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'Justice' not 'aid' for the Global South

By Koen Bogaert, Julie Carlier, Brecht De Smet, Marlies Casier, Dorien Vanden Boer and Bernard Mazijn

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Development cooperation does not work. It has never worked. So why not flush the European DG Development down the drain? That was the conclusion of a recent piece published by European researchers Jan Orbie and Sarah Delputte (<https://www.gicnetwork.be/lets-abolish-the-eu-commissioner-for-development/>). The danger of this conclusion is that Europe would ignore its historic accountability and the problems it has created. This is why we want to engage with some of the points that our colleagues have touched upon. Where does this idea of Europe needing to 'develop' the rest of the world come from? What is left unsaid when we talk about development aid? And what would a post development era look like if we would really listen to voices from the Global South?

Truman's new foreign policy

After WWII the Western civilization mission that underpinned colonialism was gradually replaced by the policy of development. In 1949 president Truman announced in his inaugural speech that from now on the US would be helping poor counties in the South to develop economically and support them with technological and political knowhow. This way the US would contribute to a new era of world peace, abundance and freedom. The 'imperialism' of the old colonial powers was finished. The US called for a new era and a new way of understanding the world. It was the first inaugural speech of an American president to be broadcasted live on television.

According to Jason Hicke (<https://www.jasonhickel.org/the-divide/>), anthropologist at LSE, this speech gave millions of American viewers a new perspective on the world. A perspective in which rich countries were 'developed'. They had become the forerunners amongst the nations of the world thanks to their own innovative capacity, intelligence, good institutions, better technology and of course better values and

norms. All of these strengths could now be shared with poor countries, in the latter's search to become 'developed'. In other words, the US became the model for development.

From colonization to development

The new narrative of development allowed rich countries of the Global North to disconnect the creation of their own wealth from their (colonial) exploitation of the Global South. The poverty of the latter had nothing to do anymore with the richness of the former. Inequality was only a temporary aberration that could be solved with development aid. Soon other Western countries, such as the United Kingdom and France jumped on the bandwagon. It allowed them to abandon the old colonial ways of domination and replace them with modern practices of development aid, charity and altruism. The fact that inequality was created because of that colonial past was completely ignored and erased.

The development narrative reduced the causes of underdevelopment, poverty and inequality to issues like bad governance and corruption. More recently, the millennium development goals repackaged this same story in 2000 as did the sustainable development goals in 2015. Despite the ambitious promises and financial engagements inequality keeps increasing. Half of the world population is living in poverty or in risk of poverty (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jan/29/bill-gates-davos-global-poverty-infographic-neoliberal>). The critical question is not 'how to reinvent development?' but rather 'how to come up with a radically different story and practice?'

Development aid, a drop on a hot plate

To tell a different story we need to place development aid in a much wider context of structural power relations and uneven development. Every year 130 billion aid dollars flow to the Global South. However, if we take into consideration all financial transactions to and from the Global South (also investments, trade, tax evasion, interests, etc.), we have to conclude that there is in fact a (negative balance) deficit of 16,3 trillion dollar (<https://www.gfintegrity.org/press-release/new-report-on-unrecorded-capital-flight-finds-developing-countries-are-net-creditors-to-the-rest-of-the-world/>) since the 1980s. In other words, the last forty years more than 16,3 trillion dollar flowed from the Global South to the North. This is mostly due to *Illicit Financial Flows* (<https://www.gfintegrity.org/issue/illicit-financial-flows/>) such as "trade misinvoicing (<https://www.gfintegrity.org/issue/trade-misinvoicing/>)" en "transfer mispricing (<https://www.taxjustice.net/topics/corporate-tax/transfer-pricing/>)". In fact for every dollar of development aid, 24 dollars flow back (<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2017/jan/14/aid-in-reverse-how-poor-countries-develop-rich-countries>) to the rich countries and investors. So who is actually developing who?

The structural underdevelopment of the South is not only rooted in a history of colonialism, racism and imperialism, but also in contemporary production chains, economic power relations and illegal financial flows. There is no such thing as economies at different speeds. There is only one world economy with a hierarchical production process and differentiated labor conditions. Through global production chains the accumulation of wealth in the Global North is intrinsically connected to pollution, low wages and even violent conflict in the Global South.

