

Leveraging South-South and Triangular Cooperation for Reducing Poverty and Hunger, and Promoting Rural Development

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Abstract

The world is experiencing unprecedented global multidimensional crises that have increased poverty, hunger and food insecurity, with the sharpest impacts being felt among rural areas and communities. Deepening international cooperation is essential to help developing countries face economic headwinds and recover from lasting scars of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change-induced natural disasters. In this scenario, scaling up of South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) can play a critical role in catalyzing sustainable development initiatives in developing and least developed countries.

This policy brief therefore considers how SSTC can be effectively leveraged for undertaking initiatives on poverty alleviation, hunger reduction and rural development through strengthening of national SSTC institutional setups. It also explores how SSTC can facilitate increased coordination among stakeholders, and considers areas for fostering mutually beneficial initiatives between developing countries. This brief then focuses on the institutional setup for SSTC in some selected countries across Asia, Africa and Latin America, and considers their role in mainstreaming of SSTC. It further considers some recent experiences from developing countries that use SSTC modalities, outlining important initiatives which could be shared with partners to support poverty alleviation, food security and rural development efforts. Finally, the brief provides some important conclusions and lessons learned which can support developing countries' efforts to achieve the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.

Le monde est confronté à des crises sans précédent de nature multidimensionnelle qui ont contribué à une aggravation de la pauvreté, de la faim et de l'insécurité alimentaire, dont les effets se font particulièrement ressentir dans les zones et les communautés rurales. Il est essentiel d'approfondir la coopération internationale pour aider les pays en développement à faire face aux vents contraires qui agitent l'économie et à panser les plaies durables laissées par la COVID-19 et les catastrophes naturelles liées au changement climatique. L'intensification de la coopération Sud-Sud et de la coopération triangulaire peut jouer un rôle essentiel à cet égard en encourageant les initiatives en matière de développement durable dans les pays en développement et les pays les moins avancés.

Le présent rapport sur les politiques examine de quelle manière la coopération Sud-Sud et la coopération triangulaire peuvent être efficacement mises à profit pour entreprendre des initiatives de lutte contre la pauvreté, de réduction de la faim et de développement rural en renforçant les structures institutionnelles de coopération au niveau national. Il explore également les moyens permettant de favoriser une meilleure coordination entre les parties prenantes et examine les domaines dans lesquels des initiatives mutuellement bénéfiques peuvent être encouragées entre les pays en développement. Le rapport aborde ensuite la structure institutionnelle de coopération en place dans certains pays d'Asie, d'Afrique et d'Amérique latine, et examine leur rôle dans l'intégration de la coopération Sud-Sud et de la coopération triangulaire. Il analyse certaines expériences récentes de pays en développement qui utilisent les modalités de la coopération Sud-Sud et de la coopération triangulaire, en mettant en avant les principales initiatives qui pourraient être partagées avec les partenaires pour soutenir les efforts déployés en vue de réduire la pauvreté et l'insécurité alimentaire et encourager le développement rural. Il dégage, pour finir, des conclusions et enseignements clés susceptibles de soutenir les efforts des pays en développement pour atteindre les Objectifs de développement durable et du Programme de développement durable à l'horizon 2030.

El mundo está experimentando crisis multidimensionales sin precedentes que han aumentado la pobreza, el hambre y la inseguridad alimentaria, y la mayor repercusión se está notando en las comunidades y zonas rurales. Es esencial intensificar la cooperación internacional para ayudar a los países en desarrollo a afrontar las dificultades económicas y recuperarse de las profundas cicatrices provo-

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cadras por la pandemia de COVID-19 y los desastres naturales inducidos por el cambio climático. En esta situación, la ampliación de la cooperación Sur-Sur y triangular puede desempeñar una función determinante como catalizadora de las iniciativas de desarrollo sostenible en los países en desarrollo y menos adelantados.

