



**Faculty of Legal Sciences**

**School of International Studies**

**ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF  
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE  
SOCIAL SPHERE MANAGED BY THE  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND  
COOPERATION DEPARTMENT OF THE GAD  
OF CUENCA, PERIOD 2014-2022.**

**GRADUATION WORK PRIOR TO  
OBTAINING THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR  
IN INTERNATIONAL STUDIES.**

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**Cuenca – Ecuador**

**2023**

## **DEDICATION**

To my grandparents Rolando and Humberto, my  
beacons in life.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would like to express my profound gratitude and recognition to those who have been instrumental in my journey towards achieving this goal.

To my beloved mother, for her unwavering love and unconditional support in every step I have taken.

To my dear siblings, for their constant encouragement and for being my source of inspiration during challenging times.

To my thesis advisor, whose wisdom and guidance have been fundamental pillars in this project.

To my university colleagues, for the exchange of knowledge, camaraderie, and mutual encouragement throughout this academic journey.

Without you all, this achievement would not have been possible. My eternal gratitude.

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### Resumen:

La cooperación internacional es fundamental para el desarrollo de los países. En este estudio, se examinó la cooperación internacional gestionada por la Dirección de Relaciones Internacionales y Cooperación (DRIC) en la ciudad de Cuenca, Ecuador. Se analizó la gestión de la DRIC y la planificación de las acciones de cooperación ejecutadas, así como la percepción de su impacto social. La metodología aplicada consta de un estudio comparativo y encuestas a los equipos técnicos de la DRIC. Las principales temáticas de proyectos de cooperación encontradas son la igualdad de género, servicios públicos y asistencia a grupos vulnerables. Se identificaron limitaciones en la formulación de proyectos, la evaluación de resultados y la capacidad técnica de la DRIC. Aunque se percibe un alto impacto social en proyectos como "Ciudades Seguras", faltan indicadores de evaluación a largo plazo. Se concluye la importancia de mejorar la planificación, evaluación y seguimiento de las acciones de cooperación.

**Palabras clave:** Ayuda Externa, Ayuda Oficial no reembolsable, Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo, Desarrollo Social, Proyectos de Cooperación Internacional, Sistemas de gestión.

### Abstract:

International cooperation is crucial for the development of countries. This study examined international cooperation managed by the International Relations and Cooperation Department (DRIC) in the city of Cuenca, Ecuador. The management of DRIC and the planning of executed cooperation actions, as well as the perception of their social impact, were analyzed. The applied methodology consisted of a comparative study and surveys conducted with the technical teams of DRIC. The main themes of the identified cooperation projects are gender equality, public services, and assistance to vulnerable groups. Limitations were identified in project formulation, results evaluation, and the technical capacity of DRIC. Although projects like "Safe Cities" are perceived to have a high social impact, long-term evaluation indicators are lacking. In conclusion, it is important to improve the planning, evaluation, and follow-up of cooperation actions.

**Keywords:** Foreign Aid, International Cooperation for Development, International Decentralized Cooperation, International Development Projects, International Non-Reimbursable Aid.



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# **ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE SOCIAL SPHERE MANAGED BY THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND COOPERATION DEPARTMENT OF THE GAD OF CUENCA, PERIOD 2014-2022.**

## **1. Introduction**

International cooperation allows countries to mobilize different resources applicable to the development of economies, societies, and cooperating governments. One of the modalities of cooperation refers to the implementation and execution of development projects. Typically, these projects are carried out within a North-South cooperation framework. However, new concepts of analysis suggest the evolution of their application, giving rise to different schemes, such as decentralized cooperation or South-South cooperation, which involve the participation and actions of new actors belonging to different levels of government.

Development projects are cooperation tools that involve a significant movement of human and financial resources. Therefore, the analysis and monitoring of their results are essential stages of their management. Evaluating development projects not only allows us to understand the scope and outcomes of their initial objectives but also to recognize, identify, and analyze the experiences of cooperating organizations regarding resource management, and implementation, and evaluation methods. Continuously conducting this process enhances the capabilities of different entities or cooperation management organizations. Thus, it is important to generate analytical frameworks for constructing outcome indicators for development projects, enabling the evaluation of their application and their effects on the population. This study examines the significance of these procedures in international cooperation processes and their role as long-term evaluation tools in relation to the social development of the population in the city of Cuenca.

### **1.1 Objectives**

1. Analyze the different proposals - cooperation projects managed by the Department of International Relations and Cooperation of Cuenca in the period 2014 - 2022.
2. Identify the different planning instruments, as well as the evaluation instruments used by the DRIC for the different cooperation proposals implemented in the period 2014 - 2022.
3. Analyze the public perception of the social impact of the cooperation actions undertaken by the Department of International Relations and Cooperation of Cuenca during the period of 2014-2022, specifically within the social axis.

### **1.2 Theoretical Framework**

Within the framework of liberalism theory, Kauppi & Viotti (2020) assert that the existence of international cooperation is driven by four factors: the emergence of transnational actors in the international environment, the economic interconnectedness and interdependence between countries, the growth of the global political agenda on various economic, social, or environmental aspects, and lastly, the defense of peace and democracy through international collaboration. According to liberalism, cooperation is the natural and logical progression of relations between countries. This theory believes in the capacity of states to form greater integration through international institutions that globally apply economic and social policies with the aim of achieving dynamism for worldwide community development (Jervis, 1999).

However, there is a debate about the nature and justification of international cooperation. For realism, international cooperation is an instrument that responds to the foreign policies of states to promote their survival in global anarchy (Morgenthau & Thompson, 1993). Therefore, cooperation is understood as a set of actions that promote particular interests, coerce states of lower status, and form strategic alliances motivated by the exchange of resources (Grieco, Ikenberry & Mastanduno, 2015). Another perspective asserts that cooperation has been more related to economic movements, and its origin has not been determined based on a specific theory (Pauselli, 2013).

