

# The GPEDC ‘theory of change’: An exposition and critique

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## 1. Introduction

GPEDC does not have an explicit Theory of Change (ToC); however, the Steering Group believes that one may be implicit in the actions that have been taken and the statements that have been made. The MAG has been asked to provide an assessment of the ToC that is implied by the GPEDC’s work to date; to provide a critique of that ToC; and to recommend ways in which challenges to the implied ToC might be addressed. This paper provides an initial assessment of these issues.

In attempting to create ex-post a ToC for the GPEDC, the MAG acknowledges the political and voluntary nature of the Global Partnership in which all stakeholders endorsing the GPEDC bring their own understanding and interpretation of the Busan principles, including the implementation of commitments that follow from these principles. As such, the GPEDC does not have an explicit, stated theory of change. Indeed that a ToC is implied rather than explicit in the work of the GPEDC is reflected also in the fact that there were differences in understanding between members of the MAG about what the GPEDC’s ToC is.

Nevertheless, the MAG has developed a possible GPEDC ToC below in order to highlight some important directions, challenges and ingredients that seem to be important factors in furthering the Partnership’s contribution to change in effective development cooperation. The constituent members of the Steering Committee may choose to take these MAG reflections further in setting out a more explicit ToC as it positions the GPEDC within Agenda 2030 in its Second High Level Meeting in Nairobi in November 2016.

## 2. The implied ToC

A review of the Busan Outcome Document, and the work of the GPEDC to date, implies a generic ToC which can be described as follows and is presented in figure 1 (see next page):

### 2.1: Action and activities inspired by global norms

The Rome/Paris/Accra/Busan process has negotiated a set of widely-agreed norms for effective development cooperation (though how far these have been internalised within different organisations remains a matter of debate). In Busan, these norms and specific commitments consistent with these norms were negotiated in an inclusive multi-stakeholder process. The existence of these norms for development, and for development co-operation, provides a basis for pursuing commitments, action and concrete activities to achieve a more coherent, inclusive, efficient and effective approach to the development process. Moreover, following Busan, these norms can be applied to all actors that endorse the GPEDC. Although their adoption is voluntary as well as country and stakeholder specific, the Busan agreement, and its expression in the GPEDC, strongly endorsed adoption and subsequent action for results.

### 2.2: Effective monitoring and assessment of progress

Development change is driven at a country level, and therefore the GPEDC’s inclusive country-led monitoring and multi-stakeholder dialogue processes are essential for encouraging and sustaining behaviour change and institutional reforms. At the same time, there is a need for an international and regional space for systematic and inclusive discussion over time to seek solutions on complex

issues in development cooperation. GPEDC provides such an international space. Together, these two factors facilitate an environment for effective monitoring of commitments made by different actors under the internationally-agreed norms.

### 2.3: Behaviour change

Adoption of and action resulting from the Busan agreements will contribute to behaviour change, and behaviour change will be strengthened through effective monitoring and assessment of progress. Ideally, global and country-level dissemination and discussion of progress on the basis of monitoring data will lead to further behaviour change, which in turn will lead to better monitoring. There are thus implied feedback loops between behaviour change and monitoring. Monitoring draws attention to current stakeholder practices, against Busan norms and commitments, and builds trust and encourages accountability through dialogue based on evidence gathered in the process.

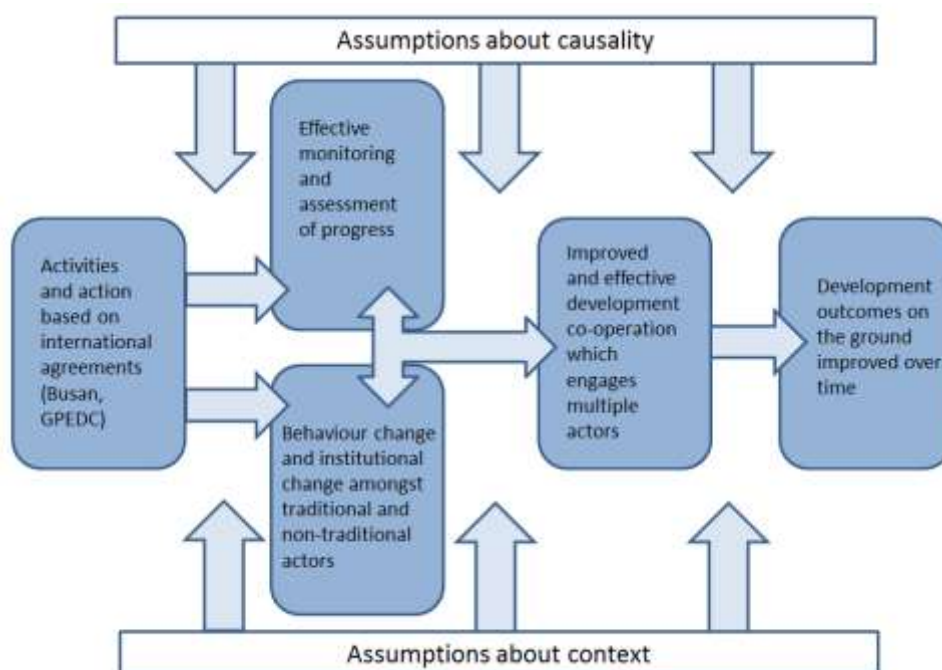
### 2.4: Improved development co-operation

