

Decentralised South-South Cooperation and South Africa's Post-conflict Support in Africa:

What Role for SADPA?

Fritz Nganje

The notion of South-South cooperation (SSC) has become increasingly relevant to the foreign policy of both developing and developed countries. A distinguishing feature of contemporary SSC is the growing cooperation between sub-national entities of developing countries, including a recent rise in partnerships between sub-national governments (SNGs) of such countries. This policy brief takes a closer look at the upsurge in decentralised SSC, and argues that with sufficient support from national institutions such as the soon-to-be-launched South African Development Partnership Agency (SADPA), cooperation between South African provinces and municipalities and their counterparts in other developing countries could give South Africa the opportunity to deepen its post-conflict and reconstruction efforts on the continent, most notably in the domain of rebuilding state capacity. The brief concludes with a number of policy recommendations.

Introduction

As a significant number of middle-income developing countries assume global economic prominence against the backdrop of an uncertain economic future for Europe and the United States (US), the notion of South-South cooperation (SSC) has become increasingly relevant to the foreign policy and international development strategies of developing and developed countries alike. Initially conceived with reference to the solidarity movement of developing countries dissatisfied with Western imperialism and domination of the global political economy, SSC today provides a framework for more functional and development-oriented cooperation

among these countries, reflecting their changing fortunes in the global political economy.

A distinguishing feature of contemporary SSC, which resonates with the changing nature of international relations articulated by Brian Hocking in his notion of multilayered diplomacy,¹ relates to the growing cooperation between sub-national entities of developing countries. Bilateral and multi-lateral frameworks such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa); IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa) or FOCAC (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation), which are correctly or wrongly perceived as embodiments of present-day SSC, have

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spurred cooperation and partnerships between businesses, sub-national governments (SNGs), civil society organisations and epistemic communities of developing countries. In particular, recent years have seen the rise in partnerships between SNGs from developing countries, which are serving as instruments for economic cooperation, cultural exchange, and capacity-building support at the sub-national level.

This policy brief takes a closer look at the upsurge in decentralised SSC, and reflects on its potential relevance to South Africa's peace and development diplomacy in Africa. It argues that with sufficient support from national institutions such as the soon-to-be-launched South African Development Partnership Agency (SADPA), cooperation between South African provinces and municipalities and their counterparts in other developing countries affords Pretoria the opportunity to deepen its post-conflict and reconstruction efforts on the continent, most notably in the domain of rebuilding state capacity.

SA's post-conflict support in Africa: Noble intentions versus capacity constraints

Given its post-apartheid Africa-focused foreign policy, South Africa is no stranger to post-conflict support in Africa. Having defined its socio-economic and security interests as inextricably linked to conditions on the African continent, South Africa has not only championed the economic development of Africa, but has since 1994 also prioritised peacebuilding² on the continent. The focus on peacebuilding is inspired by the belief that Africa's development cannot take place outside the framework of peace and stability on the continent, a notion that is succinctly articulated in the South African inspired New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).³ In this regard, South Africa has over the years dedicated considerable resources and diplomatic energy to supporting peace processes in Africa, including efforts to rebuild societies emerging from violent conflict.

A major normative influence on South Africa's peace support efforts in Africa has been the notion of developmental peacekeeping, conceived as a post-conflict reconstruction intervention which aims to achieve sustainable levels of human security through a combination of interventions aimed at accelerating capacity building and socio-economic development.⁴ With its emphasis

on restoring or unlocking the potential of local capacities to deliver on human security needs in an efficient, democratic and sustainable manner, the application of this idea has seen South Africa giving particular attention to providing institution and capacity-building support to a number of African countries emerging from violent conflict, including Burundi, South Sudan, the Comoros Islands and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).⁵ In all these cases, financial donations, mostly from the African Renaissance and International Cooperation Fund (ARF), have been complemented by technical support and training in the areas of public service and administration, as well as strengthening of democratic and governance institutions.⁶

