

Beyond Economic Growth

Rethinking Foreign Financial Aid for Sustainable and Human Development

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May 2025



THE GLOBAL POLICY HORIZONS LAB

Empowering Evidence-Based Solutions

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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of foreign aid policies has been a central topic of debate since the rise of the development economics discipline. In this paper, I argue that these policies have failed to achieve genuine development because they prioritize economic growth over addressing sustainable human security needs. It's necessary a reconceptualization; a new model focused on a recipient-led model and specific local analysis in order to address the unique characteristics of each context. To achieve this, international organizations must decentralize their decision-making, enhance accountability, and prioritize social indicators.

INTRODUCTION

Since 2000, the aid given to developing countries to promote their economic development and welfare has not stopped growing. According to OECD last reports, The Development Assistance Committee allocated \$214.4 billion for development assistance in 2023, compared to \$77.28 billion in 2000 (OECD, 2024). This Committee also invested 0.37% of their Gross National Income (GNI) in aid. While this may seem like a significant amount of money, it is important to remember that it represents only the funding allocated by one international organization. There are also other actors contributing to development funding, including non-profit organizations, independent investors, and key governmental entities, such as the United Nations. While it is challenging to determine the precise amount that developing countries actually receive, one undeniable fact is that this amount is increasing. But does this increase in aid actually lead to greater growth?

Many scholars argue that this is not the case and are increasingly skeptical about the actual effectiveness of Official Development Assistance (ODA). Previous studies in the field show a clear range of mixed results, which makes it incongruent to demonstrate whether this ODA really has the positive effects (Ekanayake and Chatrna, 2010). In general, there is a consensus in the literature that aid does not have a uniform impact. In this paper, I argue that in order for development aid to be effective, it must prioritize sustainable, human-centered approaches rather than economic growth metrics, as traditional growth-focused frameworks often overlook the core objective of development: improving human well-being. Through this lens, the effectiveness of aid depends not on its quantity but on how it is managed, controlled, and applied. But to understand this, we must first understand the conditions influencing its applicability, which include both observable and unobservable factors.

Scholars have become more and more invested in studying the specifics of endogenous development. The focus right now should not be on whether development aid works on average, but rather on understanding why, how, and under what conditions aid has been successful in particular contexts (Quibria, 2014). This perspective recognizes that developing economies are diverse, with unique characteristics that lead to different outcomes from aid. Recognizing that developing economies are not homogeneous, but have many types of unique characteristics that make aid have different repercussions (Rahnama et al., 2017). In this paper, I'll go further.



There is no magic formula for ensuring the effectiveness of aid, but we can understand the mechanisms that make aid successful. We don't just need specific aid policies that understand the particularities of the communities, but we also urgently need human-centered policies. In this paper, I argue that we need to prioritize human development. We are so focused on economic growth that we often lose sight of its true meaning. What does growth really mean? In my research, scholars frequently rely on complex econometric models to demonstrate a country's economic success. While I recognize that these tools are important and practical for measurement, I contend that this emphasis on economic growth has caused us to forget the true goal of development: the well-being of people. The ultimate purpose of development should not be about growing an economy, but about developing humans, as it is humans who drive the economy, not the other way around. I argue that the current discourse on development often forgets this. In summary, don't show me an increase in GDP; show me an improvement in human security.

Traditionally, security threats are defined as "freedom from fear," focusing on military aggression from other nations. However, I argue for a stronger international emphasis on "freedom from want." Access to basic needs such as food, healthcare, and housing is as critical to security as freedom from external threats. I am less concerned with metrics that indicate economic growth and more focused on whether individuals have access to clean water, education, and medicine. This is what human security defends and it is the essence of what development should truly represent.

This paper argues that real development must be grounded in a framework of sustainable human security; otherwise, it cannot truly succeed. As I delved into this topic, I recognized the critical role aid policies play in fostering development, but also how poor implementation can lead to devastating consequences. Through my literature review, I found myself disagreeing with the prevalent approach to framing development as synonymous with economic growth. What should the ultimate goal of development truly be? Emulating Western nations and reaching the final stage of capitalism? Through this lens, foreign aid has become a means of neocolonialism by Western countries. For that reason, if we aim for different outcomes, we must change the rules of the game. I propose an entirely new approach to understanding development: a sustainable and human-centered one.

