

The emergence of a fourth pillar in development aid

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Abstract

Traditionally official development co-operation has been the playing field of governments, multilateral institutions and established development NGOs. In the last decade however, other actors in Northern countries (such as business, migrant organisations, trade unions, professional groups, groups of friends, schools, etc.) have actively shown interest in development related activities, and in developing and implementing development oriented initiatives in the South. Although they do not belong to the epistemic community of development specialists and are often overlooked in the discourse on and studies about development cooperation, their number and importance within the development field may not be underestimated. However, these novel approaches to development cooperation also give rise to some important reflections about the methodology used, potential impact, fundraising and so on. Unfortunately, studies about these actors are very scarce. Based on our experiences in the field, and research in the Flemish region of Belgium, we attempt to raise some issues about what we have termed the fourth pillar of development cooperation, in order to stimulate the academic and policy oriented debate.

Landmarks in development aid

The first three pillars in brief

Until recently, responsibilities in the development cooperation sector were clearly designated. A governmental donor was to support its fellow governments in Africa, Asia, and Latin America by what was referred to as ‘direct and bilateral aid’. Loans, technical advice and material aid contributed to setting up modern government bodies with efficient government departments, national banks, customs services and public utilities. This type of aid constitutes what we call a *first pillar* in development aid.

The *second pillar* is referred to as multilateral development aid. From the outset, all donor countries have channelled a part of their development aid through the United Nations or other international institutions such as the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation of the European Commission.

These multilateral organisations are extremely authoritative and are able to utilise expertise present elsewhere. For example, they can ensure that Indians with a rich experience in the dairy cattle sector transfer their know-how to dairy cooperatives in Ethiopia. More so than is the case for the bilateral development aid organisations, these multilateral organisations focus on the recipient countries macro-economic and social policies.

The *third pillar* is defined in several ways. It is most often associated with Non-Governmental Organisations. Sometimes it is referred to as indirect, private or civilateral development aid. Most NGOs specialise in supporting initiatives that are closely linked to local communities. They finance basic infrastructure such as wells, schools and health services or collaborate with movements such as farmers’ associations, women’s movements, unions and co-operatives. NGOs are additionally typified by the fact that they advocate greater solidarity with the third world population, and aim to sensitize populations in rich countries to these issues.

Competition for vision and funds

The organisations described above have found their *raison d’être* in international development cooperation. They have specialised in it, are recognised for it and together they form the “development aid or development cooperation sector”. Although they are a particularly heterogeneous group, they form one community as it were, with a domain-specific set of values and norms, codes of conduct and a proper discourse and vocabulary. As an epistemic community, they connect institutions and people from government bodies, international organisations and NGOs.

However, simultaneously, their sector can be seen as an arena. Within the sector there are different views, interest groups and strategic networks. Some say that active humanitarian aid should prevail while others defend more structural forms of aid. Some defend short-term projects, others long-term programmes, technical assistance or budget support.

The development aid sector is also a market. Internationally, more than US\$ 100 billion is spent by these development aid agencies on a yearly basis. The competition for funding, contract awards and personnel is particularly harsh at times.

The rise of the non-specialists: the fourth pillar

Over the last five to ten years, this development aid community, arena and market have been challenged in Western countries. The actors of the three specialised pillars are no longer considered the only authorities in the field. Other institutions and organisations are staking their claim, taking over a part of the tasks or suggesting alternative methods. The rise of non-specialists includes other government departments (ministry of education, ministry of trade,..), unions, farmers' associations, social movements, schools, hospitals, foundations, migrant organisations, companies, sports clubs and many groups of friends. Based on their experiences in their own communities and economies in the North, these new actors are forging ties with their colleagues and communities in the South. We refer to these organisations, institutions and private initiatives as the *fourth pillar* in development co-operation.

Very little is known about the consequences of the emergence of the fourth pillar. Researchers, who are largely loyal to the traditional development aid community, prefer to render their services to 'real' development aid, and tend to ignore or minimize this phenomenon. In the sector itself, staunch opinions and misconceptions are rife with regard to this array of new initiatives. We will try to put these in perspective in this article.

