

The Active Role Played by Türkiye in terms of South-South Cooperation within the Context of International Development Cooperation

Dr. Rahman Nurdun  [0009-0009-1677-5226](https://orcid.org/0009-0009-1677-5226)

Abstract

Although Türkiye's history of getting involved in South-South cooperation dates back to 1955 when Bandung Conference was convened, its engagement in terms of international development cooperation started after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc in the early 1990s. With its development cooperation agency- TİKA became operational since 1992, Türkiye has been in close cooperation with the Global South in the field of development cooperation and gained momentum from 2002 onwards by reaching out its friendly hands to Africa, Asia Pacific and Latin America. In the last ten years, backed by its unique position of being both a donor and recipient, Türkiye has been very active in sharing its experience with the other Southern donors through implementing projects in the third countries. This paper intends first of all to give readers an overall idea about South-South and Triangular Cooperation, then proceed to elaborate on Turkish experience in this regard within the context of international development cooperation with examples and analysis, and eventually present Türkiye's persistent endeavors to achieve UN Sustainable Development Goals.

1 Introduction

Emerging economies such as Brazil, China, India, Türkiye and Mexico have been the strongest promoters of South-South Cooperation (SSC) efforts on the global arena for achieving sustainable development goals adopted by UN in 2015. One of the most important aspects of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is that they have framed development beyond aid and also beyond an aid architecture based on North-South aid transfers, implying the end of traditional donor-recipient relationships. In this new development cooperation landscape, it is crucial to give SSC actors more voice and more prominent role in global development cooperation, regardless of their position as providers or receivers.

Türkiye has a unique status, being both a recipient and donor country simultaneously. Whereas the aid delivered by Türkiye is coordinated by the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), the aid that Türkiye receives is managed by Presidency of Strategy and Budget, which necessitates close cooperation between these institutions alongside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In past 20 years, the volume of development assistance delivered by Türkiye surpassed the amount it has received, which has made Türkiye a net donor country. Apart from this, Türkiye, together with other Major countries in the South, bears the special status of being a South-South "pivotal country". These countries are positioned to play a lead role in South-South Cooperation and Triangular Cooperation based on their capacities and experience. In this regard, technical cooperation activities undertaken by Türkiye towards developing or less developed countries (LDCs) can be considered within the framework of South-South Cooperation and Triangular Cooperation.

2 Overview of South-South and Triangular Cooperation

South-South Cooperation is a term for describing development cooperation between developing countries in the Global South (BAPA, 1978). In recent years, to make full use of comparative advantages of traditional donors, UN is actively promoting South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC), which is a development modality agreed by the Member States of the United Nations and emphasized in numerous international agreements and UN General Assembly resolutions. Countries in the Global South have accumulated enormous knowledge and experience from decades of national development progress and international development assistance, which they can then share with other countries in the Global South through SSTC (UNFPA, 2023). To elaborate further, South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) is an instrument applied by "governments, international organizations, academics, social partners, civil society and the private sector to collaborate and share knowledge, skills, know-how, and good practices in decent work and lifelong learning approaches as well as successful initiatives in specific areas such as agricultural development, human rights, urbanization, health, climate change, social protection and employment generation" (ILO, 2023).

The SSTC involves three stakeholders: two or more developing countries from the South and one actor from the North. The latter (can also be an international organization) covers the financial expenses to enable the countries of the South sharing knowledge on a certain topic. The division of "North" and "South" refers to the social, economic, and political differences between developed countries (North) and developing countries (South) and does not indicate a specific geographic location (UPU, 2023).

Given the unilateral tendency of world politics and ongoing regional crisis, South-South cooperation (SSC) has become even more relevant, and its potential has been explored by the international community as it was

demonstrated by the BAPA+40 with the theme “Role of South–South cooperation and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: challenges and opportunities.” (BAPA+40, 2023)

Indeed, since the ground-breaking First UN Conference on Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries that was held in 1978, SSC have proved that Southern donors of development aid might be well placed to champion sustainable development among themselves through sharing their own experiences for mutual benefits (Silvia Lopez Cabana, 2014). The importance of SSC has grown in parallel with the changing landscape of aid architecture in which traditional donors no longer play the leading role.

3 Turkish Experience with South-South Cooperation

In recent years, Türkiye’s development cooperation has grown remarkably and surpassed the contributions of many established donors, in both absolute numbers as well as in terms of the ODA/GDP ratio. As a matter of fact, Türkiye’s development cooperation combines aspects of both established and emerging donors. While it follows many of the DAC values and principles, it also shares with the Southern partners its status as a developing country and its experience as an aid recipient. The similarities and differences of Turkish aid model from both DAC and non-DAC assistance should provide the lesson that we do not necessarily have to be subject to certain categories and blocs in development cooperation. Instead, we can make use of the different modalities and experiences in a diverse cooperation landscape.

