

SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION IN THE 2030 AGENDA AND TOWARDS PABA+40

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Introduction

South-South Cooperation (SSC) currently faces a particular situation resulting from two concurring events, the first one being the recent adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015. The second forthcoming event will be the United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation to be held in Buenos Aires, in commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the adoption of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA+40 Conference).

Both events are indispensable reference points in order to consider the strengths and challenges of current SSC or to conduct an analysis of its history that will prove useful to map the future path.

This document combines them, by assessing the manner in which SSC was included in the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), as well as in other related documents, considering the resulting challenges for SSC. On that basis, it identifies issues that should be taken into account at the BAPA+40 Conference.

The first part discusses the changes in context since the Buenos Aires Plan of Action to Promote Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries was adopted by the United Nations Conference on Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries held in Buenos Aires on 19 December 1978. The first elements that may help to establish the agenda for the BAPA+40 Conference can be identified here.

The analysis then moves on to the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. Based on the elements identified as relevant to SSC as part of the International Development Cooperation System, we continue with the task of selecting elements to be considered at the BAPA+40 Conference

Finally, we briefly present our conclusions, in which we identify challenges to SSC considering both the changes that the 2030 Agenda requires of International Development Cooperation (IDC) and the organization of the upcoming Buenos Aires Conference on South-South Cooperation.

1. BAPA: contexts, early definitions and forced silence

In order to begin this analysis, we need to take the Buenos Aires Plan of Action as the starting point.

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First, it should be noted that the United Nations Conference held in Buenos Aires in 1978 worked on a specific subject: Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (TCDC), which was then distinguished from Economic Cooperation among Developing Countries (ECDC), a subject that three years later had its own conference in the city of Caracas and required a revision of the then-existing trade preference system, as well as the creation of a group of experts to study the establishment of a solidarity fund and a bank for developing countries.

Back then, "[e]ven though the close connection between technical cooperation and economic cooperation goals was recognized, they were defined as different fields of action" (Colacrai, Kern, Vallone, Pattacini, Weisstaub, 2009:90).

Although "South-South Cooperation" as a term covering both TCDC and ECDC was already commonly used by scholars and in intergovernmental discussions by the mid 1980s' (López Cabana, 2014:16) -as shown by the publication of articles such as "Beyond the slogan of South-South co-operation" (Ul Haq, 1980), the closing speech of Indira Ghandi at the 7th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement² (1983) or the minutes of the 6th Session of UNCTAD held in Belgrade (UNCTAD, 1983)³ - it was not until the beginning of this century that referring to "South-South Cooperation" became standard practice in official United Nations documents. Still, it was only in 2003 that Resolution 58/220 of the UN General Assembly decided to formally change the name of the then High Level Committee on the Review of Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries to High Level Committee on South-South Cooperation. A year later, the Special Unit for TCDC of the United Nations Development Programme followed the same path and became the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation (subsequently, the Office for South-South Cooperation).

Thus, the 1978 Buenos Aires meeting did not analyze in full the subject that we currently refer to as SSC, but only its technical segment.

The fact that this work was carried out within the context of the Cold War is equally important, since the capacity for action of Southern countries was then rather restricted by a world order polarized by the two superpowers.

That scenario was the context within which Southern countries, after the crisis caused by the oil embargo established by the Arab countries in 1973, began to express their main demands with the claim for the establishment of a New International Economic

² There, when referring to the "Declaration on Collective Self-Reliance among Non-Aligned and other Developing Countries" adopted at the Summit, she stated that it "gives shape to our wish for greater South-South co-operation".

³ The summary of proceedings shows that the Chinese representative "recalled the statement by the Vice Premier of China at the 180th plenary meeting when he had said that against the background of a deteriorating world economy and a stalemate in North-South negotiations, it became all the more important to strengthen South-South co-operation, because such co-operation could reinforce the developing countries' economic strength and further encourage the North-South dialogue" (para. 400).

