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FOURTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

ILO South–South and triangular cooperation and decent work: Recent developments and future steps

Purpose of the document

This document reports on the implementation of the ILO South–South and triangular cooperation (SSTC) strategy adopted by the Governing Body in March 2012, and proposes future SSTC steps, with a view to informing the forthcoming general discussion on effective development cooperation in support of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the 107th Session (2018) of the International Labour Conference. The decision requests the Office to take into account the initial guidance provided in the current Governing Body discussion on SSTC, as well as the recommendations for future steps, in the forthcoming general discussion on effective development cooperation in support of the SDGs at the 107th Session (2018) of the International Labour Conference (see draft decision in paragraph 23).

Relevant strategic objective: All.

Main relevant outcome/cross-cutting policy driver: Enabling outcome A: Effective knowledge management for the promotion of decent work.

Policy implications: Enhanced SSTC cooperation and implementation of SSTC requirements in the programme and budget.

Legal implications: None.

Financial implications: None.

Follow-up action required: Inputs to the International Labour Conference discussion.

Author unit: Partnerships and Field Support Department (PARDEV).

Related documents: GB.313/POL/7; GB.316/POL/5; GB.325/POL/6.

I. Introduction

1. The United Nations (UN) defines South–South cooperation (SSC) as a process whereby two or more developing countries pursue their individual and/or shared national capacity development objectives through exchanges of knowledge, skills, resources and technical know-how, and through regional and interregional collective action, including partnerships involving governments, regional organizations, civil society, academia and the private sector, for their individual and/or mutual benefit within and across regions. South–South cooperation is not a substitute for, but rather a complement to, North–South cooperation. The SSC agenda is guided by the principles of respect for national sovereignty and ownership, equality, solidarity, non-conditionality, and mutual benefit.¹
2. Triangular cooperation refers to South–South cooperation supported by a northern partner.² South–South and triangular cooperation (SSTC) is today a significant modality of development cooperation, based on financial and non-financial exchanges among parties.
3. The Governing Body has discussed the topic on several occasions. In March 2012, the Governing Body endorsed the paper “South–South and triangular cooperation: The way forward”,³ making the ILO the first UN agency with a dedicated strategy. In November 2012, the Governing Body revised the SSTC indicators and, in November 2015, the Governing Body discussed the updated ILO Development Cooperation Strategy 2015–17,⁴ which further stressed the importance of SSTC, and agreed to continue the 2012 strategy.
4. As evidenced by successive programme and budget documents, and the accompanying allocation of resources, the Office has placed particular emphasis on SSTC as a vehicle for achieving the Organization’s objectives and as an effective means of capacity development. Implementation of the SSTC strategy adopted in the programme and budget, guidance from the Governing Body, and the implementation of the SSTC programme have provided valuable experience. SSTC has acted as a catalyst, underpinning development cooperation programmes and stimulating new initiatives.

II. Background

5. Within the UN system, the role of SSC is well recognized as an important component of the international cooperation towards the achievement of multilaterally agreed development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SSTC has been an important part of the work undertaken by the United Nations development system, and has been the subject of technical work, policy discussions within the UN General Assembly, and the High-level Committee on South–South Cooperation. In view of the forthcoming general discussion on effective development cooperation in support of the SDGs, to be held at the International Labour Conference in 2018, it is timely to learn from SSTC practices that support development cooperation in pursuit of decent work, with a view to their possible reinforcement and expansion.

¹ Framework of operational guidelines on United Nations support to South–South and triangular cooperation, SSC/17/3, paras 8, 9, 10 and 16.

² [GB.313/POL/7](#), para. 3(c).

³ [GB.313/POL/7](#).

⁴ [GB.325/POL/6](#).

