

CHAPTER 1

South-South and Triangular Cooperation to support post-pandemic sustainable development in Ibero-America: contributions and challenges*

The humanitarian and health emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic at the global level has stressed the need to strengthen new types of partnerships through international cooperation. At the same time, it has called upon Ibero-America to adapt to a context of challenging problems, by transforming South-South and Triangular Cooperation, and it has revealed the need to deepen multi-stakeholder and multilevel partnerships, as well as to consolidate these modalities' evaluation and measurement mechanisms.

In addition to all the above, a series of direct and indirect effects of the pandemic have exposed our countries' limitations to achieve recovery and development. In this sense, it is important for Ibero-America to promote a greater regional strengthening through its cooperation, encouraging the generation of public policies and their reinforcement, as well as the implementation of impact initiatives that contribute to the socioeconomic development of the population.

1.1 South-South and Triangular Cooperation in the post-pandemic scenario: preventing crisis and promoting the region's growth

More than two years have passed since the COVID-19 pandemic spread around the world, highlighting the fragility of some Latin-American countries and their difficulties to face a widespread health crisis. According to the Economic Commission for Latin-America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), this region was the most impacted by the pandemic as a whole, being the most indebted in the developing world in 2020 and, at the same time, the one that faced an economic contraction equivalent to -7.7%, the sharpest in 120 years (ECLAC, 2021).

Problems of a structural nature have worsened in the region, and these have resulted in a severe economic decline, a raise of unemployment and an increase of migration flows. Likewise, strategic sectors have been affected throughout their productive structure, especially trade, industry, hotel services, tourism, culture, among others; and the need to strengthen public health, risk management and social protection systems has become evident.

* This chapter was prepared and agreed upon the 22 Ibero-American Heads of Cooperation and it is based on an original version prepared by Ecuador together with Brazil, Chile and Peru.

As a result, Latin-America is facing a complicated scenario in which barriers to growth have increased and limited resources hinder, at least in the short term and in several countries, an adequate post-pandemic development, undermining national efforts.

In this context, the international cooperation system and, especially, South-South and Triangular Cooperation, can contribute through the exchange, systematization and dissemination of successful experiences and best practices, technology transfer and mutual support, both at the national and regional levels. These mechanisms, all of them inherent to both modalities, are favored by the digital transformation and the use of technologies that enable the international community to develop innovative solutions and effective recovery initiatives. This has the dual purpose of achieving systemic prevention and promoting socioeconomic growth and it has allowed the continuation of many initiatives despite mobility restrictions imposed by the pandemic.

— It is important for Ibero-America to promote a deeper regional strengthening through its cooperation

Ibero-America can increase its presence in the global scenario, showcasing its capacities and presenting its vulnerabilities in international platforms and, from a South-South and Triangular Cooperation perspective, especially focusing on the Global South as a strategic partner. In spite of their high heterogeneity, developing countries face common and persistent problems that can be addressed by proven solutions.

Strategies must be redesigned to face challenges arising in the post-pandemic context. As it was demonstrated during the most critical moments of this period, this requires the commitment of all stakeholders in order to develop actions to prevent and mitigate crisis. South-South and Triangular Cooperation initiatives implemented during the pandemic clearly confirmed the importance of sharing experiences and of other activities to transfer good practices and specific knowledge between countries.

It is necessary to reframe the international cooperation system, developing adaptable strategies in line with a post-pandemic socioeconomic scenario which includes all countries, without exclusion, contributing to build a knowledge community. This new system should also be strengthened with multilevel and multi-stakeholder

cooperation, including bilateral, multilateral and regional platforms, and it should also promote technical assistance and financing modalities, with technology transfer and the creation of strategic partnerships.

1.2 South-South and Triangular Cooperation and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Ibero-America

The 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs are a guiding reference for the region. They have paved the way for the alignment of national development plans with these global objectives, based on the common goal to achieve sustainable and inclusive development with an approach that focuses on human rights and social security, as well as on the economic dimension, in harmony with the environment. It should be noted that the SDGs, their 17 goals and 169 targets all respond to the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. In this context, the role that national governments have in their implementation and in the coordination of multiple stakeholders for their achievement and reporting, together with local governments and public institutions, is especially worthy of mention.