Order (NIEO) and a New World Information Order (NWIO); the former must be taken into consideration in the interpretation of the position held by Southern countries at the Buenos Aires Conference on TCDC, which must be read as part of the struggle to achieve that "new economic order", where TCDC was another tool, as expressed by the Buenos Aires Plan of Action in paragraph 12, defining TCDC as follows: "Technical co-operation among developing countries has emerged as a new dimension of international co-operation for development, which gives expression to the developing world's determination to achieve national and collective self-reliance and to the need to bring about the new international economic order. Its emergence and rationale should therefore be viewed in this global perspective..."

Many segments of the BAPA are not regarded with the political depth and value they actually had if these interpretative elements are ignored. This is illustrated by Paragraph 6 of the Plan of Action and its statement that TCDC was not a new form of cooperation, rather "[w]hat is new, however, is that co-operation among developing countries is now perceived by those countries to be increasingly important in promoting sound development in the present world context."

Without the creation of a project designed by the South for the South, SSC faces the risk of being dragged into discussions that do not concern its actors or, what is worse, of being used to further interests other than those of Southern countries in times of change and definition within the International Development Cooperation System (IDCS) such as these. It is to be expected that, at the BAPA+40 Conference, traditional donor countries from the North will be much more interested in debates and results than they were in 1978.

We have yet to refer to a third element regarding the context: the regional framework in Latin America within which the Buenos Aires Conference took place was marked by the presence of dictatorships throughout the region (and in many other countries in the world). Considering that it was held in an Argentina ruled by Dictator Jorge Rafael Videla —who was subsequently tried and convicted for crimes against humanity committed in the context of genocide— it is easy to understand why the BAPA does not mention political variables that are currently unavoidable: democracy, participation, accountability and good governance, among others.

Those absences had various effects, but one stands out in light of its current significance: the debate about TCDC governance at an international scale was barred. The BAPA+40 Conference provides an opportunity to write the as yet unwritten chapter on democratic governance of SSC.

2. The current framework: 2030 Agenda and other milestones

The adoption of the Millennium Development Goals provided the IDCS for the first time with a work structure based on general goals, specific targets and quantitative monitoring indicators, which brought about changes for all actors in terms of their approach to and management of development cooperation.

Now, the SDGs not only add qualitative variables, but also, fundamentally, present an unparalleled level of ambition in terms of development promotion, which can be better understood when one fully grasps the notion that these goals are currently part of a larger agenda, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, based on a process of unprecedented magnitude and involvement, much different from those of its predecessors.

SDGs are a key part of that Agenda but not all of it. As regards SSC and the upcoming BAPA+40 Conference, it is better to think of the 2030 Agenda as a whole than to focus on the list of 17 SDGs, their targets and indicators.

The reason for this is that this new agenda binds us to a specific development paradigm: Sustainable Development, which is currently defined as the point of convergence of three spheres (environmental, social and economic). The following question then arises: What are the effects of the decision to adopt the Sustainable Development paradigm as a guide in SSC governance, practices and management? The answer requires an analysis of the existing degree of alignment between SSC and Sustainable Development and makes it necessary to rethink the principles of SSC based on a new paradigm. That task could begin to show progress at the BAPA+40 Conference.

Likewise, the 2030 Agenda has also identified five critical areas (the "5 Ps") with respect to which changes must be made in order to achieve Sustainable Development. What are the links and experience of SSC in each of these areas? Which present strengths and which weaknesses? One of these critical areas deserves special attention: partnerships.

This does not only involve potential partnerships between Southern States or with third parties to work under SSC or Triangular Cooperation (TC) structures, but also the creation of joint work spaces and dynamics that connect the State with non-governmental actors who are capable of using the advantages that each party may provide for the achievement of common goals, who contribute to the leveraging of resources, and who identify and strengthen existing synergies.

It is clear that, due to its origin and rationale as part of the claim for the NIEO, SSC has been built by giving special priority to the role of States. Far from criticizing this aspect, we believe that this structure was a response to the political needs existing at the time of the 1978 Buenos Aires Conference. Nowadays, there is a different reality and, even though the centrality of the State's actions and functions continues to be essential because it is the authority in charge of assuming international commitments, it has exclusive and essential tools to make the desired changes—such as the power to enact laws—and, in democratic societies, its management is legitimized by society as a whole, the role given to it by the 2030 Agenda is one of leadership in carrying out broad and inclusive processes.