International cooperation consists of the collaboration of two or more international actors, whether they are countries, non-governmental organizations, or private organizations, to collectively act towards a common social, economic, or environmental issue (Paulo, 2014, p. 10). Its objective is to jointly combat the effects of global change and underdevelopment, which cannot be solved individually due to the lack of resources or economic elements (Zartman & Touval, 2010). Previously, the concept of international public goods (GPG), which suggest the importance of collective action, initiated the debate on the analysis and presentation of global agendas that bring together universal efforts towards global governance (Barrett, 2010). Thus, different cooperation initiatives consider the current realities as global issues. The international community relies on this precept to build the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Sustainable Development Goals, and later the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the United Nations (Paulo, 2014).

The different instruments and modalities of international cooperation offer various tools of assistance to all countries. One of the forms of assistance proposed through international cooperation is Official Development Assistance (ODA). According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), ODA is a mechanism for cooperation between governments that can channel economic, financial, technological, and technical resources from developed countries to developing countries (Keeley, 2015, p. 51-55). The OECD, through its Development Assistance Committee (DAC), assesses the local needs of different countries and establishes cooperation priorities based on a classification according to their income level, public policies, emergency situation, among other criteria (OECD, 2006). Presently, the DAC has classified Ecuador as a high-middle-income country, the least prioritized level in terms of access to ODA (OECD, n.d.).

At present, state and institutional actors come together in operational agendas where a diverse range of solutions and action plans are proposed to address global problems. Due to the number of actors at the global level, their responsibilities, objectives, and needs are divided according to criteria such as their economic impact, membership in different international organizations, their environmental responsibility and influence groups; and in the case of nations, their foreign policy. In this sense, the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development serves as an inclusive and sustainable cooperation reference framework. This agenda is a set of concrete goals and targets that have been agreed upon to improve people's lives and protect the planet (Chaturvedi et al., 2021).

The focus of International Cooperation action centers on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The SDG are long-term objectives and global indicators proposed under the action of the United Nations General Assembly with the purpose of extending their application universally, inclusively, and sustainably (Fukuda-Parr & McNeill, 2019). Therefore, the SDG imply guidelines for action regarding the different global development targets in such a way that they can be adapted to the local realities of each country (United Nations, 2019). Their importance for sustainability and development is such that Rockström & Sukhdev (2016) mention a relationship between the social and economic aspects of a society and the protection and care of the biosphere and food systems. Through a graph, the authors illustrate the importance of this interconnection between the SDG of different categories, where SDG 17, "Partnerships for the Goals," remains the central axis of the system and directly refers to the application of multi-actor cooperation mechanisms to strengthen relationship activities between developed and developing countries.



**Figure 1**

*Disaggregated SDG's*



Source: The SDGs weeding cake (Rockström Johan & Sukhdev Pavan, 2016)

The various forms of aid and assistance to developing countries must adhere to the precepts of the 2030 Agenda, and countries must adjust their national development priorities according to the commitments adopted in this agenda. The United Nations Development Cooperation Framework is established as a support tool for the long-term development planning of each country. Through principles of resilience, sustainability, and accountability, the cooperation framework establishes strategic priorities based on the concordance of the 2030 Agenda with each nation's national development strategy (United Nations, 2019).

With the various precepts, policies, and principles of international cooperation mentioned, a classification of their actions can be established according to different criteria related, for example, to the type of resources and the number of actors involved in the cooperation processes between countries. This classification allows us to visualize the wide range of existing instruments within international cooperation. Below, we detail one of the different classifications that encompass most criteria:

**Table 1***Classification of International Cooperation*

CRITERION	TYPES
<b>According to the origin of the public funds</b>	<b>Public:</b> Funds from the national, regional or local public administrations of the donor countries.
	<b>Private:</b> Own funds contributed by individuals, associations and companies.
	<b>Bilateral:</b> Carried out by the public administrations of a State, either directly or through funds from development organizations that do not have an official character.
<b>According to who manages the funds</b>	<b>Decentralized:</b> Carried out by regional or local public administrations.
	<b>Multilateral:</b> Carried out by agencies, institutions or organizations whose members are the States and which manage funds autonomously.
	<b>Non-governmental:</b> Carried out by nongovernmental development organizations and NGDOs
<b>According to the return</b>	<b>Business:</b> Carried out by companies. Aid that generally focuses on technical assistance and technology transfer.
	<b>Refundable:</b> Aid that must be returned in the form of money or payment in kind
	<b>Non-refundable:</b>
<b>According to the degree of concession</b>	<b>Linked aid:</b> Aid that is conditioned to a series of requirements or political and/or economic circumstances.
	<b>Untied aid:</b> Aid that is not linked to conditions of a political and/or economic nature.
<b>According to its object</b>	<b>Financial:</b> Supposes a real transfer of funds.
	<b>Non-financial:</b> Involves a cultural, technological, in-kind transfer, etc.

Source: Estudios contemporáneos sobre geopolítica, conflictos armados y cooperación internacional. (Lora & Domínguez, 2020)

Part of the evolution of international cooperation is reflected in the new trend of decentralized international cooperation (DC). DC emerges in reference to the increased active participation of actors in the global south, South-South cooperation, and the emergence of development priorities at regional and local levels (Nganje, 2015). The concept of DC refers to any development assistance mechanism that meets two

conditions: firstly, the intervention or work of central governments of a state is not required, and secondly, cooperation proposals must be put forward by governments at the regional or local level (Nganje, 2015). DC allows for the partnership of non-profit private organizations, non-governmental organizations, international agencies, and/or local governments.

International Cooperation Development Projects maintain a convergence between international policies and national policies of a state. In Ecuador, the National Development Plan *Creando Oportunidades 2021-2025* (NDP) maintains action axes for different national priorities around the 2030 Agenda. The main action axes are: economic, social, integral security, technological transition, and institutional. As the main topic of this study, under the NDP, the social axis maintains eradicating poverty, free and quality health, and diverse and high standard education as priority actions (Secretaría Nacional de Planificación, 2021).

