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Office for South-South Cooperation

South-South in Action

**South-South and triangular cooperation in
agricultural development: FAO's experiences**

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Contents

Acknowledgements	6
Foreword	7
Acronyms and abbreviations	8
Summary	9

Chapter I **South-South and triangular cooperation** **in agricultural development** **11** |

Introduction	12
FAO's approach to South-South and triangular cooperation for agricultural development	13
How FAO's engagement in South-South and triangular cooperation links with major regional or global development agendas	18



Chapter II **Application of South-South and triangular cooperation in FAO** **21** |

A. Grassroots development	22
Case study 1	
FAO-China South-South cooperation project in Madagascar	24
B. Institutional capacity-building	27
Case study 2	
Capacity development and experience sharing for rice value chains through South-South and triangular cooperation	27
C. Policy initiatives	30
Case study 3	
Mesoamerica Hunger Free AMEXCID-FAO programme	31



Chapter III

Lessons learned and way forward 35

- Lessons learned 36
 - Lessons learned are often poorly documented 36
 - Need to mainstream SSTC both within FAO and among its partners 36
 - Challenge of language 37
 - Broadening the funding base 37
 - Private sector involvement in spreading innovations 37
 - Government engagement and political commitment 38
 - Building a skills base for South-South cooperation projects 38
- Going forward 38
- References 39



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Foreword

South-South and triangular cooperation (SSTC) is at the heart of FAO's operations. We first established our focal point for South-South cooperation in 1979, the year after the United Nations Conference on Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries was held in Buenos Aires, Argentina and where the Buenos Aires Plan of Action for Promoting and Implementing Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries was adopted.

Since then, we have been spearheading cooperation among countries of the global South for more than 40 years, working through our extensive country-level presence. SSTC has been progressively integrated into our work, including FAO's *Strategic Framework 2022-31*. Furthermore, we have developed new SSTC Guidelines for Action for 2022-25 and implementation is already underway. This will reflect the outcomes of the Second High-Level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, held in Buenos Aires 20–22 March 2019 (BAPA+40), and will highlight the role of SSTC in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 1: No poverty and SDG 2: Zero hunger.

We continue to facilitate policy dialogue between governments and other stakeholders, such as civil society organizations, academia and the private sector, providing us with a framework for cooperation, offering technical oversight, promoting international standards and mobilizing resources for SSTC.

This publication will provide insight into the key features of SSTC and how we at FAO have applied SSTC to the delivery of our mission. The case studies showcase how SSTC has contributed to alleviating hunger and malnutrition in countries across the global South and has helped build resilience in the face of climate change and other development challenges. The lessons learned from these experiences are feeding into the new *SSTC Guidelines for Action (2022–2025)* and will guide our future results-based SSTC programmes.

I wish to thank our partners who have made this work possible, and I am pleased to affirm our commitment and efforts to expand South-South and triangular cooperation in supporting all countries in their efforts to achieve the SDGs.



Beth Bechdol

Deputy Director-General, FAO

Acronyms and abbreviations

AMEXCID	Mexican Agency of International Cooperation for Development
BAPA	Buenos Aires Plan of Action for Promoting and Implementing Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
SAF	strategic area of focus
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SMAE	small- and medium-sized agricultural enterprise
SSC	South-South cooperation
SSTC	South-South and triangular cooperation
TF	trust fund
UNOSSC	United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation
UTF	unilateral trust fund
WFP	World Food Programme

Executive summary

This publication describes FAO's engagement in South-South and triangular cooperation (SSTC) in support of efforts to boost agricultural productivity, enhance food and nutrition security and alleviate poverty in developing countries worldwide.

More than 40 years ago, FAO first established a focal point to promote, coordinate and integrate technical cooperation among developing countries in all activities. This followed the endorsement by the United Nations General Assembly of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action for Promoting and Implementing Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (BAPA). Now, following the BAPA+40 conference, the Organization has a fully-fledged technical division on SSTC, is in the process of revising its SSTC strategy and has more than 15 formal SSTC partnerships in place. This work has served to demonstrate the power of SSTC to deliver sustainable solutions to vulnerable populations in the global South and the contribution that SSTC can make to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 1 (No poverty) and SDG 2 (Zero hunger).

Chapter I introduces the concepts of South-South and triangular cooperation (SSTC), especially as defined by FAO and its partners. It goes on to describe FAO's approach to SSTC in agricultural development and how this links to major regional and global development agendas, including the Sustainable Development Goals.

Chapter II provides a snapshot of FAO's engagement in SSTC through three case studies, focusing on grassroots development, institutional capacity-building and policy.

Chapter III presents lessons learned from FAO's experiences with SSTC and provides an outline of future developments of SSTC in FAO as proposed in the Organization's new *SSTC Guidelines for Action (2022–2025)*.





Chapter I

South-South and triangular cooperation in agricultural development

South-South and triangular cooperation in agricultural development

Introduction

Rapid economic transformation across the developing world over the past 30 to 40 years has created an opportunity—and demand—for cooperation among developing countries in their efforts to improve the lives and livelihoods of their people. Some middle-income countries¹ in the global South, including Brazil, China and India, have become major players in global development thanks to their economic progress, technological advances and contributions to a global pool of tested solutions to pressing development challenges.

Countries in the global South offer myriad development solutions, delivered in the forms of knowledge, experiences, good practices, innovative policies, technologies and resources, etc., that can be adapted to the socioeconomic, environmental and agroecological contexts of other developing countries, and usually more readily than solutions developed in the North. Innovation in the South is generating new tools and partnerships to tackle issues of food insecurity, poverty and sustainable agriculture.

This has created an environment for South-South cooperation (SSC) (Box 1) and triangular cooperation (Box 2) to complement traditional North-South development efforts and contribute to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Together, they allow states, international organizations, academia, civil society and the private sector to collaborate and share knowledge, skills and successful initiatives in specific areas, such as agricultural development and climate change adaptation. Recent developments in South-South cooperation include an increased volume of South-South trade, South-South flows of foreign direct investment, movements towards regional integration, technology transfers, sharing of solutions and experts, and other forms of exchanges.

¹ The term “middle-income country” as used here is based on the World Bank classification. See <https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519> and <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.CD?locations=XP>.

Box 1.

What is South-South cooperation?

