

Multilateralism & Development Cooperation at a Turning Point

I have always believed in the multilateral system, first as a student of it, and today as an active participant shaping its evolution.

As we mark the International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace, celebrated by the United Nations, I find myself reflecting not only on its importance, but also on its future, especially coming out of the recent World Bank and IMF Spring Meetings.

Today, the question is no longer whether multilateralism matters. Because we already know it does.

But it is being tested, by a more fragmented, uncertain, and fast-moving world.

Over the past months, from Munich to Baku to Hong Kong to New York to Washington during the Spring Meetings, the conversations have been remarkably consistent: There is no shortage of dialogue, but there is a growing demand for delivery. There is indeed also a particular focus on how global imbalances are impacting growth, jobs, and social spending across emerging markets.

Right now, we are navigating a global economy shaped by geopolitical tensions, shifting trade dynamics, higher financing costs, and overlapping crises, and in this context, international cooperation is becoming more necessary and more demanding.

This is precisely why the conversation must shift, from *whether* we cooperate, to *how* we cooperate more effectively, and part of that shift is already underway.

Reinvigorating Multilateralism

As the International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace is celebrated by the United Nations every year, it serves as a reminder of a simple but enduring truth: no country can solve today's challenges alone.

Through initiatives like the Future of Development Cooperation Coalition, there is a growing recognition that development cooperation must evolve; becoming more agile, more aligned with country priorities, and better connected to private capital and real economic outcomes.

And from all this, one lesson stands out clearly: country leadership matters.

When cooperation is anchored in national priorities and supported by well-structured platforms, it becomes more than coordination, it becomes execution.

We have seen this in practice through country-led models that align partners, mobilize financing at scale, and translate global agendas into tangible results. Here I recall how in Egypt's Country Platform for the Nexus of Water, Food and Energy (NWFE), we leveraged international

partnerships to mobilize climate finance to accelerate the country's green transition, an effort that led to the mobilization of \$4 billion for the private sector in the renewable energy sector. All of this was incepted in my [book](#) titled “**Stakeholder Engagement Through Economic Diplomacy: Egypt's Economic Diplomacy Fostering Multilateralism & International Cooperation**”, published from the London School of Economics in June 2021.

From Global to Regional: The Role of ESCWA

In this context, regional platforms also have an increasingly important role to play in bridging global priorities with country realities.

As I step into my new role at the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), this region brings together a diverse group of countries, 21 Member States, each with its own initial conditions, yet all navigating shared economic, social and geopolitical challenges. This diversity makes regional cooperation not just relevant, but essential. It is at this level that global frameworks can be translated into actionable policies, where countries can exchange experiences, and where tailored solutions can emerge.

Strengthening this bridge; between global ambition and national execution through regional platforms, will be critical to delivering more effective and responsive international cooperation.

Another interesting observation as of late is that we are also seeing the rise of regional and issue-based initiatives stepping in to fill gaps. These are not substitutes for multilateralism, but signals that the system must adapt faster to remain effective.

More Mutual Reliance

At the same time, multilateralism must move beyond parallel efforts. Too often, institutions operate alongside one another, rather than together.

What is needed is a more deliberate shift toward mutual reliance where institutions build on each other's strengths, streamline processes, and deliver as a system rather than as silos.

Because in a world facing climate pressures, debt vulnerabilities, and widening inequalities, the ability to deliver global public goods, whether in energy, health, or financial stability, will define the relevance of the system itself and this requires all kinds of efforts such as cooperation between multilateral development banks, blended finance, policy-based lending, country-level coordination, crowding in private capital, co-financing frameworks, debt swaps and more.

When we talk about multilateralism, we have to talk about what pushes people-centric development pathways and there is no development without energy. In the currently complex geopolitical environment, the High-Level Panel on Universal Energy Abundance, the newly launched global initiative by Columbia University's Center on Global Energy Policy (CGEP) at the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA), in partnership with The Rockefeller Foundation, we will unravel how to multilaterally address these urgent issues.

Inflection Point for International Cooperation

Back in 2024, the Summit for the Future at the UN in 2024, leaders adopted the Pact for the Future; in 2025 at the Financing for Development Conference, the Sevilla Platform for Action (SPA) was launched, containing over 130 initiatives to accelerate sustainable development financing; all the while the World Bank was also leading Multilateral Development Bank (MDB) reforms based on the G20 Roadmap to create "better, bigger, and more effective" institutions for expanding lending capacity (hybrid capital), mobilizing private investment, tackling climate change, and improving operational efficiency, aiming to increase financing for SDGs by trillions.

However, ultimately, the future of multilateralism and international cooperation will not be determined by declarations or frameworks, but by outcomes.

Not by how often we convene, but by whether we can respond **at speed and at scale** to the challenges countries face. This is a moment to rethink, but also to act. Because in a world defined by interdependence, cooperation is not optional...But making it work better...Now that is the real task.