Environmental Triangular Cooperation as a tool for the bi-regional alliance between the European Union and Latin America

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ACRONYMS

AECID (by its Spanish acronym)	Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation
AFD	French Development Agency
CAF	Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GIZ (by its German acronym)	German International Cooperation Society
IDB	Inter American Development Bank
EU	European Union
LA	Latin America
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SIDICSS	Integrated Data System of Latin America on South-South and Triangular Cooperation
SSC	South-South Cooperation
TC	Triangular Cooperation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

Introduction

The potential of Triangular Cooperation (TC) is widely recognised today as a form of cooperation that promotes the exchange, systematisation, and dissemination of experiences and best practices, as well as activities related to technology transfer and the mobilisation of technical resources to support the implementation of national and regional projects, and to launch innovative, flexible, effective, and appropriate solutions to the challenges posed by development. Due to its potential as a horizontal, multi-level, multidimensional, and multi-stakeholder form of cooperation, TC emerges as the most effective approach for forging new alliances to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out in the 2030 Agenda, particularly in tackling key structural challenges such as inequality, technological and productive lag, and the environmental crisis (SEGIB, 2023 b).

In this regard, particularly in Latin America (LA), TC has proven to be a crucial and ever-evolving tool over the past few decades, with trends of growth, decline, stability, and change observed in the volume of cooperation initiatives. These trends have been influenced by economic and political factors, as well as by the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a substantial effect on international cooperation. Nevertheless, TC in LA has evolved towards more comprehensive and cross-cutting approaches, moving beyond the fragmented and focused strategies that have often dominated decision-making processes. It has also gradually transitioned from individual actions to larger projects, reflecting the maturation of this modality in the region (Herrero, Peixoto Batista, and Lanzieri, 2023).

Specifically in the environmental sector, LA has been the site of significant initiatives focused on biodiversity conservation, waste management, combating climate change, and the sustainable management of natural resources. The consolidation of cooperation projects in this area not only reflects the importance of these issues on the regional agenda but also highlights the ability of TC to adapt to the changing global needs and challenges through a "glocal" approach (Herrero, Peixoto, and Lanzieri, 2023).

Within this framework, this study has been carried out with the main purpose of analysing TC as a tool for the bi-regional alliance between the European Union (EU) and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), and to derive lessons that highlight, through the connection of local and global efforts, its key contribution to tackling the vast environmental challenges.

To this end, the study examines the historical development of EU-LAC bi-regional TC in the environmental sector, focusing on the most active stakeholders, the instruments that have been strengthened and those that need further strengthening, the environmental sectors/themes with potential to enhance the alliance, while also identifying challenges and opportunities for promoting bi-regional TC in general, and specifically in the environmental field.

This version is an executive summary of the report and consists of five sections, which initially present the results of the analysis of the primary sources regarding the evolution and scope of TC in the environmental field. In this way, the analysis of the "Ibero-American Integrated Data System on South-South and Triangular Cooperation" (SIDICSS) outlines the general trends of TC, as well as those specific to the sector, the composition of countries involved in TC based on their roles as first providers, second providers, and recipients by topic, and, lastly, an analysis of the SDGs. The results of the survey, interviews, and focus groups are then presented, in which various stakeholders involved in international cooperation activities and TC in general, and in the environmental sector in particular, participated. The following section elaborates on the challenges presented by EU-LAC TC, opportunities, priority issues and recommendations from the perspective of interviewees and survey respondents. Finally, the fifth section offers some concluding reflections, summarising the key aspects of this study and presenting possible perspectives for the future.

1 Analysis of the "Ibero-American Integrated Data System on South-South and Triangular Cooperation" (SIDICSS)

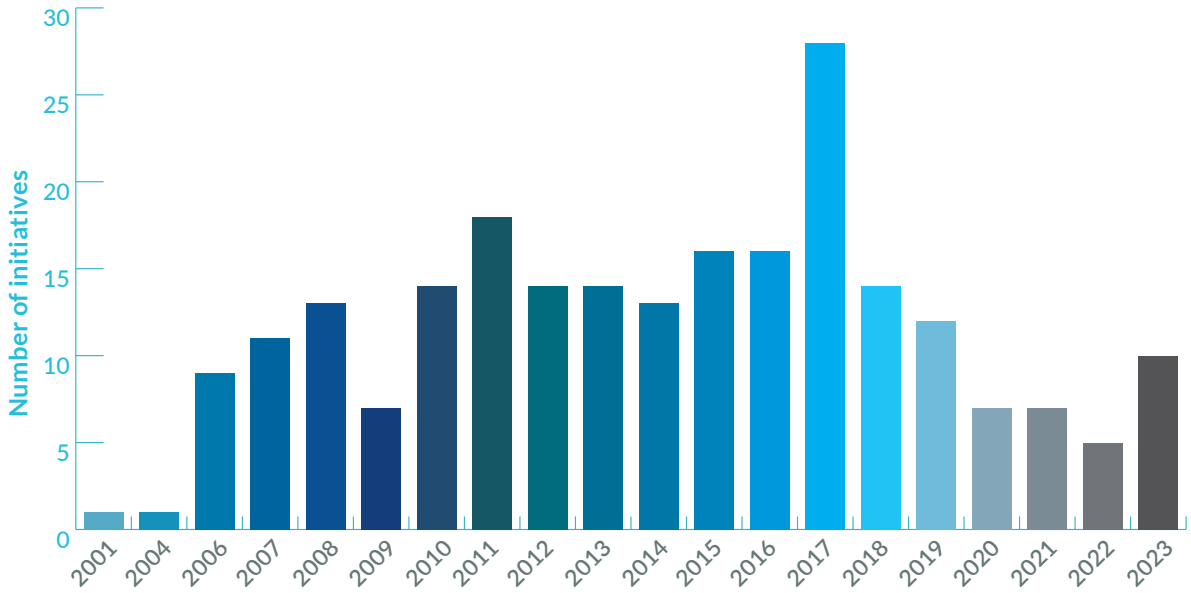
The information from the SIDICSS has been coded to provide more detailed data on the environmental sector, specifically using the fields of "project (or action) title" and "objectives".

