



# South-South cooperation for development

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## High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation

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Items 3, 4 and 5 (b) of the provisional agenda\*

## **Progress made in implementing decision 19/1 of the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation, with emphasis on enhancing the role and impact of the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation, and in implementing the Buenos Aires outcome document of the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation**

### **Report of the Secretary-General**

#### *Summary*

The present report has been prepared in response to decision 19/1 of the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation, in which the Committee requested the Secretary-General to submit to it, at its twentieth session, a comprehensive report on progress made in implementing the decision, including the recommendations and proposals made in the report on a comprehensive proposal on concrete ways to enhance the role and impact of the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation as well as the key measures taken to improve the coordination and coherence of United Nations support to South-South cooperation (SSC/19/2). It also responds to the related resolution of the General Assembly (resolution 72/237). The report thus highlights measures taken to enhance the role and impact of the Office and improve the coordination and coherence of United Nations support for South-South cooperation. It also responds to paragraph 36 of the annex to Assembly resolution 73/291, by presenting information on how the Office and other United Nations entities have contributed to the implementation of the resolution. A significant development in the period from 2016 to 2020 was the formulation of the United Nations system-wide strategy on South-South and triangular cooperation for sustainable development. The report concludes with a set of recommendations on the way forward.

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\* SSC/20/L.2.



## I. Introduction

1. Developing countries have consistently expressed the need for United Nations support for South-South cooperation initiatives to eradicate extreme poverty and accelerate sustainable development across the global South. In that overarching context, they requested that I present to the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation, at its twentieth session, a comprehensive report on progress made in implementing Committee decision 19/1, adopted at its nineteenth session, including the recommendations and proposals that I made in my report on a comprehensive proposal on concrete ways to enhance the role and impact of the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation as well as the key measures taken to improve the coordination and coherence of United Nations support to South-South cooperation (SSC/19/2). The present report also responds to the related resolution of the General Assembly (resolution 72/237). It therefore highlights measures taken to enhance the role and impact of the Office as the focal point for promoting and facilitating South-South and triangular cooperation for development across the United Nations system. It also presents information on the support that United Nations entities have provided to Member States to implement Assembly resolution 73/291, as requested by Member States.

2. Central to the report are two pivotal events that significantly influenced the development landscape as well as South-South and triangular cooperation during the period from 2016 to 2020:

(a) First, 2019 marked the beginning of a transformative period for South-South and triangular cooperation on the basis of deliberations held during the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation and its outcome document, which the General Assembly endorsed in its resolution 73/291;

(b) Second, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic created unprecedented socioeconomic havoc in every country and every economy, with numerous adverse effects worldwide. In the wake of the first wave, the world economy contracted by 4.3 per cent in 2020. The concern now is that the modest recovery projected for 2021 will not be sufficient to make up for the losses incurred in 2020.<sup>1</sup> Equally troubling is the fact that an additional 131 million people lapsed into poverty in 2020, many of them women, children and persons living in marginalized communities.<sup>2</sup> Despite current signs of an economic rebound, the devastation caused by the pandemic could have lasting adverse effects on incomes and many other aspects of human well-being unless the world unites further to implement remedial measures with a sense of urgency. Alongside vaccines and stimulus packages, the world needs concerted measures during the current decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals to make up lost ground and ensure resilience to future shocks. This is where South-South and triangular cooperation can have a significant impact.

3. Prior to the pandemic, at the nineteenth session of the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation and at the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, Governments expressed a need for enhanced South-South cooperation through knowledge-sharing, peer learning and lessons on how to deal with shared challenges based on solutions that had worked. Clearly, the many complex development challenges that the world faces cannot be solved by individual countries working in isolation. Governments have to cooperate further to revitalize economies, expand public investment, boost trade, provide solutions to tackle

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<sup>1</sup> *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2021* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.21.II.C.1).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

unemployment in the face of a growing debt crisis and ensure targeted support for communities most affected by the disease. If the virus is allowed to spread like wildfire in the global South, it will mutate again and again.<sup>3</sup> The COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility<sup>4</sup> could be a major game-changer in international development cooperation, including South-South and triangular cooperation, to ensure that rich and poor countries alike have immediate access to therapies and vaccines.

4. The COVID-19 pandemic has put the spotlight on the overwhelming number of nurses, doctors and other essential workers from developing countries embedded in the workforce of developed countries. This global interdependence underscores the benefits of strengthening human solidarity as well as South-South and triangular cooperation by sharing vaccines and pooling resources to build back better from the pandemic. Between 2016 and 2021, the momentum for international cooperation and the scope and dynamism of South-South cooperation have been increasing amid many opportunities to be seized and challenges to be overcome.

5. Against that backdrop, section II of the present report summarizes the actions taken to enhance the role and impact of the Office, leveraging the resources of the newly repositioned United Nations development system to support the South-South initiatives of developing countries in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the related Sustainable Development Goals. These actions include establishing the United Nations Inter-Agency Mechanism for South-South and Triangular Cooperation and developing the first United Nations system-wide strategy on South-South and triangular cooperation for sustainable development. Section III is focused on trends in United Nations support for South-South and triangular cooperation leading up to and following the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation. Section IV describes support by the United Nations system for South-South and triangular cooperation initiatives in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and for building back better. The recommendations set out in section V are aimed at improving United Nations system-wide coherence to further enhance the contribution of South-South and triangular cooperation to achieving the 2030 Agenda. These two modalities can play a key role in galvanizing local, national and regional measures in the response to the pandemic and in the recovery from it.

