

**IS THE SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION ACHIEVING ITS INTENDED OUTCOMES? CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION BASED ON THE FINDING OF THE UNDP STUDY (2009)**  
**BY ROSE WANJIRU<sup>1</sup>**

**INTRODUCTION**

The year 2009 marked 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1978 United Nations Conference on Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries held in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The 1978 conference marked the birth of the South-South Cooperation.

It is expected that after the many years, there would be clear evidence of the achievements made through the South-South Cooperation; and even more critical, it is expected that there would be clear conceptual and policy clarification and clear rules of engagement. A study done by UNDP reveals otherwise.

This paper seeks to provide a critical analysis of the South-South cooperation based on the UNDP study commissioned by the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation. The study was carried out in 22 countries and the findings are captured in the publication “Enlarging South-South and Triangular Cooperation: Study of the Current Situation and Existing Good Practice in Policy, Institutions and Operations of South-South and Triangular Cooperation” (2009).

This paper also seeks to provide from a CSOs perspective, the missing links and gaps in the South-South Cooperation and provide recommends that would enhance greater focus on development effectiveness and incorporation of civil society in South-South cooperation. This would enhance ownership and a focus on human rights and gender equality which is key to sustainable development.

One of the key challenges observed is that South-South cooperation is that it is to a large extent supply driven. The demand-driven cooperation that would ensure the South-South cooperation meets the high threshold set and would enhance national ownership is low and in many cases missing.

**THE INCEPTION**

Following 30 years experience in South-South cooperation, there should be clear information of its achievements and its unique contribution to global development generally and to development cooperation more specifically.

The global south nations have a shared history (for instance colonialisation??); shared development progress and challenges (low and middle income countries, low industrialisation, etc); shared experience as recipient of aid from the north, its aid architecture and system. It was therefore anticipated that there would be a greater, equal and effective cooperation that would lead to transferred knowledge, ideas, experience and development model that would result in greater development outcomes and poverty reduction in the countries of the global south and one that would avoid the unbalance relationships experienced through the North-South cooperation.

It is therefore important to examine the various facets of the South-South cooperation and draw lessons from them and also identify the various bottlenecks

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<sup>1</sup> Rose Wanjiru works with Centre for Economic Governance and AIDS in Africa (CEGAA) and is a member of Reality of Aid – Africa (ROA-Africa).

that have led to lower achievements of the expected outcomes of the South-South cooperation.

To examine the effectiveness of the South-South cooperation, it is important to ask whether South-South Cooperation has facilitated transfer of knowledge and ideas and of Southern-grown development solutions.

## **THE STUDY**

The study was commissioned by the special unit of South-South Cooperation of the UNDP and carried out in 22 countries. It is covered in “Enlarging South-South and Triangular Cooperation: Study of the Current Situation and Existing Good Practice in Policy, Institutions and Operations of South-South and Triangular Cooperation” (2009). The study examined the current practices of South-South cooperation in several areas identified as key challenges and constraints by various conferences and studies:

- Policy and institutional framework,
- Comparative advantages,
- Demand-driven approach,
- Sustainability and
- Achievements of results

### ***1. Do countries have Policy and Institutional Framework on South-South Cooperation?***

In the dialogue on the good practice in the formulation of national policy on South-South Cooperation, the focus was on whether the pivotal countries (countries that provide the South-South cooperation) have South-South cooperation strategy. It was noted that many pivotal countries have country and issues specific South-South cooperation strategies, most of them aimed at medium term. The study also revealed that much fewer countries have a long-term overall national policy on South-South cooperation.

### ***2. Is South-South Cooperation Demand-driven?***

The researchers noted that limited capacity in articulating and assessing the needs and developing specific programs/projects constrained the use of demand driven approach. They also stated that limited information at the stage of need matching and limited participation of beneficiary countries in programs/projects development as other key constraints. The lack of participation of the beneficiary country in development of the programs/projects typify of lack of ownership and indeed strong indicator of supply driven programs and interventions.

### ***3. Is there any evidence of achievement of results?***

Responses from pivotal countries indicate that many of their programs have achieved results from the level of output. However, fewer numbers of programs and projects have achieved desired results at the level of outcome and impact.

