

**Keynote remarks by Mr. Mabingue Ngom,
Regional Director of the United Nations
Population Fund, West and Central Africa
Regional Office
(UNFPA WCARO)**

**17th International Inter-Ministerial Conference on
South-South Cooperation
in Population and Development**

Technical Session 1

**Implementation of the Nairobi Commitments Through South-
South Cooperation
in the post-COVID-19 era**

19 November 2020 - Virtual

Thank you very much, dear Mr. Tarik Iziraren, the Partners in Population and Development (PPD) and China for organizing this gathering. It is a pleasure to see you again.

I would like to thank all the panelists - most of whom I know either personally or through their work. I also recognize all participants connected worldwide. It is my great honor and privilege to deliver these remarks on behalf of the United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA - as a devoted promoter of South-South Cooperation, at this 17th International Inter-Ministerial Conference on South-South Cooperation in Population and Development.

I would like to thank the Partners in Population and Development (PPD) for creating this unique opportunity to discuss the ***“Implementation of the Nairobi Commitments Through South-South Cooperation in the post-COVID-19 era”***.

Honorable Ministers, fellow panelists, dear participants, colleagues, and friends,

I am delighted to be here today to talk about a topic that is very close to my heart, for at least three reasons:

- 1) I see this as an opportunity to celebrate and to reflect on the efforts so far deployed since the early 80s to promote South-South Cooperation;
- 2) To share some lessons learned from past pandemics, with the last ones being from the Ebola in 2014/2015;
- 3) Situate the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the Nairobi Commitments to finish the unfinished business of the ICPD PoA.

Let me begin by stating that very early in my professional life, I felt the incredible potential of South-South Cooperation. In the late 80s, I was privileged to be among the very first groups of few professionals trained to promote South-South Cooperation under the auspice of the SU/TCDC.

This was a turning point following the adoption of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA) for promoting and implementing technical cooperation amongst developing countries.

Like many of the colleagues in this forum, I remained an active member of the South-South Cooperation community before the MDGs, including during the transition towards the establishment of the UN Staff College. We were convinced that scaling-up South-South Cooperation could accelerate prosperity for all.

My conviction was even stronger when the entire development community entered the last 1,000 days of the MDGs. At the time, these were clear signs that MDGs would end without transforming the lives of a significant range of people living below the poverty line.

This exactly is what drove a small group of colleagues, some of whom are with us today, to organize the Taicang consultations on South-South Cooperation in 2014.

It was an opportunity to remind development partners of the potential to leverage South-South Cooperation to lift people out of poverty, such as by accelerating the implementation of the ICPD PoA.

At this stage, allow me to acknowledge the instrumental role played by my friend Dr. Hu former Commissioner of NHFP of China.

Following the Taicang Consultations and the adoption of the Taicang Commitments for South-South Cooperation, we wanted to ensure that South-South Cooperation was fully taken into account in the new development agenda to replace the MDGs.

This was the background of the Fall 2014 Special Edition of UNFPA's flagship publication, "Evidence and Action", entitled, "South-South Cooperation: A Development Accelerator for Post-2015. In that edition, I underscored the importance of South-South Cooperation as an instrument and strategic lever to achieve the ICPD PoA and the Sustainable Development Goals.

We wanted to start early and accelerate upfront rather than wait until the last 1000 days to start rushing and possibly missing opportunities to deliver on our ambitious Post-2015 targets. You will understand why I said earlier that I am honored to be with you today to speak about South-South Cooperation.

Secondly, today, more than ever, I see incredible opportunities in South-South Cooperation. The COVID-19 pandemic broke out shortly after the November 2019 Nairobi Summit on the ICPD25. We had just renewed our commitment to finish the *unfinished business of the ICPD* and carry on with the principle to *Leave-No-One-Behind*.

In responding to COVID-19, we have drawn lessons from our experiences dealing with other epidemics in the South. Some of the lessons were from Ebola that hit Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone between 2014 and 2016.

From the lessons, we have seen the need to apply a community-based approach, focus on contact-tracing, ensure that maternity wards are perceived as safe places, avail healthcare workers with proper training

and

effective use of PPEs. These lessons and experiences have helped us deliver successful results and availed us with key information to face the current COVID-19 pandemic.

We held learning afternoons to share country experiences and drawing lessons to overcome common and specific challenges. We developed tools to guide in-country actions building on successful experiences in countries of the global south, especially concerning behavioral challenges (burial rituals, ceremonies), mobilizing their resources such as youth to facilitate contact-tracing, treatment, and other key tasks necessary to roll back the pandemic in the communities.

Today, most countries in Africa are performing relatively well in responding to COVID-19. Of the 57 million positive cases recorded globally, Africa has about two million cases. South Africa, Morocco, Egypt, and Ethiopia together having about 60% of the overall cases. African countries continue to learn from each other, including on how applying restrictive measures to contain and manage the disease's spread.

