

The United Nations' Role in the Evolution of Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries, South-South Cooperation, and Triangular Cooperation: Real or Cosmetic Approaches to Development Cooperation?

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Various parts of the United Nations (UN) system have been part of the definition and implementation of technical cooperation among developing countries (TCDC), South-South cooperation (SSC) and triangular cooperation (TrC) over the years since the Buenos Aires Plan of Action of 1978 (BAPA). This paper will take the view that there is a perception that South-South and triangular cooperation have not achieved their potential to be transformative because accompanying changes needed for the modalities have not been pursued fully and thus these development modalities seemingly remain largely cosmetic. To respond to this perception, the authors will review what was expected of the United Nations development systems (UNDS) from Bandung to Buenos Aires and what has been achieved since noting the constraints of lack of data and measurement.

Keywords Bandung Conference, Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA), Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), South-South cooperation (SSC) and triangular cooperation (TrC), technical cooperation among developing countries (TCDC), United Nations Development System (UNDS)

Introduction

On June 25, 2021, during the annual meeting of the Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS), an event themed “Toward a Fit for Future United Nations System,” a panel discussion was convened entitled “Toward a Better Fit for the UN System in Handling South-South and Triangular Cooperation.” During the panel discussion, the representative for the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) related the journey of the United Nations (UN) system’s support to South-South cooperation (SSC).

Questions arose around the effectiveness of the support. This led to further research to answer the question of whether UN support to SSC has been effective or merely cosmetic. This article addresses that question. The following research is based primarily on UN self-assessments through the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU). Further examination of other UN documents expands our analysis towards a conclusion that responds to this article's central question about the effectiveness of UN support to SSC.

From Bandung to Buenos Aires

The Bandung Conference of 1955 is generally regarded as the birthplace of ideas that became the pedestal for technical cooperation among developing countries (TCDC). In his essay, "Ten Principles of Bandung," George Burchett (2018) explains that the leaders of twenty-nine Asian and African countries gathered to "chart a course of peaceful co-existence and mutual respect between all nations." In *Political and Moral Imperatives of the Bandung Conference of 1955*, Kweku Ampiah (2007) notes that before the conference, the ideas that would be formally expressed in Bandung had been playing out in various UN forums. With a number of countries decolonized, the raging debate was on the framework of the new international order. Ampiah (*ibid.*, 3) elaborates that the established members of the UN expressed the "ideal of peace as the moral foundation of the United Nations," while the newer members thought that the moral foundation should be based on human dignity and justice in the face of what they perceived to be a world of economic and political injustices. Ampiah further explains that for most of the new members of the UN from Africa and Asia the priority was to be free from economic exploitation and political domination and they were determined that this should be the chief imperative of the new international order.

The expression of that struggle to reach a confluence between the ideal of peaceful co-existence and political and economic justice was expressed in the Conference outcome document, particularly its five principles and goals. According to the US State Department's Office of the Historian (1955), the principles that came out of Bandung included political self-determination, mutual respect for sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, and equality. Furthermore, the communiqué issued at the end of the Bandung Conference contained objectives to promote economic and cultural cooperation among the new countries and the promotion of human rights and the principle of self-determination and called for an end to racial discrimination. In particular, through collaboration among Third World countries, leaders aimed to reduce reliance on Europe and North America.

While Bandung set the stage for cooperation among developing countries,

it took almost a quarter of a century for the ideas from Bandung to be put into a global actionable document: the Buenos Aires Plan of Action for Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries. On September 12, 1978, 138 UN member states adopted by consensus the Plan of Action for Promoting and Implementing Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries. In December 1978, the UN General Assembly endorsed the Plan and urged all governments and elements of the UN system to implement its recommendations (UN 1978). Writing in 1994, Denis Benn, the then Director of the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation noted that the “Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA) represents a major milestone in the evolution of technical cooperation among developing countries in that it provides a conceptual underpinning as well as a practical guide for realizing the objectives of TCDC” (UNDP 1994, 1).

The link between BAPA and the issues raised in Bandung is clear from the documents of the UN Conference on TCDC. The second paragraph of the BAPA summarizes these issues before the call for action:

Profound changes are taking place in international political and economic relationships. When the principal institutions of the present international system were first established, a group of industrialised countries were dominant in world affairs. However, the historic process of decolonization now makes it possible for a large number of States, representing an overwhelming proportion of the world's population, to participate in international affairs. Moreover, substantial changes are taking place at the world level in control and resources and in the capabilities and needs of nations. As a result, these changes and other international developments, the expansion of international relations and progressively increasing independence, however, demands sovereign and equal participation in the conduct of international relations and the equitable distribution of benefits (*ibid.*, 5).

