

Leveraging
triangular
partnerships
to respond to
COVID-19 and
build back
better from
the pandemic



GLOBAL
PARTNERSHIP
INITIATIVE ON
**EFFECTIVE
TRIANGULAR
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The Global Partnership Initiative on Effective Triangular Co-operation (GPI) is a global platform to advocate for triangular co-operation supporting the 2030 Agenda. The GPI brings together development stakeholders to promote and ensure that triangular co-operation projects and initiatives are effective, country-led and involve inclusive partnerships for sustainable development.

The GPI works at the policy level to mainstream triangular co-operation in development co-operation systems globally and to promote the Voluntary Guidelines for Effective Triangular Co-operation for governments, international organizations, civil society and the private sector to agree to and use in their triangular co-operation programming. At the operational level, the GPI compiles and, on-demand, develop better tools to ensure effectiveness in the implementation of triangular co-operation. GPI members advance these objectives through advocacy, analytical and operational workstreams.

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Leveraging triangular partnerships to respond to COVID-19 and build back better from the pandemic

Executive summary

The challenges posed by COVID-19 are global in scope and unprecedented in scale. In 2020, the global community suffered a severe setback in the progress made towards reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Millions of people lost their incomes, and the SDGs financing gap, already significant before the pandemic, may increase by 70%. The challenges related to COVID-19 are numerous, the resources available to both developed and developing countries are stressed, and financing for sustainable development is on edge. The pandemic's consequences substantially altered life throughout the world, and thus focus the priorities of the development co-operation agenda and discussions towards more global solidarity. More vital and strategic partnerships are crucial to overcoming this crisis in an effective, just, and equal way. Against this background, the present brief has two main objectives:

- *To analyse the impacts of the pandemic on existing triangular co-operation programmes; and*
- *To explore how partners can leverage triangular co-operation to catalyse resources and efforts tackling the development challenges triggered by COVID-19, during and after the pandemic.*

KEY MESSAGE 1

There is a pressing need to foster effective partnerships for development

The COVID-19 global emergency highlights similarities of development challenges among different countries and, concurrently, the existing inequalities across the world. The pandemic has also reinforced the importance of strategic partnerships to prepare and overcome crises in an effective, more just and equal way. No co-operation modality alone is a silver bullet to tackle the complexity of the challenges aggravated with the outbreak of the pandemic. The development co-operation community is at the edge of a moral failure if it misses this opportunity to help. This is a strategic moment to harness effective triangular partnerships for horizontal knowledge sharing and innovative thinking.

KEY MESSAGE 2

Triangular co-operation is an effective modality in promoting robust partnerships and innovative solutions during and after the COVID-19 pandemic

The regulatory measures of COVID-19 require flexibility and adaptability to continue development projects planned before the pandemic and to establish new partnerships. Triangular co-operation, being dynamic and flexible, is a key modality in the development co-operation landscape to foster capacity building, joint learning, promoting complementarities and increasing co-ordination to tackle the development challenges in various sectors.

There is increasing evidence of the value-added of triangular co-operation as a modality that unlocks a broader range of financial resources, technical expertise and human capacity by stimulating innovative solutions to overcome development challenges. The results of triangular partnerships contribute directly to tackling the current crisis. The laboratory in Ghana responsible for around 80% of PCR tests during the first several months of the pandemic in the country is an example of that. It is part of the “Partnership for Building Resilience against Public Health Emergencies through Advanced Research and Education (PREPARE)”, a triangular co-operation initiative with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and other African countries.

Triangular co-operation enables horizontal knowledge sharing and innovative thinking. Previous experiences of triangular programmes and projects provide evidence of the modality’s effectiveness in preparedness and response to transboundary emergencies and development threats. It provides an enabling environment for peer-learning among countries. Beyond the national level, triangular co-operation enables knowledge and experience at sub-national and city levels. For instance, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) promotes city-to-city collaboration for knowledge and experience sharing on sustainable urban food systems. In one triangular co-operation project involving Kigali, Nairobi, Milan and FAO, project activities initially planned for physical and in-person training and exchanges were adapted into virtual settings, because of travel restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, through an e-learning Platform established for this purpose.

Numerous ongoing triangular projects were adapted, and new projects have started during the COVID-19 crisis. Flexibility and shared responsibility have been key to adapt triangular co-operation projects and respond to partners’ priority and needs due to the outbreak of COVID-19. In a survey conducted by the Global Partnership Initiative (GPI) on Effective Triangular Co-operation with its members between August and September 2020¹, many partners indicated the need to adapt ongoing programmes and projects, as the “Structured Mechanism for the Exchange of South-South Cooperation Experiences (MECSS)” of the Ibero-American Program for Strengthening of South-South Cooperation (PIFCSS), and the “German Regional Fund for Triangular Co-operation with Latin America and the Caribbean”.

Triangular co-operation complements North-South and South-South co-operation, fosters equitable partnerships and provides a space for creative solutions and innovation. On the one hand, triangular co-operation

¹ The GPI conducted a survey with its members between August and September 2020, including questions related to triangular co-operation and the COVID-19 pandemic. It received 24 responses from its members (20 national government of 16 countries, 3 international organisations and 1 local government).

is usually not taken into account when it comes to quick action, and immediate rescue was and still is needed. On the other hand, the majority of GPI members reported fostering triangular partnerships in response to the current crisis, as the triangular co-operation project between the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), Sudan and the Palestinian International Cooperation Agency (PICA) to support the national laboratory and blood bank through knowledge-sharing and the provision of medical equipment.

