

THE TRENTO CHARTER



FOR BETTER
COOPERATION

The world has changed. The Trento Charter is an attempt to re-interpret contemporary times in order to rethink together the meaning of 'development cooperation' in its essential and unique characteristics, beyond the current legislative scenario and the need for new laws governing the matter. The fact that this movement has been detected in diverse locations stresses the urgency of this problem. We therefore have attempted to set down a few traits that we deem fundamental in shaping what we call 'cooperation as we see it': a new vision and a new practice of cooperation. Other traits may be added to these and we hope all of them in the future will be transformed into explicit indications for new regulations. Methodologically speaking, the following paper is the product of the work performed together by players in the field of international cooperation, each one variously committed in international solidarity action.

Promoters of the Trento Charter

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1. **READING THE PRESENT: COOPERATION THAT THINKS AND ACTS**

In an ever faster-moving world, featuring continuously changing dynamics, the approaches to and the procedures for intervention (cultures and tools) of non-governmental and governmental organizations in development cooperation often prove outdated. There is often no time to think one's action out or to update/synchronize the thought (and consequently the action) with the world. This calls for the strengthening of the research and training approaches in order to produce theory and enhance experiences, by creating places within and between the organizations involved in cooperation in which to prepare the intervention philosophy and the orientation of the action, starting from critical interpretation and from the communication of practices applied. These are places in which to merge thought and action as the hinges of a single, identical process. For this to come about, laws and regulations as well as financing circuits supporting them are required: a law on cooperation in association with regulations and programmes in tune with the times.



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2. **REGAINING THE WORLD: DIALOGIC AND NOT SELF-REFERENTIAL COOPERATION**

The action of part of the world of international cooperation is featured by the inversion between means and ends. Indeed, although quite comprehensibly, organizations tend to focus on the safeguarding of their own survival rather than on social promotion within the communities. The question is: is it possible to regain a non self-referential approach aimed outwards, towards the Other, towards the world? An initial shift towards escaping from self-referencing implies the reviewing of not only one's coherence with the principles underlying one's vision of the world and inspiring one's actions, but also with the results and actual impact of one's action on reality. Thereby, evaluation, intended as verification and assignment of meaning/value, takes centre stage. The need to address the world requires a viewpoint that outlines a form of cooperation that is dialogic (in which subjects, places and languages dialogue one with the other) and dialectic (that sees difference and conflict as potential constitutive elements of interaction), where relations are constitutive.



3. **INVESTMENTS: IN HUMAN AND SOCIAL CAPITAL**

Putting relations centre stage also means recognizing and enhancing the strong human and social resources in international cooperation organizations and in the territories, in which to invest with a view to exercising conscious citizenship. It is necessary to over-

come the dichotomy between 'community of donors' and 'target community', within a partnership approach: cooperation means living the present, aware that contemporary challenges are effectively fought only by activating internal processes of social animation. To this end, one must engage in a 'mutual mirroring' work, so as to stamp out the borders between 'inside' and 'outside', in order to achieve social transformation both within our own communities and in those of the countries with which one is cooperating. The central position of the relationship reflects the central position of the individual, seen as the core of the concept of human development, as an individual capable of relating and that, within the mutual autonomy of the parties involved, generates change.



4. **FOCUS ON THE COMMUNITY: QUALITY COOPERATION RELEASED FROM ECONOMISM**

International cooperation mainly depends on public financing of development. It is without question that action without financial resources is impossible. Another obvious fact is that its dependence from public financing, to be augmented and at the same time reviewed in terms of institutional management based on a more effective, topical and balanced attitude, is proof of the political character of international cooperation. The financial bond, however, although there, runs the risk of becoming a misleading simplification that prevents us from seeing a more radical aspect of the problem. It seems sometimes that cooperation, before being bonded, 'binds' to the need for financial resources. Convinced that good cooperation does not depend exclusively on a larger allocation of the GDP, it is necessary to gauge the importance of activating local resources and of involving partner communities. Without this stage, the boat inevitably drifts in a one-way direction and towards ineffectiveness of the intervention. The ensuing risk is the social impoverishment of the communities involved. It is necessary to work in the direction of a kind of cooperation capable of abandoning the economic growth paradigm and of acquiring the idea and practice of development co-promoted by the partner communities that include quality of life parameters chosen by the individuals and communities concerned, based on their peculiar values and priorities.



