

FOCUS SESSION:

Leveraging development innovations from Non-State Actors in the BRICS and MICs: Civil Society Organisations, Think-Tanks and Businesses as drivers of mutual learning for inclusive and effective development

14 April 2014, 08.00-09.15, Room Diezmo 3

Speakers/Panelists:

- Moderator: *Ana Toni, CEO of GIP, Board Chair of Greenpeace International, Brazil*
- Keynote speaker – Civil society, innovation and mutual learning:
Rajesh Tandon, Founder-President of PRIA, India
- Keynote speaker – Private-sector actors, innovation and mutual learning:
Lizbeth Navas-Alemán, Associate and Lead Researcher on “Business from the BRICS”, Institute of Development Studies, UK
- Keynote speaker – Think-tank networks, innovation and mutual learning:
Li Xiaoyun, China Agricultural University/China International Development Research Network, China

Round-table discussion speakers:

- *Bianca Suyama, Coordinator and Founding-Partner, Articulação SUL, Brazil*
- *Kaustuv Bandyopadhyay, Director of Society & Global Partnerships, PRIA, India,*
- *Richard Carey, Advisory Council member, Future International Cooperation Policy Network*

The session aimed to highlight and showcase the roles played by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Think-Tanks and Businesses in South-South Cooperation (SSC); analysing their current and potential value-added for the “how” of development cooperation in the post-2015 landscape; drawing on an evidence-base of case-studies and research on the BRICS’ and Mexico’s engagements with Low-Income Countries. The session showcased how these non-state actors (NSAs) have played a significant role in the delivery of SSC over the last few decades, bringing a wealth of experience and knowledge from which other actors in SSC can learn. The session explored the politics of why NSAs’ role in SSC has hitherto been somewhat neglected, and also identified key lessons learned from recent research.

Summary:

“**We’re in it together**”, said Rajesh Tandon, calling attention to the long history and value-added of CSO-led SSC. Kaustuv Bandyopadhyay discussed the **importance of civil society working with government on civic engagement for improved local governance** in India, Bangladesh and Cambodia, and of **south-south knowledge sharing for the inclusion of urban poor** in India and South Africa, where housing rights were achieved through **horizontal exchanges on mobilisation, advocacy and women’s leadership**. Bianca Suyama highlighted the **complex roles and responsibilities of CSOs from the BRICS working on a native seed-exchange project** between Brazil, South Africa and Mozambique, which brought to light the challenges of the **contrasting needs**

of family agriculture and BRICS-led agri-business. Lizbeth Navas-Alemán's work on Business from the BRICS showed businesses are keenly aware they need to work with government and civil society to achieve business sustainability. The **private sector** from Brazil and South Africa can have a key role in **supporting learning and other exchanges** in the African continent, ranging from delivering public goods such as training, through to setting higher health and safety standards. Exchanges between trade unions from South Africa and Brazil lead to improved wages. Li Xiaoyun and Richard Carey showed the importance of **multiplying points of initiative and knowledge production** in an increasingly complex and multipolar world, where research institutes and **think-tanks** from the South (as well as the North) **have a key role in shaping new knowledge production and facilitating multidirectional learning** in development cooperation, through inclusive partnerships with multiple stakeholders such as NSAs.

Key messages and conclusions:

The case-studies and experiences discussed by the panel and audience showed how CSO initiatives complement the development cooperation practices of government, business and think-tank actors in ways which strengthen the Busan principles of **ownership and results, inclusive partnerships, and transparency and accountability.** NSAs from the BRICS and MICs are uniquely placed to contribute to effective development cooperation through their critical mass of capacity and growing international influence. The challenges of domestic poverty and inequality are a powerful incentive to continue seeking innovative development solutions, as demonstrated in the case-studies.

The low visibility afforded to NSAs' role in SSC in favour of government-to-government SSC ignores the opportunity to capitalise on NSAs' experience, knowledge and capacity. This requires an enabling environment (e.g. adequate legal frameworks and receptive policy contexts) where stakeholder coordination and dialogue is key, particularly where there are funding challenges, for example in MICs and LICs. Building more horizontal relationships between South and North – through spaces such as the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE) and the GPEDC – is needed in order to develop innovative forms of collaboration which respond to the needs of our rapidly changing world. The case-studies showed the clear benefits of multi-stakeholder collaboration, leading to shared learning amongst all partners.

The challenge of systematising and disseminating learning from this kind of collaboration remains, although networks such as the China International Development Research Network, and the newly-launched Future International Cooperation Policy Network and Network of Southern Think-Tanks all seek to do this in different ways.

For example, the private sector's increasingly progressive role in fostering inclusive business practices, social entrepreneurship, and incorporating poor people to the core operations of businesses is clearly positive, but as yet is hard to monitor and measure. The same goes for CSO-led SSC and other learning exchanges. This offers a timely opportunity for the development community to work together to create new methods and indicators which measure the impact and complex effects of these changes, particularly as NSAs become increasingly involved as active partners in the post-2015 space.

In this context, balanced knowledge generation is fundamental in nurturing more equitable partnerships between North and South, where knowledge should be owned by those who are involved in development, and not implanted or imposed, as pointed out by Li Xiaoyun. Developing a Southern-based knowledge system is not about a confrontation with the knowledge produced by the North but rather it is an opportunity to build a bridge enabling knowledge-sharing, which enriches mutual understanding of the development process and greater ownership for the South.

Some of the key lessons emerging from the research done under the CSO-SSC project can be applied broadly to thinking about the role of NSAs from the MICS in SSC and development cooperation:

- **Take time to build mutual understanding:** effective adaptation of experiences requires building understanding across contexts and cultures and takes time
- **Inspiring and capturing long-term change:** the process and relationships are in themselves an important result to those involved – systematising and measuring the impact of this requires a different way of analysis
- **NSAs are often more agile and flexible than government,** and can afford to be less risk-averse in experimenting with development innovations: **lessons from these pilots should be systematised for wider usage,** fostering multi-directional learning exchanges and improved development cooperation outcomes
- **Broadening alliances for sustainability is key:** scaling up CSO-led initiatives sustainably requires building alliances with governments and other NSAs
- **Moving from solidarity to shared ownership:** CSO-led SSC can draw strength from the trust inspired by shared political or religious values – but need to go beyond this to establish genuinely horizontal approaches to implementation, achieved through shared agendas and equitable partnerships

Collaboration with NSAs is increasingly recognised as the way forward for multidirectional learning, through networks and other broad coalitions for mutual learning in development cooperation, such as the Future International Cooperation Policy Network (launched as Voluntary Initiative number 26 at the GPEDC), and the CIDRN. The session concluded that we are seeing greater recognition for the critical role played by non-state actors in knowledge production and dissemination, be it with global, national or local governments.

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For further reading and resources relating to this project, visit:

www.cso-ssc.org

<http://www.ids.ac.uk/idsresearch/rising-powers-in-international-development-programme>

<https://www.ids.ac.uk/project/advisory-council-and-network-development>