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PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

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Evaluation of FAO's South-South and Triangular Cooperation

Queries on the substantive content of this document may be addressed to:

Ms Clemencia Cosentino
Director, Office of Evaluation
Tel: +39 06570 53903
Email: OED-Director@fao.org

Documents can be consulted at www.fao.org

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- At the request of the Programme Committee, the Office of Evaluation (OED) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) conducted an evaluation of FAO's role and work in South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC). FAO has a long history in promoting SSTC that goes back to the late 1970s, when it began helping developing countries benefit from lessons learned and innovations that had already been tried and tested elsewhere in the south. This work was revamped in 2012–13 by establishing a dedicated unit and developing FAO's first strategy on South-South Cooperation.
- By June 2021, FAO implemented a portfolio of 137 projects covering 107 countries with a budget of about USD 280 million implemented to date. SSTC projects have supported knowledge brokering, sharing of technical know-how, peer-to-peer learning and policy dialogue at global, regional, national and local levels.
- The evaluation of these projects and SSTC strategy focused on answering the following questions:
 - a) To what extent are FAO's SSTC strategy and projects relevant and coherent?
 - b) To what extent has SSTC contributed to results at global, regional and local levels, and done so by building an enabling environment?
 - c) To what extent are SSTC results, if any, sustainable?
 - d) To what extent have cross-cutting themes, such as gender, been integrated into SSTC?
- The evaluation used multiple methods. These included a descriptive analysis of the portfolio of 137 SSTC projects implemented between January 2012 and June 2021, a review of documents (FAO strategy and planning documents, funding agreements with SSTC providers), more than 300 interviews with stakeholders (project beneficiaries, government counterparts, and academic and civil society representatives in countries with SSTC projects), a synthesis of 55 evaluations of SSTC projects or components, 11 country case studies, and a benchmarking analysis of 8 United Nations (UN) agencies (including Rome-based agencies) implementing similar initiatives.
- The evaluation finds that SSTC projects have to a large extent been **relevant** to national plans and partners' needs; these have mostly focused on supporting the achievement of development outcomes, whereas their use in humanitarian contexts has been much less frequent. In addition, SSTC is becoming an increasingly important topic for the Rome-based agencies.
- SSTC has **contributed** to enhanced institutional collaboration and policy dialogue in a wide range of technical areas. FAO's ability to identify and promote a variety of "southern solutions" was recognized by government counterparts as an area of strength. Several SSTC interventions were designed to meet local needs, adapted to local contexts, and leveraged learning from prior projects or other programmes. There were, however, some whose design was not always appropriate for the local context. The evaluation also found that SSTC projects designed and implemented in synergy with other FAO or partners' projects were more effective than stand-alone projects.
- **Sustainability** of SSTC projects has been variable and affected by the level of ownership, local and FAO capacities, and resources. Also, SSTC strategic documents do not make adequate reference to relevant corporate policies and strategies such as the Policy on Gender Equality 2020-2030, the Vision and Strategy for FAO's Work in Nutrition and the Strategy on Climate Change 2022-2031.
- The evaluation concludes that FAO has made significant progress in facilitating SSTC, and has the opportunity to take on a leading role within the UN system, working closely with emerging economies, middle-income countries and traditional donors (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD), in promoting tested solutions among countries in the global south. The evaluation includes recommendations for FAO to consider

in determining how to best leverage SSTC as a mechanism to implement its expanding emergency and resilience portfolio (Recommendation 1), strengthen the design of SSTC interventions (Recommendation 2), place greater focus on supporting the creation of an enabling environment (Recommendation 3), and revamp its strategic guidance, communication and resource mobilization efforts (Recommendation 4).

GUIDANCE SOUGHT FROM THE PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

- The Programme Committee is invited to review the content of the document and provide guidance as deemed appropriate.