## **2. Literature Review**

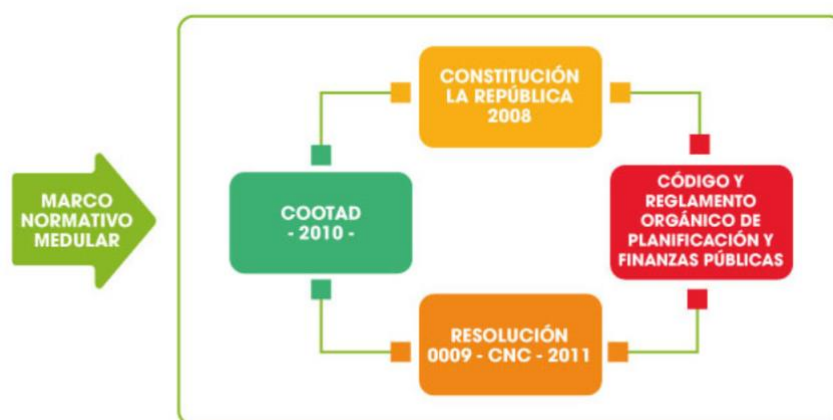
The Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador establishes the guiding principles for the country's international relations. The objective is to establish the values and interests of the Ecuadorian state in the formation of equitable ties with other states, promoting collaboration, solidarity, and integration processes. Likewise, Latin American integration is established as a strategic objective of the state driven by the need to improve economic integration, energize strategic alliances, and promote cultural diversity in the region as an alternative to traditional forms of international cooperation. The Magna Carta establishes the management competence of international cooperation for provincial governments (regional governments), municipal governments (local governments), and parish governments (rural zone governments) in articles 263, 264, and 267, respectively (National Assembly of Ecuador, 2008). Simultaneously, guaranteeing political, administrative, and financial autonomy of the different levels of government, the Código Orgánico de Organización Territorial, Autonomía y Descentralización (COOTAD), through its articles 42, 55, 65, ratifies international cooperation management as part of the exclusive competencies of the mentioned levels of government (Asamblea Nacional del Ecuador, 2010a).

Observing the need for regulations that govern the actions of the different levels of government, the Código Orgánico de Planificación y Finanzas Públicas (COPFP) establishes the different entities in charge of the management, execution, and evaluation of non-refundable international cooperation. Under Article 65, non-refundable international cooperation is defined as "a mechanism by which the Republic of Ecuador grants, receives, transfers, or exchanges resources, goods, services, capital, knowledge, and/or technology, with the aim of contributing to or complementing national initiatives to achieve planning objectives" (Asamblea Nacional del Ecuador, 2010b). Additionally, the COPFP establishes the harmonization and coordination of cooperation management with the National Development Plan (NDP).

Subsequently, the Consejo Nacional de Competencias, under Resolution No. 0009-CNC-2011 published in the Official Registry No. 565 on October 27, 2011, extended the competence of Decentralized Autonomous Governments (GADs) to obtain non-refundable resources and technical assistance for the fulfillment of their functions in relation to international cooperation. Article 4 of the resolution establishes the criteria for the exercise of the competence of managing international cooperation, such as complementarity and co-responsibility, territorial articulation, transparency, effectiveness and impact, self-sufficiency and non-conditionality, specialization and harmonization, and decentralized management. Likewise, through the establishment of control and evaluation systems, together with accountability mechanisms, the resolution details the necessary elements for the existence of national regulation and compliance with current regulations (Consejo Nacional de Competencias, 2011).

**Figure 2**

*Ecuadorian regulations on International Cooperation*



Source: : Manual de cooperación internacional para la Gestión Ambiental de los GAD parroquiales en el Cantón Cuenca. (Universidad del Azuay, 2021, p. 30)

One of the pillars of action of the Global 2030 Agenda is the application of international development mechanisms through North-South cooperation. These mechanisms include the creation of common funds, global funds, budget support, and, most importantly, international development projects (IDPs). In Ecuador, the National Development Plan called the Plan de Creación de Oportunidades 2021-2025 maintains the maximum guidelines for the application of political and administrative priorities that agree with a long-term vision and desired scenario for the country's economic, social, security, and institutional development by 2030. The IDPs aim to improve equity and sustainability conditions on a global scale by improving the living conditions of developing countries.

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility, Ecuador has received more than 300 million dollars through the modality of international development projects in the 2020 period. The main sources of financing come from multilateral organizations, such as the UN, the Green Climate Fund, and, above all, bilateral international cooperation from countries such as the United States and Germany. In the province of Azuay, 64 development projects have been executed with a total value of 62 million dollars in 2020 alone (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Movilidad Humana [MREMH], n.d.). In previous years, the figures are similar, varying in non-considerable percentages. These statistics generate an interest in the analysis and study of the application of these projects within the city of Cuenca and to what extent they have an impact on long-term social development.

Within the analyzed literature, research has focused on the analysis of the different administrative tools used for the development of IDPs, as well as on the identification of the variables and characteristics that significantly affect the development and success of IDPs. The mentioned characteristics focus on the social environment of the project, the number and nature of the participants, the availability of resources, and cultural differences when adapting administrative tools to the different social environments of IDPs (Golini & Landoni, 2014).

The reviewed studies highlight the distinction between the effective administrative management of IDPs and their direct impact on the target community during the analysis of successful IDPs. Although the two perspectives are related, their division is based on the analysis of the administrative tools used and the social development variables resulting from the application of the projects. Despite having a direct influence on the efficient administrative management of IDPs, their degree of success is analyzed according to the change they generate in the social scale in fulfilling the objectives of IDPs. Thus, within the analyzed literature, research studies divide their focus among the externalities that directly or indirectly influence IDPs, the administrative resources used, and the approach, scope, and fulfillment of the proposed objectives in the planning phase (Rodríguez-Rivero et al., 2019).