As per the BAPA+40 outcome document, South-South cooperation is “a manifestation of solidarity among peoples and countries of the South that contributes to their national well-being, their national and collective self-reliance and the attainment of internationally agreed development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals, according to national priorities and plans” (para. 8).

Box 2.

What is triangular cooperation?

As per the Note by the United Nations Secretary-General on the framework of operational guidelines on United Nations support to South-South and triangular cooperation: “Triangular cooperation involves Southern-driven partnerships between two or more developing countries supported by a developed country(ies)/or multilateral organization(s) to implement development cooperation programmes and projects.”

FAO’s approach to South-South and triangular cooperation for agricultural development

South-South and triangular cooperation (SSTC) is widely applied across FAO’s work and is promoted as a strategic mechanism to deliver on the Organization’s mandate.

FAO’s initial forays into SSTC focused largely on technical exchanges in the Farmer Field Schools programme but subsequently led to the development of the Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries and Countries in Transition programme. The latter provided a framework to mobilize experts from developing countries for short-term deployment in others to serve as technical consultants, trainers and organizers of workshops and seminars.

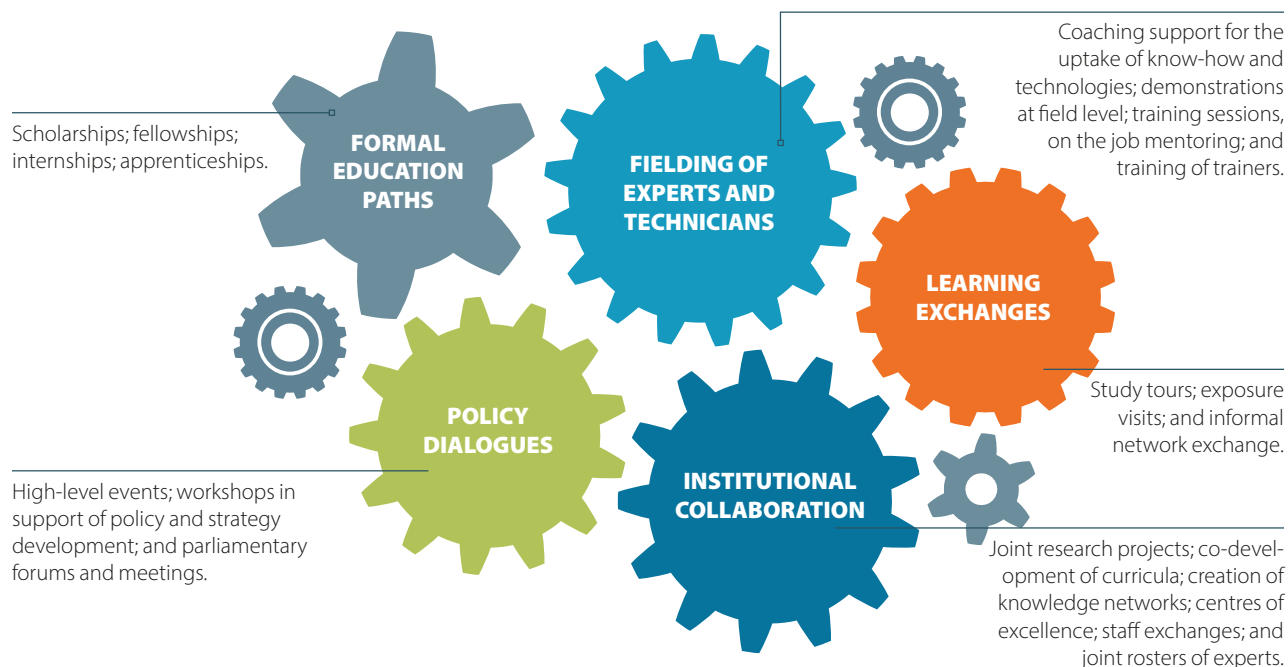
FAO’s engagement in SSTC became more formalized in 1996 with the establishment of the Special Programme for Food Security. By 2004, this programme had deployed more than 2 800

South-South cooperation experts in 28 countries, supporting the exchange of knowledge and experiences on good agricultural practices and the transfer of technologies among developing countries. The initial focus on pilot-scale technology demonstrations changed over the years to increasing emphasis on large-scale national and regional programmes for food security employing a wide range of modalities, including deployment of experts, knowledge-exchange workshops, study tours and training.

The gradual evolution of SSTC in FAO took major steps forward with the establishment of the Brazil-FAO International Cooperation Programme in 2008, which included South-South cooperation projects, and the FAO-China South-South Cooperation Programme in 2009. These programmes gave new momentum to South-South cooperation in FAO and among Member States. The programmes involved

Figure 1

Diverse and flexible SSC modalities for exchange at policy, institutional and grassroots levels



Source: FAO (2015). *FAO's Quick Guide to South-South Cooperation: Fostering partnerships among the Global South*.

stakeholders at all levels, embracing farmers, women and rural youth, governmental and non-governmental partners, small island developing states and least developed and landlocked countries, stimulating creativity and entrepreneurship of farmers, local and central governments and non-governmental FAO partners (FAO, 2019a). They were incubators and engines for innovation at multiple levels, from adapted technologies to new approaches to implementing SSC activities, business methods and models, international policies and strategies. They also served as models for other South-South cooperation programmes.

FAO's first SSTC strategy in 2013 expanded the scope of SSTC in the organization and included three main features: 1) upstream policy engagements and the facilitation of policy dialogues and exchanges; 2)

active engagement in SSTC with non-state actors, including parliamentarians, local governments, the private sector, academia, NGOs, cooperatives and farmer associations; and 3) a decentralized approach to involve local actors, municipalities and cities in SSTC.

New *SSTC Guidelines for Action (2022–2025)* are being used as the basis for consultations with countries and regions within the scope of the organization's new vision—One FAO. This framework provides the strategic direction for FAO's SSTC programme, with the aim of strengthening the organization's position as a global advocator, convener, broker, facilitator and enabler of SSTC in agriculture and agrifood systems. Aligned with *FAO's Strategic Framework 2022–31* (FAO, 2021a), the *SSTC Guidelines for Action (2022–2025)* are geared towards a more programmatic, focused, results-based, systematic, quality-assured and

service-driven approach to operationalizing and mainstreaming SSTC in FAO.

A focus in both documents is the role of transformative and inclusive partnerships in everything that FAO does in working towards the “Four Betters” (Better production, Better nutrition, a Better environment and a Better life), which are the organizational principles for how FAO intends to contribute to achieving the 2030 Agenda.

