

Executive Summary

A Myth or a Reality?—Triangular Cooperation as a Vehicle toward Green Economy

Hiroshi Kato

1. Introduction

1.1 About this volume

This two-part volume is the joint work of an international team of experts and contains essays on triangular cooperation (TrC).¹ Part I explores thematic issues, such as the significance of TrC (Chapter 1), its relevance to green economy (Chapters 2 and 3), knowledge management mechanisms (Chapter 4), and TrC management systems (Chapter 5). Part II contains specific case reports contributed by practitioners working for multilateral, bilateral, and other development organizations (Chapters 6 through 12).

These chapters have been compiled chiefly to address, collectively, the following three questions:

- a. What is the relevance of TrC to the green economy?
- b. How does TrC support successful knowledge management?
- c. What are the institutional and managerial challenges related to TrC?

The motivation for producing this work, in an age when busy policy/decision makers and development practitioners hardly have time to read through voluminous compilations of essays and papers, is two-fold. First, we believe that a systematic look into such a multi-faceted phenomenon as TrC requires more than PowerPoint presentations. Second, we acknowledge that the writing of expository essays can provide an opportunity for self-reflection by developing practitioners.

We hope that this booklet attempting at systematic and in-depth

1. There is no established definition of TrC (OECD 2013). In this essay, the term Triangular Cooperation (TrC) is used to mean “Southern-driven partnerships between two or more developing countries supported by a developed country (ies) /or multilateral organization(s) to implement development cooperation programs and projects” (United Nations 2012:5).

analysis of TrC lends momentum to existing initiatives, such as the Global South-South Development Expo, the Community of Practice of Knowledge Hubs, and the recent exercises led by the OECD². It is our humble hope that this volume inspires the process of mutual learning about TrC, potentially leading to the organization of various activities, such as thematically focused workshops and mutual visits amongst participants of different projects relating to TrC.

1.2 Why triangular cooperation

The importance of South-South cooperation (SSC) has increasingly been emphasized in various international fora, including the Outcome Document of the Busan High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in 2011. This demonstrates a marked contrast to the Paris Declaration in 2005, which did not mention SSC. Attention to TrC has also intensified among the actors outside the UN system, a long-time advocate of SSC and TrC; the OECD, for example, has begun to examine the idea (see OECD 2013), and Germany articulated its policy on TrC in a recent position paper (BMZ 2013).

Different actors may have different reasons for paying close attention to TrC. It is the author's view that TrC is important as a gateway to a new form of international cooperation. The volume of aid from the traditional donors is likely to wane in the decades to come, and while SSC will instead be of paramount importance, that is insufficient to fill the gap. Innovative methods for mobilizing and effectively using whatever resources are available are required. TrC is one such method, for it is assumed that "by joining forces, and bringing different skills and strength [through TrC], the DAC and non-DAC donors can improve aid effectiveness through developing better and more appropriate practices" (McEwan and Mawdsley 2012: 1192).

TrC could be particularly important for the horizontal exchange of local knowledge. Such exchange is becoming increasingly necessary, as we live in a world faced with multitudes of issues with no ready-made solutions, and hence "development cooperation must take the form of mutual learning and joint solution discovery (Tanaka 2012: 5)." TrC therefore, and SSC more generally, must be mainstreamed in the 21st century.

2. A recent initiative by OECD is its Policy Dialogue on Triangular Cooperation.

2. Green Economy and TrC

This volume's first message is that TrC can be a very important instrument for the attainment of the green economy in the South.

Chapter 2 illustrates the many examples of SSC and TrC impacting global environmental issues. To name just one: in the Coral Triangle Initiative, six countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, the Solomon Islands, and Timor Leste) have worked together to promote marine protected areas.

Chapter 3 analyzes why TrC can be a particularly effective vehicle for tackling environmental issues including green economy and sustainable development. The author argues that sustainable environmental conservation efforts must be supported by bottom-up initiatives of residents (i.e., they must be “be inclusive”), and propose locally-created and applicable solutions (i.e., they need “innovative solutions”). Such innovative solutions, he goes on to claim, can be facilitated by TrC.