1.1. Analysis of general trends

Trends by time period, between 2001 and 2023. A total of 246 initiatives in the "environment" sector dimension have been identified, with a peak in 2017 (29 initiatives) and a significant decline starting in 2018. The growth of cooperation in the environmental sector took place between 2010 and 2017, a period in which 60% of the total initiatives were implemented. With regard to the sectors of activity, 66% are related to the environment, while 34% are focused on disaster management.

GRAPHIC 1.

Evolution of the number of TC initiatives in the environmental sector by year



Source: compiled based on the data from SIDICSS

- ***Measurement and assessment.*** 60% of the initiatives included environmental measurement or assessment efforts, for example. the solid waste management project in Guatemala (2008) and one related to remote sensing techniques in Argentina (2023). These initiatives reflect a strong focus on knowledge generation, the improvement of methodologies, and the exchange of best practices.

- ***Strengthening capabilities.*** More than half of the initiatives focused on strengthening capabilities, while about a third on creating new capabilities. Strengthening technical and institutional capabilities is crucial for improving resilience in natural resource management and adaptation to climate change.

- ***Public policy and skill building.*** The majority of initiatives (208) were aimed at improving processes or public policies, training technicians and officials, and promoting regulatory frameworks. This reinforces the idea that TC in the environmental sector is used as a tool for knowledge transfer, enabling the improvement of institutional capabilities in recipient countries.

- ***Public policy and skill building:*** The majority of initiatives (208) were aimed at improving processes or public policies, training technicians and officials, and promoting regulatory frameworks. This reinforces the idea that TC in the environmental sector is used as a tool for knowledge transfer, enabling the improvement of institutional capabilities in recipient countries.

- ***Stakeholder participation:*** Two predominant patterns have been observed in the origin of the initiatives: requests for assistance from recipient countries (54%) and calls for participation from providers (36.5%). A smaller percentage (9.4%) originated from joint discussions among all partners. Additionally, programmes with non-Ibero-American partners have played a significant role, serving as the preferred framework for almost half of the initiatives.

- ***Data limitations.*** It is important to highlight that there are significant gaps in information, particularly regarding the objectives of the initiatives and their alignment with the SDGs, which remains a challenge when conducting more precise analyses and generating trends. For example, nearly half of the initiatives reported in the analysed sector (which includes the environment and disaster management) lack any information regarding their objectives. The same applies to the information regarding the main SDG. In relation to the secondary SDG, the situation is even more complicated, as two thirds of the initiatives lack information in this area. The information becomes more comprehensive from 2014-2015 onwards[1] , but the lack of data in key areas still hinders in-depth analysis. Although, unlike other databases, the SIDICSS — in terms of the triangular modality — provides complete information on the first provider, second provider, and recipient, it would be useful in the future to include fields that classify stakeholders by "participating institutions". This would help capture multi-stakeholder, multi-sector, and multi-level trends, which are crucial for achieving the objectives and ensuring the long-term continuity of TC initiatives in the environmental sector.

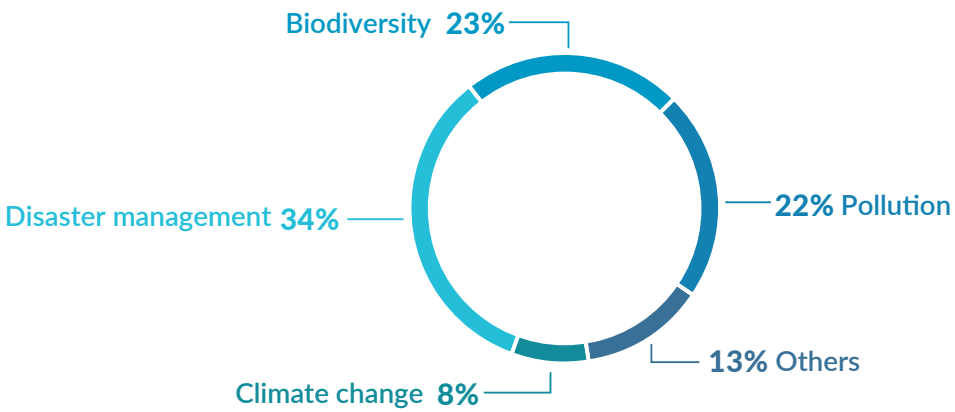
1.2. Analysis of trends in environmental topics

