

Better Together: Advancing South-South and Triangular Cooperation in the Greater Caribbean Region



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“If you want to go quickly go alone, if you want to go far, go together” ~ African proverb

The Greater Caribbean Region is faced with unique vulnerabilities; particularly in terms of susceptibility to natural hazards and issues arising from poor connectivity. Simultaneously, the region has demonstrated its capacity for managing these concerns which is greatly amplified through cooperation among countries. South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation have become important development tools for Caribbean countries within recent years. These types of collaborative efforts have facilitated the sharing of resources and experiences with the end goal of achieving poverty reduction and economic and social development within developing countries. Efforts to address common challenges within the region is demonstrated through the creation of forums for South – South cooperation such as the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) among others. Through these methods, a multi-pronged approach has been created that encourages partnerships among governments, non-governmental organizations, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders in the region. These forums have served to facilitate agreements between member states on a host of issues including trade, natural resource management, transport, tourism, disaster risk reduction, public health and communications. Developing countries are increasingly using the avenues of south-south and triangular cooperation as catalysts to becoming the owners and proponents of their own advancement.

Many countries in the “South” including Caribbean nations have benefited through official development assistance (ODA), a form of North-South cooperation through “soft loans”, grants and technical assistance. This type of assistance was either expended bilaterally or through multilateral

development agencies such as the World Bank and the United Nations from developed nations to those at the lower end of the development scale. From 2005 to 2013, the ODA flow in the sector of transport amounted to USD 4.6 billion dollars for air transport while for road transport the figure was 60.9 billion. For SIDS, receiving ODA in this form represents an opportunity to improve regional connectivity which has positive implications for sectors such as tourism and trade. ODA has, however, not been unsusceptible to global economic factors. The impact of the global recession coupled with the experience that, over the last few years an increasing number of Caribbean countries have been removed from the list of ODA eligible recipients due to their classification by income, has curtailed available funding to many of these nations. Consequentially, South-South cooperation has emerged as an alternative in bridging the gap left by the decrease or removal in ODA flows. This type of cooperation has the distinctive characteristic of providing “expertise and financial support to developing countries from developing countries to promote sustainable development”. This presents a unique opportunity for developing countries to promote an inclusive, multi-lateral partnership which is defined by effective relationships based on solidarity, similarity and a strong coordination framework. In this manner developing countries are able to find innovative solutions to support their own development processes in line with their values and strategic goals. The rise of South-South cooperation does not mean that North-South cooperation has not been advantageous for stakeholders. It does however signify a movement towards interdependence among developing countries while high income nations continue to lend their support.

South-South cooperation has the ability to ensure that economic and social concerns are addressed by regional experts who can benefit from each other’s experiences and access to resources. This kind of cooperation cannot exist within a vacuum; high level political support and accountability, sustainability and partnerships at the global, regional and country levels are all keys to ensuring that south-south cooperation has the ability to effect significant change. Countries in the Caribbean share a similar cultural and historical context, as well as geographic proximity which provide an excellent foundation for cooperation. The rise of regional bodies in recent years and the existence of a plethora of economic, social and political agreements being signed and ratified prove that the interest in regional cooperation is greater than before. This level of development cooperation provides a new avenue for developing countries to potentially improve their processes and augment regional capacity to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Besides advancing the region towards subscribing to and implementing international guidelines, South-South cooperation can also assist with the development of the national agendas of individual countries. Through the pooling of information, resources (technical, financial and otherwise), best practices and experiences, all countries within the region have the opportunity to tap into mutual benefits.

Triangular cooperation is a product of this interdependence movement and can be defined as a “collaboration in which traditional donor countries and multilateral organizations facilitate South-South initiatives through the provision of funding, training, and management and technological systems as well as other forms of support”. This initiative is often patterned after previous cooperation agreements between the traditional donor countries and emerging donors and allows for an exchange of expertise and financial support to occur within a single region. Benefits of this type of cooperation are extensive and include the creation of partnerships between developing countries - which has allowed them to build capacity and collaborate to cultivate innovative solutions to shared problems through the use of technical expertise and/or financial assistance of developed nations. A relevant and recent example of the strengthening of partnerships through triangular cooperation was the participation of the ACS at the 6th High Level Forum on the Korea-Caribbean Partnership in October 2016 entitled “Enhancing the Korea-Caribbean Partnership on Climate Change and Food Security”. The ACS, through this forum, continues to seek initiatives that will

mitigate the impact of climate change in the region by giving its member states greater agency in formulating climate change policy as a tool to realizing the Sustainable Development Goals. In the area of disaster risk management, the ACS in cooperation with the Finnish Meteorological Institute has increased capacity in sixteen SIDS in the region regarding the development methods for early warning systems and disaster risk reduction, improved quality management systems and enhanced regional tools in the area of climate monitoring services. Initiated in 2010, and currently in its third phase, this project uses the principles of triangular cooperation to incorporate up to date risk information i.e. weather forecasting and analysis into disaster planning and risk mitigation efforts in a region that is highly open and vulnerable to natural threats.

As with North-South cooperation, there are risks involved in countries offering development aid to one another such as the existence of competing interests of the donor state/s and the recipient. To address this concern, it must be very clear when countries are agreeing to this kind of high level cooperation what they are willing to contribute, what their expectations are and a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system must also be in place. The Association of the Caribbean States is one of the main proponents and facilitators of South-South cooperation and the only facilitator of triangular cooperation within the Greater Caribbean Region. The forum for political dialogue created by the ACS provides an opportunity for countries of Spanish, English and French speaking background to collaborate on policy formulation; pooling ideas, resources and experiences to craft the best possible unified approach to overcoming shared obstacles in achieving sustainable development. The Greater Caribbean has the potential to achieve autonomy through the utilization of South-South and triangular cooperation and the resources, experiences and technical expertise of regional and international stakeholders in crafting home grown policies to address each country's specific situation. What the region requires now are strengthened regional and institutional frameworks in order to achieve true effectiveness and sustain mutually beneficial partnerships.

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