

## SECTION 1. POLICY

### 6.2 Rationale and policy context

The creation of the handbook follows the approval of the first-ever UN system-wide strategy on South-South and triangular cooperation for sustainable development, called for by the Secretary-General in his 2017 [report to the General Assembly on the state of South-South cooperation](#)<sup>6</sup> and approved by the Secretary-General's Executive Committee in 2020 as well as the [development of an action plan and the M&E framework to implement the Strategy](#). It responds to the specific call by Member States in [General Assembly resolution 76/221](#) of 2021 and [77/185](#) of 2022 for the UN development system to continue to mainstream South-South and triangular cooperation into CCAs and UNSDCFs at the country level.

The critical role of the UN development system and UN entities in facilitating, catalysing and accelerating nationally designed and led South-South and triangular cooperation initiatives at the country level is reiterated in the 2009 [Nairobi outcome document](#)<sup>7</sup> and the 2019 [BAPA+40 outcome document](#) and is reflected in the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) [strategic framework, 2022–2025](#).<sup>8</sup>

The role of UNOSSC is to promote, coordinate, advocate for and support South-South and triangular cooperation at the global level and within the UN development system. At the country level, UNOSSC works through the Development Coordination Office (DCO) headquarters and regional offices to leverage the resident coordinator and UNCT roles to support national efforts to advocate for, manage, design and implement South-South and triangular cooperation policies and initiatives by identifying, sharing and transferring Southern-generated development solutions. Through its global and regional support architecture, and together with DCO, UNOSSC will support efforts by resident coordinators, UNCTs and resident coordinator offices (RCOs) to integrate South-South and triangular cooperation into UN operational activities for development, especially during the CCA and the UNSDCF programming processes.

The role of the UN development system in supporting South-South and triangular cooperation is also recognized in major **multilateral agreements**, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway, the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024, and the Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2022–2031. Each of these instruments points to the role and potential of South-South and triangular cooperation in accelerating the achievement of the goals of their specific thematic focuses within the framework of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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<sup>6</sup> A/72/297.

<sup>7</sup> A/RES/64/222, Nairobi outcome document of the High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, 21 December 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Draft strategic framework of the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation, 2022-2025 (DP/CF/SSC/7). Available at <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/357/90/PDF/N2135790.pdf?OpenElement>.

## 6.2 South-South and triangular cooperation definitions, principles, objectives and criteria

The primary objective of South-South and triangular cooperation is to help developing countries to achieve their nationally defined sustainable development aims, including the SDGs. It is reflected in the definitions and principles of South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation agreed on by Member States and set forth in the Nairobi outcome document and reiterated in the BAPA+40 outcome document and as articulated in the UN system-wide strategy. It is also reflected in the role of UN support to achieve to achieve those aims.

### 1.2.1 What are South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation?

The BAPA+40 outcome document sets out the basis, rationale, principles and key actors in South-South and triangular cooperation, while the [2016 framework of operational guidelines on UN support to South-South and triangular cooperation](#)<sup>9</sup> provides *working definitions* that capture the broad understanding of South-South and triangular cooperation among Member States and stakeholders at all levels. These working definitions are also reflected in the new UN system-wide strategy on South-South and triangular cooperation for sustainable development.

- **South-South cooperation** is a form of partnership “whereby two or more developing countries pursue [through concerted efforts] their individual and/or shared national capacity-development objectives through exchanges of knowledge, skills, resources and technical know-how and through regional and interregional collective actions, including partnerships involving Governments, regional organizations, civil society, academia and the private sector” and other relevant actors, “for their individual and/or mutual benefit within and across regions”<sup>10</sup> and taking into account the principles of South-South cooperation.<sup>11</sup>

#### South-South cooperation in action

Examples of how this definition of South-South cooperation translates into reality can be found in [Good Practices in South-South and Triangular Cooperation for Sustainable Development, vols. 1–](#), and the [thematic and special editions](#) including on food security, small island developing States (SIDS), least developed countries (LDCs) and made-in-Africa solutions as well as **good practices regarding each SDG**. These compendiums showcase South-South cooperation in action at the country and regional levels across the world including through partnerships with the UN system.

<sup>9</sup> Note by the Secretary-General on the framework of operational guidelines on United Nations support to South-South and triangular cooperation (SSC/19/3), 14 March 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., para. 10.

<sup>11</sup> Other types of regional cooperation, such as East-East cooperation, follow the same principles as South-South cooperation and deal for the most part with the sharing of national capacity-development objectives among developing and developed countries through exchanges of knowledge, skills, resources and technical know-how and through regional and interregional collective actions and partnerships.