Por lo tanto, este informe sobre políticas examina el modo en que la cooperación Sur-Sur y triangular se puede utilizar eficazmente para poner en marcha iniciativas que hagan posible la mitigación de la pobreza, la reducción del hambre y el desarrollo rural a través del fortalecimiento de los marcos institucionales de la cooperación Sur-Sur y triangular a nivel nacional. También explora la manera en que la cooperación Sur-Sur y triangular puede facilitar una mayor coordinación entre las partes interesadas, y considera los ámbitos en los que se pueden fomentar iniciativas que beneficien mutuamente a los países en desarrollo. Por consiguiente, el presente documento se centra en el marco institucional de la cooperación Sur-Sur y triangular en determinados países de Asia, África y América Latina, y analiza su función en la incorporación de la cooperación Sur-Sur y triangular. Asimismo, aborda algunas experiencias recientes de los países en desarrollo que emplean modalidades de cooperación Sur-Sur y triangular, en las que se exponen iniciativas relevantes que podrían compartirse con los asociados a fin de respaldar los esfuerzos destinados a la mitigación de la pobreza, la seguridad alimentaria y el desarrollo rural. Por último, el informe proporciona algunas conclusiones y enseñanzas extraídas importantes que pueden servir de apoyo para la actividad que los países en desarrollo emprendan con miras a lograr los ODS y cumplir la Agenda 2030.

1. Introduction

The world is going through unprecedented global shocks and multidimensional crises which threaten to roll back the progress made over the last few decades in poverty alleviation, reduction of global hunger and malnutrition, and in sustainable development as a whole.

Rural areas and communities in developing countries have been hit the hardest by these crises, given the prevalence of poverty, especially extreme poverty, in rural areas. There is also rising food insecurity and hunger globally, and even the threat of famine and starvation in some regions.

Estimates suggest that “a total of 685 million people could be living in extreme poverty by the end of this year - nearly 90 million more than would have been the case if the pre-COVID pace of poverty reduction had continued”.¹ In the face of this, it is essential that national efforts towards rural development, promoting sustainable agriculture, reducing poverty and hunger are strengthened across countries as part of their recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

International cooperation is an important element that can help support the national efforts of developing countries to recover from the pandemic; and to cope with the related and ongoing socio-economic crises, as well as climate change-induced natural disasters. The issues of poverty alleviation, reduction of hunger and rural development are of high importance to developing countries, and there is an urgent need to bolster efforts in these areas, including through increasing cooperation among developing countries, and the sharing of national experiences and lessons learned. In this context, South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) has immense potential to enhance the efforts of developing countries, while being complementary to, and not a substitute for traditional North-South cooperation.

As has been highlighted in previous research by the South Centre, “developing countries have different national circumstances and varying internal and external constraints, both of which in turn result in a multi-

plicity of development conditions. Therefore, it is natural that developing countries undertake SSTC in different ways, using different approaches and methodologies, and with different institutional arrangements at the domestic level”.²

Furthermore, “[t]he different national conditions and the diversity and multitude of SSTC activities, actors, modalities, and approaches for undertaking SSTC are important factors that account for the differences in institutional arrangements at the national level in developing countries. With the actors increasing quickly, SSTC initiatives are also rapidly multiplying. Opportunities for enhancing international cooperation are presenting themselves in different areas and from more partners. Developing countries can leverage these opportunities to accelerate their economic and social development.”³

This policy brief therefore looks at how national institutions can support developing countries in their efforts to leverage SSTC for reducing poverty and hunger, and promoting rural development. It draws upon the research and analysis conducted by the South Centre in seven targeted developing countries across different regions, considering their national institutional frameworks for SSTC, as well as their important experiences and lessons learned in reducing poverty and hunger, and in promoting agriculture and rural development. The data used in this brief has been gathered through the use of a survey questionnaire, interviews with government officials and practitioners in developing countries, desk research and views expressed by participants during two capacity building and training workshops on ‘Leveraging SSTC for Reducing Poverty and Hunger, and Promoting Rural Development’, held in November and December 2022.

2. Current Scenario

The uniquely mixed global economy headwinds, including the recent shocks due to the pandemic, the increased geo-political tensions and climate change are some of the current challenges that have negatively impacted efforts made in achieving the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These overlapping crises have left lasting scars on the world economy, especially for devel-

oping countries, as their economies have limited resilience in face of external shocks. These challenges are a direct threat to vulnerable societies and people in most developing countries, and have pushed them closer towards humanitarian crises. To make things worse, official development aid in the form of grants from industrialised countries has been declining, and some has been redirected to non-economic development areas in recent years. Meanwhile, the needs of developing countries have increased considerably in face of the many crises they continue to face.

