**Workshop**

**Learning from South-South and Triangular Cooperation:**

**Sharing Knowledge for Development**

Bogotá, September 26-27, 2011

**Session 1: Towards good practices to improve quality**

**of South-South and Triangular Cooperation**

***Keynote speech***

***Mohammad Shamsul Alam***

***Deputy Secretary***

***Aid Effectiveness Unit***

***Economic Relations Division***

***Ministry of Finance***

***Government of the Peoples’***

***Republic of Bangladesh***

**Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen**

South-South Cooperation (SSC) is the most contemporary and vibrant cooperation platform that is caters the needs of a developing country like Bangladesh. SSC, during the last two years, has significant achievements in sharing development experience, transferring knowledge and strengthening horizontal partnership. It now has become a tangible source of inspiration in building effective development cooperation in between the low-to-Middle Income Countries (MICs) of the Southern region.

A kind of new cooperation architecture has emerged through building horizontal partnerships by sharing development experience and knowledge of best practices among the countries in the region. It is only the beginning of integrating knowledge towards fostering practices beyond North-South. More needs to be learned about SSC modalities and practices. The leadership shown by MICs in sharing experience using this platform represents a valuable source that complements the traditional North-South Cooperation. The gradual increase in triangular cooperation has reinforced this trend, allowing Northern support to horizontal partnerships and enabling SSC to expand its scope and meet demands from more partners’ countries.

* The effectiveness of South-South and Triangular Cooperation, as tools for horizontal partnerships, stems from its adaptability and flexibility to particular contexts, and envisioning a long term perspective.
* Ownership and mutual accountability still remain to be key challenges for many years in the future. Ownership and mutual accountability can be ensured when supported by strong commitment in terms of political, institutional and legal framework to contribute to capacity development for exercising country leadership involving all partners and stakeholders.
* Mechanism and operational arrangement should be put in place to facilitate sharing of information, transparency, monitoring and evaluation to ensure mutual accountability.

**Distinguished Colleagues**

Let me take the opportunity to extend our heartiest thanks to TT-SSC for their outstanding imagination to initiate collecting tangible evidence on “what works best” through case stories and case studies. The findings and lessons of the rich and diverse analytical work on South-South and Triangular Cooperation has opened a very effective window in the area of knowledge sharing involving Southern academia.

Like many other developing and middle income countries, we in Bangladesh has learned how to embed regional cooperation in an effective framework of joint leadership, where all parties contribute and share responsibilities in every stages of development intervention i.e. planning, implementing and evaluating. The Government of Bangladesh in recent years prioritized generation of shared ownership through alignment with national strategies, as well as mobilizing political support in a collaborative fashion at multi-level. The Government led formulation of Joint Cooperation Strategy (JCS) and annual Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) are the local level transformation of SSC lessons into practical actions.

Policy-makers, at the highest level, Members of the Parliament, for example and practitioners, at the implementation level, have been anchored hand-in-hand to create formal and informal links to identifying together key challenges, practices and solutions to be shared and adapted with a view to policy and institutional changes. A new dimension of building sustainable trust among all stakeholders has started to take shape at the national level.

But developing a common vision and a shared set of priorities to make aid more effective is not an easy task in many developing countries like Bangladesh. Although, Government ownership over development processes in Bangladesh has been assessed recently as moderate, weak linkages between policy, strategy and implementation procedures remain to be a major challenge.

Bangladesh’s major aid flow represents the contribution of developed countries representing mainly North. The manner in which aid is provided to Bangladesh reflects aspects of fragmented vision and unrelated priorities. This limits its contribution to building tangible partnerships and its impact on developing national capacity to determine, lead and manage the development outcomes. The Government of Bangladesh is expected to exercise strong leadership to avoid fragmentation and mitigate challenges. However, government capacity to press development partners, especially large volume donors, to rationalize their activities is often lacking.

The challenges are aggravated by the spread of aid budget over a large number of sectors by most development partners. This undermines the value and effectiveness of foreign assistance in Bangladesh, as it increases the transaction costs, as well as the coordination challenge, resulting in potentially wasteful duplication and overlaps in the delivery of aid, competition for scarce skills, and distorting of sectoral allocations of domestic resources. In sectors where increasing fragmentation leads to growing competition between development partners, the effect can be that the development partners and government ministry counterparts become increasingly focused on the results of their own projects, losing sight of the broader and more strategic objectives of the national programme. The competition among many donors for visibility and quick success at the country level creates burden on the limited public sector capacity and in effect, undermines the common-pool resource rather than building it up.

Development Partners frequently refer to ‘ownership’ when they would like the government to take the ‘lead’ on a specific issue. However, DPs demand more ‘leadership’, mainly where they would like to see the government take actions on issues high on the Development Partners’ agenda. But, in fact they are frequently unwilling to fully accept government leadership and ownership and often undermine it through interventions that are not in line with national priorities, unpredictable aid disbursements, and fragmented aid delivery through parallel structures. Moreover, the assistance policy of some of the well-meaning DPs to limit the concept of national ownership only to participatory stakeholder consultations engender misrepresentation that sometimes lead them to act on behalf of the host government and its citizens in the assumption that they know what is the best for the country. DPs’ HQ demands on country offices to demonstrate progress – of whatever kind, sometimes lead to *ad hoc* approaches focusing on short-term results that also undermine national ownership.

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

The lessons learnt from the case studies ignited the process of prioritizing division of labour in order to take full advantage of the complementary strength of each partner. Accountability mechanism has been strengthened in Bangladesh with flexibility and continued adaptation by incorporating Development Results Framework (DRF) in our latest (6th) Five Year Plan launched from July 2011. We are now focused on regional integration for contexualising longer-term relationship. The Government, with the introduction of Joint Cooperation Strategy, formalized the process of sharing knowledge and information among partners through LCG Working Groups, covering a broad range of sectors and involving diverse set of actors, for example, civil society, academia, local government and development partners.

The most important lesson from the SSC, we consider, that received highest attention in Bangladesh, is the involvement of academia in aid management forum. This is practically a bold step initiated by TT-SSC which we find to carry enormous value in the post-Busan era. The recognition of the role of academia alongside the practitioners and executives is well appreciated in Bangladesh. We have, in recent times, brought in academic institutions and think-tank in different forums like BDF, PD evaluation, PD Monitoring Survey, Five-Year Plan consultations, MDGs progress assessment. We see a great potential in this collaboration in order to get critical evaluation on the impact of development interventions. This mechanism has started playing key role in Bangladesh to identify experiences that offer solutions adaptable to concrete needs. A balance in thoughts has started to emerge through specialized brokering mechanism with information on both supply and demand side.

We are immensely benefitted from SSC engagement during the last couple of years in capacity development through knowledge management. SSC has prompted key challenges in the transformation of aid effectiveness into development effectiveness and ignited issues on several fronts including, sharing experience and successes in capacity development, increasing the flow of information to improve aid effectiveness and advancing the need for beneficial technology transfers dedicated to improved resource management at the country level. The SSC efforts provided a unique experience for government to learn about other countries ‘Good Practices’ in aid management through peer-to-peer learning and sharing process.