



Task Force 6
Accelerating SDGs: Exploring New
Pathways to the 2030 Agenda



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ACCELERATING SDG IMPLEMENTATION THROUGH TRIANGULAR COOPERATION: A ROADMAP FOR THE G20

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The image features a white rectangular area centered on a solid red background. In the top-left corner of the white area, there are several overlapping, semi-transparent shapes in shades of red and orange, resembling stylized leaves or petals. The word "Abstract" is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font, centered horizontally within the white area.

Abstract



The G20 brings together the world's largest development cooperation providers from both the 'developed' and the 'developing' world, and thus offers an important space for recalibrating the road towards implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This policy brief^a argues that G20 countries should join hands to promote triangular cooperation as a modality for mobilising material, symbolic, and ideational resources across continents, political ideologies, and development trajectories. This policy brief suggests

that the G20 should (i) establish a matchmaking mechanism to identify triangular cooperation opportunities among its members; (ii) set up a trust fund for triangular cooperation at the United Nations; (iii) establish a stakeholder forum for triangular partnerships where state and non-state actors can discuss priorities and engage with G20 support schemes; and (iv) combine the reporting and evaluation capacities across G20 countries to monitor whether and how triangular schemes contribute to the implementation of the SDGs.


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The Challenge



1




The 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a globally agreed framework for development cooperation efforts. Due to several—mostly human-induced—hazards, however, the implementation of this multilateral agenda is under pressure. Challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, have contributed to undermining global development efforts. SDG implementation has been slowed down and has even seen a reversal in some cases.¹ According to the United Nations (UN) High-Level Political Forum, even before the onset of the pandemic, the SDGs were not on track to be reached by 2030.² The 2022 edition of the UN SDG Progress Chart reveals the deterioration of progress towards a range of targets, including those focusing on food security, employment and biodiversity loss.³ In addition to and often coupled with the social and economic crises induced by the pandemic, other factors have also negatively impacted SDG implementation. They include not only (increasingly frequent) extreme weather events and natural disasters, such as recent floods in Bangladesh and Pakistan or earthquakes in Turkey and Syria, but also the global economic

consequences of the war in Ukraine that undermine the global fight against hunger.⁴ Against this backdrop, all available resources and cooperation modalities need to be mobilised in order to advance SDG implementation and prepare the ground for a post-2030 development agenda.

A Tool to Accelerate SDG Implementation: Triangular Cooperation

SDG 17 focuses on the means of implementation for the 2030 Agenda and presents several cooperation modalities. One of them is triangular cooperation.⁵ According to the UN, triangular cooperation centres on collaboration among Southern countries supported by multilateral bodies and/or Northern donors.⁶ Stakeholders at the Global Partnership Initiative for Effective Triangular Cooperation have recently put forward a complementary definition that takes a broader approach to the potentially evolving roles and functions of at least three cooperation partners: the beneficiary seeks support to tackle a specific development challenge in which the so-called pivotal partner has proven experience and shares its resources, knowledge and



expertise, while facilitating partners help connect beneficiaries and pivotal partners through financial and/or technical support. This broader take on triangular cooperation also explicitly includes non-state actors such as civil society organisations and private sector companies as partners.⁷

Triangular cooperation offers a concrete means to move beyond entrenched North–South logics by not only creating partnerships with unusual composition but also recalibrating—at least in theory—the roles and positions of cooperation partners.⁸ Triangular cooperation lends itself to a strong emphasis on mutual learning and multi-directional exchanges, moving beyond unidirectional transfer of resources and knowledge from ‘developed’ to ‘developing’ countries. It not only offers support for low(er)-income countries but can also circle back and inform SDG-related policies for all partners involved, including high(er)-income countries.⁹


The central proposition of triangular cooperation is leveraging synergies from players across the development spectrum in order to provide a better response to global, regional and partner country challenges. It thus provides an

avenue for states, international bodies, civil society organisations, private sector companies, philanthropic entities and others to jointly create—often flexible and cost-effective—solutions for advancing towards SDG implementation.

