

## **Academic mobility for Colombia and Mexico as a strategy for South-South Cooperation**

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### **Abstract**

The objective of this document is to estimate the degree of compliance of the South-South Cooperation principles and characteristics for the academic and student mobility platform of the Pacific Alliance, precisely for Colombia and Mexico. Therefore, the consensual agenda among the parties, valuation of the local, participation and ownership principles were considered, in addition to the low costs during project implementation and the engagement of both the recipient and donor in the cooperation initiatives. Quantitative information from the Pacific Alliance was considered. Also, an online questionnaire was applied to higher education institutions from Colombia and Mexico, in addition to semi-structured interviews made to the focal points of the platform. It was concluded that the platform is a South-South Cooperation project which is forthcoming to consolidation and that the principles of ownership and valuation of local issues are still in a strengthening phase for the two selected countries.

**Keywords:** Pacific Alliance, South-South Cooperation, Colombia-Mexico, Academic Mobility.

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Date of Submission: 20-11-2021

Date of Acceptance: 05-12-2021

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### **I. Introduction**

The Platform for Student and Academic Mobility (PMEA) of the Pacific Alliance (PA) is one of the projects of the South-South Cooperation (SSC) of this integration bloc. The PMEA is a programme of exchange grants to contribute to the formation of human capital between countries and is based on cooperation, a fundamental pillar of PA.

The scientific literature on PA academic mobility is not very extensive, despite the fact that it has been a pioneering project. Aguilar [1] carried out one of the first studies on the PMEA in which he links the approach to academic cooperation and contrasts it with other grant programmes in the region. The main conclusion points to the consolidation of SSC in the academic sphere and an instrument that contributes to deep integration in the bloc. Gaitán [2] considers PA mobility as a way of equalising opportunities among the countries' students, in particular based on the government strategies implemented by Colombia. In its conclusions, it recommends Chile's methodological and innovative learning in education, Peru's experience in academic cooperation with Europe and Asia, and Mexico's academic-business networks. Pineda [3] analyses student and labour mobility as an opportunity for access by professionals from the four countries, and highlights the role of PA in favouring the internationalisation of education in Colombia.

Morales & Manosalba [4] question the economic model of PA countries to adjust the labour market and the education system; from their perspective, the PMEA promotes qualified human capital towards market-determined actions. The authors conclude that this is an important SSC logic for research and teaching in Latin America, but with a marked bias towards specific and technical careers, under a curriculum and objective-based knowledge. Didou [5] agrees with Morales & Manosalba [4] on the SSC strategy represented by the PMEA, but highlights the imbalances and disagreements between the countries. The author recommends the instrumental use of networks and placements abroad as a career accelerator, avoiding exclusion from technical education and strategically defining areas for participation, both institutional and individual.

In the same line of the convergence between the market economy and mobility in higher education in PA, Sueyoshi [6] believes that the PMEA is a mechanism for the creation of global value chains within PA

because students come from similar fields of knowledge and benefit from the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the destination countries, which contributes to the formation of specialised human resources.

On the economic importance of education, Rodríguez & Amparo [7] analyse the role of the PMEAs, but in particular the educational issue of the AP Education Technical Group, to compare the policies of the four countries with those of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC) in economic, technical and professional education actions. They highlight the links of cooperation and training of high-level human resources in APEC; in contrast to the priority to professional technical education for AP countries, academic mobility and innovation with indicators far from those presented by APEC countries.

Finally, Morales, et. al.[8] analyses the PMEAs from the perspective of government actors and HEIs in Mexico, with a public policy network approach. Autor believes that the mobility platform is a hierarchical network, which operates with limited resources and which represents an incentive for undergraduate students and for HEIs that do not have resources for the internationalisation of their activities.

Research shows the importance of the PMEAs as an SSC strategy in the framework of PA; however, there are no specific studies for the countries to corroborate compliance with principles linked to this type of cooperation. The objective of this document is to estimate the degree of compliance of SSC principles and characteristics for the PMEAs of the Pacific Alliance, specifically for Colombia and Mexico.

In addition to this introduction, the section on materials and methods is presented, which contains two elements, the first of which theoretically analyses the principles of SSC and the second points out the methodological strategy that defined this analysis. The results section, its discussion and the conclusions of the document are incorporated below. The main conclusion is that the PMEAs are SSC projects which are forthcoming to consolidation and that the principles of ownership and valuation of local issues are still in a strengthening phase for the two selected countries.

## **II. Literature Review**

### **South-South Cooperation Guiding Principles**

To understand SSC it is important to understand International Development Cooperation (IDC). Gómez & Sanahuja [9] point out that IDC is a set of actions between state and non-state stakeholders, between countries of different income levels, with the purpose of promoting the economic and social progress of the countries in the South, in order to achieve a more balanced and sustained relationship with the countries in the North.

