



February 2017

# Approaches to measuring and monitoring South–South cooperation

Discussion paper

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# Summary

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**Development Initiatives is an independent organisation with the vision of a world without poverty. Our mission focuses on ensuring that decisions on different resources, financial and not financial, result in the end of poverty, increase resilience of vulnerable people and leave no one behind. We work to support evidence-based decisions, increased accountability and ultimately better development outcomes. We work to increase transparency of all resources for development, national and international, public and private, and improve data and its use by a multiplicity of stakeholders. As the development landscape has increased in complexity and Southern providers have become more influential, they have become a focus of our work jointly with other actors, resources and modalities.**

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This paper aims to be useful to policymakers and technical experts of South–South cooperation and the wider development community by documenting in one place the ways in which South–South cooperation providers are responding to growing demands for more transparency. It was shared as a draft for consultation at a private dinner with key South–South cooperation actors in the margins of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation's High Level Meeting in Nairobi on 30 November–1 December 2016. The paper has been updated on the basis of discussion at this event and other feedback. The growing relevance of South–South cooperation to both the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Agenda 2030) and the Paris Agreement on climate change has led to increased interest in measuring and monitoring its contributions as a means of improving effectiveness and accountability. The draft Outcome Document for the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation's Second High Level Meeting in Nairobi recognises the efforts made by Southern providers to improve effectiveness and includes a specific reference to the 2009 Nairobi Outcome Document of the High-Level United Nations Conference of South-South Cooperation.

Southern providers themselves recognise the benefits of measuring and monitoring South–South cooperation in order to maximise its unique contribution to Agenda 2030, and there is a clear demand for better information from partner countries. Better data could support monitoring and evaluation, improve effectiveness, explore synergies with other resources, and ensure accountability to a diverse set of stakeholders.

At the moment, an international consensus on how and whether to measure and monitor South–South cooperation is far from sight. This is due to technical and political

challenges such as the lack of a common definition of South–South cooperation; different views on how to measure and account for different components; different ideas on accountability and the purpose of monitoring; and the uncertain governance of any future system.

A review of national and regional initiatives shows the variety of approaches currently used and highlights the need for deepening technical and political discussions on how to further a coherent and shared approach to measuring and monitoring South–South cooperation. The existence of multiple, parallel initiatives reflects the variety of South–South cooperation, but these make transparency and accountability more difficult to realise, in particular from the perspective of data users.

Ultimately, a unified framework to measure and monitor South–South cooperation would allow comparability among providers, easier access to data and clearer evidence on its contribution to Agenda 2030. While this appears to be the most feasible option, it still remains a challenge. A global standard for all providers would be the best option for increased accountability and transparency, although this seems overly ambitious in the current scenario.

It is important to identify incentives that could bring forward the agenda on measuring and monitoring South–South cooperation. These include Southern providers' interest in monitoring and evaluation of their own work, the building of national institutional and legislative frameworks for South–South cooperation, and the increased involvement of non-state actors in development projects. Internationally, Agenda 2030 could offer key incentives and a space for multilateral conversations. International peer pressure and demands from developing countries to better understand the increasingly diverse range of resources available at country level could provide further incentives for action.

The global transparency movement has developed the most advanced technical standards for data publication. In defining its own approaches, South–South cooperation providers could consider these standards for their own data publication and reporting. Key principles are: 1) respond to different information needs; 2) be useful and relevant for different purposes; 3) allow for data interoperability; and 4) ensure high quality data.

# Introduction

South–South cooperation has been growing in prominence for the past 15 years, especially as Southern providers have gained the economic and political weight to influence the international development agenda, while still facing their own development challenges. Southern providers have become more engaged internationally and have invested in building more political, economic and social ties with other developing countries. While evidence remains weak, available data suggest a rise in overall volume of South–South cooperation resources and a larger geographical reach. Developing countries have welcomed these providers due to the similarities in their national challenges, more equal relationships with them and more advantageous conditions offered for development cooperation agreements than those offered by other sources of funding.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been designed to reflect the aspirations of the international community for development. Goal 17 (Revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development) establishes what means of implementations will be needed for the success of the sustainable development agenda. While official development assistance (ODA) will still play a key role in international development, Goal 17 recognises the essential contribution of other means of implementation to reach the goals, such as trade, technology, capacity building, finance and systemic issues. South–South cooperation is widely recognised as an additional, complementary instrument for the realisation of this agenda.