Young wine, sometimes in old barrels

'Nothing new under the sun'

The fourth pillar consists of development aid initiatives that were not instigated by the 'development aid specialists', but instead by government departments, private persons, companies or organisations that were confronted with certain needs in the third world and wished to take action in their own way.

'Nothing new under the sun' is a rather popular reaction in the 'traditional' development cooperation sector with regard to these new initiatives. The third pillar is also said to have originated in this way: a number of NGOs originated indeed from committees and groups supporting missionaries. Also, the student and protest movements of the 1960s focused strongly on the unequal relations between the North and the South and as such were the forerunners of a significant segment of the third world movement.

In most donor countries, social movements such as unions, farmers' movements and co-operatives founded their own NGOs for development aid years ago. North American foundations such as the Rockefeller Foundation and the Ford Foundation have been renowned as driving forces behind the American philanthropic community for decades and are key-players of the third pillar. Given these facts, it is an interesting question why

the present generation of novel development initiatives are different from third pillar organisations, and why these initiatives have not been absorbed by the third pillar.

Children of a post modern era

From our perspective, these initiatives do indeed represent a new phenomenon. Fourth pillar initiatives are not embryonic NGOs. They do not stem from North-South relations, but are children of a post modern story of globalisation and international networking, even of individualization. They are not so much concerned with redistribution of wealth between the rich North and the poor South or with the creation of a new world order. They want to redefine and adapt their organisation, institution or life to the new morphology and dynamics of a globalising society. Already existing working patterns, experiences and ambitions determine what these organisations and individuals want to do on the global scene. As a result, locally rooted institutions might develop into (more) globally oriented, networking players, or individuals with local social and cultural capital might become global or world citizens.

Re-integration and internationalisation

It is significant that the aforementioned social movements, unions, farmers' organisations and co-operatives, have redefined their development cooperation or third world policy in a dual way to break out of the third pillar and become truly fourth pillar players. On the one hand, national social movements are attempting to re-align the objectives and the focus of the development NGOs which they once created, with their own. Indeed, during the 1960s in many countries social movements founded development NGOs. Gradually the latter gained a large extent of autonomy, and concentrated on issues which did not necessarily belong to the core focus of the social movement. However, in recent years we have seen that these social movements attempt to re-integrate the NGOs into the mainstream of their activities. The NGOs were asked to realign themselves with the movement's objectives and dynamics. This was apparent, for instance, with the co-operative movements that encouraged their NGOs, such as the Swedish Cooperative Centre, the Canadian 'Développement International Desjardins' and the Rabobank Foundation Nederland, to support co-operative and market oriented projects and to abandon the typical NGO kind of community development and social projects. It could also be seen in the trade union movement in, for example, Belgium and the Netherlands, where over the past 15 years, their NGOs have been focusing once again on workers' rights and industrial relations, rather than on traditional NGO projects.

Also, national social movements have been reformulating their third world or development cooperation activities and policies in order to be in accordance with the international organisations they belong to. Previously, national social movements and their NGOs developed their own strategy and policy, without following a broader and overarching strategy of the global movement they are part of. In practice, this resulted often in ad hoc projects, without synergies with sister organisations. An example of this internationalisation of the third world activities and policies is Agricord. Agricord was created by several large farmers' movements from Canada, France, the Netherlands,

Japan, Belgium, Norway, Sweden and Finland. The NGOs of these movements explicitly align their activities with the strategy of the International Federation of Agricultural Producers, to which their parent movements belong. The recently founded International Trade Union Confederation shows similar dynamics.

International Giving and global alliances

In the world of foundations, a dual evolution is also taking place.

On the one hand, we can observe a proliferation of new foundations with a clear mission to solve certain problems in developing countries. For example, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has become an influential player in the world of development aid, specifically in the health care and research sector. Another example is the Japanese Sasakawa Peace Foundation, which focuses on international governance and peace issues.