According to Socas&Hourcade[10], IDC encompasses different categories, among which is South-South Cooperation. It is called horizontal or south-south cooperation when it is a developing country that has managed to obtain a capacity that it can transfer to another developing country. This type of cooperation focuses on the creation and strengthening of capacities through technical, economic, commercial and cultural cooperation models, achieving close links between countries and a multiplier effect in the dissemination of capacities [15]. SSC emerged in 1954 with the Panchsheel Treaty between India and China, as an idea of solidarity between countries with similar economic development. In the case of Latin America, in 1978 the Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA) emphasised technical and scientific cooperation between countries.

Since 1990, IDC has evolved from a focus on economic growth – financial assistance, resource transfer through international institutions, private sector contributions and pro-growth trade systems [11]– to an emphasis on development. Under the new paradigm on the conception of development, the emphasis is on human development and the fight against extreme poverty. The most developed countries expressed their doubts about the impact of development aid, in addition to the fact that other stakeholders, or now called partners, such as civil society organisations (CSOs), stood out in the work of cooperation. Countries pointed to the Millennium Development Declaration and Goals, as well as the Conference on Financing for Development (2002), as the forums in which stakeholders (donors and recipients) discussed the need to improve development aid.

The Millennium Development Goals were a first global agreement for development, with specific objectives and quantifiable targets, which made the fight against extreme poverty a priority, followed by targets such as establishing rules for a fair and sustainable trade, economic and financial system. Meanwhile, the Monterrey Conference on Financing showed the inadequacy of development aid and its quality, which prevent the achievement of development goals in the neediest countries.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) called for a debate on the joint performance of donor interventions [12], through the High Level Forums (HLF) on Aid Effectiveness (2003, Rome, 2005, Paris Declaration, 2008, Ghana, 2011, Busan<sup>1</sup>). The Second HLF and the Paris Declaration

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<sup>1</sup>At the first forum, the coordination of activities and cost reduction for the aid-recipient countries was agreed upon. The third forum obliges the transparency of official development aid, the reduction of conditions, deepens the principles of IDC, recognises the importance and participation of CSOs as agents of development, the relevance of South-South Cooperation and the defence of human rights and gender equality. As the fourth forum, it evaluated the results of the previous forums and gave negotiating capacity to the different development stakeholders and the launch of the platform “Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation” [12].

are highlighted because they adopted the principles that should influence the effectiveness of development aid: ownership, alignment, harmonisation, development results and mutual accountability.<sup>2</sup>

The resizing of the ICD paradigm, therefore, also affected SSC. Above all, in the dimension given to the States as protagonists of these actions. For Fagaburu [13], the role of governments was to provide an appropriate contextual framework for the development of cooperation by formulating, guiding and implementing the national development model. It was the State which, because of its institutional structure and decision-making power, held the capacity to shape the process of change of a nation through public policy.

Therefore, “the State should conceive South-South Cooperation as an essential tool to achieve the development of the country”[13]. The State should encourage policies that strengthen the organisation and articulation of each of its sectors and of non-state stakeholders, leading to a cycle of learning and progress between the two parties. Hence, non-state stakeholders such as CSOs, companies and universities played a preponderant role in the development of SSC. The state would thus guarantee that the social, economic and political context, both at the domestic and international level, was adequate for the correct development of SSC.

Based on this new vision, international and academic organisations have proposed more specific principles to determine whether a project can be considered an SSC initiative. On the one hand, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [14] emphasises solidarity as a fundamental element of the historical background of SSC (see Table 1). Meanwhile, Acuña& Vergara [15] propose principles that are in line with the considerations that rethought ICD, in accordance with the Paris Declaration (see Table 2). In both cases, SSC would have two outstanding features. The first referred to the low costs involved in implementing projects and initiatives. The second is the involvement of both the recipient and the cooperation donor, since both parties would make a technical, economic and logistical effort to carry out the proposal in the best possible way [15].

**Table 1**FAO: Specific principles of South-South Cooperation

<b>Principle</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Solidarity	Projects benefit the host country and contribute to it on gratuitous or concessional terms.
Sense of national ownership and leadership	Project objectives are clearly aligned with the priorities of the host country and national entities are encouraged to participate in the project.
Mutual benefit	Projects are utilized to encourage mutual exchange.
Partnership among equals	Project objectives contribute to the countries’ efforts in this area.
Non-conditionality	No conditions on the provided support should be established.
Respect for national sovereignty	Projects should not influence political processes in the host country.
Complementarity	Project objectives should be aligned with the priorities of the country concerned.

Note: Own preparation with information from FAO [14].

