



# **FUTURE(S) OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION: CONTINUITIES AND DISRUPTIONS**

acep

25 years of  
cooperation

## **FACT SHEET**

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Mário

(a life full of energy, kindness, solidarity, joy, from São  
Lourenço dos Órgãos to Praia,  
and leaving marks on all of us,  
in Bissau, Dakar, Brussels, Lisbon, Bamako, São Tomé,  
Madrid, Luanda, Paris...)

*sodade, sodade, sodade, nha terra e Cabo Verde*

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At a time when a new strategy of the Portuguese Cooperation is being established and profound changes are occurring in the field of International Development Cooperation, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Association for Cooperation Between Peoples (ACEP) has been analysing the direction of Portuguese Development Cooperation for the past 25 years or so (when its work began in this area) and has identified possible futures for the field, through its continuities and disruptions.

This document was prepared by the ACEP team, under the framework of an advocacy and political influence project developed under a partnership between ACEP and the Centre for Studies on Africa and Development of the School of Economics and Management (CEsA/ISEG), with the support of Camões, IP. The document is broken down into four complementary parts:

- the first part is taken as the starting point. It is based on founding principles and values and focuses on a few central themes for the future while laying out the options that we strive for in the domain of International Development Cooperation;
- the second part centres on an analysis of Portuguese Development Cooperation, identifying some pressing challenges and clarifications within the context of preparation of a new national strategy document for this public policy;
- the third part deals with the European dimension of Development Cooperation, and specifically its relationship with the African continent and questions some current and future trends with respect to Development financing;
- and, finally, the fourth part seeks to identify some of the current threats to the civic space, both in domestic context and in the domain of

international development cooperation partnerships, and also some challenges internal to NGOs.

In addition to our vision and questionings regarding this policy, we also include other voices of partners and specialists, in particular Africans, which run through the entire document, giving it a more plural, multidisciplinary and multi-geographical character.

### **1. Founding principles and present challenges**

It is vital to return to the foundations and to the primary goal of Development Cooperation in order to reiterate its role as a noble policy within the framework of international relations, based on principles and values that should guide the relationship of states and peoples at the global level. The omission of the principle of solidarity with a win-win discourse and a rationale of using Development Cooperation in the promotion of national interests, without clear reference points, is dangerous and completely distorts the founding principles of this policy.

Along with the recovery of principles and values - in words and in practice - a serious and uncomplicated discussion should take place regarding power relations and the “delocalisation of aid”, which has been laid bare by the pandemic. This debate, already on the agenda of countries such as the United Kingdom, remains absent from Portuguese Development Cooperation. Seeing the localisation of Development Cooperation as a mechanism of empowerment requires a process-based approach, without a set time, in which a high value is placed on non-financial resources, allowing a subjective space/time of growth and that lasts beyond a specific funding or project.

Finally, in this first part, we return to reflect on the quality/effectiveness of Development Coop-

eration, which in recent years has lost its place in current political discourse. We analyse the role of Official Development Assistance which, in public political discourse, has assumed a diminished role. The promise of leveraging other resources, specifically from the private sector, may be nothing more than a liberal vision of unaccountability of the states, releasing themselves from their responsibility and role in the promotion of the common good - a vital role, as the COVID-19 pandemic has unquestionably demonstrated.

## **2. Portuguese Development Cooperation as a response to global challenges**

In the second part, we focus on recent trends in Portuguese Development Cooperation, identifying the challenges and potentialities of this policy, within the broad context of Portuguese foreign policy at a time of definition of the new Portuguese Development Cooperation strategy. For this, an overview of the current strategy is presented, along with a few proposals for inclusion in the new strategy.

The chapter points to a progressive reduction in investment in the Portuguese Development Cooperation, signaled by changes in the institutional architecture of Camões, I.P., the stagnation of aid flows, the progressive strengthening of multilateralism and a focus of Camões, I.P. on the implementation of European Cooperation projects, which has repercussions for the sector.

Against this backdrop, it is recommended a greater balance between the human and financial resources channelled into multilateral and bilateral cooperation, and the strengthening of Portuguese bilateral Development Cooperation, so as not to compromise the work that has been done with partner countries, namely in the context of the PALOP and Timor-Leste.

It is equally important to invest in transparency mechanisms, insofar as there is greater involvement of actors in the implementation of Portuguese Development Cooperation without public scrutiny and/or that seek profit. There is a need as well to invest in the assessment, likewise transparent, of the programmes, with a view to learning and building knowledge that may be useful for future interventions.

## **3. European Development Cooperation faces the challenges of coherence and tackling inequality**

The European Union, as the largest financier of Development Cooperation, has a growing influence on Portuguese Development Cooperation. Hence, it is crucial to analyse its role and suggest ways forward for the future. Following a general trend, found above all in bilateral Development Cooperation, European Development Cooperation has focused primarily on the countries at its borders, and has not been immune to criticism for using Development Cooperation resources to defend the *European way of life*, i.e. its own interests.

Recent treaties and documents prepared by the European Union indicate that the increasing securitisation of European Cooperation will not be a passing trend, despite the criticisms aimed at it, in particular by civil society.

The new multiannual financial framework also throws light on the growing weight granted to the private sector, specifically through the financial envelopes dedicated to private actors, with greater focus being required on transparency and accountability and on the criteria for selecting actors (local companies versus multilateral or foreign companies).

Finally, the discussions in progress regarding the future relationship between the African and

European continents must be based on an equal partnership, with greater involvement of civil society on both sides. The construction of a stronger and more strategic partnership between the two continents will require cooperation that goes beyond short-term imperatives (such as debt relief, for example) and a paradigm shift in their relationship.

#### **4. Civil society space**

Last, but not least, we include a chapter dedicated to the enabling environment for civil society, at a time when this same space is progressively being squeezed at global level. COVID-19 was an acid test for civil society around the world, very often serving as a pretext for authoritarian regimes to restrict even further its field of activity.

Against this backdrop, it is paramount to reiterate the role of civil society as a guarantor of the democratic vitality of states. In response to the attempts to force civil society to take a back seat in discussions, NGOs and CSOs must, simultaneously, remain faithful to their vocation of forging closer ties with communities and position themselves, demanding a voice and decision-making powers (whether at national level or in the international arena).

It is for this reason that, for ACEP, there is a pressing need for a debate on national and international issues in the near future, greater intervention at the advocacy and political influence levels, greater dialogue between the different actors on the direction of Portuguese Cooperation and greater involvement of policy makers, in particular parliamentarians, in these matters.

We hope that this document adds to that discussion.

# INTRODUCTION

Playing an active role in International Development Cooperation and seeking to influence its direction for around the past 25 years - both as a civil society organisation and, at various times, as the managing body of the Portuguese Platform for NGOD - the Association for Cooperation Among Peoples (ACEP) considers essential to recall some elements that form part of its institutional memory in relation to International Development Cooperation.

This will allow us to clarify some key issues from the time of its founding, its history and the present time so as to create a coherent line in the debate on the future.

By addressing the Future(s) of Development Cooperation, ACEP does not start with a “blank page”, without any connection to its previous history.

That which is being added today fits into a time line and a learning process with shared experiences reflected on with others.

However, neither can we have the goal of tackling all the issues facing International Development Cooperation, with the risk of losing focus, which we believe is essential in this phase of International Development Cooperation and Portuguese Development Cooperation.

Therefore, over the course of this document, we aim to highlight a few traps and misconceptions that have undermined a number of debates and practices, which the definition of public policies cannot ignore, so as to propose clear and coherent options to societies.

The document is broken down into four parts:

- the first establishes our point of departure, then focusing on some central themes for the future,

and lays out the options we have argued for in the domain of International Development Cooperation;

- the second part centres on Portuguese Development Cooperation, identifying some pressing challenges and clarifications within the context of the preparation of a new national strategy document for this public policy;

- the third part addresses European Development Cooperation, specifically its relationship with the African continent and questions some trends in the financing of development cooperation;

- the fourth part seeks to identify some of the current threats to the civic space, both in domestic contexts and interactions with public entities and in the domain of international cooperation partnerships. It analyses as well some challenges to NGOs.



**THE PROCESS:** We have chosen to select a number of issues that we regard as vital in the clarification of that which is essential to preserve, and that for which disruptions should be proposed. This process is characterised by:

- it is a process that seeks to follow a consistent line, with “the same challenges, strengthening complicities and risking innovation” (ACEP, 1997), replacing adaptation to comfort zones with “cautious steps towards the unknown” (Wood, 2020);
- for this reason, it is a shared process that broadens the debate, in which we seek to listen to partners, policy makers and researchers in Development Cooperation from different backgrounds, and not merely the European. A provisional version, already featuring various contributions, was shared with participants in the Congress of NGOs from Portuguese-Speaking Countries - Paths of Citizenship, organised by ACEP (Lisbon, October 2021). New contributions were gathered in this congress;
- it is also a process of questioning and self-questioning, which rejects adaptation to passing fashions, is mindful of traps and misconceptions and seeks to provide basic guidelines for continuing our intervention in cross-cutting domains such as political influence and social advocacy;
- finally, it is a process that is in a hurry to make great strides, but which knows that building takes a long time.



PART I

**FOUNDING  
PRINCIPLES  
AND PRESENT  
CHALLENGES**

## A PRELIMINARY ISSUE: THE COVID-19 CONTEXT

This reflection process takes place in the midst of a pandemic, with its various constraints. These constraints cannot, however, overshadow the nature of the problems we are analysing, as if they stemmed from the pandemic or were something new.

For example, since the pandemic is not the cause of the inequalities that International Development Cooperation has proved incapable of addressing consistently, the multiple accounts of the effects of the pandemic in different geographies refute the claim of ignorance, making nationalistic or Eurocentric arguments all the more inexcusable.

In fact, in this context, the head of the German Development Institute commented,

*"It is no longer acceptable to conceive external action as centred on national interests and DC*

*as only having a supporting role for the poorest countries. Instead, to be truly global, international cooperation must take sharing an interest in the global common good as its starting point, forging strong alliances and institutions that protect it"* (Scholz, 2021).

And, in the context of post-COVID-19 recovery, the question of the role of Official Development Assistance (ODA), as discussed below, cannot be avoided:

*"Development aid is one of the few financing options available to support low-income countries to deal with the health emergency and support economic recovery after the COVID-19 crisis. Now, more than ever, is the time to protect – if not increase – aid budgets."* (Carlon, et al., 2021).

**UNCOVERING:** our interpretation, and that of many others, of the impact of the pandemic is above all the fact that it forced the creation of conditions to uncover issues that we have long considered as fundamental for International Development Cooperation, such as:

- the need to focus on the worsening of inequalities (which, in the context of the pandemic, is evident in the responses not only in terms of health, but also at an economic and social level), which is something different from the fight against poverty;
- the indispensability of structured states, capable of social investment and guaranteeing access to public goods, open to different social options and capable of promoting policies to maximise the well-being of their respective societies, according to the social and cultural identity of each people;
- the irreplaceable role of Official Development Assistance, an expression of the founding values of International Development Cooperation and which, in this decade, should be a central instrument for guaranteeing a globalisation that protects human rights;
- the urgency of breaking away from a type of cooperation that replaces states and other local actors with actors from donor countries, perpetuating dependency and generating new forms of colonisation in development.

OTHER VOICES

WHAT ARE THE LIMITATIONS OR CONTRADICTIONS OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT THAT THE PANDEMIC VERY CLEARLY EXPOSED?

"I don't think that significant changes have occurred in IDC during the period of the pandemic. I continue to believe that, for reasons I cannot go into here due to a lack of space, what always existed was "false Development Cooperation", given that, in fact, it was not true cooperation, nor did it bring development as I understand it. Money is spent on programmes and projects without (or with little) impact on poor communities, which fail to take into account the local situation on the ground, fail to respect the institutions and peoples of the countries deemed beneficiaries, and is mainly consumed by the very countries or organisations that provide it. What the pandemic showed most clearly was the hypocrisy of aid, as despite the awareness of the risks to everybody, there is an unacceptable policy in the distribution of vaccines, which clearly harms poor populations".

*Fernando Pacheco, founder of ADRA and coordinator of the Fórum Social de Angola*

"The COVID-19 pandemic doubtlessly represents a great opportunity to change International Development Cooperation. There are two basic limitations that the pandemic exposed: the importance of political will and the question of transparency. Of even greater importance is solidarity between the rich and the poor. Not in terms of the rich helping the poor, but in relation to how they relate to each other. We all have responsibility in the "production" and protection of global public goods, such as global health, the climate issue, social justice and peace. The latter two are of particular importance, as inequality may precipitate situations of conflict in the future. International cooperation must be much more than flows of Aid and each country's foreign policy, we should be moving towards a new global contract, looking to the SDG and giving them greater political breadth. The question of transparency is the other limitation that the pandemic exposed. It is becoming increasingly important to monitor the financial flows and projects and to find out whether the policies are consistent. Civil society's role will be intensified in monitoring the policies. Civil Society, where new organisations, some almost inorganic and largely associated with young people, will play a major role".

*Hermínia Cabral, director of the Partnerships for Development Programme of Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian*

"There is a need to reorganise the Development Cooperation system and procedures to formulate a new legal framework with clear strategic guidelines, which is not based on reacting to crises or individual issues. There is little coordination and collaboration at all levels, starting with the relations between public and non-governmental institutions, between central services and local offices of the organisations charged with providing cooperation and aid, and between the different entities involved in international cooperation. Dialogue with society around issues of government action and strategic fronts is limited. We do not see the adoption of a modern, transparent and effective information policy in relation to international development cooperation, action that coordinates interest groups, such as parliament, an effort to inform the public and a more open dialogue with public opinion, forging closer relations with other state actors and non-governmental actors".

*Nelvina Barreto, ex-consultant of the ADB and founder of MIGUILAN, Guinea-Bissau*

**OTHER VOICES**

**WHERE SHOULD THE FOCUS FOR CHANGE BE DIRECTED?**

"In a nutshell, the focus for change lies in the assumption that human rights, in the broadest sense, have to be understood in universal terms. More important than transmitting anything, cooperation must promote mechanisms to help those who have difficulties to develop their own ideas. It is necessary to create a social capital that allows mutual trust, and this objective can perhaps be achieved if Development Assistance allows the strengthening of civil society in a broad sense – which includes the community dynamics underway in many regions – resulting in the creation of spaces where non-formal democracy can flourish. On the other hand, cooperation must allow the development of the economy based on sectors such as agriculture and small business, in order to create employment and allow the poor who today make up the so-called informal sector to find opportunities for a more dignified life. A good cooperation policy must also obey principles, such as a clear separation between cooperation policy and economic interests, which almost always have a promiscuous relationship; it should be based on the SDG targets and aim to achieve development aid levels of 0.7% of GDP in rich countries; alongside the government, it must involve civil society organisations, not only in terms of political influence, but also to allow oversight of public decisions, through the media or the creation of observatories, as is beginning to happen in Angola. Finally, it should not only be based on projects, but fundamentally on processes, such as the expansion of civic spaces or new democratic spaces where voiceless citizens can make their needs heard and express their priorities; finally, it should include not only central-level decision-makers, but also local-level actors to ensure that there is more realism in the interventions".

