



UNIDO Side Event at the 22<sup>nd</sup> Session of  
the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation

## Leveraging AI for Sustainable Development through South-South and Triangular Industrial Cooperation

Friday, May 30, 2025, 10:00 to 11:30 a.m. (EST)  
Conference Room 8, United Nations Headquarters, New York

— **Concept Note** —  
(Final v21.05.2025)

**Thematic Session (Panel Discussion)**

### Background and rationale

The dawn of the Artificial Intelligence (AI) era promises unprecedented advancements for sustainable industrial development. However, this transformative potential is overshadowed by a stark "AI divide."<sup>[1]</sup> Recent analyses underscore this disparity: the UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) projects the global AI market to soar to \$4.8 trillion by 2033, yet access to AI infrastructure and expertise remains heavily concentrated, with just 100 firms, predominantly in the US and China, accounting for 40% of global AI R&D.<sup>[2][3]</sup> This concentration risks widening existing inequalities if not proactively addressed, potentially leaving much of the Global South behind.<sup>[4][5]</sup> Bridging this gap is not merely a technological challenge but a developmental imperative, requiring concerted efforts in [South-South and Triangular Industrial Cooperation \(SSTIC\)](#) to map existing AI capacities, facilitate the strategic transfer of innovative and appropriate technologies, and share and scale successful industrial applications.

Despite this divide, numerous countries in the Global South are not just passive recipients but active innovators and adopters of AI. China continues to lead with extensive industrial AI applications and significant technology transfer initiatives. India leverages its robust IT talent pool and comprehensive national strategies like "[AIForAll](#)". Brazil is rapidly advancing through national AI strategies and notable applications in key sectors like manufacturing and agribusiness, positioning itself as a regional innovation hub. The African Union champions a continent-wide "AI for All" approach, with countries like South Africa and Egypt hosting significant AI ecosystems, and nations such as Mauritius and Rwanda demonstrating strong government AI readiness.

However, the broader adoption and scaling of AI in developing countries are significantly constrained by multifaceted barriers. Critical infrastructure limitations, including unreliable electricity and inadequate internet connectivity (Sub-Saharan Africa's internet penetration was around 37% in 2023), impede the deployment of sophisticated AI solutions.<sup>[6]</sup> A persistent shortage of skilled AI professionals and the migration of talent further hamper local innovation and effective AI adoption. Furthermore, regulatory uncertainty, the lack of comprehensive national AI strategies in many nations (less than one-third of developing countries have AI strategies), insufficient investment and funding, and sometimes restrictive intellectual property regimes create complex hurdles for technology transfer and widespread adoption. The environmental costs and potential for labor disruption also present emerging concerns that require careful consideration.

South-South and Triangular cooperation frameworks, particularly UNIDO's SSTIC approach, can potentially play a key role in addressing these challenges. Complemented by initiatives such as UNIDO's [AIM Global Alliance](#) - which actively fosters collaboration and knowledge sharing in AI for industry – and the growing emphasis on AI governance and capacity building by groups like BRICS, these platforms can empower developing countries. BRICS, for instance, is advocating for a UN-led global AI governance framework that prioritizes Global South development needs and national sovereignty. Within this context, this session aims to explore how SSTIC, through targeted knowledge-sharing, joint policy development, strategic investments in data infrastructure and localized AI solutions, and focused capacity building, can unlock AI's potential for countries in the Global South.

## Objectives

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This side event is designed to explore practical approaches for leveraging [South-South and Triangular Industrial Cooperation \(SSTIC\)](#) to mitigate AI disparities and advance inclusive and sustainable industrial development throughout the Global South. The session will examine how SSTIC mechanisms can effectively bridge digital and technological gaps, ensuring AI contributes to equitable economic growth and sustainable practices. It will feature analysis of existing AI capacities, present innovative industrial solutions, and share concrete success stories from the Global South. Furthermore, the session will illustrate the utility of UNIDO's SSTIC framework in mobilizing partnerships, scaling proven AI-driven innovations, and fostering technology-based industrialization.