I. Introduction

1. At its 129th Session, the Programme Committee of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) requested that the Office of Evaluation (OED) conduct an evaluation of FAO's South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) initiatives.
2. Under these initiatives, cooperation refers to the “sharing and exchange of key development solutions – knowledge, experiences and good practices, policies, technology, and resources.”¹ These interactions may occur between countries in the global south (called “South-South Cooperation” or SSC) or among two or more developing countries in collaboration with a third partner, often a developed or donor country, an emerging economy, or a multilateral organization (called “Triangular Cooperation” or TrC). Throughout this report, references to both cooperation approaches collectively are referred to as SSTC.
3. SSTC is primarily funded through agreements to offer activities in response to country needs. These include: a) short-term exchanges of technical expertise, b) medium-to-long-term exchanges of technical expertise, c) study tours and trainings, d) policy dialogue, and e) in-kind and technical solution exchanges.
4. SSTC builds on FAO's long history of promoting collaborations to help developing countries benefit from lessons learned and innovations tried and tested elsewhere in the south. This work was institutionalized in 2012–2013 through the establishment of a dedicated unit and the elaboration of FAO's first SSC strategy anchored on four pillars:
 - a) exchange and uptake of southern development solutions;
 - b) platforms for SSC knowledge networking;
 - c) upstream policy support for effective SSC; and
 - d) creation of an enabling environment for SSC—externally and internally.
5. The evaluation assesses the relevance, coherence, contributions and sustainability of the SSTC strategy and projects. The findings of this report may assist FAO in improving the design and implementation of future SSTC interventions, and in communicating its achievements to stakeholders. The primary intended users of the information are FAO Members, Senior Management and personnel working on SSTC at global, regional and country levels.
6. The remainder of this report is organized as follows. Section II includes a description of the methodology; Section III provides an overview of FAO's SSTC; Section IV contains the findings, and Section V contains the evaluation's conclusions and recommendations.

¹ FAO. n.d. *South-South and Triangular Cooperation*. <https://www.fao.org/3/h0045e/h0045e.pdf>

II. Methodology

7. **The evaluation was guided by a theory of change (TOC)** developed in consultation with FAO's South-South and Triangular Cooperation Division (PST). The TOC outlines how SSTC seeks to address the key challenges faced by agrifood systems in the global south. In brief, FAO and its partners provide the "inputs" (that is, the institutional support, resources and capacities for the design and implementation of SSTC projects). When deployed, these inputs are used to implement activities such as exchanges of knowledge or innovations that, in turn, lead to a set of outputs (such as knowledge shared, partnerships established, and policy dialogue and advocacy conducted). These outputs are expected to lead to outcomes (capacities built or strengthened, solutions or innovations adapted and scaled up, and public policies adjusted/developed and implemented). In the long run, these outcomes would result in more resilient, inclusive and efficient agrifood systems.
8. **The evaluation relied on this theory of change to guide the analysis used to address the evaluation questions:**
 - a) To what extent are FAO's SSTC strategy and projects relevant and coherent?
 - b) To what extent has SSTC contributed to results at global, regional and local levels, and done so by building an enabling environment?
 - c) To what extent are SSTC results, if any, sustainable?
 - d) To what extent have cross-cutting themes, such as gender, been integrated into SSTC?
9. **To answer these questions, the evaluation used multiple methods**, including a descriptive analysis of the portfolio of 137 SSTC projects implemented between January 2012 and June 2021, a review of documents (internal FAO strategy and planning documents, and funding agreements with SSTC providers), more than 300 interviews with stakeholders (between 18 and 25 FAO personnel, project beneficiaries, government counterparts, and academic and civil society representatives were interviewed in each country), a synthesis of 55 existing evaluations of SSTC projects or components, 11 country case studies, and a benchmarking analysis of 8 United Nations (UN) agencies (including Rome-based agencies) implementing similar initiatives. The evaluation also conducted surveys of FAO personnel and government stakeholders. Annex 1 provides detailed information about these methods and data sources².
10. **This evaluation faced a number of challenges** which caused delays and impacted the data collection and analysis plans. Specifically:
 - a) The surveys of personnel and of government counterparts designed to generate representative estimates of stakeholder experiences and perceptions suffered from low response rates (4 and 23 percent respectively) and, therefore, could not be used in the analysis.
 - b) The evaluation relied on the monitoring and evaluation of data systems to obtain data on project outcomes, but these data were not available.
 - c) Considerable effort was required to construct a data set of the portfolio of SSTC projects for this evaluation, which caused delays.
 - d) The COVID-19 pandemic hindered the evaluation team's access to beneficiaries in many countries, limiting the number of beneficiaries interviewed as part of the case studies.
11. **These challenges were addressed** through additional interviews of stakeholders and synthesis of existing evaluations of SSTC projects or components. Nevertheless, and although valuable in providing perceptions on performance and suggestions on areas of potential improvement, the insights from interviews should not be interpreted as representative of the portfolio of SSTC projects.