*Fernando Pacheco, founder of ADRA and coordinator of the Fórum Social de Angola*

"Moving from words to deeds and paying special attention to Institutions, including civil society organisations. It is impossible to overcome the challenge without countries having strong and democratic institutions that are held accountable. Alongside climate issues, education must be a pillar of the agenda. The importance of access to knowledge, where technology is increasingly a means to an end and less the ultimate goal".

*Hermínia Cabral, director of the Partnerships for Development Programme of Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian*

"It would be desirable to adopt a more proactive attitude both at the political level and at the level of organisations working in the field of international development cooperation. The approach of the Development Cooperation should have a certain flexibility, allowing countries and partner entities to adapt to rapidly evolving global contingencies, such as the pandemic in the current case. This approach should be holistic, in order to include all the actors and variants relevant to poverty alleviation and the consequent achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Regarding alignment, International Development Cooperation should position available technical and financial resources around fronts defined in the countries' strategic plans, rather than scattering investments. Issues such as gender inequality, rural development, the fight against HIV, malaria and tuberculosis, and the different aspects of the fight against generalised poverty should be integrated into multiannual programmes and commitments linked to the budget of the international cooperation partner entities or countries".

*Nelvina Barreto, ex-consultant of the ADB and founder of MIGUILAN, Guinea-Bissau*

## STARTING FROM THE BEGINNING: PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

The reason we continue to insist that Development Cooperation is the noblest area of international relations is due to the fact that it was established on the basis of ethical principles, in the light of which policies and relationships should be defined in a field that is also that of international solidarity.

Recent decades have not been exemplary in terms of coherence. In fact, the recent discussions around Development Cooperation as a win-win terrain, without defining concepts and limits, can be a way of making it “popular” to vast sectors of societies, in times of advancement of nationalism, individualism and neo-liberal doctrines. However, such a discourse compromises education for global citizenship, in a world affected by global threats that we all have to face and where there is no place for selfish solutions.

The beginning of ACEP’s intervention in International Development Cooperation is contemporaneous with the paper setting forth the position of the OECD’s DAC *Shaping the 21st Century – the Contribution of Development Cooperation* (1996). This document starts by establishing values and principles to face what were identified as global threats at the time:

*“Those of us in the industrialised countries have a strong moral imperative to respond to the extreme poverty and human suffering that still afflict more than one billion people. We also have a strong self-interest in fostering increased prosperity in the developing countries. Our solidarity with the people of all countries causes us to seek to expand the community of interests and values needed to manage the problems that respect no borders - from environmental degradation and migration, to drugs and epidemic diseases. All people are made less secure by the poverty and misery that exist in the world. Development matters.”*

That which is regarded as the first Portuguese

Cooperation strategy document, approved by the Council of Ministers in 1999, states, in its recitals and principles, that

*“In a world where around a quarter of the population lives below the threshold of absolute poverty, respect for the universality of human rights imposes on the richest countries the responsibility of adopting an active policy to fight for development on a global scale. Portugal, a country that only a few years ago reached a level of development that allows it to be part of the group of donor countries, shares this concept of international responsibility and solidarity. (...) Thus, the principles that shape Portuguese development cooperation policy are, in short, the following: 1) Respect for the universality of human rights; 2) International responsibility and solidarity; 3) Partnership with recipient countries and consultation with other donors; 4) Sustainability of development and equity in the sharing of its benefits; 5) Coherence with other policies affecting the recipient countries.”* (Council of Ministers, 1999).

In 2006, and as leader of the Portuguese NGDO Platform, ACEP, in partnership with the University of Aveiro, organised an opinion poll on “Cooperation and Public Opinion”, motivated by the need to *“create a more favourable environment for the Portuguese state to assume its ethical and political responsibilities in the field of cooperation”*

and insisting that,

*“the NGDOs and the respective national Platform (are responsible for) determining the issues that must be at the centre of their work for social mobilisation (...) in support of cooperation with other peoples and the civic demand for coherence between policies and also the policies with the practices associated with them.”* (Proença, La Tour, Krupenski, 2006).

The then Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs,

João Gomes Cravinho, also supported a more active participation of Portuguese public opinion in the

*"international mobilisation in favour of the fight against poverty and in the active defence of international equity and solidarity".*

To conclude, let us cite the review that the institution responsible for Portuguese Cooperation made, in 2011, of the previous 15 years of Portuguese Cooperation (IPAD, 2011), which claims that

*"DC policy as an aspect of foreign policy (...) focuses on values such as the search for peace s olidarity, the promotion of democracy and the rule of law, the protection of human rights, fundamental freedoms, the promotion of the Portuguese language, the conservation of the environment and equal opportunities for all".*

**At the institutional level, ten years later, a review of the Portuguese Cooperation strategy is currently underway. Two notes:**

Below, we reiterate the expectation of a reaffirmation of the values and principles in the document that will be approved. However, here we leave a note of dissatisfaction regarding this process and the opportunities for participation and political dialogue with Civil Society Organisations (CSO) and other state bodies, in particular the National Assembly (NA).

As far as CSO are concerned, this demonstrates that the shrinking space for civil society is not just a problem for countries with non-democratic regimes, as will be analysed below. As for the NA, it should be for the members of parliament, and in particular the specialised Parliamentary Committee, to make this assessment.

**At the same time, on the CSO side, it is essential that the NGOD (and their Platform):**

- face the need for a debate on identity (without corporate "defensiveness" or simplistic lower common denominators);
- clarify their role today and the fundamental choices they face;
- build alliances for progress – with appropriate continuities and disruptions.



# THE DEBATE ON LOCALISATION: PRAGMATISM OR POWER RELATIONS?

In recent years, there has been a debate on the so-called “localisation of aid”, an expression used for the first time by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), a British think tank, in 2012.

Before that, the topic was addressed in other contexts such as debates on “aid effectiveness”, “capacity development”, “ownership” or “community empowerment” and focused only on one of the parts of the action taken.

The debate on localisation has been absent from the International Development Cooperation sector in Portugal and we hope that it may become inevitable, perhaps based on lessons learned from the effects of the pandemic on International Development Cooperation, as illustrated by the following example:

*“The news that Oxfam was laying off 1,450 employees and withdrawing from 18 countries was not news to Degan Ali, executive director of ADESO. For ADESO and other Somali NGOs in the NEXUS network, this was a topic that had been discussed for weeks (...). Ali said that, while it was terrible to see an ally withdraw and people lose jobs, an opportunity was being created for leadership by civil society, a long-standing promise, as part of the localisation agenda. (...) (Localisation is) highly rhetorical – lots of beautiful aspirational language, but in fact there has been no real action or substantive change in the system. (...) The spread of COVID-19 in Africa highlighted the fact that localisation had not advanced – especially with the evacuation of international actors”. (Cornish, Canberra, June 2020).*

The pandemic made decision-making processes slower and caused responses to be delayed:

*“Ali said that the absence of expatriates and in-*

*ternational colleagues on the ground made the process even slower”,*

but, as Siale Ilolahia, executive director of the Pacific Islands NGO Association, said,

*“COVID-19 is not really the enemy – it simply exposed a series of challenges”. (Cornish, *ibid.*).*

These statements reflect the two angles from which the issue of localisation has been approached: the angle of pragmatism and the angle of power relations.

The pragmatic approach has been the most common in international organisations (and in particular those of an Anglo-Saxon bent), with localisation being promoted as a way of guaranteeing increased efficiency, due to the greater proximity and knowledge of local organisations in relation to the problems and also with the justification of a need to reduce “transaction costs”, with the reduction of intermediaries.

This is clearly evident when, for example, primacy is given to the creation of forms of localisation in humanitarian or emergency interventions or in situations of conflict (forgetting that it is in conflict situations that local organisations need what we would call “security screens”, as has already happened in the experience of ACEP).

Let us recall here, for example, the role played by ACEP in situations of threat to leaders of civil society organisations in Guinea-Bissau or in the political/military conflict in the same country, assuming its positions in its place, either in Guinea-Bissau itself or outside the country, and also creating protection mechanisms through the promotion of solidarity movements in other

Portuguese-speaking or European countries, in order to prevent them from becoming isolated.

If those kinds of pragmatic argument are generally valid, they are not, however, consistent with the promotion of a profound change in the funding system.

On the contrary, there is an increasing tendency towards the management of international financing of Development Cooperation becoming ever more complex, and towards exponential growth in the amounts of each contract – thus excluding most of the local NGOs and contributing to the existence of an “oligopoly of aid organisations”, rather than contributing towards the “de-westernisation of aid” (Vielajus, Bonis-Charancle, July 2020).

As anti-racist organisations argue, the policies are therefore far from contributing to the decolonisation of international development, but rather maintain the systemic racism that underlies an unequal sharing of roles and resources in development cooperation, as illustrated by the Morris and de la Torre (2020): *“If this conversation fails to make you uncomfortable, it is because*

*you are not having the right conversation!”.*

By contrast, the approach centred on power relations forces us to look critically at development policies, financing systems and the quality of partnerships. This approach entails more balanced power relations between local and international actors, intensifying the space and capacities of civil society and local institutions.

In our view, this is a particularly important challenge to the dominant situation between national and international NGOs. In fact, relations between the two are established through the roles they play at the time when priorities are determined and strategic decision-making occurs, in relations with the financing institutions, in visibility and in the taking of a leading role, namely in the media:

*“The notion of localisation is not part of a strictly operational rationale. It also corresponds to a desire to take back the organisation of aid and strategic decisions”.* (Groupe URD, 2019).

OTHER VOICES

THREE EXAMPLES FROM MOZAMBIQUE ON COOPERATION, LOCALISATION AND PUBLIC POLICIES

“Speaking from the experience of two sectors – agriculture and health – I find that Mozambique is unable to develop a framework of policies and programmes that last beyond a decade. There is a context in which a model of relationship between cooperation partners and Mozambique is established. A model that has historical roots and comes with constraints. Part of these is directing how resources should be used. What the country does is develop plans that conform to these standards and the country is left with no agenda of its own. When there are radical changes in the sectors, there is doubt as to whether there is an agenda. There are strong programmes, but they are not institutionalised because they are dependent on donor resources. The partners are in an economy of their own and have interests. These interests become a continuous exercise in the production of new development paradigms.”

*Euclides Gonçalves, Kaleidoscópio, Mozambique*

“Over the past decade, the Government of Mozambique has significantly expanded the coverage of the national social protection system. However, less than 10% of Mozambicans are covered by the contributory and non-contributory subsystem, which is based on three important challenges. The first challenge is that **social protection is not yet rooted in the national political debate** on the redistributive role of the state, but rather reduced to a technical issue, discussed behind closed doors between representatives of international development agencies, state technocrats and civil society platforms. (...) The second challenge is that **development agencies often impose their “best practices”, without taking into account the context of the country**. Outsourcing cash transfers to financial institutions is an example of an inappropriate solution for a country with high levels of illiteracy, unequal access to digital technologies and deficient infrastructure. Instead of strengthening national systems and state capacity, the World Bank opted to privatise the administration of cash transfers and promote their financialisation, which proved more costly as the government had to introduce hybrid systems. (...) The third challenge is **that the concept of social protection is often conceived in isolation from other social and economic policies**, with little intersectoral involvement. This silo mentality treats contributory and non-contributory social protection as separate issues. The combination of the various pillars of social protection would allow the universalisation of social protection, reducing selection costs, as well as inclusion and exclusion errors. More importantly, it would guarantee the constitutional right to social protection”.

*Ruth Castel-Branco, Social Policy Specialist Researcher at the Southern Centre for Inequality Studies at the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa*

“Donors cannot be considered equal. There are often major differences between them. In Mozambique, there is a group of donor countries called “the likeminded group”. This consists of the four Nordic countries, Ireland, Canada and the Netherlands. All of them are members of the 19 development partners, commonly known as the G19, which since 2009 have financed the Mozambican state budget. When direct budget support was suspended, they contributed with around 12% to the total state budget. (...). In many discussions within the G19, there has always been a certain degree of disagreement between the likeminded group and other donors. The former were more critical of the government’s slowness in fighting corruption and mismanagement, were more supportive of civil society and insisted on monitoring human rights violations. It is no coincidence that Sweden paid for Kroll’s audit of hidden debts. On the other hand, some of the other donors seem to be more willing to accommodate the interests of the Mozambican Government, namely with regard to areas in which there are major economic interests at stake, as is the case with France and Italy, with the interests of the main energy companies at stake, with respect to gas resources in Cabo Delgado.”

*Helge Rønning, professor emeritus at the University of Oslo and senior research associate at CMI, Bergen, Norway*

The pandemic has given more impetus to the urgency of this debate, but at the same time, there is a risk that it is skewing the data in favour of pragmatic arguments, making their application dependent on exceptional situations:

*"(...) in this relationship, who has the power to lead and control the design and implementation of activities and projects? In International Development Cooperation, the dominant tendency on the part of the donors of the*

*OECD-DAC is to finance activities and projects led by international NGDOs and supported in their implementation by local partners. (...) The problem is if this localisation of Development Cooperation is seen only as the result of a very particular context dominated by the pandemic. The signals from donors seem to point to this perception, as they allow the temporary suspension of activities and projects. But by opting for this decision, they jeopardise the economic livelihood of the local partners of the international NGDOs"* (ACEP, 2020).

**THE ACEP AND LOCALISATION:** for the ACEP it is problematic to discuss the issue of localisation as a mere question of efficiency and transaction costs saving. This approach favours a concept of International Development Cooperation as a "technical" field of "implementation of projects, focused on results", which neglects the founding principles, the values of international solidarity and the need to rebalance power relations in a context of global challenges.

## LOCALISATION AND THE CHALLENGE TO CONCEPTS OF PARTNERSHIP

The first challenge for partnerships is the sharing of responsibilities and the search for complementarities. This implies, however, that it is an equal sharing, in which the international NGO don't retain strategic decision-making powers, specifically those of a financial nature. It implies, as well, that the local NGO takes on the responsibilities of implementation.

The partnership needs to include a vision of the way forward, in which the contributions of the international NGO are situated in areas that promote the quality of the partnership and new competences of the partner NGO (e.g., new areas of intervention, access to new relationships, in particular with funding institutions or access to expertise and experience from other organisations and networks...). Without forgetting that mentioned above: the moral duty of using the status of international NGO as a "protective screen" for the partners, in situations of conflict and threat to national civil society and its leaders.

