

TRIANGULAR CO-OPERATION: PROMOTING PARTNERSHIPS TO IMPLEMENT THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

I. KEY MESSAGES

Participants agreed to take the following key messages to relevant global events including the second high-level meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation in Nairobi in November 2016:

- Triangular co-operation is linked to and can be promoted and monitored as a means of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.
- Triangular co-operation is a relevant and strategic modality for all types of development co-operation.
- Triangular co-operation has a clear value added. Through triangular co-operation, the partners involved share knowledge, learn together, facilitate capacity development, collaborate and jointly create solutions to development challenges. Combining efforts based on complementary knowledge - as happens in triangular co-operation - is key to achieving good results and to taking the 2030 Agenda forward. All countries can potentially be providers, facilitators and beneficiaries of knowledge sharing in triangular co-operation, so it transcends divides between different types of co-operation.
- Greater political attention and high-level backing – both domestically and internationally – supports more targeted use of triangular co-operation. To help triangular co-operation achieve its full potential, the partners involved should capture and communicate better its value added, based on their respective goals as well as the overall development objective.
- Greater visibility and awareness can dispel the myths on triangular co-operation. More systematic collection and analysis of data and other information on existing projects, including their results, will support this objective.
- Linking triangular co-operation more to other programmes and different forms of co-operation and financial instruments will help scale up this form of co-operation.
- Many partners in triangular co-operation have developed guidelines and joint agreements, such as MoUs, that will reduce transaction costs and facilitate implementation.
- Engaging in multi-stakeholder partnerships with the private sector, civil society and academia can mobilise additional resources for triangular co-operation and generate innovative solutions to development challenges.
- At an operational level, six keywords summarise the success factors for triangular co-operation:
 - **Reciprocity** among the partners
 - **Commitment** at both the political and technical levels
 - **Collaborative use of resources**, such as expertise, funds and in-kind contributions
 - **Time** in the sense of a long-term commitment and longer planning phases
 - **Common ground**, clear communication and steering structures: management responsibility may rotate among partners
 - **Innovation and co-creation** of solutions to development challenges

II. BACKGROUND

The OECD Development Co-operation Directorate and the Camões – Institute for Co-operation and Language (Portugal) organised an [International Meeting on Triangular Co-operation on 19 May 2016](#) in Lisbon. Representatives from all constituencies involved in triangular co-operation participated. In total, the meeting brought together 63 participants from governments, implementing agencies and international organisations.

Partnerships are at the heart of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with goal 17, on the means of implementation, emphasising the contribution of triangular co-operation to achieving the other goals. Participants agreed that the meeting was taking place at a critical moment, when all countries are finding ways to achieve the SDGs. At the same time, African countries are also looking into the implementation of the African Union 2063 Agenda, which provides a strategic vision for development and co-operation with partner countries on the African continent.

Against this background, the meeting provided an opportunity to dispel some common myths on triangular co-operation and to share knowledge and experiences on three critical factors, namely: 1) partnership arrangements and resourcing, 2) implementation and operational guidelines, and 3) capturing and communicating the value added of triangular co-operation. In addition to the key messages set out above, the participants also identified a series of follow-up actions that are listed in the final section of this summary.

The following recent analytical work carried out by the OECD and the Ibero-American Programme for the Strengthening of South-South Co-operation (PIFCSS) provided a common knowledge base for the discussions:

- The findings from the OECD's 2015 survey on triangular co-operation, based on responses from 60 countries and organisations.
- Consultations within the Ibero-American Programme for the Strengthening of South-South Co-operation (PIFCSS) to produce a set of management guidelines for implementing triangular co-operation in Ibero-America.

III. MYTHS AND REALITIES OF TRIANGULAR CO-OPERATION

Participants de-constructed three common myths of triangular co-operation and discussed the reality based on their experiences.

1) Myth: Triangular co-operation is scattered and small in scale and scope. It is only relevant in some niche areas.

Triangular co-operation has increased across all sectors of co-operation and in all parts of the world. Participants agreed that there is a wide diversity of approaches for triangular co-operation in terms of scale, scope, regions, sectors and types of project. For instance, the Ibero-American Secretariat (SEGIB) found that the number of triangular co-operation projects and activities that were implemented in 2013 was 36% higher than in 2012. Since 2006, the number of triangular initiatives increased six-fold - from 26 to 166 - in Latin America and the Caribbean. Some projects might be smaller and provide inputs in niche areas – but this is not necessarily a reason for criticism. At times, pooling the expertise of the partners involved in triangular co-operation creates solutions to development challenges that would have not emerged otherwise.

2) Myth: Triangular co-operation projects don't follow a strategic vision and don't have clear guidelines.

Many of the partners involved in triangular co-operation have developed guidelines, policy frameworks and strategies for triangular co-operation that help to reduce transactions costs and facilitate the initiation and implementation of projects. Many joint agreements and memoranda of understanding (MoUs) have been signed that formalise and guide triangular co-operation projects. Participants agreed that the principles and mechanisms of bilateral co-operation also apply to triangular co-operation. Triangular co-operation projects follow a strategic vision in aligning with the 2030 Agenda, national development strategies of the partners involved and in forming multi-stakeholder partnerships.

