



WORK PROGRAM OF THE SOUTH CENTRE

(2023 TO 2025)



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**THEMATIC WORK PROGRAM OF THE SOUTH CENTRE
(2023 to 2025)**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. INTRODUCTION.....	1
B. THEMATIC ISSUES IN THE SOUTH CENTRE'S WORK PROGRAM.....	2
1. Developments in Global Finance and External Debt.....	3
2. Implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including Policy Action for Poverty Eradication.....	3
3. Climate Change, Environmental Issues and Sustainable Development	4
4. International Trade.....	4
5. International Regime on Investment	5
6. Innovation, Intellectual Property, Technology Transfer and Protection of Traditional Knowledge.....	5
7. Biodiversity	5
8. Social Dimensions of Development and Human Rights.....	6
9. Health and Development	6
10. International Institutions and Global Governance	7
11. South-South Cooperation	7
12. Reform of the International Tax System, Fighting Illicit Financial Flows	8
13. Digital Transformation and Development.....	8
14. Addressing Illegitimate Unilateral Coercive Measures	8

THEMATIC WORK PROGRAM OF THE SOUTH CENTRE 2023 TO 2025

A. INTRODUCTION

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

Pursuant to Article II of the Agreement to Establish the South Centre, it 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 is expected to 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 from the South, such as the Group of 77 (G77) and China, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the African Union.

This document presents the thematic issues that the South Centre will be addressing in the period 2023-2025. It describes the main areas the Centre will cover in providing research inputs, advice, capacity building and advocacy to address the many challenges faced by the Global South, recently aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Europe.

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 from its membership and other developing countries, fully cognizant of the diversity in the strategies they pursue to achieve national developmental objectives.

The Centre’s activities will be aimed at strengthening the capacity of developing countries to: (i) contribute to designing a multilateral system that preserves the national policy space and is supportive of actions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly for poverty eradication; (ii) participate effectively in international fora, with a full understanding of the relevance and implications of issues under negotiation; (iii) support developing countries in articulating and putting forward their own

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

development-oriented agendas, including new initiatives and counterproposals, taking diverse country positions and development strategies into account; (iv) explore common grounds to enhance the collective capacity of developing countries to influence the outcomes of international negotiations in the areas covered by the Program.

The Centre will carry out this Program with its staff, senior advisors and consultants while amplifying its capacity to implement it through cooperation with a wide network of United Nations (UN) agencies, research and academic institutions, think-tanks and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) of the South. The issues listed below can be updated by the Board in response to recommendations of the Council of Representatives and specific requests made to the Centre.

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

Subject to the availability of resources, the main themes for the work of the South Centre in the period 2023-2025 will 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 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Paris Agreement.
4. International trade, including issues relating to agriculture, services, fisheries, e-commerce, trade and environment, and World Trade Organization (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, antimicrobial resistance, and research and development (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 of 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. Digital transformation and industrialization, including data for development policy imperatives.
14. Addressing illegitimate unilateral coercive measures.

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

1. Developments in Global Finance and External Debt

Issues to be addressed include the implications and effects on developing countries of the global economic situation (including recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of the ongoing food and energy crises), implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and external debt issues. The Centre will also address various dimensions of the reform of the global financial architecture. The Financing for Development debates will be covered and assistance or advice will be provided to developing countries. The South Centre will continue participating as a partner in the UN Inter-agency Task Force on Financing for Development.

2. Implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including Policy Action for Poverty Eradication

The Centre's work will aim at building up a fair and inclusive multilateral system that preserves the national policy space and is supportive of actions to achieve the SDGs, particularly for poverty eradication. The Centre will

conduct activities that strengthen the capacity of developing countries in relation to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda with the related Sustainable Development Goals. It will continue providing support to the developing countries in relation to meetings at the United Nations, including high-level political fora and other relevant fora on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

3. Climate Change, Environmental Issues and Sustainable Development

The South Centre will support developing countries at the global and national levels in respect of environmental issues, including climate change, and sustainable development. It will undertake policy research and analysis, assist in national capacity building, and provide support for policy implementation while promoting the use of renewable energy in developing countries and Least Developed Countries consistently with their development needs. Areas to be covered include mitigation, adaptation, technology transfer, finance and loss and damage. Besides the UNFCCC processes, the Centre will also monitor developments in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and in the Green Climate Fund (GCF). 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 to promote the development and industrialisation objectives of the Global South. While the Doha Round has not been concluded and many issues of great importance for developing countries have not found an appropriate treatment and solution yet, new issues have emerged such as e-commerce, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), investment facilitation, and trade and environment. The Centre will continue to support developing countries and strengthen their capacity, as a matter of priority, to deal with the range of proposals made by developed countries for reforming the WTO which may challenge some of the foundational pillars and principles of the multilateral regime, such as the Special & Differential Treatment, including how negotiations could be undertaken and decisions made.

Beyond the multilateral level, 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, such as the African Continental Free Trade Area.

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 at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and provide advice on the reform of the international investment regime to achieve the SDGs, including investment for climate action. Work will also continue in relation to the ongoing negotiations in the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) regarding the reform of the essentially asymmetric dispute settlement system that prevails today, notably in respect of the proposed establishment of a Standing Multilateral Mechanism of dispute settlement.

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

In order to align developing countries' innovation and intellectual property (IP) policies, including on technology transfer, to their development goals, the Centre will provide analysis and advice on IP laws and regulations, including for the protection of traditional knowledge at the national and international level.

The South Centre will participate in and monitor processes and developments related to these issues in various fora including WTO, UNCTAD, the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), including analytical work on various aspects of the WIPO processes at 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 focus, including promoting the use of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) flexibilities, and the impact of bilateral and regional free trade agreements. The role of intellectual property in relation to artificial intelligence (AI) and other information technologies as well as the 'creative industries' will be considered, taking into account examples of policies implemented in developing countries to promote such industries.

