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Strengthening South-South cooperation for food and agriculture in Latin America and the Caribbean

I. Summary

1. Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the regions that has made the greatest strides in promoting South-South cooperation (SSC) as a mechanism for the mutual sharing and exchange of development solutions to address global, regional, subregional and national challenges. In turn, SSC has served as a tool for promoting regional integration, building on complementarities between countries and subregions. The summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), held in Havana (Cuba) in 2014, and the joint summit of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America - Peoples' Trade Treaty (ALBA-TCP) and PetroCaribe, held in Caracas (Venezuela) in 2013, made SSC one of the main instruments of their action plans for: helping to reduce regional disparities and gaps in national development; promoting sustainable development and innovative partnerships by linking existing regional and subregional cooperation bodies; and coordinating common positions and agendas in international fora and organizations.

2. Even though the region as a whole has made great progress in reducing extreme poverty, hunger and undernutrition, largely by implementing a complex set of public policies, coupled with heavy political commitment, further efforts are needed to ensure that a number of countries meet the World Food Summit target and Millennium Development Goals. FAO's new Strategic Framework, implemented through five strategic objectives, together with its revised South-South Cooperation Strategy, will enable the Organization to use its comparative advantages to mobilize the diverse experiences of Latin American and Caribbean countries as suppliers or users, building countries' capacity to boost their own development processes sustainably and to consolidate ongoing efforts.

II. South-South cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean

3. The Buenos Aires Plan of Action (1978), adopted by the United Nations Conference on Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries, is seen as a milestone for Latin America and the Caribbean because it highlights the horizontal nature of cooperation, as opposed to vertical official development assistance, and recognizes the ability of developing countries to create, acquire, adapt, transfer and pool knowledge and experience for their mutual benefit.

4. In Latin America and the Caribbean, SSC has been valuable in finding answers to global challenges such as energy and food crises, climate change and pandemics, which have prompted

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countries in the global south to increase their partnerships through interregional, regional and subregional bodies. SSC has come to prominence in the region at a time when we are seeing movements and dynamics aimed at constructing regional identities and spaces that go beyond what has hitherto been considered as integration.

5. A number of countries in the region have policies, programmes, experiences and institutional processes that have proved successful in fighting hunger, poverty and malnutrition. Potentially this accumulated experience could be made available to other national governments to support their ongoing efforts to meet the World Food Summit target and Millennium Development Goals.

South-South cooperation, a tool for promoting regional integration

6. SSC is a broad concept covering a range of different forms of collaboration among developing countries designed to allow them to work together to address common challenges. The knowledge, experience, good practices, policies, technology and know-how accumulated in Latin America and the Caribbean are powerful public goods that should be shared if effective progress is to be made in fighting hunger.

7. SSC is gaining momentum throughout the world. In Latin America and the Caribbean, growing numbers of middle-income countries are contributing to cooperation, prompting changes in the regional development architecture and promoting joint efforts in favour of a more inclusive, effective and broader-based development agenda. Over the past 10 years, countries such as Argentina, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Cuba, Chile, Colombia and Mexico have increased their SSC flows in the region.

8. Most Latin American and Caribbean countries view SSC as an institutional action by which a State agency enjoying institutional support provides public goods and technical assistance. Some countries also supply financial resources, while others allow lower-income countries to contribute by providing technical cooperation to a third country.

9. The diverse forms of regional integration (CELAC, ALBA, PetroCaribe)¹ and subregional integration (ALADI, CARICOM, MERCOSUR, SICA and UNASUR)² currently in operation are an expression of the continent's economic, social, political, cultural and natural diversity. While these processes have advanced in parallel, albeit at different rates, they share the common goal of enhancing dialogue and coordination with a view to broadening integration and pooling efforts to address development issues.

10. SSC has played an important role in these processes as a regional integration tool because it helps to strengthen relations between partners in the region by taking into account their complementarities in terms of cooperation capabilities and development needs.

11. Regional integration has been prompted not only by economic issues but also by a concern to fight hunger: in 2005, countries committed to eradicating hunger from Latin America and the Caribbean through the Hunger-Free Latin America and the Caribbean Initiative 2025 (IALCSH)³. The initiative has facilitated South-South exchanges at technical and policy decision-making levels among various executive and legislative bodies and local and regional governments.

