a focus on current issues

BAPA+40, South African and African lessons

Arina Muresan

Ms. Arina Muresan is a Researcher at the Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD) associated with UNISA

Executive summary

The Second High-level United Nations Conference on South–South Cooperation (known also as the BAPA+40 conference), held in March 2019, promised to reinvigorate efforts to further achieve and implement South–South cooperation (SSC). Forty years on, the Global South is shaping its image as a solutions provider. Immense strides have been made in improving access to allow a multitude of state and non-state actors to cooperate, while broadening and deepening modes of cooperation and facilitating the exchange of knowledge and technology transfers; thus moving beyond the simplistic view that developing countries require aid to function and move forward. However, noting the symbolic strides, the Global South should move forward by building understanding of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks, integrating multi-stakeholder models, improving the visibility of peace and security in South–South programming and building effective communications systems.

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Introduction

Since 1978, the United Nations Conference for South–South Cooperation (UNOSSC) and Technical Cooperation for Developing Countries (TCDC) has made significant strides in encouraging the Global South to become an engine for self-growth, engaging in more constructive South–South cooperation (SSC) through various instruments and providing more concise guidelines for a preferred model of cooperation with the Global North. The objectives, action points and recommendations still hold immense value for the present day and the future in the quest for the continuous improvement of institutions, mechanisms, information systems, research and innovation capacities and experience sharing, as well as building holistic self-reliance and cooperation. Although BAPA+40 was held against the backdrop of a multilateral landscape that had undergone a number of changes in development cooperation, the action plan contributes to a future agenda for sustainable development and similar initiatives, such as former initiatives like the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and updated initiatives like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This briefing draws from the two conferences hosted in Argentina, the first held in 1978 and the second hosted in March 2019, in exploring the achievements, changes in debates, persisting structural challenges and proactive ways forward.

Drivers for increased potential

The Global South is achieving the much sought-after expression of Global South solidarity, which has been discussed since the Bandung conference in 1955. Although solidarity itself cannot be tangible, countries contributing to SSC are making greater inroads in achieving a process of international cooperation that is based on building consensus through inclusion and horizontal decision-making.

 The BAPA+40 conference has fostered a change in global perceptions whereby the Global South has rapidly gained a reputation as a solution provider, given that actors in the region are economically empowering themselves and developing unique capabilities with the limited resources available. The challenges to multilateralism also highlight the value of SSC in reinvigorating the spirit of 'leaving no one behind' and enhancing global partnerships for sustainable development. Goal 17 of the SDGs, strengthening global partnerships, recognises the complementary role that SSC plays in relation to implementing the 2030 agenda with a focus on access to science, technology and innovation, knowledge sharing and capacity building in achieving the SDGs in general. Moreover, the BAPA+40 process is well positioned to shape United Nations (UN) support for SSC and further promote a South–South agenda. The increased demand for the horizontal governance approach inherent in SSC speaks to greater conceptualisation of partnerships and ownership by the South. In the

evolving international cooperation context, the BAPA+40 principles and views emerging from the 2009 High-level United Nations (UN) Conference on South–South Cooperation, held in Nairobi, have not changed but have rather become attuned to their potential to synergise Global South efforts in achieving the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The decade that passed between the 2009 outcomes from Nairobi and the 2019 BAPA+40 presents a good opportunity for the Global South to take stock of the achievements and changes in SSC over the last decade. For example, how the Global South has interpreted and advanced development finance since the global recession in 2008 which catalysed SSC to develop sustainable long-term finance for infrastructure in the developing world that was based on solidarity and the niche aims of the SDGs.[1]