6. SSTC has been marked by a number of important milestones. In 1974, the UN General Assembly established a special unit to promote technical cooperation among developing countries, later to become the UN Office for South–South Cooperation (UNOSSC). In addition, 138 ministers of foreign affairs of the Group of 77 and China convened in Argentina in 1978 to adopt the Buenos Aires Plan of Action for Promoting and Implementing Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (BAPA). The BAPA will be reviewed at an event in Buenos Aires in March 2019 (BAPA+40). In 1980 the UN General Assembly established the High-level Committee on the Review of Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries, renamed in 2003 the High-level Committee on South–South Cooperation. In 2005, UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/60/212 of 22 December 2005 urged all relevant UN agencies to intensify their efforts and allocate resources to mainstream the use of SSC, while welcoming initiatives and partnerships between developing countries. In 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the 2030 Agenda) highlighted the importance of SSTC under Goal 17 on partnerships, target 17.9 in particular. The invigoration of SSC was considered in the report of the UN Secretary-General in 2017 on the repositioning of the UN development system, following a discussion on SSC in the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system.
7. The importance of SSTC is also emphasized in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030,⁵ the Paris Agreement,⁶ and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.⁷ Additional guidance was also provided by the declarations and summits of the Group of 77 and China, India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA), Brazil, the Russian Federation, India, China and South Africa (BRICS), and the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation.⁸ This is complementary to processes under the Development Cooperation Forum of the UN Economic and Social Council and a wide range of UN resolutions on the topic.
8. In 2010, the IBSA⁹ ministries of foreign affairs signed an agreement with the ILO with the goal of further developing and promoting SSTC, in order to contribute effectively to the implementation of the Decent Work Agenda. This agreement was followed by a declaration of intent, signed in 2012, to intensify and further enhance policy dialogue and exchanges between IBSA countries and the ILO.
9. The UNOSSC ensures the coordination of SSTC within the UN system. Some 30 UN funds, programmes and agencies have set up SSTC units, programmes and strategies. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), for example, formulated a new SSTC strategy to address the SDG context; the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) operates an SSC and resource mobilization division; the World Health Organization operates a cooperation among countries programme for health development in the Americas; the three Rome-based agencies (the World Food Programme, the FAO and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)) announced an alignment of

⁵ Paragraphs 44–45, http://www.ifrc.org/docs/IDRL/Sendai_Framework_for_Disaster_Risk_Reduction_2015-2030.pdf.

⁶ Paragraph 4 and others, https://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/convention/application/pdf/english_paris_agreement.pdf.

⁷ Outcome document of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2051AAAA_Outcome.pdf.

⁸ See <http://effectivecooperation.org/>.

⁹ India–Brazil–South Africa Dialogue Forum.

South–South strategies; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) established an international science, technology and innovation centre for South–South cooperation; the United Nations Industrial Development Organization runs two centres for South–South industrial cooperation, in India and China; and the World Bank Institute created a South–South experience exchange facility as a multi-partner trust fund that enables the sharing of knowledge and development experience.

III. SSTC in the ILO

10. The ILO engages in SSTC through its tripartite structures in terms of the identification, documentation and dissemination of good practices; the facilitation of exchanges and peer-to-peer learning approaches; knowledge sharing between the social partners and other actors through multi-stakeholder partnerships; brokering agreements and memoranda of understanding; and sharing good practices.
11. The ILO cooperates with the UN system on SSTC, including the UNOSSC. The ILO has established SSTC partnerships with the Group of 77 and China, the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP), the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), parliamentarians from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), the g7+ group of fragile states, the South Centre, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the UN Research Institute for Social Development, the United Nations Environment Programme, the UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), and the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy.

Implementation of the ILO SSTC strategy 2012–17

12. The SSTC strategy adopted in March 2012 seeks to achieve two outcomes measured by three indicators. Outcome 1 related to greater awareness and capacity on SSTC, and outcome 2 related to the wider engagement of the ILO’s tripartite constituency and civil society in SSTC.
13. In pursuit of the first outcome of the ILO SSTC Strategy, the Organization used the potential offered by SSTC to advance the Decent Work Agenda, generating the capacity to identify and implement SSTC by drawing on its tripartite constituency experience and needs. Initiatives under this outcome have included the following:
 - In cooperation with the ILO’s International Training Centre (Turin Centre), in 2016 the Office organized the first ever SSTC Academy, which trained 300 staff and ILO constituents. Moreover, the ILO integrated SSTC into the Social and Solidarity Economy Academy sessions held in Turin over the past five years, the Green Economy Academy (2016), city-to-city cooperation seminars, and global, regional and local economic development forums (2017). As a result, over 1,000 experts were provided with training on tools and policy guidance over two biennia.
 - Another aspect of the ILO strategy was peer-learning support through engagement in the Global South–South Development Expo (GSSD). In that regard, the ILO also facilitated the engagement of constituents from the Global South to provide them with the opportunity to exchange good practices on SSTC at both ILO and other forums, organized by the UNOSSC.