Currently, each State, pursuant to the commitments assumed under the 2030 Agenda, is mainly responsible for creating favourable conditions and environments to promote and consolidate the effective involvement of the other development stakeholders.

The new forms of participation adopted by the United Nations through, for instance, the inclusion of Major Groups in the work processes of international conferences may serve as a model in this area, at both a regional and national level.

In the specific field of SSC, the solution to this issue will have a strong impact on its governance and will define how democratic such governance will be.

Furthermore, the 2030 Agenda also has a series of principles: it does not involve only the achievement of the SDGs by any means possible; rather, a series of guidelines have been adopted that must be respected in the process towards the attainment of the new globally-agreed goals and targets.

These principles include the pledge to "leave no one behind", which is becoming the manner in which the contents of the 2030 Agenda are communicated in simple terms.

How will this principle be incorporated into SSC? Was it already part of its work? In this respect, a really critical analysis is required from decision-makers in the field, which must take into account the difficulties and challenges faced by Southern countries as concerns data (a subject we will address below) and, especially, the level of disaggregation, timeliness and verifiability. The forms of management of SSC need to be capable of facing and identifying its "blind spots", including the persons and groups that might be left behind in its work as a consequence of their "statistical invisibility".

Another one of the adopted principles is that requiring holistic thinking, moving beyond stagnant compartments in management. "Cross-sectoral" thinking is an enormous challenge for all institutions that, at any level, carry out management tasks with regard to public assets, whether tangible or not, since the traditional manner of organization of their work has been determined by vertical and theme-based divisions for the assignment of functions and responsibilities; looking at the ministerial structures of any country or even the United Nations system will suffice to get a clear picture of this.

The need to give attention to matters that cross-cut management spaces (gender, environment, respect for and promotion of human rights, among others) increases exponentially, as does the need to focus on points of contact between different vertical management structures, the points where their interconnections become stronger and more visible.

SSC and its management have also been built within vertical thinking and management structures but, due to its multiple areas of influence, it simultaneously constitutes a privileged space for promoting cross-sectoral considerations and working on the points of contact between different structures referred to above.

Other principles such as universality, respect for international law and human rights, and interdependence pose their own challenges at a global level, with their

particularities and specificities in the area of SSC. The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities is expected to give rise to tensions at the BAPA+40 Conference and countries engaged in SSC should be able to arrive at the meeting with common consolidated positions on that issue.

Finally, the SDGs in themselves provide a guiding framework for IC, including SSC. Since the fact that SSC is part of the foreign policy of the States working under that structure is no longer the subject of debate, these goals are also an unavoidable issue when discussing the set of foreign actions of those States.

This does not have to do only with the need for consistency, but also with the aim of strengthening the potential of SDGs to serve as benchmarks in the design of plans for international insertion of the countries that engage in SSC in the short and medium term.

The BAPA+40 Conference should give special attention to this guiding potential of SDGs.

Resuming the analysis of potential bridges between the 2030 Agenda and SSC, we have found that in the former, cooperation between Southern countries is only mentioned twice, always accompanied by mentions of North-South Cooperation and TC, and that both are included in SDG 17, which calls for a revitalization of the Global Alliance for Sustainable Development.

Goal 17.6 is to "enhance North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation on and access to science, technology and innovation, and enhance knowledge sharing on mutually agreed terms, including through improved coordination among existing mechanisms, particularly at UN level, and through a global technology facilitation mechanism when agreed." The reference to "knowledge sharing on mutually agreed terms" leads directly to a subject-matter that has always been at the core of SSC, and it is difficult to understand why no reference is made here to North-South cooperation possibilities in this field, since there have been experiences that may be considered successful, such as the work carried out by the Argentine Forensic Anthropology team to support the identification of remains buried in mass graves in Spain.

The SSC experience in terms of technical knowledge sharing can contribute to improving the ISDC as a whole. This is why the last part of the goal, which refers to "improved coordination among existing mechanisms, particularly at UN level," can be a window of opportunity to enhance the visibility and presence of SSC as part of IC as a whole.

