

The role of South-South Cooperation in the achievement of SDGs and the BAPA + 40 Conference

South-South Cooperation (SSC) is today at a particular juncture as a result of two concurrent events: The adoption of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015; the forthcoming United Nations Second High-level Conference on South-South Cooperation, commemorating the 40th anniversary of the adoption of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action (PABA + 40 Conference). This Conference represents a unique opportunity to strengthen and further revitalize South-South and triangular cooperation, within the framework of a Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

The Buenos Aires Plan of Action and the evolution of South-South Cooperation

Almost forty years ago, the Plan of Action to Promote and Accomplish Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries, or Buenos Aires Action Plan (BAPA) became a foundational milestone in bringing Southern countries together in their demand for fair international relations and a new international economic order. The BAPA systematized, for the first time, a comprehensive conceptual and operational framework for promoting Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (TCDC), formulating a set of guiding principles and recommendations for the purpose of strengthening and supporting this modality of cooperation.

BAPA was an expression of the aspirations of developing countries to strengthen their economic, social and political interdependence, accelerate development and correct distortions in international system caused by the asymmetrical power relations of the colonial era. TCDC is identified in BAPA as a dimension of international cooperation with an increasing importance in promoting development among countries that face comparable challenges, as it facilitates equal exchanges and similar approaches to common problems.

As the Plan expressly states, TCDC is not a substitute but rather complement to the cooperation of the developed countries, therefore not diminishing the responsibility of the latter in taking the necessary measures, particularly with regard to ODA, to contribute to the development of developing countries. There is a call to work in an integrated way to face the challenges of development, considering the growing interdependence between countries. The document alludes to how the progress of developed countries is increasingly affected by the policies and actions of developing countries, and vice versa. The notions of "interdependence," "common interests," "joint work," and "shared efforts" are central to the Plan's foresight.

The Buenos Aires Conference put forward an epistemological rupture with the paradigm that labeled developed countries as "donors" and developing countries as "recipients", and that conceived development as a linear, automatic and exportable phenomenon that had to be achieved under the same formula. In contrast to this view, BAPA revealed the possibilities for developing countries to generate their own responses and to provide cooperation on account of their national and collective capacities, basing their practices on the principles of equality, solidarity, respect for sovereignty and non- interference in internal affairs.

In the four decades since the adoption of the Plan, South-South Cooperation has established itself as a distinct and innovative paradigm and has proved to be a valuable tool for building capacity and promoting development. It has also promoted the articulation of triangular schemes that increase the impact of actions and synergies with traditional cooperation actors. These developments are reflected in the emergence of South-South and triangular cooperation as a cornerstone of Southern countries' foreign policy, and in the recognition that such cooperation has obtained in many of the main global and regional developments forums.

Despite this initial impetus, expectations at the start of the 1980's regarding South-South cooperation did not come to fruition. One of the principal causes was the crisis of debt and fragmentation which resulted from the individual negotiation strategies of the countries of the South. The debt crisis and structural adjustment, among other factors, significantly reduced mutual cooperation efforts between countries of the South and made them very inward-looking. However, Southern countries would eventually begin articulating new cooperation frameworks from this heterogeneity, thus rescuing the value of diversity as an asset from which to build new ways of meeting.

As a result, during the 90's processes of regional integration acquired an important push and were perceived as the principal instrument in South-South cooperation¹. At the same time, implementation in Southern countries of a set of successful public policies in economic, social and scientific-technological affairs, fostered Southern countries resolution to promote capacity development, institutional strengthening and knowledge sharing through South-South cooperation as a way to struggle against poverty and inequality, and achieve common positions in international forums.

¹ "Cooperation and integration on a sub-regional and regional level is becoming the primary pillar in the current process of reactivating South-South cooperation. United Nations General Assembly, 50th session, Operational Activities for Development: Economic and Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries. *The State of South-South Cooperation; Secretary General's report*

Nevertheless, South-South cooperation still poses different challenges related to the systematization and measurement of deployed actions, the coordination of regional governance mechanisms, the articulation of multi-stakeholder partnerships and the existence of sustainable funding mechanisms, among others. These challenges demand a comprehensive approach and a concerted action by all developing countries, especially considering that South-South and triangular cooperation is called upon to play a crucial and complementary role in the international system.

