



## CHALLENGES FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION BY AND FOR THE PEOPLE

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The process of building new, alternative proposals for a solidarity-based, dignified, sovereign and liberating cooperation amongst people is the great task and challenge for the Latin American and Caribbean region and its governments. This is especially so for those rebuilding a new model of living, where South-South Cooperation (SSC) is a crucial and strategic tool for integration and identity.

The Latin American experience and its historic ties with internationalism demonstrates that no amount of financing will allow us to transform the reality of marginalization, oppression, discrimination and poverty faced by our people. This can only be achieved through "conscientization" (a process of achieving critical consciousness), brotherhood, justice as well as a political awareness that building another world is possible. We must not lose the utopia, the hope that all living beings (people, animals, nature, planet Earth) have the right to a dignified, just and sovereign life.

The Latin American region has the opportunity to transcend and promote new ways of life with South-South Cooperation playing a vitally important role. Already, aspects of Latin American culture are being recognized as having important values to inform new political, economic, social, cultural and environmental

relationships among our people. This includes recognition of prior knowledge working with lessons learned and the consolidation of new concepts. Fundamental to a new way of thinking is the development of proposals that are strongly opposed to the current system of capitalist neoliberalism.

In the past, international relations have been designed and built on the basis of geopolitical and economic interests. "International governance" institutions (such as the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), international financial bodies, and the Organization of American States (OAS) established a framework that originated in the 1940s, following World War Two. These institutions continue to steer the destiny of our planet, giving oxygen to a model that, can be seen as outdated, unviable, and dysfunctional.

When we talk about a new international financial or political architecture, or cooperation, this necessarily involves the reconstruction and creation of new institutions. Building transformative processes, while maintaining delegitimized structures and organizational forms, the bulwark of the very system we want to change, is simply inappropriate and unfeasible.

The emergence of regional mechanisms with a Latin American identity, such as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America (ALBA) and Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), are transformative steps forward, as they are creating new forms of organization and participation. The establishment of new financial and economic instruments has the potential to give the region a sense of

sovereignty and freedom. The region must move away from those institutions and nations that have had a role in the impoverishment of our countries (international banks, the Organization of American States (OAS), the United States).

There are people in the Latin American and Caribbean region who are increasingly aware of their rights, who are demanding structural transformations and are fighting for justice, peace, dignity and self-determination. These are essential parts of the changes being mobilized in this region.

Political, economic, institutional, social and peoples' conditions to strengthen and consolidate processes of change have been put on the table. It is essential to work towards complementing these transformative manifestations. A true process of integration and engagement must be generated among these forces and initiatives that are taking place as part of this commitment to change. Creating this integration will be one of the great challenges that we will face in the coming years in Latin America and the Caribbean.

A first step is to conduct a critical and purposeful review of the processes carried out to date through South-South Cooperation in the region. States that are currently engaged in SSC should evaluate their methods, forms of action and institutional development for this cooperation. Likewise, recipient countries should focus on ways for deploying these resources that allow for sustainable contributions that address the economic and social issues facing the most impoverished and marginalized populations. Finally, other actors engaged in these processes (Indigenous Peoples, social movements, organizations, academia, private sector) must identify their

main challenges and potentialities to engage in SSC more actively and decisively.

A review of current South-South Cooperation reveals the following organizational and operational weaknesses:

1. While SSC is influencing the construction of a new form of international cooperation governance at high-level fora, its overall political leverage has been limited. Inside the current economic and financial system where international cooperation has been nurtured, countries and donors that contribute the largest amounts of aid (without considering the aid to GNI ratio) have a strong voice in determining aid policies, priorities and guidelines. SSC must examine and learn how to use these same codes and forms of definition to establish a fair monetary value for its actions if it wants to reach or influence these fora.
2. SSC must be careful not to replicate traditional OECD cooperation practices. These include political conditioning of aid, promoting geopolitical or economic interests, 'verticalism', agenda impositions, and tied aid (trade, investment). In some cases, it has been reported that financial interests of banks or other SSC provider country commercial/economic interests have been allocated as SSC.
3. SSC must increase its information-sharing and the promotion of its forms of collaboration. SSC is currently not a well-known modality. Instead, it is often categorized only quantitatively rather than also identifying its different qualitative contributions.
4. SSC providers have established mechanisms to monitor their actions and manage the

international cooperation resources they receive and provide. In most cases, these bodies are based in the President or Foreign Ministry offices.