On the other hand, many existing foundations have recently invested a portion of their funds in development related initiatives. Driven especially by the American Council on Foundations and the European Foundation Centre, many community initiatives are being taken by the foundation sector which are directly relevant to countries in the South. 'International Giving' is promoted, also among the emerging elite and middle class in the third world itself. 'Global alliances' amongst foundations in North and South mobilise resources for major challenges such as the fight against Aids or emergency assistance operations.

We see similar dynamics in other civil society and business circuits. Whether they are for example migrants' organisations, sports clubs, companies or music ensembles, their involvement in solidarity initiatives for the South stems from their personal confrontation with challenges that are not merely related to the North-South divide, but are global. For migrant organisations, preserving transnational ties with their country of origin is of central importance, not only from a financial or material point of view, but also from a human and communicative point of view. Where companies are concerned, international (solidarity-inspired) involvement aids the securing and, if necessary, enlarging of their market position, by taking into account the new orthodoxy with regard to corporate social responsibility. As for sports clubs, they are concerned with the possibility of developing and attracting sport talent, while using sports initiatives as constructive or problem solving mechanisms in fragile societies. As a last example, music ensembles' international activities offer potential in terms of integrating new 'world' elements into their repertoire while finding international talents and employing music as a means of bringing social cohesion in local communities.

'Do it yourself' activists

The fourth pillar group that stands out most is the new 'do it yourself' development aid segment: individuals, siblings or groups of friends who use their leisure time to travel to far away places, organise solidarity events, write fundraising letters, manage websites, send e-mails to their project and regularly visit their partners locally. Examples of such individuals are Bono, Madonna, Yannick Noah, and many others, ranging from celebrities to the general Tom and Jerry. Research has shown that a very large number

start out as individual, emotionally driven explorers, but structure their initiatives fairly quickly, and almost always liaise with more established institutions such as schools, hospitals, parishes or societies.

An idiosyncratic story

The fourth pillar's composition is thus very heterogeneous. However, the other pillars also excel in diversity and internal contradictions. The first, second and third pillar also include hundreds of government services, more than one hundred international institutions, and thousands of development NGOs, which all tend to function in splendid isolation. But more importantly, fourth pillar organisations are writing a different, idiosyncratic story. They do not want to use traditional scripts. Fourth pillar organisations are non domain-specific aid organisations. They did not come into being to provide development aid, but have other starting points and show different dynamics. Their collaboration with people in developing countries is shaped by their experiences at work, at school, in local associations or leisure back home in their native communities. They do not rely on development theories and are not aid specialists. Rather, they have become specialists in their domain, be it their company, school, union, health care provider or profession, by gaining hands-on experience, and they are confident in sharing this experience with colleagues facing similar challenges.

Easy come, easy go?

'Hobbyists' versus 'professionals'

Another often made comment is that the new players will not survive or develop into a relevant development channel. Its underlying idea is that these actors are hobbyists, who will realise quickly that they are barking up the wrong tree and should leave the work to the professionals. However, this premise can not be upheld for very long once the facts have been considered.

Heeding calls for action

The fourth pillar can be said to have come about because of the traditional segment's method of communication over the years. Educational and sensitisation projects of NGOs but also of governments and international institutions have inspired many to take action themselves. The public was told for years that every citizen carries responsibility for the world's problems and challenges. Advertising slogans of the development aid community invited people to "turn the world upside down", to "be fair", "to become a world citizen", et cetera.

Additionally, the media have been the traditional development aid organisations' loyal partners, seeing that misery and catastrophes were, and still are, televised daily. Not only individuals were, and continue to be, encouraged to think long and hard about their 'guilt' with regard to third world problems. Governments and government departments were

also reminded how their policies were detrimental to the third world's interests. Unions were accused of perpetuating the unequal world system; farmers' organisations were told they were not giving farmers in the South any opportunities. Companies were reviled for seeking financial gains and exploiting the South. Schools and universities were reproached for not preparing young generations for inclusive world citizenship.

With such criticism, the traditional players wished to appeal to the public's conscience. They were aiming for a more inclusive approach to development efforts which would require people's attention on a daily basis and would be imbedded in all aspects of societal life. They achieved these goals, but in a different shape than they had anticipated or intended.

