



SouthViews

No. 221, 6 July 2021

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South-South and Triangular Cooperation: lessons from partnership between Argentina and Mozambique

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This article reviews some fruitful South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTrC) initiatives between Argentina and Mozambique. The initiatives received political support from both countries and showed that the relationship between South-South Cooperation and Triangular Cooperation can be mutually reinforcing. SSTrC may channel financial resources from development partners to projects and initiatives that can produce highly effective development results.

Introduction

The fast expansion of South-South and triangular cooperation has been one of the most important and impressive developments in the recent history. The extensive cooperation between countries of the South in multiple areas including economic, political, social, environmental and cultural, at the bilateral, regional and international levels, has promoted not only solidarity among developing countries but has also contributed to the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Triangular Cooperation (TrC) has provided boost to South-South Cooperation (SSC) through the provision of funds and expertise from donors as well as regional and multilateral organizations.

South-South cooperation initiatives between Africa and Latin America have increased exponentially over the past decades. For example, Cuba has engaged in SSC activities for supporting the fight for freedom and against colonialism in Africa; and its history of South-South cooperation on medical and health issues, educational assistance etc. is also well-known.¹ Brazil has over 40 embassies in Africa with a historic tradition of political, cultural and even language similarities with other Lusophone countries. Currently, Brazil, through the Brazilian

¹ Liomara Rivero Iser, "Cuba's Participation in South-South Cooperation", in *Global Issues and Local Actions in South-South Cooperation* (New Delhi, Research and Information System for Developing Countries, 2019). Available from https://www.ris.org.in/sites/default/files/LSSC_2019_Final%20report%2022%20November%202019_Website-min.pdf.

Cooperation Agency (ABC), has engaged in almost 300 SSC initiatives in 36 African countries, the majority of them located within the *Países Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa*².

Similarly, Argentina has a long history of engaging in SSC and triangular cooperation activities and initiatives with other developing countries, donors and international institutions in different regions. Its hosting of the First and the Second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation demonstrates their conviction of the significance of SSC. In the context of the African continent, the past two decades or so has witnessed Argentina's enhanced efforts to promote bilateral as well as plurilateral cooperation with African countries. The economic and political transformation of Africa has accelerated in the last 15 years. The proliferation of widespread democracy and economic reform has opened up more opportunities for its cooperation with the outside world. Argentina has taken the approach to proactively broaden cooperation with African countries, benefiting from the proximity in experiences, natural conditions and economic activities in some sectors as well as complementarity owing to different development stages. Accordingly, *the Argentine Plan for Cooperation with Africa* aims at strengthening ties with African countries. The four-year plan is targeted at "centralizing Argentine cooperation activities and organizing them by strategic areas in order to improve their effectiveness in fields in which Argentina has comparative advantages and a well-established track record."³

This document aims at reviewing a few South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTrC) initiatives between Argentina and Mozambique initiated since 2016, when I inaugurated the first Argentine Embassy in Mozambique, which have strengthened solidarity between the two countries, promoted economic development in Mozambique, expanded economic cooperation between the two countries and also attracted financing and support from donor countries. The initiatives showed that the relationship between SSC and triangular cooperation can be mutually reinforcing. SSC could channel financial resources from development partners to projects and initiatives that can produce highly effective development results.

1. Argentine plan for cooperation with Africa and its implementation in Mozambique and beyond

The first stage was between 2016 and 2017. The representative offices of Argentina in the African countries were tasked to play the vanguard role in implementing this strategic plan. The embassy of Argentina to Mozambique was established in Maputo, Mozambique on 29th of November 2016, for which I was the Ambassador. A main priority of the embassy was to expand cooperation with Mozambique and also to "expand the geographic area of implementation of Argentine cooperation from Mozambique to the rest of the sub-region through the South African Development Community"⁴.

Argentina's embassies played a key role in putting into practice their SSC initiatives according to the Argentine Plan for Cooperation with Africa, especially for dissemination of information, evaluation of local conditions according to the strategies of the concerned country, and integral

² See: Carlos Milani, "Brazil's South-South Cooperation Strategies: from Foreign Policy to Public Policy", Occasional Paper, No. 179 (South African Institute of International Affairs, March 2014).