There is no doubt that South Africa has made important contributions to post-conflict reconstruction in Africa, particularly in the often intricate task of rebuilding state institutions. As Landsberg correctly observes, 'no other state in the continent has played such a pivotal role in post-conflict peace-building and development as South Africa did (particularly during the presidency of Thabo Mbeki)'.⁷ Yet, over the years, South Africa's capacity to continue to play a meaningful role in post-conflict peacebuilding in Africa has become questionable. In addition to challenges associated with uncoordinated interventions by different government departments and agencies, concerns have also been raised over the mismatch between South Africa's ambitions on the continent and its overstretched human and financial resources. Kornegay captures this dilemma better in his argument that 'South Africa is stretched too thin in its peace and security engagements throughout the continent, while continually coming under pressure to escalate its involvement in additional crises'.⁸ The imminent establishment of a development cooperation agency, to be officially named SADPA, is expected to address some of these challenges, particularly in the areas of coordination, as well as the formulation and implementation of a coherent development cooperation policy for South Africa.⁹ Even so, in the context of an ever-expanding post-conflict environment in Africa, the prospects of South Africa's realising its peacebuilding intent on the continent depend as much on SADPA's aptitude to leverage emerging geo-political opportunities and optimise the use of existing domestic capacities, as on effective policy articulation, implementation and coordination. As argued in the next section, growing partnerships among SNGs from developing countries, within the framework of revitalised

and development-oriented SSC, provide one of such opportunities for rationalising South Africa's post-conflict interventions in Africa.

Decentralised South-South cooperation and post-conflict support in Africa

As already noted, a substantial number of South Africa's post-conflict interventions in Africa have been directed to institutional capacity building, or what has been referred to as investment in 'soft' infrastructure.¹⁰ However, like those of other international actors, South Africa's state-building initiatives in transitional Africa societies have largely been concentrated on restoring or strengthening the capacity of national institutions, often at the expense of sub-national institutions. This is so even though a recurrent feature of contemporary peace settlements in Africa has been their provision for the territorial decentralisation of political power, with the expectation that this would contribute to a positive transformation of power relations and the dynamics of conflict. In most cases, not much consideration is given to the institutional capacity of the sub-national administrations to which political and developmental responsibility is devolved.

Arguably, the disproportionate focus on strengthening state capacity at the national level, usually to the neglect of sub-national institutions, constitutes a weak link in recovery efforts in post-conflict societies, particularly where conditions for localised violent conflict persist even after a formal transition to a relatively peaceful dispensation. The DRC is a classic example of a post-conflict country in which weak institutional capacity at the sub-state level has contributed to eroding the gains of peacebuilding and reconstruction. Conversely, South Africa's own experience with political transition (although not a classic post-conflict scenario) suggests that where support for institutional capacity development at the national level is complemented by similar concerted efforts at the sub-national level, the chances of successful reconstruction and peacebuilding in transitional societies are increased. There is no gainsaying that capacity-building support from SNGs in countries like Germany and Canada for their South African counterparts was crucial in making South Africa's new provinces important institutional players in the country's transition from apartheid to a democratic dispensation.¹¹

SNGs worldwide are reputed to possess a wealth of experience and expertise in local

governance and service delivery, which are critical for stabilising any conflict area. Cooperation among these entities can therefore be a very effective mechanism for the transfer of expertise, experience and best practice, thereby strengthening the capacity of the state to deliver at the level where it matters most. A major challenge is that in most developing countries, like South Africa, SNGs tend to operate on relatively low budgets, which constrain their engagement in transnational peer-learning exercises. Gauteng's partnership with the Katanga province in war-torn DRC speaks to the limitations of decentralised South-South cooperation as a state-building mechanism, especially in the context of resource constraints. Although some success has been recorded in this regard, Gauteng's efforts to assist its Congolese counterpart to rebuild its governance capacity have been limited by the South African province's inability to finance programmes in a sustained manner.

