

The Road to BAPA+40 through Delhi Process IV

South-South Cooperation (SSC) and recent efforts towards the conceptualization of Triangular Development Cooperation (TDC), have come a long way from their modest beginnings and have emerged as important contributors to the global development architecture. Establishment of institutions like New Development Bank, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and the International Solar Alliance, bear testimony to the growing impact of the SSC in the global arena. The recent IBSA Declaration on the SSC made in Pretoria on June 4, 2018 reiterated further the principles of the SSC as the cornerstone of development cooperation by the members of the group. The forthcoming United Nations commemorative conference for the Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA+40) rests on this checkered and proactive history of SSC.

To deliberate on the theoretical premise of the SSC and how to carry the process forward, RIS had jointly organized with the Ministry of External Affairs, UN Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC), NeST and FIDC an International Conference on “South-South Cooperation and BAPA+40 – Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Realities” on 13-14 August, 2018 at New Delhi. The focus of this conference was to strengthen theoretical nuances of SSC and expansion of the global understanding of development cooperation – its conceptual framework and relevant empirical validations. The theoretical construct that was taken up for deliberation in this year’s Delhi Process had focused on creating a structure and an agreement on some of the non-negotiable principles of the SSC and emergence of the development compact as theoretical modeling of modalities involved in the SSC.

H.E. Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, President-Elect of the 73rd Session of the UN General Assembly delivered the inaugural address, and Prof. Amitav Acharya, Distinguished Professor, American University, Washington D.C. gave keynote address. Amb. Mohan Kumar, Chairman, RIS, chaired the inaugural session and Prof. Sachin Chaturvedi, Director General, RIS made the welcome remarks. Mr. Jorge Chediek, Director, UNOSSC; H.E. Mr. Daniel Chuburu, Ambassador, Embassy of the Argentina Republic, New Delhi; and Shri T. S. Tirumurti, Secretary (ER), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India honored the conference with special remarks.

Discussions in the conference developed to evolve a new theoretical framework for South-South Cooperation, which could evolve as either a hybrid of the monetarist and structural schools of thought or create a new approach in economics. On one side is the merging of the approaches with the monetarists strongly viewing development and growth to place with macroeconomic stability and the structuralists believing that the structure of the economy matters more in terms of building capacity of the population to undertake sustainable growth even if it is at the cost of macroeconomic stability in the short term. Either a synthesis or a new approach, the deliberations asserted that a theoretical framework should incorporate the core principles of South-South Cooperation.

The conference collectively underscored the importance of building domestic capacity as a pillar of SSC, not just for countries to take ownership of their own growth narrative but also to benefit better from both North-South, South-South and Triangular Cooperation.

During deliberations on impact assessment of SSC, two levels of analysis emerged at the macro and micro level. The macro level analysis deals with the contributions focused on the reductions of inequalities drawing from the works of Raul Prebisch and Albert Hirschmann, in a multidisciplinary way. The micro level analysis looks at how South-South Cooperation initiatives contribute towards departmental process i.e. local conditions and the respect for various idiosyncrasies. Prominent debates within SSC look at primary questions – What should be the basis for an assessment methodology and what should be the accounting framework for SSC? These questions are not independent of each other and are often juxtaposed. The possibility of applying the principles of SSC in the impact assessment add to the opportunity to improve the initial diagnosis resulting in an improved designing of projects and deliver a more objectively rich impact assessment. To that effect, projects aligned with localised needs will allow for ownership even at the community level. Prof. Sachin Chaturvedi, noted that SSC works best on the level of project initiatives, drawing upon the micro level.

Availability of Development Finance at a viable rate and its various sources were also discussed. The sessions observed that trade flows are considered natural but investments are strategic and possess the potential of capacity building which is an important consideration for Southern countries. Furthermore, it is imperative for them to realise the effectiveness of local currency in international trade to address their vulnerability. The international rupee

SWAP exchanges emerged as a key example. The presence or absence of conditionality is going to define the distinct nature of SSC vis-a-vis credit risk, indebtedness and financial uncertainties from other forms of development cooperation especially Official Development Assistance (ODA). Knowledge flows mark the progress of development and build capacity to improve the process inherently. Civil Society Organisations also have a major role to play in the process of SSC in setting standards and building successful linkages between the government and the private sector.

The conference opened avenues for a continued dialogue that aimed to seep into the debates at the G20 as well as the Second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation to be held at Buenos Aires, Argentina, from 20 to 22 March 2019. The development of the future of work, agriculture and infrastructure were the repeated priority areas for collective Southern development, as highlighted by the G20 Sherpa and the Argentinean Ambassador. The Roundtable brought new research agendas to the fore that engaged upon the running themes of the Delhi Process IV, namely, the methodology for impact assessment and curricular pedagogical initiatives. Realising its aim, the Fourth Delhi Process most of all moved towards creating a network of policymakers, civil society and academic to bring various stakeholders towards collective action.

The detailed agenda of the Conference is available on RIS website for ready reference.
