



**Wilton
Park**

Report: Reimagining International Development Cooperation

Wednesday 3 – Friday 5 September 2025

In association with
Foreign, Commonwealth &
Development Office



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Executive summary

This report records the Wilton Park dialogue on reimagining international development cooperation in a world of multiplying shocks and shifting power, 3-5 September 2025. The current global development architecture was built for an earlier era, yet cooperation remains essential as climate and nature crises, debt distress, conflict, migration and technological disruption increasingly intersect. The discussion was convened as a milestone on the road to the UK co-hosted international development conference planned for Spring 2026, intended to create the foundations for a modern compact – an agreement on principles that will define how a wider group of stakeholders cooperates internationally to address these issues- and the coalitions needed to deliver it.

The dialogue brought together a deliberately diverse group: governments and multilaterals, members of civil society from the Global North and South, philanthropy, private sector and technology companies, think tanks, and representatives from youth networks. The goal was to take stock of the current context and its challenges, test assumptions, surface what is changing, and identify where a broader and more diverse set of stakeholders can better work together through a system of international cooperation. The emphasis was on identifying current development challenges and opportunities, and more effective approaches to meeting them - including practical

partnership, mutual responsibility and plural leadership - rather than on aid volumes or institutional preservation.

Participants worked through a set of questions: What is development for in this context, and what future are we currently building? If the donor–recipient model is past its peak, how should cooperation work instead, and how do we build trust and accountability when incentives and timelines differ? What forms of partnership are proving effective, what principles should guide a new compact, and how should those principles be used, governed and monitored? Finally, which outcomes could a UK co-hosted conference most credibly accelerate by convening the right actors and demonstrating how these principles- in the form of a compact- could be put into practice?

While views differed on emphasis, a broad consensus emerged. Cooperation should move beyond the aid paradigm to outcome-focused, co-created partnerships that strengthen national and local systems and ownership. Participants agreed on centring people and locally-led delivery, including through recognising that there is a social compact between citizens and governments to drive development. For example, if taxes are collected, services must be delivered; if money is spent by ‘donor’ countries or private organisations, there must be domestic returns or other dividends, as well as international ones.

Key to future partnerships is being honest about differing power and incentives, and embedding mutual accountability and transparency. There was strong support for using all levers in partnership policy, trade, investment, technology and data and knowledge, using concessional finance sparingly where it is most critical, and shaping markets to scale proven solutions. The group recognised the need for agility in frontier markets and fragile states, and for planned transitions to domestic financing and capability. In short, the direction of travel is a practical, plural leadership model that aligns mutual interest with solidarity and measurable results.

The principles of international cooperation that resulted from the conference will now be tested with wider groups of stakeholders.

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1. Objectives

This Wilton Park dialogue brought together diverse perspectives on how to achieve development outcomes in a disruptive world with a new approach to partnership, local leadership, ownership and accountability. It considered development architecture and financial system reform, exploring common threads between existing reform initiatives – including those driven by governments, multilaterals, civil society and philanthropies. It laid the ground for new forms of partnerships to support innovative, inclusive and viable solutions, including opportunities to create new coalitions, culminating in draft ‘Principles on International Cooperation’.

2. Context – development and its purpose

Changes and challenges in international development cooperation

The global system has entered a period of radical political and economic disruption. It was designed for a different era, with a different, more concentrated, distribution of power and resources and a different set of problems. The system of development cooperation as it existed brought about significant change. In the 1980s, 45% of the global population was in extreme poverty. Today, that figure is about 9.9%, roughly 808 million people, and 48 countries have graduated from developing-country status. There is much to celebrate. But with so many people remaining in extreme poverty the job is far from done.

As we home in on addressing extreme poverty and inequality, the way we work will need to change. Multipolarity is the new normal, with global cooperation fragmenting as countries turn inward and prioritise national interests. The consequences of global challenges such as debt, climate and nature, migration, conflict and security feel more intense. While new technologies and artificial intelligence hold transformative potential, they also risk deepening inequality. There has been stalling and reversal of gains made over previous decades, including on rights

and civic space. The opportunity cost of getting things wrong is much higher than in the past.

