



Australian Centre for
Pacific Islands Research

Coordinator, International Development Policy
Development Policy Section
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
RG Casey Building, John McEwen Crescent
Barton ACT 0221, AUSTRALIA

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Dear Senator Wong,

We, as practitioners and researchers working in international agriculture for development, welcome the opportunity to contribute to the new international development policy and commend the Australian Government for investing in its development.

In particular, this submission contributes to the themes:

- building effective, accountable states that can sustain their own development
- generating collective action on global challenges that impact our region

In the following submission we address:

- **Key trends or challenges shaping development and Australia's engagement in our region and globally**
- **The opportunities for Australia's development assistance and engagement practices, advocating for use of 'Triangular Co-operation' as a horizontal and inclusive model of partnership**
- **Strategies to embed Triangular Co-operation in policy and practice, a modality which represents a commitment to building stronger and more meaningful partnerships in our region**

KEY TRENDS OR CHALLENGES SHAPING DEVELOPMENT AND AUSTRALIA'S ENGAGEMENT IN OUR REGION AND GLOBALLY

1. Current and future challenges and issues shaping development priorities

For many nations in the Pacific and Southeast Asia, food insecurity, environmental change and sustainability continue to be at the forefront of development challenges (Ahuja et al., 2018). Sustainable agriculture for development is one avenue that can address food security while simultaneously minimising or reducing the impact of agriculture systems on the planet, hence contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, the need for 'green' and 'blue' development will also continue to take centre stage in the global development space as we tackle climate change and environmental pressures.

Currently, the Australian Government provides development assistance in areas of agriculture, 'blue' and 'green' development to our neighbours in Southeast Asia and the Pacific through a mix of global, regional and bilateral agriculture for development initiatives (DFAT, 2022), and we see that need for support continuing into the future. In addition, we recognise that these investments contribute to regional security and diplomatic relations and so will remain a crucial part of Australia's development assistance program as we continue to become more strongly aligned with the Pacific and Southeast Asia.



2. Trends shaping engagement in international development co-operation

The role of international co-operation and partnerships to deliver agricultural development and blue and green initiatives are well supported in the literature and mandated through the SDGs.

In Australia, international agriculture for development is typically a North-South (N-S) Bilateral partnership. However, the N-S bilateral way of working has faced criticisms over the years, with challenges associated with its 'vertical' nature. Inequalities in partnerships can stem from unequal power relations, differing political and economic contexts, and access to knowledge and capabilities. While these inequalities can be evident in all types of partnerships, they are somewhat more apparent in those between North-South (or South-North) (Johnson & Wilson, 2006).

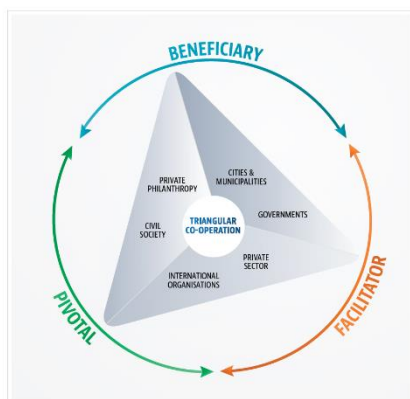
Over the past several decades, the global development landscape has been changing. These changes have seen international development cooperation move away from one-way cooperation with a push for "horizontal partnerships" (Alonso, 2018; Alonso and Santander, 2022), whereby international development is no longer about unilateral aid driven by altruistic or philanthropic motives, but rather it is driven by mutual interests and shared responsibilities. Furthermore, the landscape has also changed from being bipolar to multipolar, with the emergence of non-state actors such as NGOs and new global powers from the South (The World Bank, 2011; Fejerskov et al., 2017; Subramanian, 2011).

THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUSTRALIA'S DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE AND ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES, ADVOCATING FOR USE OF 'TRIANGULAR CO-OPERATION' AS A HORIZONTAL AND INCLUSIVE MODEL OF PARTNERSHIP

3. An opportunity to rethink how Australia does engagement – moving towards transformative horizontal partnerships through Triangular Co-operation

In response to the challenges and shifts noted above, we believe there is an opportunity to rethink how Australia engages in international partnerships, by taking up more horizontal ways of working.