The key to achieving good practice in SSC is to meet the real demands of partner countries. In this regard, Türkiye through its development cooperation agency-TİKA works on a demand-basis in the areas that it has comparative advantages. TİKA’s activities demonstrate Türkiye’s commitment to the sustainability of development assistance in the partner countries. Türkiye also extends this commitment to the selection of partner countries in order to ensure that an active contribution is made to the achievement of SDGs.

The following six case studies of good practices of SSC of Türkiye through TİKA would provide some insights into how Türkiye responded to the request of the partners in the South and managed for the best outcome in line with the spirit of South- South Development Cooperation.

3.1 Agricultural Development Support Project for Bosniaks Returning to Their Homes in Ugljevik Municipality (2023)

The Ugljevik Municipality in Bosnia-Herzegovina, home to a Bosniak population that had to leave their homes during the war, has witnessed a return process after the conflict. In this context, an agricultural development project has been implemented to support Bosniak producers, mainly engaged in farming and animal husbandry, to help them to resettle in their hometowns. Within the scope of the project, four milk cooling tanks with a capacity of 500 liters each were procured for Bosniak families. With the given support, it is planned to market approximately 365,000 liters of milk, worth 165,000 euros, under hygienic conditions within a year. Producers, who previously benefited from renting storage facilities, have been able to reduce their production costs thanks to the free storage facilities. It is aimed to increase the quantity and quality of milk production in the region through the project, which will benefit 20 producers.

The project, which is offered for the benefit of 20 producers in Bosnia-Herzegovina, has contributed to the strengthening of the economic status of young people in particular, by eliminating the rental fee for milk tanks. The project aims to support the sustainable development goals, particularly goal 2, "Zero Hunger", and goal 8, "Decent Work and Economic Growth". By providing necessary resources and support to local farmers, it aims to boost local production and improve the economic conditions of the population, enabling them to stay in their homes. The process was carried out in a participatory manner among the partners. The beneficiaries of the project, the Bosniak farmers, as well as the local authorities, had active roles in the planning and implementation phases. This joint effort ensured the success of the project and its adoption by the recipient community. The initiative provided a model for self-sufficient economic structure for local communities and increasing agricultural production. In this sense, this project can be considered a "best practice" example that can be implemented in similar communities.

Because the project offered a sustainable model, its benefits are expected to continue to be effective in the medium and long term. The improved economic situation of the supported families, thanks to increased production capacity and reduced costs, has made it possible for these families to stay in their homelands permanently. This is also an important step for economically empowering the younger generation. The implementation and results of the project offer an adaptable model for communities facing similar issues elsewhere. With the necessary resources for promoting agricultural production and strengthening the local economy, such a project can be successfully replicated.

Finally, this project has taught us that agricultural development and local capacity building are critical for the recovery of communities in the post-war period and promoting sustainable development. It also emphasizes that active participation of the local population and other stakeholders at all stages of the project is a key factor in the success and ownership of the project.

3.2 TUREP (Tourism Education Program) Trainer Training Program for Teachers (2022)

The main challenge addressed by this project is the need to improve the quality of tourism education in Azerbaijan. In many cases, the lack of practical experience, up-to-date knowledge and skills among tourism professionals are barriers to the development and competitiveness of the sector in Azerbaijan. The complexity of this challenge is further heightened by the necessity to implement novel and modern approaches in tourism education, while considering the local specificities of the Azeri context. Addressing these issues is crucial to promote sustainable tourism development, which contributes to the achievement of several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The initiative aimed to provide the necessary training and share Turkish experience with tourism professionals in Azerbaijan to enhance the quality of tourism education in the country. This goal is in line with SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), as it focuses on building human capacities and promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth. Furthermore, the advances in the tourism sector could offer economic opportunities for local communities and alleviate poverty, thus aligning with SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). The approach used was the implementation of an intensive, practical, and specialized training program for 14 tourism professionals from the Azerbaijan State Tourism Agency, Azerbaijan University of Tourism and Management, Baku Tourism Vocational School, and Mingachevir Tourism College. The training was held in Antalya, at the practical hotel of Falez Vocational and Technology Anatolian High School and covered the modern approaches in tourism education.

The cooperation between Türkiye and Azerbaijan was crucial in the success of this project. Both parties engaged actively in the process, with Turkish professionals sharing their knowledge and experience, and Azeri professionals showing enthusiasm and commitment to learning and improving their skills. The project was innovative in its focus on practical training, using Türkiye's experience and expertise in the field of tourism. It helped to improve the competitiveness of Azerbaijan's tourism sector by enhancing the quality of its human resources. As for sustainability, the acquired skills and knowledge are expected to have long-lasting effects on the improvement of tourism education in Azerbaijan. In the long term, the benefits of the project are likely to continue through the improved performance and service delivery of the trained professionals.

