

# Evaluating South-South Cooperation: Approaches, Challenges and Lessons

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# Introduction

- The recent Summit of the Future underscored the critical importance of sustainable development and South-South and triangular cooperation in advancing global development goals. Appropriately evaluating these initiatives is essential for a better understanding of their contributions.
- Specific evaluation guidance is limited. Many developing countries engaged in South-south cooperation do not adhere to OECD-DAC criteria. There is a need to explore diverse approaches and assess their suitability in varying contexts.
- Three multilateral agencies will share their **experience and lessons** from evaluating South-south cooperation. Participants, working in **small groups**, will share insights and discuss ways to appropriately evaluate these interventions.



# Facilitators



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# Contributing Agencies



**FAO** supports countries to transform their agrifood systems through its projects, programs and partnerships. With more than 20 years of SSC facilitation, FAO has worked with close to 100 partners to support the mutual sharing and exchange of knowledge, good practices, policies and technology between and among countries in the global South.



**UNIDO** has extensive experience in SSC, focusing on promoting sustainable industrial development and economic growth in developing countries. It facilitates knowledge sharing through training programs and workshops, supports capacity-building initiatives, and fosters partnerships among countries and regional organizations. UNIDO provides tailored technical assistance for specific industrial needs, implements regional projects to address common challenges, and emphasizes innovation and technology transfer.



**UNICEF** actively engages in SSC to promote the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and resources among developing countries to develop innovative solutions and scale up successful initiatives to enhance the well-being of children. It is a strategic approach to leverage the collective strengths and experiences of developing countries. Key areas of focus include improving child health, education, nutrition, and protection.

# UN definition of South-South Cooperation

**South-South Cooperation** is a process whereby two or more developing countries pursue their individual and/or shared national capacity development objectives through exchanges of knowledge, skills, resources and technical know-how and through regional and interregional collective actions, including partnerships involving Governments, regional organizations, civil society, academia and the private sector, for their individual and/or mutual benefit within and across regions. South-South cooperation is not a substitute for, but rather a complement to, North-South cooperation.

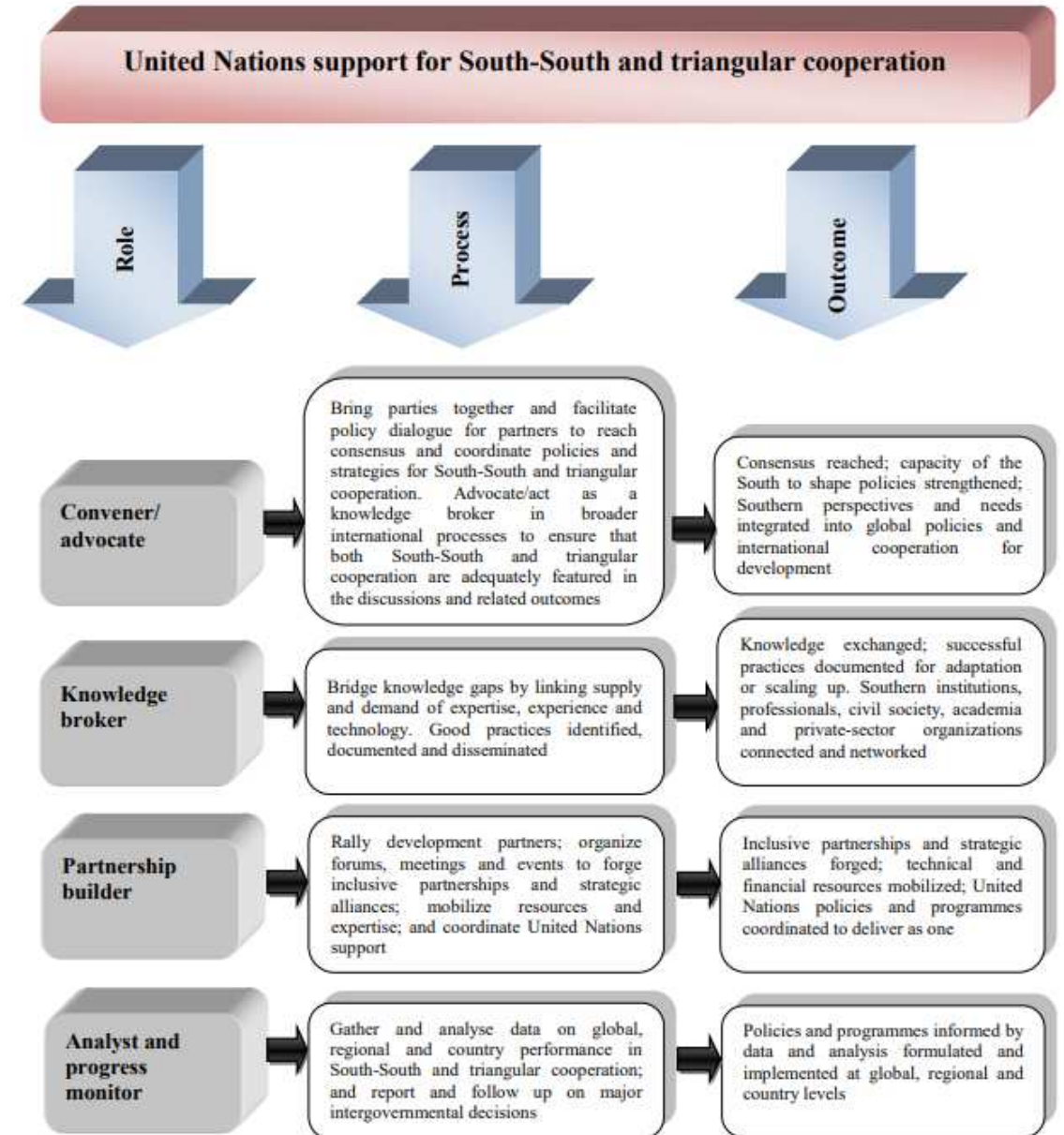
**Triangular Cooperation** involves Southern-driven partnerships between two or more developing countries supported by a developed country(ies)/or multilateral organization(s) to implement development cooperation programmes and projects.