The lack of specialized SSC bodies at the country or regional level continues to be a weakness that should be reconsidered by governments and regional bodies. There is much to learn from donor countries that have built institutions that have communication, information, systematization and positioning capabilities that operate in international arenas. Regional bodies such as MERCOSUR (an economic and political bloc comprising Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela) ALBA, ECLAC, UNASUR and the Central American Integration System (SICA) need to create dedicated SSC institutions. The founding declarations of these bodies refer to the need to foster and strengthen the collaborative capacities of its member countries. However, there are no concrete proposals on how to achieve this goal, no definitions of what these institutions would be responsible for, and no implementation mechanisms.

5. SSC implemented in the Latin American and Caribbean region has usually followed modalities that have been established by various institutions with a history of engagement in these collaborations. The three main modes of cooperation are evident: a) horizontal bilateral-multilateral; b) triangular; and c) regional cooperation.

Bilateral-horizontal SSC, which currently represents over 80% of all SSC cooperation relations, is the result of political negotiations and intergovernmental relations. Triangular relationships, whereby more than two actors are engaged, generally

focuses on issues promoted in international cooperation with European or Asian donors. On regional issues, the active participation by Latin American and Caribbean countries is still being developed. As with triangular cooperation, this cooperation is normally based on proposals and support from traditional donors.

Indigenous Peoples and social movements have called into question a form of SSC that has remained largely stagnant, except in bilateral country relations. Cooperation between peoples, between movements, in support of their struggles and transformative goals and processes, remains the greatest challenge in transcending these traditional bilateral forms of cooperation.

6. SSC is fundamentally a means to support collaboration amongst countries to strengthen social identities as well as political, social and economic relations. Every Latin American and Caribbean country participating in these processes determines the objectives and strategies it wants to implement and presents corresponding proposals and approaches. Some countries may focus on SSC objectives directly related to the search for structural transformations and collaboration in systemic processes to get out of poverty. Others may have more humanistic goals oriented to moderate democratic governance. Still others may concentrate on goals that link to the traditional cooperation processes.

Regardless of the type of SSC approach that is adopted, it is essential that objectives and strategies respond to the reality of each participating country, and that they provide sustainable and systemic responses to the issues being addressed.

7. Every SSC process should include a thorough evaluation that asks the following questions:

Is this cooperation linked to the participating country's interests and demands? Is it aimed at sustainably transforming structural causes of the problems being addressed? Does it reach the country's peoples and territories? Do recipient countries have real political will to support and monitor this cooperation? Does it establish basic conditions for participation, consultation and transparency? Is it socially sustainable?

Undoubtedly these questions will lead to the identification of gaps, weaknesses and, above all, ideas on how to make SSC more effective. The starting point for a review of different types of cooperation lies in answers to the questions that have been asked about traditional international cooperation. In these situations, unilateral, conditional, non-consultative and non-transparent practices have frequently been applied and the focus has been often on issues that populations have not prioritized or requested.

8. SSC processes must include consultative mechanisms that involve all affected social sectors and peoples. Traditionally, international cooperation processes have often operated without the binding and inclusive participation of a recipient country's affected sectors and peoples. A change of this trend is needed to guarantee participation, political will and meaningful change.
9. At present, there is a lack of monitoring mechanisms to assess the coordination among SSC provider countries. While in some cases, episodic meetings have been held of all providers to follow up on common issues or a national context (Haiti), there is no agreed upon procedures.

More information-sharing on country experiences and cooperation modalities is necessary. This would promote better

coordination, avoid duplication, and generate expertise. It would also allow for better coordination with government institutions and other country actors (social movements, Indigenous Peoples, academia, political parties, other donors, private sector, multilateral organizations, among others).

10. Social movements and Indigenous Peoples are insisting that the necessary objective conditions (institutional, organizational and thematic) be put in place to carry out solidarity cooperation processes with a wide and diverse participation. But given the current political dynamics, there is no sustained mechanisms to support political dialogue between development actors in recipient countries. This results in the exclusion of social movements and Indigenous Peoples in decision-making on crucial and strategic issues affecting their lives.

SSC can be an important mechanism for strengthening dialogue mechanisms, guaranteeing a direct engagement on issues that countries want to address. Populations that would benefit from this collaboration must be engaged as this will help ensure that processes have a strong and meaningful impact and provide indicators for the evaluation of objectives and results. The challenge is to generate political and institutional conditions for active participation of all social actors and peoples.

11. SSC-provider countries' monitoring instruments are currently quite weak. Cooperation processes require ongoing qualitative and quantitative evaluations to ensure effectiveness. Strong human and instrumental capacities that can identify obstacles and challenges are required to ensure a productive SSC that produces a positive impact. Monitoring should be

implemented at two levels: a) in provider countries, where their actions can be controlled; and b) in recipient countries, through long-term follow-up.

