



# TRIANGULAR CO-OPERATION: WHY DOES IT MATTER?



# WHAT IS TRIANGULAR CO-OPERATION?

**T**he triangle is a basic shape in geometry and one of the strongest, most stable structures there is. They are also at the heart of an innovative way of collaborating to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Triangular co-operation is when countries, international organisations, civil society, private sector, private philanthropy and others work together in groups of three or more, to co create flexible, cost-effective and innovative solutions for reaching the SDGs.

There are multiple ways of turning and shaping triangles, and so triangular co operation can actually take several forms. Some think a triangle implies a hierarchy with one partner at the top, and thus prefer calling it “trilateral” co-operation. Others consider triangles flat and illustrative of horizontal collaboration.

In the past there was a common understanding that triangular co-operation needed to include (i) a provider of South-South co-operation, (ii) a beneficiary partner and (iii) a provider of North-South co-operation (or an international organisation).

So, what about the following example of a collaboration between Poland, Canada and the Ukraine – is it triangular co-operation (Case story 1)? Or is it co financing? For instance, a lot of the triangular co-operation activities with Arab providers are classified as co-financing, even if they have an active role in the initiative, just because they are high-income countries.

**CASE STORY 1:** Poland and Canada (both DAC members) work together in Ukraine to support the country in building effective, legitimate and trustworthy democratic institutions, in particular local government and independent media. The initiative enables sharing Poland’s transition experience with Ukraine, as well as building up systematic co-operation between Polish and Ukrainian public institution and civil society organisations through Canada’s facilitation.

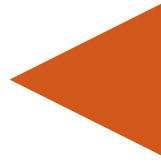
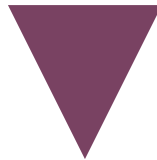
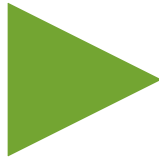


And how about several non-state actors collaborating, as is the case in this triangular co-operation among trade unions (Case story 2)? When international organisations are involved, are they neutral brokers or active participants in the initiative?

Where do we draw the lines between triangular, regional or multi-stakeholder partnerships? Is there a limit to the number of partners engaged in triangular co operation (Case stories 3 and 4)?

**CASE STORY 2:** Trade union centres from Brazil, Belgium, Canada, France, Italy, Spain and Sweden work together with the International Labour Organisation (Haiti office) to contribute to building trade union capacities with a view to implementing the decent work agenda in Haiti.

**CASE STORY 3:** Tanzania, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Kenya are working with Norway to establish an Environmental Journalists Network with the view to achieving a strong and sustainable network of environment and development advocate in all participating countries.



**CASE STORY 4:** Greece, UNDP and the UN Economic Commission for Europe work with Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to enable transboundary co-operation and integrated water resource management in the extended Drin River Basin.

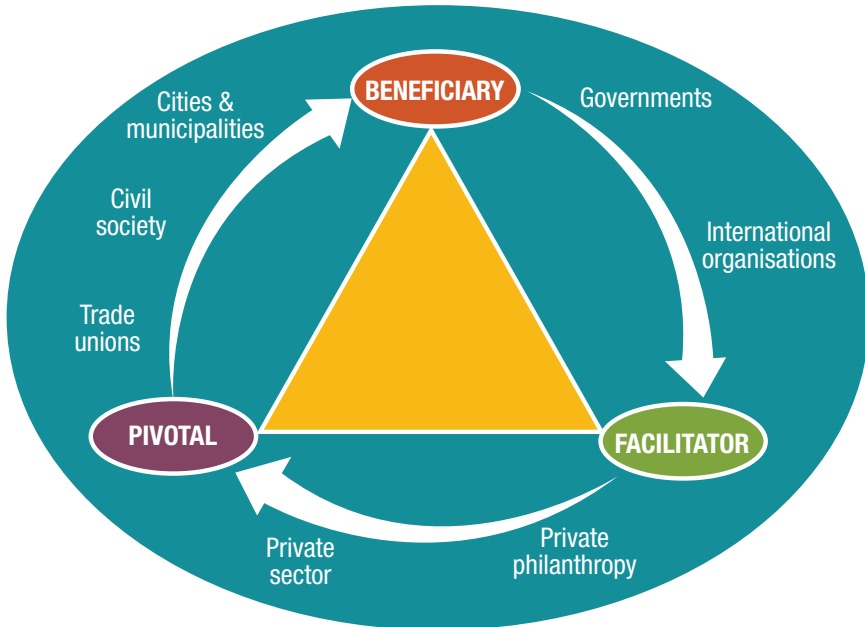
In recent years, this modality of development co-operation has been on the rise and has expanded beyond the common understanding of government-to-government initiatives among three partners only.

