



Future of Development Cooperation Coalition

Terms of Reference

December 2025

I. Background and Purpose

The concept for an independent Future of Development Cooperation Coalition (the ‘Coalition’) emerged during high-level discussions at the June 2025 Financing for Development Conference in Sevilla, Spain between multiple countries and representatives from academia, think tanks, philanthropies, and multilateral institutions.

The overarching goal of the Coalition is to facilitate a process through which countries at all stages of development—and leaders from across public, private, and civil society sectors—can co-create a bold vision, principles, implementation strategies, and a compelling narrative for a reimagined development cooperation¹ system that is more effective, efficient, and legitimate.

The Coalition is driven by the urgent need to reimagine and improve the system of development cooperation at a moment marked by persistent geopolitical and economic turbulence, a worsening climate crisis, rising conflict, a resurgence of populism and nationalist approaches to global problems, and eroding trust. In an environment characterized by more actors, more motives, more fragmentation, and increasingly complex needs, there is broad agreement that the existing development cooperation system has, in many respects, reached its limits. Yet there is little unity of vision about what should come next. The Coalition has been created to help answer that question.

Since the initial conversations, the Coalition has received enthusiastic support, and preparations for its establishment are progressing rapidly. Two renowned think tanks—the African Center for Economic Transformation (ACET) based in Accra and the Center for Global Development (CGD) based in Washington, D.C. and London—are co-hosting this independent and time-bound Coalition. An early champion group of seventeen countries has joined a diverse “coalition of the willing,” expressing support for the Coalition’s vision and a commitment to engage in shaping and benefiting from its work.² Philanthropic foundations are providing financial support and thought partnership. A small secretariat, led by Alexia Latortue, will guide the Coalition’s activities.

¹ For the purposes of the Coalition, *development cooperation* encompasses the full range of actors—and their financial and non-financial resources—from the public, private, and civil society sectors that support countries in accelerating their sustainable development, as well as the policies, norms, and behaviors that shape how these actors interact with each other.

² As of this writing, these countries include: Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Ghana, Ireland, Malawi, Mexico, Nepal, Republic of Korea, Senegal, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Spain, the United Kingdom, and Zambia.

The post-World War II era has seen the most rapid progress in human well-being in history. Yet extreme poverty remains stubborn. Too many children die from easily preventable deaths, economic inequality persists—especially for women—and many people feel powerless to shape their economic futures.

As the world has evolved, the approaches of the last eighty years no longer meet the moment or the demands of the future. Recent reductions in Official Development Assistance (ODA) from major European donors and the United States—declines that are unlikely to be reversed in the near term if at all—have only made this reality even more apparent.

ODA is, of course, only one piece of the development cooperation puzzle. Both the 2015 and 2025 financing for development agreements in Addis and Sevilla affirmed the need to mobilize domestic resources and catalyze private capital, as well as critical enablers such as sound policies, the smart use of technology, and better deployment of data and knowledge. But this vision remains far from realized.

Calls have rightly grown louder for a development cooperation system that is built around more equitable partnerships, decision-making that is closer to the countries and people that are impacted, less siloed programs and institutions, and greater agility, speed, and scale. There is no consensus on the endgame for development, and even less agreement on what paths and models lead to success.

Development cooperation is also far more complex today than it was in earlier decades. A wide array of multilateral institutions now engage in development. A group of ‘middle powers’ have opened up a multitude of new channels for cooperation. Emerging donors—such as China, the Gulf countries, and the BRICs—are taking on larger roles not only by providing finance but also by setting their own terms of engagement and, in some instances, establishing their own development institutions. At least fifty emerging economies have established their own development cooperation capacities. And the private sector—one of the most important players in development, especially through job-creation—is both essential and highly diffuse.

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the interconnectedness of all countries and exposed significant vulnerabilities in the world’s capacity to address global problems effectively. A complex mosaic of actors will need to address pressing development challenges—from mounting debt servicing burdens and record numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons to pandemic preparedness and the need for a global economic system that is fair and works for all. We need a development cooperation system that can rise to the challenge of shifting demographics, evolving trade policies, deep patterns of fragility, and an accelerating climate crisis. We also need a system that harnesses the enormous opportunities of technological innovation and artificial intelligence while buffering the most vulnerable from their disruptive effects.