*Framework of operational guidelines on United Nations support to South-South and triangular cooperation (2016)*

**12 September is International Day for South-South Cooperation**



# UN role in South-South & triangular cooperation



# Why to evaluate south-south and triangular cooperation?

South-south and triangular cooperation plays an increasingly important role in the global development cooperation architecture

The UN promotes the inclusion of relevant evaluation questions:

- **Were the UN entity evaluation processes, templates, providers and values inclusive of the Southern perspective, notably for meaningful Southern contextualization and appraisal of results, challenges, partnerships and management decisions?**
- **Did they enable effective capturing of the South-South cooperation dimensions, Southern capacity-building priorities, and the benefits of the project and their relevance and impact for the strengthening of Southern networks?**



Support and align with national plans and priorities



Respond to the specific development challenges of developing countries



Align with the UNSDCF



Align with international, regional and normative frameworks



Leverage the unique role and comparative advantages of United Nations entities



Ensure long-term engagement and sustainability



Strengthen human, technical and institutional capacity development



Improve exchange of experiences, resources and know-how



Apply results-focused programming, monitoring and impact





# FAO's experience evaluating south-south and triangular cooperation

FAO conducts evaluations and reviews of its south-south and triangular cooperation interventions at country, regional and global levels:

- **Evaluation of FAO's cooperation with Mexico 2013-2018**
- **Evaluation of FAO's African Solidarity Fund**
- **Corporate evaluation of FAO's role and work in South-south and Triangular Cooperation (2022)**

Some of the methods and data sources used at the **corporate evaluation:**

- Portfolio analysis
  - Desk review
- Evaluation synthesis
- Country case studies
- Stakeholder surveys
- Key informant interviews
- Benchmarking study





# Lessons from the corporate evaluation

Portfolio analysis is a powerful tool – several findings relied on descriptive data from this analysis

- *By 2022, FAO implemented 137 projects in 107 countries with a budget of US\$ 280 million – 96% focused on development and 4% on emergency*

Evaluating coherence (both internal and external) provided insightful findings

- *Interventions focused on systems change are more likely to be sustained and scaled up than producer technology solutions*

Assessing contributions was a challenge as it required extensive triangulation of primary and secondary evidence

- *Surveys suffered from low response rates*
- *Data on outcomes were often not available (monitoring systems are a gap)*

