

Exploring Barriers and Opportunities for Deepening Cooperation across DAC and Non-DAC Providers

RACHAEL CALLEJA · SARA CASADEVALL BELLÉS · BEATA CICHOCKA

Abstract

At a time when progress towards the 2030 Agenda has stalled, there is a clear need for collective—and cooperative—development action to put the agenda back on track. The good news is that the number of countries with institutions dedicated to sharing knowledge, skills, and resources to support development outcomes is growing, with more DAC and non-DAC countries providing cooperation than ever before. The bad news, however, is that cooperation across these providers—particularly between DAC and non-DAC countries—has faced considerable barriers to deep and impactful partnerships. In this paper, we explore the barriers to cooperation between DAC and non-DAC providers for development and how they can be overcome. To do so, we use a combination of survey and interview research, which is designed to capture diverse perspectives across providers, as well as international organisations responsible for convening actors for development. Our survey research finds that differences in the principles and visions for development cooperation, lack of capacity, and low political appetite for cooperation remain pervasive barriers to deeper partnerships between DAC and non-DAC providers, while interviewees highlighted low trust as a fundamental challenge. To overcome these challenges, providers will need to invest time and energy in rebuilding trust through engagement and should aim to co-create development norms and standards that reflect the priorities and realities of the shifting provider landscape.

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Center for Global Development

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Contents

Introduction	1
Background: What factors limit cooperation for development between DAC and non-DAC providers?.....	3
Analysis and results: Exploring the scope and challenges to cross-provider cooperation for development.....	7
How do DAC and non-DAC providers cooperate on development?	7
What barriers to cooperation exist between DAC and non-DAC providers?	10
Which international spaces are most conducive to cooperation across providers, and why?.....	12
Main findings and discussion: How can barriers to cooperation be overcome?.....	16
Conclusion and recommendations	20
References	22
Annex 1: Survey and interview methodology.....	26
Surveys.....	26
Interviews.....	27
Limitations	27
Annex 2: Supplementary figure.....	28

List of Figures

1. How do DAC and non-DAC providers engage or cooperate with other development providers? 9

2. What are the main barriers to cooperation between DAC and non-DAC providers? 11

3. Which international forums or informal spaces do DAC and non-DAC providers see as the most important channels of cooperation with other bilateral providers?13

A1. What features make an international organisation or informal space conducive to cooperation for development?.....28

Introduction

The complex challenges that define the current development landscape—in which interconnected crises have reversed progress towards the 2030 Agenda—cannot be addressed by any one country working alone, and will require deeper cooperation for development to make meaningful progress.¹ The good news is that at the halfway point to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), there are now more countries with institutions responsible for sharing knowledge, skills, and resources for development than ever before, including from a growing number of countries that are not members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC).² Indeed, research has shown that at least 85 DAC and non-DAC countries now have agencies responsible for outward cooperation for development (including a number of *dual* providers responsible for outward and inward cooperation), signaling an expansion of the ideas, perspectives, and expertise that can be leveraged to advance development outcomes. The bad news, however, is that while more countries are engaging internationally in humanitarian and development activities, DAC and non-DAC providers have tended to operate in largely separate international spaces, limiting opportunities to leverage each other's strengths and utilise the global pool of knowledge through cooperative action.³ This was even true in response to the acute COVID-19 crisis, where bilateral action driven by self-interest defined much of the international response, despite the shared nature of the crisis and potential shared benefits of working together.⁴ The emerging disconnect between the need for cooperation to tackle global development challenges and the lack of commensurate action raises important questions about the barriers preventing cooperation between providers,⁵ and more crucially, how such barriers can be overcome.

In this paper, we tackle these questions in the context of cooperation between official provider agencies of DAC and non-DAC countries. While we acknowledge that the partnerships envisioned to achieve the 2030 Agenda will require collective action across a range of actors—including the private sector and civil society—our narrow focus aims to contribute to questions around how the shifting official development cooperation provider landscape can be leveraged to advance development outcomes. To do so, we rely on primary data obtained through both surveys and interviews with DAC and non-DAC cooperation providers that sought to understand (1) the challenges limiting the ability

1 UNDESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs), "Global Sustainable Development Report 2023: Key Messages," (New York: UN, 2023), available at: https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/GSDR%202023%20Key%20Messages_1.pdf.

2 Rachael Calleja, Beata Cichocka and Sara Casadevall Bellés, *How Do Non-DAC Actors Cooperate on Development?* CGD Policy Paper 294 (London: Center for Global Development, 2023).

3 While various forms of partnerships (bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral) between DAC and non-DAC providers have been attempted, such partnerships are not yet mainstream approaches to working across historic divides.

4 Rachael Calleja, Beata Cichocka, Mikaela Gavvas and Samuel Pleeck, *A Global Development Paradigm for a World in Crisis*, CGD Policy Paper 275 (London: Center for Global Development, 2022).

5 This disconnect between the need for collective action and its limitations in practice are well founded in theories of collective action, which demonstrate the incentives to free ride and the challenges of cooperative action, even when cooperation is in the interests of the majority. See Marcus Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1965).

or willingness of providers to partner for development, (2) the forums that are the most conducive to supporting cross-provider development partnerships, and why, and (3) the opportunities for deepening cross-provider partnerships for development in the years ahead. Our survey research finds that differences in the principles and visions for development cooperation, lack of capacity, and low political appetite for cooperation remain pervasive barriers to deeper partnerships between DAC and non-DAC providers, while interviewees highlighted low trust as a fundamental challenge. To overcome these challenges, providers will need to invest time and energy in rebuilding trust through engagement, and should aim to co-create development norms and standards that reflect the priorities and realities of the changing provider landscape.

Our populations of interest within this paper include DAC and non-DAC cooperation *providers*, which we understand as any country which has a dedicated structure responsible for managing outward or dual development cooperation.⁶ We refer to these structures as cooperation provider *agencies*, and use this term to refer to a broad array of bureaucratic models for managing development cooperation.⁷ In line with our previous work, we focus on the “DAC” and “non-DAC” provider categories as a simple, clear, and technical distinction between countries that are members of the OECD-DAC and those that are not, while also acknowledging that this method of delineating between provider types is necessarily imperfect.⁸ Whenever possible, we also refer to countries that engage in outward development cooperation as *providers* rather than as *donors*,⁹ and to their outward flows as *development cooperation* rather than either as *aid* or *official development assistance*. This distinction recognises that not all providers—especially within the non-DAC grouping—may choose to self-identify as donors and underscores that we understand relevant development cooperation outflows to also include the provision of nonfinancial—or not easily quantifiable—resources such as in-kind contributions or technology and knowledge transfers. Additionally, seeing as our work focuses

6 For a full list of non-DAC cooperation providers, see Calleja et al., *How Do Non-DAC Actors Cooperate on Development?*, 2023.

7 Including dedicated agencies, units within a government ministry that are responsible for managing outward cooperation, and agencies responsible for setting strategic direction and coordinating development action across other government actors.

8 Most notably, the terminology suffers from two key challenges. First, it functionally defines non-DAC countries by what they are not (i.e., DAC members) and implicitly sets DAC membership as the reference point for comparison. Second, the DAC/non-DAC distinction may falsely imply a clear division between DAC and non-DAC members, or, conversely, a false sense of homogeneity *within* either group. In practice, countries vary in terms of their closeness to the OECD-DAC and cannot be considered homogenous within either grouping; as our previous work has shown, some countries outside the OECD-DAC may be more open to engaging with DAC standards than others. See Emma Mawdsley, *From Recipients to Donors: Emerging Powers and the Changing Development Landscape* (London: Zed Books, 2012).

9 Similarly, although not the key focus of this paper, when referring to official actors in the capacities in which they receive development cooperation, we choose to use the terminology of *partner countries* rather than *recipients*.

primarily on understanding the barriers to cooperation between DAC and non-DAC providers, we primarily use the term *cooperation* to refer to cross-provider engagement and partnerships.¹⁰

This paper is the third in a series that explores the role of non-DAC cooperation providers within a changing development landscape and asks how to foster deeper collaboration for development across DAC and non-DAC providers. The first paper in this series explored non-DAC responses to COVID-19 and the degree to which DAC and non-DAC members collaborated in response to this acute global challenge, finding limited evidence of cooperation across providers.¹¹ The second conducted a broad mapping exercise designed to identify countries with an agency for managing outward development cooperation, as well as their strategic interests in, priorities for, and openness to engaging in cross-provider partnerships.¹² Ultimately, we found that income levels and political factors affect countries' willingness to cooperate with other providers, and that most non-DAC providers are at least somewhat open to cross-provider cooperation. Building on this current study, a forthcoming paper will explore whether countries that are uniquely positioned between DAC and non-DAC providers could serve a bridging function to deepen partnerships and build better cross-provider collaboration for development.