Different actors have improved their practices, consistent with a commonly-agreed set of global standards, which are monitored in light of country-specific data, enabling improved development co-operation over time. Different actors operate in a more joined-up way, and in response to a clearer mandate and to political will.

### 2.5: Improved development impact

Improved development impact will be the consequence of operationalizing democratic ownership of development policies and processes, strengthening efforts towards concrete and sustainable results, and supporting developing countries in their efforts to leverage and strengthen the impact of diverse forms of development finance and activities. Development actors - be they traditional donor agencies, partner countries or a range of non-executive actors – are better co-ordinated and seek solutions jointly, which leads to better development impacts. This more coherent approach leads to greater improvements in the lives of the poor, women and marginalised groups in developing countries, which, in balance with the environment, results in sustainable development.

Fig 1: Implied generic theory of change for the GPEDC



### 3. The GPEDC ToC: A critique

Whilst the fundamental logic of this implicit GPEDC theory of change is clear, there are a number of challenges that can be made in regard both to the implied assumptions on causality and on the importance of context to development effectiveness. Many of these assumptions are not explicit at this stage, because there may be no consensus amongst countries and stakeholders on their logic and on their application. As well, some of the assumptions embedded in the work of the GPEDC to date are significant, but may not be realistic. These include the following in relation to each step of this ToC:

#### 3.1: Action and activities inspired by global norms and targets

- 3.1.1: Whilst global norms and targets have been negotiated and agreed in Busan, their application is voluntary and country- and institution-specific. Furthermore, it is a moot point as to how far these apply to non-traditional actors who were not directly signatories to the Paris, Busan and related processes. For example, how far will companies and other private sector actors wish to adhere to the detail of these global norms especially where their ends may not support their commercial imperatives? (§32 and §34 - §36 of Mexico Consensus) Similarly UMICs as aid providers in SSC understand these norms as reference points “on a voluntary basis,” and continue to stress that the “nature, modalities and responsibilities that apply to SSC differ from those that apply to North-South co-operation.” (§2)
- 3.1.2: Even where countries have signed-up to these global norms, it is not necessarily clear in all cases whether the domestic willingness or capacity will be in place to deliver on commitments derived from these norms. In many cases there will be complex political economy and resource challenges to the country-level implementation of global norms, even where these have in-principle been agreed upon.
- 3.1.3: Still, even when development partners and traditional donors have endorsed and support these global norms, it is necessary to consider and analyse if all staff in their agencies: (1) are aware of the norms; (2) if their decision-makers have the will to implement these norms and the required behaviour changes in doing so; and (3) if they can develop capacities in staff to adopt a new mind set regarding partner country ownership and leadership.
- 3.1.4: The presumption implicit in GPEDC’s work to date is that the existence of these norms, and the inclusive multi-stakeholder process in their development and negotiation strengthens the hand of the least powerful actors (for example, low income partner country governments, parliaments, country-level CSOs) relative to more powerful ones (mainly DAC and some MIC aid providers). Is this actually the case?

#### 3.2: Effective monitoring and assessment of progress

- 3.2.1: The reality is that there are often conditions that are unique to countries and regions, which in turn establish different needs and expectations for change to which GPEDC must be sensitive. Has country-focused monitoring created an unbalanced approach in which aid providers seemingly have fewer responsibilities for active participation and change? Creating incentives for policy changes at aid provider headquarters, and effectively communicating these changes to country offices, is a major gap in the current process.