## **II. Actions taken to enhance the role and impact of the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation**

6. Developing countries have long expressed the need to collaborate further to accelerate sustainable development within the framework of South-South cooperation, with coherent and coordinated support from the United Nations system. In 2016, in response to that justifiable demand, the United Nations proposed concrete ways to turn the Office into: (a) a dynamic secretariat of the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation; (b) an effective coordinator of United Nations support for South-South and triangular cooperation; (c) a builder of strategic partnerships to foster regional integration and other collaborative initiatives in the global South; (d) a knowledge hub capable of supporting the capacity development efforts of developing countries by identifying, documenting and disseminating proven development solutions; (e) an effective advocate for the global South on issues of critical importance to developing countries; and (f) an efficient resource mobilizer with the capacity to manage funds dedicated to the promotion of South-South and triangular

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, “Secretary-General calls vaccine equity biggest moral test for global community, as Security Council considers equitable availability of doses”, SC/14438, 17 February 2021.

<sup>4</sup> See [www.gavi.org/covax-facility](http://www.gavi.org/covax-facility).

cooperation (see [SSC/19/2](#), para. 24). On the basis of its past experience, the Office committed to maximizing its impact by adopting cost-saving strategies and leveraging the resources of its partners while focusing on the six priorities that I proposed in my report (*ibid.*).

## **A. Secretariat of the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation**

7. During the reporting period, the Office continued to be an effective secretariat for the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation and a dynamic catalyst for South-South and triangular cooperation across the United Nations system. In 2018, it took on the task of serving as the substantive secretariat of the preparatory process for the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation (see [A/75/371](#)). It facilitated the production of many issue papers, policy briefs and reports, including the comprehensive report prepared in the lead-up to the Conference ([A/73/383](#)), which guided deliberations at the Conference and informed the intergovernmental negotiations of its outcome document in compliance with relevant General Assembly resolutions. It also organized preparatory dialogues that contributed to the identification of priorities that were ultimately included in the outcome document upon which Member States agreed by consensus.

8. In addition, the Office provided secretariat and policy support to intergovernmental bodies and United Nations entities in making informed and coherent decisions on South-South and triangular cooperation. It also organized meetings of the Bureau of the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation and provided related services. Its secretariat work also informed discussions by the Second Committee of the General Assembly on the contributions of South-South and triangular cooperation to United Nations operational activities for development to achieve the 2030 Agenda (see [A/73/321](#)).

9. The Office also facilitated policy dialogues regarding South-South and triangular cooperation, including through the high-level forum of Directors General for development cooperation and the high-level political forum on sustainable development, in which support for South-South cooperation as an important element of global development cooperation for sustainable development is emphasized.

## **B. Coordination of United Nations system support for South-South and triangular cooperation**

### **United Nations Inter-Agency Mechanism for South-South and Triangular Cooperation**

10. The General Assembly, in its resolution [72/237](#), requested the establishment of a more formalized and strengthened inter-agency mechanism, coordinated by the Office, to encourage coherence, coordination, joint support and sharing of information on South-South and triangular cooperation development activities and results achieved by various United Nations entities. In 2018, the Office, following consultations with other United Nations organizations, established the United Nations Inter-Agency Mechanism for South-South and Triangular Cooperation, with membership of more than 30 United Nations entities.

11. The effective coordination of the Inter-Agency Mechanism for South-South and Triangular Cooperation enabled the Office to facilitate the system-wide engagement of many United Nations entities in the preparatory process for the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation. The Inter-Agency Mechanism further enhanced the Office's role as a coordinator for the promotion and

facilitation of South-South and triangular cooperation for development within the United Nations system, including the preparation of sectoral and inter-agency reports on South-South and triangular cooperation. The Office also used the Inter-Agency Mechanism as a channel to facilitate the mainstreaming of South-South and triangular cooperation into the corporate strategies and operational activities of United Nations entities.

12. As part of the repositioning of the United Nations development system, a review of multi-country offices was undertaken. In this process, the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Vice-Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, on behalf of the Core Group of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, tasked the Office with leading action area 7 of the multi-country offices review, on fostering South-South cooperation and cross-regional learning. Accordingly, the Office worked with the Inter-Agency Mechanism for South-South and Triangular Cooperation, drawing on the views of the Development Coordination Office, resident coordinators and United Nations country team members to: (a) review progress on the various commitments made by individual entities; and (b) develop a coherent system-wide approach to South-South and triangular cooperation and articulate what the United Nations development system had to offer. That would include recommendations for concrete actions that could be taken collectively by United Nations Sustainable Development Group entities at the global, regional or country level in support of small island developing States and other countries covered by multi-country offices. The recommendations are now being implemented following endorsement by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly of the full set of proposals aimed at strengthening the services offered by multi-country offices.

#### **United Nations system-wide strategy on South-South and triangular cooperation for sustainable development**

13. Developing countries increasingly turn to each other for solutions to shared challenges in such areas as trade, investment and infrastructure development, and the United Nations system needs to respond in a coherent, coordinated manner. The Office was therefore requested, at the seventy-second session of the General Assembly and at the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, to coordinate, in consultation with other United Nations entities, the preparation of a United Nations system-wide strategy on South-South cooperation (see [A/72/297](#), para. 94). In response, in 2019, the Office started the process of developing a strategy through the Inter-Agency Mechanism for South-South and Triangular Cooperation, guided by the principles of South-South cooperation as outlined in the Nairobi outcome document of the High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, of 2009, and reaffirmed at the second Conference. Over 30 United Nations entities contributed to the preparation of the strategy through the Inter-Agency Mechanism. The strategy, which reflects contributions by 15 resident coordinators that were submitted to the Office with the support of the Development Coordination Office, was discussed with Member States and adopted by the United Nations system in 2020.

