Why carry out development cooperation?

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When I was asked to write this editorial, the first thing I did was to look for an official definition of the term “cooperation”. It can’t be helped! It’s a professional researcher’s quirk. According to the Gran Enciclopèdia Catalana, cooperation is a concerted action among members of a social group to achieve an end. The definition is meaningful, but lacks subtlety. I prefer to see it as the sharing of resources and efforts in order to achieve a common benefit.

Development cooperation therefore means sharing resources and efforts with the aim of contributing to the progress of people in need and improving their circumstances. However, we should bear in mind that the benefits are mutual and that we often receive more than we give.

One might ask, why carry out development cooperation at the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya? According to the Organic Law on Universities (LOU), universities must encourage the participation of members of the university community in international cooperation and solidarity. In fact, universities are especially suited to carrying out this kind of task.

University cooperation work can be approached in three different ways. First, universities are areas for education and debate that make it possible to disseminate universal values to a segment of the population that will play an important role in society in the future. It is a question of educating students to be committed to a model of development that promotes solidarity and sustainability across the whole planet.

Second, the educational function of universities can be used to train human capital for developing countries. Indeed, the Millennium Development Goals emphasize the importance of education in development, and put the emphasis not just on primary education but also on higher education.

Third, universities are institutions that have technical equipment and highly qualified human resources that can make a substantial contribution to cooperation at the service of society.

The Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, through its Center for Cooperation and Development (CCD), has led the way among Spanish universities in giving support to development cooperation projects funded mainly by the point seven campaign in Spain. Thanks to its contributions, interesting projects have been carried out all over the world.

Any member of the university community can become involved in technology and knowledge transfer within the different solidarity projects. It’s a unique experience. Try it! It won’t hurt.

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