TrC is useful for the creation of innovative solutions because it encourages *horizontal* mutual learning amongst problem-solvers facing similar challenges across national borders, and allows them to create and share locally available and affordable knowledge and skills. Well-designed TrC projects can also support *vertical* collaboration among different actors within and across countries, such as local residents, administrations, and knowledge hubs. By supporting these knowledge exchanges with institutional backup, TrC can help make innovative solutions sustainable and replicable in the long term. Beyond this, TrC can help foster *international fora* where various actors can harmonize their efforts. TrC can be used to help countries having similar challenges and problems to come together and voice their problems and positions (See Chapter 12 for an example).

3. Successful Knowledge Management

Having examined the relationship between TrC and environmental conservation efforts, we now turn to the issue of successful knowledge management, which is necessary for the success of TrC projects. There are several observations.

First, as the cases demonstrate, successful projects are usually those that have been designed to acquire *the right kind of knowledge*, which is knowledge that is both desperately needed and not likely to be gained through other methods, such as traditional North-South cooperation. Knowledge of environmental conservation is one such example; it is desperately needed, and cannot be learned countries in the North with different geo-climatic and social conditions. Effective measures must be discovered locally, and mutual learning among the problem-solvers of the South facing similar problems in similar conditions is therefore of great help.

Dealing with the right kind of knowledge, however, does not guarantee the success of a TrC project. *There must also be certain mechanisms that support the healthy knowledge sharing and creation.* As Nonaka (1994) postulated, knowledge creation and exchange proceeds along a step-wise process³ and as such needs time and institutional support to develop. Not surprisingly, we find that successful cases—with varying degrees and through different means—have been designed to make sure that the time-consuming knowledge creation process takes place in a sustainable manner. Methods for achieving this include emphasizing face to face communication, field visits, workshops, and symposia, and making use of local people as resources. In some cases, it proved useful to have a solid knowledge base at Centers of Excellence for verifying and backing up local innovations with scientific methods.

4. Management of TrC

This volume examines the TrC management methods and tools that lead to maximum benefits with minimum transaction costs. The cases in the volume provide us with ample lessons, though they are not free from selection bias, as they were chosen from exceptionally successful cases.

4.1 Forms of TrC

To understand TrC management methods, we must first look at the wide variety of forms that TrC could take.⁴

3. Nonaka postulated this process as a model SECI, comprising the four stages of Socialization, Externalization, Conceptualization, and Internalization (Nonaka 1994).

4. The basic patterns of TrC have been grouped into four categories by OECD (2013). Also, a fairly detailed description of formats and contents of SSC and TrC in Asia-Pacific is given in Kumar (2008).

Among them, the “classic” formula of TrC from bilateral donor agencies’ point of view is that which capitalizes on the capacities of their partner countries, developed as a result of preceding bilateral cooperation; and they are used for supporting other countries, especially in the area in the vicinity of the original partner country. Examples of such cases are those in Chapters 6, 7, and 8.

TrC is evolving rapidly, however. For example, Japan’s TrC, which initially relied on the “classic” model, has undergone a significant evolution and today has a wide range of menus available to accommodate diversified needs (See Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion). Other innovative approaches include a project financially supported by the Netherlands and linking Benin, Bhutan, and Costa Rica (Chapter 11), one that aims at multiple beneficiary countries (Chapter 7), the one that links different regions (Chapters 9,10, and 12).

International organizations, too, are engaged in a wide variety of TrC activities (United Nations 2012, OECD 2013). These organizations use their international or global mandates to act more as catalysts. Chapter 9 provides an illustrative example of such a role for a UN agency. UNDP worked on an inter-regional project linking the Caribbean and the Pacific countries, and is described to have played the roles of “convener, facilitator, networker, resource mobilizer, and translator (across cultural differences)” (Ch.9, p.193).