However, with the growing commitment of emerging economies to SSC, SNGs in developing countries have now improved prospects of engaging in development cooperation with one another. What is more, compared with traditional forms of decentralised cooperation, sub-national partnerships undertaken within the framework of SSC are better suited to being vehicles for capacity building because of shared characteristics and experiences, which make peer-learning much easier. It is in this context that South African provinces and municipalities, at least the relatively developed and efficient ones, find themselves strategically placed to play a key role in support of Pretoria's post-conflict capacity building efforts in Africa.

It should be noted that emerging economies like China and Brazil have put in place, or are in the process of developing, decentralised cooperation programmes that seek to harness the capacities of their SNGs to promote their respective interests in Africa. As Zhimin and Junbo point out, with the support of Beijing, Chinese provinces have over the years used their sister-city relationships... [to] reach out to the local governments and general public in Africa and help consolidate a grassroots base [essential for deepening Sino-African relations].¹² In the same tradition, Brazil recently launched a programme for decentralised SSC, which would enable the country's provincial and municipal governments to make use of the financial and technical support of the Brazilian Agency for Cooperation (ABC) to share successful public policies with their counterparts in other developing countries.¹³ These initiatives offer South African provinces and municipalities, some of which already have partnerships with Chinese

and Brazilian SNGs, the opportunity to explore possibilities for triangular cooperation that would further South Africa's agenda on the continent. For example, Gauteng or the City of Johannesburg, both of which boast a sufficient footprint in Africa, could partner with their counterparts in Brazil or China to support the building of state capacity at the sub-national level in conflict-ravaged countries such as the DRC and South Sudan.

The role of SADPA

It should become apparent at this stage that, notwithstanding the comparative strength that SNGs enjoy on issues of governance and development at the local level, their potential contribution to development cooperation cannot be guaranteed without sufficient institutional support from the national government. As the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) correctly points out, 'a challenge for these actors is the lack of capacity to ensure adequate partnerships, efficient use of different aid modalities as well as sharing of knowledge and peer learning'.¹⁴ The partnerships mentioned above, involving South African provinces and their counterparts in Canada and Germany, are illustrative of the defining role that institutional support from national governments can play in catalysing the agency of SNGs in development cooperation. In the words of senior Canadian officials with direct experience of the South Africa-Canada development partnership programme:

...the [programme] plays several roles in supporting twinning [between provinces]. It helps to focus exchanges on areas that are critical to the development of governance capacity. It advises on how best to undertake specific projects. When changes in governments occur, or individual senior officials in either countries change jobs, the [programme] re-knits connections that have been broken. It funds the exchange visits, makes the travel and accommodation arrangements, briefs officials for their assignments, and debriefs participants at the end of each project.¹⁵

As noted above, the efforts of China, and most recently Brazil, to harness the international cooperation activities of their SNGs to promote their respective interests in Africa have also followed this model of 'partnership' between national and sub-national governments. For

example, Zhimin and Junbo capture the Chinese experience in the following lines:

With huge incentives from the central government aimed at encouraging closer economic ties with Africa — like large aid programmes, favourable loans and the new China-Africa Development Fund — the provinces believe that their own interest in Africa can be advanced with central government support. At the same time, the central government also finds that provincial involvement in Africa can assist the central government to fulfil its promises to African countries to implement aid programmes and deepen China's all-around and multi-level relations with Africa.¹⁶

The establishment of SADPA provides an institutional framework within which to initiate a similar programme of decentralised cooperation intended to further South Africa's post-conflict support on the continent. The role of SADPA in this regard should be twofold. Firstly, it could play a direct funding role, using the financial resources at its disposal to support capacity-building partnerships between eligible South African provinces and municipalities and their counterparts in African countries where South Africa is already involved in peacebuilding. Secondly, as the future focal point of South Africa's development cooperation and assistance, SADPA could play a crucial role in developing the technical capacity of provincial and local governments in the area of international development cooperation, while also providing them with the institutional backstop necessary to successfully engage in bilateral or triangular cooperation at the sub-national level. To this end, the following policy recommendations are made:

- ***Provide greater recognition and support of the foreign relations of provinces and municipalities.*** The national government should move away from its position of ambivalence towards the international involvement of provinces and municipalities, taking into account its potential to enrich South Africa's diplomacy in Africa. The inefficiencies displayed by some provinces and municipalities in this regard can be addressed by an unwavering commitment from national departments such as the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) and the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) to provide provinces and municipalities with sufficient institutional support, including

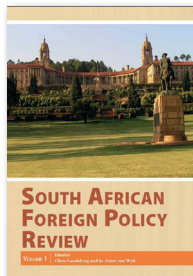
training in international relations and diplomacy.