It is also necessary to move from a rationale based on projects to a rationale based on processes. The insistence on relationships based on a project rationale, from the outset with a fixed time frame and set resources, is the cause of much of the pressure to which international NGOs are themselves sometimes subjected, contaminating the relationship, which becomes dependent on the presentation of those results, with those resources, within that fixed time frame.

An approach to the localisation of cooperation as a process of empowerment requires a rationale of process, without a set time frame, in which a high value is placed on non-financial resources, allowing a subjective space/time of growth and lasting beyond this or that funding or project. Of course, this view is not compatible with the maintenance of unwieldy superstructures, as a result of which it contradicts the rationale of "gaining scale" in a merely quantitative, and not qualitative, sense.

**OTHER VOICES**

**HOW DO YOU EVALUATE THE POWER RELATIONS BETWEEN CSO IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AND HOW CAN THEY BE POSITIVELY CHANGED?**

“The power relations between CSO in International Development Cooperation are extremely skewed, generating distortions, reducing the effectiveness of interventions on the ground and having a mitigated impact on the beneficiaries. Not infrequently, bilateral and multilateral actors within the framework of international development cooperation are guided by purely market criteria, by linking their assistance to the business and trade interests of the respective states or organisations. These actors reflect the typical dominant behaviour of some states within the international development cooperation system, which seek to take political and economic advantage, tying the relationships they establish to business or strictly material gains. A change in international development cooperation policy is desirable and necessary. It largely depends on the main actors - States, Civil Society and International Organisations - becoming aware of the high degree of interdependence and chains of transmissions that exist today at a global level, a paradigmatic example of which is the occurrence of pandemics, which do not spare rich or poor. This should give rise to greater solidarity, complementarity and coordination of efforts, guided by ethical principles and based on a quest for increased social equality and better income distribution”.

*Nelvina Barreto, ex-consultant of the ADB and founder of MIGUILAN, Guinea-Bissau*

“From a perspective of Shared and Participatory Governance, i.e. of co-management of problems and challenges, which is increasingly necessary given their magnitude and gravity, mobilising all the protagonists of the Society (states, at national, sub-national, supranational and global level, companies, CSO - Civil Society Organisations and the Citizenry, in general), the role of the CSO is fundamental, since it can enable a break with the old dichotomy of twentieth century powers (State - Market; Public - Private) and bring new powers and dynamics of Participatory Democracy, which shake up and revitalise the sclerotic Representative Democracy. In International Development Cooperation (IDC), which has to deal with and face those global problems and challenges in new ways (with local impacts and responses), the role and powers claimed and carved out by the CSO in favour of those from the south and locally based, and not just those from the north and of a global nature (which usually have more power), are essential. They should have more significant funding and a more important role attributed to them, namely in programmes and measures to support IDC”.

*Rogério Roque Amaro, professor at ISCTE, Portugal*

A second challenge to partnerships is that of joint political influence, essential to break vicious circles that prevent a more balanced relationship of forces: e.g., the current policy for financing International Development Cooperation tends to generate a vicious circle of growth in the amounts of funding per contract, a practice that excludes national organisations (or international NGOs of modest financial scale), which will thus continue to be

excluded from direct international funding. This is a policy that perpetuates current power relationships, where a new category of organisations develops, the “eucalyptus organisations”, which live off intermediation, drying everything around them, and which in fact increase the “transaction costs” with duplicated bureaucracy, in both geographies.

**For the ACEP, localisation as a process of empowerment** implies the construction, with its partners, of relationships of close cooperation, the construction of useful knowledge and a shared vision:

- on the one hand, in a sharing of responsibilities and complementarities, in the process of civic intervention and organisational development;
- on the other hand, in joint action to influence the policies and conditions of the international financing for development.

## LOCALISATION AND THE “DECOLONISATION OF AID”

The reflection on localisation, in an approach to established power relations, also makes it possible to address the current debate on the “decolonisation of aid”. The perspective that has emerged as dominant has been proposed by recent civic movements to denounce racism, particularly in European societies:

*“Recent developments around the world have rightly brought back longstanding calls for structural change in the aid sector, including the implementation of antiracist measures both individually and as organisations, contributing towards what some refer to as the need to “decolonise international development”.* (Morris e Torre, 2020).

This approach to the decolonisation of cooperation and development needs to be inserted into a holistic outlook, and on a historical continuum, which comes from the processes of formal in-

dependence and the relations of cooperation established and on which the critical and more global perspective is sometimes lost. In fact, the induction of exogenous development models comes from that time, through financing, technical assistance, models of public administration, the formation of cadres and based on relations that are not very egalitarian, when not paternalistic or overly prescriptive.

The permanence of these new forms of domination is evidenced by the director of Concord, a coalition of European NGOs:

*“The issue of ‘decolonisation’ is becoming a ‘sexy’ topic and if we are not careful, it will end up being just a catchphrase rather than a very serious issue. All actors in the global North must be willing to look at themselves in the mirror and realise the extent of the efforts needed in this respect,*



*to overcome both our historical baggage and our current neo-colonial approaches. Every part of the global economic system that we impose on others must be re-examined. All parts of the system of international governance in which rich countries impose the rules must be reviewed. All aspects of international trade must be rebalanced. And every part of the "aid" system should be reoriented towards giving power and access to actors in the global South". (Cox, 2021).*

If this is a significant challenge for the sectors of European Cooperation, built within formally democratic societies, it will be even more so for a society like the Portuguese, in which decolonisation occurred in parallel with the overthrow of dictatorship, creating the false idea that the end of the dictatorship also meant the end of colonial ideology and practices.

On the other hand, the reality of countries with whom we cooperate is not static. In countries where there have been no significant conflicts in the last 20 or 30 years, slower progress has been made than expected by the local populations at the time of independence, but clearly they have been positive and very significant - from education to health, from transports to communications or the economy in general. The national

technical capabilities of each country have contributed decisively to this, a factor that the European International Development Cooperation institutions often fail to take into account, maintaining completely outdated relationships regarding the sharing of responsibilities, resisting any loss of control or reduction in their role.

An example cited at the Meeting of NGO from Portuguese-Speaking Countries - Paths of Citizenship (Lisbon, October 2021) was that of Guinea-Bissau, where some international cooperation with very significant political and financial weight tends to contribute towards the emptying and replacement of the state. This phenomenon feeds the construction of parallel structures to manage ODA resources, using foreign organisations, which dry up national structures (both state and NGO), attracting their staff through better wage conditions and without transfers of power at the level of implementation, and even less so at the strategic level.

**For the ACEP, associating "localisation of Development Cooperation" with "decolonisation of Development Cooperation" can thus be a path of positive affirmation** and respect for ownership, one of the theoretically consensual conditions for the quality of cooperation and development. Saying "I have a million euros here and I think the best thing for you would be to do A, B and C, but I am open to other suggestions from you" or saying "I have a million euros here to improve your well-being, say how you want to use it" are two radically different attitudes, which do not preclude debate between the parties (and at the limit, disagreement), but which place it on different bases.

## THE DEBATE ON THE QUALITY OF DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AND THE ROLE OF ODA

The debate on the quality of International Development Cooperation has gone through some notable phases, among which the Paris Declaration on "Aid Effectiveness" (2005) and, later, in Accra and Busan, on "Development Effectiveness" are of particular importance. Over time, the "official" process incorporated not only new actors but also a broader vision, as proposed by the Open Forum of CSO (Istanbul, 2010). It has moved from the narrow field of "aid" to the field of "development" (now referring to Development Cooperation), albeit continuing to put forward the Paris Principles – Ownership, Alignment, Harmonisation, Results-Based Management, Mutual Accountability – and adding that of Transparency (Acra, 2008).

*"The Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (2011) reinforces the principles (...) (but) recognises that progress made in implementing the agenda of effectiveness remains far below expectations and that the architecture of international aid has undergone profound changes in the last decade that need to be incorporated in the future, extending this 'aid effectiveness' agenda to a broader perspective of 'development effectiveness'". (Camões, I.P., SD).*

Ten years after Busan, having already gone through a "minimalist" global agenda – the MDG - and with an agenda centred on sustainable development - the SDG - under implementation, there are those who argue that the issue of the quality of cooperation and development has lost its "relevance". This is not the opinion of the *Open Forum for Development Effectiveness*, of which ACEP is a member, of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for the Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and many of the signatories of the Paris, Accra or Busan Declarations.



**QUANTITY/QUALITY:** The approach we sometimes see of priority over quantity (as happened throughout the MDG process) raises, in our view, wrongly, the question of how to get results and the type of results needed.

The SDG agenda and the need to increase the volume of financing for development does not mean doing away with the criteria of quality of processes and results: Ownership by local partners, Alignment with the recipient countries' policies, Harmonisation of procedures, Results-Based Management, Mutual Accountability and Transparency. They are even more important against an international background of worsening inequalities and threats to the ideals of participatory democracy and the rule of law.

In this context, the OECD DAC should have increased responsibilities, specifically a greater demand for transparency in peer review processes. Its participation should be expanded to all stakeholders in International Development Cooperation, affording them credibility and promoting them as examples to others, namely the private sector, against a background of growth of the type and weight of donors that do not obey any monitoring or democratic control systems.

Another issue that we need to mention is the relationship between public aid versus other financial instruments. The last decade has been marked by the emergence of various development financing mechanisms, with Development financing often being confused with Development Cooperation financing.

When we talk about financing for Development Cooperation, we are talking about a public policy, in Portugal, in the EU or in other OECD DAC member countries. This is the frame of reference for the debate that we believe must be urgently held in an open manner, also in Portugal.

It is a fact that, at the same time as other instruments of financing for development appear, there has been a decrease in the relative weight of Official Development Assistance. The pandemic that we have been experiencing has shown, however, that the private investment/ public investment and Official Development Assistance dilemma is a false one, which has made more vulnerable societies where the state is unable to respond to the social rights of populations, and in particular to the right to

health. According to the head of EU external relations, European private investment in Africa has already reached 200 billion euros, while ODA stands at 20 billion. However, when it comes to dealing with the pandemic, it has been Development Cooperation (European, Chinese or Russian, it is not important) and funding of the major philanthropists that have been supporting national states' responses to their populations in low-income countries.

*"Counter-cycle external financing will continue to be much needed to recover from the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. There are many reasons that warrant this. First, in Sub-Saharan African countries, the IMF estimates that additional funding of 30 billion US dollars is needed to avoid governments having to make difficult fiscal adjustments: shortfalls are already estimated of 290 billion US dollars between 2020 and 2023 (IMF, 2020b). Many governments, especially in Africa and Asia, have a narrower set of financing options than advanced economies, and this diminishes in times of crisis. Development Assistance is one of the few sources of financing available*

*when the volume from other sources falls - such as borrowing on the global capital markets and tax revenues - but the needs are increasing. This situation makes ODA even more necessary and also has a greater impact now than when the donor countries may have, in the medium term, recovered from the crisis. Third, solidarity in relation to certain basic rights and poverty reduction were among the main motivations for the increase in ODA at the end of the Cold War. Similar arguments should apply now, so that each country can be in a position to respond to the health emergency, resume economic growth and access global public goods (GPG) (including the development of vaccines)" (Carlon, et al., 2021).*

On the other hand, some of the new mechanisms of financing are themselves partly based on public money – blended finance is an example of this. Defined as a way of leveraging private financing, the practice has shown that it has served more to leverage European or North American private interests, characterised by an absence of support for low-income countries or for services to the neediest populations.

As various civil society organisations and networks have demonstrated, experience in this domain entails significant risks (Interpares, 2021), in particular:

- an absence of additionality, as there is a risk of using public money on projects that, due to their lucrative nature, would already be of interest to the private sector, regardless of the additional public investment;
- a lack of transparency and accountability, as the private sector generally discloses little information regarding contracts, financing arrangements or interest rates;
- a risk of aid tied to business interests;
- very high opportunity costs in the use of public resources that could be channelled by other means;

- conflicts of interest when projects are oriented towards profit and not towards social welfare;

- lack of ownership by partner countries;

- risk of inducing the privatisation of sectors that should be public, such as water or health.

**THE ACEP AND ALTERNATIVES TO BLENDED FINANCE:** As an alternative to blended finance, seen as essential in the dominant narrative to close the funding gap for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), the importance of the following should be stressed:

- favouring formats of Development Assistance with proven results, such as support for state budgets, which enable the strengthening of public systems, such as health, education and social protection;
- combatting tax evasion and illicit financial flows, which undermine the ability of governments to finance public services in an equitable manner;
- encouraging debt cancellation, through a debt resolution mechanism under the auspices of the United Nations. It is not enough to encourage debt suspension processes such as the G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative or the Common Framework. Debt cancellation is an urgent matter, in order to free up resources to fight the pandemic, achieve the SDG and promote development centred on people and human rights.

**OTHER VOICES**

**HOW DO YOU SEE THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PRIVATE SECTOR IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AND THE POSSIBLE RISK OF THE PRIVATISATION OF OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE?**

"Another type of cooperation is under construction: partnerships between peers. Neither does Africa want the continuation of the cooperation model of the last half century, nor is Europe (and in particular, its public opinion) willing to insist on a model that has been wearing thin. Being an optimist, partly because of my nature, partly due to a shortcoming of my profession (if I weren't, I would have "changed my field" a long time ago), I believe that the changes underway can help to build a better future. But it isn't risk-free. A relationship less contaminated by the political and economic interests of nations is threatened by corporate interests, which (let's not be naive) always underlie the growing importance of corporate social responsibility. The diversion of resources from official development assistance to the encouragement of investment in emerging economies risks becoming merely a mechanism for widening inequalities of various kinds.

Confirming the "good will" of this optimism and anticipating the risks that threaten it will fundamentally depend on the transparency and responsibility with which the process of paradigm shift will be managed. And, unfortunately, there are worrying signs of reduced transparency in official development assistance (also, but not only) as a result of the increasing importance of the private sector in ODA. Counter to the proliferation of systems for managing and monitoring implementation of development interventions, in recent years, we have witnessed attempts to reduce the quantity and quality of information provided by governments and multilateral institutions regarding their operations. And there are (legitimate) fears that the increasing privatisation of ODA will deepen this trend.

We are at a point of transition and its success will fundamentally depend on the ability of public opinion to pressure political and economic decision-makers to ensure the common good governs their actions. What happens in the global management of this pandemic will be a good indicator of the direction we are taking.”  
*Rui Santos, president of CESO, Portugal*

“As long as it is properly framed and regulated, I see a strengthening of the role of the private sector, both in “donor” and “recipient” countries, in the implementation of actions that result from IDC in general, as well as in the management of IDC itself (through the allocation of a package), in this case, limited to interventions aimed at improving the use of the potential of economic relations, in the mutual interest of the states directly involved. However, I cannot imagine a kind of privatisation of Official Development Assistance, or even of its management, especially in terms of institutional reinforcement or humanitarian aid to the “recipient states”. It would be a complete perversion of the principles of “aid” and their replacement by a “mercantile” mindset. The COVID-19 crisis has exposed the limitations of the private replacing the public, particularly in its social function, even in developed countries with consolidated, strong and autonomous regulatory institutions, which is not the case in countries receiving Official Assistance.”  
*Avelino Lopes, former Minister of Economy of Cape Verde*

It is important to reiterate that, under a public policy based on values, it is not acceptable for the investment of public money in International Development Cooperation to be considered “the answer to new challenges” if it is used to support the European or North American private sectors and as something “inappropriate for the time” when it is the main response to the financing of social policies and the fight against inequalities in low-income countries. The same kind of concerns should colour the debate about so-called “partnerships with the private sector” (in particular, but not only, with the for-profit private sector). Also in Portugal this proposal has become part of the discourse of some “aid elites”, although, until now, with unknown impacts (to date, as far as we know, there has been no evaluation of a single case – whether successful or unsuccessful).