4.2 How to manage a TrC project

TrC projects appear to be harder to manage than bilateral projects, obviously because they have, by definition, three or more parties, each of which may again comprise a number of actors. Reducing the allegedly high transaction costs is a serious challenge. The following lessons seem to emerge from the cases.

Coordination

Coordination is seen as an intrinsically difficult issue in TrC (OECD 2013). Many of the chapters report that intensive discussions were conducted throughout the projects, and especially at the initial stage of the undertakings, and helped the projects to succeed. However, evaluating these remarks is difficult. Such arduous processes of coordination can be viewed in retrospect as having been useful if the project was successful. However, if the project achieved less-than-

satisfactory performance, these “transaction costs” would have been viewed as burdensome to project members. Thus the issues of coordination and transaction costs are beyond simple-minded judgment and needs systematic analysis and evaluation (See 5.3 below for a related discussion).

Knowledge hub

It helps to have a reliable knowledge hub working as a pivotal agency (See Chapter 4 for a discussion on Knowledge Hubs). These can be especially important when they possess sector-wise knowledge and information and function as liaisons between various actors, typically villagers and farmers, who may need help making their innovative solutions sustainable. This is clearly indicated by the examples cited in Chapters 3, 6, 7, and 8.

Networking

A center of excellence or other such knowledge base is not always necessary, as is demonstrated by the cases described in Chapters 9, 10, and 11. These cases relied more on active multi-node networking activities. This works well when networking is implemented by engaging highly motivated professionals, and provides opportunities for their continuous learning and enhancement. International organizations and bilateral actors have often been useful in these cases.

ICT technologies and personal relationships

Such network-oriented projects have devised various mechanisms to assure smooth networking and communication among their members. Examples include structured mechanisms for decision-making and coordination (see Chapters 6 and 11), or information sharing, such as the Project Space intranet platform (Chapter 9). Other projects have given awards for good practices (Chapter 10) and presented papers at symposia (Chapter 12). Ultimately what is most helpful is a core person/manager with strong networks of motivated key professionals, which is vividly illustrated in the case presented in Chapter 9. In spite of the development and convenience of IT technologies, many of the case reports have stressed the importance of personal contact and trust for success.

Policy environment

Projects supported with the commitment of the government are more

likely to succeed. Likewise TrC works particularly well when it works in conjunction with regional or global policy goals (see Chapters 7 and 12).

5. Rediscovering TrC

So far, we have looked at TrC from various angles: its relationship to green economy, the knowledge necessary for its success, and effective methods for managing it. The following discussion looks at TrC from other angles.

5.1 TrC is open to anyone in any country

The cases in this volume clearly demonstrate that TrC provides various opportunities for anybody in any country. These cases, in which participant roles are flexible, show that even smaller, “less advanced” countries can offer their experiences to bigger, “more advanced” countries. This is clearly demonstrated in cases like the TrC between the Caribbean and Pacific countries (Chapter 9), TrC among Pacific Island Countries (Chapter 10), and the cooperation among Benin, Bhutan, and Costa Rica (Chapter 11). Related to this is the idea that TrC does not have to be monopolized by middle income countries. It is, in fact, dangerous to assume only the middle-income countries can act as “pivotal” countries, as the view is tantamount to re-introducing vertical relationships—such as the traditional North-South—into SSC.

5.2 Cultural and linguistic proximities are not prerequisites

Many of the chapters in this volume confirm the often mentioned advantage of TrC, that they can provide environments wherein people with similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds can work together to tackle developmental challenges common them.

However, the report on the TrC between Benin, Bhutan, and Costa Rica (Chapter 11) complicates this widely-accepted view. This project linked three distant countries with very different cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds, and yet has produced remarkable outcomes leading to visible impacts. The report states that geographical distances have not been a problem, and that the cultural and other differences

have been a help rather than a hindrance.⁵

This experience might indicate that while having similar cultural, social, or linguistic conditions does help, it does not constitute a necessary condition for success. In other words, the fundamental factor for the success of TrC is, as discussed in Section 2, the burning desire of the people for useful knowledge; if that fundamental condition is in place, it can help overcome differences in culture, social customs, and languages.

