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Operational activities for development: South-South cooperation for development

State of South-South cooperation*

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted in response to General Assembly resolution [75/234](#), in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare a comprehensive report on the state of South-South cooperation. It highlights the follow-up to the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, focusing on, among other things, the efforts of United Nations entities to promote South-South and triangular cooperation initiatives at the global, regional and national levels from January 2020 to August 2021 and the growing relevance, mainstreaming and institutionalization of United Nations support to such cooperation. The report concludes with recommendations on ways to further utilize South-South cooperation as a key development modality to accelerate progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development during the current decade of action.

* Owing to broad consultations and to technical reasons, completion of the report was delayed.



I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted in response to General Assembly resolution [75/234](#), in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare a comprehensive report on the state of South-South cooperation, including implementation of the recommendations contained in the Buenos Aires outcome document of the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation. It describes numerous initiatives undertaken by the United Nations development system in support of South-South cooperation from January 2020 to August 2021 in the context of the follow-up to the second High-level Conference and the intensified search for multilateral solutions to global crises that have increased the need for international collective action, including South-South cooperation. During the reporting period, the urgent push for South-South approaches to development stemmed largely from the threat that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic posed by reversing progress in eradicating extreme poverty in its multiple manifestations and other promises of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

2. During the reporting period, the need for more effective South-South cooperation as a complement to and not a substitute for North-South cooperation was further underscored by the glaring disparity in access to COVID-19 vaccines, given that about 55 per cent of the eligible population in developed countries had been vaccinated, while in some low-income and middle-income countries, the vaccination rate was less than 1 per cent as of July 2021.¹ Moreover, the pandemic pushed almost 100 million people into extreme poverty in 2020.² In that context, Member States attached great importance to South-South and triangular cooperation partnerships in efforts to find multilateral solutions to challenges requiring international collective action, as envisaged in Sustainable Development Goal 17. The present report and my report to the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation ([SSC/20/2](#)) should be read through the lens of a broad vision of strengthening multilateralism, which informs the measures that United Nations organizations have taken to bring South-South and triangular cooperation to bear in efforts to fulfil the promises of the 2030 Agenda.

3. Section II of the report highlights the increased relevance of South-South cooperation and the support by the United Nations system to that modality in the context of the measures taken to address existential threats to humanity, including the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change and their numerous effects.

4. Section III describes how the renewed impetus to boost South-South cooperation that was energized by the second High-level Conference continued to hold sway in the wide-ranging initiatives of Member States that United Nations entities supported towards the overarching goal of achieving the objectives of the 2030 Agenda.

5. Section IV focuses on how the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation, in addition to coordinating South-South and triangular cooperation across the United Nations development system, continued to undertake advocacy, knowledge management and other catalytic initiatives to advance South-South cooperation.

6. The conclusions, set out in section V, are followed by recommendations on measures to further leverage South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation at

¹ World Health Organization, “Vaccine inequity undermining global economic recovery”, 22 July 2021. Available at www.who.int/news/item/22-07-2021-vaccine-inequity-undermining-global-economic-recovery.

² World Bank, “Updated estimates of the impact of COVID-19 on global poverty: Turning the corner on the pandemic in 2021?”, 24 June 2021. Available at <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/updated-estimates-impact-covid-19-global-poverty-turning-corner-pandemic-2021>.

the national, regional and global levels to help countries to recover and build forward better after the COVID-19 pandemic while accelerating the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

7. The report was prepared primarily on the basis of survey data collected by the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation for that purpose in 2021 from 23 United Nations entities and regional commissions. The report is illustrative rather than exhaustive in describing the state of South-South cooperation during the reporting period and should be read in conjunction with my report ([SSC/20/2](#)) and the report of the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) ([SSC/20/1](#)) submitted to the twentieth session of the High-level Committee on South-South cooperation in June 2021. The Committee report on that session ([A/76/39](#)) also contains considerable information on the state of South-South cooperation, in particular regarding the activities of Member States from the global North and the global South at the national and regional levels.

II. Support of the organizations of the United Nations development system to South-South and triangular cooperation in the context of existential threats to humanity

A. Facilitating South-South responses to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic

8. After the COVID-19 outbreak reached pandemic proportions, the need to respond to the resulting health and economic disruptions became a worldwide emergency. Policies and programmes to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and promote recovery were thus central to the policy dialogues, publications, knowledge-sharing events and exchanges of best practices in which United Nations organizations engaged in the global South during the reporting period.

9. The development of national deployment and vaccination plans was led by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), with support from United Nations country teams, under the overall leadership of the resident coordinators. These serve as the overarching country plans for COVID-19 vaccine deployment as well as the main framework for country support in addressing the pandemic. Efforts were also made to ensure that South-South and triangular cooperation was mainstreamed across the 121 United Nations socioeconomic response plans at the country level. Drawing on its integrator role, UNDP played a key role in that regard and in 2020, South-South and triangular cooperation projects accounted for about 17 per cent of all UNDP COVID-19 projects, with more than 60 per cent of them relating to health system support, inclusive and integrated crisis management, and governance. In addition, UNDP issued a report on African South-South and triangular cooperation responses to COVID-19 and beyond, in which it stressed the importance of South-South and triangular cooperation in addressing COVID-19 and other development challenges.