A new story rooted in justice

As Jan Orbie and Sarah Delputte rightly claim: *'there are many alternatives ready and available'*. But what do they look like? How can we move towards an era of post-development? How to radically change current economic and power inequalities between North and South? Within the Global south solutions have been put forward that replace 'aid' and 'development' with demands of 'justice' and 'solidarity'. By shifting the focus to justice a different story can be told, one that breaks with the presumed Western superiority inherent to the development paradigm. Drawing on historical and contemporary demands for a more just world order we propose the following guidelines for EU policies toward the Global South:

First, many countries of the global south are stuck in a suffocating debt trap. This needs to stop. These countries spend a large portion of their income on interests on loans that have been paid back many times over. This hampers public investments in education, health and the economy.

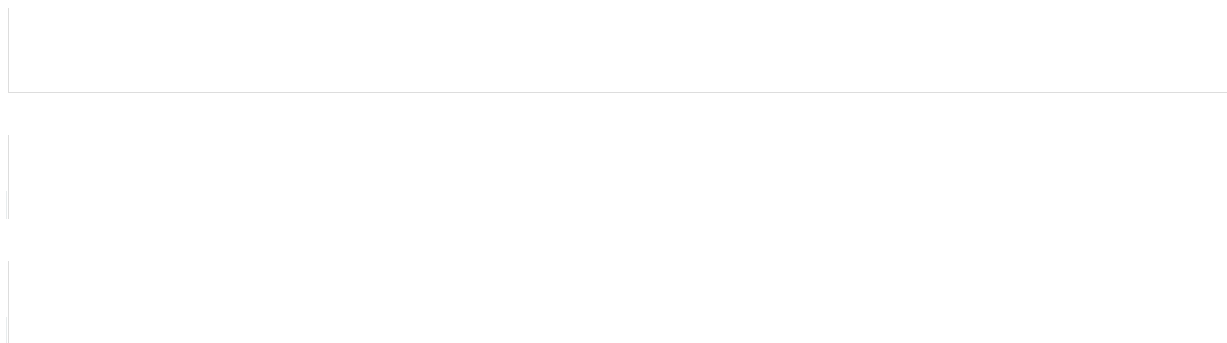
Second, the plunder and exploitation of natural resources and labor in the South needs to end. This also entails awareness of new forms of colonization (<https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/green-new-deal-alexandria-ocasio-cortez-corbyn-colonialism-climate-change-a8899876.html?fbclid=IwAR16iWX2YV-SHjg24lL18knJJuH9JVSkU-U9ayVc1Dwsh3BovYK5nU8f1y4>) through, for example, the green energy transition that involves a new round of intensive resource extraction from the Global South and a continuing reliance on cheap labor and cheap nature (<https://www.viewpointmag.com/2015/09/28/capitalism-in-the-web-of-life-an-interview-with-jason-moore/>).

Third, in order to redistribute global wealth and end growing inequality reparations have to be made. The North has to take responsibility for the wealth it has built over centuries *at the expense* of the South. These reparations are not about compensating victimhood, rather they constitute the radical claim of a growing number of individuals and movements globally for social justice. Targeting tax havens and striving towards a just taxation worldwide would be a first, although still very modest, step towards a financial model for reparations. Thus, if we abolish DG development, why not replace it with a commissioner for reparations?

Lastly, we need to follow the example of decolonization movements and climate activists who demand a more democratic world order. Powerful institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF and the EU prioritize processes of North-centered capital accumulation above human rights, social justice, and ecological concerns. Leaving behind the framework of development aid thus requires a political transition as much as a scientific paradigm shift. Only then we can start thinking about a world economy that is based on social justice and human needs rather than a political-economic model that is based on development through exploitation and unrestrained and uneven growth. Only then we can safeguard the future of coming generations.

The authors are members of the department of conflict and development studies at Ghent University. Prof. dr. Koenraad Bogaert is lecturer in History of Globalisation, Julie Carlier is coordinator of the Ghent Centre for Global Studies and teaches Gender and Globalisation, Prof. dr. Marlies Casie

is lecturer of Ethnography of Conflict and Development, Dr. Brecht De Smet is lecturer of Politics and Development, Prof. dr. Bernard Mazijn is teaching Sustainable Development and Dorien Vander Boer is the coordinator of the Governance in Conflict Network.



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