

Concept Note
Thematic Discussion at the 20th Session of the
High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation
New York, 1-4 June 2021

I. Theme

The topic for discussion during the thematic segment of the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation is *“Accelerating the achievement of the SDGs through effective implementation of the BAPA+40 outcome document while responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and similar global crises”*. A keynote speaker and five eminent panelists representing Member States, United Nations agencies, intergovernmental organizations, international institutions, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) will lead the discussion that will take place from 3:00 p.m.- 5:00 p.m. on June 2, 2021.

II. Background

As highlighted by the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, the ambitious and transformational 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development “cannot happen without the ideas, energy and tremendous ingenuity of the countries of the Global South.”¹ At the Second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation (BAPA+40), held in Argentina, March 2019, Member States reaffirmed the important role and contribution of South-South and triangular cooperation to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and renewed their commitment to work in solidarity towards achievement of these internationally agreed goals. In keeping with the commitment to follow up on the BAPA+40 outcome document, since 2019, Member States and United Nations entities have taken several measures to accelerate achievement of Agenda 2030 through an increase in the momentum, scope and dynamism of South-South cooperation.

However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has tested this commitment as Governments have been engaged in tackling multiple domestic crisis which also threaten to impact progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the 2020 SDG Progress Report², UN Secretary-General António Guterres highlights that “due to COVID-19, an unprecedented health, economic and social crisis is threatening lives and livelihoods, making the achievement of Goals even more challenging.” The Report warns that COVID-19 will worsen food insecurity and reverse years of progress in access to education and maternal and child deaths. According to recent research³, as a result of the pandemic, “there could be between 41 to 169 million

¹ <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2018-11-28/secretary-generals-opening-remarks-global-south-south-development>

² United Nations, The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020, <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/>

³ Abidoye, B., Felix, J., Kapto, S. & Patterson, L. (2021). Leaving No One Behind: Impact of COVID-19 on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). New York, NY and Denver CO: United Nations Development Programme and Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures

people in extreme poverty by 2030 in countries with low and medium levels of human development, including 20 and 83 million women and girls”. Further, “COVID-19 could also increase the number of people suffering from malnutrition by 12.8 million in this subset of countries by 2030”. An ambitious effort or “SDG push” is required to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and put countries back on a faster track towards achieving the 2030 Agenda including targeted interventions in inclusive green growth, integrated policy choices in governance, social protection, green economy, and digitalisation.

At the same time,, the pandemic has also made clear that international cooperation and collaboration among countries of the Global South is an imperative to slow the spread of the pandemic, accelerate SDG achievement in developing countries and to prevent adverse socioeconomic impact, especially in vulnerable economies. A resilient, inclusive, and sustainable response to and recovery from COVID-19 and equitable access to affordable vaccines, therapeutics, treatment, diagnostics and medical supplies, calls for a renewed commitment to multilateralism, including South-South and triangular cooperation. As developing countries grapple with the response to COVID-19 and recovery efforts, South-South and triangular cooperation in crucial areas emphasized in the BAPA+40 outcome document, such as multi-dimensional poverty, trade and investment, climate action, health, education and technology transfer, become more relevant than ever before. Leveraging South-South and triangular cooperation via technical assistance, peer-to-peer learning, exchanges of knowledge and experiences, financial support, can play a catalytic role in supporting developing countries achieve Sustainable Development Goals and build back better from the pandemic.

In this context, the international community and developed countries have a pivotal role to play in collaborating with, and supporting, developing countries in implementing their sustainable development agenda. To do so, it is important to foster South-South cooperation in line with BAPA 40, as well as triangular cooperation and public-private partnerships, bearing in mind that South-South cooperation is not a substitute for, but rather a complement to, North-South cooperation.

The pandemic has had varying degree of impact across countries. The most vulnerable nations and peoples lack capacities to respond to the health and socio-economic consequences of the pandemic. According to the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS), the pandemic threatens to impact the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) disproportionately. In addition, it is also important to recognize the specific challenges facing middle-income countries (MICs), whose difficulties have been greatly exacerbated by the pandemic.

In this Decade of Action, international solidarity is even more crucial to get back on track to fulfil the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and respond to crisis.

III. Objective

This thematic debate is designed to allow discussions on strategies, approaches and mechanisms of South-South and triangular cooperation to achieve SDGs at the national, subregional, regional and global levels, while responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and other crises.

The thematic discussion provides an opportunity to explore the following questions:

- How can South-South and triangular cooperation help member states to mitigate the impact of COVID-19, and how can UN system help?
- What capacity gaps need to be addressed in the Global South to effectively leverage South-South and triangular cooperation for development purposes in this Decade of Action, including through a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable recovery from COVID-19?
- How can we maximize the impact of regional and international South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation in line with BAPA+40 OR in crucial areas emphasized in the BAPA+40 outcome document, such as multi-dimensional poverty, trade and investment, climate action, health, education and technology transfer on mutually agreed terms?

The discussants will also share examples of good practices and successful experiences of leveraging South-South and triangular cooperation modalities to achieve SDGs and to support development priorities of countries of the Global South as well as respond to the pandemic. They will also discuss efforts at leveraging South-South and triangular cooperation to ensure equitable and inclusive access to affordable vaccines, therapeutics, treatment, diagnostics and medical supplies as well as sharing of knowledge and experiences to support resilient recovery from the socio-economic impact of the pandemic.

Among the topics that could be discussed in the thematic session are South-South and triangular cooperation approaches to ensure equitable, resilient recovery from COVID-19; the impact of graduation in social and economic progress in developing countries, including challenges and opportunities for a comprehensive understanding of multidimensional approach of sustainable development.

IV. Provisional Agenda

The thematic discussion will be held on Thursday 2nd June 2021, between 1500 and 1700 hrs., and will be moderated by XXX. Five panelists will each make a ten minutes presentation, followed by interactive discussions. The session will end with a summary presentation of the findings by the moderator.

1500 – 1515	Opening Remarks by HLC Bureau Member (President/ Vice President) (5 minutes) Remarks by the moderator and Introduction of theme of panel discussion
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	(10 minutes): Chair / Member State
1515 – 1615	Keynote Speaker (10 minutes) Presentations by panelists (8-10 minutes each): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Member State/South ○ Member State/North ○ IGO ○ UN ○ Other stakeholders (CSO, NGO, Private sector, etc.)
1615 – 1655	Interactive discussions: Moderated by Chair
1655 – 1700	Summary of discussions (5 minutes): Chair

V. Participation

Participants at the High-level Committee include United Nations member states and observers, United Nations organizations and agencies, as well as inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) and accredited non-governmental organizations.

This event is intended to stimulate discussions and interactive exchanges among and between delegations and the secretariat. Delegates and other participants will have the opportunity to interact with the panelists by posing questions and/or making remarks.

The meeting provides an opportune occasion for participants to examine, with experts, the significance of South-South and triangular cooperation for global sustainable development and the role the United Nations plays in strengthening South-South and triangular partnerships for development.

Delegates and others interested in preparing for the panel discussion in advance may wish to review the reports prepared for the 20th session of the High-level Committee. These reports can be found on our website at <https://www.unsouthsouth.org/our-work/policy-and-intergovernmental-support/high-level-committee-on-south-south-cooperation/high-level-committee-on-south-south-cooperation-20th-session/>.

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