³ Argentina, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship, "Argentina's Commitment to South-South Cooperation with Africa". Available from <https://www.cancilleria.gob.ar/en/news/newsletter/argentinas-commitment-south-south-cooperation-africa>.

⁴ Ibid.

management of the cooperation project⁵. Similarity, efforts were made to establish and consolidate mutual trust with partner countries which would pave way for deepening the political, economic, trade, investment and cooperation ties between them and also with the region⁶.

2. Identify SSC opportunities in line with SSC principles

SSC opportunities are normally discovered through careful examination of the domestic policies, legislative frameworks and national development plans. Southern countries can identify common objectives and benefit from the achievement of mutual priorities. Aligning SSC partnerships to the national development priorities of each country partner will not only increase the success rate of the partnership, but it will also attach importance to SSC principles, in particular national sovereignty, national ownership and independence, equality, non-conditionality, non-interference in domestic affairs, and mutual benefit. By adhering to such principles, national efforts are formulated as an expression of South-South solidarity based on equal footing and cooperation among all countries⁷.

The presence of the Argentine embassy allowed direct and faster means to identify opportunities of common interests and benefits to consolidate SSC partnerships and initiate activities. However, opportunities do not present themselves, and a proactive approach was necessary. As a precondition for initiating SSC activities, it would be necessary to have a clear understanding of the existing national economic conditions for the purpose of finding the areas in which Mozambique would require SSC and which would match Argentina's expertise and know-how. This could be undertaken through various ways including desk research, field studies, exchange of views between experts, among others. The approach taken by Argentina was to undertake a technical mission by the Argentine National Institute for Agricultural Development (INTA) which has been a key institution for the agricultural development in Argentina. Apparently INTA had done its own homework before the field mission and also had had experience working with African countries.

These missions discovered that although both Argentina and Mozambique are developing countries, Argentina has acquired more advanced technology and more sophisticated skills and expertise in agro-industry than Mozambique. Therefore, there was a big difference in productivity in agriculture. Mozambique and Argentina have exactly the same size of arable land, i.e. 36 million hectares to do agriculture and produce food. The difference is that Argentina manages to use 34 of those 36 million hectares for agriculture and food production for almost 500 million people. While Mozambique only used 5 million out of the 36 million hectares of land and used it mainly for low-productivity subsistence agriculture.⁸ Therefore, the country had to

⁵ Argentine Fund for Horizontal Cooperation, "South-South and Triangular Cooperation of Argentina", *FO.AR Journal*, No.10 (2010), p. 68.

⁶ World Trade Organization, Trade Policy Review of Mozambique 2017, Minutes of the Meeting, document WT/TPR/M/354, paras. 4.5 – 4.13. Available from [https://docs.wto.org/dol2fe/Pages/FE_Search/FE_S_S006.aspx?Query=\(@Symbol=%20wt/pr/m/354*%20not%20wt/pr/m/354/add*\)&Language=ENGLISH&Context=FomerScriptedSearch&languageUIChanged=true#](https://docs.wto.org/dol2fe/Pages/FE_Search/FE_S_S006.aspx?Query=(@Symbol=%20wt/pr/m/354*%20not%20wt/pr/m/354/add*)&Language=ENGLISH&Context=FomerScriptedSearch&languageUIChanged=true#).

⁷ Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) and South Centre, *Developing National Ecosystems for South-South and Triangular Cooperation to achieve Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development* (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019), p.

13. Available from <https://www.isdb.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2019-10/Developing%20National%20Ecosystems%20for%20South-South%20and%20Triangular%20Cooperation%20to%20Achieve%20Agenda%202030%20for%20Sustainable%20Development.pdf>.

⁸ Available from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/mozambique/overview>.

rely on importation of agriculture products to feed the population, thus food security was a major challenge.

Being the first Argentine Ambassador to Mozambique, I fully realized the correctness of implementing the Argentine Government's policy of taking agro-industry as an important entry point for initiating South-South cooperation with African countries.