**Table 2**Basic principles of South-South Cooperation

<b>Principle</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Principle of consensus agenda.	The agenda of items was accepted by all participating States, without imposition by the donor.
Principle of valuation of local issues.	The knowledge and information are not inherent to the donor, so local experience was taken into consideration in the development of the cooperative process.
Principle of participation.	The host country actively participates in the programmes and projects resulting from their acceptance.
Principle of ownership.	The host adopts as its own the initiatives implemented in the field of cooperation.

Note: Own preparation with information from Acuña& Vergara [15].

<sup>2</sup> Ownership refers to countries establishing their own strategies for reducing poverty, improving institutions and fighting corruption. Alignment refers to donor countries aligning themselves to these objectives using local systems. Harmonisation means that donor countries coordinate and simplify procedures and share information to avoid duplication. The results refer to both donors and partners (formerly recipients) focusing on the results of development processes and contributing to improved measurement of these results. Finally, both donors and partners are accountable for development results.

### **III. Methods and Data Analysis**

This document follows the principles proposed by Acuña & Vergara [15] to evaluate the PMEAs because they are considered indicators that can be quantitatively measured with respect to the actions arising from this research work. Indicators such as solidarity or respect for national sovereignty would be difficult to quantify for the purposes of this work. In addition, the authors consider the essential characteristics that SSC programmes should meet, which are the existence of low costs in the implementation of the project and the involvement of the recipient and the donor in the programme.

Compliance with each principle and characteristic was evaluated by means of the analysis of: grants awarded, investment made in the programme, cost to the candidates, agreement on the number of grants awarded, preparation of PMEA regulations, evaluation and selection processes of the PMEA, process of pre-selection of candidates by HEIs, participation of HEIs in the announcements, beneficiaries of HEIs, countries with the highest demand, and training offered by the focal points to HEIs.

This is exploratory research to examine the performance of the PMEA as a mechanism for SSC within PA. The study was carried out with the collection of qualitative and quantitative data. It is not in itself a mixed methodology, but rather a complement between qualitative and quantitative information. The collection of the qualitative data was done in official PA data and with semi-structured interviews to the focal points of Mexico and Colombia. An online questionnaire was also applied to 48 Mexican and 29 Colombian HEIs. The HEIs considered were both public and private and were randomly selected from the total number of participating institutions. The questionnaire consisted of 23 questions, of which 8 were considered control questions to ensure that the questionnaire was being answered by the PA Mobility Announcement official and that he/she had knowledge of the PMEA.

The quantitative information was obtained from reports on the PMEA, in particular the most recent one published in January 2020 and which contained the data cluster from the first completed announcement to the tenth edition.

To estimate compliance with the principles and characteristics of SSC, results were evaluated as “Compliant”, “Non-compliant” or “Partially compliant”. The expected level for each aspect evaluated would be one of compliance or coherence with the indicated characteristics of the SSC equivalent to the range of 90% to 100%, which would eventually be indicated as “Compliant”. If the aspect evaluated resulted in compliance or consistency evaluated between 50% and 90%, it was categorised as “Partially compliant”. If the level of compliance or coherence scored equal to or less than 49%, the label “Non-compliant” was assigned. Finally, it was considered that the project would belong to the SSC if it was categorised as “Compliant” in at least half of the aspects evaluated and if it did not present any criteria assessed as “Non-compliant”.

### **IV. Results and Discussion**

#### **AP Platform for Student and Academic Mobility**

The PMEA emerged at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Pacific Alliance Summit for Heads of State in December 2011, as a project of the PA Technical Cooperation Group and at the proposal of Verónica Bejarano, representative of the General Directorate for Educational and Cultural Cooperation of the Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation (AMEXCID) [16]. According to Aguilar [1], the countries’ negotiators accepted the proposal, considering that the grant programme would address mobility, awarding 100 grants per year. Grants awarded are classified as follows: 69 grants for an undergraduate exchange semester, 6 for technical and technological degrees, and 25 for the exchange of teachers, researchers and doctoral students for stays lasting from three months to one year [17].

With regard to regulations, Chile has prepared a proposal for regulations and a model for announcements. On this basis, each country made modifications to the instruments presented until a consensus was reached on them. In 2012, Colombia, Chile, Mexico and Peru signed the General Regulations [1], which contained the objectives of the programme, the characteristics of the grant, the benefits granted, the procedure for making an application, the selection process and criteria, and the commitments of beneficiaries<sup>3</sup>.

The work of the PMEA is carried out through focal points located in each country. In the case of Chile, this is the Chilean Agency for International Development Cooperation (AGCID); for Mexico, AMEXCID; for Colombia, the Colombian Institute for Educational Credit and Technical Studies Abroad (ICETEX); and for Peru, the National Program of Scholarships and Educational Credit (PRONABEC) [17]. It should be noted that for Colombia and Peru, the focal points are organisations specialised in education, while Mexico and Chile chose to focus on ICD when choosing their international cooperation agencies.

