



**Second session of the  
Regional Conference on  
South-South Cooperation  
in Latin America and the Caribbean**  
Santiago, 17 and 18 June 2025

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**ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION OF SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION  
IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

**DRAFT PLAN OF ACTION**



UNITED NATIONS





## INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean committed to realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Since then, they have defined institutional responsibilities and implemented policies and initiatives to meet the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), along with follow-up mechanisms to evaluate progress (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean [ECLAC], 2025a, p. 35). However, the pace of global and regional progress has slowed in comparison with that observed in the years before the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, diminishing the likelihood of achieving the proposed objectives.

In September 2024, during the seventy-ninth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, the Secretary-General spearheaded the adoption of the *Pact for the Future* and its annexes (United Nations, 2024a) to correct course and overcome the crises faced, and ensure that they are resolved. In the Pact, Member States recognized that the multilateral system and its institutions, with the United Nations and its Charter at the centre, must be strengthened to keep pace with a changing world. They also committed to 56 actions in the areas of sustainable development and financing for development, international peace and security, science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation, youth and future generations, and transforming global governance.<sup>1</sup>

Amid ongoing global crises —economic, climate, social and geopolitical— different forms of international cooperation, in particular South-South cooperation, are key to strengthening capacities, mobilizing resources and fostering solutions adapted to regional and national realities.

In addition to complementing conventional development efforts, South-South and triangular cooperation can play a strategic role in addressing current and future crises as a needed means of mobilizing sustainable financing by consolidating innovative regional instruments.

At its first session, held in Santiago on 30 and 31 May 2023, the Regional Conference on South-South Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean recognized the need to urgently address the vulnerabilities of Latin America and the Caribbean relating to development challenges, based on a renewed agreement for international development cooperation, which leaves no one behind, and in which all people and countries must participate in order to achieve the Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by 2030. The Presiding Officers and the member countries of the Regional Conference on South-South Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean were requested to examine, with the support of the secretariat, ways to advance international development cooperation, including innovative mechanisms that go beyond graduation criteria based on per capita gross domestic product (GDP), such as multidimensional or vulnerability indicators that are discussed in the region, so as to leave no one behind, and take into account the region's conceptual advances related to development gaps and traps (ECLAC, 2023).

Subsequently, at the first meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Conference, held on 19 June 2024, the countries endorsed the global voluntary conceptual framework to measure South-South cooperation led by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (ECLAC, 2024f).

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<sup>1</sup> The actions of the *Global Digital Compact* (annex 1 of the *Pact for the Future*) are focused on five objectives: (1) close all digital divides and accelerate progress across the SDGs; (2) expand inclusion in and benefits from the digital economy for all; (3) foster an inclusive, open, safe and secure digital space that respects, protects and promotes human rights; (4) advance responsible, equitable and interoperable data governance approaches; and (5) enhance international governance of artificial intelligence for the benefit of humanity.

This document addresses two areas of assessment and evaluation of South-South cooperation. First, it sets forth the regional debate on redefining development metrics beyond GDP, to incorporate dimensions such as equity, sustainability and resilience. The aim is to allow countries of the region and the world to access—in line with their needs— financing for development, along with other drivers of sustainable development, such as knowledge transfer and technical assistance, debt relief, preferential market access, support for social and economic infrastructure, resilience-building and climate change adaptation. Second, it presents regional progress on the global voluntary conceptual framework to measure South-South cooperation, a project led by UNCTAD. This initiative is intended to generate data relating to SDG target 17.3, which refers to the mobilization of additional financial resources for developing countries from multiple sources.

Ten years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, achievement of its targets is still a long way off. In the region, less than a quarter of these targets have been met or are on track to be met in the next five years. According to updated data on all the targets, only 23% are expected to be met by 2030; 41% are on track to be met, albeit at an insufficient pace to reach established thresholds; and for 36% targets, progress has stalled or deteriorated compared with 2015.

Regional results clearly show that countries must redouble efforts and step up the pace of progress to meet the commitments made in the framework of the 2030 Agenda. In light of this situation, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2025a) has emphasized room for action to boost achievement of targets by strengthening institutions' technical, operational, political and prospective (TOPP) capabilities. Weak institutional capabilities hinder implementation of effective public policies and management of vital transformations in the economic, productive, social and environmental spheres. They result in declining State capacities and governance in the region, and deterioration of key indicators such as government efficiency, regulatory quality and control of corruption. Improved governance is essential to establish forums for dialogue between the State, the private sector and civil society; foster accountability; and boost economic growth, equality and sustainable development.

Robust, transparent and efficient institutions inspire economic and social stakeholders' trust, which is fundamental to broadening the tax base, curbing tax evasion and improving public administration. These institutions also play a key role in attracting foreign investment, official development assistance and other sources of external financing, as institutional stability is a critical risk factor for donors and investors. Institutions are strategic assets that determine the efficiency and sustainability of resource mobilization, to the extent that they foster accountability, intergovernmental coordination and the formulation of policies aligned with the principles of the 2030 Agenda.

Strengthening the TOPP capabilities of institutions is indispensable to improve both the measurement of development and the effective quantification of resource mobilization. Robust and transparent institutions enable the establishment of the reliable statistical systems needed to monitor progress towards the SDGs and to suitably measure indicators such as 17.3.1, which evaluates the financial flows directed towards development. These institutions are also essential to design fiscal and administrative frameworks that favour greater domestic resource mobilization—for example through progressive taxation—and that optimize the use and recording of external resources.

