

## South-South Cooperation: The road to BAPA +40

### An African Civil Society Perspective

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#### Introduction

A growing body of evidence suggests that learning and cooperation among developing nations is increasing in both frequency and complexity. The evidence suggests that their cooperation is expanding to include not only economic cooperation but now encompasses health, education, communication, research, development and also the geopolitical ambitions of leading countries of the South. Brought together by shared backgrounds and common challenges, people in developing nations are coalescing together as peers to find new and innovative solutions to development issues. Reviews of technical cooperation suggest that South-South learning from sharing is often more effective in developing capacity than one-way knowledge transfers from the North. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and United Nations Office on South South Cooperation who have been actively promoting South- South Cooperation, define the term as a process whereby two or more developing countries pursue their individual and/or shared national capacity development objectives through exchanges of knowledge, skills, resources and technical know-how, and through regional and inter-regional collective actions, including partnerships involving Governments, regional organizations, civil society, academia and the private sector, for their individual and/or mutual benefit within and across regions. South-South cooperation is not a substitute for, but rather a complement to, North-South cooperation..”

As the build up towards the Buenos Aires Plan of Action +40 in March 2019 gains momentum, African Civil society notes with concern the need for their input in the prioritization and collaboration with other concerned stakeholder in the development of strategic frameworks of SSC. These are not limited only to the need of knowledge sharing and research but also stretch to the monitoring and evaluation of the frameworks and SSC initiatives.

#### Innovative Practices

As 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. In the Nairobi Outcome (2009), participants in the UN’s High-Level Conference on South-South Cooperation reaffirmed that South-South Cooperation differed from official development assistance (ODA) as “a partnership among equals, based on solidarity”, and must be guided by the principles of respect for national sovereignty and ownership, free of any conditionality. These globally oriented instruments make a case for and are in line with African established SSC frameworks such as the New Partnership for Africa’s Development of 2001, The Plan of Action for Accelerated Industrial Development in Africa established in 2007, Agenda 2063 of 2013 and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) of March 2018 amongst others. These provide an imperative to CSOs to mobilise for the effective engagement, participation and monitoring of SSC frameworks and initiatives and how they are implemented.

Whilst general understanding and agreement exists on the value of South-South Cooperation as a means of sharing knowledge and experiences that originate in the South, discussions at the UN and

other high-level meetings tend to focus on conceptual and political aspects of South-South Cooperation, examining whether South-South Cooperation is complementary to North-South Cooperation or whether it should serve as a substitute for traditional North-South Cooperation. Practical aspects of South-South and Triangular Cooperation tend to be neglected or touched on only superficially on such occasions. African CSOs believe there is sufficient room for improving South-South and Triangular Cooperation in the following areas:

- i. A comprehensive information and evidence base aided by research in the Africa region should be set up and developed to track South-South and Triangular Cooperation efforts.
- ii. Inter-regional and global frameworks should be put in place to gather best practices about South-South Cooperation. A regional framework is already in place to promote knowledge sharing about best practices of South-South Cooperation.
- iii. Good practices in South-South and Triangular Cooperation should be better communicated to the international community; as it stands there is a low degree of understanding about the nature and effectiveness of South-South Cooperation in the Africa region.
- iv. The efforts of bilateral donors, international financial institutions and UN organizations to support South-South Cooperation should be coordinated to avoid overlaps.

### **African CSO Issues and Challenges with SSC**

The cooperation of the peoples of the South is key in supporting the activities and initiatives of the South-South cooperation especially in the African region. Unfortunately their participation is currently limited due to financial and other capacity problems.

African CSOs call for an integrated approach to South-South Cooperation with leading governments of the South committing resources to facilitate CSO processes. We believe that civil society can play an important role in furthering the objectives of South-South cooperation. Governments should encourage and financially support civil society engagement, and recognize the key role they play in implementing and monitoring programs and policies. We urge for their structured inclusion in future deliberations and programs of South-South Cooperation.