The magnitude of economic scarring from these global crises has been alarming, the most shocking is the increasing poverty in the developing world, especially rural poverty across many developing countries, wiping out much of the gains made in the past few decades. According to the World Bank, “71 million more people are living in extreme poverty in 2020 as compared to 2019, which is a 12 percent increase. On the contrary, without the pandemic, close to 20 million people would have been expected to move out of extreme poverty in 2020. As a result, the net impact of the pandemic has been to have an additional 90 million people in extreme poverty in 2020”.⁴

Inflationary pressures are also being seen in many countries, which are driving hunger and adding to increasing malnutrition.⁵ World Bank data also shows that “84.2% of low-income countries, 93% of lower-middle-income countries, and 93% of upper-middle-income countries have seen inflation levels above 5%, with many experiencing double-digit inflation”.⁶ These concerns can be seen in developing countries across regions.

In Latin America and the Caribbean for instance,

“despite policies supporting income and food, the incidence of the moderate or severe food insecurity increased 6.5 percentage points in relation to 2019. The food crisis has been particularly severe in some countries in the region: for example, in Guatemala, Honduras and several countries in the Caribbean the effects of the pandemic have been aggravated by concurrent natural disasters”.⁷

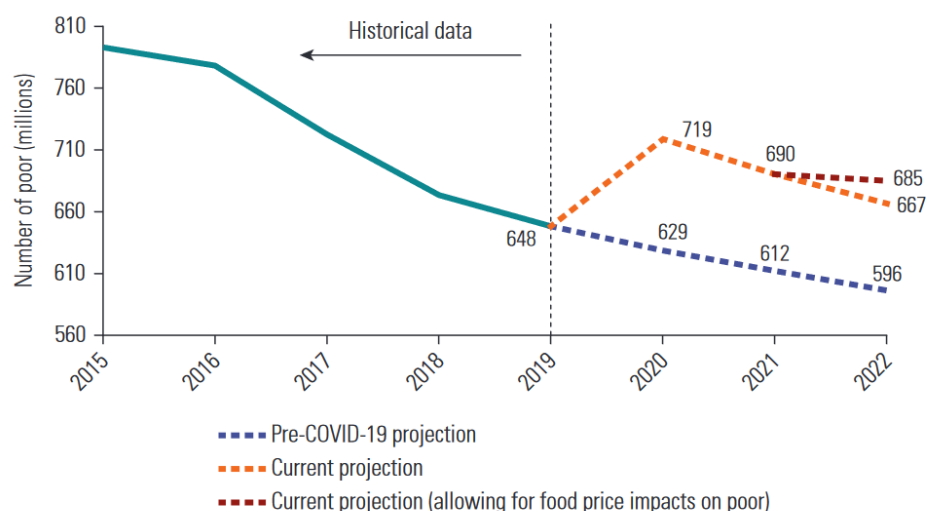
In the African context, “the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic pushed an estimated 55 million Africans into extreme poverty in 2020 and reversed more than two decades of progress in poverty reduction on the continent”.⁸ The situation has been most critical in rural areas, given that “[i]n many countries of sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, more than half of the rural population lives in extreme poverty”.⁹ The pandemic therefore “further compounded the already vulnerable position of the rural poor by reducing incomes, limiting mobility and reducing food security”.¹⁰

For the Asia-Pacific region, the pandemic “pushed 4.7 million people in Southeast Asia into extreme poverty in 2021, as 9.3 million jobs disappeared”.¹¹ While there have been some green shoots of economic recovery, it has been suggested that the “pandemic may also have worsened forms of poverty beyond income, such as food insecurity and inadequate access to health services and education”.¹²

Food insecurity has become a major challenge for most Southern countries, in addition to the gloomy global economic outlook for the coming one to two years. The scenario described above means that a quick recovery to the pre-pandemic period is quite elusive.