This paper proceeds in four main parts. First, as background for this study, we conduct a literature review to understand why cooperation between development providers has been limited and identify ongoing barriers to cross-provider partnership. Second, we briefly describe our methodology and report key findings to highlight current challenges to cooperation, as well as the spaces and characteristics that best promote cross-provider engagement. Third, we discuss the implications of key findings, and our fourth section provides closing remarks and highlights key recommendations for building a more collaborative development system in the years ahead.

Background: What factors limit cooperation for development between DAC and non-DAC providers?

The understanding that cooperation providers often struggle to *coordinate* development activities—let alone engage in deeper forms of *cooperation* or *collaboration*¹³—is far from new, with repeated calls for providers to coordinate development action, including as part of various effectiveness commitments or to work together to address the collective action problems that underlie the Sustainable Development

10 That is, when referring to the specific forums or modalities which may present opportunities or challenges for collaboration or cooperation for development, we explicitly mean to explore the ways in which these spaces foster discussion or action between two or more provider countries from across the DAC and non-DAC groupings for development purposes (i.e., collaborating on developing shared standards or commitments for best practice or working together to co-create, finance, or implement cooperation in partner countries).

11 Calleja et al., *A Global Development Paradigm for a World in Crisis*.

12 Calleja et al., *How Do Non-DAC Actors Cooperate on Development?*

13 Ngairé Woods, "Rethinking aid coordination" in *Catalyzing Development*, ed. Homi Kharas et al. (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2011).

Goals (SDGs), remaining unachieved.¹⁴ Across DAC and non-DAC providers in particular, cooperation for development has often been limited by a series of provider-specific, historical, and forum-related factors.

At the broadest level, two provider-specific factors are commonly cited as key barriers to all cross-provider cooperation for development, including between DAC and non-DAC providers. The first relates to motivational factors that can limit the incentive for countries to engage in collaborative action for development versus working independently. Based on the understanding that cooperation providers use development resources to support a range of objectives—including securing their own political, strategic, or commercial interests—coordination and cooperation among providers is often limited by the degree to which interests align.¹⁵ When interests do not align, providers are less likely to cooperate and may instead seek to use their allocations to compete against others for influence in partner countries. Put simply, coordinated action could limit the ability for providers to use development activities to “plant their flag” in a way that raises their profile in the host country and/or delineates clear achievements for constituents at home.¹⁶ While such challenges have traditionally been acute even among DAC members, some have argued that the growing number of non-DAC providers has increased competitive pressures within the system by introducing alternative sources of development finance.¹⁷ The second factor concerns provider-level institutional contexts—including organisational structures, provider-specific procedures, and capacity constraints—that can hinder coordination.¹⁸ Smaller providers or those at lower income levels, for instance, may have

14 For evidence of poor progress towards coordinated action across providers, see Peter Nunnenkamp, Hannes Öhler, and Rainer Thiele. “Donor Coordination and Specialization: Did the Paris Declaration Make a Difference?” *Review of World Economics* 149, no. 3 (2013): 537–63. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10290-013-0157-2>.

15 Alberto Alesina and David Dollar, “Who Gives Foreign Aid to Whom and Why?” *Journal of Economic Growth* 5, no. 1 (2000): 33–63, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1009874203400>; Hannah Öhler, “Do Aid Donors Coordinate with Recipient Countries?” Discussion Paper no. 539 (Department of Economics, University of Heidelberg, 2013), DOI: 10.11588/heidok.00014372; Andreas Fuchs et al., “Why Donors of Foreign Aid Do Not Coordinate: The Role of Competition for Export Markets and Political Support,” *The World Economy* 38, no. 2 (2015): 255–285, <https://doi.org/10.1111/twec.12213>; Maurizio Carbone, “Make Europe Happen on the Ground? Enabling and Constraining Factors for European Union Aid Coordination in Africa,” *Development Policy Review* 35, no. 5 (2017): 531–548, <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12194>.

16 Fuchs et al., “Why Donors of Foreign Aid Do Not Coordinate,” 255–285; Arne Bigsten, “Donor Coordination and the Uses of Aid,” *Revue d'économie du développement* 14, no. 2–3 (2006): 77–103. <https://www.cairn-int.info/journal-revue-d-economie-du-developpement-2006-2-page-77.htm>; Maija Halonen-Akatwijuka, “Coordination Failure in Foreign Aid,” *The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy* 7, no. 1 (August 2007): 1–40, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.531082>; Dale Whittington and Craig Calhoun, “Who Really Wants Donor Co-ordination?,” *Development Policy Review*, 6: 295–309 (September 1988), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7679.1988.tb00457.x>.

17 Ngaire Woods, “Rethinking Aid Coordination” in *Catalyzing Development*, ed. Homi Kharas et al., 112–126 (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2011), <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/29103>; Homi Kharas and Andrew Rogerson, *Horizon 2025: Creative Destruction in the Aid Industry*, ODI Report (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2019), <https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/7723.pdf>.

18 Sarah Rose, *Focusing on Fragility: The Future of US Assistance to Fragile States* (Washington: Center for Global Development, 2019), <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/focusing-on-fragility-report.pdf>; Stephan Klingebiel et al., “Costs, Benefits, and the Political Economy of Aid Coordination: The Case of the European Union,” *European Journal of Development Research* 29 (2016): 144–159, <https://doi.org/10.1057/ejdr.2015.84>; Jan Orbie et al., *Improving European Coordination in Fragile States*, Practitioners Network for European Development Cooperation (2017), https://www.dev-practitioners.eu/media/key_documents/FINAL_SYNTHESIS-PN_Improving_European_coordination_in_fragile_states_11.20_4LVmOOH.pdf; Sven Grimm et al., “Coordinating China and DAC Development Partners: Challenges to the Aid Architecture in Rwanda,” Study no. 56, (Bonn: Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik, 2010), <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/199181/1/die-study-56.pdf>.

fewer human resources to dedicate to cooperation, which can often be complex and time consuming, while different reporting requirements, planning timelines, or modes of engagement can complicate cooperation, especially if there is little understanding of such differences across institutions.

More specifically, cooperation between DAC and non-DAC providers is further complicated by historic injustices that underlie relations between “North” and “South”, where pervasive inequalities not only make it difficult to define fair solutions to shared challenges, but also create conditions for mistrust between countries that have benefitted from the unequal systems of colonialism and its aftermaths, and those that have not.¹⁹ At the global level, such mistrust has been identified as a key challenge to building meaningful cross-country cooperation, including to address global challenges such as climate change and environmental protection, as it fosters weak reciprocity and limits the scope for ambitious collective agreements.²⁰ While the mistrust caused by inequality may not permeate *all* relations between DAC and non-DAC providers, especially given that some non-DACs are amongst the world’s richest countries, recent failures to meet global commitments—including the globally agreed climate finance target of an additional \$100 billion per year—and broader breakdowns in cooperation witnessed as part of country responses to COVID-19, suggest that waning trust remains a key challenge for building cooperation to achieve shared developmental objectives.²¹

At the same time, differences in the principles of cooperation adopted by DAC and non-DAC providers have often been highlighted as a key challenge to deeper partnerships and cooperation for development.²² At its core, the issue stems from fundamental differences in the development models of DAC and non-DAC actors, with non-DAC cooperation viewed as being offered with fewer conditions and having a clearer emphasis on solidarity and mutual benefit than that of DAC members, whose cooperation is seen to serve opaque goals and is often highly conditional. In theory, such differences provide non-DACs with legitimacy by positioning their cooperation in opposition to the dominant norms typically associated with DAC counterparts.²³ However, recent evidence suggests that the distance between the principles underlying the actions of DAC and non-DAC providers has shrunk, with DAC members increasingly emulating non-DAC narratives for development cooperation—including around development being a win-win or in the mutual interest—and practices, such as

19 J. Timmons Roberts and Bradley Parks, *Climate of Injustice Global Inequality, North-South Politics, and Climate Policy* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006).

20 *Ibid.*

21 UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), *Human Development Report 2021-22: Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives: Shaping our Future in a Transforming World* (New York: 2022), https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/global-report-document/hdr2021-22pdf_1.pdf.