The Coalition’s work will be shaped by deep technical expertise, grounded in political realities, and focused on delivering ambitious yet actionable recommendations. Its purpose is four-fold:

- Establish a framework and process for open, frank, forward-looking dialogue on a bold and comprehensive approach to development cooperation through inclusive consultations across geographies, sectors, and generations.
- Curate and supplement data and research needed for evidence-based decisions on the future of development cooperation.
- Provide a vision, principles, recommendations, and a narrative for a reimagined development cooperation system, grounded in the national development priorities of low- and middle-income countries and informed by the perspectives of diverse financing sources and actors.
- Create a groundswell of support from decision-makers and leaders committed to improving development cooperation, beginning with changes in their own countries and institutions.

II. Outputs and Expected Results

The Coalition’s process is as significant as its written outputs—if not more so. Through active listening, curated conversations, and honest dialogue—even on difficult or controversial issues—the Coalition aims to inform and influence decision-makers with clear, compelling recommendations. The engagement process itself is viewed as a catalyst for change.

Political Connectivity

The Coalition is independent and will ultimately hold the pen on its recommendations. However, its work will be informed by extensive engagement and collaboration. Its primary audience is decision-makers in countries of all income levels, as well as relevant organizations working to promote sustainable development. The Coalition will foster political connectivity in several ways.

First, it will reach out to a diverse set of countries so they can actively engage, contribute, and—ideally—integrate Coalition findings into their technical and political systems. The Coalition aims to begin with the support of a group of twenty diverse countries—a “coalition of the willing”—including those affected by fragility, small island states, and both emerging and traditional donors.

Second, the Coalition will reach out to key intergovernmental, multilateral, and regional bodies such as the G24, G20, G7, V20, AU, EU, ASEAN, CELAC, BRICs, the United Nations, OECD-DAC, and multilateral development banks. These bodies will be invited to share insights, and later to help disseminate the recommendations of the Coalition. It is hoped that some may integrate the work of the Coalition into their own priorities and processes, championing uptake and implementation of the recommendations.

Third, the Coalition will also engage with influential non-governmental actors—philanthropies, private sector leaders, civil society, and local and regional partners—as a high priority, to both inform and enhance the relevance and uptake of the Coalition’s recommendations.

Finally, the Coalition will engage with the numerous, related initiatives focused on the future of development and collaborate with those sharing common objectives and most likely to gain traction. Our goal is a coherent system that breaks down fragmentation and duplication.

Commissioned Research

Analytical rigor is central to the Coalition's work. It will develop a research agenda informed by key research questions and knowledge gaps to inform its deliberations so that recommendations are grounded in sound economic principles and evidence. To that end, ACET and CGD will produce up to ten research papers, including meta-analysis and new research addressing specific gaps.

Beyond feeding into the Coalition's deliberations, research findings will be disseminated through multiple media channels so that key insights are accessible to broad audiences and to inform reforms.

Reports

The Coalition will release reports throughout its work, sharing findings and perspectives in stages rather than waiting for a single final report. This approach will allow for ongoing feedback and iteration from countries, institutions, and relevant stakeholders, in accordance with the Coalition's thesis that the process of the work is as important as the written outputs. Reports will be concise, plainspoken, and designed to spark reflection and action, with the aim that countries and institutions will carefully consider and implement the recommendations.

- *Analytical report(s)*. Initial reports will present data on diverse financing flows—ODA, private, domestic resources, remittances, trade, illicit finance—as well as on key research questions and case studies on countries that have achieved significant socio-economic progress, with an exploration of how development cooperation has contributed.
- *Principles*. A subsequent report will outline key principles for reshaping development cooperation.
- *Final Report*. The concluding report will include the principles for effective and responsive development cooperation, provide a positive narrative, and deliver actionable recommendations for implementing a reimagined system, possibly with guidance for specific actors.

III. Scope – Areas of Review

The overarching goal of the Coalition is to facilitate a process through which countries at all stages of development—including leaders from the public, private, and civil society sectors—can co-create a bold vision, principles, implementation strategies, and a compelling narrative for a reimagined development cooperation system that is more effective, efficient, and legitimate.

Four core questions will guide the Coalition’s consultations, research, and reports.

