

### *Background and perspectives on triangular cooperation*

Triangular cooperation, which emerged in the 1960s, has contributed to widen the scope of international development cooperation, primarily by including the performance of joint projects and programs between developing countries with support from international organizations and developed countries. Triangular cooperation initiatives now cover the provision of financial resources, the exchange of knowledge, expertise, technical assistance, best practices and information sharing. This form of cooperation has rapidly grown and led to a diversity of approaches, perspectives and institutional arrangements that reflect the richness of initiatives in this space.

The rapid expansion of triangular cooperation has underscored the need to achieve a conceptual clarity on these forms of partnerships and arrangements. While there is no internationally agreed definition of triangular cooperation, it often manifests certain characteristics: requires more than two partners, focuses on the exchange of knowledge and experience, partners can play different roles over time, and goes beyond bilateral North-South cooperation practices.

Two attributes of triangular cooperation have featured prominently: its demand-driven nature, and the attempt to specify the roles that each partner plays. Partners in triangular cooperation are often motivated by the pursuance of mutual gain and other specific but complementary considerations. Close consultations among partners during the life-cycle of a project (identification, planning, execution and review) fosters mutual trust that is essential in the pooling of resources, leveraging comparative advantages, mutual learning and the sharing of experiences.

Based on a variety of contributions aimed at characterizing triangular cooperation, Box 1 highlights its most salient features.

Triangular cooperation involves three partners that can be described as “enabler”, “provider/contributor” and “associate”. The partners can be a public entity, civil society or academic organization, private enterprise or an international organization. Specific roles played by each partner can be interchangeable in different development cooperation arrangements and initiatives.

This issues brief focuses on forms of triangular cooperation where at least two of the three participating partners are from the developing countries. It refers to triangular cooperation where projects involve one of the following partnerships: (a) two or more developing countries with participation of a developed country’s development agency; (b) two or more developing countries and international organization(s); and (c) three or more developing countries (see Box 1).

It is independently authored by Francisco Sagasti and Fernando Prada (with the assistance of Lucía Málaga, Mario Bazán, Gonzalo Alcalde and Fernando Romero).

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## BOX 1: What is triangular cooperation?

*Triangular development cooperation* (triangular cooperation in short) involves a division of labor between three or more partners, with some of them playing the role of *enabler* (through financial contributions, convening power, technical support), others the role of *provider* or *contributor* (through technical assistance, capacity building, training), and still others the role of *associate* (as a beneficiary of programs, projects, events). The roles of enabler, provider and associate may change over time in a given initiative, or from one triangular cooperation initiative to another, as participants employ fully their differing comparative advantages.

This basic tripartite structure accommodates a growing diversity of actors. The enabler partner in triangular cooperation may be a *northern organization* (government agency, private foundation, civil society organization), an *international financial institution* (multilateral development bank, special funds), a *civil society or philanthropic organization* operating at the international level (international non-governmental organization, private foundation), or another *developing country agency* at the national or subnational level with capabilities to play a supranational facilitating role. The provider / contributor and associate partners are developing country government institutions or subnational agencies, private, civil society, philanthropic or academic entities.)

Some attempts to capture the evolution of development cooperation, and the particular roles of South-South and triangular cooperation, point to growing horizontal relations between some developing and developed countries. According to the Ibero-American Secretariat (SEGIB), “the degree of maturity reached today by ... South-South cooperation forces Ibero-American countries to face the inescapable challenge of growth: that of building bridges with traditional cooperation, without losing its characteristic and defining features ... Southern countries have accumulated a wealth of experience, whose magnitude and impact gives them the possibility of establishing a peer to peer relationship with traditional actors.”<sup>1</sup>

Over the years, different views on the principles that should guide the design and implementation of triangular cooperation initiatives have emerged. Some suggest that since South-South cooperation precedes triangular cooperation, the longstanding principles and motivations of the former should guide the latter.<sup>2</sup> The United Nations has stressed that South-South cooperation and its agenda should continue to be guided by the principles of mutual benefit, respect for national sovereignty, national ownership and independence, equality, non-conditionality, and non-interference in domestic affairs.<sup>3</sup> There is an acceptance that solidarity, reciprocity, horizontal relations, efficiency and effectiveness, and regional integration, all of which are pertinent to South-South cooperation, should be extended to triangular arrangements that involve a participant from the global north.

