



Equitable Partnerships through Triangular Co-operation: Experiences from Canadian Civil Society

Highlights

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Highlights

New forms of co-operation are emerging as the global community works towards the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In this context, triangular co-operation is increasing as governments and non-state actors pursue North-South-South partnerships to realize sustainable development outcomes. While triangular co-operation was traditionally the remit of governments, recent efforts have opened space for a more contemporary understanding that includes all development actors, such as civil society organizations (CSOs), the private sector and regional organizations. In this context, government and non-state actors work as facilitators of North-South-South co-operation, where pivotal partners provide technical expertise and capacity in delivering on sustainable development outcomes in beneficiary countries.

In this context, the Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC) launched a research project, supported by Global Affairs Canada, to examine how Canadian civil society partners and other stakeholders are engaging in triangular co-operation. The research project aimed to develop a baseline of how Canadian CSOs working in international development and the humanitarian sector engage in triangular co-operation.

Carried out over October 2019–February 2020, the initiative raised awareness of triangular co-operation through social media and targeted communications through CCIC’s network, engaged over 30 CSOs in the research process and identified opportunities and challenges for increased triangular co-operation with and by Canadian CSOs.

Eight key findings emerge from the research.

- 1. Canadian CSOs are mostly unaware of triangular co-operation, its new definition and the Voluntary Guidelines for Effective Triangular Co-operation.** Some CSOs questioned whether triangular co-operation is a sustainable way to partner, noting it is a trend that may ultimately fade if unused given lack of awareness and specific funding supports.
- 2. CSOs adopt approaches to triangular co-operation in projects that have a regional scope by partnering with regionally mandated institutions and/or promote South-South learning.**
- 3. CSOs see triangular co-operation as a path to equitable partnerships with Southern partners and the adoption of equitable partnership principles.** Triangular co-operation has potential to decolonize development assistance by shifting the focus and power from Northern partners to Southern partners.
- 4. A defining feature of Canadian CSOs engagement in triangular co-operation is that partners play multiple roles.** For example, Canadian facilitators and their pivotal partners often engage in mutual learning exchanges with beneficiaries and share implementation activities.
- 5. Significant investments are needed in relationship-building and establishing effective ways of working between facilitating, pivotal and beneficiary partners to ensure success and reduce transaction costs.**
- 6. By harnessing local capacities and expertise, triangular co-operation is an effective modality to reach target beneficiaries, influence policymakers and work in challenging political contexts.**

For example, some CSOs noted that triangular co-operation was effective for working in fragile contexts and conflict zones. Pivotal partners often have greater knowledge of and comfort working in neighbouring regions. Moreover, proximity and similarities in experiences between Southern partners contributes to improved engagement with stakeholders and decisionmakers in beneficiary countries.

- 7. Hinder factors for increased engagement in triangular co-operation include lack of awareness, (mis)conceptions of higher transaction costs associated with the modality compared to other forms of development co-operation and challenges associated with current partnership practices at Global Affairs Canada that are not supportive of flexible, more equitable partnerships.** Some CSOs argue that existing funding and contracting mechanisms, such as Contribution Agreements, are ill-suited for equitable triangular partnerships. A limited number of CSOs suggested that grants may be better suited as they have greater flexibility in terms of changes to partnerships over the course of the project.
- 8. Key enablers of triangular co-operation include increased capacity in the Global South, the adoption of principles related to equitable partnerships by Northern CSOs and openness to support triangular co-operation by Global Affairs Canada.**

Overall, the report provides insight into Canadian CSOs' existing experiences and practices of triangular co-operation. The report points to the positive long-term effects of triangular co-operation not only on beneficiary partners but also facilitating and pivotal partners—reinforcing the concept of equitable partnerships. Based on the report's survey of Canadian CSOs and the variance in triangular co-operation modality usage and awareness, the report shows there is no one size fits-all approach. It concludes that for triangular co-operation to persist and grow in popularity, there is a need for flexibility in project objectives, guidelines and reporting measures. Canadian government support has potential to enhance project results geared towards sustainable development and lasting partnerships. Flexibility in project design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation requires policy changes by funders but also open-mindedness from all partners to pursue a model of collaboration that ensures an equitable approach for all parties involved.