- Regarding knowledge management, the ILO maintains an SSTC portal,¹⁰ and helped launch a South–South virtual meeting point,¹¹ which provides access to a wealth of knowledge and resources related to SSTC and decent work. It has managed communications through “regional learning journeys” on development cooperation for ILO staff. Finally, between 2012 and 2017, the Office published over 200 reports, books, e-learning tools, how-to guides,¹² and manuals covering different aspects and thematic areas of SSTC.¹³

Table I. Outcome 1 of the SSTC strategy: Results by indicators of achievement

Indicators	2012–13	2014–15	2016–17
Number of new ILO programmes in which SSTC initiatives have been established and implemented. ¹	Four new programmes – city-to-city cooperation; SSTC and the social and solidarity economy; the Global Labour University; SSTC for the implementation of gender-sensitive social protection floors at the country level.	Five new programmes – SSTC and child labour; fragile-to-fragile cooperation; SSTC and local economic development; a Brazil-funded project for combating child labour and forced labour in the cotton sector; creation of the South–South Meeting Point.	Five new programmes – the SSTC Academy; SSTC and migration; SSTC and skills development; SSTC in support of green jobs; SSTC in support of social protection.
Number of additional countries and intergovernmental organizations that, with ILO support, integrate SSTC as part of their strategies for programme implementation. ²	Six new countries – China, Mauritania, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Senegal; three new intergovernmental organizations: UCLG; the CPLP; the Union for the Mediterranean.	Five new countries – Algeria, Guatemala, Mexico, Morocco, Togo; four intergovernmental organizations: g7+; the Global Labour University; IFAD; the World Council of Churches.	Three new countries – Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia; three new organizations: UNITAR; Citi-Habitat; ³ Caritas Internationalis. ⁴

¹ Target: two new programmes per biennium. ² Target: five additional countries and two additional intergovernmental organizations. ³ See <http://citihabitat.cv/> [only available in Portuguese]. ⁴ See <http://www.caritas.org/>.

14. The second outcome of the ILO strategy concerned the advancement of the Decent Work Agenda through SSTC, towards the engagement of an increasing number of governments, social partners, UN agencies and non-state actors. The ILO secured solid accomplishments under this outcome through the following initiatives:

- During the period 2012–17, the Office concluded or renewed SSTC partnerships with 27 countries;¹⁴ with support from partners from the North.

¹⁰ See <http://www.ilo.org/pardev/partnerships/south-south/lang--en/index.htm>.

¹¹ See <http://www.southsouthpoint.net/>.

¹² See http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---exrel/documents/publication/wcms_315233.pdf.

¹³ An up-to-date list may be accessed [here](#).

¹⁴ Algeria, Angola, Argentina, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Cambodia, China, Guatemala, Haiti, India, Kuwait, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Mauritania, Mexico, Morocco, Mozambique, Panama, Paraguay, the Philippines, Qatar, the Russian Federation, Senegal, Singapore, South Africa, the United Republic of Tanzania, Tunisia, and Turkey.

- With renewed focus on regional, subregional and interregional cooperation, the ILO entered into operational partnerships with various organizations engaged in SSTC such as BRICS, IBSA, g7+, the CPLP, MERCOSUR, the Pacific Community, ASEAN, ECOWAS and UN regional economic commissions, and developed the basis for a regional SSTC facility in Africa based on tripartite consultations.
- The capacity of the social partners to engage with SSTC has been supported progressively, with the Office facilitating cooperation between trade unions and employers' organizations from the Global South; in particular through technical support provided by the Global Labour University programme and the ILO Global Business and Disability Network, and by promoting the governance dialogue of the Future of Work Initiative in the GSSD and cooperating with the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) to promote SSTC among trade unions in Asia and the Pacific.
- The ILO has supported SSTC partnerships with parliamentarians, faith-based organizations, non-governmental organizations and civil society at the national, regional and global levels.

Table II. Outcome 2 of the SSTC strategy: Results by indicators of achievement

Indicator	2012–13	2014–15	2016–17
Number of additional or renewed partnerships in which SSTC contributes to advancing the Decent Work Agenda (total value of US\$43.42 million for the three biennia) *.	Three renewed partnerships with Brazil, and four new partnerships with China, Kuwait, Panama, and the IBSA Fund.	Four renewed partnerships with Brazil, Kuwait, Panama, Singapore, and two new partnerships with Algeria and the ACFTU.	Five renewed partnerships with China, Kuwait, Panama, the Russian Federation and Singapore, and one new partnership with Qatar.