With BAPA, the issues that had been discussed by African and Asian countries in Bandung became firmly embedded in a UN document lending legitimacy to the call for action by all, including UN elements. Using the term *elements* to refer to UN agencies suggests that the drafters of the Plan intended the entities' actions to encompass the various issues of concern in their respective areas of work, from political to economic to international relations. Thus, exploring the role of the UN essentially requires reviewing the UN General Assembly's mandates and general oversight as it endorsed the Plan and created a UN High-level Committee (HLC) on SSC, with the UNOSSC as the Secretariat. Through this structure, the UN General Assembly requests the Secretary-General to provide progress reports. As it is impossible to review the role of each and every element of the UN for this article, we instead examine the UN's self-assessment through the JIU.

Recommendation thirty-two of BAPA invited the governing bodies of the organizations of the United Nations development system (UNDS) to summon all

efforts to mobilize their organizations to contribute to the implementation of the Plan “on a continuing and intensive basis” (ibid., 22-23). The recommendation asks the organizations to make these contributions on an individual basis in their areas of competence as well as jointly in multidisciplinary action. Specifically, they were asked to support the promotion and coordination of TCDC and also to address operational and financial issues relating to TCDC.

Framework for Progress Assessment: Joint Inspection Unit

The JIU is “the only independent external oversight body of the United Nations system mandated to conduct evaluations, inspections and investigations system-wide” (UNJIU n.d.):

Its mandate is to look at cross-cutting issues and to act as an agent for change across the United Nations system. The JIU works to secure management and administrative efficiency and to promote greater coordination both between UN agencies and with other internal and external oversight bodies. For the past fifty years, the Unit has been dedicated to assisting the legislative bodies of numerous United Nations organizations in meeting their governance responsibilities. The JIU provides support in the context of these agencies’ oversight function regarding human, financial and other resources. In its reports and notes, the Unit identifies best practices, proposes benchmarks and facilitates information-sharing throughout the organizations of the UN system that have adopted its Statute. The JIU had a total of twenty-eight participating organizations as of 2018 that play a crucial role in how the Unit functions (ibid.).

The JIU, therefore, occupies a unique position to track a cross-cutting issue such as SSC across the UN system. The JIU report of May 1985 (UNJIU 1985) submitted by the UN Secretary General to the General Assembly, notes that virtually all UN organizations had attended the Buenos Aires Conference. The report further indicates that between Bandung and BAPA, the UN had indeed contributed to the thinking on TCDC, as evidenced by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Governing Council’s decisions on a report of a working group on TCDC constituted by the UNDP Administrator.

The JIU analysis attempted to synthesize the specifics of what the UN organizations were requested to do. It is evident in the report that the UN system entities were expected to take action mostly at global, regional, and subregional levels. At subregional, regional, and interregional levels, support (upon request) from UN system organizations would strengthen intergovernmental and multinational training and establishment of research centers to promote, plan, and implement TCDC activities and to improve information flows and systems. At the global level, all UNDS organizations were requested to play a prominent role in promoting and catalyzing the implementation of TCDC.

All of the above actions, according to the report, would complement action at the national level where each developing country needed to assess its own capabilities, skills, and experience, as well as the availability of such assets in other developing countries. The countries had to make necessary arrangements for TCDC, such as establishing coordinating and operational mechanisms, information systems, training, research, and technological facilities, and also promoting national development programming approaches, policies, and regulations in support of TCDC. Furthermore, countries needed to break down attitudinal barriers to TCDC cooperation.

Specifically, the UN entities were asked to do the following:

- (1) Identify TCDC solutions or TCDC contributions to solutions, for specific development problems;
- (2) Apply TCDC approaches and techniques in their programs;
- (3) Support the preparation and implementation of TCDC projects on request;
- (4) Help realize the full potential of TCDC by introducing new ideas and approaches, in order to do so, to undertake necessary studies and analyses;
- (5) Strengthen and re-orient subregional and regional information systems and establishing linkages between these and the Information Referral System (INRES);
- (6) Organize and assist public information support for TCDC in their respective areas of competence;
- (7) Monitor and review the implementation of their activities; and
- (8) Utilize locally available inputs and those from other developing countries.