14. To maximize the development impact, the strategy proposes actions to promote South-South and triangular cooperation partnerships and encourages consolidation of the efforts of United Nations entities to establish robust funding mechanisms, including through the exploration of new sources and instruments of innovative financing. It will also help to foster understanding of the benefits of South-South and triangular cooperation and identify entry points in policy, planning, programming and implementation processes at all levels. Another key element of the commitment of the United Nations system to South-South and triangular cooperation is manifested

in the development of a South-South cooperation strategy by six United Nations entities (see [A/75/371](#), para. 5) and the incorporation of elements of South-South cooperation into the strategies and monitoring frameworks of 23 United Nations entities (see [A/74/336](#), para. 24).

15. The strategy further provides system-wide policy orientation to galvanize a coordinated, coherent approach by United Nations entities to their policy and programmatic work on South-South and triangular cooperation. In order to operationalize the strategy, the Office is finalizing an action plan by means of an inclusive and participatory process involving more than 30 United Nations entities.

### **C. Forging South-South and triangular cooperation partnerships**

16. At a time when collective action is much needed to address many of the world's most urgent challenges, the Office has notably forged broader partnerships and encouraged them to integrate South-South approaches to development into such areas as migration, volunteerism, intellectual property rights and the development and use of information and communications technology. This is an encouraging development, considering that developing countries host most of the world's migrants and are at risk of being left behind if they do not adjust to emerging technologies of the fourth industrial revolution through South-South cooperation and other collaborative alliances.

17. The Office organized the eleventh high-level forum of Directors General for development cooperation, held in Istanbul, Turkey, in 2019, with the collaboration and support of the Islamic Development Bank and the Japan International Cooperation Agency and in coordination with the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency, to support concerted policymaking. The forum, which brought together heads of development cooperation agencies and institutions and other partners, provided an opportunity for practitioners of South-South and triangular cooperation to reflect and exchange views on approaches to implementing the recommendations of the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation. Forum participants committed to further strengthening the institutionalization of South-South and triangular cooperation, assessing the results and promoting an inclusive, multi-stakeholder approach.

18. The Office provided guidance to Member States and the United Nations system to engage with stakeholders through the Global South-South Development Expo. Since its inception in 2008, the Expo has engaged the private sector, civil society and academic and philanthropic organizations, among others, to scale up concrete Southern initiatives.

### **D. Capacity development through sharing of knowledge and experiences**

19. Responding to the calls made at the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation to strengthen institutional capacities to maximize the benefits of South-South and triangular cooperation, the Islamic Development Bank, the South Centre and the Office decided that it was imperative to have an effective national ecosystem for South-South and triangular cooperation, comprising an institutional framework at the national level. A paper was therefore prepared, entitled "Developing national ecosystems for South-South and triangular cooperation to achieve the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development", to advocate a bottom-up incremental approach to strengthening such ecosystems.

20. The Office continued to be engaged in enhancing the institutional capacities of Member States and United Nations entities to design, implement and monitor South-South and triangular cooperation programmes through advisory services and in reinforcing the management practices of development cooperation agencies in charge of South-South cooperation, among other things. Examples include the Capacity Development in Management of South-South and Triangular Cooperation project implemented with the support of the Brazilian Cooperation Agency and the Japan International Cooperation Agency. In addition, in partnership with the United Nations System Staff College, the Colombian Presidential Agency for Cooperation, the Islamic Development Bank and the South Centre, the Office also enhanced the institutional capacities of many countries.

21. The capacity of young people to become the next generation of development actors is of critical importance to the global South. In cooperation with several partners, the Office organized a training programme entitled “South-South and triangular cooperation in implementing the 2030 Agenda: Youth4South edition”, which was held in Istanbul in June 2019. Young professionals and young officials from national Governments, technical cooperation agencies and related sectors exchanged views with their peers from other developing countries to adapt and apply South-South and triangular cooperation tools and methods in scaling up sustainable development solutions in their communities, institutions and countries.

22. The United Nations System Staff College, in close cooperation with the Office, organized a course in 2019 entitled “Catalytic support to South-South and triangular cooperation in implementing the 2030 Agenda”. Building on a common understanding of the theory and practice of South-South and triangular cooperation, the course expanded its coverage beyond individual United Nations staff and country team members to Governments and institutional focal points.

23. South-South trust funds managed by the Office provided support to develop the capacities of the National Public Health Laboratory in the Sudan to identify needs and gaps regarding COVID-19 testing. Building on past collaboration in the Arab States, Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Office and the Islamic Development Bank engaged with the Sudan, Tunisia and the State of Palestine to provide emergency financial support in response to the pandemic.

24. The Office acted as a facilitator and connector, enabling the exchange of knowledge, experiences and development solutions among countries of the global South. Along with its development partners, it developed South-South Galaxy, a knowledge-sharing and partnership-brokering platform. Launched in September 2019 during celebrations for United Nations Day for South-South Cooperation, the platform responds systematically and efficiently to the needs of Member States, United Nations entities and stakeholders to connect, collaborate and learn from each another. Engaging 45 United Nations entities, South-South Galaxy established a digital repository with information on more than 550 innovative solutions and 290 organizations by mid-2020. This improved access for national Governments, United Nations country teams and other national partners to information and knowledge on South-South cooperation, especially on measures in response to the pandemic.

