What future for South-South Cooperation?*

¿Qué futuro para la Cooperación Sur-Sur?

KARIN COSTA VAZQUEZ**

KEYWORDS

South-South Cooperation; 2030 development agenda; Normative framework; Sustainable Development Goals; Knowledge sharing.

ABSTRACT   South-South Cooperation (SSC) has increased and diversified over the past decades. This phenomenon, however, has not been followed by a reassessment of the normative framework that guide this form of cooperation, limiting the complementary role SSC can play in the implementation of the 2030 Development Agenda. As the scale, scope, and complexity of SSC expand, a reassessment of SSC normative framework is necessary to enhance the contribution of SSC to sustainable, inclusive development ahead of BAPA+40.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Cooperación Sur-Sur; Agenda 2030; Marco normativo; Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible; Intercambio de conocimientos.

RESUMEN   La Cooperación Sur-Sur (CSS) se ha incrementado y diversificado en las últimas décadas. Sin embargo, este fenómeno no ha sido seguido de una reevaluación del marco normativo que guía esta forma de cooperación, lo que limita el papel complementario que puede desempeñar la CSS en la aplicación de la Agenda para el Desarrollo 2030. A medida que se amplía la escala, el alcance y la complejidad de la CSS, es necesario realizar una revisión de los marcos normativos de la CSS para mejorar su contribución a un desarrollo sostenible e inclusivo en el marco del PABA+40.

RÉSUMÉ   La Coopération Sud-Sud (SSC) a augmenté et s'est diversifiée au cours des dernières décennies. Ce phénomène n'a toutefois pas été suivi d'une réévaluation du cadre normatif qui guide cette forme de coopération, limitant le rôle complémentaire que la CSS peut jouer dans la mise en œuvre de l'Agenda 2030. À mesure que l'ampleur, la portée et la complexité de la CSS augmentent, il est nécessaire d'examiner les cadres normatifs de la CSS pour renforcer la contribution de la coopération Sud-Sud à un développement durable et inclusif avant BAPA+40.

Introduction

Over the past decades, a number of developing countries have achieved comparatively higher levels of development and have been demonstrating competencies that contribute to growth, peace, and socio-economic resilience. This has accentuated the possibilities for more intensive forms of cooperation in pursuit of national development plans and international development goals. The approaches, modalities, and instruments used have also expanded from small-scale technical cooperation projects to longer-term development initiatives aimed at strengthening human capital, institutional capacity, and the transfer of technologies with high potential for local adaptation. Project finance for infrastructure development complement these initiatives, which are taking place in an increasingly complex mosaic of governmental and nongovernmental actors.

These initiatives have also evolved to include a wide range of commercial, financial, and diplomatic relations among developing countries. South-South trade multiplied more than ten times between 1990 and 2008, while world trade increased almost fourfold in the same period. By 2010, Southern countries accounted for 37 per cent of global trade, with South-South flows making up about half of this total (United Nations, 2012). Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) as a share of developing countries' GDP increased to almost 50 percent for inflows, and 21 percent for outflows in 2011. Developing countries are also drawing on their own achievements and using cooperation initiatives to build coalitions at the regional and global levels (Dauvergne and Farias, 2012).

The speed of changes has been so remarkable that a reassessment of the normative framework and principles that guide SSC has not been possible yet, limiting the complementary role these initiatives can play in the implementation of the 2030 Development Agenda. As the scale, scope, and complexity of SSC expands, this paper argues that a reassessment of the normative framework that guides SSC and the support role of international organizations is necessary to ensure the development

impact of these initiatives. Ahead of the Second High-Level United Conference on SSC (BAPA+40), this paper proposes two measures to enhance the development impact of SSC: first, complete the institutionalization of SSC; and second, derive lessons on the contribution of SSC to sustainable, inclusive development through the creation of knowledge sharing and learning platforms based on countries' experiences.

The state of South-South Cooperation

Two traditions of development cooperation began to take root after the end of the Second World War. North-South Cooperation, centered on the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD-DAC), is frequently described as the 'venue and voice' of the world's major donor countries on aid, development, and poverty reduction in developing countries (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2006). South-South Cooperation, in turn, originates in the non-Alignment Movement and is based on the Bandung principles of respect for fundamental human rights, equality, sovereignty, territorial integrity of all nations, and promotion of mutual benefits. These two approaches have evolved over the last six decades under two parallel but different set of processes, relationships, and historical narratives (Alden, Morphet and Vieira, 2010; Li and Carey, 2014). Table 1 summarizes the main features of North-South and South-South Cooperation.