Arguably, what some term the “aid industrial complex” no longer has the same legitimacy. The tacit and much more active civil support for aid that existed over several decades has been under strain in northern countries, where citizens are struggling with rising inequalities and domestic funding pressures at home, while sometimes raising concerns about how well aid is being used overseas. This is sometimes compounded by negative populist messaging. In southern countries, increasingly critical narratives have developed, highlighting the weaknesses of the current system, questioning incentives and spotlighting the emerging alternative sources of support, both domestically and internationally.

The impact of aid is also under challenge, with only 18% of SDGs on track to be met by 2030. Understanding why we are falling short, strengthening accountability, and building consensus on the purpose and focus of international development is essential. At a time when trust in institutions and the global system is eroding; there is a need to be careful about creating more promises that cannot be delivered.

It can be argued that the end of aid has arrived, following a decade of dwindling assistance¹, with a global system under strain, particularly when one of its key architects, the US, is turning it upside down. The Chinese have an alternative story for the world economy of south-south cooperation in which ‘development’ can be characterised as an obsolete Western concept. “Global South” governments will listen to partners who will engage on their priorities, for example, infrastructure, debt, jobs, trade, but they do not want to listen to lectures.

The purpose of international development

The former consensus on international development – what it is and who it is for – must evolve. Although there is strong agreement on the trend from ‘aid’ to

¹ US decision takes 70bn USD out of the system – every year.

‘cooperation,’ partners from different groups define development differently- naturally focusing on those aspects most of interest to them (Box 1). As long as there is no consensus on purpose, it is difficult to find normative consensus on what success looks like. This makes it more difficult to form shared partnerships and risks entrenching outdated ways of thinking and working on global issues. Perhaps because of this lack of clarity, public consensus and political support for investing in development from the richest countries has declined.

What is development for, and how do we need to rethink it?

Is it ‘development as’ ...

- **Aid** – as a form of financial flow? If so, relevant questions would be on allocation balance, and accountability to taxpayers and those whom the money is intended to help. *NO*
- **Financial flows (beyond aid)?** – ensuring the right money, in the right place, on the right terms. *PARTLY*
- **Economic growth** - requiring policies domestically, global trade, new technologies, Intellectual Property, corporate governance *YES*
- **Working on shared goals (SDGs)** – is there still a global normative agenda? How do we create structures, and accountability around that? Should it focus on tackling extreme poverty? *PERHAPS*
- **Solving global challenges that require shared solutions** – such as climate and migration? How do we agree on priorities, establish coalitions and flows of expertise and money? Can we envisage this as mutual interest in global public goods? *YES*
- **Foreign and security policy** –reconciling self-interest with cooperation. *PARTLY*
- **Building countries’ ability to govern, finance and deliver their own development** – domestic resource mobilisation, effective governance to deliver and enabling business to flow are what matters for citizens – question is how we are equipping governments to deliver effectively and accountably. *PARTLY*
- **Implementing policy to meet the aspiration of citizens (social compact)** specific to their setting, supported by collective action and strong accountability mechanisms. In effect, this is called politics and public policy in some countries and development in others. Is now the time to remove the dividing line between global north and global south as we confront these shared challenges? *PARTLY*

Box 1: Contested Purpose of Development

There has been too narrow a focus on development as finance or projects, even while acknowledging and understanding the importance of policy and systemic change. This has been driven partly by the development of institutions and networks at a time when large finance flows were prioritised, leaving donor partners in a prominent position. Even though this need to move beyond a ‘donor’ ideology is widely recognised, traditional development actors (“donors”) have continued to over-estimate their centrality.

Geo-political framing and considerations have largely replaced the focus of development on pro-poor approaches. The system, built for official concessional financing from a relatively narrow set of actors, does not easily accommodate a broader set of complex interests and sources of finance. There has been an over-focus on sectoral progress versus building sustainable systems. These developments require all partners to invest more heavily in understanding the new context (geopolitical drivers, multilateral system strengths and weaknesses, and the diversity of actors that can support development) as well as re-focusing on the underlying governance context in partner countries. The aim is to ensure that cooperation efforts do not harm and instead strengthen systems and the social compact between states and their citizens.

However, the aspiration for development remains highly valid. People want agency and governments largely welcome the right kind of support to be able to meet national aspirations. There is also increasing realisation that there are mutual benefits to tackling development challenges. Good health, progress on climate and nature, security and stable or growing economies deliver global public goods and benefits.