The JIU could therefore monitor progress by assessing if the UNDS had reoriented their internal policies and procedures in order “to adequately respond to the principles and objectives of TCDC” (ibid., 3). In addition, the JIU could determine if the organizations had made internal adjustments and arrangements in their Secretariats to facilitate the integration of TCDC. These changes had to be results-oriented and promote TCDC in their operational activities (as per BAPA 1978 recommendation thirty-three).

The review part of the JIU report points to several issues that the JIU team considered unhelpful to the cause of TCDC in the UNDS. The first was that there were just too many mandates, 445 such mandates between 1964 and 1983. The JIU observed that 245 of these mandates had been issued after BAPA. The JIU review elaborated that among these mandates, there were complex ones of fundamental importance and simpler ones of limited scope. They concluded their assessment as follows:

[M]any of the legislative directives in terms of their substance, scope and degree of precision, are neither fully consistent nor suggestive of priority goals for the United Nations System in their support of TCDC and Economic Cooperation among Developing countries (ECDC) in general, and the BAPA in particular. What has

emerged is a set of vague signals rather than a progressive articulation and refinement of policy measures aimed at mobilizing and focusing the efforts of the system in favor of a particular plan or Programme of Action (*ibid.*, 4).

The reviewers indicated that the vagueness of guidelines gave most organizations space to make declaratory statements of support and yet when it came to actions, they followed the specialized mandates given by their governing bodies. In conclusion, the JIU review observed that the expansion of mandates had had no positive effects on the response of the UNDS to BAPA.

Another factor the JIU inferred to be a barrier for UN organizations was the vagueness in differentiation between TCDC and ECDC. The latter had emerged from the 1981 Caracas Programme of Action. At the time of the JIU report, the UNDP was entrusted with promoting and catalyzing TCDC across the UN system, while the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), with its focus on trade and economic development issues, was promoting ECDC. The two concepts were eventually merged under SSC in 1995 at the HLC Review of the TCDC, with the adoption of the New Directions Strategy. However, at the time of the report, the JIU inferred that there was ambiguity both in terms of responsibility and language. For example, they noted that in the UN, technical cooperation included “all forms of economic, technical, technological, scientific and even cultural cooperation” (*ibid.*, 4). Their proposed remedy was to separate the two issues of TCDC and ECDC in the legislative directives and reporting requirements of the UN system to be consistent with institutional responsibilities. Lastly, the JIU report’s final recommendation was that the UN system focus on priorities, regardless of whether the priorities were for implementing TCDC or ECDC.

Second JIU Assessment (2011)

Thus, as of 1985, the JIU language indicated a decline in interest by the UNDS in both TCDC and ECDC. Twenty-six years later in 2011, the JIU was invited to undertake a further assessment. A number of significant changes had taken place since the 1985 report. The two concepts of ECDC and TCDC had been merged under the concept of SSC. Triangular cooperation (TrC), an approach to bring in developed countries to support SSC had been endorsed as a development cooperation modality complementary to SSC. A first UN Conference on South-South cooperation had taken place in 2009 in Nairobi, Kenya. The responsibilities of the Special Unit for TCDC had been expanded over time and its autonomy within the UNDP was endorsed in the Nairobi outcome document (UNGA 2009).

Within this much-changed environment, the JIU concluded that the UNDS

had made progress, albeit very slowly, in delivering on the assigned tasks. In order for the UNDS to reach further toward its potential, the JIU recommended improved system-wide policy frameworks, which included reviews of governance-coordination, structures, mechanisms, and dedicated resources. They also issued recommendations suggesting that the Special Unit for SSC should prioritize its resources in line with its extended mandate. Pertaining to TrC, the JIU suggested that much more work needed to be done for TrC to significantly contribute to SSC (UNJIU 2011, 5).

In 2018, the JIU was once again enlisted by the General Assembly HLC on SSC to review progress made on their findings. The JIU found out that most of their twelve recommendations had been addressed satisfactorily. A main concern, however, was that over 50 percent of the UN entities surveyed indicated that a lack of adequate resources had created a major obstacle to advancing SSC and TrC. Thus, the 2018 JIU review recommended the development of a system-wide resource mobilization strategy.