- **Triangular cooperation** involves Southern-driven partnerships between two or more developing countries supported by a developed country/countries or

**Triangular cooperation in action**

Examples of how this definition of “triangular cooperation” translates into reality can also be found on South-South Galaxy and reports by other partners.

multilateral organization(s). It builds partnerships and trust and combines diverse resources and capacities, under the ownership of the requesting developing country/countries, to achieve the SDGs, including in the context of multilateral development cooperation initiatives. It adds value by leveraging and mobilizing technical and financial resources, sharing experiences, promoting new areas of cooperation, and combining affordable, context-based development solutions under flexible arrangements and agreed shared modalities.<sup>12</sup>

### 1.2.2 What are the principles of South-South cooperation?

The guiding normative and operational principles of South-South cooperation were set out in the Buenos Aires Plan of Action of 1978 and reiterated in the Nairobi outcome document. Because South-South cooperation is grounded foremost in the principles of national sovereignty and ownership, it is the prerogative of developing countries to initiate, organize and manage South-South cooperation activities as well as their financing and programming. Developed countries and UN development system organizations may play promotional and catalytic roles, as requested.

<b>Table 1. Guiding principles of South-South cooperation</b>	
<b>Normative</b>	<b>Operational</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Solidarity</li> <li>▪ National ownership and leadership</li> <li>▪ Mutual benefit</li> <li>▪ Partnership among equals</li> <li>▪ Non-conditionality</li> <li>▪ Complementarity</li> <li>▪ Respect for national sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mutual accountability and transparency</li> <li>▪ Development effectiveness</li> <li>▪ Coordination of evidence- and result-based initiatives</li> <li>▪ Multi-stakeholder approach</li> </ul>

### 1.2.3 What are the principles of triangular cooperation?

While there has not been a normative formulation of the principles of triangular cooperation, the 1995 publication, *New directions for technical cooperation among developing countries*,<sup>13</sup> points

<sup>12</sup> Terms such as “Southern partners” or “global South” are used sparingly in these Guidelines since they do not capture the full breadth of South-South and triangular-cooperation partnerships and countries’ and regions’ self-determined typologies or levels of development.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations, High-level Committee on the Review of Technical Cooperation Among Developing Countries, *New directions for technical cooperation among developing countries* (TCDC/9/3), 7 April 1995. Available at: <https://unsouthsouth.org/library/policy-documents/>.

to the main characteristics of triangular cooperation, according to which “donors utilize the services of developing countries with the requisite capacity to deliver technical cooperation input to another developing country on a cost-effective basis” and “donors agree to fund exchanges among developing countries”. More recently, the Global Partnership Initiative (GPI) on Effective Triangular Cooperation has put together [voluntary guidelines for effective triangular cooperation](#).<sup>14</sup> “The voluntary guidelines represent a shared commitment to effectiveness”, with partners in triangular cooperation committing to: (a) country ownership and demand-driven cooperation; (b) shared commitment; (c) a focus on result-oriented approaches and solutions; (d) inclusive partnerships and multi-stakeholder dialogues; (e) transparency and mutual accountability; (f) innovation and co-creation; (g) joint learning and knowledge-sharing for sustainable development; (h) advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; and (i) leaving no one behind.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> GPI on Effective Triangular Cooperation, “Voluntary guidelines for effective triangular cooperation”, 2019. Available at [https://www.effectivecooperation.org/system/files/2019-08/VOLUNTARY%20GUIDELINES%20FOR%20EFFECTIVE%20TRIANGULAR%20COOPERATION\\_1.pdf](https://www.effectivecooperation.org/system/files/2019-08/VOLUNTARY%20GUIDELINES%20FOR%20EFFECTIVE%20TRIANGULAR%20COOPERATION_1.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

### 1.2.4 What are the comparative advantages of South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation?

Complementing the guiding principles, the recognized comparative advantages of South-South cooperation include low transaction costs; speed of service and project delivery; greater flexibility; use of national systems, capacities and demand-driven approaches; complementarity of capacities; and relevance of solutions shared among partners of the South facing common development challenges in similar contexts.

Triangular cooperation has been expanding in recent years beyond its traditional arrangement based on three development actors (at least two developing countries and at least one traditional provider). It is now assumed to include multi-stakeholder relationships among governments, international organizations, civil society and the private sector that provide comparative advantages by complementing North-South and South-South cooperation through. In triangular cooperation all partners transfer knowledge and expertise and encourage innovation and co-creation leading to shared collateral benefits.

