

# Convergence on South-South Cooperation: The Delhi Process after Five Years



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In 2013, India established an international platform for dialogue and knowledge creation on South-South Cooperation (SSC) and Triangular Cooperation (TC). The so-called Delhi Process is hosted by RIS, in collaboration with the Forum on Indian Development Cooperation (FIDC) and the Network of Southern Think Tanks (NeST). Through a series of well-attended conferences in the years 2013, 2016, 2017 and 2018, the Delhi Process has evolved as a unique venue for researchers, policy makers, practitioners as well as representatives from civil society and, to a limited extent, business, wishing to explore the specific narratives, purposes and modalities of SSC. While the organisers' perspective builds on a sharp contrast of SSC to the objectives and practices of traditional donors, the notion of triangularity in the thematic umbrella demonstrates their commitment to building bridges for transnational cooperation across the North-South divide.

Five years down the road, it is time to assess the achievements as well as the challenges of the Delhi Process by asking three critical questions.

- How has the global context for SSC and TC evolved over time?
- What did the Delhi Process accomplish so far?
- Which challenges should the Delhi Process address to strengthen its relevance and effectiveness?

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## Global context

Recent years have witnessed the phenomenal rise of South-South cooperation in all conceivable dimensions, such as trade, investment, finance, science and security as well as diplomacy and development. Yet, the institutional frameworks and functional regimes of global economic governance, for example the world monetary system and rating agencies, are still heavily slanted in favour of the North. Pushing back, developing countries are constructing their own architecture, such as the New Development Bank of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. In a parallel movement, dialogue and policy coordination between leading nations of South and North has intensified under the auspices of the G20. However, the toxic nationalism of the present U.S. administration threatens to dismantle extant multilateral arrangements for problem-solving, how asymmetrical and deficient they may be.

The North-South dichotomy is also pronounced in the field of development cooperation. Against the historical backdrop of colonialism and unequal development, industrialised countries have set up complex structures with the aim of supporting the developing world. Through their club, the OECD Development Assistance Committee, they have established a finely tuned system for joint understandings, action and knowledge production by the “aid industry”. In contrast, the rapidly growing South-South cooperation builds on principles of mutual gain, horizontality, solidarity and non-interference. While its volumes have assumed impressive

proportions lately, SSC still lacks solid institutional footings and shared concepts. Similarly, the nascent foundations for theory-building and empirical assessment of SSC need further attention. Despite these shortcomings, industrial countries have not been able to socialise Southern providers to the norms and standards of their policies. On the contrary, Northern donors have begun to emulate SSC approaches. Such “Southernisation” (Mawdsley, 2018) emphasises benefits for the provider and combines diverse instruments for aid, trade, investment etc. into a package deal.

While concepts of North and South are converging, exchange of experiences between the two camps suffers from severe gaps in the international development architecture. The OECD-initiated Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation has been staunchly rejected by key SSC providers, such as Brazil, China, India and South Africa. The biennial Development Cooperation Forum at the United Nations has never gained much traction and is now being sidelined by the UN High-Level Political Forum which is charged with monitoring the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In the face of such gaps in global development governance, India has set out to promote SSC and transnational cooperation.

## Achievements

Following the long-standing tradition of Indian leadership in the South, for example in the Non-Aligned Movement, the country’s eminent foreign policy think tank, RIS, decided to address the lack of shared concepts and empirical evidence for SSC by establishing the international

Delhi Process. Since the initial meeting in 2013, significant progress has been achieved in a number of areas.

### **SSC narrative**

The Delhi Process has succeeded in establishing itself as premier intellectual venue to reflect on the achievements of SSC, but also its deficiencies and pitfalls. A focal point has been the search for a common identity and a shared “narrative for Southern providers” (Bracho, 2018). The conversation started with a negative definition, emphasising how different (and morally superior) SSC is compared to Northern “aid”. There was little clarity then on what SSC would stand for in positive terms; only minimal empirical evidence on practices and impact existed. Over the past five years, the contours of the debate have shifted significantly. Filling the void, the Delhi Process has produced manifold contributions on the purposes and effects of SSC. Significantly, it has moved from an understanding of SSC as purely voluntary (thus arbitrary) exercise to a firm commitment to global problem-solving on the basis of common but differentiated responsibilities. However as will be shown below, the exact definition of SSC and the specification of Southern efforts for implementation of the 2030 Agenda are still the subject of controversy in the Delhi Process.