3. Obtaining political support from the highest level

One of the necessary elements for achieving successful SSC partnerships is the strengthening of political commitment or political will from the highest national authorities. Political will is indispensable for the full engagement of any country in SSC and forms the basis for any activities undertaken by the government for implementing those initiatives⁹, in particular by means of strengthening national ownership and sovereignty among partners.

As mentioned above, establishing an Argentine embassy in Mozambique did not only serve as a mechanism to consolidate mutual trust between countries, but was also an expression of political will of its Head of State towards strengthening their foreign relationship and cooperation. During my first meeting with the President of Mozambique, I introduced to the President how the Argentine agriculture sector had reached its existing advanced stage and the willingness to offer expertise and know-how to Mozambique. The President of Mozambique immediately responded that Mozambique can greatly benefit from Argentina's knowledge and experience on agriculture and develop partnerships towards improving Mozambique's agricultural sector.

Mozambican authorities had shown great interest in enhancing cooperation with Argentina, especially in the fields of livestock and dairy production, development of the fishing sector, science and technology, and culture¹⁰. Thus, "the agro-industry was identified as a very important sector, given that the development and modernization of the agricultural sector is a priority for the Government of Mozambique and that the Argentine Republic is interested in fostering cooperation for agricultural and agro-industrial development, which will help to achieve the level of transformation necessary to guarantee food security and reduce poverty levels"¹¹. Argentina has been identified as the strategic partner for modernizing the agricultural sector in Mozambique.

In order to foster the transfer of the know-how and learn from the experience of Argentina in several fields including agriculture, food processing and raising livestock as well as revolutionize production, different technical missions between the two countries had been undertaken. Personnel training activities had also been carried out in large scale. In the four years since the opening of the embassy, South-South cooperation, instead of the classic North-South cooperation, was the key channel for Mozambique to acquire the know-how. This was a major change from the period when they first gained independence, during which they relied on former colonial powers and other Northern investors. Among providers of South-South cooperation, Argentina was of special significance for Mozambique on food production and food security. Argentina started strategic transfer of know-how in more than four areas to modernize

⁹ IsDB and South Centre, *Developing National Ecosystems for South-South and Triangular Cooperation to achieve Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development*, p. 11.

¹⁰ Argentina, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Argentina's Commitment to South-South Cooperation with Africa".

¹¹ WTO Trade Policy Review of Mozambique 2017, Minutes of the Meeting, paras. 4.5 – 4.13.

food production in Mozambique including raising livestock, producing animal feed, growing crops and grain preservation.

4. Facilitating SSC through connected actors

The coherence among the multiplicity of connected actors coming together in the realization of SSC initiatives is an important aspect in achieving the success of SSC activities. The partnership formulated in the process would be a mainstay for the expansion of SSTRC. Linking different expertise, knowledge and interests originated from different actors could allow a better coordination and harmonization of countries' efforts and abilities to engage in SSC partnerships, and even take advantage of existing connections among a variety of actors¹².

In Mozambique, the presence and role of local connected actors with links to Argentina and Mozambique were essential for the establishment of a successful relationship between the countries. In this case, local entrepreneurship, with a business supporting small agricultural producers, and having an outreach to vulnerable communities, providing jobs etc. was an important resource which could be the *Sherpa* or bridge between the stakeholders in the two countries. It also facilitated a high level of engagement with the government in Mozambique after the establishment of the embassy.

Similarly, a mix of actors from the Argentine private sector was interested in the development of Africa. They engaged in SSC through the Ministry of Agriculture, but always via a joint venture approved by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the area of international cooperation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Argentina is the coordinating agency for SSC, which implies managing the project and coordinating with the connected actors.

For example, Argentina was able to demonstrate its know-how for the first time in Mozambique in 2019 at the most important international fair held in the country. Since Argentina was already identified as a strategic partner by the President, Argentina was offered a space in a prominent pavilion that was exclusively dedicated to agriculture and food production. Argentina was the only foreign country that had a space within the agricultural development pavilion, which highlights how a country from the South can meet the needs of a country, be identified as a strategic partner and engage in an effective framework of cooperation.