Regarding the analysis of administrative tools, research has been carried out on their effectiveness and the availability of tools and resources for each administrative methodology. It has been concluded, through comparative methods, that the most commonly used administrative tools in IDPs are:

- PCM (Project Cycle Management)
- LF (Logical Framework)
- PM4DEV (Project Management for Development Organizations)

The study concludes that, although these tools are of high complexity, their application optimizes the social impact of the objectives proposed by IDPs, as they provide cycles of control and adaptation to the external and internal variables that affect their development (Golini et al., 2017). Therefore, this study will be generated under two approaches. First, on the different administrative tools and their correct application, and secondly, on the impact that IDPs maintains within the sustainable development of the city. Although studies have been conducted on the different characteristics that directly influence the development of PDI, the analysis of the social impact provided by the different IDPs applied within the city of Cuenca must account for the environment and social characteristics that influence their application.

Understanding these characteristics, as well as their degree of involvement in the proposed objectives, can help different international development project researchers and directors to find more effective methods with regard to the application of different administrative tools. Identifying the main tools used provides the next researchers and directors with a framework of reference on existing management capabilities so that obstacles and deficiencies related to resource management, planning phase, and IDPs application can be identified.

### **3. Methods**

Within the presentation of the theoretical framework and state of the art, the study on the Analysis of the impact of international cooperation in the social sphere managed by the Department of International Relations and Cooperation of the GAD of Cuenca, (DRIC) period 2014-2022, is justified. Regarding the methods to be used, a bibliographic search of the recurring methodology within the field of study was conducted. The research approach is conducted under a mixed approach, that is: qualitative and quantitative.

Among the instruments used for data collection on development projects, it is proposed firstly to review the main documents and reports written by the Department of International Relations and Cooperation of the city of Cuenca. The review of documents aims to learn about the main development projects applied in the social axis within the city of Cuenca, and to identify projects that have maintained financial contributions, resources, or any type of contributions from non-governmental organizations from abroad under the framework of international cooperation.

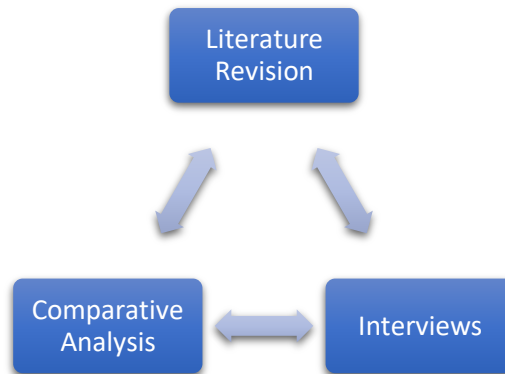
As a second point within the instruments used, a comparative study is proposed between the main accountability and annual review documents held by the DRIC. The mentioned documents are:

- Management Report of DRIC period 2014-2019
- Management Report of DRIC period 2019-2022

Through contrast analysis under the comparative study, the different methodologies applied within the two periods of DRIC management will be analyzed. In order to identify a comprehensive analysis framework of variables present on the social impact of social development projects reviewed in the data collection. Finally, the researcher will conduct semi-structured interviews and in-depth interviews with officials from the DRIC and direct participants of development projects to complement the information, using a qualitative approach. The exclusion criteria for interview participants are based on their direct participation in the development projects executed under the period of analysis of the research. It is concluded that the participants will be project managers and convening administrators of the aforementioned projects.

**Figure 3**

*Research methods and design*



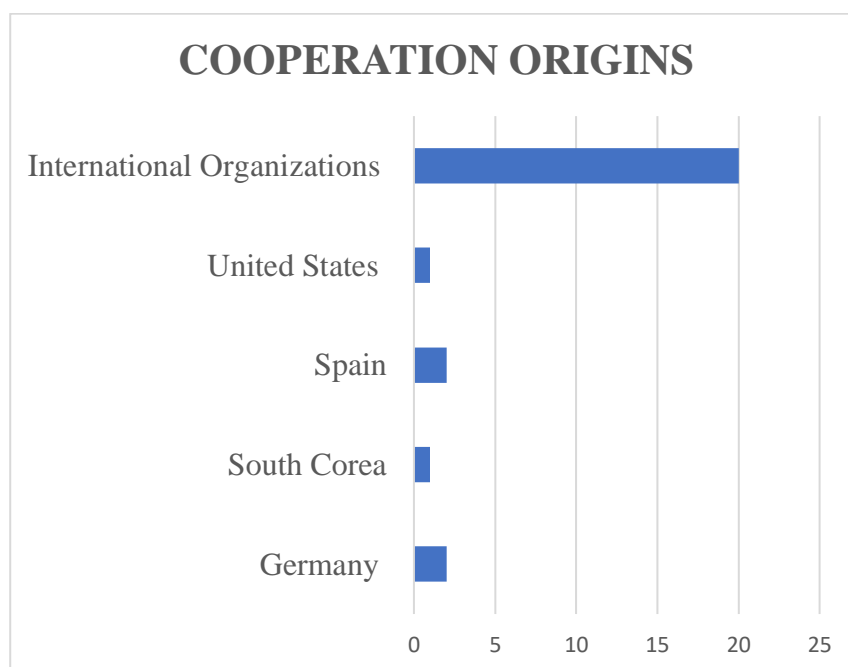
#### **4. Results and Discussion**

For the analysis of international cooperation managed under the DRIC, three different criteria were applied: cooperation modalities, sustainable development goals as the target of cooperation actions, and finally its planning according to the Plan de Desarrollo y Ordenamiento Territorial in force at the date of its application (PDOT 2015). Using these criteria, a cooperation action matrix was constructed (see Annex No. 5), which included all actions that focus on the social development of the city. Through the construction of this matrix, important analytical aspects were established to understand the actions of the DRIC in the past two management periods.

Firstly, the origin of funds raised for different cooperation proposals and projects managed by the DRIC was identified and categorized. Figure 5 shows the origin of different cooperators and the number of cooperation actions carried out with their budgetary support. It can be observed that while there are various activities and relationships with different foreign local governments, the majority of cooperation proposals and projects have international organizations as their main cooperators. Some of these organizations include the Latin American Development Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, and various assistance and aid programs of the United Nations (World Food Programme, UNDP, UN Women, IOM). Furthermore, the total funds contributed by each cooperating partner were quantified. Table 2 reflects the values established for each partner, as well as the total funds raised for all cooperation proposals and projects related to the social development of the city of Cuenca.

