



**Partners in Population and Development
A South-South Initiative**

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The Role of South-South Cooperation in an Era of Globalisation

*Jyoti Shankar Singh
Permanent Observer to the United Nations
Partners in Population and Development*

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By Jyoti Shankar Singh

Technological innovations, growing international trade and commerce, and rapid and sustained economic growth in countries such as China are fuelling the process and pace of globalisation. Globalisation is bringing many opportunities as well as challenges to the countries of the South. While for many of them there are increasing opportunities for growth and alleviation of poverty, many others are in the danger of being left behind. Within the countries, women and vulnerable sections of society may not be able to reap the benefits of globalisation, unless opportunities and choices are opened up to them through implementation of well-designed policies and programme.

Those of us who are in the population field firmly believe that education, health care and availability of family planning and other reproductive health services are essential to alleviation of poverty and empowerment of women. In this context, we have also come to recognize in recent years the value and importance of South-South cooperation in sharing among developing countries the experiences gained and lessons learned in family planning and population programmes. There is a great deal of expertise available in many countries of the South in implementing successful and effective programmes in these areas, and this expertise can be delivered in a cost-effective manner to other developing countries that need it.

This in essence is the rationale for talking about the role of South-South cooperation in the current era of globalisation. Since this workshop is primarily concerned with themes of population and development, the comments that follow are related to these themes and in

particular to the role of an organization such as the Partners in Population and Development in responding to the needs and requirements of developing countries. There is an equal justification for extending and deepening the role of South-South cooperation in many other areas of development.

Strategic thinking on future South-South co-operation has to be based on the consensus reached at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) on family planning, reproductive health and other population issues. These were updated in 1999 by the General Assembly in the context of ICPD+5 Review and though in 2004 there was no global intergovernmental review of the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action, the regional reviews as well as the NGO consultations reinforced and reiterated the ICPD goals. Of course, we also have to take fully into account the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set by the international community in 2000 and more recently by the Summit of heads of state and government in 2005 which recognized the integral linkage between provision of reproductive health services and alleviation of poverty.

Role of Partners in South-South Cooperation

I believe it will be useful to recall here that the support given by ICPD to South-South cooperation was extended by the UN General Assembly in 1999 to specific support for the Partners in Population and Development. The Key Actions for Further Implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action adopted by the 1999 General Assembly recognise the increasing political significance of South-South cooperation, and specifically mention Partners in Population and Development as the major South-South initiative requiring external funding and support: “External funding and support, from donor countries as well as the private sector, should be provided to promote and sustain the full potential of South-South cooperation,

including the South-South Initiative: Partners in Population and Development, in order to bolster the sharing of relevant experiences, and the mobilisation of technical expertise and other resources among developing countries. Updated information on institutions and expertise available within developing countries in the area of population and development, including reproductive health, should be compiled and disseminated.”

Under the chapter on “Mobilising resources”, the General Assembly document urges “developing and developed countries and countries with economies in transition.... to promote international cooperation and to increase technical cooperation and transfer of technology through South-South-South cooperation, in order to fully implement the Programme of Action” Furthermore, it urges “donor countries and international funding agencies...to support the inclusion of South-South components in development cooperation programmes and projects so as to promote cost-effectiveness and sustainability ”

How should we look at the future of South-South cooperation? The focus on four major programme areas – reproductive health, including family planning, adolescent health, HIV/AIDS prevention, and reduction of maternal mortality –that form the core of the Partners’ strategic plan, has been revalidated in view of the reiteration during the ICPD+ 10 review of the ICPD goals and objectives and the renewed emphasis on more vigorous and energetic action in these areas within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Furthermore, there is the continuing need to regard gender as a crosscutting theme in all aspects of programming by reaffirming that advancing gender equality and equity and empowerment of women must be treated as a cornerstone of all population and development programmes. Action on gender issues and concerns, as mentioned earlier, is also an essential component of the Partners’ strategy.

It is within this overall framework that we should look at the lessons learned from selected country-level experiences, and the challenges head in three interrelated areas –

meeting the challenges of HIV/AIDS, improving the outreach and quality of reproductive health services, including family planning, and realising gender equality and empowerment of women. Many developing countries also have high levels of maternal mortality, and reduction of maternal mortality deserves much greater attention than it has received so far in the health sector. Finally, we should look at how the specific modalities for promoting and strengthening South-South cooperation are being utilised in the areas of capacity building, research and exchange of information, with a particular focus on the future role of Partners in Population and Development.

