CONCEPT NOTE

PEER TO PEER (P2P) LEARNING:
AN ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT APPROACH FOR SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION

6 November 2017

It is evident that South-South Cooperation (SSC) with its growing trade and exchanges among southern countries has triggered a debate of development cooperation and has become an active contributor to the 21st-century debate on aid effectiveness with the aim to reform the global development policy. The search for a more suitable approach to deliver SSC, especially in the context of challenges of public sector reforms in southern countries, has prompted the Effective Institutions Platform (EIP) to play the role of a facilitating and knowledge brokerage agent, contributing to an evolutionary approach to South-South Cooperation by promoting Peer to Peer (P2P) Learning.

P2P Learning aims to provide opportunities to exchange knowledge and experience on public sector reform. This learning is primarily facilitated by bringing individuals within a country or from two or more countries together as “peers,” who through sustained engagement exchange knowledge and experience leading to mutual learning on how to deal with the most difficult and yet least discussed challenges: the politics of reform. Then these individuals feed the learning back to their organizations and work towards application at scale in their organization or a wider country context.

SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION: A BACKGROUND

South-South Cooperation is a term used to refer to the exchanges of knowledge, resources, and technology among developing countries popularly known as ‘Global South.’ Its origin dates back to 1955 to the first Intercontinental Conference, attended by 29 countries of Global South, held in Bandung, Indonesia. In 1974, the General Assembly of the UN endorsed the establishment of the Special Unit for Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (TCDC) within the UNDP. In 2004 this entity was renamed the Special Unit for South–South Cooperation (SSC) and is now called the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) which has a mandate to advocate for and coordinate South-South and triangular cooperation on a global and UN system-wide basis.

The SSC started influencing development in late 1990’s with two major cooperation frameworks known as South America-Africa Cooperation and Asia-Pacific Cooperation. More recently the India Conference in 2016 resulted in building a broad consensus on the role of SSC to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION: PROGRESS AND TRENDS

The trend of increasing South-South trade and cooperation using Bandung principles is influencing the global landscape for development cooperation. Economic growth in the Global South is narrowing the gap between developing and developed countries. There are only 33 countries now tagged ‘Low-Income Countries’ (LICs), reducing the number to almost half in about 15 years, i.e., 63 countries in 2000. Economic growth in stable countries has led to reduced aid from Global North to Middle-Income Countries (MICs), and increased focus on LICs, mainly fragile and conflict affected States.

The basic tenets of SSC are (1) first-hand experience sharing of development and challenges through the exchange of knowledge and expertise; (2) mutual benefits resulting in no distinction between commercial interests and poverty reduction aid; and (3) non-interference in the internal affairs of the recipient country.

While the SSC approach does not put conditions to aid to ensure political and governance reforms, the SSC does not preclude discussions and sharing of experience on these topics, in addition to the already ongoing cooperation on technical, knowledge and resources aspects. In fact, SSC approach has huge potential to be effective in discussing and addressing political and governance topics and could offer alternative models more appropriate for the Global South because of the similarities in the context and level of development, as well as the horizontal, non-conditional environments among the southern countries.

The SSC has taken place in both private and public sectors. In public sector, there are different types of SSC that have been implemented:

**Type I SSC:** This type largely uses the transfer of knowledge and resources from leading southern countries to other countries in the Southern block. The emerging economic powers from the South like China, India and Brazil are playing an active role in bilateral and multilateral cooperation in Africa, which is rooted in the spirit of SSC, giving rise to a new paradigm that some refer to as a new form of development cooperation.

**Type II SSC:** This type refers to exchanges based on commonality in challenges in development. An example is the g7+, an alliance of seven fragile and conflict affected countries established in 2008, which now has 20 members. This alliance has a growing portfolio of exchanges and peer-learning on peace building and state building. It came out with a knowledge-exchange product on the natural resources in these countries (mainly extractive industries), the legal and fiscal frameworks in place for managing natural resources, and issues related to governance and transparency.

South-South cooperation has increasingly demonstrated its contribution to development results through a variety of flexible cooperation modalities, including knowledge exchanges, technology

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1 The principles of SSC have provided an important framework for collaboration, including the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77. Recent meetings affirmed that SSC for development must be based on, "respect for national sovereignty, national ownership, and independence, equality, non-conditionality, non-interference in domestic affairs and mutual benefit."
transfers, financing, peer support, and countries forming common development agendas and seeking collective solutions.