In fact, examples of partnerships with the private sector in Portugal have been translated mainly into initiatives to support the internationalisation of Portuguese companies, often creating situations of tied aid, and not in projects modelled by the motivations and principles of IDC. This type of argument also tends to be based on another misconception, which is knowing which private sector we are

talking about when we talk about support for the private sector – whether that of European or OECD countries or the private sector of the so-called “partner countries”, whose development is important from an International Development Cooperation perspective.

But when we talk about the European private sector, it is important not to take a superficial approach, out of distrust or prejudice. It is important not to stereotype it – just as we should not stereotype NGOs or other types of cooperation actors. There are no intrinsically “good” or intrinsically “bad” types of actors. We must seek to build platforms for collective work among all those who have common principles. As highlighted at the Meeting of NGOs from Portuguese-Speaking Countries - Pathways to Citizenship (Lisbon, October 2021), it is a mistake to treat NGOs and the private sector as impermeable blocs. The private sector is highly plural and makes very different interventions with different starting points and positions. There is a private sector that acts as investor, financier, social responsibility agent or that makes a technical contribution. “*Treating the private sector as a single entity, like treating Africa as a single entity, is prejudice and it blinds us*” (ACEP, 2021).

OTHER VOICES

HOW DO YOU SEE THE ROLE OF OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE IN THE FUTURE, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE INCLUSION OF PSI IN ODA STATISTICS?

“ODA has a crucial role to play in tackling the impacts of the current crisis and supporting a recovery centred on human rights, gender equality and a just transition, as well as meeting international goals such as the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals.

In recent years, the mainstream narrative has been arguing that ODA, and public finance more broadly, will be insufficient to meet the huge funding gaps that remain to be filled if the SDGs are to be achieved. This goes hand in hand with the narrative that places ‘the private sector’ at the heart of resource mobilisation efforts. In this context, blended finance has come to dominate the development finance discourse. In line with this trend, development finance institutions have been shifting towards the direct mobilisation of private finance for development, increasingly using concessional finance from donors as leverage. However, the evidence required to confirm and justify this narrative as the key path to financing and achieving the SDGs is lagging far behind.

Within this context, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) launched a process in 2012 to modernise “the measuring and monitoring of external development finance provided by its members”, and to review the ODA concept. This included a commitment to better reflect, in ODA, donor efforts to catalyse private sector investment in development and the related use of private sector instruments (PSIs). These include loans, equity investments, mezzanine finance provided to private sector enterprises, and guarantees extended to financiers who back them. New (though provisional) reporting arrangements for PSIs were then agreed in 2018.

Latest Eurodad report on PSIs highlights several issues that the donor community should take into consideration. These can be grouped into three broad categories:

- 1. issues related to the fundamental nature and role of ODA;
- 2. transparency and accountability issues; and
- 3. statistical issues, threatening the quality and integrity of ODA as a statistical measure.

As this report shows, there are key issues at stake with regards to the implications for the quantity and quality of ODA. The main implications include: the dilution of the distinctive role and value of ODA compared to other types of development finance; a potentially weaker evidence base on which decision-making on ODA allocation would be based; and compromised transparency and accountability standards. Additionally, depending on the outcome of the pending decisions around how to calculate the grant equivalent of PSIs, there is a risk of diverting scarce ODA resources away from uses for which evidence of impact exists and which ODA is better placed to serve, towards others for which such evidence is still elusive.

For example, by supporting domestic governments to strengthen those sectors that are proven to tackle inequality – such as public health, education, social protection – or by

supporting developing countries in raising taxes progressively and spending them in an accountable manner. Last but not least, the global narrative stressing the need to fill the SDG funding gap with private sector resources shall likely encourage the increased use of ODA in direct support of private sector engagement. Thus, in the years to come, it can be expected that PSI will further increase – some donors have already stated their ambition to allocate additional resources to PSIs.<sup>1</sup>

Going forward, CSOs have a critical role to play in this process in terms of protecting the quantity and quality of ODA and in ensuring that ODA responds to its core mandate of eradicating poverty and inequalities, including agreed international commitments to 'leave no one behind'."

*EURODAD – European Network on Debt and Development*

<sup>1</sup> EBA (2020) Mobilising private development finance: implications for overall aid allocations. Available at: <https://eba.se/en/rapporter/mobilising-private-development-finance-implications-for-overall-aid-allocations/11579/>.

In recent years, this strategy has, moreover, revealed a risk of privatisation of Official Development Assistance, through mechanisms such as blended finance, as mentioned above, or the delegation of the management of public funds of various types, whether bilateral or multilateral.

The argument for the need to invest in these mechanisms to "gain scale" and a greater capacity to influence at international level has been revealed more as a way of responding to internal needs, specifically in terms of preserving "aid bureaucracies", than of achieving progress in fighting inequality under a more equitable form of international development. The entry into the field of International Development Cooperation of other international funders with different frames of reference, as is the case of China, should not, in our view, be used to accentuate (or justify) the decreasing financial weight of ODA and devalue its role.

On the contrary, it represents a challenge of reiterating its values and principles and the distinctive role it should play, as long as it reinforces its quality controls and as a way of affording legitimacy to ODA funding countries within an international debate on a Global Public Goods agenda.

**OTHER VOICES**

**IN THE CURRENT CONTEXT, HOW IMPORTANT IS A GLOBAL PUBLIC GOODS AGENDA?**

“The new global phenomena pose enormous challenges to governance. Nation States, alone or through traditional multilateral cooperation mechanisms, are no longer capable of adopting and implementing public policies that address issues such as climate change, pandemics or artificial intelligence. Globalisation, greater interconnection between states and the emergence of new actors at the national and international level are factors that reinforce this trend and highlight the need for a global public goods agenda. The adoption of a global public goods agenda must take into account the need for justice and equity in the setting of priorities. This implies a permanent dialogue between more developed countries and developing countries. Some progress is being made in this direction, as shown for example by the global concern with the management of the COVID-19 pandemic, namely in terms of the distribution of vaccines to less developed countries, but there is still a long way to go before full equity is achieved in setting the global public goods agenda, which will undoubtedly benefit everyone.”

*Geraldo Martins, former Minister of Finance of Guinea-Bissau*

“At a time when we are faced with global threats and challenges, such as climate change, a loss of biodiversity, the management of unequally distributed water that is losing its quality, new forms of poverty and social exclusion, increases in inequality, cultural arrogance and intolerance, the emptying of democracy, the manipulations and speculations of the dominant economy and globalised financial systems, and destruction of the lands and values of Communities, among others, it is fundamental and even decisive to place them on the agenda of global debates and struggles, not only as Public Issues, but increasingly as Common Issues (as in Commons), since it is not enough to involve the Private sector and states, but it is also essential to mobilise and hold jointly accountable the Community and, therefore, the whole of Society, within a framework of Shared and Participatory Governance.”

*Rogério Roque Amaro, professor at ISCTE, Portugal*



## FOR THE ACEP, IT IS IMPORTANT TO HIGHLIGHT SOME ELEMENTS OF CONTINUITY AND DISRUPTION:

- / We reaffirm Development Cooperation as the noblest area of international relations, because it is based on ethical principles, in the light of which policies and relationships should be defined, in a field that is also that of international solidarity;
- / We believe that the COVID-19 pandemic has forced the creation of conditions to uncover fundamental and urgent issues, such as the need to focus on inequalities, on the indispensability of states capable of guaranteeing access to public goods, on the irreplaceable role of ODA as a central instrument of a globalisation that defends human rights or on the urgency of breaking with cooperation that replaces local actors, generating new forms of colonisation of development;
- / We conclude that the strengthening of ODA is essential not only because it is the only financing instrument based on principles of solidarity and which reflects the contribution of citizens of rich countries to the fight against inequality, but also because it is the only instrument that includes mechanisms of peer review and the only one geared towards providing responses to social rights and support for public policies in these areas;
- / It is clear that a serious and rational debate on the localisation of Development Cooperation, as a process for affording autonomy and empowerment, is necessary. This process should be based on partnerships that are renewed in the ongoing construction of shared visions;
- / An approach to localisation centred on power relations makes it possible to associate the “localisation of development cooperation” with the “decolonisation of development”. This approach allows a critical look to development policies and financing systems where respect for ownership constitutes an indispensable condition for the quality of cooperation;
- / Finally, we consider that this is a debate from which the NGOD (and their Platform) cannot be exempted, as they need to face definitions of their own identity, with clarification of their role and the need to go beyond corporatism, building alliances of progress.



PART II

**PORTUGUESE  
DEVELOPMENT  
COOPERATION**

TOWARDS A STRATEGY  
TO RESPOND TO  
GLOBAL CHALLENGES  
AND TO THE GOALS  
OF INTERNATIONAL  
SOLIDARITY

At the end of 2020, the Strategic Concept of Portuguese Development Cooperation 2014-2020, which defined and guided, in general terms, the implementation of the Portuguese Development Cooperation policy, came to an end. In the preface to the aforementioned strategy, the then Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Luís de Campos Ferreira, already indicated the political direction of the Portuguese Development Cooperation for that seven-year period, by explicitly mentioning that "*Portugal*

*has to know how to combine development cooperation with other areas of foreign policy, namely economic diplomacy and external cultural action*". As the document is no longer valid, it is necessary to undertake a serious assessment and share it with all stakeholders, as a condition for giving credibility to the options for the next period. With regard to these last seven years, there are some indicators that are not very satisfactory, which we address in the following paragraphs.

**The change in narrative of the 2007-2014 Strategic Vision...**

*"The fundamental mission of the Portuguese Development Cooperation is to contribute to the realisation of a better and more stable world, particularly in Portuguese-speaking countries, characterised by economic and social development, and the consolidation and deepening of peace, democracy, human rights and the rule of law".*

**... for the Strategic Concept of the Portuguese Development Cooperation 2014-2020:**

*"The design of the Portuguese Development Cooperation policy takes into account the new national and international opportunities and challenges, as well as the commitments assumed internationally, and must be aligned and be instrumental to national interests and respond effectively and in a structural manner to the goals and priorities of partner countries".*

**A PROBLEMATIC INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE**

In 2012, the Portuguese Development Cooperation agency – the Portuguese Institute for Development Support (IPAD) – was merged with Instituto Camões, responsible for management of the Portuguese language and culture, an act warranted by the need to apply cuts in the public administration to tackle the economic crisis at the time.

However, the political decision not to reverse this situation had repercussions on the agency's ability to respond to the challenges of the Portuguese Development Cooperation. This was felt on the one hand through a depletion of human resources and, at the same time, of institutional

memory, and on the other hand through budget cuts to which it was subjected, a distressing situation for the agency that is responsible for managing and coordinating Portuguese Development Cooperation policy.

This reduction in investment, justified at first by the need to reduce costs, stems from a progressive decrease in the political and strategic weight of Development Cooperation, within the framework of Portuguese public policies, including foreign policy. The disinvestment has implications for the public visibility of Development Cooperation itself and the (lack of) a communication strategy with society.

**For the ACEP, under the new strategy...**

A higher value must be placed on the Portuguese Development Cooperation agency and it must be provided with the human and financial resources necessary for the definition and management of programmatic policies. Its mission must also be clarified. The Portuguese Development Cooperation policy must have autonomy in relation to policies for the promotion of Portuguese culture and language.

**THE SHRINKAGE IN ODA**

In these years of validity of the strategy, there was also a conspicuous and progressive reduction in investment in Official Development Assistance (ODA), especially at the bilateral level, and a focus on multilateral aid (representing about two thirds of ODA). This trend places Portuguese Development Cooperation in an increasingly peripheral position and could compromise decades of investment, specifically in its relationship with the main development cooperation partner countries.

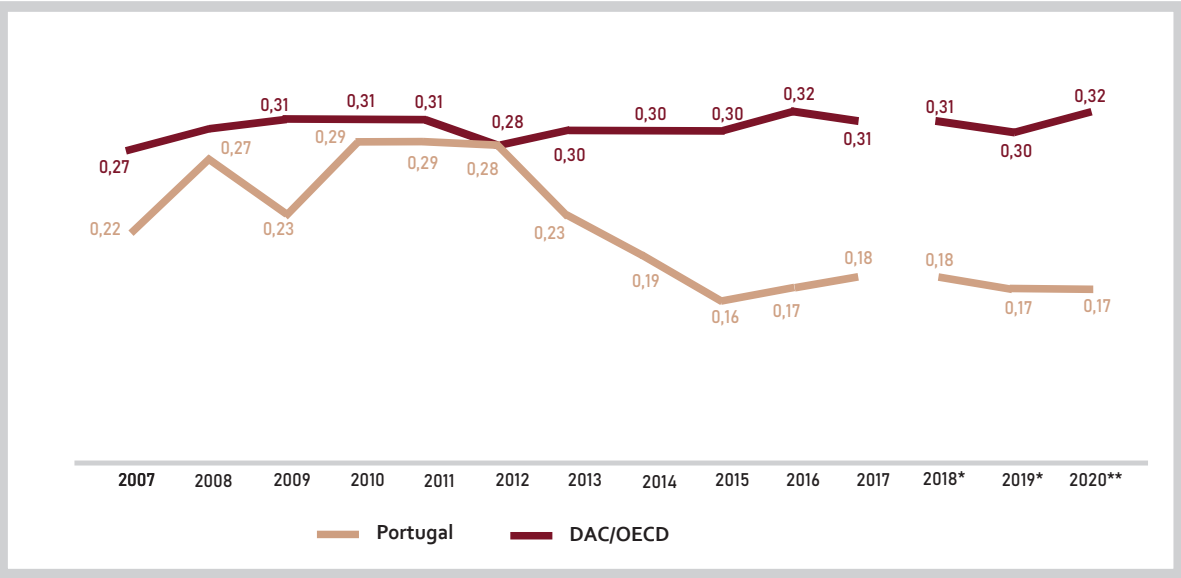
As the following graph shows, Portuguese ODA has been in progressive decline since 2011, the year in which there was also a decrease in average terms of ODA values in DAC/OECD countries, although the later recovered in the following years. In counter-cycle, the fall recorded by Portuguese ODA in 2011 was accentuated in the following years, representing in 2019 and 2020 (preliminary data) around 0.17% of GNI.