Realising the SDGs goes hand in hand with action to tackle climate change, and the importance of fostering multi-stakeholders partnerships well beyond the usual development practitioners. The Paris Agreement on climate change establishes a global commitment to limit the global temperature increase well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and strive to limit temperature rises below 1.5 degrees Celsius. It seeks to ‘strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change, in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty’ (article 2).<sup>2</sup> Many different contributions will be needed to bring about a transition to a climate-resilient, low carbon development path. Southern countries, such as China,<sup>3</sup> have started to engage with the climate change agenda from a South–South cooperation perspective and some have included South–South cooperation as part of their nationally determined contributions.<sup>4</sup>

In an ecosystem of actors who bring a variety of contributions, South–South cooperation stands out as particularly relevant. Capacity building, knowledge and lesson sharing, technology exchanges, service delivery and infrastructure projects as well as economic and political relations at a South–South level have the potential to make a difference for each SDG. Southern providers can offer additional solutions to tackle development issues based on their national policies and through more affordable technology, similarities in institutional arrangements, geography, culture or level of income.

There is increasing recognition, including among many Southern providers, of the need to consider ways of measuring and monitoring South–South cooperation to maximise its unique contribution to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Agenda 2030). This would be especially beneficial for partner countries, among which there is a clear demand for better information from non-traditional providers.<sup>5</sup> Better data could contribute to truly demand-driven South–South cooperation, supporting alignment to national development plans and responding to the demands of developing countries’ governments and population. Southern providers could benefit from better data to support monitoring and evaluation, improve effectiveness and alignment to South–South cooperation principles and ensure accountability to a growing and diverse set of stakeholders. Better information could also improve understanding of their efforts at both international and national level, as well as allowing better complementarity between different development cooperation offers.

South–South cooperation does not operate in a vacuum; rather it exists alongside other and different resources and interventions for development. Domestic resources are the key driver of national development. ODA remains an essential resource for development, but the scale of other international resources to developing countries such as private flows and remittances has become much larger. Trilateral cooperation represents an increasingly important feature of the development landscape. Clear information on this increasingly complex landscape is crucial to use these resources effectively, explore synergies and tailor initiatives that can achieve impact.

Gathering comprehensive data and information on South–South cooperation is still a challenge.<sup>6</sup> Answering simple questions on what counts as South–South cooperation, which resources are used, where they go, what results they achieve and what impact they have is difficult. A lack of timely, detailed and accessible data on South–South cooperation makes it difficult to answer emerging questions on synergies, overlaps and the role of different resources for development. The need for data that can underpin the delivery of the SDGs makes the call for a Data Revolution to bring better data on all resource flows more urgent than ever. The United Nations World Data Forum outlines a detailed Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data that aims to support the generation of quality and timely data to underpin the follow up and review of the implementation of Agenda 2030 and other relevant plans.<sup>7</sup>

At the moment, a consensus on how and whether to account for South–South cooperation is far from sight. One main bottleneck is the absence of a common, agreed definition of South–South cooperation. Providers have largely gone down the route of using their own definition, if they have one at all. Some providers have been reluctant to measure and account for their development cooperation, especially in a way that implies comparability with ODA from Northern donors. Their argument is that the nature of South–South cooperation is different and therefore requires an entirely new approach. Some countries argue that the mechanisms in place, such as communication to national parliaments and stakeholders, are sufficient as they respond to accountability requests in provider countries. Some want to give little visibility to their development cooperation to avoid criticism from national stakeholders on how these resources are used or on whether a country with national development issues should engage in international activities whose benefits at the domestic level are unclear.<sup>8</sup>

While a comprehensive, international framework to measure and monitor South–South cooperation is yet to be realised, a number of national and regional initiatives exist and some international proposals are emerging. This discussion paper reviews this work and maps the main current experiences and proposals for measuring and monitoring South–South cooperation.<sup>9</sup> It discusses some of the pros and cons of different monitoring alternatives. The paper aims to be useful to policymakers and technical experts of South–South cooperation and the wider development community by documenting in one place the ways in which South–South cooperation providers are responding to growing demands for more transparency.

# The challenges to measure and monitor South–South cooperation

Although there is increasing demand from civil society, academia, government agencies and international organisation for better information, so far discussions to establish a common international framework to measure and monitor South–South cooperation have stalled. The absence of such a framework is a major factor limiting the availability of clear, official and open information on South–South cooperation. Information needs to be gathered across multiple national, regional and international sources, which often track different aspects of South–South cooperation (eg inputs, projects, outputs), limiting transparency and the ability to produce accurate, independent information on inputs, outputs or outcomes of South–South cooperation.

## 1) The lack of a common definition for South–South cooperation

South–South cooperation providers use a range of modalities that include financial support in the form of loans or grants, technical cooperation, knowledge exchange, education and scholarships, export credits among many others. The channels and forms through which South–South cooperation is provided also change and can include governments and the public administration, private companies, academic or technical experts, civil society, governments and parliaments, development banks, regional or global multilateral organisations.

