved. Small- and medium-sized enterprises, the bulk of the business fabric, have great potential in this regard.

Decentralised cooperation will be able to face the agenda for change distilled in the SDGs with an expanded, regenerated programme for capacity building. Several training initiatives focused on disseminating the new challenges and beginning to explore the ties between development's different dimensions have succeeded each other since the approval of the SDGs. Some have focused on raising awareness about the new challenges and beginning to explore links between the different dimensions involved in development. There are also other multidimensional, multi-level initiatives to improve this knowledge and facilitate the inclusion of indicators and measurements for the desired transformations. Even more training materials need to be explored and designed to build the capacity of persons and institutions and to overcome work in silos and compartmentalised sectors. The need has been stressed for capacity building to innovate policies so that the territorial approach's tremendous potential for intersectoral work can be translated into specific policy action based on both a holistic approach to development in the geography in question and on its regional, transnational and/or global interdependence.

Finally, insofar as instruments are concerned, projects as units of intervention and their well-established administrative and methodological criteria still seem hard to overcome. A methodology for turning around the rationale behind cooperation work seems to be emerging in the form of strategic spheres where the strategic objectives in each strategic sphere and in each specific geography determine the most appropriate instruments for intervention on a case-by-case basis.

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