- **Introduce a programme on decentralised cooperation.** The design of SADPA should incorporate a programme on decentralised cooperation, which should provide an institutional framework for eligible (read: 'relatively efficient') provinces and municipalities to contribute to South Africa's development assistance projects in Africa through bilateral or trilateral partnerships.
- **Strengthen internal capacity for international relations.** It is also imperative that provincial and local governments take necessary measures to strengthen their internal governance capacities to effectively and efficiently engage in international cooperation. In this regard, international relations offices should be capacitated to better manage and channel the pool of skills and expertise in the different provinces and municipalities, and to be able to research and analyse global dynamics in order to provide strategic guidance to development cooperation initiatives.
- **Promote greater cooperation between South Africa's SNGs on international relations.** Success in harnessing decentralised cooperation to promote South Africa's peacebuilding interests in Africa would also depend on the extent to which its SNGs are able to break away from a tradition of acting in isolation, especially in their foreign relations. Setting up a coordinating framework of provincial and municipal international relations practitioners would contribute to the sharing of ideas, experience, expertise and opportunities in development cooperation.
- **Pioneer the creation of a regional/continental framework of SNGs.** South African provinces and municipalities should pioneer the establishment of a regional or continental mechanism of SNGs. Such a framework could be used as a policy dialogue forum to foster cooperation between African SNGs, while also coordinating their engagement with the rest of the world.

Notes and references

- 1 See Hocking, B., 1996. Bridging boundaries, creating linkages: Non-central government and multilayered policy environments. *WeltTrends*, 1996, 11, pp.36–51.
- 2 Peacebuilding is used here as a generic term encompassing all activities and initiatives dedicated to identifying and addressing the triggers of conflict, to prevent its escalation or de-escalation into violence.
- 3 See NEPAD Framework Document, October 2001, pp.16–17.
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- 6 Landsberg, C., 2009, op. cit.
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- 8 Kornegay, 2011, op. cit., p.45.
- 9 DIRCO, 2011. *Establishment of SADPA*. Presentation to the NCOP Select Committee on Trade and International Relations, 3 August, p.35.
- 10 Alden, C., Zhang, C., Mariani, B. & Large, D., 2012. China's growing role in African post-conflict reconstruction. *Global Review*, Spring, pp.97–99.
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- 14 ECOSOC, 2010. *Development Cooperation Forum: Draft aide memoir*, 7 June, p.4. Available at: http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/newfunc/pdf/2010_dcf_aide_memoire.pdf. Accessed 27 March 2013.
- 15 See Proctor & Sims, 2001, op. cit., p.10.
- 16 Zhimin & Junbo, 2009, op. cit., p.16.

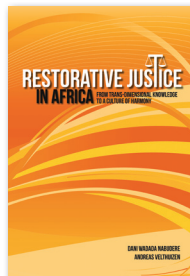
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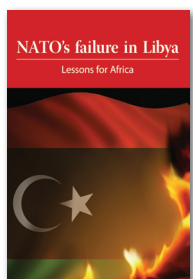
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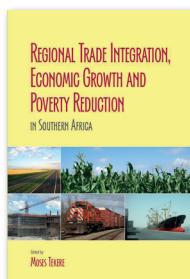
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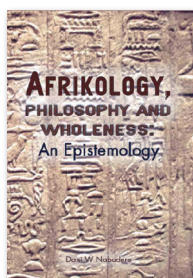
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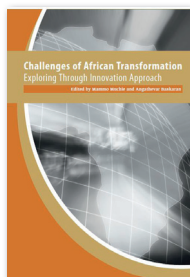
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