Role of the UN Office for South-South Cooperation

In 1974, prior to the 1978 Buenos Aires TCDC Conference, a Secretariat was set up under the UNDP. The Secretariat eventually became the Special Unit for Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (SU-TCDC). The envisaged role of the SU-TCDC, which became the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation (SU-SSC) in 2003 and the UNOSSC in 2013, is essential to assess the progress made by the UNDS. In 1978, BAPA participants proposed that the Secretariat of the Conference continue to function as the SU-TCDC to assist the UNDP Administrator with the following:

- (1) Assist governments, at their request, in collaboration with other groups and bodies of the UNDS, to undertake TCDC programs and activities;
- (2) Develop in collaboration with participating and executing agencies and the regional economic commissions new ideas, concepts, and approaches for promoting TCDC, arrange studies and analyses, and submit them for approval by legislative bodies;
- (3) Coordinate the TCDC activities of the UNDP with the participating organizations and regional economic commissions;
- (4) Expand the efficient use of INRES (later Web of Information for Development [WIDE]) with linkages to national and regional information systems or focal points;
- (5) Promote communications with inter- and non-governmental organizations to generate financial and other support for TCDC;
- (6) Service Intergovernmental arrangements for follow-up (HLC);
- (7) Prepare modifications of UNDP policies, rules, and procedures in accordance

with General Assembly and UNDP Executive Board resolutions and decisions with a view to improve TCDC capacity and assisting, at their request, UNDS entities in this regard; and

- (8) Prepare progress reports on the implementation of BAPA, including recommendations to expedite its progress, in consultation with other system organizations for consideration by the HLC.

Furthermore, in 1997, the SU-TCDC was tasked with promoting, monitoring, and coordinating TCDC on a system-wide basis. In 2001, the SU-TCDC was assigned the additional responsibility as a focal point of the UN system for SSC. In 2009, the Nairobi outcome document of the High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation (UNGA, 2009) reaffirmed the mandate of the SU-SSC (formerly SU-TCDC) as a separate entity within the UNDP, and as coordinator for promoting and facilitating SSC and TrC for development on a global and UN system-wide basis.

As the Secretariat to the UN General Assembly HLC, the UNOSSC has led responses to the JIU's findings and BAPA outcomes for strengthening UN system-wide support. For example, the UNOSSC responded to the JIU's finding that most institutions in the UN were constrained by lack of resources. That finding had suggested an important limiting factor in UN system support to SSC and had reinforced the earlier finding that institutions support their mandates as a priority, which leads to the perception that resources for SSC should be additional funding for development cooperation. The response was to answer the call for UN system-wide strategies and guidance documents, including a system-wide South-South operational framework, a system-wide resource mobilization strategy, and the information system for development. In all these areas, the UNOSSC has made substantial progress in four primary ways.

Firstly, the information system, INRES, was replaced by WIDE, and it can be argued that WIDE has been replaced by the more expansive South-South Galaxy. Through this evolution mainly driven by technology, the aim has been to share development solutions and facilitate partnership building and connection. Secondly, a system-wide strategy was developed involving inter-agency work on SSC that was initially carried out under the UN Inter-Agency Mechanism and the UN Task Team on SSC, which was part of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG)'s Working Group on sustainable development. Subsequent to 2015, the Working Group ceased to exist, and South-South work reverted to the UN Inter-Agency Mechanism. In 2016, the UNOSSC facilitated the compilation of the "framework of operational guidelines on United Nations support to South-South and triangular cooperation" after a call for this at the 2009 UN Conference on South-South cooperation in Nairobi. The framework was adopted by the nineteenth session of the HLC in May 2016. In 2019, the Second United Nations Conference on South-South cooperation (BAPA+40) also called for a UN system-

wide strategy (UN 2019). In August 2020, the “UN System-Wide Strategy on South-South and Triangular Cooperation for Sustainable Development” was launched (UNOSSC 2020). The Strategy was compiled under the umbrella of the UN Inter-Agency Mechanism for SSC. A third example of progress made by the UNOSSC is the Resource Mobilization System-Wide Strategy. A draft strategy entitled, “UNOSSC Partnership and Resource Mobilization Strategy” was compiled in 2020 but will probably need to be revised to align it with the system-wide strategy. This “Resource Mobilization Strategy” followed another attempt to compile a resource mobilization strategy before BAPA+40.

A fourth example of progress is the establishment of the UN Fund for South-South Cooperation (UNFSSC) by the 1995 General Assembly’s resolution 20/119 (UNOSSC n.d.). Managed by the UNOSSC Director on behalf of the UNDP Administrator, the Fund receives voluntary contributions and resources to support the development priorities of developing countries. It represents a legal, operational, and governance framework for engaging partners, pooling resources, and jointly implementing SSC from partners including member states, philanthropic foundations, the private sector, and individuals. The Fund is a mechanism of the UN system to support member states in their quest to engage partners and mobilize resources for the implementation of innovative and transformative SSC activities. A snapshot of country contributions to the Fund in 2018-2019 is shown in Table 1.

