

Solidarity and international cooperation - an exchange between equals

The Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FFD4) took place in Seville (Spain) from Monday, June 30 to Thursday, July 3, 2025. Official Development Assistance (ODA) is going through a major crisis. It is even more important to understand how the actors involved in global development work and their real impact on the ground - UN agencies, most committed states (bilateral cooperation), civil society actors, financial instruments set up since the 1970s little known to the general public. Crises always allow one to enrich their knowledge and consider a new beginning. Necessity rules.

For IFAD, a specialized agency of the United Nations and international financial institution that has been fighting since 1977 against hunger and poverty in rural areas, this International Conference 'represents a unique opportunity to reform financing at all levels, including by giving impetus to the reform of the international financial architecture, and to address the challenges that hinder the urgent investment needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.' These International Conferences on Financing for Development constitute "the only forum where leaders from all governments, as well as international and regional organizations, financial and trade institutions, business, civil society and the United Nations system meet at the highest level and thus strengthen international cooperation. (1)

For Forus, a global network of national platforms and regional coalitions that make a collective contribution to development, peace, democracy and justice, 'active and collaborative participation can help influence local and global negotiations and build a more effective international community to promote an equitable and sustainable world, where the most vulnerable populations have a voice, where human rights are respected and where inequalities and injustices are combated. Forus also believes that the FFD4 is an important opportunity to accelerate the implementation of #2030Agenda. The conference must play a crucial role in shaping the global financing agenda and advancing the Sustainable Development Goals. (2)

For French president, Emmanuel Macron, present in Seville "When we talk about development finance, it is about the ability to inhabit a planet in common, to set priorities, and rather than building walls or imposing tariffs or closing our digital spaces, measuring how interdependent we are." The FFD4 brings hope in a troubled geopolitics. He insisted on the major points of development in 2025. "Climate and environmental vulnerability, a concept that had been shaken for a long time, has now become established", "scientifically established and politically measured". Another point "the financial situation of the most fragile countries has deteriorated", their indebtedness and repayment are impossible in the face of an increase in security spending due to political and military instability (blows and deleterious influence of foreign powers). Four areas of work are suggested. The first is to mobilize new resources, for example by increasing the IMF's capital (special drawing rights). The second is to create new international taxes on sectors that benefit from globalization (maritime transport, aviation...). The third is to improve leverage (any euro or dollar of public money must lead to the equivalent in the private sector). The last axis is to develop value chains, create economic wealth in the poorest, developing and middle-income countries (3). Esther Duflo, winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2019, whose work on the fight against poverty refers to it, recalled that "the

poorest countries are not bottomless pits where all effort is in vain". The strategy of denigration and misinformation implemented to justify the drastic decrease in public funding for development aid, in the United States but also in Europe, is harmful. It also undermines public generosity (donations and bequests). Esther Duflo recalls that "at a time when social progress in rich countries has stagnated, where life expectancy has even dropped in some years in the United States, the progress made in thirty years in the poorest countries has been considerable." The figures speak for themselves: "According to the World Bank, the number of people living below the extreme poverty line increased from 2 billion in 1992 (38% of the world population) to 713 million in 2022 (8.5% of the world population". In sub-Saharan Africa, life expectancy at birth has increased from 52 to 63 years in twenty years (2000-2023). Esther Duflo insists on a misinformation from certain countries of the North – official development assistance is not a "waste of public money". It allows for "strengthening global public goods, overcoming crises, rigorously testing and evaluating innovative approaches". It is impossible to make an accurate and comprehensive assessment of ODA as it is diverse and varied. Examples of successful programmes are instructive. GAVI, the international vaccine fund, has saved at least 1.5 million lives (American Economic Journal). Thousands of researchers on all continents are working step by step, action by action, programme by programme, to build a scientific corpus of convincing results. They are essential to inform the political decision, abused by ill-intentioned Cassandres.

The ambition shown by rich countries to devote 0.75% of their gross domestic product to foreign aid will not be met. The security problem does not only affect the countries of the South but the whole planet where the Russian threats (in Europe but also in Africa) or Chinese ones (on all continents) are dangers not only for the countries of the South that they exploit (by pretending to help them) but also for Western democracies through an effective hybrid war (by circulating false information that undermines the morale of public opinion). It is always easy to oppose one another, to unearth less-than-glorious parts of European history (colonial past), or to cast opprobrium on NGOs presented as agents for the laundering of mafias or the financing of terrorism.

Faced with such an offensive by autocrats, the worst way would be to disengage from the poorest countries, which need support. They can get by with the will of their governments and the participation of their populations, with the support of the richest countries. This is not charity disguised as philanthropy, a form of neo-colonialism where exchanges remain unequal. It is about defining a new contract, a pact between equals with the poorest countries of the South. The often quoted African proverb says that the hand that gives is always above the one that receives. A genuine exchange, based on lasting solidarity and cooperation, is the sine qua non condition for a successful development policy that is first and foremost the responsibility of the countries themselves.

Dr Bénédicte Halba, president of IRIV (www.iriv.net), 4th of July 2025

- (1) FIDA- <https://www.ifad.org/fr/w/evenements/le-fida-a-la-4-conference-internationale-sur-le-financement-du-developpement>, téléchargé le 8 juillet 2025
- (2) Forus- <https://www.forus-international.org/fr/event-detail/11759-the-fourth-international-conference-on-financing-for-development-ffd4>, téléchargé le 8 juillet 2025

- (3) Emmanuel Macron, speech on the occasion of FFD4, <https://www.elysee.fr/front/pdf/elysee-module-24953-fr.pdf> 30th of June 2025
- (4) Esther Duflo, professor at the MIT and Collège de France, president of the Paris School of Economics and of the Funds of innovation for development, « Les pays les plus pauvres ne sont pas des puits sans fond où tout effort est vain », Le Monde Idées, mardi 1^{er} juillet 2025