

General description

The biennial high-level [Development Cooperation Forum](#) (DCF) is one of the functions of the [Economic and Social Council](#) (ECOSOC). It was mandated by the 2005 World Summit and first held in 2008 to review trends and progress in international development cooperation and promote greater coherence among the development activities of different development partners.

It is meant to be the principal forum for multi-stakeholder dialogue on international development cooperation at global level. It brings together all key development cooperation actors, including member states, multilateral organisations and players from the United Nations system as well as civil society organisations, parliamentarians, local governments and the private sector.

The full UNDCF gathers once every two years with a few of High-Level Symposia organised every year in preparation for the full session.

Development paradigm and effectiveness

DCF is anchored in the global partnership for development set out in the [Monterrey Consensus](#), the [Johannesburg Plan of Implementation](#) and the [Millennium Declaration](#) and aims to enhance the implementation of the internationally agreed development goals, including the [MDGs](#). In the most recent strategy, there is a clear reference to the need of reducing inequality and advancing sustainable development.

Approaches explored currently by the DCF include aid quality (effectiveness), policy coherence, mutual accountability as well as South-South and triangular development cooperation.

Concerning development effectiveness, in the Busan Partnership, “The UN Development Cooperation Forum is also invited to play a role in consulting on the implementation of agreements reached in Busan.” Talaat Abdel Malek, co-chair, Working Party on Aid Effectiveness, is a member of the UNDCF Advisory Group. Still, the understanding of aid effectiveness seems to have been quite narrow so far, with the strategy aiming to “improve [aid] quality and maximize its impact and value for money”.

UN DCF informal Advisory Group

A key role of members is to promote active involvement of influential stakeholders, experts, think tanks and networks in different regions in the preparations for the DCF. Members are also expected to promote partnerships with other related organisations in support of the Forum's mandate. Members include many high-level governments' representatives, various UN agencies, OECD DAC (incl. WP-Eff), and CSOs.

UN DCF 2012

The next UNDCF session will take place on 5-6 July 2012 in New York. The main topics include:

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| 1. Aid quantity, sources and allocation | 6. South-South and triangular cooperation |
| 2. Mutual accountability and aid transparency | 7. Decentralized cooperation |
| 3. Policy coherence | 8. Aid to promote gender equality |
| 4. Aid to mobilize other development finance | 9. Private philanthropic organizations in development cooperation |
| 5. Impact of the sustainable development concept on development cooperation | 10. The evolving development cooperation architecture |

One more High-Level Symposium in preparation to the DCF is foreseen on 14-15 May in Australia under the theme "[Shaping a Sustainable Future - Partners in Development Cooperation](#)". The event will explore opportunities, challenges and lessons learned for effective sustainable development; discuss opportunities for enhancing development cooperation, including official development assistance, and for innovative finance and effective partnerships. The Symposium will discuss leveraging the private sector, the future of South-South and triangular cooperation, and examine the role of sustainable development in the post-2015 development framework.

The Secretary General's report to the UN DCF 2012 is expected to be published in May. Under the title "Achieving Sustainable Development: the Role of Effective Development Cooperation", the report will outline how the global economic crisis influences aid flows, elaborate on the level of achievement of MDG 8 (global partnership for development) as well as the usual topics of aid quantity, quality, allocation etc.. It will also identify key challenges in the run up to 2015 and post-2015.

Debates around UNDCF

Hopes

In debates about aid architecture, DCF is often mentioned as the most representative of the development policy forums and the only one holding a legitimate, universal mandate as a UN body for debating global development issues. Many suggest therefore that the DCF should be granted more importance on international level and takes over the key debates and processes, including the development/aid effectiveness process.

Criticisms

Despite the ambitions, DCF has not been an important player in development policy debates so far. The forum serves mostly for general policy debates, but it lacks accountability mechanisms and no of its decisions are binding. The current framework of DCF lacks resources to expand the scope of its activities. In relation to moving key development debates to DCF, CSOs fear that the space for their participation might be limited due to the complicated and governments-oriented UN structures. Except for the informal advisory group, where CSOs hold a few of seats, DCF so far lacks proper structures for cooperation with civil society.

Trade union advocacy access

Trade unions' access to DCF lies in a number of places. First of all, trade unions have had for years a direct access to UN structures through the ITUC office in New York. Since its closure in 2010, some of the liaison has been taken over by the Washington office, but the scope of advocacy work has been significantly smaller. Other advocacy access points include advocacy with the UN delegations at country level, since it is the governments that are the main decision makers in UNDCF. Some leverage can also be achieved through joint efforts within the BetterAid platform (soon to be transformed into a new structure). If it would be considered a priority, a trade union representation to the DCF advisory group could be introduced.

Key issues at stake

- **Development effectiveness** – DCF 2012 will be the first major development policy conference since Busan and the issues of development effectiveness, Busan-follow up as well as aid architecture are high on the agenda. So far the main topics in the aid quality theme were: policy conditionality, concessionality, aid flexibility and predictability. DCF will be a good opportunity to repeat, strengthen and, potentially, deepen commitments made in Busan.
- **Mutual accountability** – DCF has always stressed the importance of mutual accountability and the role of partner country governments. DCF's understanding of mutual accountability seems to be missing the aspect of democratic accountability and the role of civil society on both sides holding their governments accountable.
- **South-south and triangular cooperation** – DCF positions itself as the main forum for promoting and advancing this kind of development cooperation. After a study in 2008 and a seminar 2009, DCF is picking up the issue again.
- **Policy coherence** – unfortunately, DCF's understanding of that term focuses on new ways to catalyse development financing rather than the real policy coherence for development, based on the 'do no harm' principle concerning policies on trade, agriculture, migration etc.
- **Post-MDG agenda** – UN High-Level Panel on post-2015 framework will start its work exactly around the next DCF which makes it a good forum to raise the first issues and debates.
- **Sustainable development** - the next DCF session will take place directly after the UNCSD Rio+20 and will keep the focus on the issues of development cooperation for sustainable development.
- **Role of DCF and accountability mechanisms** – DCF as well as many other actors, esp. in the civil society would like to see a stronger position of the Forum in international development policy debates. But for this, DCF would need to introduce stronger accountability mechanisms that would move it from a place of empty debates to an actor that can actually influence countries' policies.

More information:

- [UNDCF website](#)
- [BetterAid statement on the 2010-2012 DCF strategy](#)