Globally, one avenue that is well advocated for as a more empowering and horizontal way of working is South-South Cooperation (SSC). Core to SSC is the premise that developing countries can be the drivers of sustainable change within their own borders (UNOSSC, 2019a), as well as supporting each other through the transfer of experiences and knowledge. The value of SSC as a development tool to promote productive, inclusive, and sustainable agricultural practices and achieve development outcomes such as improved food security and livelihoods is well recognised (Perch et al., 2015).



Technically speaking, Australia does not have a role in SSC (as it is a 'North' country/partner). However, another modality of partnership, which has emerged from SSC and that offers a genuine role for Australia, is Triangular Co-operation (Figure 1). Triangular Co-operation as a partnership modality is viewed as a way to overcome the traditional North-South division and issues of power asymmetries (McEwan & Mawdsley, 2012). The TrC model has been used over the last four decades and is a growing area of interest as a means to achieve more inclusive and cooperative action (D'Alessandro, 2019; OECD, 2019; UNDP, 1978; UNOSSC, 2019a).

Figure 1. Roles in Triangular Co-operation (source: OECD, 2022)



Triangular Co-operation is considered a hybrid of the North-South and South-South models of cooperation (Alonso and Santander, 2022) and involves three actors – usually two from the South and one from the North (UNOSSC, 2019a). The latter typically provides the financial resources. A formal definition of TrC provided by the Global Partnership Initiative (GPI, 2019) is: one or more partners ('facilitators' / 'provider') that support cooperation that is provided by one or more developing countries ('pivots') that is orientated toward one or more developing countries ('beneficiaries' of the action) (Figure 1). A common feature of many examples of triangular co-operation is that know-how, skills, experiences and resources from both developed and developing countries are combined (OECD, 2013) and at its heart are principles of equality, inclusivity and horizontality. The regions where TrC has been reported to occur the most include Latin America and the Caribbean followed by Africa, Asia-Pacific and the Middle East (GPI, 2019), but currently it is not a model being formally used by Australia.

4. Triangular Co-operation creates a 'win-win-win': an equal and inclusive partnership that can achieve the SDGs

The significance of South-South and Triangular Co-operation modalities of partnership remain highly relevant in the international development agenda today and continue to play a central role in the discussions concerning the development of countries in the Global South. In 2019, the world leaders of the Global South came together at the BAPA 40+ Conference, to evaluate progress in creating effective systems for SSC and TrC and to prepare for the future. The outcome document of the conference was adopted by the UN General Assembly and outlines the global commitment to enhancing SSC and TrC, including a call for Member states are to increase use of TrC (UNOSSC, 2019a; UN-DESA, 2019).

Inclusive models of co-operative action (including TrC and SSC) are valued for their diversity of partnerships, which can help solve development challenges at both a national and regional level (OECD, 2013) and for their potential to promote sustainable development outcomes (Atwood, 2012; Hazlewood, 2015; UN, 2014a) and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (Atwood, 2012; Hazlewood, 2015). The OECD has emphasised the importance of TrC, stating "triangular co-operation helps to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in innovative and collaborative ways and can provide solutions to overcome today's most pressing environmental, economic and social challenges" (OECD, 2019). The value of TrC is reflected in Goal 17 – 'Partnership for the Goals', in which south-south co-operation and triangular co-operation are specifically mentioned in a number of targets and indicators (UN, 2014a). In addition, the call for increased global contribution to international public financing, promoting South-South technical assistance (which includes TrC) (UN, 2014b) and monitoring development effectiveness are also reflected in the targets of Goal 17.

Furthermore, there is growing interest and pressure from our partners in the South to use these models, and TrC represents an opportunity for Australia to support these emerging economies while still receiving benefits such as knowledge gain and strengthening of diplomatic relations.

- Within SE Asia, there is growing opportunity for SSC and TrC models, with countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam emerging as having the resource and capacity to assist less developed neighbours including Laos, Timor, Cambodia and Myanmar (Kumar, 2009).
- Within the Pacific there has been a strong drive by Pacific Islander leaders to engage in SSC for the sustainable development in the Pacific (UNOSSC, 2019b), as evident through the policies and work of the Pacific Island Development Forum (a multi-lateral regional South-South Cooperation platform for the Pacific region established in 2013) (Borg, 2019).



In addition, supporting Triangular Co-operation would be consistent with the commitments Australia has made through its endorsement of the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (OECD, 2011). One of the principles of the Busan Partnership is “Ownership of development priorities by developing countries: Countries should define the development model that they want to implement.”