Additionally, the UNOSSC also manages other trusts funds, namely, the India-UN Development Partnership Fund, the India-Brazil-South Africa Facility for Poverty and Hunger Alleviation, and the Pérez-Guerrero Trust Fund for South-South Cooperation on behalf of the Group of 77. These funds support fostering demand-driven and transformational sustainable development initiatives aligned with development priorities of member states. Sebastian Haug (2021) notes trust fund contributions provide one concrete modality for member states and multilateral bodies outside of the global South to support expanding South-South engagement within the UN system.

Since 2015, the call for enhanced South-South cooperation has been increasingly framed in the context of augmenting efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In 2015, the UNDG published results on what member states request from UN country teams. The data showed that 71% of the requests were on general orientation to SDGs, 67% on mainstreaming SDGs, 51% on SDG measurement and reporting, and 14% are requests for support on specific SDGs (UNDG 2015, 13). The publication also indicated that there was evidence that the United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks were starting to provide a framework to national partners in SSC and TrC (ibid.). However, the tentative word *starting* in 2015 again shows that even in the UN, the perception was that system-wide support had not yet arrived at the desired level. Furthermore, the

Table 1. All Contributions to the Pooled Funding of UNFSSC in 2018-2019, by Partner in USD

	Partner	Amount
1	People's Republic of China	2,700,000
2	World Green Economy Organisation (WEGO)	1,350,000
3	Republic of Korea	1,320,692
4	State of Qatar	564,506
5	Finance Centre for South-South Cooperation (FCSSC)	400,000
6	International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)	385,206
7	Columbia Presidential Agency for Cooperation (APC-Columbia)	341,300
8	Argentine Republic	90,000
9	United Arab Emirates	50,000
10	United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)	33,739
11	People's Republic of Bangladesh	31,300
12	World Wildlife Fund (WWF)	29,170
13	Republic of Turkey	26,000
14	Norwegian Agency for Exchange Cooperation (NOREC)	25,000
15	Islamic Development Bank (IsDB)	11,100
16	Republic of Chile	10,000
17	Republic of Kazakhstan	4,000
18	Independent Sate of Samoa	3,040
19	Republic of the Philippines	2,500

Source: UNDP (2020, 46)

kind of support provided by country teams entailing, among other assets, a broadened knowledge base in SSC may not be sufficient for national practitioners. The 2015 UNDG report seems to indicate a gap between the primary needs for implementing SDGs and the relevancy of SSC in doing so, a gap that requires UN agency resident representatives to actively close. Thus, there is a need for continued capacity building of UN Resident Coordinators to strengthen their perception of SSC as an important tool to achieve the SDGs at the country level.

Further evidence that UN member states are asking for more action by the UNDS is found in resolution A/C.2/76/L.32, adopted by the seventy-sixth session of the UNGA Economic and Financial Committee (Second Committee) in November 2021(UN 2021). The fifth item of the resolution reiterates that reforms in the UNDS and the system-wide strategy have the potential to enhance the role and impact of SSC and TrC. The resolution calls for a comprehensive report on

the state of SSC, including the implementation of the outcome document of the second high-level conference during the seventy-sixth session of the UN General Assembly. The stance by member states seems to indicate a conviction that the UNDS can do more.

The explanation for the insistent requests for the UNDS to do more in support of SSC has also been analyzed by independent scholars. In the article entitled, “South-South Cooperation and Change in International Organizations,” authors Carolina Milhorange and Falashade Soule-Kohndou (2017) demonstrate that several dynamics have occurred that have ushered in an era of international organizations supporting SSC. They suggest that this has been driven by the decline in core funding to multilateral development cooperation institutions. At the same time, they argue, an increasing number of “emerging countries” labeling themselves as part of the South, have created and deepened alliances between themselves while consolidating strategies around SSC to integrate the developing world. They further argue that these countries have established individual or collective strategic partnerships with international organizations and that international organizations “first resisted these changes and overtures from the emerging countries and then adopted these strategic partnerships as a means to reaffirm their role in the international development system as main institutions supporting SSC” (ibid., 461). They also observe that, “within this context, several UN agencies have stepped up their efforts to foster SSC in their policies, strategic frameworks, operational activities, and budgets” (ibid., 461).