25. Furthermore, knowledge-exchange, mutual-learning and partnership-brokering efforts in South-South and triangular cooperation were enhanced at the global, regional and national levels through the South-South Global Thinkers platform, which enabled the Office to commission thematic research papers, produce handbooks on good practices (volume 3 being issued in 2020) and publish the “South-South in Action” series, among other things. The platform, a joint enterprise between UNDP and the Office, pooled capacity and expertise from institutions to add to the knowledge base and advance Southern thought leadership on South-South and

triangular cooperation. Voices of the global South were better incorporated into the *Human Development Report 2020* through collaboration with the Human Development Report Office and South-South Global Thinkers to capture perspectives from think tanks in developing countries.

26. The Office also served as a knowledge hub for South-South cooperation through its many publications. Recent products include *Good Practices in South-South and Triangular Cooperation for Sustainable Development*, volumes in the “South-South in Action” and “South-South Ideas” series and research reports such as *Cooperation Beyond Convention: South-South and Triangular Cooperation in a Changing Global Landscape*, an independent report on South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation, which reviews the history and transformation of those modalities. Such reports served as guidance for developing countries to better plan, design and implement South-South cooperation initiatives and to strengthen policy dialogue and build consensus on priorities, principles and opportunities.

27. Acknowledging the importance of digital transformation, the Office prepared a report with the Finance Centre for South-South Cooperation entitled *South-South Cooperation in a Digital World*. The report contains an analysis of development prospects and trends that have an impact on digital industries in the global South, as well as proposals for digital industrial cooperation among Southern countries.

## **E. Strategic outreach, advocacy and communication**

28. The Office continued to underscore the positive impact of South-South and triangular cooperation through policy advice and related services to Member States during United Nations processes on issues of critical importance to South-South solidarity, regional integration and international collective action. It rolled out an enhanced communications strategy for 2019–2021, which leverages both traditional and innovative electronic tools to share compelling stories and promote interaction among stakeholders. Emphasis is placed on advocating the role of South-South and triangular cooperation to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Through this workstream, the Office also articulated its policy advisory services and other core areas of work; positioned itself as a facilitator of partnerships to increase the understanding and visibility of practical expressions of Southern solidarity; and followed standard operating procedures in disseminating information on demand-driven initiatives and projects relating to South-South and triangular cooperation across the United Nations system and among development partners in all regions.

29. The Office upgraded its web portal ([www.unsouthsouth.org](http://www.unsouthsouth.org)) to provide a user-friendly platform for stakeholders to showcase their work on South-South and triangular cooperation in their focus areas.

## **F. Funding and efficient management of trust funds**

30. UNDP continued to ensure the stable and predictable allocation of regular (core) resources to the Office, enabling the Office to enhance its role and have a positive development impact. The Office remained an efficient and effective fund manager of South-South and triangular cooperation trust funds through its funding facilities and in collaboration with Member States and the United Nations system.<sup>5</sup> It rapidly enhanced and expanded South-South and triangular cooperation through the management of funds that promote multilateral cooperation and serve as laboratories for innovations for South-South and triangular cooperation. In 2019, the Office

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<sup>5</sup> See [www.unsouthsouth.org/our-work/south-south-trust-fund-management](http://www.unsouthsouth.org/our-work/south-south-trust-fund-management).

demonstrated growth in resource mobilization from Member States in support of South-South cooperation. Through trust funds and innovative programmes, it mobilized \$14.1 million and delivered \$12.3 million in non-core resources.

31. The South-South trust funds fast-tracked financial and in-kind support totalling almost \$12 million to 31 countries of the global South to help them to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The resources financed the supply of ventilators and personal protective equipment as well as measures to mitigate the socioeconomic impact among the most vulnerable groups. For example, the India-United Nations Development Partnership Fund fast-tracked pandemic response projects totalling \$10.6 million for 14 Southern countries.

32. The Office took measures to reinforce its approach to partnership-building and resource mobilization, including engaging with partners in Government, civil society, academic institutions and the private sector, to support planned activities as set out in its strategic framework for 2018–2021. The non-core share of resources came from Member States and various other funding sources, including: (a) contributions to the United Nations Fund for South-South Cooperation; (b) third-party cost-sharing; (c) parallel financing; (d) in-kind contributions; and (e) special fund management arrangements such as those of the India-United Nations Development Partnership Fund and the India, Brazil and South Africa Facility for Poverty and Hunger Alleviation.

## **G. Steps taken to enhance performance of the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation**

33. As requested by Member States in resolution 19/1 of the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation and in General Assembly resolution 72/237, several measures were taken to enhance the role and impact of the Office in performing its many functions described in the present report. In March 2016, the Office's profile was enhanced by the designation of its Director as Envoy of the Secretary-General on South-South Cooperation. The designation allows the Office to better coordinate support for South-South and triangular cooperation from across the United Nations system. Likewise, the Administrator of UNDP forged closer working relations with the Office by giving the Director delegated authority to manage the Office's procurement functions that the Associate Administrator and the Bureau for Management Services had previously overseen. In addition, UNDP committed to continuing to host the Office and financed the Office's strategic framework for 2018–2021. The Administrator also appointed the Director to be part of the UNDP Organizational Performance Group, which oversees the overall performance and effectiveness of UNDP. Details of further measures that UNDP took to improve the management, financial resources, transparency, accountability and efficiency of the Office are described in the report of the Administrator submitted for the twentieth session of the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation (SSC/20/1).