7. Biodiversity

The Centre will continue to monitor developments and provide analyses to support developing countries' interests in respect of national and international

regimes for the sustainable use of biodiversity, and for sharing of benefits arising out from its exploitation. This includes the adoption of national regulations to implement the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Nagoya Protocol, the revision of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA), the negotiation of a binding instrument on access to, and benefit sharing of, marine genetic resources beyond national jurisdiction, adoption of an international obligation to disclose the origin/source of genetic resources claimed in patent applications and negotiations on the Post 2020 Biodiversity Framework.

8. Social Dimensions of Development and Human Rights

The South Centre will continue to undertake policy research, capacity building and advocacy to promote the progress of various aspects of the social dimensions of development. One major area of focus will be the social rights (and associated economic rights) such as the right to food, the right to health, the right to education and the Right to Development (RtD) and their interface with issues such as climate change, corporate responsibility, food security and small farmers' livelihood. The gender dimension of development as well as the need for greater social equity at national and international levels shall also be in focus. The implementation of the social issues in the SDGs, including eliminating poverty and hunger while increasing food security; access to health and education; and 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 a legally binding instrument on the Right to Development (in consultation with NAM and the UN Special Rapporteur on the matter). Effective means for the national/regional implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and other People Working in Rural Areas will also be addressed.

9. Health and Development

Access to affordable medicines and other medical technologies and products (including medicines of chemical and biological origin, vaccines and diagnostics) 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.²

Another focus area will be the crisis of antimicrobial resistance (AMR), including the implementation of the Global Action Plan on AMR (adopted in

² See <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/562094dee4b0d00c1a3ef761/t/57d9c6ebf5e231b2f02cd3d4/1473890031320/UNSG+HLP+Report+FINAL+12+Sept+2016.pdf>.

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 contribute to raise awareness on the actions required at the national and regional 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 as well as for new antimicrobials. The need for alternative systems of financing innovation which ensure access will continue to be taken up. The Centre will undertake policy research, and provide technical support for international negotiations, particularly in relation to a legally binding instrument on pandemics ('the pandemic treaty') under negotiation at the WHO.

10. International Institutions and Global Governance

The South Centre will continue to address issues of global governance, including the continued existence of gaps and imbalances of governance in various areas. 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 providing advice on institutional reforms in multilateral institutions (including the United Nations, international financial institutions and the WTO) as well as on developments in plurilateral processes (such as the Group of Twenty (G20), Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS), and regional integration organizations), and support to developing countries to strengthen their participation in international policymaking and norm-setting international forums.

11. South-South Cooperation

One of the key mandates of the South Centre is to foster South-South Cooperation (SSC) which has become an important tool to support development. During 2023-25, the Centre will strengthen its work on research and capacity building for expanding South-South cooperation as a means to implement the SDGs and address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and global events, including on evolving policy approaches, modalities and frameworks during a period of fast changing landscape and narratives. Work will focus on strengthening the institutional capacity of developing countries to act as providers and recipients of SSC, based on the national 'ecosystem' approach developed by the South Centre in the study co-published with the Islamic Development Bank (ISDB) (September 2019).

12. Reform of the International Tax System, Fighting Illicit Financial Flows

The South Centre will continue to work to enhance the mobilization of domestic resources and increase the capacity of developing countries to generate revenues from taxation and to combat illicit financial flows. Analytical work, particularly of proposals for the reform of the tax system, and a developing countries' annual forum to promote cooperation on these issues will be central components of the Centre's activities on such issues. The work will emphasize the support on issues of interest for developing countries such as the UN Tax Committee and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), with a focus on the rules of 'Pillar One' of the 'Two Pillar Solution', the multilateralization of the UN solution for taxation of the digital economy (Article 12B), wealth taxation, taxation of payments for computer software and international shipping, among others. The South Centre will continue to support developing countries in making an informed decision on the right policy solution for the taxation of the digital economy as well as for implementing measures to curb illicit financial flows.

13. Digital Transformation and Development

The policy dimensions of digital transformation will be one of the thematic areas of work of the South Centre, including how developing countries can harness digital technologies in education, health and the production of goods (including agriculture) and services, support the development of a domestic digital industry, improve their digital infrastructure, advance digital equity and inclusion, effectively tax the digital companies and contribute to shaping the digital governance architecture to advance the SDGs.

The South Centre will also assist developing countries in responding to the policy challenges brought about by the '4th Industrial Revolution', including the regulation and management of Big Data, the utilization of Artificial Intelligence, the conceptualization of digital rights as fundamental rights (including the right to connectivity) and the future of labor. Digital cooperation in the form of capacity building, access and technology transfer will be promoted. The Centre will provide analytical support to its members and the G77 and China in negotiations in various United Nations fora including the Global Digital Compact, in the WTO Joint Statement Initiative on E-commerce and in free trade agreements, as well as in discussions on digital health in the context of the WHO and on artificial intelligence and intellectual property in WIPO.

14. Addressing Illegitimate Unilateral Coercive Measures

The Centre will, as a matter of principle, strongly uphold multilateralism and support developing countries in their efforts to curb unilateral coercive measures (UCMs) adopted in violation of international law and the UN

Charter, which pose serious threats to the achievement of SDGS and the realization of human rights (particularly the Right to Development). Work to be undertaken will include analysis of evidence on the human rights impact of UCMs, and reporting to the UN Secretary-General in response to UN resolutions on the matter. Close cooperation and consultations with the UN Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of the unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights will be held in this area.




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