

Summary and main messages from the Seminar
“Challenges and opportunities for institutional philanthropy to work in triangular co-operation as a way to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”

28 January 2019, Lisbon

The Gulbenkian Foundation, the European Foundation Centre and the OECD’s Development Co-operation Directorate jointly organised a workshop on “Challenges and opportunities for institutional philanthropy to work in triangular co-operation as a way to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” on 28 January 2019 in Lisbon. It brought together representatives from 11 philanthropic organisations, the Camões – Institute for Co-operation and Language, I.P, Portugal, and the OECD. The seminar followed a two-fold objective: first, to introduce the modality of triangular co-operation and to assess the interest and extent to which philanthropic organisations make use of this instrument, and second, to see if the OECD and the Global Partnership Initiative (GPI) on Effective Triangular Co-operation could bring some messages from institutional philanthropy to the Second UN High-Level Conference on South-South Co-operation (BAPA +40) in Buenos Aires (20-22 March 2019).

With a view to dispelling the myth that triangular co-operation only includes governments as partners, participants discussed the following topics during the one-day seminar:

1- Setting the Scene – which role can institutional philanthropy play in triangular co-operation?

Since the adoption of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action for Promoting and Implementing Technical Co-operation among Developing Countries (BAPA), at the 1978 United Nations Conference in Buenos Aires, the development landscape has shifted, and international development co-operation dynamics and modalities have evolved. Triangular co-operation is a transformative modality that offers an adaptable and flexible approach to evolving development challenges, builds on the complementary strengths of different actors to find innovative and cost-effective, flexible context-specific solutions to development challenges, and can arise from a combination of South-South and North-South cooperation, creating coalitions around the pursuit of shared development goals. These solutions have been tested in a country with similar conditions, often in the immediate neighbourhood of the beneficiary partner, and are therefore better adapted to its context.

When triangular co-operation started evolving, the common understanding was that it includes a provider of South-South co-operation, a beneficiary partner and a provider of North-South co-operation or an international organisation. A contemporary approach to triangular cooperation reflects new development actors and changing working methods. As such, effective triangular co-operation often is multi-stakeholder, including governments, international organisations, civil society, the private sector, institutional philanthropy, academia, regional and local governments, and others. It makes use of complementarity and comparative advantages and is based on the assumption that three roles need to be identified for an activity to be considered ‘triangular’, namely: (a) a beneficiary partner; (b) a pivotal partner; and (c) a facilitating partner. There can be several partners for each role and roles may change throughout the life span of a project.

The OECD’s Development Co-operation Directorate works on triangular co-operation and collects data from institutional philanthropy, yet, this seminar was the first time that the two communities were linked to discuss triangular co-operation. According to data that the OECD collected from 26 philanthropic organisations in development co-operation, in 2017, philanthropy has contributed USD 6.1 billion, of which 38% of the funding is channelled through civil society organisations. Although, this may seem modest compared to Official Development Assistance which was at USD 178.4 billion, philanthropy was the second largest player in the health sector worldwide. One third of philanthropic funding benefitted Africa and two thirds are spent in middle-income countries.

At the same time, institutional philanthropy continues to suffer from the expectations gap and the perception of only being a partner that provides financing resources.. Philanthropic institutions often need to explain their complexity, limitations and strengths, emphasising that their skill set goes beyond just funding. Philanthropy is good at testing innovations and using small resources or seed money to scale up solutions. The reality of most institutions is not that

of large foundations, which are often seen as representative for the whole sector – the philanthropic space is very diverse and closely linked to that of civil society organisations. Partners, such as the OECD could support in bridging some divides and providing more visibility to the results achieved in partnerships with institutional philanthropy.

Triangular co-operation is on the rise. It connects all regions and contributes to achieving the SDGs. Trilateral activities differ widely in terms of scale, scope, regions, sectors and project types, but – counter a widespread myth - they are no ‘small niche activity’, although triangular co-operation can also be instrumental in niche areas. Moreover, small can go very far: Although the average budgets of triangular co-operation projects are smaller than those of bilateral or regional projects, their technical co-operation content can achieve a lot. Participants discussed the issue of scale in triangular co-operation. For instance, a solution from Zimbabwe was spotted by a representative of a UK foundation and successfully transferred to Peru, where a similar problem existed. Was this small scale triangular co-operation just an accident? And how do we systematically bring solutions to scale, so that they can be replicated?