22 Laurence Chandy and Homi Kharas, “Why Can’t We Just All Get Along? The Practical Limits of International Development Cooperation,” *Journal of International Development* 23, no. 5 (2011): 739–751, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.1797>; Penny Davies, “A Review of the Roles and Activities of New Development Partners,” CFP Working Paper 4 (Washington D.C: World Bank, 2010), <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/824291468330960846/A-review-of-the-roles-and-activities-of-new-development-partners>.

23 Nilima Gulrajani and Liam Swiss, *Why do countries become donors? Assessing the drivers and implications of donor proliferation*, ODI Report (London: ODI, 2017), <http://cdn-odi-production.s3-website-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/media/documents/11364.pdf>.

the blending of developmental agendas with trade and investment.²⁴ While the convergence of provider practices could reduce the distance between DAC and non-DAC cooperation principles, it remains unclear whether the shrinking normative space will translate into a greater willingness to cooperate—especially in light of deficient trust.

Lastly, some have noted that cooperation between DAC and non-DAC providers is further limited by the inability of current international forums, such as the OECD-DAC, UN Development Cooperation Forum (DCF), and Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC), to facilitate meaningful cross-actor cooperation. Much of this debate centers around concerns that such spaces are seen as Northern-dominated institutions where non-DACs can “never expect to exercise significant power,” making it difficult for such providers to engage on an equal footing.²⁵ At its core, the issue relates to the perception of the OECD-DAC as an exclusive club, raising concerns that DAC-related forums lack legitimacy as spaces for global collaboration. Even global forums with historic or operational ties to the OECD-DAC—such as the GPEDC—have faced legitimacy-related challenges.²⁶ While United Nations-based organisations have sometimes been viewed as viable alternatives, with some suggesting that the UN’s Development Cooperation Forum could act as a more legitimate space for equal partnership and participation,²⁷ others argue that the DCF’s inclusiveness limits the degree to which the forum can meaningfully make decisions and supplant the normative function of the DAC.²⁸ Indeed, the inability of existing development forums to balance legitimacy with normative heft raises important questions about whether the current system is conducive to meaningful engagement, and if not, what kind of forum might be better suited to fostering cooperation for development.

24 Emma Mawdsley, “The ‘Southernisation’ of Development?” *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 59, no. 2 (August 2018): 173–185. <https://doi.org/10.1111/apv.12192>.

25 Chandy and Kharas, “Why can’t we just all get along?” p. 745.

26 Jack Taggart, “A Decade Since Busan: Towards Legitimacy or a ‘New Tyranny’ of Global Development Partnership?” *The Journal of Development Studies* 58, no. 1 (2022): 1459–1477, DOI: 10.1080/00220388.2022.2032672; Xiaoyun Li, *Should China Join the GPEDC? The Prospects for China and the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation*, Discussion Paper 17 (Bonn: Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik, 2017), https://www.idos-research.de/uploads/media/DP_17.2017.pdf; Debapriya Bhattacharya and Sarah Sabin Khan, *Rethinking Development Effectiveness: Perspectives from the Global South*, Southern Voice Occasional Paper Series no. 59 (Lima: Southern Voice, 2020), <http://southernvoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Rethinking-Development-Effectiveness-Bhattacharya-and-Khan-2020.pdf>; Joren Verschaeve and Jan Orbie, “The DAC Is Dead, Long Live the DCF? A Comparative Analysis of the OECD Development Assistance Committee and the UN Development Cooperation Forum,” *European Journal of Development Research* 28 (2016): 571–587, <https://doi.org/10.1057/ejdr.2015.27>.

27 Julia Miller and Anne Schoenstein, *The United Nations Development Cooperation Forum Through a Women’s Right Lens* (New York: UN-DCF, 2013), https://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/newfunct/pdf13/primer_12.pdf.

28 Verschaeve and Orbie, “The DAC is Dead, Long Live the DCF?;” Fahimul Quadir, “Rising Donors and the New Narrative of ‘South–South’ Cooperation: What Prospects for Changing the Landscape of Development Assistance Programs?” *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (2013): 321–338, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2013.775788>.

Analysis and results: Exploring the scope and challenges to cross-provider cooperation for development

The analysis presented in the remainder of this paper draws from a combination of survey and interview-based research, both of which aim to gather first-hand perspectives on the barriers to cross-provider cooperation primarily from the perspectives of those working in official development agencies. For the survey, we contacted senior officials in DAC and non-DAC provider agencies who have clear knowledge of their agency's activities and were able to speak on their organisations' behalf. We received responses from 14 unique DAC-member agencies and 25 agencies from non-DAC providers,²⁹ representing roughly 47 percent of DAC member countries and 43 percent of non-DAC provider countries with development agencies.³⁰ In addition, we conducted interviews with 15 individuals—most of whom were at a senior leadership level—across DAC providers, non-DAC providers, and international organisations, as well as one academic. A full description of our survey and interview methodology, including caveats and limitations, is available in Annex 1.

Broadly, both the surveys and interviews aimed to understand (1) how DAC and non-DAC countries cooperate for development, (2) the key barriers to cooperation for development, and (3) the factors that make international spaces conducive to cooperation across providers.

How do DAC and non-DAC providers cooperate on development?

To provide a basis for interpreting cooperation barriers, we asked research participants to identify both whether and how they commonly cooperate with other providers, particularly in terms of the channels or modalities of cooperation used for partnership. Notably, more than 90 percent of survey respondents (93 percent of DACs and 97 percent of non-DACs) **agreed that their agencies partner with other providers on development**, using a broad range of channels.

29 Four of the non-DAC provider agencies that responded to our survey were not part of our original sample of 54 countries identified as having institutionalised capacities for outward cooperation. However, we included these responses in the survey analysis on the basis that each self-identified as being part of an agency which was responsible for outward or dual cooperation; as an "introductory" question to the survey, all respondents were asked to identify whether their agencies acted as "providers", "recipients", or "dual providers and recipients".

30 We received responses from 14 of 30 bilateral DAC providers (47 percent; denominator excludes Estonia which had not joined the DAC at the time the research was conducted) and 25 of 58 non-DAC providers (43 percent); the denominator represents the original 54 non-DAC providers identified plus the four that self-identified as providers as part of the survey. In some cases, multiple unique responses were received from the same provider agency, which results in a slightly higher number of responses included in the analysis.

When asked *how* they cooperate with others, **most survey respondents noted a preference for bilateral and trilateral cooperation partnerships (Figure 1), with interviewees elaborating that these channels were preferred due to the relative ease of working with a smaller number of actors and the ability to align cooperation more closely with provider interests.** Survey responses from both DAC and non-DAC providers identified “formal bilateral partnerships” and “triangular cooperation” as the two most frequently used modalities for cross-provider cooperation, albeit to differing degrees. While the majority of non-DAC respondents (90 percent) identified engaging with other providers via formal bilateral partnerships, this form of engagement was only the second most common response for DAC members (reported by 38 percent). By contrast, the most common channel for cooperation identified by DAC members was triangular engagement, with 46 percent of DAC respondents signaling involvement in triangular activities. However, non-DAC providers remain more actively engaged in triangular partnership overall, with 69 percent of respondents identifying triangular cooperation as a key partnership modality.

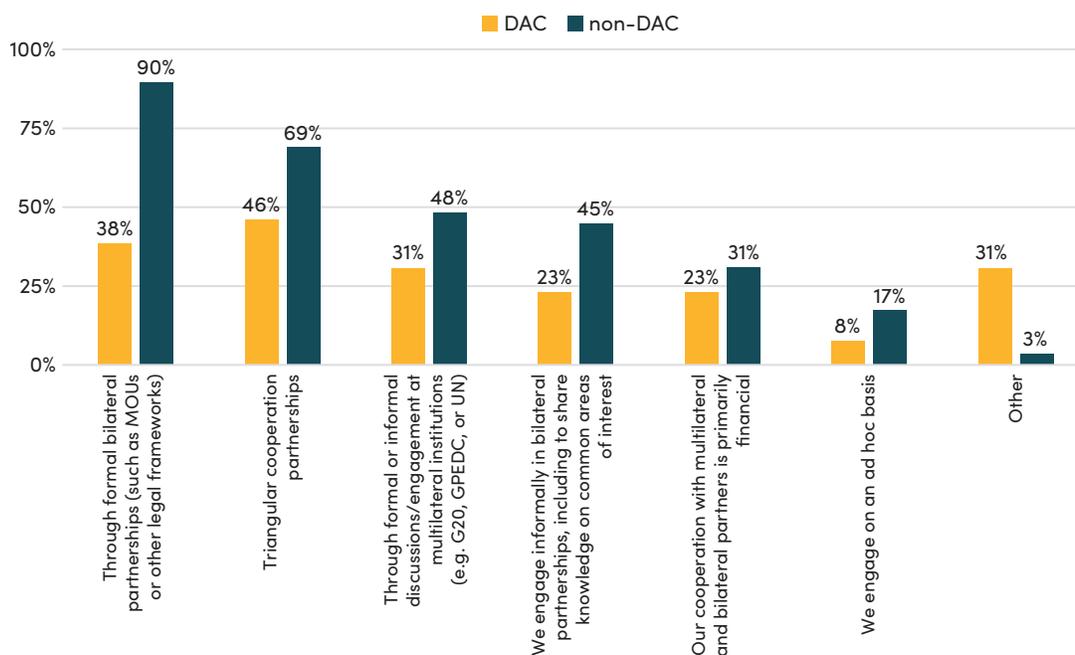
Discussions with interviewees revealed that bilateral and trilateral forms of partnerships were often preferred due to both their feasibility vis-à-vis multilateral cooperation and the ability for providers to more explicitly align engagement with actions or themes of interest.³¹ Indeed, working with fewer partners was not only seen as practically simpler—to the degree that it is easier to negotiate project development and implementation with a smaller number of partners—but also more politically palatable due to the stronger ability to tailor the content of partnerships to match the regions, sectors, or themes of interest to all parties than is possible through multilateral action.³² Moreover, some interviewees noted that bilateral or triangular partnerships tended to be *technical* in nature, making it easier for agencies to participate relative to the *political* types of action typically prioritised in multilateral settings.³³

