



EU-ACP: A force for South-South and triangular cooperation

DISCLAIMER:



Dr Patrick Gomes

Development cooperation in the 21st century is compelled to move beyond the simplistic paradigm of transferring funds from the developed North to the developing South, writes Dr Patrick Gomes.

With the global endorsement of Agenda 2030, including new modes of development finance, the proliferation of actors, and the rise of emerging economies, the traditional “donor – recipient” aid paradigm needs to be buried.

The long-standing and comprehensive North-South approaches to development cooperation – the 28-member EU and 78 African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries – could well have invaluable horizons for innovation and enhanced development effectiveness.

The current ACP-EU Partnership Agreement had been ahead of its time when it was first signed in Cotonou, Benin in 2000 for a 20-year period, linking two blocs of countries in a broad framework of trade, development cooperation and political dialogue.

But new realities in the global arena – including EU enlargement, geo-political alignments and emerging powers – demand a re-examination of historical ties, to come to grips with turbulent change and confront persistent structures of poverty and inequality.

The European Commission launched a public consultation in October 2015 to gather views on ‘Post-Cotonou’ relations, with outcomes announced earlier this month. Meanwhile, ACP leaders meeting at their 8th Summit in Papua New Guinea at end of May will hear recommendations for reforms aimed at making the ACP Group a more effective global player, working more closely with regional organisations.

As ongoing discussions intensify around an ACP-EU Accord post-2020, at least one opportunity lies in leveraging the ACP’s geographic scope in promoting South-South and Triangular Cooperation, as a complement to deepening North-South development assistance.

South-South Cooperation (SSC) is not a new phenomenon. It involves collaboration amongst two or more countries of the South, sharing resources, expertise, knowledge and proven solutions to fulfil development goals. Triangular Cooperation (TrC) happens when one or more other donors or multilateral organisations supports SSC by providing funding, training, technology or other support.

The benefits of having this more horizontal approach to development cooperation have been keenly cited by major institutions such as the United Nations and the OECD.

South-South Cooperation is widely practiced amongst ACP countries on bilateral and regional levels, but broader examples can also be seen in Nigeria’s Technical Aid Corps (TAC) scheme, which has deployed thousands of volunteers across the African continent as well as in the Caribbean and the Pacific to assist in the areas of engineering, agriculture, and medical lab technology.

Likewise, Cuba not only sends doctors and teachers to build capacity in various African countries, it also trains them in its medical schools. Around 1,000 South African doctors graduate each year from Cuban campuses along with hundreds from Pacific Island countries such as Timor Leste, Solomon Islands, and Kiribati.

As far as Triangular Cooperation, Germany has so far been the leader in Europe, through partnerships with South Africa for instance, to support political and development engagements in other African countries. Others include the United Kingdom’s support for Brazil’s social protection programs in Kenya, or Spain’s and Mexico rehabilitating water supply systems in Haiti.

For 2014-2020, the EU will provide €30.5 billion in development assistance for the member states of the ACP Group, via national, regional and ‘intra-ACP’ (cross-regional) programs. Under the intra-ACP envelope, the EU makes impact through Triangular Cooperation.

For instance, universities across Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific are able to link up and feed off of each other’s expertise through the EDULINK and the Intra-ACP Academic Mobility schemes. Similarly, under the ACP Cultures Plus program, musicians in Mozambique can build capacity amongst peers in Vanuatu through inter-cultural camps and workshops.

However, these still constitute only some of the programs, as a more coherent policy framework for South-South & Triangular Cooperation within the ACP-EU context has not been developed.

Obviously, more structured intra-ACP actions through South-South & Triangular Cooperation – supporting integration at the regional and continental level – will lead to a stronger and more effective ACP-EU partnership. This benefits both sides enormously.

Mutual learning among partners, new opportunities for regional integration, fostering collective self-reliance amongst developing countries, building Southern capacity to manage development cooperation, networking and cost-effectiveness are some of the benefits to be reaped.

At the geopolitical level, the ACP-EU framework, despite its limitations, allows the EU access to more than 70 developing countries, through a single far-reaching channel.

Such a platform cannot be underestimated as the EU builds its role as a global leader and bridge-builder in an increasingly multi-polar and turbulent world. Negotiations on joint positions in the international arena, for instance, are much neater and often quicker when done through an established, comprehensive, and legally-binding framework.

For ACP countries though, South-South & Triangular Cooperation should feed into their economic transformation. Success stories and models need to be examined, up-scaled and shared, such as Mauritius' effective use of preferential access under the ACP-EU trade protocols to restructure into a services-based economy, or Rwanda's impressive reforms in business regulation which helped catapult growth by a projected 7.5% GDP in 2016, equalling last year's leap.

Clearly, South-South and Triangular Cooperation is not a substitute for Official Development Assistance (ODA). But, the move "beyond aid" to undertake reforms by focusing on adding value to ACP products and services, diversifying economies beyond exports of raw materials, ensuring policy coherence between the EU's development and trade policies, as well as systematically enabling better governance in the ACP and globally, will contribute to a new development paradigm.

Indeed, SSC & TrC gives an edge to development cooperation that complements the North-South model and builds on innovative, cost-effective solutions to be up-scaled for the benefit of others. With Agenda 2030 and the post-Cotonou talks on the table, now is the perfect time to delve more deeply into the approach.

