

South-South Mutual Learning

A priority for national capacity development in Africa

BY DR. IBRAHIM ASSANE MAYAKI

EVIDENCE-BASED KNOWLEDGE and innovation are critical for national development in Africa if the continent is to sustain the momentum of its transformation agenda. South-South Cooperation (SSC) is a mechanism that can contribute to this objective. Knowledge- and experience-sharing are taking place on different scales among African countries; but there is a need for coordination among these initiatives and with national development plans and processes. This will help scale up and institutionalize the practice of learning for development effectiveness as a capacity development tool.

Ample opportunities exist for Africa to generate, synthesize, harness, and utilize knowledge as a means of addressing the continent's development challenges. But systematic documentation of experiences to support continuous improvement will be critical.

Globally, we are witnessing a second generation of SSC in which mutual learning among countries and non-state actors is fast becoming a core priority. Africa too is integrating knowledge and learning in its South-South initiatives as a public good for development. The success of this approach implies the building and nurturing of new multistakeholder relationships within the coordination architecture.

South-South mutual learning as a public good

SOCIOECONOMIC PROGRESS in the global economy of the 21st century demands innovative mechanisms for national and regional capacity development. More and more, mutual learning is being used more methodically as a main input to public policy design and development at all levels of gover-



Ibrahim Assane Mayaki from Niger (center) listens as two delegates exchange information before the start of the 13th meeting of the Africa Partnership Forum in January 2010 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

nance. Given that knowledge is in effect the “capacity for effective action” in achieving development results, national and cross-regional learning will be central to maximizing Africa’s development prospects.

The emerging SSC movement gives high priority to the exchange of good practice and experiences through structured mutual learning at both the national and continental levels, as a complement to the overall development process. Knowledge and learning platforms hold the potential to foster national, subregional, and cross-regional fertilization of ideas and innovation and to help monitor and evaluate learning in SSC exchanges. Such platforms can facilitate better organization and alignment of information flows, thereby linking demand for knowledge to supply. Strategic partnerships and South-South alliances can help strengthen institutional approaches for sharing development solutions.

New opportunities: African mutual learning experiences

CHINA, INDIA, AND BRAZIL are playing prominent roles in the evolving global political and economic architecture. The G20, as the premier forum for international economic cooperation, offers new opportunities for Africa and African countries to leverage South-South exchange practices. Under the aegis of the African Union, the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), since its inception in 2001, has acted as a regional facilitator in promoting and connecting African countries and institutional actors for mutual learning related to the continent’s development priorities and agenda. It has supported both South-South and North-South knowledge exchange.

The development priorities identified by the African Union and NEPAD, have been guided by sectoral policy frameworks. These regional frameworks resulted from information and

innovation exchanges in multistakeholder collaborations and partnerships. Sectoral priorities and frameworks include: Agriculture and Food Security through the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP); Infrastructure, based on the continental framework of the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA); and the Africa-wide Capacity Development Strategic Framework (CDSF). Other continental frameworks that offer mutual learning space for African development actors include the Consolidated Plan of Action (CPA) for Science and Technology, and the Environment Action Plan (EAP). The regional approach of gathering and sharing African experiences on common sectoral and thematic agendas has allowed the African Union and NEPAD to facilitate the creation of platforms for learning among countries and across subregions.

Africa’s innovation on peer review for mutual learning

OTHER REGIONS CAN LEARN from these frameworks. In particular, the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) is a unique illustration of intracontinental collaboration developed by African countries under the NEPAD framework. At the core of the self-monitoring review mechanism is a facility that promotes peer exchanges across countries on good governance and other development issues. This peer learning instrument is used to foster accountability and government efficiency.

Operationally, the APRM is a learning process among peers at the highest political level focusing on political, economic, and corporate governance and socioeconomic development. It supports citizen-driven development through capacity development. The APRM helps strengthen African institutions and systems of governance by connecting them to a robust learning network. As an African-owned process the

APRM is an innovative tool for introspection which is an important part of learning. Participating countries can, voluntarily, benchmark best governance practices against global norms and standards. African countries learn from each other and are also able to showcase innovative thinking on governance issues.

