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## CONCEPT NOTE

# COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY: PUBLIC POLICY LEADERSHIP AND INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

## 2021 INTER-REGIONAL DIALOGUE AND STOCKTAKING FOR ADVANCING SOUTH-SOUTH AND TRIANGULAR COOPERATION IN THE ARAB STATES, EUROPE AND THE CIS

6 - 8 APRIL 2021

ORGANIZED BY THE DIVISION FOR ARAB STATES, EUROPE AND THE CIS, UNOSSC

### BACKGROUND

In September 2019, the UN Secretary-General called on all to mobilize for a Decade of Action and accelerate sustainable solutions for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at *three levels*. The *global action* (aimed at securing greater leadership, more resources and smarter solutions for the SDGs); *local action* (embedding the needed transitions in the policies, budgets, institutions and regulatory frameworks of governments, cities and local authorities); and *people action* (advanced by youth, civil society, the media, the private sector, unions, academia and other stakeholders).

The year 2020 was expected to usher ambitious policies and concrete actions, but unfortunately the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic forced millions into extreme poverty. The recovery is likely to be subdued, and global GDP is projected to remain well below its pre-pandemic trend for a prolonged period.<sup>1</sup> A vaccine will be a game changer but will not be a “silver bullet” in 2021, because a large portion of the global populations are not likely to get vaccinated in 2021. The 2021 UN World Economic Situation and Prospects report underscores that sustained recovery from the pandemic will depend not only on the size of the stimulus measures, and the quick rollout of vaccines, but also on the quality of these measures to build resilience against future shocks.

It will be critical to foster resilience by safeguarding health and education, prioritizing investments in digital technologies and green infrastructure, and improving governance etc. Moreover, efforts aimed at the recovery from COVID-19 should protect the development gains so far, address the crisis, reduce risks from potential crises, and revitalize the implementation efforts to deliver the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. As the crisis has already stalled progress towards the SDGs, it makes achieving the targets more urgent and necessary. This is underpinned by leadership, effective and efficient public policies, implementation capabilities, and of course, resources. Appropriate policy and institutional reforms, including human resources capacities, will no doubt accelerate the mobilization of resources and encourage international and regional partners to finance development efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank Group Global Economic Prospects 2021 report - global economic output is expected to expand 4 percent in 2021 but still remain more than 5 percent below pre-pandemic projections. Global growth is projected to moderate to 3.8 percent in 2022. According to the 2021 UN World Economic Situation and Prospects report, a modest recovery of 4.7 per cent is expected in 2021, barely offsetting the losses of 2020 (in 2020, the world economy shrank by 4.3 per cent, over two and half times more than during the global financial crisis of 2009).



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The COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted the need for integrated approaches to development, including from the UN system entities. At the global level, a [UN global framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19](#) was developed immediately to provide a blueprint for UN Country Teams (UNCTs) to deliver joint support to countries navigating public policy decisions amidst extraordinary challenges. As of February 2021, under the leadership of UN Resident Coordinators and with the support of UNDP as the Technical Lead for socio-economic response, over 130 socio-economic impact assessments (SEIAs) and 115 Socio-Economic Response Plans (SERPs) have already been completed across 97 countries in five regions to guide the governments. The picture emerging from the SEIAs is one of rapidly deteriorating fiscal space needed to avoid a humanitarian and economic crisis in the most vulnerable countries. Governments in developing countries have repurposed vast amounts of fiscal resources, yet fiscal gaps remain. In various SERPs, a clear linkage with the Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) process is articulated as a tool to understand the national financing for the development landscape. In addition to governance, rule of law, justice and social cohesion issues and the need for a strong gender empowerment agenda, impact assessments reveal that the three most covered issues, that being the protection of vulnerable groups, jobs/livelihoods and fiscal space/debt issues, are likely to continue to play out in 2021.

At its 19th session in May 2020, the UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration, under the overall theme of *“promoting effective governance and institutional reform to accelerate delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals”*, with particular reference to the COVID-19 pandemic response and recovery, recommended that action be taken to strengthen public sector capabilities for the SDGs, invest in the future public sector workforce, expand the use of digital technologies and address digital divides. The Committee stressed the importance of strengthening the capacity of institutions and of re-establishing credible governance and public administration institutions in countries affected by conflict. Another key message was that the pandemic presented a unique opportunity to reimagine the role of institutions and policymaking, promote new governance norms and shift from past practices to transformative pathways that strengthened resilience and accelerated action. Finally, the Committee reiterated the important role of subnational governments in delivering the SDGs and that expanded efforts were needed to strengthen local government finance and financial management through a concerted global effort, in order to address severe budgetary challenges and financial risks that Governments were currently facing at the subnational level.

Countries in the Arab States and Europe and the CIS regions have focused on solutions through the innovations in public administration. Evidence has shown that collaboration and transfer of lessons learned and knowledge and the ‘know-how’ through South-South, triangular and East-East cooperation, can, with minimal cost and less time to adapt solutions, help countries to solve some of their pressing problems. In the current changing global economic landscape, financing the transformative 2030 development agenda requires an unprecedented level of cooperation between governments, international development cooperation entities and the private sector, as well as policies and institutions that facilitate the most effective and efficient use of available resources and attract new and diverse sources of financing. Mobilization of domestic resources, efficient and transparent management of development assistance, effective governance and strong and independent institutions are at the forefront of financing for development. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic also presents a genuine test of global solidarity, and an opportunity of reviewing and/or revitalizing international cooperation, within the context of SDG 17.