3. Opportunities for the system of international cooperation to change

Crises can often drive transformation and this is such a moment. However, the re-imagining of the development system will not have traction unless i) it can be

undertaken with a broader set of countries and stakeholders; and ii) we use the opportunity to address some of the weaknesses that have detracted from the quality of cooperation to date. There is a choice now between embracing change and making some hard choices, or allowing managed decline and ultimately obsolescence. The clear sense of the discussion was that what is needed is re-imagining (into a new form), not re-building (of the existing system).

Changing the narrative: From ‘aid’ to ‘cooperation’

The old narrative of international development, dominated by aid spending and results, can change. The system has lost trust and credibility, and publics around the world increasingly question its efficiency. The recognised framing of international development needs to shift from charity to cooperation, and from donor–‘beneficiary’ dynamics to shared responsibility and mutual benefit. It needs to demonstrate value and real connection with people’s lives and experience in all countries, focused on outcomes such as jobs, security and self-reliance.

Development must also be communicated in a way that is more accessible and less technocratic. Its language should reflect partnership, agency and shared problem solving. Where it works on global challenges such as climate change, global health, migration and technological disruption, it should be open and explicit about mutual interests in cooperation. The practice of communicating development work through funding pledges needs to be replaced with communicating shared problems, knowledge and expertise, and solutions – between multiple and diverse stakeholders.

This is not about abandoning values such as solidarity and inclusion, but about embedding them in a modern framing that resonates with citizens and policymakers alike. The new narrative should be honest about power dynamics, realistic about constraints, and bold in articulating a vision of cooperation that is fair, inclusive and future-facing.

Mutual interests and power dynamics

International cooperation will only succeed if it reflects the reality that countries largely act in their own interests. Citizens everywhere want jobs, growth, security, and opportunity. This offers a pragmatic and compelling basis for collaboration. However, mutual interest is not a level playing field. The starting point is often an imbalance of money and power that shapes negotiations and outcomes. Without addressing these dynamics, partnerships risk reinforcing dependency rather than reducing it. Building in sustainability to cooperation in the face of geopolitical fluctuations is also critical.

To make mutual-interest partnerships viable, we should acknowledge asymmetries, and design mechanisms that give all partners a meaningful voice.

Cooperation of the future can take place in a way that is more responsive to country contexts; empowers local leadership; draws from diverse capabilities and expertise and is provided more efficiently, in a way that does not undermine local and national systems. It can start from co-creating agreements, jointly defining priorities and respective benefits. It is important to be honest about trade-offs, as cooperation will involve reconciling self-interest with collective goals, especially on contested issues like climate, migration, and security. Embedding accountability and transparency is necessary to build trust and legitimacy in a multipolar world. In all but the poorest and most climate affected, mutual national interests could be the focus for international cooperation with other countries, as a matter of foreign policy.

4. Creating new partnerships

Many new coalitions have emerged in recent decades, for example through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), BRICS bank, and between India and African countries. Unlike under the old aid paradigm, the power balance in these coalitions is often more equal. These are illustrative of plurilateral realities, as seen through diverse clustering of countries based on specific economic, geographic and political interests. If actors in international development are much more diverse, this should be a

strength. Both 'traditional' and emerging donor development actors need to appraise their position and comparative advantage in this changing cooperation landscape.

Development draws from multiple tools, including aid, diplomacy, security, trade and investment policies. It requires collective action that draws lessons from recent years and makes the most of new sources of cooperation – from governments to private sector, philanthropic, tech and civil society partners, across regions and globally. The challenge is what form new international cooperation partnerships take and what the organising principles are for that cooperation.

An interconnected and geopolitically charged operating environment

The landscape of development cooperation is shifting, with growing South–South political (e.g. ASEAN) and economic (e.g. Africa Continental Free Trade Area) cooperation and China's increasing influence challenging traditional models. State-led capitalism is gaining ground. Liberal market economies promoted by Global North development actors are no longer recognised as the universally preferred model. Yet that approach from previous international leadership and convening has led to significant global progress e.g. on women's economic empowerment or nutrition. The best of that cooperative leadership needs to be reflected in new models of partnership.

Being outward-facing, transparent, and concerned with solidarity is more important than ever. It is important to recognise the contribution of international cooperation to upholding shared values and norms. Asking people what they want from a reformed global development system has been done at large scale before, such as with the SDGs. With the gains in technology, this could be done again now at even greater scale, more cheaply and more quickly.