² The annex is available on the FAO Evaluation Office website at www.fao.org/evaluation

III. Overview of FAO's South-South and Triangular Cooperation

A. Evolution of SSTC at FAO

12. **FAO has a long history in SSTC.** The Organization first established a focal point for South-South Cooperation in 1979, the year after the Buenos Aires Plan of Action for Promoting and Implementing Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries was adopted at the United Nations Conference on Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries. Starting in 1994, FAO launched a series of partnership programmes focused on exchanging technical cooperation experts among developing countries and promoting technical cooperation among countries in transition. The endorsement of the Special Programme for Food Security by the World Food Summit further bolstered these collaboration efforts.
13. **Building on these early experiences, FAO developed an SSC strategy** in 2013 aimed at positioning SSC as an “effective and efficient means to achieving a world without hunger”. In 2016³ some illustrative examples were added to the strategy, including a specific reference to Triangular Cooperation. The pillars of SSTC are described as follow:
 - a) **Facilitating exchanges of development solutions at the grassroots level:** based on the premise that a vast range of southern development solutions are available to meet knowledge and capacity gaps in the south. FAO facilitates the process of identifying, transferring, adapting and scaling up development solutions from one country to another.
 - b) **Platforms for SSC knowledge networking and platforms at the institutional level:** Knowledge brokering is one of FAO's core comparative advantages. FAO facilitates the connection between “demand” and “supply” through strengthening knowledge platforms to share expertise, knowledge and agricultural development solutions.
 - c) **Providing upstream policy support:** FAO engages in SSC and TrC at the highest policy level with governments and strategic partners. The aim is to attain a favourable policy environment for SSC and TrC to enable countries of the global south to work together in support of common development objectives.
 - d) **Fostering an enabling environment for effective SSC:** with strong institutional support for SSC, both within FAO and externally. Effective SSC and TrC requires building broader partnerships and strategic alliances, increasing visibility, enhancing technical capacities within FAO, mainstreaming, monitoring and evaluating, and resource mobilization.
14. **FAO recently released new guidelines for SSTC⁴ implementation (Guidelines for Action 2022–25).** Aimed at strengthening FAO's “position as a global advocator, convener, broker, facilitator and enabler of SSTC in agriculture and agrifood systems,” these new guidelines reinforce the centrality of SSTC to FAO efforts to meet the growing demands for FAO support from Members. These guidelines also showcase the increasing alignment between FAO's SSTC strategy and UN principles as outlined in the Secretary-General's 2016 Framework.⁵

B. Characteristics of FAO's SSTC portfolio

15. **FAO's SSTC projects tend to have a regional or country focus.** An analysis of the size of the portfolio (2012–2021) in terms of number of projects and funding reveals that:
 - a) SSTC projects are more likely to have a regional⁶ or country focus (43 percent and 37.5 percent respectively) than an interregional or global focus (7 percent and 12.5 percent respectively).

³ FAO. 2016a. *FAO's South-South and Triangular Cooperation Strategy in Action. Fostering partnerships among the Global South.* <https://www.fao.org/3/i6249e/i6249e.pdf>

⁴ FAO and UNOSSC. 2022. *South-South in Action – South-South and triangular cooperation in agricultural development: FAO's experiences.* Rome and New York. <https://www.fao.org/3/cc0678en/cc0678en.pdf>

⁵ UNOSSC. 2021. *United Nations System-wide Strategy on South-South and Triangular Cooperation for sustainable development.* <https://www.unsouthsouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/United-Nations-system-wide-strategy-on-South-South-and-triangular-cooperation-for-sustainable-development-2020percentE2percent80percent932024.pdf>

⁶ Includes subregional.

- b) Regional and country projects received the bulk of the funding (about USD 92 million and USD 70 million respectively between 2012 and 2021) compared to interregional and global projects.
- c) Although fewer in numbers, on average, global SSC and TrC projects have larger budgets (about USD 3 million per project) than regional or country projects (about USD 1.5 million per project).
16. **The large majority of projects are supported by three countries and FAO.** Between 2012 and 2021, 107 countries were beneficiaries of SSTC projects. Although 21 countries and 6 international/regional organizations provide financial support for these projects, 80 percent of them were supported by three countries – Brazil, China and Türkiye – and FAO.
17. **SSTC projects tend to be implemented with government; partnerships with private sector and civil society organizations are used, but are much less common.** Projects are most likely to be implemented with government ministries and other governmental entities (nearly 90 percent) and often with institutions focused on research or multilateral organizations. Partnerships with private sector and civil society are less likely (observed in only 18 percent and 9 percent of projects in the portfolio, respectively).