12. The integration of countries and the development of South-South and triangular cooperation both look set to receive new impetus in the region: not only did the CELAC Declaration of 2013⁴ establish a Working Group on International Cooperation, it also appealed to the tradition of North-

¹ CELAC: Community of Latin American and Caribbean States; ALBA: Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas.

² ALADI: Latin American Integration Association; CAN: Andean Community; CARICOM: Caribbean Community; MERCOSUR: Southern Common Market; SICA: Central American Integration System; UNASUR: Union of South American Nations.

³ In addition, individual countries decided to espouse and support IALCSH by joining the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries in the United Nations (GRULAC), a forum for dialogue to coordinate and achieve consensus on various issues, which has been monitoring IALCSH activities since 2006, as well as the IALCSH Working Group (GT2025) which regularly monitors the initiative.

⁴ Santiago Declaration issued at the first summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) in Chile in January 2013.

South cooperation and to international financial institutions to align their cooperation more closely with country priorities. The working group's priority is to prepare a regional policy for South-South and triangular cooperation that reflects the region's identity, helps to reduce regional disparities, promotes sustainable development and is coordinated with cooperation agencies already in the region.

Growing interest in triangular South-South cooperation in the region and among partners from outside the region

13. Even though most SSC forms part of a bilateral relationship between countries, triangular South-South cooperation (TSSC) involving a third partner (a traditional donor, emerging economy or multilateral organization) is increasing.

14. According to the latest report on South-South cooperation in Latin America 2012⁵ by the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB)⁶, in 2011, the number of bilateral horizontal South-South cooperation (HSSC) projects and actions in the region remained stable at 800-850 interventions, whereas TSSC doubled in the same year compared with 2010 (rising from 82 to 144 interventions), which is an indication of interest, as well as the opportunities, potential and benefits to be gained from involving more partners.

15. TSSC is therefore seen as an innovative tool for promoting synergy between the different cooperation traditions (North-South and South-South) and for leveraging the capabilities and comparative advantages of the various stakeholders and the resources they bring. Countries like Germany, Japan and Spain⁷ are also helping to increase TSSC actions; other partners from outside the region, such as the People's Republic of China, are exploring new ways to increase SSC with and among countries in the region.

16. The outcome in all instances has been to expand: the scope of cooperation actions with the involvement of various stakeholders; the contribution of different resources; and the distribution of roles in planning, technology transfer, financing, monitoring and evaluation.

III. Why does the region need South-South cooperation?

17. SSC can be a valuable tool, used in conjunction with other measures, to support national and regional efforts and help to meet challenges, including those listed below.

Progress in eradicating hunger from the region as a commitment from all

18. According to the Panorama of Food and Nutritional Security in Latin America and the Caribbean, the region has had a good record of economic growth and social protection in recent years, at a time when the economies of industrialized countries have experienced crisis and generally low growth rates.

19. The region's progress towards achieving the target set by Millennium Development Goal 1 of halving, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger, gives cause for continued optimism: if efforts are redoubled and this positive economic and social trend continues, there is every reason to believe that today's generation of Latin Americans and Caribbeans will be the first in history to put hunger and undernutrition behind them.

20. A challenge of this scale requires deeper and speedier changes in the structural redistribution of income, coupled with optimal fine-tuning of sectoral and short-term policies to help reduce poverty and eradicate hunger from the region.

⁵ No specific data for the region is available to quantify South-South and triangular cooperation on food and agriculture.

⁶ At the 17th Ibero-American Summit in Santiago (Chile) in 2007, the Heads of State and Government ordered a report on South-South cooperation to be produced annually. The Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB) helps to prepare the annual report through the Ibero-American Programme to strengthen South-South Cooperation.

⁷ Spain has been an important partner in triangular South-South cooperation since 2005: it has facilitated a number of cooperation initiatives involving Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Central America, Chile, Haiti, Mexico and Paraguay. It has also promoted South-South cooperation actions in Latin America and the Caribbean through the Spain-FAO Trust Fund.

21. The various regional and subregional integration organizations have reaffirmed their commitment to work to eradicate hunger from the region: the latest joint ALBA-TCP PetroCaribe extraordinary summit (2013) adopted the “Hugo Chaves Frias” action plan for the eradication of hunger and poverty; the latest CELAC summit (January 2014) requested FAO, jointly with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and ALADI, to draft a plan for food and nutrition security and the eradication of hunger.

