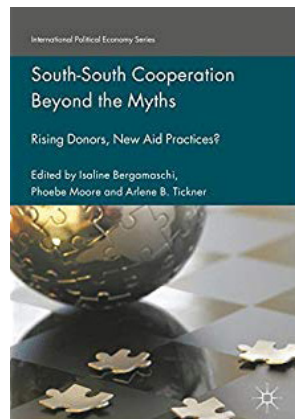

Book Review

South-South Cooperation Beyond the Myths Rising Donors, New Aid Practices?

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The collection has served an important role in laying bare the qualitative – non-economic – perspectives of SSC and their implications for both the provider and recipient countries. Since the beginning of the present millennium, SSC also appears to have been instrumental in bridging gaps in terms of financial resources. Such a shift, even though still an insignificant part of the total support provided under SSC, -- capacity building support still plays the most important role – needs to be looked at in detail .

South-South Cooperation (SSC) has been attracting considerable attention from diplomats, policy makers, development practitioners, media persons and academics during the last couple of decades. The attraction appears more visible with several global forums that accepted SSC as a prominent component in global development architecture. During 2017-18 about 5 full length books have been published with South-South Cooperation mentioned in their titles; more than 75 journal articles have appeared in print during this period. The present book under review is one of such recent additions to the literature on SSC.

Veering away from the traditional academic approach to SSC, the compilation of essays, mainly with contributions from Southern scholars, has been an effort to look at the issues from the perspectives of the “recipient” countries. Thus instead of looking at the spirit of and the guiding principles followed by the “providers” of SSC in extending development support to partner countries, the book tries to consider the implications – or better to put in a more technical term – impact assessment of SSC in the countries who were at the receiving end of such assistance programmes. The book also stands out in terms of its attempt to go beyond the “traditional” emerging nations engaged as providers of SSC to capture the efforts of assistance by countries like Turkey, Colombia, Cuba, Venezuela and United Arab Emirates. A more interesting addition to the book, however, could have been a few cases involving countries, specially from Latin America, who have been mutually engaged in SSC between one another, providing development assistance on a reciprocal basis. The SEGIB Report on South-South Cooperation (2017) records a number

of such instances. During 2015, Brazil and Argentina helped each other through reciprocal interventions under SSC. Similar instances are reported between Chile and Mexico. Such cases are very important to highlight that SSC need not necessarily be a unidirectional process in flow of resources and knowledge and that its strength can be better leveraged by recognizing the possibilities of bi-directional – and even, if needs be, multidirectional support – across countries. Recognition of such possibilities can take the process towards further horizontality and break the provider and recipient barriers.

The publication under review, as already mentioned, is a collection of case studies spread across a number of countries like Mozambique, Senegal, Lao PDR, Somalia among others, even though the experiences from Mozambique are a little extensive covering three articles. Besides experiences through the lens of recipients, the book also captures the experiences of providers who are often not highlighted as a part of the group in the existing literature. The experiences, as the researchers chronicled, are varied and cannot be generalized as characterizing the ‘true’ model of SSC. Perhaps this is the only generalized assertion that emerges from this book. This finding is relevant enough to contribute meaningfully to the present day debate about the need or otherwise, for a standardized template to describe resource flows in the name of SSC. The cases argue that the actors in SSC are influenced by a myriad factors ranging from historical links, shared past or cultural links, religion and ideology, among others. SSC also involves export of sector specific knowhow from a particular country, for example, health services by Cuba, agriculture and food security by Brazil, among others.

The book appears fascinating in terms of its approach in going beyond the debate about the normative perspectives of SSC and exploring the ground level realities pertaining to this idea. Thus it goes beyond the macro impact of SSC on global aid architecture and concentrates beyond the “idealist” structure of SSC to debate as to whether it is “desirable or dangerous”. To facilitate such a query, most of the contributions across this volume consciously move away from the analytical economic model and borrow immensely from methodological insights of political sociology, international relations etc., where SSC is treated as a social construct, shaped by the “dialectical relationship between knowledge and power”.

In the process of developing their understanding of SSC, some authors noted the connection with domestic development imperatives of provider countries in promoting their domestic enterprises as a part of their efforts to sustain economic growth. Contributors also underscored the emergence of post-Washington Consensus that led to revamping of the core principles of “aid mechanism” by the Northern donors. Emergence of poverty reduction strategic plans (PRSPs) – a pluri-annual plan to be designed by the recipient countries in collaboration with the donors from OECD/DAC to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – as a new normal of conditionalities also received considerable attention in this volume. They appear to have replaced the conditionalities ushered in terms of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) as a part of the Washington Consensus. The growing importance of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and private enterprises in facilitating SSC has also been identified.

By its own elaboration, the volume claims to have looked into the following aspects of SSC.

(1) Whether SSC has been instrumental to promote a development model that claims to be different from or alternative to the one promoted by traditional donors;

(2) Do the practitioners of SSC endorse and implement the OECD-DAC aid effectiveness agenda; and

(3) Whether they agree to participate in triangular cooperation initiatives with traditional donors or prefer to protect their independence through isolated, bilateral intervention or with other Southern donors.

Besides the introductory and the concluding sections, it has 10 chapters, looking into the practices of 10 emerging but non-traditional actors in development cooperation and their apparent implications for those who received support thereof.

The editors assert in the concluding chapter that the book is not a comparative exercise. Even though a guideline was shared and discussed with the contributors, they were free to emphasize certain aspects of the reality that obtains in their respective cases and best reflects the specificities. This editorial freedom given to the contributors constitutes the most important achievement of this collection and captured the diversity of contemporary SSC exercises - role of religion, private sector, security objectives, triangular cooperation - among others.

This collection is a welcome addition to the literature on development cooperation in general, and SSC in particular. It will whet the appetite, to a considerable degree, of those who keenly follow the trends in global development architecture.

However, to conclude, one may like to raise an issue that needs to be resolved urgently. Reading the contents of the present book under review brought such an issue under more refined focus. One may recall that the OECD/DAC approach towards development cooperation was designed around the idea of “two gap” theory that identified gaps firstly, in investible funds and secondly, in terms of foreign exchange reserves necessary to procure capital goods from the advanced nations, that necessitate flow of resources - financial and technical - to the developing nations from the OECD members. The Southern version of development cooperation did not emerge out of such a conceptual framework. It was more of a response to the apprehension of being forced to surrender their sovereignty again, in some way or other, to the countries that are politically and economically stronger than them. Thus was articulated the centrality of solidarity and horizontality in SSC. The collection has served an important role in laying bare the qualitative - non-economic - perspectives of SSC and their implications for both the provider and recipient countries. Since the beginning of the present millennium, SSC also appears to have been instrumental in bridging gaps in terms of financial resources. Such a shift, even though still an insignificant part of the total support provided under SSC, -- capacity building support still plays the most important role - needs to be looked at in detail. Such an exercise will also involve use of quantitative tools in measuring the extent of “mutual benefit” enjoyed by the partners in cooperation. A similar volume that captures the insights from impact assessment of interventions carried out in the spirit of SSC is perhaps the need of the day to strengthen the principles and practice of SSC.