The second mention appears in goal 17.9, where a call is made to "enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all sustainable development goals, including through North-South, South-South, and triangular cooperation."

Capacity building is another field in which SSC has focused its work from the beginning. The technical knowledge that circulates through SSC is always aimed at strengthening the capacity of the countries that receive such cooperation, and it has always been underscored—and identified as a principle of SSC in the BAPA—that SSC creates benefits for all parties involved: it is a win-win.

These benefits are usually materialized in an enhancement of the offeror's capacity that occurs as a result of the cooperation process, and such enhancement of the offeror's capacity leads to the offeror being better prepared to implement the SDGs at a domestic level.

What is more, the broad use of work schemes in mixed committees to define SSC programmes between States and the work performed on demand of the recipient contributes to the management capacity building for all parties concerned. Describing that reality in a clear, verifiable way seems to be an ongoing challenge.

As stated by Ambassador Alfredo Labbé Villa, Director General of Foreign Policy at the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "South-South Cooperation brings new and important elements into the cooperation for development system. Some of the most noteworthy are (...) additional capacity to create a feeling of appropriation in the recipient, with a twofold dividend, both for the recipient and for the donor; the stimulus of technical capacities between them; and a sense of shared responsibility" (Ibero-American Programme for Strengthening South-South Cooperation, 2016:16).

At this point, it is essential to refer to the countries' decision to point out that the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) on Development funding "is an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" and recognize that "the full application of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda is fundamental to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (paragraph 40).

In the AAAA, reference is made to SSC in paragraphs 28 (international tax cooperation), 56 (recognition of the supplementary nature of SSC in respect of North-South cooperation, of its specific characteristics and of its principles), 57 (recognition of the increased contributions of SSC to poverty eradication and sustainable development, including a call to step up these efforts and improve their effectiveness) and 120 (transfer of environmentally sound technologies).

There are yet two more documents closely related to the 2030 Agenda and the AAAA which must be taken into account when analyzing the current international framework for international cooperation in which the BAPA+40 conference will take place, based on which SSC can strengthen its positions: the Paris Declaration and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

While the former only refers to IC generally, without any specific mention of North-South or South-South cooperation, the latter refers to SSC in paragraphs 44 and 45: the importance of SSC and TC as complements of North-South cooperation to reduce disaster risk is underscored in paragraph 44, and the supplementary nature of SSC in respect of North-South cooperation in terms of funding is reaffirmed in paragraph 45.

It is necessary to take these two documents into consideration because, on the one hand, natural disasters are—together with armed conflict—one of the two key causes of regression in the development levels reached by countries and, on the other hand, Southern countries are some of the most vulnerable to natural disasters or are among those which are suffering the consequences of environmental harm more intensely and immediately.

In addition to this, in the countries acting under SSC schemes, there are views alternative to the official/scientific views on the relationship between human beings and nature, built on the basis of native knowledge, as exemplified by the Sumak Kawsay/Suma Q'amaña (Good Living) views.

Going back to the 2030 Agenda framework, now with a view to follow-up and assessment commitments, we find here that the threefold global, regional and national SDG implementation variable presents new, important elements for SSC, especially as regards work at a regional scale.

The task performed by United Nations economic commissions in this regard is a good example of how SSC, operating within an alliance system with the UN framework and other interested parties, can reap multiple benefits: today, all Southern regions have their own regional development fora, which have produced input for the 2017 United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

In addition, while just 15 out of the 30 members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee⁴ have submitted Voluntary National Reviews (50%) to said forum, 13 of the 18 Latin American countries that participate in the Ibero-American Programme for Strengthening South-South Cooperation (72%) have submitted their Reviews.⁵ The Ibero-American Programme for Strengthening South-South Cooperation is the source of the only annual report on South South Cooperation currently prepared by southern States, which shows how committed SSC protagonists are to the 2030 Agenda.

Finally, we must briefly refer to the question of data—an issue that was not addressed at the 1978 Buenos Aires Conference, but now has a prominent role in IC debates and will be discussed at the BAPA+40 Conference.

SSC should not only be able to present clear information on its actions, within a framework of accountability and transparency that must be adopted by the cooperating countries, but it also needs more and better data in order to succeed at implementing and following up on the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs.

