

# Mainstreaming global justice



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**T**he future of international aid does not look bright. Development aid has always been surrounded by questions and controversy, but in recent years the tone of the debate has hardened. Sweeping changes are needed if efforts to help the world's poor are to amount to anything at all, and if aid budgets are not going to be totally eaten up by national interests or evaporate altogether.

There may still be some room for traditional aid instruments. The relatively new 'budget support' is an example. Just a few years ago, it was heralded as the way to go, whereas now some are writing it off just as eagerly, arguing that it is only fattening up corrupt regimes. One article in this issue, 'Too Much, Too Quickly', shows that the truth lies somewhere in between. Budget support is likely to have a longer-term impact in some countries.

This does not detract from my conviction, however, that we really need to change direction from aid to global justice, incidentally the subject of an extensive **debate** conducted by *The Broker* nearly two years ago.

We are currently hosting a **debate** on our website in cooperation with the OECD on the 'aid effectiveness' agenda, prior to the High Level Forum in Busan, South Korea, in November 2011. This will be the fourth consecutive conference of its type, previous ones having been held in Rome, Paris (the 'Paris Declaration' on aid effectiveness in 2005) and Accra (the Accra Agenda for Action in 2008).

These conferences are generally events for the converted, the community of people working in and narrowly focused on the aid sector. But preparatory meetings this year show that the Busan conference organizers and participants realize the need to look 'beyond aid' (to include wider foreign policy and global issues) and also to look beyond the traditional actors – donors and aid recipients. It will not be easy to find common ground between the old Western donors and new ones like China – whose nascent development policy is examined in this issue – or India, let alone the wealthy foundations that are increasingly joining the aid bandwagon.

The latter – private foundations and philanthropists – are also exploring new directions. Another **debate** currently hosted by *The Broker*, in cooperation with IDS and the Rockefeller Foundation, focuses on a more strategic approach to achieve 'well-being'. The debate falls under the heading of one of *The Broker's* thematic priorities: inclusive economy. It's a feisty debate between those who see 'human well-being' and associated concepts as a new and necessary paradigm, and others who consider it nothing more than another conceptual discussion and a waste of time: old wine in a new bottle.

I personally think that we need broad concepts such as 'human well-being' to define a common aim, which goes beyond either the dollar-a-day poverty line or the view that economic growth will solve all worldly ills. But, at the same time, development

cooperation is about much more than clever concepts. It is about real change in a much more systemic, structural sense. Both on the local and the national levels, and on the global level.

This kind of change cannot be imposed from the outside, as Frauke de Weijer argues in this issue's special report on the complexities of rebuilding fragile states. Complex social systems are difficult to fathom, so external interventions have to be modest and fully understand the rule systems governing a specific country and society.

Effecting change on the global level is even more difficult, of course, but it is becoming increasingly urgent. The current systemic crises are affecting everybody, but it's the 'global' poor who are being hit the hardest.

New strategies developed by the aid industry should set their sights on this global, systemic level. They need to focus on change that creates a different, more just and sustainable kind of globalization. Globalization that bids farewell to the neoliberal economic model, and which curbs the unlimited power of the global financial sector and reforms the global financial system. Globalization that organizes global economic traffic in a more equitable way, and which softens the hard geopolitical struggle for ever-scarcer resources. Globalization that invents new instruments like a global **financial transaction tax** and which gives more policy leeway to national governments to steer their own economic and social policies, without resorting to a xenophobic, naïve and even dangerous form of nationalism.

Progressive internationalism is the only feasible and urgently needed answer to both neoliberal globalization, which has sustained a system of inequality for the last 30 years or so, and the populist tendencies that are gaining momentum throughout the Western hemisphere.

It should therefore no longer exclusively be the relatively marginalized – in terms of national and global political priorities – aid industry that tries to bring about this alternative form of globalization. **Global justice** should also be the key driver of broader foreign policies, or even of domestic policies as they are increasingly intertwined with international affairs, blurring the boundaries between domestic and foreign policy. One article in this issue examines the extent to which the EU is set to become a leader in such a global development outlook (see Mark Furness and Davina Makhan's article on the subject in this issue).

Of course, we are still far from attaining an alternative form of globalization, but 'mainstreaming' global justice concerns should nevertheless become the basis of the new aid paradigm. The old aid sector is isolated and in decline. It needs to seek alliances with other organizations and political sectors, with policy makers and with society at large. If it is to have a specific role at all, this will be to safeguard the interests of the world's poor in a concerted effort to create a more sustainable and just form of globalization. ■