To meet future challenges we should take an integrated approach to work on emerging megatrends, such as the confluence of new technologies, demographic change, labour mobility, and migration. Progress does not only happen sectorally, but

interconnectedly. Demographics are leading to shortages of labour in ageing countries and shortages of economic opportunities in lower-income countries. The corrective for this trend has been migration, but the impact on receiving countries is putting more pressure on the international system and on development resources.

The value of labour is changing due to the disruption of AI. Cognitive tasks, especially in services, will be increasingly automated in the next 3-5 years. The route to growth via services (the so-called Indian model of development) will be disrupted, and most countries are not well prepared. Connectivity and technologies like AI could democratise and create growth opportunities via innovation if access, inclusion, and distributional issues are addressed. Investment in knowledge ecosystems now will enable wider access to knowledge and expertise that can in turn drive growth.

A smart combination of economic, development, and foreign policies is needed in any new approach. There is scope to learn from the work being done in sub-sectors which have had success. Questions for the whole of international development apply in specific ways to the different thematic and policy issues that make up the international development agenda.

Cooperating on finance and accountability

Growing economies at scale is a significant challenge in traditional donor countries as well as in emerging economies.² Recent challenges have included security spending (where since 2015 global military expenses have grown by 37%); deep impacts resulting from the pandemic and commodity price rises (particularly for emerging economies); and the various shocks wrought by recent disruptions in tariff regimes and (in traditional donor countries) public expenditure pressures due to ageing

² African economies are collectively around \$3 trillion (same as Brazil), with an average GDP per capita of \$2,000. A reasonable medium-term ambition might be to achieve \$10,000 per capita – approaching that of Brazil, India etc. But, with the current rate of population growth that would be a combined economy for African countries of \$20-25 trillion.

populations. The opportunity to focus development finance carefully to catalyse change in a much larger financing gap has become even more urgent.

Different types of capital should be deployed based on their comparative advantage in a specific context. Sources include bilateral governments as investors who expect a return for ODA investment; philanthropic capital, which can take risks and undertake advocacy but not replace ODA; Development Finance Institutions (DFIs), which can leverage and de-risk but not crowd out the private sector; private sector and capital markets, which power jobs, growth, and trade; and multilateral development investment, including IFIs, which delivers results at scale, catalysing and leveraging. Though more needs to be done to invest in the evidence base on the impact of leveraging private finance, integrating an investor or private sector mindset and valuing the private sector for what it does, rather than for its money, is crucial.

With many governments around the world carrying fiscal deficits, and many new potential sources of capital, there are strong arguments that development and humanitarian work should focus on low-income countries. In prioritising concessional finance and making the case for using it, it may also be worthwhile considering further distinguishing humanitarian aid from other forms of development cooperation. Reducing the cost of capital for low and middle-income countries is an example of a clear international system priority that would have huge benefits and build resilience into borrowing.

A global observatory for monitoring the quantum, deployment, and impact of development finance could monitor how effectively development finance is used. It could track how finance addresses development challenges through partners that need most support, and in a way that strengthens systems. It would enable actors in the international system to hold one another accountable, and national governments to have an overview of development interventions in their countries such that they can be integrated into national plans.

This is a rare moment to fix a number of existing challenges that have long been understood to undermine the efficiency and impact of development efforts.

These include problems that undermine aid effectiveness, such as disparate reporting and assurance procedures that overburden government and local leaders and reduce their oversight and leadership in development planning and delivery. The need for more resilient systems for investing in and accessing data, innovation, and research has taken on new urgency following recent wide-ranging aid cuts that have left systems for critical global public goods such as health, humanitarian and climate monitoring fragile and at risk. These capabilities are crucial in providing an evidence base to maximise the impact of international cooperation, ensure that it is well prioritised and effective, and that lessons are learned.

Strengthening local foundations and systems

The new development context should re-set the balance more strongly towards cooperation that supports and strengthens systems in countries. External agendas and ways of working have historically often dominated how cooperation works, undermining and even supplanting national systems. Approaches that hold all parties involved in cooperation to account for delivery will be key to progress.