Developing countries have found innovative local solutions to overcome the negative impacts of the pandemic. The crisis has aggravated many existing challenges but concurrently catalysed better planning, contingency strategies, new approaches for building partnership and trust. We are in a strategic moment for the development community to accelerate triangular co-operation and leverage better outcomes to all people. International co-operation is crucial to advance the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines and triangular partnerships can catalyse these processes, as the partnership between Mexico and Argentina to produce, bottle and distribute vaccines² to Latin American and Caribbean countries.

Recommendations to leverage triangular co-operation during and post the pandemic include:

Ensure that good practices and solutions are replicated and scaled up in and beyond the context of COVID-19.

COVID-19 is generating an extensive amount of knowledge, innovative solutions and examples of how governments and communities are responding and adapting to the challenges posed by the pandemic. Triangular co-operation plays a vital role in the replication and scaling up of these solutions and good practices. It will help build a society and economy that are more resilient to external shocks in the long term.

Triangular co-operation enhances the technical capacities and resilience of developing countries to COVID-19 or other transboundary threats. Collaboration and networking of technical institutes, centres of excellence and universities through triangular co-operation arrangements (e.g. joint research, scholarships, exchange programmes, etc.) contribute to enhanced technical capacities of all countries responding to the impacts of COVID-19 and other transboundary threats.

Furthermore, tackling the resilience of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) will be critical in future triangular co-operation. MSMEs

² The governments of Argentina and Mexico, with the assistance of the Slim Foundation, agreed with British laboratory AstraZeneca and Oxford University, to produce, bottle and distribute its vaccine in Latin America and Caribbean countries with purchase contracts with them.

account for a large part of employment and GDP in most economies. Helping them navigate through the pandemic is key to building a resilient economy and society. Online training and business matching events, which have become popular with the pandemic's outbreak, will continue to serve as an effective tool to connect MSMEs with international markets and clients in the long term.

Incorporate triangular co-operation components, as sharing of knowledge and experience, into COVID-19 response programmes.

Different stakeholders can collaborate in dealing with the practical difficulties in implementing COVID-19 response programs and adapt existing triangular co-operation programmes during the era of the pandemic. For example, providers delivering online capacity-building programs have similar difficulties in altering their program to a virtual setting due to partner countries' digital environment. Partners can collaborate on resolving such challenges through triangular co-operation.

Additionally, regional financial institutions and development banks play an essential role in curbing disruptions on trade and supply chains, including food and agricultural commodities, by providing the necessary short-term liquidity for recovery as well as long-term finance. Fostering intra-regional co-operation, financing and investment is critical for short-term recovery and laying the foundations for resilience in many countries, increasing opportunities to find synergies and exploring complementarities across the different funding streams globally.

Promote triangular co-operation to leave no one behind.

The United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development urged stakeholders to take action and ensure no one is left behind. The Leave No One Behind (LNOB) approach goes beyond the inequalities among countries and challenges the conventional vertical growth-based development perspective.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the persisting inequalities across the world, among and within countries. The direct and indirect consequences of the pandemic do not affect humanity in the same way. Older people, women, young and unprotected workers, migrant households, the homeless or people living in informal settlements, and other vulnerable groups are disproportionately affected in all countries and societies. Triangular co-operation promotes inclusive multi-stakeholder partnerships, fostering horizontal relations among partners, mutual benefits, knowledge sharing and innovative thinking. Through this modality, partners can include stakeholders that support the most vulnerable and reach the ones further behind.

We need to foster more robust and effective partnerships for development

The World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General, Tedros Ghebreyesus, alerted “the world is on the brink of a catastrophic moral failure”, referring to the lack of available vaccines for low-income countries. While there is light at the end of the tunnel with several vaccines developed to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic, as of 18 January 2021, around 50 high-income countries have administered close to 40 million doses of the vaccine, while only 25 doses were given to one lowest-income country³.

The pandemic has increasingly put pressure on the narrative and practices of development co-operation. In 2020, the global community suffered a severe setback in the progress made towards reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The world is facing increased rates in poverty and hunger due to the socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (World Bank, 2020^[1]). Millions of people lost their jobs and incomes, and the SDGs financing gap, already significant before the pandemic, may increase by 70%. The Global Outlook on Financing for Sustainable Development 2021 estimates a drop of 700 billion USD in external finance to developing countries (OECD, 2020^[2]). The Chair of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC), Susanna Moorehead, pointed out that international development is at an inflexion point, going backwards. The international community has not yet found an answer to getting back on track⁴.

A closer look into the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic reveals an unequal reality. While in high-income countries, social protection reached almost 700 USD per capita, in low-income countries it plummets to four USD per capita. In 2020 children and youth in high-income countries lost

3 Opening remarks at 148th session of the WHO's Executive Board, on 18 January 2021. Full speech available here: <https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-148th-session-of-the-executive-board>.

4 Intervention during the event “Global Trends in Triangular Co-Operation with India – Emerging Policy Choices for Enhanced Collaboration with Civil Society Organisations”, hosted by OECD and the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS India), on 25 January 2021.

an average of 6 weeks of pre-primary to secondary school time, while in low and lower-middle-income countries it reached an average of 4 months in the same period (OECD, 2020^[3]). Estimates from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) suggest that COVID-19 may have had an unprecedented impact upon the Human Development Index, affecting at the same time life expectancy, schooling, and income. Accordingly, more than 100 million people may have been pushed back into extreme poverty (UNDP, 2020^[4]; UNDP, 2020^[5]).