# UNIDO's Methods and Approach



**Theory of Change**

**Desk and literature review**



**Field mission including direct observation**

**Stakeholder consultations**



**Interviews and focus group discussions**

**Statistical analysis**

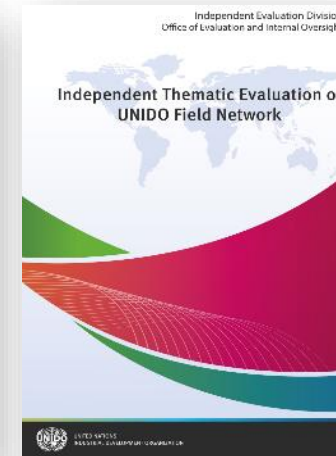
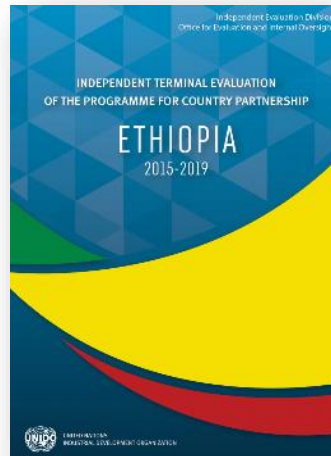
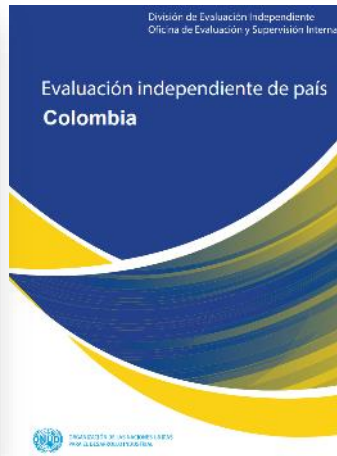
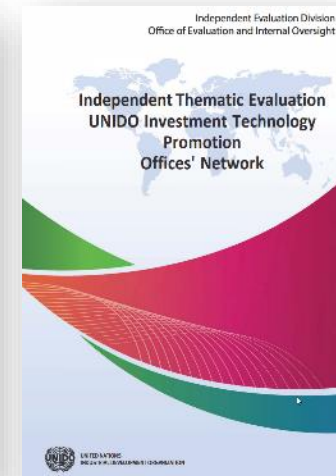
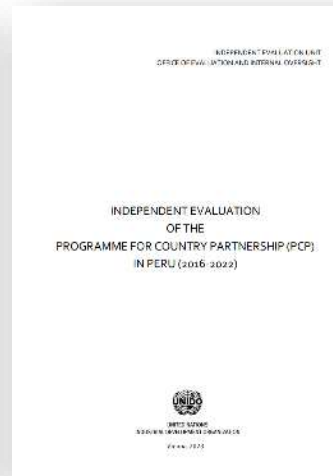
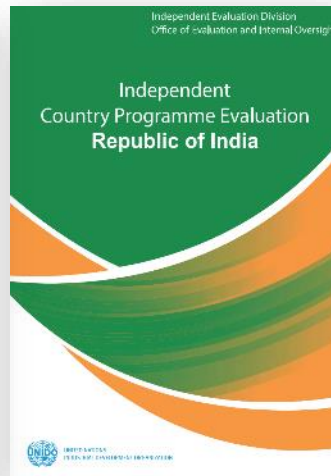
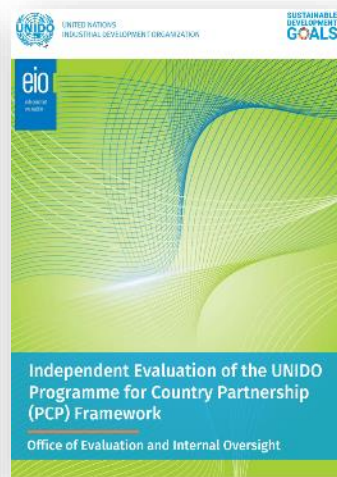


**SWOT analysis**

**Surveys**



# UNIDO's experience evaluating SSTIC





# Lessons from UNIDO in evaluation SSC

Ownership of SSC needs to be “South-Driven”, including funding commitment

- *Traditional approach is “North-Driven”*

Big countries (e.g., China, India, Ethiopia), have the internal experience (internal SSC), which enhances and facilitates SSC processes.

UN (UNIDO) value in 2 key dimensions:

- *Neutral broker → facilitator for putting together stakeholders*
- *Technology supplier → facilitator of access to expertise and technology*

Challenges at:

- *Keeping focus on results (outcome/impact) vs resources, process and activities only*
- *Coordination, monitoring and reporting*



# UNICEF's M&E on SSC: evaluations



**Stand alone evaluations:** Trilateral South-South Cooperation (TSSC) programme between the Government of Brazil and UNICEF Brazil



As a **component of Country Programme Evaluations**



Evaluations where SSC is **not a primary focus:** U-Report



**Annual Core Standard Indicators** (CSIs) reporting: scale of activities in support of south-south or triangular cooperation

# Methodologies and limitations

## Key data points under organization-wide monitoring

- Which formal arrangements on SSC exist between UNICEF and the Government or partners;
- Which institutionalised SSC modalities supported by UNICEF are in place in the country;
- How many requests for technical assistance from other countries were met through the CO;
- What is the amount of SSC and bilateral funding mobilized or leveraged by the CO?

## The evaluation methodology is essentially qualitative?

- [Brazil] When the SSC programme adopts a capacity development approach and involves diverse countries and engagement, the evaluation method is essentially qualitative and need a higher number of KIIs, extensive desk review to tackle the inherent subjectivity.
- [U-Report] Due to the highly qualitative and contextual nature of case studies, findings from this case are not generalizable.
- Respect for dignity and diversity and right to self-determination is one of the key ethical considerations.

## Need to develop the national M&E capacity and system of key stakeholders

- [Brazil] Each partnership is unique. Due to the absence of a monitoring system, it is not possible to reconstruct history of each partnership under the Programme.
- Common challenge: lack of standardized frameworks and access to reliable and comprehensive data can be limited in many countries involved in SSC.



# Group discussion



1. Please tell us about your experience evaluating South-South or triangular cooperation within your organization. Does your organization have **specific guidance** for such evaluations?
2. What **challenges** did you face in evaluating South-South cooperation initiatives? What **lessons** did you learn from these evaluations?
3. What **organizational changes or developments** are needed to promote systematic and rigorous evaluations of south-south cooperation initiatives? What role can UNEG play in promoting such changes?

# Thank you!

