

Proposal for a Session at the Development Cooperation Forum: South-South Collaboration in Health Biotechnology

We propose a side event session to discuss a recent large-scale research project on South-South collaboration in health biotechnology. This project was carried out in collaboration between groups in five developing countries and Canada. The key collaborating team was:

Brazil – Tirso Sáenz, University of Brasília

Canada – Halla Thorsteinsdóttir, University of Toronto

China - Wen Ke, Chinese Academy of Sciences

Egypt - Magdy Madkour, Library of Alexandria

India - Sachin Chaturvedi, Research and Information Systems for Developing Countries

Zambia - Victor Konde, University of Zambia

Rationale: While collaboration between developing countries, or South-South collaboration, has been frequently on the development agenda since the mid 1950s, not much research has been carried out on South-South collaboration in practise, particularly in science intensive fields. For example, while developing countries regularly express their wish to promote their joint development in science and technology, more knowledge is available about South-South trade and Foreign Direct Investment than about levels of joint ventures in science fields or the opportunities and challenges for researchers in developing countries to work together. This lack of knowledge limits the development of effective programs/policies to encourage and harness South-South collaboration. While there are potentials for costs and benefits of South-South collaboration, it is still unknown how the experience and practise of South-South collaboration in scientific fields has been. Even knowledge about the levels of science intensive South-South collaboration is limited.

To fill this knowledge gap a group of researchers from five developing countries and Canada decided to conduct a large-scale study on South-South collaboration in health biotechnology. Developing countries have shared health needs, which they have expressed an intent to address jointly by frequently signing South-South collaboration agreements in health and biotechnology. As several developing countries have built expertise in health biotechnology there are increasing opportunities for South-South learning in this field.

Description of study: The study was large in scope and examined both research collaboration, primarily involving researchers at academic and public research institutions, and entrepreneurial collaboration, mainly involving private sector firms. It used multiple methods, including a survey of biotechnology firms about their South-

South collaborations; a scientometric analysis of South-South research collaboration using co-authored publications in international peer reviewed journals and case study research on South-South collaboration examining collaboration of 13 developing countries. For this research the group interviewed 348 experts in developing countries that had either had direct experience of South-South research or entrepreneurial collaboration, or who had played a role in planning the collaboration or supported the collaboration in other ways.

Key findings: The key findings indicate that South- South research collaboration is modest, but slowly increasing. Firms in developing countries seem, however, to be more heavily engaged in South-South collaboration with more than 1 in every 4 firms that responded to our survey stating that they collaborate with other developing countries. Further, even though governments and international organisations can cultivate close linkages between researchers in developing countries by setting up programmes to support their collaborations, and allocating dedicated funding to them, the collaboration is still seriously hampered by lack of resources dedicated to fund the collaboration. This research showed that in order to have impacts the South-South collaboration should be looked at as interactions of innovation systems in the participating countries and attention needs to be placed on how the innovation systems in the participating countries are aligned. With dedicated funding and well aligned innovation systems, developing countries can work together to better address local health needs that may otherwise be overlooked by developed countries. They can thereby promote innovation and increase availability of affordable health products for meeting the MDGs and improve global health.

Relevance to Development Cooperation Forum: This session provides results of a systematic research on South-South collaboration in a science intensive field, the health biotechnology field, and fills a gap in knowledge on science based collaboration between developing countries. It thus provides an independent and high-quality analysis of development cooperation relevant to diverse groups, such as policy makers, civil society organizations, Members of Parliaments, local authorities, private sector and foundations from diverse countries around the world. The research is centred on extensive data collection involving experts in developing countries who have had direct experiences of South-South collaboration and thereby provides an opportunity for bottom-up experiences of collaboration to be shared with participants at the Development Cooperation Forum. A session discussing the research on South-South collaboration in health biotechnology presents, therefore, a unique opportunity to have evidence based practises of South-South collaboration inform and influence the multi-stakeholder dialogue on international development cooperation at the global level that takes place at the Development Cooperation Forum.