At the OECD and in the Global Partnership Initiative (GPI) for Effective Triangular Co-operation, we see the combination of three roles, which may revolve throughout the implementation of the initiative, as the common denominator in triangular initiatives:

- **The beneficiary partner** has demanded support to tackle a specific development challenge;
- **The pivotal partner** often has proven experience tackling the issue, and shares its resources, knowledge and expertise to help others do the same; and
- **The facilitating partner** helps connect the partners, supporting the collaboration financially and technically.

Roles are dynamic and can change throughout the life of a project. Moreover,

- There can be several actors at each edge of the triangle
- Those actors may be representing countries, international organisations, civil society, private sector, trade unions or private philanthropy.



With knowledge and benefits flowing between all partners, these collaborations can be more robust and flexible than other types of partnerships, thus potentially bringing about real change on the ground.

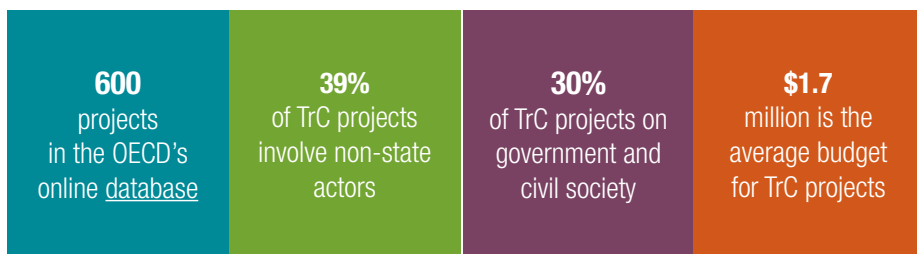
## WHY DOES TRIANGULAR CO-OPERATION MATTER?

Triangular co-operation helps to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in innovative and collaborative ways and can provide solutions to overcome today's most pressing environmental, economic and social challenges, ensuring sustainable development in partner countries. This explains why triangular co-operation is part and parcel of the Second UN High-level Conference on South-South Co operation (BAPA +40).

## WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT TRIANGULAR CO-OPERATION?

Through its analytical and evidence-based dialogue, the OECD has been raising awareness on this recent modality of development co-operation. The 2012 and 2015 OECD surveys on triangular co-operation led to the creation of an [online project database](#) and helped structure a series of policy dialogues in Lisbon, Portugal.

### The OECD Triangular Co-operation Database



## MYTHS AND REALITIES

While many countries and organisations acknowledge the advantages of working through triangular co-operation, it still only makes up a small proportion of overall Official Development Assistance (ODA). As triangular co-operation is growing, the assumptions and myths about this modality are increasing, as is the need for evidence.

**Myth #1: “Triangular co-operation is scattered and small in scale and scope. It is only relevant in niche areas.”**

**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. Besides, as different partners contribute, funds can be leveraged. Finally, numerous triangular co-operation projects have large budgets (Case story 5).

**CASE STORY 5:** Malaysia and Australia work in Afghanistan to improve the learning outcomes of schoolchildren, especially girls, and to train teachers to develop and use new curricula and teaching methods. The project makes use of Malaysia cultural proximity with a budget of over USD 10 million from 2009-2013.

The OECD is building the evidence base by collecting data on projects through its [online project repository](#), tracking triangular co-operation through DAC statistics and providing analyses of trends. The amount of triangular co-operation projects as well as in their budgets and average project length are increasing - a fact also confirmed by other institutions such as the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB).

Triangular co-operation activities differ widely in terms of scale, scope, regions, sectors and project types: they are no “small niche activity”, although triangular co-operation can also be instrumental in niche areas. For example, ‘green’ triangular co-operation is crucial to implementing the Paris Agreement (Case story 6). The OECD is putting particular emphasis on triangular co-operation for “greener” development.

**CASE STORY 6:** China, Denmark and the UNDP are implementing a technology transfer project in Zambia since 2014 as a solution for providing access to renewable energy, building upon Chinese experience and technical knowledge.