In the first section of the paper, I will argue for the necessity of foreign aid in developing economies. There is an ongoing academic debate questioning the effectiveness of aid, which attempts to undermine its real positive impact on communities. In this section, I will examine the benefits of foreign aid to support its defense. In the second section of the paper, I will examine the criticisms of aid, addressing the question: What's problematic about doing good? I will provide a brief literature review and demonstrate how a sustainable, human-centered approach can help mitigate these criticisms.

In the third section, I will debate the epistemology of development. In this section, I will explore the concepts of development, security, and growth, highlighting how these three essential concepts are often misrepresented. This critique will lay the groundwork for establishing a new framework for the application of foreign aid. In the fourth section, I will examine a recent case study that has framed foreign aid through this lens. Through this case, I will analyze what went wrong and what lessons can be learned from it.

Finally, in the last section, I will propose policy recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of foreign aid within international organizations. The goal of this paper is to bridge philosophical and abstract critiques with practical solutions. The key to realizing these ideas lies in grounding them



through effective policy implementation. There is still much work to be done, and I hope this paper serves as a meaningful starting point.

II. Why do we need foreign aid?

This paper will explore various criticisms that have been raised about foreign aid since the field of development economics emerged in the 1950s. Additionally, I will also contribute my own critiques to this discourse. The aim of this paper is not to frame aid itself as the problem but rather to highlight how it has been misapplied. The issue lies not with aid but with the framework within which it operates. Therefore, this paper advocates for a defense of foreign aid policies in the development economy field and this section will explore why the aid is necessary to understand its value and the motive of its defense.

There are many reasons to promote foreign aid in developing countries. First, there are numerous scholars that frame aid as global responsibility – a means of addressing historical injustices, fostering solidarity, and building global partnerships. One example is the well-known philosopher Peter Singer who advocates for a moral imperative to address global poverty and famine (Singer, 1977). Singer’s core contention is rooted in the principle that those with the means to prevent suffering have a moral duty to act, regardless of geographical boundaries. His argument can be interpreted as supporting the notion that foreign aid is not merely charity but a moral duty tied to global justice.

Second, aid plays a crucial role in stabilizing regions to reduce migration and conflict, offering both economic and political benefits for donor and recipient countries. Beyond a purely altruistic design, aid can also be approached from a realist perspective—not solely as an act of philanthropy, but as a form of national security. While ethical frameworks should not be disregarded, it is essential to consider alternative frameworks to support the defense of aid. This perspective becomes particularly relevant when examining the rising number of “climate refugees” in recent decades, a challenge magnified by global environmental issues.

According to the latest report from UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, published in November of this year, more than 120 million people are forcibly displaced worldwide, with three-quarters of them living in countries heavily impacted by climate change (UNHCR, 2024). Over the past decade, weather-related disasters have caused 220 million internal displacements—an average of around 60,000 displacements per day. The countries most affected by climate change include developing nations such as Ethiopia, Sudan, or Syria. The report also highlights that by 2040, the number of countries facing extreme climate-related hazards is expected to increase from 3 to 65. These numbers continue to rise. That’s why we need not only human-centered policies but also sustainable ones—policies that can be applied broadly and understood within the context of the interdependent relationships we share with the environment.

The third and final reason I will present in this paper is the alleviation of the humanitarian crisis, which is arguably one of the most urgent justifications for the immediate need for aid. In 2023, approximately 2.33 billion people worldwide faced moderate or severe food insecurity, a number that has remained largely unchanged since the sharp increase in 2020 (FAO et al., 2024). Additionally, 2.2 billion people lack access to safely managed drinking water, and 3.5 billion lack access to safely managed sanitation



services (United Nations, 2024). This does not even account for the lack of access to housing, basic healthcare, and other essentials. These people are in desperate need of help. That's why we must frame this issue through the lens of human security, focusing on human-centered security rather than state-centered approaches. This involves empowering communities instead of governments or elites, reducing dependency through capacity building and self-sustaining policies, and advocating for sustainable development that protects the environment while considering local cultural contexts. This is the position that this paper will defend.