5. **RIGHTS IN RESPONSIBILITY: BEYOND THE LOGIC OF NEED**

The world of international cooperation describes itself through the media and in the official language as a set of 'donors' of material assets (structures) and of immaterial assets (democracy and development). It runs especially the risk of perceiving itself as such in the cooperative and solidarity action, thus generating an unbalanced relationship with the Other, reduced to and in some cases offended by its identification as essentially 'needy', non self-sufficient and not autonomous, which causes the onset of a syndrome that prevents the Other from imagining the future and of socially self-promoting itself. It is necessary to work to adjust this unbalance, to work on the

implications of a relationship of mutual dependence, on the ambivalence and on the shadows of the 'humanitarian' concept. In order to work successfully, a kind of cultural innovation must be applied: the logic of need implies the logic of aid (in its more or less refined variations), to the detriment of the logic of rights. The basing of the foundations of cooperation on the logic of rights, instead, means to place the cooperative action within a political dimension, a place dedicated to addressing the challenges posed by global disequilibria and injustices. It also means to consider each territory, no matter how impoverished, as a supplier of richness in terms of knowledge, tradition and culture before being a supplier of material goods, thus repropounding the issue of the democratic re-appropriation of resources and therefore of self-government.



6. ESTABLISHING LONG-LASTING RELATIONS: COOPERATION BEYOND EMERGENCIES AND NEXT TO CONFLICTS

International cooperation has a hard time in expressing relationships between places and faces. It seems to be in tune with our present times that in turn have a hard time in assigning appropriate value, in activating and in boosting process, continuity, construction and duration logics and prefers occasional interventions of apparently very high effectiveness. The result is a kind of 'fixed term' cooperation, marked by project deadlines, by the quantitative dimension of the many occasional relations, activated each time in the wake of an emergency. In order



to redirect the cooperative action towards its final objectives, it is absolutely necessary to reacquire process (relationship) time over the project (action) time. The assumption and at the same time the fundamental outcome of this reacquisition process is the kindling of trust between the parties involved. The interpretation of international cooperation as a process of mediation and of social transformation, prior to being an intervention in aid of development, also implies the placing of the issue of the non-violent management of conflicts at the heart of the cooperative activity. There is no development without peace. And there is no peace without justice, i.e. without the delicate contact with the direct, structural and conflictual violence that marks life, truth and the memory of individuals and places.



7. COOPERATION IN THE PLURAL: RECOGNIZING THE PLURIVERSE OF THE PLAYERS AND OF THE FORMS

Italian development cooperation is no longer the exclusive sector of the government, at institutional level, nor of the formally recognized NGO's, at non-governmental level. Perhaps it is no longer the exclusive sector of the non-profit scenario either. Other institutional subjects (local and regional bodies, universities), other non-governmental subjects (associations, non-profit-making organizations for community work, foundations, fair trade, micro credit, responsible tourism and even the world of labour, enterprises, fair economy, associations of migrants) in the last twenty years have entered the cooperation scenario and taken their legitimate places. It is now necessary to formally and substantially recognize the pluriverse of the players in the international cooperation and solidarity sectors that act in different ways and specific forms (international development cooperation, decentralized cooperation, community cooperation, solidarity actions), thus accepting the challenge of interconnection and of the search for common meanings.