Efforts have been made at various levels to create enabling conditions to support SSC and make it more effective for delivery at scale. A Colombian proposal to the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness (OECD-DAC) to establish a South-led platform, with support from the MICs, led to the creation of a Task Team on SSC (TT-SSC) in 2009 to map synergies in SSC and aid effectiveness and identify good practices. At the global level, the TT-SSC aims to contribute to the evolving global effectiveness agenda by boosting horizontal partnerships and peer learning, making technical cooperation more useful, promoting Southern expertise, and contributing to developing capacities (TT-SSC 2010).

UNDP has been supporting SCC and South-South Triangular Cooperation (SSTC)\(^2\) with a goal to maximise the outcome of development interventions for accelerating poverty reduction and achievement of SDGs. UNDP as of 2015 had a portfolio of 689 projects/programs in 132 countries using SSC and SSTC. It accounts for 15% of UNDP’s Global portfolio of projects and programs; 16% of its Country Offices are using SSC and the Triangular Cooperation approach. UNDP’s role in these countries has been that of a facilitator and knowledge broker.

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**THE EFFECTIVE INSTITUTIONS PLATFORM (EIP): A BACKGROUND**

The Effective Institutions Platform (EIP) was created in 2012 in response to international commitments such as the New Consensus\(^3\) on Effective Institutions, based on the need to strengthen the effectiveness of the public-sector institutions for the delivery of better public services. The EIP is an alliance of over 60 countries and organizations that support country-led and evidence-based policy dialogue, knowledge sharing and peer learning on public sector management and institutional reform. The EIP does this through hosting a different kind of conversation: using collective learning processes to capture innovation, stimulating experimentation and bringing this learning to a wider audience through an influential global network.

One of the objectives of EIP is to introduce and use Peer-to-Peer (P2P) learning as a strategic initiative to promote SSC. The P2P learning aims at providing opportunities to public sector officials from southern countries to come together to share experiential knowledge on issue/issues affecting public sector effectiveness and learn how best to deal with the politics of bringing change or reform to address those issues. In 2016 the EIP developed a Guide on P2P Learning, building on its research on experiences of organizations that use peer engagement and learning. As part of this effort, the EIP presents this Concept Paper to bring effectiveness to the delivery strategies of SSC through the use of

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\(^2\) Triangular cooperation is collaboration in which traditional donor countries and multilateral organizations facilitate South-South initiatives through the provision of funding, training, management and technological systems as well as other forms of support

\(^3\) The ‘New Consensus’ is the fourth High-Level Forum Agreement among donor and partner nations achieved due to the Aid Effectiveness debate in the 21st century. The first agreement was made in 2002 led to the first High-Level Forum Agreement in Rome in 2003, followed by the second-High Level Forum in 2008, popularly known as Paris Declaration, and the Third one is in Accra endorsing the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA) to accelerate the achievements made in Paris.
P2P learning approach, and explore the potential of SSC in addressing the politics of reform in the Global South through P2P learning approach.

The EIP P2P Learning Guide has now been tested in some initiatives of peer engagement in areas such as public procurement, climate finance, fiscal decentralization and local revenue mobilization and the use of evidence in parliamentary deliberation. The challenges that the peers face in their domain of reforms cited here are related to lack of an empowering legal framework, bureaucratic barriers, political and leadership deficiency, competing budgetary demands, etc. The concept of P2P Learning introduced by the EIP aims to promote facilitated peer exchange and learning on how to deal with those challenges and manage public sector reform effectively.

**THE EIP P2P LEARNING APPROACH**

The concept of P2P Learning is deeply rooted in the spirit of the Bogota Statement of March 2010:

“... Although there has been a long tradition of collaborative work among partner countries, the current economic and social environment provides opportunities to foster mutual learning across all partners. South-South learning for all countries in all phases of development is key to capacity development through sharing of experience and learning, knowledge exchange, and technology and skills transfers—all of which are important components of SSC …”

P2P Learning aims to provide opportunities to exchange knowledge and experience on public sector reform. This learning primarily is facilitated by bringing individuals within a country or from two or more countries to become peers who through sustained engagement exchange knowledge and experience leading to mutual learning, feeding the learning back to their organisations, and work towards its application at scale in the organization or the country context. The goal of this approach includes how to manage the politics of reforms in the southern countries through a robust exchange of knowledge, mutual learning, and cooperation that might involve an exchange of expertise and skills within the framework of SSC.