A lack of a common reporting framework means information on triangular cooperation is scattered, incomplete, often anecdotal. Several databases and surveys that cover triangular cooperation experiences suggest an emergence of some common features of this form of development cooperation. Triangular cooperation initiatives emphasize the importance of provision of knowledge, sharing of experiences and technical assistance; they also employ various modalities, and involve a diversity of partners in specific development initiatives, most of which are of temporary nature.

Studies show that partners find high value in triangular cooperation, and that they engage in it to learn and share experiences, to better respond to partners’ demands, and to collectively build comparative advantage (see Table 1).<sup>4</sup> Triangular cooperation initiatives are increasingly becoming more structured, are following well-defined procedures and incorporating monitoring and evaluation processes in their execution. Others are lasting longer, and attracting more funds (Box 2). A recent study covering a diverse number of partners engaged in more than 100 triangular cooperation projects found that they were also readily aligned with several SDGs (please see table 2)<sup>5</sup>.

## BOX 2: Triangular cooperation by region

A 2015 OECD survey identified 488 triangular cooperation projects involving some 60 partners. It found that project durations and budgets had increased since an initial survey was conducted in 2012. The average project duration was now 32 months, while each project was for a budget of \$1.7 million. Japan had the highest number of projects (more than 100). Six developing countries - Chile, Brazil, Guatemala, South Africa, Mexico and Colombia - had a portfolio of more than 20 projects. Latin America accounted for more than half of the total number of projects in the survey, while Africa represented 22 per cent and Asia Pacific 20 per cent.

Source: Development Cooperation Directorate (2016), Dispelling the myths of triangular co-operation - Evidence from the 2015 OECD survey on triangular cooperation.

### *Prospects for triangular cooperation*

The 2030 Agenda, Addis Agenda and Paris Agreement on Climate Change recognize that international development cooperation in general, including explicitly triangular cooperation, must play a major role in fostering collective action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Efforts to implement SDG 17 on revitalizing the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development should stimulate the exploration of novel institutional arrangements for international collaboration. Triangular cooperation may be especially well positioned to stimulate such arrangements in the area of science, technology and innovation, where it can contribute to reducing global imbalances between the north and the south, and foster more equitable international relations across many fronts.

Evidence from surveys and case studies indicate that novel institutional arrangements are emerging, and that more complex configurations for designing and carrying out triangular cooperation projects will continue emerging.

Developing countries can use triangular cooperation to more efficiently signal their specific demands for international cooperation, thereby increase opportunities for joint-projects. Several initiatives and arrangements are poised to further influence the way triangular cooperation is conceived and implemented. There is a growing popularity in multi-year funding arrangements for specific purposes through multilateral organizations, such as the Haiti Reconstruction Fund that was created by Latin American countries using individual country contributions and resources drawn from the concessional loan window of the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB). In the climate change arena, 15 developing countries have proposed using South-South and triangular cooperation to implement their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) contained in the Paris Agreement<sup>6</sup>. With the support of the United Nations, Arab countries have developed an inventory of potential initiatives in their region that could be implemented through South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation.