**Figure 4**

*Origin of the funds of the different cooperation proposals (2014-2022).*



**Table 2**

*Total amounts of cooperation with respect to its origin (2014-2022).*

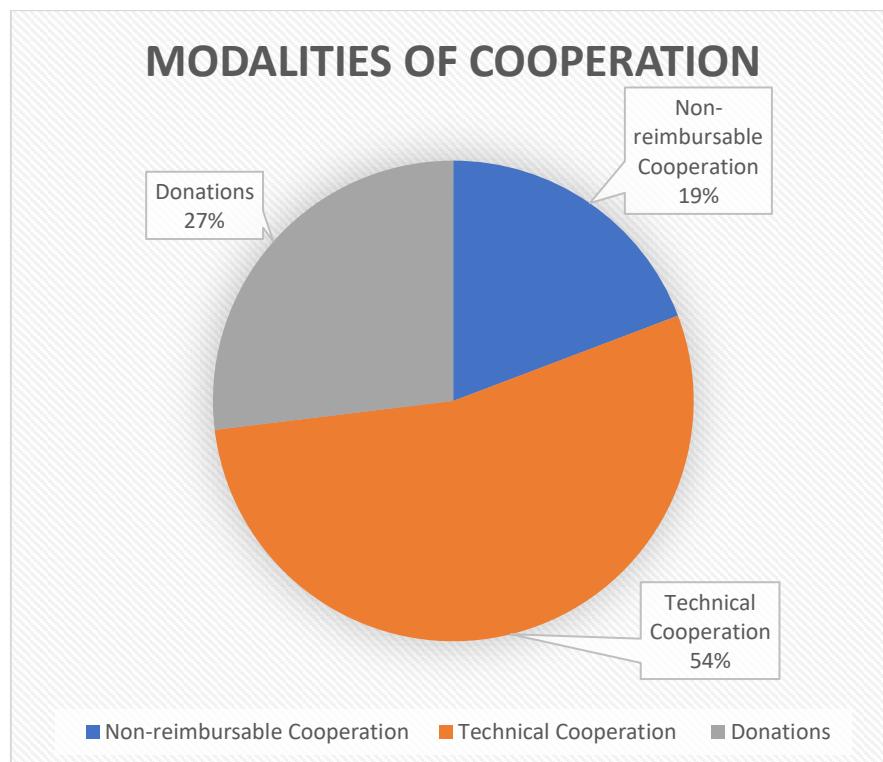
COOPERATION ORIGINS	TOTAL AMOUNTS
Germany	\$ 181,000
South Korea	\$ 300,000
Spain	\$ 10,934
United States	\$ 500
International Organizations	\$ 11,661,460
TOTAL COLLECTED	\$ 12,153,894

Regarding the modality of international cooperation actions executed, they mainly fall under technical cooperation, non-reimbursable financial cooperation, and donations. The analyzed technical cooperation actions are grouped into training of technical staff of the corporation, execution of studies related to socio-economic effects, human mobility, sustainable development, and urban mobility, as well as technical assistance in the form of consultancy and advisory services. The non-reimbursable financial cooperation actions focused on raising resources for projects proposed by different departments of the municipal corporation. The main themes of these actions include strengthening international cooperation and internationalization of Cuenca, implementing sustainable development plans, and the management and treatment of water resources through infrastructure development. As for donations, the actions focused on supporting different social mission establishments in the city such as shelters, vocational schools, and migrant support centers. Figure 6 shows the percentage of cooperation actions for each modality out of the total actions. Technical cooperation represents 54% of the total actions, followed by donations at 27%, and finally, non-reimbursable financial cooperation at 19%. These statistics suggest a certain need or priority

in establishing cooperation actions that strengthen the technical capacities of the various activities of the municipal corporation. This is evident in the different training programs but is even more significant in the processes of consultancy and advisory services for the technical evaluation of social issues in Cuenca, as well as the needs and priorities of the city.