South-South and Triangular Cooperation and its principles promote respect for sovereignty, national ownership and independence, equality, non-conditionality, non-interference, mutual benefit, and it must be efficiently and effectively implemented to contribute to the achievement of the ambitious and transformative 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Through this modality, each stakeholder contributes according to its capacities and has differentiated responsibilities and commitments in the framework of the international development agenda.

In 2020, the 2030 Agenda increased South-South and Triangular Cooperation's visibility by setting indicator 17.3.1, which measures "Foreign direct investments (FDI), official development assistance and South-South Cooperation as a proportion of total domestic budget" (UNSTATS, 2022). The challenge, therefore, lies in governments' capacities to allocate human (technical capacities) and economic resources (national budgets) to meet South-South and Triangular Cooperation's challenges.

So far, and as a result of partnerships in Ibero-America, most cooperation initiatives implemented by the region have been considered contributions to SDG 17. However, as the agencies and ministries responsible for international cooperation in Ibero-American countries are well aware, their importance goes well beyond this, since their implementation and results also have positive impacts on other development goals.

Although the countries of the region have intensified their efforts to strengthen institutional frameworks for the implementation of the Agenda, as revealed in numerous voluntary national reviews, it is necessary to promote political dialogue on the importance of South-South and Triangular Cooperation as an effective instrument for the development of initiatives that favor the achievement of the SDGs and their targets.

In the regional and multilateral context, commitments have been made to promote work between governments and organizations to foster the creation of funds for South-South and Triangular Cooperation and to implement programs with greater efficiency and flexibility, according to countries' demands. The Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB by its Spanish acronym), for example, has been working for more than a decade to strengthen South-South and Triangular Cooperation and to enhance its value in terms of information systematization and knowledge generation, as well as to support the international positioning of this cooperation modality. In this sense, it is also worth to highlight the relevance given by the United Nations to South-South Cooperation (SSC), which is considered in more than 80 UNDG assistance and cooperation frameworks (UN, 2021).

The promotion of partnerships for development (SDG 17, Partnerships for the goals) is consolidating in the region through the strengthening of South-South and Triangular Cooperation

The opportunity to contribute to development will significantly depend on the instruments, mechanisms and procedures that are available in each country. In addition, although capacity strengthening in terms of methodologies for South-South and Triangular Cooperation's valorization continues to be a challenge that must be addressed, important efforts have been made by Ibero-American countries to register information and the region has become a model for other stakeholders in the Global South.

In short, South-South and Triangular Cooperation plays an important role in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and creates opportunities to establish partnerships to support national, regional and global strategies that provide solutions to structural problems, including inequality, technological and productive backwardness, and environmental threats.

1.3 The contribution of South-South and Triangular Cooperation to Ibero-American partnerships for sustainable development

Strengthened South-South and Triangular Cooperation in the region is consolidating the promotion of partnerships for development, as stated in SDG 17. Currently, these cooperation initiatives (multi-stakeholder, multilevel, public-private) include the participation of non-traditional stakeholders that broaden the scope of cooperation beyond traditional government-to-government relations, thus fostering the desired generation of partnerships and constructive dialogue at all levels.

At the multilateral level, the most important global effort in recent years to stress how South-South Cooperation contributes to the achievement of the SDGs, and to make this visible, was the Second United Nations High-Level Conference on South-South Cooperation (BAPA+40), where Ibero-American countries played an important role, presenting how this cooperation modality is implemented.

In addition, several organizations in Latin-America aim to generate and promote integration policies and regional strengthening, such as the Central-American Integration System (SICA by its Spanish acronym), the Andean Community (CAN by its Spanish acronym), the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR by its Spanish acronym), the Latin-American Integration Association (ALADI by its Spanish acronym), the Pacific Alliance and the Community of Latin-American and Caribbean States (CELAC by its Spanish acronym). These institutions complement each other in the region's search for innovative solutions for economic and social development, with the participation of inclusive multi-stakeholder partnerships.

SEGIB, as an organization within the Ibero-American Conference, promotes regional dialogue enabling the exchange of perspectives on international cooperation for development, as well as on South-South and Triangular Cooperation. In this framework, the contribution made by PIFCSS to knowledge management and training for offices responsible for international cooperation in the 22 Ibero-American countries and for other institutions that are part of national cooperation systems, should be specially highlighted.