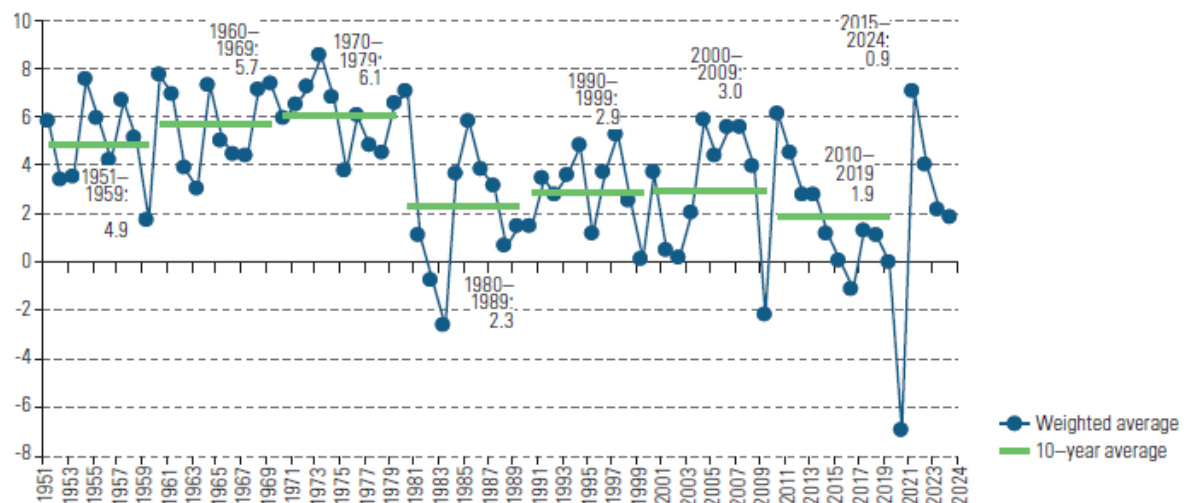
Latin American and Caribbean countries must increase their efforts to achieve the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda by strengthening their institutional capacities and actively seeking new ways of defining and measuring development, along with fairer and more effective mechanisms for planning, allocating and monitoring financing for development, including through South-South cooperation.

## A. CHALLENGES OF COOPERATION IN THE NEW REGIONAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXT

The economic and geopolitical landscape in 2025 is one of the most challenging in recent decades. The global economic context is highly uncertain, with the resurgence and worsening of geopolitical tensions, the reshaping of international alliances and diverse threats to international cooperation and the multilateral system, which all pose considerable challenges for international cooperation for development (ECLAC, 2024a, p. 26, 2025a, p. 10).

According to ECLAC, Latin America and the Caribbean is caught in a trap of low capacity for growth. Between 2015 and 2024, average growth was a mere 0.9%, less than half the 2% recorded during the “lost decade” of the 1980s (see figure 1). GDP growth in 2025 is projected at only 2.0%, four tenths less than that estimated in December 2024. These growth rates put the region at risk of experiencing a third lost decade.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 1**  
**Latin America and the Caribbean: growth in GDP, 1950–2024**  
(Percentages, on the basis of dollars at constant 2018 prices)



**Source:** Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. (2024). *Development Traps in Latin America and the Caribbean: Vital Transformations and How to Manage Them* (LC/SES.40/3-P/-\*).

Most Latin American and Caribbean countries are mired in three traps that limit their advancement towards more productive, inclusive and sustainable development, and towards achievement of the SDGs. The first trap relates to lower capacity for growth in the 10 years to 2024. The region’s average labour productivity in 2023 was barely above the level seen in 1980. Low growth complicates efforts to reduce poverty and informality, create formal jobs and decent employment, and ensure sufficient tax revenue to finance investments in infrastructure, health, education and other social policies. This low capacity for growth is explained mainly by weak investment, lack of productive diversification and sophistication, lack of qualified human talent and the preponderance of low-productivity sectors.

<sup>2</sup> The Latin American and Caribbean region accounts for an increasingly smaller share of the global economy, with GDP in terms of purchasing power parity declining from 9.4% in 2000 to 7.3% in 2023 (data from International Monetary Fund. World Economic Outlook. <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2023/10/10/world-economic-outlook-october-2023>).

The second trap is high inequality, low social mobility and weak social cohesion, stemming from factors such as: (i) low growth, which leads to sluggish and highly informal labour markets, and large disparities in productivity, which generate segmented labour markets with large pay disparities; (ii) regressive tax systems; (iii) weak social and social protection policies that do little to reduce the effects of production-based inequality; (iv) education systems with serious deficiencies evident not only in terms of dropout rates in secondary education, but also in relation to learning outcomes that are unequal to the new needs arising from the technological revolution and the labour market, and that are too segmented to act as powerful mechanisms of social mobility; (v) persistent gender inequality; and (vi) considerable inequalities and spatial segregation in urban areas, where 80% of the region's total population lives. The effect of this trap is that the most vulnerable populations —children, women, Indigenous Peoples, people of African descent and young people— face structural barriers that hinder their social mobility and access to rights.

The third trap relates to low institutional capacities and ineffective governance, reflected in States' difficulty in implementing effective policies continuously, which restricts progress towards sustainable development. This trap results in limited capacity to guide the economy and society, weak management and execution capacities, low private sector, civil society and citizen participation in policy design and implementation, and inadequate accountability among public institutions. These limitations are more evident in certain territories and local governments, which exacerbates territorial disparities (ECLAC, 2024a).

Global foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows declined in 2023 for the second year running against a backdrop of persistent geopolitical conflicts and high interest rates. Almost all regions were affected. Latin America and the Caribbean received FDI of US\$ 184.304 billion in 2023, which was 9.9% lower than in 2022 but still above the average for the 2010s. As a result, the weight of FDI in regional GDP also decreased, to 2.8% in 2023. Nonetheless, inflows represented 14% of the world total in 2023, a higher share than the 11% average for the 2010s (ECLAC, 2024b, p. 9).