- ***Breakdown of initiatives by category and historical evolution:*** five main categories have been created to classify the initiatives in the "environment" sector dimension, with the following results: Disaster Management (34%), Biodiversity (23%), Pollution (22%), Climate Change (8%), and Others (13%). In the early years (2001-2006), initiatives were concentrated in Disaster Management and Pollution. The first Biodiversity initiative appeared in 2007, and the first Climate Change initiative in 2010, reflecting the gradual introduction of these topics onto the agenda.

[1] The improvement in data reporting coincides with the creation of the SIDICSS itself.

GRAPHIC 2.

Initiatives per category (percentage over the total)



Source: compiled based on the data from SIDICSS

- ***Main subcategories:***
  - ***In Biodiversity:*** the most frequent subcategories were Protected Areas, Sustainable Use of Natural Resources, and Watershed Management, while Marine Resources, Environmental Services, Environmental Monitoring and/or Enforcement, and Biotechnology represented less than half.
  - ***In Pollution:*** the majority of initiatives focused on Solid Waste Management, accounting for more than half, while topics such as Ocean Pollution, Air Pollution, and the management of toxic substances were far less common.
  - ***In Climate Change:*** the most common were projects and training focused on adaptation, the payment for environmental services (PES) approach, and initiatives related to measuring and reducing emissions, representing half of the total. However, it is a category covering a huge variety of themes and detailed information is lacking in many cases.
  - ***In Disaster Management:*** the initiatives in this category include projects mainly focused on earthquakes, as well as wildfires, floods, storms, and hurricanes, with an emphasis on training in risk management, disaster prevention, and response. It is also the category with the most significant lack of information on specific objectives.
- ***Cross-cutting topics:*** when exploring issues related to social participation and local stakeholders, a significantly low volume has been observed: only 17 initiatives report the involvement of local stakeholders, mainly municipalities, 9 mention social participation, and only 1 refers to indigenous communities.
- ***Other emerging topics:*** although to a lesser extent, topics such as climate change adaptation, CO2 emissions, sustainable cities, and food security are also the focus of some initiatives.

1.3. Analysis of the composition of first provider countries by topic

- ***Leadership of Mexico and Chile:*** Mexico and Chile, with 63 and 57 initiatives respectively, are the countries that have acted most as first providers, with projects primarily focused on Pollution and Disaster Management. Mexico, in particular, has worked with Japan and Germany as its main partners in the Global North, while Chile has mostly collaborated with Japan on Disaster Management issues.
- ***Brazil and diversity of topics:*** Brazil has been active with 39 initiatives, most notably Disaster Management and Biodiversity. Its cooperation with Japan has been broad and diverse, also covering issues such as Climate Change and Pollution.
- ***Costa Rica and Argentina:*** in these two countries, most of their initiatives have been focused on Biodiversity Conservation. Costa Rica has worked in particular with Spain and Germany, while Japan has been Argentina's main cooperation partner.
- ***Distribution of initiatives in Colombia:*** Colombia's 11 initiatives are mainly distributed across Disaster Management and Biodiversity, with its cooperation partners predominantly being Spain, Germany, and international organisations.
- ***Soft diplomacy and regional leadership:*** The analysis suggests that these Latin American countries are consolidating themselves as regional leaders in environmental cooperation, using the triangular modality to strengthen their influence at both the regional and global levels. Furthermore, their progress in key areas such as natural resource management and environmental conservation has supported their role as providers.

1.4. Analysis of the composition of recipient countries by topic

- ***Widespread trend in the region:*** although 34.5% of the initiatives have been training activities involving a wide range of recipients, this trend has decreased over the years. In fact, since 2020, a clear trend towards a higher number of projects instead of individual actions has been observed. This trend continued in 2023, reflecting an evolution in triangular cooperation towards more sustainable and structured commitments.
- ***Main recipient countries:*** Ecuador, Peru, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua are the main recipient countries, followed by Colombia, Haiti, Bolivia, and Honduras. These nations have been frequent recipients of projects rather than actions.

1.5. Analysis of the composition of second provider countries by topic

- ***Dominance of Japan, Germany and Spain:*** Japan leads as the second largest provider, with 45.5% of initiatives, particularly in disaster management. Germany and Spain follow with 17.1% and 12.6%, respectively, covering issues such as biodiversity, pollution, and climate change.
- ***Participation of international organisations:*** various multilateral organisations (IDB, CAF, FAO, UNDP, among others) participate in 10.5% of initiatives, complementing the efforts of countries from the Global North.
- ***Projects from the ADELANTE 2 Programme:*** this European programme has shown increasing participation since 2023, with several initiatives in areas such as management of protected areas and solid waste, in collaboration with countries such as Spain.

