

Concept Note
**Thematic Discussion at the 21st Session of the High-level Committee on South-South
Cooperation**
UN HQ, Conference Room 2, New York, 31 May 2023
15:00-18:00

I. Theme

The High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation, a subsidiary body of the UN General Assembly, meets every two years to review progress made in implementing the Buenos Aires Plan of Action for Promoting and Implementing Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries, the New Directions Strategy for South-South Cooperation, the Nairobi Outcome Document of the High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, and the Buenos Aires Outcome Document of the Second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation. The Committee will hold its twenty-first session on 30 May to 2 June 2023. The topic for discussion during the thematic segment of the Meeting on 31st May 2023 is, “Accelerating the Recovery from the Coronavirus Disease (COVID -19) Pandemic and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through South-South and triangular cooperation.” The theme enables Member States to further discuss the role that South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation can play to galvanize multilateralism in policy measures and actions to attain inclusive recovery from the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic while spurring progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The twenty-first session of the Committee comes at the end of the COVID-19 pandemic that has further exacerbated the already existing development challenges in the global South such as climate change, thus increasing the vulnerability and instability of developing countries. The ongoing conflicts have also caused considerable suffering for millions of people worldwide, besides reversing hard-won development gains. However, the reports prepared for the Committee indicate that the crises that have claimed millions of lives and disrupted beneficial socioeconomic activities have also strengthened the resolve of developing countries and their partners to engage more in creative South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation in efforts to build forward better from the pandemic and to strengthen their resilience to future shocks.

There is therefore a need for intensified international commitment to bolster innovative partnerships to marshal the resources of the North and the South in building forward better through enhanced South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation. Such commitment is all the more essential to support developing countries in addressing the unprecedented socioeconomic downturn due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other global crises, considering rising poverty levels and the reversal of progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

Against that backdrop, the thematic discussion of the High-level Committee is meant to explore collaborative pathways to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, mindful of the need for: inclusiveness, resilience, and sustainability. Adherence to these principles is necessary for the world to:

- Build more inclusive societies, by promoting an employment-led recovery and closing gaps in access to social protection;
- Build more resilient economies, by ensuring that countries are better prepared for climatic disasters and health emergencies, in addition to creating more resilient regional supply chains; and
- Build a more sustainable environment, by incorporating environmental sustainability into public and private investment processes that include clean energy and climate-resilient infrastructure.

It is envisaged that the thematic discussion will contribute to a better understanding of the challenges of rising poverty rates in efforts to “Building Forward Better” and to avoid exacerbating existing global and national inequalities deepened by the COVID-19 pandemic and other global crises such as climate change and on-going conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Yemen, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine and other countries. The panellists leading the discussion are expected to highlight the role that South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation can play to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on inequality within and between countries and regions. They will also highlight Southern approaches or solutions to improving equitable access to income, healthcare, social protection, resource mobilisation and education, among other necessities.

To that end, the Thematic Discussion will focus on sub-themes highlighting priority actions led by regional groupings in the Global South and their partners, as illustrated in the reports before the twenty-first session of the Committee. The relevant sub-themes are highlighted below:

➤ ***South-South and Triangular Cooperation for Digitalization Transformation***

Digital technologies are transforming global development on a large scale, introducing new opportunities for institutional reform and growth that is inclusive of many marginalised groups, such as youth, women, and children. Despite such potential advantages, these technologies also pose the risk of widening the digital divide and inequalities between developed and developing countries. For example, connectivity has become an important global metric for digital inequality, with 2.9 billion people still offline across the world (UNDP, 2022). Approximately 60 per cent of the world's population now has access to the internet, but most of the connected people live in developed countries. Only one out of every five people in developing countries has access to the internet. Although the vast majority of the one billion people who live in least developed countries (LDCs) are covered by a mobile broadband signal, only 25 percent are online (ITU and UN-OHRLLS, 2021). This is significant since digital access is becoming increasingly important in education, work, and the delivery of public services. For instance, across Africa alone, it is estimated that achieving universal, affordable, and quality internet access by 2030 will require an investment of approximately US \$100 billion (UN, 2020). As a result, human development is being increasingly hampered by the lack of connectivity.

However, a poly-crisis, including the COVID-19 pandemic, has provided opportunities in digital transformation. A need for an unprecedented international and digital cooperation to address various critical questions, such as bridging the digital divide, required capacity building, as well as online safety, security and data protection, among others became apparent. Accelerating actions are needed for an inclusive digital transformation as a pathway to deliver on the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and the SDGs.

Considering the above challenges and opportunities, the thematic discussion will include examples of

how digitalization including South-South financial cooperation have been brought to bear to enable developing countries, including LDCs, to recover from the pandemic and build forward better.

