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SOUTH-SOUTH COLLABORATIVE PROGRAMME

OCCASIONAL PAPER SERIES

**The Contribution of South-South
Cooperation to the Strengthening
of Democratic Developmental
States: Laying a Research
Agenda**

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About the South-South Tri-Continental Collaborative Programme

The South-South Tri-continental Programme is a scholarly collaboration for Research, Training, Publishing, and Dissemination, between the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (**CODESRIA**); the Asian Political and International Studies Association (**APISA**); and the Latin American Council of Social Science (**CLACSO**). The Programme was established as a reaction to the need, identified by scholars in the South, to reorient theoretical and methodological frameworks of the dominant development discourses; and to improve the organization of Southern research infrastructures. The Programme aims at reviving cooperation and collaboration among scholars of the global South working in the broad field of the social sciences. The collaboration was entered into with the specific aim of sustaining knowledge exchange between scholars on the three continents as a long-term initiative. At the core of this collaboration are the objectives of

deepening intra-South networking

contributing a South perspective towards the transformation of the Social Sciences on a global scale

producing alternative theoretical and methodological approaches of knowledge building

Networking and dialoguing take place in the different International Comparative Seminars that the partners set up annually on a rotational basis. For each International Seminar, **CODESRIA**, **CLACSO** and **APISA** select representatives from their respective continents. Each themed Seminar brings together a total of no more than twelve senior scholars who have been working on the thematic area identified for the Seminar, and are recognized as leaders in such area of scholarship. The small number of participants is meant to enable close, thorough discussion of issues, with a view to producing scholarly publications that not only make audible the voices of the South in the global arena, but effectively advance scientific scholarship.

The **CODESRIA-APISA-CLACSO Occasional Paper Series** disseminates work discussed at the South-South International Comparative Seminars. The Occasional Papers are written by participants from the three continents, and are designed to provide an opportunity for a sustained South-South dialogue, and to enhance the understanding of the current research issues that scholars of the South are actively engaged in. The papers offer reflections emerging from issues that are pertinent to the South; and are informed by experiences from the South, as well as from South-South and South-North contact as viewed from the perspective of the South.



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Introduction


Although South-South cooperation has, in the past, inspired many developing countries, for a variety of reasons its potential has been far from being fully exploited. More recently, the impoverishment of wide strata of the population and the consequent drop in social standards in many Southern societies after several years of structural adjustment and other similar neo-liberal policies suggest that cooperation tending to uplift social areas is an urgent necessity. Therefore, the realities of the present-day global situation will require an increased South-South cooperation for the successful strengthening of democratic developmental states in the South. The declining interest in the North, in general, to assist the South makes South-South cooperation more urgent, while the increasing differences in stages of development within the South itself (and, consequently, the appearance of more and more complementarities among Southern countries) make it more feasible.

In this light, South-South cooperation, particularly in social spheres of very urgent needs, might contribute to promote socio-political stability, to reduce dependency on countries of the North and therefore to increase, in general, the negotiating capacities of Southern countries vis-a-vis their Northern counterparts.

Many countries of the South can provide other developing countries with important assistance that has a significant social impact. Countries like Cuba and Colombia have developed capabilities in tropical medicine; India, Brazil and China produce vital medicines at affordable prices. Uganda has acquired an outstanding and valuable experience in the control of HIV/AIDS.

South-South cooperation has developed in mid- and long-term projects but also in more short-term situations of disasters and emergencies, in which developing countries increasingly share their resources (funds, food, drugs, etc.) with affected nations. Cuba's medical Henry Reeve Brigade was effective in saving lives in the sequel of recent earthquakes in Pakistan and Indonesia. Sharing know-how on how to deal with disasters and emergencies is another area in which South-South cooperation is important.

Taking the example of Cuba's cooperation with a wide variety of countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America, particularly in the new millennium, when the negative social effects of neo-liberal-inspired policies have been strongly felt throughout the South, it can be



argued that South-South cooperation can go a long way in compensating present-day social deficits. But although this type of cooperation can prove feasible with comparatively reduced expenditures, it does require a return of the State as a central player for the design and implementation of development strategies. In this context, South-South cooperation might become, moreover, an indispensable tool for the efficient functioning of Southern (neo) developmental states called on to correct the democratic and social lacks of the previous model.

Literature

An abundant amount of literature has been produced on the topic of South-South cooperation throughout the world in the past three decades. Various groupings, in particular the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77 have debated the subject extensively in the past and drafted Programs of Action and other documents tending to pursue South-South cooperation.

Among other developing countries, Cuba has pursued a very active policy of cooperation with nations of the South in the past four decades, and Cuban scholars have written extensively on the subject. However, very few academic works have been produced on Cuba's civilian programs of cooperation with countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. In particular, Cuba's cooperation with Africa -more continuous since 1962, than with other developing areas— attracted most international attention only from 1975 to 1990, but this attention was generally limited to the military aspect of the relationship, even if civilian cooperation had been more continued, varied and extended to a wider array of countries.

It is true, however, that although a lot of information circulated on Cuba's civilian cooperation with Africa prior to the new millennium, specific official data was sometimes hard to find: most information was to be found in political speeches of officials from both Cuba and recipient countries. Therefore, most works that approached the topic were generally short, speculative, politically inspired and superficial papers, mostly written by academics from the North, since Cuban and other academics seldom wrote on the subject.