In the following section, I will explore some criticisms of aid: what's problematic about doing good? By exploring these critiques, I aim to develop a more nuanced understanding of this tool and create a framework based on human-centered design that incorporates these criticisms to improve its effectiveness.

III. What's problematic about doing good? – A literature review about Aid Foreign effectiveness

One only needs to visit any academic search platform, such as STOR or Scopus, and search for "foreign aid effectiveness" to find thousands of articles that critique this tool. Since the emergence of the development economics field, foreign aid has faced criticism. In the previous section, we highlighted not only the necessity of this tool but also its benefits. In this section, we will explore the negative consequences resulting from the implementation of these policies, some of which are obvious, while others are more subtle. My aim is to examine how we can incorporate these insights into a new human security framework. Let's begin with one of the most common criticisms: the Dependency Syndrome.

Many scholars have explored the issue of aid and its consequences, but in this paper, I will focus on one particularly resonant voice in the debate: Dambisa Moyo. In her book *Dead Aid*, Moyo argues that foreign aid has perpetuated a cycle of dependency, stunted economic growth, and failed to address the root causes of poverty (Moyo, 2010). Moyo's central thesis is that aid is damaging to African economies and societies, encouraging governments to rely on external support rather than fostering sustainable domestic growth. While I disagree with her proposed market-driven alternatives to aid, which lean toward neoliberal policies and global capitalism, I believe Moyo raises several critical points worth considering. Specifically, she highlights two key issues: the role of aid in fostering dependency and the need to prioritize the leadership of developing country governments in addressing their own challenges. This last one concerns the second issue that we will discuss in this section: the donor-recipient model.

Scholars like Moyo critique the traditional donor-recipient model, highlighting how it often fosters dependency and fails to tackle the root causes of underdevelopment. Others advocate for a paradigm shift toward a partnership-based approach rooted in mutual accountability, where both donors and recipients share responsibility for development outcomes (Park, 2019). Building on this discussion, I argue that donors, particularly Western countries, are often perceived as the experts and saviors through this model. This reinforces a narrative of virtuous imperialism. This dynamic effectively turns foreign aid into a tool of neocolonialism. To counter this, it is essential to transition to a Recipient-Led Development model. This approach emphasizes building institutional capacity in recipient countries to



manage resources effectively and foster an environment conducive to sustainable development. Rather than prioritizing donor-driven agendas, this model ensures aid aligns with and addresses local priorities. I argue that a mixed model, with a strong emphasis on a recipient-focused approach, would be the most effective. This model acknowledges and balances the responsibilities and capacities of both donors and recipients while prioritizing the recipient's development goals as the ultimate focus. Finally, this leads to the third issue associated with aid previously mentioned: accountability.

The lack of accountability in the foreign aid process is a key issue in the current debate surrounding aid. One well-known scholar in this debate is Easterly. He points out the lack of democratic accountability in the operations of foreign aid agencies and international organizations (Easterly, 2010). Easterly contrasts the accountability structures in Western democracies with those in developing countries. In our Western democracies, if consumers disagree with the practices of a private or public company, they can simply stop purchasing its products. However, the situation is different with foreign aid in developing countries. The people in these nations have no means to hold foreign aid agencies accountable. If these agencies misuse the aid, there is no way for the population to protest, as they cannot "stop buying" the aid or take other similar actions. This lack of accountability undermines the legitimacy of foreign interventions and obstructs sustainable development. Easterly argues that without proper accountability mechanisms, aid often leads to corruption, worsens governance issues, and fails to achieve long-term progress. Indeed, he also suggested a shift in the donor-recipient dynamic. That's because the problems in foreign aid are interconnected.