10. A number of initiatives were also undertaken in response to the call by the Secretary-General for concrete financing solutions to the COVID-19 health and development emergency, in particular for developing countries. In its *World Investment Report 2021: Investing in Sustainable Recovery*, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) noted that global flows of foreign direct investment had been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, having fallen to \$1 trillion in 2020 from \$1.5 trillion in 2019. Developing countries regretted the decline given that most of the reductions were greenfield investments in industry and new infrastructure on which they greatly depended for sustainable development.

11. Supported by the African Union and the World Bank, the Africa Vaccine Acquisition Task Team initiative is a demonstration of African regional cooperation in which African Union member States collectively purchased vaccines to safeguard the health of the African population, leveraging a \$2 billion facility provided by the African Export-Import Bank.

12. In 2020, a regional South-South workshop on boosting remittances during the pandemic was organized by the UNDP Africa Finance Sector Hub. In addition, a round-table series on COVID-19 was launched under the League of Arab States-Japan-UNDP tripartite partnership. UNDP Somalia, through the accelerator lab, conducted a COVID-19 hackathon with SIMAD University and collaborated with the Information Technology Institute (Egypt) and the Access to Information Programme (Bangladesh) in building the capacity of Somali youth.

13. In the report *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020: Transforming Food Systems for Affordable Health Diets*, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), UNICEF, the World Food Programme (WFP) and WHO warned that the world was not on track to achieve zero hunger by 2030 and cautioned that the food security and nutrition status of the most vulnerable population groups was likely to deteriorate further owing to the health and socioeconomic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

14. IFAD, through its Rural Solutions Portal, shared innovative practices and experiences to mitigate the adverse impact of the pandemic and increase the resilience of agriculture and food systems. More than 60 solutions are currently available on the platform to support knowledge-sharing and future contributions to the COVID-19 response. The China-IFAD South-South and Triangular Cooperation Facility designated \$4 million to support the generation and exchange of innovative solutions, approaches and methodologies for post-COVID-19 recovery.

15. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) organized many policy dialogues and workshops on leveraging public governance and exploring innovative solutions to address the COVID-19 pandemic in the Arab States region, a high-level meeting on supporting persons with disabilities in the region during COVID-19, and the response of the region to COVID-19 and the way forward for health and well-being. ESCWA and the Division for Arab States, Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) of the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation jointly convened the event “South-South cooperation for more inclusive and sustainable social protection systems in the COVID-19 recovery and achievement of the 2030 Agenda” on the sidelines of the 2021 high-level political forum on sustainable development. The aim was to highlight the potential of intraregional and interregional South-South cooperation in advancing more inclusive, sustainable social protection systems in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis and during the decade of action.

16. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) compiled the measures and policies adopted by the 33 countries of the region to confront the effects of the pandemic. It also supported the development of a series of intergovernmental consultations and assessment studies to analyse the economic and social impacts of COVID-19 at the national level and within specific sectors. In addition, ECLAC organized seminars, policy dialogues and meetings for Governments to share their best practices and discuss challenges regarding the pandemic and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

17. In 2020, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) organized a series of South-South knowledge-sharing events for medical and policy experts from China to share their experiences in the early response to COVID-19 in the context of sexual

and reproductive health and rights. The series was the most-attended online event ever organized by UNFPA, with 450 participants from national agencies.

18. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) supported developing countries in their response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic through its Global Education Coalition. That included promoting South-South cooperation in the COVID-19 education response by facilitating distance learning and developing smart classrooms through the UNESCO International Research and Training Centre for Rural Education in Beijing, the Smart Learning Institute of Beijing Normal University, the UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education and the International Institute of Online Education. Regarding obstacles to implementing Sustainable Development Goal 4 on access to education, in its *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and education – All Means All*, UNESCO reiterated that 40 per cent of the poorest countries had failed to support learners at risk during the COVID-19 crisis and urged improved inclusion in education, focusing on those left behind, when schools reopened to foster resilience and equal societies. In addition to pointing out that 258 million children and young people were entirely excluded from education, with poverty being the main obstacle to access, the report highlighted many challenges that could be tackled through South-South cooperation. For example, many countries still had policies and laws that fostered education segregation and the related stereotyping, discrimination and alienation; others banned pregnant girls from school; 117 countries allowed child marriage; and 20 countries had not ratified the International Labour Organization (ILO) Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) banning child labour.

19. The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) convened exchanges of good practices and lessons learned in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in collaboration with UNFPA, UNICEF and the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation through virtual sessions on the themes “Universal health coverage and the coronavirus crisis: challenges and responses”, “Maintaining essential health services while responding to COVID-19”, and “Post-COVID-19: how can countries in the South work together to strengthen health systems around reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health”.