We consider it important to highlight the drop of around 10.6%, in real terms, in Portuguese ODA in 2020, the year in which the pandemic struck. This year, most DAC/OECD countries increased their ODA budgets to address global public health challenges and mitigate their effects, with a slight increase of around 4.1%.

It is therefore urgent in this context to reflect on the value of ODA as an instrument for reducing asymmetries at a global level and how we can make it more effective and more targeted. It is equally important to focus on communicating

the impact that bilateral cooperation has on the daily lives of those who benefit from it and thus make it something more “palpable” and easily perceptible by most public opinion (and in strict compliance with the ethical codes of communication, which has not always happened in initiatives supported or sponsored by Portuguese Development Cooperation).

Percentage of GNI dedicated to ODA of the average of the DAC/OECD countries and Portugal (trend between 2007 and 2020)



Source: Camões, IP website and OECD/DAC statistics, 2021  
\* Accounted for using the 'grant equivalent'  
\*\* Preliminary data accounted for using the 'grant equivalent'

**For the ACEP, under the new strategy...**  
Portugal must develop a progressive plan to avoid a further decline in ODA and align itself with international commitments. Portugal should recognise that ODA is a unique financial instrument for tackling inequalities and guaranteeing access to basic social rights, especially for the most vulnerable countries (the so-called Least Developed Countries). To this end, a progressive timetable must be drawn up with annual commitments, so that ODA reaches 0.7% of GNI by 2030, in conjunction with an action plan for the new cooperation strategy.

## THE STRENGTHENING OF MULTILATERALISM AND THE WEAKENING OF BILATERAL RELATIONS

The year 2015 represents a reversal in the amounts made available for multilateral and bilateral aid. Until then, Portuguese Development Cooperation prioritised its bilateral relations with partner countries. Since 2015, there has been an exponential increase in investment in multilateral cooperation and the strengthening of the Portuguese presence in multilateral bod-

ies, above all the European Union, which, in our view, is intrinsically related to the focus on delegated cooperation (a point explored later in this document).

This decision to strengthen multilateralism represented a reduction in investment in bilateral cooperation. Between 2011 and 2019, bilateral

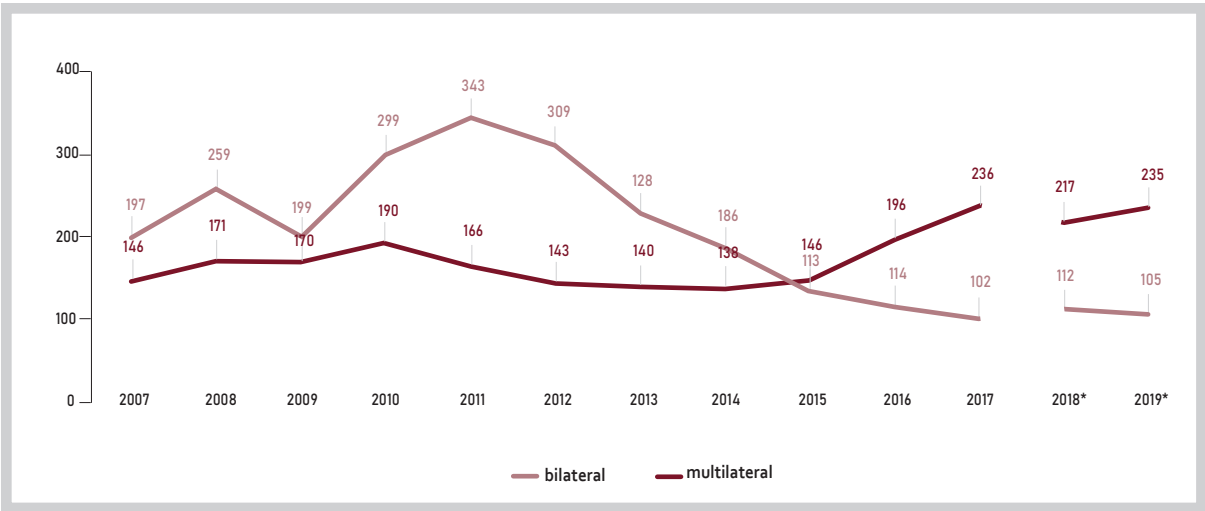
cooperation declined from 67% of disbursed ODA to just 36%, as shown in the chart below on the distribution of bilateral and multilateral ODA.

The strengthening of multilateralism is a positive sign, given the major international challenges we face (the climate crisis, inequalities, poverty, populism, etc.), and is one of Portugal's flagship approaches in dealings with international bodies. However, it is necessary to seek a balance with the national Development Cooperation agenda, guided by values and by a global vision of Portugal's contribution to a more equitable world. To date, it has not been possible to assess the impact on the ground of this progres-

sive reduction in investment in bilateral cooperation. However, it is important to underline that it is within the framework of bilateral cooperation that programmes with closer ties and greater flexibility are carried out with partner countries.

Times of crisis, such as the one we are facing with the current pandemic, have been marked by greater flexibility in programmes and a greater ease of dialogue with actors of bilateral cooperation, not only in the extension of project deadlines, but also in the integration of unplanned activities (although this dialogue has also taken place at EU level, through its local delegations).

Portuguese ODA - bilateral, multilateral and total - between 2007 and 2019 (in million euros, absolute values)



Source: Camões, IP website and OECD/DAC statistics, 2021

\* Accounted for using the 'grant equivalent'

**For the ACEP, under the new strategy...**  
Specific reference should be made to the need for greater balance between the amounts disbursed for multilateral and bilateral cooperation. Bilateral cooperation should be intensified, so as not to compromise the work that has been done with partner countries, specifically in the context of the PALOP and Timor-Leste. The balance between the national and international agenda must be explained under the new strategy.

# THE NEED TO RECOVER THE VALUES OF COOPERATION AND CONSISTENT DIALOGUE

It is particularly important to take this opportunity to discuss the principles and values that should guide the actions of Portuguese Development Cooperation, since there are numerous actors involved and the aim is to increase the involvement of the private sector. This actor requires a strict frame of reference, given that its purposes and values may not be consistent with those of International Development Cooperation.

It is crucial to question procedures, guide actions and focus on transparency, which is valid for all types of actors. It is also essential to invest in the independent and participatory evaluation of Portuguese Development Cooperation processes and programmes, as this is an area that has fallen short of what is desirable in terms of its intervention. Evaluation is the responsibility of Camões, IP. This stage of public policies is central for correcting any failures and learning from previous programmes, in order to increase its effectiveness and quality.

In January 2019, the editorial team of *Mundo Crítico*<sup>1</sup> published six proposals for debate regarding Portuguese Development Cooperation. Among some of the concerns already enumerated above, there are two aspects that are equally relevant: research/production of knowledge and communication and connection with public opinion. It is important to question how Portuguese scientific production has contributed towards responding to the challenges of the sector and, on the other hand, what public perception and knowledge society holds regarding what Portuguese Development Cooperation actually is.

There is therefore a need for a new broad consensus regarding the vision for Portuguese Development Cooperation in the face of the new

universal challenges, especially at a time of slow (and still ongoing) recovery from the pandemic. The invaluable platform for dialogue and broad consensus among all actors – the Portuguese Cooperation Forum – is increasingly an information platform for the Secretary of State, lacks criteria for representation and/or representativeness, and, over the last two years, has not even met with the anticipated regularity.

As a civil society organisation, we look forward

## The process of constructing the Swiss Development Cooperation strategy

In February 2020, Switzerland adopted its international development cooperation strategy 2021-24<sup>2</sup> which, for the first time, was subject to a public consultation that included civil society, academics, the private sector and the public administration, receiving 249 responses over several months of discussions. According to the document, the new strategy will seek to be more effective than in the past, based on three criteria:

- 1) the needs of populations in developing countries;
- 2) the long-term interests of Switzerland,
- 3) the added value of its international cooperation vis-à-vis other countries. The strategy also includes a detailed financial plan for the next four years.

<sup>1</sup> Magazine dedicated to topics related to International Cooperation and Development, edited by the ACEP, in partnership with CEsA/ISEG. See more at [www.mundocritico.org](http://www.mundocritico.org)

<sup>2</sup> Access a summary of the document, in English, at [https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/deza/en/documents/die-deza/strategie/broschuere-IZA-strategie-2021-2024\\_EN.pdf](https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/deza/en/documents/die-deza/strategie/broschuere-IZA-strategie-2021-2024_EN.pdf)

to engaging in the debate on the priority areas of this policy, the instruments to be used and the priority actors to be involved.

It will be based on a balance of the previous Strategic Vision and an assessment of the challenges posed on a global scale (increasing political polarisation, the return of nationalism, new situations of fragility, inequalities between

and within countries, migration, etc.) from which Portuguese Development Cooperation should outline the new course and start a new period of validity.

It is up to us, as a civil society organisation, to look for the appropriate ways and alliances to influence the final document, monitor its application and question any deviations.

**For the ACEP, under the new strategy...**

Channels for dialogue between all the actors involved in Portuguese Development Cooperation must be created and/or bolstered, in particular the Cooperation Forum, with regular meetings, clear criteria for representation and participation, the creation of thematic working groups and room should be found for the involvement of actors from partner countries, in order to intensify their participation in the definition of programmes and enhance effectiveness in the implementation phase.

## THE FOCUS ON DELEGATED COOPERATION

In recent years, in particular from 2015 onwards, Portuguese Development Cooperation has focused on the management and implementation of programmes delegated by the European Union to member states – the so-called delegated cooperation. The imbalance that has been created at different levels (human and financial resources, visibility, political discourse, etc.) between the various components of Portuguese Cooperation in favour of delegated cooperation is widely acknowledged. The institutional weaknesses of Portuguese Development Cooperation results in a narrowing of the space for the bilateral component and of the space for autonomous civil society initiatives.

These and other consequences for Portuguese Development Cooperation need to be reflected on and debated, otherwise the thread that separates a national institution for the promotion of public policy from an agency for implementing the programmes of others will become increasingly tenuous.

This ambivalence ends up being harmful on both fronts: the public policy institution sees its role and resources diminished by the rationale of being an institution dependent on the state budget in an area without political weight; on the “implementing agency” front, since it is obliged to implement projects and programmes within a normative framework that is unfavourable to the operability and flexibility that it requires.

It is therefore necessary to have an open and comprehensive discussion on delegated cooperation, starting with its role under the ambit of Portuguese Cooperation, and the conditions for participating in it. It should be discussed at all stages, i.e., from the moment of defining the programmes in Brussels and with the institutions of the partner countries, to their implementation on the ground.

The level of information and transparency with respect to these programmes is residual, although there have been improvements over

the last two years, in particular with the creation of an online space dedicated to delegated cooperation programmes on the Camões, IP website (around a decade after the first project)<sup>3</sup>.

The delegated cooperation programmes that Portugal has been managing are mainly concentrated in the traditional countries of Portuguese Development Cooperation (PALOP-TL), so there is no geographical dispersion (unlike with trust funds, which have had Portuguese participation in countries such as Colombia or the Sahel region).

In the phases of prior negotiation, there has also been an effort to involve various actors. But it is

important to bolster consultation and participation, in particular by creating effective ways for CSO to participate in the various stages of the process. This could, moreover, be an indirect way of promoting the participation of counterpart CSO in partner countries, especially countries where the sphere of influence of civil society has been reduced. Finally, the evaluation of the programmes still lacks transparency.

## PORTUGUESE DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION: STATE POLICY OR INSTRUMENT OF OTHER POLICIES?

Portuguese Development Cooperation should be characterised by an approach based on continuity, regardless of the prevailing governing mandates, with a political consensus around the importance of this dimension of foreign policy in order to mitigate international imbalances and in favour of global development. Notwithstanding this consensus, in recent years there have been various changes in strategy, approach and partnerships, without extensive reflection and discussion on those same options.

As far as Parliament is concerned, we consider it useful and urgent to create a subcommittee dedicated to Development Cooperation, as a space for dialogue between the different actors and parliamentarians. In addition, Parliament should also be involved in the discussion and approval of the new strategy.

It is therefore essential to capitalise on this moment of discussion of the new strategy to discuss Portuguese Development Cooperation

as a policy of state, Portugal's role in the world, its contribution to Development and its added values.

This debate must go beyond the "development community", which shares a common language, and integrate others, in particular the Parliament, in order to reinforce its political weight, calling for parliamentarians to be held jointly accountable and focusing on public communication and dialogue with society, namely through the media.

The current pandemic is particularly favourable to discussion of the need for greater solidarity on a global scale and to alleviate the social imbalances that we are witnessing within and between countries and continents. Civil society, on its front of Education for Development and Global Citizenship, can play a key role in this context, in liaison with universities.

<sup>3</sup> For consultation at <https://www.instituto-camoes.pt/activity/o-que-fazemos/cooperacao/cooperacao-na-pratica/projetos-com-a-ue>



### ODA and the impact of the pandemic

The pandemic turmoil we are facing demands a robust international response and solidarity and ODA appears as a unique instrument for dealing with this crisis. Proof of this was the substantial increase in levels of ODA in 2020 in the overall balance of DAC/OECD countries (with Portugal in counter-cycle), after

several years of decline. Despite the slight increase, the OECD warns that more investment is needed in ODA in the coming years, as a financial instrument of solidarity, channelled mainly towards the less advanced economies. According to Eurodad, the richest countries invested in foreign aid only 1% of the funds they channelled into mitigating the impact of the pandemic<sup>4</sup>.

## THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND THE POST-ODA NARRATIVE

Over the last decade, but in particular after 2015, the political discourses of the countries that finance global development are aligned with the need to channel other flows for development, in addition to ODA. In Portugal, the progressive reduction in investment in ODA and the growing importance of private sector involvement in development programmes deserve special attention from civil society and public debate.

There is consensus on the contribution that the private sector can make towards development. However, it is equally important to discuss approaches, practices and the partnerships being drawn up on the ground. Which private sector are we talking about – local or foreign? How to ensure that development is prioritised rather than mere profit? And what kind of partnerships can be built with civil society?

The greater involvement of the private sector must respect a clear and coherent development strategy, based on the international declarations (such as the Busan and Addis Ababa Declarations and the Kampala Principles). It should also provide mechanisms for monitoring by other development actors, as well as mechanisms for assessing risks and their impact on human rights and sustainable development (social, cultural, economic and environmental).