Essential lessons learned from the APRM since its inception in 2003 include leadership in support of citizen empowerment; strategies to increase women’s participation in parliaments; and self-reliance in mobilizing and utilizing domestic resources for development. These outcomes are captured in the National Programmes of Action (NPOAs) developed by each peer-reviewed country, and in which capacity development is a substantial part.



Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika attends the 11th Summit of the Committee of Participating Heads of State and Government of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APR FORUM) in Sirte, 500 km southeast of Tripoli, capital of Libya, in June 2009.

CDSF as regional platform for intra-Africa learning

AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS are often hindered by the dearth of *implementing capacities* required to translate development policies into practice at the state and institutional levels. Adequate capacity to align resources from development aid with national priorities is also a challenge.

Africa is consciously making capacity development a key priority, and has adopted a continent-wide strategy on capacity development—the NEPAD Capacity Development Strategic Framework (CDSF)—by decision of the 14th African Union Summit of February 2010. This framework offers a common approach for diagnosing and addressing fundamental systemic, organizational, and individual capacity challenges. Focusing on the need to capitalize on African resourcefulness, the framework stresses solutions, impact, and results-based innovation. It promotes both “hard”—*technical* and “soft”—*strategic and less tangible skills*.

The CDSF is built on six strategic cornerstones, or capacity development priorities as defined by Africans: including leadership and citizen transformation, and unlocking African potentials, skills, and resources for development. The main thrust of the CDSF is to enhance the capacities of capacity developers and institutionalize integrated approaches and evidence-based knowledge and innovation systems that support continuous improvement. Therefore, this integrated approach is a key qualitative leap forward for Africa's development.

Mutual learning as the key to capacity development: Knowledge as Capacity for Action

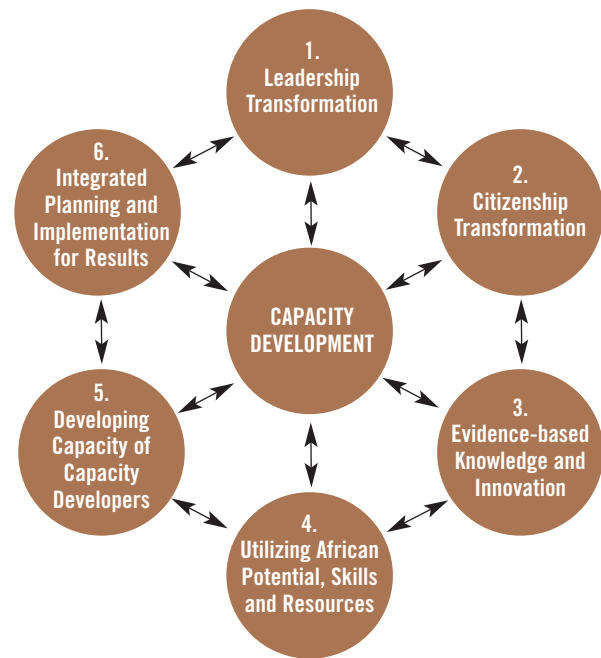
CDSF OFFERS SPACE for policy formulation and practices that supports the building, sharing, and scaling up of knowledge and experience across countries. It promotes cross-regional learning and the improvement of North-South partnerships. When applied to SSC, CDSF helps integrate knowledge and learning within African countries and institutions, including Regional Economic Communities (RECs).

Capacity Development and political support for mutual learning in SSC exchanges

AT THE HEART OF THE CDSF is the realization that for capacity development to be effective, political ownership and leadership at all levels is a necessary condition. By using the CDSF's six cornerstones to benchmark for quality and alignment, African development actors will help connect and disseminate local knowledge on intra-Africa and interregional SSC opportunities.

High priority is placed on harnessing African resources, including human and institutional capital. Forging creative and results-based partnerships among Africans and the global community will support the attainment of Africa's develop-

THE SIX CORNERSTONES OF THE CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK



ment objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In addition to the need for political commitment, deeper engagement of regional bodies, civil society, the private sector, academia, and development partners is also fundamental.

