

NOREF Expert Analysis

Triangular Development Cooperation for peacebuilding: opportunities and challenges

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Executive summary

Triangular Development Cooperation (TDC) is a relatively new form of development relationship that, ideally, complements both North–South and South–South modalities. It brings together a Development Assistance Committee (DAC) bilateral and/or a multilateral donor with a ‘pivotal’ state (typically but not always a rising power such as Brazil, Turkey or South Africa) to work in a third-country setting (such as Haiti, Iraq or Mozambique).

Supporters argue that, by drawing on complementary strengths and attributes, TDC achieves greater development/aid effectiveness within recipient states. DAC donors provide resources, institutional strength and considerable experience, while pivotal states provide further resources, experience-based knowledge and closer socio-cultural

and linguistic ties. TDC also has political value in a context where many formerly dominant industrialised countries are rapidly reassessing and retuning their relationships with increasingly economically and geopolitically significant rising powers. TDC for peacebuilding, for example, offers tangible spaces for interaction, joint learning and cooperation.

The global development architecture and dominant development paradigm are currently in a state of extreme flux, and TDC may represent one pragmatic means of building new development relationships within an increasingly complex and plural international landscape. In this briefing paper, we outline the key dimensions of TDC, and then examine a series of opportunities and challenges it offers for peacebuilding.

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Introduction

At the Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan in November 2011, a number of countries and international organisations endorsed an agreement on a new global direction for engagement with ‘fragile states’ (a term rejected by some rising powers). This agreement has since been endorsed by the members of the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, comprising the G7+ group of 19 ‘fragile’ and conflict-afflicted states, development partners and international organisations, with the declaration that meeting peacebuilding goals requires new ways of engaging based on building mutual trust and inclusive, country-led and country-owned processes. In similar vein, at a recent General Assembly (March 19th 2012), the UN Peacebuilding Commission stated that national ownership of the peacebuilding process sits at the core of UN efforts, and that the sharing of experiences, best practices and lessons learned between and with post-conflict states is key to success. Triangular Development Cooperation (TDC) appears to offer precisely these qualities and opportunities, and this report assesses its contribution to peacebuilding within a rapidly changing global development architecture.

Trilateral Development Cooperation

TDC is a development relationship in which a Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donor and/or multilateral agency (e.g. the Norwegian Government or the United Nations Development Programme) partners with a ‘pivotal’ country (e.g. Brazil, Thailand or South Africa) to work with a third ‘partner’ (recipient) country (e.g. Angola, Laos or the Democratic Republic of Congo [DRC]). Earlier lineages can be traced back at least to the 1980s, but in the last five years or so interest in TDC has accelerated substantially. Donor partners can be proactive contributors of resources and expertise (e.g. Norway working with Brazil in both Angola and Guinea-Bissau on promotion of institutional/public administration strengthening), or take a back seat without directly intervening (e.g. Canada funding South Africa in post-conflict African countries).

The intention of TDC is to draw on the respective strengths of each partner while promoting new and more egalitarian development partnerships. In theory, individual DAC partners and/or multilaterals can offer financial resources, development experience and institutional capacity. Decades of engagement have led to robust institutions, trained personnel, strong networks with non-state actors and multilateral institutions, and extensive experience of undertaking projects and programmes, as well as familiarity with the norms and requirements of the international development community. For their part, it is expected that the ‘pivotal’ states can provide goods, services and assistance more cheaply, and in ways that are more appropriate to recipient-country settings. The technologies and expertise available are assumed to be cost-effective, having been adapted in developing country contexts. Their own experiences of development transition, and often their shared geographies and cultural and linguistic ties, may allow for more efficient and effective delivery of development assistance. The pivotal states are also expected to benefit through capacity building and learning from Northern donors. Advocates of TDC claim that recipient countries may be able to assert more country ownership and negotiate better development outcomes given the involvement of other Southern partners.

TDC thus represents an important dimension of a fascinating re-articulation of power that is reflecting and producing a more complex geography of development actors and power relations than the ‘traditional’ North–South and South–South axes.

TDC for peacebuilding

Opportunities

- *Reorienting development agendas and institutions to a changing global dispensation of power*

The rising powers – from growing global giants such as China and India to emerging middle powers such as Indonesia and Turkey – are increasingly challenging the post-1945 world order. ‘Northern’ hegemony in global development norms and governance is being rapidly eroded, with little certainty over the

shape or nature of future institutions and regulation. ‘Traditional’ donors, especially those with a history of innovation and leadership in peacebuilding, need to reorient their development relationships, requiring institutional and procedural restructuring. TDC may represent a valuable opportunity to build development relationships with the rising/emerging middle powers, deepening engagement in ways that are reflective of their new status and demand for dignity and recognition.

- *Different rising powers have a genuine claim to expertise and experience in peacebuilding initiatives domestically and overseas*

The rising powers can offer real opportunities for co-learning and greater peacebuilding effectiveness. For example, since its own relatively peaceful transformation from apartheid to democratic governance, South Africa has positioned itself as a leader in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction (e.g. in the DRC, Lesotho, Burundi, Rwanda, Liberia, Sierra Leone) funded by a range of donor countries (e.g. the UK, Japan, Sweden, Norway, Canada, the U.S., Germany). Japan has partnered with Malaysia in its efforts to support peacebuilding in multicultural societies such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, Sri Lanka, East Timor and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Japan has vast experience in post-conflict reconstruction, while Malaysia has experience of maintaining peace in a plural society. Together they learn from each other’s experiences while offering successful development experiences to multicultural countries experiencing conflict or rebuilding their communities after conflict.