Recognizing the challenges faced by civil society in furthering the implementation of effective SSC, African Civil Society is particularly concerned by the following:

- i. The absence of clear African Civil Society frameworks in South-South cooperation;
- ii. There are poor accountability mechanisms in resource governance, development management and human rights observance in SSC;
- iii. Lack of an integrated overview of Africa's own responses. African CSOs and governments should have forums in which they can speak on Africa's interests. The governments should take advantage of the AU's "one voice" reform agenda to speak as one continent and use the Agenda 2063 as the basis for negotiations. There should be a SSC unit or focal point at the AU. The voices of Africa's Civil Society organizations are seemingly muted in the South-South Cooperation discourse. African Civil Society either marginally participates in the discourse or is altogether left out of it. African CSOs can optimise the spaces afforded them better. BAPA + 40 outcomes should also factor in the goals of the AU's Agenda 2063 and refer to them explicitly. SSC can play a meaningful role in enhancing NEPAD's priorities..

### **Policy Recommendations**

Realizing the need for broad-based meaningful inclusion on all South South Cooperation initiatives for the African region, African Civil Society organisations call for

- i. The devolution of the South-South cooperation conversation. These debates often happen only in the elitist domains of Foreign Policy and Economic Policy think tanks and International NGOs in the North. A special fund could be created to increase the resources available for some of these SSC debates to occur among CSOs in the South and among think tanks of the South. The resources could be competitive for southern think tanks and CSOs using agreed guidelines.
- ii. The need for CSOs in the South to create synergies through network and solidarity building for collective action in high level platforms of South-South state exchanges among the CSOs and governments.
- iii. The need for African CSOs to be 'empowered' to meaningfully participate in the development management. The current mode of engagement tends to be paternalistic, the African govts need to develop an effective and meaningful outreach strategy to their CSOs whereby CSOs should increase their capacity to engage on these issues by having the right skills and putting aside resources to enable their participation to avoid playing a subservient and dependent role in their interactions with governments.

## About NeST Africa

The past decade has generated growing interest and debate on the role of emerging economies and Southern partners in global development. It has also demonstrated tensions in the integration of new development players in the global aid effectiveness regimes, originally spearheaded by the OECD-DAC donors, as witnessed for example in international development cooperation conferences such as Busan HLF4 (2011) and Mexico HLM (2014). Despite some efforts to address knowledge gaps and to develop appropriate platforms for the exchange of knowledge, such as the Delhi Conference of Southern Providers (2013), limited understanding and evidence continues to exist on the role and contribution of Southern partners in global development.

Against this background the Network of Southern Think-Tanks (NeST) was established on the fringes of the Mexico High Level Meeting (HLM) in March 2014. This network of development cooperation experts and academics from the global South was formed in order to generate, systematise, consolidate and share knowledge on South-South Cooperation (SSC) approaches in international development. The executive group of NeST met in Beijing in November 2014 to finalise the governance arrangements, and to draw up the work plan, which included an ambitious agenda of methodology development, empirical research, capacity development, improvement of data and M&E systems, knowledge sharing and policy support to Southern development agencies. While some of the plans of NeST remain global in nature, many of the activities are to be further elaborated and implemented by the various national and regional chapters of the network. In 2015 the South African chapter of NeST was established.

NeST Africa's aim is to generate evidence, understanding and systematised knowledge on South Africa and African development cooperation, and how this relates to approaches of other Southern providers and traditional donors operating on the African continent. This paper is a result of meetings held on 4 April 2018 and from 12-13 June 2018, which brought African stakeholders together to discuss the key priority areas that civil society identify as important for feeding into the discussion on BAPA+40.

Select participants agreed to develop a number of papers on specific thematic areas that would be submitted to the United Nations Office of South-South Cooperation in the lead-up to BAPA+40. These include: 1) definitions 2) monitoring and evaluation 3) civil society's role in BAPA+40 and 4) peace and security.