

DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION DIRECTORATE

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Triangular Co-operation with Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) can benefit from triangular partnerships to share relevant expertise in tackling specific challenges, strengthening capacities and optimising resources to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

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Triangular Co-operation with Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

Challenge: Why do we need to foster more and better triangular partnerships with SIDS?

Small Island Developing States (SIDS)¹ are a heterogeneous group of countries with a shared set of unique development challenges related to their remote geography, small landmasses and populations, undiversified economies, difficulties in accessing finance, and vulnerability to climate change and other external shocks. The UN-led Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI)² shows SIDS as the most vulnerable country group. Independent of their gross national income (GNI) per capita, SIDS are uniquely vulnerable to various imminent shocks, such as natural disasters, supply disruptions and health emergencies (OECD, 2024_[1]). While SIDS span different regions – from the Caribbean to the Pacific Ocean – there is great potential to tackle their vulnerabilities through sharing experiences, expertise and knowledge in triangular partnerships.

Looking at the key vulnerability of climate change, although SIDS are responsible for less than 1% of global greenhouse gas emissions, their position on the frontline of climate change places them at disproportionate risk for large-scale disasters, loss of life, and infrastructural damage. They are remarkably vulnerable to the effects of extreme weather and the consequences of climate change, such as increasing frequency and intensity of tropical cyclones, storm surges, droughts, changing precipitation patterns, sea level rise, coral bleaching, and invasive species (OECD, 2023_[2]).

While SIDS struggle to access and absorb the funds they need, international public finance for development has seen impressive growth over the past decade, with an approximate increase of 5% on average per year (OECD, 2024_[3]). However, finance alone is not sufficient to address their unique vulnerabilities. Recent crises show the need to strengthen international co-operation and co-ordination. SIDS face challenges connecting with global networks and processes due to their small, remote populations and limited capacity. Policies and partnerships are necessary to put that finance to good use and to combine it with relevant expertise and knowledge.

¹ In 2024, the OECD's Development Assistance Committee identifies 32 countries as ODA-eligible SIDS: Belize, Cabo Verde, Comoros, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Fiji, Grenada, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Kiribati, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Mauritius, Micronesia, Montserrat, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, Solomon Islands, Suriname, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. This brief also includes data, when applicable and available, for the following graduated SIDS: Antigua and Barbuda (graduated in 2022), Bahamas (1996), Barbados (2011), Cook Islands (2020), Singapore (1996), Saint Kitts and Nevis (2014), Seychelles (2018), and Trinidad and Tobago (2011).

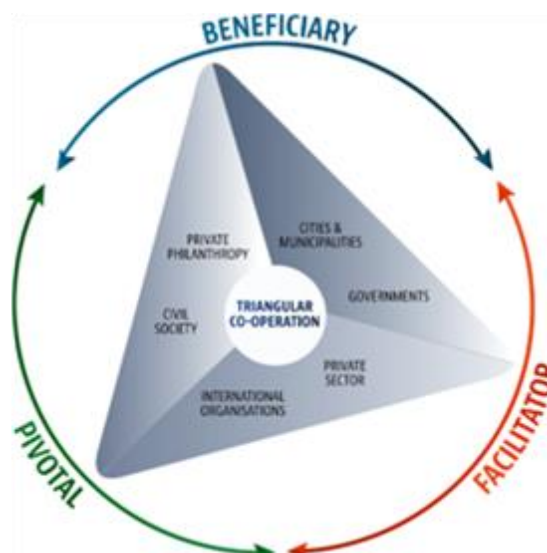
² MVI captures economic, environmental and social vulnerabilities, as well as structural economic, structural environmental and structural social resilience (United Nations, 2024_[16]).

Approach: How can SIDS engage in triangular co-operation?

Triangular co-operation presents key opportunities to catalyse resources, build on partners' comparative advantages, and link SIDS with relevant knowledge, collaborative activities and partnerships that strengthen ties and develop capacity. Triangular co-operation is a development modality of its own that goes beyond complementing South-South and North-South co-operation – bringing diverse constituencies together and drawing on strengths of different instruments. It taps into the wealth of resources and experiences of three actors:

- The **pivotal partner** often has proven experience and shares its resources, knowledge and expertise through triangular co-operation.
- The **facilitating partner** helps to connect countries and organisations to form a triangular partnership and gives financial and/or technical support to the collaboration.
- The **beneficiary partner** seeks support to tackle specific development challenges in line with their national development priorities and needs.