- *Greater recipient ownership and agency*
The expectation of TDC is that historic ties, shared languages and cultural familiarity can potentially assist recipient actors to assert greater voice and ownership. For example, partnered by Spain, Colombia has shared its lessons in disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration with peers in Liberia, Haiti, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. Peer learning appears to be a powerful tool for achieving basic conditions for human development, since not only lessons but also political sensitiveness can be shared. This is also strongly reflected in the peer-learning process around public-sector capacity development funded by South Africa and its Northern partners in post-conflict

Burundi, Rwanda and South Sudan, where more equal power relations are leading to greater openness and camaraderie. Similarly, Ireland is engaged in a particularly inspiring triangular learning partnership with Liberia and Timor Leste on the role of women in conflict prevention, management and resolution. In a project funded by France, Haiti specifically requested Mexico’s support to transfer to the Haitian police know-how, information and experience of techniques for fighting kidnapping.

- *Value for money*

At a time of considerable economic pressure for many European economies, taxpayers and political parties are keen to ensure that development financing is effective and represents value for money. It is expected that ‘pivotal’ states can provide goods, services and assistance in peacebuilding more cheaply, and in ways that are more appropriate to recipient country settings. The technologies and expertise available are assumed to be cost-effective, having been adapted in developing country contexts.

Challenges

These fall into two (sometimes overlapping) categories. The first are technical-administrative challenges, and are familiar problems within more mainstream bilateral and multilateral initiatives. They include:

- *Difficulties in alignment of systems between donors and pivotal states*

There are challenges in working across differing legal frameworks, budgeting and procurement procedures, sectoral priorities, reporting criteria, management structures and monitoring goals and frameworks. Weaker institutions and limited trained personnel in pivotal states can sometimes be a problem.

- *Time and resource inefficiencies in initiating TDC projects*

The novelty of TDC means that, where operational procedures and policy guidelines are not yet formulated, initiating partnerships can be extremely time- and resource-consuming for all partners. Lack of clarity around the division of roles and responsibilities can further create inefficiencies.

- *Bureaucratic and administrative complexity*
TDC tends to involve a larger range of actors

than either North–South or South–South cooperation. It may, therefore, generate even more complexity within an already highly proliferating sector struggling to achieve harmonisation and alignment goals.

A second set of challenges emerge from political and ideological differences between partners. Peacebuilding is not simply a technocratic-administrative exercise in finding and implementing the ‘right’ policies, but enrolls an inherently contested set of concepts around what are its social, economic and political goals, and what are the best ways to achieve them, while acknowledging political choices that create winners and losers, costs and benefits in the process. Resultant challenges include:

- *Shaping TDC to other commercial and political relations*

TDC is inevitably influenced by political and commercial choices made by all parties in the partnership. Brazil may be an excellent partner in many respects for Norway to work in Timor Leste, but it also has geopolitical and commercial ambitions that may complement but may also undermine recipient interests – which are themselves varied and in some cases incompatible. It is no coincidence that South Africa’s peacebuilding efforts have been focused in countries, such as the DRC, in which South African companies had prior operations. TDC enables South Africa to play an increasing role in the continent while lowering the costs of engagement. Post-conflict assistance in countries such as the DRC, Burundi and Sudan has often been followed by commercial flows which have differential costs and benefits for different actors. Multiple interests need not be detrimental to development outcomes, but these need to be acknowledged, recognising whether and which donor interests align with the development needs of recipients, and what trade-offs and compromises are made when they do not.

- *Recipient country reservations about TDC extending regional dominance*

Some recipient countries have expressed concerns about ‘development’ activities acting to extend the sub-hegemonic ambitions of relatively powerful pivotal states in their region. They may therefore exercise caution about TDC initiatives.

- *Prioritising the ‘Northern–pivotal state’ axis of TDC*

The focus and motivation for TDC partnerships is often the relationship between the Northern and pivotal states. There is some evidence that, to date, ‘Northern’ donors engaged in TDC are primarily concerned with building their relationship with rising powers, here in their role as pivotal states. At the same time, TDC enables pivotal states such as Brazil to seek to promote and enhance their global image and reputation with powerful industrialised countries, without sacrificing their Southern solidarities or sense of sovereignty. The challenge is in ensuring that recipient countries achieve greater ownership of peacebuilding initiatives within this context.

- *Cultural differences and hierarchies between pivotal and recipient countries*

Claims to a naturalised solidarity between Southern partners can conceal cultural hierarchies which may in some contexts be quite as profound (and sometimes pernicious) as ‘North–South’ constructions of difference. Assuming a congruence of interests simply because two states are deemed ‘developing’ is naïve. Assuming that shared language and intertwined histories alone can overcome profound cultural differences is also problematic. For example, Brazilian development workers in Mozambique are by no means exempt from attitudes of superiority, and they too experience differences in culture and understanding from their Mozambican counterparts.

Concluding points

There is quite a policy ‘buzz’ around TDC at present, and it may become a means of re-articulating development relationships in a rapidly changing world. This analysis suggests that, in order to maximise the potential benefits and manage potential challenges, the inherently political nature of peacebuilding goals, policies and relationships must be recognised, between and within all parties.