SSTC partnerships currently practised in FAO include:

- long-term partnerships with national governments in the global South through large SSC funds and programmes (e.g., the FAO-China SSC Programme, the FAO-Brazil Partnership, the FAO-Morocco Trust Fund and the Mesoamerica Hunger Free AMEXCID-FAO programme);
- short-term project-specific partnerships with national governments in the global South involving direct financial contributions to implement SSC projects (e.g., financial contributions by South Africa for SSC projects);
- long-term partnerships with Northern countries involving technical and financial resources to implement triangular cooperation programmes and projects; and
- a variety of partnerships with multilateral organizations and non-state actors, including parliamentary-to-parliamentary and farmer-to-farmer alliances and city-to-city collaboration.

The latter type of partnership has been particularly effective in bringing more direct and beneficial impact at grassroots level by paying special attention to vulnerable groups, including rural women,

Indigenous groups and youth.

Fostering of these partnerships is facilitated by FAO’s South-South and triangular cooperation (SSTC) Gateway,² a platform designed to facilitate knowledge and partnership brokering for SSTC in the agriculture and rural development sector. The Gateway, which was under revision at the time of writing (July 2021), will serve as:

1. a platform for communicating, connecting and collaborating on SSTC;
2. a source of up-to-date information on FAO’s SSTC programmes and interventions around the world, including stories and case studies;
3. a knowledge hub where users can easily search for and access good practices, technologies, solutions and policies from the agrifood sector;
4. an interface for users to contribute knowledge, technologies and solutions in diverse formats (video, audio and text); and
5. a collaborative space for virtual SSTC between FAO and its SSTC partners to discuss, share experiences, contribute knowledge and innovations and support capacity-development activities.

The new *SSTC Guidelines for Action (2022–2025)* have a specific focus on actions to increase and diversify FAO’s SSTC partner base to effectively service the growing demand from Member Countries for SSTC support. This will be particularly important in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has reduced the availability of financial resources in both the global South and the North and undermined growth in economies in the global South.

2 www.fao.org/south-south-gateway/en/.

FAO has adopted an innovative approach to mobilizing resources (both financial and technical) to implement SSTC initiatives. While middle-income countries in the global South, such as Brazil and China, have played central roles in the past, other countries in the global South (including Bangladesh, Cambodia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mexico and Morocco) and triangular cooperation partners (such as the Netherlands and Germany) have become important providers of technical and financial support for SSTC. Southern governments, including those of Angola and Nigeria, have also contributed financially to the cost of implementing SSTC in their respective countries by establishing unilateral trust funds.

Current funding models for SSTC in FAO include the following:

- unilateral trust funds (UTF) established by member countries, whereby the recipient country funds the planned activities (e.g., the Angola South-South Cooperation UTF of USD 11 million, for which the provider of technical expertise is Brazil, and the Nigeria UTF of USD 67 million with the support of Chinese expertise);
- multi-partner trust funds, such as the African Solidarity Trust Fund and the Flexible Multi-Trust Fund Mechanism, with financial contributions from several parties;
- trust funds (TF) for the Government Cooperative Programme, such as the Morocco South-South Cooperation Trust Fund, which support actions in selected recipient countries both financially and technically;
- umbrella programmes jointly financed by both UTF and TF, such as the Uganda SSC phase III project, which is co-financed by the Uganda UTF and Chinese TF;

- engaging triangular partners to co-finance projects for triangular cooperation, such as the Namibia-Viet Nam-Spain triangular cooperation project, in which Spain provides both funding and technical knowledge and experience, Viet Nam provides technical experts and Namibia, the recipient, provides in-kind funding; and
- strategic alliances, such as the FAO-China South-South Cooperation Strategic Partnership, in which the partner provides a combination of knowledge, technical experts and funding to a range of prioritized countries and technical areas.

An emerging area is private sector funded SSTC projects. FAO plays a crucial role, ensuring that the projects adhere to the principles of responsible agricultural investments and safeguarding the quality of the initiatives. FAO's engagement with the private sector is guided by the *FAO Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2021–2025* (FAO, 2021b).

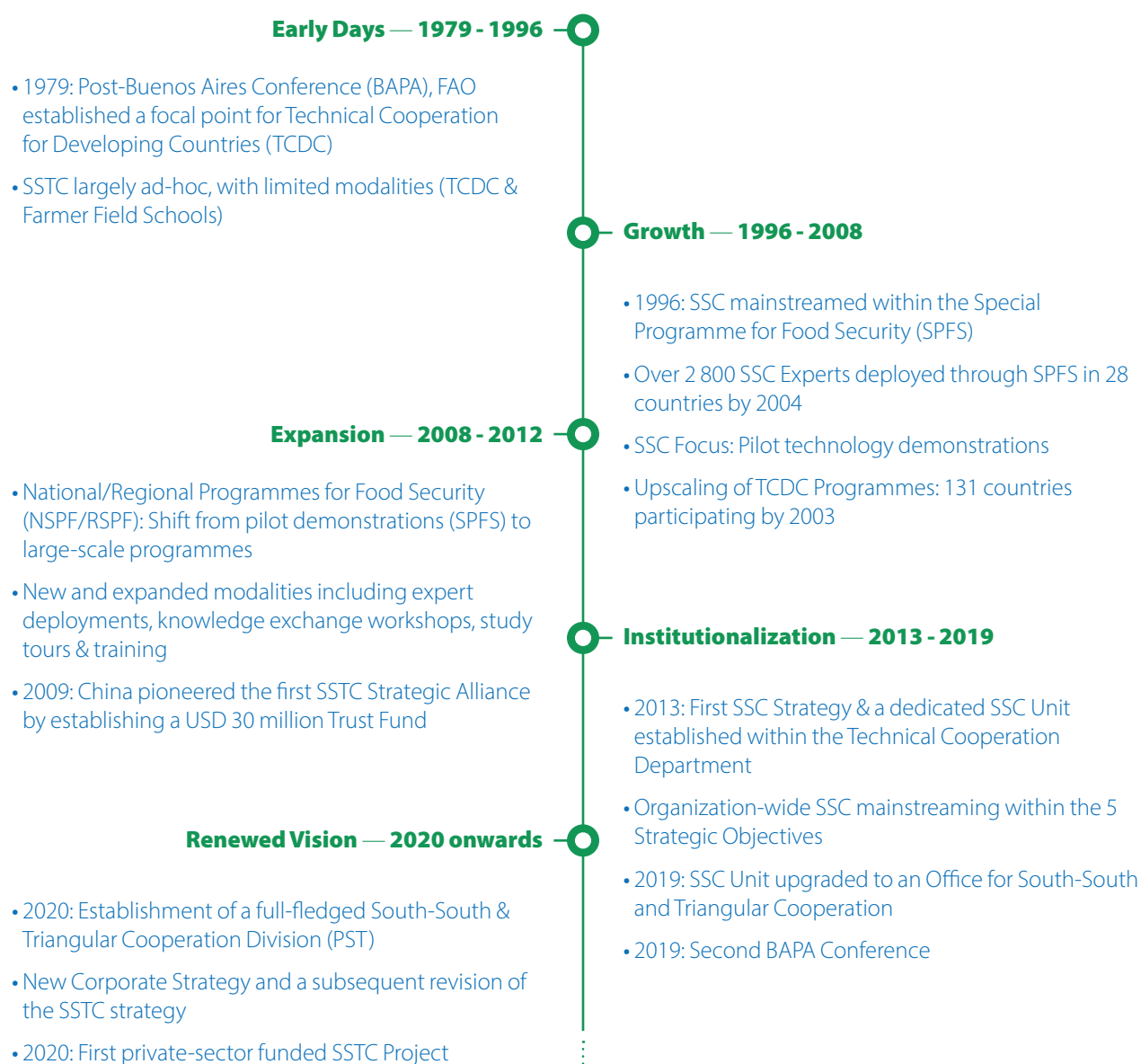
FAO actively pursues collaboration on SSTC with other United Nations agencies and multilateral organizations. FAO and the other Rome-based agencies—the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP)—collaborate on SSTC with a joint roadmap to deliver on their individual and shared mandates to improve access to and adequate supply of nutritious food (FAO, IFAD and WFP, 2018). FAO also has strategic collaborations with sister organizations, such as the United Nations Office for South-South cooperation (UNOSSC).