### **III. Trends in United Nations support for South-South and triangular cooperation leading up to and after the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation**

#### **A. Renewed commitment by the United Nations system regarding South-South and triangular cooperation**

34. The scope and strategic focus of United Nations support for South-South and triangular cooperation expanded into geographic initiatives and strategic sectors, including climate action, food and nutrition, social protection, peacebuilding and the establishment of physical and online collaborative platforms. After the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation decided to hold the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation in 2019, the Office and many other United Nations entities supported the efforts of Member States to identify strategies and priorities that would enable Member States to accelerate achievement of the 2030 Agenda through South-South and triangular cooperation.

35. At the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, the key role of the United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies, non-resident agencies and regional commissions, including the United Nations country teams, in supporting and promoting South-South and triangular cooperation was reaffirmed. Focusing on a longer-term impact, specific measures that entities of the United Nations development system took in response included convening global and regional forums, fostering policy and institutional coherence, creating multi-stakeholder partnerships and mainstreaming South-South and triangular cooperation into their monitoring and accountability frameworks.

36. Responding to calls by Member States to bolster coordinated and coherent support for South-South cooperation, 12 of 28 United Nations development system entities reported having a specific unit dedicated to South-South cooperation, and 21 of 27 entities included South-South cooperation in their most recent annual report (see [A/75/79-E/2020/55](#), para. 263).

37. The United Nations development system was urged to enhance its assistance for developing countries and to act as an enabler in seeking or facilitating partnerships, in line with national development policies (see General Assembly resolution [73/291](#), annex). United Nations entities have therefore emphasized South-South cooperation in over 80 United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks. They have provided support for South-South cooperation to government partners in 72 per cent of all United Nations country teams, with the Asia-Pacific region leading with 83 per cent.

38. The Office increased its momentum in working effectively with international and regional actors to improve understanding of the importance of international collective action in the global South to address shared challenges in implementing the 2030 Agenda and regional development frameworks such as Agenda 2063 of the African Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Community Vision 2025. The Office collaborated with the African Peer Review Mechanism and other partners to organize a meeting of experts on the theme “Post-BAPA+40 road map: South-South cooperation for the implementation of the African Union Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development”. Participants emphasized the value of strategic partnerships with stakeholders of the South to accelerate implementation of Agenda 2063.

39. The year 2019 saw a surge in the number of policy dialogues and related initiatives by members of the United Nations development system, reflecting the commitment to follow up on the Buenos Aires outcome document of the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation. As highlighted in the 2020 report on the state of South-South cooperation, more than 145 policy dialogues and 175 programmes and capacity-building activities on South-South and triangular cooperation were held by 27 United Nations entities, targeting achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

40. Support for regional integration increased during the reporting period. In the regional economic commissions, for example, South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation remained an integral part of technical cooperation focusing on the implementation of legal instruments, norms and standards, and relevant good practices. Harnessing renewed commitments after the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, the Forum for East Asia-Latin America Cooperation, an interregional partnership between the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, called for the strengthening of cooperation with international organizations, think tanks, civil society and the private sector to intensify concerted efforts and effectively conduct projects and forums. Each forum will serve as a platform for countries to share their experiences as users of South-South and triangular cooperation, their institutional arrangements, policies and lessons learned, and ways to leverage multi-stakeholder partnership.<sup>6</sup> The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia leveraged resources from its Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation to encourage the exchange of experts and experiences among its member States and to build national capacity to improve coordination with external development actors for the absorption of aid and assistance. It was noted in the 2020 programme plan and budget of the Economic Commission for Africa that the Commission would work to develop joint initiatives with other regional commissions to strengthen the regional dimension of both global development and South-South cooperation (see [E/ECA/COE/38/12](#), annex, para. 13).

41. In 2019, with regard to climate action, there was also growth and consolidation in the Partnership for Action on Green Economy, which brings together the United Nations Environment Programme, the International Labour Organization (ILO), UNDP, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research to collaborate on and synchronize activities.<sup>7</sup>

42. In the area of food and nutrition, agencies based in Rome intensified their collaboration in the fight against hunger, building on their joint road map entitled “Towards BAPA+40”. Their commitment to South-South cooperation was guided by innovative mechanisms, such as brokering partnerships with the private sector and establishing blended finance mechanisms, furthering synergies among existing and forthcoming projects to strengthen the capacity of host Governments and generate development benefits for the most vulnerable.<sup>8</sup> These initiatives are of critical importance because it is not projected that the world will achieve zero hunger by 2030.

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<sup>6</sup> See Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Technical Cooperation Highlights 2018–2019*, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> See Partnership for Action on Green Economy, “PAGE agencies meet in Geneva to design the Partnership’s future beyond 2020”, 9–11 April 2020.

<sup>8</sup> See Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), *Evaluation of the FAO Strategy for Partnerships with the Private Sector* (Rome, 2019).

43. In April 2019, the Division for Inclusive Social Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the ILO Social Protection Department joined forces to address the challenge of the lack of social protection, which has been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic in many developing countries. As a result, the partners implemented a joint project on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and ending poverty through universal social protection. The main objective of the project was to strengthen the capacity of Governments in that area. As a result of the project experiences, new practical tools will be developed and shared with more countries through South-South and triangular cooperation.<sup>9</sup>

44. UNDP had created 91 support platforms for 115 countries and territories as at February 2021.<sup>10</sup> The platforms contribute to identifying, co-creating, replicating and scaling up South-South cooperation solutions. In 2020, UNDP implemented over 1,300 South-South cooperation projects, accounting for 8 per cent of all projects.