Table 1. Types of implementing partners

<i>Implementing partner</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>Government</i>	<i>Ministries, governmental entities</i>
<i>Research institutions</i>	<i>Research centres/institutions, laboratories, universities and academic associations</i>
<i>International/regional organizations</i>	<i>Multilateral international organizations, intergovernmental organizations, UN agencies, regional entities/bodies</i>
<i>Civil society</i>	<i>Civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, professional associations, and networks.</i>
<i>Private sector</i>	<i>Farmers and farmers' organizations, producers' organizations and cooperatives, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, large national and multinational corporations, and financial institutions.</i>
<i>Parliament</i>	<i>Parliament/national legislation bodies</i>

Source: Evaluation team

18. **Projects incorporate a range of cross-cutting areas of focus for FAO – particularly gender, nutrition and governance – and their designs align with FAO's four betters.** All projects integrate activities focused on at least one cross-cutting theme in their design, most often gender (40 percent), nutrition (29 percent) and governance (25 percent). Fewer projects focus on climate change (14 percent) or youth and Indigenous Peoples (12 percent). In addition, in their designs, 38 percent of SSTC projects align with better production (especially through BP1 “Green Innovation” and BP4 “Small-scale producers’ equitable access to resources”), with smaller shares aligning with better nutrition, life and environment (24 percent, 21 percent, and 17 percent respectively).

IV. Findings

A. Relevance

Finding 1. SSTC projects largely focus on development in alignment with national development plans, across a range of technical areas and focusing on learning exchanges.

Development focus

In Uganda, SSTC projects have supported the implementation of the national development plan III. In Mesoamerica, several projects funded by Brazil and Mexico supported policy dialogue on school feeding and family farming. In Mongolia, the government approved an exemption from customs and VAT taxes for building passive solar greenhouses developed through the Chinese intervention model.

Humanitarian focus

SSTC projects in Ecuador, Gambia and Morocco supported FAO's response to a number of emerging crises, such as desert locust, swine fever, fall armyworm, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Humanitarian-development focus

An intervention in Algeria included an SSC component aligned with the emergency and development needs and priorities in the areas of agriculture, management of natural resources and desert locust prevention.

19. The vast majority of SSTC projects (2012–2021) focus on development across a wide range of technical areas, offering learning exchanges as the most prevalent approach to implementation. Specifically, 94 percent of SSTC projects focus on development and 6 percent on emergency. (A combined focus on both areas was rare.) Project documents reveal that the focus on development priorities aligned with national development plans.
20. Projects were spread across a wide range of technical areas, including agriculture (13 percent in crop, livestock, agribusiness, etc.), food security and nutrition (11 percent), family farming and school feeding (10 percent), forestry and land resources (8 percent), aquaculture (7 percent), plant health, and water and soil (5 percent each), climate change (4 percent) and others.
21. Projects offer learning exchanges (about 70 percent do), often in combination with other activities such as field visits by experts and technicians or policy dialogue. Technology exchanges and institutional collaborations are the least frequent implementation activities (observed in less than 20 percent of projects).

Table 2. SSTC implementation approaches

Implementation approach	Description
Fielding of experts and technicians	Deployment of experts and technicians (usually more than three months) for support including coaching, demonstrations at field level, training sessions, on-the-job mentoring, training of trainers
Learning exchange	Learning activities (usually short-term) such as study tours, exposure visits, informal network exchange
Technology exchange	Transfer of specific technology-based knowledge, methods and tools, including agricultural inputs, small machinery, farm equipment, improved varieties, and/or methodology associated with technologies
Institutional collaboration	Collaboration with/among institutions including joint research projects, co-development of curricula, creation of knowledge networks/centres of excellence, staff exchange, and joint roster of experts
Policy dialogue	High-level policy dialogue, including events/workshops in support of policy and strategy development and parliamentary forums and meetings

Source: Evaluation team

Finding 2. The evaluation found stronger evidence of outputs in two pillars of the 2013 SSC Strategy: supporting learning and technology exchanges, and establishing platforms for networking.