Figure 2 illustrates FAO's increasing engagement with SSTC since 1979, from the establishment of a focal point to promote, coordinate and integrate technical cooperation among developing

countries in all the Organization's activities to the creation of the Division for South-South and Triangular Cooperation in 2020.

Figure 2

Timeline of South-South and triangular cooperation in FAO, 1979–2021



How FAO's engagement in South-South and triangular cooperation links with major regional or global development agendas

FAO is guided by the resolutions of the General Assembly, many of which have addressed the need for South-South cooperation over the last half century. These include resolution 33/134 of 19 December 1978, which endorsed the Buenos Aires Plan of Action for Promoting and Implementing Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (BAPA) and led to the establishment of what is now the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation, the main policymaking body on SSC in the United Nations system.

Resolution 75/234 of the United Nations General Assembly on South-South Cooperation, adopted on 21 December 2020, encourages “the continuation and advancement of South-South cooperation on COVID-19 response and recovery efforts in the pursuit of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, and calls for continued support from the relevant United Nations development system entities in that regard” (UN, 2020). This was reiterated at the twentieth session of the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation (1–4 June 2021), focused on implementation of the outcome document of the BAPA+40 (UN, 2019). This highlighted the crucial catalytic role that South-South and triangular cooperation can play in accelerating achievement of the SDGs through effective implementation of the BAPA+40 outcome document and in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and similar global crises.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights SSTC as a critical partnership modality in delivering the 2030 Agenda. SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals) recognizes the complementary role that SSC plays in relation to North-South cooperation to support capacity-building, knowledge-sharing and enhancing the use of science, technology and innovation to achieve the SDGs.

SSTC also features strongly in other global development frameworks, including the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (UN, 2015a), the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UN, 2015b) and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development (UN, 2015c). The last of these encouraged “developing countries to voluntarily step up their efforts to strengthen South-South cooperation and to further improve its development effectiveness” and committed “to strengthening triangular cooperation as a means of bringing relevant experience and expertise to bear in development cooperation.”

The strategic focus areas (SAFs) of the FAO *SSTC Guidelines for Action (2022–2025)* (a living document) are guided by the Framework of operational guidelines on United Nations support to South-South and triangular cooperation (UN, 2016) and the United Nations System-wide strategy on South-South and triangular cooperation for sustainable development (UN, 2021) and respond to the call to strengthen global partnerships and SSTC, enshrined in SDG 17, while addressing SDGs 1 and 2.

The four strategic focus areas, based around the Organization's Mandate and comparative advantages, are described below.

SAF 1: **Advocacy and agenda setting**

- Strengthening internal collaborations within FAO to leverage its knowledge and expertise to scale up the SSTC programme.
- Ensuring that perspectives and interests of the global South are integrated into global policy processes and frameworks related to agriculture and food systems.

SAF 2: **Brokering knowledge**

- Enabling self-sustaining mutually beneficial "equal footing" learning pathways and schemes among countries to enable transfer, scale-up and adoption of innovations and associated behaviour change.

SAF 3: **Partnerships and collaborations**

- Increasing and diversify FAO's SSTC partner base to effectively support Members' growing request for SSTC support.
- Enhancing abilities of countries in the global South to cooperate with each other (including on regional integration and trade).

SAF 4: **Evidence base and adaptive learning**

- Formulation of the learning agenda for South-South cooperation, including questions of effectiveness, incentives for collaboration, cost-benefits and relevance.
- Enhancement of SSTC-related monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems at both project/programme and United Nations agency corporate levels and improvements in capacities to monitor and evaluate SSTC projects, programmes and initiatives.





Chapter II

Application of South-South and triangular cooperation in FAO

Application of South-South and triangular cooperation in FAO

FAO's portfolio of SSTC projects has shown dramatic growth in recent years, in line with the increasing institutionalization of SSTC in the Organization's programme. The operational portfolio of the Organization has grown rapidly. Total expenditure on SSTC projects since 1997 was approximately USD 435 million, with nearly half of that mobilized in the last five years thanks to Southern partners, including China, Brazil, Mexico, Morocco and Uganda, and triangular partners (Germany, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Netherlands, Spain). Overall, between 1997 and 2020, FAO has deployed more than 2 000 experts in over 80 countries, and the impact of SSTC has been widely recognized by Members.