HEIs were also considered as preponderant stakeholders in the PMEA because they contribute to the beneficiaries of the programme and provide continuity to the process. For the eleventh announcement of the

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<sup>3</sup>For more information on the PA PMEA regulations, please visit: [http://media.utp.edu.co/internacional/archivos/Reglamento\\_Plataforma\\_de\\_Movilidad\\_Academica\\_y\\_Estudiantil\\_de\\_la\\_Alianza\\_del\\_Pacifico\\_4.pdf](http://media.utp.edu.co/internacional/archivos/Reglamento_Plataforma_de_Movilidad_Academica_y_Estudiantil_de_la_Alianza_del_Pacifico_4.pdf)

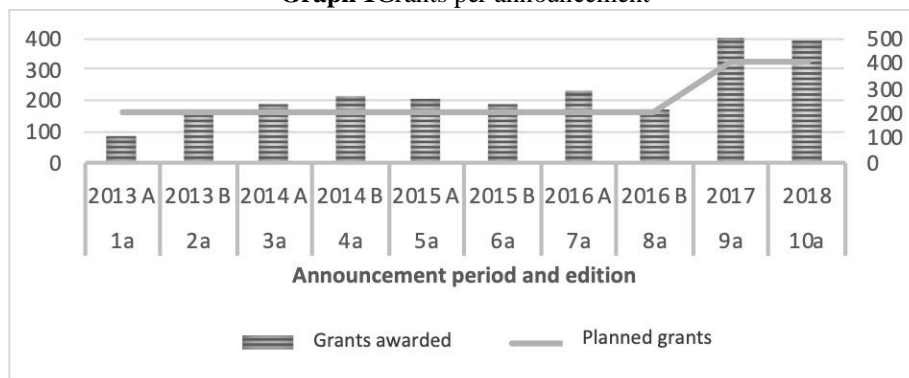
Platform, 439 participating HEIs [17] were registered. The participation of students in technical and technological studies was also incorporated, in addition to the undergraduate and doctoral students, teachers and researchers already considered [18]. The application process for a PME grant consists of submitting a series of documents stipulated in each announcement [19] and the administrative procedure is a free, online registration, common to all member countries.

A monthly benefit amount is allocated for support, depending on the type of grant and country. In addition, medical insurance is granted during their stay, the recipient focal point assumes the transport costs and there is the extension of academic costs in the HEIs [19].

### Grants Awarded Through the PME

From the first to the eighth announcement, the mobility announcement was on a six-monthly basis and had 50 grants per country. Starting with the ninth edition of the programme, 400 grants were awarded through a single annual announcement. According to the most recent PA report [17], 2,228 people have been awarded grants so, if theoretically, the governments of PA countries together awarded 400 grants annually, then there should have been 2,400 grantees. The evidence shows 172 fewer people than those enrolled (see Graph 1). Most of the unawarded grants were registered in the first editions of the announcement, so the initial inexperience is a likely explanation for the shortfall in actual grant delivery compared to the estimate.

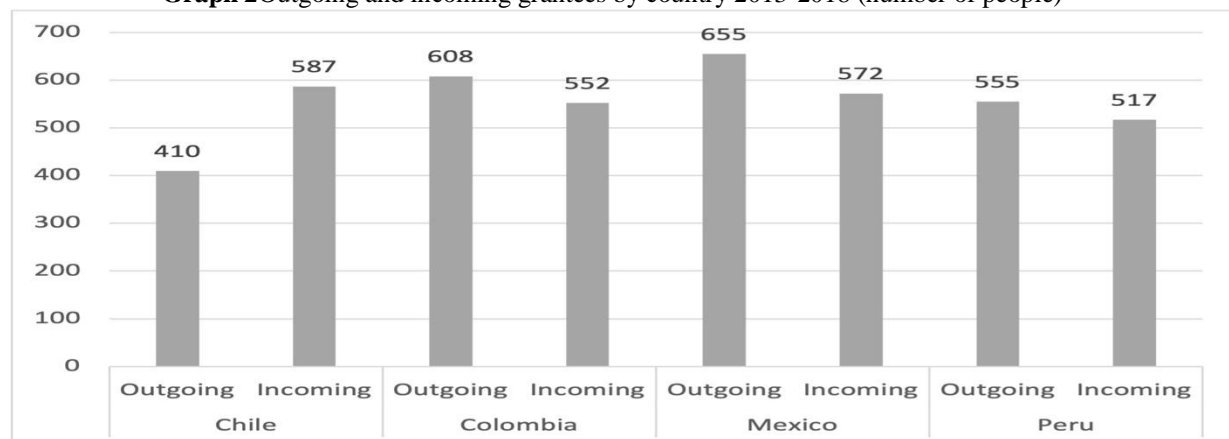
**Graph 1** Grants per announcement



Note: Own preparation with information from Pacific Alliance [17].