Title	Budget (€)	Countries	Main SDG	Second SDG	Subject	Source of funding
Sustainable and Resilient Construction in Central America and the Caribbean in the Face of Seismic Hazards: Regional Cooperation Based on Costa Rica's Experience	119.615	Costa Rica, Guatemala, Dominican Republic, Spain	11	9	Green transition, green recovery and decarbonization	Triangular Cooperation Fund European Union - Costa Rica - Latin America and the Caribbean
Bio-circular: value chains based on circular bioeconomy, opportunities for cocoa in Central America	112.390	Costa Rica, Honduras, Nicaragua, Italy, France	12	8	Green transition, green recovery and decarbonization	Triangular Cooperation Fund European Union - Costa Rica - Latin America and the Caribbean
Sustainable strengthening in implementing selective and environment friendly fishing programmes	96.990	Costa Rica, Peru, Spain	14	2	Green transition, green recovery and decarbonization	Triangular Cooperation Fund European Union - Costa Rica - Latin America and the Caribbean
World Agricultural Heritage Systems Alliance	158.157	Costa Rica, Honduras, Spain	8	15	Green transition, green recovery and decarbonization	Triangular Cooperation Fund European Union - Costa Rica - Latin America and the Caribbean
Technological transfer to Costa Rica's and Colombia's coffee and avocado producers to implement high quality and inexpensive inputs to promote sustainable agriculture	137.900	Costa Rica, Colombia, Sweden	12	2	Green transition, green recovery and decarbonization	Triangular Cooperation Fund European Union - Costa Rica - Latin America and the Caribbean
Strengthening the management of protected areas, environmental impact assessment and monitoring under authorisation in Costa Rica, Uruguay and Spain	177.879	Costa Rica, Uruguay, Spain	11	14	Environment	Triangular Cooperation Project Uruguay - European Union
YU RAYA: Energy and Light for Life	1.055.693	Honduras, Brazil, Germany	7	17	Energy	Instrument for Trilateral Cooperation Brazil - European Union - Germany

Title	Budget (€)	Countries	Main SDG	Second SDG	Subject	Source of funding
Study of the durability of materials in the face of climate change: atmospheric corrosion in areas of the Caribbean	96.015	Cuba, France, Mexico	11	10, 7	Climate change / Environment	Fund for Triangular Cooperation European Union - Cuba - Latin America and the Caribbean
Salt Flats Monitoring Information System	377.200	Argentina, Uruguay, Italy	6	13	Environment	Common Fund for Triangular Cooperation Chile - European Union
HV2: Green Hydrogen	253.376	Chile, Panama, the Netherlands	7	8	Energy	Common Fund for Triangular Cooperation Chile - European Union

- ***Changes in Germany's focus:*** a transition can be observed in the initiatives led by Germany, shifting from a focus on pollution (2006-2014) to biodiversity, climate change, and disaster management since 2016.

- ***Other European providers:*** France, Italy, Luxembourg, and Finland have also participated as second providers, addressing issues such as glacier management, wildfire prevention, and alternative development.

- ***South-South-South initiatives:*** Mexico and Uruguay have collaborated as second providers in some trilateral initiatives, particularly in disaster management and marine resource management, although these initiatives have been limited and not recent.

1.6. Analysis of the SDGs

- ***Focus on specific SDGs:*** despite the lack of data, 46% of the initiatives identified a strong focus on SDG 13 (Climate Action), which accounts for 29% of the initiatives (based on the available data). This is followed by SDG11 (Sustainable cities and communities) with 22% and SDG 15 (Life on land) with 20%.

- ***Least represented SDGs:*** initiatives focused on other SDGs, such as SDG 12 (Responsible consumption and production) and SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation), were less represented, while SDG 9 (Industry, innovation, and infrastructure), SDG 14 (Life below water), and others such as SDGs 1, 8, 4, and 7 were marginally represented, together accounting for the remaining 29%.

- ***Shortage of data on secondary SDGs:*** 78% of the initiatives did not report data on secondary SDGs, which limits the analysis in this area.

2 Survey analysis

2.1. Analysis of closed-ended questions

The survey was answered by **45 people** from **15 countries** in Ibero-America.

Of these people, the majority are coordinators or specialists in cooperation (35.7% and 31% respectively)[2] , with extensive experience in international cooperation (69%) and in TC (31%).

The most common areas of environmental specialisation in include climate change (50%), biodiversity (44%), water resource management (35%), and disaster management (32%).