Triangular co-operation is increasingly multi-stakeholder, involving actors beyond governments, where interests converge and complementary strengths are used to co-create solutions that improve the lives of people in a sustainable way. Many participants shared examples of triangular co-operation projects that they were engaged in, but did not label or report them as such. Examples included turning cocaine plantations in Colombia into cacao plantations with the support of São Tomé and a Portuguese foundation. New trilateral constellations also include foundations from different parts of the world working together, e.g. the Gates Foundation joining forces with Chinese foundations in Africa.

Overall, participants agreed that triangular co-operation is away to alter power relations and disrupt inequalities to ensure more inclusiveness in development co-operation. It is a way for different partners, including philanthropy, to share power and decision making, irrespective of who provides funding for projects. Going forward, there is a need to further assess impact on the ground and to strengthen communication and dialogue among different stakeholders with a view to speaking the same language, increasing evidence, and assessing ways to scale up trilateral initiatives and effective partnerships.

2 - What are priorities for foundations on the road to BAPA +40? How can we collaborate to advance a common agenda?

With the Agenda 2030, more than ever, there is a shared understanding that no one actor can do development alone – we need to work with a number of different partners to deliver projects on the ground and achieve sustainable development results. Representatives of institutional philanthropy were not actively involved in the the processes around the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. Usually, philanthropic organisations prioritise work to advance the specific agenda of the field that they are active in, and not so much in discussions to shape the global development agenda. Similarly, engagement and interest in the BAPA +40 process has been limited to date. A key issue to step up engagement is to assess, if other actors are sincerely interested in understanding the logic of working and thinking of institutional philanthropy and what they have to offer. Philanthropy is keen on maintaining independence from governments and public institutions.

In this regard, it would be interesting to assess where and how philanthropy can step in to occupy the blank spaces in delivering on the SDGs through its networks, knowledge and function as catalysors. Furthermore, as we are all working to go transcend the traditional North-South transfer of knowledge and funding, and in advancing the use of triangular co-operation modalities, finding the right local partners from the South remains challenging.

3- What is necessary to increase the participation and visibility of philanthropic foundations in triangular co-operation?

The OECD study on “Private Philanthropy for Development in 2017” found that middle-income countries are at the centre of attention for philanthropy. Participants discussed that the value added of institutional philanthropy could be in their ability to take risk in fragile contexts and least developed countries. Triangular co-operation may be a good tool to work in risky countries, addressing the political context, and to share the risk among different partners, e.g. bilateral co-operation agencies and philanthropic organisations.

Participants showed interest in using triangular co-operation, where the situation, local and political context are conducive to this modality. They called for a change of perception of institutional philanthropy as funders towards them being active partners that bring in expertise, networks and specific skills. They would be pleased to engage in conversations members of the DAC on their contributions to development co-operation, given their specific nature and identity.

4- Which role can the Global Partnership Initiative on Effective Triangular Co-operation play in terms of advocacy and as a platform for sharing knowledge and experiences?

The Global Partnership Initiative (GPI) on Effective Triangular Co-operation is a multi-stakeholder initiative with currently 57 members. It is led by a core group consisting of Canada, Japan, Mexico, the UN Office for South-South Co-operation (UNOSSC), the Islamic Development Bank, the Ibero-American Programme for the Strengthening of South-South Co-operation (PIFCSS), and the OECD.

Participants were interested in the facilitating role that the GPI could take vis-à-vis the UN system and the follow-up process of BAPA +40. They welcomed being informed about the GPI and about how discussions on the Outcome Document of BAPA +40 and work to implement the agreements advance.

5- What are the next steps?

To conclude, participants encouraged more dialogue among different development partners and looked forward to continuing the exchange during other meetings, possible during the next international meeting on triangular co-operation in Lisbon during the second half of the year. Together with other partners, the OECD proposed a side event at BAPA +40, which looks at the role of private actors (institutional philanthropy, civil society and private sector) in achieving the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, participants were interested in contributing to a report that the GPI is preparing for BAPA +40 on “Triangular Co-operation in the Era of the 2030 Agenda”. Proposals and information can be sent to Nadine Piefer (nadine.piefer@oecd.org).