New helping and giving behaviour

The energy created by these sensitisation campaigns partly found its way to the traditional players themselves. Increasing private funds were made available to NGOs by individuals, companies and organisations. Other government departments also began to fund development causes. However, the traditional development sector tends to offer few alternatives for action other than giving or collecting money.

As a result, citizens, companies and organisations with concrete plans were left with no alternative but to take action themselves and start their own projects. This resulted in new helping and giving behaviour that was channelled towards new initiatives, close to home or to work. A world of possibilities emerged: a world of travel, direct contacts, independent action, exchanges, gifts, investments, trade, cooperation, et cetera.

This world also corresponds with the today's society's new patterns; a globalising world consisting of scores of international networks. The fourth pillar thus originates from as well as shapes this new, more global world. It is not surprising that international contacts made during travels and international study, economic and other relations have resulted in a large number of new initiatives. Ideas and possibilities for collaboration emerge from these international networks, in which our personal and working lives are ingrained.

Pertinent questions remain

Neither academics nor the sector itself has paid much attention to the fourth pillar over the past 10 to 15 years. And yet it has grown substantially. The OECD has calculated that approximately US\$ 3 billion are invested by donor country foundations in development aid on a yearly basis. These means originate largely from the United States, although 40 per cent of European foundations are also developing international activities.

The exponential growth of remittances from immigrant communities to their countries of origin is subject to more debate. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the volume of formal remittances has doubled. Taking unregistered remittances into account, the total amount exceeds \$200 billion yearly. This amounts to more than all rich countries' official development aid (ODA) combined. However, many questions remain relevant. Who wins in case of migration? Do the remittances actually benefit the most needy? Do they provide leverage for development?

Analogous concerns could be raised with regard to the millions of euros set aside by Western companies to support all kinds of small or large projects in developing countries. These funds often go to social projects in the proximity of the company's business centres in African, Asian or Latin American countries.

They are also spent on micro projects recommended by local or expatriate personnel. Corporate strategy is never far away in such cases, but it does generate substantial funds. So-called cause related marketing plans, in which a product or brand is linked with a good cause, have generated a market expansion in the United States from US\$125 million in 1990 to US\$ 828 million in 2002. In addition, company loyalty and cohesion are stimulated by creating opportunities for employee volunteering. Employees can offer their services to a good cause pro bono, or can allow automatic salary deductions to benefit the cause. Companies are glad to take on the costs of such services and match the gifts with an equal sum.

The fourth pillar: a burgeoning phenomenon

As previously mentioned, very little research has been conducted which would allow us to gauge the extent of the fourth pillar phenomenon.

The few figures available lead us to suspect that it is an extremely far reaching phenomenon that is growing continuously. In France, 182 networks of 'initiatives de coopération décentralisée' ('decentralised development cooperation initiatives') have been registered. Since 1992, the French government has been promoting cooperation between French regions, the cities and townships, local companies and civil organisations on the one hand, and 'sister-regions' in developing countries. In the Netherlands, the term 'private initiatives' (*'particuliere initiatieven'*) is used to distinguish between the traditional non-governmental development organisations and the new generation of scores of, mostly smaller, citizens' initiatives. The researchers Bouzoubaa, Brok and Schulpen (2005) registered four 'private initiatives' per 10,000 inhabitants, or approximately 6400 temporary or less than temporary solidarity groups. Our HIVA study focused solely on permanent and institutionalised initiatives in the Flemish region of Belgium. We found more than 1100 recent non-traditional organisations for which we coined the term 'fourth pillar initiatives'. The study showed that the fourth pillar in Flanders mobilises between 25,000 and 60,000 active participants. Larger structures such as unions or foundations were excluded from the count. Including them we found that the fourth pillar mobilises an amount of private funds equal to what the traditional NGOs collect from the public at large. The fact that they stress concrete initiatives, in which people from the North take direct action and are extremely visible, offers an important explanation for their success.