22. Bilateral and triangular SSC will continue to make an important contribution to the commitments and efforts of countries and integration organizations to combat hunger. There are also opportunities for SSC with other regions of the world, especially Africa, with which Latin America and the Caribbean could share experiences, processes and advances in addressing this major challenge.

Family farming and rural development

23. Family farms are responsible for producing most of the food consumed in Latin America and the Caribbean. On average, smallholdings account for more 80 percent of all farms and 30–40 percent of the region’s agricultural gross domestic product. In addition, family farming boosts employment in rural areas, which are home to the worst pockets of poverty and food insecurity.

24. Despite their huge potential to increase the local availability of affordable food, family farmers continue to face severe challenges and constraints, especially compared with export-oriented mechanized farming.

25. International Year of Family Farming 2014 provides an opportunity to raise the profile of family farming by focusing world attention on the key role of family farming in eradicating hunger. SSC can facilitate exchanges of experience on the formulation and adoption of successful policies and programmes that have not only increased the production of goods and services from family farms sustainably but also linked them with local market, public procurement and other initiatives.

Malnutrition

26. While the region has made progress in eradicating hunger, another serious food-related problem has emerged in recent decades: overnutrition, leading to high rates of overweight and obesity, mainly as a result of lifestyle and dietary changes among Latin Americans and Caribbeans in recent years.

27. Malnutrition in all its forms – undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and overweight and obesity – imposes unacceptably high economic and social costs on countries of all income levels. Awareness of this harmful phenomenon has led to a wide range of initiatives for reducing and, in the medium term, reversing it. SSC can make available to countries, on request, the experiences and good practices of other countries in the region.

Focusing on priority countries

28. Haiti is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to risk, disasters and climate change. In the past decade, the country has suffered a devastating earthquake (January 2010), drought, tropical storms and hurricanes, floods, cholera epidemics and political crises.

29. The 31st and 32nd Regional Conferences for Latin America and the Caribbean (held in Panama in 2010 and Argentina in 2012 respectively) designated Haiti a priority of FAO’s technical assistance programme⁸. In response to this priority, during the 2012-2013 biennium Brazil and FAO mobilized their technical and financial cooperation in the context of TSSC across a range of projects. In November 2012, FAO also sponsored a regional technical workshop to mobilize SSC in support of the Haiti – Relaunching Agriculture plan⁹, which was attended by representatives of ten countries,

⁸ The first CELAC Summit in 2013 called upon governments in the region to continue contributing to Haiti’s comprehensive development and ratified the resolution adopted by the first meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of CELAC on special cooperation with Haiti.

⁹ The plan’s aims include reviving agricultural production, increasing productivity and resilience, promoting agro-industry and reversing the process of land degradation.

three of which confirmed and offered to expand their cooperation and a further three identified potential areas of cooperation.

30. Even though Haiti receives bilateral SSC from Argentina, Cuba and Venezuela, more contributions are required in this sector, while establishing synergies and complementarities with other cooperation actions.

Countries classified as middle-income still face major challenges

31. Per capita income is the main criterion used to group countries by level of development and to allocate funding from international cooperation. According to this criterion, 72 percent of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean fall into the category of upper middle-income countries; 24 percent of countries are classified as lower middle-income; and 4 percent, as low-income.

32. However, as ECLAC (2012) points out, countries differ markedly in terms not only of size and social conditions, but also of economic and structural conditions linked to such characteristics as development potential, production performance and integration into world trade. High levels of inequality and vulnerability to external shocks, coupled with institutional issues, are just some of the challenges faced by middle-income countries.

33. SSC can: make a key contribution to poverty eradication efforts (middle-income countries are home to 41 percent of the developing world's population whose income is less than 2 dollars a day); prevent reversal of social and economic progress; and serve as regional development hubs. In addition, SSC is still an important means for sharing and facilitating the provision of such global public goods as peacekeeping, prevention of contagious diseases, financial stability and environmental sustainability.

Development solutions that take into account indigenous peoples and civil society participation

34. With an estimated population of around 50 million, the 670 indigenous peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean are a source of identity. Poverty and food insecurity are three times higher among indigenous peoples than among the rest of the region's population and, in some cases, up to eight times higher.