FAO SSTC projects cover an extensive range of topics across the fields of food security and nutrition, rural development, poverty reduction and resilience, including climate change adaptation, sustainable agricultural productivity and animal health. Major areas of focus include:

- sharing and transferring knowledge and technology, in particular sharing successful development solutions in agricultural development and agrifood systems transformation;
- promotion of policy dialogue, through for example creation of multistakeholder platforms;
- preparation and sharing of knowledge products, including documentation of good practices, webinars and e-dialogues; and
- capacity development through participatory training and mentorship, with new developments using virtual and blended approaches, including video and online platforms.

While almost all SSTC projects comprise all these areas of work, we have chosen three case studies that best illustrate the following areas of focus: grassroots development, institutional capacity-building and policy initiatives.

A

Grassroots development

Grassroots-oriented agriculture-related projects focus on bringing knowledge, technology and policy to the service of those directly involved in the production, processing and marketing of agricultural products. Such projects direct their efforts in particular to vulnerable and underserved groups, such as rural women, Indigenous peoples and youth.

The range of projects in this category is wide, and includes such activities as:

- supporting FAO's global action to control desert locust,
- promoting sustainable and inclusive cotton production systems in Latin America and the Caribbean;
- promoting hybrid-rice production in Madagascar;
- promoting foxtail and proso millet production in Uganda; and
- using "innovation corridors" to boost transfers of knowledge, experience and technologies between communities in the Near East and North Africa, Europe and Central Asia.

All these projects and activities address crucial issues of adapting to climate change while enhancing food and nutrition security and boosting livelihoods for the most vulnerable.

The first case study focuses on the work of the FAO-China South-South Cooperation Programme's work in Madagascar (UNOSSC, 2020).



Field visit to demonstration plots for improved rice cultivation in the United Republic of Tanzania. © FAO/Daniel Hayduk

Case study 1

FAO-China South-South cooperation project in Madagascar

Overview

Agriculture accounts for more than a quarter of the gross domestic product of Madagascar and employs more than three-quarters of the country's workforce. However, production is still insufficient to meet the needs of the growing population. The main constraints are low productivity, lack of infrastructure, poor access to markets and lack of access to capital, seeds, inputs, technical services and training.

Efforts are needed to increase agricultural production and productivity and the technical capacity of farmers and other actors and stakeholders in agricultural value chains and to promote investment and trade in agriculture.

Approach

China has expertise and technologies that are adaptable to key areas of the agricultural sector in Madagascar. These include hybrid rice production, sheep and goat production and agribusiness.

A tripartite agreement between the People's Republic of China, the Republic of Madagascar and FAO was signed in November 2018 to implement the China-FAO-Madagascar South-South Cooperation project from 2019 to 2021³. Supporting implementation of the Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries Sector Programme of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries (MAEP), the project contributes to increasing national food security and household incomes, reducing rice imports and promoting investment, agribusiness and trade in agriculture.

An important approach of the project is embedding 17 Chinese cooperants, in three agricultural regions of the country, to work closely with national counterparts appointed by MAEP to transfer knowledge and technologies to smallholder farmers and their organizations through training and demonstration activities. The project also targets civil servants, local technicians and research institutes. These local counterparts provide an enabling environment for the cooperants to optimize knowledge and technology transfer, while FAO ensures smooth implementation of activities through the provision of necessary inputs, technical guidance and monitoring.

Cooperants, counterparts and FAO worked together to jointly formulate the annual workplans, procurement plans and training plans. This helped build the capacity of MAEP in project planning, management and monitoring and ensured a sense of ownership among all parties. The various plans were debated and endorsed by stakeholders, including the private sector, at an inception workshop, further strengthening broad-based ownership of the project and its outcomes.

A central aspect of the work has been the introduction of improved production practices for hybrid rice, including planting and transplanting techniques, mechanization using small rotary tillers, electric fertilizer applicators, improved water pumps and pest control. The project has established demonstration plots for hybrid rice at two sites in important rice-growing areas, Mahitsy and Ambatondrazaka, where improved practices have been introduced to small- and large-scale farmers and others in the value chain, generating considerable coverage in the media.

³ The project was still ongoing as of May 2022 due to COVID-19-related delays.



Farmers threshing rice by hand in Madagascar. The China-FAO-Madagascar South-South cooperation project is working with farmers in Madagascar to boost rice and livestock production. © FAO/Yasuyoshi Chiba

The project has conducted studies of small ruminant production systems in the Diana Region, identifying problems of inbreeding and shortages of feed during the dry season as principal constraints on the system. To address these, the project has brought in improved rams and billy goats to improve the genetic make-up of the local flocks and herds and established demonstration plots. The latter have been used to introduce farmers, livestock managers and extension agents to improved forage production practices developed in China using *Brachiaria* grass and to conduct trials to adapt these to local conditions (FAO, 2021c).

These practical actions have been supplemented with extensive training programmes, covering both practical and theoretical aspects of crop and livestock production for farmers, while training for technical staff and high-level officials in MAEP covered hybrid rice, livestock, agribusiness, policy and governance in agriculture.

Results

The hybrid-rice demonstration plots yielded 9 to 11 tonnes per hectare, compared with only 2.8 tonnes per hectare with local cultivars. More than 300 farmers, almost half of them women, received training in hybrid-rice production along with nearly 100 technicians and experts from MAEP. This “training of trainers” is central to the effort to promote the continued expansion of hybrid rice in rice-growing areas across Madagascar and in continuing to adapt the Chinese technologies to local conditions.

The forage demonstration plots achieved yields ten times those of local practices, producing up to 54 tonnes of dry matter per hectare. Work on breed improvement has been constrained by delays in setting up the new national centre for artificial insemination.

The demonstration plots attracted considerable interest, not only from local farmers, farmers' organizations and others involved in the agricultural value chains but also from non-governmental organizations. The latter will be instrumental in promoting the spread of the improved production practices to other areas of Madagascar and also, potentially, to neighbouring countries.

Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic placed considerable restrictions on the project, especially field visits and training. A prolonged drought in November and December 2020 delayed the planting of rice, particularly in Mahitsy. Rapid adjustments that allowed dry planting of rice still allowed the plots to be planted with an almost 90 percent survival rate of seedlings (FAO, 2021c). This technique was picked up by nearly 1 000 local farmers under the technical guidance of the Chinese experts and is being rolled out across the island.