Each provider has a different understanding of its own contributions and a common definition of South–South cooperation does not exist. Some countries have endorsed a definition and others do not use one at all. Some providers have adopted the definition for official development assistance by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC); others feel ODA does not capture the unique aspects of their development cooperation adequately.<sup>10</sup>

The absence of a commonly agreed definition for South–South cooperation is a major bottleneck to establishing an international monitoring system. The advantage of a single definition is that it allows comparability among providers. But from a technical perspective a common definition is not essential to monitoring, as different providers could agree to monitor different flows to a flexible data standard. The search for a common definition of South–South cooperation does have political relevance though, particularly in relation to establishing a common narrative on development cooperation from the South.<sup>11</sup>



## **2) Technical dilemmas of South–South cooperation measuring and monitoring**

Different views exist on how to monitor different elements of the development cooperation bundle. Some countries monetise their contributions, including financial flows, in-kind resources and technical cooperation (eg Mexico, China, Turkey). Other countries oppose applying a financial value to their development cooperation as they say it leads to underestimation of their contribution or does not reflect the spirit of solidarity that underpins South-South cooperation (eg Brazil, India). Costs for goods and personnel in the South are usually lower than in developed countries. If non-financial inputs were monetised, their inputs would look unduly low compared with Northern donors. For countries that use national civil servants in technical cooperation and projects, such as Brazil, it is also unclear whether the cost-opportunity of allocating a national civil servant to international duties should actually be considered. Those that support monetisation then discuss how to value non-financial resources, that is actual costs in the national currency, the cost of similar services in Northern countries, or possibly an international standard (eg international standardised salary).

Another option is to account for outputs and outcomes of the development process, rather than just inputs – the Brazilian Development Agency (ABC) proposal includes both (see 'National experiences' section below). Linking inputs to these additional metrics would build a fuller picture of South–South cooperation and more clearly assess its value for development partners. Existing development cooperation public monitoring systems do not provide this information, which could be available separately in the monitoring and evaluation exercises of specific initiatives if they are done.

A system that tracks inputs, outputs and outcomes of development cooperation would be very useful and meet a growing demand to show the added value of development cooperation globally. Different data serve different purposes and it is essential that the entire spectrum of necessary data is covered to ensure effective planning, full accountability, assessment of results and impact, and for learning purposes, among other possible uses.

South–South cooperation providers are still in the process of building the institutional architecture required to undertake development cooperation programmes. Collecting information and data in systems with little coordination or expertise, or building these systems in a context of low political leverage and limited resources can be challenging. Political will and domestic support are vital to break these bottlenecks. Peer learning and statistical capacity building are areas to exploit for those countries interested in developing such systems.

## **3) There are different ideas on accountability and the purpose of monitoring**

Data and information related to South–South cooperation exist in many cases, for example in public management systems, sector or institutional databases, project

documents or financial reports. But their format and access serves purposes other than to provide information to the public.

Different views exist on the extent to which information should be provided and to whom. Some providers consider that their main accountability is to the recipient government or development partners directly involved in projects, and to some extent to national stakeholders in provider countries. As long as these stakeholders are involved or informed, accountability requirements are met. The development partner government on the recipient side should take responsibility for accountability in its own territory. Evidence shows that this assumption is being challenged and different stakeholders and accountability mechanisms need to be in place both at domestic and international level.<sup>12</sup> Some evidence exists that providers could gain in reputation and support to project implementation in partner countries if better information was available.<sup>13</sup> It is important that any future information architecture takes into account these multiple accountabilities and answers the diverse knowledge needs.

#### **4) The governance of a possible future system is disputed**

At the moment there is no single institution or forum with a recognised mandate to foster policy discussion on accounting for and monitoring South–South cooperation. The Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation has given substantial attention to the topic, but not all players see it as a legitimate space for discussion. A UN platform is probably the best option, but which existing or new institutions should lead it is still under discussion. The UN Office of South-South Cooperation has a broad mandate to promote and support South–South and trilateral cooperation. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has worked on issues of trade, investments and finance of great priority for the South and has put forward a proposal to support the creation of a South–South cooperation database, in collaboration with Southern partners and the Network of Southern Think Tanks.<sup>14</sup> The UN Development Cooperation Forum has been highlighted by some Southern providers as the legitimate forum to discuss South–South cooperation issues.

Regional fora and country groups such as BRICS and the G20 lack the right membership and legitimacy for such discussion, but they could support policy discussions and consensus building. Similarly, the OECD DAC could share lessons based on its wide development cooperation expertise and technical skills, but its membership and linkages to traditional providers have proved problematic for some key Southern providers. Any future arrangement will need to be adequately resourced and have the necessary political authority to drive this agenda forward.

# Measuring and monitoring SSC in practice

As a result of these political and technical challenges, an internationally agreed approach to measure and monitor development cooperation has yet to emerge. More fundamentally, an agreement on the need for a common standard of data on South–South cooperation is lacking. A multiplicity of approaches and proposals exist at national, regional and international level.

