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# **South-South Cooperation: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Realities**

By Sachin Chaturvedi

Drawing on the heterogeneity and pluralities among the practitioners of South-South Cooperation (SSC), this article argues against any effort to develop a uniform structure of methodological and accounting approaches to capture its nuances. It further elaborates the importance of sectoral interventions in a mission mode that lies at the core of SSC interventions, unlike the project mode approach pursued under the official development assistance (ODA) framework. Underscoring the recent discussions in the literature that the world is moving towards a multiplex that would have no hegemonistic role for any nation, but would simultaneously preserve cultural and political diversity, it calls for moving beyond the idea of “Government to Government” approach to a more democratic process of “people-centric” cooperation. It concludes with the important role that think-tanks from the South are expected to play in strengthening SSC.

Le présent article s'appuie sur l'hétérogénéité et la pluralité des acteurs de la coopération Sud-Sud pour plaider contre toute initiative visant à uniformiser les structures méthodologiques et comptables visant à englober ses nuances. Puis, il montre l'importance des interventions sectorielles dans le cadre d'une approche axée sur la mission qui est au cœur de la coopération Sud-Sud, contrairement à l'approche basée sur des projets sur laquelle repose le cadre de l'aide publique au développement (APD). En se fondant sur les dernières études qui montrent que le monde se dirige vers un système pluriel dans lequel aucune nation n'exercerait son hégémonie, mais qui préserverait la diversité culturelle et politique, l'article défend l'idée que les processus de coopération entre les gouvernements doivent laisser la place à des processus plus démocratiques de coopération « centrée sur les personnes ». En conclusion, il souligne le rôle majeur que doivent jouer les centres d'action et de réflexion (*think-tanks*) des pays du Sud dans le renforcement de la

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coopération Sud-Sud.

**Apoyándose en la homogeneidad y la pluralidad entre los actores de la cooperación Sur-Sur, este artículo refuta todo intento por establecer un marco único de planteamientos metodológicos y contables que englobe sus matices. También aborda la importancia de la intervención sectorial en un planteamiento basado en la misión, que ocupa un lugar central en las intervenciones de la cooperación Sur-Sur, contrario al planteamiento centrado en proyectos que cimienta el marco de la asistencia oficial para el desarrollo (AOD). Haciendo énfasis en el análisis de estudios recientes que indican que el mundo se está convirtiendo en un entramado en el que ninguna nación desempeñaría un papel hegemónico pero que preservaría la diversidad cultural y política, el documento aboga por pasar de un planteamiento «de Gobierno a Gobierno» a un proceso más democrático de cooperación «centrada en las personas». El documento concluye destacando el importante papel que se espera que desempeñen los centros de reflexión y de investigación (*think-tanks*) en la consolidación de la cooperación Sur-Sur.**

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With continuous expansion and consistent deepening of South-South Cooperation (SSC), discussions are to assess and evolve a theoretical framework for its detailed understanding and substantive analysis. There may be some argument on whether we need to have a theoretical framework but questions like whether South-South Cooperation, triangular development cooperation fit in a theoretical framework, may not have much of a basis. The crux certainly lies with initiatives in terms of defining the idea of a framework and in what way we go for evolving southern methodologies, which are sensitive to the principles of SSC. However, the debate is still on in terms of how those principles are different from North-South cooperation, how those principles in the theoretical framework are important in terms of how we go forward. The efforts would also bring out the heterogeneity that one may notice within the SSC. We cannot have one framework for all the regions and all countries to follow. As is being observed, the heterogeneity and the plurality of South-South Cooperation are different at least among the Latin American countries and the other countries of the South and particularly in Asia as a whole. The Latin American countries come up with what is called a trust fund and this trust fund then decides the activities. Thus reporting and financial accounting becomes much easier in Latin American countries when it comes to South-South Cooperation.

With multiplication of global challenges, we require global responses coming forward. It was with this idea that the global leadership got together in 2011 at the Busan conference. Efforts for this, all of us know, could not go very far. Ideas for the North and South working together for addressing these challenges had limited forward movement. One of the factors probably was a very limited understanding of what South-South Cooperation is and what it can deliver.

