



THEMATIC WORK PROGRAMME OF THE SOUTH CENTRE (2026 TO 2028)



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 **SOUTH
CENTRE**



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I. INTRODUCTION

The South Centre functions as an independent intergovernmental think tank for developing countries, with the aim of promoting South solidarity, South consciousness, and mutual knowledge and understanding among countries and peoples of the South through its work on development policy issues.

In accordance with Article II of the Agreement to Establish the South Centre, its objective is to “promote convergent views and approaches among Southern countries on global economic, political, and strategic issues, related to the evolving concepts of development, sovereignty, and security.” Additionally, in line with Article III of the Agreement, the Centre is expected to “generate action-oriented ideas and proposals for consideration, as appropriate, by Southern governments, South-South cooperation institutions, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, and the wider community.” This includes policy advice and support to collective Southern entities such as the Group of 77 and China (G77), the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and the African Union.

This document outlines the thematic areas that the South Centre will address during the 2026–2028 period. It describes the key areas the Centre will cover through research inputs, policy advisory, capacity building and advocacy to address the many challenges facing the Global South.

This Work Programme is designed to enable the Centre to respond effectively and in a timely manner, within its capacity and mandate, to the demands of its Member States and other developing countries, fully recognizing the diversity of strategies they follow to achieve their national development goals.

The Centre’s activities will aim to strengthen the capacity of developing countries to:

- (i) contribute to the design of a multilateral system that preserves national policy space and supports actions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially poverty eradication;
- (ii) participate effectively in international fora, with a full understanding of the relevance and implications of the issues under negotiation;
- (iii) support developing countries in articulating and presenting their own development-oriented agendas, including new initiatives and counterproposals, taking into account the diversity of national development strategies and positions;
- (iv) explore common grounds to enhance the collective ability of developing countries to influence outcomes of international negotiations in the areas covered by the Programme.

The Centre will implement this Programme with its staff, while expanding its implementation capacity through cooperation with a broad network of UN system agencies, academic and research institutions, think tanks, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from the South. The topics listed below may be updated by the Board of the South Centre in response to recommendations from the Council of Representatives and specific requests made to the Centre.

In developing this Work Programme, the Secretariat has considered the interventions at the Council meetings and Board meetings, and at other meetings with Member States. Given the limited resources available, it does not aim at expanding the thematic areas covered by the Centre.

The issues indicated under each area below are illustrative and do not exhaust the range of aspects that may be covered in the light of relevant national and international developments and the demands received from Member States. As some of the covered themes are cross-cutting in terms of the issues involved, they will be jointly addressed by two or more Programmes of the Centre.

II. THEMATIC ISSUES OF THE SOUTH CENTRE WORK PROGRAMME

Subject to resource availability, the main thematic priorities of the South Centre for the 2026–2028 period will include:

1. Implementation of the 2030 Agenda including Policy Action for Poverty Eradication
2. Climate Change, Environmental Issues and Sustainable Development
3. International Institutions and Global Governance
4. Digital Transformation and Frontier Technologies
5. Addressing Unilateral Coercive Measures
6. Developments in the Global Economy, notably in relation to Finance for Development and External Debt
7. International Trade and Development
8. International Regime on Investment
9. Innovation, Intellectual Property, Technology Transfer and Protection of Traditional Knowledge
10. Biodiversity, Access to Genetic Resources (Marine and Terrestrial), and Benefit-Sharing
11. Social Dimensions of Development and Human Rights, including Income and Gender Inequalities

12. Health and Development, including Universal Health Coverage, Access to Medicines and Medical Technologies, Antimicrobial Resistance, and Research and Development (R&D)
13. Strengthening of the South-South and Triangular Cooperation
14. Reform of the International Tax System, Tax Rights in the Digital Economy, and Illicit Financial Flows

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

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

The Centre's work will aim at building 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.

2. 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 various aspects of 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, green industrialization, finance and loss and damage. Under this work area, the Centre will continue to work on the interphase of climate change with human rights, trade, innovation, investment, intellectual property and other policy areas with the aim of overcoming the fragmentation of the international system in this regard. This will include work on how trade frameworks can support green and digital industrialisation, beneficiation, and value addition in the context of just transitions and sustainable development.

3. 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 thematic 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 BRICS and regional integration organizations). It will also include support for the implementation of the Pact for the Future and of other international agreements.

4. Digital Transformation and Frontier Technologies

The main aim of this cross-cutting area of work is to ensure that global digital and artificial intelligence (AI) governance frameworks reflect developing country interests and contribute to a more equitable participation in the global digital economy. This requires addressing how digital transformation and AI can advance economic development in developing countries while mitigating associated risks such as technological dependency, employment displacement, and widening digital divides. The research agenda will focus on impact and access to frontier technologies including AI, and how regulations on data localization, and cross-border data flow impact developing countries' ability to adopt and develop AI capabilities and pursue industrial strategies. It will also address the impact of digital technologies on trade (including emerging disciplines on e-commerce and duties) education and access to health services, support the development of a domestic digital industry and Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI). The Centre will provide advice on governance of AI, ensuring it is human-rights-based, ethical, and does not exacerbate the technological divide.

5. Addressing 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.

6. Developments in the Global Economy, notably in relation to Finance for Development and External Debt

Issues to be addressed include the effects of global economic situation on development finance of developing countries, implementation of the Sevilla Commitment, external debt issues and domestic resource mobilization. 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 and advice will be provided to developing countries on these matters. The South Centre will continue participating as a partner in the UN Inter-agency Task Force on Financing for Development and as observer for the Intergovernmental Group of 24.