45. With regard to peacebuilding, the 2019 Peacebuilding Commission ambassadorial-level meeting on South-South and triangular cooperation for peacebuilding and sustaining peace and the complementary provisions and principles of the twin resolutions on the review in 2015 of the peacebuilding architecture served as the basis for the mainstreaming, by the Commission, of South-South and triangular cooperation into its support for national priorities, in accordance with the Buenos Aires outcome document of the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation. The Commission's country- and region-specific meetings and thematic discussions facilitated the sharing of experiences, good practices and expertise among conflict-affected countries, including through centres of excellence.

46. The establishment of physical and virtual mechanisms to facilitate the South-South and triangular sharing of knowledge and experiences also expanded. Many United Nations entities created multilingual, interactive virtual collaboration spaces. Examples include: (a) the South-South Meeting Point of ILO; (b) the Rural Solutions Portal of the International Fund for Agricultural Development; (c) WIPO Match of the World Intellectual Property Organization; (d) the Inclusive Policy Lab of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; (e) the United Nations Industrial Development Organization Centres for South-South Industrial Cooperation; (f) the South-South Experience Exchange Facility of the World Bank Group; (g) the South-South Cooperation Gateway of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); (h) the SDG Good Practices portal of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs; and (i) South-South Galaxy of the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation.

## **B. Triangular cooperation: complementing strengths of various actors**

47. Northern and Southern partners are cooperating to accelerate achievement of the 2030 Agenda through multilateral alliances called “triangular partnerships”. The United Nations system recognizes that triangular cooperation involves Southern-driven partnerships between two or more developing countries supported by a developed country or countries or a multilateral organization or organizations to implement development cooperation programmes and projects (see [SSC/19/3](#), para. 11). Experience has continued to show that triangular cooperation is an investment in partnerships that encourages innovation and co-creation through mutual learning. For example, the Global Partnership Initiative on Effective Triangular Cooperation is led by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

<sup>9</sup> See United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “Achieving SDGs and ending poverty through universal social protection”, 30 April 2019.

<sup>10</sup> See <https://acceleratorlabs.undp.org>.

(OECD). The Core Group of the Global Partnership Initiative builds on the fresh momentum generated at the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation to take further steps to: (a) deepen engagement with all constituents around the effectiveness of triangular cooperation; and (b) explore data collection to generate an evidence base for informed policy action and peer learning on effective triangular cooperation.<sup>11</sup> The Core Group is diverse and includes Canada, Chile, the Ibero-American Programme for the Strengthening of South-South Cooperation, the Islamic Development Bank, Japan, Mexico, OECD and the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation.

48. In supporting the implementation of commitments made at the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, the Global Partnership Initiative on Effective Triangular Cooperation developed a road map and action plan on triangular cooperation until 2022. It launched the publication *Triangular Cooperation in the Era of the 2030 Agenda: Sharing Evidence and Stories from the Field*, which presents the comparative advantages and opportunities of triangular cooperation, analyses challenges and opportunities to strengthen the institutional framework of that modality and introduces voluntary guidelines for effective triangular cooperation.

49. In October 2019, OECD organized the fifth international meeting on triangular cooperation, entitled “Implementing BAPA+40: what’s next for triangular cooperation?”, which brought together over 150 representatives of a diverse range of stakeholders from 67 countries. Recommendations made at the meeting were focused on mainstreaming triangular cooperation, integrating development banks and adapting triangular tools to favour peer learning and local ownership, among other things.

50. The Regional Fund for Triangular Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean, established by the German Agency for International Cooperation, seeks to promote public policies for sustainable development by implementing triangular cooperation projects. It provides the framework for cooperation, involving recipient countries, Southern providers and Germany as a traditional provider.

### **C. Commitment of United Nations entities and countries to triangular cooperation as a development cooperation modality**

51. One example of triangular cooperation partnerships facilitated by United Nations entities is the collaboration between the United Nations Children’s Fund and the Government of Brazil in partnerships spanning different regions of the South, including Armenia, Ethiopia, Nepal, Paraguay, Sao Tome and Principe and Yemen, to address child protection, health, early childhood development, social protection and water and sanitation.

52. The Colombian Presidential Agency for Cooperation, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, the Brazilian Cooperation Agency, the Islamic Development Bank, the African Peer Review Mechanism, the Global Partnership Initiative on Effective Triangular Cooperation, the Pacific Islands Development Forum, the Commonwealth and the Group of 77 and China collaborated with the Office to implement joint triangular cooperation activities.

53. A triangular cooperation project agreement was signed by FAO, China and the Netherlands in the context of scaling up the FAO-China South-South Cooperation

<sup>11</sup> See Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, “How we partner together for sustainable development: global partnership for effective development cooperation – 2020–2022 work programme”, May 2020.

Programme. The project is aimed at enhancing aquaculture production and value chain development in Ethiopia.