## National experiences

Some countries have gone down the route of producing national-level mechanisms to disseminate information to the public. For example, Brazil, China, Qatar, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates publish reports on their development cooperation activities, sharing qualitative and quantitative information. Colombia couples its development cooperation report with regular online webinars in which civil servants update the public on the activities of the Colombian Presidential Agency for International Cooperation (APC-Colombia).<sup>15</sup> South Africa presents financial and project information about its African Renaissance and International Cooperation Fund, but broader development cooperation is not accounted for.<sup>16</sup>

These experiences provide valuable insights on the definitions, approaches and institutional arrangements to deliver development cooperation. But reports vary in their comprehensiveness, disaggregation and timeliness of data. Definitions and methodologies used vary greatly, so comparability is limited. Reports are also subject to long and sometimes unpredictable publication schedules. From the perspective of data users, reports can make data collection more difficult, bringing the need to scrape data that then allows only partially independent analysis, due to previously done aggregations or calculations.

Online platforms provide an alternative solution to published documents. Among South–South cooperation providers, Mexico provides potentially the most accomplished instrument so far. The Mexican cooperation agency (AMEXCID) has built a public platform that presents data and visuals on its development cooperation activities.<sup>17</sup> Data available on the platform is aggregated and downloads of the raw data are not available, but the experience is valuable because of the elements that underpin the platform. Indeed it relies on national legislation on development cooperation that includes the establishment of an administrative registry for Mexican activities in this area (RENCID).<sup>18</sup> This restricts access to civil servants but feeds data into the public platform, which is online, publicly available and very user-friendly. Finally, each visualisation is complemented by definitions of what it represents and quantitative values.

IPEA (*Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada*), a national public think tank, publishes a report on Brazilian development cooperation jointly with the Brazilian Agency for Cooperation (ABC). The ABC has put forward a proposal for a platform to collect information on South–South cooperation and other ‘development-related exchange flows on capacity building, humanitarian cooperation, scholarships, cooperation on science and technology, financial cooperation, investments and trade’.<sup>19</sup> Its goals are:

1. establishing a relationship between inputs, outputs and outcomes of South–South cooperation
2. supporting discussions by developing countries on the different exchanges they recognise as South–South cooperation
3. ensuring visibility of all contributions of Southern partners.

The proposal does not aim to establish a global monitoring mechanism for South–South cooperation but is presented as a possible starting point for discussion.

The platform would include quantitative detailed information on inputs and outputs. Qualitative information would be available on expected SDG outcomes. It could be used flexibly by development partners to input information on a voluntary and country-by-country basis. Monitoring would not require attributing a monetary value to non-financial contributions.

## Regional experiences

Other available data come from regional or national initiatives. The Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB) has been publishing a report on South–South cooperation in Ibero-America that provides information on projects and actions undertaken as South–South, regional and triangular cooperation for 10 years.<sup>20</sup> The report presents breakdowns based on the number of projects and financial information for a limited number of countries or initiatives. It has started to build indicators on project execution, efficiency and cost sharing between provider and recipient. The 2016 report provides information on more than 1,000 South–South cooperation initiatives in the region and the next one plans to include Ibero-American cooperation with other developing regions, namely Asia and Africa.

SEGIB prepares the report in collaboration with the Ibero-American Programme to Strengthen South-South Cooperation (PIFCSS)<sup>21</sup> and started recently to draw data from the Integrated Ibero-American South-South and Triangular Cooperation Data System (SIDICSS) virtual platform. This platform was developed to underpin the production of the report but also to gather data from country members and build region-wide knowledge on these forms of cooperation. In 2016, SIDICSS completed its first full implementation cycle and countries proceeded to its first evaluation, including sharing challenges and possible solutions.<sup>22</sup> The platform is not open access and therefore does not provide information to a wider group of stakeholders, but it is a step forward and an experience on which better systems could be built. SEGIB plans to publish sectorial studies on Ibero-American cooperation and build an interactive tool to analyse and visualise South–South cooperation data.

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has done substantial work on defining a methodology to measure, quantitatively and qualitatively, South–South cooperation in the region. ECLAC has supported Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela. This exercise focused on clarifying statistical terminology for South–South cooperation; contributing to international discussions on South–South cooperation’s components; and strengthening the work of national statistical offices and development agencies.

Participants are yet to reach an agreement on a methodology but the group has underlined the political, technical and financial dimensions of South–South cooperation. They recognised the relevance of a common standard to monitor South–South cooperation in the region and started to discuss the technical dimensions of this endeavour.<sup>23</sup> The current proposal is based on the national accounts system. It includes expenditures incurred by providers and recipients, including governments, subnational agencies and non-state actors.

## International experiences

There have been a number of attempts to estimate South–South cooperation based on the existing, low quality, partial data.<sup>24</sup> But due to the challenges already outlined, concerted international efforts to account for and measure South–South cooperation and improve the quality data have not progressed.

