



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

FAO SOUTH-SOUTH AND
TRIANGULAR COOPERATION

GUIDELINES FOR ACTION

2022–2025

Living document



Overview

“The goal is to understand where and how investment, innovation, policy and institutional change can help in making agri-food systems transformation a driver for the achievement of the SDGs.”

Qu Dongyu

Director-General

FAO Interactive Dialogue on SSTC for Transforming Agriculture 2020

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has embraced **South-South and triangular cooperation (SSTC) as a key delivery modality** to catalyse agricultural development, food security, rural development, poverty reduction and nutrition over the past two decades. FAO has **strengthened** its support for SSTC **since 2012**, and the **SSTC portfolio** has been **expanding** in line with the progressive institutionalization of SSTC in FAO.

Notwithstanding these achievements, FAO’s support for SSTC has had difficulty in keeping up with increasing demand from its Members. In 2020, FAO established a separate Division for South-South and Triangular Cooperation (PST) to scale up **FAO’s SSTC programme**, and to further leverage SSTC to **accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda**.

FAO issued its first corporate strategy for south-south cooperation (SSC) in 2013, which was developed in a **vastly different global and institutional context**. The main objective of the new SSTC Guidelines for Action is to develop a **results-focused vision and structure**, providing strategic direction for FAO’s SSTC programme and strengthening FAO’s position as **global advocate, convener, broker, facilitator and enabler** of SSTC in the area of agri-food systems.

The new SSTC Guidelines for Action mark a **shift** from ad-hoc SSTC activities to a more **programmatically focused, results-based, systematic, quality-assured, service-driven** and integrated approach to operationalizing SSTC in FAO.

The primary focus of the SSTC Guidelines for Action is to scale up **SSTC technical and financial partnerships to support agriculture and food systems transformation and development** in the Global South and contribute to the achievement of the **four betters** (better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life).

Strategic areas of focus (SAFs) FAO's work on SSTC in 2022–2025 will be channelled under the following four **strategic areas of focus (SAFs)**, to be carried out in close **collaboration** with FAO streams/offices/centres as well as countries and regions:

SAF 1 ADVOCACY AND AGENDA SETTING

SAF 2 BROKERING KNOWLEDGE

SAF 3 PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS

SAF 4 EVIDENCE BASE AND ADAPTIVE LEARNING

In addition to the SAFs, the SSTC Guidelines for Action also identify **thematic areas of focus (TAFs)** including supporting the **Hand-in-Hand Initiative (HiHI)**, **agricultural innovation**, **Small Island Developing States (SIDS)** and **COVID-19 recovery and response**. The scope of work includes supporting **collaboration** among **southern universities, research institutes and centres of excellence** (e.g. for joint or collaborative research on agricultural technologies and creation of agricultural education programmes) as well as strengthening networking between southern and northern cities (city-to-city collaboration), for technical assistance and exchanges.

Diversifying financial modalities and partner base is at the heart of the new SSTC Guidelines for Action. FAO will expand existing partnership alliances to additional middle-income countries (MICs), including emerging donors and triangular partners. Additionally, FAO will proactively engage with more non-traditional partners (private finance and investment) to expand funding and investment opportunities in SSTC for agri-food systems.

The SSTC Guidelines for Action will remain a living document throughout 2021

The SSTC Guidelines for Action will remain a **living document** throughout 2021 to enable detailed alignment with FAO programme priority areas (PPAs) and, if needed, performance indicators outlined in FAO's Strategic CP 2022–2031.

The document will also integrate lessons learned and feedback received during the rollout process, as well as recommendations from the ongoing independent evaluation of FAO's SSTC Programme (2012–2021).

Rationale for the new FAO SSTC Guidelines for Action

The revised FAO SSTC Guidelines for Action can be seen as FAO's direct response to a series of external and internal "triggers" as outlined below, all of which aim at leveraging SSTC to accelerate agricultural transformation, food security and nutrition in order to implement the SDGs.

Internal

FAO leadership: A new FAO Director-General was appointed in August 2019. He has set a vision for a dynamic and innovative FAO in a world in which challenges are complex and inter-related.

FAO's Strategic Framework 2022–2031: This will guide the work of the Organization for a period of ten to fifteen years. It focuses on the SDGs and targets relevant to FAO's mandate, and articulates related programmatic priorities and actions.