Putting Triangular Cooperation to Use: The Triple Challenge of Knowledge, Political Will and Funding

Triangular cooperation is already an integral—if still comparatively small—part of the development cooperation landscape.¹⁰ As highlighted by the outcome document of the Second High-Level UN Conference on South-South Cooperation (BAPA+40) in 2019, triangular cooperation has gained political prominence in global development debates among both Northern donors and Southern development partners.¹¹ So far, however, the effective use of triangular cooperation as a modality has been hampered by at least three factors: a lack of knowledge, political will and funding.

First, most development cooperation institutions—across North–South, donor–recipient or public–private divides—have at best a rudimentary idea



of the concrete contours and strategic potential of triangular cooperation. If at all, their engagement with the modality is limited and usually part of a piecemeal approach where small and isolated initiatives unfold without mobilising synergies, and without systematically learning from past experiences.¹²

Second, there has so far been limited political will to promote triangular cooperation at different administrative and executive levels. While a small and growing group of dedicated practitioners across the UN, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), regional bodies and a number of Northern and Southern governments has tried to champion the modality,¹³ the majority of officials and decision makers continue to put a strong and often exclusive focus on bilateral—and to a more limited extent, multilateral—cooperation. Often brushed aside as a new or “niche” modality,¹⁴ triangular cooperation requires a larger number of more emphatic advocates in order to unlock its full potential.

Third, and inherently linked to the lack of knowledge and political support, the financial resources dedicated to triangular cooperation globally have been limited.¹⁵ A lack of funding means that triangular cooperation projects often have to operate with short timeframes and at a limited scale. It also undermines attempts to show how triangular schemes can generate more equal relations between partners as well as combined partnership and development results.¹⁶ Ultimately, the lack of resources contributes to reinforcing the impression that triangular cooperation projects generate limited impact, and that there is no need to learn from past triangular cooperation experiences or make it a future priority.


Addressing the different dimensions of this triple challenge—the lack of knowledge, political will and funding—in a conjoint and holistic manner is set to free a considerable degree of untapped potential for triangular cooperation that can be put to use for accelerating SDG implementation.



The G20's Role

2






The G20 brings together the world's largest development cooperation providers from both the 'developed' and the 'developing' world and thus offers an important space for recalibrating the road towards SDG implementation. By connecting development partners from the North that are members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee with other (often increasingly active) providers, most of them from the South¹⁷—notably Brazil, China and India as well as Argentina, Indonesia, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and Turkey¹⁸—the G20 offers a cross-continental powerhouse of development expertise, institutional and financial capacity, and global reach. It also provides a geopolitically strategic venue to foster resource mobilisation and coordination beyond, or in addition to, existing development cooperation platforms that suffer from institutional limitations and/or legitimacy deficits.¹⁹

All G20 members are, at least rhetorically, committed to promoting sustainable, balanced and inclusive development.²⁰ Together, they can use their agenda-setting and resource-mobilising power to review their development cooperation practices in light of the need to jointly

increase and coordinate efforts for SDG implementation. This involves strengthening both G20 members' individual strategies and collective G20 action to improve financing, partnership and accountability measures.

G20 members can take a step towards this goal by promoting triangular cooperation as a modality that, arguably more than any other, carries the potential to mobilise material, symbolic and ideational resources across continents, political ideologies and development trajectories. Through the promotion of triangular cooperation, G20 member states can make use of their diversity and channel their reservoirs of development knowledge, resources and institutional capacities towards the coordinated provision of global public goods, such as the fight against biodiversity loss and climate change.²¹ Triangular cooperation can also serve G20 members as an instrument to jointly—and with non-G20 partners—provide a synergetic and mutually reinforcing approach to addressing development challenges at (sub)national levels, such as growing inequalities or unstable health systems. Together with the promotion of multi-stakeholder approaches, triangular cooperation can also serve to improve



knowledge exchange practices across G20 member states and engagement groups on SDG-related processes.

Beyond individual initiatives, a comprehensive G20 engagement would establish triangular cooperation as a go-to modality for strengthening partnerships and addressing development needs on the ground.²² In the long run, it would thus contribute

to enlarging and strengthening the international cooperation toolset. Overall, a more explicit and substantial engagement of the G20 as a platform that gathers major development cooperation providers can help address the triple challenges of knowledge, political will and funding in order to strengthen triangular cooperation as a means for delivering on the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda.