5.3 Cost analysis and evaluation

TrC is said to be more cost effective than the traditional North-South cooperation. This claim has yet to be verified, and being unable to provide evidence-based discussion, here it is important only to note that the question of cost effectiveness must be addressed not just in terms of *monetary* costs and benefits. Possible transaction costs, such as the coordination of projects as previously discussed, must be considered. Likewise, intangible benefits that derive from TrC must be taken into consideration. Such benefits can include, among others, the long-term capacity development that takes place in the course of TrC (and SSC), and the personal bonds that are created (See Chapter 9, p.206, for example⁶).

This raises the issue of impact evaluation—a difficult challenge. Even among the successful cases, it seems difficult to evaluate the whole value of the impacts and costs of the endeavors, especially in numerical terms. Based on the observations contained in the volume, our view is that, given the absence of numerical data with which to evaluate tangible impacts and costs, we must look at the *process* of the projects—for example, the enthusiasm of the participants and their willingness to continue—as indicators of the success of the project.

5. The reports states, “Language, culture, religion and geography are not barriers to cooperation. Although language and culture posed some difficulties at the start of the PSC, six months down the line these problems were long forgotten. None of the project coordinators or beneficiaries interviewed for this case study cited language as a problem in their project.” Containing many experiences that defy the conventional wisdom, this project offers much for development practitioners to explore (p.244).

6. “[A]n expert from St. Lucia elaborates on this point. “Many of the regions achievements are based on interpersonal interactions...when I go to a country to assist I am not seen as a stranger walking in but a friend known for year: such a bond is priceless and cannot be measured.”

6. Summary of Thematic Chapters

Chapter 1: Multilateral support to South-South and triangular cooperation (Yiping Zhou)

Written by the Director of the UNOSSC, a strong advocate of South-South and Triangular cooperation, this chapter highlights the potential of triangular arrangements in creating a “triple-win scenario” in international development. It starts with the review of the dramatic changes the world has gone through in recent years, and concludes that, “South-South is no longer just another idea or topic for discussion. It is a reality” (p.22). Director Zhou then traces how the international community and particularly the UN system have supported SSC and TrC. The chapter concludes with a list of “value propositions” for consideration by partners in development. Among other things, traditional partners are invited to stay engaged with MICs to leverage their capacities. These mid-income countries are called for to do more TrC, while low-income countries are expected to strengthen their partnerships with MICs. Finally, the author urges the UN system to do more to help bring MICs into the larger development value chain.

Chapter 2: Green economy set to strengthen South-South and triangular cooperation (Tomoko Nishimoto and Nick Nuttall)

Starting with the premise that the global shift to a more inclusive and resource-efficient green economy is strengthening south-south and Triangular Cooperation, this chapter presents a number of illuminating examples of TrC. One salient example given in that context is the case of the E-waste African Programme, participated by a group of countries sharing the need for the protection of their environment in West Africa. The chapter goes on to introduce other, and quite encouraging, examples, including the ones by UN agencies like UNEP, FAO and UNDP.

Chapter 3: Catalyzing an inclusive green economy through South-South and triangular cooperation: Lessons learned from three relevant cases (Akio Hosono)

This chapter contends that TrC can indeed contribute to the green economy. Its argument is based on the premise that inclusive green economy requires innovative solutions based on the wisdom and knowledge of local people, and supported by solid scientific research. Such innovative solutions are indispensable for green economy, as the poor in rural or mountainous areas cannot afford skills and technologies

from afar. TrC makes possible the creation and exchange of such locally available and applicable knowledge.

Local people alone, however, cannot develop such knowledge and skills in a sustainable manner; they need institutional and often long term support. Here again TrC serves to unite the efforts of the government and communities, and contribute resources to the effort. In this regard, the author emphasizes the importance of what he calls the Centers of Excellence (COEs).