Persistent poverty and vulnerability are characteristic of the region. Extreme poverty is estimated to have fallen by less than 4 percentage points between 1994 and 2024, from 14.3% to 10.4%, meaning that around 66 million people still lack the resources to cover their food needs. Total poverty, however, has declined significantly over the past 30 years —it fell from 48.4% in 1994 to 27.7% in 2014— and, following a period of stagnation and a pandemic-induced rise to 32.8%, fell again in 2024 to 26.8%, bringing the number of people who lacked sufficient income to meet their basic needs to 170 million. Moreover, the most vulnerable population, which in 2022 had incomes between 1 and 1.8 times the poverty line (low-income non-poor stratum), accounted for 26% of the region's population, while the population with incomes between 1.8 and 3 times the poverty line (the lower-middle-income stratum) represented 21.4%. In short, three quarters of the population lives in poverty or in a situation of high vulnerability (ECLAC, 2024b).

Income inequality in the region is more persistent than poverty, with levels remaining relatively unchanged. In 2023, the Gini coefficient was 0.452, practically the same figure as in 2022, reflecting historically rigid income distribution, with 52.8% of income concentrated in the last decile and 18.9% in the highest percentile. Wealth distribution inequality is even starker, with a concentration of 65.9% and 33.1% in the wealthiest decile and percentile, respectively (ECLAC, 2024c).

According to ECLAC (2024c), setting a standard for investment in non-contributory social protection, of between 1.5% and 2.5% of GDP or between 5% and 10% of total public spending, is key for progress in poverty eradication. The ministries of social development of 20 Latin American and Caribbean countries allocated an average of 0.8% of GDP or 3% of total public spending to non-contributory social protection in 2022 (ECLAC, 2024g).

Various structural gaps also continue to hinder development. These include gender inequality in the labour market. The sexual division of labour and the current social organization of care create gender gaps manifested throughout the life cycle and in the barriers to labour inclusion and social protection that women face: women record weaker labour market participation than men (a gap of 22 percentage points), earn lower incomes and carry out more unpaid work. In fact, 56.3% of women devote their time exclusively to domestic and care work, compared with just 7.3% of men. Women aged 65 and older record higher poverty levels than men, despite receiving pensions (contributory and non-contributory), and 70.3% of women who do not receive any pension earn an income of their own below the poverty line. The same is true for 42.6% of women who do receive a non-contributory pension (ECLAC, 2024c).

Latin America and the Caribbean also faces a persistent care crisis involving growing demand for care, exacerbated by population ageing and climate change effects, that far outstrips the level of care that can be provided by the people, services and infrastructure available. Against this backdrop, social reorganization of care is urgently needed to avoid the worsening of inequalities resulting from the sexual division of labour, whereby women continue to shoulder a disproportionate burden of care work, mainly unpaid and in precarious conditions. In addition, public policies to guarantee access to care and support for those who need it are sorely lacking.

Care policies contribute to well-being and sustainable development and determine the direct and indirect creation of quality jobs, tax revenue and social security contributions for the State, and productive and social improvements for all of society. Investing in the care economy, which accounts for between 16% and 28% of countries' GDP and promotes well-being, personal development and productive processes, is also efficient.

The Pact for the Future reinforces this commitment, underscoring the importance of “significantly increasing investments to close the gender gap, including in the care and support economy”. The Pact recognizes that gender gaps and poverty are closely linked, and that investing in care systems is a means of reducing inequality and promoting women’s empowerment. Similarly, the sixteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, to be held in Mexico City in August 2025 with the theme “political, economic, social, cultural and environmental transformations as a means of advancing the care society and gender equality”, will provide a crucial opportunity to explore the necessary strategies and consolidate this approach throughout the region.

The region is also undergoing a swift demographic transition. The share of the population aged 65 and older is projected to double by 2050 (from 9.9% to 18.9%), to 138 million people, while fertility rates continue to fall and dependency ratios are rising (ECLAC, 2024e), increasing pressure on health and pension systems. This is being compounded by steady growth in intraregional migration since 2000 (United Nations, 2024b).

Latin America and the Caribbean is highly vulnerable to negative climate change effects, for example floods, storms, drought and landslides. In 2024, 56 dangerous events and disasters were recorded in the region, directly affecting more than 6 million people and resulting in the loss of more than 800 lives. The total cost of economic damage and losses directly or indirectly linked to these disasters amounted to US\$ 10.210 billion (ECLAC, 2025c).

In 2024, in support of priority 1 of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030—understanding disaster risk— ECLAC led three disaster assessments of the impact of flooding in Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil, Hurricane Beryl in Barbados and Tropical Storm Sara in Honduras. The assessments in Brazil and Honduras were carried out jointly with the Inter-American Development Bank. ECLAC also participated in assessments of the impact of Hurricane Beryl on Grenada and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, led by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the European Union.

With regard to capacity-building, ECLAC organized courses on its disaster assessment methodology for civil servants in Brazil, the Dominican Republic and Honduras. Training was organized jointly with the Inter-American Development Bank in Brazil and with the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System in the Dominican Republic. Lastly, ECLAC provided technical assistance to Uruguay in the estimation of a multisectoral baseline for La Paloma municipality.

With respect to environmental matters, Latin America and the Caribbean accounts for 9% of global emissions, owing in particular to agriculture and deforestation. Climate change is already weighing on productivity. Meeting climate action commitments will require investment equivalent to up to 4.9% of annual GDP, especially in key sectors such as transport and water (ECLAC, in press).

The geoeconomics landscape indicates divergent patterns in trade integration. South America has strengthened its ties with China—which in 2023 received 27% of the subregion’s exports, compared with the 13% directed towards the United States—while Mexico and Central America have maintained closer trade links with the United States market. Against this backdrop, the growing rift between China and the United States poses challenges, but also strategic opportunities for regional repositioning (ECLAC, in press).

Considerable economic uncertainty, along with a shifting geopolitical landscape, have weakened the momentum of Latin America and the Caribbean’s main trading partners, amid the resurgence of protectionism and cuts to international assistance in various countries and thematic areas. International cooperation is being limited as a result, with many donor countries facing domestic pressure that weighs on their commitment to development assistance. This is compounded by the current macroeconomic scenario, limited fiscal space and high debt service in recipient countries, which hampers implementation of transformative public policies.