According to the World Bank, poverty increased by a wide margin in 2020, but would have continued to decline had it not been for the pandemic (see Figure 1). Although the degree of poverty started to reduce again in 2021 and

Figure 1 – Global Poverty Levels and Estimates



Sources: World Bank estimates based on Mahler, Yonzan, and Lakner, forthcoming; World Bank, Poverty and Inequality Platform, <https://pip.worldbank.org>; World Bank, Global Economic Prospects database, <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/global-economic-prospects>.
 Note: The figure shows the number of poor at the US\$2.15 a day poverty line. For 2022, nowcasts are reported for the “Current projection” and for the “Current projection (allowing for food price impacts on poor).”

Source: World Bank ¹³

2022, to fully recover to the pre-pandemic trend of poverty reduction will take years. Rural poverty has increased in relation to urban poverty, making the rural population vulnerable to external shocks and liable to be pushed into extreme poverty.

The Group of Twenty (G20) in its recent Bali Declaration¹⁴, recognised increasing poverty as a major challenge for the international community and called for “an accelerated transformation towards sustainable and resilient agriculture and food systems...” A policy shift to address this issue will require the promotion of agriculture and rural development as an urgent means to reduce poverty and end hunger.

The past decades of globalization have witnessed developing countries’ efforts in economic catch-up with developed countries. This process allowed some developing countries to become vibrant emerging economies and some other countries to improve their economic conditions, offering markets and more opportunities for cooperation. Economic progress made in the South has given rise to new complementarities among developing countries, both within and among regions in trade, investment, financial cooperation, people-to-people exchange, experience sharing and policy making, among others.

In addition, given the fact that developing countries are at similar development stages, they also face common challenges and share proximity in their national conditions. Thus, among such partners, South-South cooperation can be more effective and efficient to achieve certain outcomes linked to the achievement of development objectives. As it is cooperation between equals, mutual benefits could be derived and complementarities explored.

Triangular cooperation has also been playing an important role in facilitating and catalysing partnerships and offering technical and financial assistance as required. Leveraging fully the potential of SSTC has become an imperative for developing countries to realize their developmental and foreign policy objectives, and the 2030 Agenda. It is also vital for their efforts towards increasing their international standing and strengthening solidarity with other developing countries. Mainstreaming and leveraging SSTC in development activities requires strengthening national institutions and building the technical capacity to formulate and implement specific cooperation programs.¹⁵

SSTC has gained more significance and momentum in recent years, which has led an increasing number of countries to establish new independent agencies or upgrade their institutional structures to adjust to the new demands from developing countries, as well as other development partners.¹⁶ Developing countries have also strengthened the coordination among domestic stakeholders, promoting their dual role as recipients and providers of SSTC.

Regarding poverty reduction and rural develop-

ment, countries generally have different institutional setups for implementing their national poverty alleviation initiatives. For instance, some countries have set up decentralized governmental agencies responsible for national efforts and coordination with different line ministries. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Agriculture remains indispensable in all these different setups, and is a key actor for promoting rural development programs, and food security through agricultural development. These ministries also engage frequently in SSTC initiatives, including through the support of international organizations such as the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

There are some weak links to be found in the institutional setup for leveraging SSTC for poverty alleviation, hunger reduction and rural development, such as gaps in coordination among stakeholders, information asymmetries, communication problems and lack of financing. Strengthening the institutional setup for leveraging SSTC at the national level could promote better communication channels and exchange of information, bridging partners and financing options. Mobilization of more national, regional, and multilateral funding and resources could also help address these weak links and meet the specific needs of developing countries.

3. National Institutional Setups for Leveraging SSTC

As mentioned above, leveraging SSTC for poverty alleviation, hunger reduction and rural development can benefit from the establishment of effective institutional setups that respond to the reality and needs of each State, as such institutions can help streamline and facilitate the implementation of SSTC initiatives.