### *Concluding remarks*

Triangular cooperation promotes mutual benefit by leveraging the comparative advantage of each partner, although their specific roles may change from one cooperation initiative to another. Triangular cooperation allows development cooperation enablers, providers / contributors, and associates to reverse their relative positions over time in the same project, or in different projects. In this way, it contributes to the achievement and consolidation of more horizontal forms of international development cooperation, as envisioned by the ambitious and universal 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Several challenges, among them, the lack of a common framework, different working methods and processes, may limit the capacity of triangular cooperation to foster the implementation of the SDGs and the Paris Agreement. Besides agreeing on their specific roles, participating partners should also clarify their expectations, set up knowledge sharing schemes and define management processes at the earliest opportunity. Triangular cooperation should remain demand-driven, with projects initiated in response to a clearly stated interest of the associate member. It is also important that partners agree on the results to be achieved and how these can be monitored and assessed.

Capacity development support should be provided to associate partners, intended to benefit from triangular cooperation initiatives, when they lack the requisite human and institutional capacity, policy and legal framework and instruments to be truly equal partners. The rise in triangular cooperation should not be seen as leading to the dilution of South-South cooperation, while allowing developed countries to meet their historical obligations of helping with capacity development, technology transfer and the provision of financial resources.

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<sup>1</sup> SEGIB (2015b) Management Guidelines for implementing Triangular Cooperation in Ibero-America September 2015 Working Document No. 8, 2015

<sup>2</sup> Lópes, Marcio (2010) *Prática comentada da cooperação internacional. Entre a hegemonia e a busca de autonomia*. Brasília: edição de autor.

<sup>3</sup> UN (2010), "Nairobi outcome document of the High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation", A/RES/64/222, 23 February 2010, paragraph 11.

<sup>4</sup> Development Cooperation Directorate (2016), *Dispelling the myths of triangular co-operation - Evidence from the 2015 OECD survey on triangular cooperation*

<sup>5</sup> UNOSCC (2016), *Good Practices in South-South and Triangular Cooperation for Sustainable Development*, United Nations

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Executive Office of the Secretary-General (UN EOSG) and the United Nations Framework Convention of Climate Change (UNFCCC) (2016), *Catalyzing the Implementation of Nationally Determined Contributions in the Context of the 2030 Agenda through South-South Cooperation*

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### DCF Secretariat

Development Cooperation Policy Branch  
Office for ECOSOC Support & Coordination, UNDESA  
UN Secretariat Building, 25th floor, New York, NY 10017

TABLE 1: Databases of projects and case studies of triangular cooperation

Database	Source	Description
<b>Triangular cooperation database</b>	OECD (2016) and virtual data in this <a href="#">OECD link</a>	488 triangular projects from a survey that OECD conducted in 2015. The document provides evidence to challenge three triangular cooperation myths: (1) TC is fragmented; (2) TC has no clear, value-added compared to bilateral or regional cooperation; and (3) TC projects follow no planning and implementation mechanisms.
<b>Ibero-American General Secretariat</b>	Database in SEGIB (2016)	More than 100 projects of triangular cooperation in the Ibero-American region, under a classification developed collectively with international cooperation agencies.
<b>Task-Team on South-South cooperation</b>	TT- South-South cooperation (2010), database in the <a href="#">following link</a>	Partners involved created a database of more than 110 Cases of South-South and Triangular Cooperation.
<b>Good Practices in South-South cooperation and TC for sustainable development</b>	<a href="#">UNOSSC</a> (2016)	More than South-South and triangular cooperation projects group by the <a href="#">SDG they impact</a> . Database shows active participation of developed and developing countries, MDBs, international organizations and other institutions playing various roles (provider, enabler, and associate) outside the "traditional" cooperation framework.
<b>Database of good practices</b>	<a href="#">UNESCO</a> (virtual data)	South-South and triangular cooperation specific to the education sector. UNESCO aims at identifying cross-regional networks, NGOs and private sector partners in the South. Information covers early childhood and education, education for sustainable development, women and girl's education, higher education, among other areas.
<b>Social and solidarity economy in Asia: A South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation perspective</b>	<a href="#">ILO</a> (Quiñones 2015)	38 case studies from 17 countries selected from research studies contributing to the Asian Solidarity Economy Forum. Good practices include evidence of solidarity, social dialogues, and shared interests, among other characteristics in sectors such as fair trade, community based agriculture, value chain financing and workers' collective rights.
<b>Tackling global challenges through TC</b>	JICA Research Institute (JICA-RI 2013)	This book reports 10 case studies describing good practices where traditional donors as Japan, Germany and Netherlands cooperate with developing countries as Bolivia, Benin and Bhutan based in common goals.
<b>Database South-South world</b>	Arab States and UNOCSS ( <a href="#">database link</a> )	The project's aim is to map several experiences of projects and south centers promoting cooperation between Arab counties and the rest of the world.