20. Various efforts were undertaken to leverage South-South and triangular cooperation to support the work of cities in the spirit of the United Nations system-wide strategy on sustainable urban development. Under its project on South-South and triangular cooperation among maritime-continental Silk Road cities for sustainable development and with funding from the Government of China, the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation organized events on disaster risk reduction strategies to respond to COVID-19 jointly with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Global Education and Training Institute and PAHO. Nearly 50 other online and in-person capacity development training events and knowledge-sharing exchanges were organized with some 30 United Nations specialized agencies and entities in 2020 under the cities project and the Global South-South Development Centre project. The training and exchanges, on topics such as public health, e-commerce and agriculture value-chain development, achieved more than 3.2 million views globally. Also through its cities project, the Office mobilized donations of personal protective equipment from city partners and coordinated the deployment of more than 1 million masks in partnership with UNDP country offices, benefiting people in 22 countries in 2020. The Global South-South Development Centre project, with its partners and the institutions of its members, facilitated the mobilization of more than 36,000 masks, 12,000 test kits and devices, and other medical supplies valued at \$3,364,000, benefiting people from more than 20 African countries. Separately, in 2020, the United Nations Capital Development Fund facilitated the exchange of experiences and adaptable development solutions

through its initiative on rebuilding local fiscal space, providing a platform for six cities in Bangladesh, Ghana, Mexico, Morocco, the Republic of Moldova and Uganda to share ideas and expertise to address COVID-19-induced losses and boost local economic development opportunities.

21. In its role as the United Nations system-wide focal point for South-South cooperation, the Office further leveraged the expertise of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes in facilitating the capacity development of Member States to address the pandemic in various countries and regions around the world.

22. South-South Galaxy, a repository of knowledge on South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation hosted and managed by the Office, supported the mapping of responses to COVID-19 across the global South, providing a dynamic source of knowledge to address the pandemic and enable countries to learn from one another. The platform was also used in organizing more than 20 knowledge-sharing events in partnership with United Nations partners and Governments that facilitated exchanges on responses to COVID-19.

23. The Office and its Division for Africa mobilized \$260,000 and teamed up with the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and the African Union Development Agency to provide COVID-19 test kits to African countries and to organize training for medical personnel. It also teamed up with the Federation of West African Chambers of Commerce and Industry to set up and conduct a continental discussion group for Africans to exchange information on possible ways to address the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa. In addition, the Office and the African Union Commission co-organized a series of consultations and a webinar to exchange information and facilitate dialogue between African women on their contribution to COVID-19 responses.

24. The Office's Division for Asia and the Pacific conducted a survey on the role of South-South cooperation in the response and recovery from the pandemic in the region. All 17 countries responding to the survey had received support and most had also provided support to neighbouring countries and other countries of the global South.

25. In a further response to COVID-19, the Office, jointly with the International Telecommunication Union, collaborated in developing a digital innovation challenge to scale up digital innovations through South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation. The challenge, which was launched in June 2021, will identify scalable innovative digital solutions that will enable countries, societies, communities, institutions and individuals of the global South to deal with the cascading effects of the pandemic.

26. The Office's Division for Arab States, Europe and CIS organized an interregional policy dialogue and stocktaking on public policy leadership and institutional arrangements for advancing South-South and triangular cooperation in the Arab States, Europe and CIS within the overall context of COVID-19 response and recovery in the decade of action. With the participation of senior public policy officials and experts, regional United Nations entities, including regional commissions, relevant issue-based coalitions, United Nations resident coordinators and think tanks, participants deliberated on topics such as opportunities for strengthened interregional, intraregional and subregional collaboration; the role of a national architecture for South-South, East-East and triangular cooperation; and key elements for making those institutions more effective and efficient.

27. The Office and UNDP, through the South-South Global Thinkers initiative, organized a three-day virtual regional workshop in partnership with Bahrain on investing in the Sustainable Development Goals through South-South and triangular cooperation beyond COVID-19, which brought together 33 speakers representing diverse stakeholder groups from some 18 countries from the Arab States region and beyond.

28. The Office, the Japan International Cooperation Agency and the Islamic Development Bank co-organized the twelfth session of the high-level forum of Directors General for development cooperation, held in March 2020 on the theme “Trends, opportunities and challenges on the path to sustainable development: strengthening South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation in the COVID-19 context”. The event was attended by more than 160 participants, including the heads of development cooperation agencies and institutions as well as other partners. It provided specific recommendations on South-South and triangular cooperation in the context of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the need for greater efforts, nationally and internationally, to strengthen the health-care systems of the Member States, build capacities for recovery and resilience through South-South and triangular cooperation, institute enabling policies and regulations to increase the participation of the private sector in South-South and triangular cooperation activities, and intensify cooperation in the area of information and communication technologies.

29. In West and Central Africa, more than 404 volunteers of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme supported United Nations agencies, civil society organizations and public and government organizations online in their pandemic response programmes.

30. The significance of the South-South response to the COVID-19 pandemic was underscored by many delegations during the twentieth session of the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation. They emphasized that the solidarity underpinning South-South cooperation had enabled many developing countries to obtain urgently needed medications, vaccines and other medical supplies from their global South partners during the pandemic. The enhanced value of South-South cooperation revealed as a result of the pandemic is described in the report of the twentieth session of the High-level Committee (A/76/39), which highlights some new priorities for South-South cooperation necessitated by the pandemic, including the heightened need for enhanced collaboration to improve health-care systems, social protection systems and numerous other public services.

B. Facilitating South-South responses to climate change

31. The recent intensification of extreme weather events including floods, droughts and wildfires, which affect developing countries more adversely than developed countries, also sparked great interest on the part of developing countries and their partners in addressing them collectively through South-South cooperation. Over the past four years, following on from the Climate Action Summit convened by the Secretary-General in 2019 and the appeal of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination for more action on climate change in the same year, United Nations organizations took measures to nurture multilateral approaches to climate change through South-South and triangular cooperation within and across regions.