The Network of Southern Think Tanks (NeST), a recently established forum of academics and think tanks from the South, initiated a discussion on defining, measuring, accounting and monitoring South–South cooperation. In 2015, participants at a NeST technical workshop discussed different proposals and the underlying issues to be solved to establish a global database on South–South cooperation.<sup>25</sup> However, limited progress has been made on this as a result of differing views on more commercially-oriented flows, and methodological issues around concessionality and monetisation. NeST members have focused on a qualitative assessment framework and tested it through case studies: a valuable initiative that will hopefully contribute to identifying information needs and stakeholders within the discussions on transparency and accountability.

For those South–South cooperation providers that agree to report data to the OECD DAC, annual, comparable and monetised data on contributions are available, although with different degrees of details on country recipients, channels, sectors and components.<sup>26</sup> The DAC database remains the most comprehensive source of data on development cooperation flows, although it presents a number of limitations in terms of data disaggregation, timeliness and forward-looking spending. The DAC also provides estimates of development cooperation flows of some countries that do not report to the Committee.<sup>27</sup>

The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) also offers a possible solution for South–South cooperation providers who are keen to publish information on their development cooperation. IATI is a voluntary, multi-stakeholder initiative that works to

ensure that transparent, good quality information on development resources is available and used to help achieve sustainable development.

A wide range of actors are already publishing their data to IATI, including bilateral donors, multilateral institutions, development finance institutions, philanthropic foundations, national and international civil society organisations (CSOs) and private sector actors, demonstrating that the IATI Standard is flexible enough to be used by many different types of providers. South–South cooperation providers could also consider publishing to IATI on a voluntary basis, with scope to further extend the Standard to meet their specific needs if there was interest in pursuing this route.

# Possible incentives and principles for future measuring and monitoring practices

The most likely future scenario is the coexistence of different, parallel systems to measure and monitor South–South cooperation. The cleavage is not only between North–South cooperation providers, but within South–South cooperation providers too. This is because some see no benefit in an international standard or, more broadly, in providing publically accessible information on measuring and monitoring South-South cooperation. While the existence of multiple parallel systems may be able to reflect the variety of South–South cooperation, they make access to development data more difficult. As different systems use different platforms, reporting guidelines and standards, analysis becomes difficult and data quality can be undermined. In short, multiple systems make transparency and accountability more difficult to realise when compared with a global standard, and this is especially true for those who seek to use that data at country level where multiple providers operate.

Ultimately, a unified framework to measure and monitor South–South cooperation would allow comparability among providers, easier access to data and clearer evidence on what South–South cooperation entails and what contribution it brings to development. This is the most feasible option, though still a challenge due to the issues already outlined.

A global standard for all providers at a global level would be the best option for increased accountability and transparency. This standard seems overly ambitious in the current scenario, but could, as time goes on, build on the development cooperation experience of the traditional providers and on the outcomes of a Southern-led process on a standard for South–South cooperation. An alternative option would be to publish data according to multiple standards, but in ways that can be joined up and communicate with one another to work across institutional and statistical boundaries (data interoperability).

It is important to identify the incentives that could bring a similar agenda forward to identify opportunities and to qualify the current debate. South–South cooperation providers are aware of the need for better evidence and data on their activities. The latest conferences on South–South cooperation recognise the need to improve data collection and evidence. The Conference of Southern Providers in New Delhi in 2013 represents an important step forward.<sup>28</sup> It recognises the need for ‘a demand-driven and structured data collection and information analysis system in order to support the growth and impact of SSC, with a focus on developing corresponding support institutions’.<sup>29</sup> It also identifies



the need to clarify what development cooperation is in the context of South–South cooperation. The outcome document of the Second High-Level Meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation recognises the efforts made by Southern providers to improve effectiveness of their development cooperation, including through better accountability and transparency.

The international activities of Southern providers are currently less subject to national scrutiny than in the traditional donor countries, where domestic pressure to show results or cut aid budgets has increased steadily. Southern providers consider development cooperation a voluntary initiative and put the responsibility on Northern providers on the basis of their historical commitments. But one key driver for Southern providers to produce better data and evidence has been the interest in improving their monitoring and evaluation systems. The need to build national buy-in within the national government to steer the establishment of institutional and legislative frameworks for South–South cooperation could be an added incentive. As South–South cooperation programmes develop, providers could be put under scrutiny by domestic constituencies not only because of the size of their international cooperation, but because of the results they bring at home and in partner countries.

As South–South cooperation moves towards the inclusion of non-state actors in development projects, the pressure for accountability and transparency is likely to rise. Some countries have a strong tradition of transparency, accountability and inclusivity on national policies that could be translated to their international activities.<sup>30</sup> Within partner countries, some South–South cooperation activities have already suffered strong critiques or had little endorsement beyond official institutions. Wider engagement and clear information at country level could avoid reputational risks, lack of legitimacy or even project failure.