### 1.2.5 What are the objectives of UN development system support for South-South and triangular cooperation?

The priority objective of UN development system support for South-South and triangular cooperation is to help countries, upon their request, to implement their nationally defined development goals and the SDGs as well as agreed regional and subregional agendas by leveraging Southern knowledge, expertise, best practices, financing and other forms of cooperation. UN support for South-South and triangular cooperation is guided by the key normative and operational guidance embodied in the quadrennial comprehensive policy review, the Nairobi and BAPA+40 outcome documents, other documents and resolutions adopted by Member States, and the guiding principles for UNSDCF programming and implementation.<sup>16</sup>



<sup>16</sup> These guiding principles are found in: United Nations, Sustainable Development Group, United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework Guidance, 3 June 2019. Available at [https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/UN-Cooperation-Framework-Internal-Guidance-Final-June-2019\\_1.pdf](https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/UN-Cooperation-Framework-Internal-Guidance-Final-June-2019_1.pdf); and United Nations, Sustainable Development Group, Consolidated Annexes to the Cooperation Framework Guidance, updated in May 2022. Available at <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/consolidated-annexes-cooperation-framework-guidance>.

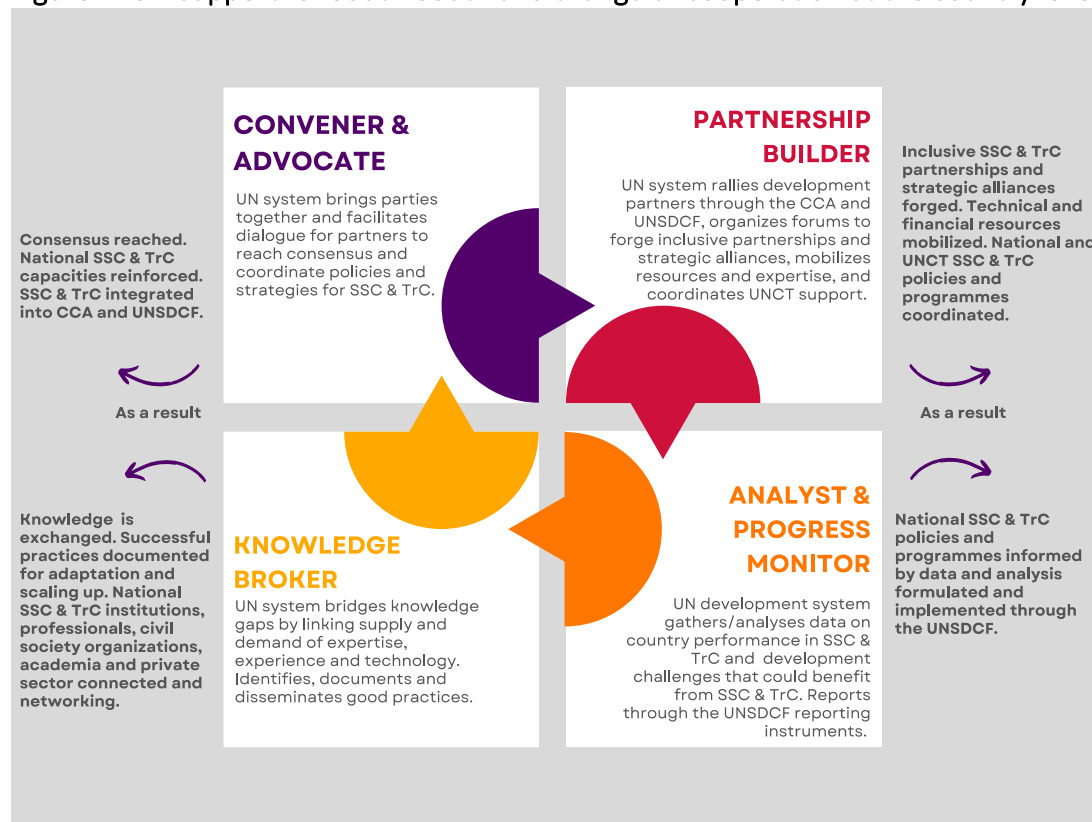
### ***1.2.6 How does the UN development system help to achieve national objectives through South-South and triangular cooperation at the country level?***

The UN development system helps to achieve national objectives at the country level by supporting the development leadership of Member States and harnessing the unique role and comparative advantages of South-South and triangular cooperation. South-South cooperation initiatives may arise outside of the normal programming cycles of UN entities; for example, they may result from the direct discourse between the leadership of countries or needs caused by shocks or simply new opportunities for collaboration. Member States have always maintained the need for South-South cooperation to be flexible to enable countries to benefit from opportunities that arise. Thus, at the country level, the role of the UN development system will be largely supportive and sometimes catalytic – leveraged to mobilize the knowledge, experience, technologies, and technical and financial resources, including from the private sector and other non-State actors, in accordance with the laws and regulations of programme countries – to implement South-South and triangular cooperation programmes and initiatives that meet the country’s development needs.