Of the total number of grant holders in the PME, 1,792 grants were awarded to undergraduate students and 436 to teachers and doctoral students. These figures are expected because governments agreed to give more grants to undergraduate students than to technical and technological careers, teachers and doctoral students. There is also evidence that the geographical distribution of grants among countries was to some extent uneven; theoretically, in the ten announcement, each State should have registered 600 outgoing and 600 incoming grantees, assuming that all the grants had been awarded. However, the actual situation was different, as no country recorded a balance between the number of outgoing and incoming grantees (see Graph 2).

**Graph 2** Outgoing and incoming grantees by country 2013-2018 (number of people)



Note: Own preparation with information from Pacific Alliance [17].

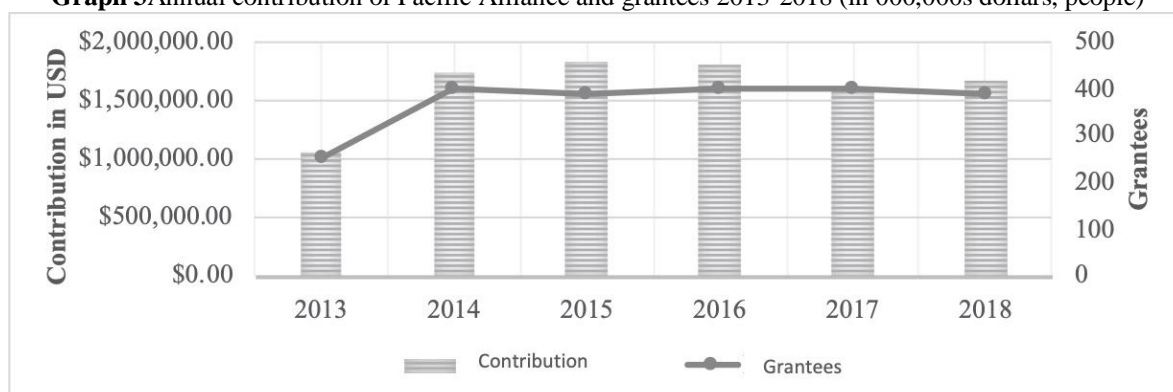
The country with the highest number of outgoing grantees was Mexico with 655 people and the nation with the lowest number of outgoing grantees was Chile with just 410. With reference to the grants received, Chile attracted 587 and Peru just 517. On the other hand, Peru was also the country with the lowest number of HEIs in the programme, with only 43 participating institutions. Mexico was also the country with the highest number of HEIs registered in the PMEAs with 242 registrations in the last announcement [18].

### **Economic Investment by Pacific Alliance Countries in the PMEA**

The total contribution of the four governments to the project between 2013 and 2018 was just over US\$9.6 million [17], although official PA information does not specify the amount each country contributed during this period.

Graph 3 allowed the identification of the variations in the annual investment made by the countries in each announcement. It highlights that the project's initial capital almost doubled by its second year. This could be explained by the success of the first announcement for the programme and the fact that the PA member states sought to boost cooperation through this aspect.

**Graph 3** Annual contribution of Pacific Alliance and grantees 2013-2018 (in 000,000s dollars, people)



Note: Own preparation with information from Pacific Alliance [17].

By 2015, investment increased by only 5% compared to the previous year's amount and by 2018 only a 4% increase was recorded. In contrast, for the years 2016 and 2017, member countries reduced the financial budget allocated by 2% and 10% respectively. The number of participating grantees remained constant despite government reductions, which may be due to the fact that increased experience on the part of project implementers made the project more efficient, accompanied by a reduction in costs.

As proposed by Acuña & Vergara [15], the low costs of project implementation have been a characteristic of SSC initiatives. From this, the need arose to analyse whether the initial investment made by the PA member countries in the PMEA was low. The total initial investment of the project was just over one million dollars (see Graph 2), which was used to make a comparative study to measure the investment made in the initiative.

To determine whether the initial cost of the PMEA was high or low, the investment made in a North-South Cooperation project by 2013 was used as the point of comparison. The initiative that was chosen was the bilateral cooperation programme between the governments of Mexico and France called Mexico-France-Engineers-Technology (MEXFITEC). This project has awarded one hundred grants per year to students from public state universities to study engineering in French HEIs for one academic year. The programme covers the concepts of transport, meals, health insurance, an intensive French course and school costs, which are the same benefits that have been granted by the grants of the PMEA, with the exception of the French language course [20]. It should be noted, however, that the period of stay of the grantees and thus some of the costs of the programme proved to be different between the two initiatives. One of the main distinctions between both initiatives would be the investment made, with the PMEA expected to register a considerably lower amount than that granted to MEXFITEC.