22. The analysis of available progress and final reports, evaluation synthesis and country case studies indicate that SSTC projects achieved several expected project outputs. These included a) sharing experts and technicians and supporting learning and technology exchanges (pillar 1) in countries as diverse as Algeria, Azerbaijan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Uganda; and b) establishing platforms for networking (pillar 2) as was done through Congo's Network of Forestry and Environmental Training Institutions of Central Africa and Sri Lanka's Interregional Platform for Information Sharing across regions.
23. Examples of FAO's efforts to "upstream policy support for effective SSC" (pillar 3) and to create "an enabling environment for South-South Cooperation" (pillar 4) were more limited. One notable example is provided by Uganda, where a policy, trust fund, and national coordination mechanism have been put in place in support of SSTC. Nevertheless, such examples were few, suggesting less success in creating a supportive environment for SSTC.

Finding 3. Stakeholders recognize FAO's credibility and trustworthiness as a provider of technical assistance and backstopping around SSTC, which is becoming an increasingly important agenda item for the Rome-based agencies.

24. Analysis of stakeholder interviews (including government counterparts and funding providers) indicates that FAO is seen as a trusted and credible Organization that provides a framework for cooperation, a neutral forum for negotiations among countries, and technical skills to identify areas of focus and guide implementation across the project cycle.
25. SSTC collaboration is an increasingly important agenda item for the Rome-based agencies, as reflected in the joint roadmap for SSTC.⁷ Feedback from FAO personnel pointed to strong SSTC collaborations with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP) at the global level. An example is FAO's collaboration with WFP on the "Purchase from Africans for Africa" programme. Collaboration at country level is, however, less common. This is corroborated by the relatively low number of joint SSTC interventions with Rome-based agencies found in past evaluations and in the case study countries.⁸ Key challenges identified for increasing country-level collaboration include different mandates of Rome-based agencies, limited resources at country level and high transaction costs.

B. Coherence

Finding 4. Elements of SSTC intervention designs sometimes enhance and other times limit the potential for success of the initiatives.

26. The evaluation found several examples of interventions that are coherent – that is, well-designed to meet local needs, adapted to the local context, and often leveraging learning from prior projects and other initiatives. There were also a few cases, according to stakeholders interviewed, particularly in Africa and Mesoamerica, where deeper engagement of technical stakeholders was needed early on to ensure the alignment of project designs with local needs. For example, in the case of Namibia, the project was well-designed to support government-operated medium and large-scale commercial agricultural enterprises, but not rural communities and small producers that could have benefited the most from the small-scale solutions introduced through SSTC. This was attributed by interviewees to the limited engagement of local non-government stakeholders in the conceptualization and design phase of this project. Similar examples were found in Azerbaijan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where SSTC projects were designed with

⁷ FAO, WFP and IFAD. 2018. Joint Roadmap towards BAPA+40. <https://www.unsouthsouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/RBAs-Joint-Roadmap-towards-BAPA40.pdf>

⁸ With WFP, besides the Purchase from Africans for Africa (PAA Africa) programme, four SSTC pilot projects were identified in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ecuador, Kenya and Sri Lanka. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, project FMM/GLO/113/MUL was the only one featuring a collaboration with IFAD.

central authorities but failed to engage with local counterparts. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Togo, the evaluation found cases of projects that had a very ambitious design in relation to their budget and time frame for implementation.

27. Some interviewees noted that there are advantages and disadvantages of having SSTC as separate projects or mainstreamed into other initiatives. The former makes it easier to monitor SSTC, but in the latter it is potentially more influential. Some examples of mainstreaming SSTC into other initiatives include:
- a) The SSTC Brazilian scheme in Latin America was integrated into the Regional Initiative 1 (Zero Hunger) and through this platform it was used to advocate for policy changes in areas such as school feeding, family farming and agroecology across the region.
 - b) The SSTC project for Sustainable Rice Partnership leveraged interventions from previous FAO projects (Technical Cooperation Programmes [TCPs] in Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal), but also government initiatives (Expanding Rice Production Project in the United Republic of Tanzania).
 - c) In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Dimitra approach was integrated into new FAO projects⁹ such as project UTF/CAC/001/CAC, which supported the identification of drivers of deforestation and approaches to address it, which were at that time among the Country Programming Framework's pillars and lines of action.
 - d) In Azerbaijan, the work on the agricultural sector assessment under SSTC project GCP/SEC/016/TUR feeds upon the work carried out to strengthen agricultural services under a previous project (TCP/AZE/018) and the capacity development for the Agrarian Services Agency (ASA) under SSTC project GCP/SEC/016/TUR is synergetic with the ASA restructuring support provided under previous project TCP/AZE/017.
 - e) In Senegal, project OSRO/RAF/202/BRA established synergies with national programmes such as the "Project to Support Local Small-scale Irrigation for rice production". Also, the Government's "Support programme for Agricultural Development and Rural Entrepreneurship" facilitated the marketing of the production with the involvement of the private sector through the Development Company of Textile Fibres, thus ensuring a market for the surplus.
28. Awareness about SSTC among FAO personnel is another factor affecting coherence; the evaluation found that in the regions where FAO personnel was generally more aware about SSTC (Africa, Europe and Central Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean), there were more examples of synergetic interventions. Also, country offices are generally more aware and active in SSTC when the government has a national policy such as in Cuba, Mexico or Uganda.

