Engaging Asia’s Diverse Development Actors

The international development landscape has changed dramatically in the last decade in response to new global challenges and emerging development actors. The current aid architecture is largely a product of the consensus among the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors around the purposes of aid, where it should be directed, and how it should be managed. The DAC consensus is being challenged, however, by the increasing presence of non-Western development actors which, in fact, have contributed to international development cooperation for decades but have remained largely under the radar of traditional aid frameworks. Taken together, these “new” actors, often emerging economies, are contributing major resources to development efforts in partner countries.

While some observers fear that the emergence of new actors may undermine DAC-led efforts to promote aid transparency and harmonization for greater development effectiveness, others see opportunities for innovative and responsive modalities such as South-South and triangular cooperation. The Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF-4), held in Busan, Korea, in November 2011, launched a more inclusive development compact in recognition of these diverse actors and approaches. Taken together, these “new” actors, often emerging economies, are contributing major resources to development efforts in partner countries.

The 2011 dialogues culminated at the HLF-4, the world’s largest and most important gathering for discussing issues of international development. Along with Vietnam’s Ministry of Planning & Investment, the Foundation and the KDI hosted one of the best attended panels at the forum on the theme of Asian Approaches to Development Cooperation.

Now in its fourth year, the AADC dialogues have focused on the changing aid landscape, rising inequality and pro-poor growth, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and social mobility. Meetings have been convened in various Asian cities, including Beijing, Colombo, Kuala Lumpur, New Delhi, Bangkok, Hoi An, and Seoul. Sessions have examined commonalities and differences among Asian development cooperation approaches, and provided a platform for South-South knowledge-sharing and cooperation. Exposure visits have included sharing Songdo, Korea’s smart, green city masterplan with experts from Asia’s other megacities, and visiting a Chinese-supported highway construction project in Sri Lanka.

The Foundation has also co-convened seminars, public events, and policy roundtables with Australia National University’s Development Policy Centre, USAID, UNDP L’Agence Française de Développement (AFD), and the Lowy Institute, to bring together Asian and Western development policy officials and experts to share strategies and seek opportunities for collaboration on global development challenges. Topics have

SHARING KNOWLEDGE ON ASIAN DEVELOPMENT POLICY AND APPROACHES

Since 2010, The Asia Foundation and the Korea Development Institute (KDI) have jointly organized the Asian Approaches to Development Cooperation (AADC) dialogue series bringing together leading experts and practitioners from China, India, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, as well as partner countries and “traditional” donors, to share and contribute their perspectives on development cooperation and Asia’s critical development challenges.

The aim of The Asia Foundation’s program is to improve the quality of development policy and implementation in Asia through proactive engagement with Asian providers and applied South-South cooperation.

Our three program areas: Sharing knowledge on Asian development policy and approaches; Strengthening the capacity of Asian providers; and Scaling up South-South cooperation.

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included the intersection of foreign policy and development cooperation, global public goods, development priorities for the post-2015, post-MDG period, and new modalities of development finance.

**CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT**

As growing development cooperation partners, Asian countries also face capacity challenges as they diversify and expand their assistance, participate more actively in international development fora, and streamline the management of their development cooperation programs. In response to this need, The Asia Foundation provides customized training and exposure visits for officials, facilitates dialogue and reviews of Asian development strategies, and supports data collection, documentation, and cataloguing of Asian cooperation experience.

For example, since 2008, the Foundation and the Korea Development Institute School of Public Policy and Management have worked together to organize study tours and fellowships for Korean government officials and advanced development studies students. Partner countries include Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Laos, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Nepal.

In Thailand, the Foundation is supporting the Faculty of Political Science of Thammasat University to conduct a comparative study of Japan’s and Thailand’s development assistance policies and practical experience in Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam that will yield concrete guidelines for future refinement and exchange of experience. To help enhance transparency and understanding of India’s development cooperation, the Foundation and the New Delhi-based Centre for Policy Research have developed a comprehensive database of India’s outgoing development assistance. This data is being used to inform India’s own Development Partnership Administration, as well as the wider community, about India’s increasing development cooperation footprint. The Foundation, in partnership with Research and Information Systems for Developing Countries (India), is also producing the first-ever volume on the history and evolution of Indian development cooperation. In Malaysia, the Foundation is collaborating with the International Institute of Public Policy and Management at the University of Malaya to develop a forward strategy for Malaysia’s technical cooperation efforts.

Across the region, the Foundation is also supporting the development of new networks in Korea, China, Thailand, and India which provide a platform for national stakeholders from government, civil society, academia, and the private sector to discuss their country’s role in South-South Cooperation. In 2014, The Foundation will work with these networks to develop and pilot an evaluation and impact assessment framework for South-South Cooperation efforts in Asia.

**SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION**

Since the HLF-4, South-South Cooperation has emerged as a key component of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation. South-South Cooperation is a long-standing modality amongst Asian partners. The Asia Foundation’s extensive regional networks, practical understanding of capacity needs and strengths, and track record of facilitating horizontal partnerships offer a viable, convenient platform for South-South knowledge exchange. For more than a decade, the Foundation has established itself as a facilitator of South-South partnerships in critical areas such as central and local governance capacity building, security and justice reform, women’s and minority rights, leadership development, and disaster management.

With support from USAID, the Foundation is working with the National Institute of Emergency Management, housed under the Chinese Academy of Governance, to strengthen disaster management in China. A core element includes experience-sharing via study programs to Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines. Under its Partnership with the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Foundation is organizing additional exchanges between China and its ASEAN partners focusing on foreign disaster assistance.

As part of the Foundation’s Leaders of Influence program, religious leaders from the Maldives and Bangladesh have participated in knowledge exchange and learning visits to Malaysia and Indonesia. The visits provide exposure to the roles that Islamic leaders in other countries play in addressing critical development challenges such as education, health, and community empowerment, and in promoting women’s rights within an Islamic framework.

These opportunities for dialogue and networking aim to contribute to a dynamic and evolving global discourse on practical development effectiveness issues involving development actors of all kinds.