Specifically, the session aims to:

- **Demonstrate SSTIC's relevance in AI adoption for industry:** Highlight how the SSTIC framework can facilitate AI-powered industrial transformation and knowledge exchange among Global South partners, identifying leading countries with relevant AI capabilities and showcasing UNIDO's approach in supporting this integration.
- **Assess AI capabilities and cooperation potential in the Global South:** Present an analysis of current AI capacities, achievements, and existing cooperation frameworks relevant to AI technologies for industrial applications across the Global South.
- **Analyze AI technology transfer dynamics:** Examine the opportunities and challenges associated with transferring and adapting AI technologies within South-South contexts, focusing on overcoming economic, infrastructural, regulatory, and human capital barriers to adoption in industrial value chains.
- **Showcase industrial AI applications:** Share practical AI solutions and case studies that demonstrate measurable contributions to productivity, economic growth, job creation, and sustainability goals within key industrial sectors of the Global South.

## Organizer

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### | United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) is the specialized agency of the United Nations with a unique mandate to promote and accelerate sustainable industrial and economic development. UNIDO supports countries to industrialize in ways that foster digital and green transitions and accelerate progress with the Sustainable Development Goals. UNIDO is offering [South-South and Triangular Industrial Cooperation \(SSTIC\)](#) as a key complementary modality to traditional development assistance that can facilitate the transfer of industrial technologies and capacity-building services based on the lessons learned by developing countries in their specific country context.

## Format and Structure

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This 90-minute side event is structured to facilitate a rich exchange, blending high-level perspectives with practical insights on AI adoption and technology transfer within South-South cooperation frameworks. The format is designed to promote UNIDO's [South-South and Triangular Industrial Cooperation \(SSTIC\)](#) approach, emphasizing AI's role as a catalyst for industrial transformation across the Global South.

It will consist of the following sessions:

### **Opening Segment (15 minutes)**

Keynote address: The session will start with a keynote address by UNIDO senior management setting the context on the importance of SSTIC for AI-driven industrial development and its connection to the 2030 Agenda. It will also provide an overview mapping the current AI landscape in the Global South, highlighting key capabilities, opportunities, and the potential impact on industrial sectors. Furthermore, a concise outline of UNIDO's SSTIC approach for AI integration will also be presented, including the role of enabling initiatives like the Global Alliance on Artificial Intelligence for Industry and Manufacturing (AIM Global).

### **Panel Discussion (50 minutes): Perspectives on AI, SSTIC, and Industrial Development**

A moderated, interactive dialogue featuring diverse expertise to explore key facets of leveraging AI through South-South cooperation.

#### **Key Discussion Themes:**

This session will examine AI capacities across the Global South - analyzing research, adaptation, and application maturity levels - and explores how SSTIC frameworks can catalyze indigenous innovation beyond mere technology diffusion. It will address structural impediments to AI adoption (infrastructure deficits, financing constraints, regulatory gaps, human capital limitations) and identify practical SSTIC mechanisms to overcome these barriers collaboratively. Through case studies, the session will evaluate AI's industrial impact against economic, social, and environmental metrics while addressing scalability challenges and knowledge transfer pathways - to inform development of equitable AI ecosystems through South-South cooperation.

### **Interactive Dialogue (20 minutes): Co-creating Solutions**

A structured Q&A and discussion inviting contributions from the audience (policymakers, industry experts, technology specialists, development partners). The focus will be on identifying concrete opportunities, potential collaborations, and actionable pathways to harness AI for industrial transformation through SSTIC.

### **Closing Segment (5 minutes)**

Concluding Remarks: Synthesizing the key insights, recommendations, and potential next steps identified during the session. This will highlight prospective follow-up initiatives and knowledge products to sustain momentum.

### **| Language:**

The session will be conducted in English, with simultaneous interpretation available if required.