The project is replicable and can be adapted to similar situations or settings, as long as there is a need for improvement in the quality of tourism education, availability of experienced trainers, and commitment from the participants. The successful implementation of the project in Azerbaijan suggests its potential for replication in other countries facing similar challenges in the tourism sector. This initiative demonstrated the effectiveness of practical, intensive training in enhancing the skills and knowledge of professionals in the tourism sector. It also highlighted the importance of international cooperation in sharing experiences and learning from each other for mutual benefit. This lesson could be useful for future projects aimed at improving the quality of education in various sectors.

3.3 Bone Marrow Transplant Training in Tanzania (2022)

The project "Bone Marrow Transplant Training in Tanzania" addresses a significant challenge in Tanzania's healthcare sector. The Muhimbili State Hospital, which recently started bone marrow transplantation procedures, sought to establish its transplant unit on solid foundations. As a result, they requested to benefit from the experience of Türkiye in this field. The initiative aimed to improve the quality of healthcare services in Tanzania, in line with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3). A two-week training program was prepared by the Hematology department of Ankara University Faculty of Medicine, offering both theoretical and practical training.

The applied methodology involved practical and laboratory training at the Therapeutic Apheresis Center of Ankara University İbni Sina Hospital, with theoretical and practical training provided at the Hematology Department of Ankara University Faculty of Medicine Cebeci Campus. This approach was participatory, involving active engagement between Turkish and Tanzanian stakeholders. The trained participants are expected to initiate the application of bone marrow transplantation procedures in the Muhimbili State Hospital and contribute to the knowledge and experience development of other personnel in the field.

The outcomes of this initiative, in relation to the SDG targets, have shown a significant improvement in the healthcare services provided in the Muhimbili State Hospital, particularly regarding bone marrow transplantation. The impact of the training program extends beyond Tanzania and Türkiye, contributing to systemic, cross-country transfer of knowledge and good practices, in line with SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). The initiative was innovative, enhancing the competitive advantage of the Muhimbili State Hospital by improving its bone marrow transplantation capacity.

This "best practice" example is quite adaptable and replicable for similar healthcare service capacity-building projects. The success of the endeavor requires sound planning, sufficient training, and active participation. In places where these conditions are met, such a project can be readily implemented and scaled up. One of the lessons learned from this project is the importance of collaboration between local and international stakeholders in improving both the quality and accessibility of healthcare services. Additionally, continuous education and skill

development of healthcare service personnel is vital in enhancing the sustainability and effectiveness of healthcare services.

In conclusion, this project presents an effective and innovative approach in efforts to enhance bone marrow transplantation capacity and augment the skills and knowledge of healthcare service workers. Furthermore, this project represents a significant step towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

3.4 Türkiye-Mexico Guadalajara Autism Vocational Training Center Project

The Türkiye-Mexico Guadalajara Autism Vocational Training Center Project was designed to support the active participation of young adults with autism in social and economic life, and to provide the necessary support for revealing their skills and including them in working life. Located in Guadalajara, a municipality of the State of Jalisco, Mexico, the Education Center for Autistic and Disadvantaged People, serving different age groups of individuals with autism, aims to integrate these individuals into society and improve their vocational skills by providing various vocational trainings to 120 autistic individuals aged between 15 and 45 every week. These trainings are provided in areas such as computer, cleaning, textile, pastry, traditional toys, and gardening.

This project, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), aims to enhance the active role of individuals in social and economic life and the development of individual skills. The project focuses on young adults with autism, offering a wide range of vocational skill trainings to increase their employability and self-confidence. In this context, the project particularly supports SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). The implementation of the project has shared solution approaches and implementation techniques through bilateral cooperation between Türkiye and Mexico. This process was carried out with the mutual exchange of knowledge and experience, contributing to the learning processes of all partners at the end of the project.

Trainings were delivered along with practical workshops, providing a practical approach to enhancing individuals' skills. This approach has been effective in preparing individuals with autism for working life. The implementation and results of the project have increased awareness of autism in Türkiye and Mexico and demonstrated the value of interventions in this area. Specifically, the integration of individuals with autism into the labor force is of great importance in terms of economic development and social cohesion.

In conclusion, the Türkiye-Mexico Guadalajara Autism Vocational Training Center Project is an important step towards increasing the integration of individuals with autism into the workforce and their visibility in society. This project has created a model for realizing the skills of individuals with autism and integrating these skills into the workforce. This model can be implemented in both Türkiye and Mexico and can facilitate the active role of individuals with autism in society on a broader scale. The success of the project emphasizes the importance of education and vocational training in revealing the skills of individuals with autism and integrating them into working life. This has helped to increase awareness and understanding of autism in society at large.

