

South-South Cooperation and the BAPA+40 Conference FAQs

SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION (SSC): WHAT IT IS AND WHY IT MATTERS

South-South Cooperation emerged in the 1950s in the context of the common struggle of former colonies for genuine independence and peace. It started with the Bandung Conference in 1955 organized by Indonesia, Myanmar, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Pakistan participated in by 29 newly independent countries from Asia and Africa. In the midst of increasing conflict between the world's major powers, these countries united to maintain their independence from these competing camps and engage in mutual cooperation to prevent an impending war and support ongoing anti-colonial struggles.

What is SSC?

There is no official definition of SSC but it is generally understood as an expression of solidarity and a partnership among equals between and among developing countries. It is a process whereby they pursue their national development goals through numerous ways ranging from economic integration, formation of negotiating blocs within multilateral institutions, and exchanges of knowledge, skills, resources and technical know-how, among others. The purpose of SSC is to contribute to national well-being of peoples and countries of the South.

In helping one another, developing countries agreed that they will observe respect for national sovereignty, national ownership and independence; equality; non-conditionality; non-interference in domestic affairs; and mutual benefit.

How does it differ from N-S cooperation?

North-South cooperation is currently an unequal form of cooperation, with Northern countries giving out official development assistance (ODA) to Southern countries and dictating how it should be used, thus perpetuating neocolonialism.

Donor countries require their recipients to change or introduce certain policies or structural adjustments in order that they may receive aid (policy conditionality). When purchasing materials or equipment or hiring people needed for development projects, recipient countries are also required to buy them from corporations of the donor country (tied aid), which essentially brings aid back in the hands of the donor countries themselves. As intended, ODA has yet to be effective to fulfil its development promise.

As cooperation among developing countries, SSC is considered as a partnership among equals. It takes mainly the forms of technical cooperation and knowledge sharing towards development and self-reliance – no infringement of

national sovereignty, untied to the business interests of the providing partner country, and no policy nor structural conditionalities.

SSC, however, is not a substitute but complementary to N-S cooperation. As a complement, it is an additional form of cooperation to achieve development goals. By saying it is not a substitute, we mean that developed country governments should still provide us with ODA, because we would not have needed development assistance if not for the centuries of colonization. In essence, ODA is a historical debt and at the same time, not only have they committed to providing us with ODA; it is their historical debt and obligation, and they have actually committed to providing 0.7% of their GNI for this.

Why is it important to us?

Many countries have placed high hopes on SSC because it came about as an expression of solidarity among peoples of the South against colonialism. It was founded on the principles of and with the aim of realizing national sovereignty, mutual benefit, and self-reliance as opposed to the paternalistic traditional North-South development cooperation. If implemented in its true sense, SSC poses huge development potential.

Trends in SSC however show that it is taking the same path of unequal relations and unsustainable development, with emerging economies putting their own geopolitical interests above anything at the expense of the peoples of developing countries. Making it more worrisome is the heightened call for financial support from big private sector, which we know have caused massive poverty and environmental destruction in their insatiable thirst for profit; and from international financial institutions that ensure the realization of these corporate agenda.

What is our vision of SSC?

We want SSC that does not forget the historical context of Southern peoples' struggle against colonialism and the paternalistic nature of the North-South relations and strives not to replicate it. We want SSC to live true to its noble principles and goals: cooperation that respects each country's national sovereignty, not interfering in each other's domestic affairs but neither tolerating one another's human rights violations. We want a South-South cooperation where providers and recipients act as equal partners, serving the people's needs.

We want a people-centered South-South cooperation, wherein the people, their communities and their organizations lead the identification of development needs, setting of development objectives and targets, and designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating of development programs, policies and projects. We want a South-South cooperation that institutionalizes these through frameworks, official spaces, mechanisms and resources for people-to-people cooperation and civil society organizations' engagement.

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BAPA+40 is the common name for the UN 2nd High Level Conference on South-South Cooperation that will be held on March 20-22 in Buenos Aires Argentina, which will also commemorate the 40th year of the signing of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA). The conference will have the overarching theme: Role of South-South Cooperation and implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Challenges and Opportunities.