The charity trap

This leads us to another stubborn misconception. While development co-operation specialists have concluded, after years of experimenting, reflecting, trial and error, that there is good and bad development cooperation, the fourth pillar is said to revive an older

model of a charitable nature. Even worse, ‘miserabilism’ is said to be gaining ground, combined with the unfounded opinion that Westerners should take matters into their own hands once again in the South.

From logical frameworks to or ‘anthropo-logic relations’

Indeed, many fourth pillar organisations are still young and have not yet acquired much experience in the South. Many try to re-invent the wheel. Tall stories circulate, such as the one about European cyclists teaching their colleagues in Burkina Faso to take corners at great speed – while the roads there tend not to have sharp corners! However, their extremely intense contacts with the ‘field’ result in an incredibly fast learning curve in many cases. The methods of many non-traditional development initiatives are often diametrically opposed to the current development paradigm. Firstly, modern development thinking is based in the concept of ‘ownership’, which entails that people, organisations and institutions in the South should follow their own strategy while maintaining control over their programme. This programme should offer a long term perspective so that needs can be addressed and rights can be acquired step by step, at a local pace, underpinned by a logical framework and a rigorous project cycle.

Many a fourth pillar initiative is reminiscent of ‘donorship’: people, organisations and institutions in the rich West have something to offer, whether it be money, knowledge, models of organisation or know-how. All kinds of projects, often small, are intended to achieve concrete short term aims, no matter the cost. In this case, the logical framework must make way for ‘anthropo-logic’ relations, seeing that trust in the skills and dedication of talented people, here as well as in the field, is primordial. More often than not, fourth pillar activists are doers. They want to improve people’s lives, not change the world. However, contrary to what this statement seems to insinuate, they do not simply ‘give and run’. They exhibit great loyalty and, in many cases, long-term commitment. Often, (post)modern business people, activists, philanthropists and fortune seekers do not eschew self-interest or win-win operations: ‘If my school becomes more attractive because we are involved in school project in Surinam, all the better (...)’; ‘If our workers’ rights and interests can be better protected because we also enable trade unionism in Indonesia, we have a win-win situation’. Rather than planners, who seek security, they are doers who seek the unknown - and enjoy the process. Development co-operation is considered fun rather than cheerless and difficult.

A laboratory for new co-operation

Rather than a considerable step back, the fourth pillar actually functions as a laboratory in which new forms of co-operation are tested. New leverage for development is discovered as a result. Who would have thought ten years ago that community sports activities could be used as a stepping stone to bring awareness about health risks and HIV-AIDS in the local community (the so-called ‘sports plus approach’), or that linking sports to existing development programs can result in more social cohesion and local peace (the so-called ‘plus sports approach’)? Traditional development organisations can improve the quality of their work by collaborating with the newcomers. This can lead to interesting

configurations. For instance, a local health insurance provider, the University Hospital and the city of Nantes in France have founded a society (*Nantes Guinée*) to support the health sector in Guinea Conakry. A Belgian not-for-profit health insurance provider, an NGO and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) have published a handbook about micro-insurance in the health care sector. Similarly, the German insurance company Munich Re's foundation has begun a cooperation with the international CGAP Micro insurance Working Group. In the United Kingdom, the Department for International Development (DFID) has signed 'strategic grant agreements' with the Trade Union Confederation, the British Medical Association, the cooperative movement and other civil organisations that do not focus primarily on development cooperation, but nevertheless wish to integrate the international and North-South dimensions.

Concrete story rather than the big picture

Ostrich politics

A final staunch opinion is reminiscent of so-called ostrich politics: if hobbyists and do-it-yourself activists have at least some future, this will not affect the real players. However, just as the emergence of the NGOs in the 1960s radically changed the thinking and approaches of the entire development aid sector, the emerging fourth pillar is already changing old ways.

The fourth pillar offers an alternative for those who care about the world's poor. There are large numbers of young graduates applying in vain for a position with a traditional development organisation, as well as people who want to do more than give or collect money during NGO fundraising campaigns. The alternative often lies in starting up a project of one's own, or joining a fourth pillar organisation that celebrates modern volunteering.

