

**“The Enablers of Development Cooperation:
Opportunities to enhance national capacities through South-South Cooperation”**

**Summary of Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) Webinar, co-organized by UNDESA and UNOSSC
28 October 2020**

The global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has starkly demonstrated the need for international development cooperation that is more effective, reduces risk and builds resilience. The 2020 Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) Survey Study revealed the burgeoning challenges associated with the COVID-19 response and recovery, emphasizing the role of the enablers¹ of development cooperation in improving quality and impact of development cooperation for better results. The webinar provided an opportunity for participants to learn more about how countries are using South-South and triangular cooperation to build capacities and strengthen the enablers of development cooperation to reduce risk and build resilience for sustainable development in the COVID-19 context.

The webinar was one in a series of DCF webinars leading up to the DCF High-level Meeting (6-7 May 2021). The event fostered interactive dialogue and featured presentations by: Ambassador Marcela Ordoñez Fernandez, Director of International Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Colombia; Mr. Fred Twesiime, Principal Economist, Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, Uganda; Dr. Claire Melamed, CEO, Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD); Mr. Adel Abdellatif, Director a.i., UN Office for South-South Cooperation; Ms. Angela Bester, independent expert and author, 2020 DCF Survey Study. Mr. Navid Hanif, Director, Financing for Sustainable Development Office, UNDESA moderated the webinar.

Responding to COVID-19 and strengthening health systems

The COVID-19 pandemic has raised uncertainties and concerns over competing priorities for limited development resources, in the short and long term. The impact of redirecting resources from existing projects and sectors toward the health sector raised questions about how progress might be slowed or reversed in other priority areas, such as poverty eradication and food security. Uganda’s experience had demonstrated that having strong national development cooperation policies and related tools in place had helped to navigate some of these challenges and strengthen development cooperation to build back better.

The pandemic helped to demonstrate the potential of South-South and triangular cooperation to strengthen health systems in developing countries. Given the rapid evolution of COVID-19, countries were compelled to quickly identify, replicate and scale up successful practices in the health sector learned from their Southern partners. The flexibility and swiftness of South-South cooperation was identified as a distinctive quality in this regard: this could provide an opportunity for scaling up access to COVID-19 vaccines in the future. Development of a database to share best practices during the COVID-19 period could be useful for countries to draw upon for future emergencies. The South-South Galaxy platform, managed by the UN Office for South-South Cooperation, could be further utilized to map such practices and build partnerships.

Participants also shared technological advances that could contribute to South-South learning. Colombia had successfully spearheaded new telemedicine and app-based tools to respond to pandemic-related health assessments and contact tracing, which served as potential models for partners. The GPSDD reported on the use of new technologies to track the impact of COVID-19 on food security, using artificial intelligence and big data.

¹ The enablers of effective development cooperation identified by the DCF Survey exercise include: (i) national development cooperation policies; (ii) country results frameworks; (iii) development cooperation information systems; (iv) national development cooperation forums; and (v) capacity support. See webinar presentation by DCF Survey Study author, Angela Bester, [here](#).

Strengthening national data and statistical capacities and systems

Participants emphasized that strengthened capacities for data and statistical systems would be essential to building policy responses to the pandemic and future challenges to sustainable development, especially for the most vulnerable populations. Putting in place national development cooperation plans and related data and information systems was identified as an important starting point. Improving access to information, and technical training to use and interpret data were also crucial. Uganda referred to growing intra-regional cooperation in Africa, aided by South-South cooperation, around technology, data, education and training. The GPSDD outlined its project to support peer exchange on administrative data between African and Latin American country partners, which tracked the effectiveness and inclusiveness of public services. In collaboration with UNDESA, the initiative had been scaled up from the regional level to develop knowledge-sharing tools and products for use at the global level.

Timely and reliable data was also emphasized as a key to developing responsive recovery policies. Working with the UN Economic Commission for Africa, GPSDD had facilitated a project in the African region, building on Ghana's successful creation of a data hub for COVID-19 related data. Learning from Ghana's approach, the project scaled up and enhanced data capacity in other countries through a coalition of more than 50 partners from governments, the private sector, civil society, academia, the UN, and multilateral agencies to improve access to timely data for pandemic recovery.

Yet, quality data must be matched with a willingness and capacity to use it. Effective response to current and emerging risks would rely on different stakeholders making the choice to use the data towards evidence-based policies and practices. Capacity-building would be critical to ensure that developing countries had the necessary knowledge, tools and skills to use the data to support the achievement of sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Role of South-South cooperation in strengthening the enablers of development cooperation, including to reduce and manage disaster risk.

Participants also noted other contributions of SSC in strengthening key enablers, such as the need for stronger integration of risk considerations into development cooperation policies and tools. Strong, country-owned frameworks for development cooperation were identified as critical for building capacities to address disaster-related risks. Colombia described its experience in promoting social and economic recovery in the face of disasters and other risks through capacity-building, drawing on experience at both national and local levels. Due to the country's vulnerability to natural disasters, it had developed a set of strategies, approaches and tools, with a focus on building awareness among communities around the importance of disaster preparedness and risk management. For example, it had extensive peer learning and capacity-building programs with Latin American and Caribbean regional partners around wildfire preparedness and forest management. It was noted that many of these partnerships were forged over a period of time, built on long-term trust and solidarity. Looking ahead, it would be important to integrate environmental risk considerations and climate action into building back better from the pandemic, and South-South cooperation had a role to play in this regard.

While an increasing number of developing countries were institutionalizing and better integrating SSC into national development cooperation policies and country-led systems, participants agreed that the impacts of South-South cooperation in this area were still to be fully realized. Renewed efforts were needed by development cooperation policymakers and practitioners to further systematize and build on the experiences, expertise and knowledge of countries of the South. The resilience of SSC in the time of COVID-19 and contracting economies worldwide was illustrated by intensified sharing of knowledge and innovations among peers, including through inter- and intra-regional sharing and person-to-person exchange, throughout recovery efforts.

SSC could enhance the enablers of effective development cooperation to support the effective implementation of the 2030 and Addis Agendas, Paris Agreement and Sendai Framework in the years ahead. The United Nations was working to catalyze and strengthen its support for such efforts, including through a forthcoming system-wide strategy on South-South cooperation. The DCF's global policy dialogue and analytical work provide an inclusive, action-oriented platform for bringing diverse partners together around such innovation. The DCF was acknowledged as the only inclusive global platform for nurturing exchange of knowledge, best practices and policy frameworks on SSC.