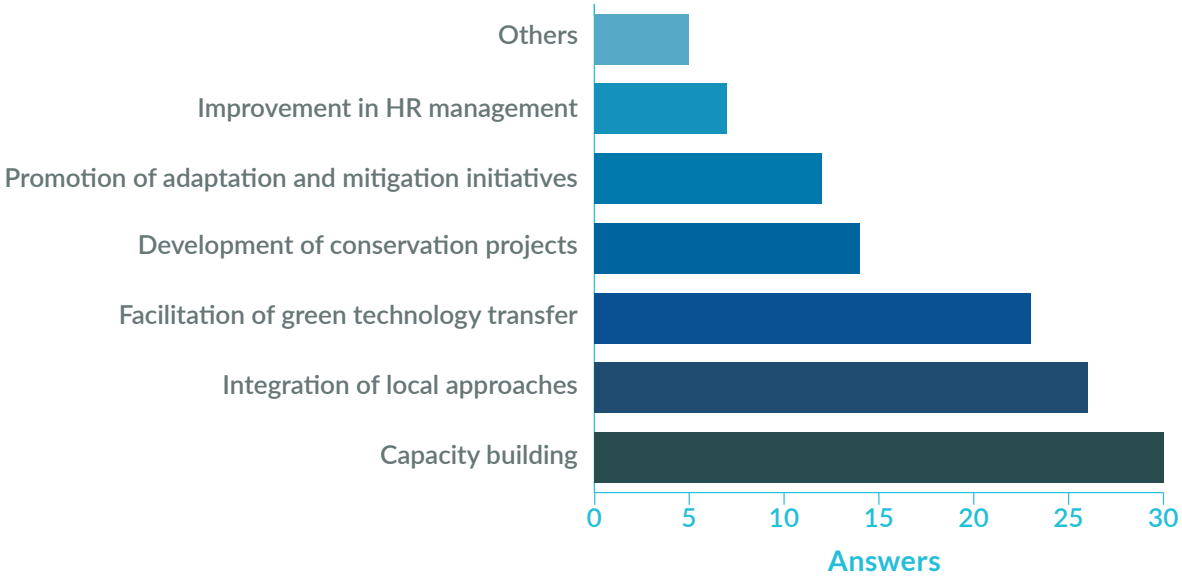
[2] Of the remaining participants, 11.9% are directors, 9.5% are technicians and 2.4% are analysts, researchers, assistant directors and advisors.

The main **motivations for Latin American countries to establish triangular partnerships** are, as expressed, the strengthening of local capabilities (85%), access to advanced technologies (62%), and opportunities for external funding (64%). Diversification of funding sources and diversification of areas of activity accounted for 38% and 16.7% respectively.

Regarding the **added value of TC** compared to other cooperation modalities, for the majority of respondents (71.4%), it primarily lies in capacity building; for 62%, it is in the integration of local and global approaches; and for 59%, in the transfer of green technologies. To a lesser extent, climate change adaptation and mitigation (28.6%) and the development of large-scale conservation and biodiversity projects (33.3%) were also considered as added value.

GRAPHIC 3.

Added Value of enviromental TC



Source: Compiled by the authors based on the survey 'Environmental Triangular Cooperation, 2024'.

In relation to the **main challenges of TC**, the majority of respondents (76%) mentioned financial constraints, 64% mentioned disparities in technical capabilities and approaches, and 47% mentioned difficulties in technology transfer. Coordination and communication between partners and harmonisation of approaches and standards were considered challenges for TC by 35.7% and 33.3% respectively.

In terms of **identifying good practices** to improve the effectiveness of TC, more than half (62%, 66% and 61% respectively) mentioned the strengthening of coordination between partners, cooperation between various stakeholders and the creation of knowledge-sharing platforms. 50% stressed the importance of monitoring and evaluation. To a lesser extent (28.6%), the importance of ensuring the participation of local communities was highlighted.

On how the historical evolution of EU-LAC TC is rated, the majority of respondents considered it positive (62%) or very positive (16.7%), while 19% took a neutral stance.

In relation to the most common mechanisms for initiating triangular partnerships, the application to calls for triangular / mixed / regional funds (71.4%) was mentioned as the most used mechanism. The second most common mechanism (57.1%) mentioned was joint committees or bilateral meetings. 35.7% mentioned that triangular partnerships are initiated in response to a direct request from the recipient partner, which would contribute to aligning initiatives with local needs. In the same proportion (35.7%), workshops were also mentioned as tools for initiating partnerships.[3]

With regard to how environmental TC projects are predominantly financed, triangular / mixed / regional funds were the most mentioned option (76.2%), then — to a lesser extent (47.6%) — technical and financial cooperation from traditional partners (suggesting that relationships with countries or institutions with previous experience in cooperation play an important role in providing both technical assistance and resources).

In terms of the types of stakeholders with whom respondents have most frequently collaborated, cooperation agencies (85.7%) were the most mentioned. This was followed by governments of other countries (71.4%) and then local governments (42.9%). [4] The private sector was not mentioned by any of the respondents.

With regard to the analysis of the most effective working mechanisms, joint financing was considered to be the most effective (71.4%). Training and technology transfer initiatives (66.7%) are the second most valued mechanism.