### **Multi-stakeholder dialogue**

The Delhi Process has proven itself as a unique environment for the sharing of diverse perspectives and experiences in a multi-stakeholder setting. Officials from providers and beneficiaries of SSC as well as from the UN system play a key role in the conversation. To give but one example:

At Delhi Process IV in August 2018, the UN Office for South-South Cooperation used the opportunity to enlist support for the upcoming “Buenos Aires Programme of Action plus 40” (BAPA+40) meeting, March 2019 in Argentina. At the same occasion, FIDC, a co-host of the Delhi Process, organised a panel of scholars, policy makers and business people to highlight the specific approaches of the country’s SSC.

Recently, RIS has complemented the face-to-face dimension of the Delhi Process by launching a monthly journal, *Development Cooperation Review*, thus significantly expanding the space for policy dialogue and empirical analysis of SSC. By enlisting authors from South and North and ensuring open access at the RIS website, the publication represents a global public good for discourses on development cooperation in all its facets. A further achievement of the Delhi Process lies in opening up to the North. At the first conference, attendance was limited to participants from the global South. Since then, the organisers have actively reached out to traditional donors in order to foster mutual understanding beyond the South-North divide.

### **A NeST of potential**

The Delhi Process has spawned an important institutional innovation in the realm of SSC, the Network of Southern Think Tanks. NeST members have been instrumental in knowledge creation on conceptual frameworks and impact assessment of SSC. Acting as co-host of the Delhi Process, NeST brings in a growing body of analytical results from its national and regional chapters, as demonstrated by the following examples. A report prepared

by Chinese NeST members for BAPA+40 provides a conceptual template and rich empirical findings on China-Tanzania development cooperation (Li, 2018). In Brazil, the national NeST chapter followed a different concept for assessing SSC (BRICS Policy Center & Articulação Sul, 2017). In addition to facilitating mutual learning within the network, NeST channels the insights of the Delhi Process into global spaces, such as the coalition of South-South Global Thinkers organised by UNOSSC and the UN High-Level Political Forum. NeST members are also providing substantive input to the preparatory process for BAPA+40. However, the SSC studies presented by NeST so far reveal persistent differences in substance and methodology among members - one of the challenges the Delhi Process should address to strengthen its relevance and impact.

## Challenges

Since its inception five years ago, the Delhi Process has proven its value as key platform to reflect on the role of SSC for international development. To strengthen its contribution to Southern cohesion and to the global common good, the organisers need to address existing weaknesses and future challenges, for example by considering the following steps.

## SSC for SDG 17

The 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are universally accepted as guide posts for global transformation. SDG 17 underlines the critical importance of transnational cooperation in this process. The global indicator framework for the SDGs has been unanimously adopted by the UN General

Assembly but still lacks operational precision in certain areas. In the field of capacity-building, indicator 17.9.1 refers to the “dollar value of financial and technical assistance” committed to developing countries through South-South cooperation and other sources (UN, 2017). However, the operational status of the indicator reveals a clear inconsistency. It is classified as “tier 1”, meaning that “internationally established methodology and standards are available, and data are regularly produced” (IAEG-SDGs, 2018). Since no accepted methodology exists yet for SSC, this description obviously applies only to official development assistance (ODA) of the North. It follows that participants of the Delhi Process, particularly NeST, should focus on the development of meaningful metrics for SDG 17 which can capture the quantitative and qualitative specifics of SSC. However, before this work could bear fruit it would be necessary to provide definitional clarity and statistical practicality for the measurement of SSC.