South-South and triangular cooperation, as a complement to North-South cooperation, continue to play an important role in the global development cooperation discourse and architecture for sustainable development. Within this ever-growing space, many efforts are already under way both in countries and within the UN system to leverage South-South and triangular cooperation in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and other internationally agreed development goals. The BAPA + 40 Outcome Document of the Second UN High-level Conference on South-South Cooperation in 2019 has also underlined the imperative for sharing knowledge, experiences, best practices and homegrown development approaches. The Outcome Document also reaffirmed the role of UN system entities in this endeavor, including UNCTs, and called on the entities to also continue supporting regional and sub-regional organizations. A significant



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number of UNSDCFs and SEIAs underline the importance of South-South, triangular and East-East cooperation and regional and inter-regional integration and cooperation, including on several sectors and themes. Last year was also critical transition year as the UNCTs were, as part of the UN development system reform, progressively shifting to the new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs).

Within the UN system, the UN Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) is responsible for mainstreaming South-South and triangular cooperation across the UN system and assisting developing countries in strengthening their capacities to manage, design and implement South-South cooperation policies and initiatives through the identification, sharing, and transfer of successful Southern-generated development knowledge and solutions. Over the last several years, several UN entities have also stepped up their engagement and support, within their respective mandates, and this is on the rise. With the approval of the first-ever UN System-wide Strategy on South-South and Triangular cooperation by the Executive Committee of the UN Secretary-General in 2020, we should expect a more system-wide, systematic, and coherent approach to policy, programmatic and partnership support on South-South and triangular cooperation at all levels: global, regional and national.

Today's challenges are no longer confined to one country or region - they transcend boundaries and affect peoples and communities disproportionately. This is where collective actions, solidarity, international cooperation, and multilateralism are so crucial.

## KEY OBJECTIVES

Since 2016 and in response to the ambitious development agenda of the countries in the Arab States, Europe and the CIS, the Division for Arab States, Europe and the CIS of UNOSSC, with the support of governments, UN entities and international and regional organizations and partners, had been organizing Regional Networking Forums on South-South and Triangular Cooperation:

- i. To improve the understanding of the role and contribution of South-South and triangular cooperation to development in general, and to achieving the 2030 Agenda in particular
- ii. To provide a platform to share best practices and policy recommendations
- iii. To enhance the South-South and triangular cooperation's national eco-system within the Arab States, Europe and the CIS through identification of joint challenges, and co-development of solutions. Last forum took place in 2019 on the margins of the BAPA +40 Conference.

This Inter-regional Dialogue, organised in the context of renewed public policy leadership, UN development system reform, and financing for development, will take stock of developments thus far and identify key policy, programmatic and partnerships opportunities that can be advanced through South-South, triangular and East-East cooperation. It is also anticipated that relevant outcomes of the dialogue could also feed into the several deliberative processes around the development of the new Strategic Framework for UNOSSC 2022-2025.

More specifically, the inter-regional dialogue will:

- **Identify key public policy challenges** in the context of COVID-19 response and recovery - current and emerging demands for support.
- **Deliberate on opportunities** for strengthened inter, intra and sub-regional collaboration, through evidence-based examples and partnership modalities, and recommend actions to overcome challenges and bottlenecks.



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- **Discuss the role** of national architecture for South-South, East-East and triangular cooperation, key ingredients for making those institutions more effective and efficient.
- **Discuss how the UN system** entities can, in a more systematic and coherent manner, support South-South, East-East and triangular efforts of partner countries both at the regional and country levels, thus enhancing the impact of UN operational activities for development.
- **Serve as a platform** for sharing of experience, networking, finding synergies, complementarity and optimization of capacities and resources towards collective action in the Arabs States, Europe and the CIS.

## EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Greater understanding of the imperative to align South-South and triangular cooperation efforts with national and regional priorities.
- Specific recommendations on addressing the key demands and priorities of national institutions for South-South and triangular cooperation, identification of existing opportunities to strengthen regional and intra-regional collaboration, transfer of knowledge etc.
- Greater understanding of the role of UN system entities in further advancing South-South, East-East and triangular cooperation, and the identification of region-specific priorities for alignment and synergies.
- Measures identified for enhanced cooperation and collaboration on South-South, East-East and triangular cooperation between and among UN entities at the regional and national levels, as well as with national partners and institutions in pursuit of further implementation and localization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- New partnerships initiated among participants on specific areas of public policy to collaborate through South-South and triangular mechanisms.
- Renewed commitments by national and regional institutions, UN system entities and other stakeholders to strengthen efforts and support towards leveraging South-South, East-East and triangular cooperation modalities for achieving the 2030 Agenda

## PARTICIPANTS

Directors General for development cooperation and national focal points for SSTC from Arab States, Europe and the CIS; senior policy makers and public policy experts/practitioners from regional and international entities; UN Resident Coordinators, representatives of UN agencies, IFIs and other stakeholders.

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