After 1990 Cuba experienced a severe economic crisis due to the changes that occurred in the former USSR and the socialist Eastern European block, its major economic partners. The fact that cooperation with other developing countries was not stopped at this juncture but rather re-designed further underscored that it was a viable enterprise, and its enormous expansion in the past ten years or so -together with the ready availability of more and more data on the topic– motivated the appearance of some new literature. Still, most works refer to Cuba's cooperation with only one country and usually rely heavily on personal interviews/surveys with either direct Cuban actors or local African/Asian/Latin American beneficiaries of that cooperation, and a work that would extend to relations with Asian, African and Latin American countries as a whole remains to be written.

Research about the results of this type of cooperation is urgent due to its very rapid growth in the past few years. For instance, the integrating effort *Alternativa Bolivariana para Las Américas* (ALBA), proposed only a couple of years ago by Venezuela (provider basically of energy and financial resources) and Cuba (provider basically of human resources and know-how) has launched a series of projects in the social sphere that have very quickly extended to several countries in Latin America and is now reaching Africa.

Method

Research work oriented towards assessing the impact of Cuban cooperation in the uplifting of social conditions in recipient African, Asian and Latin American countries is essential. Particularly imperative to focus on are two areas: medical cooperation at large and teaching to read and write with the new Cuban method *Yo sí puedo*.

Medical cooperation stands out as the one field in which Cuban civilian cooperation has been truly outstanding and constantly increasing. From 1963 to 2005, almost 132.000 Cuban doctors, nurses and other health personnel have worked in 102 countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. As of November 2006, over 20.000 doctors and 11.000 nurses and other experts in the field of health are working in 69 different countries. A higher stage in health cooperation was achieved when Cuba established local versions of its national healthcare model (Comprehensive Healthcare Program,

or PIS, according to its acronym in Spanish) in various countries, starting with several Central American countries in the sequel of hurricane Mitch in 1997.

In the field of education and training, over 45.000 students from 128 countries have graduated in Cuba from 1963 to 2005. As of November 2006, over 27.000 students from 120 countries are studying in Cuba (80% of them study Medicine). Adding those foreign students that study medicine in Cuba and those that study medicine in their own countries in Medical Schools staffed by Cuban professors, the figure grows to 46.000 medical students from 82 Southern nations. Cuba's goal in this field is to train a total of 100.000 doctors from those countries in a decade.

More recently, Cuba has undertaken "Operation Miracle", to operate free of charge on people with ophthalmological problems. In a few years this experience gradually extended to 28 countries and already a total of 485.476 patients have recovered their eyesight. Today, one out of 213 Bolivians have been operated on, as well as one out of 87 Venezuelans and one out of 60 Antiguans.

With respect to the *Yo sí puedo* method, that has been particularly useful among segments of more or less isolated groups of aborigines such as Papua-New Guinea and Bolivia, and among poor populations of Haiti and other countries, is very adaptable to local languages and tremendously reduces the time needed to learn to read and write.

Exploring these areas of cooperation, analysis will concentrate on:

- Establishing the impact of this cooperation in the improvement of social conditions of the recipient country. This will be done in a comparative before/after analysis of changes in the available figures related to maternal and child mortality, literacy, etc., locally and, wherever possible, nationally;
- Assessing as far as possible the economic costs of the cooperation programs that produced those improvements; again, this would be based on the available figures from the Cuban Ministry for Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation, or on calculations.
- Assessing to what extent this type of cooperation is habit-forming or, on the contrary, tends to transfer know-how and means to make this cooperation unnecessary in the long run; here, the ratio between Cuban experts on the field in each country and students

from each country in Cuban Medical Schools (in Cuba or abroad) will be established, as well as the rate of training of local personnel to carry out literacy campaigns with the Cuban method.

- Assessing to what extent this model of cooperation might be adopted by other countries of the South in these same or other social areas. In other words, how can small country with scant resources such as Cuba offer a cooperation of this magnitude? Here an analysis of the human and material requirements of the Cuban experience will be undertaken, supported by interviews with Cuban experts in this field basically.

Even if data will be collected and processed for all the recipient countries of Cuban cooperation in those areas in Asia, Africa and Latin America, the focus will concentrate on three specific countries -one from each region. The choice has to do mainly with the rather small dimensions of the country (in which therefore the national impact of this cooperation will be more visible) and the fairly intensive and extensive nature of Cuban cooperation. These countries are:

- Eastern Timor. Cuban cooperation has been present in this country ever since its recent independence, uninterrupted even through periods of violence such as those of May 2006, and the country has adopted PIS. There are 302 Cuban doctors in the country, while 498 Timorans study Medicine in Cuba and will be joined by 200 more before the end of this year.
- Guiné-Bissau. Cuban doctors were present in liberated areas of the country even before formal independence in 1974, and ever since cooperation has been very intensive. 1601 Guinean students have graduated in Cuba until 2005, there are presently 29 Cuban doctors in the country. A Cuban Medical School was opened in Bissau, the country established PIS nationally and will soon be launching the Cuban literacy program *Yo sí puedo*.
- Guatemala. Cuban doctors first arrived in large numbers in Guatemala in a Brigade right after the destruction caused in the country by Hurricane Mitch in 1997, and this was the first country to establish PIS. Nowadays, there are 350 Cuban doctors in the country. There are over 670 Guatemalan Medical students in Cuba, while 4.462 poor Guatemalans have recovered their eyesight after being operated on through *Operación Milagro*. When Guatemalan Vice-President Eduardo Stein visited Cuba on 26-28 October 2006,

he publicly stressed that the work of Cuban doctors in remote areas of the country had allowed the nation to perceivably reduce maternal and infant mortality.

Final research results should provide a more accurate and substantiated perception of the social impact of these types of South-South cooperation programmes, their cost and the convenience/possibility of extending them to other countries and social areas in the future.

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