The Future Role of South-South Cooperation

I would now like to offer a few conclusions and recommendations on the future role of South-South co-operation, in particular as they refer to the Partners in Population and Development:

1. The first objective should be to continue to promote and strengthen political commitment and support for South-South co-operation at the highest levels. The Partners as an intergovernmental organisation involves senior political leaders and policy makers in its policy-making bodies. Many ministers and senior most officials regularly participate in its Board and Executive Committee meetings. This advantage should be utilised to the maximum, by broadening knowledge of and support for South-South activities through organisation of inter-ministerial or inter-departmental bodies to deal with South-South activities within the countries and by organising well planned visits by political leaders and policy makers from Partner countries with people at their levels in other countries. I recall that a few years ago India set up a steering committee including representatives of several ministries as well as academic institutions and NGOs to coordinate activities relating to South-South cooperation. Action

along these lines will help secure high-level and broad-based political agreement and co-operation towards translating into reality the potential benefits of South-South co-operation.

2. Non-governmental organisations of the South such as ICOMP can play a similar advocacy and networking role vis-à-vis programme managers and leaders of other NGOs. Regional networks of NGOs which are now being established in Asia and Africa to promote South-South activities at both national and regional levels may indeed complement and, in many ways, strengthen the work done by national governments as well as the Partners.

3. The Partner countries must devote more of their own financial and technical resources to South-South co-operation. In recent years, the economic crises facing several of the Partner countries since the ICPD have reduced or limited their capacity to do as much as they wanted to do in this area. But as these countries begin to emerge from these crises, they should consider giving South-South co-operation the priority it truly deserves in the allocation of domestic resources. On the other side of the equation, there are several Partner countries which now have the financial means to contribute much more than in the past to South-South cooperation.

4. In 1995, the Partners' mission was defined in its by-laws as follows: to expand and improve South-South collaboration in the fields of family planning and reproductive health; to strengthen institutional capacity to undertake South-South exchange activities and to rapidly expand the number of South-South training and consultative programmes, with particular emphasis on long-term collaborative arrangements; and to provide through the Partners Secretariat a central point for networking among Partners and for identifying opportunities for South-South exchanges and sources of financial support. These tasks remain as valid today as they were in 1995. However, the Partners' future strategy should focus on establishing specific priorities within each of the programme areas, taking into account the experiences gained and the lessons learned in the past ten-twelve years. It should also develop global conceptual

frameworks for its own contribution to capacity building, research and exchange of information - the three major modalities for South-South co-operation.

5. The time has come to broaden the scope of training and research programmes conducted nationally so as to include not only the in-country experiences but also relevant experiences and lessons learned from other developing countries. A truly global approach to formulating the content and framework of the training programmes will enable participants from a much larger number of countries to benefit from such programmes; though this is not to deny the importance of devising special activities focussing on the needs and requirements of individual countries. Identification of developing country institutions that have the capacity to organise short term and medium term training suited to needs and requirements of officials and programme managers from other countries and provision of technical and financial assistance to them to strengthen their curricula and faculty should be a continuing priority for the Partners as for other agencies involved in promoting South-South co-operation.

6. In the area of research, the focus should be on promoting inter-country collaborative efforts among research and academic institutions on those topics and themes that have been identified through consultations between researchers and policy makers as being relevant to the operational priorities of South-South co-operation.

7. In the area of exchange of information, the objective should be to bring to the attention of policy makers, programme managers and others concerned relevant experiences and lessons learned on a continuing basis using both print and electronic media.

8. Many of the Partner countries also expect the Partners' Secretariat to help raise new and additional resources for their regular programmes. The experience so far indicates that the Secretariat, given a rather small staff, can only be of limited assistance in this regard. Members of the Secretariat may help best by facilitating contacts between potential donors and

programme countries and recommending the use of qualified consultants. The Partners should also work closely with UNFPA country support teams in this regard

9. On their part, donors should give favourable consideration to inclusion of South-South components in their country aid packages, in line with the recommendations adopted by the GA special session. UNFPA is already encouraging its country representatives to do this. It is to be assumed, in this context, that programme countries will themselves request the inclusion of such components, as appropriate. Increasing use of consultants and experts from the South by the donors in their own project formulation activities and joint consultations between experts from both donor and programme countries are two other modalities that could be used to strengthen the effective planning and implementation of such activities.

10. Continuing international support for the Partners in Population and Development as the major South-South initiative (as urged by the 1999 special session of UN General Assembly) is also needed, with the understanding that the member countries will demonstrate their commitment by increasing their own contributions to the core budget of the Partners.

In the end, sustained political commitment, strong advocacy, pro-active networking and well-prepared and properly implemented research, training and information exchange programmes can become the key ingredients of increasingly successful and effective South-to-South co-operation in population. It also needs to be emphasised that while the developing countries committed to South-South co-operation must provide the bulk of resources required, major donor countries have a key complementary role to play - in providing both financial and technical support to innovative international and regional efforts in the area of South-South co-operation and to third country programmes which bring together with donor funding two or more developing countries to work on collaborative projects.