

Policy brief

Unlocking the potential of Southern Trade Unions through South-South Cooperation

Experiences from the IIWE South-South Exchange Programme

Tom De Bruyn & Huib Huyse – April 2017

Southern trade unions possess relevant experiences and practices that can inform their counterparts in other countries to address similar challenges. From 2012 to 2016 the Belgian trade union ACV-CSC/IIWE in cooperation with ten Southern trade unions carried out a capacity building programme to unlock this knowledge by facilitating exchanges. An end-of programme evaluation of HIVA-KU Leuven identifies the main characteristics of the strategy as well as good practices of how South-South exchange can induce organisational and policy change.

South-South and Trilateral Cooperation

South-South Cooperation and Trilateral Cooperation (SSC-TC) has received increasing attention in development. It refers to cooperation between Latin American, African or Asia actors (SSC) sometimes with the financial or logistic support of a third actor (TC). SST-TC recognises the expertise of Southern actors to address development challenges and build capacities in other regions and promotes an approach based on principles like solidarity, non-conditionality, non-interference, equal partnerships, and mutual benefit.

While SSC-TC can involve a variety of actors, most of the discussion has focused up to now on governmental agencies. The efforts and potential contributions of civil society organisations have been greatly neglected. Nevertheless, cooperation among civil society and in particular trade unions, might be better apt to adhere to the SSC-TC principles than governments, because of the shared ideology, trust, and objectives. Moreover, trade unions have been aligning themselves already for decades in global networks. However, despite increasing efforts of ITUC, the ILO and TUDCN, very few examples of trade union led SSC-TC have been documented.

Evaluation of the IIWE SSE Programme

The HIVA evaluation was carried out in May-November 2016 and is based on document analysis, skype interviews with Southern-based partners, a survey, and observations during an international workshop with the trade union representatives in South Africa. The results of the evaluation provided inputs into the new strategies of ACV-CSC/IIWE for South-South cooperation and related monitoring and evaluation procedures.

IIWE South-South Exchange Programme

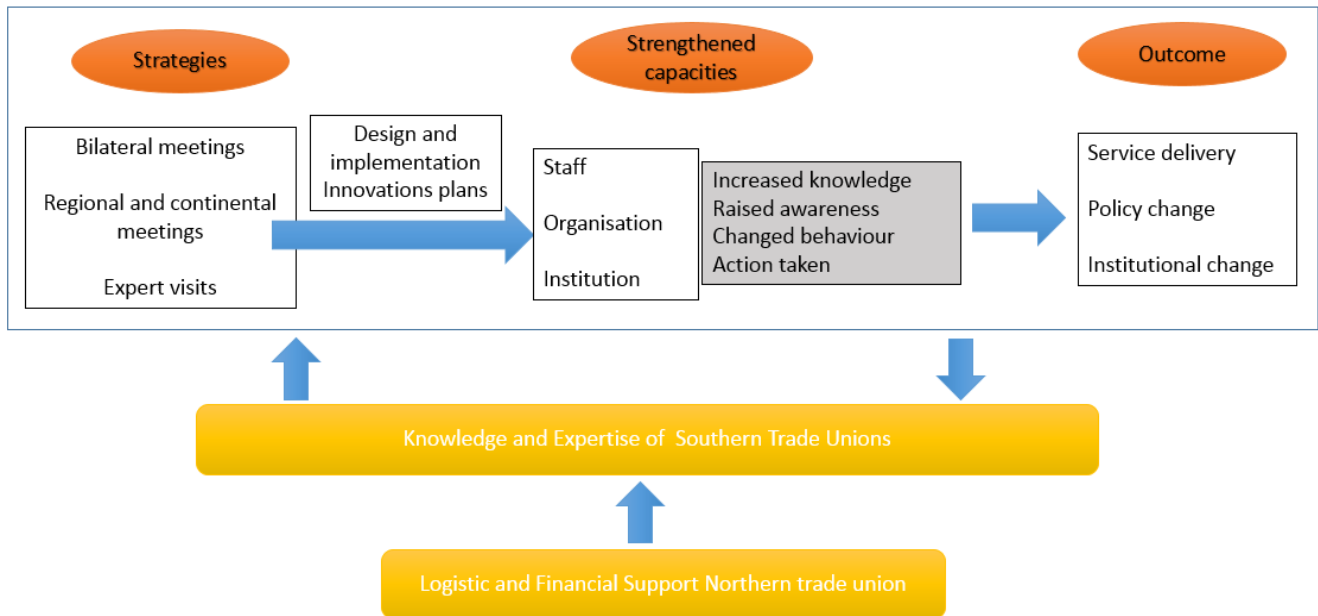
From 2012 to 2016, the Institute for International Workers Education (IIWE) of the Belgian trade union ACV-CSC carried out a South-South Exchange (SSE) programme in which ten trade unions from Latin America, Africa and Asia were assisted in sharing expertise to build capacities and induce societal change.