In terms of figures, the French government has invested an estimated \$13,000 dollars per grantee per year in the MEXFITEC programme [5], while the Mexican government has granted up to \$20,200 dollars per beneficiary [20]<sup>4</sup>. Taking into consideration that there are 100 grantees projected to receive the grant annually, the minimum investment that the French government would have made was \$1.3 million dollars, while the

<sup>4</sup>Originally the figures were 12,000 EUR for the investment by the French government, and 376,882 MXN by the Mexican government. To standardise the currency used, such amounts were converted to U.S. dollars using the exchange rates of 1.08 USD to the euro and 0.054 USD to the Mexican peso.

Mexican government's investment would have been just over two million; in total it should be \$3.32 million dollars. If compared with the initial figure of PMEAs (one million dollars), this amount does not represent even half of the total invested in MEXFITEC, so it could be considered as a low initial cost.

Another way to evaluate the initial investment of the PMEAs was to determine the percentage it represents with respect to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the PA. GDP at constant 2010 prices was considered, which for 2013 was US\$1.916 billion<sup>5</sup>. Considering again the initial investment of the PMEAs, it represents 0.055% of the total GDP of PA, which evidences a minimum investment cost.

As mentioned above, the applying to the PMEAs does not generate costs for programme beneficiaries or the HEIs because it is managed by a virtual platform online.

It is important to remember that the amount of investments made in the PMEAs was agreed upon by consensus by the countries, it was the governments who stipulated that they would grant 100 grants annually in the programme and, therefore, decided on the economic resources that would be allocated to this initiative [1]. This fact is corroborated by the subscription to the General Regulations of the PMEAs published in 2013, which detailed the benefits granted to students, academics and researchers [22].

Similarly, the Memorandum of Understanding on the Platform for Cooperation between PA governments can be consulted, in which it was agreed that participants should finance cooperation activities according to the provisions of that document [23]. The initiative was therefore considered to have met another requirement for consideration as an SSC project that refers to the principle of the consensus agenda.

### **Participation of Higher Education Institutions**

With regard to the estimation of the principles of ownership and valuation of local issues, given that the information should be more specific for each country, the application of the questionnaire to the HEIs in Mexico and Colombia was considered.

With regard to the assessment of the principle of ownership put forward by the SSC for the PMEAs, the first element considered was the year and form of incorporation of the HEIs into the PMEAs, under the argument of knowing the link that allows HEIs to form part of the PMEAs. In the case of the Colombian HEIs, 31% responded that they knew the date of incorporation and answered that they had joined the PMEAs by invitation (34%), followed by the signing of an agreement and joining letter (14% and 10% respectively), although 7% said they did not know and 34% did not answer. In the case of Mexican HEIs, 44% of them knew the date they had joined and had done so by invitation (31%), by signing an agreement (19%) or other instrument (19%), and 31% did not answer the question.

A second element was to know the evaluation and selection process of the PMEAs grantees and whether the HEIs had a pre-selection process. This would make it possible to point out that HEIs were indeed taking ownership of the initiative by adapting it to their context [15] and therefore complying with this principle. On the one hand, the experience of the academic internationalisation of HEIs contributes to the pre-selection process they have not only for this mobility initiative and, on the other hand, the evaluation process by the focal points would indicate the degree of involvement with a particular initiative such as PMEAs.

In the case of HEIs in Colombia, 34% said they knew about the evaluation and selection process of grantees, but 41% said they had a pre-selection process. For Mexico, 38% of the institutions said they knew about the evaluation and selection process of grantees and 54% said they had a pre-selection process.

Finally, the participation and beneficiaries of HEIs in PMEAs announcement was considered a fundamental requirement for the ownership of the mechanism. 69% of the Colombian institutions answered that they have participated in an announcement and, of these, 55% have been awarded at least one grant. For Mexico, 67% of the institutions have participated in an announcement and, of these, 65% have been awarded at least one grant.

With regard to the analysis of compliance (see Table 3) with the principle of valuation of local issues, it was assumed that HEIs should take into consideration the knowledge, information and experience of the host country and not only focus on what was provided by the donor nation [15]. To this end, three questions were taken: the country most in demand by applicants, the knowledge of the focal point (ICETEX or AMEXID) and the training provided by these focal points.