In addition, at the regional level, the UN development system works with countries in the region to identify both their self-defined development needs as well as their development offers; in this way, a regional network for sharing incoming and outgoing South-South and triangular cooperation knowledge-sharing and technology transfer is nurtured. Central to this is identifying entry points for South-South and triangular cooperation in the common country programming process and implementation, all of which will benefit from improved UN development system coordination, coherence and contextualization, and recognition of the specific experience and expertise of UN entities based on their mandates and policy frameworks.

Using its convening power and status as a trusted partner, the UN development system acts as partnership builder, advocate for South-South and triangular cooperation, broker of knowledge and solutions, provider of guidance, analyst and monitor of progress.

Figure 1. UN support for South-South and triangular cooperation at the country level



**1.2.7 How do you determine if South-South cooperation and or triangular cooperation is the more suitable modality for meeting a country’s specific development challenge(s) and/or accelerating development results at the country level?**

Assessing national capacity against nationally defined needs is the means to determine whether South-South cooperation or triangular cooperation is the more suitable option to address a national development challenge or accelerate development results. UNOSSC could support a capacity assessment for South-South and triangular cooperation if requested by the UNCT or national counterparts. The capacity assessment would be based on country-defined needs and respond to country-level circumstances. As part of the assessment of national capacities, the Government and UNCTs may consider undertaking a **national stocktaking exercise on trends and opportunities for South-South and triangular cooperation**<sup>17</sup> with support from UNOSSC. This exercise would also help the Government and UNCTs to decide which modality would best meet a country’s specific development challenge(s). Box 2, found in section 2, describes a UNOSSC model for stocktaking exercises.

**1.2.8 Is there an in-built risk analysis tool in the CCA/ UNSDCF process that UNCTs can use when considering the use of South-South cooperation or triangular cooperation?**

<sup>17</sup> For additional information, see UN, UNOSSC, “National stocktaking exercise on trends and opportunities for South-South, East-East and triangular cooperation in the Arab States, Europe and the CIS [Commonwealth of Independent States]: Concept note, June 2021. Available at <https://www.arab-ecis.unsouthsouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/CONCEPTNOTENationalstocktakingexerciseUNOSSC.pdf>.

The CCA and UNSDCF processes set out in the 2019 “UNSDCF: Internal guidance<sup>18</sup>” provide ample risk-analysis exercises and tools. These can also be applied when considering South-South and triangular cooperation and other developmental issues.

Specifically, the UNSDCF internal guidance addresses potential risks as part of its analysis and discussion on: (a) how to implement the UNSDCF guiding principles through “results-focused programming”, “capacity development” and “coherent policy support” (p. 12); (b) “identify[ing] multidimensional risks that could impact the development trajectory of the country” (p. 14); (c) “integrat[ing] analysis of relevant regional, subregional and cross-border dynamics” (p. 15) as part of the CCA; and (d) anticipating emerging risks as part of the SDG analytical toolbox and the theory-of-change exercise.<sup>19</sup> In turn, the UNSDCF M&E mechanism integrates an ongoing and an end-of cycle assessment of risks to track the changing operational environment and determine how to adapt programming as needed. The UNCT, in close cooperation with the Government, may use the already-existing risk-analysis tool within the UNSDCF guidance, together with the questions, checklists and milestones in these Guidelines, when considering suitable forms of South-South or triangular cooperation such as mobilizing knowledge, experience, technology, or technical and financial resources – to implement and pursue.

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<sup>18</sup> UN, Sustainable Development Group, United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework: Internal guidance, 3 June 2019. Available at [https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/UN-Cooperation-Framework-Internal-Guidance-Final-June-2019\\_1.pdf](https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/UN-Cooperation-Framework-Internal-Guidance-Final-June-2019_1.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> See section 2.1.3 of UN, Sustainable Development Group, United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework: Internal guidance, 3 June 2019. Available at [https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/UN-Cooperation-Framework-Internal-Guidance-Final-June-2019\\_1.pdf](https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/UN-Cooperation-Framework-Internal-Guidance-Final-June-2019_1.pdf).