* Target: at least five new partnership agreements per year in the current biennium.

Regional highlights in SSTC 2016–17

Americas: SSTC has been extended through the Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labour Regional Initiative, as well as projects funded by Brazil on combating forced labour in the cotton sector, migration and green jobs. It also features in the South–South Cooperation Project for the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers in Latin America and the Caribbean region, and in continued support for SSC between Mexico and Guatemala in respect of migrant labour rights. In addition, the Inter-American Centre for Knowledge Development in Vocational Training (CINTERFOR), set up by the ILO in Montevideo, serves as an SSC institution for the Americas. In March 2014, with technical support from SENAI, Brazil, a CARICOM–ACS–ILO initiative was carried out for projecting skills requirements in tourism.

Africa: In May 2017, ILO constituents in the African region adopted the ILO Framework for Action on South–South Cooperation for Decent Work in Africa to advance decent work within the context of the 2030 Agenda and the African Union’s Agenda 2063. The framework provides for the creation of an African South–South cooperation coordination facility. SSTC between Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa has been growing since 2005, especially in the field of combating child labour, including in its worst forms, as well as within the CPLP.

Arab States: Complementing a development project on establishing an independent social security institution for the administration of the new social security system for private sector workers and their family members in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, study tours have been organized to foster peer-learning approaches through exchanges of experiences with Jordan, Algeria and Oman.

Asia and the Pacific: The Office supported the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in developing the Kathmandu Declaration (2014) on labour migration, which resulted in the SAARC Plan of Action on Labour Migration (2016), and the ASEAN tripartite plus forum on the protection of the rights of migrant workers. Furthermore, the ILO and China facilitated regional learning among China and ASEAN countries, including knowledge sharing on employment services among ASEAN+3 countries, built on the lessons of the ILO–China SSTC project to expand employment services and enhance labour market information in Cambodia and the Lao People’s Democratic Republic.

Europe and Central Asia: Peer-learning approaches involving a partnership with LUKOIL have stimulated the sharing of good practices between the Russian Federation and Central Asian countries and provided skills development for youth employment. SSC has also supported Central Asia on the green jobs front: Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia have been partner countries in the Partnership for Action on Green Economy since 2016 and 2013 respectively.

IV. Achieving the ILO’s policy outcomes: Good practices in SSTC

15. The allocation of US\$1.7 million for SSTC in the Programme and Budget for 2016–17 contributed to all ten ILO policy outcomes. For example, in achieving outcome 1 of the programme and budget, peer-learning initiatives on skills development were implemented in the Netherlands, among North African countries and in Spain, and technical support was provided in the framework of GSSD on the topic of youth employment. Under outcome 2, the ILO provided support in the integration of normative approaches and the implementation of international labour standards in the UN multi-stakeholder group on SSTC, the training of CPLP judges, and in capacity building for the implementation of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) and the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138).
16. Regarding social protection (outcome 3), the China–ASEAN–ILO High-level Seminar to achieve the SDGs on Universal Social Protection through SSTC facilitated the sharing of good practices and support for the extension of social protection in ASEAN countries. The UNOSSC worked jointly with the ILO on a gender-sensitive initiative for the promotion of social protection floors in Africa and Asia, with support from China and Brazil. In pursuit of outcomes 4, 5 and 6, the ILO, together with the Turin Centre, designed SSTC gender-sensitive modules for academies and training courses on sustainable enterprises, rural development and the formalization of the informal economy, the social and solidarity economy, and green jobs.