3.5 Establishment of Cham Silk Processing Workshop (2021)

This project, initiated to preserve and maintain the cultural heritage of the Cham people living in Cambodia, takes significant steps in the production of Cham silk and the research of Cham motifs. The cultural heritage of the Chams, who suffered massive deaths during the Khmer Rouge era, has been severely damaged. This project aims to revive the silk weaving craft of the Chams and create a new economic activity in this field. The project initiated to protect and preserve the cultural heritage of the Cham people living in Cambodia aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Specifically, the project is in harmony with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

The implementation of the project has expanded opportunities for knowledge and experience sharing between Türkiye and Cambodia. This process has supported sustainable cooperation between the two countries, contributing to the learning processes of all partners at the end of the project. In the project, tangible steps have been taken such as R&D activities to research local motifs and creating the necessary infrastructure for the production of Cham silk. These activities have helped preserve and develop the cultural heritage of the Chams, while also serving to increase the economic welfare of this community. The outcomes of the project, thanks to the potential of reviving the silk-weaving craft of the Cham people and increasing their visibility within society, have enabled more active participation of the Chams in social and economic life.

In conclusion, the Türkiye-Mexico Guadalajara Autism Vocational Training Center Project has helped to revive the cultural heritage and crafts of the Cham people, strengthening their position within society and the economy. This project has developed the silk-weaving skills of the Chams and offered them a stronger economic future. Additionally, significant visibility has been provided to our country by DC-CAM, which contributed significantly to the development and implementation of the project.

3.6 Establishment of Mushroom Production Garden in Chittagong Girls' Foster Home (2023)

This project, initiated for the young girls at the Chattogram Balika Sadan Orphanage, aims to improve the quality of life for the 200 girl students in Chittagong, the second-largest city in Bangladesh. Their needs for housing,

medical care, clothing, and education are met at this orphanage. However, the aim of this project is to prepare these young girls for life outside the orphanage and to equip them with skills to sustain themselves.

Therefore, a mushroom production facility has been established in the orphanage. The girls have received practical technical training in mushroom production, thereby acquiring a new skill and contributing to the economic sustainability of the orphanage. A part of the mushrooms produced meets the nutritional needs of the children residing in the orphanage, and the rest is sold in the local market, generating additional income for the orphanage. This project has a direct impact on the girls' lives. While their nutritional needs are met, they have also gained a new skill through hands-on training. Additionally, mushroom cultivation has imparted them knowledge and experience in agricultural production. These skills can provide them with economic independence even after they leave the orphanage. Another significant aspect of the project is its contribution to the economic sustainability of the orphanage. The income generated from the sale of mushrooms supports the functioning of the orphanage. This has made the orphanage's operations sustainable and increased its capacity to assist more children.

In conclusion, the Mushroom Production Garden Establishment Project implemented at the Chattogram Balika Sadan Orphanage has helped to improve the lives of the young girls and ensure the economic sustainability of the orphanage. This project has assisted the orphanage children in enhancing their skills and capabilities, in their nutrition, and in gaining economic independence for their future. In short, this project has positively impacted the lives of the orphan girls in Chittagong.

4 Conclusion

Being a country transformed from an agriculture-based economy to a trade and industry-based economy, Türkiye has a lot to share with the countries that are following the same process with regard to globalization. This transfer of experience and know-how was initially aimed towards Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Balkans. All these activities and projects are undertaken with an utmost desire to attain the SDGs, and therefore in recent years, Türkiye has started to focus on assisting African countries in their struggle against poverty and the development of infrastructure.

From the good practices discussed above, it is quite certain that there is huge potential for South-South Cooperation to complement the support of developed countries and Türkiye is working hard to explore this potential through its TİKA field offices while observing its added value to SDGs. The case studies have not only underpinned Türkiye's commitment to UN SDGs, but also demonstrated Türkiye solidary with the Global South through sharing its experience and know-how on areas where considerable achievements have been made.

It is true that bilateral and multilateral donors from the North and the international organizations, especially the United Nations, can play an important role to promote and facilitate this cooperation and make use of its potential for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. However, we believe that it should be the Southern stakeholders themselves in driver's seat shaping the scope and boundaries of the SSC.

Nowadays, aid modalities of some Southern donors are challenging the status quo of aid architecture both in terms of discourse and practice, which echoes the defining aspect of Southern development cooperation which allows the understanding of no "one-size-fits-all" solution to development challenges. Some Southern donors may follow different paths in accordance with their own traditions and standards as long as they remain committed to the SDGs.

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