3) Myth: There is no clear value added of triangular co-operation in comparison to bilateral or regional co-operation.

Through triangular co-operation, the partners involved share knowledge, learn together, facilitate capacity development, collaborate and jointly create solutions to development challenges. Participants agreed that there is a very clear value added of triangular co-operation. Participants called for an overall “mind shift” in international development co-operation, whereby triangular co-operation is seen as reciprocal and equal co-operation among partners, which is part of its value added. Scaling-up triangular co-operation offers opportunities to include the private sector, civil society and academia in partnerships aimed at achieving development results and promoting mutual benefits. Matchmaking by facilitators is another value added - some triangular projects might have not otherwise have happened.

IV. PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS AND RESOURCING

Partnerships in triangular co-operation projects are a critical factor that is both a challenge and an achievement. Finding the right partnership arrangement requires time and resources, especially in the first stages of the project. Once achieved, partnership arrangements established are more stable and allow for more efficient management of resources later on, which can compensate for higher initial transaction costs. Against this background, participants discussed the following key issues:

- How do the three roles of facilitator, pivotal partner and beneficiary play out in practice?
- How can good communication and information flows be ensured?
- How can costs and in-kind contributions be shared between partners?
- If required, how can additional funding be obtained?

Participants agreed that the three roles of facilitator, pivotal partner and beneficiary characterise triangular co-operation and that partners need to ensure alignment and complementarity. These roles are not bound to the type of actor involved (e.g. civil society, government or private actor) or the development level of the partners (e.g. least developed, low, middle or high-income countries). Also, roles are not fixed for the lifetime of a project and partners can change roles as the project progresses. Clear communication and information flows from the outset, e.g. by identifying individual expectations and objectives of each partner in the project and using these as a framework for collaboration, support effective implementation.

All three partners actively contribute to triangular co-operation projects through different types of resources (e.g. expertise, time, finances, in-kind contributions). Financial costs are shared in some cases. By looking at all aspects of projects, it is clear that all partners provide in-kind contributions, including the beneficiary. Participants agreed that quantifying such in-kind contributions is a critical factor to demonstrate equality and horizontality in triangular partnerships. Some methodologies are already being tested to account for in-kind contributions in South-South co-operation which might be useful for triangular co-operation as well. Participants felt that more could be done to link the issues of cost-sharing, in-kind contributions and knowledge sharing to the work on financing for development.

Participants discussed whether additional funding for triangular co-operation is needed and agreed that the private sector and civil society organisations can play a crucial role in this regard. Including private sector expertise and funding in triangular co-operation projects requires more strategic approaches and systematic planning. Identifying mutual benefits can also help to attract the private sector. To identify convincing arguments and incentives for private actors, participants discussed the importance of adopting a common language. Discussions about funding instruments that could underpin triangular co-operation projects with the private sector are useful to identify common ground for collaboration. Some international organisations, including the Food and Agriculture Organisation and the United Nations Office for South-South Co-operation, have established web-based matchmaking platforms for South-South and triangular co-operation to match demand and supply. These could usefully be scaled up and used by a broader range of partners in triangular co-operation, including possible future partners.

V. IMPLEMENTATION AND OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES

Once a triangular co-operation project is agreed, all partners involved need to plan and formalise implementation arrangements. In some cases, this follows overall operational guidelines for triangular co-operation while in others, processes, steering structures and responsibilities are defined on a case-by-case basis or through use of bilateral mechanisms. Participants discussed the following key issues and shared experiences on good practices of implementing triangular co-operation projects:

- How can project implementation plans best be worked out jointly?
- How can ownership of all three partners - facilitator, pivotal partner and beneficiary - be ensured?
- Which components of a project need to be done together and where is a division of labour more efficient?
- How can lean, but effective, steering structures be created on all levels of the triangular co-operation activity?

Participants considered that the planning phase and a good steering structure, with clearly defined roles and communication structures, are very important. Partners should allocate sufficient time in the beginning to

establish common ground and set-up management structures. Bottom-up and top-down initiation of triangular co-operation projects are possible. In both cases, political endorsement and buy-in, as well as flexibility, are crucial. In all cases, it is important to take the local context as a baseline. Participants regarded bottom-up management and promoting the local counterpart as leader of the process as a success factor because local management will bring more ownership. Rotating management responsibility among the three partners ensures greater ownership by all the partners.

Understanding the different cultures of countries and institutions of each of the partners is important. Building trust is essential for bridging language and cultural differences. A common vision and alignment among partners supports effective implementation.

Participants identified several obstacles at the operational level that hinder implementation: high transaction costs, differences in procurement systems that might lead to delays in project implementation, difficulties with transferring funds across borders or fluctuation in exchange rates.