12. The lack of a well-organized statistical and disaggregated analysis on South-South Cooperation has made it impossible to provide an accurate account of what SSC currently means for the region. Studies confirm that SSC involves important financial flows although this has not appeared in official reports.

Cuba's SSC is a case in point. There are strong indications that a thorough and quantifiable study on the country's SSC would show that it contributes the most in Latin America and the Caribbean (a better performance than any OECD-DAC donor) and that in relation to GNI it likely represents at least 3% per year. Having verifiable information and analysis would strengthen SSC's awareness and credibility and help to assume its rightful place in the ranking of countries with very significant aid commitment worldwide.

13. There is a lack of public information so that people can learn about what countries are doing terms of SSC. It is difficult to find reliable and accurate information, even in countries with dedicated cooperation agencies (Mexico, Colombia, Chile, Brazil, Peru, among others). In international politics, information is essential to promote new ideas and forms of cooperation. Agile and up-to-date web-based mechanisms could make this information available.

South-South Cooperation has important challenges if it is to become an effective tool to address problems of inequality and injustice. It needs to be transformed, constructing new paradigms for political and economic support and for a more supportive, sustainable

cooperation system. It can and must contribute to the eradication of the structural causes of social and economic inequalities within countries and inequities in Latin America and the Caribbean. The main challenges and ways forward to realize these goals are as follows:

1. It is important to build SSC that respects the self-determination and sovereignty that the people in Latin America and the Caribbean require. Traditional Northern cooperation practices must be abandoned and a collaboration with no conditional procedures, and where geopolitical interests are transformed into legitimate demands emanating from the countries themselves, must be generated. This should be aligned to national and regional interests, with countries being the masters of their own destiny.
2. SSC must confront and challenge the neoliberal model. Cooperation should question all those forms that produce – and reproduce – inequities (trade, illegitimate foreign debt, investments, illicit capital flows). SSC linkages as part of countries' foreign policies should not become a means for persuasion or conditioning, but a means for solidarity and internationalism. This is especially important inside the global crises that we are currently experiencing.
3. SSC should promote new paradigms that respect the role of political citizenship. Politicians uphold the will of the majority. Work must be done to realize 'Buen Vivir' for our people, one which supports a holistic vision and a sustainable coexistence. And in the face of increasingly alarming major climate imbalances, SSC should foster effective, sustainable practices for the conservation of the planet's natural resources and ecosystem.
4. SSC should not be a tool to sell charity or philanthropy. Instead, it should be understood as a process to socialize capacities and resource-sharing to serve and enhance human well-being.
5. A reconfiguration of South-South Cooperation involves recovering past practices where human rights were also understood collectively. The concept of "collaboration" cannot be based on an individualistic approach, but rather on communal sharing. Any practice aimed at seeking sustainable solutions to social or economic injustices must be based on the concept of community and humanity. A joining together of all the factors that coexist in a social reality must be connected to the socio-political, economic, cultural and environmental reality of each territory.
6. SSC should be a means to generate a revolution of humankind, one that promotes social awareness of citizens' highest democratic values and prioritizes the realization of all human rights (political, economic, social, cultural, environmental) that a society needs for its well-being.
7. SSC must be built on the basis of complementarity between the different actors and key country stakeholders. These includes governments, social movements, Indigenous Peoples, academia, women, and other key actors. Permanent spaces for political engagement must be promoted, ones that create willingness and capacities for joint work. Only if we are united in harmony will it be possible to face all the hardships and obstacles that humanity is currently experiencing.
8. SSC should work to define its own concepts and codes that respond to the reality of the people it is engaging. It should design

tools for impact assessment using social, redistribution of wealth and well-being indicators. It must respond to its own institutional framework and generate new and innovative implementation mechanisms.

9. SSC must focus its efforts on the consolidation of the instruments needed for institutional strengthening and sustainability. This approach requires innovation and institutions committed to democratic principles. Undoubtedly, there are international cooperation experiences that can serve as references to seek efficiency and create an effective SSC organization that responds to the realities of Latin America and the Caribbean.

10. Countries should establish a financial fund within the framework of SSC that

is accessible for social movements and Indigenous Peoples. This will help strengthen and stimulate their political objectives aimed at: a) generating active citizens that stand up for their rights; b) supporting mobilizations to advocate for respect for human life, land and natural resources; c) strengthening peoples' international solidarity; d) expanding and improving alternative media; and e) working for community training and organization. Together these initiatives will consolidate the unity of all peoples and take up the challenge to work towards a sovereign, deeply fair and democratic Latin America and Caribbean region.