Lessons learned

This project, like so many SSTC actions, has demonstrated the crucial role of local counterparts in engaging with local farmers and other actors in the value chain. This was particularly evident in the response to the 2020 drought. The combination of practical demonstrations, hands-on engagement of stakeholders in activities and theoretical and practical training greatly facilitated knowledge and technology transfer.

Constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for flexibility in project planning and programming and in the people engaged in the project. The rapid adoption of virtual training methods enabled much of the planned training to go ahead despite restrictions on face-to-face events, as did modification of field visits to ensure safe distancing and other measures to prevent the spread of the virus.



A Chinese expert dispatched by the FAO-China South-South Cooperation Programme demonstrates hybrid rice planting in Madagascar. © FAO

B

Institutional capacity-building

Strong national institutions—including ministries of agriculture, research and development institutes, extension services and farmers’ organizations—are essential to the long-term sustainable development of a robust agricultural sector. All of FAO’s SSTC projects have a component of capacity-building, but some, such as the case study below, focus more strongly on this element.

Topics covered by SSTC projects in institutional capacity-building include support for geographical indications (GIs) and globally important agricultural heritages systems, implementation of the International Plant Protection Convention and support for school feeding programmes, freshwater aquaculture value chains and gender-sensitive services to rural communities.

The second case study focuses on a project to enhance rice value chains in Africa and Asia through capacity development and experience sharing (FAO, 2021d).

Case study 2

Capacity development and experience sharing for rice value chains through South-South and triangular cooperation

Overview

Demand for rice is growing rapidly across the global South as a result of both increasing population and dietary changes. However, production is not keeping pace. For example, demand in Africa is expected to reach nearly 35 million tonnes a year by 2025, but production is expected to be just over 22 million tonnes—a deficit of nearly 13 million tonnes (FAO, 2021d).

Meeting this growing demand for rice will largely fall to smallholder farmers, working through small- and medium-sized agricultural enterprises (SMAEs) and traders to access markets. However, SMAEs commonly lack the capacity to provide the technical and financial assistance necessary to bring smallholders’ produce up to a standard that satisfies the needs of the market. Despite the important role SMAEs occupy in the value chain, they also often lack institutional support from the public sector and have little influence over policies related to agricultural markets.

To address these gaps, FAO and the Republic of Korea formulated the “Capacity Development and Experience Sharing for Sustainable Rice Value Chain Development through South-South Cooperation” project to enable partners to create competitive and inclusive rice value chains. The first phase from 2014 to 2019 was implemented in Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire and Nigeria, and a second phase was launched in 2020 to advance and bring this experience to Côte d’Ivoire, the Philippines and the United Republic of Tanzania.

Approach

The first phase of the project focused largely on technical aspects of rice value chains, including production, processing, marketing and the forming of rice inter-professional platforms. The Rural Development Administration of the Republic of Korea provided experts and training programmes to key stakeholders, as did other collaborating institutions, such as the International Rice Research Institute and the Africa Rice Center.

Specific objectives of the first phase of the project included:

- creating programmes to facilitate knowledge exchange and experience sharing in sustainable rice value chains between participating countries and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN);
- strengthening the capacity of policymakers, technicians and stakeholders in rice value chains in partner countries; and
- promoting knowledge exchanges on private-public partnership models and cooperation of stakeholders in support of rural development.

During the second phase, the project will identify technology gaps and will promote needs-based solutions and practices in the areas of rice policies and the rice value chain.

This project will contribute to achieving self-sufficiency in rice in target countries in the two regions. Through SSTC, the countries will be able to map their capacity needs and knowledge gaps and find sustainable, cost effective, long-lasting and economically viable solutions by building on the strengths and experiences of countries that have progressed further in upscaling their rice productivity and nutrition security.

Building on lessons learned in phase I, phase II will:

- adapt or develop rice value chain training curricula based on the needs of target countries;
- train national rice experts in selected areas of the rice value chain; and
- facilitate learning and sharing of best practices on rice policies.



Women harvest rice using the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) method. Rice is a major staple crop in the United Republic of Tanzania, a focus country of the project “Capacity Development and Experience Sharing for Sustainable Rice Value Chain Development through South-South Cooperation.

© FAO/Alberto Conti

Results

During the first phase, extensive training programmes targeting the main stakeholders in the rice value chain—producers, processors and sellers—enhanced agribusiness entrepreneurship skills among these groups.

Rice processors and traders from all three countries were trained in post-harvest handling, quality management, modern processing technologies, storage and packaging, business management, accounting, contracts, negotiation and marketing. In Côte d'Ivoire, a rice value chain platform comprising farmers, rice millers, marketers, chemicals sellers and researchers was established and staff from the National Rice Development Agency were briefed on the seed management and distribution system of the Republic of Korea. Rice production experts from Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria visited the Republic of Korea to learn about rice production and harvesting techniques, extension systems, planning for research and training and cooperation with the private sector. Farmers groups received training in irrigation, seed production and business management, among other core skills.

Equipment and machinery, including rice processing machines, were distributed to beneficiary groups in all three countries and recipients were trained on their maintenance and repair.

Challenges

Language barriers contributed to the challenges of coordinating stakeholder efforts and fully integrating local counterparts in the co-development and adaptation of technologies being introduced by experts from the Republic of Korea.

The implementation of the second phase of the project faced difficulties related to the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular restrictions on travel and movement of participants. However, activities planned up to December 2021 were implemented virtually to overcome these challenges and ensure timely implementation of the project.

Lessons learned

Lessons learned from phase I included the need for more efficient coordination of stakeholders, stronger involvement of local counterparts and training to align with country needs more closely. This is reflected in the greater emphasis on participatory studies to assess capacities and needs of key stakeholders and on strengthening the capacity of national research and training institutions in all aspects of the rice value chain, from production through to marketing and policy development and implementation, and on creating an enabling policy environment to help boost agricultural productivity and the sustainability of the countries' rice value chains.



A woman winnows rice in Bagre, Burkina Faso, one of the focus countries of the project "Capacity Development and Experience Sharing for Sustainable Rice Value Chain Development through South-South Cooperation". © FAO/Alessandra Benedetti



The “Mesoamerica Hunger Free AMEXCID-FAO programme” works with countries throughout the region to design, validate and support public policy instruments on food security and rural development. © FAO/Giuseppe Bizzarri



Policy initiatives

Policy is the foundation on which all development rests: without a conducive policy environment, even the best innovations will struggle to make any impact. This is why all SSTC projects have a core component of policy work. However, some projects have a stronger policy focus than others. Such projects build political commitment in the fight against hunger and rural poverty. This is done mainly by: raising public awareness of the need for such a commitment; strengthening institutional capacities to formulate, implement and monitor policies; fostering legal frameworks that support agricultural and rural development and poverty alleviation; and facilitating policy dialogue among stakeholders.

