

Thematic Work Program of the South Centre (2020-2022)



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THEMATIC WORK PROGRAM OF THE SOUTH CENTRE 2020 TO 2022

A. INTRODUCTION

This document presents the thematic issues that the South Centre will be addressing in the period 2020-2022. It provides a summary of such issues and describes the main types of activities the Centre will be undertaking. This work program is conceived to allow the Centre to effectively and timely respond, within its capacity and in the context of its mandate, to the demands of its members and other developing countries, taking into account the diversity in their levels of socio-economic development and in the strategies they pursue to achieve national objectives.

The South Centre serves as the independent inter-governmental think-tank of developing countries in relation to international development policy-related issues “to promote South solidarity, South consciousness and mutual knowledge and understanding among countries and people of the South.”¹

In order to meet its objectives under Article II of the Agreement to Establish the South Centre, and within the limits of its capacity, the Centre aims to “foster convergent views and approaches among countries of the South” with respect to global economic, political and strategic issues related to evolving concepts of development, sovereignty and security. Further, in accordance with Article III of the Agreement, the Centre should contribute to “generate ideas and action-oriented proposals for consideration, as appropriate, by Governments of the South, institutions of the South-South cooperation, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations, and community at large.” This includes policy advice and support to collective entities of the South, such as the Group of 77 and China and the Non-Aligned Movement.

In the three-year period 2020 to 2022, the Centre’s work program will cover international policy issues that the Centre has worked on in the recent past as well as new international policy issues that have emerged and become relevant in the previous three-year cycle. The below enumeration of issues, however,

¹ Agreement to Establish the South Centre, Objectives (a).

could be updated by the Board in response to developments and specific requests made to the Centre.

The South Centre's work on the issues covered by the Program will include monitoring, policy-oriented research, support to developing countries in international negotiations, capacity building at the national and regional levels and advocacy of pro-development approaches.

The Centre's activities will be aimed at strengthening the capacity and ability of developing countries to: (i) increase their understanding of the relevance and implications of the issues under negotiation, taking diverse country situations and development strategies into account; (ii) articulate and put forward their own development-oriented agendas, including new initiatives and counterproposals, where appropriate; (iii) participate more effectively and fully in international fora and negotiations; (iv) identify possible divergences and find common grounds to enhance the collective capacity of developing countries to influence the outcomes of international negotiations in the areas covered by this Program.

The Centre will undertake this Program with its own staff, senior advisors and consultants and through cooperation with UN agencies, Southern research and academic institutions, think tanks, development banks and NGOs of the South.

B. THEMATIC ISSUES IN THE SOUTH CENTRE'S WORK PROGRAM

Subject to the availability of funding and staff, the main themes for the work of South Centre in the period 2020-2022 include:

1. Developments in the global economy, notably in relation to finance for development and external debt.
2. Implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including policy actions to eradicate poverty.
3. Climate Change and other environmental issues, including the green economy and implementation of the UNFCCC Paris Agreement.

4. International trade, including issues relating to agriculture, services, fisheries, e-commerce and the WTO reform, as well as free trade agreements involving developing countries.
5. International regime on investment: protection and promotion of investment and dispute settlement mechanisms.
6. Innovation, intellectual property, technology transfer and protection of traditional knowledge.
7. Biodiversity, access to genetic resources (marine and terrestrial) and benefit sharing.
8. Social and human rights dimensions of development, including income and gender inequality and the realization of economic and social human rights.
9. Health and development issues, including universal health coverage and access to medicines and other medical technologies, anti-microbial resistance, and R&D to address the needs of developing countries.
10. International institutions and global governance, including enhancing the participation of developing countries in decision-making in international organizations and processes.
11. South-South cooperation, particularly the strengthening the institutional capacity for South-South and triangular cooperation.
12. Reform of the international tax system, taxing rights in the digital economy, illicit fund transfers.
13. The 4th industrial revolution and its impact on industrial policies and development strategies.

The following is a brief description of the issues listed above.

1. Developments in Global Finance and External Debt

Issues to be studied include the implications and effects on developing countries of the global economic situation; vulnerabilities due to global

financial developments; implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda; external debt; and the need for the reform of the global financial architecture. The Financing for Development debates will be covered and assistance or advice be provided to developing countries; the South Centre will participate in the Inter-agency Task Force on Financing for Development.