In terms of the most effective aspects, the majority (71.4%) pointed to the strengthening of local capabilities, followed by biodiversity conservation (61.9%) and sustainable management of natural resources (52.4%).[5]

Regarding the stakeholders considered most active and relevant for EU-LAC TC, government agencies were perceived as such by the majority (85.7%), followed by academic institutions (47.6%), both local and international non-governmental organisations (38.1%), and local governments (23.8%). Here too, private companies were not considered important.

In relation to which instruments are considered to require the most strengthening to improve environmental TC, funding mechanisms were the most mentioned option (85.7%). In second place (66.7%) came training and skill building. Monitoring and evaluation strategies (52.4%) were also mentioned, and to a lesser extent, coordination and communication platforms (47.6%).

With regard to the key areas considered strategic opportunities to strengthen EU-LAC TC, the promotion of innovation in clean energy (57.1%) appears as a priority, followed by the development of new conservation and sustainability initiatives (54.8%) and the strengthening of cooperation on climate change (50%). [6]

In terms of respondents' recommendations for improving EU-LAC TC, responses focused on improving coordination and alignment between partners (64.3%), followed by increasing funding amounts (57.1%) and promoting the active participation of local communities in projects and initiatives (57.1%). The establishment of clear

[3] To a lesser degree, the following were mentioned: dialogue with traditional partners (28.6%), academic collaboration programmes (14.3%), seed projects (28.6%), and conferences with traditional partners (7.1%).

[4] To a lesser extent, but still with a significant percentage, international organisations (33.3%), local and/or international NGOs (28.6%), and academic and research institutions (28.6%) were also mentioned.

[5] Disaster management (19%), reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (19%) and integrated management of Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) (4.8%) were the least mentioned.

[6] Although of lesser importance, the increase in collaboration on natural resource management (38.1%), the expansion of environmental education and training programmes (35.7%), and the promotion of cooperation in disaster management (28.6%) were also mentioned.

objectives and targets in environmental projects (42.9%) were also mentioned and, in similar percentages, the need to increase transparency in the funding and execution of projects (40.5%).

2.2. Analysis of open-ended questions

The survey shows that EU-LAC TC received a generally positive assessment, with particular emphasis on its historical development, which warrants further in-depth analysis. The strengthening of institutional and technical capabilities, as well as the promotion of environmental governance and citizen participation in decision-making for improved natural resource management, were also highly valued.

It was noted that the EU has driven the transformation of consumption and production systems towards a low-carbon model by establishing circular economy platforms that engage various sectors (public, private, academia, and civil society).

TC is seen as a valuable process for learning, knowledge exchange, and the development of documents, guides, and tools to expand this approach in the region.

Relevant initiatives and funds were mentioned, such as EUROCLIMA (EU), ARAUCLIMA (AECID), ADAPTATION (AFD), VENTANA ADELANTE, and the Regional Fund for TC (GIZ), which enable the sharing of experiences and conducting research in areas such as sustainable agriculture.

On challenges and areas for improvement, it was highlighted that, although generally positive, collaboration with the EU can sometimes be too strict or hierarchical; the importance of strengthening funding was underlined; and the fragmentation of programmes where multiple stakeholders work in isolation was pointed out, which makes it difficult to articulate and coordinate priorities. The need to coordinate efforts between government stakeholders and local governments to negotiate more effective projects and adequate funding was emphasised.

Conservation of species and ecosystems

The exchange of knowledge and experiences in SSC and Triangular allows, for example, to strengthen the social role of zoos as a key element in raising awareness of the biodiversity of countries. Image bank on South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Ibero-America. SEGIB-PIFCSS. 2022.

3 Results of the Interviews and Focus Groups

3.1. Trends in environmental TC

The responses highlighted that, despite the lower number of initiatives and funding compared to bilateral cooperation, there has been significant growth in its implementation in LA. This increase suggests a shift towards a more inclusive and collaborative approach, where countries act as active partners rather than merely recipients of aid.

Reciprocity is identified as a key factor in ensuring that all parties involved benefit equitably, which is fundamental in environmental projects that require sustained cooperation.

TC is considered well-positioned to address complex environmental issues, and it was highlighted that this modality is a perfect match between supply and demand, which is not common in other areas and modalities.

Although mainstreaming continues to be a challenge in the region, the growing need to integrate cross-cutting issues such as gender equity and sustainability into projects was mentioned, with the belief that empowering communities is crucial for this.

In several interviews, it was highlighted that, although TC has grown, the lack of complete information and documentation on projects limits visibility and the analysis of their impact, making it a significant challenge to institutionalise TC in the environmental field in LA.

Due to the increasing demand for funding for environmental projects, the need to adapt cooperation funds to the changing context and demands of recipient countries was emphasised. Although funds generally do not condition projects on environmental issues, these are recognised as relevant, which increases the number of projects in this sector.