By exploring these criticisms, I emphasize that development goes far beyond economic growth. Misinterpreting this can result in significant misapplications, turning aid into an oppressive tool rather than a liberating one. To address this issue, I propose reconceptualizing key terms that all development scholars use —development, growth, and security. I argue that this reconceptualization is essential and sometimes overlooked. For meaningful change, we need to go to the roots: the epistemology of development.

IV. An exploration about the epistemology of development

Development is a concept that might seem straightforward to those familiar with development economics. However, do we truly understand what it entails? I argue that we do not and I think we should ask this more often. Like all knowledge, our understanding of development is shaped by hegemonic perspectives. Why must success always be defined by Western standards? Economic growth, often positioned as the ultimate goal of development, reflects an ideology rooted in this framework. However, development can take on different meanings, far removed from reaching late-stage capitalism or embracing Western notions of individualism. To truly achieve meaningful development, it is essential to also consider this bias and promise for one unique to social and geographical contexts of each state.

One key concept that develops is growth. How much growth is enough? What kind of growth matters? And who gets to decide this? These questions are frequently overlooked but are essential.

We must carefully examine the type of growth we prioritize. As stated earlier in this paper, the overwhelming focus on economic growth often causes us to neglect the most critical aspect of



development: humans. It is imperative to shift our focus toward metrics that measure human well-being. The notion that "human development is difficult to quantify" is no longer an acceptable excuse, as it can be achieved through operationalization. By adopting a human security approach, we can identify what truly drives individual growth—namely, ensuring “freedom from want.” This approach provides a pathway to achieving better growth by embedding human development into measurable frameworks.

On the other hand, it is equally important to consider not just how we foster human growth, but how we ensure it is sustainable. The influential book *The Limits to Growth* demonstrated that industrialization comes at a cost: environmental degradation (Meadows, 1972). The impacts of climate change are a stark reminder of the consequences of industrialization in Western countries, which began in the 18th and 19th centuries and escalated in the 20th century, driving significant increases in production, consumption, and urban expansion. The book warns that continuing this trajectory without acknowledging ecological boundaries risks both global ecological and economic collapse. Today, the international debate has developed on how developing economies can industrialize while addressing the challenges posed by climate change.

This poses a significant challenge in the field of development for emerging economies and calls for collective international action. Western colonial powers have a moral obligation to assist developing countries in adopting greener urbanization methods, as they were the primary contributors to environmental degradation through its own urbanization process. Given that developing nations also have a right to pursue development, it is crucial to consider how Western countries can support this process by providing green technologies and sustainable planning solutions. But as well, we return to the question on how much it is necessary to grow and if this is answered in western terms. Maybe we need to create new growth goals in order to address this climate change problem.

Ultimately, development economics is fundamentally a matter of security. As Duffield states: “there’s not development without security and there’s not security without development” (Duffield, 2006). While traditional notions of security focus on “freedom from fear,” there is a significant insecurity in failing to protect “freedom from want.” This insecurity is evident in developing economies, particularly when phenomena like the “poverty trap” are overlooked. A poverty trap refers to a self-reinforcing cycle of economic and environmental challenges that make it nearly impossible for individuals to escape poverty. For instance, foreign aid might be directed toward promoting education by constructing schools, but this often fails to account for practical challenges, such as the lack of transportation for students living in remote areas. Countries trapped in extreme poverty typically lack the resources to invest in critical improvements like infrastructure, education, and healthcare, perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

Jeffrey Sachs, renowned for his Big Push theory, has suggested that large-scale, coordinated investments are essential to lift countries out of poverty traps (Sachs, 2005). In this framework, aid is viewed as a catalyst to initiate development by breaking the cycle of poverty and enabling nations to ascend the “ladder of development.” I agree with the notion of aid serving as a catalyst rather than a solution. I defend that the role of aid should focus on supporting reforms, building infrastructure, and creating an environment that fosters private sector growth, rather than being the primary driver of development. However, I disagree with Sachs' emphasis on large-scale projects, as these often invite the criticisms highlighted in earlier sections, such as dependency, inefficiency, and a lack of accountability. Instead, I



advocate for incremental approaches that prioritize gradual, small-scale reforms and localized initiatives. The mixed donor-recipient model I propose encourages collaboration with local communities and organizations, fostering a deeper understanding of the poverty trap and tailoring solutions to specific contexts.