For UNFPA, South-South Cooperation will remain a significant mode of engagement and delivery of our promises.

Thirdly, COVID-19 is not over yet. The second wave is unfolding, and we must be ready for it. We all know how the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged our efforts toward achieving the SDGs by 2030.

Now is the time and the opportunity to make South-South Cooperation a real accelerator of the Decade of Action and a tool to ***Build Back Better***.

We

must deploy our experiences and scale-up South-South Cooperation and extend them across various development sectors beyond our direct mandates.

South-South Cooperation plays a critical role in operationalizing the commitments that partners and governments made in Nairobi precisely a year ago. In Nairobi, partners boldly committed to transforming the world by ending all maternal deaths, unmet need for family planning, gender-based violence, and harmful practices against women and girls by 2030.

However, the socio-economic impact is enormous on countries, particularly for women and youth in the informal sector. In each country, the UN is working closely with the governments and development partners, to implement the global socio-economic response plan.

We need to ensure that the three transformative results and the Nairobi commitments are well taken into consideration.

In reality, we know that COVID-19 has shifted us away from the expected results, particularly in areas in which we had not done well over the last 25 years, such as on Gender-Based Violence. Restrictive measures to contain COVID-19 have led to an increase in cases of GBV across the world.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Buenos Aires outcome document recognizes the contribution of South-South and triangular cooperation in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in sustainable development. This is also why the response to, and recovery from

COVID-19 pandemic needs to be carried out with a gender lens: ensuring sexual reproductive health and rights, promoting gender equality, and protecting people from GBV and harmful practices, and more specifically, women, girls, and youth who are the most vulnerable.

Providing family planning and other sexual and reproductive health commodities are central to women's health, empowerment, and sustainable development and may be impacted as supply chains undergo strains locally from the pandemic response.

South-South Cooperation has had a major positive impact on maintaining systems up and running. For instance, Jack Ma's donation of Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) to African countries is a key example when there were huge constraints on production systems and harsh competition among countries to get those protective and life-saving resources.

Two years ago in Buenos Aires, we reaffirmed our view of South-South cooperation as a manifestation of solidarity among peoples and countries of the South. South-South cooperation is not a substitute for, but rather a complement to, North-South cooperation. There is indeed an opportunity for using Southern solutions as a complement to traditional assistance modalities.

Government representatives also stressed institutionalizing South-South and triangular partnerships as mechanisms for policy dialogue, technical cooperation, and the sharing of innovative approaches contextualized to local situations.

There was a call for countries of the South to increase financial resources to scale up such mechanisms.

In Nairobi, the session on South-South and Triangular Cooperation highlighted South-South Cooperation as an alternative political and financing tool in developing countries for achieving unfinished ICPD and SDGs 2030 agenda.

If we are to accelerate progress after Nairobi in the framework of COVID-19, we, therefore, need to accelerate commitments and intensify South-South cooperation financing mechanisms.

At this point, I would like to acknowledge, and recognize the commitments that have been made since 2015 by China and India, among others, and congratulate them as some of those commitments are progressively materializing to support the attainment of the 3 transformative Results.

I would also like to thank all those who have made South-South Cooperation a recognized approach to complement other forms of partnership.

Those forms of cooperation must be strengthened so that together we can produce the kind of partnerships we need for global solidarity.

Going forward, we should ask ourselves the question: ***How does South-South Cooperation will help to build back better?***

Here are a few orientations for further conversations and reflection:

We must invest more in innovation, not only technological innovation but in social and financial innovation that would create fiscal space for governments to invest more and more efficiently in the ICPD agenda.

We must develop South-South multi-stakeholder partnerships beyond governments, involving influential civil society networks such as youth or traditional and religious leaders. This will actively contribute to the strengthening of primary health care and the establishment of universal health coverage, as a way to leave no one behind.

We must leverage South-South and Triangular Cooperation that goes beyond traditional cooperation to achieve more, such as what is currently being done for the research for a vaccine on COVID-19.

We must, therefore, act together through a global, all-encompassing partnership between countries of the South and countries of the North.

Achievements of South-South and Triangular Cooperation must also be promoted and shared. For instance, the concepts of contact-tracing were developed and applied first in developing countries. Those strategies and approaches have inspired the response in developed countries.

Dear Ministers, fellow panelists, and participants,

Tremendous progress has been made from 1994 to 2019 and has continued since the Nairobi Summit held in 2019, but more needs to be done by the international community to foster cooperation in a non-traditional way and build innovative partnerships - let us not leave this as an unfinished business.

We have learned valuable lessons from this epidemic, and we have learned them the hard way. Let us all use our experiences to build resilience and keep on making this world a better place.

Global solidarity is vital, South-South and Triangular Cooperation is crucial in the success of future initiatives.

As the UN Secretary-General said, “in an interconnected world, none of us is safe until all of us are safe”.

I thank you.