

An emerging development agenda in flux

ADDRESSING THE DILEMMAS IN SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION

As South-South Cooperation grows in importance, actors and policy makers need to address the challenges of unequal power relationships, inequality and inclusive participation.

The growth of South-South Cooperation (SSC) presents new ways of practicing development cooperation by breaking old hegemonic patterns of North-South aid relationships. However, if SSC is to offer a viable alternative to traditional forms of aid, SSC actors, policy makers and southern Civil Society Organisations have to address standing challenges of unequal power relationships, inequality and inclusive participation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- SSC stakeholders and recipient countries need to address new power imbalances potentially undermining the founding principles of SSC.
- SSC actors should adhere to SSC's traditional focus on poverty alleviation by ensuring positive local economic impacts and averting negative effects within the framework of internationally agreed development goals.
- Recipient countries should have inclusive dialogues on how SSC partnerships are formed, defined, managed and evaluated in order to benefit their populations.

South-South Cooperation may strengthen new global power imbalances and have limited positive local impact.

"The growing importance of a handful of southern assistance providers has fundamentally changed the power dynamics of SSC and continues to challenge the principles of equality, non-interference and mutuality."

The long awaited Sustainable Development Goals adopted at the UN General Assembly in 2015 highlight South-South cooperation as an important development modality and presents an opportunity to address the prospects and challenges of SSC. Based on a growing documentation of lessons learnt this policy brief discusses how to address three key challenges.

1. Rising unequal power relationships between the countries in the South

Since the late 1980s, a range of significant new providers of development cooperation has emerged and engage in SSC. In particular, the BRICS but also second tiers of emerging economies progressively take on a "donor" or capacity provider role typically in their own regions. SSC is often articulated around principles of equality, non-interference and mutuality. As such, the political motivation for engaging in SSC is a wish to break free of unequal global power relationships by countries of the global South coming together and building self-initiated development partnerships. The discourses in the Global South

continue to focus on SSC as a welcome departure from traditional OECD-DAC donor assistance. Thus, SSC marks a break with the need to accept aid with a conditional package of Western donors' requirements for good governance and rights-based approaches – a package recipient nations have often felt was imposing unfit, neo-liberal and ineffective concepts on them. However, the emphasis of equality and mutuality defined against the hegemony of the Western powers often downplay the diversity of, and unequal power relationships between, countries involved in SSC. Development countries welcome new development powers like the BRICS and the diversification of development assistance providers.

At the same time, there is growing concern that some countries are introducing new forms of hegemony and promotion of national self-interest at the expense of the poorest countries and peoples. The 1955 Bandung principles (see text box below) emphasize sovereignty and equality and promote the idea of SSC as being "value-free" cooperation. However, there is a tendency for SSC to gradually incorporate more "intrusive" or

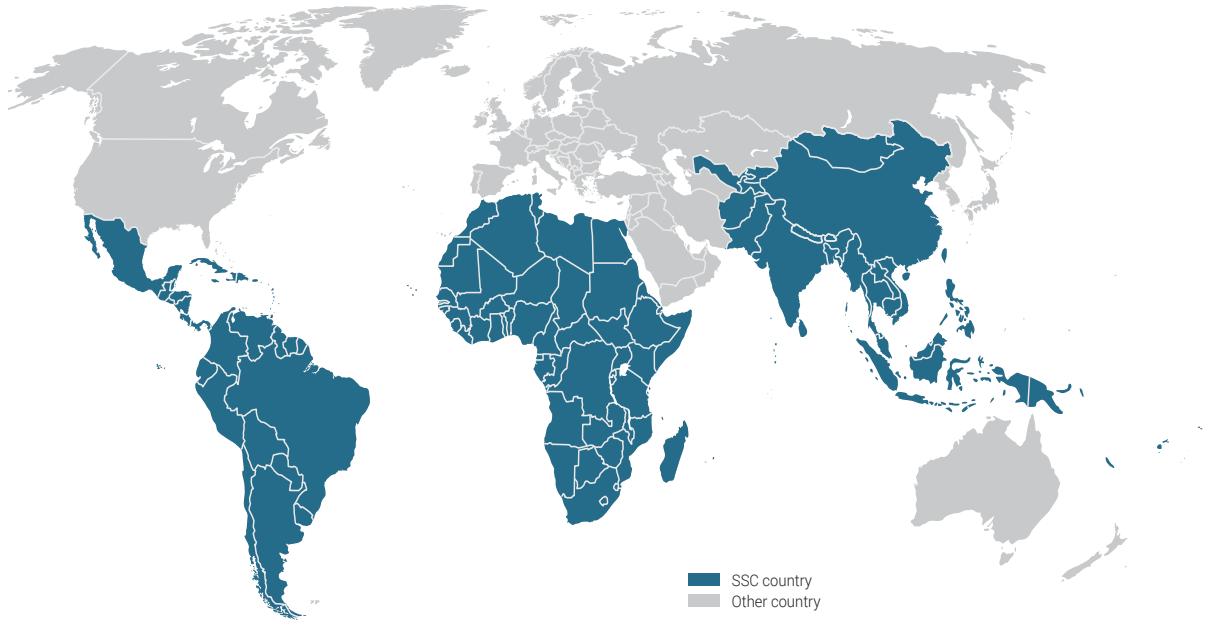
SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION

While no agreed definition exists, SSC often refers to the exchange of technology, resources, personnel, and knowledge between developing countries. Recently, SSC is expanding to comprise a broader range of sectors including foreign direct investments, security sectors and institution-building.

The language around SSC dates back to the Bandung conference in 1955 inaugurating the ideas of partnerships between equal nations grounded in solidarity,

equality and respect of sovereignty. In 1978 the UN opened a special unit for SSC to support academic research and cooperative efforts between southern countries to promote South-South trade and investment.

In 2011 the UN assessed the global volumes of SSC to about US\$16-19 billion. North-South assistance amounts to US\$130 billion.



Most nations of Africa, Central and Latin America and most of Asia are collectively known as the Global South. The global South includes nearly 160 of the world's 195 recognized states.

prescriptive conditions, principles and approaches. E.g. grants and concessional loans from emerging partners are often tied to the purchase of goods and services from the providing partner. Large-scale infrastructure projects may also be set up in ways that ensures the providing partner contracts; and indeed South-South cooperation is concentrated in recipient countries of direct (often economic) strategic importance to the provider. Such examples of tied aid indicate that new power imbalances are at play in SSC, particularly when cooperation is between a less developed country and an emerging or recently emerged power. Here, the power asymmetries profoundly challenge the original principles and perceptions of developing-to-developing country cooperation.

2. Economic inequality within the countries in the South

There is growing concern from Southern civil society organisations that SSC is driven by and benefitting southern elites rather than creating genuine alliances between societies-at-large to the benefit of the poorest. Particularly SSC involving emerging powers is criticized for ignoring civil society inclusion and for doing little to benefit local communities. There are several examples of private sector projects that have generated limited or no positive local economic impact in terms of employment and growth. The

criticism has primarily focused on cooperation involving private sector interests reflecting the interconnectedness of national and corporate interest and institutions among some emerging development assistance providers.

While the Indian, Brazil, South Africa (IBSA) fund, a flagship for SSC, explicitly supported the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, a range of SSC initiatives led by the IBSA founders have been accused of resulting in land grabs, forced displacements, human rights violations and environmental deprivation. This critique has led civil society representatives to re-emphasize SSC's original focus on poverty alleviation. It also raises questions about accountability and responsibility vis-à-vis ensuring that SSC aims to alleviate poverty. Policy makers should strive to align SSC to the internationally agreed Sustainable Development Goals, which in turn should provide space and support for developing effective SSC partnerships.

3. Forming, defining and evaluating SCC partnerships requires inclusive participation

Recently, a range of southern CSOs has become increasingly vocal about their exclusion from key planning, policy and decision-making processes impacting the populations they represent. This criticism does not only address specific SSC interven-

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tions, it also reflects a sense of exclusion of civil society from broader policy-making processes such as the development of the African Union's strategic framework for New Partnership for Africa's Development as well as national and regional policies on SSC. When excluded from the overall policy discussions from the onset, CSOs fear there will be limited incentives for, and pressure to, involve local communities and CSOs in deliberations around specific SSC initiatives.

As developing countries increasingly turn to SSC as the assistance model of choice, the "founding principles" of SSC must be revisited. The growing importance of a handful of southern assistance providers has fundamentally changed the power dynamics of SSC and continues to challenge the principles of equality, non-interference and mutuality. While this development may be inevitable, it should trigger renewed debate, particularly among recipient countries, on how SSC partnerships are formed, defined, managed and evaluated.

The voice of populations in recipient countries will be key in this debate. Throughout the planning, implementation and evaluation phases, communities and CSOs must be provided with platforms for probing to which extent SSC initiatives ensure positive local economic impact and avert negative effects. Recipient developing countries could benefit from embracing well-known, though not always employed, development practices of consultations, inclusion and community-driven development.

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Coverphoto: A Chinese foreman looks on as African labourers work on the construction of military officers housing, donated by China, in Guinea-Bissau. ©AP, Rebecca Blackwell.