Domestic resource mobilisation and greater attention to governance are critical to achieving self-reliance. FDI, remittances and aid as income without these two additional factors will not be sufficient to bring about long-term benefits of development. Domestic revenue mobilisation requires parallel effort from governments to deliver service provision and that motivates people to pay tax. Successful tax partnerships with external partners are characterised as long term, expertise sharing, grounded in local context, and building sustainable foundations. It was suggested that this external partnership can be powerful in persuading citizens that their governments are being held to account for financial management and a motivator in paying taxes, particularly during a period of transition.

The foundations of the re-imagined international system will also need to build in resilience. Recent years have demonstrated the increasing importance of recognising the risks when the biggest powers opt out, and the challenges this can pose to multilateral systems and action. A system of cooperation that is based around local and national foundations, rather than international ones, should carry longer-term resilience.

Building local systems means understanding people's aspirations for a better future. These aspirations are highly salient, even if what they focus on will continue to shift. There can be an issue of 'denialism' of development challenges by countries conscious of their image on the global stage. In this context it will be important to offer channels to understand peoples lived experiences better, and to respond with changes in how international development happens, including sensitive framing in the approaches to these. These could include the shifts from grants to debt and financing, developing better systems for innovation and knowledge exchange, and developing different systems of representation.

5. The pathway to change

Setting out the pathway to a modern system of international cooperation needs a clear vision and rationale. This has been difficult for some partners who have been hesitant about the way forward in a fast-changing and less certain wider global context. It is difficult to design a system of re-imagined development cooperation for the next forty years when it is hard to anticipate the disruptions of the next three to five years. That will have an impact on the best development model. Yet development demands a long-term horizon: it is an intergenerational challenge.

We need to be honest about what has contributed to this moment of disruption within the current international development system. Unequal power relationships, external security threats which mean reverting to national interests first, insufficient traction in building national systems and demanding mutual accountability,

an international financial system under strain, challenges to prevalent values and dominant voices – and the fact that development itself over the last decades has been successful, leading to increased demands from partner countries and people. Understanding this gives us the building blocks of the re-imagined system.

Partnerships should be a means to achieve impact, not an end in themselves.

The impact we seek is about reducing inequalities within and between countries and promoting convergence. It is about global public goods as well as national development and humanitarian assistance. Organising around policy coherence will be more effective than organising around ODA. Given the interconnectedness of global challenges, the pathway to success will include working within the current geopolitical reality but shifting the approach from one dominated by ideas of self-preservation to one that recognises mutual interests and interdependency. This will be particularly difficult on issues where interests are not aligned- and the imbalance of money and power makes the aspiration of real partnership harder.

Institutions and networks that include a wider span of diverse partners could be more effective at integrating efforts and harnessing different strengths to deliver progress. There is a question of which platforms will set the norms of the future: global (UN), like-minded (OECD-DAC), mixed (G20), South-South (BRICS), or new majority-led forums such as those shaped by China – and which of these support which sets of power relations, alliances, and outlook (self-reliant or dependent). There is a credibility gap for institutions perceived as exclusive or ineffective. Reform at the edges will only result in managed decline. The ideal is for system strengthening through transparent, diverse partnerships and this should be core to the new approach and narrative. New partnerships should aspire to safeguard, transform and scale cooperation, reform institutions to allow everyone to participate and contribute according to their ability and invest according to need.

Elements of the new partnership paradigm

New partnership initiatives must share a common goal: reduce dependency and increase self-reliance, moving beyond the traditional aid paradigm. Achieving this often requires sufficient institutional reform to help national governments become more accountable and deliver more effectively for citizens, and cooperation that supports, and does not undermine these efforts. Building in transition from external to domestic financing and delivery of this transition against capability milestones is key. There will be practical questions that need to be worked through on how to ensure agility while remaining accountable; how to enable risk-taking without excessive additional bureaucracy.

Partnerships should be transparent about mutual benefit, reflect shared accountability, and have an investment mindset. This will include joint governance mechanisms, with jointly defined objectives, metrics and course correction mechanisms built in. With multiple partners, each should play to its comparative advantage. Shared dashboards on spend, results and learning, with independent verification can help track results. Lessons from recent decades demonstrate the importance of building in resilience and being able to adapt in the face of rapid change or uncertainty. Investment should be jointly managed, usually beyond grants-only, blending public, philanthropic and private capital with clear roles for each.