31 Based on responses from interviewees 1 and 12.

32 To a degree, the issue here is one of control, where bilateral partnerships allow providers to have more direct input into engagements and ensure that cooperative actions align with provider interests than is often possible through multilateral action. A similar logic has often been used to explain provider preferences for bilateral versus multilateral development spending and engagement. See Nilima Gulrajani, *Bilateral versus multilateral channels: Strategic Choices for Donors*, ODI Report, (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2016) <https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/10492.pdf>.

33 Based on responses from interviewees 3, 12, and 13.

FIGURE 1. How do DAC and non-DAC providers engage or cooperate with other development providers?



Note: Based on 29 non-DAC responses and 13 DAC responses. The percentages represented between the two surveys are not entirely comparable; while both surveys asked the same question, the non-DAC survey asked respondents to rank the top three from predefined options, while the DAC survey asked for open responses in text format with no limit on the number of options listed. For the non-DAC survey, all responses have been combined, regardless of whether the option was ranked first, second, or third. Responses to the “other” category include partnerships through topical international networks, such as the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) Partnership or regional institutions “owned” by partner countries (such as the Mekong River Commission or the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development).

Despite relatively lower preferences for cross-provider engagement through multilateral channels, interviewees noted that multilateralism remained important to achieving the SDGs, yet worried that the current political context had made such cooperation with other providers more difficult. Multilateral partnerships appeared as the third most common cooperation channel overall, identified by 48 percent of non-DAC provider respondents and 31 percent of DAC participants, with interviewees noting that while multilateral cooperation is more difficult than other types of action, especially during a period where multilateralism is seen to be in “crisis”, multilateral channels remain important for negotiating global commitments on shared challenges and action.³⁴ Particularly, interviewees pointed to increasingly divergent political interests across countries as a key source of the problem, noting that in addition to the traditional North–South divide, a more heterogeneous development cooperation landscape alongside a growing number of providers was adding complexity to conversations about development norms and standards, as well as about who should contribute to development solutions and to what degree.³⁵ At the same time, increased geopolitical tensions among large international players—notably the United States and

34 Based on responses from interviewee 14.

35 Based on responses from interviewees 5, 10, 11, 12, and 14.

China—as well as the current war in Ukraine, were seen by some interviewees to not only complicate international dialogues on cooperation but potentially subordinate development issues to more immediate political, economic, or security priorities.³⁶

What barriers to cooperation exist between DAC and non-DAC providers?

A key objective of our survey was to understand the barriers that limit cooperation between DAC and non-DAC providers. We put these questions to survey respondents and interviewees, who highlighted several key challenges for the future of development partnerships.

Participants in the study highlighted four key barriers to cooperation between DAC and non-DAC providers: (1) differences in the principles and visions for cooperation, (2) capacity constraints, (3) low political appetite for engagement, and (4) procedural and legal difficulties. Across responses, DAC and non-DAC participants agreed that “different underlying visions or principles” for development cooperation presented the main barrier to cross-actor cooperation, with 82 percent of non-DAC respondents and 57 percent of DAC respondents highlighting the issue (Figure 2); several interviewees similarly noted this as a challenge.³⁷ Specifically, respondents pointed to differences in the norms and standards of development engagement—including on conditionalities, tying cooperation to domestic procurement, measurement and monetisation, and development effectiveness—as key barriers. However, interviewees noted that such differences between DAC and non-DAC providers are not uniform, and that the heterogeneity within the non-DAC grouping in particular means that some countries are more or less aligned with DAC standards on different issues.³⁸ Consider for instance, that some non-DACs, notably providers from the Middle East, regularly report cooperation spending to the DAC, while several Latin American providers publish details on their cooperation outflows and are leading efforts to “quantify” South-South cooperation.³⁹

Other key barriers identified by providers included a “lack of capacity” for investing in partnerships and “low political appetite for cooperation.” Perhaps notably, lack of capacity for engaging in partnerships appears as a key barrier for both DAC and non-DAC providers according to survey respondents, suggesting that constraints on time, human resources, and budgets are shared.⁴⁰ However, interviewees

36 Based on responses from interviewees 3, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 14.

37 Based on responses from interviewees 1, 4, 11, 13, and 14.

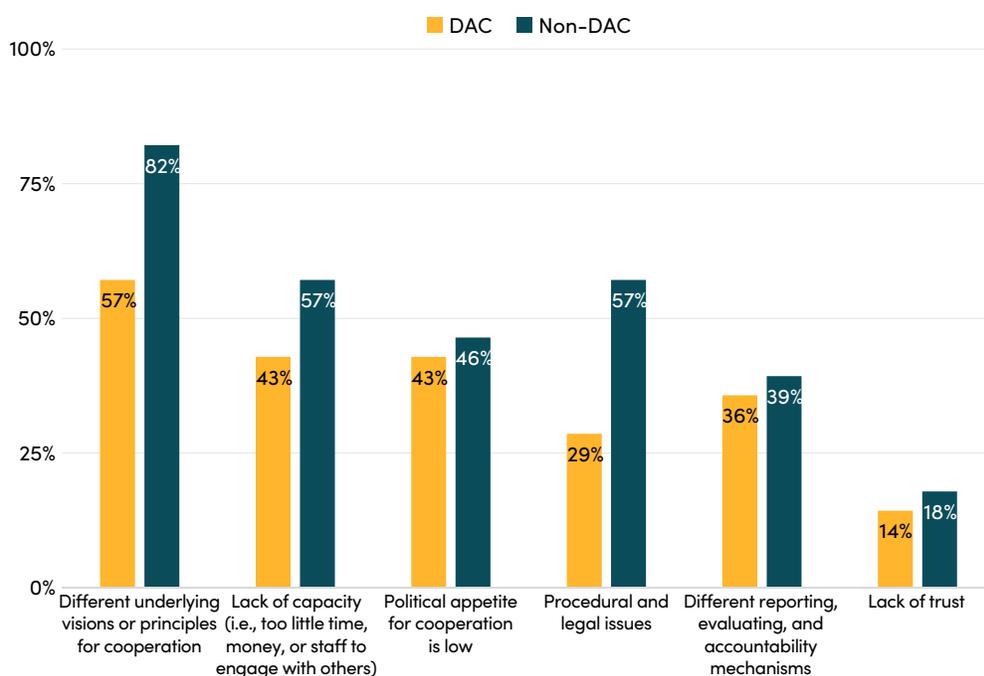
38 Based on responses from interviewees 1 and 13.

39 For instance, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates regularly report development cooperation volumes to the OECD. Additionally, several Latin American countries report cooperation activities via national or regional reporting mechanisms, including annual reports of the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB), while the Community of Practice established by APC Colombia serves as an example of leadership on issues of quantifying south-south cooperation. See: OECD, “Data Explorer” available at: <https://data-explorer.oecd.org/>; APC Colombia, “Community of Practice on Measurement and Quantification of South-South Cooperation Meeting on established approaches to measurement and quantification”, meeting held on May 26 2022, available at <https://www.apccolombia.gov.co/sites/default/files/2022-07/EN%20-%20CoP%20Measurement%20of%20SSC%20-%20minutes%20v20220526.pdf>.