**Figure 5**

*International cooperation activities by modality (2014-2022)*

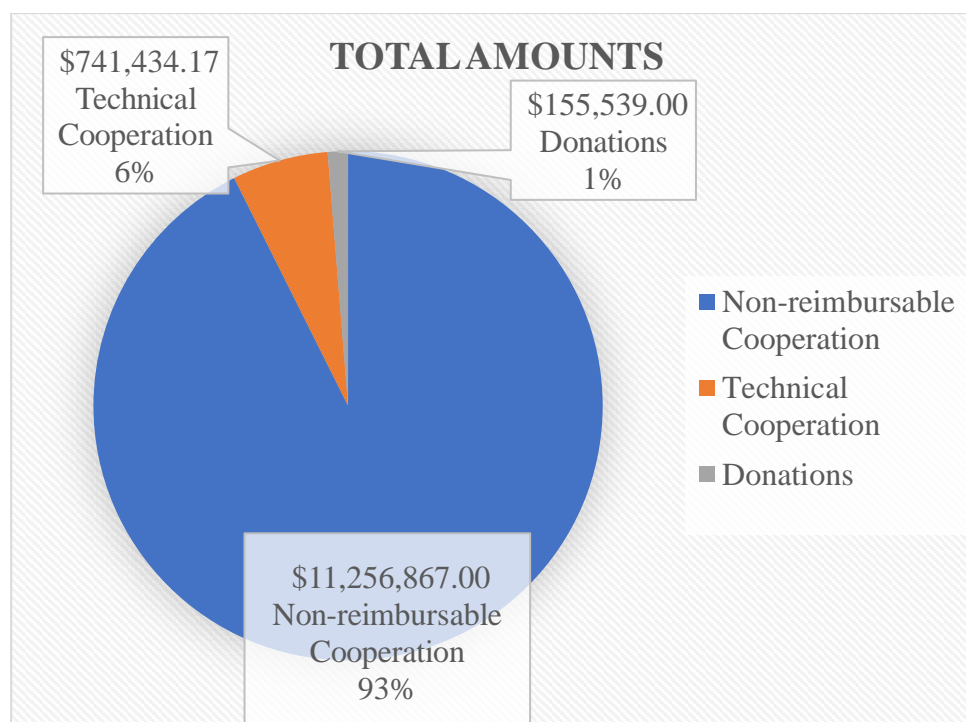


However, the previous result contrasts with the amounts received under different cooperation modalities. Figure 7 suggests the relationship between the total funds raised and the different cooperation modalities. In monetary terms, non-reimbursable financial cooperation is established as the main cooperation mechanism implemented by the DRIC, followed by technical cooperation and, finally, donations. It should be noted that the construction of the cooperation action matrix did not consider the different relationship activities carried out by the DRIC with the international community, as they are not relevant to the social study focus. Nevertheless, these activities provide the DRIC and the city in general with indispensable and necessary visibility in front of different international organizations and cooperation partners. These activities include international weeks, international awards and recognitions, participation in international events, international agreements, protocol visits, and twinning programs.



**Figure 6**

*Total contribution of cooperation actions in USD, according to modality (2014-2022).*

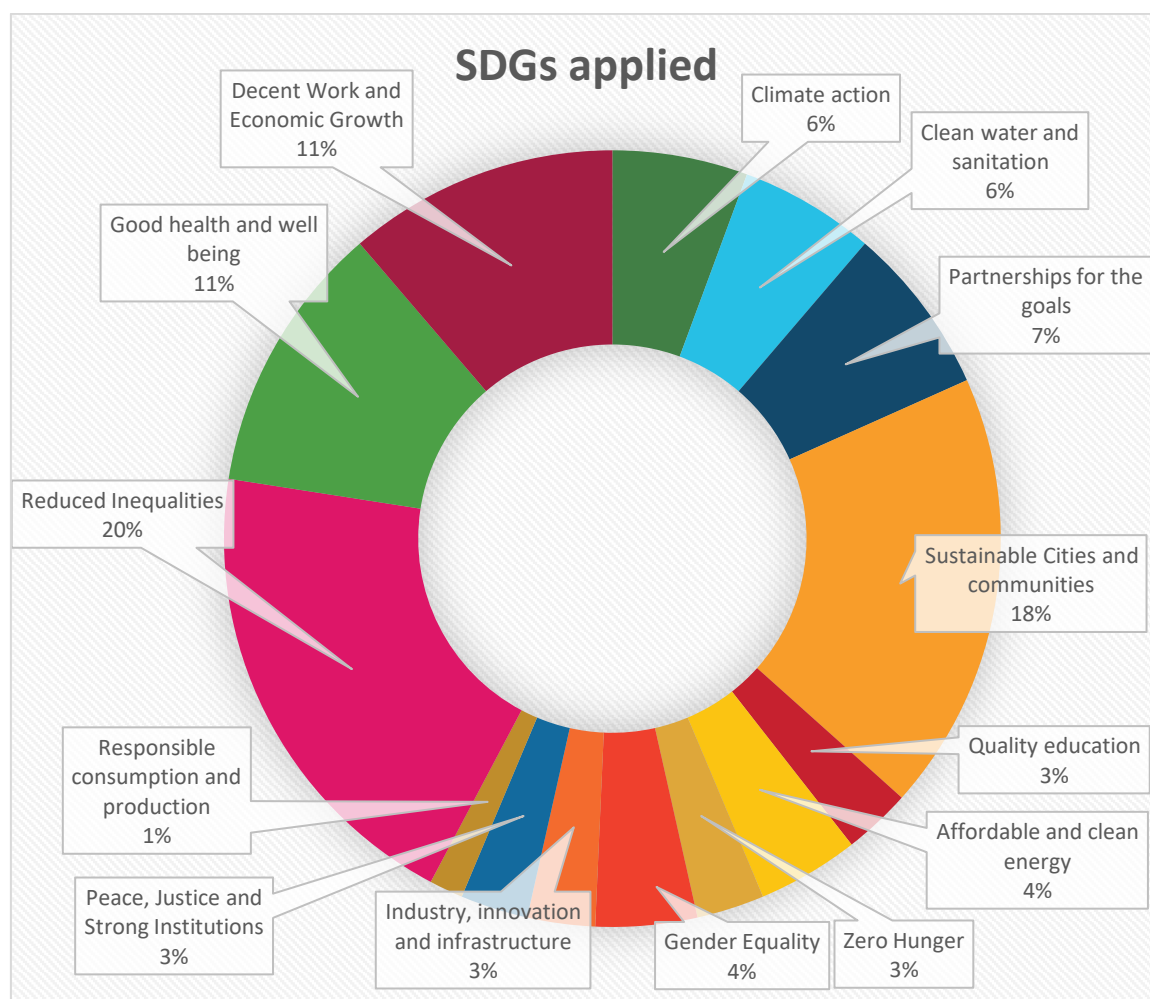


In the following point related to the analysis of the actions of the DRIC, the different areas of implementation were established through the identification of the SDGs they contribute to. This was done as a measure of prioritizing the city's needs and the cooperation actions undertaken. All cooperation actions that comprise the main matrix (Annex No. 5) were collected and classified according to their contribution to the SDGs. To do this, the objectives of each cooperation action were related to the different targets established within each SDG (Annex No. 8). Actions were identified in fourteen out of the seventeen existing SDGs. Figure 8 shows the percentage of each SDG in relation to the total number of cooperation actions carried out by the DRIC. SDG No. 10, Reduced Inequalities (20%); No. 11, Sustainable Cities and Communities (18%); No. 3, Good Health and Well-being (11%); and No. 8, Decent Work and Economic Growth (11%), are the most important according to the mentioned criterion.