35. Although institutional development is uneven across Latin America and the Caribbean, the common denominator in countries' public policies and programmes is lack of an approach to secure the active participation of indigenous peoples and sociocultural considerations that ensure that actions have greater impact and sustainability.

36. SSC can make a key contribution to experience-sharing and capacity-building to improve the institutional environment in response to their demands and build the capacity of governments to include indigenous peoples in development processes, respecting their rights and views. SSC among indigenous peoples' organizations can be another important means for capacity-building and advocacy. This dimension also needs to be included in bilateral and trilateral SSC policies.

37. There has been far-reaching innovation in stakeholder participation (particularly civil society) in institutional development in Latin America and the Caribbean, especially in participatory development strategies, which has led to a more critical and inclusive approach focusing closely on the most vulnerable sectors. A number of countries in the region have a set of policies and programmes in which civil society is playing an active management role, which has improved implementation outcomes. South-South exchanges of such experience could assist other countries in building their capacity, especially in the design phase of new policy instruments for helping to eradicate hunger.

Broaden and deepen poverty alleviation policies that take gender into account

38. Women comprise half the rural population over the age of 15; 46 percent of women in rural areas over the age 15 have no income of their own; on average, women employed in agriculture receive 75 percent of men's wages. To achieve a world without hunger and malnutrition, it is

paramount for women and men to enjoy the same opportunities and to be able to benefit on an equal footing from sustainable development and humanitarian interventions.

39. Public policies are not indifferent to gender issues and impact differently on men and women in the various population segments. Although governments have made efforts to gradually mainstream gender into policies and programmes, clearly inequalities remain.

40. Gender equality is central to achieving a hunger-free Latin America and the Caribbean, and SSC could contribute to the sustained sharing and exchange of ideas, experience, knowledge, skills and tools among countries in the global south in every field (including agriculture, social protection, education, health and the environment)..

IV. FAO's new Strategic Framework

41. To address major global trends in agricultural development and challenges faced by member countries, FAO has identified key priorities on which it is best placed to assist.

42. Following an exhaustive review of FAO's comparative advantages, five strategic objectives were extrapolated representing the main areas of FAO's global work: (i) help eliminate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition; (ii) make agriculture, forestry and fisheries more productive and sustainable; (iii) reduce rural poverty; (iv) enable inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems; (v) increase the resilience of livelihoods to disasters.

43. The programme of work for Latin America and the Caribbean on the five strategic objectives in the 2014-2015 biennium aims to respond to the priorities set by member countries at previous regional conferences, which is an ongoing challenge requiring further progress. Through regional initiatives as a way of improving the work of FAO, there will also be a focus on priority countries and on integrating work on the five objectives.

44. To meet the demands of national priority frameworks and FAO strategic objectives there will need to be greater and more effective mobilization of TSSC to help strengthen institutions, regulatory frameworks and intersector interaction. New mechanisms and instruments will also need to be identified to respond swiftly to development support requests and to emergencies.

V. FAO South-South Cooperation Strategy

To eradicate hunger, we need to combine efforts, knowledge and experience.

45. FAO has geared its South-South Cooperation Strategy to the new context: adjustments to the FAO Strategic Framework, growing participation in SSC by countries in the global south and the importance of SCC in subregional and regional processes, coupled with a trend towards a more global approach and more efficient use of resources,.

46. Thus the new strategy introduced by FAO in 2013 incorporates lessons learned from 16 years of implementing TSSC in support of food and nutrition security, during which time the SSC of 15 partner countries was mobilized to support the efforts of a further 52 countries.

47. The new FAO strategy defines SSC as the mutual sharing and exchange of key development solutions – knowledge, experience and good practices, policies, technology, know-how and resources – between and among countries in the global south. The principles used to promote SSC are: mutual benefit, solidarity, respect for sovereignty and equality, as part of a demand-driven approach.

48. With its renewed vision, the FAO South-South Cooperation Strategy provides a frame of reference for FAO's participation in SSC at global, regional and national levels, with a view to facilitating and promoting national leadership and capacity-building of member countries to enable them to conduct their own development processes sustainably.