Figure 1. Understanding triangular co-operation



Source: OECD/IsDB (2023⁽⁴⁾), Global Perspectives on Triangular Co-operation.

Who is engaging in triangular co-operation with SIDS?

According to OECD data³, all SIDS have already engaged in triangular partnerships. Almost 20% of the initiatives listed in the OECD repository of triangular co-operation projects⁴ include at least one SIDS. Among those, more than half involve at least two SIDS, which shows the high potential of SIDS-to-SIDS

³ The OECD hosts three global datasets that capture different aspects of triangular co-operation: the OECD's Creditor Reporting System (CRS), the Total Official Support for Sustainable Development (TOSSD) measurement standard, and the OECD's online project repository for triangular co-operation. As these databases vary greatly in their methodological approaches, scope and the types of information gathered, they are not directly comparable.

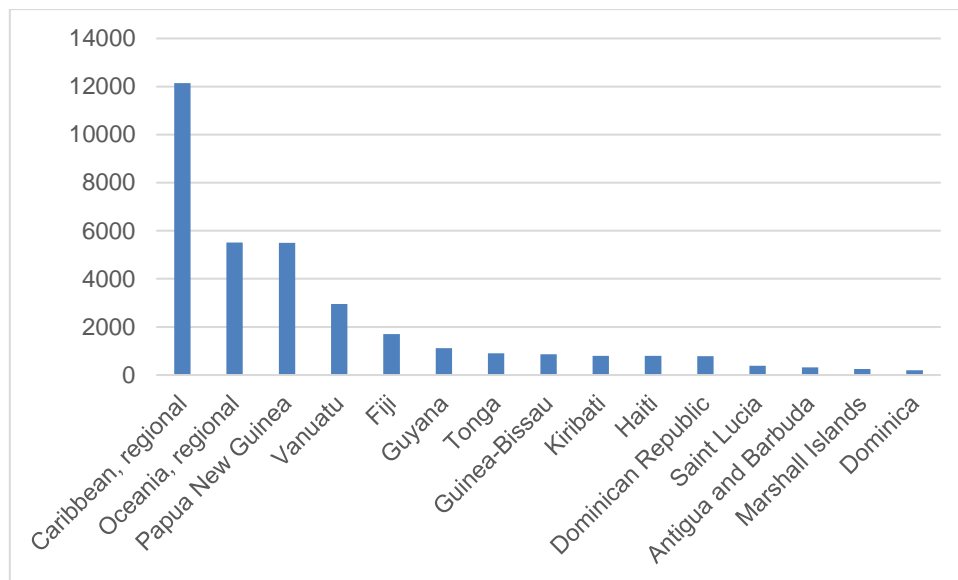
⁴ The online repository of projects is a voluntary, self-reporting database, covering the widest range of actors of the three databases, with project examples from 1993 to 2022.

exchange. The repository of projects, the only global dataset which clearly identifies not only the beneficiary but also the other partners involved, shows that 16% of projects are inter-regional exchanges.

According to the Total Official Support for Sustainable Development (TOSSD) measurement standard⁵, regional triangular co-operation projects in the Caribbean receive most funding, followed by regional projects in the Oceania. Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Fiji, Guyana, and Tonga are the top SIDS countries engaging in triangular co-operation (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Top SIDS engaging in triangular co-operation

(Disbursements in USD thousands¹, 2019 and 2022, with SIDS as beneficiary of the triangular co-operation project)



Notes: ¹ Constant 2022 prices

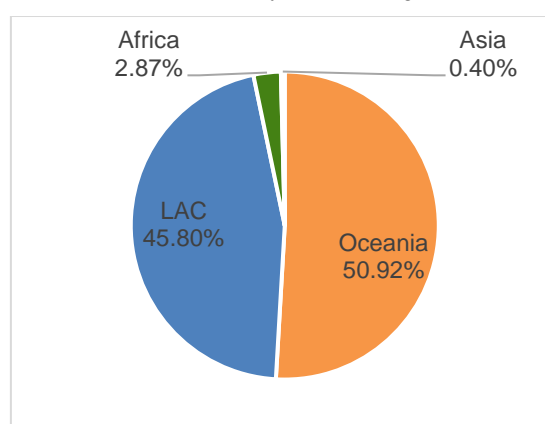
Source: Total Official Support for Sustainable Development (database) (TOSSD, 2024^[5]).