In addition, ODA should be bolstered and channelled into international solidarity programmes, especially for the “least advanced” economies and in areas such as health, education, civil society and the strengthening of the rule of law and peace. Over the last few years, Portugal has experimented with new ways of financing its international cooperation programmes, alongside traditional ODA. In general terms, the following are of particular note:

- the quest for scale through its role as implementer of European Development Cooperation, using delegated cooperation, instead of using its own funds and the strengthening of bilateral cooperation;
- the deepening of collaboration with international financial institutions and the restructuring of the role of its development financing agency – SOFID, which resulted in the SOFID Strategic Plan 2017-2021;
- the development of new instruments for private sector engagement, such as blended finance mechanisms;
- the creation of the Lusophone Compact with the African Development Bank, for the implementation of joint private sector investment projects;
- intensifying work with the Inter-American Development Bank, in order to strengthen Development Cooperation with that region.

<sup>4</sup> See [https://www.eurodad.org/just\\_1\\_of\\_rich\\_countries\\_spending\\_on\\_covid\\_went\\_to\\_overseas\\_aid](https://www.eurodad.org/just_1_of_rich_countries_spending_on_covid_went_to_overseas_aid)

## **FOR THE ACEP, THERE ARE SEVERAL QUESTIONS REGARDING THE FUTURE OF PORTUGUESE DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION:**

- / How can we ensure that the new strategy responds to the goals of international solidarity and to global challenges?
- / How can the new strategy be endowed with independence in the face of contradictory foreign policy interests, in particular those of internationalisation of the economy?
- / What type of cooperation (bilateral or multilateral) should we invest in and why?
- / How can we ensure the integrity of ODA and consistent timing, allowing us to find common ground with international commitments?
- / What are the advantages/disadvantages of delegated cooperation and what should be its role in Portuguese Development Cooperation?
- / What is the degree of political commitment and through which instruments does the new strategy guarantee room for civil society to monitor the implementation of the cooperation policy, reflect on the changes that are taking place and influence its direction?
- / How can we guarantee policy coherence for development (PCD) and the link between Portuguese Development Cooperation and other public policies?
- / How can ownership of the strategy by the partner countries and the involvement of the different civil societies be ensured?
- / How can it be ensured that the new strategy is based on principles of quality of international development cooperation?
- / How can it be ensured that blended finance instruments prioritise development goals? What mechanisms does civil society have at its disposal to monitor this commitment?

PART III

**EUROPEAN  
DEVELOPMENT  
COOPERATION**  
THE CHALLENGES OF  
POLICY COHERENCE  
AND TACKLING  
INEQUALITY

Historically, the European Union and its member states have been the largest donor of Official Development Assistance worldwide (Wieser *et al.*, 2019). The Lisbon Treaty, signed in 2007, establishes as a central objective of the European Union's development policy the reduction, and subsequent eradication, of poverty (Article 208).

In 2020, according to preliminary OECD data, European Union institutions disbursed a total of 19.378 billion US dollars and its member states allocated 72.677 billion US dollars in ODA, an increase of 25.4% and 7.8 %, respectively, compared to 2019. In 2020, European Union countries that are members of the Development Assistance Committee contributed 45% of the total ODA of DAC countries (DAC/OECD, 2021).

However, at present, with regard to aid disbursed by European institutions, we observe, in geographical terms, a large concentration in the EU's neighbouring countries, namely Mediterranean countries (Egypt, Syria, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia and Jordan) and Eastern European countries (Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia). These are, for the most part, middle-income countries and represent some of the main security concerns of the European Union (Oliveira and Cavaco, 2019). This goes against the priority issue of tackling poverty as established in the Treaty of Lisbon, which has ended up being supplanted by the security agenda. It also contradicts the OECD's own recommendations to prioritise ODA to support less advanced economies. European civil society, along with Portuguese civil society, has been warning of this trend of prioritising the geostrategic interests of the EU and its member states to the detriment of a truly transformative agenda that serves the most vulnerable and that tackles inequalities in furtherance of global development.

In thematic terms, we are witnessing a progressive trend towards a focus on the use of aid to manage migration and the security agenda, on the one hand, and on the other, an increase in

the channelling of European ODA to the private sector, through loans and blended finance (Sheriff, 2021).

The narrative used by the European institutions seems to focus increasingly on the principle of mutual benefits (the win-win policy, which is overriding the fight against inequalities). This is visible at the institutional level through the transition from the Directorate-General for Development (DGVECO) to the Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DGINTPA). In her mission statement, DGINTPA Commissioner Jutta Urpilainen mentions that contributing to the political priorities of the EU forms part of the priorities of European Development Cooperation and that one of its objectives is to take advantage of the political, economic and investment opportunities offered by the African continent (Magalhães Ferreira, Oliveira, 2021).

# THE SECURITISATION OF THE EUROPEAN DEVELOPMENT AGENDA: A TREND HERE TO STAY?

In the European Consensus on Development, adopted by the European Union in 2017, the development/security nexus and the development/migration nexus are very prominent. The document emphasises the need to prevent migration, linking ODA with issues of internal management of migration policies and foresees the possibility of creating aid conditionalities related to the readmission and return of migrants.

The new European Union Development Cooperation instrument, called “Global Europe”, has been heavily criticised by civil society (CONCORD, 2021, European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2021) for the way in which it addresses the issue of migration, seeking to curb it, and for making the disbursement of Official Development Assistance dependent on the partner countries’ migration policy. The regulation establishing the “Global Europe” instrument explicitly provides for changes in the allocation of funds according to migration issues and asserts that ODA allocations shall depend on the progress of partner countries in relation to multiple indicators, including cooperation on migration issues (European Parliament, 2021).

Given that 93% of “Global Europe” funding must meet the eligibility criteria for Official Development Assistance, it will have to respect the Paris principles, such as ownership and inclusive partnerships. The tensions that have arisen between the European Union and the ACP countries on migration issues and the return of asylum seekers reflect the disparities between the priorities of the European Union and the partner countries (Jacobsen, 2018, European Council of Refugees and Exiles, 2021).

Moreover, the tendency to externalise European migration policy and the prioritisation of the EU’s internal agenda to the detriment of

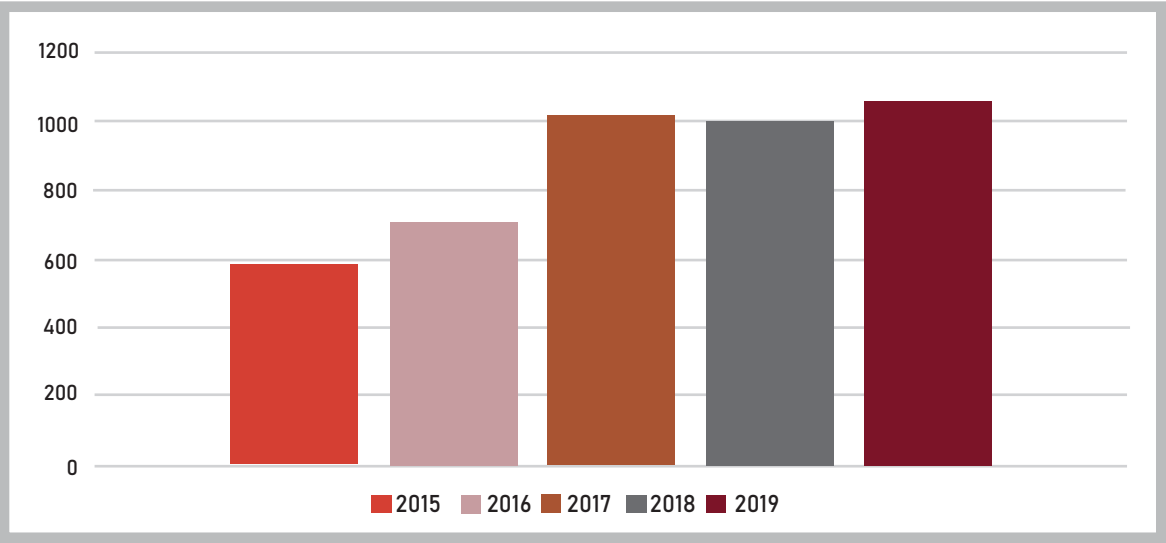
migrants’ rights has been highlighted by various civil society organisations.

A recent report by CONCORD (2018) points to a very substantial increase in ODA from European institutions being channelled to “Conflicts, Peace and Security”, owing to the growth of total ODA over the last decade. According to the OECD (QWIDS, OECD), the commitments of European institutions on the “Conflicts, Peace and Security” front increased from 587.87 million US dollars in 2015 (current prices) to 1055.02 million US dollars in 2019 (current prices).

The importance of tightening the security and stability of the countries is unquestionable, especially in conflict-affected areas, or to promote peace and dialogue between the state and civil society. ODA expenditure on “Conflict, Peace and Security”, if channelled towards the security needs of the beneficiary countries, can play a key role. However, we have observed that the tendency of European Cooperation has been to use ODA to tackle issues perceived as threats to the European continent. Accordingly, European ODA programmes in the area of security and the promotion of peace have focused on short-term solutions and urgent action to respond to terrorist attacks or waves of migration.

This trend is visible through an increase in ODA channelled towards boosting military capacity and police forces, controlling borders in partner countries and preventing terrorism.

Commitments of European institutions on the “Conflicts, Peace and Security” front in millions of dollars (current prices)



Source: Query Wizard for International Development Statistics, OECD, 2021

**For the ACEP, European Cooperation must respect the Paris Principles**, namely ownership by partner countries, alignment and mutual responsibility, as well as the principle of policy coherence for development, as reiterated by the Lisbon Treaty. European Development Cooperation must maintain its focus on tackling inequalities and refuse to give in to the nationalist agenda and the rise of the extreme right on the continent. The prevailing narrative focusing on the win-win concept, which prioritises the security interests of the financing countries, cannot override the interests and sustainable development of the partner countries. At the same time, the European Union must invest in positive migration policies, which strengthen the channels for legal migration.

## TOWARDS THE PRIVATISATION OF EUROPEAN OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE?

Over the last decade, discussions on greater private sector involvement in Development Cooperation have gained increasing force in the public pronouncements of different government officials and in position papers in different international forums.

The 2011 Agenda for Change, for example, promotes private sector involvement in different ways. On the one hand, it refers to supporting

the development of competitive private local actors. This support to the local private sector is advocated by strengthening local institutions, promoting small and medium-sized enterprises and cooperatives, supporting legislative and regulatory reforms, improving access to financial services and promoting industrial, agricultural and innovation policies. At the same time, the document calls for an increase in foreign investment and

improved infrastructure. To this end, the European Union proposes to leverage private resources for the provision of public goods, through blended finance.

Recently, the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-2027 has reinforced the focus on blended finance, through the European Fund for Sustainable Development+. The EFSD+ provides for an increase in the geographic reach and volume of ODA channelled to blended finance, being able to guarantee operations up to 70% of the financial envelope of “Global Europe”.

This shift from the European Union to the private sector seems to follow in the footsteps of the so-called emerging “new donors”, who use their Development Cooperation programmes to finance the penetration of domestic companies into new markets and promote the internationalisation of their economies. According to the Development Finance Institutions Working Group (DFI WG), the European Union is currently the donor channelling the highest volume of ODA to blended finance (DFI WG, 2019).

The European Union’s heavy focus on this mechanism has been questioned by several civil society organisations and academics. In 2020, an independent study commissioned by the European Parliament concluded that there is no evidence of additionality or any quantifiable impact of blended finance on development.

Simultaneously, the study concludes that this commitment implies a transfer of resources from Least Developed Countries to middle-income countries and from social sectors to the finance and infrastructure sector (Bayliss *et al.*, 2020).

Despite being part of the dominant narrative of donors such as the European Union, blended finance raises questions of a different nature, such as, for example, ownership, related to the effective capacity of partner countries to

influence the decision-making process in the allocation of funds.

Moreover, this format has reinforced the importance of Financial Institutions for Development which, among their different mandates, seek to promote the business interests of their countries of origin (Bayliss *et al.*, 2020).

**OTHER VOICES**

**HOW DO YOU SEE THE CHANNELLING OF PUBLIC FUNDS TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR? WHAT ARE THE MAIN RISKS AND ADVANTAGES?**

“Blended finance is usually used as a ‘catch-all’ term to describe the combination of public and private funds for funding development projects, however there is no consensus on the definition. In fact, at least 15 different definitions are used by different organisations, which present problems for comparative analysis of scale and impact evaluation.

In the past, blended finance at the EU level had focused on combining EU grants with public non-concessional loans and some limited private resources to support private or mixed projects. However, this practice has now reoriented and focuses entirely on the use of public funds to leverage private commercial finance. The rationale behind this stems from the idea of a ‘financing gap’, which cannot be filled by public funds. In this context, blending is considered as an effective way of attracting private sector resources on the grounds that capital markets would enable a flow of resources to areas where expected returns are higher. To achieve this, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are framed as a way of promoting socio-economic growth in developing countries. While it is clear that private finance might be needed in certain sectors and for certain projects, this misses the fact that capital markets are complex and the mismatch between supply and demand cannot simply be addressed through the inclusion of private finance.

In stark contrast to the high ambitions of raising private finance under the blended finance model, research shows that to date, the amount of private finance has been limited in comparison to public counterpart funds. The main sectors attracting blended finance have been banking and infrastructure. Funds have mostly been mobilised for middle-income countries, while low income countries and the least developed countries have attracted a very small share. In spite of their small size in blending, the inclusion of private finance reorients the development model and creates a series of new risks, which should be carefully considered before promoting the use of blended finance even further at the EU and at the global level.

These risks include excessive emphasis on private sector or commercial needs at the expense of public sector alternatives, the tendency to promote the domestic commercial interests of OECD companies thereby incentivising tied aid, and the high level of cost incurred by the public sector in recipient countries to attract private finance. Blended finance also holds the potential for limiting the ownership of recipient countries as this model of financing pivots Development Finance Initiatives (DFIs) and external stakeholder at the core of the national development agenda. Lack of transparency in blended finance projects also makes it hard to evaluate the returns generated by the projects and analyse the nature of impact. There is also a high opportunity cost of using aid in this way, as the resources used for blended finance cannot be channelled through other instruments that have a proven track record of delivering development results, such as budget support. These risks can end up undermining the main objective of ODA, which is poverty reduction, leaving communities and countries even more vulnerable (see *Eurodad briefing on blended finance and leave no one behind*<sup>5</sup> and *Eurodad and Oxfam report on blended finance*<sup>6</sup>).

<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.eurodad.org/blended-finance-briefing>

<sup>6</sup> See [https://www.eurodad.org/blended\\_finance\\_what\\_it\\_is\\_how\\_it\\_works\\_and\\_how\\_it\\_is\\_used](https://www.eurodad.org/blended_finance_what_it_is_how_it_works_and_how_it_is_used)



The multifaceted risks raised by the blended finance model are contrary to the long-term structural growth needs in developing countries. This is especially of concern when considering the category of Least Developing Countries (LDCs). These countries are vulnerable due to a lack of structural resilience; they lack institutionalisation of industrial and investment opportunities and suffer from poor development indicators. The use of blended finance in these countries risks contribution towards indebtedness, inhibiting the much-needed transformation of their weak economic models to strengthen public infrastructure and mobilise domestic resources areas such as health and education.”

