

South Africa's South-South cooperation 40 years after BAPA

La Cooperación Sur-Sur de Sudáfrica 40 años después del PABA

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KEYWORDS

South Africa; BAPA; Technical cooperation; South-South cooperation; Africa.

ABSTRACT As member states and the United Nations (UN) prepare to come together for the 2nd High Level Conference on South-South cooperation (SSC) forty years after the adoption of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA), this article reflects on the journey South Africa has made in implementing technical cooperation with developing countries (TCDC). Although the Apartheid government of Pretoria was excluded from the discussions of Buenos Aires, in the last two decades South Africa has played a major role in SSC, promoting capacity building, exchange of experiences, and TCDC in Africa and intra-regionally. The article will explore the degree of compliance by South Africa with the 38 recommendations (Rec. 1-38) set out in the BAPA, and the follow up work still required, both nationally and globally, to advance the SSC agenda.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Sudáfrica; PABA; Cooperación técnica; Cooperación Sur-Sur; África.

RESUMEN Mientras los Estados miembros y las Naciones Unidas (ONU) se preparan para la Segunda Conferencia de Alto Nivel sobre Cooperación Sur-Sur (CSS) cuarenta años después de la adopción del Plan de Acción de Buenos Aires (PABA), este artículo refleja el recorrido de Sudáfrica en la implementación de la cooperación técnica con países en desarrollo (CTPD). Aunque el Gobierno del apartheid de Pretoria fue excluido de las discusiones de Buenos Aires, en las últimas dos décadas Sudáfrica ha desempeñado un papel importante en la CSS, promoviendo la creación de capacidades, el intercambio de experiencias y la CTPD en África e intrarregionalmente. El artículo explorará el grado de cumplimiento por parte de Sudáfrica de las 38 recomendaciones establecidas

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en el PABA y el trabajo de seguimiento que aún se requiere, tanto a nivel nacional como mundial, para avanzar en la agenda de la CSS.

MOTS CLÉS

Afrique du Sud; PABA; Coopération technique; Coopération Sud-Sud; Afrique.

RÉSUMÉ

Alors que les États membres et les Nations Unies (NU) se préparent pour la deuxième Conférence de haut niveau sur la coopération Sud-Sud (CSS) quarante ans après l'adoption du Plan d'Action de Buenos Aires (PABA), cet article reflète le parcours de l'Afrique du Sud dans la mise en œuvre de la coopération technique avec les pays en développement (CTPD). Bien que le gouvernement d'apartheid de Pretoria ait été exclu des discussions à Buenos Aires, l'Afrique du Sud a joué un rôle important au sein de la CSS, au cours des deux dernières décennies, en promouvant le renforcement des capacités, l'échange d'expériences et la CTPD en Afrique et au niveau intrarégional. L'article examinera le degré de conformité des 38 recommandations établies dans le PABA par l'Afrique du Sud et le travail de suivi qui reste nécessaire, aux niveaux national et mondial, pour faire avancer le programme de la CSS.

History of South Africa and the BAPA

Following the 21/179 United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution, Buenos Aires hosted, from the 30 August to the 12 September 1978, the first United Nations Conference on Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (TCDC). President Videla of Argentina welcomed five Cabinet Ministers, 41 Deputy Ministers, and 81 heads of development planning and cooperation departments, who studied and debated every line of a roadmap for the promotion of TCDC. The outcome of the conference —what become known as the Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA)— was adopted on the 12 September 1978 by delegates of 138 member states, and subsequently endorsed by the UNGA in December 1978. This kick-started several decades of implementation by governments and the United Nations system of a plan to promote TCDC, and encourage national and collective self-reliance in the global South as foundations for a new international economic order.

The Republic of South Africa, still under heavy British and Dutch colonial influence, had not joined the earlier activities of the newly independent developing countries such as the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung in 1955, that led to the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Group of 77 (G77) and the United Nations Conference of Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in the first half of the 1960s. To the contrary, South Africa was still governed by a white minority that enforced a system of racial segregation, known as *Apartheid*, that disfranchised and oppressed the majority of the indigenous African, Coloured and Asian population of the country.