Debates over time

There is a desire for some groups to come to a formally recognised definition of SSC, however, this in itself is still a contention point of debate for why a standardised definition is needed and which purposes it will serve. For example, civil society actors have been more vocal to achieve a particular standard of SSC in order to improve on working experiences; whereas think tanks across the global South are more divided on the topic and have instead worked on the basis of agreed principles of SSC operationalised through a plurality of modalities. Moreover, the intention to secure a common definition is a double edged sword whereby it may streamline implementation, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) but also discriminate adversely and impact directly on country commodity processes, interest on loans, resource transfers and increased protectionism.[2] This has influenced a shift in terms of which most partners engaging in SSC and trilateral cooperation are working with the common understandings and positions of SSC and TCDC that have been developed over the last four decades through the Group of 77 (G77) South Summits in Havana (2000) and Doha (2005) and the Marrakech Declaration and Framework of Implementation of SSC (2003) aimed at advancing technological diffusion investing in appropriate solutions for pressing challenges, and promoting cost-effective sources with no full reciprocity applied to the processes.[3]

Next, global development has become a human right, or rather, people are entitled to the right to development. Therefore the link to the SDG 2030 Agenda goes beyond interstate inequalities and allows countries to focus on economic, environmental and social security activities that leave no one behind. This denotes a proactive people-centred approach that recognises the need to include broader society as cooperation partners.[4] Given the persistent issue of inequalities, the BAPA+40 outcome document took note of the vast opportunities for a holistic and coherent approach to sustainable development and the potential of SSC in tackling inequalities within and between countries. The need for Africa to develop is at the core of the focus of the BAPA+40 outcome document on regional organisations.

Hence, the consultation process with Africa through the UNOSSC, UNDP, African Union (AU) and African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) aimed to ensure that African countries have inclusive ownership of the BAPA+40 outcomes. African countries are in the process of aligning themselves to achieving and implementing the SDG agenda and African development priorities articulated in the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063, cognisant that while economic development is a core priority, a peaceful and secure continent will be able to better integrate mechanisms to promote economic interests. The UNOSSC, together with the APRM Secretariat, the Islamic Development Bank and the Ugandan Permanent Mission to the UN in New York, hosted an Africa regional meeting ahead of the Second High-Level UN Conference, which drew linkages between the UNOSSC understandings of SSC and the African Union Agenda 2063 to invigorate collectively the SDGs efforts specifically focused on achieving development in Africa. However, there is an urgent need to link peace and security and development agendas because of the scale of violence and conflict in some African countries.[5]

The Report of the Secretary General, which details operational activities for SSC development, has acknowledged that peaceful conditions are necessary for creating and achieving societies working towards harmonious socioeconomic development. Global South peacekeeping becomes difficult to incorporate in SSC, because such cooperation has historically been based on in-kind partnerships that are easier to measure and translate into socioeconomic partnerships.[6] However, the strides made in addressing the growing demand are encouraging as various UN agencies are taking on more collaborative efforts.

Overall, a number of challenges to the future roadmap of SSC may be outlined; firstly, SSC is still largely voluntary, participative and demand-driven, therefore working towards implementing SSC is predicated on a strong enabling environment and political will. Decades later, the move towards a common understanding of SSC and its modalities has been slow and incremental and more efforts need to be made to strengthen the local capacities of countries engaged in SSC. In addition to the spirit of multilateralism for enhanced SSC, there is a need to gain access to adequate financing for SSC projects and supporting institutions, which would build capacity, support functions, and mobilise sufficient resources.

Secondly, a limited understanding of SSC is further built on misunderstandings and global trends in rightist politics that push away from globalisation. Although there is a need and opportunity for communities to engage through multi-stakeholder and people-to-people engagement, SSC is still largely viewed as a government-to-government activity. It is ever more evident that SSC is also part of intellectual self-empowerment.[7]

The multi-stakeholder engagement model is very important to the success of SSC because of the possible impact that development cooperation can have on communities, as well as the potential for monitoring and evaluating SSC. South Africa's model of inclusive engagement

aims to bridge the gap between civil society organisations and government through its support of civil society at international fora and the collection of civil society inputs for the policymaking process.