The conference will also be divided into the following sub-themes:

1. Comparative advantages and opportunities of South-South Cooperation;
2. Challenges and strengthening of institutional framework of South-South Cooperation;
3. Sharing of experiences, best practices and success stories; and
4. Scaling up means of implementation of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in support of SSC and Triangular Cooperation.

The conference will review trends in the last four decades and launch inclusive South-South and triangular cooperation strategy for optimizing SSC towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

The UN's working definition for triangular cooperation (TrC) is "Southern-driven partnerships between two or more developing countries, supported by a developed country(ies) or multilateral organization(s), to implement development cooperation programmes and projects.

So, what is BAPA?

The Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA) for the implementation of Technical Co-operation among Developing Countries (TCDC) is the first comprehensive framework for SSC which reaffirms the idea that the purpose of TCDC is to derive mutual benefits from the sharing of experience and knowledge in the Global South with the aim to achieve their national and collective self-reliance.

The document enumerates basic principles that should serve as the basis for the implementation of TCDC such as strict observance of respecting national sovereignty, economic independence, equal rights and non-interference in domestic affairs. This disallows the imposition of policies which aim only to benefit one country at the expense of another.

This, however, was adopted in Buenos Aires in 1978 in the context of (i) the perverse 'Plan Condor' military technical cooperation which was responsible for genocides and capture and enforced disappearance of persons; and (ii) the centralization of cooperation actions in the hands of the government while undermining the role of civil society. These emphasize even more the need to uphold the core principles SSC and development effectiveness.

Why is the BAPA+40 Conference important for CSOs?

This conference will establish the role of SSC in achieving the SDGs. In order for SSC to contribute to the implementation of Agenda 2030 and the achievement of the SDGs, it

echoes the mainstream development cooperation narrative that more financing is needed. It thus emphasizes the need for inclusiveness and multi-stakeholder partnerships – but focusing mainly on attracting the private sector and IFIs, with little to no mention of meaningful peoples and CSO participation.

As such, it expands corporate capture and reinforces shrinking civic spaces from mainstream North-South development cooperation into South-South cooperation. Apart from the already many concerns surrounding SSC, this further compromises its integrity as a mode of development cooperation supposedly founded on transformative principles of solidarity, horizontality, national sovereignty, self-reliance among others. It is crucial that we CSOs resist this corporate capture of development and fight for our rightful space not as mere beneficiaries of but main actors in development.

What are we going to do at BAPA+40?

We will be having a small delegation to the Conference proper and a side event to register the strong demand for upholding the principles of SSC. Specifically, we will be advocating for institutionalized support for CSO inclusion in all SSC processes and for people-to-people cooperation. At the same time, we will be registering our strong opposition to increased IFI and big private sector intrusion in SSC, considering their instrumentality in creating poverty, conflicts, and planetary destruction. Instead, we will call for developing micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to contribute to genuine national industrialization and sustainable agriculture modernization towards overall sustainable development and self-reliance. To further advance these, we will be raising awareness on people's concerns and linking up with potential allies among various stakeholders, most especially smaller developing country governments.

How can others support Southern CSO delegation to BAPA+40?

You can support the delegation in many ways! Share with us your own experiences (specific country/regional examples) on SSC to serve as evidence in support of our statements and interventions during the Conference and various side events.

Circulate widely our statements, press releases and other advocacy materials on people-centered SSC and resistance to corporate capture of SSC. Email them to your respective governments (permanent mission to U.N in New York, foreign ministry, parliamentarians, local government authorities), to the media (local and international), to fellow CSOs, think tanks, academia, and development practitioners as part of awareness raising and lobbying. Post them on your social media accounts and websites. Repost our social media posts and tag your friends!

After BAPA+40, what's next?

Surely, we will continue advancing our calls beyond BAPA+40. We will closely monitor developments post-BAPA+40 and will continue to assert for our rightful space in all processes of South-South cooperation. Of course, we will first have to collectively discuss the specific ways forward.