Current global asymmetries in trade, technology and access to development finance highlight the need for new multilateral cooperation agreements (ECLAC, 2025e). There are also growing environmental challenges: climate change and environmental degradation not only endanger the sustainability of development; they also increase the need for international cooperation to address structural inequalities and attend to the most vulnerable groups, whose quality of life and productivity are increasingly under threat. International cooperation must therefore be adapted to a more and more complex world shaped by interlinked challenges such as climate change, social inequality and economic crises. In order to be effective, this cooperation must prioritize joint action by States, multilateral organizations and non-governmental stakeholders, as well as foster financial innovation for more efficient resource mobilization. The strategies adopted must also focus on solutions that are both lasting and equitable, and that distribute the benefits of development among all sectors of society, especially the most vulnerable. A more suitable definition and better measurement of development, along with mechanisms that more accurately quantify global resource mobilization, are essential to rigorous and transparent follow-up of these efforts.

## **B. MEASUREMENT OF DEVELOPMENT AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**

The understanding of poverty has evolved significantly in recent decades. Although initially, it was associated primarily with the lack of economic resources, broader theoretical analyses have incorporated more complex dimensions of well-being. Feres and Mancero (2001, cited in Oviedo and Fernández, 2024) emphasize that this theoretical shift derives from recognition of the limitations of available statistical information and the growing importance of interpretations of poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon. Traditionally, a one-dimensional perception based on income was used: a person was considered poor if their income did not surpass a minimum threshold. However, this view has come under increasing criticism

as it fails to capture the true nature of poverty. Since the end of the twentieth century, multidisciplinary approaches have reinforced the need to incorporate non-monetary indicators that reflect living conditions related to education, health, decent work and access to suitable housing (Stezano, 2021, cited in Oviedo and Fernández, 2024).

One of the main drivers of this shift is Amartya Sen, who introduced the capability approach, and who says that poverty is not exclusively a lack of resources, but the deprivation of real freedoms to allow people to lead the lives that they want (Sen, 2000). From this perspective, what matters is not how much a person has, but what they can do and be with what they have.

This vision has helped to link the analysis of poverty with the human rights-based approach, considering poverty not only as a situation of scarcity but as a systematic violation of fundamental rights. Principles such as dignity, equity, freedom and solidarity therefore play a central role in defining the problem, establishing effective access to rights such as health, education and social participation as essential indicators of human development (Stezano, 2021; ECLAC, 2019b; Mowafi, n.d., cited in Oviedo and Fernández, 2024).

At the same time, indicators such as per capita GDP have been used to measure countries' economic development. However, such aggregate measures do not reflect internal inequalities. A rise in per capita GDP may coincide with an increase in the concentration of wealth if the benefits of growth are not evenly redistributed. Thus, although there is a link between economic growth and development, it is not automatic and does not guarantee improvement in quality of life for the entire population (ECLAC, 2016; Kaldewei, 2015; Ranis and Stewart, cited in Oviedo and Fernández, 2024).

Moreover, the use of per capita income as the only criterion for economic classification represents at least two major limitations: first, as it is an average, it conceals internal inequalities between different social groups, and second, as it focuses only on the monetary dimension, it excludes other key development variables, such as access to basic services, quality of education and the state of infrastructure. This limitation has had a concrete impact in Latin America and the Caribbean, where many countries, categorized as middle-income, have had their access to international cooperation restricted under the premise that the level of per capita income is sufficient to meet their needs.

In the light of this, various organizations and experts have emphasized the need to develop new conceptual and methodological tools to complement this indicator, to ensure a more accurate assessment of national and regional realities that identifies structural gaps and suitably directs development efforts.

## **1. The debate on the multidimensional nature of development in Latin America and the Caribbean**

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the need to move beyond GDP as the only measure of development and criterion for allocation of international cooperation resources has been emphasized for years.<sup>3</sup> One of

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<sup>3</sup> At the thirty-third session of ECLAC (Brasilia, 2010), member countries adopted resolution 647(XXXIII), whereby they requested the secretariat to continue to analyse new alternatives for generating the volume of resources necessary for financing the development of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean and to develop a broader set of indicators to reflect the particular realities in the countries and support the identification of their main needs, so that classification as a middle-income country ceased to be an a priori impediment to participation in official development assistance. In 2012, ECLAC published *Middle-income countries: a structural gap approach* (ECLAC, 2012).

the reasons is that GDP does not take into account the structural gaps that limit development of middle-income countries, such as those deriving from inequality and poverty, investment and saving, productivity and innovation, infrastructure, education, health, taxation, gender and the environment.

In the region, there has been staunch support for adopting a new, broader and more multifaceted concept of development that includes not only eliminating poverty and improving living standards but also achieving sustainable and inclusive growth that addresses the social inequality and productive heterogeneity characteristic of Latin American and Caribbean countries, and of middle-income countries in general.<sup>4</sup>

Measuring inequalities in development processes would allow the reformulation of international cooperation to ensure the inclusion of developing countries in all forms of cooperation.

In January 2025, representatives of Latin America and the Caribbean and other international stakeholders met at ECLAC during the seminar on the measurement of development and its relationship to international cooperation (ECLAC, 2025d) and discussed new ways of measuring development. They recognized that GDP does not sufficiently reflect the complexity of development and that access to financing and international cooperation are limited when GDP is the sole criterion used. GDP also does not show inequalities in countries, climate vulnerabilities and structural challenges. Thus, it was proposed that the region should join global efforts to adopt multidimensional, technically robust and politically viable metrics that guide international cooperation and include indicators of equity, sustainability, access to services and resilience to crises.

During the technical panel discussions, experts described progress in building indicators complementary to GDP, such as the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (Daly and Cobb, 1989), an index of global challenges and ECLAC exercises based on key development transformations. Participants discussed the need for stronger national statistical systems and universally applicable indicators that also factored in local realities.

The regional debate is inspired by a global model: the Pact for the Future, which has established a political and normative framework for rethinking development, how it is measured and how international action is evaluated on the basis of these new standards. Without a new development metric, there is a risk that the commitments of the Pact will not be met.