49. The four pillars of the FAO South-South Cooperation Strategy are to:

- a) facilitate the exchange and uptake of development solutions in terms of policies, programmes, methodologies and technologies, as well processes for enhancing the cross-sector approach, civil society participation, policy dialogue and other aspects;
- b) promote platforms for knowledge networking at the institutional level, strengthening organizational capacity through networking among institutions, innovation generators, SCC promoters and knowledge users;
- c) mobilize upstream policy support for SSC, targeting policy-makers as an important pathway to achieving agricultural development impact;
- d) foster an enabling environment for effective SSC, enhancing technical capacity at FAO headquarters and decentralized offices, mobilizing adequate resources and broadening partnerships and strategic alliances.

VI. FAO's role in South-South cooperation processes

50. The two latest FAO Regional Conferences highlighted the importance of expanding the use of SSC as a priority mechanism for mutual sharing and exchange of development solutions and experiences in the region. Some of FAO's comparative advantages as a facilitator and promoter of TSSC are as follows.

- a) The widespread presence of FAO offices in member countries, which facilitates collaboration with national authorities and other relevant stakeholders and understanding of their potential strengths and of areas where support is required.
- b) FAO's presence and dialogue with national, subregional and regional bodies in which attention could be directed towards priority issues. To date, FAO's presence has allowed hunger-alleviation cooperation efforts to be consolidated and pooled, including globally. One challenge is to develop food security plans and another is to successfully mobilize South-South financial and technical resources for implementation.
- c) Another of FAO's comparative advantages for engaging in TSSC is its ongoing support for country capacity-building in policies, programmes, projects and technology, which enables FAO to identify the potential and complementarities of different SSC initiatives and ensures that they are better targeted and converge on issues of national or even subregional interest.
- d) As a United Nations system organization, FAO seeks to ensure that partners in TSSC agreements comply with their mutual commitments and with such SSC principles as a horizontal relationship, respect for sovereignty, accountability and a demand-driven approach.
- e) FAO serves as a knowledge network that uses the experience of staff highly qualified in a variety of areas to collect, analyse and disseminate information to contribute to development. Another of FAO's comparative advantages is that it can provide this knowledge through technical supervision and quality assurance to ensure that the development solutions proposed are those best suited to the political/institutional, social, environmental and cultural context of countries seeking SSC.
- f) FAO generates and shares important information on food, agriculture and natural resources in the form of global public goods. However, it is not a one-way flow of information. FAO plays a liaison role, identifying and working with partners with proven experience, and facilitating dialogue among those with knowledge and those in need of it, as well as a two-way learning process.
- g) By joining forces, FAO facilitates partnerships among governments, development partners, civil society and the private sector. FAO can contribute to TSSC by promoting alliance-building and facilitating resource mobilization. New allies need to be found to help to promote SSC in the region on the basis of their different roles, experience and resources.

VII. Guidance sought from the Regional Conference

The Regional Conference is invited to:

- Request FAO to continue supporting country efforts to expand triangular South-South cooperation as a support tool in fighting hunger and addressing priority issues in the region.
- Confirm the importance of FAO supporting and facilitating South-South cooperation initiatives for the eradication of hunger and malnutrition promoted as part of CELAC and ALBA-TCP PetroCaribe, as well as triangular South-South cooperation initiatives, with FAO participation, in which Brazil and Chile are already collaborating, to be joined shortly by Cuba, Mexico (through the Hunger-Free MesoAmerica Initiative) and Venezuela.
- Request FAO, jointly with ECLAC, to continue supporting the facilitation, design and implementation of the South-South cooperation proposal by the People's Republic of China to assist Latin America and the Caribbean in food- and agriculture-related areas to enable it to contribute effectively to ongoing regional, subregional and national efforts.
- Recognize the response of several countries in the region in mobilizing bilateral or triangular South-South cooperation to support implementation of the Haiti – Relaunching Agriculture plan; call upon other countries to formalize their support and request FAO to continue supporting this effort.
- Request FAO to promote fora for exchanging information, awareness of options and ways to help increase flows of South-South and triangular cooperation among Latin American and Caribbean countries and between the region and other regions, in particular on food and agriculture matters, and to foster closer relations between them and South-South cooperation agencies and units within countries.
- Recognize the importance of complementing and organizing bilateral and triangular South-South cooperation efforts to reinforce priority issues in the region and expand stakeholder participation (civil society).