Knowledge exchange is becoming increasingly mutual, and multidirectional—South–South, South–North, North–North and Global, and should support and strengthen diverse international cooperation partnerships. It may be technical, indigenous or tacit, and will always be at least to some extent contextual. The system should move away from extractive models and invest in sustainable knowledge ecosystems, especially in the Global South. This can be done through investing in data and evidence, including local statistical capability, direct funding to local institutions and building platforms that interact. Traditional and new methods can work together, such as combining university exchanges and secondments with digital platforms,

hackathons, and AI-enabled collaboration. Multilateral organisations could support research and monitoring infrastructure to be used by a range of partners to support development. Centres of expertise can convene communities of practice and broker practitioner networks. Experience has shown that knowledge ecosystems can remain collaborative even if the politics are not. This makes them a source of strength in the new system of international cooperation.

There are huge opportunities to better integrate new technologies into existing cooperation, to address existing challenges and to anticipate those of the future brought about by technological disruptions to global problems. For example, technology can shape markets, using proven tools such as pooled procurement, and advance market commitments and open standards, drawing on lessons from health and vaccine markets. It can research technical climate and health solutions at speed. It should enable cooperation, not widen divides. It can connect partners, accelerate innovation and improve service delivery, with investments in digital foundations and access, and attention to governance. There is a role for a coalition of like-minded actors to shape systems, promote digital public goods and embed values within technology systems that support development.

In re-imagining international cooperation on development, we must be ready to listen to non-obvious voices. Those who stand to benefit the most from development- whose voices are difficult to find- should be actively sought out: the poorest, women and girls, youth, minorities, migrants, indigenous communities, persons with disabilities. It should be possible to publish how feedback influences decisions, and track participation as a measure of quality. Those who can help should also be included: diaspora, high net worth givers, who have resources and ideas to offer. Innovators should be part of the conversation: private sector, business, SMEs, students. Those who are willing to pay: taxpayers and politicians, and those not willing to pay because they are sceptical, should also be included.

And finally, we must not forge an agenda which leaves countries with the most difficult development contexts even further behind - countries that are conflict affected, ungoverned, unstable, and which cannot secure their development pathway. The majority of poverty is concentrated in fragile states: each has its own local realities. Local leadership in this context may not always be able to be grounded in partnerships with host governments. Partnerships with people and institutions, including civic groups and private actors, will help to diversify delivery and accountability. Development partnerships and interventions will need to be agile and flexible, open to windows of opportunity for change, as context can change quickly. Development and security approaches will need to work together.

6. A compact and a future UK-convened conference

Taking all these factors into consideration, the UK, with co-hosts, aims to convene a wider set of partners to chart a new course for international cooperation in Spring 2026. This Conference on the Future of International Development will launch a “Compact on International Cooperation”, based on the principles discussed during the Wilton Park Re-imagining Development dialogue. The final session debated these principles, some potential pitfalls and choices.

The starting point is considering why previous principles of partnership have been difficult to realise in practice. Those principles set out at Paris and Busan remain important: transparency, accountability, ownership, voice and inclusion. Power, money, and dominant national rather than global interest have had a role to play. Maintaining a global social compact has been difficult, when domestic social compacts either do not exist or have broken down. But there was a general sense that these principles work as a first building block.

There was acknowledgement that principles alone do not change behaviour, incentives do. It is important to build positive norms, think about champions and influencers, and make behaviour change easier. To engage citizens and politicians,

work through intermediaries, including civil society and the private sector. Consider how development success is communicated positively and aspired to.

The importance of defining the end point and shared purpose before agreeing principles was re-emphasised. This purpose could be, for example, reducing global inequality or phasing out ODA by a target date. Or it could be a specific sectoral objective based around global public goods. This will help partners to be clear about their own roles in cooperation. There will be value differences and conflicts e.g. between commercial benefit and public interest that need to be worked through and these should be surfaced.

Any compact should be able to capture how complex, diverse, dynamic and fast evolving the world of development is. Principles of international cooperation must be geopolitically robust. They will need to be flexible: fragile states may require humanitarian approaches, while middle-income countries may prioritise commercial or foreign policy interests – though they should be broad enough to work across contexts.