Ensuring sustainability from the beginning of the project is important as it is in any other development intervention. To leverage the investments that have been made, especially when starting with small projects, the partners involved should envisage planning new project phases and scaling-up activities. Just as a triangular co-operation project can be initiated based on successful bilateral co-operation, co-operation could also be continued bilaterally after the triangular co-operation project ends. In this way, bilateral arrangements can complement triangular co-operation. On the other hand, triangular co-operation can also be scaled up into multi-stakeholder partnerships. In this way, regional organisations, platforms and networks for knowledge sharing can enhance the sustainability of projects after their official termination.

VI. CAPTURING AND COMMUNICATING THE VALUE ADDED OF TRIANGULAR CO-OPERATION

Practitioners, policymakers and experts often describe the value added of triangular co-operation as working in horizontal partnerships, building trust, learning among all partners, strengthening networks and increasing intercultural understanding. Against this background, participants discussed the following key issues:

- How can the value added of triangular co-operation be captured through evaluations?
- How can triangular co-operation projects be scaled up? Which role could the private sector, civil society, development banks and academia play?
- How can the value added of triangular co-operation be transformed into convincing arguments that can be communicated to policy makers, potential new partners and the general public?

Participants agreed that triangular co-operation is working and producing good results as an implementation modality. It can add value in different kinds of partnership arrangements across all sectors. Participants pointed to the need to showcase how triangular co-operation is working, focusing on capturing more evidence and strengthening capacities with the modality. Mainstreaming triangular co-operation and scaling it up into multi-stakeholder partnerships will help to implement the 2030 Agenda. Including a wider variety of actors in triangular co-operation, e.g. academia, civil society and the private sector, can encourage thinking “out of the box” and innovation.

Participants discussed that creating more awareness and visibility, better communicating results and reporting data on triangular co-operation to as wide an audience as possible will help to raise visibility and communicate the value added of triangular co-operation. Participants regarded the private sector as a potentially important partner in triangular co-operation and a vehicle to provide visibility. Information is already available on some cases of private sector involvement in triangular co-operation projects. At the same time, since there is currently no internationally agreed definition, projects involving civil society, academia or the private sector are often not reported or listed in official statistics.

In terms of planning for and measuring results, participants discussed the necessity to agree up-front on the overarching project objective that will be used to monitor achievements. However, each partner can also include their own specific objectives in the framework for measuring results. This approach allows for better measuring of results, both individual and collective, and collecting data that will support better communication of the value added of triangular co-operation throughout the project’s lifecycle.

VII. ACTIONS TO PROMOTE TRIANGULAR CO-OPERATION

During discussions, participants identified several ways to promote triangular co-operation and to link it to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Co-operation. Participants agreed that triangular co-operation is delivering good results, but there is a need to showcase these better, gather more evidence through case studies and evaluations and increase visibility. Engaging in multi-stakeholder partnerships with the private sector, civil society and academia can mobilise additional resources for triangular co-operation and generate innovative solutions to development challenges. Participants found that more could be done in the fields of quantifying in-kind contributions in triangular co-operation, reporting, developing results frameworks, monitoring and evaluation, as well as increasing leverage by linking triangular co-operation to larger development co-operation programmes.

During their discussions at this international meeting, participants identified several actions to promote triangular co-operation:

1. Link work on triangular co-operation to the work on financing for development and mainstream triangular co-operation into the SDG agenda. With a view to the second high-level meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation in Nairobi: compiling more evidence on triangular co-operation to showcase how it works and generally give triangular co-operation more visibility.
2. Emphasise the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The most common model of triangular co-operation is government-to-government interaction or co-operation with international organisations. To tap its full potential, enhanced engagement in multi-stakeholder partnerships with the private sector, civil society, academia will be important to:
 - Mobilise private sector contributions by clarifying the incentives to get involved.
 - Identify funding instruments that will assist with channelling contributions from the private sector.
 - Involve civil society, academia, and think tanks as resource providers and implementers.
3. Develop ideas for all partners to define and monitor their objectives in triangular co-operation as a complement to the overall development objective. This calls for clear results frameworks for the intended development impact and including the measurement of results from the beginning. Each partner may have its own individual objective in the triangular co-operation which should also be evaluated and the results communicated.
4. Build awareness about triangular co-operation through continuing to compile case studies and conducting more evaluations. Explore how evaluation methodologies can be applied to capture all aspects of the value added of triangular co-operation.
5. Develop a methodology that can quantify in-kind contributions, measure and evaluate results by looking at holistic aspects of the project. Among others, the UN institutions, SEGIB and PIFCSS are conducting work on assessing South-South and triangular co-operation that could provide a good starting point.
6. Increase and share reporting of triangular co-operation (e.g. by reporting through the OECD statistics, which is open to all countries).
7. Assess the extent to which existing platforms on triangular co-operation could enhance their matchmaking role for proposed projects and activities.
8. Establish a repository of projects, experiences and documented case studies that provide a knowledge base on triangular co-operation.
9. Look into ways of leveraging triangular co-operation better and linking it to larger programmes, e.g. by the World Bank and regional development banks.