Chapter 4: Knowledge Hubs—Progress in practice since the Bali Communiqué (Tubagus A. Choesni and Nils-Sjard Schulz)

This chapter traces the current development of Knowledge Hubs and the Community of Practice. The concept of Knowledge Hubs emanated from the recognition that “One of today’s limitations to knowledge exchange is that development solutions are often shared in an ad-hoc way and based on short-term projects rather than longer-term programs” (p.82). Hence a consensus emerged that knowledge exchange should be embedded in strong institutions. This argument seems to resonate with Hosono’s emphasis of the roles of the Centers of Excellence (Chapter 3 of this volume and Hosono 2013).

The latter half of the chapter introduces a variety of activities being promoted at the Community of Practice, aimed at providing a web-based space for champions to share their experiences creating and scaling up knowledge hubs.

Chapter 5: The approaches and mechanisms of JICA’s triangular cooperation: An analysis (Shunichiro Honda)

With increasing interest in TrC, there is a growing demand for information on how to formulate, manage, and evaluate TrC projects. This paper has been written to reduce the knowledge gap on how to manage TrC. Focusing on Japan, which is seen as a pioneer in promoting SSC and TrC, the essay covers such characteristics of Japan’s TrC system as the policy framework, current performance, patterns of cooperation, key instruments, and the processes of evaluation, staffing, and decision making. The author argues that JICA’s TrC system has evolved substantially to mobilize a variety of instruments. He also suggests, however, that to meet changing needs in the future, there must be further evolution from the system that is essentially based on its

bilateral cooperation systems and instruments.

7. Summary of Case Chapters

The cases included in Part II of this volume represent as wide a variety as possible in terms of contents, formats, actors, and regions. Contributed to a volume for the conference co-hosted by UNEP, they are largely projects that deal with environmental issues.

| Ch. | Major Partners/Participants | Domain/Sector |
|-----|--|--|
| 6 | Mexico, Bolivia, and Germany | Wastewater management |
| 7 | Turkey, its neighboring countries, and Japan | Energy conservation |
| 8 | Jordan, Palestine, and Japan | Science education using IT |
| 9 | Caribbean and Pacific countries, and UNDP | Disaster risk management and climate change adaptation |
| 10 | Pacific countries and Japan. | Solid waste management |
| 11 | Bhutan, Benin, Costa Rica, and the Netherlands | Sustainable development |
| 12 | Malaysia, Asia/Pacific, Africa, and Japan | Biodiversity conservation |

Chapter 6: Climate change adaptation: Fomenting reuse of treated wastewater for agriculture and water protection in Bolivia — Triangular cooperation Mexico - Bolivia - Germany (Jürgen Baumann)

Chapter 6 introduces the experiences of a Mexico-Bolivia cooperation supported by Germany, a country known as one of the active OECD members in promoting TrC (BMZ 2013). The presented project is based on a long-term (about 40 years!) collaboration between Germany and Mexico, and their shared understanding of the need for better waste water management in Bolivia. The three countries, each motivated by different incentives but working toward the shared goal, have pushed the project forward. Germany works as a financial, logistical, and sometimes technological supporter to the project. Mexico provides experts and technical expertise as well as financial support for coordination, organization, and mobilization of experts. Though the project is still in its early stage of implementation, it has realized various exchanges between Mexican and Bolivian experts.

Chapter 7: A process of scaling up: Initiatives for energy conservation by Turkey and neighbouring countries (Yukimi Shimoda)

This essay illustrates TrC project involving Turkey and Japan. This is a classic TrC, which takes advantage of the fruit of initial bilateral cooperation. The author argues that the project was successful because, *first*, Turkey and its neighboring countries shared a common target and motivation under similar socio-political circumstances; *second*, there was strong leadership by Turkey substantiated by the capacity of its energy agency, serving as COE; and *third*, there was long term support from external actors that contributed to the capacity development of the Turkish organization.