*Eurodad – European Network on Debt and Development*

**For the ACEP, the promotion of greater private sector involvement in International Development Cooperation,** through the use of mechanisms such as blended finance, will have to be supported by evidence of its additionality in sustainable development. It will also have to show advantages over other types of strategies, such as direct support to the state budget, in sectors that guarantee basic rights such as health and education.

The transfer of resources from the Least Developed Countries to middle-income countries, and from the social sectors to the finance and infrastructure sectors will certainly have harmful consequences for the countries that most need ODA.

ODA channelled through the European Fund for Sustainable Development+ will have to respect the principles of transparency and ownership, have clear criteria with regard to human rights and the environment, a focus on supporting the local private sector and safeguards linked to the prevention of tax evasion.

# THE EUROPEAN UNION-AFRICA RELATIONSHIP: AN UNEQUAL PARTNERSHIP

In the coming years, the future of the relationship between the European Union and the African continent will be profoundly marked by three simultaneous processes: the African Union-European Union Summit, the African pillar of the successor to the Cotonou Agreement and the formulation of the new European Union-Africa strategy. African and European civil society have been calling for greater participation at the negotiating table and for a more equitable partnership between the two continents. The African Union-European Union Summit, scheduled for February 2022, and the formulation of the new European Union-Africa strategy may represent important opportunities to rethink this relationship.

## OTHER VOICES

### EUROPEAN UNION – AFRICA RELATIONSHIP: WHAT KIND OF PARTNERSHIP FOR THE FUTURE?

“The first generation that was born and has lived outside the colonial context is coming to power. In Europe and Africa. Of course, this will not erase the common past, but it is an opportunity to open a new page in relations between Africa and Europe. I believe that the future will bring significant changes that reflect the new page that (hopefully) is being opened:

- Less Public and More Private: the centre of relations will tend to shift from the public sector to the private sector, in its most varied forms, companies, universities, civil society organisations, churches, etc., with Corporate Social Responsibility being of growing importance;
- Less Money and More Knowledge: progressive dematerialisation of the partnership, with less focus on traditional infrastructure and more focus on information and knowledge and the transfer of know-how;
- Less Compliance and More Exigency: the increase in access to education and, in particular, to information through the Internet will make public opinion on both continents less compliant and more demanding of public and private authorities;
- Less Interference and More Confluence: diplomacy (both political and economic) will play a central role.”

*Rui Santos, president of CESO, Portugal*

“The Europe-Africa relationship must be based on the principles of cooperation, partnership and co-responsibility and must involve not only public and governmental institutions, but above all peoples (and their communities) and opportunities for exchange. This implies greater decentralisation of the liaison and communication bodies, as well as the provision of devices and

means that allow a broadening of the consultation and involvement of populations, so that they can participate and take ownership of the spaces and processes for building joint visions.

Moreover, in cooperation processes it is necessary to decouple Official Development Assistance and Investment from the package of partnerships, allowing desirable impacts to be generated at the local level and without giving rise to local competition and without the constraints of the repatriation of capital to funding countries, in terms of acquisition of equipment and assistance.

This element presupposes greater transparency and the principle of equality among actors. It is essential to change the discourse of welfarism and paternalism in the narratives and cooperation relations between Europe and Africa. To this end, it is imperative to decomplicate the partnerships and produce alternative models for sharing learning and knowledge, based on communication for development in both societies.”

*Miguel de Barros, director of TINIGUENA – A Terra é Nossa!, Guinea-Bissau*

The first European Union-Africa Summit took place in Cairo in 2000, the same year the Cotonou Agreement was signed, between 15 EU member countries and 77 ACP countries.

Under the Cotonou Agreement, the system of non-reciprocal trade preferences, provided for in the Lomé Convention, was replaced by a system of reciprocal trade agreements incorporated into the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA), negotiated with 6 different regions: four in Africa, one in the Caribbean and one in the Pacific. According to Fergus Kell and Alex Vines (2020), these Economic Partnership Agreements have harmful consequences for the region, significantly hampering the continent’s regional integration. The “stop-EPAs” campaign, promoted by a group of NGOs, criticises the link between economic liberalisation and development, defended by the European Union, and rejects the EPA as if they were an agreement between two equal parties (Carbone, 2013).

In 2015, an assessment of the 15 years of the Cotonou Agreement identified several weaknesses in the process, such as limited ownership of aid, the securitisation of the relationship and an increase in tensions regarding the negotia-

tions of the Economic Partnership Agreements (Raimundo, 2021).

The negotiations on the successor to the Cotonou Agreement, dubbed the Post-Cotonou Agreement or Cotonou 2.0, have recently ended and the agreement is expected to be signed in 2022. The negotiation period, which lasted roughly three years, was considerably longer than anticipated. This delay in negotiations was due to a series of particularly contentious issues between the 27 member countries of the European Union and the 79 countries of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), specifically issues of migration and trade.

With regard to migration, throughout the negotiation process, the European Union’s position was marked by support of the inclusion of directives on the return and readmission of migrants in an irregular situation.

By contrast, the ACP countries advocated a focus on voluntary return and legal migration pathways. The final text has a chapter entirely dedicated to issues of migration, explicitly laying down the return and readmission processes

(Magalhães Ferreira and Oliveira, 2021), which raises some questions regarding the imbalance of the bargaining power between the two parties.

As far as trade is concerned, the new agreement only regulates trade between the European Union and Sub-Saharan Africa, excluding North Africa, and may compromise the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). No synergies between the AfCFTA and the Post-Cotonou Agreement are visible in the document.

Another process of extreme importance for the relationship between the two blocs is the new EU strategy for Africa “Towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa”.

Currently being defined, this will be one of the important pillars of the European Union-Africa relationship. According to Carlos Lopes (2020), the strategy may represent an opportunity to rethink the European Union-Africa partnership, as *“both sides must abandon the unbalanced, piecemeal approach of the past, and work toward creating an effective joint-governance mechanism.”*.

However, the European Union proposal, which serves as the basis for future discussion, was designed unilaterally, without the participation or consultation of European and African civil society and the African states (CONCORD, 2020).

**For the ACEP, the political legitimacy of the future strategy and its real adequacy and effective execution** depend on the discussion process being truly inclusive and taking into account the perspectives and priorities of all the actors involved, namely, the states and civil society of the African and European countries.

In fact, the major issue that arises in relation to these processes is related to the need to create a true partnership between equals, which takes into account the inequality in current power relations. The current distortions in the relationships and roles of each cannot be omitted from the debate on the EU-Africa Strategy, otherwise it may perpetuate dependencies and inequalities.

It is necessary to reduce inconsistencies and contradictory policies and strategies, promote the integration of the African continent, with a focus on the Agenda 2063 and the AfCFTA, and invest in the co-production of knowledge on Europe-Africa relations. This involves strengthening networks and partnerships between civil society organisations and African and European research centres.

OTHER VOICES

EUROPEAN UNION-AFRICA: BUILDING A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN EQUALS

“This was supposed to be the year Europe and Africa redefined their relationship. In March, the European Commission unveiled its vision for a “comprehensive strategy with Africa,” intended to kick-start a six-month consultation process, which would culminate at the European Union-African Union summit in October in an agreement on a new blueprint for relations – one that would give Africa significantly more agency. Then COVID-19 arrived.

Even without the pandemic, the road to a stronger, more equal EU-Africa partnership would have been difficult. When the year began, tensions were high in many parts of the world, raising serious geopolitical and security risks. Moreover, the strategic competition between the United States and China had escalated into a trade war. Multilateralism was faltering.

As challenging as these conditions were, they also encouraged progress, by highlighting how high the stakes had become. Africa’s resolve was evident: a series of AU summits and meetings had indicated that the continent was committed finally to implement the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), to reform regional bodies, and to move onto a more ambitious development path. Such initiatives implied an overhaul of the tenets of any partnership with the continent.

The COVID-19 crisis threw a wrench into plans to engineer such an overhaul with Europe. But it also underscored the need for one – not least because the EU is Africa’s main trade and investment partner.

The pandemic has demonstrated the practical implications of inequality; revealed the excessive dependence of critical value chains on certain economies, particularly China; and exposed the vulnerabilities of the international finance system. It has also shown the limits of current modes of global cooperation, even in the face of shared crises.

As a result, the desire to “return to normal” has increasingly given way to calls to “build back better.” Progress on the European Green Deal reflects policymakers’ determination to take advantage of the current upheaval to advance real change. Africa should follow suit – beginning by accelerating the implementation of the AfCFTA.

An integrated continental market could have cushioned the blow of declining international trade during the COVID-19 crisis, saving jobs and livelihoods. Instead, Africa is struggling to revive its economies, despite having been significantly less affected by the virus than many other parts of the world. The continent’s leaders must ensure that, when the next crisis strikes, Africa is ready.

Given the likelihood of another health crisis – experts warn that pandemic risks are rising – this means, among other things, ensuring stable supplies of critical medical equipment. Early restrictions on medical-supply exports and more recent “vaccine nationalism” on the part of a handful of countries show just how quickly countries can resort to protectionism. It is thus in

Africa's interest to promote production of strategic supplies and create robust value chains for pharmaceuticals and medical equipment on the continent. The AfCFTA would facilitate these efforts.

But the AfCFTA's implementation will need to go hand in hand with broader international engagement, especially with the EU. During the COVID-19 crisis, Africa has needed large-scale debt relief and increased access to liquidity, so that countries could implement economic-support measures on par with the advanced economies. It hasn't gotten them – at least not to the necessary extent.

Of course, it is far from ideal for Africans to assume that others will rescue them. But this is not a choice; it is a systemic problem. As it stands, some African countries – especially those with very limited monetary-policy space – need external support, particularly from the International Monetary Fund, to be able to respond to exogenous shocks. The EU can and should play a key role here.

Such cooperation must extend beyond short-term imperatives to address medium- to long-term structural challenges. For example, while debt relief is important, and the sustained push for it by several G20 countries is welcome, it will not be enough to reinvigorate African economies. Rethinking financing approaches for infrastructure investment, to support the implementation of the AfCFTA, would have a greater long-term impact.

Building a stronger, more strategic partnership with Africa will also require EU countries to abandon their fixation on the migration "threat," and recognize the continent's strategic importance. A candid debate about the expansion of legal pathways to ensure mobility, including circular migration, would help.

The idea of returning to "normal" after the COVID-19 crisis may still tempt many people. But, when it comes to the EU-Africa relationship, it is simply not an option. The partnership must be rethought and reshaped. To that end, both sides must abandon the unbalanced, piecemeal approach of the past, and work toward creating an effective joint-governance mechanism.

At the upcoming "mini-summit," EU and AU leaders have an ideal opportunity to catalyze this process. By the time the full summit takes place next year, they should be able to put forward a clear vision of a partnership fit for the twenty-first century."

*Carlos Lopes – professor of economics and former Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, Guinea-Bissau*

Indeed, in the Meeting of NGOs from Portuguese-Speaking Countries - Pathways to Citizenship (Lisbon, October 2021) the relationship of (some) EU delegations with the local CSO was heavily criticised, as they failed to involve them in the political dialogue and induced them into a relationship of sub-contractors of international NGOs.

Care is often lacking in ascertaining whether the relationship between international and local NGOs consists of real partnerships or are reduced to utilitarian relationships, to fulfil the formal requirement of the existence of a "local partner" for financing contracts.

In fact, many of these contracts generate unacceptable situations, such as the existence of international NGOs with better conditions for operation and intervention than the national states, inverting roles in the development of countries and compromising the creation of the states' capacity.

## **FOR THE ACEP, THERE ARE SEVERAL QUESTIONS REGARDING THE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION**

- / What mechanisms should be created to strengthen the participation of European civil society and the countries of the global South in the definition of priorities and the allocation of resources for European ODA?
- / How can we ensure that European ODA is channelled towards reducing inequalities and tackling poverty on a global scale?
- / How can we ensure that European ODA does not contribute to human rights violations, does not prioritise domestic security issues in donor countries and is aligned with partner countries' national development priorities and the needs of local populations?
- / How is European and African civil society expected to participate in the process of discussing and defining the new EU strategy for Africa?
- / Do ODA resources channelled to blended finance operations benefit small and medium-sized companies in partner countries or do they actually favour companies in the global North?



PART IV

**CIVIL SOCIETY  
SPACE**

ACHIEVEMENTS  
AND OBSTACLES  
TO A GLOBAL  
CITIZENSHIP

Today, it is unquestionable the role of Civil Society Organisations (CSO) in development, in the protection of human rights and in contributing towards the definition of public policies at global level. Over recent decades, CSO have come to assert themselves as fundamental actors in the processes of development and promotion of a global citizenship.

If on the one hand, they are crucial elements in the building of democracies, on the other, they are also vigilant actors in the actions of governments and global governance. The effective power granted to civil society in multilateral spaces still needs to be consolidated. In addition to their multilateral representation, CSOs have sought to create and strengthen networks of dialogue and action at national, regional and international level, affording them greater coordination, legitimacy and power.

The history of CSOs has been marked by achievements, but also by multiple challenges over recent decades. Much of the recognition of CSOs, namely Non-Governmental Organisations engaged in the development and promo-

tion of human rights, is due to their close ties to communities (unlike any other actor) and their ability to intervene and work with the most vulnerable populations, in the protection of their rights and in processes that empower them and make their voices heard. They are also agents of innovation and important sources of knowledge that should be capitalised on in their connection with academia (an aspect still little explored in Portugal).

More recently, their role as actors in advocacy, monitoring and dialogue in the definition and implementation of public policies has been reinforced. This dimension is anchored in education and awareness-raising initiatives for development and citizenship and, in many cases, in close connection with the Development Cooperation programmes on the ground.

## THE CHALLENGES FOR NGOS

### GREATER DIALOGUE, COORDINATION AND POLITICAL INFLUENCE

The need for greater commitment to dialogue between the different development actors has been mentioned at different times in this document, since it appears as one of the central aspects for the operation of NGOs and civil society in general.

As mentioned, CSOs have privileged access to development fieldwork, holding a unique capital of information and knowledge about communities and local spaces that must be systematised and brought to the discussions, either in national or in multilateral forums.

This capitalisation is only possible if there are internal conditions (human and financial resources) for the NGOs that allow them to invest in advocacy and political influence programmes and if the spaces for dialogue allow for effective participation of civil society.

In the course of our work, we have witnessed the frustration of inconsequential dialogue or “all talk and no action”, which never goes beyond mere formality. In fact, it is necessary to invest in effective spaces for coordination. At the national level, creating and/or reinforcing

ing platforms for dialogue between the different actors, such as the Cooperation Forum, with regular meetings and thematic working groups and, at the international level, allowing greater involvement in the main sessions of organisations such as the United Nations system and financial institutions or those of the EU; and funding specific spaces for coordination (civil society networks, alliances, exchanges, etc.).