2. The Current Framework: 2030 Agenda and International Agreements

If the United Nations Millennium Declaration omitted any reference to cooperation among developing countries, the year 2015, on the contrary, was an important moment for all of us working in South-South Cooperation, due to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, which singled out South-South and triangular cooperation as vital means of implementation.

Recent years have also seen agreement on a number of complementary development frameworks. These include the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, and the Agenda for Humanity. In these complementary development frameworks, Member States have continued to emphasize the importance of South-South and triangular cooperation for action.

The consideration of these documents is essential since natural disasters are -along with armed conflicts- one of the two main causes for regression in the levels of development achieved by countries. In addition we find Southern countries among the most vulnerable countries to natural disasters (or experiencing the consequences of environmental damage in a more immediate and intense way).

This new agenda commits us to a particular development paradigm: sustainable development understood as interconnected dimensions (environmental, social and economic). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) contribute not only with the incorporation of qualitative variables but, fundamentally, proposing an unprecedented level of ambition in the promotion of sustainable development through a larger agenda, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

By involving partners who face comparable challenges and by fostering capacity development taking local specificities into account, South-South cooperation has a distinctive value in contributing to the success of established national frameworks in achieving SDGs. Moreover as a partnership for sustainable development, South-South cooperation introduces itself as a space capable of complementing traditional cooperation

without replacing it, promoting within the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development a dialogue between peers, fostering mutual understanding, integration and alliances around common goals between different countries and development actors.

The main challenge we must face, then, is to articulate a strategic framework that promotes the role of South-South and triangular cooperation as an instrument that, based on its distinctive characteristics, contributes to the achievement of SDGs within the framework of 2030 Agenda.

Likewise, the challenges posed by the implementation of the 2030 Agenda require the combined efforts, capacities and resources from the wide diversity of actors that have been incorporated into South-South and triangular cooperation. Under the leadership of States, we must develop a creative and inclusive approach with these new actors, ranging from the private sector, to civil society and academia, among others. The incorporation of these actors will maximize the impact on the field and the scope of cooperation actions.

Another challenge has to do with the systematization and measurement of South-South and triangular cooperation. Although in the case of the Ibero-American space, for example, significant progress has been made in terms of systematization, Southern countries do not yet have sufficient tools to measure and evaluate how exchanges of knowledge, skills, resources and technical know-how, contribute to the development of countries. Development of such tools should respect the diversity of approaches adopted by Southern partners.

Finally, it is a priority to improve the coordination and coherence of the United Nations System's support for South-South Cooperation and Triangular Cooperation at the national, regional and global levels. We understand that the United Nations System should become an active channel for encouraging and expanding developing countries' access to South-South and triangular cooperation, and a catalyst for developed countries efforts to provide human and material resources in this practice.

Currently, the international system is passing through a stage characterized by a return of geopolitical interests, a turn towards protectionism and a weakening of multilateralism. This scenario presents new challenges for Southern countries, and we believe that the adequate response is to reinforce our commitment to international cooperation and regional integration, and to work towards building a revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, as called for by the 2030 Agenda.

Thus, it is reasonable to ask: what is the impact of adopting Sustainable Development paradigm as a guide in governance, practices and management of South-South cooperation? The answer to this question requires an analysis of the alignment between

South-South cooperation and sustainable development and confronts us with the need to rethink the principles of South-South cooperation from a new paradigm. That task could have its first breakthroughs at the BAPA + 40 Conference.

We trust the process that will culminate in the BAPA+40 Conference represents an opportunity for the construction of new consensuses that, as 40 years ago, privilege spaces of agreement and solidarity, conformation of alliances and shared frames of meaning, and an enduring commitment with peace and development.

The value of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action was not to have set a framework for TCDC, but to have left the doors open for future work. That is what makes us discuss it, 40 years after its adoption, and we can point out that it is not necessary to rewrite it, but to understand the message it wants to deliver in a different international context, and then we'll be able to add what is truly relevant today and for the future of SSC from a discourse elaborated by its own protagonists and that is globally relevant.