While the SDGs provide a categorization of the actions carried out, it is important to mention the main themes they cover, as categorization based solely on the SDGs is useful for macro-level analysis only. By considering the main themes of each cooperation action, it is possible to identify the different priorities and social issues addressed by the cooperation actions implemented under the management of the DRIC. For this purpose, Table 3 was created, which relates the number of cooperation actions identified in the main matrix (Annex 5) classified according to the observed SDGs, as well as their main thematic areas of action. In this way, it can be observed that the different actions focus on social issues such as migration, vulnerable groups, women's empowerment, and the fight against gender-based violence and sexual harassment. There are other themes related to the economic development of the population and access to public services, such as mobility, drinking water, and sanitation. Although these themes do not directly concentrate on social issues, their implementation and development have an impact on the quality of life and the health of the inhabitants of the city of Cuenca.

**Figure 7**

*SDGs of the different DRIC cooperation actions (2014-2022).*



*Note: Chart based on the information compiled in the matrix in Annex No. 5.*

**Table 3**

*SDGs and main themes of DRIC cooperation actions (2014-2022).*

SDGs	NUMBER OF ACTIONS OF COOPERATION	MAIN THEMES
Climate action	4	Solid waste management
		Technical studies on sustainable development
		Water management
Clean water and sanitation	4	Infrastructure construction
		Water management
		Care of water resources
Partnership for goals	5	Consulting and technical assistance

Sustainable Cities and communities	13	Technical capacity building
		Infrastructure construction
		Migration and vulnerable people
Quality education	2	Educational platforms
		Support to educational institutions
Affordable and clean energy	3	Solid waste management
		Sustainable mobility
Zero Hunger	2	Proper nutrition
		Urban agriculture
Gender Equality	3	Technical capacity building
		Inclusion and economic empowerment of women
		Gender violence and sexual harassment
Industry, innovation and infrastructure	2	Sustainable mobility
		Infrastructure construction
Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions	2	Effectiveness of judicial systems
		Public services
Responsible consumption and production	1	Solid waste management
Reduced Inequalities	14	Migration and vulnerable people
		Inclusion and economic empowerment of women
		Economic inclusion and entrepreneurship
Good health and well being	8	Social services
		Migration and vulnerable people
Decent Work and Economic Growth	8	Inclusion and economic empowerment of women
		Migration and vulnerable people
		Economic inclusion and entrepreneurship

*Note:* Table based on the information compiled in the matrix in Annex No. 5.

Regarding the planning, evaluation, and monitoring instruments of the DRIC, important points were established based on interviews with technical teams from two different management periods (see Annex No. 6). There are different technical documents that support the annual planning of priorities and objectives within the DRIC, such as the Annual Operational Plan (POA) and other instruments like the Territorial Development and Planning Plan (PDOT), which serve as a technical basis for diagnosing the needs of the city and its population.

These instruments complement each other as they align local objectives with the National Development Plan "Creación de Oportunidades 2022." It should be mentioned that all the results obtained in this study were based on the Plan de Ordenamiento y Desarrollo Territorial 2015. Although the PDOT-PUGS 2022 currently exists, the analyzed cooperation actions were executed under the mentioned PDOT. With that said, the interviews concluded that, in addition to the POA, annual planning agendas are established in collaboration with the DRIC, the different departments, and/or departments of the municipal corporation. The proposal and technical evaluation of projects or actions are carried out with the technical support of the different departments. In this sense, the DRIC evaluates the cooperation proposal and connects the proposed initiatives according to the different links it maintains with the international community, providing technical advice and connectivity regarding the presentation of proposals from the different

departments of the municipal corporation. However, all of this depends on external factors such as the agenda of the international cooperating partner, the international agenda, and the periodic calls for funds established by the cooperators, which to some extent limit the construction of proposals by the municipal corporation.

Furthermore, due to the cooperation mechanism between the different municipal departments, there are certain limitations within the DRIC. The interviews revealed a need for technical capacity in project formulation as one of the limitations. Secondly, the lack of evaluation mechanisms for the different projects/actions executed with the assistance of the DRIC was mentioned. While there are monitoring mechanisms for ongoing cooperation proposals, the DRIC does not establish evaluation mechanisms that allow for the measurement and quantification of results in projects aimed at the social development of the city. The technical capacity for evaluation within the DRIC is limited due to its size and structural organization.

Regarding the perception of social impact, the interviews conducted with the technical teams of the DRIC took into account the number of direct and indirect beneficiaries as a quantifiable measure of the social impact of the different proposals and projects carried out through the collaboration, guidance, and relationships between the municipal corporation, the DRIC, and various cooperating entities and individuals. The following analysis will focus on this variable and its relationship with the perception of social impact. Statistics regarding the number of beneficiaries for each executed project and cooperation proposal can be reviewed in Annex No. 7.

To begin, there are projects with broader scope, such as "Safe Cities," aimed at combating gender-based violence and sexual harassment against women. This project has a high number of direct beneficiaries since it aims to raise awareness among the general male population and improve the quality of life and safety for women in the city of Cuenca. According to the interviews conducted, the social impact within this project is perceived as high, as it directly benefits approximately 62.7% (around 400,000) of the total population of Cuenca, which corresponds to 636,996 inhabitants according to population projections for 2022 (INEC, 2018). Additionally, there are secondary objectives within the project aimed at training 350 public officials on gender-based violence and sexual harassment. The goal of these training sessions is to increase the generation of different public policies that directly address the minimization of these issues through response mechanisms and assistance to victims of gender-based violence and/or sexual harassment. Therefore, it can be argued that the actions within the "Safe Cities" program were carried out with the aim of bringing about systematic and socially profound changes that, in the medium term, will result in much more active citizen participation against gender-based violence and sexual harassment. One of the limitations for assessing the long-term results of these actions is the lack of proposed indicators for evaluation and efficiency within the projects, which are currently unavailable.