Having established the essential role of foreign aid in development, analyzed its potential risks, and proposed a new epistemological framework, it is now time to delve into what this new framework for applying foreign financial aid entails.

V. Case Study – Ecuador’s Yasuni-ITT Initiative

In this section, I will explore one case study that aligns closely with the human-centered and sustainable development perspective that I propose. This emphasizes local empowerment, sustainability, and human security rather than purely economic growth. The case that I will discuss is the Yasuni-ITT Initiative.

In conducting the case study, I relied on a combination of secondary data sources, including published reports, scholarly articles, and institutional assessments, to evaluate the impact of aid in the selected context. By utilizing both secondary data and theoretical frameworks, this approach allows for a comprehensive examination of how development aid impacts local communities and the effectiveness of recipient-led models. Next, I will explore what it proposes, why it fails and what teachings leave for the field of developing the economy.

The Yasuni National Park is one of the most biodiverse spots on Earth and in one hectare there are more tree species than there are native tree species in the whole of North America. According to UNESCO, 99.73% of the Biosphere Reserve is represented by original natural vegetation (UNESCO, n.d.). The biosphere reserve covers an area of 2.7 million hectares and is home to more than 75,000 people, including diverse Indigenous communities, some of whom live in voluntary isolation. Ecuador, a Global South petro-state, relies on oil for roughly a third of its export earnings and public revenues. Within Yasuni, significant oil reserves were discovered in the ITT (Ishpingo-Tambococha-Tiputini) block during the 1990s and early 2000s. Since then, Ecuador has had tension between the country's economic dependence on oil, which accounts for a third of its export earnings and public revenues, and the protection of Yasuni's natural and cultural heritage. The protection of the Yasuni National Park represents one of the most critical and contentious environmental conservation efforts globally. The fight to protect Yasuni is not just about a single park in Ecuador; it is a global test of our ability to prioritize the well-being of the planet and its most vulnerable communities over short-term economic gains.

In 2007, the government of Ecuador proposed the Yasuni-ITT Initiative, which aimed to keep oil reserves in the Yasuni National Park untouched in exchange for international financial support, ensuring that the resources would instead be allocated toward sustainable development and poverty alleviation for the country. The initiative was based on the idea that international donors, including governments, private entities, and individuals, could help fund the conservation of the Yasuni area as an alternative to oil extraction. The initiative presented the idea that foreign aid could help preserve biodiversity, combat



climate change, and promote sustainable development while respecting the rights and needs of the local indigenous populations living in the area. This initiative did involve foreign financial support, although it was structured in a unique way.

The goal was to raise \$3.6 billion over a 13-year period—half of the value of the estimated profits that Ecuador would have received from oil extraction in the region. The funds were intended to be deposited into a United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Multi-Partner Trust Fund, with contributions directed toward various projects aligned with Ecuador's National Development Plan for the Good Life (CBD, 2013). This funding would support human security programs such as renewable energy projects, conservation programs, social programs, and research. The UN would have the role regarding the management of this trust fund. Nevertheless, even the UN would have the initial say, the final decisions would be made by the Ecuadorian state to ensure that the country's sovereignty is respected.

Unfortunately, this project was abandoned in 2013 due to insufficient contributions from the international community. Several factors contributed to this outcome. First, the global financial crisis of 2008, which led wealthier countries to prioritize domestic economic recovery over international conservation efforts. Second, Ecuador's heavy reliance on oil revenues played a significant role in the project's downfall. To address such challenges, a gradual transition toward more sustainable policies could help adapt the economy, reducing dependency on oil and fostering long-term environmental and economic resilience. Third, the absence of an effective binding mechanism has been a critical weakness, as the initiative relies heavily on goodwill and philanthropy. To address this, it may be necessary to explore alternative approaches that incorporate legally binding commitments. Such frameworks could compel countries to go beyond moral obligations, fostering more robust and enforceable actions to ensure sustained engagement and accountability in development efforts.