1. What is the purpose of development cooperation?

In an environment of competing and ever-expanding priorities, the development agenda has become sprawling, fragmented, and at times overlapping. There are also differing views on what development itself means, what the endgame is, and what model of development works.

This area of review will seek to create a practical framework to clarify the purpose and priorities of development cooperation. Questions to be considered include shared global challenges; classes of cooperation (people, prosperity, planet, and peace); economic and structural transformation; growth; vulnerability; fragility; and poverty.

2. Who decides “the rules of the game”?

There is considerable debate about the rationales for development cooperation—whether grounded in national interest, mutual benefits, or solidarity. Emphasizing one of these rationales over another can lead to very different priorities. At the same time, frustration has grown over the lack of voice and representation, fatigue with a development “industry” that “does development unto countries,” and uncertainty about how to navigate the often-implicit sense that those who pay get to decide how the funding is allocated.

This area of review will propose pragmatic options for how country-led, multi-stakeholder development cooperation can—and should—function, as well as principles for allocating concessional funding. Issues to be considered include decision-making frameworks, transparency, country ownership, partnership models, allocation criteria (such as need, vulnerability, highest potential for impact, return on investment, etc.), and balancing national, regional, and global priorities.

3. What are the sources of finance, and how is financing best distributed? What are the non-financial levers that also matter?

Low- and middle-income countries have been consistently vocal about their interest in investment and trade, not just aid—though for some of the poorest, most fragile, and most debt-burdened countries, aid has provided a vital lifeline. With the recent cuts in ODA, many countries are re-energized to raise and leverage domestic resources more effectively. There are also numerous non-financial drivers of progress, including sound macroeconomic environments, the rule of law, good governance, technology, etc.

This area of review will recommend strategies for leveraging diverse financial flows and non-financial levers to accelerate development progress—in short, what financing for development should look like in the modern era and the compacts and understandings that should underpin it. Issues to be considered include the best use of concessional resources; addressing negative financial flows; pragmatic actions to unlock private sector engagement—both domestic and international, financial and corporate; growing and mobilizing the various sources of local resources; enhancing the quality of finance (such as predictability,

risk-bearing capacity, patient and long-term horizons, and catalytic potential); reducing the cost of capital; and integrating sound policies, technology, and better use of knowledge and data for enhanced outcomes.

4. What delivery models increase impact, effectiveness, efficiency, and scale?

Even though national polls in different countries show continued support for development assistance, there remains a persistent perception that it is not effective. As development cooperation—a much broader and multi-actor proposition—is reimagined, the goals of impact, effectiveness, operational efficiency, and scale must be central. The need for progress is even more urgent in countries experiencing demographic growth.

This area of review will focus on actionable recommendations for improving implementation—the *how* of development cooperation—with an emphasis on achieving systemic impact at the country level, while recognizing that both the supra-national and sub-national levels are critical to achieving progress. Issues to be considered include streamlining the development architecture; addressing silos within and across development, climate, and humanitarian work; reducing duplication; strengthening national systems and institutions (and addressing implications when state capacity is weak or absent), and modernizing delivery through technology and artificial intelligence. This area of review will also address accountability, knowledge sharing, and the skills required to support a more effective system.

IV. The Approach – Values and Governance

Values

The five core values of the Coalition are:

- *Independence.* The Coalition is independent; it is not a governmental or intergovernmental process. Co-chairs, commissioners, co-host organizations, and secretariat members are selected in their personal capacity for their expertise and commitment to the Coalition’s ambition, not their country or institutional affiliations. These individuals will hold the pen on the Coalition’s written outputs; they will listen actively through inclusive consultations but will not negotiate text in a public process. The Coalition’s independence will be safeguarded through its values, governance, and diversified funding base.
- *Transparency.* The Coalition has transparent governance, funding, consultation processes, and decision-making, including how evidence and data are used.
- *Frank and open communication.* The Coalition will engage and consult with a broad group of stakeholders, raising difficult, uncomfortable, and even politically sensitive questions with respect, addressing areas of disagreement openly, and avoiding “lowest common denominator” consensus for its own sake. Communications and reports will use clear, jargon-free language focused on actionable recommendations.