One of the reports that served as input to the negotiation of the current global development agenda is A world that counts: mobilising the data revolution for sustainable development, prepared in 2014 by the Independent Expert Advisory Group

⁴ A full list is available at <http://www.oecd.org/dac/dacmembers.htm>.

⁵ 18 Latin American countries, Spain and Portugal participate in the Ibero-American Programme for Strengthening South-South Cooperation. For more information, visit <http://www.cooperacionsursur.org/>.

on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development, comprised of 20 independent data experts⁶, at the request of Ban Ki-moon, then United Nations Secretary-General.

That report definitively introduced into debates on development the notion of "data revolution", presented as "an explosion in the volume of data, the speed with which data are produced, the number of producers of data, the dissemination of data, and the range of things on which there is data" (Stuart, Samman, Avis and Berliner, 2015).

This revolution is based on three key pillars known as the "3C": Capacities, which stem from new tools and work methods with data and statistics; Community, a result of including non-governmental entities in the field of data production, processing and usage; and Crumbs, which underscores the digital traces left by our current life patterns and activities.

The notion of Data Revolution has the advantage of giving people back their leading role not only as a passive source of data or as data users, but as data "makers."

SSC will have to enhance its capacity and alliances in order to make the most of this "data revolution": there is a new line of work before us, enabled by the relative differences among southern countries in this field. The need to share experiences between them based on common challenges will grow in the immediate future, and response mechanisms will need to be devised.

Conclusions

How should the BAPA principles and views change as it comes into contact with the 2030 Agenda and with the new context of IC in general and SSC in particular?

The first certainty as we answer this question is that, 40 years after its adoption, the Buenos Aires Plan of Action does not need a "revision" or redraft. What we should be able to do is discover its current meanings in the new international context, with the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and taking into account the evolution of SSC.

We should be calling for a rediscovery of the BAPA from our current place and time, and the Plan of Action adopted in 1978 paves the way: paragraph 13 of the BAPA can play a key role to think about the future and SSC governance. That is where the countries, in their first introduction of the principles that informed TCDC, stated the following: "TCDC, as well as other forms of co-operation among all countries, must be based on strict observance of national sovereignty, economic independence, equal rights and non-interference in domestic affairs of nations, irrespective of their size, level of development and social and economic system."

⁶ Including representatives of China, India, Brazil, South Africa, Mexico; all of which have done solid work in the context of SSC. Alicia Bárcena was also a member of the group representing ECLAC, the only United Nations regional economic commission that was present.

The statement that TCDC principles were also applicable to "other forms of cooperation among all countries" shows the drafters' inclusive intent and amplitude, as they proposed a vision that went beyond TCDC or any kind of cooperation maintained between developing countries. The establishment of TCDC principles was a projection of its leading countries' own views onto all IC, supported by each country's world view and by an action strategy.

This statement is even clearer in the light of the statements of paragraph 5 of the same document, where it is held that "In this historic new stage of progress towards the attainment of the new international economic order, technical co-operation among developing countries is becoming a critically important dimension." The NIEO is not being sought today, but States have just committed to Sustainable Development as a paradigm and SSC continues to be critical to achieve that, since it is not a mere "supplement" to traditional cooperation but, primarily, a political option that is prepared to speak on an equal footing to any other in the construction of a world that global leaders envisaged under the heading "Our vision" when they drafted the 2030 Agenda. As stated in the context of the United Nations Development Programme (2016:8), "South-South Cooperation and Triangular Cooperation have increased the diversity in opportunities for development assistance".

A second certainty with respect to the question that brings about these conclusions is that if the PABA+40 Conference merely explains the role of SSC today, it will have missed a great opportunity: the true possibility that lies in this conference, in the current context, is that of completing the analysis by leaving a mark in the future. The Buenos Aires Plan of Action was valuable not because it established a framework for TCDC, but because it left the door open to future work. That is the reason why, 40 years after its adoption, we are still discussing it and we are able to point out that it does not need rewriting—what we need is a deeper understanding of its message in a different international context, and only then can we add matters that are truly relevant today and to the future of SSC, in a message voiced by its leaders, but having global significance.

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