7. International Trade and Development

The South Centre will continue to engage actively in shaping the evolution and governance of the international trading system, with a focus on ensuring that trade rules and practices support the development, industrialization, and resilience objectives of the Global South. This comprehensive approach encompasses agriculture, services, e-commerce, digital trade, climate-related trade measures, green industrial policy, trade and environment, reform of the World Trade Organization (WTO), and free trade agreements. The Centre's work on WTO reform covers institutional governance, the negotiating function, dispute settlement, and the continued relevance of Special and Differential Treatment and the development dimension within the WTO framework. The Centre will also address broader systemic trends affecting the trading system, including shifts in tariff policy, the use of unilateral trade measures, new trade deals, and the growing deployment of trade instruments for political or geopolitical purposes, while intensifying

focus on digital trade policy and trade-related aspects of Artificial Intelligence. The Centre will support developing countries in advancing WTO reform proposals that reflect their priorities and reinforce development-oriented disciplines and address, inter alia, how developing countries can navigate challenges related to particular sectors, such as critical materials. In addition, the Centre will continue to monitor regional and bilateral trade processes, including the negotiation and implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area agreement and supporting protocols and annexes, and to support developing countries in aligning their trade engagement with national development strategies and South-South cooperation priorities.

8. International Regime on Investment

The South Centre will continue to examine trends in relation to bilateral investment treaties (BITs) and other international investment agreements (IIAs), particularly as regards protection standards, investors' responsibilities, preservation of national policy space to implement public policies, and changes to the dispute settlement systems. The Centre will provide advice on the withdrawal from BITs and the inclusion of pro-development provisions in new or renegotiated agreements, and on the reform of the international investment regime to achieve the SDGs, including investment for climate action. Work will continue in relation to the ongoing negotiations in the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) regarding the reform of the dispute settlement system, including in respect of procedural and substantive issues, such as damages determination, and the proposed establishment of a Standing Multilateral Mechanism of dispute settlement.

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

In order to align developing countries' innovation, technology transfer and intellectual property (IP) policies to their development goals, the South Centre will support developing countries through negotiation advice and training for their effective participation in various fora including the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). It will continue to provide analysis and advocate for the use of the public health and other flexibilities in implementing the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), including through rigorous patent examination, and to advice on the implementation of WIPO administered treaties (including the new treaties adopted in 2024) and in IP- related provisions in Free Trade Agreements. The areas of work will include the progressive development of patent and copyright law, the interplay of intellectual property and artificial intelligence and other frontier technologies, including biologicals, and the protection of traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions.

10. Biodiversity, Access to Genetic Resources (Marine and Terrestrial), and Benefit-Sharing

The Centre will continue to provide analyses to support developing countries' interests in respect of international regimes for the sustainable use of biodiversity and for sharing of benefits arising out from their exploitation. This includes support for relevant negotiations and domestic implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing, the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement), the WIPO Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge Treaty and the protection of traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions.

11. Social Dimensions of Development and Human Rights, including Income and Gender Inequalities

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 from a human rights perspective. 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 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, including sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR). The implementation of social issues in the SDGs, including eliminating poverty and hunger while increasing food security; access to health and education; implementation of the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas, 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 covenant on the Right to Development.

12. Health and Development, including Universal Health Coverage, Access to Medicines and Medical Technologies, Antimicrobial Resistance, and Research and Development (R&D)

The South Centre will prioritize the following areas of work on global public health to support developing countries, through research to inform policy and negotiation advice, awareness raising, capacity building and participation in global discussions, with the aim of: enhancing access to affordable medicines, vaccines and diagnostics tools; promoting health equity in international governance frameworks; strengthening health systems, primary health care and infection prevention; implementing the amendments to the WHO International Health Regulations and supporting negotiations concerning the Pandemic Agreement, including its Annex; tackling the crisis of antimicrobial resistance; addressing the linkage of human health with animal health and the environment in the context of climate change.

13. Strengthening of the South-South and Triangular Cooperation

The Centre will continue its work on research and capacity building for expanding South-South and Triangular cooperation (SSTrC) as an important tool to implement the SDGs and address the challenges arising from parallel crises and global events. Work will follow on trends and strategies for strengthening SSTrC, including the institutional capacity of developing countries to act as providers and recipients of South-South Cooperation. The role that Global South institutions, such as BRICS, and development banks can play in expanding (SSTrC) will be addressed, as well as ways to reinvigorate NAM and support the collective action of developing countries to enhance their influence in shaping global governance frameworks, including through the work of UN bodies such as the UN Office on South-South Cooperation.

14. Reform of the International Tax System, Tax Rights in the Digital Economy, and 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. Specific attention will be given to strengthening enforcement of tax compliance by multinational enterprises and countering aggressive tax planning. The work will also emphasize the support on issues of interest for developing countries such as the UN

Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation, the taxation of the digitalized economy, tax measures to accelerate the green transition, effective taxation of high net worth individuals, sin and wealth taxes, dispute prevention and resolution, public country by country reporting and the conversion of the UN Fast Track Instrument into a treaty. Emphasis will also be given to the priorities of developing countries in the UN Tax Committee as outlined in the Committee's Work Plan for 2025-2029. Central to these efforts will be ensuring a fair allocation of taxing rights for developing countries. The South Centre will continue to support its Member States in making informed decisions on adopting international tax standards through generating quantitative revenue estimates and impact assessments.



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