The overall regional distribution mirrors the disbursements to countries and for regional projects: 50.92% go to Oceania, 45.8% to Latin America and the Caribbean, 2.87% to African SIDS and 0.4% to SIDS in Asia – outside the Pacific region (Figure 3Figure 3).

⁵ This factsheet mainly uses data from Total Official Support for Sustainable Development (TOSSD), an international standard for measuring resources to deliver on the 2030 Agenda collecting data since 2019. It is a voluntary database, open to all official development co-operation providers and international organisations, covering the largest number of triangular co-operation initiatives. To avoid double-counting of projects and activities, the analysis of TOSSD data in this factsheet is based on disbursements, unless stated otherwise.

Figure 3. Regional distribution of the beneficiary partner in triangular co-operation with SIDS

(Disbursements, 2019 and 2022, with SIDS as beneficiary of the triangular co-operation project)



Source: Total Official Support for Sustainable Development (database) (TOSSD, 2024^[5]).

The dataset also shows a wide range of countries and institutions across the globe engaging in triangular partnerships with SIDS as pivotal or facilitating partners. The Global Green Growth Institute, Canada, Interpol, Brazil, and Chile are the main partners according to disbursements for triangular co-operation projects with SIDS (Table 1).

Table 1. Top 10 countries and institutions engaging in triangular co-operation with SIDS

(Disbursements in USD¹, 2019 and 2022, with SIDS as beneficiary of the triangular co-operation project)

Reporting country or institution	Disbursements
Global Green Growth Institute	20 million USD
Canada	9.8 million USD
Interpol	2.2 million USD
Brazil	942.000 USD
Indonesia ²	304.000 USD
Chile	289.000 USD
Organisation of American States	188.000 USD
Central American Bank for Economic Integration	176.000 USD
Costa Rica	109.000 USD
Islamic Development Bank	56.000 USD

Notes: ¹ Constant USD 2022 prices; ² Indonesia has not reported actual disbursements but commitments.

Source: Total Official Support for Sustainable Development (database) (TOSSD, 2024^[5]).

The Dominican Republic is the only SIDS that features as a beneficiary of triangular co-operation, which also reports disbursements to triangular partnerships – showing its dual role also in the TOSSD reporting (Box 1) (TOSSD, 2024^[5]).

Box 1. Triangular partnerships with the Dominican Republic as pivotal and beneficiary partner

Support for national procurement systems - Costa Rica, El Salvador, Dominican Republic and Spain

In 2019, the Dominican Republic partnered with Spain to share its experience in innovative management of public procurement with El Salvador and Costa Rica. The initiative emerged from the existing bilateral co-operation agreement between Spain and the Dominican Republic, scaling up a previous triangular co-operation and including Costa Rica as an additional beneficiary. The project included support to micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and an approach focused on gender equality. Through targeted capacity development activities, the initiative contributed to the social and economic inclusion of women in state processes and the empowerment of women in the public sphere as well as to strengthening the Dominican Republic's role as development co-operation provider.

Fostering sustainable solutions to a green preparedness and recovery – Germany, Cuba and Dominican Republic

Between 2021 and 2023, Germany, Cuba and the Dominican Republic partnered to exchange experiences on green preparedness and recovery from the impacts caused by natural disasters and pandemics. The project, co-financed by the three partners, also engaged several Dominican private and academic stakeholders. It focused on electricity generation and water pumping for relevant institutions in the health and agricultural sectors. Through the exchanges, the Dominican Republic built the technological capacity to develop and apply fast-impact, climate-resilient and replicable solutions for the use of solar energy.