### ***4. Are there any benefits of Triangular Cooperation?***

Pivotal countries said the benefits of triangular cooperation include technical capacity building, strengthening of national policy and institutional framework, enhancement of credibility and reputation and scaling up. The beneficiary country perspectives indicated that triangular cooperation provides an intermediary that facilitates knowledge and information sharing, match-making and networking amongst developing countries. The donors perspectives were

that triangular cooperation enhances effectiveness of cooperation through use of developing countries own experiences/know how and also scaling up of past assistance to pivotal countries.

The four areas flagged out from the report capture the significant challenges and unique areas that need to be addressed in order for the South-South cooperation to achieve its intended objectives and make a significant input in global development agenda and poverty reduction. In addition to the four, this paper will examine additional challenges and constraints that are critical from the civil society perspective and for sustainable development. These include broader perspective of ownership (by the poor and for the poor), poverty reduction, human rights, and gender equality.

Before addressing the flagged out issues, it is important to make critical observations on the study, which in essence, also indicate that there is need for change in the mindset of implementers and those engaged in supporting the South-South cooperation as well as the researchers who are involved in generating and disseminating technical information on the South-South cooperation.

## **CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE STUDY**

### ***Skewed towards the providers***

On the overall it has been noted that of the 22 countries that participated in the study, 16 countries were those that actively provide South-South cooperation, referred to as pivotal countries and 6 countries are those that receive South-South cooperation, referred to as beneficiary countries.

From the above sampling, where of the 22 countries, 73% were pivotal and 27% were beneficiary countries, it was obvious that the study was more inclined or skewed towards the providers of the South-South cooperation. This is an already biased position to begin analysing the South-South cooperation. Based on this, it is not surprising that the analysis and the views expressed are largely those of pivotal countries, promoting the practice experienced in the North-South cooperation, where the donors' views and perspectives are usually promoted and upheld.

In the chapter on Policy and Institutional Framework, for instance, only pivotal countries were asked to respond to the question on whether they have a national policy on South-South cooperation. Therefore the findings and discussions are narrowed to the need for the pivotal countries to develop national policy without looking at the bigger need for the beneficiary countries to do so. This position by the researchers was propagating a supply driven perspective which is contrary to the concept of ownership and demand-driven approach.

In the chapter on Achievement of Results, the researchers reviewed whether the responding pivotal countries had verifiable indicators and clear monitoring and evaluation system. This didn't seem to be a key question for the beneficiary countries which again indicates a focus on the supply side of South-South cooperation.

In the study, triangular cooperation is generally viewed from the perspective of traditional donor being engaged in South-South cooperation initiative. The survey therefore concentrated on the views of donors and international organisations again lacking in balance.

In general, the report provides significant information on what ails the South-South cooperation therefore, whilst challenging the skewedness highlighted, there are important findings that can give insight to possible solutions to the challenges identified.

## **ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES**

### ***Policy and Institutional Framework and Ownership***

The countries in the global south need to have clear national policy and institutional framework upon which South-South cooperation is to operate on. This is of greater importance especially amongst the countries that seek to benefit from the South-South Cooperation. The research indicated that most (70%) pivotal countries sampled do not have national policies on South-South cooperation, although most had country-specific and issue-specific cooperation strategies. This question was not directed to the beneficiary countries but it can be deduced that the same or even lower percentage would apply.

The absence of strong policy and institutional framework of engagement has affected the delivery of South-South cooperation especially in beneficiary countries. If South-South cooperation is to have greater impact, there is need for the beneficiary countries to take leadership in strategic use of South-South cooperation and to identify the development models, technical and technological initiatives, etc that they would want to get support on.

The chapter on demand driven cited the following as the main reasons for low demand-driven approach from the beneficiary countries perspective: i) limited capacity to take leadership in strategic use of South-South cooperation, ii) limited information about pivotal countries experience and expertise and iii) limited participation in program/project development iv) own limited capacity to articulate needs.

For South-South cooperation to set a model in international development cooperation, having observed some of the failures of North-South cooperation, then the above enumerated issues would have to be first addressed. The countries in the global south that are seeking to benefit from south-south cooperation ought to conduct their due diligence, identify the appropriate South-South cooperation initiatives they know would strengthen their development and poverty reduction plans. A focus on demand-driven initiatives will also enhance ownership and result in greater impact.