5. Success in SSC leads to its further expansion

With the blessing from the highest political level and backed by expert field missions, different areas of cooperation were identified by both country partners. The development of food and food processing were identified as priority areas.

Poultry sector is very important for Mozambique. Previously, they used to import 75% of the chickens they ate from South Africa and only 25% was nationally produced. After four years, Mozambique was able to completely reverse this pattern of relying on the importation of chicken. Now, 75% of the chickens consumed domestically were raised in the country and only 25% is imported. The progress has been impressive. However, the problem remained that the nationally raised chicken is still more expensive than the imported one, as the feed for the chickens is still imported. The inability to produce sufficient fodder was a main challenge. First of all, Mozambique did not grow soya beans as a crop. There was wild soya but they did not harvest it. Being a major soya exporter country in the world, Argentina has the know-how.

¹² Ibid, p. 18.

Therefore, another opportunity for SSC opened in the production chain of processing soya beans into chicken feed with the help of Argentine experts. With it, the price of chicken naturally will become competitive.

Another strategic area is milk production, as Mozambique did not have any significant fresh milk industry. The milk consumed in the domestic market is imported and remains stored in boxes for a long time. This could limit the access of the lower income population as it becomes too expensive. So with the assistance of the private sector and technicians from Argentina, we started to develop a project focused on installing the know-how of Argentina to help create a milk industry, involving all stakeholders and keeping in mind the impact on the community, the commercialisation of produce etc.

Human capacity building is essential for sustaining the development made in promoting the agricultural sector. Argentina has helped with the establishment of agrarian high schools. To be able to train sufficient professional personnel for agriculture is an important reason for the development of agriculture in Argentina which has over 400 such technical schools specialised in agriculture and food production. Every year, thousands of teenagers from these public high schools graduate knowing the value chain of agriculture and food production. Professionals from these schools learn know-how from raising a cow, bringing the milk, processing the milk, making the cheese, and to commercialising the cheese. Each year, thousands of Argentine young people are able to go to the small producers in the countryside and teach them immediately about these techniques. They graduate from high school armed with knowledge of the most advanced technique of food production. Mozambique was interested in the idea of transferring the experience of Argentina in this strategic development because it is precisely what they needed. They have 60% of their population under the age of 22, so there is great potential in their young people to be educated and then going to the small producers and teaching them how to do things differently.

Another area of cooperation is the silos, which are the technique used to store grain until it is sold. The new technology is to use 'silo bags' - air-tight plastic bags - instead of conserve grain in a big grain storage structure. The production of silo bags does not require big investments like building the physical storage infrastructure. This technology allows producers to store their products in their own land, avoiding travelling in bumpy roads to take their grains and keep them in storage until they get a good price. It is a very practical and frugal technology that eases the preservation of the grains for small and local producers. In a big country like Mozambique, where it is difficult to travel from one place to the other, it is a huge solution for farmers and producers, as they would be able to utilize this technology instead of building new structures, which was very expensive. Argentina is assisting Mozambique in setting such a technology for storage.

6. Building synergies between SSC and Triangular Cooperation

The proximity in economic conditions and development stages make it easier for the Southern countries than the Northern countries to identify SSC opportunities and also to achieve good outcome. Yet as SSC expands, financing activities in growing scale could be a challenge for SSC. To maintain the momentum, it would be a good option to involve traditional donor countries and multilateral organizations, which would also bring with them additional funding, skills as well as other forms of support.

After achieving significant progress in SSC in Mozambique, one obstacle Argentina faced was that it did not have enough resources to transfer all our know-how. The budget of the Foreign

Ministry for undertaking SSC was limited to achieve the high expectations from the Mozambique side. It requires a lot of efforts to obtain funds to bring agricultural technicians to Mozambique. The limited resources could only allow the technical experts to stay in Mozambique for a short period of time which would be difficult to finish the training courses. To be able to finance even one expert to stay for a required length of training time would make a big difference. For instance, once we got funding for an agricultural engineer to come for a month to teach the vulnerable communities how to grow crops in a more productive way to at least maintain subsistence level for the local population. Within that period, he managed to train 400 people. The end of the training was enthusiastically celebrated, recognizing all the knowledge the participants had acquired to allow them to grow sufficient food to avoid hunger.