Since then, the environment in which SSC functions has changed both substantively and operationally. In the 1960s, the vast majority of today's developing countries were heavily dependent on developed nations for the transfer of knowledge and technology. Over the past decades, a number of these developing countries have achieved comparatively higher levels of development, underpinned by an expanding middle class and scientific and technological expertise (United Nations Development Programme, 2013). This phenomenon has amplified the opportunities for developing countries to exchange solutions to national and international development challenges based on approaches that suit better their own reality.

For example, in Africa SSC has largely focused on technical cooperation and issues like peace and security, good governance, health, and agriculture. Activities are generally led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Ministry of Finance, and implemented by a multitude of government and non-government organizations. Few countries in the region (i.e. Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria, South-Africa, and Tunisia) are in the process of structuring development cooperation agencies or already have a central authority responsible for engaging in South-South initiatives. SSC also features prominently in regional and sub-regional fora like the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development, as well as African Economic Communities like the Economic Community of West African States. The still incidental nature of SSC, however, limits the scalability, impact, and sustainability of such initiatives in the continent (Vazquez and Lucey, 2016).

Table 1. Two traditions of development cooperation

	North-South Cooperation	South-South Cooperation
Geopolitical context	Cold War (1940-50s) (period of tight bipolarity)	Cold War (1960s) (period of loose bipolarity)
Rationale at creation	East-West	Third World
Definition	Official Development Assistance (OECD 1969)	South-South Cooperation (High-Level Committee on South-South Cooperation 2012)*
Governance	Highly centralized at the global level (OECD-DAC). Highly centralized global-local coordination through the Global Partnership for Development Cooperation (GPEDC), highly decentralized at the national level (Ministries and agencies in charge of development assistance.	Highly decentralized at the global, regional and national levels (i.e. Development Cooperation Forum, High-Level Committee on South-South Cooperation, regional fora, Ministries and agencies in charge of SSC).
Actors	OECD-DAC donors. At least one participant has very high per capita income.	Southern (developing and emerging economies) and triangular partners (OECD-DAC donors and IOs).
Conditionality	Top-down, policy conditionality.	Demand-driven, generally free of policy conditionality.
Main modalities	Humanitarian aid, debt relief, grants, loans, and budget support.	Technical cooperation, capacity building, technology transfer, joint action for policy change.
Estimated amounts	USD146.6 billion (OECD-DAC. 2017 data for 29 countries).	Generating estimates of SSC remains complex and challenging, given its emphasis on non-financial modalities and the lack of comparability in definitions and categories used for reporting.
Accountability	OECD-DAC guidelines and instruments (Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness). Peer reviewed by OECD-DAC. Data compiled and periodically released by the OECD-DAC and GPEDC.	National accountability systems. Mutual trust of partners. Nascent monitoring and evaluation systems as well as mechanisms to assess development impact.

* The Framework of Operational Guidelines on the United Nations Support to South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSC/17/3 2012) contains the United Nations Secretary General's working definition for 'South-South Cooperation.' The document complies with decision 16/1 of the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation and the definition is currently being used by UN organizations and agencies. This topic will be further discussed later in the paper.
Source: Elaborated by the author.

In Asia and the Pacific, SSC has been heavily promoted by countries like China, India and Indonesia. More recently, Malaysia and Thailand have also started to engage in SSC both within and outside the region. SSC in Asia and the Pacific combines infrastructure development and finance with more soft-oriented initiatives and modalities like social development, governance, expert training, and volunteering. There is scope for SSC to feature more prominently in regional and sub-regional fora like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations as partners remain consistent in their commitments and Secretariat plays an enabling role (Vazquez, 2014).

In Arab States, SSC has been one of the hallmarks of development cooperation for the past 40 years with Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates featuring among the top contributors in the region and in the world. More than 80 percent of Arab cooperation has been directed towards other Arab countries like Morocco,

Oman and Yemen. Financial resources have also been allocated to infrastructure and social projects in least developed countries and heavily indebted poor countries. Arab States are equally supportive of South-South capacity development initiatives, including the establishment and operation of training institutes for partner-country officials, as well as knowledge-sharing. There is scope for improving normative framework, coordination structures and mechanisms for SSC in the region (United Nations Development Programme, 2014).

Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States have been championing East-East Cooperation as a new dimension of SSC that focuses on knowledge exchange among Eastern European, Western Balkans, Caucasus, and Central Asian countries in areas like social inclusion, youth employment, and disaster risk reduction. Like in Arab States, East-East Cooperation shares the SSC discourse of equal partnership and demand-driven support despite being largely driven by OECD-DAC donors. It is also marked by limited funding for regional and sub-regional cooperation as well as the lack of a centralized platform where information about available expertise and countries' needs would be available for matchmaking.

