

New Tasks Concerning Development and Development Cooperation in the Mediterranean

Rafael Grasa

Vice-rector
Universitat Autònoma
de Barcelona

In the last 15 years, the study and practice of development and development cooperation have changed substantially in three directions: a) the studies on development have been «de-economized», attributing a growing importance to sociology, anthropology and political science, and comprehensive approaches based on promoting capacities and achieving people's wellbeing; b) development has been understood as a goal and process that must be driven primarily by the countries, sectors and communities targeted by the development, with the result that the involvement, assistance or cooperation of outside players is viewed solely as an obstacle or adjuvant; and c) in a context of significant curtailing of total funds (little more than 50 billion dollars worldwide), the effectiveness and efficiency of aid and cooperation development have been brought into question, with a critical scrutiny of its highly fungible nature, and, in spite of this, new goals and purposes have been added to those habitually proclaimed during many decades (strengthening of civil society, governance and strengthening of democratisation and the institutions, fight against corruption and promotion of good government, restoration and reconstruction after armed conflicts,

empowerment, etc.). In short, uncertainties and changes regarding the goal (development), the instruments (development and cooperation policies) and the agents (combination of private and public, state and market, the role of the organisations of civil society). These changes, as we shall see further on, have taken place on both a general level and also within the context of the Mediterranean.

As regards development, a new «doctrine» has emerged that is broadly accepted in international forums and official documents but still rarely seen in actual practice. According to this doctrine, development is conceived as a multidimensional process (where the social dimension sets the goals; the environmental dimension establishes the baseline constraints and the contextual conditions; and the economic dimension provides the instruments, tools and certain interim goals), with plural models and the right to choose, not necessarily conceived for the South, and where the results do not justify all the means (empowerment, strengthening of capacities, etc.).¹ In short, development is seen as a right and as a global public good.

All of this has been given a framework of expression and commitment within the United Nations, as the *Declaration on the right to development* (Resolution 41/128 of 4 December 1986 shows), which provides that the right to development is a right by virtue of which all subjects of the international order must respect –and cause oth-

ers to respect– the right of peoples and individuals to development. Specifically, Article 1 of the Declaration states that

«1. The right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized.

2. The human right to development also implies the full realization of the right of peoples to self-determination, which includes, subject to the relevant provisions of both international Covenants on Human Rights, the exercise of their inalienable right to full sovereignty over all their natural wealth and resources.»

This is fully in tune with the conception of development and cooperation pointed out at the beginning: 1) multidimensional and focused on human beings, seen both as individuals and as groups/peoples; 2) progressive execution, as a process of improvement and fulfilment of needs that is never fully completed; 3) which integrates and strengthens other rights of individuals and peoples; 4) which must be carried out at both national and international level and therefore entails rights and duties; and 5) which includes as a crucial component involvement both in its attainment («constant improvement»)

¹ See Rafael Grasa/Ignacio Sachs, «Ecodesarrollo y gobernabilidad: sugerencias para la aplicación de nuevas estrategias de desarrollo», in R. GRASA / A. ULIED (eds.), *Medio Ambiente y Gobernabilidad. Diagnóstico y gobernabilidad en el Mediterráneo*, Barcelona, Icaria/Institut Català de la Mediterrània, 2000, p. 90-126.

LOCAL CATALAN COOPERATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

It is true that in the past municipal Catalan cooperation has not centred on the Mediterranean region as the main area of its cooperation. But it is also true that in recent years there has been a positive turn and a new approach to the regional reality of which we irrefutably form part. There are many factors that have generated this growing interest. Among the most important we can point out the significant increase in the number of immigrants from Maghreb countries and, undoubtedly, the escalation of the conflict in the Middle East. More generally, other factors are the lack of advance in the negotiated resolution of the conflicts and the spread, at an international level, of prevailing military visions that increasingly favour the expansion of the spiral of war and violence, an approach that in Catalonia is widely rejected. Cooperation toward development seeks to be an instrument to favour meetings and exchange between societies, placing the emphasis on the fight against poverty, the promotion of human, social and economic rights, and the strengthening of institutions committed to these tasks.

But we must recognise that the links and bilateral relations of cooperation established with the countries and cities of the Mediterranean shores are still on a low scale if we compare them with those that we maintain with Latin America.

For this reason, the Fons Català de Cooperació al Desenvolupament together with the Fons Mallorquí, Menorquí i Pitiús have worked in coordination to promote a campaign that includes our cooperation with the development of the countries of the south Mediter-

anean region, as well as the issue of raising general awareness. The campaign *La Mediterrània: Cruïlla de pobles* (The Mediterranean: Crossroad of peoples) involved the participation of around one hundred town councils from Catalonia and the Balearic Islands, which between them have passed a Declaration of Mediterranean municipality. As a result, diverse local environments have been united in the need to work from their own particular field in a rediscovery of the richness of the area.

At the same time, the development aimed at assisting impoverished peoples involves lending our support to projects of cooperation and strengthening existing organisations. The prohibition of associations in some countries has often been the cause of problems within these organisations, resulting in weak points that must be taken into consideration when proposing joint initiatives. The supplementary position and dynamization of the organisations that put forward interesting proposals will help these weak points to be minimised and will strengthen the associative structure, something that will also affect democratisation and citizen participation in the development of the communities. In this context, the opening three years ago of an office of cooperation of the Fons Català de Cooperació al Desenvolupament in Morocco, located in Tetuán, allows for a more consistent contact with the organisations of the southern and eastern Mediterranean areas.

