



**Partners in  
South-South Cooperation**  
Together for Sustainable Development



## Partners in South-South Cooperation: Benin, Costa Rica, Bhutan

“South-South Cooperation is a visionary idea of the Netherlands that is starting to pay off today. Just to mention a few of its benefits: the discovery of Afro-Caribbean cultural links, music, new agricultural methods, eco-tourism, diversification of diets of rural people, coping with climate change, the development of a happiness index, and the promotion of women micro-entrepreneurship.”

René Castro, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Costa Rica



In the 21st Century, national and international schemes for development and cooperation are changing rapidly. A new environment is emerging in development cooperation; one of equal partnership between developed and developing countries in their economic development. The Netherlands is bringing people together in three countries across three continents to share skills and knowledge on agriculture, environmental issues and much more.

## Partners in South-South Cooperation

Partners in South-South Cooperation (formerly Programme for South-South Cooperation) between Benin, Bhutan and Costa Rica (PSC) is a strategic partnership for cooperation on sustainable development initiated and funded by the Netherlands. Cooperation between Costa Rica in Central America, Benin in West Africa, and Bhutan in South Asia has already led to 36 separate programmes delivering thousands of jobs and hundreds of new businesses and products. The focus of the programme rests on four intertwined pillars of sustainable development: economic development, social development, environmental protection and gender equity. One of the amazing results of the programme is that the sectors developed through the programme are being sustained without further intervention after just three years. Programme costs are kept low by making use of the expertise of those directly benefiting: local farmers and entrepreneurs.

“The advantage of South-South Cooperation over North-South Cooperation is that it applies the Paris Declaration Principles. Beneficiary states identify their own priorities and execute them with financial support from the North.”

– Mathias Pofagi, Partners in South-South Cooperation representative in Benin

“Southern nations become both co-donor and co-recipient, advise each other and work together. We welcome such partners. We face the rising consequences of climate change. North and South need to work on this basis.”

– Matthijs van Bonzel, Dutch Ambassador to Costa Rica

“The programme sets the tone for a balanced and mature relationship; it fits well for both our nations. Our relations evolve through the promotion of international legal order and trade, not aid.”

– Matthijs van Bonzel, Dutch Ambassador to Costa Rica

## A unique approach based on equality, reciprocity and participation

Recognising that poverty alleviation can only be achieved in the context of sustainable development, Partners in South-South Cooperation seeks to catalyse the transition to sustainability by supporting policy innovations and seeding initiatives, replicating successes, disseminating information, and establishing new partnerships with civil society organisations across partner countries. Sustainable development is interpreted as achieving a balance between social, ecological and economic development for current and future generations, and ensuring that economic sectors can be sustained without dependence on outside intervention.

### The main thematic areas of the programme are:

- Sustainable tourism
- Sustainable production and consumption chains
- Conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity
- Access to sustainable energy and efficient energy use
- Gender equity
- South-South cooperation

The basic technical feature of the Partners in South-South Cooperation is an institutional arrangement and financial facility for ‘call for proposals’ from a bottom-up approach, taking into consideration the guiding principles of equality, reciprocity and participation and other criteria, laid down in the Programme for South-South Cooperation Regulations in May 2005. Programmes are practical, hands-on and with a strong focus on sustainability. Through their joint projects, people from the various countries have built lasting friendships and remain engaged with each other.

The programme has brought people together to exchange knowledge and expertise: Experts in Benin introduced people in Costa Rica and Bhutan to the idea of edible insects as source of extra income and nutritional cattle feed; Bhutanese experts shared knowledge with farmers in Costa Rica and Benin on the cultivation of high value shiitake mushrooms; and Costa Rican farmers taught their colleagues in Benin how to cultivate and market organic pineapples.

South-South cooperation makes developing countries equal partners in their own development and creates joint global responsibility for solving problems. By breaking away from North-South development stereotypes, global development issues are addressed in new and modern ways. The approach recognises that all of us can be leaders for change. The old North-South dependency has made way for new relationships of cooperation between the North and South.

## High impact development policies: Making aid effective

Development cooperation has been heavily criticised in recent years with a range of popular books arguing that aid has failed and is a waste of money. The overriding criticisms have been that development aid resources should be used more effectively and that ownership by the South is missing. In response to these concerns, South-South cooperation is appealing as a model based on the notion that ownership for sustainable development in the South must be with the South, involving both governments and non-state actors (civil society, universities and the private sector).

