



## ***Synergies to increase impact: Colombia's South-South Cooperation in 2021 and the Effectiveness Agenda***

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### **1. What's in a name? Two brands with distinct politics and histories**

#### **a. ODA and effectiveness**

The concept of Official Development Assistance (ODA) was discussed and reviewed within the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) throughout the 1960s and 1970s, until a consensus was reached around defining it as “financial and technical flows to developing countries, which fit the parameters of being a) developmental in purpose; b) concessional in nature; and c) undertaken through the official channels whether bilateral or multilateral”. (Beshherati & MacFeely, 2019)

As a recent development within the sphere of ODA, the effectiveness agenda can be understood as an effort by traditional donor countries to make ODA more aware of local contexts and priorities, thus improving the conditions to make development work more politically and financially sustainable. From the Global South, this agenda is considered a result of dialogue between Northern and Southern countries, along with Non-Governmental and Private Sector organizations, during multistakeholder events organized in Paris in 2005, Accra in 2008 and Busan in 2011.

To promote effective development cooperation, the OECD and the UNDP joined forces to build the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC), an association of public, private, non-governmental and subnational organizations that promotes good practices in international cooperation. The cornerstone of the GPEDC are the four principles of effective development cooperation: which are country ownership, focus on results, transparency and accountability, and inclusive partnerships.

These principles can be thought of as the minimum necessary values to conduct joint work that takes into account the views and priorities of the receiving partner.

#### **b. South-South Cooperation and the Global South**

The origins of South-South Cooperation (SSC) can be traced back to the 1955 Bandung Conference, called upon by the newly-independent African and Asian nations within the context of the Cold War. In the following years, the countries comprising the Non-Aligned Movement developed SSC as a brand that encompasses different methodologies for financial, technical and cultural work. The 1978 Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA) proposed a set of principles for SSC and explicitly recognized it as a modality of cooperation independent from ODA.

The United Nations (2012) defines SSC as “a process whereby two or more developing countries pursue their individual and/or shared national capacity development objectives through exchanges of knowledge, skills, resources and technical know-how, and through regional and interregional collective actions, including partnerships involving Governments, regional organizations, civil society, academia and the private sector, for their individual and/or



mutual benefit within and across regions. South-South cooperation is not a substitute for, but rather a complement to, North-South cooperation”.

As can be understood from the wildly different contexts, SSC has different characteristics depending on the region in which it is conducted, with technical and knowledge-related exchanges being more prevalent in Africa and Latin America while forms of trade, investment and development finance are more prominent in Asia (Besharati & MacFeely, 2019). Regardless, all SSC practitioners recognize and herald principles such as non-conditionality of cooperation, horizontal relations between partners, mutual accountability and alignment with national development priorities and instruments.

### **c. The rising importance of the Global South, and the technification of SSC**

In the last couple of decades, Southern countries have steadily increased their performance in key economic indicators. When examining figures of Gross Domestic Product, Export-Import flows, Foreign Direct Investment and remittances, for example, Global South countries account for 50% or more of the total global share. This increased presence is reflected in industries such as agriculture, apparel, construction, energy, entertainment, finance and technology. Yet despite this shifting wealth narrative, Southern countries don't seem to be increasing their participation in political fora in a similar proportion (Bhattacharya, 2020).

In 2020, APC-Colombia joined the GPEDC as Steering Committee member and lead of Action Area 2.3, dedicated to promoting the Effectiveness of South-South Cooperation. We believe that acting within the GPEDC presents an opportunity to bring to the attention of traditional donors that the Global South has been doing a type of international cooperation that is defined by local priorities and involves local partners and provides mutual accountability and is based on solidarity. **It's called South-South Cooperation, and we have been doing it for over 40 years!**

But to show this compatibility of principles, we need to compare “apples to apples”, which brings us to the topic of measurement and its challenges in SSC.

## **2. Synergy as a response to the administrative costs of compliance**

### **a. Reporting mechanisms for Ibero-American countries**

Latin American countries have a robust mechanism for reporting South-South Cooperation to the Ibero-American General Secretariat (*Secretaría General Iberoamericana*, SEGIB), which has been producing reports on SSC for over 12 years. Countries report the number of projects conducted, the participating partners and their roles, as well as the project title and general area of activity (e.g. Education, Health, Infrastructure, etc), with some information of the total budget.

Yet this focus of reporting on projects, partners and topics doesn't reflect the quality or the impacts that SSC projects commonly have on the professional networks, the institutional capacities and the public policies of the participating countries. This has been extensively discussed and, while our countries in Latin America agree that measuring South-South



Cooperation is important, we haven't yet reached a consensus about WHAT to measure, or HOW to measure it.