## **Date and Location**

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**Date and time:** Friday, May 30, 2025, 10:00 to 11:30 a.m. (Eastern Standard Time)

**Location/Venue:** Conference Room 8, United Nations Headquarters, New York.

## **Expected Outcomes**

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The immediate outcomes of this session will contribute to advancing AI-driven industrial transformation across the Global South and strengthening UNIDO's SSTIC framework. Specifically, the session aims to:

- **Develop a Knowledge Product:** Based on the deliberations, compile a comprehensive report documenting AI capabilities across the Global South, highlighting successful technology transfer models, open-source approaches, and industrial applications that demonstrate the transformative potential of AI through South-South cooperation.
- **Foster AI-Focused Partnerships:** Identify opportunities for new collaborative initiatives among Global South countries, technology providers, and research institutions to develop and deploy AI solutions for industrial challenges.
- **Inform Global AI Governance Dialogues:** Provide direct input to international processes related to AI governance, ensuring that Global South perspectives on technology access, capacity building, and ethical considerations are represented.
- **Strengthen Institutional Mechanisms:** Identify concrete pathways to incorporate AI into existing South-South cooperation frameworks and programs, with special attention to capacity building and technology transfer opportunities.

## Provisional programme

### UNIDO Side Event - Thematic Panel Session Leveraging AI for Sustainable Development through South-South and Triangular Industrial Cooperation

Friday, May 30, 2025, 10:00 to 11:30 a.m. (EST)  
Conference Room 8, United Nations Headquarters, New York

10:00

#### Keynote Address

- **Ms. Cecilia Ugaz Estrada,**  
Deputy to the Director General and Managing Director, UNIDO

10:10

Scene setting

10:15 –  
11:10

#### Panel Discussion

##### Panelists:

- **Mr. Ralf Bredel**  
Director and UNIDO Representative, New York Liaison Office,  
UNIDO
- **Mr. Jean-Paul Adam**  
Director for Policy, Monitoring and Advocacy  
Office of the Special Advisor on Africa (UN-OSAA), United Nations
- **Ms. Aygun Aliyeva**  
Executive Director, Agency for State Support to  
Non-Governmental Organizations, Republic of Azerbaijan
- **Dr. Fahad Al-Balawi**  
Chief AI Strategy Advisor, The Saudi Data & AI Authority (SDAIA)

##### Moderator:

- **Mr. Pradeep Paulose**  
Programme Officer,  
Division of Strategic Planning and South-South Cooperation,  
UNIDO

11:10

Q & A

11:25

Closing remarks

### | Keynote speaker



#### **Ms. Cecilia Ugaz Estrada**

*Deputy to the Director General and Managing Director, UNIDO*

Ms. Ugaz Estrada serves as Managing Director of the Directorate of Strategic Planning, Programming and Policy at the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and Special Representative for Latin America and the Caribbean. In this capacity, she leads UNIDO's strategic planning and programming, oversees South-South and Triangular Cooperation, and directs the organization's engagement with multilateral forums including BRICS, G20, and G7. Previously, she was Director of the Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women Unit and Director of the Policy Research and Statistics Department at UNIDO. Her extensive UN experience includes serving as UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative for Paraguay, Deputy Resident Representative for UNDP in Argentina, and Deputy Director for the Human Development Report Office in New York. Prior to her UN career, Ms. Ugaz Estrada held academic positions in Switzerland, United Kingdom, and Finland, and worked with the World Bank in Washington DC. She holds a PhD in economics from Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris.

### | Panelists



#### **Mr. Ralf Bredel**

*Director and UNIDO Representative, New York Liaison Office, UNIDO*

Mr. Bredel currently serves as the Director and Representative of the UNIDO Liaison Office to the UN Headquarters and International Organizations in New York. His UNIDO career spans over two decades, beginning in Beijing in 2003. Previously, Mr. Bredel served as the Chief of the Division for Asia & the Pacific (2019-2021), Representative to China, DPRK, and Mongolia (2016-2019), and Deputy Representative to the UN in New York (2011-2015), where he participated in the negotiation and adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals. He also held advisory positions at UNIDO headquarters in Vienna from 2006 to 2011. Before joining UNIDO, he was a visiting fellow at the University of Oxford and Harvard University. Mr. Bredel is a German national and holds two PhDs from the University of Vienna in international development and philosophy.