And lastly, the need to measure and evaluate progress and standards is becoming increasingly complex where some advocate for a typical M&E approach whereas others advocate for an Impact Assessment approach. More than ever, questions surrounding the way human development can or should be measured and ascribed value are contentious. This inhibits an in-depth review and analysis of SSC and what improvements can be made to implementation in countries and among institutions, the perceptions of the public, and following up on factors contributing to the enabling environment.[8] As the demand for SSC increases there has been a shift in operational focus; development agencies and governments want to know what the impact of their involvement has been, however there is a reluctance to define M&E. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries have worked with standard definitions of Official Development Assistance (ODA) for decades, and incorporated various M&E frameworks, this is still contested in the South. Thus it is ever more important for the global South to develop more common understandings and positions for their own M&E design and implementation. Some of the approaches to measuring this input have been technical, however there are limits to the extent to which technical measurements can capture the wider nuances and dimensions of what development means. Thus far, UN organisations – the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the World Food Programme (WFP) – have applied a collaborative approach, and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) has instituted a financial tag for tracking SSC. All have further committed to applying better M&E measures in achieving Agenda 2030, and countries are encouraged to develop and apply their own models of M&E.[9]

Conclusions and recommendations

The BAPA+40 process and the guidelines for TCDC have significant implications for the evolution of the global development cooperation landscape. Although the BAPA+40 conference showed that there is a high degree of lesson-sharing among the Global South, more action needs to be taken, and for many SSC remains the starting point. Therefore, what kind of policy interventions can contribute to proactively changing country-level principles, values, norms, institutions and procedures after the BAPA+40?

- Existing partnerships, such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the G77 + China, which were key to amplifying the evolved collective voice of the Global South, have a sustained responsibility in driving the SSC agenda on other platforms, while

maintaining a spirit of collective self-reliance. Exclusive clubs, for example BRICS bi-lateral partnerships with the Global South and the BRICS countries' commitment to regional outreach, may be channelled more effectively to form SSC partnerships for development cooperation along SSC guidelines, while maintaining a multi-stakeholder approach.

- It is important for South Africa to implement its SSC agenda in line with the recommendations of the TCDC and ECDC, as well as the outcomes of the BAPA + 40. By rationalising its development cooperation initiatives to official interpretations for SSC, South Africa may move forward in formalising supporting institutions like the South African Development Partnership Agency (SADPA) and improving the M&E of South African development cooperation. While this is likely to be a monumental task, involving various ministries, several models are available to learn from, for example Brazil, China, Indonesia, India and Mexico, all have interesting lessons that can be adapted to the South African context and improve upon inter-Ministerial cooperation, varying levels of autonomy, and M&E frameworks for the new development agencies or frameworks that are being created and consolidated. This may then work with the government to civil society and multi-stakeholder engagement model, which has already had positive reviews. However, mobility and communication challenges persist across South Africa and Africa and there is a need for government to increase efforts and reach more organisations for sustained inputs.

- Discussions surrounding SSC should acknowledge the peace and security contexts and elements of the discussions surrounding development. This discussion was first acknowledged in the broader role of the United Nations, "taking a more active role in world affairs",[10] specifically in the reform of the United Nations Security Council. However, it has since evolved in the SSC context from food security, to gender-based security, to general insecurities,[11] which are not linked to the pervasive impact of conflict. Although it may be increasingly difficult to measure and have in-kind contributions from countries, SSC can bolster input in peace and security arenas from a Global South understanding, building on knowledge exchanges and effectively shaping policy.[12]

- The UNOSSC could borrow lessons from the M&E frameworks of the APRM. The APRM model of SSC 1) takes into account the uniqueness of country systems and aims to work towards operating within a problem-solving environment, 2) allows for public consultation without antagonism or mounting hostilities toward particular parties, and 3) overall it contributes to introspection and the opportunity to learn and improve holistically.[13] The APRM framework could be adapted to suit the growing need to monitor and evaluate SSC that respects a voluntary process.

- Countries should mainstream their strategies or orient their policy and regulatory frameworks to SSC in order to create a more enabling political environment.

- Lastly, communication should be improved; sharing information and dispelling preconceptions but more importantly linking the Global South more effectively and communicating a strategic message on the way the desired triangular cooperation should be conducted.

Endnotes

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Acknowledgements

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3rd Floor Robert Sobukwe Building
263 Nana Sita Street
Pretoria South Africa

PO Box 14349
The Tramshed,
0126
Pretoria South Africa

+27123376082
+27862129442
info@igd.org.za
www.igd.org.za