- We have **conceptual differences**. We agree that South-South Cooperation involves sharing best practices and building institutional capacity, but we're suspicious when the technical exchange is bundled with a loan or a financial commitment.
- We also have **language differences**. We don't like the term "evaluation" because it implies a power relationship ("who are you to evaluate what I do?"). We prefer to talk about "assessments" or "measurement".
- We have **differences in scope**. Since our countries are in constant flow we don't like to commit to measuring impacts - we prefer to measure processes, over which we have more control.

Despite this lack of consensus at a regional level, APC-Colombia as a public institution is committed to improving the efficiency of its spending, following the principle that you can't manage what you can't measure. Therefore, for us data is key to improving the work of our teams and the results of our cooperation.

#### **b. Reporting mechanism at the GPEDC**

At APC-Colombia, we recognize the success that the GPEDC monitoring effort has had in aligning procedures and data sources between providers and recipient countries, in accordance with the four effectiveness principles. As a recent new member, we look forward to improving the information available on our and our partner's cooperation.

Colombia is a Middle-Income Country, an increasingly common status for Southern countries in the context of the "rising South". As such, we still face challenges that require us to receive ODA while at the same time we've developed good practices in different sectors that allow us to provide a great deal of SSC to other partner countries. This dual role (as both provider and recipient of international cooperation) allows us to participate in different cooperation mechanisms but also imposes on us a dual load of administrative costs, due to differences in data gathering and reporting methodologies.

Yet, being a dual role country shouldn't require having dual reporting staff. We believe the Effectiveness and South-South Cooperation frameworks have commonalities that can be exploited to improve the efficiency of reporting mechanisms and to provide valuable insights to participants of both spaces.

#### **c. There's a common core of principles between the Effectiveness and SSC agendas**

As was mentioned at the beginning of this document, SSC has a long and well-documented history of evolution and refinement since the 1978 Buenos Aires Plan of Action. The most recent compilation of its principles can be found in the 2012 "Framework of operational guidelines on United Nations support to South-South and triangular cooperation". In the following table we highlight the important similarities between both sets of principles.



Principles of South-South Cooperation (United Nations, 2012)	GPEDC Effectiveness principles
Respect for national sovereignty and ownership	Country ownership
Mutual accountability and transparency	Transparency and accountability
Coordination of evidence- and results-based initiatives	Focus on results
Partnership among equals	Inclusive Partnerships
Multi-stakeholder approach	
Mutual benefit	
Non-interference in domestic affairs	
Development effectiveness	
Non-conditionality	

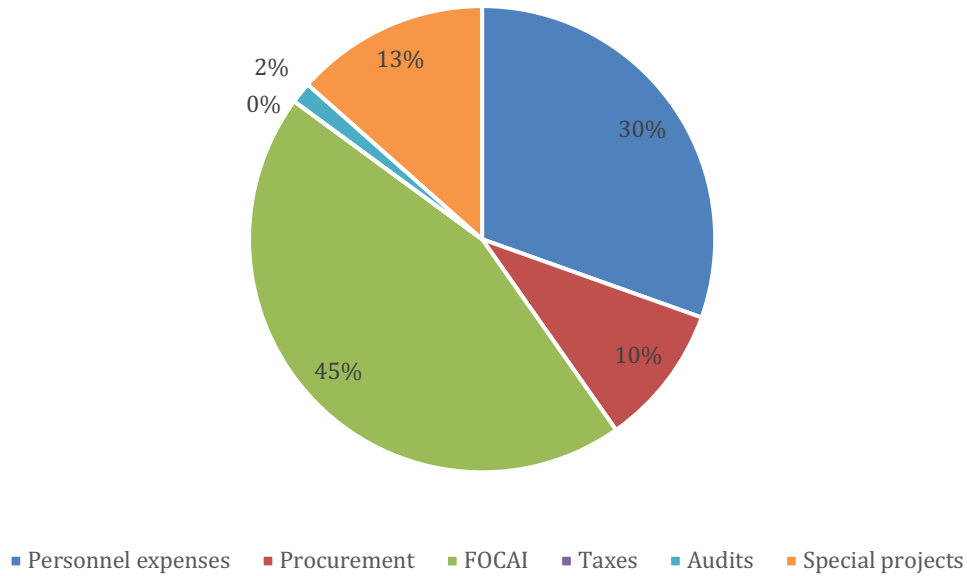
For APC-Colombia, our thesis is that we should be able to take advantage of these similarities to build national reporting frameworks that can help us provide information both to the SEGIB and the GPEDC, thus (1) improving the efficiency of our tools and (2) expanding the reach of our information.

