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South Africa and Opportunities for Trilateral Development Cooperation

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Introduction

Ms Sibulele Walaza is an avid scholar of International Relations. Her research focuses on Global Political Economy issues. She most recently worked in an international economic development consultancy and has extensive experience in policy-oriented research working as a researcher in news and current affairs.

International development cooperation has traditionally been channeled from the geo-political North to the South, but developments in South-South cooperation and the appreciation of shared developmental experiences among developing countries is beginning to change the development cooperation landscape. Trilateral development cooperation in particular has the potential to bring together partners from developed, emerging and developing countries in realizing more effective development cooperation. South Africa continues to invest in developmental cooperation agreements on the rest of the continent, including agreements of a trilateral nature. It is expected to consolidate these efforts in the South African Development Partnership Agency (SADPA), which will take the place of the African Renaissance Fund for International Cooperation. This policy brief argues that South Africa is best placed to pursue the opportunities of trilateral development cooperation, enhancing the benefit of cost-effective partnership arrangements.

The Geo-politics of Development Cooperation

To effectively gauge how trilateral development cooperation differs from existing means of channeling development aid, such as bilateral or multilateral mechanisms, it is necessary to briefly examine these long-standing arrangements. Within receiving states, traditional development aid has been

used to try and bridge the gap between government spending on addressing socio-economic challenges and the magnitude of challenges themselves. Traditionally, this aid has been channeled from the geo-political North to the South with a propensity for former colonial powers to provide aid to their former colonies. There is a general agreement among international relations scholars that the billions directed towards Africa in the form of aid is contentious, with abject poverty continuing to haunt significant parts of the African continent.

Development assistance has been widely criticised for its links to reforms that included austerity measures, deregulation, trade liberalization and privatisation. Aid from traditional donors has too often been premised on these conditions with the observation that there are often adverse social and economic effects as a consequence of development assistance.

The world's main donors, grouped under the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC),¹ are still predominantly comprised of countries from the North. In the last four decades, the narrative of South-South Cooperation has become pronounced. In the main, it is informed by the understanding that developing countries are likely to impart related developmental experiences to each other and perhaps cooperate at a more balanced level.

While the narrative of 'aid' and 'aid effectiveness' has traditionally been used in reference to development aid channeled from the geopolitical North to the South, terms such as 'development cooperation' and 'development assistance' are increasingly expressed in the global discourse. The so-called emerging powers in the global system, especially the BRICS group of nations that include Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, are central in the formation and reshaping of this narrative.

Traditionally multilateral development assistance, through development finance institutions, such as the World Bank, African Development Bank (AfDB), as well as bilateral development assistance through country agencies such as United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), remain the focus within the framework of aid relations. For South Africa, aid disbursements under the African Renaissance and International Co-operation Fund, soon to become SADPA, demonstrate that countries of the South remain central in development cooperation for South Africa and indications are that this will continue in future partnerships.

The idea of trilateral development cooperation introduces a further dimension in the channeling of development assistance to beneficiary countries. This includes relations between three parties within the development cooperation framework, and usually comprises a developed country or multilateral agency, an emerging country, such as China, India or South Africa and a developing country as the recipient country.

The Changing Development Landscape: Trilateral Development Cooperation

Platforms for trilateral development cooperation can be traced to the increased interactions between nations of the South that has roots in the 1955 Bandung conference. The Conference saw Africans and Asians came together to express unified positions and consolidate cooperative relations.

The OECD defines trilateral development cooperation as arrangements between an OECD – Development Assistance Committee (DAC) country or a multilateral institution, partnering with a 'pivotal' country (or emerging power), to implement development cooperation programmes in a third beneficiary country.²

These partnerships are growing remarkably in frequency and scale. According to a paper on Sino-South African Cooperation in Development Assistance to Africa, North-South-South cooperation, often takes the form of an initiative by a country from the South who cooperates with a Northern donor, to capitalize on their financial, logistical and technical resources for the support of a country in need. When priorities match those of the Northern donor, a Southern country often provides technical support.³

It is in this context that South Africa has also become more involved in trilateral development cooperation. For example, South Africa actively utilized engagement Japan, a key member of the OECD/DAC, to secure financial support for eight peacekeeping training centres in Africa. A similar arrangement where a bilateral engagement became the springboard for the pursuance of trilateral cooperation saw South Africa engage the UK to secure continued support for some of its Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) initiatives in Sudan.⁴ The growth in trilateral cooperation flows from an eagerness by the countries of the North to demonstrate partnership with countries of the South, who are also beneficiaries of the aid, while countries of the South, particularly those considered 'emerging powers', have become increasingly committed to international development cooperation. As these arrangements grow however, it will be important to guard against developmental agenda-creep when involved in these cooperation agreements. In other words, the most resourced partner should not dictate the development cooperation agenda, rather the three stakeholders should strive for true partnership.