32. UNDP is implementing the project “Biogas, biomass and solar trilateral cooperation: Transitioning to sustainable energy uses in agro-industry in Sri Lanka” under a partnership among the Governments of China, Ethiopia and Sri Lanka. The project enables participants to engage and cooperate at the international level in the transfer of renewable energy technology, with a focus on smallholder farmers.

33. A project organized by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) on enhancing capacity, knowledge and technology support to build the climate resilience of vulnerable developing countries assisted Mauritania, Nepal and Seychelles in developing country-specific ecosystem-based adaptation protocols. The teams from Mauritania, Nepal and Seychelles collaborated to produce 13 scientific papers. The exchange of knowledge culminated in an array of publications and tools now used by

practitioners across the global South, including in organizing and analysing information to plan effective ecosystem-based adaptation options.³

34. The FAO-China South-South cooperation project on transboundary animal disease control in the Greater Mekong subregion resulted in the sharing of good practices and transfer of technologies for cattle and swine disease management in participating countries (Cambodia, China, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar). In addition, FAO promoted sustainable, inclusive production systems in the cotton sector in Ecuador and Paraguay through the Lazos application, with a view to connecting men, women, young people and institutions to information that promotes sustainable rural development.

35. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) China Voluntary Fund, which promotes the transfer of South-South knowledge and technology between China and developing countries, funded a project on the transfer of solar photovoltaic technology solutions from China to Fiji and the wider region of the Pacific islands and territories to promote their sustainable social, economic and environmental development through greater use of such solutions. The project led to the design of a comprehensive programme for the transfer of photovoltaic technology from China to Pacific islands and territories.

36. UNCTAD supported landlocked developing countries and small island developing States through South-South and triangular cooperation to improve their transport systems (transport infrastructure and logistics) and ensure better access to worldwide markets while contributing to the effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement.

37. South-South cooperation has become more relevant in addressing the effects of climate change, which have a more severe impact on developing countries, but much more needs to be done to address that challenge.

III. Highlights of activities of United Nations entities in implementing the recommendations of the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation

38. In the Buenos Aires outcome document of the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, the international community expressed its appreciation for the work that United Nations entities had done to mainstream South-South cooperation into their strategic frameworks and workplans and encouraged them to continue such practices to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and related intergovernmental development objectives.

A. Continued reinforcement of the capacity of United Nations entities to engage in South-South and triangular cooperation

39. United Nations entities adhered to key recommendations of the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation in ways that thrust South-South and triangular cooperation to the fore in the operational activities for development of the United Nations development system, in line with the relevant General Assembly resolutions on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review. Foremost, United Nations organizations continued to lay the groundwork for more effective support to South-South and triangular cooperation by strengthening their own institutional capacity for work in that domain. To that end, they continued to invest in

³ See www.iisd.org/projects/alive-adaptation-livelihoods-and-ecosystems-planning-tool.

strategies and in the establishment of specialized units and programmes with human and financial resources dedicated to South-South and triangular cooperation as a basis for supporting the related capacity development initiatives of Member States.

B. Use of institutional and other mechanisms to bolster South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation in order to attain sustainable development objectives

40. United Nations entities continued to adopt a more systematic or institutionalized approach to South-South and triangular cooperation, as requested in the Buenos Aires outcome document. They made progress in addressing the persistent obstacle of a lack of adequate knowledge on the part of developing countries about the appropriate institutions with which to work, potential partners and effective development policies and good practices worth adapting in other jurisdictions so that developing countries could learn more from one another about effective ways to meet development objectives on the basis of the policies and practices that developing countries had proved to be effective.

41. Developing countries, with support from United Nations entities, increasingly engaged in South-South and triangular cooperation initiatives facilitated by a range of institutional and other mechanisms, including pilot projects, centres of excellence, digital platforms, networks, think tanks, databases, focal points and multi-stakeholder partnerships, as described below.

42. In 2020 and 2021, WFP implemented the second phase of South-South and triangular cooperation pilot projects with seed funding and technical support from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of China. The second phase consolidated results in Ecuador, the Congo, Kenya and Sri Lanka and expanded its reach with a new project in Peru. The pilot initiatives sought to strengthen the resilience and livelihoods of vulnerable smallholder farmers through expertise from the WFP China Centre of Excellence and Chinese institutions.

43. UNDP continued to support the systematic knowledge codification of global South development solutions and to link those solutions and good practices to the South-South Galaxy digital platform. It also partnered with the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation on the South-South Global Thinkers network, which brings together six networks encompassing more than 250 global South think tanks to foster dialogue, new thinking and evidence-based research on South-South cooperation and global South development solutions. In 2020, nine research papers were produced by global South think tanks on national institutional arrangements for South-South cooperation, including collaboration in science, technology and innovation. UNDP also has a part-time focal point for South-South and triangular cooperation in each regional bureau who coordinates with South-South and triangular cooperation focal points in UNDP country offices. The UNDP Africa Finance Sector Hub promoted the role of African countries as active South-South partners in implementing the regional project on South-South and triangular cooperation and the Africa South-South cooperation agenda for the Regional Bureau for Africa. The UNDP Seoul Policy Centre for Global Development Partnerships played a convening role for worldwide discussions, including those relating to South-South and triangular cooperation, and the UNDP accelerator laboratory network in Africa mapped and codified 21 Africa-based South-South solutions and innovations for scaling up South-South and triangular cooperation.