Latin America has been one of the most active regions in SSC, with initiatives aimed at strengthening the economy and social development alike. Approximately 90 percent of the 721 bilateral South-South projects that Iberoamerican countries participated in 2015 were executed by Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Mexico, Colombia, and Uruguay. All 19 Latin American countries, without exception, were active as recipients of bilateral South-South projects, being Argentina, Bolivia, and El Salvador the top recipient in 2015 (Secretaría General Iberoamericana, 2017). Most of the projects in the region have secured funding from the participating countries themselves, but the amounts have been found to be often insufficient. South-South projects are rarely a mainstream form of cooperation, leading governments to struggle while planning these initiatives and making budget decisions.

Three overall trends can be observed as the scale, scope and complexity of SSC increases worldwide: the expansion of delivery modalities; the development of inter-regional cooperation initiatives; and the emergence of new management and partnership development mechanisms. On the expansion of delivery modalities, developing countries have been adopting collaborative instruments (e.g. knowledge and scientific networks and platforms) and technology transfers, beyond traditional technical cooperation. This trend stems from the growing recognition that by combining different delivery modalities, partners can aim for longer-term, high impact development results. These delivery modalities focus on different aspects from skills and capacity development, to institutional strengthening, systems design, and pre-investment initiatives. They can be further combined with each other to create an enabling policy, institutional, and technical environment for sustaining economic growth and development (Zhou, 2010; Kumar, 2008).

With respect to the development of inter-regional cooperation initiatives, SSC has been increasingly taking the form of bilateral and triangular engagements among countries in different regions, in addition to traditional bilateral cooperation with regional and sub-regional neighbors. Intra-regional cooperation has been taking place mostly with Sub-Saharan Africa, but also between Asia and Latin America; Latin America and Arab States; Arab States and Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent Status (CIS); Latin America, Africa and Asia, among other bilateral and triangular intraregional arrangements. Examples include Colombia's agreement with Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam for knowledge exchange on climate change, agricultural innovation, social protection, and disaster risk management; and India's support to the establishment of India-Africa Institutes in Botswana, Burundi, Ghana, and Uganda in areas like trade, information technology, education.

The increased scale, scope and complexity of SSC have also prompted developing countries to boost their institutional capacity for engaging with peers abroad. This is observed through the growing number of countries establishing development cooperation agencies or equivalent central organizations like Indonesia's National Coordination Team on South-South and Triangular Cooperation, and the recently created China's International Development Cooperation Agency, South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund, and the Center for International Knowledge on Development. Developing countries have also embarked in intra- and interregional initiatives to strengthen SSC, like the Iberoamerican Program to Strengthen South-South Cooperation and the Capacity Development in Management of South-South and Triangular Cooperation. Sectoral ministries and other entities of the central government beyond the development cooperation agencies are also contributing to the increase of the quantity and the quality of SSC. In Brazil, the number of government organizations entering in SSC increased from approximately 90 between 2005 and 2009 to more than 120 in 2010 (IPEA, 2010 and 2011).

Sub-national entities, civil society organizations, and the private sector are also partnering with national governments and even directly engaging in SSC abroad. Sub-national entities are forming innovative arrangements such as the South-South-North cooperation for the exchange of experience in participatory budgeting in Latin America, the United States and Europe (Sintomer, 2012). Increasingly, NGO have been acting as watchdogs and pushing for greater transparency, accountability, equity and socio-environmental justice in SSC. Academia has been taking part in substantive assessments and evaluations of South-South initiatives as well as supporting governments in the elaboration of definitions for SSC. There are also examples of private sector contribution to SSC through 'second generation' corporate social responsibility, mainly in countries where companies have held long-term investments (Carrillo and Vazquez, 2014).

Addressing the challenges to South-South Cooperation going forward

With the establishment of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in 1964, a formal institutionalization of cooperation among developing countries

commenced focusing on two main aspects: technical cooperation and economic cooperation. A set of operational guidance for technical cooperation among developing countries was embodied for the first time in the 1978 Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA), and subsequently endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly at the First High-Level United Conference on SSC. In the same year, following the provisions of the UN General Assembly resolution 3251 (XXIX), UNDP established a special unit for Technical Cooperation among Developing countries (later renamed into the Special Unit for SSC and then UN Office of SSC). Since then, numerous G77 and UN meetings and conferences have been held. The most recent one, the Nairobi Conference held in 2009, set forth the rationale, normative and operational principles, and key actors of SSC. Until today, the BAPA Declaration and the Nairobi Outcome Document remain the key normative documents for SSC. The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs has been providing support within the context of the UN Development Cooperation Forum and the High-Level Committee of SSC.

The Nairobi Outcome Document defines five normative principles (respect for national sovereignty and ownership, partnership among equals, non-conditionality, non-interference in domestic affairs, mutual benefit) and four operational principles (mutual accountability and transparency, development effectiveness, coordination of evidence, and results-based initiatives, multi-stakeholder approach) of SSC. These principles were negotiated and agreed by UN member States at the UN High-level United Nations Conference on SSC, endorsed by the UN General Assembly. However, little is known about how developing countries conceive and apply these internationally agreed SSC principles in practice.