Notwithstanding the political issues identified here, the history of establishing the DAC and formulating its ODA definition offers some lessons and technical insights that could be useful to the current debate. That history shows that the ODA concept has evolved and solidified over more than 50 years. As the technical changes to reporting ODA and the discussion on ‘total official support for sustainable development’ show, evolution is ongoing. The ODA definition is also the result of compromises between different countries, their views and priorities – these too evolving with the changing political and economic landscape.<sup>31</sup> Southern providers could consider how to overcome existing technical and political barriers and set a feasible timeframe and forum to do so.

Agenda 2030 could offer both incentives and a space for multilateral conversations. The report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda outlines the Data Revolution for sustainable development.<sup>32</sup> This is a call for all development practitioners to improve data production and use and empower others to do the same. South–South cooperation providers have the opportunity to build on a wider movement to shape their own ways to measure and monitor their contributions to sustainable development.

The current international scenario offers limited incentives to transparency and multilateralism. It is more likely that peer pressure, demands from developing countries to



have clear information on the South–South cooperation offer and the need to understand what is already happening at country level will build some opportunities.<sup>33</sup>

The construction of a Southern approach to measuring and monitoring its contributions to international development could build on the global transparency movement. Along with the political discussions, there is an opportunity to take inspiration from the most advanced technical standards for data and transparency. In defining its own approaches, South–South cooperation providers could consider some of the following dimensions and principles on data publication and reporting.

- **Respond to different information needs.** Demands for information come from different stakeholders in the provider country, the partner country and internationally, in the public sector, civil society and academia. Future systems should be able to satisfy these demands.
- **Be useful and relevant for different purposes.** Data and information need to be useful for making evidence-based decisions at governmental level; supporting budgeting and planning; supporting monitoring and other administrative systems; enabling accountability and independent analysis; among others uses.
- **Allow for data interoperability.** Coexistence of different reporting systems should allow data from different sources to be used together and especially to be integrated in national and local budgets and development plans
- **Ensure high quality data.** Data quality is a key pillar for data use. Data should be timely and comprehensive, accessible and usable, comparable and interoperable, empower citizens and foster innovation and inclusion.<sup>34</sup> The best available standard is open data.<sup>35</sup>

# Conclusion

Today there are a number of parallel processes within which Southern providers are slowly developing their own shared understanding and standards on how to define, measure and monitor South–South cooperation. This discussion sits within a broader conversation on the role of Southern actors in international development and on the specific, varied and unique contributions that they can make to realising the SDGs.

There are a number of technical and political barriers that have made this endeavour especially complex, but the current experiences, proposals and discussions offer an opportunity to build technical expertise and agreement for a South–South cooperation mechanism. As these processes move along, it is important to reflect on current incentives and how to create new ones to build momentum and consensus on a Southern standard for monitoring South–South cooperation. Ideally, this should be done with the view to build a more global standard adequate to the new world of international development in the future.

Southern providers could identify a fair and realistic forum to discuss these issues, including all the necessary stakeholders and in a sensible timeframe. In doing so, providers could also learn from past experiences that have successfully brought different countries to build common measuring methodologies and statistical standards. This includes the existing regional initiatives, monitoring of the Millennium Development Goals, the OECD DAC and also IATI.

A common international framework to measure and monitor South–South cooperation would greatly improve the availability of and access to reliable information. This framework could underpin monitoring for different providers and could be either voluntary or compulsory. Southern providers could begin by agreeing a minimal common definition and statistical framework, based on the recognition that more learning is needed and the measuring and statistical framework will evolve in time. Southern providers could agree common guidelines for monitoring specific items, agreeing to report the same items to the framework or allow flexibility without everyone committing to monitor the same elements.

At the moment, political and technical issues have not allowed progress, but the existing initiatives provide opportunities for sharing of experiences and policy discussions based on concrete solutions. The initiatives presented in the paper are Southern-led and brought together major development experts.

This paper has been written with transparency in mind. While it recognises the political and technical constraints existing in the current debates, it fundamentally argues that there is an overarching interest in increasing transparency. A global standard for development cooperation that is flexible and legitimate enough to involve actors from the North and from the South still remains the best technical option available. While in the

short term a multiplicity of systems are likely to coexist, in the longer term the aim should be to endorse such a system.

# Notes

<sup>1</sup> Prizzon, A. Greenhill, R. Mustapha, S. April 2016 for Overseas Development Institute (ODI). *An age of choice for development finance: evidence from country case studies*.