For Colombian institutions, Mexico is the country with the highest demand for applicants (55%), 66% of HEIs stated that ICETEX is the focal point but only 34% located the officials that operate the PMEAs. However, 62% of the HEIs answered that they do not receive any training from the focal point. For Mexican

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<sup>5</sup> According to World Bank data, in 2013 the registered GDP for Chile was 254,105 million USD, for Colombia it was 333,733 million USD, for Mexico it was 1,152 billion USD and for Peru it was 176,238 million USD.

HEIs, Colombia is the country with the highest demand (38%)<sup>6</sup>, 71% recognise AMEXID as the focal point but only 27% recognise AMEXID's officials, and 40% said they do not receive any training from the focal point.

**Table 3** Evaluation of the Mobility Platform as a South-South Cooperation initiative

<b>Principles and characteristics of South-South Cooperation</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	<b>Aspect assessed</b>
Recipient and donor involvement	Complies	Number of grants offered and grantees received by country
Principle of participation	Complies	Number of grants offered and grantees received by country
Low implementation costs	Complies	Comparative with investment in MEXFITEC
	Complies	Investment in the PMEAs as a percentage of Pacific Alliance GDP.
	Complies	Costs for applicants
Principle of consensus agenda	Complies	Agreement on the number of grants awarded and rules of operation
	Does not comply	Year in which HEI joined PMEAs
	Partially compliant	Instrument of accession
	Does not comply	Evaluation and selection of PMEAs grantees
Principle of ownership	Colombian HEIs do not comply	HEIs with pre-selection process
	Mexican HEIs partially comply	
	Partially compliant	Participation of HEIs in announcement
	Colombian HEIs partially comply	Beneficiaries from HEIs
	Mexican HEIs do not comply	Country with highest demand from applicants
	Both HEIs comply with knowledge of focal point but do not locate the officials	
Principle of valuation of local issues	Does not comply	Knowledge of focal point
	Colombian HEIs do not comply	
	Mexican HEIs partially comply	Training by focal point

Note: Source: Own preparation

## V. Discussion

The first indicators assessed refer to the involvement of the donor-recipient and the principle of participation. In both cases the number of grants offered, and grantees received was considered because it is the foundation of academic cooperation between the countries and because, as cooperation recipient stakeholders, they actively participate in PMEAs announcements [15]. It is evident that the four countries in PA make a technical, economic and logistical effort to implement the announcement each year. This effort and participation have been measured through the number of grants, which has been constant since the implementation of the first announcement, but not the number of grants received in each PA member nation. The figures in graphs 1 and 2 show that the countries in the PMEAs actively participated in the project by awarding grants and receiving students, teachers and researchers annually, so both the recipient and the donor are involved. This information made it possible to support that this initiative complied with the principle of participation required to be considered within the SSC category. The level of compliance for both indicators should be at least 540 grants received and awarded; indeed, although Chile and Peru do not comply with the 90% indicator, in the case of the former for outgoing grantees and, in the latter, for incoming grantees, the compliance indicators do apply for Mexico and Colombia, in both categories.

However, it should also be noted that a more coordinated effort is needed among the four countries to equitably receive and offer grants, by making the announcements more widely known, increasing the amount of resources allocated to each grantee and expanding the fields of study to other areas of knowledge.

The next characteristic assessed was the low implementation costs arising from the PMEAs initiative [15] for which three elements were considered: the comparative investment with a similar programme, the investment as a percentage of the GDP of PA and the cost for the PMEAs beneficiaries. The initial investment in

<sup>6</sup>In the case of Colombia, Peru and Chile follow Mexico in terms of demand from grantees, with 7% each of these countries respectively, and 31% of HEIs did not answer the question. In the case of Mexico, Chile is in second place with 25%, Peru with 6% and 31% did not answer.



the PMEAs were lower compared to the MEXFITEC programme, despite the fact that both promote academic mobility in similar ways. The comparison was justified because the second programme derives from North-South Cooperation and because, although no country-specific data were available for PA, the result eventually led to the operability of the mobility programme. This aspect was classified with 100% compliance. On the other hand, the investment made in the PMEAs was calculated as a percentage of the GDP of PA, the result of which was estimated at 0.055%, and was categorised with a congruence level of 100%. Finally, the costs incurred by applicants to the PMEAs, which turned out to be nil, were evaluated and, therefore, 100% compliance with the analysed characteristic was assigned.

With regard to the principle of the consensus agenda, its satisfactory fulfilment is estimated because the participating States jointly agreed on the number of grants that each country would grant annually, which indicated that the decisions regarding the PMEAs are discussed and agreed upon by all the countries in PA. Similarly, the decisions and results of the programme are set out in official PMA documents, as detailed in the adoption of the PMA regulations, so there is no imposition by any donor, as established in the consensus agenda principle [15].