The establishment or upgrading of national agencies focused on SSTC are becoming a common practice among developing countries. The deepening and formalization of institutions on SSTC can contribute to mainstreaming outcomes into broader development efforts, thus synergizing SSTC activities/initiatives with the national development strategies and foreign policies of the country. Improved institutional structure can also provide coherence and visibility to the country’s SSTC cooperation activities and also render them more accessible, both to domestic society and the international community. It can further facilitate and smoothen coordination among all relevant stakeholders, increase flow of information and data, and streamline cooperation activities. Strong institutions are crucial to ensure long-term and sustained efforts to build South-South links and contribute to a more effective SSTC to face the systemic challenges of our time.

These institutional arrangements are intended to identify, encourage, coordinate and provide guidance among domestic actors and South-South cooperation stakeholders. These institutions could also support activities such as data collection and dissemination, which could allow broader identification of trends and patterns of SSTC and new opportunities for development. Similarly, a national

institution in charge of SSTC can serve as a “conduit for streamlining such exchanges, enabling all developing countries (particularly least developed countries) to maximize the benefits from SSTC.”¹⁷

Several developing countries have established such national agencies on SSTC. Colombia, for example, established the Presidential Agency for International Cooperation (APC-Colombia) through a presidential decree.¹⁸ APC-Colombia is the technical secretariat for the implementation of the National Strategy for International Cooperation.¹⁹ As part of the Administrative Department of the Presidency, APC-Colombia has administrative and financial autonomy; and also manages the Colombia Fund for International Cooperation and Assistance. APC-Colombia was established to “manage, guide and technically coordinate the non-reimbursable public, private, technical and financial international cooperation that the country receives and grants; as well as execute, manage and support the channelling and execution of international cooperation resources, programs and projects, meeting the objectives of foreign policy and the National Development Plan”.²⁰

Other countries in the region have adopted different approaches to their national SSTC frameworks. Panama has developed a two level International Cooperation System (ICS). The first level is responsible mainly for strategic issues and is led by the International Cooperation Cabinet (ICC). The second level institution is the Vice-Ministry of Multilateral Affairs and Cooperation, which takes care of the operational issues.

The International Cooperation Cabinet is comprised of different government institutions and defines the strategic guidelines for international cooperation policies. The Vice-Ministry of Multilateral Affairs and Cooperation, through the General Directorate for International Cooperation (GDIC), is the operational apparatus of the system, and conducts the planning, supervision

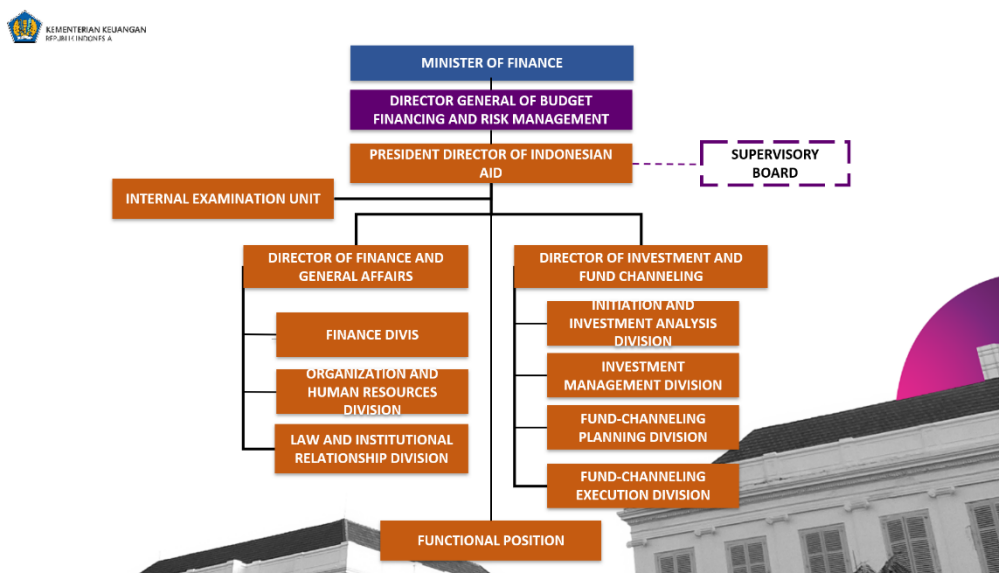
and monitoring of initiatives and activities. The GDIC serves as the technical secretariat of the entire ICS, and also serves as the link between the strategic planning proposed by the ICC with other operational areas.