This led very quickly to international condemnation, which included arms and trade embargos and banning of South Africa from the United Nations organizations. Hence the absence of the South African government in the deliberations of BAPA in the late 1970s, which were also some of the most violent and repressive years of South Africa's domestic history.

Interestingly, UNGA resolution 31/179 allowed the liberation movements fighting the Apartheid regime, in specific the Pan African Congress of Azania (PAC), the Zimbabwe African Nation Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), and the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO), to participate in BAPA discussions as observers (United Nations, 1978). Even more interesting was that after the Plan of Action for TCDC was discussed, the second major item of deliberation at the Buenos Aires Conference was providing UNDP the mandate for the nation building process of Namibia. The South West Africa region had suffered several decades of long conflict between the occupying South African army and the local SWAPO rebels, backed by the communist Angola, Cuban and Russian forces.

It was only in 1994, when the African National Congress (ANC) came to power through the first democratic elections, that South Africa came back to the international arena, aggressively reasserting itself as part of the global South. It joined and even acted as chair of the NAM and the G 77 in the decades to come. It spearheaded the development of new South-South alliances such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) and Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS). Many of these new alliances were championed by ANC stalwart and second President of democratic South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, who currently serves as the Chair of the South Centre.

It was in fact under President Mbeki that the first structured mechanism for South Africa's TCDC was instituted, through the establishment of the African Renaissance and International Cooperation Fund (ARF) in 2000, which till today is jointly managed by the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) and the National Treasury of South Africa. The ARF was never viewed as an instrument to provide aid in the traditional sense. It was rather established as a Fund which would promote partnerships, demonstrate solidarity and support the economic empowerment of Africa, while furthering Pretoria's foreign policy objectives. The analysis of South Africa's implementation of the BAPA and its recommendations begins mostly from this era of Pretoria's development cooperation.

Compliance of South Africa with BAPA recommendations

While continuing to pursue other approaches to international cooperation, such as debt relief, peace-building and conflict resolution, financial cooperation and regional integration, South Africa has conducted also a very active campaign of TCDC. This

has occurred through a wide array of ministries, public agencies and state-owned enterprises. Congruent to its foreign policy, the focus of South Africa's technical cooperation has been predominately the African continent. South African TCDC has ranged from exchanges and support to agricultural projects in Zimbabwe, cultural projects in Mali, humanitarian assistance in Somalia, water management systems in Lesotho, police training in the DR Congo, to just name a few. A significant part of South Africa's engagement with the region has been the promotion of peace and good governance, election support, and what Pretoria has termed as post-conflict reconstruction and development (PCRD). South Africa's application of the 38 recommendations made in the BAPA can be analyzed by observing the advances made by the post-1994 government in implementing TCDC at national, regional and global level.

Bilateral cooperation

Much of South Africa's technical cooperation occurs through bilateral links (Rec. 14), that are formalized through joint bi-national commissions (BNCs) that South Africa organizes every year with numerous developing countries. Over the years South Africa has refined its technical offerings and comparative advantage (Rec. 1). It has demonstrated itself as regional leader in the field of public financial management (PFM) and taxation; conflict resolution and nation-building; disaster relief and humanitarian assistance; infrastructure and human resource development; offering many valuable experience from which other developing countries can learn from.

Through the work done for instance by the Department of Public Service Administration (DPSA), the National School of Government (NSG), and the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), Pretoria has played a large role in strengthening institutions of democracy and governance throughout the continent (Rec. 5). This has included also the TCDC in the field of education, research, science, and technology (Rec 6-8) promoted by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), the Department of Science and Technology (DST), the National Research Foundation (NRF), the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), and the South Africa National Space Agency (SANSA).

Like in most SSC, most of the assistance from South Africa has occurred through government to government (G2G) relations. Nonetheless in some countries, like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mozambique, and Somalia, civil society organizations and humanitarian agencies have also played a significant role in South Africa's technical cooperation. Similarly, South African private sector has made a substantial contribution to strengthening local economies and supporting the business sector of other African countries (Rec. 12), but this has occurred independently without much coordination with the efforts by the South African government (Besharati and Mthembu-Salter, 2016).

