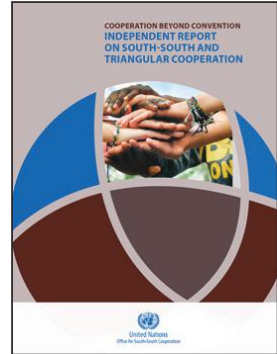# Report Review

Cooperation beyond Convention – Independent Report on South-South and Triangular Cooperation: A Case for Knowledge Sharing

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*C*ooperation beyond Convention is a unique effort towards stock-taking of South-South Cooperation (SSC), since the Bandung Conference, 1955, and Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA), 1978, and identifying a new phase in southern engagements and its 'sibling approach' (p. 157) of Triangular Cooperation (TrC). The report examines SSC and TrC in light of emerging challenges of the changing nature of work, growing demographics, and climate change. It identifies the exiting gaps in the literature and research to address the lack of research and its dissemination on SSC and TrC.

The report, a compilation of seven chapters, is complemented by case studies and best practices, draws contributions from practitioners and academicians from across the South supplemented by an annexure that contains background papers. It makes a consistent effort to showcase the evolution and continued role of SSC, essential for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and reflects upon the knowledge emerging from the South to tackle endemic development challenges.

The chapters unfold in a triadic manner with the first set of chapters (I to IV) attempting a review of SSC, assessing its role in the past 40 years and identifying the diversity and uniqueness of this mode of cooperation

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that engages multiple actors and utilises multiple modalities. These chapters also delve into the discussions around the institutionalisation, operationalisation and diversity of SSC. The second set of chapters (V and VI) identify a 'new' era of cooperation depicted by a deepening of Southern cooperation and complemented by TrC. The final chapter (VII) charts the way forward, underlining the paucity of knowledge and literature on southern development challenges and southern-led solutions. It also provides a set of policy recommendations to mainstream SSC and TrC.

In following paragraphs we discuss the various chapters of the Report, bringing out the essence of the issues covered, and presenting an initial analysis. *Chapter I* details the evolution of SSC, highlights the various narratives and the non-negotiable principles guiding Southern cooperation. It reflects upon the uniqueness of SSC unlike North-South Cooperation (NSC), on issues of conditionality, diversity of actors and modalities, and the role of guiding principles that lay the groundwork for a solidarity based model of cooperation. It adopts the UNDP definition of TrC, articulating it as a Southern-driven approach, supported by developed country/s or multilateral institutions. The idea of 'beyond convention' is best reflected in the cited examples of cultural cooperation in SSC through the 'Confucius institutes, Yoga and Nollywood', that showcases a model of cooperation that goes beyond mere political and economic spheres to build trust, shared values and knowledge to ultimately strengthen the sphere of Southern influence regionally and globally. Furthermore, the contribution of SSC towards various dimensions of

socio-economic development, ranging from capacity building to infrastructure financing, is critical towards overcoming a 'trust deficit' that has often been an impediment in NSC. Thus, SSC presents a more stable base for cooperation built upon mutual trust and shared value systems essential to establish successful partnerships and collaborations, as envisioned in SDG 17.

Chapter II draws upon the 'multidimensionality' of participation and leadership of the emerging economies of India, China, Turkey, Brazil in a world with shifting power balances. It makes a distinction in the evolution of the South characterising the old South in the context of the core-periphery theory as a dependent region. However, the new South is depicted as an emerging economic entity which is increasingly becoming independent in furthering its own development interests. SSC is the main driver of this phenomenon and it can best be noticed in the new-found Southern institutions which aim to provide an alternative to the pre-existing Northern-led global financial architecture. The chapter also depicts southern countries as the new defenders of multilateralism and globalisation. Furthermore, it recognises the need to move towards an inclusive global engagement process between developed and developing countries. This need for a more inclusive engagement conducive to the interests of developing countries was strengthened during the deliberations at BAPA+40, calling for a more complementary approach towards development cooperation and the achievement of Agenda 2030.

Chapter III takes multiple lenses – economic, political and financial

– to understand the process of institutionalisation in the South. It explains this process taking into account all the above aspects, highlighting their tangible impact on contemporary South-South institutions. The chapter discusses that this impact has been two-fold. First, 'the growth in South-South institutions has had a positive effect on the structure of the global economy'; and second, 'SSC institutions have had some, albeit limited, impact on the modalities of cooperation in global relations' (p.75). It makes a reference to the fact that political cooperation is 'the most important' area of SSC. However, the process of Southern integration suffers due to political differences between states which highlight the changing nature of solidarity in the South. While discussing the impact of South-South institutions, the report mainly elaborates on the impact on global economy, but it misses to emphasise on the importance of interdependency between economic and political cooperation, which requires an identification of some minimum common political objectives that are necessary for enhanced cooperation to be achieved in the 'new' era of SSC for facilitating a greater economic impact of cooperation.

