

CONCLUSIONS

Brainstorming Meeting on Triangular Co-operation

Lisbon, 13-14 September 2012

The *Brainstorming Meeting on Triangular Co-operation* brought together 24 technical experts with in-depth knowledge and practical experience of triangular co-operation to share their views on this type of development co-operation (see Annex for the list of participants). Drawing from a set of case studies presented at the meeting as well as their own experiences, participants discussed the characteristics and the conditions for “good” triangular co-operation, one that supports the common goal of reducing poverty and promoting development.

This meeting is part of a consultative process involving members of the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC), middle-income countries, low-income countries and international organisations. Its conclusions, together with a literature reviewⁱ and the findings from a survey on triangular co-operation,ⁱⁱ will inform discussions at a policy dialogue meeting to take place on 16-17 May 2013 in Lisbon. The conclusions of the policy dialogue will be brought to the attention of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation and other relevant international processes, with a view to encouraging further debate and joint action in the area of triangular co-operation.

CHARACTERISTICS OF TRIANGULAR CO-OPERATION

Participants at the brainstorming meeting agreed that all forms of triangular co-operation share the following characteristics:

- Triangular co-operation is often focused on sharing knowledge. As developing countries innovate and create development solutions, triangular co-operation offers an opportunity for disseminating successful experiences, thus promoting learning among all partners involved.
- Triangular co-operation involves three types of partners: a *facilitator*, a *pivotal partner* and a *beneficiary*.
 - The *facilitator* helps to connect countries and organisations to form a triangular partnership and gives financial and/or technical support to the collaboration.
 - The *pivotal partner* often has proven experience and shares its knowledge and expertise through triangular co-operation.
 - The *beneficiary* is the target for the development results to be achieved by the initiative and is responsible for ensuring that results are sustainable.

These roles are sometimes clearly attributed to each partner; but partners can also play simultaneous roles in a triangular co-operation. Also, there can be more than one country playing the role of facilitator, pivotal and/or beneficiary partner in a triangular co-operation.

- All three partners are significantly involved in and contribute to every step of the initiative, from design to evaluation.
- Triangular co-operation has objectives at several levels: there are development goals, which include building capacity of developing countries to create and share development solutions, and there can also be objectives related to the partnership itself.
- There is no single model for triangular co-operation: they are designed to capture opportunities for collaboration and learning. For instance, they can happen to replicate successful bilateral co-operation in

third countries, or when a facilitator connects two (or more) developing countries to share innovations and development solutions, or when a facilitator supports a pivotal partner to share its knowledge and expertise with beneficiaries.

- Triangular co-operation is most often linked to bilateral relationships, building on and complementing them. Through bilateral co-operation, partners can identify knowledge to be shared through triangular co-operation. Bilateral co-operation can also provide institutional arrangements to support implementation of triangular co-operation.
- Triangular co-operation adds value to bilateral co-operation, scaling-up and helping disseminate its results.
- Triangular co-operation has a “multiplier effect”, combining efforts of different development partners and strengthening developing countries’ capacity to share their development experiences, knowledge and innovations with other developing countries.

Participants mentioned two key challenges in triangular co-operation. First, it can be difficult to ensure good communication among all partners. Second, there is a general lack of systematisation and evaluation of triangular co-operation. This hampers understanding and makes it difficult to demonstrate the results and impact of triangular co-operation.

There was no conclusion on whether transaction costs in triangular co-operation are necessarily higher than those in bilateral co-operation. This is a common assumption since more partners could lead to more difficulties and delays in negotiation, communication and co-ordination. Three participants confirmed that transactions costs are higher, but four others questioned whether this is a common trait to all triangular partnerships. Another participant mentioned that impact should be taken into account to evaluate the cost-benefit of triangular co-operation: it is harder to co-operate with two rather than one partner, but the results can be scaled up and have a broader reach. Therefore, the results achieved offset the costs. One participant said that transaction costs are lower in triangular co-operation because the responsibilities are shared among more partners.

CONDITIONS FOR GOOD TRIANGULAR CO-OPERATION

According to participants at the brainstorming meeting, some of the elements necessary for “good” triangular co-operation are:

- Shared objectives, even though partners may have different interests.
- Strong commitment and involvement of all partners, with the beneficiary in the lead from design to implementation.
- Establishment of needs-driven partnerships, which depend on the ability of beneficiaries to clearly articulate their needs and priorities as well as on a clear commitment by all partners to respect beneficiaries’ national priorities and promote the socio-economic well-being of the local population.
- Agreement on implementation mechanisms and division of responsibilities among partners.
- Regular monitoring and evaluation as well as mutual accountability among partners.
- Strong communication among all partners, with a common understanding of technical language.
- Strong political support, which will ensure easier implementation.

- Achievement of development results and a multiplier effect in developing countries, which will ultimately lead to more sustainable development impact.

There are some other elements that help, but are not necessary conditions for “good” triangular co-operation:

- Cultural, linguistic and institutional similarities among partners can make collaboration easier.
- Existing bilateral relationships can ensure a higher level of trust among partners and support implementation. At least two of the three bilateral links should be strong.

Participants were not able to agree on whether a certain level of institutional capacity in pivotal and beneficiary partners is a condition for “good” triangular co-operation. If it is, this would mean that triangular co-operation in fragile states can be more difficult.