In this context, civil society is faced with the challenge of achieving greater coordination and better monitoring of the ongoing discussions and debates regarding the strategic options for Development Cooperation. In recent years, although many organisations have made an effort to focus on advocacy, NGOs still have some weaknesses (namely in terms of specialisation) that prevent them from following up on many of the dossiers concerning Development Cooperation policies, due to their degree of complexity and the volume of available information.

**FUNDING POLICIES**

Globally, NGOs today face major challenges in the face of changes in funding policies, specifically at European level. Public resources are now concentrated among a smaller number of NGOs and projects, but of a larger scale, in order, according to the EU, to reduce transaction costs and prevent fragmentation. This trend carries significant risks in terms of the innovation, autonomy and diversification of the non-governmental fabric, thus tending to create “multinational” NGOs that often act in competition with local NGOs in partner countries or transforming them into implementers of partial projects. At national level, public funds channelled into projects initiated by Portuguese NGOs continue to represent minimum shares of public financing. At the same time, the financial volume of projects included in

At national level, the Portuguese NGOD Platform has sought to focus on advocacy and the political influence of civil society, on the definition and debate on the direction of Portuguese Cooperation, although its leverage remains somewhat lacking.

There are various reasons for this trend: the NGOs’ lack of human and financial resources to undertake this endeavour; a lack of involvement and critical mass within the associated NGOs; the growing complexity of the topics addressed.

The fact should not be ignored, however, that many NGOs do not intervene in these areas by choice, either because they do not see themselves as citizen intervention organisations, or because they opt for relationships with less potential for conflict with public or funding institutions.

delegated cooperation programmes or trust funds is growing, with NGOs acting as implementing agencies with no specificities of their own.

This entails very significant risks as, by assuming a substantial part of the amount of funding managed by an NGO, its autonomy is compromised, along with the implementation of its agenda in accordance with its mission and objectives.

## SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE

The so-called “civic space” is one of the central pillars of open and full democracies, and is measured by the degree of freedom with which citizens organise themselves and participate and intervene in society. In recent decades, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11 and in the context of the so-called “war on terror”, we have witnessed a progressive restriction of the space for civic action, at a global level.

In more authoritarian societies, we have witnessed the criminalisation, persecution and murder of activists, journalists and other citizens who question, oppose or confront prevailing power. In a more subtle way, we have also witnessed, in more democratic societies, a weakening of the action of civil society, either through measures restrictive of their actions (in the public space or through funding cuts), or through the erosion of public trust in NGOs.

The action of NGOs at European level, in the area of cooperation and even in humanitarian aid, also faces multiple challenges, in particular in terms of monitoring public policies and the promotion and protection of human rights (e.g., the criminalisation of assistance to migrants in the Mediterranean).

CIVICUS, an organisation that monitors the degree of openness of the civic space at an international level, has been warning of the progressive narrowing of the space for civil society over recent years. In a recently released report that takes stock of the last decade, CIVICUS identifies 10 broad trends<sup>7</sup>:

1. A sustained civic space crackdown – states, even those considered more democratic, have been increasing their capacity to repress civic action;
2. Political changes and risks to democracy – populism and nationalism have resurrected

attacks on the civic space and dissenting voices;

3. The impacts of ultra-capitalism - economic inequalities, precariousness and attacks on social and environmental protection have exposed citizens to situations of vulnerability;

4. The recognition of the climate crisis as a crisis – civil society has been sounding the alarm on the climate urgency and many activists have been silenced;

5. The challenge of structural exclusion and the claiming of differences – we have witnessed the affirmation of movements that claim voice and power, namely anti-racist movements;

6. The rise of social networks and the economy of disinformation – social networks have been a genuine tool for mobilisation, but they also carry risks of disinformation;

7. The global export of authoritative models – namely the Chinese model of development, which prioritises market economy growth detached from the development of democracy and the promotion of rights;

8. The harassment of multilateralism – the advent of nationalism and the growing role of the private sector in international forums has undermined its credibility;

9. Conflict and militarisation – armed conflicts have an extremely negative impact on civic action;

10. New ways of mobilising civil society – large-scale protests and virtual campaigns – have been able to mobilise citizens on a global scale, even if physically separated, around common causes.

<sup>7</sup> Can be read at <https://civicus.org/state-of-civil-society-report-2021/>

OTHER VOICES

WHAT SHOULD BE THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE COUNTRY'S CHALLENGES?

"Civil society has played an important role in creating well-being, promoting social justice and building broader democratic systems in a participatory manner. The processes triggered by the intervention of civil society have favoured the enhancement of social awareness, opportunities to experiment with various formats of active citizenship and new forms of organisation and mobilisation in the public space.

On this basis, the construction of new utopias and the affirmation of public policies has benefited from a greater contribution and influence from marginalised sectors, contributing towards greater equity and plurality in democracy building.

On the other hand, it is necessary to recognise the utility and relevance of the role of civil society in monitoring public policies, promoting transparency and accountability, as well as influencing public policies at the local, national and international levels.

The learning generated by civil society constitutes an enormous source of education for citizenship from environmental, cultural, gender issues and the creative and solidarity economy, to collective responsibility and rights, substantiating the expansion of democratic canons and the transformation of societies into well-being communities."

*Miguel de Barros, director of TINIGUENA – A Terra é Nossa!!, Guinea-Bissau*

I think that our role should not be limited to the implementation of economic/social policies, but we must also assume the role of guaranteeing political stability, overseeing the Government in the materialisation of the policies outlined as well as presenting proposals that serve the socioeconomic and political interests of our states. Here in Cape Verde, the tendency is for political parties to monopolise civil society organisations and put them at their service. We have to be firm and avoid falling into this temptation to avoid creating a vacuum on matters of social protection on the part of organised civil society."

*Idalina Freire, leader of the Organização das Mulheres de Cabo Verde*

"Civil society organisations that focus on promoting transparency and good governance face more dilemmas than other organisations. Because they inconvenience the ruling elites, they can be silenced with the blessing of cooperation partners, if their interests are more important than the agenda of promoting transparency and integrity in the public sphere. An example of this is Angola, an oil producing country, where various western countries had commercial interests and where the revenues that their companies obtained from being in that market surpassed the desire to finance civil society organisations that were intervening in matters concerning tackling corruption and promoting transparency. In Mozambique, those same countries took a different approach, helping civil society and organisations dealing with governance issues to be more interventionist. As Mozambique has become a player in the mining sector that attracts actors with commercial interests in the country, the challenges from civil society organisations, such as the Centre for Public Integrity, could lead to funding restrictions and, above all, attempts to close down the civic space."

*Edson Cortez, Centro de Integridade Pública, Mozambique*

## CIVIC SPACE AND COVID-19

Unprecedented, the crisis caused by COVID-19 has been a trial by fire for civil society on a global scale. All over the world, citizens have seen their rights restricted in order to contain the spread of the virus, through the adoption of successive states of emergency and public disaster.

The crisis has exposed pre-existing social fractures, exacerbated inequalities (internal and global: who can and cannot work from home, who loses income and who remains with their salary unchanged) and forcing citizens to face

the challenge of continuing their social and political struggles, without worsening the public health situation.

This trend has cut across different continents and, in multiple contexts, citizen organisations have shown evidence of resilience, creativity and quick adaptation to the situation, in order to proceed with their intervention.

### OTHER VOICES

#### WHAT IMPACT IS THE PANDEMIC HAVING ON THE SPACE OF CIVIL SOCIETY?

“The health crisis that humanity has faced since 2019, caused by COVID-19, has significantly limited the functioning of the democratic system, especially with regard to the civic space reserved for civil society organisations for the consolidation of a wide range of citizens’ fundamental rights and freedoms.

If the civic space of civil society organisations was seen as a threat to various authoritarian regimes or those with dictatorial tendencies around the world, and in Africa in particular, measures to contain COVID-19 began to be used to not only restrict the exercise of citizens’ rights and fundamental freedoms, but also to limit their participation in the definition and monitoring of public development policies. According to WHO recommendations, sheltering in place and social distancing are the main measures to contain COVID-19. The application of these measures under a democratic regime can only occur under a state of emergency in order to allow the legal restriction of the exercise of civil and political rights. It was in this context of a race against time that citizens in the world saw their essential freedoms severely restricted through the successive application of states of emergency, namely, freedom of demonstration, assembly, press, movement, civic participation in issues of public interest, among others.

In this global wave of limiting the civic actions of civil society organisations, the censorship of any dissenting voice has become institutionalised in several countries. Thus, many human rights activists, journalists, bloggers, Internet users and trade unionists were arbitrarily detained and accused of undermining government measures to combat COVID-19. In some more serious cases, there were summary executions and enforced disappearances. With the reduction of the civic space for intervention by civil society organisations, social problems and violations of citizens’ rights have increased exponentially.

Among various examples, an increase in cases of gender-based violence, food shortages in

various countries, the abuse and mistreatment of children, poverty and social exclusion, etc., stand out. Given this scenario of astonishing reversal of democratic values, as a result of the alleged fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, it is no exaggeration to conclude that the health crisis allowed various governments around the world to dismantle the exercise of citizenship and the defence of the most elementary values of humanity.”

*Bubacar Turé, Vice President of Liga Guineense dos Direitos Humanos, Guinea-Bissau*

“In the context of Angola, I see two impacts. The first is a shift in funding from multilateral organisations or international agencies to national and international non-governmental organisations (CSO) operating in Angola. This also causes a change in the intervention agenda of CSO whose social intervention depends on external funding. The second impact is the importance that is being attributed to networked action, both among CSO and between them and state institutions. Proof of this is that, at the central level, some critical voices of civil society were invited by the Presidency of the Republic to join the Economic and Social Council, as a space specialising in macroeconomic and social issues and, at the local level, some non-state actors are members of social concertation councils. Despite these two impacts, which I consider positive, the truth is that the economic and social situation of most of the Angolan population is worrying. In fact, official figures from the Government of Angola state that the poverty rate is 54%. The situation is more worrying in rural areas, where it reaches 57% (INE, Poverty Report, 2020).”

*Carlos Cambuta, director of ADRA, Angola*

## **FOR THE ACEP, THE PRIORITIES ARE:**

- / A debate on urgent topics, such as national and international issues that are fundamental for CSO in the near future, strategies and alliances to promote citizen participation in debates on global development, strengthening the legitimacy of CSO in its relationship with society, with the state and with international cooperation;
- / An intervention of political influence with a view to rebuilding the Portuguese Development Cooperation Forum, as a space for dialogue, debate and consultation on strategic options for this area, including the different actors, namely civil society organisations, based on clear criteria of representation and representativeness;
- / A greater demand on the part of civil society organisations for the opening of civic space in the face of the negative impacts of the pandemic, intensifying their action at the level of the public space, and also at the level of consultation and funding;
- / Closer working relationships with parliamentarians, in order to make them aware of the role and importance of Portuguese Development Cooperation policy in Portugal's relationship with the world, for which the creation of a cooperation sub-committee within the Assembly of the Republic is essential;
- / Greater involvement of journalists in the activities and work of civil society organisations, namely within the scope of Education and Development Cooperation projects, in order to raise awareness of the issue and increase public attention to issues related to global development;
- / Greater commitment by civil society organisations to monitoring and advocacy programmes on Portuguese Development Cooperation, to scrutinise the performance of the different actors and the strategic options of this policy, under a rationale of action based on the principles of solidarity and efficient management of resources;
- / More debate among civil society organisations on their positioning under the scope of Portuguese Development Cooperation, at a time when there is a growing tendency to be mere implementers of projects, to the detriment of interventions of their own.



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**ANNEX**

**ISTANBUL**

**PRINCIPLES**

**ISTANBUL PRINCIPLES  
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATION  
DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS\***

**RESPECT AND PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

**CSOs are effective as development actors when they...** develop and implement strategies, activities and practices that promote individual and collective human rights, including the right to development, with dignity, decent work, social justice and equity for all people.

**EMBODY GENDER EQUALITY AND EQUITY WHILE PROMOTING WOMEN AND GIRLS' RIGHTS**

**CSOs are effective as development actors when they...** promote and practice Development Cooperation embodying gender equity, reflecting women's concerns and experience, while supporting women's efforts to fully realize their individual and collective rights, participating as fully empowered actors in the development process.

**FOCUS ON PEOPLE'S EMPOWERMENT, DEMOCRATIC OWNERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION**

**CSOs are effective as development actors when they...** support the empowerment and inclusive participation of people to expand their democratic ownership over policies and development initiatives that affect their lives, with special emphasis on the poor and marginalized.

**PROMOTE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

**CSOs are effective as development actors when they...** develop and implement priorities and approaches that promote environmental sustainability for present and future generations, including urgent responses to climate crises, with specific attention to the socio-economic, cultural and indigenous conditions for ecological integrity and justice.

**PRACTICE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

**CSOs are effective as development actors when they...** demonstrate a sustained organizational commitment to transparency, multiple accountability, and integrity in their internal operations.

**PURSUE EQUITABLE PARTNERSHIPS AND SOLIDARITY**

**CSOs are effective as development actors when they...** commit to transparent relationships with CSOs and other development actors, freely and as equals, based on shared development goals and values, mutual respect, trust, organizational autonomy, long-term accompaniment, solidarity and global citizenship.

\* Porque consideramos que continuam a ser um roteiro muito importante para orientar a participação da sociedade civil em processos de desenvolvimento, anexamos a este documento os Princípios de Istambul para a Eficácia do Desenvolvimento das OSC.

**CREATE AND SHARE KNOWLEDGE AND COMMIT TO MUTUAL LEARNING**

**CSOs are effective as development actors when they...** enhance the ways they learn from their experience, from other CSOs and development actors, integrating evidence from development practice and results, including the knowledge and wisdom of local and indigenous communities, strengthening innovation and their vision for the future they would like to see.

**COMMIT TO REALISING POSITIVE SUSTAINABLE CHANGE**

**CSOs are effective as development actors when they...** collaborate to realize sustainable outcomes and impacts of their development actions, focusing on results and conditions for lasting change for people, with special emphasis on poor and marginalized populations, ensuring an enduring legacy for present and future generations.

Guided by these Istanbul principles, CSOs are committed to take pro-active actions to improve and be fully accountable for their development practices.

Equally important will be enabling policies and practices by all actors. Through actions consistent with these principles, donor and partner country governments demonstrate their Accra Agenda for Action pledge to “share an interest in ensuring that CSO contributions to development reach their full potential”.

All governments have an obligation to uphold basic human rights – among others, the right to association, the right to assembly and the freedom of expression. Together these are the pre-conditions for effective development.

Istanbul, Turkey  
29 September 2010





PROJECT

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CENTRO DE ESTUDOS SOBRE  
ÁFRICA E DESENVOLVIMENTO  
ISEG - Universidade de Lisboa

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