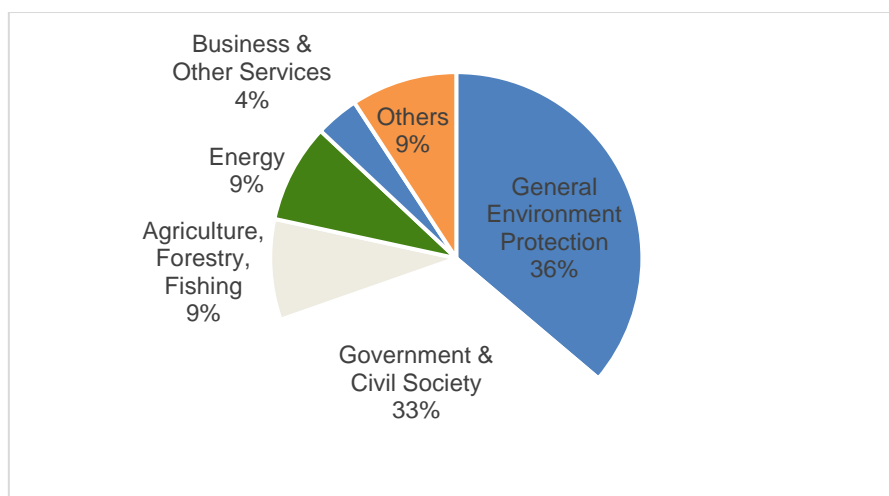
Source: OECD Repository of Triangular co-operation projects (OECD, n.d.^[6]); TOSSD, Data visualisation tool (database) (2024^[5]); Dominican Republic, RD se convierte en oferente de cooperación triangular para apoyar los sistemas de compras públicas de El Salvador y Costa Rica (2019^[7]); SEGIB, The Dominican Republic takes its first steps as Triangular Cooperation provider (2021^[8]); Ministry of Economy, Planning and Development of the Dominican Republic (MEPyD), Ministerio de Economía impulsa recuperación verde post covid-19, mediante el aprovechamiento de energía solar (2022^[9]).

In which areas are SIDS most active in triangular co-operation?

TOSSD data show that triangular co-operation spans various sectors, and when looking into triangular projects with SIDS, a concentration of projects tackling climate change is noteworthy. Whereas 44% of reported triangular co-operation goes to projects focused on government and civil society, screening only the initiatives involving SIDS, the focus shifts to general environment protection, followed by government and civil society, agriculture, forestry and fishing, and energy – sectors of high relevance for SIDS (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Sector distribution of triangular partnerships with SIDS

(Disbursements, 2019 and 2022, with SIDS as beneficiary of the triangular co-operation project)



Source: Total Official Support for Sustainable Development (database) (TOSSD, 2024^[5]).

Triangular co-operation projects with a component tackling climate change span across several sectors and SIDS also use the modality to foster economic and social resilience.

Results: What results can triangular co-operation deliver for SIDS?

Promoting peer-to-peer exchange, triangular co-operation is locally-led, mutually beneficial and leverages contributions from all partners.

Triangular co-operation catalyses financial and technical resources, leveraging contributions of all partners involved. For example, Portugal partnered with Colombia and São Tomé and Príncipe to strengthen competitiveness, support associations and enhance quality in the cocoa sector. A Colombian NGO and São Toméan cocoa export and production associations shared tools and methodologies to build the institutional capacity of diverse stakeholders linked to both countries' cocoa and agrotourism production chains.

Experience shows that through triangular partnerships, SIDS engage in new alliances at the project level, catalysing resources and increasing peer-to-peer and knowledge exchange with other developing countries, including fostering SIDS-to-SIDS co-operation. For example, Australia facilitated community-based exchanges in the agriculture and fishing sectors between Kiribati and Samoa (Box 2).

Box 2. Triangular co-operation fostering community-based and locally-led approaches

Diversification of seaweed industries in Pacific Island countries - Australia, Kiribati and Samoa

Australia partnered with Pacific Island countries to diversify and revitalise seaweed industries. A team of the Samoan Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, supported by experts from the University of Sunshine Coast, held a series of peer-led seaweed training workshops in Kiribati between 2018 and 2019, providing women with knowledge, skills, and support needed to engage in the seaweed supply chain. The main goal was to respond to the “triple burden” of malnutrition, obesity and diabetes,

alongside micronutrient deficiencies, stunting and wasting in Kiribati, building the capacity of women and youth in Kiribati to manage seaweed as a sustainable and nutritious source of food. The project successfully achieved its goals, and experience showed benefits well beyond its duration. Samoan experts reinforced that the learning benefits were not uni-directional, highlighting the empowerment of its villagers, who also gained new perspectives and skills, as well as improved capacity and confidence of the Ministry's officials. Trust and clear communication mechanisms were key elements to the success of the project.

Source: OECD/IsDB, Global Perspectives on Triangular Co-operation (2023^[4]); Heaton, Seaweed: A Healthy Boost To Pacific Island Economies? (2021^[10]); Swanepoel et al., Supporting Women's Participation in Developing a Seaweed Supply Chain in Kiribati for Health and Nutrition (2020^[11]).

Triangular co-operation is a flexible approach that adds value to a wide range of sectors, and can contribute to the priority areas of the SAMOA Pathway.

