



# POLICY COHERENCE FOR DEVELOPMENT: THE ROLE OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES

IGNACIO MARTÍNEZ

Research coordinator of "Plataforma 2015 y más"  
estudios@2015ymas.org

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Beyond the international cooperation efforts, policy coherence for development (PCD) is seen as one of the most transformative approaches to reach the development and governance goals. This idea is also extensible, now more than ever, to local authorities, that are called on to overcome their focus on cooperation issues by integrating a comprehensive view of development in all their activities. Therefore, this paper will focus on the role of local authorities in the promotion of PCD.

But, before going into this, it is necessary to clarify the approach to be taken when talking about PCD. This paper will be based on "*The whole of government approach*"<sup>2</sup>, which states the necessity of incorporating the principles and objectives of development to the design, implementation and evaluation of any public policy and, therefore, providing an appropriate and comprehensive framework in the triangular relationship between migration, development and integration.

Besides, this approach becomes even more relevant in the current international context due to the rising role of local authorities in multilevel governance, the process of definition in the post-2015 development agenda, or the weakness of decentralized cooperation policy as a result of the economical crisis, at least in the case of Spain, among other reasons. In this context, it's imperative to revise the role of local authorities within development from a broad perspective.

In order to achieve this aim, this paper is structured in three sections: the first one is dedicated to arguing the relevance of local authorities in PCD as a contribution to global governance; the second one consists on an overview of the international doctrine about PCD, specifically focusing on how this doctrine has addressed local authorities; and finally, the third one

<sup>1</sup> I thank Sonia Garrido, Luisi Gil and Freest Saralegui for the text supervision.

<sup>2</sup> OECD (2005): *Fostering Development in a Global Economy*, OECD, Paris.



points out some strategic elements to improve the promotion of PCD in the decentralized field.

## 2. MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT GLOBALIZATION: REASONS FOR PCD IN THE DECENTRALIZED FIELD

One of the main characteristics of globalization is the increasing interdependence between different actors and geographical contexts. This globalization process, with the increasing interdependence between global, national and local matters, shows the need to adopt a multilevel approach in order to deal with global issues and, specifically, with the development agenda.

This comprehensive approach seems to be the most effective way of tackling the global challenges that come from the interaction of global and local needs. A vision that, on one hand, highlights the increasingly fundamental role of local authorities and civil society in solving development problems, such as the provision of Global Public Goods, education of global citizens, the provision of basic services, and the fulfilment of human rights, to name some. And, on the other hand, a vision that integrates all the policies with an impact on development, recognising that “aid policies” are ineffective by themselves in contributing to a more efficient development progress.

Thereby, this approach promotes the importance of policy coherence for development, which is a perennial issue widely addressed and studied by the International Development Doctrine, but that has hardly been explored in connection to decentralized governments.

However, although the doctrine and the PCD analysis have, in general, ignored decentralized governments, they do have a real impact on development. Moreover, this impact is increasing due to the internationalization, interdependence and power redistribution.

For this reason, all the policies and all decentralized government’s interventions must integrate this development perspective in the design, implementation and evaluation of public policies, and not just in cooperation policies.

This doesn’t mean that development should be the main priority of all the different policies, blurring the outlines of the rest of its targets, but that development principles and objectives should be incorporated in all of them, which implies necessarily re-shaping the aims of the design and implementation of policies at the different government levels.

In this sense, although substantial differences can be found among countries depending on the degree of decentralization and the territorial model, there are several policies on which regional and local governments



may have their own competences that significantly affect the development process. These are obviously international cooperation, migration and integration, but also education and economic spheres such as supporting entrepreneurship, the internationalization of companies, public spending, or others like research or tourism. Sometimes interactions among policies reinforce the development link, but these interactions can also have negative effects on development and important incoherencies can take place between policies from a decentralized government in connection to their development objectives.

### 3. PCD AND THE DECENTRALIZED GOVERNMENTS: AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE.

Despite the fact that policy coherence has been a growing concern in the international agenda over the last two decades, decentralized governments have had little importance in the international literature on PCD.

Even the United Nations (UN), that has been the most decisive organization to contribute to an advanced and comprehensive development agenda, hasn't referred to decentralized governments in its mandate on PCD, unlike in other processes, such as the dialogue for setting the post-2015 agenda.

Besides the UN, the OECD (Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development) is surely the body where further doctrinal progress and policy guidelines have been generated on PCD. But despite the long history of this organization working on the PCD approach, decentralized governments have been absent from its agenda until recently. They haven't participated in its design, or haven't been considered like actors that could favour the promotion of PCD.

However, this trend may be changing. In this way, one of the last OECD documents related to PCD –*Policy framework for policy coherence for development*– highlights the significant role that decentralized governments can play in promoting and monitoring PCD, as well as stating that these governments are in a unique position to observe firsthand where inconsistencies occur<sup>3</sup>.