This case study represents great teachings. First, this is a revolutionary way to conceptualize environmental pollution moving beyond the conventional understanding of value, which is typically measured in monetary terms. We are accustomed to assigning value to things based on financial transactions, a framework shaped by capitalist systems, but this approach overlooks the deeper, inherent worth of nature. We often struggle to grasp that nature itself holds intrinsic value, not merely a price tag. From an indigenous perspective, particularly the Sumaq Kawsay or Buen Vivir philosophy, nature is not a commodity but an essential, interconnected part of life, deserving of respect and care. Similarly, ecocentrism places nature at the center of the value system, prioritizing its well-being over human-centered concerns. But how can we convince a Western, individualistic audience to recognize nature's value in this way?

Many scholars have explored how to give nature legal and ethical rights, particularly within capitalist and anthropocentric frameworks. This task has become even more pressing in a world where the value of commodities is determined by work and market transactions. Scholars like Amy Ando have made significant efforts to assign economic value to ecosystems and species, attempting to integrate them into modern economies in a way that aligns with our current understanding of value (Ando and Manning, 2022). I argue that this shift toward operationalizing nature's worth through financial means is an important step toward achieving the goal of protecting nature from an ecocentric perspective. Although it may not fully capture nature's intrinsic value, this approach can help bridge the gap between the conventional economic system and the need for nature's preservation.



The second key lesson is the need to reimagine foreign aid through alternative mechanisms that prioritize a recipient-focused approach. This shift requires moving beyond traditional top-down models to one that actively considers the needs, contexts, and aspirations of the recipient communities. While significant gaps remain in implementation—such as the need for greater engagement from the international community and a deeper acknowledgment of historical oil dependency—this approach holds considerable promise. A recipient-focused model emphasizes sustainable, human-centered development, which can mitigate issues like the Dutch Disease by strengthening local economies rather than fostering dependency on external resources. By empowering governments and communities in developing nations to take the lead in shaping aid projects, resources are channeled more effectively into initiatives that enhance human security—including access to food, healthcare, education, and housing—and promote genuine, long-term development.

With this, we come to the final section of this paper: policy recommendations. In the following section, I will propose some policy restructurings within international organizations to enhance the effectiveness of foreign financial aid.

VI. Policy Recommendations

There is a clear need for institutional reform within international organizations. Most large budgets are managed by intergovernmental organizations that are primarily state-centered. As this paper advocates for a sustainable, human-focused development approach, which shifts the dynamic to a recipient-led model, the first policy recommendation is the decentralization of power.

A shift towards decentralizing power within international organizations is essential to create more regionally appropriate policies. Donors and recipients should engage in mutual dialogue to identify shared goals, with recipients taking a leading role in designing and implementing programs. This shift would encourage more sustainable, locally-driven solutions and foster long-term development, as it builds trust and ownership among recipient governments and communities.

Nevertheless, it's necessary also to point out the potential downsides of this recipient-led model. One of these criticisms is the risk of corruption and mismanagement of funds. For that reason, the second policy recommendation is the improvement better transparent governance structures and accountability mechanisms. Institutional reforms should focus on improving accountability at all levels of operation. This could include strengthening internal audit systems or implementing clear standards for reporting. Such reforms would ensure that resources are allocated effectively and that programs achieve their intended outcomes.

Another downsides can be the potential lack of capacity and expertise in recipient countries. In this paper, I offer a strong critique of the prevailing development perspective, which often portrays developing countries as “ignorant”, perpetuating a white savior narrative that favors donor-recipient models. While I advocate for a reconceptualization of development, I also recognize the potential lack of skills among recipients. The collaboration capacity-building initiatives where donor organizations provide technical assistance while allowing recipients to retain decision-making authority.