The Pact for the Future —adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations at the Summit of the Future (United Nations, 2024a)— aims to reinvigorate multilateralism and strengthen international cooperation amid the global challenges of the twenty-first century. One of its key pillars is transforming global governance so that it is more effective, inclusive and focused on sustainable and equitable outcomes. There is a direct link with the need for a new development metric, reflected in at least three dimensions: (i) moving beyond GDP as the only development indicator, in alignment with the ongoing initiatives of the United Nations, such as the work of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, (ii) quantification of the mobilization of resources with clear, comparable metrics that enable transparent and effective follow-up and (iii) accountability and reform of the international system for financing development cooperation.

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<sup>4</sup> Channelling resources towards lower-income countries is in keeping with the assumption that countries have more resources and tools to fight poverty and finance their development as their per capita income levels improve. However, the decision to concentrate international cooperation resources on the fight against poverty and its most immediate effects, and to prioritize lower-income countries, excluded the more than 70% of the global population living in poverty in middle-income countries (ECLAC, 2012).

## 2. The multidimensional vulnerability index

In August 2024, the General Assembly of the United Nations officially established the multidimensional vulnerability index, a new metric that small island developing States affected by climate change and others have requested as a complement to gross domestic product (GDP) for measuring development and facilitating access to international finance.

The General Assembly adopted resolution 78/322 of 13 August 2024 by consensus, deciding to advance the index and that it will be maintained by a relevant existing United Nations entity and an Independent Expert Advisory Panel. The index includes indicators on countries' structural vulnerabilities and lack of economic, environmental and social resilience, based on the findings of the High-level Panel on the Development of a Multidimensional Vulnerability Index for Small Island Developing States.

The index addresses, among other things, import dependency, exposure to extreme weather events and pandemics, the effects of violence in the region, as well as refugee flows, demographic pressure, shortages of water resources and arable land, and infant mortality.

As noted in the resolution, although initially proposed by small island developing States, the multidimensional vulnerability index aims to capture exogenous vulnerabilities and lack of resilience to exogenous shocks of all developing countries, so as to ensure credibility and comparability.

The index addresses two aspects. The first is structural vulnerability, which is defined as the risk that a country's sustainable development will be hindered by recurrent, adverse, exogenous shocks and stressors, such as environmental, economic or social factors. The impact is contingent upon three key elements: the magnitude of the shock or stressor, and whether it is recurring or progressive; the level of the country's exposure to the shock or stressor; and the country's resilience. The second aspect is structural resilience, which is defined as the inherent characteristics or inherited capacity of countries to withstand, absorb, recover from or minimize the adverse effects of shocks or stressors.<sup>5</sup>

The use of the multidimensional vulnerability index by countries is voluntary; however, United Nations system entities, development partners and multilateral development banks are invited to explore using it as a complement to existing policies.

As noted above, the index could be used as a decision-making instrument by donors and international financial institutions, and also as a source of data for public policymaking. This, however, raises at least two major questions: how to interconnect official development assistance with the vulnerabilities identified by this instrument and, at the same time, how to integrate those interconnections with national projects arising from social demands that are expressed in the political direction taken by each country (Oviedo and Fernández, 2024).

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<sup>5</sup> Preliminary scores based on the index for 145 countries, including 33 from Latin America and the Caribbean, were presented in April 2023. Although at the time no official threshold had been determined for characterizing countries as vulnerable or not, the median was used as a proxy for a preliminary classification. On average, the region showed slightly lower levels of vulnerability than the global average. Differential correlations were also identified between the dimensions of vulnerability and resilience. Structural vulnerability was most closely related to economic vulnerability, followed by environmental vulnerability and social vulnerability. With regard to structural resilience, the highest correlation was seen with environmental resilience, followed by social resilience and economic resilience (Oviedo and Fernández, 2024).

### 3. Beyond GDP and graduation: towards a comprehensive development metric and index

In January 2025, ECLAC prepared a briefing note for the seminar on the measurement of development and its relationship with international cooperation, exploring alternative approaches to GDP as an index for measuring development. It was structured around the 11 great transformations proposed by ECLAC: (i) rapid, sustained, sustainable and inclusive growth: productive development, productivity and employment; (ii) reduced inequality and increased mobility and social cohesion; (iii) expansion of social protection and the welfare state; (iv) effective education for all and wide access to vocational training; (v) progress towards gender equality and the care society; (vi) an environmental big push to promote sustainability and address climate change; (vii) digital transformation; (viii) safe, orderly and regular migration; (ix) progress towards greater regional and global economic integration; (x) macroeconomics for development and sound and strong taxation; and (xi) strengthened capacities of the State (institutions, governance and social dialogue) (Salazar-Xirinachs, 2023).

The aim of the exercise was to stimulate discussion on an alternative metric to GDP that was more comprehensive and better reflected the challenges of middle-income countries. An initial draft —not the final version— of the index was put forward for discussion. A set of 44 international indicators was compiled, mostly from the World Bank and the Global SDG Indicators Database. Indicators available for at least 150 countries were selected. For each of the 11 transformations, four indicators were chosen: two main indicators and two complementary indicators (indicators for countries and territories or that directly or indirectly correspond to the global indicator framework for monitoring the Goals). The multiple imputation method was used to complete missing data.<sup>6</sup>

For the final index, six indicators considered key for the formulation of a development index complementary to per capita GDP were selected: per capita GDP in purchasing power parity (logarithmic transformation), Gini index (inequality), public spending on education (as a share of GDP, logarithmic transformation), women's labour force participation (percentage), population living in low-lying areas (environmental risk) and level of water stress (logarithmic transformation). The indicators were normalized between 0 and 1 and a geometric mean similar to the UNDP human development index was used.

The results show that the exercise yielded a new index with a low correlation with GDP ( $R^2 \approx 0.30$ ), suggesting that it adds valuable information. In Latin America and the Caribbean, several countries slip down development rankings when the multidimensional vulnerability index is used, owing to inequality and gender inequality. There are relevant differences between regions; for example, the relative position of Sub-Saharan Africa improves owing to the inclusion of non-monetary criteria.