The SSE programme fits within a broader capacity building framework for the partner organisations of IIWE to implement the decent work agenda. The framework combines different strategies to build capacities, ranging from financial support provided by the Northern institution for capacity building efforts by individual partner organisations, over peer-to-peer cooperation with Northern actors, to participation in global thematic networks, and involvement of locally sourced expertise. In 2012, IIWE decided to add a South-South exchange component because previous cooperation with partner organisations had demonstrated the need and potential for learning by partner organisations from Southern counterparts' practices and solutions.

Figure 1 depicts the theory of change of the programme. In short, the strategy used a mix of methods permitting

Southern partners experience on five specific topics to be used to develop human resources, organisational and institutional capacities which would facilitate and induce improvements in service delivery (e.g. training, legal support), as well as changes at policy level (e.g. collective bargaining agreements, labour laws) and at institutional level (e.g. tripartite bodies, labour inspection).

The five specific topics were initially identified by IIWE as challenges for trade union work in which partner organisations of IIWE possessed most valuable experience as these challenges take different or bigger forms in the South. They included gender, informal economy, domestic work, trade union rights and environment & climate change.



The strategic mix allowed different working configurations and in-depth and broader exchanges.

- Partner-to-partner exchanges aimed to share and identify good practices between two partner organisations on one of the five topics. For one week, a team of 6 to 9 people with relevant functions and motivations of one national organisation, including political leaders, staff and militants, visited another national organization, i.e. in another Southern country. The host organised field visits (with companies, negotiation platforms, policy makers) and discussion moments to enable the exchange of ideas and experiences.
- Three to five day continental and international seminars with one to three participants of each of the Southern partner organisations, as well as representatives of the Northern organisation (IIWE) to share experiences and to further identify good practices which may be adaptable to the own national contexts. Methods included field visits, workshops, and plenary sessions.

- Southern experts visited trade unions and delivered assistance to conduct studies, evaluations, trainings, coaching or participatory workshops on specific themes, in order to facilitate adaptation of borrowed ideas to own national contexts, and their implementation.

A key focus of all the methods was the emphasis on taking action. This was ensured by the introduction of 'innovation plans' to be developed from identification of relevant practices during bilateral and continental/international meetings, constituting outlines for action to be undertaken by the own organization. It was equally recognized that further development of 'innovation plans' would require the help of Southern experts to help facilitate the transition of identified best practice to best fit within a specific context.

The Northern partner (IIWE) provided the funding via a federal government subsidy and coordinated the program, while the ten partner organisations took up specific coordination roles for the exchanges or seminars and provided their expertise

Achievements of the Programme

The evaluation of the programme confirmed the assertion that Southern partners' experiences can provide solutions to address similar challenges of other trade unions and identified a number of good practices. Important was the acknowledgement that the 'foreign' solutions needed adaptation to local contexts. Moreover, the SSE activities were also used as an instrument to lobby governments and advocate for policy changes. Here are some examples of results on each of the five themes.

Gender

CNT of Niger was inspired by the experiences of the Moroccan trade union CDT to lobby with trade unions for a minimum representation of women in their congresses and to set up gender focused trainings. In addition the exchanges with other Southern trade unions urged CNT to set up political campaigns for the right and added value of education of girls until 16 years of age.

Environment and climate change

Good practices of UGT Brazil in São Paulo informed KSBSI of Indonesia to negotiate successfully an agreement with the Indonesian government in two regions for the recycling of waste in companies. Moreover, KSBSI mainstreamed environmental issues in all training modules after the exposure to the Brazilian practices.

Domestic work

The Indian lobby and advocacy campaigns of NDWF inspired the South African trade union CONSAWU in a variety of ways. For instance CONSAWU uses the Indian method of sending postcards to campaign on teenage

pregnancy in the realm of domestic work, and incorporated Indian examples in training manuals on domestic workers. Furthermore India provided a solution to the South African trade union's challenge to organise domestic workers with limited means by showing how they could be organized according to the streets in which they worked.