Chapter IV showcases case studies and best practices that highlight the plurality and heterogeneity in terms of actors and modalities of SSC and TrC. These case studies further the narrative of 'beyond convention' depicting collaborations between civil society organisations, academia and private sector such as the Cuba-Brazil Entrepreneurial Collaboration in Biotechnology; India-South Africa programme on Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI); and seed banks project established between Brazil-Mozambique-South Africa. These examples show how institutions beyond governments can promote capacity building and provide cost effective solutions for developing countries through enhanced Southern collaborations. Furthermore, the chapter also highlights role of platforms such as Network of Southern Think Tanks (NeST), to promote evidence-based policy making and enhance knowledge exchange to integrate southern knowledge and avoid 'research in silos' as a key case of bridging the knowledge gap and building capacity is highlighted in the report.

Reflecting upon the technological revolution with the Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain and digital finance, e-Commerce, e-Health etc., *Chapter V* delves into the potential of emerging technologies for developing countries to ensure better access to markets, innovation and knowledge resources. It tries to urge the Southern countries to treat technology and its development as an essential tool for sustainable growth and prudently employ it in the progression of their respective development strategies. The potential in the South vis-à-vis cross border e-Commerce trade, technological innovation, and robust broadband infrastructure is such that it would bring a transformational shift in the digital economy. In order to tap into this immense potential and an economic sector that itself requires connection, sharing, engagement and mutual cooperation, SSC becomes imperative to overcome this digital divide and unlock its true potential.

The focus of *Chapter VI* is on the role of SSC and particularly TrC, towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The chapter situated legal basis for TrC in the original BAPA document (article 60[b] and 65[h])

and articulates that TrC embodies the values of partnership as articulated under SDG 17 (p. 133). It cites a legal premise in the original BAPA document as an instrument of legitimacy to establish TrC in the wider ambit of cooperation and provide a foundation for it which is in sync with the ideals and aims of SSC. It is noteworthy that the report, in general, apart from relying on international law, explicitly picks up the UNDP definition for TrC. This highlights the fact that, apart from having a foundational understanding of what TrC is and why it must be practiced, there is an operational angle to TrC as to how it must be practiced being articulated as well.

It is important to bring out this linkage between a legal premise and an operational definition because TrC as a concept is relatively new and does not have the same traction as SSC or NSC within the larger ambit of development cooperation. In order to achieve a significant impact, TrC is in need of contemporary relevance along with historical significance. The chapter further reflects upon the diversity in triangular cooperation, with the coming together of two southern countries with developed partners (eg. Germany's TrC approach with African and Latin American Countries) or three developing countries (such as the case of IBSA) which further extended cooperation with the UN to establish the IBSA Fund. It calls upon Southern countries to consolidate their development cooperation architecture at the national level to further their role in establishing global partnerships for the achievement of Agenda 2030.

Chapter VII underlines the need for research to investigate into 'second generation issues' that emerged with the Nairobi Outcome Document to better understand the role of SSC in peacekeeping, debt relief, Small and Medium Enterprise Development, amongst others. There is also a need to look into the curation of comparative perspectives emerging from the South, to critically examine the role and impact of SSC across different levels, from governments to grassroots. In line with this view, the chapter concludes with policy recommendations demanding transparency in monitoring Oversees Development Assistance monitoring, increasing southern integration and strengthening southern-led innovation and knowledge systems, as well as effectively tapping into the use of digital technology to drive the development agenda in the South.

Examining the Report in light of Key Issues Post-BAPA+40

As discussed above, the report articulates SSC as a framework through which different development approaches converge providing an alternative model of individual development strategies. In doing so it indicates SSC as a unique mode of cooperation that allows actors to form partnerships and collaborations based on their own development trajectories directed by a mutual interest to cooperate. SSC can then be said to provide these actors multiple modalities, that often work in tandem with each other highlighting the multimodality approach of SSC as articulated in the Development Compact (Chaturvedi, 2016), to arrive at the destination of collective action for development. Given the plurality of approaches constituting Southern development cooperation, the report recognises its limitation in coming up with

a concrete definition of SSC. It has been one of the challenges towards finding a balance between the various perspectives and approaches that currently exist on SSC.

As we move forward Post-Buenos Aires, it must be noted that over a period of time a wide range of principles have emerged out of many conferences from Bandung to BAPA+40. The emphasis here is that there exists a set of non-negotiable principles that are instrumental in making a particular mode of development cooperation, a Southern one. These principles have remained more or less constant throughout this period. One of the principles that remain a central pillar of these principles is the demand-driven nature of Southern cooperation. The report could have elaborated on the demand-driven nature of SSC, which allows SSC to emerge from the grass-roots of the situations, thereby enhancing the sustainability of cooperation.