The exercise conducted by ECLAC leads to the conclusion that it is possible to construct an aggregate index that captures aspects that are not adequately reflected by per capita GDP and that provides a more comprehensive metric of countries' level of development. However, the exercise brought to light some constraints and challenges that should be taken into account in the move towards more comprehensive development metrics.

First, limitations related to data availability and possible ambiguities or biases in certain indicators must be considered. Indicators compiled in international databases are a good starting point, but not all of them adequately reflect the dimension to be measured. Some indicators may induce biases because they are less relevant for certain countries or data may be missing.

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<sup>6</sup> For the exercise, the construction of an index by dimension was ruled out because of the loss of information associated with this option. Statistical analyses, such as principal component analysis, were used to identify a subset that was more informative and less correlated with GDP.

Second, the suitability of these indicators for identifying recipients of international cooperation needs to be assessed, particularly in the framework of graduation mechanisms. This is because higher public spending on education or female participation in the labour market would improve conditions in the country, but would also reduce its chances of receiving international cooperation.

Third, and lastly, development challenges and priorities are not uniform across regions. Consequently, a global index or system of indicators must strike a balance that adequately reflects these differences.

#### **4. High-level Expert Group on beyond Gross Domestic Product (GDP)**

In May 2025, the Secretary-General of the United Nations appointed an independent high-level expert group to develop recommendations for indicators of sustainable development that complement and go beyond gross domestic product.<sup>7</sup> The Group was established in response to the request from the Member States in Action 53 of the Pact for the Future and reflects a shared and long-standing objective. This is because, when adopting the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, Member States committed to developing, by 2030, progress indicators that complement GDP, with the understanding that GDP does not fully capture the various dimensions of sustainable development, yet it is widely used as a development indicator.

The High-Level Expert Group is tasked with preparing a conceptual framework that identifies key dimensions of progress and developing an initial list of country-owned, universally-applicable indicators of sustainable development to equip governments with the information needed. It will also provide guidance on the deployment of the dashboard of indicators to maximize its uptake, and on priorities for data collection and statistical capacity to operationalize the dashboard and indicators.

The Expert Group will closely consult with Member States and key stakeholders throughout the process, taking into account the work of the Statistical Commission and building on the global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals. The outcome of its work will then be presented to the General Assembly at its eightieth session, to subsequently serve as input in the intergovernmental process. The Expert Group consists of 14 leading academics and experts from various fields, reflecting gender and geographic diversity.<sup>8</sup>

### **C. STRENGTHEN MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION AND REVITALIZE THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

As noted in previous documents, 2025 marks the 10-year anniversary of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the start of the 5-year countdown to 2030, and regional progress towards the SDGs is lagging behind expectations. At the current pace, only 23% of the targets are expected to be achieved by 2030; for 41% of the targets, although the trend is moving in the right direction, the pace will be insufficient to reach the thresholds; and for the remaining 36%, progress had stalled or reversed compared with 2015<sup>9</sup> (ECLAC, 2025a).

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2025/05/unsg-hl-expert-beyondgdp/>.

<sup>8</sup> The Expert Group will be co-chaired by Kaushik Basu and Nora Lustig, with support from a technical secretariat comprising staff from the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNCTAD, UNDP and the Executive Office of the Secretary-General.

<sup>9</sup> In the region, progress is uneven among subregions: South America (23%) and Central America and Mexico (24%) have the highest proportion of targets expected to be met, 10 percentage points higher than the Caribbean, where only 13% of the targets are on track.

In the context of the commitments made in the 2030 Agenda, Goal 17 underscores that the effectiveness of the sustainable development agenda is largely dependent on strong partnerships between governments, the private sector and civil society. It also reinforces the need for urgent action to mobilize, redirect and leverage financial flows to accelerate the structural transformations required to achieve the SDGs.

Goal 17 calls for sustained long-term investments, monitoring and evaluation frameworks, as well as regulatory systems and incentives to facilitate and attract investments. There is also a need to strengthen national accountability mechanisms. In this regard, the availability of data for the indicators for each of the SDG targets is critical.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, South-South cooperation adheres to a set of principles that promote equity, reciprocity, respect for sovereignty and the search for common solutions. This form of cooperation, which encompasses technical, economic, social and political aspects, is based on a horizontal and mutually beneficial approach, in which all participants share responsibility and the outcomes. It is seen as a flexible regime, centred on strengthening the State and improving the well-being of populations, with an emphasis on its moral and political value that goes beyond mere economic concerns.

In recent years, the region has risen to the challenge of measuring and systematizing South-South and triangular cooperation, with a view to strengthening a monitoring system that can assess the real impact of cooperation, identify common priorities and advance sustainable development and capacity-building in the countries of the region. Some notable experiences include the work conducted between 2010 and 2021 by the Committee on South-South Cooperation of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) (since renamed the Regional Conference on South-South Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean); the *Report on South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Ibero-America*, published by the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB) since 2007; the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) international standard to measure Total Official Support for Sustainable Development, since 2017; and the project “Quantifying South-South cooperation to mobilize funds for the Sustainable Development Goals”, of the United Nations Development Account (2023–2026).

At their first meeting, held on 19 June 2024 in Santiago, the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on South-South Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean agreed to endorse the global, voluntary conceptual framework to measure South-South cooperation led by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), to establish an open-ended working group in the framework of the Regional Conference to follow up on the efforts being undertaken by UNCTAD, through the project to quantify South-South cooperation to mobilize funds for the Sustainable Development Goals, and request the secretariat to prepare a substantive document, which would include a plan of action in line with the process led by UNCTAD.