40 While we do not have disaggregated information on this point, it would be interesting to understand whether DAC and non-DAC providers face the same kinds of capacity constraints.

were more concerned by political barriers to cooperation than practical constraints, noting that the incentives to cooperate are often low, with different interests across providers seen as a key challenge for building better partnerships.⁴¹ In particular, interviewees stressed that cooperation between DAC and non-DAC providers is often limited by perceived political risks associated with such partnerships, with several noting that for non-DAC’s, cooperation with DAC members was seen as potentially harmful to their credibility as “Southern” partners. For DAC members, engagement with some non-DAC partners—particularly China—was similarly viewed as challenging due to broader geopolitical tensions. Additionally, practical challenges related to aligning varied reporting or accountability requirements—which are well-documented barriers to *coordination* across providers working in the same partner country—appear as barriers to cross-provider cooperation in the same way.⁴²

FIGURE 2. What are the main barriers to cooperation between DAC and non-DAC providers?



Note: Based on 28 non-DAC responses and 14 DAC responses. The percentages represented between the two surveys are not entirely comparable; while both surveys asked the same question, the non-DAC survey asked respondents to rank from predefined options, while the DAC survey asked for open responses in text format, without imposing a limit on the number of options listed. For the non-DAC survey, all responses have been combined, regardless of how the option was ranked.

While differences in principles and visions of development between DAC and non-DAC providers were identified as the main barrier to cooperation, some interviewees suggested that these differences were overstated, arguing that common values and shared goals of achieving the SDGs underpin both approaches. Indeed, there was some debate between interviewees about the degree of

41 Based on responses from interviewees 4, 9, 11, 12, and 14.

42 Based on responses from interviewees 2, 4, and 14.

commonality across providers, with several noting that at the core, DAC and non-DAC providers share most key goals and values, including the underlying objective of pursuing development to advance progress towards the SDGs and to secure a sustainable future for all.⁴³ These interviewees noted that the main differences between providers has less to do with the principles of cooperation than how they both approach development challenges and how development programming is implemented to support shared goals.⁴⁴ In essence, these interviewees suggested that providers differ on *how* and *what* they do to support development, yet share a common—and big picture—answer to “why” they cooperate. Indeed, the idea that DAC and non-DAC providers share common goals and values is not new, with some arguing that all providers have a demonstrated interest in principles of development effectiveness, yet implement such principles through different interpretations and approaches.⁴⁵

Interviewees also viewed a lack of trust between DAC and non-DAC providers as a pervasive barrier to cross-provider cooperation, highlighting three key sources of mistrust.⁴⁶ First, interviewees pointed out that relations between DAC and non-DAC actors are—at least in part—constrained by historical injustices related to colonialism and continued structural imbalances that make it difficult to view present spaces or systems as fair.⁴⁷ Second, interviewees pointed to a long history of broken promises and unmet commitments on development—such as the 0.7 percent ODA to GNI spending target and the \$100 billion climate finance target—as creating distrust and reducing the perception of reliability across actors. Third, several noted that deepening geopolitical tensions and diverse interests across providers can make trust more difficult, especially without a clear understanding of one another’s priorities and preferences. More broadly, the trust deficit highlighted by interviewees mirrors global trends of declining trust,⁴⁸ raising important questions about how collaboration to address shared challenges can be built without first investing in rebuilding trust.

Which international spaces are most conducive to cooperation across providers, and why?

Given the challenges to cooperation, particularly at the multilateral level, and the need for deeper engagement to support shared development outcomes, we asked both survey respondents and

43 Based on responses from interviewees 3, 11, 12, and 14.

44 Based on responses from interviewees 3, 5, 11, and 14.

45 See Chandy and Kharas, “Why can’t we just all get along?”, which notes that the operationalisation of the principle of ownership differs significantly between DAC and non-DAC providers. While DAC members view ownership as ensuring projects are aligned with national development plans, non-DAC providers often take a more direct approach to ownership, which is attained through responding to requests for projects from senior officials and ministers.

46 Based on responses from interviewees 2, 3, 5, 12, and 13. Interviewees placed a higher importance on low trust as a barrier to cooperation than survey respondents. This could be due to differences in the survey and interview sample, with some interviewees having a clearer view on challenges to multilateral cooperation due to their role as senior leaders in international organisations. It could also be driven by the ability to nuance and explain responses more easily in interview research than through the survey, which asked respondents to rank challenges from a preset list of options.

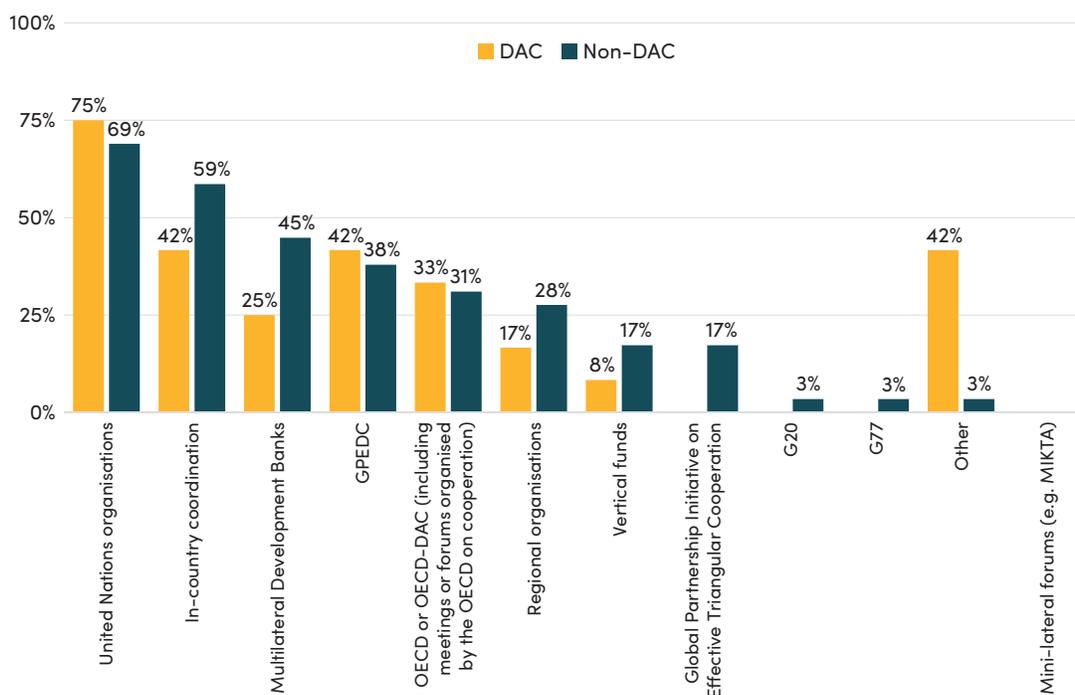
47 See Roberts and Parks for examples from climate negotiations.

48 UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), *Human Development Report 2021–22: Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives: Shaping our Future in a Transforming World* (New York: 2022), https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/global-report-document/hdr2021-22pdf_1.pdf.

interviewees to consider which international spaces they find most conducive to cooperation on development and to identify the factors that contribute to making such spaces effective for fostering development dialogue.

Survey responses overwhelmingly identified UN agencies as the most important channels for cooperation with other providers, largely due to the perceived neutrality of UN spaces and the ability for all actors to have a voice in debates. Indeed, our survey results show broad consensus between DACs and non-DACs on the value of the UN system as a key space for partnership, with 75 percent of DAC respondents and 69 percent of non-DAC respondents identifying it as a key forum for cooperation with other providers (see Figure 3). Interviewees similarly highlighted the importance of UN-led institutions as spaces for development dialogue, arguing that, by virtue of their universal membership, the UN system remains a “neutral” and “legitimate” space for cross-country discourse.⁴⁹ Indeed, several interviewees highlighted the importance of finding neutral venues for discussion, where all actors could sit on “equal footing” with a reasonable expectation that their voices and preferences would be “heard” as part of the debate.

FIGURE 3. Which international forums or informal spaces do DAC and non-DAC providers see as the most important channels of cooperation with other bilateral providers?



Note: Based on 29 non-DAC responses and 12 DAC responses. For non-DAC providers, the top three options selected by each respondent are summed towards the totals. “Other” responses from the DAC group included two mentions of the International Aid Transparency Initiative and one mention each of the Paris Peace Forum, the International Development Finance Club, and the Finance in Common Alliance. The non-DAC respondent did not specify what was meant by “other.”