Finally, we can say that we have successfully started this project for the dynamization of the municipal cooperation of Catalonia with

other Mediterranean cities and that we also work from the resolve to construct a network of Mediterranean municipalities for peace that can embrace cities from all the Mediterranean shores, understanding that from municipalities it is possible to work actively toward dialogue and for peace in our region. Within this perspective are inscribed the initiatives that we have underway:

- The recent trip of a delegation of the member municipalities of the Fons Català de Cooperació al Desenvolupament to Morocco in order to fully experience the reality of the Rif, in the north of the country, and see *in situ* how the different projects already underway are developing.
- Our support for the organisation of the Mediterranean Social Forum within the structure of the World Social Forum as an organisation dedicated to dialogue and reflection between social movements and organisations, in order to contribute alternative proposals to the current system.
- The presence of the European Network of Municipalities for Peace in the Middle East and in the Euromed Civil Forum.
- To continue promoting the economic and technical cooperation in various projects, with the aim of adding our support to processes of local development, promoting human, economic and social rights and giving support to humanitarian initiatives, mainly directed at the inhabitants of Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Palestine, Lebanon and the Saharawi People.

Núria Camps i Vidal
Manager of the Fons Català
de Cooperació al Desenvolupament

and in the benefits achieved in each stage or phase.

All of this is also seen in the context of the Mediterranean. After all, the sea that bathes both shores is, after the three thousand kilometres that separate Mexico from the United States, the second major line of fracture and division between North and South. In other words, the Mediterranean too shows all the changes and uncertainties mentioned previously, including the curtailing of funds for development aid.

However, it is possible to identify, in my opinion, three distinctive features that should be used to establish the priority tasks over the next few years for the

various parties involved in development cooperation in the Mediterranean.

First of all, in the Mediterranean context, one observes an excess of economicism in the conception and practice of development and development cooperation, related to a great extent to the approaches currently in vogue in the European Union and the overriding emphasis given to the creation of free trade areas. Although this is a vital goal for the medium and long term, the present insistence on it has led to a divorce between the official line which, in line with the «new doctrine», stresses the role of human and social development and the need to take into consid-

eration the environment and the protection of ecosystems, and the actual practice of almost all the players involved. Social goals, including those incorporated since almost a decade in the policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, are often non-existent outside of the speeches or, at most, the documents. And the same thing happens with environmental protection practices, particularly the most innovative (protect ecosystems and the social practices and groups that have kept them relatively intact until now). One has only to look at the impact of many of the stabilisation policies implemented in recent years.

Second, conceptual, translation and cultural understanding difficulties, often rooted in the Western centralism of the prevailing conceptions of development and cooperation, in a cultural «colonialism». To put it bluntly, the effectiveness of the strategies and policies aimed at strengthening civil society, governance and good government, co-development or shared responsibility, empowerment find themselves significantly hampered by the fact that they have not taken adequately into account the connotations and denotations of concepts such as civil society on the southern shores of the Mediterranean or widely followed practices of a religious origin such as the zakkat. This is to be attributed not only to the official agents –governments, states and intergovernmental organisations– but also, to a great extent, to private agents, including the organisations of civil society in the North. Hence the vital necessity to increase mutual knowledge, to dialogue and to establish shared meanings, not only to prevent cultural impositions but also to promote efficiency and effectiveness, the achievement of goals, moreover with a reasonable cost-benefit ratio.

Third and lastly, I would like to stress an aspect that is linked in part to the cultural «colonialism» I have just mentioned: the lack of attention paid to the impact of the resurgence of cultural and identifying factors, a phenomenon that is closely tied to the advance of globalisation and the world system in

the post-Cold War period, and which is visible on both shores and, in particular, in the relationship between the two. One sign of this –not the only one but the most visible because of its impact on the communication media– is the increase in the number of events with violent and often fatal consequences in the name of identity.

I allude, in particular, to what Amin Maalouf has called «murderous identities», those that, being unable to compatibilise the idea of multiple allegiances with an unique identity (unrepeatable, special, for each individual or small group) strengthen the perception of incompatibility –including physical incompatibility– between the identity considered to be exclusively one's own and that of others. The outcome, as Maalouf points out, is that by reducing identity to a single allegiance, human beings adopt a «partial, sectarian, intolerant, dominating, sometimes suicidal attitude, often becoming murderers or the supporters of murderers. Thus, their vision of the world is biased and twisted. The people who belong to the same community are "our people"; regarding them, we are concerned about their fate but tyrannical in our treatment of them: if they are considered "soft", they are persecuted, terrorised, punished as "traitors" and "renegades". Regarding the others, those who are on the other side, no attempt is ever made to see things through their eyes (...) The only viewpoint that matters is "ours", a viewpoint

that is often expressed by the community's most militant members, the most demagogic, the fiercest and most impassioned».²

Development cooperation should work to overcome the inability to accept multiple allegiances within identities which, although they continue to be unique in their individuality, are increasingly multifaceted. However, it is common to see the opposite direction being taken, at least by omission: the proliferation of manichaeisms and uncompromising dualities, the recourse to the existence of «natural laws» or historic events to justify episodes of mass-scale, organised violence. No doubt it would exaggerating –because it would be overgeneralising– to say that certain conceptions and practices of development cooperation have encouraged the formation of murderous identities, but they have certainly facilitated the appearance of sectarian offshoots and conceptions.

To conclude, these specific features set –or should set–, within the context of the new conception and practice of development, the priorities for cooperation for agents in the North. In short, the aim is to move away from paternalism and an excessively asymmetrical relationship marked by the absolute inferiority of the recipients of the development programmes in the South. To not do so would be to perpetuate a situation exemplified by the African proverb, «the hand that receives is always below».

² Amin Maalouf, *Les identités meurtrières*, Paris, Grasset, 1998, p. 48.