In defining triangular cooperation, the report finds its essence as 'one of South-South Cooperation, supported by a traditional development actor or donor (p.21).' The deliberations and outcome document of the BAPA+40 conference took forward this view. As Chakrabarti (2019) points out, there is a fundamental issue with fusing TrC within SSC as the latter has developed over decades (evident in the stocktaking) guided by a set of non-negotiable principles. TrC on the other hand, is a more nascent approach yet to be 'concretised in terms of guiding principles that would facilitate its operations' (Chakrabarti, 2019). Additionally, TrC in a short time has positioned itself as a supplementary approach to NSC and SSC. To an extent the report claims TrC

to be a remedy, bridging the divide between NSC and SSC and overcoming existing contentions that impede collective development and tapping into comparative advantages of all actors. However, as we move towards institutionalising and opertaionlising TrC it is important to retain it as a complementary approach, rather than being subsumed under SSC or as a replacement to the 0.7 per cent ODA target for DAC countries.

With respect to reporting, accounting, and assessment of development cooperation, the independent report draws upon the need to improve transparency, focusing mainly on ODA and its role in traditional cooperation. The report further recommends that the 'monitoring and measuring [… of] ODA should be at an international forum such as the UNDESA Development Cooperation Forum (p. 173)', the aim being to promote coherence among the development activities of various partners. With respect to monitoring mechanisms of SSC, the report only marginally touches on the same (in various case studies or in Annex – paper 3). The outcome document of BAPA+40 proposes institutionalistaion of SSC through the establishment of 'country-led systems to evaluate and assess the quality and impact' of SSC and TrC (Para 25) (Chakrabarti, 2019). Acknowledging the existing 'voluntary and needs-based' monitoring mechanisms undertaken in SSC, the outcome document urges the establishment of an experience oriented 'methodology for accounting and evaluating (UNGA, 2019, para 26)' that is tailored to the reality and modalities of SSC and complements national systems. The efforts initiated in the recent meet of India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Academic Forum (May 2019) to set up an

academic taskforce to look into the impact assessment of the initiatives taken under the IBSA Trust Fund is a welcome move in the desired direction.

The need for collective, or even individual, mechanisms for monitoring, accounting and assessing SSC continues to remain a contentious issue. However, as we move forward there is need to break down this contention to establish a synergetic approach among all actors that is compatible to the demand-driven nature of SSC. There is also a need to acknowledge the fact that the plurality of Southern approaches towards development cooperation and their corresponding tailored assessments should ideally be able to facilitate transparency and accountability as a show strength of the South rather than being a hindrance to them.

A Case for Knowledge Sharing

The report also acknowledges the role of knowledge sharing in SSC and TrC for building long-lasting partnerships. It rightly points out that there is a considerable gap in research and curation of knowledge in the South. It should be noted that the South is continuously creating and evolving knowledge to address endemic challenges, which are common to most developing and least developed countries. The issue lies not just in its curation, as pointed out by the report, but also its effective exchange. With the changing ground realities given triangular cooperation, knowledge exchange can move beyond binaries of North to South or South to South to a more circular flow, that is demand-driven to address domestic and global challenges. TrC can play a key role, through which the traditional

donors can learn from the plurality and uniqueness of the Southern approach to facilitate a two-way flow, creating a circuit of knowledge sharing. Multilateral organisations such as development banks, which currently play the role of knowledge brokers in development cooperation, can then become proactive members in this circuit wherein knowledge shared can better guide lending practices and innovation while ensuring organisational effectiveness with targeted context-specific development approaches and tailor made strategies for a stronger impact (Bawa, 2018).

The process of bringing about a free and unconditional flow of knowledge sharing would inevitably need to be started from the operational level in order for it to be sustainable and not subjected to strategic considerations. Therefore, it is important to strengthen SSC which has started to emerge in a big way at the grass-root level in the form of people-to-people ties collectively and by identifying themselves as peoples of the South (Dwivedi, 2018). Therefore, programmes like the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC), which aim to propagate the sharing of technical know-how and best practices across developing countries, needs to be strengthened and expanded across the South for a global flow of knowledge, which is liberating in nature from the challenges of development. The rationale for this lies in the fact that in SSC no country is too rich to refuse assistance provided and no country is too poor to be overlooked in its efforts to provide assistance.

In conclusion, the report is a comprehensive collection of key issues related to South-South Coopertaion, best practices, new perspectives and also

provides a way forward. But, as realised within the report itself, there are many more avenues that await to benefit from being analysed through the lens of SSC.

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ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE – THE NEED FOR TRANSPARENT AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

Nine developing countries – Nigeria, Armenia, Brazil, Republic of Korea, South Africa, Thailand, Republic of North Macedonia, Uruguay and Vietnam – would present their role and contribution towards reducing greenhouse emissions at the UN Climate Talks at Bonn in June 2019. A process called "Facilitative sharing of views" (FSV) will help identify the role of North-South and South-South cooperation to increase interaction for transparency in reporting efforts, build resilience and improve the means of implementation such as finance, technology transfer and capacity-building.

Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Amina Mohammed called for Africa to be "at the center" of the climate action agenda, and for mobilising increased finance to the region. There is a need for increased investments to harness renewable energies while ensuring clean development through existing energy sources.

Source: Uwaegbulam, C. (2019, April 22). Nigeria, eight other countries to present climate action in Bonn. The Guardian. Retrieved from: https://guardian.ng/property/nigeria-eight-other-countries-to-present-climate-action-in-bonn/