SSTC policy initiative projects supported by FAO cover a wide range of topics. They include:

- strengthening agricultural and food security information;
- control of transboundary animal diseases in the Greater Mekong subregion;
- policy development in support of water and sanitation systems in Latin America and rice value chains in Africa;
- forest landscape restoration in the Caucasus and Central Asia; and
- support for national and subregional strategies for food and nutritional security and overcoming poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The third case study focuses on the Mesoamerica Hunger Free AMEXCID-FAO programme, which works closely with institutions in Belize, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and the Dominican Republic.

Case study 3

Mesoamerica Hunger Free AMEXCID-FAO programme

Overview

Food insecurity and poverty in Mesoamerica are mainly rural phenomena. Rural areas are commonly underserved by infrastructure, such as roads and electricity, and productive investment is often lacking. Natural resources are degrading, while natural disasters, like droughts and floods, are increasing in frequency. Few public policies and programmes are designed to meet their needs. Smallholder farmers, who are often Indigenous people and people of African descent, have little or no access to markets, technology, infrastructure, financing and technical assistance.

The Mesoamerica Hunger Free AMEXCID-FAO programme addresses these issues, particularly that of policy deficits. The programme is a South-South triangular-cooperation initiative jointly led by the Government of Mexico, through the Mexican Agency of International Cooperation for Development (AMEXCID), and FAO (FAO, 2019b; FAO, 2021e).

The programme works closely with institutions in Belize, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama. It focuses on providing technical support for building and implementing regulatory frameworks and public policies aimed at ensuring food security and nutrition and

promoting rural development, especially in areas vulnerable to extreme weather events and with high rates of migration. Mexico and the beneficiary countries share cultural roots and common challenges, providing the opportunity for knowledge exchange not only at institutional level but also among family farmers.

Approach

The programme focuses on:

- ensuring political commitment in the fight against hunger and rural poverty and raising public awareness;
- strengthening institutional capacities to formulate, implement and monitor effective and adequately funded public policies and legal frameworks in specific vulnerable rural areas;
- designing and validating technological solutions and methodologies to be scaled up and integrated in public policies and legal frameworks; and
- facilitating dialogue, technical assistance, study tours and peer learning among Mesoamerican officials and farmers at both national and regional levels.

Central to this work are the programme's efforts to build alliances and collaboration with like-minded organizations and initiatives operating in the region. The programme's strategic partners include the Latin American and Caribbean Parliament, the Parliamentary Front against Hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Central American Integration System, the Hunger Free Latin America and the Caribbean Initiative, and the Mesoamerica Integration and Development Project.

At national level, the programme encouraged

and supported social and political dialogue and promoted national legal frameworks addressing crucial issues in agricultural and rural development. It has helped consolidate and strengthen the chapters of the Parliamentary Front against Hunger in each of the target countries, promoting exchanges of experience and know-how. At regional level, the programme has contributed to the formulation of model laws on family farming, small-scale fisheries and community water and sanitation systems. It supports university research on the human right to adequate food through the Right to Food Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean.

The programme's approach is well illustrated by the work on formulating a model law on community water and sanitation systems (UN, n.d.). Based on its experiences working toward safeguarding access to clean water and effective sanitation systems for the health and nutrition of its population, Mexico led the preparation of a proposal for a model law that would give communities a means to ensure their human right to water and sanitation and strengthen the equitable and sustainable management of water in the region. This process, started in early 2020, was led by the Parliamentary Front against Hunger of Mexico, AMEXCID, the Mexican Institute of Water Technology (IMTA) and the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources of Mexico (SEMARNAT). The work took place in close coordination with FAO within the context of the high-level political dialogue promoted by the Mesoamerica Hunger Free AMEXCID-FAO programme. The proposal was based largely on the experience of Mexico but also incorporated previous experiences gained by FAO and the Mesoamerica Hunger Free programme.

In June 2020, the proposal was submitted to the Public Services, Health, Environment, Agriculture and Indigenous Peoples parliamentary

commissions of the Latin American and Caribbean Parliament, or Parlatino (<https://parlatino.org>), a regional body made up of the national parliaments of 23 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. These commissions agreed on the relevance and importance of the issue and established a joint committee to review and enhance the proposal.

In parallel with this process, the Mesoamerica Hunger Free programme promoted and facilitated a high-level political dialogue with members of several national Parliamentary Fronts against Hunger. This process included a series of thematic videoconferences called "Zero Hunger Parliamentary Meetings" that prepared recommendations and proposed joint efforts to give food security and nutrition greater prominence as a strategic issue at a political level. One of these meetings, held in November 2020, was dedicated to community water and sanitation issues and brought together lawmakers from Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico and Parlatino to share their experiences and provide recommendations.

Results

In February 2021, Parlatino's Board of Directors approved the final version of the model law, along with ten other model laws considered of priority for the regional agenda to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. The model law includes a reference to the 2030 Agenda and SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation), as well as a chapter on emergency management that defines the responsibility of States and inhabitants to establish mechanisms and strategies to address emergencies. It encourages and promotes the implementation of actions to strengthen the capacities of communities for the sustainable management of water and sanitation systems, the improvement of the infrastructure of the systems they manage and the exchange of experiences regarding water culture.

To make the model law more accessible to all countries in the region, the Mesoamerica Hunger Free programme had it translated from the original Spanish into English, French and Portuguese.

The model law is now available for all countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. It plays a fundamental role as a legal reference to design and approve national regulatory frameworks, recognizing the strategic role of community management systems for water and sanitation.

Several national parliaments in the region are in the process of adapting and considering adopting the model law.

Challenges

As with every aspect of life in 2020/21, the COVID-19 pandemic posed challenges for the Mesoamerica Hunger Free programme. Fortunately, dialogue around the formulation of the model law and its subsequent consideration by Parlantino could be conducted virtually, allowing the process to continue to a rapid conclusion.