49 Based on responses from interviewees 11 and 12.

Despite such strengths, interviewees were quick to caveat that UN development spaces—notably the DCF—were not a panacea, flagging lower engagement from DAC providers and the increasingly complex development landscape as key barriers to generating consensus.⁵⁰ It is difficult to reconcile the discrepancy between survey responses showing that DAC members generally perceived the UN system as a useful space for development discussions and the reality that DAC members have disengaged from the DCF. When asked why DAC members had seemingly disengaged from the DCF, two interviewees highlighted misaligned expectations on the part of DAC members about what could be achieved through DCF discussions—namely, that the DCF could or would become a space for disseminating DAC norms rather than agreeing on new standards with non-DAC providers.⁵¹ Indeed, one interviewee noted that as non-DAC provider agencies matured in their roles, it became increasingly clear that they wanted to maintain their independence and define their own approaches, and were not receptive to DAC members bringing their rules to DCF discussions.⁵² At the same time, several interviewees recognised that the increasingly diverse and multi-polar development landscape had made it difficult for DCF discussions to lead to concrete outcomes, with many noting that the forum is generally perceived as a “talk-shop” that is unable to tackle problems in an effective manner due to increased difficulties in attaining consensus.⁵³ Such challenges are amplified by the irregular nature of UN gatherings, which limit the opportunities for deeper discussions and knowledge exchange.⁵⁴

Other key spaces enabling cross-provider cooperation selected by survey respondents included in-country platforms, multilateral development banks (MDBs), and the GPEDC, though the prioritisation of each differed across provider groupings. Non-DAC respondents, for instance, identified in-country coordination platforms and MDBs as more important cooperation spaces than DAC respondents, who equally prioritised in-country platforms and the GPEDC (see Figure 3). While the prioritisation of in-country coordination platforms for both DAC and non-DAC providers is perhaps unsurprising given the practical nature of these spaces—which focus on coordinating activities within a specific country context—differing prioritisation of MDBs and the relatively high prioritisation of the GPEDC is somewhat curious. Our survey responses show that MDBs, for instance, are more highly prioritised by non-DAC providers, 45 percent of which identify these bodies as key

50 Indeed, disengagement from the OECD-DAC was highlighted in opening remarks to the 2023 DCF by H.E. Ms. Lachezara Stoeva, who noted that for the DCF to meaningfully enhance efforts for North and South to work together towards a common purpose, “OECD/DAC partners need to engage in the DCF at the same level as do our partners in developing countries,” urging DAC representatives to “take this message back to [their] capitals.” Lachezara Stoeva, “Opening Remarks”, 2023 Development Cooperation Forum (New York, March 14, 2023). <https://financing.desa.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/2023%20DCF%20-%20Opening%20Statement%20-%20ECOSOC%20President.pdf>.

51 Based on responses from interviewees 14 and 15. See also, Thomas Fues, Sachin Chaturvedi and Elizabeth Sidiropoulos, “Conclusion: Towards A Global Consensus on Development Cooperation”, in *Development Cooperation and Emerging Powers: New Partners or Old Patterns?*, ed. Sachin Chaturvedi, Thomas Fues, and Elizabeth Sidiropoulos (London: Zed Books, 2012), 243–262.

52 Based on responses from interviewee 14.

53 Based on responses from interviewees 5, 10, and 13. This point is also well-articulated in the academic literature (Fues et al. 2012; Janus et al. 2014).

54 Based on responses from interviewee 12.

spaces for cross-provider cooperation versus 25 percent of DAC members. To a degree, this could reflect that non-DAC providers can exert greater influence in some MDB spaces, particularly those with restricted membership or that are non-DAC founded (such as the New Development Bank) and in some cases, open to DAC membership (such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank).⁵⁵ Additionally, the prioritisation of MDBs by non-DAC providers could be linked to the importance of such spaces for the exchange of knowledge or technical expertise on key policy areas, which some non-DAC providers expressed was in demand.⁵⁶ Indeed, MDBs are often utilised for technical expertise, including from countries that are “in transition” from receiving development finance.⁵⁷

Most curious, however, is the relatively high prioritisation of the GPEDC as a space for cooperation for development between providers, with 42 percent of DAC respondents and 38 percent of non-DACs identifying it as an important forum for development discourse. While the GPEDC was designed to act as a shared space for DAC and non-DAC dialogue and exchange, several interviewees noted that the forum failed to live up to its initial ambition.⁵⁸ Instead, many have argued that the GPEDC lost momentum when large non-DAC providers—notably the BRICS—disengaged from its proceedings due to the perception that the forum was DAC-led. In addition, the broader decline of the effectiveness norm in DAC countries—particularly throughout the 2010s and alongside the rise of the national interest—can be seen to dilute the level of engagement from both DAC and non-DAC members.⁵⁹ Despite such challenges, the relatively high prioritisation of the GPEDC as a space for development partnership could suggest an acknowledgment of the importance of such spaces and leave open the potential for rethinking or re-creating a similar type of forum for cross-actor exchange.

While international forums with more restricted membership were considered less-important channels for development discourse by survey respondents, some interviewees saw the G20 as a useful space for large DAC and non-DAC providers to cooperate on development. The finding that smaller cooperation forums were seen as less-important channels for cooperation is perhaps unsurprising given that limited membership makes them unfit spaces for broad consensus, and often facilitate conversation between like-minded actors (consider the OECD-DAC, for instance, as a forum for discussion between [primarily] its members). The exception however, was the G20 forum, which some interviewees highlighted as a potentially useful space for discussion across large non-DAC providers—namely the BRICS—and DAC members, particularly on issues of international

55 Europe’s engagement with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank has broadly been seen as successful, see also: Bora Ly and Albert W. K. Tan, “The rationale of European countries engages in AIIB,” *Cogent Business and Management* 7, no. 1 (2020).

56 Indeed, in another question, asking about key features of international spaces which make them conducive to cooperation with other providers—posed only to non-DAC respondents—82 percent identified a space’s ability to “facilitate technical cooperation in partner countries” as a priority; this was the joint topmost frequently selected option, alongside spaces that are “built on mutual respect” (see Figure A1 in Annex 2).

57 Rachael Calleja and Annalisa Prizzon, *Moving Away from Aid: Lessons from Country Case Studies*, (London: ODI, 2019).

58 Based on responses from interviewees 10 and 13.

59 For more on the dilution of the DAC norm and limitations of the GPEDC, see Stephen Brown, “The Rise and Fall of the Aid Effectiveness Norm,” *The European Journal of Development Research* 32 (2020): 1230–1248.

development finance.⁶⁰ Indeed, one interviewee pointed to the G20 agreement on debt forgiveness in the wake of COVID-19 as a key example of what the group *could* achieve.⁶¹ While there are likely limits to what the G20 can achieve on development—as it is not a core focus of discussions—some suggested that the current sequence of G20 presidencies, which will be led by four large non-DAC countries in succession (Indonesia, India, Brazil, and South Africa), provides an opportunity to advance Southern perspectives on a range of issues, including development.⁶²

Main findings and discussion: How can barriers to cooperation be overcome?

The picture emerging from our survey and interview research shows that while cross-provider cooperation is occurring, challenges related to the *content* of discussion, *spaces* for discussion, and *politics* that inform interactions between providers remain barriers to deeper partnership. If we assume, and agree, that building a more collaborative system has positive implications for collective interests, then finding solutions to pervasive cooperation barriers must be a priority.

In terms of *content*, the realities of the shifting provider landscape are not yet reflected in the practices, norms, and standards that govern development action, many of which were created and agreed by members of the OECD-DAC. To overcome this challenge, there is space to invest in co-creating new standards and practices—where appropriate—that better reflect the diverse perspectives of the current provider landscape.