“It’s completely different from an expensive consultant being flown in from the West to lecture poor farmers on how they should change the way they do things. People have taken the initiative themselves. The innovations have been made possible through the exchange of experience and techniques between the countries themselves and creating livelihoods in a modern global economy. These farmers understand each other without words because they share a common language in the experiences they share.”

- Prof Mirjam van Reisen, Chair of International Social Responsibility, Tilburg University, the Netherlands

South-South Cooperation facilitates the creation of empathy between southern countries and creates a better understanding of realistic strategies for problem resolution. The closeness of southern countries to the identification of the main problems can increase the cost effectiveness of technical cooperation; promote the transfer of appropriate technology; and enhance ownership, leadership and capacity building among southern countries.

The international consensus around aid effectiveness has promoted a serious reorientation towards increased ownership over development by developing countries. Aid effectiveness also promotes donor alignment and harmonisation around national policy approaches, strengthening the role of national governments, combating the donor-driven approach and reducing project fragmentation. The European Union is a leader in the promotion of aid effectiveness, and South-South cooperation will be an important part of its methodology to increase ownership, create local leadership and ensure the more efficient use of resources.



## Shiitake mushrooms: Generating income sustainably

Shiitake mushrooms have high economic value, particularly on the international market where they are the third-most relevant mushroom. Farmers in Costa Rica learnt from their Bhutanese counterparts how to commercialise shiitake mushrooms to generate income.

During the project period, mushroom farmers were visited and supported in cultivation and post harvest processing and marketing. By the end of the project, each community was able to sell their increased and improved production, without the help of any of the organisations involved in the project. The project facilitated the production and sale of mushrooms in a continuous way by:

- Conducting research on how to improve the quality and quantity of shiitake mushrooms
- Providing training on shiitake harvesting, post-harvest management, packaging, and producing marinated and dried mushrooms
- Conducting market research on how to access potential customers
- Developing branding including a brand name and labels for the fresh, marinated and dried shiitake mushrooms
- Assisting in the use of biodegradable packaging including trays and food-grade plastic film, making it easier to sell the product commercially



## Achievements

In nearly four years, the programme has led to the empowerment of women, creation of income for poor farmers, protection of mangrove ecosystems, a reduction in the use of chemical fertilizers, distribution of solar panels and improvement of hygiene in poor communities through waste management. The programme addresses, directly and indirectly, the prioritised sustainable development themes (especially water, energy, agriculture and biodiversity) and the Millennium Development Goals (especially poverty reduction, gender equity, environmental sustainability and partnership for development).

Another attractive attribute of this programme is its cost-effectiveness: the total investment for the 36 projects of Partners in South-South Cooperation over the last four years was (only) US\$ 13.2 million. These projects are independently continuing only three years after the economic sector was built.



## Looking ahead

Global problems require global cooperation and leadership. South-South cooperation focusing on creating livelihoods for people in remote areas and in poverty opens up areas for new economic development in sustainable ways. Mutual learning across the globe facilitates cooperation and understanding. The pilot programmes implemented by Partners in South-South cooperation have been successful and deserve replication and upscaling.

To read more about the project: [www.southsouthcooperation.net](http://www.southsouthcooperation.net)  
Contacts us at: [info@south-southcooperation.org](mailto:info@south-southcooperation.org)  
Look for us in Facebook as: [Partners in South-South Cooperation](#)

## Award winning programme

In 2010, Partners in South-South Cooperation won the United Nations' South-South Cooperation Award in the categories 'Partnership' and 'Climate Change Solutions'. This award recognises Partners in South-South Cooperation as a successful programme because its activities emphasise mutual needs and interests based on reciprocity, equality between the members and the participation of governments, civil society, universities and businesses.



## Some facts at a glance

Partners in South-South Cooperation has brought significant economic, social and environmental benefits to the people in the partner countries, especially women.

- 21 projects in Benin; 23 in Costa Rica; and 21 in Bhutan
- 174 new services created
- 674 new products created
- 326 new enterprises and 880 new jobs created
- sales of US\$ 122,747 registered in the last 6 months
- 1132 women involved in decision making
- 3505 farmers converted to organic production; 15,903 hectares used for organic production