➤ ***Advancing South-South and Triangular Cooperation on Climate Change***

The 2020 report of the UN Secretary-General on the state of South-South Cooperation indicated that “South-South and triangular cooperation are among the most important and fastest growing forms of bilateral and multilateral cooperation” and that the two approaches to development help in the mobilization of additional financial resources, including those for “climate adaptation”. Since the adoption of the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2015, support for South-South and triangular cooperation in addressing climate change has been increasing at the global, interregional, regional, national and local levels. Such inclusive measures for recovery are imperative because developing countries, particularly the Small Island Developing States, are affected most adversely by climate change. The reports before the Committee also demonstrate the growing relevance of South-South cooperation in addressing climate change. For example, they show that countries and regions in the Global South are taking concerted measures to find adaptation and mitigation solutions to extreme weather events in line with their socioeconomic circumstances, building on indigenous knowledge and endogenous technologies. Dynamic Southern countries offer cutting-edge technology, know-how and expertise to their peers in the Global South. Renewable technologies originating from developing countries are likely to be more suitable for other developing countries because they are well-attuned to similar climatic, cultural, and socioeconomic conditions.

The Committee will hear about the concerted policy measures and actions that Asia-Pacific Member States have taken to ensure that their region achieves the zero-carbon goals by mid-century.

➤ ***South-South and Triangular Cooperation Accelerating Results for the SDGs***

There are many Good Practices in South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation that have demonstrated their contributions to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals, besides meeting other development objectives. However, the threat of future shocks, particularly the possibility of another pandemic and other ongoing crises, could further undermine the chances of achieving the SDGs. Fostering readiness and resilience to shocks at all levels is therefore imperative to safeguard current and future progress.

Additionally, the focus on providing innovative and strengthened financial access for development has become a growing concern in the Global South. There is significant research on the ability of South-South and triangular cooperation mechanisms in facilitating access and transfer of technologies, especially regarding financial access for development. However, there is a need to further leverage financial resource mobilization through Southern-led multilateral, regional and bilateral financial and development institutions. Increased financial resources cooperation through multilateral development banks (MDBs) and international financial institutions (IFIs) is a significant concern in the context of addressing the COVID-19 crisis and other crises and their financial strain on the global economy. South-South and triangular cooperation offer the opportunity to expand technical operations and know-how and build towards strengthened financial support systems. This needs to be further explored in understanding the vital role of South-South financing and investment in a post-pandemic era.

Thus, under this sub-theme, the thematic discussion will hear about impactful good practices in South-

South cooperation and triangular cooperation relating to the production of COVID-19 vaccines and other medications in Africa as the region equips itself to address present and future shocks. Discussions will also focus on the role of South-South financial cooperation that are providing support to countries in the global South to recover from the pandemic and build forward better.

➤ ***Framework to Measure South-South Cooperation***

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only caused immeasurable suffering but has also derailed global efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Since South-South cooperation is expected to play an increasingly important role in getting the Global South back on track to achieve the SDGs, it is equally important to measure the impact or the tangible results of South-South initiatives. Some parts of the Global South, especially LDCs, are in dire need of enhanced, targeted, and tailored support from the global community. Developing countries can gain a better understanding of the assistance they provide to each other by measuring the impact of their South-South cooperation programmes as envisaged in Decision 1 of BAPA+40 and SDG Target 17.3.

Hence, under this topic, the thematic discussion will learn about the measures that the Member States of Latin America and the Caribbean have taken to strengthen the institutional mechanisms to manage South-South cooperation in the region, and to measure the quality and impact of their South-South programmes.

➤ ***The Role of South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Poverty Eradication***

While some developing countries have been able to lift millions of people out of extreme poverty due to poverty reduction policies, programmes, and strategies, around 700 million people (World Bank, March 2022), or nearly 10 percent of the world's population, remain in extreme poverty, unable to even meet their most basic necessities. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the global poverty rate increased sharply from 8.3 per cent in 2019 to 9.2 per cent in 2020, representing the first increase in extreme poverty since 1998 and the largest increase since 1990 and setting back poverty reduction by about three years.¹ As such, poverty is a severe and multifaceted deprivation especially in LDCs, limiting people's ability to benefit from economic growth.

This pervasive deprivation calls for stronger global partnerships, multilateralism, and a multi-stakeholder approach to sustainable development. Nevertheless, poverty reduction policies, strategies and solutions of nations and people of the South have enabled many developing countries to lift millions of people out of extreme poverty. Hence, there is a growing recognition that South-South cooperation supported by Northern partners or international organizations through triangular cooperation contributes to the eradication of poverty. Experience also shows that effective policies and strategies for poverty can enable countries to better implement other SDGs and the broader objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Under this sub-theme, the discussion will focus on the steps taken by developed countries to enhance their engagements in triangular cooperation towards increased resource mobilization and human as well as human and institutional capacity development for poverty eradication and for addressing other sustainable development goals.

¹ United Nations, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/poverty/>

➤ *Supporting Resilience and Sustainability through South-South and Triangular cooperation*

Many countries in the Global South saw their economies significantly shrink in the past three years due to the severe global recession caused by the pandemic, the current on-going conflicts and climate change impacts. The devastating impacts (socioeconomic, health, and governance among others) of these crises have put in jeopardy many of the development gains that have been achieved, especially in Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing countries, Small Island Developing States and countries in crisis as well as among vulnerable groups including youth and women. Indebtedness and inflation have been rising with additional adverse impacts on food supplies and energy flows. Gains made over the past decade in progress to achieving the SDGs, especially on poverty eradication, were severely impacted and threaten prospects for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda on sustainable development.