The finding that differing principles and visions for cooperation between DAC and non-DAC actors continues to be a key barrier to development partnerships suggests that even as the shifting balance of power in the development landscape has gained increasing recognition, these changing dynamics have yet to fundamentally impact the content of the norms, standards, and practices that guide cooperation and form the basis for development partnerships. Instead, DAC and non-DAC providers continue to operate through different models, modalities, and standards, some of which are seemingly at odds and limit the space and opportunities for cooperation for development. On the DAC side, interviewees noted that part of the challenge is a reluctance from DAC members to renegotiate existing norms and standards, which they continue to view as “best practice” despite the changing provider landscape and the OECD’s declining hegemony.⁶³ On the non-DAC side, interviewees highlighted hesitation to adopt long-standing DAC standards that they had no part in setting and that often fail to account for their own contexts and constraints. Interviewees also noted

60 Based on responses from interviewees 1, 3, 12, and 13.

61 Based on responses from interviewee 12.

62 Based on responses from interviewee 13.

63 Based on responses from interviewees 3, 4, 9, 10, and 14.

that heterogeneity across non-DAC providers meant that there is unlikely to be a single “non-DAC” position on specific issues.⁶⁴

The point here is not that DAC and non-DAC providers lack common ground on development action, but rather that the uncomfortable questions that accompany discussions around principles and shared commitments—especially on burden sharing and differentiated responsibilities—often limit progress. Indeed, some interviewees argued that providers already share common goals and principles, including the overarching objective of using cooperation to advance a shared 2030 Agenda, as well as on issues of effectiveness.⁶⁵ Yet common principles sit alongside fundamental and difficult questions about differentiated responsibilities, particularly how, or to what degree, DAC and non-DAC providers can—or should—comply with certain standards or practices given differing capabilities (financial or otherwise).⁶⁶ These challenges underlie attempts to formulate common standards that account for the heterogeneity of the current provider grouping—many of which remain dual cooperation providers that continue to receive development resources while advancing outward cooperation.

In response to this challenge, some interviewees suggested that there was a need for DAC and non-DAC providers to “co-create” new standards, principles, and visions for development engagement to ensure that the diverse voices found in the current provider landscape are reflected in the norms and approaches that govern development action.⁶⁷ The basic idea is that working together to build new practices or standards for development engagement would create an opportunity to develop shared visions or expectations that account for the different preferences, priorities, and realities of the current era. While the intention is not to renegotiate all prevailing norms, there are opportunities to invest in co-creation to build trust and agreement on areas where shared goals and principles could make consensus possible. It is difficult to see how the pervasive North–South divide in development discourse and action can be meaningfully overcome—or how a more globally oriented development paradigm could be created—without efforts to rethink and co-create development norms that match the shifting landscape.

64 Indeed, some also noted that different “blocs” of non-DAC providers are more or less willing to engage on specific issues; consider, for instance, the leadership of Latin American providers on measuring South–South cooperation volumes. DAC members are also not a homogenous group. Based on responses from interviewees 9, 10, and 13.

65 Based on responses from interviewee 3, 11, and 14.

66 Based on responses from interviewee 10 and 13; see also Paulo Esteves and Stephan Klingebiel, “Diffusion, Fusion, and Confusion: Development Cooperation in a Multiplex World Order,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Development Cooperation for Achieving the 2030 Agenda*, ed. Sachin Chaturvedi et al. (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021): 185–215.

67 Based on responses from interviewees 3 and 14.

Current development spaces appear insufficient for fostering meaningful exchange between DAC and non-DAC providers. Some interviewees suggested that there is a need to rethink and co-create a forum that is “neutral,” “legitimate,” and mandated to foster cross-actor dialogue for development.

To meaningfully co-create shared development norms across DAC and non-DAC providers, there needs to be a multilateral space that is “mandated and endowed with the convening power” to bring together providers for dialogue and debate.⁶⁸ At present, it is unclear that such a space exists. Indeed, several interviewees highlighted that current international spaces for DAC and non-DAC providers to cooperate on development are limited and insufficient for building better cross-actor collaboration, noting that existing forums—including the GPEDC, DCF, and to a degree, various OECD or DAC groups—face critical challenges due to concerns over “legitimacy” (GPEDC and OECD-DAC forums) or inability to reach agreement (DCF).⁶⁹ The result is a cooperation landscape where the impetus for cooperation is met without an institutional arrangement that can meaningfully facilitate cross-actor discussion on shared development issues and standards.⁷⁰

As a result of these challenges, some interviewees suggested that there was a need to rethink the development architecture for cross-actor collaboration and consider building a new multilateral space designed to foster mutual respect and encourage conversations that occur on an “equal footing”.⁷¹ When asked what this forum could or should look like to avoid the pitfalls of current spaces, some interviewees suggested that in theory, the governance structure of the GPEDC—with four co-chairs representing DAC members, non-DAC providers, partner countries, and civil society organisations—was ideal, yet they conceded that it failed to live up to expectations as the DAC-funded nature of the institution was seen to reduce non-DAC influence.⁷² To create a more equal and neutral development forum, interviewees stressed that any new institution should be “co-created”, “co-governed” and presumably, “co-funded” (though likely to differing degrees), to generate cross-actor buy-in and ownership of the forum and the discussions it facilitates.⁷³ Indeed, interviewees stressed that any new multilateral space for collaboration must be built on, and guided by, the principal of mutual respect, and should provide a space for developing new and shared definitions, norms, and indicators for development that can be agreed across providers. While there are obvious questions about both the feasibility and desirability of creating a new institution, especially given fragmentation in the development landscape and the bandwidth needed to maintain engagement, it is difficult to see how some of the key barriers to cooperation—particularly around differing norms and principles for development—can be overcome without a space for meaningful dialogue and co-creation.

68 Paulo Esteves and Stephan Klingebiel, “Diffusion, Fusion, and Confusion”, p. 209. Sentiment was echoed in responses from interviewees 11 and 14.

69 Brown, “The Rise and Fall of the Aid Effectiveness Norm,” 2020; Bhattacharya and Khan, “Rethinking Development Effectiveness”, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2013.775788>.

70 Esteves and Klingebiel, “Diffusion, Fusion, and Confusion”, 2021.

71 Based on responses from interviewees 6, 12 and 14.

72 Based on responses from interviewees 10 and 13.

73 Based on responses from interviewees 3, 6, 12, 13, and 14.

In a tense and multi-polar geopolitical landscape, the *politics* of cross-provider cooperation for development are increasingly difficult. While technical exchanges are often proposed as more feasible and practical solutions for building trust in the near term, they are not a replacement for the political consensus needed to move the needle on collaboration for development.

The complex political tensions between DAC and non-DAC providers, as well as within these groupings, limit cooperation due to a combination of divergent interests and a lack of trust. At the most basic level, the understanding that divergent provider interests—which permeate how and why they cooperate—can limit the incentive for cross-actor cooperation is not new, with many noting that bilateral engagement is often preferred to cooperative action as it allows providers to more directly pursue their interests with partner countries.⁷⁴ Indeed, interviewees noted this challenge—and its amplification in a complex geopolitical landscape—where the reputational risks of cooperation sit acutely alongside recognition of the need to cooperate. At the same time, the trust deficit between DAC and non-DAC providers, which is intensified in a competitive geopolitical landscape, has undoubtedly damaged the willingness for providers to cooperate.

To overcome these challenges, interviewees suggested that seeking cooperation on smaller, discrete partnerships that focus on addressing issues of mutual interest could provide a concrete basis for ongoing engagement and a first step to building trust between actors, particularly in cases where normative or political differences have historically limited opportunities for partnership. The basic idea is that by identifying a concrete project or thematic issue where development actors have a shared interest, there are opportunities to have *technical* bilateral or trilateral partnerships that allow for dialogue, learning, and building trust through developing a shared history of engagement. Indeed, one interviewee noted that technical-level dialogues between their agency and a large non-DAC provider had been useful and stable, even in tense geopolitical periods, and had provided “a valuable way to have a detailed substantive discussion” with a key developmental partner.⁷⁵

Despite such successes, there are important questions about whether these types of technical partnerships can be meaningfully translated into political cooperation to support multilateral partnerships for development. Indeed, an interviewee currently involved in technical dialogues noted that higher-level political discussions had not yet followed from ongoing technical exchanges.⁷⁶ While technical dialogues can provide—at the very least—a regular forum for exchange, they are no replacement for the political-level engagement that is needed to signal intent, make commitments, and support meaningful progress towards building a more collaborative development system.

74 Also see responses from interviewees 1 and 12.

75 Based on the response from interviewee 12.

76 Ibid.

Conclusion and recommendations

In a development landscape defined by complex and global development challenges that will require collective action to make meaningful progress, there is a need to think about how to better leverage the skills, expertise, and resources that exist across a diverse development system. Yet as our research showed, several pervasive and deep-seated barriers related to the content, spaces, and politics of cross-actor cooperation continue to limit both the opportunities and willingness for agencies to work together on shared development challenges.