### ***Achieving Results***

On achievements of results, the responses from pivotal countries were that many of their programs have achieved results at the level of output with very few sharing that there were desired results at the outcome and impact level. The research also revealed that programs/projects that were more demand-driven were more successful in achieving results. It largely seems that the beneficiary countries participate in M&E processes that are initiated and led by the pivotal countries in most of the South-South cooperation programs/projects.

This implies that the beneficiary countries largely depend on indicators generated by the pivotal countries in the project/programs they support. This is a misnomer. An even greater concern is that the results focus at the program level and not the strategic level. Whilst the research revealed that some of the pivotal countries have a strategic focus to the South-South cooperation there was no mention of any

beneficiary country that has this strategic focus, nor was there any question within the survey to probe the beneficiary countries along this notion.

To achieve results at the outcome and impact level, there is need for the beneficiary countries to take greater lead in assessing the needs and shaping the programs from a strategic. The beneficiary countries ought to have national outlooks to the South-South cooperation and they need to strategically identify the needs, identify the pivotal countries (technologies, skills, knowledge) they need. The beneficiary country also ought to allocate resources – manpower and funds – that would enable them to gain maximum return on the cooperation.

The beneficiary countries should plan for and review their South-South cooperation initiatives at the strategic levels and not just at the tactical (projects/programs) levels. This implies that there should be clear the national policy and institutional framework, allocation of budget and annual reviews. Planning and implementing South-South cooperation at the strategic level also implies that there would be clear expectations at the outcome and impact level with targets on poverty reduction, gender equality and development and not limited to short or medium term outputs at project or programs level.

### ***Expanded notion of Triangular Cooperation***

Triangular cooperation has been recognised as a tool to promote closer collaboration among developing countries and traditional donors, promoting of northern support for south-south cooperation. It is expected to enhance effectiveness of cooperation through synergies. In the study, and generally in its definition, triangular cooperation is viewed from the perspective of engaging with the traditional donor hence having a North-South-South sort of cooperation. However this narrow definition needs to be reviewed.

The triangular cooperation needs to be redefined to embrace a second approach that focus on generating new partnership between governments, the private sector and civil society especially in the context of poverty alleviation and achievement of Internationally Agreed Development Goals, including the MDGs. Civil society have been a key player in global development cooperation and it is important that the South-South cooperation recognise the role of civil society in addressing the development challenges in the global south and involve them accordingly.

Triangular cooperation also ought to recognise the South-South Peoples solidarity initiatives which is are platforms of progressive social organizations, movements and individuals from the global south striving for a world of peace, security, equality, dignity and human-centred sustainable development aimed at furthering exchanges of information and experience among its members, promoting joint researches on people's alternatives and facilitating networking for joint actions and progress on alternatives. Through this recognition and involvement, the South-South cooperation initiatives will have a greater people and civil society involvement and hence have greater impact on poverty reduction, gender equality amongst the poor and the marginalised.

### ***Innovative funding and transactional mechanisms***

The survey findings indicated that many countries collect and compile data on the volume of South-South cooperation (such as the number of projects, experts and training participants); however, data on disbursement and regional distribution is not easily available. This indicates that compilation on financial flows is a challenge to most of the countries. There was a positive feedback by most of the pivotal

countries that they have increased allocation of national budget for South-South cooperation over the last 5 years. However, with the limited funding and transactional systems and mechanisms, the challenge of transparency and accountability is made more apparent.

South-South cooperation should promote good practice of transparency and accountability. This should be done by countries ensuring that countries develop innovative funding and transactional mechanisms and systems which would enhance accountability and transparency.

Nevertheless, there is no accountability and transparency in the absence of participation. Involvement of other stakeholders ensures that there is transparency. The regular public disclosures of programs, finances, human resources, etc allocated to South-South cooperation would enhance transparency and accountability.

### ***Promotion of human rights and gender equality***

Some of the South-South cooperation has been done at the expense or oblivious of other critical issues of human rights and gender equality. All development should be done as if people matter. South-South cooperation that continues to support repressive regimes or promote corruption and denial of human rights are inappropriate. Development initiatives through the South-South cooperation should ultimately look at solutions to food, energy and climate change that are creating humanitarian emergencies are indeed inadequate.