8. BEYOND THE NETWORK: BUILDING OVERALL SCHEMES IN CREATING COOPERATION

A glance at the international cooperation scenario, in its diverse forms, gives the impression of a world consisting of networks of vertical and horizontal organizations that are fragmented and non-communicating, both intra- and inter-organizationally. In these networks it is unlikely to trace the specifics of the players (such as: the task of an institution engaged in cooperation, the percentage contributed by the non-governmental portion, the role played by the governments), all mixed into a blurred 'intervention' politically and operationally featuring redundancy, ineffectiveness and unproductiveness as well as structural distortions: cooperation, as aid, acts as an ointment on injuries induced, in places and in people, by that very same world that also produces injustice. It is difficult to build and reinforce coherence among national public policies as regards development, international cooperation and foreign politics. The fragile networks drawn up on paper appear as a set of dots that cannot operate together because of the lack of lines connecting them in an overall blueprint, given the plurality of languages. In order to reverse this trend, one must step back from direct action so as to open up work space and integration tables on which to trace connections, construct overall views and harmonize intervention both in terms of approach and of operations, thus moving on from the local and national dimension towards progressive Europeanization.



9. LOOKING AHEAD: SUSTAINABLE AND RESPONSIBLE COOPERATION

Human life depends on the goods and services supplied by natural eco-systems. An overall view and an effective and synergic approach are key to the safeguarding of the

functions and processes exerted by the environment, with a view to providing future generations with the right to achieve longevity, health and creativity within the context of sustainable human development. It is important to pay greater attention to environmental issues when practicing development cooperation, so as to restore, where possible, compromised environmental functions and to conserve integral ones. To this end, it is necessary to base cooperation programmes on a wider awareness of the impacts on the environment (such as deforestation, reduction of natural habitats, pollution, erosion and soil salinization, overexploitation of resources, for example) and of the options available for addressing them at the various space-time scales (renewable sources, efficient use of resources, territorial use planning, for example). This calls for careful integration of local cultures and traditional practices with recent knowledge and technologies the application of which should promote equal access to basic services while guaranteeing production and the chance for social participation. At the same time, it is essential to obtain positive integration and communication between the local level, where the effects of the interventions on the environment are felt, and the various institutional levels where the decisions are made and the intervention and environmental management policies are prepared.



10. **KNOWING ONE'S LIMITS: EXPERIMENTAL, FALLIBLE, PARTICIPATED COOPERATION**

A number of scenarios featuring greater social and cultural fragility should be approached and treated via experimental and reversible processes strongly oriented towards participation of local societies. When one is dealing with the effects of international migratory policies, with the impact of the rules of international trade, with the outcome of the action of international agencies, the capacity to mobilize civil society and public opinion in order to have a say in the final decisions of the state in which one is operating and the capacity to stop on the threshold of interference in the name of aid may prove more effective in obtaining change and sustainable human development than receiving larger funds for interventions.



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LA WORLD SOCIAL AGENDA (WSA) Promoted by Fondazione Fontana Onlus (a non-profit making organization for community work), WSA is a programme of events, appointments, workshops and initiatives for the civil society, schools and local authorities of the Veneto and Trentino-South Tyrol regions in Italy. From 2008 to 2015, its intention is to promote thought and indicate actions capable of contributing to the achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals, in a special trip backwards from the Eighth Goal to the First. In 2008, in fact, it is addressing the “global partnership for development” issue and thus the debate launched on international cooperation with the Trento Charter.

The initiatives for 2008 in Trentino-South Tyrol are supported and sponsored by



PROMOTERS OF THE TRENTO CHARTER The ‘Carta di Trento per una migliore cooperazione’ (Trento Charter for Better Cooperation) stems from a route travelled by institutional and non-governmental players in international cooperation in the first months of 2008 in Trento in parallel with the initiatives for the World Social Agenda. A fundamental stage in the development of the Charter has been the Seminar ‘New Cooperation’ held in Trento on March 14, 2008.

Promoters of the Charter are:



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