The project “Quantifying South-South cooperation to mobilize funds for the Sustainable Development Goals”, which has an estimated duration of four years (2023–2026),<sup>10</sup> is one year from

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<sup>10</sup> The project was driven by the countries of the Global South, led by Brazil and Mexico, which, with other pioneering countries, championed the creation of a methodological framework for measuring South-South cooperation. The project is based on the Buenos Aires outcome document of the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, which encouraged all actors to support initiatives for information and data collection, coordination, dissemination and evaluation of South-South cooperation, upon the request of developing countries (United Nations, 2019). In April 2020, the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators established a Working Group on Measurement of Development Support, which prepared a methodological proposal for SDG indicator 17.3.1, including South-South cooperation. This led to the development of the methodological framework for measuring South-South cooperation, which is currently in testing and validation phases at various stages of the project.

completion. Its objective is to strengthen the capacity of developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America to measure and report the contribution of South-South Cooperation to progress on the 2030 Agenda, mobilize resources for the 2030 Agenda, and enable a more inclusive, resilient and green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Currently, the lack of information on target 17.3 of the SDGs (mobilize additional financial resources for developing countries from multiple sources) limits monitoring and decision-making in this area. To address this, the project aims to provide preliminary estimates and build national capacities in the preparation of country reports in the framework of this voluntary instrument.

The project is now in the second phase, with the focus on refining methodological and training tools—including a manual and a “welcome kit” prepared in the region—that will serve as input for the third phase (expand), in which countries will be able to apply these tools and begin to prepare their first national reports on South-South cooperation.

The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean that are actively participating in this process are Ecuador and Peru (which were among the first pilot countries), alongside Argentina, Chile, the Dominican Republic and Uruguay, which have expressed their interest in and commitment to joining the project and working in coordination with ECLAC.



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**ANNEX 1****DRAFT PLAN OF ACTION, 2025****QUANTIFICATION OF SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION TO MOBILIZE FUNDS FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS****A. PLAN OF ACTION: INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVE**

This draft plan of action has been prepared pursuant to the agreement to endorse the global, voluntary conceptual framework to measure South-South Cooperation led by UNCTAD, adopted by the member States at the first meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Conference on South-South Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean (June 2024). It also complies with the mandate to establish an open-ended working group in the framework of the Regional Conference to follow up on the efforts being undertaken by UNCTAD and support capacity-building in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean by conducting workshops in countries, at their request.

The draft sets forth the activities to be carried out by the Statistics Division of ECLAC, in coordination with the secretariat of the Regional Conference on South-South Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean. It also outlines the coordination between UNCTAD and the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, in the framework of the second phase (master) of the global project, " Quantifying South-South cooperation to mobilize funds for the Sustainable Development Goals".

The aim of this phase is to strengthen the capacities of Latin American and Caribbean countries to measure and report on South-South cooperation in the framework of SDG indicator 17.3.1, using standardized tools tailored to national contexts, in order to highlight the strategic value of South-South cooperation, facilitate the monitoring of this indicator and promote transparency, accountability and international recognition of the efforts of the Global South.

**B. KEY COMPONENTS OF THE PLAN AND EXPECTED OUTPUTS****1. Technical training and support for pilot countries and countries joining the project****(a) Pilot survey on national institutional structures**

ECLAC, in collaboration with UNCTAD, is designing and piloting a questionnaire with the overall aim of collecting systematic and standardized data to identify the institutional frameworks and capacities that exist in each country for measuring the mobilization of resources for South-South cooperation.

The pilot survey, or preliminary test of a questionnaire, will be conducted with a small group of countries before the final survey is applied to a larger sample of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. The pilot survey will enable the detection of errors or problems in the design of the questionnaire and in the data collection process.

The pilot survey will be an opportunity to assess issues such as whether questions are clear and understandable; whether question sequence influences responses; whether the time needed to complete the

survey is adequate; whether any technical problems (in online or electronic surveys) arise; and whether the data collected are adequate for the objectives of the study.

It will serve as a tool to ensure the validity and reliability of the final survey to be applied in all countries of the region that join the project to quantify South-South cooperation to mobilize funds for development. This will make it possible to adjust, eliminate or reformulate problematic questions, and to detect logistical errors, such as confusing instructions or formatting problems.

**(b) Project governance document: who makes decisions, how is compliance monitored, and how are risks and resources managed?**

The governance document, like the pilot survey on national institutional structures, is in the development stage. This document will clearly define, among other aspects, the governance structure, roles and responsibilities, communication channels, and decision-making mechanisms and processes for implementation of the second phase of the project.

The structures, processes, roles and rules established for effective project management, monitoring and oversight will ensure that the project remains aligned with the interests of countries and key stakeholders. They will also help to improve transparency and accountability, help to target efforts, including those related to budget, scope and time, and reduce risks, thereby increasing the chances of success.

**(c) Welcome kit**

The welcome kit is a tool designed to guide and facilitate the work of the institutions responsible for collecting data and reporting in the framework of the project on measuring South-South cooperation. It has two main sections:

(i) Institutional organization and situation analysis

(ii) Good practices for data collection

**(d) Translation into Spanish of the Manual for the framework to measure South-South cooperation<sup>1</sup>**

The Manual, which is intended to support pilot testing of and data collection for the framework, exists in English.

The Manual focuses on government-led development or humanitarian activities, which are the elements that are the most feasible to track and measure as a starting point. Activities driven by commercial interests and exchanges between private parties are excluded from the framework and the Manual.

The document provides guidance on key concepts and methodologies for measuring South-South cooperation in line with the framework in order to facilitate data reporting under SDG indicator 17.3.1 on development support.

It is the outcome of a country-led process, drawing on vast experience of pioneering countries in the collection of data on South-South cooperation. It will be complemented with additional country experience based on pilot testing, and is structured in eight chapters, as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. (2025). *Manual for the Framework to Measure South-South Cooperation: Technical and Procedural Aspects for Pilot Testing*. This section is based largely on the Manual.