Several African countries have also developed institutional mechanisms for benefiting from SSTC. The Egyptian Agency of Partnership for Development (EAPD) is part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Egypt, and is responsible for overseeing SSTC activities undertaken at national level. It coordinates the efforts of different line ministries and other Egyptian agencies involved in Egypt’s SSTC activities. EAPD is also engaged in providing capacity building programs for the officials of other developing countries through conducting programs in various fields in partnership with identified Egyptian Centers of Excellence.

In the case of South Africa, the development cooperation initiatives are conducted through a range of government departments, parastatal bodies, government agencies, and other statutory bodies, in addition to the work carried out by the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO).²¹ Likewise, Uganda’s international cooperation system is established across several government institutions, in particular the Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development and the National Planning Authorities.²²

Indonesia’s National Coordination Team (NCT) was developed by the Ministry of State as a multi-ministerial/agency team tasked with coordinating Indonesia’s SSTC. The NCT is co-chaired by the Minister of National Development and Planning, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and supported by three working groups and a secretariat. In 2019, the Indonesian government announced the creation of the Indonesian Agency for International Development (Indonesian AID) which is within the Ministry of Finance (see Figure 2). The steering committee for the agency is composed of the Ministers of Finance, Foreign Affairs, State Secretariat and Development

Figure 2 - Organizational Structure of Indonesian AID



Source: Indonesian AID website²⁴

Planning,²³ which enables high level of coordination among the line ministries. This new agency is designed to contribute to international development cooperation, as well as to ensure global partnership in development.

Although developing countries have very different approaches to the establishment of a national body for SSTC, these specialized institutions, bodies, or agencies dealing with SSTC can support developing countries' efforts in streamlining their cooperation activities and aligning them with their national development priorities. These institutions can allow a more efficient and smoother operations for the country's SSTC initiatives. They can also enable the expansion of traditional operational activities for development, and identify partnerships with national, regional and international stakeholders to provide innovative solutions.

4. Recent Experiences and Initiatives on SSTC

SSTC has become an important means for developing countries to share their national experiences, expertise and lessons learned in poverty alleviation, reducing hunger, promoting agriculture and rural development. Some existing challenges and initiatives to address them, including the important role played by national SSTC institutions in this regard are described below.

Faced with the increased poverty owing to the pandemic and other crises, some countries such as Colombia have increased the active participation of government agencies in international cooperation strategies for the purpose of leveraging SSTC, and the APC-Colombia is responsible for spearheading SSTC activities in the country. For example, Colombia, together with the Brazilian Cooperation Agency and the FAO in Colombia, established the project on "Public Policies with an Agroecological Approach in Agriculture Family and Peasant Communities in Rural Territories in Colombia", with the objective of improving the quality of agricultural services, and to strengthen the capacities of peasants' communities to promote new markets and short marketing circuits.²⁵ The project has also increased the participation of women in agricultural innovation, thereby obtaining better living conditions for the community.

Similarly, through the Mesoamerica Hunger Free project implemented together with the government of Mexico (AMEXCID) and FAO, Colombia has strengthened the institutional capacities for ensuring food security and nutrition and promoting rural development. Contributions of this project have been especially relevant to the implementation of the Colombia Peace Accord, particularly on the basis of comprehensive rural reform.²⁶

To address the weak links in national institutional frameworks on SSTC, some developing countries have explored innovative measures. In Egypt, the EAPD has suggested the development of an online tool to pool the

specific needs of developing countries in one platform. According to them, SSTC efforts are sometimes delayed not because of lack of resources but because of lack of clarity on the specific needs of countries. Developing such a platform would facilitate match-making between available resources on one hand and, on the other, the development needs of countries of the South.