17. Cross-country exchanges within the Arab region were fostered on labour inspection and occupational safety and health (OSH), and a study tour was organized for Palestinian constituents to the United Arab Emirates to learn from its experience of automating the labour inspection OSH database (outcome 7). In achieving outcome 8, SSTC was used to combat unacceptable forms of child labour and forced labour between Brazil and Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa. SSTC also contributed to developing labour migration policies (outcome 9) when the Office convened an interregional consultation on labour migration from Asia and Africa to the Middle East, which brought together tripartite constituents, civil society organizations and academia, and resulted in agreed policy recommendations for fair labour migration. Finally, and to contribute to the achievement of outcome 10, scholarships were provided for representatives of the social partners from the Global South to engage in international forums and academies on various topics related to the world of work, in order to strengthen their capacity to realize the Decent Work Agenda.
18. The ILO's SSTC programme has also contributed to the implementation of the ILO flagship programmes. The extension of social protection was supported by Algeria with the creation of a higher school of social security, which provides scholarships for African countries and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The Brazil–Peru–United States initiative is a key flagship of triangular cooperation that contributes to the achievement to the IPEC+ flagship programme on child and forced labour. The Jobs for Peace and Resilience programme was promoted through support for g7+ countries, the launch of fragile-to-fragile cooperation initiatives, experience-sharing platforms for Syrian refugees and host countries in the Middle East, and by providing input to several Turin Centre academies. The Better Work programme benefited from complementary support provided by an IBSA-funded project in Haiti, while the OSH flagship programme was supported by SSTC through the training of labour inspectors in the Americas and in CPLP countries.
19. Lastly, the SSTC programme was instrumental to the participation of representatives from developing countries in a recent dialogue on work in society at the Turin Centre in 2017, providing inputs and support to the related publication.

V. Future steps to expand the ILO's involvement in SSTC

20. In the SDG context, SSTC offers a strategic approach for people of the South and the North to work together, providing opportunities for triangular cooperation, peer learning, and knowledge exchange. The ILO Development Cooperation Strategy will benefit from an expanded SSTC strategy. The examples given in this report show the adaptability to the needs and context of SSTC, including the ability to combine resources in a cost-efficient manner.
21. The ILO will expand its active role in UN inter-agency processes that involve SSTC such as the GSSD, the South–South chapter of the Partnership for Action on Green Economy, the UN multi-stakeholder task force on SSC, and the UN High-level Committee on South–South Cooperation, in order to ensure that the Decent Work Agenda is properly reflected in such processes and to leverage support for the achievement of the ILO's policy outcomes.
22. An expanded SSTC programme would, in particular, aim at:
 - advancing the Decent Work Agenda through the engagement of an increased number of governments, social partners, UN agencies and non-state actors in the context of the ILO's Strategic Policy Framework, as well as the Future of Work Initiative and the flagship programmes;

- addressing current challenges, such as developing a capacity to address emerging needs and trends in international cooperation and cross-regional peer learning swiftly;
- strengthening the awareness and capacity of ILO constituents and partners, in order to implement SSTC programmes under the framework of the ILO Development Cooperation Strategy;
- supporting the achievement of regional ILO and UN initiatives through SSTC's comparative advantage in facilitating peer learning and exchanges of knowledge, information and practices to achieve the SDGs;
- promoting the Decent Work Agenda in UN system-wide consultations related to the forthcoming Second High-level United Nations Conference on South–South Cooperation (BAPA+40, Argentina, 2019);
- contributing to the advancement of the ILO's strategic framework and flagship programmes through regional, subregional and interregional programming, networking, joint learning and mutual capacity development and of regional facilities for SSTC;
- contributing to the Fragile-to-Fragile cooperation initiative (F2F cooperation). Given the ILO's experience in successfully promoting and expanding SSTC, the Organization would be well positioned to offer valuable insights on consultation and policy processes to countries in fragile situations. The ILO could expand and reinforce exchanges among countries and facilitate peer learning among developing and least developed countries and countries in fragile situations, as well as g7+ members, with a focus on F2F cooperation as per the recommendations of earlier Governing Body discussions.¹⁵
- increasing SSTC support to cooperation between least developed countries and small island developing states, in the spirit of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–20; and
- widening the scope of SSTC, in areas where it has proven its worth, such as local economic development, city-to-city cooperation, and support for the social and solidarity economy, and with the private sector, to support southern-driven partnerships and initiatives in the world of work.

Draft decision

23. The Governing Body requests the Office:

- (a) taking into account the recommended future steps above, to further develop the implementation of the South–South and triangular cooperation strategy as stated in the Programme and Budget for 2018–19;*
- (b) to consider the initial guidance provided in the current Governing Body discussion on South–South and triangular cooperation in the forthcoming general discussion on effective development cooperation in support of the Sustainable Development Goals at the 107th Session (2018) of the International Labour Conference.*

¹⁵ [GB.331/INS/4/2](#), paragraph 40.