The conventional definition of trilateral development cooperation is, however, limited given that South-South-South arrangements are also an emerging form of trilateral cooperation. This sees an arrangement where all the key partners in development cooperation are countries of the South.

South Africa has become increasingly engaged in trilateral development assistance with other partners in the geo-political South. The DIRCO's Annual Reports 2011/2012 and 2011/2013 highlight the following:

- South Africa finances the deployment of Cuban doctors, through the Cuban Medical Brigade Project, in Sierra Leone - for a period of three years. South Africa funded a similar project in Rwanda, with doctors providing medical assistance to Rwandan citizens who survived the 1994 genocide.⁵
- South Africa funds Vietnamese experts who are assisting Guinean farmers with agricultural know-how to improve food security.
- South Africa engaged with Guinea-Bissau and Cuba to manage and advance the three trilateral Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) programmes in Guinea Bissau, namely a university teaching hospital project, community based malaria project and the Cabral Museum Project.⁶

The OECD definition, however, does make provision for institutionalized cooperation such as in the forum for the India, Brazil and South Africa Dialogue Forum (IBSA). This arrangement takes the form of cooperation beyond aid by including political dialogue, economic relations, science and technology and other policy sectors. Established in 2003, IBSA has been an important platform for advancing trilateral cooperation. It has over the years promoted sectoral cooperation in the three countries through 16 Working Groups (reduced to 14), which were established to deepen mutual knowledge and explore common interests. Six of the working groups are prioritised - with Trade and Investment, Tourism, and Transport and Infrastructure championed by South Africa.

Agriculture and Environment, championed by Brazil and Science and Technology, Information Society and Health by India – as decided by the 20th IBSA Focal Point Meeting on the margins of United Nations General Assembly in September 2012.⁷ The IBSA trilateral forum thus illustrates the varied opportunities for trilateral cooperation amongst these countries of the South.

As an institution, IBSA is well placed to advance trilateral cooperation agreements. Already, it has the IBSA Facility for Poverty and Hunger Alleviation (IBSA Fund,)⁸ established in March 2004. Located within the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Fund is a lauded initiative to channel funds and use expertise from the three countries to implement South-South cooperation initiatives through the multilateral system for the benefit of countries of the South.

South Africa contributed approximately R9million (US\$1million) in the last financial year (2013) to the IBSA Fund with each of the countries having made a commitment to contribute from the 2006-2007 financial year.⁹ As a body, the IBSA Fund has up to now partnered bilaterally with developing countries on projects that address poverty and hunger. There is, however, an opportunity to source other resources, from pivotal countries outside IBSA, to support ongoing or new initiatives by entering into trilateral arrangements.

Trilateral development cooperation affords cost-effective opportunities for IBSA countries, developed donor states and other the emerging states as they share resources and bring their comparative advantages to the table. For the beneficiary country, there is the opportunity to capacitate existing domestic priorities, rather than being dictated what the priorities should be. It also affords a level of coordination among donors within the beneficiary state. At the same time this presents a possible

challenge in the extended period of time it may take to coordinate and conclude negotiations on cooperation agreements, given that there are three partners involved.

Consolidated development cooperation efforts, following the establishment of SADPA, should promote a more focused approach, with outgoing resources being channeled from a single source in government. It will further present South Africa with the opportunities to expand trilateral development arrangements. In its presentations of plans for the agency, DIRCO recently stated that an agreement has in principle been reached with 15 development agencies for trilateral cooperation in the future.¹⁰ As the framework for SADPA was developed, international development partners that include the Australian Government's overseas aid program (AusAID); the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA); DFID; the New Zealand Government's international aid and development programme (NZAID); the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and USAID were engaged. IBSA partners and other stakeholders – the World Bank; the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) and the OECD, were also engaged.¹¹ The development agencies are likely to be part of the 15 with whom agreement has been reached for trilateral cooperation.

Implications of Trilateral Development Cooperation for South Africa

South Africa's engagements on the continent have been cautiously welcomed by other countries, as has the country's foreign policy commitment to promote the African Agenda in world affairs. There is the understanding that South Africa should not act as 'Big Brother' on the continent – muscling ahead as the continent's key representative on global affairs, flooding its neighbours with its produce, or being the key decision maker on peace and security issues.