Technical knowledge transfers are common practice. What P2P learning as a concept brings to the paradigm is a focus on tacit learning or learning through experiential knowledge among peers about how they manage the reform. The rationale for P2P learning is that it is difficult to capture the experiential knowledge of practitioners in varying individual country contexts and package it for dissemination through traditional channels (manuals, structured training, documents or reports produced by experts, etc.). P2P learning, on the other hand, provides opportunities to learn directly from the exchange between practitioners or peers. The lack of adequate research and evaluation of the P2P learning in the public sector under SSC draws attention to information and analysis gaps. The current effort is to bridge those gaps and provide evidence to help in estimating cost effectiveness regarding decisions for further scale-up.
The P2P Learning aims at providing a tool to manage the politics of reform through mutual exchange of knowledge among peers facing similar challenges in the public sector. The objective of this Concept Paper is to provide:

- A tool for effective SSC delivery for public sector reform.
- A guiding framework to plan and manage inputs and resources required for using P2P learning in a particular context.
- A measurement system to collect and examine information on the effectiveness of processes and outcomes.

### The Implementation of EIP P2P Learning Guide as of Today

The EIP conducted a research on peer learning in the public sector in 2015. The research resulted on some principles of effective P2P learning, which the current concept builds on.

The experience of using the P2P Learning Guide in several P2P learning initiatives implemented in the last six months has resulted in some observations below for a P2P learning to be effective and sustain:

- It needs to have a clear learning objective and clarity on mutual benefit out of similar context and challenges.
- A structured framework for peer engagement is to be agreed to by countries and organizations.
- The peers are to be selected and matched using a set of selection criteria.
- The participating organizations to provide authority and empower members for peer engagement, learning, and application.
- It requires a relatively long (1-3 years) period of engagement and commitm ent among peers.
- There are multiple avenues of engagement (in-person meeting, distant communications, shared work, site visits, events, etc.).
- It requires a mechanism to support peers to take stock on peer-learning and application - "what gets measured gets done."
- Throughout the learning process, feedback and communication to the organization needs to happen continuously.
- Performance measurement to track progress, learning outcomes, and its effective implementation at scale.
- Provision of facilitators at international and country levels to engage with and support stakeholders for effective implementation.

This proposed concept outlines a process that aims to bring clarity and structure to the P2P learning and support its effective implementation. The learning from its practices aims at addressing some of the gaps in SSC delivery while adding value to its implementation at scale, adding to the knowledge for a new paradigm for development cooperation.
Figure 1

P2P Learning Cycle – Stages and Processes

The illustration above provides a process cycle diagram that includes four stages of pursuing P2P learning. Each state has two-process steps giving rise to eight process steps to implement to complete the cycle of learning. Each step includes a set of activities, inputs, measurable outputs and outcome.

There are four elements to the execution of this process: 1) the process cycle; 2) the actors involved; 3) the facilitation and sustained process and system required to implement the learning within an average time frame of three years per initiative; and 4) a mechanism for measuring progress and outcomes.

THE PROCESS

The entire cycle can be divided into four phases of activities. The first phase is called foundational having step 1 & 2 of developing a clear objective (reform ideas), selecting peer countries and peer partners, and carrying out initial exchanges. The second phase is called development that includes steps 3 & 4, with sustained exchanges resulting in learning by individuals and groups. The third stage is called application that includes steps 5 & 6 with peers taking the learning back to their organization and applying it at scale. The final phase is called evaluation that includes measurement of the process, progress, and outcomes to provide feedback on effectiveness.

The P2P learning cycle provides a framework to facilitate a learning and action platform to deal with the politics of reform in the public sector. It brings structure to the process by defining measurable steps in the cycle, helps to plan for resources and inputs using the framework, and manage it more effectively.
THE ACTORS

Peer learning supported by various networks suggest the involvement of a variety of actors. This Concept Note draws its knowledge about actors from the EIP observation on a number of P2P Learning initial work, done so far, to carry out pilot initiatives.

