

# South-South Entrepreneurship: Strengthening Global Responses to Address Global Challenges

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On 24 February 2021, an Emirates plane carrying 600,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines landed at the Kotoka International Airport in Accra, Ghana, marking the first shipment to Africa under the COVAX initiative. The vaccines, manufactured in India and distributed with the help of UAE logistical capabilities, exemplified the potential of South-to-South cooperation in tackling global challenges. This significant moment also illustrated the undeniable reality revealed by the pandemic: global health is an invaluable public good and a critical reminder of the collective imperative to ensure the safety of all. Over the subsequent 18 months, Emirates SkyCargo delivered more than 1 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines to more than 80 destinations, with two-thirds of the doses sent to developing countries.

COVAX was not a silver bullet; its effectiveness was undermined by inequities in vaccine distribution, delays, and the hoarding of vaccines in high-income countries. However, moments like that morning in February 2021 encapsulate the challenges and opportunities for effective South-South cooperation. In the following sections, this paper will outline the significance of this cooperation, and discuss the essential elements required to foster effective South-South cooperation.

## **A Vindication of Global South Leadership**

The agenda of the Global South must be defined by its own aspirations and not by what it lacks or seeks to overcome. Within the developing world, numerous countries with emerging markets and dynamic Middle Powers are not only

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envisioning a brighter future for their immediate regions but for the entire world – and they are armed with the capacity to realise these ambitions. For far too long, there has been an under appreciation of the leverage, strategic vision, and capacity of the Global South to act as a bridge-builder, to implement novel ideas, and to propose and deliver solutions to global challenges. It is critical for the Global South to reclaim its rightful role as a norm-setter and leader in shaping the global agenda.

In a world marked by growing polarisation, the UAE has maintained open channels of communication with a wide range of stakeholders to advance political solutions that benefit people around the world. As an elected member of the UN Security Council during our 2022-2023 term, the UAE has leveraged its role as a Middle Power to navigate disagreements, identify areas of convergence, support humanitarian outcomes, and promote dialogue and confidence-building initiatives. It is with this background and insights gleaned that this paper shares four lessons outlining the potential of South-South synergies in advancing multilateral solutions.

### **Lesson 1: The importance of building consensus and trust**

Current global tensions have undermined the capacity to build and expand consensus. When everything is viewed through the lens of strategic rivalries, cooperation often takes a back seat to competition. This phenomenon is evident in the Security Council, where firsthand experiences reveal several

concerning trends. For instance, in 2021, 84 per cent of resolutions of the UN Security Council were adopted unanimously. However, this figure declined to a mere 66 per cent in 2022, with the penholders of these resolutions and abstaining members sharing the responsibility for this decline. The absence of unanimity across adoptions reflects and fuels the erosion of trust in the Security Council as an effective body. As many of these resolutions play a role in mandating peace operations, disunity is a major source of concern. For the tens of thousands of UN peacekeepers deployed around the world– most of whom hail from the Global South – the lack of a unified Council voice highlights the limits of the support that the Council can offer.

Yet, elusive as it may seem, the consensus is attainable. Earlier this year, the UAE took on the role of co-penholder with Japan for Afghanistan – a file that has divided Council members in the past. Thus far, the Council has unanimously adopted three resolutions on Afghanistan by embracing consultation and inclusivity to accommodate diverse perspectives, without diluting key priorities. A notable example is Resolution 2681, which garnered co-sponsorship from an unusually high number of 90 Member States, including many from Muslim-majority countries. This resolution unequivocally condemned the Taliban’s decisions that violated the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan, showcasing the potential of unified action despite complex challenges.

## **Lesson 2: Results Matter**

One of the key paradigm shifts that can help make the case for enhanced South-South cooperation is the emphasis on tangible results. Ideas are best measured by their real-world impact. For instance, one of the most important developments in the UAE over the last 15 years has been its political and economic investment in the clean energy transition and innovation in renewables. This transformative journey, driven by a vision of sustainability, diversification, and global synergies has led to consistently low solar energy prices in the UAE. Partnering with the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), headquartered in the UAE, underscores our commitment not only to a sustainable future at home but also to empowering other nations in their pursuit of sustainable development through UAE-developed renewable energy innovations.

One manifestation of this commitment is the IRENA/Abu Dhabi Fund for Development (ADFD) Facility, which provided USD 350 million for 26 renewable energy projects between 2013 and 2020 that benefited 3.5 million people in 21 countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. We will be building on these efforts through the Energy Transition Accelerating Financing (ETAF) Platform, a new IRENA facility launched in 2021, with USD 400 million in anchor funding from ADFD to accelerate the transition to renewable energy in developing countries. In the face of the generational challenge of climate change, the UAE has already

committed more than USD 1 billion to the renewable energy sector worldwide to improve climate adaptation efforts.

## **Lesson 3: Beyond governments - engaging multilateral stakeholders**

There is an urgent need to realise that South-South cooperation cannot be driven and executed by public institutions alone. It demands the active involvement of diverse stakeholders, ranging from the private sector to civil society and academia. This vision has inspired the creation of the FoodTech Valley in the UAE, designed to promote a nurturing business eco-system for advanced modern farming to cope with our arid environment, offering effective solutions to cope with arid environments and assisting other countries grappling with desertification and climate change. At the launch of the food and agriculture agenda for COP28, to be held in the UAE in November of this year, the UAE actively encouraged governments to collaborate with various actors, including businesses, cities, financial institutions, civil society, non-government organisations, indigenous communities, academia, and all segments of society, to find sustainable solutions to pressing food security issues encompassing production, consumption, loss, and waste.

## **Lesson 4: Tailored and Context-specific support does make a difference**

International engagement succeeds when it focuses on strengthening national capacities and supporting context-specific solutions. While importing

successful initiatives can be tempting, their effectiveness in new contexts heavily depends on appropriate adjustments and an open feedback loop. This fundamental belief drove the establishment of the Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak's Women, Peace and Security Training Initiative in 2018. This training initiative, pioneered by the UAE Ministry of Defence, UN Women and the UAE General Women's Union, is conducted at the Khawla bin Azwar Military Academy in Abu Dhabi and has successfully trained three cohorts, comprising more than 500 women, from countries across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. The message is clear: the empowerment of women reinforces the agenda of the Global South. The programme aims to increase the pool of female military officers, create peer-to-peer networks among women interested in joining the military and peacekeeping fields, and drive the strategic objectives of Security Council Resolution 1325, with

attention to the importance of capacity building and training.

Currently providing the majority of the world's peacekeepers, the Global South's active involvement need not be hindered by the lack of a permanent seat on the Security Council. Supporting and empowering more women peacekeepers is vital, and the Global South can forge ahead, collaborating without waiting for others, to bring about meaningful change in this critical realm.

From my involvement in the UN Security Council, I can conclude that the shifting dynamics present a unique opportunity for non-permanent members, like the UAE, to not only follow but lead, address core issues, and set standards. Leveraging the diversity and expertise of the Global South is vital in safeguarding international peace and security, making multilateral cooperation all the more essential.