While overcoming such barriers will require concerted effort—and in some cases, tough conversations and a willingness to compromise—there are opportunities to rebuild trust and expand cooperation between DAC and non-DAC providers for development. In particular, our research points to three main recommendations:

1. **Take time to talk and listen to each other.** At the crux of several cooperation barriers—including a lack of trust—is a perceived lack of understanding of each others' priorities, positions, and practices. To help rebuild trust, there is a need to create opportunities for discussion designed to foster learning across development partners and more genuine efforts to listen to one another's points of view. While talking and listening is not enough to foster active partnerships for development, it is difficult to build deeper collaboration without a base level of trust.
2. **Start small and focused.** In a complex political environment where competing interests and lack of trust impedes cooperation—particularly at the multilateral levels—seeking cooperation on smaller, discrete partnerships that focus on addressing issues of mutual interest could provide a concrete basis for engagement and a first step to building trust between actors. While the value of such action is the ability to foster relationships through working together towards a clear project or goal in the short term, it should not be considered a replacement or alternative for more difficult political cooperation.
3. **Co-create development norms—and spaces to discuss them.** To overcome barriers linked to differences in the principles and visions of cooperation across providers, there is a need to co-create new standards and practices for cooperation that reflect the shifting consensus in the provider landscape. At the same time, challenges with current spaces for development dialogue raise questions about where such conversations could occur, with several research participants noting the need to co-create a new forum for cooperation that could serve as a meaningful space to convene cross-actor discussions. To be successful, such co-creation would benefit from a champion to convene initial discussion, generate buy-in, and work to further transform the cooperation landscape.

Despite pervasive differences and challenges to cooperation, it is useful to remember that the development goals that underlie the actions of DAC and non-DAC providers alike—to support and achieve the SDGs—are fundamentally shared across providers and serve as a basis for partnerships and collaborations that promote mutual interests. At a moment when the SDG agenda is in trouble, there is a need to place common goals front and center, as all actors consider ways to make better use of the resources available across the diverse development system to support achieving these shared aims. Working together is never easy, but going alone will surely fail to meaningfully harness the value and potential of an expanding provider landscape.

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Annex 1: Survey and interview methodology

The analysis presented in this paper draws from a combination of survey and interview-based research, both of which aimed to gather first-hand perspectives on the challenges to cooperation primarily from the perspectives of those working in development agencies. Both the surveys and interviews aimed to answer three key research questions:

1. What are the barriers to cooperation across DAC and non-DAC providers for development?
2. How can these barriers be overcome?
3. Which forums are the most conducive to international cooperation for development and why?

Surveys

To gather broad development agency perspectives, we launched two surveys—one targeted towards DAC agencies and one directed at non-DAC respondents.

DAC survey: The DAC survey was sent to 26 high-level respondents, one for each DAC provider where we were able to identify appropriate senior-level officials. We targeted senior officials, primarily in strategy or partnership units, who we assumed would have an overarching view of how their agency cooperated with others. Respondents were identified using a convenience sampling, which drew from our available networks. The survey was launched between June and August 2022. We received 14 responses, each representing a unique agency.

Non-DAC survey: The non-DAC survey was sent to a total of 165 individuals from across non-DAC provider agencies in 54 countries,⁷⁷ over three survey rounds between December 2022 and April 2023. We targeted senior officials from units responsible for outward cooperation within non-DAC provider agencies, who we assumed would have an overarching view of how their agency cooperated with others on development. For countries where we had pre-existing relationships, we utilised these contacts; other contact points were identified through desk research using publicly available information. To reach a wider array of contacts, we also leveraged our network and shared the survey via partner organisations.⁷⁸ We received 33 responses, representing 25 unique agencies.⁷⁹ This survey was administered in English and Spanish.

77 These 54 non-DAC countries correspond to those with agencies responsible for outward cooperation for development, as identified in our prior work (see Calleja et al. 2023).

78 These included Korea International Cooperation Agency country offices and the OECD's Development Cooperation Directorate.

79 In a minority of cases, multiple unique responses were received from the same provider agency.

Interviews

While our surveys provided a broad overview of the challenges to cooperation, we used interviews to gather deeper insight into these challenges and to help explain survey responses. We targeted high-level officials from development agencies and international organisations that support or aim to foster collaboration across development providers, including the OECD and UN system. In total, we spoke to 15 individuals over a series of semi-structured interviews, which were conducted between June and August 2023.

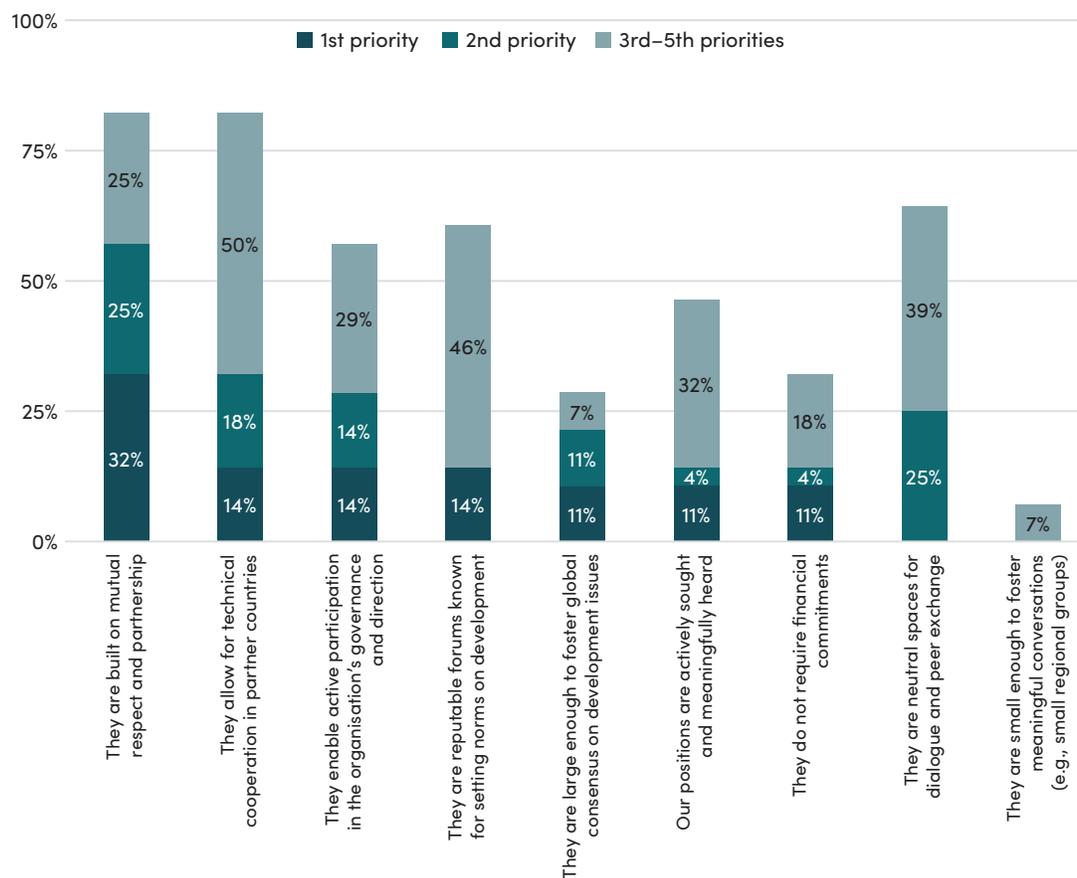
Limitations

Our approach is necessarily limited in several ways.

1. **Sample bias and size:** The sample for both surveys and interviews is limited to those who opted-in to participating in our study. While we tried to gather a broad range of perspectives and made a concerted effort to include individuals from all DAC and non-DAC agencies, the need for participants to self-select into the study means that we likely capture responses from those with greater interest in understanding the barriers to cooperation—and working to overcome them—than those who chose not to participate. Additionally, while we recognise that the total number of responses included in our surveys and interviews is small, we hope that the relatively broad coverage of our survey responses and the seniority of our respondents means that the responses provide insights into the challenges facing cross-actor cooperation for development.
2. **Indirect comparability:** While our DAC and non-DAC surveys ask the same key questions, the DAC survey often used open text responses, while the non-DAC survey utilised more multiple choice and rank options. This means that while both approaches allowed respondents to include multiple options in their responses, the differing form of the question could lead to differing results.
3. **Generalisability:** Due to the relatively low number of responses and sampling methods, we recognise that our survey findings reflect trends among our respondents but may not reflect the full range of challenges to cooperation or perspectives that exist across the broader population. Others in DAC and non-DAC agencies, including those working in field offices, for instance, may face more practical challenges to cooperation than those working at headquarters. While this is necessarily a limitation of our study, by targeting those with a strategic overview, we hope to include perspectives of those responsible for planning partnerships and considering how organisations can work together to support global development outcomes.

Annex 2: Supplementary figure

FIGURE A1. What features make an international organisation or informal space conducive to cooperation for development?



Note: Based on 28 responses from non-DAC provider agencies. Comparable figure for DAC agencies is not available.