Chapter 1 provides a conceptual overview and historical background of South-South cooperation, including the development of the conceptual framework for measuring South-South cooperation, which lays the foundation for discussion on the importance of its measurement. Chapter 2 considers the value of data, challenges and considerations emerging when measuring and reporting on South-South cooperation, as well the rationale behind the framework, including SDG indicator 17.3.1. Chapter 3 outlines the voluntary framework adopted and sets out the means for data collection accordingly. Chapter 4 explores the national institutional set-up required for effective measurement and reporting of South-South cooperation. Chapter 5 focuses on the data sources needed. Chapter 6 outlines quality assurance considerations, in line with practices in official statistics. Chapter 7 elaborates on data analysis. Chapter 8 examines the reporting of data and statistics on South-South cooperation. The document concludes with relevant tools for data collection and reporting in annexes and includes a glossary of terms.

The revised English version of the manual will be available in June 2025 and will then be translated into Spanish.

**(e) Online course on South-South cooperation and its measurement**

UNCTAD is the lead agency designing the online course on South-South cooperation and how to measure it, with support from ECLAC.

The online course will provide access to knowledge without the need for classroom attendance, and is self-paced, allowing flexible scheduling.

The course is being designed for digital platforms and virtual learning environments through which users can access content, complete assignments, participate in forums and more. Multimedia content, online assessments and digital communication tools will be made available. Users will be able to interact with instructors and other participants through messaging, forums, videoconferencing or chats, among other means.

**(f) Evaluation survey of South-South cooperation mechanisms**

As part of the technical training and support to pilot countries and new participants, an evaluation survey will be developed to collect opinions, perceptions and data on the countries' experiences using the Framework, the Manual and the welcome kit, with a view to measuring their quality, effectiveness and impact.

The evaluation survey will provide feedback that will help to pinpoint strengths and areas for improvement, to make informed decisions, and to adjust or redesign strategies, content or methodologies. It will also help to determine whether the proposed objectives were met.

The survey will collect general data on respondents by country, and will consist of closed-ended questions, such as the Likert scale (e.g. 1 to 5), yes/no, multiple choice. Open-ended questions will only be an option where comments, suggestions or critiques are required.

**(g) Awareness-raising and communication materials**

Fact sheets, infographics, presentations and videos will be prepared as key communication tools for outreach on the strategic value of measuring South-South cooperation and highlighting the contributions of the Global South to sustainable development.

These tools will be used specifically to inform, raise awareness, educate, engage and mobilize various audiences and stakeholders around the objectives, initiatives and benefits of the project.

## 2. In-person and online activities

### (a) Interregional webinar on South-South cooperation, second half of 2025 (virtual)

This synchronous online workshop will foster active participation, with presentations on the progress made in Latin America in the implementation of the project.

The focus of the webinar will be on teaching and dissemination of information, and will be an opportunity for sharing of knowledge and experiences between Latin America and the Caribbean and other regions.

### (b) Regional technical workshop, second half of 2025 (in-person, ECLAC headquarters in Santiago)

The aim of the technical workshop is to bring together experts, technicians, practitioners and stakeholders from the pilot countries in the region, as well as from the new participating countries, to conduct an in-depth review of the framework, complete hands-on exercises related thereto and define common objectives for the second phase of the project.

Participants in the workshop will discuss key technical issues, such as methodologies, tools and solutions; solve complex technical problems; exchange specialized knowledge; receive technical feedback; and plan or adjust activities that require technical accuracy.

The workshop will have a practical and specialized focus. It will bring together people with technical expertise on the project and will be interactive in nature, with presentations, exercises, case studies and round table discussions. The outcomes of the workshop will serve as inputs for technical or strategic decision-making in the second phase of the project.

### (c) Regional workshop in Colombia, September–October 2025 (in-person)

The regional workshop in Colombia will be similar in nature to the one in Santiago, but with the following objectives:

- To deliver preliminary presentations of national reports.
- To conduct joint review of the process and fine-tune collaboration among pilot countries .
- To incorporate new countries and members of the technical team into the project.

The technical workshop is designed to be a practical and specialized training activity, at which the pilot countries (Ecuador and Peru) and the countries that will be added subsequently are expected to submit products that will allow for a more in-depth analysis of specific issues related to the measurement project.

Participants will include persons who have already acquired a certain level of expertise or experience in the project, as well as technicians and experts who require more detailed and applied training.

### (d) National reporting on flows under the framework to measure South-South cooperation

A fourth activity under the project will be the preparation and presentation of a document containing structured and detailed information on the organized flows of resources, knowledge and technical or financial assistance among various stakeholders—including countries, institutions and international organizations—covered by the framework to measure South-South cooperation.

The report will present, in a clear and structured manner, the findings, progress, outcomes and recommendations regarding these flows in line with the measurement framework, in order to facilitate decision-making and project follow-up and, with a view to fostering development and solidarity and resolving shared problems that new countries joining the project may face.

**(e) Lessons learned as feedback for the final version of the framework**

What was done? What worked, and why? What did not work, and why? What should be done differently next time?

Lessons learned are a key tool for learning and continuous improvement, as they ensure that cumulative experience is not lost and can serve as a guide for future efforts. This is why the final activity planned is a report on lessons learned, i.e. the knowledge and experience gained in implementing the project, which will help to identify what worked well and what did not. These lessons will help to improve future performance as past mistakes can be avoided and successful practices can be replicated.

It is hoped that the report will help to improve future projects, enable better planning and avoid the repetition of failures, transfer knowledge, promote learning in the country teams and entities involved, reduce risks by detecting mistakes or problems that could be avoided in the future, streamline processes by highlighting effective practices that can be replicated, and strengthen decision-making by drawing on proven experience.

## **C. CONCLUSION**

This plan of action is a flexible but concrete road map that will harness the synergies between the Regional Conference on South-South Cooperation, the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC, UNCTAD and the member countries of the Regional Conference, in order to consolidate the measurement of South-South cooperation, led by the Global South.

Measuring cooperation among developing countries is critical to strengthening their leadership at the global level, improving the effectiveness of their public policies and advancing jointly towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.