South-South and triangular cooperation could be leveraged to enhance resilience building and prepare countries against future shocks, eradicate poverty, address loss and damage, mobilize resources and promote transfer of adaptation technologies to address these crises that are affecting developing countries most adversely.

Under this sub-theme, discussions will focus on deliberate concrete actions, innovative tools and solid partnerships to build resilience and fulfil the promise of leaving no one behind through South-South cooperation, which is a complement to North-South cooperation.

II. Objective

The thematic debate takes place at a critical half-way point on the pathway to the 2030 Agenda. Assessments by Regional Sustainable Development Forums that have taken place in 2023 show that the world will not achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by the target date of 2030. A critical path to get on track again is to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic through multilateral, solidarity-based and innovative development solutions. The objective of the thematic discussion is therefore to share regional experiences and remedial actions, with a view to facilitating cross-regional development solutions to attain inclusive recovery from the pandemic.

III. Provisional Agenda

The thematic discussion will be held on Wednesday, 31 May 2023, between 15:00 and 18:00 hrs. It will consist of a keynote (10 minutes) and regional presentations (10 minutes). That will be followed by two expert comments and an open discussion. The session will end with a summary presentation of the findings by the moderator and closing remarks by the HLC President.

Time	Description
Opening Segment	
15:00-15:05	Opening by the President of the High-level Committee introducing Thematic Discussion and inviting the moderator to lead the discussion. H.E. Peter Mohan Maithri Pieris , HLC President and Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka
15:05-15:10	Message by UN Secretary-General António Guterres (tbc)
15:10-15:15	Welcoming remarks by Ms. Dima Al-khatib , Director, United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation
15:15 -15:20	Remarks by the Moderator and introduction of Panellists. Mr. Ben Dotsei Malor , Chief, Communications and Public Information UN Mission in South Sudan, UNMISS
15:20 – 15:30	Keynote Speaker: Recovery of the Global South from the COVID-19 pandemic -- Challenges and Opportunities in the second half of the Decade of Action. An overview of the challenges and opportunities for recovery, as well as requisites for resilient and inclusive recovery focusing on gender aspects. Ambassador Farukh Amil , Chairman, Intellectual Property Organization of Pakistan, Ministry of Commerce (virtual participation)
Panel Discussion	
15:30– 15:40	Asia-Pacific: concerted policy measures and actions that Asia-Pacific Member States have taken to ensure that their region achieves green recovery and achieves the zero-carbon goals by mid-century. Ms. Ureerat Chareontoh , Director-General, Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA)
15:40-15:50	Africa: Readiness and resilience to shocks: Impactful good practices in South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation relating to the production of COVID-19 vaccines and other medications in Africa as the region equips itself to address present and future shocks. Prof. Petro Terblanche , Chief Executive Officer, Afrigen Biologics and Vaccines
15:50-16:00	Arab States: Examples of how in the Arab States region, South-South financial cooperation has been brought to bear to enable developing

	<p>countries, including LDCs, to recover from the pandemic and build forward better.</p> <p>Mr. Amer Bukvic, Director-General of Global Practices and Partnership, Islamic Development Bank (IsDB)</p>
16:00-16:10	<p>Latin America and the Caribbean: The measures that the Member States of Latin America and the Caribbean have taken to strengthen the institutional mechanisms to manage South-South cooperation in the region, and to measure the quality and impact of their South-South programmes.</p> <p>Mr. Raúl Álvarez Villaseñor, Director of Project Operations in Mexico. the Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation (AMEXCID)</p>
16:10-16:20	<p>Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Caucasus: digitalisation to accelerate recovery from the pandemic and cooperation for public service excellence.</p> <p>Mr Alikhan Baimenov, Chairman of the Steering Committee- Astana Civil Service Hub, Kazakhstan (pre-recorded message)</p>
16:20-16:30	<p>Steps taken by developed countries to enhance their engagements in triangular cooperation towards increased resource mobilization as well as human and institutional capacity development for poverty eradication and for addressing other sustainable development goals.</p> <p>Ms. María del Pilar Garrido Gonzalo, Development Cooperation Director, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (virtual participation)</p>
16:30-16:45	<p>Key Respondents</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1- Ms. Rebeca Grynspan, Secretary-General, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (virtual participation) 2- Ambassador Ruy Pereira, Director, Brazilian Agency for Cooperation (ABC)
Open floor discussion and Q&A	
16:45-17:50	List of Speakers
Closing segment	
17:50-18:00	Wrap up by Moderator and Closing Remarks by HLC President

IV. 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 panellists by posing questions and/or making remarks.

Delegates and others interested in preparing for the panel discussion in advance may wish to review the reports prepared for the 21st session of the High-level Committee. These reports can be found on UNOSSC website at <https://unsouthsouth.org/our-work/policy-and-intergovernmental-support/high-level-committee-on-south-south-cooperation/21st-session/>.

For more information on the Thematic Discussion, please contact Shams Banihani (shams.banihani@unosscc.org) and Ms. Cynthia Olouasa (Cynthia.Olouasa@unosscc.org)

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