This amazing experience led to the decision to aim for transferring that type of know-how on a systematic and permanent basis, which requires significantly more financial resources. Thereafter, Argentina reached out to traditional donors and international organizations. The response was very positive. One important reason is that these donors were also looking for good opportunities for their international cooperation projects. It is like finding a short cut if they can join hands with SSC projects which have been proved to be effective and meeting the local needs. This is because for these development partners, to get to know a country with a different language and different economic conditions would take time and efforts. A Southern country which has already had established projects and requires more scale would be a good window of opportunity to use their international cooperation resources in an effective way. Subsequently, several countries including Portugal, Japan, the Netherlands, the United States and even multilateral institutions like the African Development Bank have offered financial support for cooperation in agriculture and food security and other areas. This kind of seamless joint efforts between SSC and triangular cooperation could be a good model for operation in other countries.

More recently, Argentina has signed the request to introduce the silo bags in Mozambique, with the African Development Bank. Another producer of Argentina is also inaugurating a milk processing establishment.

7. SSC in peace-building

Not related to the areas mentioned above, but very important for the present and future of Mozambique, Argentina engaged as a main actor in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process (DDR) of the former guerrilla of RENAMO. This DDR process was coordinated by a group of international experts under the command of a General of the Argentine Army, General Javier Pérez Aquino, who was the successful leader in the DDR process of the FARC in Colombia under United Nations supervision. I was included as Ambassador of Argentina in the small group of representatives that helped to move the process forward. All this work had its fruits in August 2019, when the Peace Agreement and the Cease Fire was signed between the leaders of RENAMO and FRELIMO, followed by a visit of Pope Francis to Mozambique the month after. This was another SSC at the heart of the shaping of the future development of the country, which obviously needs a context of peace and security.

Conclusions

I was fortunate to be appointed as the first Argentine ambassador to Mozambique. To implement the Argentine plan for cooperation with Africa was an important priority during my tenure which covered the first and second stages of the operationalization of the strategic plan and promoted SSC with Mozambique. The fruitful SSC between the two countries have gone

through a process consisting of good practices that could be replicated by other practitioners of SSTRC.

The Argentine government's plan to promote cooperation with African countries was the policy which started the process. The political support of my country was very well reciprocated by strong political will from the highest level of the host country. This has paved the way for subsequent operationalization of various projects.

The political support from Mozambique could not have been obtained without the identification of SSC opportunities which match well with the economic conditions and needs of Mozambique and the comparative advantages and expertise of Argentina. Mutual benefits and other principles of SSC have been well followed from the very beginning of the SSC activities between the two countries. The outcome of the SSC projects has been impressive as it has met the urgent needs for mitigating the food security problems of the country. In the process of project implementation, various actors and stakeholders all have played their due role in facilitating the operation.

When the SSC activities between the two countries have expanded in scale and run into the bottleneck of financing and other capacity shortages, we were able to reach out and bring triangular cooperation partners including traditional donor countries and multilateral institutions into the process. Their financial resources and knowledge have strongly facilitated the overcoming of the bottleneck thus not only maintaining the momentum of the expanding activities but also injecting further vitality to the process. The successful merging of SSC with TrC demonstrates the potential of SSTRC in promoting sustainable development in developing countries.

This is an extremely enriching and rewarding experience in my career. Looking back at the processes, I also realized that the National Ecosystems for SSTRC¹³ formulated by the Islamic Development Bank and the South Centre have identified important pillars which have been utilized in the Mozambique case and have contributed to the success of the SSTRC activities.

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*** The views contained in this article are attributable to the author and personal, and do not represent the institutional views of the South Centre or its Member States.**

¹³ IsDB and South Centre, *Developing National Ecosystems for South-South and Triangular Cooperation to achieve Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development*, p. 13.

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