- 3.2.2: There is a risk that general global discussions and local-level practicalities find themselves disconnected. It is not impossible that the ‘diversity of realities’ at country and regional level renders global discussion unhelpful. Yet, these global discussions may continue nonetheless, with the result that they will be seen as irrelevant either at aid provider headquarters or at country or regional level.
- 3.2.3: To what extent does a global discussion fully engage all the relevant stakeholders in a meaningful way. The private sector and CSO umbrella bodies may be present at these debates, but in most cases there will not be any clarity as to whether the issues that these groups raise will be reflective of their presumed constituency, and consequently how far that constituency will feel itself bound by any comments or commitments these umbrella groups might make. On the other hand, experience shows that information on the discussions and requests for these bodies do not necessarily trickle down to their members.
- 3.2.4: The unique value of the GPEDC monitoring framework builds on Busan’s commitment to inclusive development involving all development stakeholders under the leadership of a government national coordinator at country level. However, these stakeholders may have very different understanding of the implications of “inclusive.” To what degree do GPEDC country-level processes allow and create conditions that enable inclusion of the voices of multiple stakeholders, accept leadership in initiatives from a range of development actors, and direct actions that benefit all segments of society? Does GPEDC need to consider tools to assess whether processes at a country level sometimes may actually exclude certain actors?

### 3.3: Behaviour change

- 3.3.1: Busan translated the principles of effective development cooperation into both institutional reforms and targets that require changes in the practices or behaviour of development actors. But behaviour change amongst stakeholders is often embedded in changes in those stakeholders’ own processes and capacities for more effective development cooperation. In measuring progress on behaviour change, therefore, assessing the qualitative aspects of development cooperation relationships is as important as measuring specific changes in amounts of aid delivered “on budget” or in access to information. This poses difficult methodological challenges for the monitoring framework. How is behaviour change to be measured, especially if there is a range of quite different stakeholders to assess?
- 3.3.2: The evidence from a range of different behaviour-change efforts – be that on reducing smoking, improving road safety or addressing risky sexual behaviours – makes it clear that behaviour change takes a long time to happen. The evidence from campaigns in the UK on the wearing of seat-belts, for example, suggests that behaviour change took around 20 years to come about. If that is the case in relation to individual behaviours on a relatively-simple topic, how much longer may it take to achieve behaviour change in an institutional environment on an issue as complex as development co-operation? That the GPEDC is too optimistic is borne out by the fact that although the number of countries applying the Paris Declaration monitoring survey increased from 32 in 2006 to 78 in 2011, by 2010 only one out of 13 targets had been met.

- 3.3.3: Behaviour change among individual development actors, consistent with the Busan norms, can improve specific initiatives in development cooperation. But in the absence of institutional policies guiding development practice, human resource policies, enabling conditions in laws and regulations, transparency and mutual accountability and mechanisms for collaboration within stakeholder groups (e.g. among aid providers at country level), such behaviour change will be difficult to sustain.
- 3.3.4: It is not clear that the current indicators cover the most important areas that might suggest a positive direction in behaviour change. As noted above, policy reform, institutional reform, enabling laws and regulations, and the emergence of new coordinating mechanisms are all important indications of behaviour change for partner and aid-providing countries, which may not be captured in the current monitoring framework. Moreover, what measures of behaviour change might realistically and usefully be applied to non-executive actors in the development space?

#### 3.4: Improved development co-operation

- 3.4.1: Changes in the priorities and policies of development actors can depend as much on domestic political priorities as it can on prior international commitments. Changes in national governments, financial and other constraints, or even shifts in domestic opinion may dictate to a significant degree whether in practice stakeholders are willing to deliver on their commitments. Is the inclusive aspect of the GPEDC sufficiently robust at all levels to impact domestic discussion of these priorities for development and development cooperation (e.g. through independent CSO voices and advocacy at the country level)?
- 3.4.2: GPEDC implicitly assumes that ODA delivered through development cooperation has had an important role in catalyzing development outcomes, and can mobilize other flows (domestic and external) to these purposes. Whether or not this is true, the current aid system is becoming more complex with more fragmentation, many new channels and new actors in play. How far can the norms and practices that have been identified for effective aid to date be applied to ensure development effectiveness of other flows (e.g. climate finance, blended finance, SSC), and co-operation between them?

#### 3.5: Improved development impact

- 3.5.1: How far do improvements in development co-operation lead to improvements in development impact? Progress in development outcomes in all countries, North and South, is essentially an endogenous, contested process involving political leadership, often provoked by social movements. Consideration needs to be given to factors that affect whether the lives of poor people are improving or not, and be more clear about the causation in such improvements that can be accorded to better development co-operation, even if this does actually occur.
- 3.5.2: While the aid and development effectiveness agenda provides an avenue for learning and monitoring progress, it is not entirely clear to what degree real changes in development in the past have occurred as a result of such initiatives alone. Historically, change has occurred in response to broader political incentives to be more strategic and deliberate in directing development resources at the country level. Demonstrating real

benefits over time from reform of development cooperation, which out-weigh the perceived costs, is essential to sustain support for continued reform: Given the difficulties in causation noted above, how can these benefits be better reflected in the work of the GPEDC?