#### d. Colombian South-South Cooperation show-and-tell

Global South countries dedicate important financial and human resources to organizing knowledge exchanges between their peers. In monetary terms, APC-Colombia has a Cooperation and International Assistance Fund (*Fondo de Cooperación y Asistencia Internacional, FOCAI*) which is used exclusively to finance SSC projects and provide humanitarian aid. In 2021, FOCAI represented 45% of APC-Colombia's entire operating budget. These resources (around 4 million USD) were invested in support of 126 SSC initiatives with partners around the world. In human talent terms, the agency dedicates around two thirds of its staff to SSC.

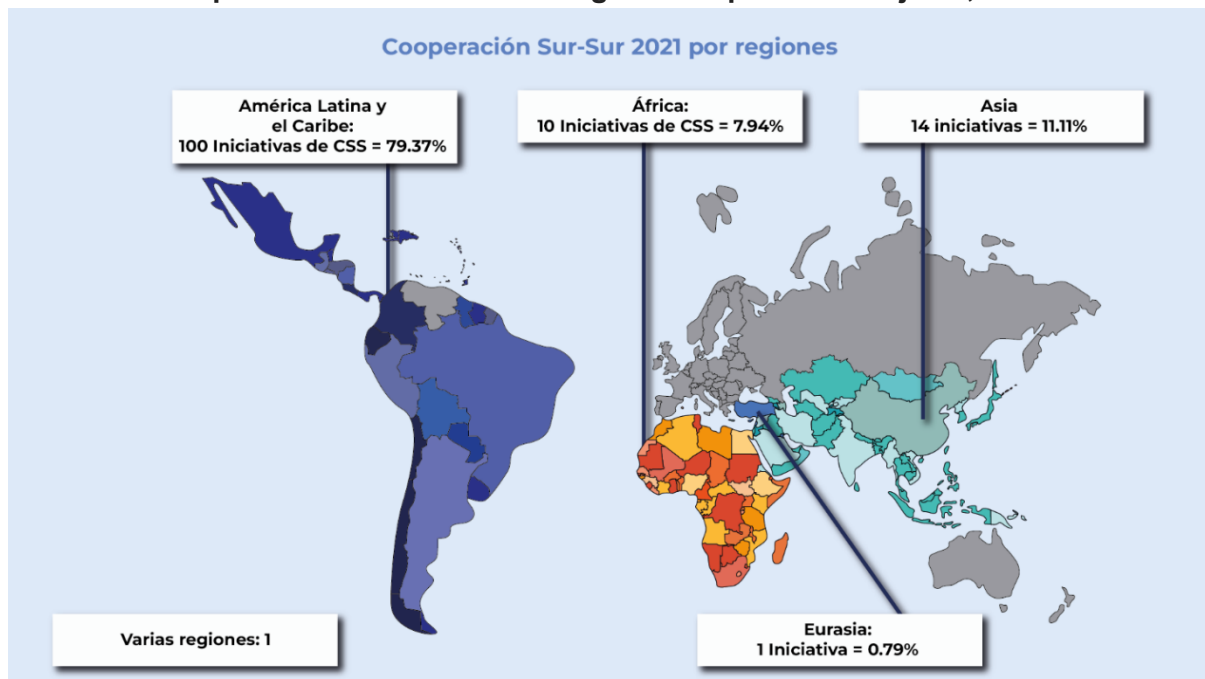


## APC-Colombia, operating expenses 2021 (%)



Source: APC-Colombia 2021 budget report

## Map of South-South and Triangular Cooperation Projects, 2021



Source: APC-Colombia 2021 South-South Cooperation report



We believe that global efforts to monitor international cooperation are valuable, but they need to take into account South-South Cooperation to have a comprehensive picture of the amount of work taking place around the world, and not only around the traditional agencies. As such,

in the spirit of inclusive partnerships, **Southern countries should be recognized as legitimate contributors to international development with their own voices and visions, if we are to promote truly global partnerships.**

### 3. A hypothesis for exploiting complementarities while not converging

As leads of Action Area 2.3, APC-Colombia has worked with countries in different continents to develop and pilot an information framework that can provide data to highlight the commonalities of South-South Cooperation and Effectiveness. This can improve the efficiency of our reporting tools, allow us to make decisions based on better evidence and also provide the GPEDC with a window into debates around South-South Cooperation that may be unknown to OECD countries.

This exercise aims to exploit complementarities and increase the visibility between Northern and Southern spaces. It is not to promote convergence between both modalities. As has already been stated, South-South Cooperation as a modality of work originated and continues to be defined *in contrast with* ODA, and we do not disregard the meaningful differences between both modalities to “fit a square peg into a round hole”.

The value of having locally relevant, globally understandable data is continually increasing as SSC builds bridges with other initiatives such as the OECD Total Official Support for Sustainable Development (TOSSD), or the United Nations’ Working Group on Measurement of Development Support (UNWGMDS).

#### References:

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