Likewise, Triangular Cooperation (TC) fosters partnerships between regional stakeholders and other partners in developed countries, and Latin-America is very enthusiastic about this modality. The search for strategies through these associations is a way to encourage traditional and emerging partners to promote new modalities to implement projects between regional and extra-regional stakeholders, and with a greater sense of belonging. In addition, TC materializes the contribution of traditional and south-south partners, fostering partnerships in the most diverse sectors.

— SEGIB makes a significant contribution by systematizing South-South and Triangular Cooperation initiatives

The establishment of these alliances, both in the Ibero-American space and with stakeholders of other regions, can broaden the results of South-South and Triangular Cooperation projects, which implementation generates positive impacts, quality results and effectiveness in the sectors of intervention. In addition, partnerships can strengthen South-South and Triangular Cooperation to contribute to overcome Ibero-American countries' structural challenges as well as those of other regions.

1.4 South-South and Triangular Cooperation: measurement and evaluation as a response to the challenges of sustainable development in the region

The mobilization of technical resources for exchanges and for the strengthening of institutional capacities are examples of how South-South and Triangular Cooperation provides flexible and adaptable solutions to development challenges and of how it supports the execution of national plans. However, the absence of clear mechanisms to measure the scope and impact of this cooperation in Ibero-American countries interferes with the possibility to make the magnitude of these contributions visible.

In 1978, the Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA) pointed out the need for SSC to be subject to evaluation, to assess the impact of initiatives implemented in the framework of peer country exchanges, and to strengthen this cooperation mechanism, which is complementary to traditional cooperation. In this sense, South-South and Triangular Cooperation stakeholders are aware that evaluation systems are necessary to provide lessons to be shared, leading to a better implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

In recent years, significant progress has been made at the theoretical and methodological levels, as evidenced in annual statistics reports, in bilateral and triangular mechanisms to identify best practices, and in joint evaluations implemented among the countries of the region. Currently, countries have different capacities and institutional frameworks to address this issue. However, they agree on the importance of South-South and Triangular Cooperation's registration and valorization. Technical guidelines designed for measurement and evaluation processes have contributed to deepen the common interest to quantify and demonstrate the actual contributions of cooperation for sustainable development.

SEGIB has a very significant role in this through the systematization of South-South and Triangular Cooperation initiatives implemented by Ibero-American countries. This has materialized in the Report on South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Ibero-America, which has been published for more than 10 years.

In addition, and supported by PIFCSS, countries have shared their experiences and best practices on South-South and Triangular Cooperation's management, measurement and evaluation, contributing to the generation of knowledge and consensus on these modalities. This has allowed for debate and reflection

on minimum criteria that should be considered in order to valorize this type of cooperation. Other less tangible but real aspects of the short, medium and long term benefits of South-South and Triangular Cooperation are related to the generation of bonds between countries and their institutions, and to the possibility to shorten learning curves through knowledge exchange.

In this regard, it is worth noting that Ibero-America has been a pioneering region in the intergovernmental debate on how to measure South-South and Triangular Cooperation. In this sense, and as a result of Brazil's, Mexico's and Colombia's initiative, a methodology to measure SSC was developed and approved by the United Nations in the framework of sustainable development indicator number 17.3.1. This methodology, of which the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) is the custodian agency, is currently being applied.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic caused a slowdown in activities and plans to tackle this issue, 2022 renewed the opportunity to advance towards the definition of practical guidelines and standards for the evaluation of South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Ibero-America. Reaching a consensus on minimum criteria and finding complementarities among data platforms in order to minimize the likelihood of duplicating the registration of initiatives are among the main challenges to overcome.

However, progress has indeed been made within the Ibero-American space, where countries have agreed on the relevance of South-South and Triangular Cooperation's evaluation. This has already been identified as a challenge that must be jointly addressed and is considered an opportunity to establish common minimum criteria among the 22 countries.



Photo: Researchers from Mexico and Uruguay work to map viral diseases of economic impact for poultry farming in order to identify the genetic characteristics of the agents that cause them. Bilateral SSC project between Mexico and Uruguay *Development and application of biotechnological tools in animal health for the implementation of a research network on viral diseases affecting commercial poultry farming*. Image bank on South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Ibero-America. SEGIB-PIFCSS. 2021.