#### **IV. South-South and triangular cooperation in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and building back better: the impact of the pandemic and the imperative for South-South and triangular cooperation**

54. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 heightened the urgency for more inclusive regional and national policy responses to crises. The pandemic put to the test the reaffirmation by Member States at the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation of South-South cooperation as a manifestation of solidarity among peoples and countries of the South that contributes to their national and collective self-reliance. It made collaboration among countries of the global South to address a common challenge in the spirit of solidarity more imperative. Without concerted action, the spread of the pandemic in developing countries could have a long-lasting, adverse socioeconomic impact, especially in countries with fragile and vulnerable economies.

55. In addition to the health crisis and the human cost of the pandemic, most developing countries lack stimulus packages; the economic recovery will require significant international support and cooperation. The present report shows that there are opportunities within existing South-South approaches on which the development community could build in this regard. Such approaches include policy dialogues, technical assistance, financial support, peer-to-peer learning, exchanges of knowledge and networking. Several areas highlighted as priorities in the Buenos Aires outcome document of the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, including trade and investment, climate action, health and education to reduce multidimensional poverty, are also crucial to the response to the pandemic in the global South and future recovery efforts.

56. The importance of multilateral approaches for the development of equitable access to affordable vaccines, treatment and medical supplies cannot be overemphasized. Funding of the COVAX Facility by developing countries in a position to do so encapsulates South-South solidarity and human solidarity in general.

57. Countries of the South looked to a repositioned United Nations development system to provide support for a robust response to the pandemic and for meeting their longer-term development challenges. In response, resident coordinators and United Nations country teams worked with national Governments and regional economic commissions to support Governments of the global South through coordinated efforts. In future, the United Nations development system will work closely with national Governments of the South, at their request, to respond to the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic in line with the United Nations socioeconomic response plans coordinated by resident coordinators. The identification and documentation of the policies and strategies that developing countries have used to prevent widespread infections will be useful evidence for future capacity development in responses to pandemics and other crises.

58. In the 2020 Development Cooperation Forum survey study, challenges associated with the response to and recovery from the pandemic were revealed, emphasizing the role of enablers of development cooperation in improving quality and impact for better results. National productive capacities can be bolstered by supporting Southern stakeholders in identifying the most pressing issues for the

global South to address through collaborative efforts and by enhancing linkages between actions taken, partnerships built and resources mobilized.

59. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific developed a regional COVID-19 policy tracker<sup>12</sup> and organized the third meeting of the Asia-Pacific Directors General Forum for South-South and Triangular Cooperation for member States and leaders to learn from the experiences and good practices of other countries as they gradually emerge from the crisis and enhance their resilience.

60. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean built the COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean to support the review of and follow-up to the public policies being implemented by its 33 countries to limit the impact of the pandemic and provide analyses of the socioeconomic impact that those policies would have at the national and sectoral levels.

61. The World Food Programme (WFP) supported its response to the pandemic through the COVID-19 South-South Opportunity Fund. The Fund helped seven host Governments in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and the Middle East to address critical areas of need in order to protect and enhance progress in meeting Sustainable Development Goal 2 on ending hunger, including measures to strengthen food systems, emergency preparedness and response, and school-based programmes.

62. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) embraced the outcomes of the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, recognizing trends towards rapid urbanization in developing countries and calling for greater South-South and triangular cooperation initiatives aimed at the eradication of poverty in all its forms and dimensions in urban and rural areas (see General Assembly resolution 73/291, annex). Between March and August 2020, the UN-Habitat COVID-19 response “supported the overall response to the pandemic in 37 countries and territories and more than 250 cities, benefiting 6.8 million people, the majority being residents of slums and informal settlements”.<sup>13</sup>

63. In 2020, ILO, with its International Training Centre, launched 23 South-South and triangular cooperation projects across five regions, covering 75 countries. These global activities promoted peer-learning activities, training and capacity-building, joint research, fellowships and virtual study tours between countries of the South. The projects included innovative virtual components addressing the impacts of COVID-19 on workers.

64. In the area of access to and transfer of technologies, WFP launched a toolkit for designing and implementing South-South and triangular cooperation activities using digital modalities. The aim was to provide new step-by-step guidance for WFP practitioners of South-South and triangular cooperation on how to effectively design and implement such cooperation using remote means. The Pan American Health Organization, in collaboration with United Nations entities, organized an exchange of good practices and lessons learned in response to the COVID-19 pandemic with respect to different aspects of health emergency preparedness and response, in particular for countries of the global South.

65. On digital cooperation, the United Nations development system “will support Governments to rapidly design, adjust, scale up and implement cash transfer programmes to respond to immediate economic impacts of COVID-19”.<sup>14</sup> The South-South digital cooperation agenda of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development for boosting new industrialization and integration opportunities among

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<sup>12</sup> See [www.unescap.org/covid19](http://www.unescap.org/covid19).

<sup>13</sup> See <https://unhabitat.org/ar/node/143739>.

<sup>14</sup> United Nations, “A UN framework for the immediate socioeconomic response to COVID-19”, April 2020, p. 14.

developing countries can provide a policy path towards building resilience in the South.

66. The World Trade Organization developed the Goods Trade Barometer and the Services Trade Barometer to provide timely and accurate information on handling the unprecedented disruption caused by the pandemic to the global economy and world trade, especially in the global South.

67. The International Monetary Fund responded to the COVID-19 crisis with unprecedented speed and magnitude in terms of its financial assistance to help countries to set the stage for economic recovery. The United Nations Capital Development Fund helped local governments to channel resources necessary to meet the needs of the immediate crisis as well as strengthen their capacity to deliver services to citizens afterwards. The World Bank advised countries to scale up social protection programmes and leverage technology to ensure that cash transfers and stimulus packages reach citizens directly. It also made \$12 billion available for developing countries to purchase and distribute COVID-19 vaccines.