### ***Conceptual and policy clarity***

In the 30some years, there are still discussions around the conceptual and operational clarity of the South-South cooperation. In addition, various efforts to explain and elaborate it tends to incorporate a disclaimer, "South-South cooperation is not a supplementary to the North-South cooperation but a complimentary to North-South cooperation" as almost all official statements kept repeating in the last South-South cooperation meeting held in Nairobi 1-3, December 2009.

The two adjectives seem close to each other, but the deliberate effort to differentiate them implies that there is a significant difference which needs to be highlighted. A complement is a thing or a person that completes something; one of two parts that make up a whole or complete each other. Complementary is one that acts to complete, forming a satisfactory or a balanced whole. A supplement is an addition, designed to complete; make up for deficiency. Supplementary is a person or thing that acts to complete to make up for deficiency.

The emphasis therefore is that the South-South cooperation completes the international cooperation and makes it satisfactory or balanced. It means that the South-South cooperation is not an effort to complete with the aim of making up for a deficiency, in this case a deficiency of the North-South cooperation.

A critical look of the North-South cooperation however, would recommend that South-South cooperation should be both complementary and supplementary to the North-South cooperation. In other words, there should not be a negation, neither a disclaimer on the expected contribution of the South-South cooperation in the global/international cooperation.

So is it by design or default that there is still the lack of conceptual and policy clarity on the South-South cooperation? Perhaps it is by design because the aid architecture and system has for many years resisted change and this may explain the slow adoption of new and better practices amongst the global south actors.

Countries in the global south, particularly those that target to benefit from the South-South cooperation are largely low income countries. This implies that if the rules of global south development cooperation are not set out clearly, the beneficiary countries may begin to experience unequal relationship and conditions that will not promote the initial aim of South-South cooperation.

## **CONCLUSION**

The fact that there is no comprehensive set of information on South-South explains why there is measured or limited confidence in what South-South really is or its achievements. However, this does not imply that little has been achieved or can be achieved. It is an accepted fact that throughout global south, there exist enormous wealth of innovative, successful and scalable inclusive development solutions.

South-South cooperation is meant to be a good alternative and unapologetically – supplementary and complementary. There should not be apologies or doubt that South-South cooperation may be supplementary in context where the north-south cooperation falls short. It should as well be complementary. South-South cooperation is a win-win situation for nations in the nations involved and it is not a mere add-on in to the existing unbalanced development efforts.

South-South cooperation should espouse the highest levels of ownership in programs design, implementation and review. The fact that there still seem to be some high level of supply driven development programs/projects and initiatives from the pivotal countries, which involve very few of the beneficiaries is an underachievement on the highly espoused South-South cooperation. There should be clear policy framework and political leadership that involves all the beneficiaries, including citizen and civil societies. The increased participation will ensure that appropriate programs are implemented and intended outcomes are realised and owned by all.

South-South cooperation can and should make greater strides with more deliberate, concerted and programmatic action. There is need for more central role for the south in international economic decision-making. The G20 Summit on Financial Markets and World Economy of 15 Nov 2008 demonstrated recognition of this in the invitation to a number of southern leaders to participant in the summit on an equal basis. The developing countries must ensure that this widening G20 does not lead to another, slightly larger, exclusive club.

As His Excellency P J Patterson, former Prime Minister of Jamaica said in The Way Forward statement (19 Dec 2008) following the 5<sup>th</sup> UN Day on South-South Cooperation, “The full voice of developing countries, including the least developed countries and other specially disadvantaged southern countries, must be heard. It must remain a key task for South-South cooperation to ensure fundamental change in the global financial and economic governance structure”.

Paris Declaration that promoted the principles of ownership, alignment, harmonisation and coordination, managing for results and mutual accountability is an important reference and benchmark for the South-South cooperation, but it still falls short of the expected principles and that all the global south cooperation

practices should be hinged on. The principles of sustainable development: poverty reduction, human rights, and gender equality should underpin all the development initiatives in South-South Cooperation. Failure to this, the South-South Cooperation will remain unviable model of development cooperation and will be a replica of the North-South cooperation.

As well stated in the Accra Agenda for Action (2008) article 19d), “South-South cooperation on development aims to observe the principle of non-interference in internal affairs, equality among developing partners and respect for their independence, national sovereignty, cultural diversity and identity and local content” provides a good conceptual, operational and practice definition that could be adopted, expanded and developed into a policy and framework of engagement.

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