Another aspect that was noted is that environmental TC is aligned with the priorities of key stakeholders such as Germany and the EU, who allocate resources and calls for proposals to this sector, playing a dominant role in defining project agendas.

3.2. Benefits of TC

- ***Knowledge sharing*** between Northern and Southern countries and empowering Southern countries to implement projects that respond to their local needs.
- ***Flexibility and adaptability*** of TC projects, allowing recipient partners to adjust them to their specific realities.
- ***Synchronisation*** of efforts between different stakeholders, avoiding duplication and optimising resources.
- ***Scalability:*** Triangular initiatives can be scaled up more quickly, thanks to the pre-existing trust and established networks from successful bilateral projects.
- ***Promotion of political dialogue,*** which emphasises horizontality and allows for innovative collaboration.
- ***Focus on global public goods,*** such as biodiversity and risk reduction, aligning efforts with global priorities.
- ***Exchange of best practices*** and successful experiences and adaptation of technologies, such as Germany's sustainable solutions.
- ***Greater commitment and accountability*** thanks to the active participation of countries, thereby ensuring long-term sustainability.

- ***Bidirectional approach:*** the ability of countries to act as both providers and recipients, promoting circular cooperation.

- ***Multi-sectoral collaboration:*** allows for a greater variety of participating stakeholders and better coordination between state and non-state actors, which is crucial for addressing the complexity of issues such as climate change.

- ***Strengthening South-South alliances,*** while leveraging the knowledge and technical expertise of Northern countries.

3.3. Types of projects and stakeholders involved

- ***Wide range of topics,*** including clean energy, natural resources, and sustainable tourism. The climate crisis has broadened the connection between nearly every topic and the environment.

- ***Preference of the private sector for projects with visible economic impact,*** which may limit its participation in environmental conservation initiatives that do not offer immediate economic benefits.

- ***High potential for TC in cross-border areas,*** where collaboration between countries can optimise resources and address common environmental challenges.

- ***Multi-stakeholder and multi-level nature:*** TC involves a variety of stakeholders, including local governments, the private sector, civil society and networks of municipalities. However, this multi-stakeholder involvement is not always consolidated.

- ***Public-Private Partnerships and networks of municipalities:*** key stakeholders in environmental TC, enabling greater cooperation between sectors.

- ***Raising awareness among national cooperation agencies and foreign ministries*** on the importance of involving local stakeholders, especially communities and civil society, in order to optimise projects.

- ***Resistance to TC:*** Although well accepted in multilateral forums, resistance persists in traditional bilateral cooperation, which limits the uptake of TC projects.

3.4. Best practices and success stories

- ***Importance of documenting success stories and best practices in environmental TC.*** The lack of formal documentation limits the ability to scale up these initiatives.

- ***Replicability*** of success stories: this is crucial for scaling up capabilities in other contexts, strengthening organisational capabilities and strategic alliances.

- ***Importance of increasing the volume of cooperation and improving monitoring mechanisms*** to assess the long-term impact of projects.

- ***Long-term sustainability:*** Short-term success does not guarantee sustainable results. External factors, such as political or economic changes, may affect the continuity of projects. It is important to implement mechanisms for continuous evaluation and adaptability to ensure that initial success is sustained over time.

- ***Leveraging Resources:*** would facilitate the participation of more countries in global environmental projects.

- ***Cooperation between state and non-state stakeholders:*** this has made it possible to address complex environmental issues, with a prominent role played by TC in facilitating collaboration between provincial and national governments.

3.5. Challenges and limitations

- ***Sustained funding over time:*** there is a growing demand for projects, but also limitations in the capacity to respond due to limited financial resources, requiring more effective strategies for fundraising.

- ***High transaction costs.***

- ***Coordination to avoid duplication of efforts.***

- ***Fund management*** in TC needs to adapt to changing national and international contexts.

- ***Importance of evaluation and monitoring processes.***

- ***Lack of regional TC frameworks in LA.***

4 Recommendations and opportunities for EU-LAC TC on the environment

4.1. Recommendations

- Promote regional platforms and dialogue between funding mechanisms to enhance coordination among stakeholders and agencies, facilitating communication and synchronisation while avoiding duplication of efforts.
- Capitalise on the interest of international stakeholders, such as the EU.
- Learn from the experience of other donors.
- Promote more flexible methodologies and rules for a more horizontal relationship between partners.
- Increase the volume of TC, diversify funding sources and ensure adequate and sustainable funding.
- Implement mechanisms to reduce transaction costs, simplify administrative processes and improve efficiency in project management.

Protection of biodiversity in Latin America

Colombia and Costa Rica are working on the protection and conservation of biodiversity and marine and coastal resources that make up the protected areas of the Marine Corridor of the Eastern Tropical Pacific. Image bank on South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Ibero-America. SEGIB-PIFCSS. 2022.