Source: Compiled by the authors.

TABLE 2: Selected cases of South-South and Triangular Development Cooperation supporting SDGs

Project	Main SDGs	Enabler	Provider/Contributors	Associates
<b>India, Brazil and South Africa facility for poverty and hunger alleviation</b>	No Poverty	IBSA Fund (India, Brazil, South Africa)	UNDP, Brazil, India	Guinea-Bissau
<b>Rice-fish Culture in Sub-Saharan Africa</b>	Zero Hunger	FAO-China Trust Fund	FAO/ China	Nigeria (and Mali, Ethiopia, Liberia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Uganda)
<b>South-to-South Learning Exchange on HIV Prevention</b>	Good Health and well-being	UNAIDS and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria	Cambodia (Khana NGO), Thailand (HIV Found. Asia)	Indonesia
<b>Quality education</b>	Pacific Open Learning Health Net	WHO	WHO, Pacific island health ministries	Pacific small island developing States (16 states)
<b>Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Global Flagship Initiative</b>	Gender equality	UN-Women, UNICEF, AECID, European Commission, Korea, the Netherlands, USAID, Australia Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand, Japan, National Committees for UN-Women (Australia, Iceland and the United Kingdom)	UN-Women, UNICEF, UN-Habitat, UNDP, local and national governments, NGOs, CSOs	21 cities of Ecuador, Egypt, India, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Morocco, Mexico, Colombia, South Africa, Honduras, Tajikistan, Guatemala, Mozambique, Belgium, Ireland, Canada, Japan, Iceland, US.
<b>Water management and sanitation for dispersed rural and indigenous communities</b>	Clean water and sanitation	Spain, Nicaragua, Panamá, Paraguay	ILO	Nicaragua, Panamá, Paraguay
<b>FGV Projects for Biofuels</b>	Affordable and clean energy	Brazil (Mining Company Vale SA)	Fundação Getulio Vargas, governments, EC	Mozambique (plus 13 other countries in the tropical belt)
<b>Initiative to Combat Child Labor</b>	Decent work and economic growth	Brazilian Cooperation Agency, United States Department of Labor	ILO	Brazil, Ecuador, Paraguay, Bolivia
<b>China's One-stop Service Centre Model</b>	Sustainable Cities and Communities	UNDP, four mayors from Bangladesh, city administrations	China, Malaysia, Singapore	Bangladesh
<b>Programme of South-South cooperation for sustainable development</b>	Life on Land	Netherlands	Bhutan, Costa Rica, Benin	Costa Rica, Bhutan, Benin
<b>African Risk Capacity Prevention</b>	Climate Action	African Risk Capacity Ltd, DFID, KfW Development Bank	African Risk Capacity	30 African countries
<b>Think Tank Initiative</b>	Partnership for the goals (obtaining evidence for development policies)	IDRC (Canada), The Bill & Melinda Gates Found, DFID, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, NORAD, DGIS (the Netherlands)	43 Think Tanks; international consultants and NGOS (e.g. <i>On Think Tanks</i> )	43 Think Tanks, (11 from Latin America, 14 from South Asia, 18 from Sub-Saharan Africa)

Source: Selected from UNOSCC (2016), *Good Practices in South-South and Triangular Cooperation for Sustainable Development*, United Nations. For the Think Tank initiative see the [following link](#).