As the next point, cooperation projects and proposals related to the construction and improvement of drinking water and sanitation services in the city are reviewed. Within the projects "Tixán Drinking Water Plant" and "Construction of the Saymirín Conduction," the number of direct beneficiaries amounts to 141,456 and 13,423 people, respectively. The entire general population of Cuenca is considered as indirect beneficiaries since one of the objectives resulting from these infrastructure investments is to improve the quality of drinking water and increase the percentage of the population with access to drinking water (97.85%) and sanitation (99.34%) within the city (ETAPA EP, 2022). Although these cooperative actions are not directly part of the social study axis, their impact on the population's development is of utmost importance. Actions that improve people's quality of life by increasing access to basic services provide conditions for positive and sustainable social development.

Another point to mention within the DRIC's cooperation actions is the donations made to support different social mission centers in the city of Cuenca. The shelters, CEMISOL, Casa Violeta, the Casa del Migrante, and the Escuela Taller provide learning spaces, assistance, and support to people with limited resources or in vulnerable situations. When analyzing the beneficiaries of these actions, approximately 900 direct and indirect beneficiaries are considered for the shelters, and around 3,034 beneficiaries for the Casa del Migrante and Escuela Taller. It should be noted that these assistance centers have limitations in terms of their operational capacity to accommodate beneficiaries. Furthermore, the mentioned cooperation actions were aimed at acquiring food kits, as well as donating equipment and supplies necessary for the functioning of the shelters and social mission centers. Consequently, although vulnerable populations benefit from these actions, they do not focus on long-term social impact but rather on mitigating and improving the living conditions of vulnerable individuals who require short-term economic or educational support. Undoubtedly,

one of the challenges faced by the city of Cuenca is to promote actions that improve the living conditions of migrants, as well as the quality of work and education for vulnerable groups.

## 5. Conclusions

Within the different proposals - social cooperation projects managed by the DRIC; the importance of international organizations as cooperating entities has been mentioned. The various divisions of the United Nations, as well as Development Banks, constitute the main sources of non-reimbursable cooperation for the city of Cuenca. This modality of cooperation is the most important in terms of financing amounts and social impact of cooperation actions. The project proposals put forward by the different departments of the municipal corporation do undergo a prior evaluation of the city's needs. This is observed in the application and use of technical diagnostic documents aimed at identifying the priorities and social issues that affect the citizens of Cuenca. However, there are certain limitations regarding the competence of the DRIC. Firstly, there is a deficiency in technical capacity regarding project formulation, and secondly, a limitation in the application for different calls for access to cooperation funds due to the cooperating entities' own agendas. In other words, the attention to the city's cooperation priorities is somewhat affected by the cooperation agendas of the cooperating partners, which are expressed through calls or fund availability.

Furthermore, the analysis of the perception of the social impact of the DRIC's management indicates that there are different programs or projects that enhance the technical diagnostic capacity of the municipal departments for the subsequent implementation of projects with a large number of beneficiaries. These actions have focused on social issues related to violence against women, sexual harassment, access to drinking water and sanitation services, assistance to vulnerable groups, and support for migrants. The DRIC has monitoring mechanisms in place for the fulfillment of the established cooperation agreements. However, the lack of indicators for the different social areas of action hinders the capacity to monitor and quantify the results of the cooperation actions implemented under the management and advice of the DRIC in conjunction with the different departments of the municipal corporation.

Within the study, four criteria have been identified to measure the long-term impact of different activities managed or carried out by the DRIC. The first criterion is the existence of actions related to changing the socio-economic conditions of the population, primarily through the implementation of assistance programs and technical education for vulnerable groups. The second criterion is community empowerment and participation, as evidenced by cooperation actions and programs focusing on gender equality, migration, and the economic empowerment and inclusion of women. The third criterion is the overall sustainability of the city, which can be observed through various projects aimed at improving and constructing infrastructure for basic services and sustainable mobility. Lastly, the criterion of changing attitudes and behaviors of the population as a whole is addressed through macro-level programs targeting harassment, physical violence, and sexual violence against women. All of these criteria indicate that the DRIC, through the projects implemented during the analyzed period, has identified and addressed significant social issues within the city, establishing them as priority areas for social development. It is important to mention that the construction of local social indicators is essential for the evaluation and monitoring of future projects, considering it as a desired objective to enhance the technical capacity of the DRIC.

Regarding planning, there are technical instruments that provide annual action plans to link the different Territorial Planning Plans, National Development Plan, and Annual Operating Plans together. An essential characteristic of these technical instruments is that they maintain a hierarchical relationship that allows for the identification of local needs and their connection with the national priorities outlined in the NDP. In terms of cooperation capacity development and the internationalization of the city, the evolution of the DRIC has been identified in subsequent stages of improving its operational and management capabilities. Initially, the DRIC functions as a department that seeks to showcase the city's actions on the international stage, engaging in activities to establish relationships with different international actors that provide a link between the city and local governments of different countries, cooperation networks, and international organizations, all within the framework of decentralized cooperation. Subsequently, the DRIC implements different actions that demonstrate growth in management capacities and experience, such as the development of the Internationalization Strategy of the city of Cuenca, which serves as a planning instrument and ensures continuity of efforts for future administrations. These stages are reflected in the different SDGs identified and derived from the analyzed cooperation actions in this article. In the future, under the new administration, the DRIC aims to not only be a recipient of international cooperation but also a Cooperation Agency that enhances the capacities of local governments at the parish level. It is worth

noting that the city of Cuenca, with the support of the DRIC and the municipal corporation, has established itself as a national and international benchmark for good practices in environmental management and public administration, receiving various local and international recognition and awards.

The results obtained from this research suggest the existence of strengths and weaknesses in the management of international cooperation within the analyzed periods. In this regard, future researchers are invited to use these observations as a basis for building management and evaluation models that enhance the city's capacities in handling international cooperation and measuring the results of implemented cooperation proposals. Similarly, it is crucial to explore the possibility of establishing local alliances with academia and the private sector in order to strengthen the technical capacities of the municipal corporation for the benefit of the people of Cuenca. These strategic collaborations could significantly contribute to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of implemented cooperation initiatives. Further research in this field will lead to increased knowledge and the identification of best practices, benefiting local communities and the field of international cooperation in general.

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## **Annexes**

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