The Regional Conference ‘Perspectivas de la Cooperación Triangular en Latinoamérica: Los impactos de la Cooperación Triangular’ (Perspectives of Triangular Cooperation in Latin America: the impacts of Triangular Cooperation), which took place in Mexico City on 26 and 27 September 2013, was convened by the German Federal Government, via the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and the Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation (AMEXCID) in collaboration with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GiZ) GmbH.

The aim of the event was to continue the dialogue and exchange of experiences initiated at the first Regional Conference ‘Perspectivas de la Cooperación Triangular en Latinoamérica: Nuevas dinámicas y acciones en un mundo de actores emergentes’ (Perspectives of Triangular Cooperation in Latin America: new dynamics and actions in a world of emerging actors) held in Bogotá, Colombia, in June 2012 and organised by the Colombian Presidential Agency of International Cooperation (APC-Colombia) and BMZ. In the light of the increasing capacities and potential of middle-income countries as development cooperation providers in Latin America, Triangular Cooperation (TrC) has become established as an innovative and attractive mode of delivery in the global architecture of development cooperation. The regional dialogues are part of Germany’s TrC strategy, which is supported by a regional fund set up specifically to promote this form of cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean, in view of its particularly dynamic development in the region, largely owing to recent socioeconomic changes across the continent. TrC breaks with the traditional donor-beneficiary arrangement, establishes a more horizontal relationship between the actors involved and facilitates the exchange of ideas and expertise between the partners, creating a win-win-situation.

The participation of 93 high-level representatives of the development agencies and ministries of 18 countries and representatives of the European Union and six multilateral and regional organisations reflects the recognition enjoyed by this innovative form of cooperation and the fund in the region. The countries represented at the conference were Germany, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Spain, United States, France, Guatemala, Honduras, Japan, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru and the Dominican Republic.
The multilateral and regional organisations represented were the ECLAC, IICA, OECD, UN, UNDP, SEGIB and the EU. The directors of the development agencies of Brazil (deputy director), Chile, Mexico and Peru and the BMZ Deputy Director General for Sectoral Affairs/Latin America also participated in the conference among others.

The specific objective of this conference was to foster the exchange of experiences in the region, putting particular emphasis on the impact, potential and management of TrC. The work was divided into four thematic blocks, moving from the presentation of national perspectives (Block 1: How far can we get?) to the analysis of concrete case studies (Block 3: Effectiveness of TrC: a review of experiences) and the gathering of lessons learned on TrC effectiveness with a special focus on improving its management (Block 4: Effectiveness of TrC – management aspects). A Supply and Demand Marketplace activity (Block 2) was carried out in parallel, resulting in an initial matching of demands identified and capacities developed in the region.

RESULTS

The conference generated a reflection process on two levels, the political and the technical level. On the political level, the position of TrC in the global architecture of cooperation was confirmed, and TrC was suggested as a starting point for future multi-actor partnerships. On the technical level, different factors were identified throughout the project cycle that could improve the TrC management process, resulting in greater effectiveness.

1. Management of Triangular Cooperation

When addressing the impacts and effectiveness of TrC, it became clear that many of the challenges that partners are facing in connection with increasing visibility and attracting more political and financial support are directly linked to the management process and coordination among the partners. The analysis of concrete experiences facilitated the identification of aspects that are key to overcoming these challenges and of the stages within the project cycle at which they have to be addressed. Therefore, the findings of the conference serve as a ‘Guide to improved TrC management’, which is particularly useful in the planning process when the terms and conditions of cooperation are established and mechanisms are put in place to guarantee the success of co-management, monitoring, evaluation and the learning process.
Guide to improved TrC management