Therefore, Triangular Co-operation as a modality of partnership may help support and harness the SSC ideals and meet the expectations of Southern partners in the Pacific and Southeast Asia whilst also meeting the commitments of Australia such as those articulated through the Busan Partnership. It represents a potential partnership modality that could support Australia’s development assistance agenda and contribute to sustainable development outcomes, through the provision much needed and often ‘scarce’ financial resources from a provider partner such as Australia (Alonso and Santander, 2022; Piefer-Söyler and Pelechà, 2020; Kumar, 2009) within a model of inclusive and cooperative action that emphasises mutual benefits for all partners.

STRATEGIES TO EMBED TRIANGULAR CO-OPERATION IN POLICY AND PRACTICE, A MODALITY WHICH REPRESENTS A COMMITMENT TO BUILDING STRONGER AND MORE MEANINGFUL PARTNERSHIPS IN OUR REGION

5. Embed Triangular Co-operation in policy and practice

To reflect commitments to build stronger and more meaningful partnerships in our region, we call for the Australian Government to give genuine consideration to Triangular Cooperation as a modality of partnership, which is a modality founded on mutual trust and respect and shared values of fairness and equality.

The following considerations are needed for Triangular Co-operation to be reflected in the new policy:

- First and foremost, support and enable the leadership of our First Nations people to lead the way for Australia in building stronger and more meaningful partnerships. We need to acknowledge and value the synergies between the cultures, strength and resilience of our First Nations people (encompassing Aboriginal, Torres Strait and South Sea Island peoples) and our partners in the South, and their traditional knowledge in inclusive and strength-based ways of working together. If we are serious about decolonising our development efforts, then our international partnership work should be led and informed by our First Nations people.
- Recognition of TrC as a modality and fostering a mindset change is needed, not only to engage more effectively in partnerships for the 2030 Agenda but in TrC more specifically (Piefer- Söyler et al. 2019). This mind-set change encompasses a shift from ‘aid’ or ‘assistance’ to ‘partnership’, as well as shift away from an expert mindset in which all partners accept that they can learn from each other, rather than relying on North-South flow of expertise and experience (Piefer-Söyler et al., 2019). These mindset changes are needed at all levels (political through to practitioner) and from all partners (providers through to beneficiaries) (Piefer-Söyler et al., 2019), and can be enabled by giving value to the partnership itself beyond the project outcomes usually measured (Alonso and Santander, 2022).
- Formation of a TrC strategy as part of this new Australian Policy. Having a national ecosystem and enabling environment for TrC is considered key. An enabling national ecosystem is characterised by the presence of a high-level political will and related legislation such as a policy, strategy or guiding document as well as structures, resources and procedures at the country level to enable engagement in and management of triangular co-operation activities (Piefer-Söyler et al., 2019).



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- Investing in the capacity building of Australian development staff as well as of our partners. Ensuring there is sufficient capacity for implementing and delivering TrC arrangements is crucial, particularly for emerging donors who take on the role of pivotal partners and have increased or new responsibilities in managing the whole project cycle with the beneficiary partner (Ashoff, 2010). A need for sufficient skills and capacity of the facilitating partner is equally important, to enable them to take on the role of supporting building capacity and skills of agencies and institutions in these pivotal partners or emerging donors (Ashoff, 2010).

6. *Designing performance and delivery systems to promote transparency and accountability, as well as effectiveness and learning in Australia's development assistance*

The following enablers are essential for creating performance and delivery systems that are transparent, accountable and effective:

- Systems and process that reflect the time needed for establishing effective partnerships. This includes:
 - i. Dedicating time during the design phase for authentic co-design based on TrC principles
 - ii. Recognising long-term partnerships as an asset, and continuing to invest in relationships to maintain trust and communication
- Establishing robust and universally shared evaluation, monitoring and reporting systems that reflect and support TrC ways of working, along with political will and support for this model. Currently, there is a lack of TrC-specific guidance documentation including at the policy and strategy level in Australia. Having a consistent and agreed definition along with clear guidance documentation and reporting structures at the national level will assist in monitoring and evaluation of TrC initiatives, to be able to communicate impact across the various sectors and at various levels of international development.

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to this new international policy. We welcome any further opportunities to contribute to this process.

Yours sincerely,

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