The following actors are involved in the P2P Learning:

1. **EIP Joint Secretariat** – coordination and support management.
2. **Facilitators (international and in-country):** to build peers’ capacity; support country practice teams to deal with challenges and risks, work with technical expert, and multiple stakeholders; and build capacity to implement steps 7 & 8.
3. **Country practice teams (peers) and public sector organization:** primary actors.
4. **Donors:** funding and donor coordination; expertise and network.
5. **Inter-government forums, regional alliances:** regional cooperation policy.
6. **Technical experts/consultants (for particular topics):** to provide new knowledge/skills, technical inputs.

THE FACILITATION AND SUSTAINED PROCESS AND SYSTEM

The P2P learning’s effectiveness is conditional on the provision of facilitation and support to bring rigor to the process of peer exchanges, learning, and its application in a sustained process, up to a period of 1 - 3 years as changes need time to materialize. For the learning to be effective, a system of how the learning works is also required.

As explained above, international and country-level facilitators -- made up of individuals or organizations or engage/hire them separately for each initiative -- are required. The facilitators will provide mentoring support, quality assurance, documenting and measurement of outcome.

The following section on measuring progress and outcome provides further explains the role of facilitation in achieving the goals expected through P2P Learning.

MEASURING PROGRESS AND OUTCOMES

The EIP observation on P2P Learning points to the lack of adequate measurement or an evaluation system to examine the effectiveness and challenges of this approach. The proposed design makes measurement central (along with facilitation) for effective implementation and the development of useful knowledge products under SSC.

The design of each imitative should include a logic model that becomes the basis of a performance management framework. With the overall flexibility of SSC, the framework takes into account three areas necessary to build such a system:

1. A process cycle showing the link between inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes;
2. A facilitation support system adapted to individual context; and
3. An appropriate measurement system for the process, suited to the capacity of the peers themselves, to assess progress and outcomes.
The logic model for P2P Learning provides a theory of change that sustained peer exchanges with facilitation and support systems can lead to increased capacity among the peers to manage the politics of reforms with the outcome of effective delivery of homegrown reforms through SSC and SSTC. The theory of change suggests that facilitated P2P Learning helps the peers to learn what reform works, what does not, and how to deal with the challenges of its implementation within their organization.

Figure 2 below supplements the information provided in Figure 1 by adding details on facilitation and support systems required at each stage to achieve set of outputs and outcome by implementing the process steps.

**Figure 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitation and Support Systems</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Foundation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Facilitating opening event – PPL objective setting</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Identifying Potential peers</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Developing matching criteria and selecting peers</td>
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<td>• Managing personality and cultural differences</td>
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<td>• Collecting peer information</td>
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<td><strong>2. Development</strong></td>
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<td>• Building learning environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Tools development for assessment and reviews</td>
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<td>• Assistance in establishment of multiple modes of exchanges</td>
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<td>• Logistics planning</td>
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<td>• Facilitating learning events &amp; knowledge products</td>
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<td><strong>3. Practice</strong></td>
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<td>• Feedback to Organization on homegrown reform and its implementation (how best to do it)</td>
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<td>• Designing communication medium and products</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Communication with stakeholders by PPL practice teams</td>
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<td>• Assistance in trouble shooting during application</td>
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<td><strong>4. Evaluation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Regular review through Peer practice teams</td>
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<td>• Reporting using tools</td>
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<td>• Training on reporting systems and ongoing improvements</td>
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<td>• Outcome monitoring</td>
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<td>• Development of knowledge products</td>
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<td>• Final evaluation of PPL initiative</td>
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**CONCLUSION**

This Concept Note attempts to present an outline of the P2P learning approach developed by the EIP that allows peers from the Global South to share with and learn from each other on how they address and manage the politics of reform under the SSC framework which is horizontal and non-conditional – two factors that are required to develop an honest, trusting environment for tacit learning and exchange on not much discussed topics on the politics of reform.

**REFERENCES**


Martins Nelson, Leigh Claire, Stewart Josie & Anderson David (2014). “Natural Resources in g7+ Countries” *g7+ Secretariat*.

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