Chapter 8: Enhancing the capacity of science teachers in Palestine: A case of triangular educational cooperation between Jordan, Palestine and Japan (Jun Kawaguchi)

Here is another example of a classic TrC project, supported by Japan, which takes advantage of the success of a preceding project. The chapter argues that the success of this teacher training project for Palestine thus far can be attributed to several factors. First, there were shared development needs among the participating actors, Jordan, Palestine, and Japan. Second, there was strong political commitment by the respective governments. And third, the project incorporated many of the lessons learned during the Jordan-Japan bilateral project, which preceded the TrC project among the three countries.

Chapter 9: Small islands, vast oceans and shared challenges: Linking Caribbean and Pacific SIDS through South-South and triangular cooperation (Karen Bernard and Lingxiao He)

This essay illustrates the first-ever project that attempted to pilot inter-regional south-south cooperation, by linking the Pacific and Caribbean regions, which share similar geography and face common environmental threats. Initiated by a UNDP staff person who was transferred to the Pacific region after serving in the Caribbean Office, the project was formulated after a lengthy but deliberate process of discussions involving key partners. The person who initiated the process went on to serve as the project manager, which helped the networking process.

The project addressed the issue of disaster risk management and climate change adaptation between the Pacific and the Caribbean regions., and

has shown steady progress on each of its three goals.

Chapter 10: J-PRISM: A case study of regional mutual learning and discovery towards an effective solid waste management in the Pacific (Hiromichi Kano and Shunichiro Honda)

This essay showcases an interesting case of truly mutual learning among the Pacific and Asian countries and Japan. Originally set up as a platform for triangular cooperation, J-PRISM is unique in that it goes beyond the usual framework of one country acting as the sole pivotal partner. Instead it encourages multiple countries to act as pivotal partners in their respective fields of expertise and excellence.

Thus the project has taken full advantage of regional good practices, like landfill improvement in Samoa and Vanuatu, landfill improvement and recycling in Palau, and so on. Local experts from different countries, well-versed in these advanced practices, served as resource persons working as regional trainers and/or advisors. Likewise, different countries are offering training and mutual learning opportunities to share their good practices with other countries.

Chapter 11: Promoting reciprocal learning in the South: A case study of South-South cooperation between Benin, Bhutan and Costa Rica (Nira Gautan, Mary Luz Moreno, Marianella Feoli and Carolina Reyes)

This chapter details a project which received the 2010 UN Award for South-South Cooperation Partnership. The case is interesting in many senses, including the composition of its partners—Benin, Bhutan, and Costa Rica—located on different continents. Not only are they far apart geographically, but they are also different linguistically, (speaking, respectively, French, Bhutanese [English], and Spanish), and economically. Despite these differences—or, as the author argues, because of them⁷—this project has achieved remarkable results. After only four years and using a relatively small fund, the project has involved over 180 organizations, achieving more than 3000 direct beneficiaries, 692 new products, 179 new services, and the list goes on and on. (pp.238-239)

7. The author argues: “Although skeptics might question the value of collaboration between such culturally and geographically distinct countries, it was precisely their differences that helped develop positive results.” (p.239)

Chapter 12: Practical use of triangular cooperation as part of the capacity development process to strengthen a leader country on biodiversity conservation in a region: A case of the BBEC Programme in Sabah, Malaysia (Motohiro Hasegawa)

This paper illustrates a case in Sabah, Malaysia, that has utilized TrC effectively to build up the regional capacity needed for the preservation of biodiversity in the region, based on the “Bornean Biodiversity and Ecosystems Conservation (BBEC) Programme.” It started as a bilateral cooperation project between Malaysia and Japan, which centered, in its Phase I, on conventional technology transfer for specialized Malaysian agencies. On the basis of that, Phase II the program, using TrC, sought to establish and strengthen regional biodiversity and ecosystem conservation. The author stresses that TrC’s usefulness could be further enhanced when it is aligned with internationally agreed-on goals, such as those outlined at the Ramsar Convention.

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