

Evidence-informed development cooperation and management of South-South and Triangular Cooperation in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals

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Background document

The past two decades have seen a rapid growth in South-South cooperation, in terms of scale, geographic reach, intensity and modalities. It is now recognized as an important complementary source not only of financing of global and regional development, but also for sharing and exchanging knowledge and experience of critical development challenges overcome in their specific countries.

The speed at which South-South cooperation has risen has naturally led to a desire for accounting these significant flows of human, financial, knowledge and technological transfer between developing countries, however to do so, remains a challenge for many national governments as well as international institutions. There is currently, no universally agreed definition, or understanding of what constitutes South-South Cooperation existing among all development partners both from the North and the South. Understanding South-South Cooperation in terms of flow, scale, trend, and impact is therefore difficult. This task is further complicated by inconsistent recording across countries often rendering the collection, analysis and compilation of data on South-South cooperation incomplete and unreliable. As a consequence, the availability of data and the quality of research on the scale and impact of South-South cooperation has not kept pace with the growing demand for information, intelligence and data. Knowledge gaps and uneven access to solutions are currently major obstacles hindering the scaling-up of South-South cooperation and the maximization of its impact on sustainable development.

The Group of 77 and China have stated on numerous occasions that they give importance to the issue of South-South cooperation and the need for proper data analysis of this form of cooperation, so as to enable countries of the developing south to understand its contribution to meeting the development goals of Agenda 2030.¹

Indeed as the Group of 77 and China notes, the recently agreed Agenda 2030 and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda have launched a new ambitious global development programme. It is clearly anticipated that South-South cooperation will make an increasingly important contribution to their

¹ Opening Remarks delivered by H.E. Cecilia B Rebong Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Philippines and Chairperson of the Group of 77 and China in Geneva at the Network of Southern Think-Tanks (NeST) - UNCTAD 1st Joint Technical Working Group.

implementation. Across the full spectrum of the Sustainable Development goals (SDGs) the importance of South-South cooperation is evident. Whether the issue is sustainable agriculture (Goal 2) and fishing (Goal 14), infrastructural development (Goal 9) such as clean water and sanitation (Goal 6) or sustainable and affordable energy (Goal 7) or economic growth (Goal 8) the potential role for South-South and Triangular Cooperation is clear. Furthermore, Goal 17 calls for a strengthening of 'the means of implementation' and a revitalization of 'the global partnership for sustainable development'. Here too, the importance of South-South cooperation is apparent across a range of issues from finance, technology, national capacity building to trade and enhanced information - all with a view to improving development management and policy coherence.

A new 'Data Age' and its importance

The importance of evidence to inform policy and debate is increasingly recognized and valued. The publication in 2014 by the Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development (IAEG-SDG) of the report 'A World that Counts' has highlighted, not only the need for more data to support the Agenda 2030, but better and faster data that aligns with modern policy debate. In March 2016, United Nations Statistical Commission endorsed the selection of the IAEG-SDG in their choice of 230 indicators to measure progress towards sustainable development. The full scope and complexity of the data required to measure progress on 169 SDG targets is only now becoming apparent and the monitoring framework required for it will be at least 4 times larger than that required for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). But a simple volume count underestimates the complexity of the data required and the range of new data required. It is becoming clear that a great deal of additional investment in national and international statistical systems and data infrastructure will be required to meet this challenge.

In this context, many of the countries of the global South are at a deep disadvantage where data collection, analysis and use in government policy considerations are concerned. For many decades there have been calls for Governments to strength their data so as to be better able to monitor poverty, gains in education and health care as proxies for demonstrating that the lives of their citizens were improving. Indeed the MDGs and the need to report, did help improve some data collection, but not nearly enough to now feed the complex needs that are being called for in Agenda 2030. Coupled with this is the need through the Addis Ababa Agenda, to know “how” the targets are being met. Thus, the need now, to understand how the contribution of *all* means, including South-South cooperation are contributing to the achievement of the SDGs and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.

A Partnership to begin Collecting Data for the 2030 and Addis Ababa Action Agenda.

UNCTAD has been asked by the G77 and China (Geneva Chapter) to further develop and strengthen their statistical capacity to monitor and follow up on the implementation of the SDGs. Additionally, UNCTAD has been asked to support its Southern member states in the scaling up of their capacities to track progress. Furthermore in the context of its leadership of Goal 17 of the SDGs, with targets 17.6 and 17.9 that deal directly with South-South cooperation, UNCTAD will capitalize on the opportunity of the upcoming gathering of its constituents at UNCTAD XIV to

begin a meaningful discussion on data collection and analysis in the context of South-South cooperation and the challenges and opportunities surrounding this effort.

More information than is currently available is required to respond to this demand for better understanding SSC through data and evidence. This raises several important questions, not least: who will represent and lead the South in the journey towards improved information? What constitutes data in the context of South-South cooperation? How will South-South cooperation be defined and measured? Who decides these important matters? Who has the technical capacity to manage, curate and disseminate this new information?

In seizing the opportunity now to begin the discussion on a framework for data collection on South-South cooperation, UNCTAD is doing so with a clear understanding that there is now a sizeable opportunity and rationale for southern partners to define and measure South-South cooperation on their own terms, using concepts and methodologies appropriate to the south.

UNCTAD in collaboration with UNOSSC and UNDP (amongst other UN System agencies) are in the early stages of forging a partnership that will allow the South to lead and shape this important issues of data collection and measurement of South-South cooperation and its efficacy in meeting SDGs and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. It is envisaged that UNOSSC can bring political support through existing mechanisms and facilitate partners' relationships within a data partnership. UNDP, together with UNOSSC, can support dialogues among partners, and by bringing in broader perspectives through the Global Coalition of Southern Think Tank Networks. UNCTAD can provide technical, statistical, IT and analytical support to Network of Southern Think-tanks (NeST) and other regional think tanks networks.