Trilateral cooperation

South Africa has acted as an important gateway to the rest of the continent, allowing increased coordination and support by developed countries (Rec. 35-36) to TCDC in Africa. The prime instrument of such process has been the numerous trilateral cooperation arrangements that South African institutions, like the NSG, the National Treasury, the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), and the South African National Defense Force (SANDF) and Police Services (SAPS), have spearheaded through different programs throughout Africa. Some of the key Northern supporters of South Africa's technical cooperation in Africa have included the United States, Germany, Japan, Canada, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the Nordic countries. Triangular cooperation activities of South Africa have also included at times nations from the South, such as Cuba, Vietnam, India, Brazil, that have joined hands with Pretoria to provide technical support to other developing nations.

Regional cooperation – beyond TCDC

As highlighted earlier the “African Agenda” has always taken a central stage in post-1994 international development cooperation of Pretoria. “We cannot be an island of prosperity surrounded by a sea of poverty” have been the words of Nelson Mandela to highlight the crucial interconnectedness of South Africa to the rest of the continent (Besharati, 2013).

Pretoria has thus always invested substantial political, technical and financial resources in strengthening sub-regional and regional institutions (Rec 16-21), such as the African Union (AU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and their subsidiary bodies. Some of the regional initiatives spearheaded by Pretoria such as the Collaborative African Budget Reform Initiative (CABRI) and the African Tax Administration Forum (ATAF), have been important avenues to promote self-reliance in economic spheres (Rec. 9) and encourage technical cooperation among developing countries through professional and technical organizations (Rec. 11). During the Mbeki administration, NEPAD and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) were established as important agencies in the promotion of SSC on the continent (Gruzd, 2014). Under the NEPAD planning framework, many sectoral initiatives have been further established, such as the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) and the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA). Through these specialized regional platforms extensive technical cooperation occurs among the African nations.

Often combined with financial cooperation, much of technical cooperation of South Africa occurs in the infrastructure sector (Rec. 30), thanks to the international activities of public entities such as the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), the South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA), Eskom and Transet. The Presidential Infrastructure Championing Initiative (PICI), launched under Jacob Zuma, and the Continental Free Trade

Agreement (CFTA), launched under Cyril Ramaphosa, are more recent examples to South Africa's commitment to regional integration.

All the above examples, highlight that South Africa's model of SSC goes beyond the limited scope of technical cooperation envisaged by BAPA. It includes substantial aspects of financial and economic cooperation, that utilizes development finance, infrastructure, trade, investment, industrialization in service to regional economic integration. In this regard SSC in Africa is more in tune to the Asian models of development cooperation. While Buenos Aires promoted the emancipation of developing countries through technical cooperation, Bandung encouraged the emancipation of developing countries through trade and industrialization. Both of these traditions have permeated in the manner solidarity is manifested today among countries in Latin America and countries in Asia (Bracho, 2018). South Africa's approach seeks to converge the Buenos Aires and the Bandung traditions.

Global cooperation and the United Nations

Beyond Africa, technical cooperation of South Africa occurs in inter-regional fora such as the Group of 20 (G20), IBSA, BRICS, the Commonwealth, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), and in various platforms organized within the context of the United Nations (UN) system.

BAPA emphasized the large role to be played by UNDP in the promotion and support of TCDC (Rec. 34). While UNDP has played a substantive role in strengthening the TCDC of regional institutions such as the AU and NEPAD, UNDP has been less effective in engaging South Africa's national TCDC programming. Due to its prominent role in peace-keeping and conflict mediation in Africa, South Africa has taken more interest in the global governance space of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). It has nevertheless also played a prominent role at times in the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), in the G 7 and in the Financing for Development (FfD) processes.

Its participation in SSC fora hosted within the UN, such as the Core Group and the Director General Forum of Southern development cooperation agencies, has been fairly limited. Nonetheless, South Africa remains one of the key tripartite member-states contributing to the IBSA Trust Fund, managed by UNDP, that acts as an important financial arrangement (Rec. 38) for the promotion TCDC.

Institutionalization of TCDC

With regards to the adoption of national mechanisms, policies and regulations for the promotion of TCDC (Rec. 2-3), South Africa has been fairly weak in this ambit. As previously discussed, many South African ministries, public agencies and state-owned enterprises engage in TCDC in Africa; however, there is very little (if any) coordination among all these entities (Besharati, 2013). Even though South African civil society and private sector are also engaged heavily on the continent, there is limited coordination with the efforts of the government.