Egypt has also leveraged SSTC for agricultural development, including through the establishment of the Egyptian International Center for Agriculture (EICA), which is an important actor for SSTC in Egypt. EICA was "established in 1965 within the system of the Agricultural Foreign Relations Department at the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation to carry out the crucial role of transferring expertise and technology in agriculture"²⁷ Through its training programmes offered jointly by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Egypt, EICA provides scientific and practical experience to help train the officials of countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe.²⁸

Meanwhile, some other countries have pursued their own unique approaches. For instance, Panama has highlighted the need for strengthening the coordination of national stakeholders to identify synergies among different development actors and initiatives, particularly in cross-cutting concerns, including agriculture, livestock, environmental and rural development projects. Sectoral roundtables under the governance architecture of international cooperation have been utilized to collect specific proposals and data. Such information would subsequently be communicated to stakeholders for promoting better integration of these initiatives.

Panama also engages in SSTC through different means. For instance, the program "Study Without Hunger" is an inter-institutional program under the Ministries of Education, Health, Agricultural Development and the Food and Nutritional Security Plan (Senapan), and representatives of Panama to the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). Until June 2022, the plan has been implemented in 169 schools, and 30,039 students have been beneficiaries of the program.²⁹

In the area of South-South cooperation, Panama has established the Regional Logistical Center for Humanitarian Assistance (CLRAH in Spanish). The Center was established as a mechanism for facilitating and supporting the response of national systems and international agencies in situations of natural disasters, or anthropogenic events that impact countries in the region. As part of its mission, CLRAH promotes existing expertise in humanitarian response and facilitates the transfer of knowledge in view of identified skills and development needs.³⁰

It is well known that some developing countries are highly prone to natural disasters. With agricultural productivity dependant on the weather conditions, the risks of climate change induced extreme weather conditions and natural disasters have been increasing. This makes the challenge of rural development and poverty

reduction even more difficult in these countries. Therefore, increasing resilience to natural disasters and adapting to climate change are important to poverty alleviation and are critical elements for SSTC activities. Further efforts are required to address these challenges.

Indonesia provides important experiences for countries in such circumstances, as it has developed a strong national framework for undertaking SSTC. By bringing together different line ministries and government agencies for designing and implementation of its SSTC initiatives, Indonesia has greatly mainstreamed SSTC within its National Development Plans, and also shares its experiences with other developing countries. For instance, Indonesia has been undertaking capacity building activities through various kinds of training programs, workshops, exchange of experts and scholars. According to a study based on the information from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, from 1999 to 2016, Indonesia conducted 783 programs and activities, with 5,091 participants, and an allocated budget of US\$ 57.4 million.³¹ Agriculture is an important sector which has been a focus of knowledge sharing and related activities in Indonesian SSTC.

Strengthening national and global information management systems for SSTC is still a challenge for countries which do not yet have an efficient mechanism in place. Thus, both real time impact and statistics remain difficult to trace. The need for enhanced coordination in digital transformation, agricultural development and food systems has been well-noted. However, the lack of centralization does not prevent developing countries from sharing their experiences in agriculture and poverty alleviation through SSTC initiatives. In the case of South Africa for instance, it has met the demand by African countries for technical assistance support in the field of agriculture through the establishment of a technical assistance programme called the 'African Agricultural Development Programme'³². With the assistance of the FAO, a framework for national level implementation of the African Union initiative on Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP)³³ has also been developed. This programme has utilized structures in the regional economic communities to facilitate the creation of a common African food market in strategic commodities.³⁴

Uganda has had successful initiatives in leveraging SSTC for agriculture and rural development. For instance, Uganda is a partner of an important SSTC initiative for technical cooperation in the agricultural sector, in collaboration with FAO. Since 2011, the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries of Uganda has been implementing this project, which has over 11,000 beneficiaries and is now in its Third Phase. The main beneficiaries of the project were small-scale farmers and agribusiness enterprises involved in production, processing and marketing of agricultural products. With the support of the project, Ugandan farmers were able to increase production and productivity in horticulture, cereals, aquaculture, livestock and cross-

cutting technologies.³⁵ Its good experiences have attracted other developing countries, particularly in Africa, to learn how they can replicate the initiatives as well. Delegations from Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea Conakry and Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, Senegal, and Tanzania have visited Uganda to learn from its experiences of leveraging SSTC in agriculture and rural development.³⁶

With regard to the institutional setup for SSTC in Uganda, there are still some gaps in coordination to be addressed. Some of the major challenges in rural development include low agricultural productivity, weak infrastructure, and weather dependent agriculture (which means the agriculture output is at the mercy of the weather conditions each year). Enhanced coordination among stakeholders and government agencies could support better handling of such gaps.

