

New Opportunities for South-South Cooperation in Asia & the Pacific



For many decades now, countries have worked together and shared know-how, ideas, training and financing to improve the situation of children and to support each other in meeting their obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, a large part of this cooperation has flowed from countries of the “North” (developed) to countries in the “South” (developing).

That flow help cultivate a rich field of financial, technical and human resource capacities and good practices that the so-called ‘developing’ countries are now exchanging with each other in what is often identified as South-South cooperation.

In this form of collaboration, countries of the South have become partners and contributors with each other, sharing technical capacity, ideas, experience and even personnel for mutual benefit and shared goals.

‘Partnership among equals’

At a recent high-level meeting on South-South cooperation held in Africa, participants cited the strengths and value of this as a ‘partnership among equals, based on solidarity’. They regarded it as more aligned with the principles of national sovereignty and ownership and providing freedom from the conditionality that often comes with international cooperation.

In a business sense, South-South cooperation creates opportunities for assisting countries to expand the markets for their skilled nationals and their technologies and products while making relevant, affordable technologies available to receiving countries.

Similar principles apply in the development field. Many countries in the South share similar development contexts, challenges and perspectives and can learn from one another about what has worked or not worked and adapt these experiences. South-South cooperation is not meant to replace but rather to complement the older approaches to international collaboration for child rights and for development. The approach builds on the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action, which emphasize principles of ownership and adherence to national priorities.

Examples

Countries such as China, India, Malaysia and the Republic of Korea have emerged as financing or facilitating countries in South-South cooperation. Examples of international collaboration among developing countries include the directors of immigration ministries in the Pacific region collecting data on victims of trafficking for a joint annual report; the Association of Southeast Asian Nation’s Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children; and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation’s Development Fund that will be applied to poverty alleviation and provide financial assistance to projects on women’s empowerment, maternal and child health and other areas.

China, Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines and Viet Nam currently send agriculture specialists to other developing countries in support of the FAO’s food security programmes.

A number of non-government organizations from developing countries are collaborating in advocacy to resolve the worst forms of child labour and other child rights issues, as are national human rights institutions. For example, the national human rights institutions in

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Southeast Asia have established a standing cooperative organization that works on areas of mutual concern including the rights of children and women, migrant workers and trafficking in persons.

Opportunities for expanded cooperation for children

A large part of South-South cooperation to date has focused on trade, finance and infrastructure development. There have been some relevant collaboration initiatives in health, human trafficking and food security. But there are many other areas of child rights and child protection in particular that afford opportunities for governments and other actors to cooperate across borders and to learn from and work with each other. Such areas include improving criminal justice systems so they become more responsive to children's rights, promoting gender parity in education and harmonizing cultural and traditional attitudes with child rights standards.

Other areas that are have so far not been widely addressed in the South-South dynamic, but are prime candidates for collaboration, are child participation, local government, children with disabilities, indigenous children, children and migration, children in armed conflict and remedies and assistance for child victims of rights violations.

There are many examples of successful experiences at country level which are highly relevant and could be adapted and adopted in other countries, sub-regions and even across regions. From an initial review, these might include the work of child protective families and communities in Papua New Guinea, Pakistan's Lady Health Worker programme, the Pacific nations' police programme on domestic violence and the Philippine courts' guardian *ad litem* system.

To further realize the potential of South-South cooperation, assisting countries should invest in human resource development to scale up the pool of available trainers and experts – while maintaining the availability of needed skills at home. International agencies and financing institutions, including collaborations such as the new partnership between UNICEF and the Asian Development Bank, are in a position to facilitate and support the expansion of South-South cooperation.

This "partnership of equals" holds the potential to profoundly advance the pace and quality of development in the Asia-Pacific region, to better ensure that children live healthier lives and are able to seize the opportunities presented to them in a changing world.