The final policy recommendation in this paper is the valorization of social indicators. International organizations have often emphasized economic indicators such as GDP growth or trade volume when evaluating development progress. However, this focus on economic growth often forgets to take into account critical social outcomes like health, education, and inequality, which are integral to human development. To address this imbalance, reforms should prioritize social indicators that capture the well-being of people, particularly the most vulnerable. Incorporating metrics like access to quality healthcare, education, sanitation, and social equity into development programs would enable international organizations to design more holistic policies that improve the quality of life for people in developing countries.

VII. Conclusion

There is still much to be done. But, through this paper, we saw that there is already work done. There are a great number of scholars that have raised the same concerns as me. In fact, the case study of Ecuador shows us that there is still hope. While the Yasuni-ITT Initiative may not have been perfectly executed, it undeniably marked a pivotal moment in the evolution of foreign aid and its role in contemporary development. The initiative, although imperfect, sparked critical conversations about the need for more sustainable and human-centered development approaches.

After the Suspension of the Yasuni-ITT Initiative, thousands of Indigenous groups went to the streets and raised their voices. They organized protests, marches, and public demonstrations, both within Ecuador and internationally, to raise awareness of the environmental and cultural risks posed by drilling. Some groups also took the issue to international bodies, such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), arguing that their land and cultural rights were being violated. These protests exemplify the power of grassroots movements in holding governments accountable and asserting the importance of respecting Indigenous rights in development decisions.

The suspension of the initiative left many economists and development experts concerned about the future of Ecuador's economy. A central critique is that the country remains overly dependent on petroleum exports, with limited progress toward creating a diversified national economy that is independent of fossil fuels. This situation underscores the broader issue of over-reliance on oil and the dangers of short-term economic gain at the expense of long-term environmental sustainability. It also compels us to reflect on the type of world we want to build as a global society.

As consumers in developed countries, we must recognize that the oil extracted from Ecuador and similar countries is partly driven by our own consumption patterns. The demand for petroleum in the Global North contributes directly to the exploitation of natural resources in the Global South. One way to approach the solution to this problem is through a critical examination of our consumption habits. By the consumption of fair trade export products, we can support local economies and encourage more equitable development in the countries we engage with. Additionally, we must reduce our reliance on oil and explore alternative economic sectors, such as bioeconomy, which focuses on sustainability and local empowerment. For example, promoting artisanal crafts and local entrepreneurship can empower communities and reduce their dependence on resource extraction. Nevertheless, we need to also



consider that there's a highly dependent economy relying on this petroleum economy, so this change should be taken slowly.

Finally, I would like to emphasize an important point: while good intentions alone can lead to unintended disasters, well-structured and thoughtfully executed intentions have the power to transform the world. Foreign aid, despite its criticism, remains a vital tool in development. However, it should not be the sole tool. Instead, it should act as a catalyst for broader, more systemic changes. To ensure its effectiveness, foreign aid must be integrated into a larger framework that prioritizes sustainability, local empowerment, and respect for human rights. By focusing on these core values, we can work toward a development model that is more just, equitable, and truly beneficial for all.



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Inmaculada Cepeda De La Cruz (she/they) is a senior student double majoring in Philosophy and International Relations at Webster University. Originally from Mallorca, Spain, her research focuses on translating environmental, social, and economic justice into policy. Inma is deeply involved in campus life as the president of the Webster Environmental Coalition, student event coordinator in Campus Activities, and a member of the Gleich Honor College. Throughout their academic journey, she has actively participated in a range of impactful projects, including the “In Defense of Pachamama Fellowship,” organizing the *Environmental Summit on Critical Food*, and coordinating the panel *Feminism in the Contemporary World*.





ABOUT THE GLOBAL POLICY HORIZONS RESEARCH LAB

Webster University's Global Policy Horizons Lab is a policy-focused research entity where students, Lab researchers, affiliated faculty, as well as members of the policy community from across disciplines, can explore national and global security issues, generate original research, as well as produce peer-reviewed policy papers and commentaries. The Lab pursues innovative research focusing on unconventional threats, identity and security, role of technology in security, economic security, as well environmental and food security. The goal of the Lab is to become a knowledge hub that informs national governments and other members of the global policy community on contemporary and future security challenges.

The current Director of the Lab is Professor Dani Belo, PhD.