68. The United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation leveraged established partnerships to facilitate support among countries of the global South to contain the spread of COVID-19 through policy dialogues and peer-to-peer support among various actors. This engagement was encouraged in a resolution adopted by consensus by the Second Committee, which is focused on the contributions of South-South and triangular cooperation in the response to and recovery from the pandemic.<sup>15</sup>

69. In efforts to mobilize monetary and other resources to strengthen the preparedness and response capacities of countries globally, including vulnerable developing countries of the South, the United Nations launched the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund and is grateful to donor partners and institutions that have come forward to assist developing countries in combating the pandemic.

70. To address challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, “developing countries have responded to support each other, particularly least developed countries, small island developing States and landlocked developing countries, with agility and solidarity ... within the framework of South-South cooperation”.<sup>16</sup> Several instances of such cooperation, including triangular cooperation, were presented in my 2020 report to the Second Committee on the state of South-South cooperation.

71. The United Nations development system has endeavoured to bring Southern perspectives and development solutions to the forefront by tapping into the comparative advantages of different stakeholders. The pressing challenge today is to pool isolated resources available through the ever-expanding architecture of South-South and triangular cooperation in meeting the development needs of Member States.

## V. Recommendations

72. Within the context of the broader reforms of the United Nations development system, the recently agreed United Nations system-wide strategy on South-South and triangular cooperation for sustainable development has the potential to enhance the role and impact of the Office and to galvanize the expertise of many United Nations organizations to support the South-South initiatives of Member States. All relevant United Nations entities are fully committed to implementing the strategy at the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> See [www.unsouthsouth.org/2020/10/12/health-and-socio-economic-impact-of-covid19-challenges-and-opportunities](http://www.unsouthsouth.org/2020/10/12/health-and-socio-economic-impact-of-covid19-challenges-and-opportunities).

headquarters, country and regional levels in line with their respective mandates and strategic plans. This should help to maximize the development impact through measures such as the establishment of robust funding mechanisms, using inclusive partnerships involving Governments and the private sector.

73. The report also shows that the Office has had an impact on the work of many United Nations policymaking bodies and the high-level forum of Directors General for development cooperation to elevate the contribution of South-South and triangular cooperation to achieving the 2030 Agenda. The Office coordinated United Nations support for South-South cooperation in addition to spurring the sharing of knowledge and experiences to foster human and institutional capacity development in the developing world. Member States in a position to do so are encouraged to contribute further to the Office's work to ensure that it has the human and financial resources necessary to carry out its work more effectively.

74. The establishment of the United Nations Inter-Agency Mechanism for South-South and Triangular Cooperation by the Office and other United Nations organizations was an important milestone for the United Nations in this area. Looking ahead, it offers opportunities to use digital and other technologies to refine the South-South and triangular cooperation methodologies, including coordinated policy dialogue and the sharing of knowledge and experiences. It also allows members to increase support for developing countries towards the mobilization of collective action informed by knowledge products based on data on and analysis of effective policies and strategies that are responsive to global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. The developing countries that have been more effective in preventing the spread of COVID-19 and those that have had notable success in the provision of social safety nets or in addressing such hazards as floods, droughts, wildfires, pests and earthquakes can, in future, inform new forms of South-South peer learning.

75. In line with the earlier recommendation on the need for United Nations entities working in similar sectors to harmonize their support for the South-South initiatives of Member States, the present report shows that organizations based in Rome have undertaken joint South-South cooperation initiatives to support implementation of the priorities in food and nutrition that are set out in the Buenos Aires outcome document of the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation. More United Nations entities can maximize the impact of their work through similar collaborative programmes.

76. The report has highlighted that developing countries increasingly trade and invest within the global South. They can further bolster aspects of South-South cooperation focused on the creation of an enabling environment for enhanced economic cooperation through policy measures to integrate South-South cooperation into United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks. Such policy measures should spur the provision of adequate investments in public goods, health and the preparation of a skilled workforce that most developing countries need to gainfully participate in regional and global value chains to create jobs and eradicate poverty in all its dimensions.

77. I commend countries of the global South that showed solidarity with each another to control the spread and limit the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, I encourage countries of the South, their partners in the North and other stakeholders to increase their support for developing countries and vulnerable groups through United Nations mechanisms established for that purpose, including the COVAX Facility and the United Nations Fund for South-South Cooperation, where appropriate. Such joint efforts should leverage expertise and other resources in the global South to ensure a more equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines and to

lay the foundation for stronger alliances in addressing other existential threats to humanity as the world builds back better and stronger from the pandemic.

78. I welcome the measures taken by partners in developed countries, such as OECD members, to foster triangular cooperation using concrete plans to follow up on the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation through multi-stakeholder partnerships inclusive of the private sector, with a focus on peer learning and local ownership, among other priorities. Such partnerships can reinforce human solidarity and envision practical policies and strategies to reduce inequalities and extreme poverty. Such measures need to build on current lessons about increased interdependence in the globalized world, as illustrated by the thousands of doctors, nurses and other essential workers from the global South who are firmly embedded in the workforce of many developed countries.

79. During the current decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals, South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation supported by the United Nations system should have a greater development impact. This can be achieved with the help of the twentieth session of the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation by, for example, considering measures that are calibrated to enable the least developed countries to graduate from that status and to empower other developing countries to escape the middle-income trap.

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