The Indian trade union already lobbied for a long time for a welfare Board at the Jarkhand Government, but the breakthrough was provided by the mediatized visit of the South African delegation. This visit was used as an instrument which finally convinced the Jarkhand Government to take action.

Informal sector

CSC from the DR Congo got the idea from CSTT of Togo to organise market vendors in the informal sectors per type of activity and products instead of sector. Basic committees were installed and after winning the elections gave them the mandate to successfully negotiate improvements in income and labour conditions. As a result half of the taxes of market vendors are used for cleaning and safety and amelioration of market infrastructure, while taxes have decreased with 30%.

Trade union rights

Colombian and Cambodian trade unions recognized that they are confronted with similar safety issues. After exchanging practices and policies to address these problems, the trade unions developed and implemented new prevention and protection techniques, as well as cooperation with other actors (such as police and NGO's). Afterwards CLC of Cambodia developed a comprehensive plan on Trade Unions Rights through Social Protection with the assistance of an expert from Indonesia.

Participating trade unions (partner organisations of IIWE)

Confédération Démocratique du Travail Maroc (CDT)

Cambodian Labour Confederation (CLC)

Confederation of South African Workers' Unions (CONSAWU)

Confederation des Travailleurs Haïtiens (CTH)

National Domestic Workers Movement Trade Union India (NDWF)

Confederación de Trabajadores de Colombia (CDT)

Confédération Nigérienne du Travail (CNT)

Confédération Syndicale du Congo (CSC)

Konfederatie Serikat Buruh Sejahtera Indonesia (KSBSI)

União Geral dos Trabalhadores (UGT)

Policy recommendations

The evaluation concludes that South-South Exchange can be an effective capacity building strategy to build capacities among trade unions. By tapping into the extensive experiences and practices of Southern trade unions **South-South Exchange unlocks a vast amount of know-how and expertise** next to that of the traditional, Northern based body of knowledge. Moreover, while there are differences in trade unions capacities and resources, the evaluation showed that contrary to many state-to-state cooperation, **the experiences of trade unions allow for genuine two-directional learning processes**. This was most obvious when trade unions experienced common challenges in similar political or economic contexts and exchanged strategies to address these. In 2017 the programme will enter a second phase in which South-South Exchanges will be continued and expanded with joint campaigning strategies. Organisations exploring to set up or support South-South cooperation can draw inspiration from the experiences of the IIWE South-South Exchange programme:

Address a well-defined demand

South-South Exchange responds to a specific well-defined need for capacity building which a trade union identified in the course of its campaigns, internal organisational process or service delivery. South-South Exchange should be regarded as one of the options available which can potentially address this demand.

Embed in action oriented process

South-South Exchange is most effective when embedded in an action oriented process. The evaluation of the programme showed that exchanges which did not include a well-defined plan of action in which a commitment was made to use and take on board the lessons learned risked to have limited effects. The importance of the involvement of a combination of high ranked officials (to ensure political commitment) and domain-specific technicians (to ensure in-depth knowledge sharing) was crucial in this respect.

Include mechanisms to identify relevant complementary Southern practices

Also within Latin America, Africa and Asia, contexts in which trade unions operate differ to great extents. Effective South-South learning necessitates possibilities to identify challenges together with trade unions which possess the most relevant expertise to address the issue at hand. This implies easy access to information about other trade unions' practices, as well as mechanisms and spaces in which trade unions can meet and get to know each other's challenges and contexts.

Adopt a mixed methods based strategy

Trade unions practices and learning experiences vary, therefore an effective programme allows to make use of different exchanging methods, for instance bilateral, continental and expert meetings, field visits, discussions, on-the-job-training, and joint action taking.

Evaluate and document practices

Whilst the ex-post evaluation un-earthed a number of outcomes on different levels, it also showed the importance of having appropriate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in place during the implementation of the programme. These mechanisms should permit to identify how and where the exchanges contribute to policy and institutional effects, to document the good practices (and challenges) and use these in promotion and lobby and advocating strategies of trade union work.

Provide logistic and financial support

South-South Exchange programmes involving multiple actors and countries require abundant logistical and financial resources. This is where external support, such as coming from Northern actors, can play a facilitating role. The challenge however, is to avoid that the support provider sets the agenda for South-South Exchange.

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