2. Implementation of the 2030 Agenda

The Centre's work will aim at the design of an international regime that preserves the national policy space and is supportive of actions to achieve the SDGs, particularly poverty eradication.

The South Centre will conduct activities that strengthen the capacity of developing countries in relation to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda with its related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Centre will provide support to developing countries in relation to meetings at the United Nations (including high-level political fora and other relevant fora on the development of the 2030 Agenda).

3. Climate Change and other Environmental Issues

The need for environmental protection and natural resources conservation is a major issue at both global and national level. Climate change is internationally recognized as the most serious threat to human survival. In 2020-2022, the Centre will continue to undertake research, provide capacity building and support developing countries in climate-related negotiations, including the implementation of the Paris Agreement in relation to mitigation, adaptation and support to developing countries in the provision of the means of implementation.

The South Centre will continue to support developing countries at the global and national levels in respect of the above processes and issues. The Centre will undertake policy research and analysis, awareness raising, national capacity building, and support for international and national policy implementation in relation to the policy and science of climate change (including in the context of multilateral discussions and processes and domestic policy development and implementation), and will promote the use of renewable energy in developing countries and Least Developed Countries. Areas to be covered include mitigation, adaptation, technology transfer, finance and loss and damage. Besides the UNFCCC process, the Centre will also

monitor developments in the IPCC and in the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and assist developing countries' delegations in these processes. It will also support developing countries to get access to and efficiently use finance to address climate change.

4. International Trade

The South Centre will continue to actively participate in the processes relating to the articulation of the multilateral trade system. While the Doha Round has not been concluded and many issues of great importance for developing countries have not found yet an appropriate treatment and solution, new issues have emerged such as e-commerce, SMEs, investment facilitation, trade and environment. Moreover, the Centre will continue to support developing countries to deal with a number of proposals made by developed countries for the reform of the WTO, including how negotiations could be undertaken and decisions made, which, which challenge basic pillars of the WTO system, such as the Special & Differential treatment for developing countries. These issues will be part of the main priorities of the South Centre in 2020- 2022.

Besides the multilateral level, and to the extent possible, trade issues will also be monitored and analyzed as they occur and develop at the bilateral and regional levels, including bilateral or regional trade agreements.

5. International Regime on Investment

The South Centre will continue to examine trends in relation to bilateral investment treaties (BITs), particularly, protection standards, investors' responsibilities, preservation of national policy space to implement public policies, and changes to the dispute settlement systems. The Centre will also monitor the work and activities undertaken in UNCTAD, and provide advice on the reform of the international investment regime to achieve the SDGs. Work will also continue in relation to the ongoing negotiations in UNCITRAL regarding the reform of the essentially asymmetric dispute settlement system that prevails today.

6. Innovation, Intellectual Property, Technology Transfer and Protection of Traditional Knowledge

This cluster of issues is critically important for developing countries for them to be able to take advantage of and have access to global knowledge and

technology, which are key components to the development process. The objective in this area is to align developing countries' innovation and intellectual property (IP) policies, norms and regulations, to their development goals and to preserve or expand domestic policy space to do so. The South Centre will also provide analysis and advice on the protection of traditional knowledge at the national and international level. The role of intellectual property in relation to *creative industries* will also be considered, taking into account examples of policies implemented in some developing countries to promote such industries.

The South Centre will participate in and monitor processes and developments related to these issues in various fora including WIPO, WTO, UNCTAD and WHO. The Centre will, in particular, continue its analytical work on various aspects of the WIPO processes, including the committees relating to patents, copyright, traditional knowledge and genetic resources, and the WIPO Development Agenda. The public health implications of IP will be a major area of continued work, including promoting the use of TRIPS flexibilities, and the impact of bilateral and regional free trade agreements.

The Centre will also address issues relating to technology transfer in different contexts, including to address the effects of climate change, and provide advice and support to developing countries to bring back to international debates the conditions necessary for technology to effectively flow to developing countries to promote their development. Also to be included in this work will be linkages of these issues to other policy regimes, such as health and the deployment of information and communications technologies.

7. Biodiversity

The national and international regimes for the sustainable use of biodiversity, and for sharing of benefits arising out from its exploitation, are still in evolution. This includes the adoption of national regulations to implement the CBD and the Nagoya Protocol, the ongoing revision of the ITPGRFA, the negotiation of a binding instrument on access to and benefit sharing of marine genetic resources beyond national jurisdiction and proposals by developing countries to introduce an international obligation to disclose the origin/source of genetic resources claimed in patent applications. The South Centre will continue to monitor those developments and provide analyses to support developing countries' interests in these areas, including in the negotiation of new agreements or regulations.