For South Africa, SADPA presents an opportunity to depoliticize its engagements on the continent. Trilateral development cooperation, in particular invites other partners to the table with beneficiary countries, pacifying apprehension of South Africa's 'Big Brother' ambitions. The examples of trilateral cooperation earlier, included the partnering with Cubans and Asian partners, demonstrate that trilateral development cooperation can be arranged in support of socio-economic developments as well as in efforts to address peace and security issues. These arrangements therefore present the opportunity to trilaterally assist in addressing varied challenges faced by beneficiary countries.

Conclusion

South Africa's development cooperation has been primarily focused on bilateral development assistance under the African Renaissance and International Co-operation Fund. Trilateral development cooperation presents an opportunity to further enhance cooperation with both developed and developing countries and depoliticize engagements on the continent. It also affords an opportunity for South Africa to partner with other states in building its resources for international development cooperation, reflecting positively on its foreign policy. Firstly, this could see the country become central in managing effective development programmes, not only by funding, but by sharing knowledge, developmental experience and technical expertise with other developing countries. Secondly, South Africa would be able to expand its involvement in development cooperation agreements, because trilateral arrangements allow for a wider spread of resources. Finally, this could support the further strengthening of broader international relations.

The opportunities in a South-South-South arrangement present further prospects for being exposed to shared developmental experiences. With continued apprehension concerning development aid from the North, it is on the North-South-South partnerships that South Africa will have to tread carefully. It will have to manage sensitive, existing relationships between a potential partner and the beneficiary country as well as guarding against agenda-creep.

Policy Considerations:

The South African Government should invest more in extending development cooperation through trilateral arrangements as these arrangements are cost-effective, and present the opportunity to bring together partners with their comparative advantages in expanding involvement in international development cooperation.

South Africa's pursuance of Trilateral Development Cooperation	
Opportunities	Challenges
Sharing of knowledge and developmental experience and technical expertise with other developing countries. It is an opportunity to extend South-South cooperation.	Period of time it may take to coordinate and conclude negotiations on cooperation as opposed to bilateral engagements.
Cost-effective through the use of emerging country resources.	While possibly cost-effective, expansion to additional cooperation agreements may offset this benefit
Beneficiary countries afforded the opportunity to capacitate existing domestic priorities	Managing existing relationships between the potential partner and the beneficiary as well as guard against developmental agenda-creep.
Building and consolidating stronger relations.	Opposition by beneficiary country of engaging with an 'intermediary' country
Positive reflection on foreign policy.	

The South African Government should position SADPA to play a key role in this distinct form of development cooperation on the continent ensuring that it distinguishes itself from conditions-based development assistance. In seeking partnerships, the country should guard against the old developmental agenda creeping into its expanded efforts.

The South African Government should strengthen efforts to continuously engage other emergent donors; particularly those that share similar challenges, experiences and considerations and that are themselves expanding their involvement in international development cooperation. Efforts to partner on trilateral development cooperation arrangements with these emergent donors will enhance opportunities to share developmental experiences. Where partnering already exists as with the institutionalized cooperation provided by the IBSA Fund, it will be useful to explore the possibility of IBSA itself advancing trilateral development cooperation. The IBSA Fund could approach other emergent donors to partner in the implementation of projects that address poverty and hunger.

Notes

- 1 There are currently 26 members of the DAC: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Commission.
- 2 Fordelone, Talita Yamashiro. 2009. 'Triangular Co- operation and Aid Effectiveness: Can triangular co-operation make aid more effective?' OECD, September 2009, pg. 4.
- 3 Mei, Hu. 2010. 'South Countries Combining their Strengths - the Perspective of Sino-South African Cooperation in Development Assistance to Africa', NORRAG, Geneva, Switzerland, pp. 56-58.

- 4 Department of International Relations and Cooperation. (DIRCO). 2012. Annual Report 2011-2012, DIRCO, Pretoria, 2012, pp. 67-68.
- 5 Department of International Relations and Cooperation. (DIRCO) .2011. Annual Report 2010-2011, DIRCO, Pretoria, 2011, pg. 71.
- 6 Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO). 2012, Op.Cit, pg. 68.
- 7 India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) (2013) "About IBSA" in http://www.ibsa-trilateral.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=87&Itemid=64, (Accessed 13/09/2013).
Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO). 2013. Annual Report 2012-2013, DIRCO, Pretoria, 2013, pg. 31.
- 8 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2013. 'IBSA Fund' in <http://tcdc2.undp.org/IBSA/Default.aspx>, (Accessed 25/11/2013).
- 9 DIRCO. 2013. Op.Cit, pg. 112. DIRCO. 2012. Op.Cit, pg. 10
- 10 Ibid, pg. 21.
- 11 DIRCO.2011. Op.Cit, pg. 101



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