The core argument in this article is that UN agencies have stepped up their support for SSC as a prudent measure to remain relevant in the face of the changing international development cooperation system, and that the emerging partners have been largely responsible for that. If that argument holds it may explain why developing countries may feel the need to reiterate their need for support from the UNDS at every opportunity.

While the UNOSSC is the designated UN entity with a coordinating role for the UN system’s support to SSC, it is worth noting that the UN Development Cooperation Forum (UNDCF) also spearheads SSC as one of the development cooperation modalities. There are other platforms that embrace the modality as well, such as the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC).

The UN Development Cooperation Forum

The UNDCF was launched in 2007 and “brings together decision-makers and experts from developing and developed countries” (UNDESA, n.d.). This includes parliamentarians, local governments, civil society organizations, philanthropic foundations, international organizations, development banks and

the private sector. All members of the UN can participate in the UNDCF. The UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), in its support to the UNDCF, “acts as a trusted and balanced source of information on South-South Cooperation” (ibid.). As the UNDCF’s activities also include the provision of financial resources, capacity building, technology development and transfer, policy development, and multi-stakeholder partnerships, the DCF has a major role to play in SSC.

The Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation

The GPEDC was officially established in 2012 with the intention to “maximize the effectiveness of all forms of co-operation for development for the shared benefits of people, planet, prosperity and peace” (UNDP 2022). It is co-chaired by the UNDP and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). It was established following several meetings, including the High-level Fora on Aid Effectiveness held in Rome (2003), the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005), and the Accra Action Agenda (2008). It adheres to the following four effectiveness principles: country ownership, results-focus, inclusive partnerships, and transparency and mutual accountability.

The Fourth High-level Forum on Aid Effectiveness held in 2011 in Busan, Korea endeavored to create a “comprehensive, inclusive and multi stakeholder development cooperation platform to address aid-effectiveness and horizontal partnership modalities” (ibid.). As stated in the Busan Partnership Agreement, the GPEDC acknowledges the complexity of a development cooperation framework with different characteristics and needs of stakeholders and builds on the principles of South-South and triangular cooperation. Furthermore, it welcomes “the opportunities presented by diverse approaches to development cooperation, such as South-South cooperation, as well as civil society organizations and private actors; we will work together to building on and learn from their achievements and innovations, recognizing their unique characteristics and respective merits” (OECD 2011, 8).

Conclusions

The concerns that brought countries together in Bandung in 1955 that were focused on economic and social justice have driven the South-South agenda from TCDC only to economic cooperation among developing countries as well. The role of the UNDS in the evolution of South-South and triangular cooperation has been pragmatic, supporting the aspirations of the program countries while at the same time recognizing their constraints and thus maintaining a close

collaborative arrangement with the OECD Development Assistance Committee and other partners. The HLC for SSC is a major driver of UN system-wide SSC and TrC. While there is an indication that UNDS entities are mostly limited by lack of resources, the analysis shows that developing countries are increasingly providing resources to deliver development cooperation in partnership with the UN system. However, in this scaling up of SSC, a major problem has been the lack of tools for measuring the scale and impact of the cooperation. In the past, a number of countries did not see a need for the quantification of SSC arguing that such cooperation is not about the amount of resources, but rather is about solidarity, sharing, and empathy. This stance largely followed by UN entities, has meant that there is no quantification or indicators of what level of UN support would be considered a success. This too may be a reason why member states call for more support for SSC at every opportunity as there is no evidence of what would have been achieved. In other words, it has been difficult to arrive at a conclusion on the scope, scale, and effectiveness of the UNDS support to SSC on an aggregative level.

While in the past issues around the measurability of SSC sometimes stood in the way, there is evidence of a thirst for more data on SSC and TrC. For example, the Ibero-American General Secretariat compiles an annual report on SSC and TrC (SEGIB 2019). Similar reports focusing on the UNDS would likely shed more light on the actual efficiency and scale of UN system-wide support for SSC and TrC.

Pertaining to the platforms for SSC and TrC support, the future may include the existence of parallel forums or some kind of rapprochement and consolidation towards one platform for development cooperation. That would likely be something like the UN Global Development Forum. However, even within the concept of the UNDCF it is unlikely that countries of the global South will give up on their slow but positive progress on implementing their conceptualization of SSC and TrC. The often-repeated statement in South-South conference documents, stating that the UN will act “when requested” means that the global South will want to remain firmly in the driver’s seat on the direction of SSC and anchored on the principles from Bandung, including ownership.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations, UNDP, UNOSSC or United Nations Member States.

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