44. ESCWA provided support for the exchange of good practices to implement the 2030 Agenda and related international agreements. It designed South-South and triangular cooperation initiatives to support its member States in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, including an electronic platform for managing

assistance from donors for Lebanon with a view to making triangular cooperation for the recovery of the country from multiple shocks more efficient and transparent, and the climate/Sustainable Development Goal debt swap mechanism aimed at converting national debt-servicing payments on foreign debt into domestic investment for the implementation of climate-resilient projects through collaborative arrangements among debtors, creditors and donors. Related work is being done with many stakeholders, including Egypt, Germany, Jordan and Tunisia. ESCWA also worked on building the Arab Sustainable Development Goal gateway to improve the statistical capacity of countries and foster regional collaboration on data and statistics to monitor and report on the Goals.

45. The Capacity Development and Partnerships Section of the Strategy and Programme Management Division of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) served as a focal point for South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation across the Commission. ESCAP also fostered cooperation and peer-to-peer learning to help selected developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region to overcome systemic challenges in preparing voluntary national reviews. For example, it initiated a voluntary national review twinning programme, piloted in four developing countries in North and Central Asia (Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan), to share knowledge, experiences and practical recommendations for preparing and following up on the reviews.

46. UNIDO implemented 130 projects on the basis of its South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation modalities. International coalitions and multiple donors supported most of the projects, which had a diverse geographical focus; some aimed to strengthen the capacity of developing countries to establish and manage industrial parks.

47. FAO has a dedicated Office of South-South and Triangular Cooperation, while its South-South and triangular cooperation programmes are based in each of the five FAO regional offices. FAO implemented various activities under its South-South and triangular cooperation framework, including the city-to-city initiative, which exemplifies a mechanism for the exchange of good practices in innovative policies and approaches for sustainable and inclusive urban food systems in the global South.

48. The PAHO triangular cooperation project with Argentina on strengthening antimicrobial resistance detection and surveillance at the national and regional levels in Caribbean Community member States helped to build the laboratory capacity of 119 participants in the detection and surveillance of antimicrobial resistance.

49. As the above-mentioned examples illustrate, United Nations organizations continued to support South-South and triangular cooperation using institutional and other mechanisms.

C. Continued mainstreaming of South-South and triangular cooperation into the strategic frameworks of the United Nations development system

50. In addition to the institutional and other mechanisms described above, United Nations organizations continued to roll out development strategies. Many United Nations entities, including FAO, IFAD, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), reported having designed strategies that enabled them to continue mainstreaming South-South and triangular cooperation into their policies and programmes in line with the practices that the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation had welcomed and had urged entities to continue. Together, those strategies signify a remarkable shift from an ad hoc to a more programmatic, focused approach that

enabled South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation to play a more prominent role in the operational activities of the United Nations development system. For example, the UNDP strategic plan, 2022–2025, is aimed at operationalizing South-South cooperation more strategically by strengthening connections between countries and applying their knowledge and experience to advance sustainable development.

51. At the regional level, ESCAP mainstreamed South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation into all divisions as key modalities for achieving the objectives of the ESCAP programme plan for 2021 and in support of Member States' implementation of the 2030 Agenda. ESCAP offices and regional institutes used those modalities extensively to promote regional cooperation in Asia and the Pacific in implementing capacity development activities. The ECLAC secretariat included South-South cooperation in its programme of work through a subsidiary body, the Committee on South-South Cooperation, with the main objective of strengthening international cooperation for development, including South-South, North-South, triangular and multilateral cooperation. ESCWA adopted the project approach for all its activities and programmes. Its projects have a specific format that ensures that all knowledge produced has an aspect of development assistance. Projects without such a component are not implemented, and proposals containing South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation are prioritized.

52. Following the second High-level Conference, the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation strengthened its engagement with regional and international development actors to increase the impact of South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and regional development frameworks, such as Agenda 2063 of the African Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Community Vision 2025.

D. Building the human and institutional capacities of Member States to design, implement and manage South-South and triangular cooperation initiatives

53. The recommendation to establish or strengthen national and regional institutions for the management of South-South and triangular cooperation is among the most impactful recommendations in the Buenos Aires outcome document. Without such institutions to improve public service delivery and address other needs, many promising action plans cannot come to fruition.

54. UNDP, in line with the outcome document, supported countries in such key areas as fostering an enabling environment at the country and regional levels for South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation through its regional hubs and country offices and establishing a global South development solutions network and exchange. It published the UNDP country office guidelines for developing national South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation strategies. The guidelines are aimed at supporting UNDP staff in assisting Governments to develop and implement their national South-South cooperation policies in line with the Buenos Aires outcome document and to strengthen the national ecosystem for South-South cooperation in line with national priorities.

55. China, Indonesia, Mexico, the Russian Federation and Turkey partnered with UNDP to strengthen their institutional schemes through the development of legal regulations and strategies and the establishment of a results framework for South-South and triangular cooperation. The UNDP Seoul Policy Centre for Global Development Partnerships assisted the Rwanda Cooperation Initiative with the development of the South-South cooperation strategy of Rwanda. The UNDP regional project in Africa on South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation promoted

African countries as active South-South sharing partners through support for the development of national South-South cooperation architecture, such as mechanisms for reporting on South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation solutions and networks to facilitate regional dialogues, including national matchmaking events.