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In a demand-driven engagement with the idea of mutual gain, South-South Cooperation is no more a government to government process alone. It brings in the civil society and, of course, also the private sector. We also need to realise that South-South Cooperation came in much before the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)-led North-South cooperation which came into existence only in 1961 and, of course, the Marshall Plan was one of the leaders in this. The Delhi IV conference tried to cover different dimensions of South-South Cooperation which are important for theorising this exercise. The academics from the South have to make efforts for deepening the work which Raúl Prebisch led with his centre-periphery theory. This conference was an effort in that direction. We need to see that the rise of the South is peaceful and we do not repeat the centre-periphery theory on which Raúl Prebisch wrote extensively. With preparation for the Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA) plus 40, the United Nations (UN) is planning several reports and the Delhi Process IV also aimed to deliver the required outcome.

In the Asian countries South-South Cooperation is largely driven by the political leadership. Announcements would be made and then activities would start. So one may not delineate budget-heads in terms of what you are spending on South-South Cooperation. As a result, when one is thinking of a logical framework approach, the idea of results, output and activities comes in. This may also bring in intervention logic vis-à-vis objectively verifiable indicators, means of verification, and analysis of a framework whereby the Department for International Development (DFID) and many others have been working. In fact, DFID's own approach has largely been adopted by and modified by other donor agencies from the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members. The peer review mechanism of the OECD DAC has also evolved around that framework. When we talk of developing countries and their projects and their impact assessment, we need to see how it can be tweaked in terms of reflecting the idea of mutual gain in terms of a demand driven approach. So if projects are to be assessed, in what way do we assess them, to see whether gain is mutual. It is extremely pertinent for us to see that we do not end up with what Raúl Prebisch was afraid of, the centre-periphery. So the South should not be creating another centre-periphery within itself with the rest of the South at the periphery and the emerging economies at the centre. So in order to avoid that conflicting situation, any methodology that we are looking forward to has to have that realism, that pragmatism at the core. With that pragmatism the statistical measurements should take a call as to whether linking lines of credit with sourcing of material from the country offering it should be treated as a conditionality or as mutual gain, which is one of the guiding principles of South-South Cooperation. So how you look at the same fact is important

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when we are defining the methodology. In this regard the question of project versus programme is one big question for South-South Cooperation. How do we bring in monetisation to that? How do we bring in accountability within that framework? How do we bring in our data assessment etc. within that framework? These are the main concerns.

Another point is about the excellent example of cross border integration and its monetisation or just the accounting of initiatives in South Asia, particularly India and Bangladesh where cross border integration has emerged as an important dimension from both the sides. Trade and export subsidies are dimensions of how you measure duty free, quota free access. The role of international agencies, SSC and triangular cooperation are important dimensions, for example in terms of how we account for the India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA) trust fund. The UN agencies already have the necessary details in terms of what kind of assessment can be undertaken and the reports have already been published. Thus, what role international agencies have in South-South Cooperation is important. What is the framework for South-South Cooperation and what are our learnings out of the experiences are extremely important. So how we derive that accounting is important. The Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB) accounts for 22 member states, has over 8000 cases of South-South Cooperation in their database and ten editions of a SSC report based on data collected. It is important in terms of how project units for reporting of South-South Cooperation are taken in. Therefore, it is important that we see the dynamics of South-South Cooperation at that micro level. They cannot be extrapolated as they would lose the relevance and the unique features that SSC has.

It also needs to be pointed out that not everyone counts the same thing in South-South Cooperation. So the diversity is important. Health and agriculture are important aspects, but the question is what impact you see of the sectoral interventions and to what extent they play an important role. In this regard, assessment versus evaluation is important and this is in terms of the accounting framework. If you see accounting frameworks from the lenses of assessment or accounting frameworks from the assessment of evaluation, what differences do we find? Do those differences mean the same thing? Another pertinent point is in terms of how we bring in the issue of immediate assessment and long-term results and to what extent South-South Cooperation can be assessed.