### **Mr. Jean-Paul Adam**

*Director for Policy, Monitoring and Advocacy  
Office of the Special Advisor on Africa (UN-OSAA), United Nations*

Mr. Adam is the Director for Policy, Monitoring and Advocacy in the Office of the Special Advisor on Africa to the United Nations Secretary General. He joined the UN in January 2020 and served as the Director for Technology, Climate Change and Natural Resources Management in the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa up until June 2023. He previously served in several Cabinet positions in the Government of Seychelles including Minister of Finance, Trade and the Blue Economy (2015-2016) where he negotiated a debt for climate change adaptation swap in 2015 which placed 30% of Seychelles oceanic space under protection and launched the process for Seychelles to become the first issuer of a Blue Bond. He also served as Seychelles' Minister of Foreign Affairs (2010-2015) and Minister of Health (2016-2019).



### **Ms. Aygun Aliyeva**

*Executive Director, Agency for State Support to Non-Governmental Organizations, Republic of Azerbaijan*

Ms. Aliyeva serves as the Executive Director of the State Support Agency for Non-Governmental Organizations of the Republic of Azerbaijan since November 2021. She holds advanced degrees in International Relations from Azerbaijan University of Languages and completed doctoral-level education at Khazar University. With extensive experience in public administration, Ms. Aliyeva previously served as Deputy Head of the Executive Power of Binagadi District in Baku (2013-2020) and Head of Department for Public Relations at TABIB (2020-2021). Under her leadership, the Agency became a key organizer of the Global South NGO Forum and established strategic partnerships with international organizations. As a member of the COP29 Organizing Committee, she was instrumental in amplifying civil society voices during Azerbaijan's hosting of the climate summit in 2024. In 2021, Ms. Aliyeva was recognized as a finalist in the prestigious "Yukselish" national leadership competition established by the President of Azerbaijan.



### **Dr. Fahad Al-Balawi**

*Chief AI Strategy Advisor*

*Saudi Data & AI Authority Organization (SDAIA)*

Dr. Al-Balawi currently serves as Chief AI Strategy Advisor at SDAIA, where he plays a pivotal role in shaping Saudi Arabia's AI regulatory landscape, leading strategic initiatives and advising top leadership on AI safety, risk, and international alignment. He has been appointed as AI scientist representing Saudi Arabia in the advisory body for the International Scientific Report on the Safety of Advanced AI led by Prof. Yoshua Bengio, which was published in January 2025. Previously, Dr. Al-Balawi has served as a Senior AI Advisor at SDAIA and a founding team member of the National Center for AI. As the Founder and CEO of Deep Horizon, he has pioneered secure, air-gapped large language models and vision-based checkout systems. He has also held academic positions at UC Berkeley, KAUST, and Taif University. Dr. Al-Balawi holds a Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering from UCLA and has conducted research at institutions including Imperial College London and Ilmenau University of Technology. He is a Senior Member of IEEE and holds multiple patents in model predictive control and signal classification.

## **| Moderator**



### **Mr. Pradeep Paulose**

*Programme Officer, UNIDO*

Mr. Paulose is a Programme Officer in the Division of Strategic Planning and South-South Cooperation at the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). With nearly two decades of experience at UNIDO, he has played a pivotal role in advancing trade-related technical assistance, particularly in the areas of quality infrastructure, investment promotion, technology transfer, and South-South cooperation initiatives. Prior to his tenure at UNIDO headquarters in Vienna, Mr. Paulose worked in the private sector, where he specialized in consultancy for the design and development of enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems. His diverse professional background, spanning both international development and private enterprise, equips him with a unique perspective and a strong commitment to promoting inclusive and sustainable industrial development through cross-border collaboration. He holds a master's degree in International Relations and Diplomacy from the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and another Master's in Computer Science from Bharathiar University, India.

## Contact

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