The lack of clarity in the implementation of SSC principles is further aggravated by the inexistence of a minimum conceptual definition for SSC that encompasses the wealth of approaches, modalities and instruments across countries and regions (Research and Information System for Developing Countries, 2013; Siridopoulos, Chaturvedi, Fues, and Pineda, 2014; Vazquez, 2014). This can be clearly observed, for instance, in the realm of South-South investments: while countries like Brazil make a clear distinction between development cooperation and investments (even for development purposes), others like China and India link development cooperation to concessional loans and preferential bilateral loans provided through Exim Banks.

Traditionally, SSC is defined as a common endeavor of peoples and countries of the South, born out of shared experiences and sympathies, based on their common objectives and solidarity, and guided by the principles of respect for national sovereignty and ownership, free from conditionalities (United Nations General Assembly, 2010). More recently, the Framework of Operational Guidelines on the United Nations Support to South-South and Triangular Cooperation has defined SSC as the "process whereby two or more developing countries pursue their individual and/or shared national capacity development objectives through exchanges of knowledge, skills, resources and technical know-how, and through regional and interregional collective

actions, including partnerships involving governments, regional organizations, civil society, academia and the private sector, for their individual and/or mutual benefit within and across regions. South-South Cooperation is not a substitute for, but rather a complement to North-South cooperation".

Today, SSC has increased in terms of strategic importance and volume. The scope of modalities has also expanded to incorporate South-South trade, investments, and technology transfer. As the scale, scope, and complexity of SSC expands, a reassessment of the normative framework that guides SSC is necessary to enhance the contribution of SSC to sustainable, inclusive development. It is correct to say that this diversity of national trajectories and the limitations of the international development cooperation regime create opportunities in terms of political creativity and flexible management procedures (Milani, 2014). In the absence of a proper regime, countries can innovate in the field of rules, procedures, and practices (Vazquez, 2014); nevertheless, the lack of a common denominator may render a proper examination of the relative significance and development impact of SSC very difficult.

One of the distinctive aspects of SSC is its heavy reliance on experiences tested in countries facing similar development challenges and the numerous possibilities for mutual learning on what works and what does not work in development. More qualitative and quantitative information is needed to allow robust analyses of the approaches, modalities and instruments taken by developing countries in different fields, the drivers, the successes and the challenges of SSC, and how initiatives can complement each other as well as North-South cooperation. This information would not only be relevant for internal management, funding allocation, and partnership development; but also for the design, transfer and adaptation of South-South initiatives to the local context.

International organizations could play a support role in the review of SSC normative framework and definition as well as building the evidence base for SSC contribution to sustainable, inclusive development. This could include at least three critical measures: i) facilitating the reassessment of SSC normative framework and definition during BAPA+40; ii) embedding the new normative framework in the implementation of the 2030 development agenda; iii) setting up quantitative and qualitative data collection systems and rolling it out to government and non-government actors, allowing for data comparability and assessment of lessons learned across countries and sectors; crowdsourcing SSC analyses, developing evidence-base information, and drawing recommendations for strengthening SSC contribution to sustainable, inclusive development that would ultimately feedback into the policy processes (upstream) and programming (downstream).

Final remarks

The theory and practice of SSC provides new meanings to development cooperation and accounts for changes in policy ideas, discourse and institutional practices. If the

past decades saw the emergence, revitalization, mainstreaming and institutionalization of SSC, in the future, there tends to be growing complementarity between South-South and other forms of development cooperation in delivering international development goals. For this to happen, developing countries need to learn from the successes and failures of North-South cooperation as well as from the different approaches to SSC.

If SSC is indeed to help redefine the development cooperation landscape then it should guard against dismissing Northern approaches as being fundamentally different, and rather use them (as well as the different approaches adopted by developing countries themselves) for the insights and lessons that can be drawn from them. A constructive dialogue between all partners on how cooperation can contribute to sustainable, inclusive development should be at the core of the efforts to the implementation of the 2030 development agenda. The update of the existing normative framework that guides SSC as well as the review of the role of international development organizations in supporting developing countries could play an enabling role in this process ahead of BAPA+40.

This process would also include a reassessment of the normative framework and definitions upon which SSC is to operate, structuring approaches that combine different delivery modalities and funding sources, framework for public-private partnerships, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Some useful questions for future investigations and debates could be: how did the different countries' experiences contribute to tackling specific development challenges? What are the different approaches and strategies? What are the success drivers of such approaches and strategies? Into what extent these success drivers can be adapted?

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