But even though this seems to be a first step in recognising the role of local authorities within PCD, it doesn't recognise it as coherent or incoherent sources from the design and performance of their own policies, but through their participation in the phases of implementation and monitoring of policies. It's an approach that doesn't seem to pick up the potential impact of the policies of local authorities on the development logic, nor the potential role of them in solving global problems through their contribution to the processes of global governance.

<sup>3</sup> OCDE (2012): *Policy framework for policy coherence for development*, Working Paper n°1, 2012, p.8.



From another point of view, the EU regulatory framework for development is also profuse. The framework on PCD that appeared in the founding Treaty of Rome and was endorsed in the Lisbon Treaty is also expressed in the Communication “Policy Coherence for Development: Accelerating the progress to accomplish the Millennium Development Goals” adopted in 2005. However, in such a relevant Communication for PCD in the European framework, the role of decentralized governments has not been explored.

It wasn't until 2008 that the role of decentralized governments on development policies was clearly recognized, with the Communication *Local Authorities: Actors of development*. But, not even in this document, which is a milestone in the architecture of the development agenda in relation to decentralized governments, is PCD incorporated as one of the strategic fields where the contribution of local and regional governments to the development processes lies.

After this brief analysis of the international framework, and as a result of the absence of real references to decentralized governments in the international framework to PCD, several questions can be raised: Is the role that these actors can play in promoting PCD limited, and therefore, the dependence of global governance with respect to this? Is this the reason why the doctrine on this issue is so scarce? Or is it the doctrinal framework, by contrast, the one that has not been able to recognize the potential of coherent action by decentralized governments in the international development agenda?

The phenomenon of the redefinition of power and internationalization of territories in a context of growing interdependence seems to suggest that an affirmative answer to any of these questions ignores the responsibility and the potential that decentralized governments have in order to take an integral and consistent action on development.

Therefore, it's urgent, especially in the current configuration process of the post-2015 agenda, to raise the discussion on PCD at the decentralized level to be part of the concerns of the international development agenda.

## 4. STRATEGIC ELEMENTS TO PROMOTE PCD

The importance of PCD within local authorities and the review of the international doctrinal framework suggest the need to raise the profile of decentralized governments in promoting PCD. This paper concludes by pointing out some elements that seem to be strategically important for this purpose. However, given the heterogeneity, the different nature and different competences between different decentralized governments, it isn't possible to find a valid proposal for all local authorities. Despite this, we can make some general suggestions that could be adapted to the specific situation of each local authority:



- It is necessary to have a conceptual clarification of PCD: PCD is more than coordination and finding synergies. It is suggested to take the whole of the government approach based on a horizontal approach that involves a holistic and comprehensive perspective of governance and a global dimension that promotes a collective and concerted action among countries<sup>4</sup> and the different levels of government and territories.
- It's necessary to have a political commitment on development: a political commitment at the highest level over the idea of development. The focus on the cooperation policy alone is not enough.
- And finally, it's necessary to develop a roadmap for PCD within local authorities. This roadmap could consist on the following: the policy analysis, own or shared with other levels of government, with a development impact; the identification of meeting points, the potential and the interference between them; with this information, the development of a strategy or plan for the promotion of PCD; the creation, if possible and appropriate, of a specific unit to promote PCD, which should have its own structure and resources; the identification of a focal point on PCD for policy dialogue and coordination with other governments (central, regional and local); and the preparation of regular reports accounting the degree of progress in promoting PCD<sup>5</sup>, evaluating both the instruments design and the coherences or incoherencies of the different policies from a development perspective.

In short, it's a proposal that requires i) analytical skills, ii) political will and iii) resources, even if limited, to start-off.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The reflection and debate on the contribution of decentralized governments to development should not be limited to discussing just decentralized cooperation policies. The debate on the triangulation between development policies, migration and integration is a clear step towards policy coherence. This progress, however, could be strengthened by framing itself in a discussion about how it can empower the role of decentralized governments in global development, breaking the artificial dichotomy between domestic and foreign policies, taking into account the global and interdependent context which has global challenges with local impacts.


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<sup>4</sup> Millán, N. (2011): "Coherencia para el desarrollo en un mundo globalizado: más allá de las políticas de ayuda. Los casos de Suecia y España", in *Revista Sistema*, nº 220, Madrid, pp. 139-161.

<sup>5</sup> Grassa, R. y Gmelch, N. (2009): *Estudi de coherència de polítiques per al desenvolupament a la Generalitat de Catalunya*, julio de 2009.



PCD becomes a fundamental commitment in facing this challenge. The OECD<sup>6</sup> is pointing out that PCD, although it may appear as a confrontation scenario between the development interests and other government actions, is actually a chance for them to converge and reinforce each other. This is because we live in an increasingly interconnected world, where neglecting the answer to the development problems undermines the success of the objectives of domestic policies.

In this sense, PCD can only be achieved through a collective effort and in an open and inclusive framework that encompasses developed and developing countries, emerging countries, international organizations, decentralized governments and civil society organizations. 

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<sup>6</sup> OECD (2012): *Policy framework for policy coherence for development*, Working Paper n°1, 2012, p.4.