Corporate structural adjustments and new institutional arrangements for SSTC: A major step in the institutionalization of the SSTC function, FAO has undergone major structural and programme adjustments that culminated in the creation of a South–South and Triangular Cooperation Division (PST) in July 2020.

Evolving corporate priorities: Prominent are the themes of innovation, Digital FAO (e.g. International Digital Council), data-driven interventions (e.g. Hand-in-Hand Initiative) and global emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Internal processes: A new focus on enhancing alignment with country-level processes and strengthening a shared vision for a "One FAO" approach.

External

The 2030 Agenda places increasing emphasis on SSTC as both means to support effective capacity-building and the objective of enhancing cooperation. It underscores the need to mobilize resources through SSTC and strengthen SSTC partnerships on capacity-building, science, technology and innovation.

The United Nations Second High-level Conference on South-South Cooperation (BAPA+40) calls for greater SSTC institutionalization, improvement of the SSTC evidence base and focus on results.

UN Reform and United Nations Development System (UNDS) Repositioning aim at both management and structural shifts across the board and at cultural change "needed for greater collaboration across pillars and tangible results for people on the ground".

COVID-19 impacts are continuing to unfold and are likely to be more severe and longer lasting in developing countries in the Global South.

In this context, the new SSTC Guidelines for Action clarify and rethink:

- The **nature and potential** of SSTC as programmatically cross-cutting and complementary to the Organization's other delivery modalities
- The **enabling role of FAO in SSTC**, in line with both United Nations (UN) guiding documents and FAO's "enabler of change" agile business model
- The SSTC **results architecture** (strategic areas of focus [SAFs]), which should ensure the integration of SSTC in FAO's Strategic Framework 2022-2031 – and thereby into the Organization's SDG targets – and also enable project- and programme-level monitoring and learning
- FAO's **work planning modality**, taking an issue-based approach in line with evolving corporate priorities, converging on the themes of innovation, digitalization in agriculture, data-driven interventions (e.g. Hand-in-Hand Initiative) and global emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic
- The **services offered by the South-South and Triangular Cooperation Division (PST)** to Members and FAO departments using a modular, flexible and demand-driven approach
- The **institutional and functional architecture** for delivering FAO's SSTC programme at global, regional and country levels
- The **external partnerships and internal collaboration arrangements** required to meaningfully and collectively amplify FAO's contribution to the SDGs through SSTC
- A **results-based approach to communicating** the achievements of the FAO SSTC programme



South–South and triangular cooperation (SSTC)

Triangular cooperation (TrC) has been understood as a framework whereby a **traditional donor(s) or multilateral organization(s) would support cooperation initiatives between two or more developing countries**, largely through financial contributions. Over the years, this approach has evolved into a more comprehensive model of cooperation in which several actors (governments together with international/multilateral organizations, civil society, the private sector, academia and others) engage in trilateral cooperation and exchanges. Accordingly, triangular cooperation is defined as:



“A development cooperation framework whereby two or more developing countries, alongside other development stakeholders, engage in mutually beneficial collaboration and exchanges with the support of a developed country(ies) and/or multilateral organization(s).”

More broadly, SSTC refers to a **development cooperation framework** comprising both SSC and TrC in contrast with traditional North–South cooperation. SSTC serves as a **bridge** between **traditional partners** and **emerging donors**, including those from the **Global South**. It offers a model of cooperation and collaboration that leverages synergies stemming from North–South and South–South cooperation initiatives.





While there is no universally agreed definition for SSC, the United Nations framework of operational guidelines for South-South and triangular cooperation provide an operational definition for SSC. Consistent with this framework and drawing from its extensive experience, FAO broadly defines SSC as:

“The mutual sharing and exchange of knowledge, experience, technical and financial resources related to agriculture and food systems between two or more developing countries, as well as collective actions in pursuit of their individual and/or shared development objectives.”



Global discourse on SSTC



There has been **rapid economic transformation** across the **developing world** over the past three decades, with notable increases in economic output, improvement in human development, and expansion of trade, investment and finance. Some of these developing countries have become **major players in global development** and economic governance owing to their economic progress, technological advances and contribution to a global pool of tested solutions to pressing development challenges.

SSTC has **gained stronger emphasis** in subsequent **global development frameworks**, including the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development. The latter underscored the need for adequate and sustained financial resources – public, private, from financial institutions, national and multilateral development banks, and others – to meet the ambitious goals of the 2030 Agenda, and noted the unique role that SSTC would play in that endeavour.