56. The United Nations Capital Development Fund used the Better Than Cash Alliance to encourage Member States to actively promote South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation by providing a platform to foster cross-country learning on digitizing payments for basic public services among countries of the global South, boost opportunities for and use of local economic development, access climate finance and cultivate regional and pro-poor market development approaches to financial inclusion.

57. FAO supported individual and organizational capacity development mainly in the formulation, implementation, coordination and scaling up of South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation programmes to meet national development objectives, including the Sustainable Development Goals and targets. For example, it established a triangular cooperation project among China, the Netherlands and FAO to enhance the understanding, research and training capacities of the Chinese partners regarding South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation. In the Asia and the Pacific region, it facilitated technical capacity development for an animal health laboratory in Afghanistan with the support of Thailand. In Africa, FAO helped to build the human and institutional capacities of Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania, respectively, in formulating and implementing South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation initiatives. In Latin America and in the Caribbean, it supported the development of a catalogue of experiences, knowledge products and services to promote South-South cooperation in both regions in line with national policies, with a focus on the agriculture and food sectors.

58. IFAD allocated a \$1 million grant to the Government of Morocco to implement a country-led South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation programme and pursue a leadership role in sharing its expertise with other African countries. The grant was aimed at promoting policy, value-chain development and the adoption of the “agropole” concept in Côte d’Ivoire and Madagascar. The Fund provided financing to leverage the South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation centre of excellence in Ifrane, Morocco, and to scale up the success achieved in Madagascar to other countries, including Burkina Faso and the Niger.

59. The United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation collaborated with the International Organization of la Francophonie to initiate a very high-level direct dialogue on South-South cooperation between the African Union Commission and the ASEAN secretariat. It also developed a framework for cooperation with the African Peer Review Mechanism and the African Union Development Agency, with a view to supporting African countries and the region towards the achievement of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda.

E. Resource mobilization and partnership initiatives supported by United Nations entities to accelerate sustainable development through South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation

60. United Nations entities continued to use their convening power to play a catalytic role in attracting a wide range of actors to participate in and support South-South and triangular cooperation initiatives. The ESCAP resource mobilization strategy, 2020–2022, integrates South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation as key partnership and development cooperation modalities. In that regard, ESCAP and China collaborated under an overarching funding and cooperation framework called the China-ESCAP Cooperation Programme. Accordingly, 23 developing and

least developed countries in the Asia-Pacific region provided financial support to five ESCAP regional institutes to implement capacity development programmes and promote South-South exchanges on agricultural mechanization and machinery, technology transfer, information and communications technology for development, data and statistics, and disaster information management in 2020.

61. WHO supported the establishment of the first COVID messenger ribonucleic acid (mRNA) technology transfer hub in South Africa. The initiative, which is being designed to scale up production and access to COVID-19 vaccines and other medical products, includes the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility partners, Biovac, Afrigen Biologics and Vaccines and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

62. In 2020, ESCWA created an extrabudgetary fund and mobilized resources for it from the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development based in Kuwait. It continued to mobilize resources from external partners and donors to support developing and least developed Arab countries.

63. The UNDP Regional Centre in Europe and Central Asia has a portfolio of programmatic engagements with many strategic donor partners (the Czech Republic, Poland, the Russian Federation, Slovakia and Turkey) to test and implement various forms of South-South, East-East and triangular cooperation, including resource mobilization and modalities for engagement with the private sector.

64. At FAO, in addition to allocations from the core budget, substantial non-core financial resources are dedicated to South-South and triangular cooperation through trust funds, the largest being the FAO-China Trust Fund (with \$80 million from the Government of China) to promote South-South and triangular cooperation in the agriculture sector. In 2020, FAO partnered with China in phase II of the FAO-China South-South Cooperation Programme, with an additional \$50 million investment from China. Phase III, which started in 2021, is aimed at scaling up South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation initiatives to contribute to the FAO vision, global goals and the Sustainable Development Goals. It will build on some of the key lessons learned from the previous phases, which included the full engagement and political commitment of the host Governments with respect to project implementation, private sector participation and the development of the agriculture-industry continuum.

65. IFAD established 51 partnerships to advance South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation, and more than \$10 million in South-South investments was raised. In addition, over 30 experience- and knowledge-sharing and capacity-building workshops were held on sustainable agriculture, rural finance, water management and market access, among other things. To strengthen partnerships and engagement at the global level, IFAD created the Global Engagement, Partnership and Resource Mobilization Division. The South-South and Triangular Cooperation Unit within the Division is dedicated not only to facilitating South-South and triangular cooperation but also to cultivating partnerships and resource mobilization.

66. As the world looked for ways to build back better from the pandemic, the World Bank, in the *World Development Report 2020: Trading for Development in the Age of Global Value Chains*, reminded readers of the role that global value chains had played in enabling developing countries to grow rapidly and begin to catch up with developed countries before the 2008 global financial crisis. According to the report, global value chains could continue to boost growth, create jobs and reduce poverty. However, developing countries would need to implement more effective reforms to promote their participation in global value chains, developed countries would need to pursue open, predictable policies, and all countries would need to commit to reviving multilateral cooperation. Multilateralism is imperative, and South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation are essential components of the formula for success.