The impact of COVID-19 on micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) is devastating. According to a survey conducted by the International Trade Centre (ITC) in May 2020, one-fifth of MSMEs were at risk of bankruptcies within three months, and 15% of jobs may potentially be lost (International Trade Centre, 2020^[6]). Its impact can be seen in various aspects of society as MSM enterprises account for a considerable share of GDPs and jobs worldwide.

The challenges related to COVID-19 are numerous, and the resources available to both developed and developing countries are stressed, and financing for sustainable development is on edge. While the COVID-19 threat reinforced nationalism in some countries, it has likewise underlined the development challenges across the globe. More vital and strategic partnerships are crucial to overcoming this crisis in an effective and more just, and equal way.

Recent analysis indicates triangular co-operation as a dynamic modality that strengthens collaboration and catalyses efforts and resources for development co-operation. Different stakeholders share responsibility in implementing the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Chaturvedi and Piefer-Söyler, 2021^[7]). The modality is on the rise globally, both in nominal terms, as well as a growing proportion in the overall Official Development Assistance (ODA) and South-South Co-operation initiatives (OECD, n.a.^[8]; SEGIB, 2020^[9]).

BOX 1

What is triangular co-operation?

Various stakeholders have different definitions and terminologies for triangular co-operation. The GPI understands triangular co-operation as a modality of its own, complementary to North-South and South-South co-operation, that requires at least three roles being represented and each potentially having more than one actor:

The **FACILITATOR** helps to connect countries and organisations to form a triangular partnership and gives financial and/or technical support to the collaboration.

The **PIVOTAL** partner often has proven experience and shares its resources, knowledge and expertise through triangular co-operation. It can sometimes provide a bridge between South-South and North-South.

The **BENEFICIARY** partner seeks support to tackle a specific development challenge in line with its national development priorities and needs. It is responsible for ensuring that results are sustainable.

There is no pre-defined list of which countries are facilitators, pivotal or beneficiary. Partners can take on various aspects of all roles throughout the lifetime of the collaboration. Triangular co-operation allows for flexible financing and working arrangements.

Source: Concept Note of the Global Partnership Initiative on Effective Triangular Cooperation (GPI).

Triangular co-operation unlocks a broader range of financial resources, human capacity and technical expertise (GPI, 2019_[10]). Despite increasing evidence of its value-added, the modality is still not incorporated across the diversity of stakeholders, regions and sectors, and hence not deployed by many stakeholders for quick responses.

Even so, several GPI members reported to a GPI survey⁵ upholding triangular partnerships to overcome the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. During the GPI webinar *Strengthening Partnership and International Solidarity through Triangular Cooperation: One Year after BAPA+40 and*

5 The GPI conducted a survey with its members between August and September 2020, including questions related to triangular co-operation and the COVID-19 pandemic. It received 24 responses from its members (20 national government of 16 countries, 3 international organisations and 1 local government). Similarly, the UNDP Africa Finance Sector Hub conducted a survey to assess the impact, identify opportunities and challenges of COVID-19 on triangular co-operation. It received also 24 responses from 14 African countries and China (eight national government officials, 14 representatives of UNDP country offices, one research institution and one civil society organisation), between August and October 2020. Responses from both surveys served as reference to this brief.

*during the COVID-19 Times*⁶, panellists shared (i) how the current context changed triangular co-operation projects designed or initiated before the COVID-19 outbreak, (ii) how concluded triangular co-operation projects are facilitating partners' responses to the pandemic, and (iii) how partners are adjusting and planning for future triangular co-operation.

This brief seeks to deepen the discussion and provides more evidence on those topics. The following section focuses on the added-value of triangular partnerships in preparedness and response to the COVID-19 crisis, bringing evidence from previous triangular co-operation initiatives and ongoing programmes. Later, we explore how the different stakeholders have been fostering new triangular co-operation projects to respond to the development challenges imposed by the COVID-19. We provide examples of new approaches for building partnerships and trust, exploring the key success factor when planning new triangular projects during the pandemic. We also advocate for a more just and equal distribution of COVID-19 vaccines and identify triangular co-operation as a modality that can boost the vaccine roll-out. Finally, we provide recommendations to leverage triangular co-operation and catalyse efforts responding to the crisis. The brief provides a comprehensive analysis, not focussing on a specific sector or region of the world, but instead taking advantage of the authors' diverse experiences.

⁶ The GPI organised this webinar within the scope of the celebrations of the UN Day for South-South Cooperation, on 11 September 2020, and brought together almost 100 participants from across the globe. The report of the webinar is available at <https://triangular-cooperation.org/event/webinar-strengthening-partnership-and-international-solidarity-through-triangular-cooperation/>.

Catalysing additional resources and finding innovative solutions during the pandemic is crucial

One year after the milestone of the Second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation (BAPA+40), which increased the attention on triangular co-operation and provided a high-level push to normalise the modality across different regions and sectors, the world began to face the most significant development challenge of the century. In March 2020, WHO classified COVID-19 as a pandemic, and it has since then directly or indirectly affected all sectors and regions of the world. There is a clear need for collaboration on epidemiological surveillance, but the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic go far beyond that.