## Unified SSC concept

As indicated above, scholars and governments in the South have not arrived yet at a widely shared understanding of what SSC exactly stands for. Providers in Latin America tend towards a narrow view of SSC centered on technical cooperation, as demonstrated by the Ibero-American Cooperation Report (SEGIB, 2017). In contrast, Asian definitions follow a more holistic approach which encompasses a wide range of South-South interactions (Chaturvedi & Mulakala, 2016). The Delhi Process has offered the only continuously active space to explore differences and commonalities of SSC but has not accomplished much

regarding a consensual SSC concept. As the significance of SSC increases and monitoring for the SDGs advances, it would be desirable that relevant actors from the South agree on a common framework. BAPA+40 might generate the needed momentum as UNOSSC has announced that their independent report for the conference will articulate a sound definition of SSC. It will be interesting to watch if governments are ready for a political agreement at BAPA+40 next March.

### Governmental efforts

The Delhi Process has included a diverse set of actors from governments and public institutions. The first meeting in 2013 was instrumental for the launch of an informal governmental network of SSC providers which was coordinated by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. After several meetings, the group fell apart since officials could not find common ground on concepts and policies. The Delhi Process would score a major success if it could nudge SSC providers towards a shared meta-governance framework for SSC, including institutional arrangements where structured dialogue and mutual learning could take place. Many governments of the South are reluctant to provide adequate funding for analytical work on their SSC by scholars and activists at home. This shows in the work programme of NeST members who cannot fully mobilize their potential due to financial gaps. Southern providers should enhance the effectiveness of their activities by dedicating public resources to independent research and impact assessment.

### Conclusions and way forward

There can be no doubt that the Delhi Process has been a key driver for substantive reflection on SSC. Its reach and relevance in coming years will, to a large extent, depend on enhancing inclusivity and diversity. For this to happen, the participation of voices from beneficiary developing countries should be expanded. Considering the leading role of China in SSC, it would also be appropriate to aim for a much larger attendance of scholars and officials from that country. The future of the Delhi Process will be shaped by the strategic orientation of India's foreign policies. There seem to be competing visions on the country's place in the world. While one side of the debate focuses on India's autonomous trajectory as major power in the global system, the Delhi Process builds on the historical legacy of Southern solidarity. Whichever way the country turns, the world needs India's leadership for sustainable, inclusive development at home and abroad.

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## ASIAN COOPERATION DIALOGUE FOR 2019

The State of Qatar affirmed its presidency for the Asian Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) for 2019. The objective will be of Asian consensus and cooperation and the development of the inter-Asian working mechanisms as a priority. During the Qatar presidency efforts to deepen trade and economic partnerships and promote the economic competitiveness of the countries of Asia will be made. The ACD, which first held a dialogue in 2002, has been key in promoting cooperation and interrelationships among Asian countries in all fields and has contributed to the joint efforts to address the common challenges facing the continent. Primarily in the field of development and improving the quality of life of the Asian peoples together with regional and international groups and blocs so as to achieve the common objectives of the international community. Qatar will also host a forum for businessmen for presenting expertise, visions, ideas and distinguished experiences among investors, entrepreneurs and experts in the fields of economy and trade.

Source: <https://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/29/09/2018/Qatar-takes-over-Presidency-of-Asian-Cooperation-Dialogue-for-2019>

## MOROCCO AND UNOSSC PUSH FOR SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION

The Moroccan International cooperation agency (AMCI) and the UN office for south-south cooperation (UNOSSC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding to promote cooperation between countries of the south notably those in the African continent. The agreement is in line with Morocco's foreign policy driven by co-development and solidarity. The MoU reflects Morocco footprint as a regional hub for south-south cooperation through the launch of an array of sustainable development projects in Africa as part of a win-win approach. Jorge Chediek Director of UNOSSC applauded Morocco's South-South initiatives and stated that the MoU will allow for UNOSSC to cooperating closely with Moroccan institutions to promote an efficient south-south cooperation in the region.

Source: <http://northafricapost.com/25596-morocco-teams-up-with-un-office-for-south-south-cooperation.html>