<https://www.odi.org/publications/10390-age-choice-development-finance-evidence-country-case-studies>

<sup>2</sup>

[http://unfccc.int/files/essential\\_background/convention/application/pdf/english\\_paris\\_agreement.pdf](http://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/convention/application/pdf/english_paris_agreement.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) China. 2016. *More Money More Impact? China's Climate Change South–South Cooperation to Date and Future Trends*. Available at: <http://www.cn.undp.org/content/china/en/home/presscenter/articles/2016/04/22/undp-china-releases-pioneering-study-on-china-s-south-south-cooperation-on-climate-change-mitigation-and-adaptation.html>

<sup>4</sup> Nationally determined contributions are the nationally-driven plans of what countries have committed to do to tackle climate change. For information on national plans see:

[http://unfccc.int/focus/ndc\\_registry/items/9433.php](http://unfccc.int/focus/ndc_registry/items/9433.php)

<sup>5</sup> See for example the synthesis report of the partner country consultation undertaken by UNDP on behalf of IATI: <http://www.aidtransparency.net/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/Partner-Countries-and-IATI.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Clearly this is an issue that regards other flows and initiatives, being from the North or the South. The call for better information applies to all areas, each with its different challenges and steps forward. This work focuses on South–South cooperation and argues that the limited transparency of other areas is not a justification for progress in this specific case.

<sup>7</sup> The plan will be adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission at its 48th Session in March 2017 <http://undataforum.org/WorldDataForum/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Cape-Town-Action-Plan-For-Data-Jan2017.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Di Ciommo, M and Amorim, A for Development Initiatives/GiP. 2015. *Brazil as an international actor: drivers for development cooperation*. Available at:

<http://devinit.org/staging/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Brazil-as-an-international-actor.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Di Ciommo, M for Development Initiatives. 2014. *Development cooperation for the future: the increasing role of emerging providers*. <http://devinit.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Development-cooperation-for-the-future1.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> ODA is defined as flows to the list of ODA recipient countries and multilateral institutions 'provided by official agencies, including state and local governments, or by their executive agencies; and [for which] each transaction: a) is administered with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as its main objective; and b) is concessional in character and conveys a grant element of at least 25% (calculated at a rate of discount of 10%).' See: <http://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/>. ODA is also a mix of different resources, see: Development Initiatives. 2013. *Investments to End Poverty*, Chapter 4. Available at: [http://devinit.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Investments\\_to\\_End\\_Poverty\\_full\\_report.pdf](http://devinit.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Investments_to_End_Poverty_full_report.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> For example, this is important to the strengthening of a Southern providers' narrative on development. See Bracho G. 2015. *In search of a narrative for Southern providers: the challenge of the emerging economies to the development cooperation agenda*. German Development Institute discussion paper: <https://www.die-gdi.de/en/discussion-paper/article/in-search-of-a-narrative-for-southern-providers-the-challenge-of-the-emerging-economies-to-the-development-cooperation-agenda/>

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of accountability in development cooperation see for example Ocampo JA and Gómez Arteaga N. 2014. *Accountable and effective development cooperation in a post-2015 era, Background Study 3 Accountability for Development Cooperation*. Available at: [http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/newfunct/pdf13/DCF\\_Germany\\_Bkgd\\_Study\\_3\\_Global\\_Accountability.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/newfunct/pdf13/DCF_Germany_Bkgd_Study_3_Global_Accountability.pdf); for a civil society perspective, see Reality of Aid. 2016. *Case studies on South–South cooperation*. [http://www.realityofaid.org/roa\\_report/country-case-studies-on-south-south-cooperation/](http://www.realityofaid.org/roa_report/country-case-studies-on-south-south-cooperation/)

<sup>13</sup> China Office of the Asia Foundation. 2016. *A Civil Perspective on China's Aid to Cambodia* (outcome of one-year joint programme sponsored by the China Office of the Asia Foundation and undertaken by Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, College of Humanities and Development Studies and the East China Normal University).

<sup>14</sup> UNCTAD. 2016. Conference on South–South Cooperation, New Delhi, Available at: <http://unctad.org/en/pages/SGStatementDetails.aspx?OriginalVersionID=190>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.apccolombia.gov.co/index.php?idcategoria=798>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.dirco.gov.za/departament/report/index.htm>; estimates of development cooperation from India are underway but still to be completed at the time of press. For information on South Africa see Besharati NA and Rawhani C. 2016. *South Africa and the DRC: Evaluating a South–South Partnership for Peace, Governance and Development*. South African Institute of International Affairs, occasional paper n. 235. Available at: <http://www.saiia.org.za/occasional-papers/south-africa-and-the-drc-evaluating-a-south-south-partnership-for-peace-governance-and-development>

<sup>17</sup> <https://infoamexcid.sre.gob.mx/amexcid/ccid2013/home.html>

<sup>18</sup> Mexico has national legislation on domestic transparency, another potential incentive to drive this process forward.

