South-South Cooperation



South-South collaboration is defined as the exchange of resources, technology, and knowledge between developing countries, also known as countries of the Global South. These are countries that have emerged from colonial rule and are moving towards improving the living conditions of their populations and are also making significant contributions to global development.

African countries gained independence from colonialism on a high and positive note. It was expected that within a relatively short time Africa would have eradicated poverty, disease and ignorance which was not possible under colonialism. However, resources for this to be achieved were lacking leading to African countries turning to international institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and development agencies of developed countries not only for resources but also for ideas and leadership.

On the other hand, South Asian countries such as South Korea and Singapore that got their independence at the same time as African countries and with similar development indices achieved much faster economic and social growth than African counterparts. South Korea has a well-developed South-South collaboration institution, known as Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA). This institution provides technical assistance and financial grants for development programs in African countries in a similar way to developed countries.

Another example of successful South-South collaboration is where the government of Brazil has over the years provided development assistance to Portuguese speaking countries in Africa including financial and technical support. This has filled a gap where due to language issues, these countries were not benefitting from other donor programs.

A powerful mode of South-South collaboration is centrally coordinated partnership between African countries sharing knowledge and good practice. These have happened through coordinated pan African agencies such as the recently established Africa Centers for disease Control (Africa CDC) that has guided the establishment of Health Security Agencies in African countries known as Public Health Institutes. This agency is also promoting the sharing of locally manufactured commodities such as vaccines and other pharmaceuticals. Another example of African continental partnership is the establishment of the Free Trade zone that enables duty-free movement of goods between African countries thus facilitating economic growth.

There are many examples of successful collaboration at the level of the African Regional Economic Communities such as the West African Health Organization (WAHO), the East, Central and Southern African Health Community (ECSA-HC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). These organizations convene Health Ministers and technical leaders regularly to share experience and to learn from each other. I have personally promoted successful initiatives on South-South collaboration through the ECSA HC such as the establishment of the regional College of Surgeons and the dissemination of the Quality of Health Care principles and practices.

In the area of Health Professionals Education and Training there are many examples of collaboration between institutions. During the implementation of the Medical Education Partnership Initiative (MEPI) funded by PEPFAR and NIH many medical schools shared experience through joint meetings and exchange visits in promoting good practices such as developing research support centers and medical education units both of which worked to strengthen the quality of medical education and research. MEPI ended with the establishment of the African Forum for Research and Education in Health (AFREhealth) that includes other professions such as nursing and midwifery, physical therapy, pharmacy etc. AFREhealth hold annual symposia where joint learning and capacity building take place between African education institutions. There are currently many collaborations both South to South and North South between educational institutions in Africa which need support and encouragement as they have potential to contribute to improved living conditions of the African people.

There are also pan African and regional professional associations which provide another opportunity for South-South collaboration and joint learning. My work over the years has benefited from being a member of the Pan African Society of Cardiology.

The success of any collaboration is premised on the observance of certain partnership principles. These include a shared vision of the expected results, mutual respect, strong management structures, documented working arrangements and availability of resources needed to achieve the expected results. The individuals involved in the collaboration need to be personally committed to the partnership and open to learning from the all parties involved.

The environment to promote South-South collaboration is favorable and all efforts should be supported to promote these partnerships and collaborations as they hold a more realistic possibility of riding Africa of poverty, disease and ignorance that we aspired for at the time of gaining our independence from colonial rule.

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