- Create repositories and platforms for exchanging best practices and lessons learned, dedicating resources to evaluate past projects, document success stories, and share experiences to adjust and improve the planning, execution, and effectiveness of future projects.
- Focus on processes where Southern countries are the protagonists, avoiding top-down cooperation formulas.
- Promote TC on issues related to adaptation to the Green Deal, in other words, focused on the regulatory and sectoral adaptation of LAC to Europe's new environmental regulations.
  Launch calls for proposals on specific themes.
- Increasing the visibility of TC and "TC pedagogy".
- Strengthen technical capabilities.
- Strengthen the link between agriculture and the environment.
- Map opportunities and create database of funds for the countries in the region.
- Strengthen cross-cutting topics.
- Promote the strengthening of the regulatory frameworks of LAC in TC.

4.2. Relevant topics and opportunities

- Promote Public-Private Partnerships.
- Explore new financing mechanisms, such as development banks and investment funds.
- Accelerate the economic viability of green hydrogen projects.
- Approach smart city projects on a larger scale.
- Promote ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA).
- Promote citizen science or co-science.
- Promote projects in border and cross-border areas.
- Develop sustainable value chains.
- Explore innovative mechanisms that combine public and private resources to promote sustainable development, such as green bonds, blue bonds, and other topic-specific bonds.
- Address the issues of the lithium triangle and the conservation of water sources.
- Promote sustainable agriculture.

5 Final thoughts

The analysed data shows that bi-regional environmental TC is strongly focused on strengthening capabilities in priority areas such as waste management, marine resource protection, water resource management, biodiversity conservation, and disaster management. It also serves as an effective platform for the transfer of technology and innovative knowledge, since collaboration between countries with different levels of development enables the introduction of solutions that adapt international innovations to local contexts.

In the EU-LAC context, countries such as Germany, Spain, Luxembourg and Portugal, recognised for their experience and institutional capacity in the field of international cooperation, have promoted TC initiatives. Similarly, countries such as Chile, Mexico, and Brazil are notable key partners, while Costa Rica, Colombia, and Argentina are also establishing themselves in this landscape, offering their capabilities and fostering the exchange of experiences and knowledge in TC within the region.

Community leaders and species protection

Panama and El Salvador share experiences on environmental protection in Los Andes Forest Park (San Miguelito, Panama). Image bank on South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Ibero-America. SEGIB-PIFCSS. 2022.

Despite its enormous potential, EU-LAC TC still faces several challenges that limit its long-term effectiveness. These include high transaction costs within a framework of often limited resources and the lack of a systematisation of information on initiatives, hindering proper monitoring and evaluation, which in turn compromises future improvements. In this regard, it is important to increase TC funding, as well as fundraising and mobilisation efforts and, equally important, to continue strengthening the institutional framework for TC between the two regions and enhance evaluation efforts with a medium- and long-term perspective.

Furthermore, the unequal participation of countries and stakeholders can impact the equity and effectiveness of TC projects. Countries with fewer resources or capabilities may face challenges in fully participating and benefiting from this approach. It is important to ensure that all participants have equal opportunities to contribute to and benefit from the initiatives.

Another obstacle is the bureaucratic and administrative complexity inherent in multilateral organisations and the TC mechanisms themselves, which can reduce both the quality and effectiveness of the projects. Linked to this, the limited duration of projects makes it difficult to consolidate long-term sustainable results, especially in projects focused on political advocacy or institutional transformation.

There is also the question of the leadership of some partners such as Germany and Spain. While the experience and management capabilities of these countries are undeniable, there is a risk that this leadership is based on historical relationships that do not necessarily reflect the current priorities of LAC. The involvement of other EU members in the leadership of these projects could diversify and enrich the initiatives, preventing the concentration of power and resources in a limited number of stakeholders. The same applies to LA countries that are leading first providers, such as Chile, Mexico and Brazil.

The limited involvement of non-traditional sectors, such as the private sector, civil society, sub-national governments, local communities, is also a challenge. Although the TC framework allows for their inclusion, in practice these entities are not always sufficiently integrated, suggesting that the communication strategy should be strengthened, more spaces for participation should be opened to these stakeholders, and government bodies, mostly from the national administration, should be made aware of the importance of their inclusion in environmental TC initiatives. The involvement of a greater diversity of partners could bring resources, capabilities and innovative approaches to projects.

Particularly with regard to local communities, it is important to clarify that social participation is a long-standing issue across all cooperation modalities; therefore, SSC and TC are no exceptions. Although these modalities represent an alternative with greater horizontality among partners, in general, this horizontality does not extend to local stakeholders, particularly in the case of local communities.

Looking to the future, it is important to highlight that TC is the springboard towards a horizon that extends beyond triangulation, embracing more complex alliances that involve a greater number of stakeholders and multiple roles, in dual, bidirectional, or even circular movements. To a large extent, the characteristics that TC between the EU and LAC currently adopts will contribute to shaping future modalities and its capacity to continue proposing alternatives towards a fairer and more equitable system of cooperation, and towards a sustained structural transformation.

Environmental Triangular Cooperation as a tool for the bi-regional alliance between the European Union and Latin America

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