- *Evidence-based.* The Coalition’s strength lies in its analytical rigor and transparency of its methods and sources.
- *Diversity.* The Coalition emphasizes co-creation, representation, active listening, and meaningful engagement with diverse perspectives, including seeking to hear voices that are under-represented.

Governance

The Coalition’s governance and management structure consists of:

- *Co-chairs.* Two co-chairs—former senior public or private sector leaders—will provide leadership for the Coalition. They will bring the credibility and authority needed to guide a complex, multi-stakeholder global process that spans political and technical domains. The co-chairs will be strategic thinkers, willing to challenge conventional wisdom, excellent synthesizers, empathetic listeners, and strong communicators.
- *Commissioners.* Ten commissioners from countries of varying income levels—including economists, development experts, policymakers, and leaders from the private sector, civil society, and philanthropy—will work with the co-chairs to deliver the Coalition’s outputs and outcomes. Commissioners should be future thinkers who are willing to roll up their sleeves.
- *The secretariat.* Led by the Head of Secretariat, Alexia Latortue, and supported by a seven-person team, the secretariat will guide the overall process, curate research, manage stakeholder interactions, synthesize findings and recommendations, and ensure the timely delivery of outputs and reports. The Head of Secretariat brings extensive global experience in development finance, political economy, policymaking, private sector and civil society engagement, and coalition building.
- *The co-host organizations.* ACET and CGD will provide their intellectual leadership, research capacity, convening power, and communications heft to support the Coalition, and provide the infrastructure needed to run the Coalition. They will help shape its goals and work plan, commission research, organize consultations and meetings, and develop and amplify key messages.

Co-chairs will be selected by the secretariat and the co-host organizations, with input from funders and supporting countries. Following extensive consultation, a commissioner shortlist will be presented to the co-chairs for final selection. The Coalition’s recommendations will be agreed by consensus among commissioners, co-chairs, co-host leads, and the secretariat. If consensus is not reached, the co-chairs, with support from the Head of Secretariat, will finalize the content. Supporting countries of the Coalition are not obligated to accept the Coalition’s recommendations.

Funders

The Coalition is currently funded by a range of important philanthropic institutions. All funding for the Coalition is channeled through the co-host organizations. We are in advanced conversations with others beyond these key funders:

- Coefficient Giving – *support provided to CGD*
- Conrad N. Hilton Foundation – *support provided to ACET*
- Ford Foundation – *supported provided to CGD*
- Gates Foundation³ – *support provided to ACET and CGD*
- Foundation name forthcoming – *support provided to ACET*

V. High-Level Timeline

The Coalition is time-bound (14 months), reflecting the urgency of its mission and the need for prompt, actionable recommendations.

Preparatory work occurred over summer and early fall 2025, including securing funding, selecting co-host organizations, building the coalition of willing countries, and refining the terms of reference.

The core work of the Coalition will take place from November 2025 to November 2026, with three Coalition meetings anticipated between January and September 2026, and regional consultations between February and July 2026. Commissioned research papers and reports will be released throughout 2026, culminating in a final report expected in October 2026.

The Coalition will share its report with continued outreach and engagement and begin to wind down its work in November-December 2026. This will include identifying other initiatives or existing groups that can sustain the momentum and continue engaging on the recommendations, recognizing that systemic change requires more than 14 months.

³ *The work described in these Terms of Reference is funded in part by the Gates Foundation. The material contained within are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the Gates Foundation.*

ANNEX

For the purposes of the Coalition, *development cooperation* encompasses the full range of actors—and their financial and non-financial resources—from the public, private, and civil society sectors that support countries in accelerating their sustainable development, as well as the policies, norms, and behaviors that shape how these actors interact with each other.

Specifically,

<i>The Coalition IS...</i>	<i>The Coalition IS NOT...</i>
about development	about the development industry
interested in all types of financial flows (domestic resource, private, ODA) as well as flows of trade, technology, and knowledge	just focused on ODA
focused on all development sectors (agriculture, infrastructure, health, education, etc.), climate, and development in fragile and conflict affected contexts	focused solely on humanitarian aid. Nonetheless, the Coalition recognizes the importance of the humanitarian-development nexus
focused on principles, approaches, and delivery models for more effective, efficient, and legitimate development cooperation	just focused on a review of existing architecture or institutional arrangements
by and for countries at all stages of development	targeted exclusively to traditional donor countries