Before the pandemic, international leaders, think tanks, and civil society organisations have called attention to a crisis of multilateralism globally. In this context, triangular co-operation is often referred to as a modality that fosters co-operation among different stakeholders, despite contestations in multilateral forums (Chaturvedi et al., 2021^[11]). The current crisis reinforced the importance of meaningful partnerships. The increasing data on triangular co-operation shows the modality can catalyse resources and stimulate innovative solutions to overcome development challenges.

2.1 Triangular co-operation adds value in preparedness and response to the COVID-19 crisis

As the virus spread worldwide, the lack of specialised human resources and medical supplies became the main constraints in fighting the pandemic. Few GPI members reported considering triangular co-operation for the immediate response to the COVID-19 outbreak. The modality is usually not taken into account when it comes to quick action and humanitarian aid. At the same time, 79% of GPI members mentioned using triangular co-operation in response to the current crisis⁷.

⁷ According to the GPI survey circulated in August and September 2020.

Triangular co-operation enables horizontal knowledge sharing and innovative thinking. Among the GPI survey responses, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) highlighted the efforts to tackle through triangular co-operation projects the fall armyworm and desert locust control in agriculture and food security sectors⁸. This example and previous experiences of triangular programmes and projects show that the modality can be effective in preparedness and response to transboundary emergencies and development threats.

Triangular co-operation projects reinforce the importance of knowledge sharing and peer-learning to the capacity to react to the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of triangular partnerships contribute directly to tackling the current crisis. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) launched in 2017 a triangular co-operation project focused on promoting capacity of research institutes and laboratories in African countries. In Ghana, one of the laboratories engaged in this triangular partnership has been key in the COVID-19 response, having conducted around 80% of the PCR tests in the country during the first several months of the pandemic (Box 2).

⁸ Experiences also shared during FAO technical webinar Success stories from the Global Action from Fall Armyworm control in the era of COVID-19, on 12 May 2020 (https://fao.adobeconnect.com/_a1026619000/p94qmdt0kge9/).

BOX 2.

Building resilience to respond to crises – Experiences from the Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA)

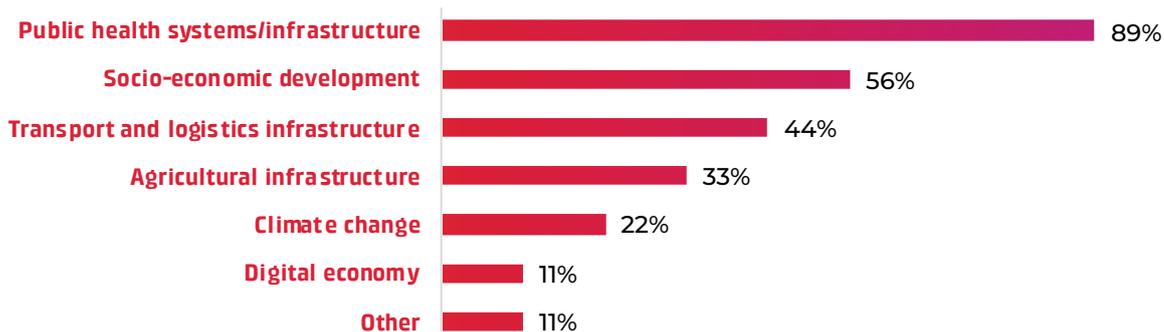
In response to the spread of the Ebola virus in West Africa, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) launched in 2017 the “Partnership for Building Resilience against Public Health Emergencies through Advanced Research and Education (PREPARE)”. The project aimed at preparing for pandemics and strengthening the capacity of disease control experts in Africa. Through triangular co-operation, Japan could scale up the programme’s impacts, training in Egypt, Ghana and Kenya technical experts of national core laboratories of almost half of the African countries.

In Ghana, the Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research, part of the PREPARE programme, was able to conduct over 370,000 PCR tests between March and mid-July, representing around 80% of the PCR tests in the country. It has been key in the COVID-19 response in the country and beyond. In January and February 2021, Ghana hosted a third-country online training on counter-measures against infectious diseases, including COVID-19, with participation of 15 experts from nine countries in West Africa.

During the past 20 years, JICA has received approximately 40,000 participants under the framework of the Third Country Training Program, and dispatched about 1,600 third country experts building institutional and human capacity of beneficiary countries.

Results of triangular projects are facilitating national responses to the crisis. According to the UNDP Africa Finance Sector Hub survey, public health systems/infrastructure, socio-economic development, and transport and logistics infrastructures are the three most prominent areas of concluded and existing south-south and triangular co-operation now supporting the COVID-19 response.

Main sectors of existing South-South and Triangular Co-operation partnerships contributing to COVID-19 response in Africa



Source: The authors, based on the UNDP survey responses.

The majority of partners engaged and promoting triangular partnerships during the pandemic⁹ identify knowledge sharing and joint learning as the main value-added of the modality responding to the challenges that COVID-19 triggered, be it in the health sector or beyond. In this context, the other two most valued strengths are achieving global and regional development goals through strengthened partnerships for sustainable development, and promoting complementarity and increasing co-ordination in development co-operation¹⁰.

Value-added and strength of Triangular Co-operation during the COVID-19 pandemic



Source: The authors, based on the UNDP survey responses.

Development co-operation agencies, research institutes and international organisations have produced abundant evidence in recent years endorsing triangular co-operation both, as a modality that builds trust among diverse partners and as a dynamic and innovative approach with meaningful development results¹¹. Promoting peer-learning among developing countries is crucial for triangular co-operation, particularly in responding to the current emergency. It increases the sense of inter-regional solidarity through the sharing of knowledge and experience.