Lessons learned

One of the main lessons learned in formulating the model law and getting it approved by Parlantino was the crucial role of a shared vision on the intended outcome, and the need for time and space for dialogue and interaction among stakeholders to allow this to be developed.



Access to safe water is fundamental to development of food industries, such as cheesemaking seen here in Honduras. The “Mesoamerica Hunger Free AMEXCID-FAO programme” works to ensure people in the region have legal protections for their right to water and sanitation. ©F AO/Giuseppe Bizzarri





Chapter III

Lessons learned and way forward

Lessons learned and way forward

FAO's experience with SSTC clearly demonstrates the power of the approach, especially in the crucial area of promoting national leadership and ownership of development efforts. SSTC projects and programmes have contributed greatly to raising the profile of food security and nutrition on national and regional agendas, especially through facilitating policy dialogues, peer-to-peer learning and co-design. These projects and programmes have highlighted good practices and promoted sharing knowledge, experiences and appropriate technology in agriculture, forestry and fisheries, increasing access to nutritious food and enhancing sustainable agricultural production. Capacity-building has been central to all these efforts, from policy and agricultural technology to management of value chains, creating a base of knowledge and solutions that will support future development efforts in the South and for the South.

This section highlights some of the main lessons learned from FAO's involvement in SSTC and efforts that the Organization is making to enhance its SSTC contributions toward achieving the SDGs, particularly SDG 1 (No poverty) and SDG 2 (Zero hunger).

Lessons learned

Lessons learned are often poorly documented

A key finding of recent reviews is that FAO's systems for monitoring and evaluating SSTC projects and programmes and sharing knowledge are lacking. Moreover, lessons learned are often not well documented (FAO, 2020). This is being addressed under the *SSTC Guidelines for Action (2022–2025)* through a dedicated strategic area of focus (SAF) on evidence-based and adaptive learning and through the redevelopment of the FAO South-South Cooperation Gateway.⁴

Need to mainstream SSTC both within FAO and among its partners

A recent review of FAO's contributions to SDG 2 (Zero hunger) (FAO, 2020) identified several issues relating to SSTC, including low visibility within the Organization, a lack of common understanding of its definitions and scarce resources. "Visibility, outreach and communication" was also one of the main issues identified by the FAO-China South-South Cooperation Programme (FAO, 2019a). This is being addressed through the "SSTC Academy," which includes consultations around the *SSTC*

⁴ <http://www.fao.org/south-south-gateway/en/>

Guidelines for Action (2022–2025) and accompanying guides and tools, and the new strategic framework itself, with a dedicated SAF on advocacy and agenda setting. This will contribute to forming a common understanding of what SSTC is and how it is best conducted.

Plans include elaboration of guidelines (pragmatic tools for practitioners) on topics such as how to design projects with SSTC components and activities, financing for SSTC, partnering for SSTC and monitoring and evaluating SSTC. Some resources are already available, including the programme guidelines for projects under the FAO-China South-South Cooperation Programme (FAO, 2018), which are specific to the FAO-China Programme but form a basis for preparation of more generic guidelines, and the 2011 Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit for South-South Cooperation Projects (FAO, 2011). Guidelines for monitoring SSTC projects and programmes are currently under preparation jointly with IFAD and WFP.

Challenge of language

Where partners do not share a common language, the transfer and upscaling of new practices and innovations from one country to another can be hampered. This restricted the scope of some SSTC programmes. For example, much of SSTC involving Brazil was focused on countries in the Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa (FAO, 2020). Investment in translation and selection of cooperants with adequate language skills is crucial. In the longer term, the goal should be to incorporate SSTC into university curricula to create a cadre of future experts and technicians who have a basic knowledge of SSTC, project design, management and M&E that can be deployed to other developing countries to provide capacity-building technical training and demonstration.

Broadening the funding base

South-South and triangular cooperation remain reliant on a relatively small base of resource partners (FAO, 2020). FAO's main financial contributors to South-South cooperation are Brazil, China, Mexico, Morocco, Türkiye and Uganda; with Angola and Nigeria contributing through UTF. Current triangular partners include Germany, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Netherlands and Spain, with Oman currently under negotiations.

One of the objectives of FAO's *SSTC Guidelines for Action (2022–2025)* is to diversify funding for SSTC, both through formulating a range of funding models and expanding the partner base. This includes fostering new partnership alliances with emerging economies and additional middle-income countries and engaging with more non-traditional partners (private finance and investment) to diversify the funding and investment opportunities in SSTC in agriculture and food systems, including venturing into innovative financing schemes, for example, blended financing.

Private sector involvement in spreading innovations

Much of FAO's SSTC effort has focused on enhancing the production and productivity of small-scale producers. However, as with many development agencies, FAO recognizes the importance of engaging with the private sector and other non-state actors to promote the spread and uptake of new technologies and innovations and in strengthening market-related measures, including policies, to support these efforts. This is reflected in the *SSTC Guidelines for Action (2022–2025)*, especially under the SAFs on brokering knowledge and on partnerships and collaborations.

Government engagement and political commitment

Experience has shown the crucial role of host government engagement and commitment to SSTC arrangements. It is essential that all parties involved in an SSTC programme are fully aware of the commitments involved, including staff and other resources, and that they make all appropriate efforts to honour these over the life of the programme.

Building a skills base for South-South cooperation projects

SSTC projects and programmes are complex, both to create and to manage. They therefore require considerable management and programmatic skills and competencies to design and deliver them effectively, and these may not be readily available in host countries. SSTC projects and programmes will need to invest in building the project development skills and competencies of partners and in monitoring and evaluating progress against clearly defined goals and objectives.

Going forward

The *SSTC Guidelines for Action (2022–2025)* identify priorities for the FAO's SSTC actions, including:

- moving from a **project to programme approach**, i.e., from projects and activities to a series of interrelated results-based interventions;
- enhancing **geographic targeting** (e.g., on small island developing states);
- defining and **harmonizing** the **definition and typologies of SSTC projects** and their results frameworks and setting up systems for **systematic documentation** of project **results, successes and lessons learned**;
- **expanding** the volume of SSTC **projects/initiatives** in **targeted regions**, in particular Asia and Pacific and Near East; and
- expanding the **number of triangular projects** and engagement with new and non-traditional SSTC partners (e.g., private sector and international financial institutions).



A women's group in Niger exchanges improved horticultural tips under a project supported by the African Solidarity Trust Fund.
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