

What plot?—Rationalising the G20's development agenda



by Robin Davies

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The fifth edition of the *G20 Monitor*, a periodical of the G20 Studies Centre at the Lowy Institute of International Policy, is out today. Its theme is 'Development and the G20'. Like previous editions on special topics, namely trade and financial regulation, it comes at this theme from a very practical angle, asking, 'if the G20 is going to be in this business, what value can it add?' My own general answer to that question is the article 'What plot? — Rationalising the G20's development agenda'. Here's the abstract:

The G20's development agenda, as constructed in 2010, has not held together well. While some good outcomes have been achieved, there has been too much busy work. The G20 needs to build a firmer foundation and a more coherent narrative for its work on global development. The 'G20 Development Principles' articulated at the Seoul summit, and subsequently ignored, provide a good starting point. The G20 should seek to contribute to the provision of certain global public goods important for development. It should do so primarily by stimulating or strengthening collective action by international organisations, particularly the international financial institutions. Where necessary it should also pursue its objectives through collective action by G20 members themselves. Its work on development should be more directly linked to the core concerns of G20 leaders, relating to global economic stability and prosperity. It should proceed with greater transparency and outreach to low-income countries, particularly the most vulnerable among them. This work should be concentrated in three domains: growth and employment; social security; and—a largely new area—international public financing for development. Food security, while remaining important, should be considered in the wider context of social security.

The G20's existing multi-year action plan on development, agreed at the Seoul summit in 2010, expires this year. Even the sympathetic regularly describe it as diffuse, lacking a coherent narrative and disconnected from the central concerns of

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G20 leaders and finance ministers. It is due to be replaced in September 2013 by a 'St Petersburg Development Action Plan' which Australia will be expected to put into action during its presidency in 2014. It's hard to be optimistic that the new action plan will be more focused than the old, but plans are just plans. The real question is what Australia will actually seek to do, or rather have the G20 do, in this area. One can start with themes or 'announceables', as is the way of the G8, or one can start with principles and problems. The latter approach, advocated in my article, is harder but more likely to achieve results. In the long run, it is also more likely to enhance rather than diminish the credibility of the G20.

The development issue of the *G20 Monitor* also contains an overview by the G20 Studies Centre's Director, Mike Callaghan, and papers from Susan Harris Rimmer (ANU), Annmaree O'Keeffe (Lowy Institute), Steve Price-Thomas and Sabina Curatolo (Oxfam), and Julia Newton-Howes and Michelle Lettie (CARE Australia). You can download it [here](#).

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