Some countries that have gained particular experiences in agriculture and rural development have been actively sharing their expertise with other developing countries. For example, Vietnam is cooperating with countries like Mozambique, Angola, Laos, Cambodia, Cuba and Haiti in various capacities as part of its SSTC initiatives in agriculture and related sectors. It has sent more than 400 agricultural experts to African countries under different SSTC projects on aquaculture and crop production. Given its experience as a biodiversity hotspot, Vietnam is cooperating with South Africa in the field of biodiversity conservation and protection.³⁷ The high level of expertise of Vietnam's experts in rice production is much sought after. It has also attracted inward SSTC initiatives, as the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Fund has financed the project on 'Establishment of Rice Seed Production Hub in Da Nang City' in Vietnam. It has been implemented by the Da Nang Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, with the support of FAO. Thus, the identified comparative advantages of Vietnam in agriculture could be further promoted, for instance, by setting up and supporting national centres of excellence to facilitate Vietnam's role as a Food Innovation Hub. Strong commitment from key stakeholders, including the government and private sector, is key to the success of such SSTC initiatives.

5. Conclusions and Lessons Learned

The negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on poverty alleviation have been massive, resulting in large increase in poverty, especially rural poverty. While many countries had made gains in reducing poverty in the past decades, the pandemic has been a setback, requiring urgent course correction.

Insufficient national legal, policy and institutional arrangements can hamper effective conduct of SSTC, as it can lead to a low level of coordination and knowledge-sharing, both within the country and internationally. For instance, the decentralized nature of international cooperation entities within government ministries can lead to the establishment of 'silos', if no effective measures and mechanisms have been put in place to ensure good vertical and horizontal coordination.

To make the coordination among government agencies more effective, prioritization, coordination, monitoring and communication of its SSTC initiatives and projects are required. However, it seems countries need to further enhance such kind of capacities in order to reach the desired results. Greater information sharing on SSTC knowledge, experiences and good practices, through mechanisms such as national information databases on SSTC, can be explored in this regard.

There is a great benefit from disseminating information on SSTC initiatives that have had strong impact on the ground as awareness of successful initiatives spreads among SSTC actors regionally and internationally. This encourages the creation of new partnerships to expand on or replicate those initiatives. The process of strengthening SSTC at the global level should account for the realities of the countries of the South.

Further, ensuring the sustainability of some of the developmental projects being implemented has sometimes been challenging, and has in a few cases constrained countries' willingness to replicate these projects with other partners. One solution therefore is to elaborate a long-term plan with all parties involved that takes into account the specificities of the local context in order to ensure that the project is sustainable.

Finally, insufficient funding and declining availability of resources for undertaking SSTC is a significant concern for many other developing countries. The reallocation and reduction of funds for international cooperation from developed countries require that more concrete actions be taken for resource mobilization at the regional and multilateral levels.

Endnotes:

¹ World Bank, "COVID-19 dealt a historic blow to poverty reduction. Fiscal policy can help repair the damage", 5 October 2022. Available from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/immersive-story/2022/10/05/covid-19-dealt-a-historic-blow-to-poverty-reduction>.

² South Centre and Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), *Developing National Ecosystems for South-South and Triangular Cooperation to Achieve Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development* (2019), p. 3.

³ Ibid., p. 10.

⁴ Daniel Gerszon Mahler, Nishant Yonzan, Christoph Lakner, "The Impact of COVID-19 on Global Inequality and Poverty", Policy Research Working Papers, 10198 (Washington, DC, World Bank, 2022). Available from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/38114>.

⁵ Siobhan McDonough, "Yet another inflation problem: Food prices are driving up world hunger", *Vox*, 7 September 2022. Available from <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2022/9/7/23340896/inflation-world-hunger-food-security-world-bank>.

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