Countries have been affected by and responded to the COVID-19 crisis differently, depending on their existing health/medical system, human capacity, and infrastructure. Triangular co-operation provides an enabling environment for peer-learning among countries' specialists. Part-

9 According to the UNDP survey circulated in August and October 2020.

10 The OECD toolkit for identifying, monitoring and evaluating the value-added of triangular co-operation systematised six ways partners usually see the value-added of triangular partnerships: (i) building ownership and trust, (ii) promoting complementarity and increasing co-ordination in development co-operation, (iii) sharing knowledge and learning jointly, (iv) co-creating solutions and flexibility, (v) enhancing the volume, scope and sustainability, and (vi) achieving global and regional development goals through strengthened partnerships for sustainable development (OECD, 2018_[14]).

11 The GPI has an online and open-source library with more than 200 entries on triangular co-operation, including evaluation reports, analysis, strategies, and other types of publication. The library is available at www.triangular-cooperation.org/resources/.

ners learn from each other and apply new knowledge to practical actions, jointly exploring innovative solutions to the crisis. This opens new opportunities for triangular co-operation to be incorporated as components of partners' larger development programmes and projects.

The Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) conducted an on-line capacity building program covering COVID-19 responses for health-care professionals in the seven ASEAN countries (Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam). The program was aimed at sharing Korea's experience of dealing with the global pandemic, including infection control, diagnostic test and treatment options. At the same time, it targeted the promotion of inter-regional communication regarding diverse responses to COVID-19 by organising separate in-depth sessions for interactive knowledge/experience sharing among participants.

Similarly, the UNDP Seoul Policy Centre convenes global policy discussions, produces knowledge products to share Korea's innovative and tested-and-proven policy tools, and provides advisory support to partners, including on the COVID-19 response¹².

2.2 Flexibility enabling effective triangular partnerships in times of COVID-19

Partners' flexibility and capacity to innovate have been crucial in adapting ongoing triangular co-operation projects designed before the COVID-19 outbreak. The Uruguayan Agency for International Cooperation (AUCI) reported negotiating and reframing ongoing projects to address partners' main priorities and needs in mitigating the effects of the pandemic.

The pandemic has profoundly changed lives in all regions of the world. The COVID-19 policy and regulatory measures hindered numerous development projects already planned or initiated before the pandemic onset. In responding to the UNDP survey, most stakeholders (57%) indicated facing hindrances in ongoing South-South and triangular co-operation projects. In comparison, 33% were not sure, and only 10% responded negatively.

FAO promotes city-to-city collaboration for the exchange of knowledge and practices on sustainable urban food systems. In this context, a triangular co-operation project promotes exchanging good practices on urban food waste reduction and management between Kigali, Nairobi and Milan. Due to COVID-19, the project that initially involved in-person and on-

¹² More information is available on the UNDP Seoul Policy Centre's website: https://www.undp.org/content/seoul_policy_center/en/home/development-solutions-partnerships.html

site training and exchange was adapted into a virtual training based on an e-Platform established for the purpose. Kigali and Nairobi will put in place systems that will improve food waste and loss, drawing on Milan's experience.

In 2019, approximately 70% of the Norwegian Agency for Exchange Co-operation (Norec)'s project portfolio comprised triangular co-operation projects. As the agency's focus is on exchanging personnel between organisations, business and governmental agencies on the project level, its activities were highly impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak. Partners needed a great capacity to adapt and innovate to handle the pandemic's regulatory measures, rethinking the implementation of many development projects. If, on the one hand, the pandemic has delayed ongoing projects, it also has provided more evidence of triangular co-operation as a dynamic and flexible modality.

BOX 3.

Is triangular co-operation a more robust concept of exchange during times of COVID-19? – Experiences from the Norwegian Agency for Exchange Cooperation (Norec)

Norec's mandate is to finance and oversee the international exchange of personnel for mutual capacity building within institutional co-operation. The core of the concept is that personnel is mutually hosted for a year in the workplaces of international partners, exchanging knowledge and competence with the host on the job, and of course, vice versa. The BAPA+40 Outcome Document recognised triangular exchange as an essential means of implementation of the SDGs.

Travelling, staying and working in foreign countries have become severely restricted after March 2020. Norec could not fulfil its mandate in the usual way, since around mid-March several governments around the world implemented strict measures, and many experts abroad on exchange chose to return home and terminate their contracts.

Before the pandemic struck, Norec supported 228 partners, exchanging a total of 437 personnel between them. After the various measures taken during March 2020, we see an overall decline in personnel in an exchange abroad, especially of Norwegian personnel.

	17 March 2020	27 March 2020	Reduction
Norwegian personnel on assignment in the South	85	13	85%
Southern personnel on assignment in Norway	89	57	36%
South-South personnel exchange	263	176	33%
Total	437	246	44%

Norec had to redefine its immediate tasks and look at ways to support the exchange of competence. Norec opened its grant applications for 2021, welcoming digital exchange/co-operation and physical exchange of personnel. The main measures taken were: (i) no new personnel sent out, ongoing contracts honoured, (ii) competence building by virtual means, (iii) already planning for new exchanges once the world opens up again, (iv) digitalise all preparation courses both for the sending and receiving organisations as well as for the personnel to travel, and finally (v) strengthened research and policy development.