Numerous examples of triangular co-operation projects show that the modality can accelerate knowledge sharing and scale up innovative solutions, contributing to all 15 priority areas of the SAMOA Pathway, the integrated framework of the development aspirations of SIDS for the following decade, adopted in 2014 during the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States (Box 3) (UNOSSC, 2021^[12]).

For example, in the business sector, New Zealand partnered with the Fiji-based Centre for Pacific Crops and Trees to support farmers from Samoa and Tonga in accessing pest, disease, drought, salt-tolerant seeds, and other planting materials. The project increases the regional resilience of Pacific agriculture and supports Pacific farmers in accessing climate-resilient varieties of seeds and plants, improving their livelihoods by increasing yields and production (OECD, 2024^[13]).

Box 3. Addressing priority areas of the SAMOA Pathway through triangular co-operation

Accelerating innovation in statistics - United Kingdom, Maldives, and third countries in Asia Pacific

The SAMOA Pathway recognises that SIDS struggle with compiling statistics to support national development planning - data collection and analysis are needed. At the same time, innovation is taking place across the globe to increase the availability and accuracy of statistics for development planning and monitoring. The United Kingdom partnered with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) between 2017 and 2020 to promote exchange among several developing countries in Asia and the Pacific on documenting and replicating statistics innovation.

The partners, together with the National Bureau of Statistics of the Maldives, conducted a review of the country's national statistical system and identified learning opportunities from the experience of the Mongolian National Statistical Office. Mongolia, which had a few years earlier gone through a similar assessment, shared experience and lessons learned and provided recommendations for the improvement of the national statistical system of the Maldives, the preparation of new legislation and the establishment of a national indicator set to produce high-quality statistics necessary for formulating and monitoring national development plans, including for achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Following the Maldives' review process, the country was then able to share its own experience with Sri Lanka to advance a similar review of the Sri Lankan statistical system.

Source: UNOSSC, South-South Galaxy: Documenting and Replicating Statistics Innovation in Asia and the Pacific (2021^[14]).

Triangular co-operation connects different actors, strengthens international co-operation and coordination, and can contribute to linking SIDS to unusual partners and global networks.

Triangular co-operation enables expanding alliances to new partners, including beyond the region, accessing a broader range of expertise and resources. Examples of inter-regional triangular co-operation, including SIDS-to-SIDS exchange, show the modality's potential to diversify partnerships. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Luxemburg partnered with Cuba to support medical teams and the health system in Cabo Verde (Box 4). Moreover, the modality has increasingly provided new opportunities to mobilise additional expertise, resources and networks, engaging local and non-state actors (see Box 1 for an example).

Box 4. Scaling up SIDS-to-SIDS inter-regional co-operation through triangular partnerships

Reinforcing COVID-19 response - Luxemburg, Cuba and Cabo Verde

Cuba and Cabo Verde started medical co-operation five decades ago, with a medical brigade from Cuba assisting the African island in various health areas. In April 2020, following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Luxemburg joined the partnership, allowing more than 30 experts from Cuba, including physicians, nurses, and hygiene and epidemiology specialists, to support the Cabo Verdean emergency response to the virus.

Source: Cabo Verde, COVID-19: Cabo Verde reforçado com especialistas cubanos no âmbito da cooperação trilateral entre Cabo Verde, Cuba e Luxemburgo (2020^[15])

Lessons learnt

- Examples show that triangular co-operation is a powerful tool to strengthen international co-operation and coordination, and to join forces instead of duplicating efforts. Scaling up successful bilateral relations and fostering networking and coordination through regional institutions accelerate the identification of possible synergies and optimise the available resources.
- Diversifying the partnerships, especially promoting inter-regional SIDS-to-SIDS co-operation, expands access to knowledge and expertise, building on consolidated experiences and comparative advantages of SIDS across the globe.
- Despite the continuous increase in interest in the modality, triangular co-operation is still small compared to other development co-operation modalities. However, data usually only capture the contributions of one partner for the project – unless all three partners report. Furthermore, partners provide expertise and knowledge as in-kind contributions, which are usually not monetised. Still, experience shows there remains untapped potential. For instance, adequate financing to invest in long-term partnerships is needed.
- Fostering peer-to-peer learning, triangular partnerships are often less burdensome and can thus ease SIDS's absorption capacity.
- Triangular co-operation is a holistic approach offering bold and innovative solutions to diverse challenges. Several examples prove it is a valuable way to fulfil the commitments of the SAMOA Pathway.

OECD resources

To learn more about SIDS's development co-operation see oe.cd/SIDS.

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