Other factors to consolidate for the draft principles draw from the discussions captured in this report: frame principles around mutual interest, trust and co-creation; set out a clear narrative with new modern language and terminology (including international cooperation, perhaps, rather than international development); keep catalytic impact at the core: unlocking domestic resource mobilisation, strengthening systems, harnessing technology, knowledge and innovation.

Principles should endure, but their relevance depends on how we act differently now. They must be pragmatic, workable, and resonate with multiple stakeholders and their interests.

Draft principles on international cooperation

Based on the discussion, the UK Government has developed the principles below as a first set for testing, to be taken forward over the coming months:

1. **Clear purpose** – Partnerships based around a clear framing of desired outcomes.
2. **Mutual interest, respect and trust** – Commit to partnerships grounded in mutual interest, respect and trust; co-create priorities; align incentives; make voice, risk and benefit-sharing explicit; and hold all parties mutually accountable.
3. **Streamlined and enforceable accountability** – Commit to a single, country-led accountability framework with a common results system, proportionate risk-based assurance, transparent mutual assessments, and agreed remedies for noncompliance.
4. **Use country systems by default** – Use and strengthen in-country systems, formal and informal; integrate any additional measures with clear exit criteria.
5. **Power to those most affected** – People-first governance: decisions, budgets and oversight led by those most affected, consent for major changes, enforceable redress, and measures to mitigate the risk of power and influence captured by influential groups.
6. **Predictable and transparent finance** – Predictable, multiyear, on budget, citizen-visible finance with clear disbursement schedules and real-time transparency.
7. **Catalytic use of finance** – Deploy concessional finance where it unlocks the greatest impact; crowd in other capital; recognise distinct roles of ODA, DFIs, philanthropy, private and South–South flows.
8. **Knowledge, data, and technology as Global Goods** – Invest in data and knowledge systems; support networks and South–South/multi partner exchange; co-develop technology that reduces, not deepens, inequality.
9. **Shared risk and resilience** – Share risks equitably and in proportion to capacity; build adaptive, preventive systems with pre-agreed triggers for course correction.

Box 2: Draft principles for international cooperation

7. Conclusions

The Wilton Park dialogue brought together a wide range of voices and perspectives on the future of development cooperation.

In concluding, the group asked itself what choices we need to make now, in order to be ready for the challenges that will be forthcoming in ten years' time.

If we are clear in recognising and naming those challenges (e.g. pandemics, climate change impacts, drive for cleaner energy, participation in governance- or, writ large, e.g. health, education, climate, inclusive technological advances, humanitarian crises), then the principles identified can set out the means of cooperation through which we both work together to find solutions and put those solutions into action. Different issues will require different approaches, but the principles of cooperation can remain constant. We should home in on what we do best with greatest impact in countries of need, maximise combined resources and follow the principle that what can be driven and led from country level, should be.

This new cooperative approach needs to work geopolitically and bring together all levers we have for action (including finance, expertise, technology) so that international cooperation lands in a realistic place that achieves impact and bridges idealism and pragmatism. It must be grounded in political conversations and political will - in order to have an approach that will work in the face of changing geopolitical headwinds. Technological innovation has to be driven into solutions thinking and can be instrumental in coordination.

Re-imagining needs to start from within and changing our own behaviour. This means doing things differently as well as thinking differently. It means joining others' initiatives and thought processes rather than inviting other people to join the prevalent 'donor' ones. It means listening to voices beyond the ordinary stakeholders, such as SMEs and youth, and integrating those perspectives- broadening who is at the table for the future. It is important to do what has most catalytic impact.

We need to heed calls for more join-up between wider sets of stakeholders, more voice for those who are directly at the forefront of international development, to create the right avenues for participation in setting the agenda, and to co-establish partnerships. The new narrative needs to work for everyone.

Many participants noted that different countries and coalitions are having similar and complementary conversations. There is an opportunity to bring these initiatives together, to build on thinking, and also potentially to come to a division of labour in rethinking what international cooperation needs to look like and how to get there. Integration and low ego will be essential to drive progress.

The challenge is not only to rethink development, but to reimagine cooperation in a way that changes power dynamics, puts the most affected in the foreground, and is brave in working through new coalitions. The UK with partners will now take forward this re-imagining to build out a Compact on International Cooperation as we work collectively towards the co-hosted conference in Spring 2026.

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