IV. Policy support, advocacy, knowledge management and other catalytic work of the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation

67. The United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation continued to provide secretariat and policy support to intergovernmental bodies and United Nations entities. The Office undertook analytical reporting on South-South and triangular cooperation; supported policy dialogues and intergovernmental processes, including the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation and the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation; coordinated coherent United Nations support to South-South cooperation, including the preparation of the United Nations system-wide strategy on South-South and triangular cooperation for sustainable development; and galvanized the international community to follow up on the recommendations contained in the Buenos Aires outcome document.

68. Energized by the renewed commitments to South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation expressed during the second High-level Conference, the Office continued to promote, advocate for, coordinate and support such cooperation globally and within the United Nations development system. Detailed accounts of the actions taken to enhance the coordination role and impact of the Office are contained in my report to the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation ([SSC/20/2](#)) and the report of the Administrator of UNDP ([SSC/20/1](#)), while the present section is focused on the catalytic work of the Office.

69. In addition to coordinating South-South and triangular cooperation across the United Nations system, the Office implemented many catalytic initiatives, organized advocacy events and served as a knowledge hub for South-South and triangular cooperation at Headquarters and at the country level to spur practical exchanges. Such initiatives included the promotion of the South-South transfer of technologies, the establishment of digital collaborative platforms, the documentation of good development practices, the forging of partnerships and the preparation of many knowledge products.

70. Under the Global South-South Development Centre project, the Office supported technology transfer and capacity development in developing countries. In 2020, four demand-driven small grant projects were initiated, including in the areas of sustainable fishery in the tilapia value chain for smallholder farmers in the United Republic of Tanzania; the development of high-performance building materials and construction through the sharing of efficient technology among countries along the Belt and Road corridor in China; sustainable tourism development and poverty eradication in Uzbekistan, with exchanges among local policymakers at the grass-roots level; and sustainable bamboo development in Rwanda.

71. As of June 2021, the South-South Galaxy platform had a digital repository of over 600 good practices and innovative solutions, with more than 300 bodies having registered, including 55 Member States and 45 United Nations programmes, funds and specialized agencies.

72. In September 2020, the Office's Division for Asia-Pacific co-convened events to commemorate United Nations Day for South-South Cooperation. The celebration, co-organized with the Government of Thailand and UNV, with the participation of the Governments of Cambodia and China, focused on South-South volunteering as an important element for the achievement of the sustainable development agenda. The Office's Pacific subregional office co-organized the first such commemoration in the Pacific with the resident coordinator's office, with the participation of most of the Pacific island developing countries and major global South partners (China, India, Indonesia and South Africa).

73. The Division for Asia-Pacific also engaged in the process of United Nations reform at the regional level in 2020. It advocated for a stronger role for South-South cooperation across relevant mandates of the United Nations system and promoted the integration of South-South and triangular cooperation approaches into the common country analysis and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework processes.

74. In 2020, the Division for Asia-Pacific collaborated with the Government of Bangladesh to document 24 best practices from seven countries and 14 organizations in the second volume of *The South-South Matchmaker: 2019–2020 Best Practices*. The *Matchmaker* development solutions were presented at South-South Network for Public Service Innovation workshops where the supply of, and demand for, solutions meet.

75. In June 2021, the Office's Division for Arab States, Europe and CIS extended an offer to all United Nations resident coordinators and the United Nations country teams in the two regions, through the respective regional presences of the Development Coordination Office, to strengthen support to interested partner countries in carrying out a national stocktaking exercise on trends and opportunities for South-South, East-East and triangular cooperation in the two regions. The exercise will, among other things, take stock of the cooperation stage in the country; document successful policies and practical solutions; identify main challenges and opportunities in establishing, strengthening and consolidating South-South, East-East and triangular cooperation; and develop a set of practical recommendations for national stakeholders and United Nations country teams. The exercise is also in line with the Buenos Aires outcome document, in which the United Nations development system was urged to assist countries in building the human and institutional capacity needed to formulate and implement national development policies, strategies and programmes for South-South and triangular cooperation.

76. The Office also served as a knowledge hub for South-South cooperation through its many knowledge products ranging from South-South cooperation thematic reports to innovative research presented in the South-South Ideas papers as well as the solution-focused volumes of *Good Practices in South-South and Triangular Cooperation for Sustainable Development* and the South-South in Action series. In 2020, 26 knowledge products were co-produced by the Office and partners, and the South-South cooperation solutions database was expanded with an additional 197 good practices for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, which were documented in the third volume of *Good Practices in South-South and Triangular Cooperation for Sustainable Development*. The third volume has been translated into five languages, making it accessible to more countries and development partners.

77. The Office, the Brazilian Agency for Cooperation and the Japan International Cooperation Agency co-organized a virtual four-day project-planning workshop and training course on capacity development in the management of South-South and triangular cooperation in March 2021. Participants from 16 countries in five regions shared knowledge and experiences on the management of South-South and triangular cooperation at the national and regional levels.