Overall Pretoria lacks a structured and strategic administration of its TCDC. The most advanced institutional mechanism has been the ARF established in 2000. Since then, the South African cabinet and parliament have not yet managed to establish the long awaited South African Development Partnership Agency (SADPA), which supposedly will provide a coherent policy framework to Pretoria's TCDC in the future.

Information systems for TCDC

BAPA highlighted the importance of strengthening national (Rec. 4) and global (Rec. 26) information management systems for TCDC. Forty years later, this is still a challenge for South Africa as well as most SSC providers.

Some of these challenges stem from the institutional problems alluded to earlier. Many departments and agencies are involved in the provision of TCDC, however there is no central repository of information or reporting system for South Africa's TCDC, as there may be in the case in Brazil and Mexico. Monitoring and evaluation of South Africa's TCDC remains weak, and development cooperation spending tends to be treated as a "state secret" by DIRCO (Grimm, 2011). Data on South Africa's TCDC is not officially published by the government, but has previously been estimated by different local scholars (Braude, Thandrayan and Sidiropoulos, 2008; Vickers, 2012; Besharati and Rawhani, 2016) and international institutions (United Nations, 2010; OECD, 2017).

An area of BAPA which still requires significant work is the improvement of information systems on SSC both nationally, regionally and globally. This endeavor is in part hindered by the lack of a unified definition and system of quantification of SSC. Major advances with accounting and reporting TCDC have occurred in Latin America, through the work done by the Ibero-American Secretariat (SEGIB, 2017), the Brazilian and Mexican cooperation agencies.¹ Information systems on SSC in Latin America are however limited to technical cooperation, and do not capture the more holistic spectrum of SSC considered by Asian countries, which includes blended finance, trade and investment.

For South Africa to effectively capture the full extent of its SSC it will have to learn to quantify its technical cooperation like its Latin counterparts do, but also integrate ways to measure its extensive economic and financial cooperation as Asians strive to do. Finally, the measure of South Africa's SSC will also need to capture effectively the unique contributions the country is making to the arena of peace-building and good governance in Africa.

¹ See for instance http://www.ipea.gov.br/portal/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=30412&Itemid=424 and <https://www.gob.mx/amexcid/acciones-y-programas/publicaciones-41850>

Conclusion

Apartheid history did not allow South Africa to be part of the early global South movements, including the development and implementation of the BAPA. The Buenos Aires Conference in 1978 was however an important platform for the international community and the liberation movements to discuss how to respond to one of the last colonial regimes affecting the Southern African sub-continent.

Following the political changes of the post-1994 dispensation, South Africa emerged as a major leader in the integration, development and revival of the African continent. This occurred through enhanced technical cooperation by Pretoria in diverse fields such as public financial management, conflict resolution and peace-building, infrastructure and institutional development. This occurred at times in close collaboration with other Western and Eastern powers, and to a lesser degree with civil society and the private sector. While a plethora of South African departments and state entities continue to be engaged on the continent, the African Renaissance Fund (ARF) remains the primary instrument to promote and enhance TCDC.

Pretoria's technical cooperation, nonetheless, is heavily complemented by other foreign policy actions in the field of conflict mediation and peace-building, trade and investment, financial cooperation for infrastructure development —all to promote a strong vision of regional economic integration. The South African Development Partnership Agency (SADPA) is not yet established; and South Africa lacks a structured and cohesive administration of its vast array of international development cooperation activities.

Information systems to capture TCDC are weak at national level but also at regional and global level. This stems from institutional and technical limitations in all Southern countries, including weak monitoring and evaluation systems. More conceptually and politically, progress is hindered by the lack of a common definition for the systematic reporting of SSC. The quantification of SSC can, in fact, go beyond the limited scope of technical cooperation discussed in Buenos Aires and in the SEGIB community. A comprehensive SSC measure would need to incorporate also the Asian elements of economic and financial cooperation, and the African approaches towards peace-building and state-building. Developing a clear definition and reporting system for SSC will be a challenge for South Africa but also for the rest of the global South as the fortieth anniversary of BAPA is commemorated.

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