WAYS OF FULFILLING THE CONDITIONS FOR GOOD TRIANGULAR CO-OPERATION

Participants at the brainstorming meeting exchanged views on how to ensure that the elements necessary for “good” triangular co-operation are in place:

- Identifying a common challenge for all partners can help to establish an objective that unites them. Partners often sign a joint memorandum of understanding that sets out the overall objective of the initiative.
- To ensure strong commitment by all partners, triangular co-operation should be built on mutual respect and shared responsibilities. A joint document can help to define clearly the responsibilities of each partner.
- Use of country systems to channel funds and implement triangular co-operation can help strengthen developing countries’ ownership and contribute to achieving national priorities. It also supports the long-term goal of building the capacity of pivotal and beneficiary partners.
- The easiest way to determine implementation arrangements for triangular co-operation is to build on and adapt established mechanisms of bilateral co-operation. This minimises the time-consuming process of establishing new mechanisms.
- There is no need to establish a common fund among all partners to support triangular co-operation. However, certain arrangements can be helpful. For instance:
 - The facilitator can establish a dedicated funding arrangement for triangular co-operation, speeding up project implementation in parallel to and independent of bilateral programmes. Having a separate fund that it is not tied – for example to a specific sector – makes the choice of area of investment easier.
 - It is also useful to have the possibility of using bilateral funds and resources to complement those available for triangular co-operation, especially to ensure continuity and sustainability of interventions.
 - Partners can share costs according to their capacities and type of resources available (financial or in-kind). This ensures that all activities are funded and that all partners are committed to the initiative.
- Partners often rely on established bilateral mechanisms for monitoring triangular co-operation initiatives. Many participants agreed that it is important to go beyond monitoring: partners should agree on common indicators so that evaluation and accountability involves all partners.

- Communication can be facilitated through: i) the use of existing bilateral channels of communication, ii) the establishment of focal points in each partner, and iii) the involvement of providers of development co-operation'sⁱⁱⁱ country offices that have direct access to pivotal and beneficiary partners.
- To ensure strong political support, partners should build and strengthen political relations before starting an activity. Once there is political commitment, implementation becomes easier.
- Long-term sustainability of the results of a triangular co-operation activity can be ensured when there is a clear focus on building the capacity of developing countries to develop and share solutions to their development challenges.

MESSAGES FOR POLICY-MAKERS

The discussions at the brainstorming meeting produced some key messages that could be considered by policy-makers:

- The international community should re-think the concept of triangular co-operation. There are at least three partners in a triangular co-operation, with the beneficiary in the lead. All partners have an active role, and should work together from design to evaluation of the initiative.
- There is no single model of triangular co-operation, but rather a diversity of approaches. The international community should embrace this diversity instead of limiting it to one definition.
- Triangular co-operation is a good long-term investment. Its value resides in the long-term capacity development of developing countries to create and share development solutions.
- Triangular co-operation should be seen as a complement to bilateral co-operation. It should focus on strengthening and scaling up the results of bilateral co-operation.
- The effectiveness of triangular co-operation lies particularly at the political level. Strong political commitment is needed to ensure good implementation of triangular co-operation.
- High-level political commitment should be translated into practice. Implementation agencies should be mandated and supported to participate in triangular co-operation. Funding for triangular co-operation should be more predictable, and policy instruments and procedures should be more flexible.
- Identifying solutions that can be shared through triangular co-operation can be difficult. International organisations and providers of development co-operation can help, particularly through their country offices, by: i) identifying valuable capacity, knowledge or innovation in a developing country that can be transferred to other developing countries; and ii) connecting two or more developing countries to scale up development solutions. Countries and organisations can also use their knowledge networks to identify good practices and innovations that can be shared. Centres of excellence should be strengthened and made more visible.
- There is a need to better assess – and therefore better understand – the impact of triangular co-operation. It appears that many triangular initiatives are not evaluated.
- There is also a need to track financial flows for triangular co-operation. This can be challenging when triangular co-operation funds are channelled through the pivotal partner to the beneficiary partner. In this case, it is important to avoid double-counting of funds.

Annex: Participants at the Brainstorming Meeting on Triangular Co-operation

A small group of countries – identified through a literature review and a survey report as some of the key players in triangular co-operation – were invited to participate in the brainstorming meeting. The Special Unit for South-South Cooperation (UNDP) was also invited given its important role in the United Nations system for promoting, co-ordinating and supporting South-South and triangular co-operation. Technical experts from the following countries and organisations, representing different types of partners involved in triangular co-operation, attended the meeting:

- Bolivia
- Cameroon
- Chile
- Egypt
- Germany
- Japan
- Mexico
- Mozambique
- Portugal
- South Africa
- Tanzania
- Thailand
- Turkey
- United Kingdom
- United States
- Special Unit for South-South Cooperation, UNDP

ⁱ OECD (2013), *Triangular Co-operation: What's the Literature Telling Us?*, OECD Development Co-operation Directorate, May 2013.

ⁱⁱ OECD (2013), *Triangular Co-operation: What Can We Learn from a Survey of Actors Involved?*, OECD Development Co-operation Directorate, May 2013.

ⁱⁱⁱ For the purposes of this document, a provider of development co-operation is every country that only provides development co-operation and is not eligible to receive official development assistance. This includes DAC members, non-DAC Eastern European donors, Arab donors, among other high-income countries.