The question of efficiency, efficacy and sustainability, all three come in and that is where greater communication between the actors of the North and the actors of the South is important. We may brush aside irrelevance of northern models, but at some level, some sort of communication would help us avoid reinventing the wheel. That dimension of

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horizontality and participation is important.

The debates at the global level are converging on issues that are reflected in the World Trade Organization (WTO) issues and are also coming up in the Group of Twenty (G20). They are also running across the UN agencies to which most of the governments of the South are not tuned to. Within the developed countries, OECD plays that role extremely well but the South has yet to put their act together and it is the responsibility of some of the think tanks, the research institutions across the South to get the governments on one page.

In terms of plurality and the heterogeneity of South-South Cooperation, the fact that the Palestine International Cooperation Agency (PICA) very categorically articulates that no country is poor enough not to give anything and we still have something to give though we are going through so much of distress, this sharing even with limited resources is a clear testimony to the very idea of South-South Cooperation. It is also important in terms of passing on the message of self-reliance in terms of how we are moving forward. The fact that PICA could extend assistance towards Ecuador, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and an elaborate civil list of countries is a testimony to SSC, in terms of how a structured cooperation amongst the Southern countries can move forward.

We are witnessing the idea of the larger global scenario. The world is moving towards a multiplex which would have no hegemony but at the same time would have cultural and political diversity which would get reflected in the diversity at the level of functionality. This is important as we are talking about data reporting, impact assessment and several other ideas. In terms of the very idea of the theoretical framework, the fact is that we have delivered South-South Cooperation but documenting and interpreting a theoretical framework for South-South Cooperation with these factors being built in are still to be seen. The idea of going beyond a process of Government to Government (G2G) has become a reality as we are going beyond government to government partnerships. Civil society organizations (CSOs) are articulating the idea that came up in terms of how we are going to go forward in terms of putting in this agenda at the G20 level and at many other platforms where development finance is being discussed. The Sustainable Development Goals and Development Finance are squarely responsible in terms of how we move forward in addressing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

**Think-tank led efforts**

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The Delhi Process launched in 2013 has entered its sixth year with the fourth conference held in August 2018, and has made some moves in this direction, in light of the empirical realities. The first conference of the process was organised in 2013 in Delhi and was called the Delhi Process. This was extremely successful. In fact, a Track-I process emerged out of Delhi I which gave rise to an intergovernmental group at the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It had four meetings in 2014 and in early 2015. It was hoped that this process would deliver and bring out the key details of South-South Cooperation. Somehow this could not go very far. The Delhi II and Delhi III were organised in 2016 and 2017, respectively. With collective commitment for the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030, there are more reasons to see how we go forward together. In the Delhi Process II and III the idea of One World and the approach towards triangular cooperation were also explored.

Since 2014, the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has laid extra emphasis on how India can be part of triangular partnerships. With close partnership with the Ministry of External Affairs, particularly the multilateral economic relations division, great support has been forthcoming in terms of moving forward and the debates on South-South Cooperation are getting linked with several global processes including at G20 and, of course, BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa association) and IBSA. The very rise of the new development bank also gave a flip in this direction. Encouragement and support also came from the UN Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC). The Delhi IV conference also made efforts to bring in the national chapters like the Forum for Indian Development Cooperation (FIDC) and the national chapters of the Network of Southern Think-tanks (NeST) with NeST Brazil, NeST Africa, NeST Mexico and NeST Argentina, and the China International Development Research Network (CIDRN) which is also part of the NeST network. At the global level NeST is linked up with similar institutions and has tried to evolve an ecosystem where we can collectively deliberate upon several issues. As literature in this field has multiplied, South-South Cooperation is evolving. It is not enough to report what we are giving to other countries but it is equally important how it is being delivered. Thus, the idea of impact assessment is becoming part of the whole narrative. It is not mere semantics that we call it impact assessment and not monitoring and evaluation on which there is huge emphasis from our Northern partners. Thus, the need for launching a process for exploring nuances of SSC was felt and, therefore, the NeST was launched.

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