1. **Political backing** is an essential condition, particularly if it is linked to public policies.
2. The smooth implementation of Triangular Cooperation projects depends to a large extent on the **initial identification and design phase**. It is not only necessary to have a clear understanding of the needs of the recipient country, but also of cooperation options offered by the cooperating partners and the local context.
3. **Monitoring mechanisms, indicators** of progress, **adjustment and evaluation points** and a **sustainability** strategy have to be planned in the initial phase.
4. Open recognition of the **impact and benefits** that the project generates for each partner facilitates the definition of the above-mentioned mechanisms and the visibility and accountability strategy. The impact on the beneficiary country must be the priority concern.
5. It is also vital to define a **coordination structure** in the initial phase, without necessarily creating additional bureaucracy. It should be kept to a minimum and make use of existing coordination mechanisms.
6. This core structure will only function well if it is accompanied by **clear, formalised processes for decision-making, co-management and communication** between the two required coordination levels: the political and the technical level.
7. Even though TrC involves **joint management**, it is not possible to do everything together. The formulation of operational plans facilitates the allotment of responsibilities and identification of the role and contribution of each partner. There are so many different Triangular Cooperation arrangements that the roles of the partners have to be defined on a case-by-case basis in accordance with an analysis of comparative advantages and complementary strengths (technical, logistical, methodological and legal expertise).
8. Although the beneficiary country should take the lead in conducting the project, it is important to make sure that the **coordinating institution** has the capacity required to perform this function. Another possibility would be for the technology and training provider to assume this task.
9. The **evaluation of the project** – of the design, process and results, including indirect impacts – helps to increase the visibility of TrC and institutional learning.
10. During the process, there are three elements that facilitate co-management: **fluent communication** (formal but also informal, especially at the beginning), **permanent flexibility** and **participation** by all key actors.

2. Consolidation of multi-actor partnerships: the political relevance of TrC

Triangular Cooperation promises a future of multi-actor partnerships, in which the innovative integration of scarce resources achieves greater impact. The institutional structure and treatment of Triangular Cooperation may differ from one country to another, but there is consensus that TrC is a form of cooperation that necessarily breaks with the concept of vertical project management, establishes closer political relationships and fosters horizontal relationships among cooperation partners.
In the course of the conference, particularly the Supply and Demand Marketplace activity, it became clear that regional forums facilitate the identification of potential partners and the formulation of joint initiatives. It also showed that there is a demand base that can be matched to capacities developed in the same region. Some are the result of previous bilateral cooperation experiences, while others arise from endogenous development processes in middle-income countries. In either case, TrC has the potential to multiply tried-and-tested models, reduce gaps and, consequently, strengthen regional integration processes.

TrC also has important indirect impacts, particularly on institutional learning and development. The horizontal relationships established among partners and the need for flexibility and co-management create effects which reach far beyond the specific project results. These impacts can be translated into attitude changes, including greater acknowledgement of the contributions of south-south cooperation, institutional changes arising from knowledge of other types of cooperation and cultural changes, expressed, for instance, in the transition from ‘transfer’ to ‘joint construction’.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this event suggest that the improvement of management processes and acknowledgement of the benefits of TrC for each partner help to amplify its impact. A virtuous circle is generated between improvement at the technical level and consolidation at the political level: better management and systematisation of TrC actions produce the information required to increase the visibility of the impacts of TrC and validate TrC as a mechanism for innovation and development. The conference served to identify success factors in Triangular Cooperation. The next step is to move forward with the systematic analysis of TrC experiences and the monitoring and evaluation of the impacts achieved through TrC. There is also a need to optimise the means of presenting the impacts in order to facilitate the exchange of experiences at a global level.

The Regional Conference ‘Perspectives of Triangular Cooperation in Latin America: the impacts of Triangular Cooperation’ has contributed to ensuring the continuity of the regional dialogue on topics introduced at the Bogotá conference and to constructing the global debate on efficient development cooperation. Bringing together the political and technical levels was the key to the success of this conference. In doing so, the event strengthened common learning processes and contributed to the elaboration of a common concept of TrC. It also contributed to promoting the exchange of ideas and the continuation of the fruitful debate on Triangular Cooperation.