8. Social Dimensions of Development and Human Rights

The South Centre will undertake policy research and analysis and capacity building to promote the progress of various aspects of the social dimensions of development. One major area of focus will be on economic and social rights such as the right to food, the right to health, and the right to development and their interface with issues such as climate change, corporate responsibility, food security and small farmers' livelihood. The gender dimension of development will also be part of the Program, as will be the need for greater social equity at national and international levels. The implementation of the social issues in the SDGs, including eliminating poverty and hunger and increasing food security; health; reduction of inequalities, will be covered. Work will also continue in relation to the initiative to adopt a legally binding instrument on transnational corporations and other businesses with transnational activities and human rights, as well as on the adverse impact of illegitimate unilateral coercive measures applied against a number of developing countries.

9. Health and Development

Access to affordable medicines and other medical technologies and products has been a major focus of the South Centre and will remain so. This will be done also in the context of the need for developing countries to make better use of the TRIPS flexibilities, building on the Centre's previous work and the report of the UN High-Level Panel on access to medicines.

Another area of focus will be the need to address the crisis in antimicrobial resistance, including in implementing the Global Action Plan on AMR (adopted in May 2015) and the UN General Assembly Political Declaration on AMR (adopted in September 2016). The Centre will participate in the global discussions on this issue and on raising awareness about the actions required at the national level. Other issues of focus will be the conditions to implement Universal Health Coverage and the need for research and development for new medicines and vaccines for neglected diseases and newly emerging diseases as well as for new anti-microbials. The need for new and alternative systems of financing innovation, which was highlighted in the UNGA Political Declaration, will also be taken up. The Centre will undertake policy research, and provide technical support for international negotiations and policy making.

Policy oriented research and promotion of awareness among policy makers and regulators will also be undertaken in relation to biological medicines, notably how to overcome the IP, regulatory and other barriers (e.g. actions by pressure groups) that in many countries prevent or limit the production and commercialization of biogenerics/biosimilars which may allow access to otherwise unaffordable medical treatments.

10. International Institutions and Global Governance

The South Centre will continue to address issues of global governance, including the continued existence of imbalances in governance in various areas, and the absence of global governance in areas where it is required. The Centre will assist developing countries to build their capacity to participate more effectively in global processes and decision-making, and in the reform of global institutions and systems. The issues and activities to be covered include monitoring and engaging in institutional reform developments in multilateral institutions (including the United Nations and the international financial institutions); developments in new plurilateral processes (such as the G-20, BRICs, and regional integration organizations); and support to developing countries to strengthen their participation and voice in international policymaking and norm-setting international forums. Preparations for the forthcoming UNCTAD XV will be a priority issue during this period.

11. South-South Cooperation

One of the mandates of the South Centre is to foster South-South cooperation and collaboration. This is an area that has a lot of potential, as there has been an increasing interest in and commitment to South-South cooperation by developing countries' leaders in recent years.

In the 2020-22 period, the Centre will strengthen its work on research and capacity building for expanding South-South cooperation as a means to achieve the SDGs, including on policy approaches, modalities and frameworks. It will focus on strengthening the institutional capacity of developing countries to act as providers and recipients of SSC, based on the 'ecosystem' developed in the study co-published with the ISDB (September 2019).

12. Reform of the International Tax System

Achieving the SDGs requires the mobilization of domestic resources and increasing the capacity of developing countries to generate revenues from

taxation. The South Centre will continue to work to enhance tax cooperation among developing countries to contribute to the reform of the international tax system in a way responsive to their development needs. Work will address, in particular, the challenges faced in the digital economy, namely how to tax companies that make profits in developing countries through digital means. Analytical work, particularly of proposals for the reform of the tax system, and developing countries' fora to promote cooperation on these issues will be central components of the Centre's activities on these issues.

13. The 4th Industrial Revolution and its Impact

The socio-economic implications of the so-called '4th Industrial Revolution' raises serious concerns among developing countries, as major changes, *inter alia*, in investment and trade patterns, labor demand, and educational needs are expected. The Centre will contribute with analyses of the possible implications of the new technologies underpinning such a 'revolution' particularly in relation to the formulation of industrial policies and technological catching-up strategies.



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