78. Under its Youth4South initiative, the Office launched a call for the submission of youth entrepreneurship ideas regarding South-South and triangular cooperation towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, resulting in the submission of more than 455 initiatives and ideas. Top entrepreneurship initiatives were presented at the International Youth Dialogue on Innovation and Entrepreneurship organized around International Youth Day 2020. More than 540,000 young people and other audiences participated in the dialogue online. The Youth4South Fellowship pillar was launched to channel scholarship and fellowship opportunities to young scholars from developing countries to advance their study of and research on South-South and triangular cooperation and international development. Full scholarships were offered to young

fellows from Rwanda and Sierra Leone by the China Agricultural University's International Programme of China-Africa Cooperation in Agriculture to pursue a master's degree in rural development and management studies.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

79. One notable result of the COVID-19 pandemic is an increased awareness of the relevance of South-South cooperation in responding to crises and other challenges. The distinctive features of South-South cooperation have become clearer, including the emphasis on human and institutional capacity development through the sharing of knowledge and experiences; policy dialogues and policy coordination; the building of multi-stakeholder partnerships and innovative financing; and frameworks to bolster international solidarity and collaboration at the national, regional and interregional levels.

80. The present report demonstrates that support for South-South cooperation was well integrated into the operational activities for development of the United Nations development system during the reporting period. It also indicates that global crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, have increased the urgency of the need for international collective action in the face of challenges that are impossible to address without effective international cooperation. Countries are thus encouraged to support the South-South and triangular cooperation initiatives of the United Nations development system, particularly those at the country level under the leadership of the resident coordinator. The partnerships that WHO and other partners are establishing to manufacture COVID-19 vaccines and other medical supplies in Africa and other regions of the global South are of particular importance at the present time. The cooperation of vaccine manufacturers, vaccine-producing countries and the countries that have attained high vaccination rates is especially needed to address the acute shortage of vaccine supplies in low-income and lower-middle-income countries. Relevant United Nations organizations are also encouraged to catalyse the formation of such collaborative partnerships in response to pandemics, climate change and other development challenges in keeping with Sustainable Development Goal 17.

81. Amid reversals in the eradication of poverty, hunger and the achievement of other Sustainable Development Goals, Member States have increasingly called on United Nations organizations for assistance to strengthen their human and institutional capacities at the national and regional levels towards achieving the 2030 Agenda. To that end, the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation should include in its forthcoming strategic framework more robust support for developing countries in establishing and strengthening national institutions to plan and manage South-South cooperation upon request by Member States and United Nations country teams as applicable. Such work should be anchored in a robust results framework aligned with the United Nations system-wide strategy on South-South and triangular cooperation for sustainable development and the quadrennial comprehensive policy review monitoring and reporting framework as applicable.

82. United Nations organizations have continued to integrate South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation into their strategic policies and programmes. They have also supported the establishment of institutional mechanisms, including centres of excellence, think tanks, digital platforms and networks. The United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation and other relevant entities should harness the expertise of centres of excellence and think tanks in the global South to map the institutions that are most active in South-South cooperation; identify the Sustainable Development Goals on which they focus, the sectors where they have effective policies and good development practices, and the development results that they have achieved; and share such information through the South-South Galaxy online platform. The goal should be to amass evidence-based data on the results achieved

and the scalable good practices to accelerate the achievement of the 2030 Agenda through South-South and triangular cooperation.

83. The ECLAC Committee on South-South Cooperation responsible for South-South and triangular initiatives aligned with the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals in the region is a noteworthy tool for collaboration. Equally commendable are the regional planning, implementation and reporting on South-South cooperation among Ibero-American States, as described in the report of the UNDP Administrator (*SSC/20/1*). The United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation regional offices, in collaboration with United Nations regional commissions and other relevant entities, should catalyse the formation of such regional collaborative frameworks for South-South and triangular cooperation across the global South. United Nations organizations should, as appropriate, use such frameworks for policy dialogues, policy coordination and cross-border and interregional programmatic work on South-South and triangular cooperation, with the aim of marshalling human and other resources of the global South while building an enabling environment to improve access to education, health care, trade and investment at the subregional, regional and interregional levels. The results should then be scaled up through the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation.

84. United Nations organizations have supported Member States in the follow-up to the recommendations contained in the Buenos Aires outcome document. There is, however, a great need for United Nations agencies to respond further to the call at the second High-level Conference for support that would enable developing countries to improve their productive capacities through South-South and triangular cooperation. The relevant United Nations organizations should therefore prioritize support to improve such capacities, especially those of the least developed countries, in strategic sectors such as agriculture, industry and energy, drawing on lessons from effective practices in developing countries. The forthcoming Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries could provide further impetus for South-South cooperation that enables more least developed countries to address national priorities and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals during the current decade of action. The results of such initiatives should also be shared through South-South Galaxy to publicize the contribution of South-South and triangular cooperation in lifting least developed countries out of that status during the current decade of action. In addition, the response to the request in the Buenos Aires outcome document for the support of Member States to improve infrastructure connectivity, technological innovations and technology transfer requires more attention, as do measures to improve the status of women and girls.

85. United Nations organizations have also supported the building of multi-stakeholder partnerships to mobilize resources to promote South-South and triangular cooperation. The relevant United Nations organizations are encouraged to increase their support for South-South initiatives to enable developing countries to boost economic growth and structural transformation in a sustainable manner. In doing so, United Nations organizations should increasingly catalyse innovative financing mechanisms that comprise traditional development assistance from the North supplemented by funding from the private sector and sources led by the global South such as national and regional development banks, the New Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

86. The establishment of frameworks for United Nations inter-agency collaboration in support of South-South initiatives of Member States is encouraging. During the current decade of action, however, United Nations entities are urged to intensify inter-agency collaboration and support the implementation of the United Nations strategy on South-South and triangular cooperation for sustainable development in a coordinated manner, including through the regional collaborative platforms in all regions.