<sup>19</sup> [http://unctad.org/meetings/en/Contribution/gds\\_stats\\_2015d06\\_Contribution\\_Brazil2\\_en.pdf](http://unctad.org/meetings/en/Contribution/gds_stats_2015d06_Contribution_Brazil2_en.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> The latest report is available at: <http://segib.org/wp-content/uploads/REPORT-ON-SOUTH-SOUTH-2015-INGLES-NUEVO.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.cooperacionsursur.org/>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.cooperacionsursur.org/informacion-del-programa/noticias-de-cooperacion-sursur/1442-evaluacion-del-sistema-integrado-de-datos-de-iberoamerica-sobre-cooperacion-sursur-y-triangular.html>

<sup>23</sup> See: <http://www.cepal.org/es/eventos/cuarta-reunion-la-mesa-directiva-comite-cooperacion-sursur>

- <sup>24</sup> UN ECOSOC Development Cooperation Forum (DCF). 2008. *Background Study for the Development Cooperation Forum*. Available at: [http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/docs/pdfs/south-south\\_cooperation.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/docs/pdfs/south-south_cooperation.pdf); UN ECOSOC DCF. 2010. *Development Cooperation for the MDGs: Maximising Results*. Available at: [http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/newfunct/pdf/10-45690\(e\)\(desa\)development\\_cooperation\\_for\\_the\\_mdgs\\_maximizing\\_results.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/newfunct/pdf/10-45690(e)(desa)development_cooperation_for_the_mdgs_maximizing_results.pdf); UN ECOSOC DCF. 2014. *Trends and progress in international development cooperation. Report of the Secretary-General*. Available at: [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=E/2014/77](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/2014/77). Development Initiatives. 2013. *Investments to End Poverty*. Chapter 9. Available at: <http://devinit.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Investments-to-End-Poverty-Chapter-9.pdf>. Prada F, Casabonne U, Bezanson K. 2010. *Supplementary study on Development resources beyond the current reach of the Paris Declaration*. [www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/dcdndep/47641381.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/dcdndep/47641381.pdf)
- <sup>25</sup> <http://www.saiia.org.za/events/nest-technical-working-group-meeting-defining-measuring-and-reporting-southsouth-cooperation>
- <sup>26</sup> The following countries (that are not members of the DAC) currently publish data on the DAC statistics database: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, Romania, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Chinese Taipei, Thailand, Turkey, Timor Leste, United Arab Emirates.
- <sup>27</sup> Currently, it provides estimates for Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Qatar and South Africa, see: <http://www.oecd.org/development/stats/non-dac-reporting.htm>
- <sup>28</sup> For the outcome documents and reports see: Nairobi. 2009: <http://ssc.undp.org/content/dam/ssc/documents/Key%20Policy%20Documents/Nairobi%20Outcome%20Document.pdf>; Bogotá, 2010: <https://www.oecd.org/development/effectiveness/45497536.pdf>.
- <sup>29</sup> Research and Information System for Developing Countries, UNDESA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of India. 2013. *Conference of Southern Providers South–South Cooperation: Issues and Emerging Challenges*, page 3. Available at: [http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/newfunct/pdf13/dcf\\_delhi\\_conference\\_report.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/newfunct/pdf13/dcf_delhi_conference_report.pdf)
- <sup>30</sup> Martins et al. 2016. *Panorama do monitoramento dos fluxos da cooperação internacional para o desenvolvimento: oportunidades e desafios para a construção de uma metodologia brasileira, Articulação Sul* [in Portuguese]. <http://articulacaosul.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Panorama-do-Monitoramento-dos-Fluxos-da-CID.pdf>
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- <sup>33</sup> Neissan BA. 2013. *Common Goals and Differentiated Commitments: the Role of Emerging Economies in Global Development*. German Development Institute Discussion Paper. Available at: [https://www.die-gdi.de/uploads/media/DP\\_26.2013.pdf](https://www.die-gdi.de/uploads/media/DP_26.2013.pdf)
- <sup>34</sup> See for example the Open Data Charter. The Charter is designed to ‘support the design, delivery, and assessment of SDGs at a global scale’ and enable implementation of the UN data revolution. As of October 2016, the Charter has been adopted by 15 national and 24 subnational governments. Available at: <http://opendatacharter.net/principles/>
- <sup>35</sup> For what is open data, see: <http://opendatahandbook.org/guide/en/what-is-open-data/>

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Development Initiatives (DI) is an independent international development organisation working on the use of data to drive poverty eradication and sustainable development. Our vision is a world without poverty that invests in human security and where everyone shares the benefits of opportunity and growth.

We work to ensure that decisions about the allocation of finance and resources result in an end to poverty, increase the resilience of the world's most vulnerable people, and ensure no one is left behind.

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Development Initiatives is a group headed by Development Initiatives Poverty Research Limited, a not-for-profit company established in England no. 06368740. Registered office: North Quay House, Quay Side, Temple Back, Bristol, BS1 6FL, UK.

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