**Myth #2: “Triangular co-operation projects do not follow clear planning and implementation mechanisms.”**

Planning in triangular initiatives follows the same procedures as any other development co-operation project. Many countries and regions and several international organisations have put forward guidelines. Partners in triangular co-operation projects often sign joint agreements or Memoranda of Understanding (Case story 7).

**CASE STORY 7:** The United Arab Emirates (UAE) deployed renewable energy in several Small Island Developing States in the Pacific through the UAE-Pacific Partnership, which is a facility with a USD 50 million grant established in 2013. Implementation involved several providers of development co-operation, in particular New Zealand, with which the UAE signed a memorandum of understanding to exchange information regularly on project pipelines, co-financing areas and agree modes for joint planning and implementation.

The OECD is gathering various guidelines of countries and institutions to design, plan, implement, monitor and evaluate their triangular co-operation projects and programmes (Case story 8).

**CASE STORY 8:** The Ibero-American Programme for the Strengthening of South-South Co-operation (PIFCSS) has developed “Management Guidelines for Triangular Co-operation” that are applied in all of Latin America and the Caribbean.

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

**1+1+1 > 3:** Partners in triangular co-operation achieve greater results than the sum of their interventions would have yielded. Triangular co-operation does not only deliver direct development results: the collaboration enhances the capacity of partners to tackle global challenges and to work together more strategically. It leads to strong and trusting partnerships that often reach beyond the project.

**Knowledge is priceless and complementary:** Knowledge sharing and joint learning are core elements of triangular co operation. In the spirit of mutual benefit, countries share their experiences and expertise. Partners often find innovative and cost-effective, flexible, context-specific solutions to development challenges (Case story 9). These solutions have been tested in a country with similar conditions (pivotal partner), often in the immediate neighbourhood of the beneficiary partner, and are therefore better adapted to its context. The cost / benefit ratio is typically high.

**CASE STORY 9:** Brazil and Germany are managing disaster risks in Mozambique by measuring and monitoring the water levels of rivers. Germany provided advanced technological solutions while Brazilian experts adapted their knowledge to the climatic conditions of Mozambique. But both providers had not foreseen that transmitting measurements of water levels via internet would be difficult due to the frequent power cuts. The solution came from the Mozambican experts: to transmit the results via the cell phone network.

These aspects feature prominently in debates on triangular co-operation, but analyses or evaluations rarely capture them. Therefore, the OECD, together with a group of experts, is developing a “*Toolkit for identifying, monitoring and evaluating the value added of triangular co-operation*”.



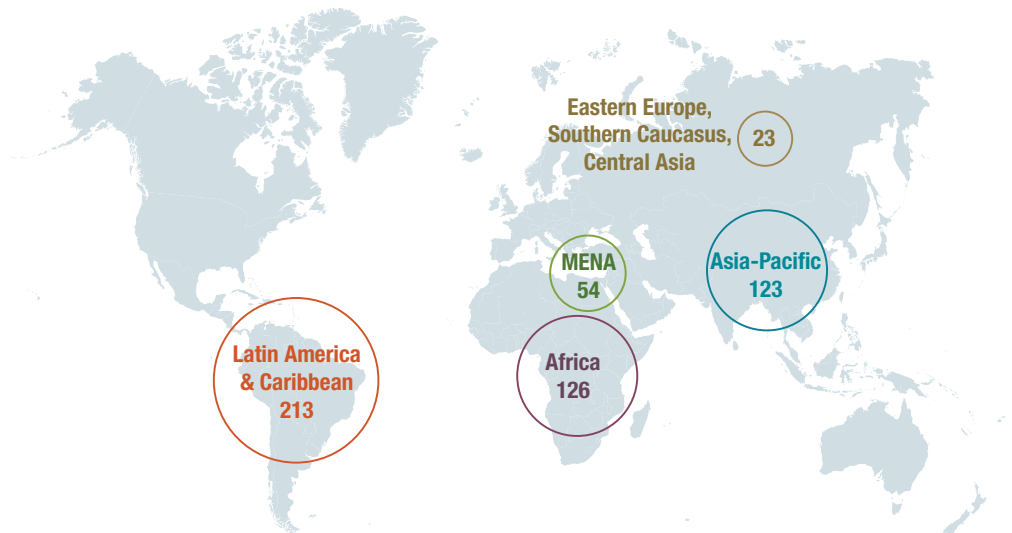
#### Myth #4: “Triangular co-operation is only in Latin America and the Caribbean.”