In 2021, Norec will collect learnings from digital projects to identify success factors. There was an interesting variation in how institutions, organisations and individual people reacted to the pandemic in 2020. In general, Norec saw that personnel recruited in the Global South, who went to other countries in the south or to Norway, remained with their host partner to a significantly higher degree than Norwegians (see table above). They did, to a much less degree, return home and instead stayed on and completed their contract abroad. In other words, it seems that South-South and triangular co-operation could provide more robust concepts of exchange co-operation than North-South.

Scaling-up successful practices and fostering innovation through triangular co-operation

Numerous ongoing triangular projects were adapted, and new projects have started during the COVID-19 crisis. Developing countries have found innovative local solutions to overcome the negative impacts of the pandemic. The crisis has aggravated many existing challenges, but concurrently catalysed better planning, contingency strategies, new approaches for building partnership and trust. Innovation and technology fostering virtual solutions have been key in planning new projects, as the digital economy and e-learning platforms.

Some members refocused ongoing programmes or mechanisms, as the German Regional Fund for Triangular Co-operation with Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Germany has extended the criteria of its call for applications on an extraordinary basis to meet the specific demands of 2020 due to the pandemic, adding a rationale on projects' contribution to COVID-19 related challenges. Furthermore, a new timeline allowed more flexibility and time for establishing partnerships and elaborating proposals. Countries in LAC welcomed the opportunity to submit proposals. The majority of the GPI members from the region responding to the GPI survey, including Colombia, Costa Rica, and Peru, reported proposals submitted to the German Regional Fund.

To address the partner demands related to the challenges COVID-19 has triggered in the LAC region, this unique and thematic 2020 call for proposals focused on projects that respond to specific needs arising from the effects of the pandemic. The proposals should not necessarily focus on the health sector but rather on the social, economic and structural consequences affecting the countries of the region. The proposals covered various areas: anti-corruption, energy efficiency, social and solidarity economy, and sanitation (Box 4).

BOX 4.

Reframing ongoing mechanisms – Experiences from the German Development Co-operation

The German Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development (BMZ) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) established the German Regional Fund for Triangular Co-operation with Latin America and the Caribbean in 2010, which has since then opened almost 20 rounds of proposals. With defined processes, criteria and deadlines, the fund is a well-established and known mechanism fostering triangular partnerships between Germany and LAC countries.

In 2020, following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, German development co-operation adjusted its processes, merging the two calls for proposals (with the usual deadlines in May and November each year) into one call with a new deadline in August 2020. This aimed to provide more flexibility for partner countries to identify their needs and capacity in responding to COVID-19. The 2020 call included a rationale on how the proposal was dealing with the consequences of the pandemic in that specific area of the proposal.

Germany highlighted the quality improvement of the proposals throughout the years since the establishment of the fund. There has been a considerable increase in contributions from the beneficiary country, and almost 50% of the proposals endorsed by BMZ mentions win-win and mutual benefits.

The Regional Fund received almost 30 proposals, of which 23 were reviewed and 14 were successfully endorsed by BMZ. The total German contribution reached 3.5 million EUR, adding 1.1 million to the initially planned budget. Together with the partners' contributions, the 14 approved projects will provide approximately 10 million EUR for triangular co-operation projects addressing the negative impact of the pandemic in LAC. BMZ considered the 2020 budget – 3.5 million EUR of German resources – as part of its Emergency COVID-19 Support Programme.

The member countries of the Ibero-American Program for Strengthening of South-South Cooperation (PIFCSS) decided to temporarily enlarge the scope and execution modalities of the Structured Mechanism for the Exchange of South-South Cooperation Experiences (MECSS). Traditionally, this mechanism finances bilateral and triangular South-South knowledge exchange co-operation projects among the 21 PIFCSS member countries, including Andorra, Portugal and Spain, and 18 Latin American and Caribbean countries. The New MECSS “Partners in the face of COVID-19” allows members to bid for technical assistance to support the formulation and implementation of diagnoses, studies, consultancies, strategies, applied research and projects in different areas of government work at the sub-national level. It also provides specific acquisitions, framed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, to strengthen the project's development and

implementation processes, such as particular inputs, software licenses, publications, among others. Also, the Mechanism provides for short-term academic training for the staff of the countries' national co-operation systems. The MECSS is financed by all 21 PIFCSS member States.

The German Regional Fund for Triangular Co-operation with LAC and the MECSS "Partners in the face of COVID-19" provide good examples of how triangular co-operation is a dynamic and flexible modality. Partners could adapt and respond to the countries' specific needs and priorities, following the principle of "country partnership and demand-driven co-operation", one of the nine Voluntary Guidelines for Effective Triangular Co-operation proposed by the GPI (Box 5).

BOX 5.

Voluntary Guidelines for Effective Triangular Co-operation

To help make triangular co-operation more effective along with a contemporary understanding, the GPI has advanced a set of Voluntary Guidelines for Effective Triangular Co-operation:

- 1. COUNTRY OWNERSHIP AND DEMAND-DRIVEN CO-OPERATION:** Triangular co-operation should be undertaken with the ownership of partner countries and aligned with their national priorities, as well as those of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- 2. SHARED COMMITMENT:** Partners agree to participate and share responsibility with regard to identification, design, implementation, contribution, monitoring, and evaluation;
- 3. FOCUS ON RESULTS-ORIENTED APPROACHES AND SOLUTIONS:** All partners commit to achieving agreed upon results, as well as to demonstrating and systematising results;
- 4. INCLUSIVE PARTNERSHIPS AND MULTI-STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUES:** Responding to the needs and objectives of all parties, partners aim to involve multiple actors with a view to foster knowledge-sharing; and to find sustainable development solutions;
- 5. TRANSPARENCY AND MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY:** All partners are accountable for commitments made and agreed. They agree to share information on their triangular co-operation activities in accordance to the standard to enable monitoring, evaluation and accountability;
- 6. INNOVATION AND CO-CREATION:** Through new and existing partnerships, intelligent risk-taking, evidence-based policy and programming, technology, and flexible approaches to locally-driven innovative solutions, with a view to improving development results;
- 7. JOINT-LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE-SHARING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:** Through horizontal exchanges and co-creation of development solutions, all partners mutually benefit from sharing their knowledge, capabilities and strengths;
- 8. ADVANCE GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS:** Triangular co-operation should contribute to gender equality in its multiple dimensions as a way to accelerate sustainable development progress;
- 9. LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND:** Triangular co-operation furthers inclusive multi-stakeholder partnerships, including those that provide support to the most vulnerable.

Source: Triangular Co-operation in the Era of the 2030 Agenda (GPI, 2019_[10]).

All crises open room for innovation. The COVID-19 context provides a fertile ground for the change of mind-set from vertical assistance to horizontal partnerships in international co-operation, much needed to deliver on the UN 2030 Agenda (OECD, 2019_[12]). No co-operation modality alone is a silver bullet to tackle the complexity of the development challenge aggravated with the outbreak of the pandemic. Triangular co-operation complements North-South and South-South co-operation, fosters equitable partnerships and provide a space for creative solutions and innovation.

As an example, to strengthen Sudanese capacity to respond to COVID-19, the IsDB, through the Reverse Linkage mechanism, is facilitating a partnership between Sudan and the Palestinian International Cooperation Agency (PICA). The initiative supports the national laboratory and blood bank through knowledge-sharing and the provision of medical equipment to ensure the effectiveness of the project's capacity-building component. Similarly, IsDB is also supporting a partnership between the Comoros Islands and Tunisia to strengthen the capacity of national laboratories in medical analysis.

Under the framework of the existing triangular initiative Partnerships for Investment and Growth in Africa (PIGA)¹³, the International Trade Centre (ITC) supported Chinese businesses dispatching medical equipment to Ethiopia for their immediate response to COVID-19. Beyond the health sector's emergency response, the initiative supports Mozambique and Kenya's business continuity, promoting a stable flow of investments during the pandemic.

ITC also supported the development of triangular partnerships in Latin America and the Caribbean. ITC's China-LAC project, which facilitates business and trade between China and the LAC region, launched a series of online training and awareness sessions for Chinese SMEs at the outset of the pandemic. This helped them tap into the opportunities in COVID-19 for improved regional trade through more robust regional value chains. Eventually, benefits will trickle down to small and medium-sized businesses with improved resilience during turbulent times (International Trade Centre, 2020_[13]).

The majority of the UNDP Africa Finance Sector Hub survey respondents (67%) have concrete good practices of national solutions handling COVID-19 that could be adapted and scaled up in peer African countries, such as the engagement and association of natural and traditional medical practitioners to the COVID-19 response in Cameroon. In Latin America, Costa Rica is fostering triangular partnerships to exchange with neighbour countries on sanitary measures.

The GPI survey responses indicate that triangular co-operation projects reach a wide range of sectors, and point to an increase in innovation and digitalisation. Examples of areas covered in triangular co-operation initiatives:

¹³ PIGA is a 4-year triangular co-operation component of the programme Manufacturing Africa, a programme of the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO). The triangular component is implemented by the International Trade Center (ITC), the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) and the China-Africa Development Fund (CADFund), aiming to increase job creation and sustainable growth in Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique and Zambia.

- The use of artificial intelligence to develop tracking systems by the Ministry of National Development Planning of the Republic of Indonesia (BAPPENAS) and the Islamic Development Bank;
- Analysis of the high impact of the pandemic on Bangladesh's expatriates, and the consequences to Bangladesh's economy, in partnership with the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia;
- Optimising efficiency of strategic value-chains, like textile, tourism, honey and others, by Madagascar;
- Support to SMEs for regional trade, led by the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA).

BOX 6.

Mapping potentialities to triangular co-operation – Experiences from the Palestinian International Cooperation Agency (PICA)

The Palestinian International Cooperation Agency (PICA), in partnership with the Islamic development bank (IsDB) and other technical agencies from the global South, is establishing an international platform for experts to exchange good practices, knowledge, and expertise to face the current pandemic. The resource-mapping centre in Palestine will enhance the capacities and abilities to collaborate on an international scale. This exercise will identify experts and resource centres that can carry out innovative interventions that respond to real development constraints in aid of SSTRC initiatives. It will also develop a report on the experts and resource centres' profiles to act as a comprehensive database accessible to local and international partners.

In June 2020, PICA launched the BUSALA programme in partnership with the Higher Council for Innovation & Excellence (HCIE). The initiative engages the private sector, academia, and non-governmental organisations. It aims to connect Palestinian innovation and the development needs of marginalised communities across the global South. By incorporating a triangular co-operation component, Palestinian innovators, entrepreneurial teams, and start-ups will have the potential to apply, test, and scale-up their innovative solutions to tackle global development challenges.

Similarly, in cooperation with the Polish Center for International Aid (PCPM), PICA conducted several virtual capacity building programs aiming at supporting the skills of the personnel of the Palestinian Rapid Response and Rescue Team (PRRRT). It focused on enhancing crisis management capacities, improving crisis response, adopting the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (UNOCHA) and the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) working methodologies during disasters.