Africa platform on development effectiveness: Evidence-based knowledge and innovation

IN 2009, African countries took an important step in establishing the Africa Platform on Development Effectiveness. This platform, coordinated by the NEPAD Agency in conjunction with the African Union Commission, connects existing communities of practice for mutual learning and develops capacity through peer-to-peer learning on the three interrelated themes of Aid Effectiveness, South-South Cooperation, and Capacity Development. In furtherance of this objective, African leaders at the Kampala 15th African Union Assembly in July 2010, endorsed the Platform based on the recommendation of the NEPAD Heads of State and Government Orientation Committee (HSGOC).

Such innovations and the NEPAD Agency's role as the Africa regional platform coordinator for the global Task Team on South-South Cooperation present many opportunities to

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to take a more active and coordinated role in international discussions and to influence and submit joint proposals to the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness to be held in 2011 in Seoul, Korea.


The key conclusions of the regional dialogue were:

- Latin America and the Caribbean have a great deal to contribute to the world debate on cooperation. It is important for them to have a more active and coordinated role, particularly in the events leading up to the meeting in Seoul.
- These fora are important for cooperation actors to exchange information and coordinate their cooperation processes. Regional dialogue spaces like the ones offered by the OAS, particularly CooperaNet, can be valuable in this regard.
- It is necessary to promote regional workshops to:
 - Acquire more knowledge on the processes that take place in the international context at various levels and with different actors.
 - Exchange lessons learned on the implementation of the principles of the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action.

LAC countries face an enormous challenge in articulating their views on cooperation effectiveness for the Korea HLF because these vary so much throughout the region. This dialogue is meant to illustrate the diversity and richness of ideas in the region. It is about better understanding the different interests, and helping to construct a new design for international cooperation that unites all actors and values their diversity.

The OAS continues to be committed to the process and has recently joined the Steering Committee of the Task Team for South-South Cooperation (TT-SSC) which it will support by bringing the Aid Effectiveness Agenda to a subregional level through a series of workshops and high-level forums for South-South knowledge exchange.

We are pleased that other partner institutions are also taking a leading role in this regional process, including the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB) launched in 2008, and the Ibero-American Program for the strengthening South-South cooperation, which responds to regional institutional capacity-building needs.

Finally, effective cooperation depends on more than resources; it requires new institutions as well as changes of mindset, culture, attitude, and focus. This can only be achieved by building capacity among all cooperation actors, by involving academia, and by focusing clearly on collecting evidence that can inform high-level policy making. 

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scale up and foster learning, analysis, and practices through the continents' institutions and to link with existing processes. This greatly supports Africa's current efforts to promote evidence-based decision making by investing more in science- and technology-based knowledge. Pitching innovation as a driver of development, special efforts are made to systematically identify, harness, and use existing capabilities by sharing knowledge and learning at all levels. Therefore, while focusing on aid effectiveness and SSC, the Africa-wide Platform is also an important mechanism to mobilize for capacity development action.

Conclusions

INCREASINGLY, Africa is investing in knowledge exchange to support national and regional development. With strong commitment, the continent will continue to build coalitions and alliances to promote Southern-led cooperation at the intra and interregional levels. This opens up opportunities to further strengthen mutual learning initiatives so that African know-how, good practices, and innovations can continue to contribute to global development thinking and actions. The Africa Platform, as an intra-African process, for instance, will be instrumental to the Continent's coherent preparation for the 2011 Busan HLF4.

If Africa is to be globally competitive, greater investment in knowledge and learning will be required. Knowledge-based approaches to resolving Africa's development challenges should be strengthened, with research and innovation helping to expand the SSC policy frontiers. Strategically designed institutional arrangements can facilitate the participation of multiple stakeholders, thus fostering the formation of social capital by enhancing SS networks for the exchange of knowledge.

Existing regional frameworks are critical in guiding and framing the knowledge and learning architecture in Africa. Only by grounding innovations in the realities of the continent can development investments achieve their desired results. Mutual learning, particularly in SSC exchanges, is a capacity development process that should be based on, as well as stimulate, local capacities and institutions. Ultimately, the success of this new paradigm depends on the establishment of new partnerships to foster more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable forms of development cooperation. 

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