Partners all over the world often work trilaterally without using the triangular co-operation label, largely for lack of an agreed international definition. A recent OECD paper on the [Middle East and Northern Africa](#) shows the potential for cross-regional dialogue and learning (Case story 10). A forthcoming OECD paper will look at triangular co-operation trends in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

**CASE STORY 10:** Germany and the Arab Gulf Programme for Development (AGFUND) implement the ‘Promoting Women’s Financial Inclusion Project’ in Yemen, a triangular initiative to teach financial skills and develop financial products for vulnerable women.

The OECD is studying how countries and institutions in all regions of the world conduct triangular co-operation, looking for new approaches, gathering good practice and lessons learnt and fostering regional, cross-regional and global dialogue and policy exchange on the subject.

Mapping the regional distribution of triangular co-operation projects does confirm that the majority are in Latin America and the Caribbean, but it also shows substantial activity in Africa and Asia. In the Middle East and North Africa region, as in Eastern Europe, Southern Caucasus and Central Asia, most projects involve more than one region.



## TRIANGULAR CO-OPERATION - IS IT ODA?

Triangular co-operation can be reported as Official Development Assistance (ODA) to the OECD DAC Creditor Reporting System (CRS). A provider of development co-operation can report financial flows committed and disbursed for a triangular activity, when beneficiary countries are ODA-eligible. An activity can only be reported as ODA when the objective of the triangular co-operation is to provide assistance to a beneficiary country that is ODA-eligible. It can also be counted as ODA if the resources committed and disbursed are channelled through a country that is not ODA-eligible (see Box 11).

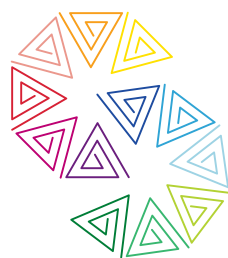
### BOX 11: EXAMPLE OF THE ODA-ELIGIBILITY OF TRIANGULAR CO-OPERATION

Let us assume that a DAC member, e.g. Japan works with a country that is not ODA-eligible, e.g. Chile, in a country that is on the list of ODA recipients, e.g. Mozambique. Any financial flows that would be spent for development in Chile would not qualify as ODA, however the payment of Chilean experts to deliver training or workshops in Mozambique could be counted as ODA. In this example, the 'channel of delivery' reportable in the CRS is the 'third country' government, Chile - as is the case for experts hired to work in development co-operation projects by any DAC member (e.g. Norway).

## HOW TO MOVE THE AGENDA FORWARD?

### *Engaging in partnerships*

The Global Partnership Initiative (GPI) on Effective Triangular Co-operation was created at the second high-level meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation in Nairobi in December 2016. It is steered by Mexico, Canada, Japan, the Islamic Development Bank, the UN Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC), the Ibero-American Programme for the Strengthening of South-South Co-operation and the OECD. The GPI is the only global platform for sharing experiences and information on triangular co-operation. UNOSSC and Argentina invited the GPI to feed into the preparations and outcome document of BAPA +40 in March 2019. The GPI has three work streams:



- An advocacy work stream elaborating voluntary principles on effective triangular co-operation;
- An analytical work stream compiling reports and policy briefs with insights, models and lessons learned;
- An operational work stream developing tools to facilitate managing triangular co-operation.



### ***Building the evidence base***

We work on dispelling the myths of triangular co-operation by collecting data, project documents, evaluation reports and other publications to learn more about what works and what does not in triangular co-operation. We need more evidence and ‘killer’ facts on triangular co-operation to capture its full potential.



### ***Convening meetings, dialogues and exchanges***

Practitioners and policy makers need a platform to meet, exchange and network on issues related to triangular co operation. We organise international meetings, dialogues and side events at major international fora.



### ***Providing tools to facilitate triangular co-operation***

Numerous guidelines, manuals and other operational tools support effective planning and implementation of triangular co-operation. By pooling expertise, the “Toolkit for identifying, monitoring and evaluating the value added of triangular co-operation” fills the information gap on the value added of triangular co-operation.



### ***Advocacy and global actions for triangular co-operation***

The OECD, the Government of Argentina and the UN Office for South-South Co-operation (UNOSSC) are preparing input for the United Nations second High-level Conference on South-South Co-operation (BAPA +40) and its follow-up. Since the Buenos Aires Plan of Action in 1978, the development co-operation landscape has changed dramatically. Triangular co-operation has come of age and will feature explicitly in BAPA +40, paving the way for all development stakeholders to shape a new agenda.

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