#### 4. Emerging issues for further examination

It is clear that the MAG's implicit ToC for the GPEDC, described above, contain a number of assumptions that need to be tested, and the obvious weaknesses addressed. To this end, the MAG makes the following initial suggestions about issues that should be looked into further:

- 4.1: The key challenge is to be able to explain how, in practice, high level oversight discussions translate into behavioural change. This black box needs to be better explained by the GPEDC itself. For example, is it through improved knowledge and skills, strengthened national and domestic political commitments and processes? How would this political economy process actually occur? As to enhanced national capacities, how are these key ingredients strengthened through GPEDC oversight and country-focused monitoring? What new capacities do aid providers need to help support partner countries and commit to behaviour change themselves? What are the mechanisms that address these issues?
- 4.2: There is a need to find ways to engage more effectively and realistically with new players in the development space, in particular non-executive actors such as private foundations, parliamentarians, CSOs and the private sector, in their diversity. The goals of the GPEDC would benefit from a framework that structures an engagement with their different agendas in the development architecture at country level.
- 4.3: How can the political economy realities of making development happen be better reflected in the approaches and tools that the GPEDC employ to realize its principles for effective development cooperation? At various stages – from the domestic priorities of traditional donor governments to the structural challenges in recipient countries – hard political realities and decisions will be at least as important for what happens in the development space as any commitment to a global framework. Understanding the risks and potentialities posed by these other constraints is therefore extremely important.
- 4.4: How can the GPEDC engage effectively with middle levels of organizations, moving the point of engagement from quality assurance staff to planning and policy staff? Can monitoring generate new and convincing insights that create incentive for new policies and procedures for aid providers and partner country governments?
- 4.5: With respect to the Busan commitment to mutual accountability (§35) and subsequent practice in monitoring, it is not clear whether GPEDC's key aim is to collect data to be able to evaluate the relative performance of different countries in delivering greater effectiveness; or whether it is to do so in order to be able to establish mutual accountability or generate examples of best practice that can inform the process of effecting change elsewhere. It need not be a binary choice, but greater clarity about what is intended for the monitoring framework is needed.

- 4.6: There is a need to ensure that high-level political discussions in the Steering Committee and in High Level Meetings are informed by a nuanced synthesis of country level evidence. The global discussions need both to learn from what has worked in effecting change at a local level, but also develop a better understanding of what factors inhibit reform and the solutions to overcome some of these challenges. Generalised discussions at a global level will be less relevant if not informed by the granularity of country-level insights.
- 4.7: The obverse of the previous recommendation is that country-level actions are properly able to learn from global deliberations, and from relevant experience from other countries. Large-scale and data-heavy reports are unlikely to achieve this aim. There is a need therefore to consider what process and tools will be best suited to facilitate effective lesson learning, based on the outcomes of monitoring of relevant and useful indicators. A communication strategy, including social media resources, is required at this stage in time.
- 4.8: There is a need to understand better how non-executive actors in the development space can and want to engage in monitoring their development practice at country level. National-level frameworks for evaluation and the metrics used need to bear in mind that different types of stakeholders will have different imperatives, operate under different country conditions, and therefore will internally shape their contributions according to their own metrics and processes of evaluation.
- 4.9: The GPEDC builds on a decade of experience in developing a distinct multi-stakeholder country-focused monitoring process on development cooperation with broad political ownership. More than 75 countries are participating in the Second Monitoring Round. The GPEDC should assess and build on the current practice in this Round of identifying stakeholder “focal points” for the monitoring, to explore how these mechanisms (or others that exist) might expand into structural platforms that can continue dialogue on policy and practice, and perhaps draw together the SDG and GPEDC agenda at country level, engaging traditional development partner country offices in the process.
- 4.10: Rather than seeking to universalize the GPEDC agenda, the approach should be to support space for UMIC aid providers to share their experience of SSC with partner countries, assessing this experience against SSC principles, without imposing a pre-determined GPEDC agenda, which is perceived to be derived from traditional DAC donors.
- 4.11: The commitment to “mutual accountability for making progress against commitments and actions agreed in Busan” (§35) creates a powerful incentive for monitoring and serious dialogue on long-standing issues in development cooperation. But taking advantage of this opportunity requires investment of resources in strengthening capacities and an enabling environment for all stakeholders to engage in country-level monitoring against a (revised) GPEDC indicator framework, improved access to requisite information from aid providers, encouragement of multi-stakeholder processes to collect data, validate country reports, and ongoing open forums to discuss the implications of issues identified and proposed solutions. In some countries, global indicators may be adapted to include country-specific issues that are proposed by country stakeholders.