

32. South-South co-operation to leave no one behind: What it will take?

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South-South co-operation needs to adopt and embed the leave no one behind pledge

Leaving no one behind is an essential approach for lifting people furthest behind from extreme poverty, as well as for tackling inequality and its multiple sources - including disadvantages based on gender, race, disability or age. The leave no one behind approach has the potential to bring about normative changes in the way South-South co-operation is conducted, giving priority to disadvantaged groups and particularly to those suffering from the intersections of different sources of disadvantage. However, to fulfil its promises, leave no one behind must be embedded in South-South practices and thoroughly adopted by partners.

A dialogue to foster mutual learning on leave no one behind

Embracing this challenge, the BRICS Policy Center and the Network of Southern Think Tanks - Latin America (NeST-AL), in collaboration with the Brazilian Cooperation Agency, organised the second annual “Dialogues on International Development Cooperation” around the topic of South-South co-operation contributions to leaving no one behind.² The organisers decided to focus on this topic in 2018 with three aims: to foster mutual learning and knowledge sharing to reach a clear understanding of what addressing leave no one behind entails; to share leave no one behind-oriented experiences; and to contribute to setting an agenda on leave no one behind for South-South co-operation which could be addressed at the Second High-Level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation (known as the BAPA+40 Conference). Fifty-one representatives of governments, civil society organisations, think tanks and academia, from 11 countries, gathered to discuss the topic.

Participants suggested that adopting a leave no one behind approach in South-South co-operation requires five steps:

1. Identifying those furthest behind as preferential beneficiaries of projects.
2. Building mutually beneficial, multi-stakeholder partnerships, including the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in the whole project cycle. In this context, capacity development is critical to help partners identify the drivers of inequalities and ways to address them.
3. Developing instruments and establishing venues for knowledge sharing as a way to learn from successes and failures, disseminate findings, empower those furthest behind, and mainstream the leave no one behind approach among partners.
4. Formulating evidence-based policies and strategies to act against structural inequalities.

5. Adopting leave no one behind as a supplementary approach to implementing South-South co-operation principles. The BAPA+40 Conference seems to be an essential opportunity to discuss synergies between approaches to leaving no one behind and the principle of demand-driven co-operation.

Sharing success factors in engagement, evidence and principled partnerships

As a universal commitment, participants to the dialogue found that the focus on leave no one behind could serve as a platform to share and value lessons and best practices across the global South and North. Triangular co-operation could play a useful bridging role in this regard. In both triangular and South-South co-operation taking a leave no one behind approach can be an opportunity to find new, innovative and inclusive ways to engage different stakeholders. International organisations can also play a crucial role in convening and facilitating knowledge sharing between transnational policy networks.

Participants to the dialogue recognised that South-South co-operation projects can stress leave no one behind objectives and components all along the project cycle, from design to implementation, monitoring and impact assessment by targeting and empowering vulnerable groups. There was a consensus around the need to address challenges related to data gaps and quality, including the need to have disaggregated data that better capture official development assistance flows and South-South initiatives directed to those left behind.

Finally, South-South co-operation could support the design and implementation of leave no one behind-oriented national policies - given the consent and interest of partner countries. The principle of non-interference into internal affairs guides South-South co-operation, similar to the way ownership guides development co-operation by Development Assistance Committee members. At the same time, these principles might seem contradictory to answering the pledge to leave no one behind - a fine balance must be found to reconcile principles of non-interference and ownership with prioritising the needs of those furthest behind.

What next?

South-South and triangular co-operation can be effective instruments for tackling structural and intersectional inequalities that contribute to excluding people. There is strong and sufficient evidence and lessons learned among partners in the South to integrate a leave no one behind agenda in South-South co-operation.

This agenda encompasses normative and operational components. The normative component requires understanding South-South principles, from non-interference to being demand-driven, through the lens of leaving no one behind. The operational component involves mainstreaming the commitment to leave no one behind into co-operation guidelines and practices. The BAPA+40 Conference which will take place in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 2019 has adopted ‘South-South Co-operation and the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda’ as its overarching theme. It is an excellent opportunity to both embed the leave no one behind approach into South-South principles and to establish the instruments and venues to build and strengthen an inclusive agenda.

Notes

¹ Rather than being an official report of the dialogues, this is an authored case study, and does not express the official position of the Brazilian Cooperation Agency, nor that of any of the individuals who have actively participated in the dialogues or the institutions they represent. The “Dialogues on International Development Cooperation” were also supported by the Seoul Policy Center, DFID and BMZ.

² *Inter alia*. For more information see www.bricspolicycenter.org/en/projetos/south-south-cooperation-dialogues.



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