3.1 Triangular co-operation boosting the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine

During the G20 virtual summit in March 2020, Mexican President, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, proposed universal access to COVID-19 medication and equipment for treatment, as well as to eventual vaccines. The UN General Assembly endorsed and adopted the proposal the following month (Resolution 74/274), opening the way for the COVAX mechanism to finance and deliver vaccines to low and middle-income countries. However, on 8 February 2021, WHO Director highlighted that over 90% of countries vaccinating their population were wealthy and that just ten countries deployed 75% of the doses until then. International leadership has called attention to the importance of vaccine equity¹⁴.

Scientists alert that vaccine nationalism is counterproductive and epidemiologically troublesome, making it more likely to prolong the pandemic. Susanna Moorehead, DAC Chair, advocated that it is a strategic moment for the development community to accelerate triangular co-operation and leverage better outcomes to all people. International co-operation is crucial to advance the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines¹⁵ and triangular partnerships can catalyse these processes, for example, the negotiations between Bangladesh's Ministry of Finance with the United Kingdom, China and India to avail vaccine access show.

Mexico and Argentina negotiated with AstraZeneca and Oxford University to produce their vaccine. Argentina is producing the active biologic, shipped to Mexico for bottling and distribution to Latin America and the Caribbean. In both cases, local pharmaceutical laboratories are working with the governments to accomplish this triangular co-operation project. Also, Mexico's government agreed with China's CanSino Biologics laboratory to bottle its vaccine in-country by another private pharmaceutical laboratory, which started output in March 2021. In June 2021, Mexico donated over a million doses of its contract with AstraZeneca to countries in Latin America and the Caribbean¹⁶, as well as mechanical respirators produced in Mexico through a public-private partnership of government, scientists and enterprises, and assorted medical supplies¹⁷.

14 Interventions during the event "Vaccine Equity and Resilience Building: Two Tests for Global Solidarity", on 8 February 2021.

15 Intervention during the event "Global Trends in Triangular Co-Operation with India – Emerging Policy Choices for Enhanced Collaboration with Civil Society Organisations", on 25 January 2021.

16 Belize, Bolivia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Paraguay and Trinidad & Tobago.

17 Mexico donated 2 mechanical respirators per country, delivered to Antigua & Barbuda, Belize, Bolivia, Guyana, Paraguay, Trinidad & Tobago, and Suriname, and assorted medical supplies requested by Guatemala.

Learning from the crisis: Recommendations for leveraging triangular co-operation and cat- alysing efforts responding to the COVID-19 crisis

Aiming to promote triangular partnerships for effective development co-operation responding to the development challenges triggered by the pandemic, ***we recommend:***

Ensure that good practices and solutions are replicated and scaled up in and beyond the context of COVID-19.

COVID-19 is generating an extensive amount of knowledge, innovative solutions and examples of how governments and communities are responding and adapting to the challenges posed by the pandemic. Triangular co-operation plays a vital role in the replication and scaling up of these solutions and good practices. It will help build a society and economy that are more resilient to external shocks in the long term.

Triangular co-operation enhances the technical capacities and resilience of developing countries to COVID-19 or other transboundary threats. Collaboration and networking of technical institutes, centres of excellence and universities through triangular co-operation arrangements (e.g. joint research, scholarships, exchange programmes, etc.) contribute to enhanced technical capacities of all countries responding to the impacts of COVID-19 and other transboundary threats.

Furthermore, tackling the resilience of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) will be critical in future triangular co-operation. MSMEs account for a large part of employment and GDP in most economies. Helping them navigate through the pandemic is key to building a resilient economy and society. Online training and business matching events, which have become popular with the pandemic's outbreak, will continue to serve as an effective tool to connect MSMEs with international markets and clients in the long term.

Incorporate triangular co-operation components, as sharing of knowledge and experience, into COVID-19 response programmes.

Different stakeholders can collaborate in dealing with the practical difficulties in implementing COVID-19 response programs and adapt existing triangular co-operation programmes during the era of the pandemic. For example, providers delivering online capacity-building programs have similar difficulties in altering their program to a virtual setting due to partner countries' digital environment. Partners can collaborate on resolving such challenges through triangular co-operation.

Additionally, regional financial institutions and development banks play an essential role in curbing disruptions on trade and supply chains, including food and agricultural commodities, by providing the necessary short-term liquidity for recovery as well as long-term finance. Fostering intra-regional co-operation, financing and investment is critical for short-term recovery and laying the foundations for resilience in many countries, increasing opportunities to find synergies and exploring complementarities across the different funding streams globally.

Promote triangular co-operation to leave no one behind.

The United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development urged stakeholders to take action and ensure no one is left behind. The Leave No One Behind (LNOB) approach goes beyond the inequalities among countries and challenges the conventional vertical growth-based development perspective.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the persisting inequalities across the world, among and within countries. The direct and indirect consequences of the pandemic do not affect humanity in the same way. Older people, women, young and unprotected workers, migrant households, the homeless or people living in informal settlements, and other vulnerable groups are disproportionately affected in all countries and societies. Triangular co-operation promotes inclusive multi-stakeholder partnerships, fostering horizontal relations among partners, mutual benefits, knowledge sharing and innovative thinking. Through this modality, partners can include stakeholders that support the most vulnerable and reach the ones further behind.

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