The fourth pillar is also shaking up the sector's patterns of thought. The sector's jargon ('ownership', 'mechanisms of participation', 'gender sensitivity', 'participatory appraisal', 'logical framework', 'project cycle management', 'outcome mapping', etcetera) might refer to real concerns and insights, but it is unfathomable and inaccessible to non-specialists. In the fourth pillar, such jargon is replaced by a concrete story of co-operation, told by a few faces and many pictures on the internet. Particularly the traditional organisations' young personnel and young followers are attracted to the fourth pillar's daring, active new approach. Although NGOs are still especially popular with the public opinion in donor countries, their credibility is set to decrease in favour of these novel initiatives. The question is whether the public prefers to support, for instance, a colleague at work who has been brave enough to start up a project in Somalia, a country almost deserted by NGOs, and regularly sends newsletters convincing the reader of his professional approach, or an NGO which sends out a brochure explaining how complex issues such as the fight against poverty, the local community's capacity building, and lobbying and advocacy work is handled together with 20 partner organisations in as many countries in the South.

In addition, the local media have also discovered the fourth pillar organisations, as they offer news with a local flavour.

Political and international appreciation on the rise

Political appreciation of the fourth pillar is also on the rise. The government departments responsible for development cooperation still show resistance to this ‘intruder’ in many donor countries, but can not prevent unions, migrant organisations and other civil groups, backed by their lobbyists, from also obtaining government funds for their development work. On the other hand, line ministries and regional and local government authorities are more benevolent. Most already reserve a budget for development initiatives of their own, but also for subsidies for those in their field of competence wishing to undertake projects in the South. Many fourth pillar initiatives draw funding from such sources. This is not surprising, since fourth pillar organisations have often built political relations in their own country and are very familiar with the subsidy systems of the departments of labour, economics, health care, agriculture, education, and others.

The fourth pillar organisations’ credibility is also increasing at the international level. They can increasingly be found in international networks and at forums where they take pride of place next to UN experts and other development specialists. They play an important role in international initiatives such as the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP), the United Nations Global Compact and the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria. In addition, organisations and individuals in the South have discovered the phenomenon. Unions, foundations, farmers’ groups, cooperatives and hospitals in the South wish to keep their preferential ties with Western NGOs, while seeking ‘homologous’ partnerships as well – partnerships which they hope will be more horizontal, accommodating, generous and durable in nature than with the traditional development organisations.

All the development world's a stage. And all merely players

(After Shakespeare)

To understand the meaning of the fourth pillar and the increasing de-specialisation of development cooperation, we should imagine the four pillars together as a parliament of claimants. Every player is trying to claim attention for his story and presents sufficient arguments to defend his role in the fight against poverty and injustice. Depending on the fashion of the period in question, the state, the UN or the NGOs take precedence. There might not seem to be enough room to also accommodate suddenly globalising citizens and value seeking institutions. This is hardly surprising: the market of generosity is limited and not endlessly elastic, and its support can only reach so far.

Thus, every player fights for his 'good' cause and strives to stake his claim against the others - while the good cause should in fact promote mutual tolerance and pluralism. All players, in fact, show strengths as well as weaknesses. International institutions can tackle large scale projects but, because they are not accountable to anyone, often end up complacent. States often foster long-standing ties with states in the South, but sometimes end up drowning in bureaucracy. NGOs ensure the structural support and partnerships with communities in third world countries, but tend to largely reduce interested civilians and other players, such as schools, civil society players and companies, to fundraising followers. Hence, interested civilians become the fourth pillar, which shows involvement and enthusiasm, but often lacks essential knowledge and experience.

The fourth pillar's exponential growth is undoubtedly one of the greatest challenges in the development co-operation sector. It is an opportunity which can contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. However, it simultaneously calls into question the definition of development cooperation, the conditions for quality development cooperation, and the ethics of philanthropy and international cooperation. By taking the fourth pillar seriously, it will in time learn to differentiate between good practice and amateurism. Pioneers tend to be followed by those who consolidate, systematise, and separate the wheat from the chaff. Most likely, this will also be the case for the fourth pillar.

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