Under the principle of ownership, the cooperation recipient stakeholder adopts the initiatives implemented as its own [15]. In the cases of Colombia and Mexico, this principle was assessed on the basis of information provided by the stakeholders who manage the reception of cooperation to beneficiaries. As noted, it was fundamental to know the institutional link between HEIs and the PMA: neither Colombian nor Mexican HEIs reached 50% over the year of knowledge of the instrument of the link, although 58% of Colombian HEIs and 69% of Mexican HEIs did know the instrument. Another element of institutional ownership was both the selection and evaluation process by the focal point and its own pre-selection process. Less than 40% of both Colombian and Mexican HEIs said they were aware of the process that the focal point carries out to evaluate and assign grants; and only 54% of Mexican institutions have a pre-selection process, compared to 41% for Colombia. However, this last indicator should be taken with caution since it is experience in academic internationalisation projects, and not specifically the PMA, that grants or makes visible a pre-selection process for HEIs. A final element of evaluation was the participation and grants granted to HEIs as an element that would also evidence the ownership of the cooperation initiative by the institutions. More than 65% of the HEIs in both countries have participated in an announcement and between 55% and 65% of them have been beneficiaries, which is assumed to be partial compliance of the principle and in the process of ownership of this initiative. Indeed, although the allocation of grants does not depend on these institutions, it is important that countries expand resources so that more academic institutions take ownership of the mobility programme.

The last principle evaluated was the valuation of local issues to consider local experience in the development of cooperation [15]. On the one hand, official quantitative evidence revealed that Chile is the country that attracts the most grantees in the whole of PA due to the level of education it has in Latin America<sup>7</sup>. On the other hand, and at the level of Colombia and Mexico, grant applicants from the former mostly demand (55%) Mexico as a country of mobility, and in the case of Mexican HEIs the percentage is reduced to 38% for Colombia as the most in-demand country, thus having partial compliance and non-compliance respectively.

Likewise, the knowledge of focal points was evaluated: although over 60% of the institutions of the two countries know what AMEXID or ICETEX is, less than 35% know the officials, which actually reveals a lack of knowledge on focal points by officials. More serious is the statement of not receiving training on the focal points, which in the case of Colombia is above 60% and in Mexico is 40%. This confirms that the HEIs do not really develop a link that leads them to have better knowledge of the experience at the local level. The workshops given would have the purpose of teaching the HEIs how to correctly manage the requests of grantees, that they be informed about the operation of the Platform, the formalisation of the supports, among other items. There is a clear separation between the lack of communication about the existence of training and the fact that cooperation agencies claim to be transmitters of information and knowledge from their experience to HEIs [16] [24]. Likewise, Pacific Alliance did not have a document proposing the way in which the training should be carried out to the HEIs, so they design and carry out each focal point from their own experience.

There are two principles of SSC that Colombia and Mexico fully comply with in terms of the functioning of the PMA: the principle of the consensual agenda and the principle of participation, in addition to the characteristics of the involvement of the recipient and donor and the low costs of participation. These four elements are perhaps the least complex to fulfil because they respond to operational aspects that derive from the functioning of the PMA or PA itself (such as consensus decision-making). However, more complex principles such as local ownership or valuation are not fully consolidated. This is fundamental in ICD, not just in SSC, because it is the countries themselves who establish the guidelines for improvement and alignment with local systems, in accordance with the contextual frameworks that determine the model of cooperation and national development. In the case of Colombia and Mexico, the reason that some of the criteria evaluated were partially

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<sup>7</sup>According to the QS Latin American Ranking of 2020, 15 of the 100 best universities in Latin America are in Chile, with the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile leading the ranking.

met or not met at all is linked to fundamental institutional arguments in relation to the focal points, the operability of the programme and the resources allocated by country. This last aspect depends on the coordinated effort of the four countries to increase the universe of mobility grants, more than on the political will of the countries.

## VI. Conclusions

The PA Platform for Student and Academic Mobility has been developed as a South-South Cooperation project that promotes exchange and mobility in the technical and scientific fields. While, as noted in the methodology, to conclude whether the PMEA currently functions as a SSC project should not violate any principles or characteristics, it would also not be fair to say that the proposal is far from the SSC framework. We believe that, in the case of Colombia and Mexico, the PMEA is a SSC project that is in the process of consolidation and that the principles of appropriation and valuation of local issues are more complex because they involve not only the will of the stakeholders, but also the synergy of technical, economic and logistical efforts that are essential to any project.

This research has been an effort to include quantitative and qualitative estimators that would reflect a measurement more in line with the reality experienced by the stakeholders in a project. Of course, the selection and estimation of these indicators is debatable, but we believe that it is a small contribution that can generate a broader discussion, by including the four countries and not only two.

## Acknowledgements

*Research conducted under the UNAM-PAPIIT IN300918 programme.*

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