



Meeting of Directors-General of Southern Partners

Venue: Conference Room 6, UNECA Headquarters, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
3:00 – 6:00 p.m., 7 June 2013

Background Note

The 2009 High-level UN Conference on South-South Cooperation underscored that South-South cooperation and its agenda have to be set by countries of the South and should continue to be guided by the principles of respect for national sovereignty, national ownership and independence, equality, non-conditionality, non-interference in domestic affairs and mutual benefit.

The ongoing preparations for a post-2015 global development agenda are drawing attention to the global partnership for development that will be needed to support its implementation. The renewed global partnership for development is expected to reflect in a balanced manner the perspectives of all stakeholders, including Southern partners.

In the April Conference of Southern partners in Delhi, Southern partners recognized the need for a genuine dialogue, driven and supported by the South, which enjoys broad-based buy-in, affects policy-making and produces concrete deliverables to maximize the impact of South-South cooperation, while also bolstering efforts of Southern partners to engage in the global policy dialogue and relevant intergovernmental processes. In this context, Southern partners identified the need to articulate the unique principles, definition, measurement, framework/indicators and comparative advantage of South-South cooperation.

Principles

The principles of South-South cooperation are well defined. Southern partners are also of the view that these principles should also guide development cooperation at large. For example, the principle of non-conditionality has been largely missing in existing frameworks despite the repeated calls by recipient countries of ODA. What is needed is a common effort by Southern partners to achieve broader understanding and strong buy-in by other stakeholders.

Definition

South-South cooperation is conceptually clear. But, what is meant by South-South cooperation is context specific. In the context of development cooperation, the meaning of South-South cooperation has been subject to varying interpretations, with some blending public undertakings and purely private/commercial activities, thereby creating confusion. In essence, South-South *development* cooperation shares some common characteristics: namely, cross-border, publicly driven, development-oriented and grant based or concessional. Clarity about the subject under consideration is a first step towards common ground.



Measurement

There is a proliferation of estimates about South-South development cooperation flows. This is partly due to the above-mentioned different interpretations of South-South development cooperation, on one hand, and the lack of authoritative country-specific data, on the other. As a result, these have created unrealistic expectations about the role and responsibility of South-South cooperation.

The availability of South-South cooperation data has greatly improved in recent years. For example, China will publish its second white paper on its foreign aid. Brazil, through the Institute of Applied Economic Research IPEA, has also tracked the size of its development cooperation. Southern partners themselves should be the authoritative source of information. It may be of benefit for Southern partners to come up with their own assessment of the overall scale of South-South cooperation, using the standards owned by themselves and taking into consideration the diversity of their cooperation. As emphasized in Delhi, Southern partners will move this forward at their own pace.

Framework/Indicators

The 2009 High-level UN Conference on South-South Cooperation encouraged developing countries to develop country-led systems to: evaluate and assess the quality and impact of South-South and triangular cooperation programmes. The framework/indicators used for this purpose should be one anchored in what Southern partners see as effective and efficient development cooperation. For example, Southern partners prioritize alignment with local priorities, timely completion, speed of delivery, and non-conditionality, which are largely absent in the aid effectiveness frameworks.

Comparative advantage

Comparative advantage of South-South cooperation provides strong rationale for other partners to learn from Southern partners. It is beneficial for Southern partners to better articulate and communicate the comparative advantage of South-South cooperation. They can also demonstrate that such comparative advantage is not ad-hoc, but systemic. Of particular importance is to show the unique mindset, institutions, governance, policy-making processes and management that underpin the comparative advantage of South-South cooperation.

Expected outcomes of Meeting

The Meeting of Directors-General of Southern partners is organized to discuss next steps in each of these five areas, to identify lead actors, concrete deliverables and specific timelines for the next 6-9 months of work.