Recommendations to the G20

3



Strengthening the engagement with and the use of triangular cooperation should be an integral part of the G20 contribution to SDG implementation. As a key grouping of development cooperation providers, the G20 can employ triangular cooperation as a strategic tool not only to implement concrete initiatives but also to revamp the global cooperation toolbox. Based on the above discussion, this policy brief puts forward the following recommendations.

Identifying Triangular Cooperation Opportunities: A G20 Matchmaking Mechanism

The G20 should establish a matchmaking mechanism within the G20 Development Working Group to identify triangular cooperation opportunities among its members and their partner countries. A G20-led coordination can help ensure that beneficiaries connect with the expertise they need from the right partner for high-quality support, whether short, medium or long-term, depending on the challenges at hand. The G20 Development Working Group should put an explicit focus on mutual learning, experimentation opportunities

and ownership by all parties, including non-G20 members and particularly least developed countries. It should also develop a joint umbrella where projects and initiatives can benefit from a growing cross-continental and cross-institutional awareness of how triangular cooperation partnerships unfold, and how they are best made use of in order to generate the most relevant development impact.

Connecting Triangular Cooperation Partners: A G20 Stakeholder Forum

The G20 should establish a stakeholder forum for triangular partnerships together with the UN Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) where state and non-state actors—including those from non-G20 countries with more limited institutional capacity—can discuss priorities and engage with G20 support schemes. The forum would provide a dedicated global platform where development cooperation providers can continuously engage in the exchange of experiences and mutual learning on triangular cooperation, among each other and with representatives from partner countries, international organisations, civil society

and the private sector. Through the forum, G20 members would be able to:

- identify key needs to improve SDG implementation across policy fields and segments of society;
- share best triangular cooperation practices to build a multi-stakeholder action agenda with cross-sectoral buy-in; and, by doing so,
- highlight vis-à-vis non-members that the G20 is firmly committed to global public good provision.

Financing Triangular Cooperation: G20 Funding Tools


The G20 should identify funding mechanisms to strengthen and expand the resource flow for triangular cooperation initiatives. Here we flag three potential avenues:

- The G20 could set up a G20 trust fund for triangular cooperation in partnership with UNOSSC that provides resources and support to interested member states through regular funding cycles, with a particular focus on supporting

countries with limited institutional capacity.

- The G20 should offer a coordinated approach to identifying opportunities for co-funding schemes with national and regional development banks and other funding facilities. The Islamic Development Bank, for instance, has recently consolidated its use of triangular cooperation schemes and can act as key partner to expand engagement.²³
- The G20 Development Working Group should explore the potential of using non-conventional funding mechanisms for triangular cooperation. Old ideas that long seemed unrealistic—such as a universal carbon tax—could be mobilised to generate revenues, part of which could be channelled into a triangular cooperation fund administered by the UN Secretariat.

Resources from across these funding mechanisms could be used for a variety of schemes, including triangular pilot initiatives for building national SDG implementation capacities, larger-scale triangular programming that builds on successful pilots, and triangular research, training and



advisory services to address national
SDG implementation challenges.

Strengthening the Triangular Cooperation Knowledge Base: G20 Reporting Efforts

The G20 should combine the reporting and evaluation capacities across G20 members to probe the strength of triangular schemes as an effective and distinct category of development cooperation and continuously improve the extent to which triangular schemes contribute to SDG implementation. This should be aligned and unfold in dialogue with other development cooperation-related effectiveness and reporting initiatives. They include the Total Official Support for Sustainable Development,²⁴

the Global Partnership Initiative on Effective Triangular Co-operation,²⁵ and recent national and multilateral processes to foster monitoring, learning and evaluation capacities as well as knowledge generation around South-South cooperation flows, including at the UN Conference on Trade and Development²⁶ and through the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation.²⁷ Together with detailed case study data and growing efforts to conduct assessments for monitoring, evaluation and learning purposes, the G20's quantification of triangular cooperation input and output across partners would contribute to showcasing how triangular schemes can make a real difference as part of global cooperation efforts.

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