Furthermore, the 2019 Second High-level United Nations Conference on SSC (BAPA+40) provided momentum and a roadmap for SSTC. The outcome document recognized the significant role SSTC plays in accelerating implementation of the 2030 Agenda and in eradicating poverty in all its forms.



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Modalities of SSTC at FAO



By its nature, SSTC is a multi-faceted phenomenon that does not follow a unified approach.

Using identified gaps as a starting point, i.e. lack of a systematic approach to establish and strengthen the **four building blocks of SSTC** – knowledge, networks and partnerships, funding and match-making – our efforts over the next four years will be focused on enhancing a platform for knowledge, partnership brokering and match-making as follows:

Knowledge generation

Ensure systematic **documentation and packaging**. **Benchmark quality** of knowledge and systemize monitoring of results.

Networks and partnerships

Establish a functional mechanism for knowledge sharing, and **deploy experts** to provide technical assistance and capacity building by establishing collaborations with technical institutions, knowledge networks, universities and centres of excellence.

Funding

Develop and implement **resource mobilization action plans** and engage with emerging middle-income countries from the South, emerging donors, triangular partners and non-traditional resource partners, including with the private sector and International Financial Institutions (IFIs).

Match-making

Upscale and consolidate **FAO solutions, knowledge brokering infrastructure and knowledge sharing platforms** by revamping and redesigning the existing SSTC gateway.



Vision and strategic direction for SSTC in FAO (2022–2025)

FAO is recognized by its Members and development partners as an **innovative, inclusive** and **trusted** partner that fully **leverages proven development solutions**, resources, knowledge and technologies from the **Global South** to accelerate **agri-food systems transformation**, food security, poverty reduction and sustainable use of natural resources.

With its new vision, FAO places greater emphasis on SSTC to support implementation of the 2030 Agenda and contribute to achievement of the SDGs with State and non-State actors as well as financing mechanisms. Major contribution from SSTC is expected under SDG 17 (Innovative Partnerships) as well as the other SDGs FAO is working towards, such as SDG 1, SDG 2, and SDG 10.

Strategic areas of focus (SAFs)

FAO work on SSTC for 2022–2025 will be channelled into four **strategic areas of focus (SAFs)**. These outline the areas in which FAO would like to deliver and/or contribute to producing results on SSTC over the next four years and are as follows:

- SAF 1 ADVOCACY AND AGENDA SETTING**
- SAF 2 BROKERING KNOWLEDGE**
- SAF 3 PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS**
- SAF 4 EVIDENCE BASE AND ADAPTIVE LEARNING**

Going forward: key priorities

There is an urgent need to further expand FAO's SSTC partnership base. As a priority, emphasis will now be placed on:

- Moving from a **project to programme approach**, i.e. from projects and activities to a series of inter-related results-based interventions

- Enhancing **geographic targeting**: for example, on Hand-in-Hand and/or in SIDS countries

- Defining and **harmonizing the definition and typologies of SSTC projects** and their results and frameworks, setting up systems for **systematic documentation** of project results, successes and lessons learned

- Expanding the volume of SSTC projects and initiatives in **target regions**, in particular in Asia and Pacific (RAP) and Near East (RNE)

- Expanding the **number of triangular projects** and engagement with new and non-traditional SSTC partners, for example the private sector and IFIs



Regional and country priorities for 2022–2025 will encompass:

- Further **strengthening** of the **institutional architecture for SSTC** at **regional and country level** (e.g. SSTC focal points in priority countries) **and rethinking the functional relationships** between headquarters and regional and country levels
- Identifying **capacity gaps** and **bottlenecks** that hinder countries and development partners from actively engaging in SSTC in the areas of agriculture and food systems
- Developing **guidelines and tools** to enable quality-assured application and systematic mainstreaming of SSTC into: i) FAO programme priority areas (PPAs); ii) the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) jointly with United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC); iii) Country Programming Frameworks (CPFs) jointly with Office of Strategy, Programme and Budget (OSP)
- Developing **SSTC regional roadmaps** and **country roadmaps** in pilot countries based on regional/country **specificities, comparative advantages** and **expertise** and **resources**
- Enhancing **collaboration** with Regional **Economic Communities (RECs), with regional and country platforms** for policy dialogue, advocacy and coordination
- Strengthening **knowledge sharing architecture** at regional and country level
- Systematizing and strengthening **monitoring and reporting processes** and systems at regional level and country level



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