Finding 5. SSTC could be incorporated into other FAO strategic initiatives for mutual reinforcement.

29. FAO personnel interviewed flagged a promising opportunity that, at present, might not be leveraged to its full potential. They identified initiatives such as Hand-in-Hand and the Yanbao fund that could provide valuable mechanisms for expanded use of SSTC, enhancing both the potential success of those initiatives and of SSTC to support transformative collaborations. The evaluation team reviewed some of these initiatives and did not find evidence of synergies with SSTC¹⁰.

Finding 6. System solutions appear more likely to succeed than technology solutions.

30. Visits to projects and a review of prior evaluations revealed that interventions focused on systems change (such as school feeding schemes) are more likely to be sustained and scaled up than producer technology solutions. This is often due to factors such as restrictions on access to

⁹ For example, in the FAO Project *Rural Women's Empowerment Agriculture Programme* (RWEAP) financed by the African Solidarity Trust Fund.

¹⁰ For instance, the design of SSTC interventions could benefit from the country-level analysis carried out as part of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative.

essential inputs (such as high-yield modified seed varieties for rice production), the short duration of projects, and limited technical backstopping from extension officers, which result in technology solutions that remain confined to a limited number of beneficiaries.

C. Contributions

31. As described in the theory of change, FAO's work on SSTC can lead to an increased transfer of technical know-how, enhanced peer-to-peer sharing, strengthened institutional collaboration and networking, enhanced policy dialogue for collective action, and effective partnerships and functional capacities. These are expected to lead to SSTC outcomes, such as systemic and sustainable solutions. Below are the evaluation findings concerning SSTC contributions.

Finding 7. The majority of SSTC interventions focus on transfer of technical know-how, mutual learning and peer-to-peer sharing.

32. The analysis of available progress reports, final reports, evaluation synthesis and country case studies indicate that the majority of SSTC activities are concentrated on the transfer of technical know-how, mutual learning and peer-to-peer sharing among southern countries. For example, an SSTC project in Yemen shared microfinance knowledge to women and youth in Somalia. Another project supported country-to-country visits for peer exchanges among a wide range of stakeholders from Myanmar (central and local government personnel, civil society and producer organizations) visiting counterparts in Nepal and Viet Nam.

Finding 8. FAO SSTC has supported institutional collaborations through regional expert networks and academic organizations.

33. SSTC seeks to enhance the coordinating capacities of Members by establishing mechanisms for regional coordination, and supporting academic collaborations for joint research, co-development of courses and student exchanges.
34. An example of the former is the establishment of the Central Asian and Caucasus Regional Fisheries and Aquaculture Commission, considered one of the most successful intraregional partnerships.¹¹ An example of the latter is the establishment of five reference centres to share knowledge across countries, such as the five centres of excellence in China that are recognized as top institutions in different technical areas including rice production, tropical agriculture and fisheries.
35. Another example of institutional collaboration is in Cuba, which provided technical advice and training to the Dominican Republic and Haiti on the eradication of classical swine fever for three consecutive years from 2015 to 2017. This triggered further collaboration and the National Centre for Animal and Plant Health from Cuba with the University of Santo Domingo from Dominican Republic, developed and implemented a TCP project (TCP/RLA/3502) on food security in the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

Finding 9. The evaluation found several examples of SSTC projects that contributed to enhanced policy dialogue.

36. Stakeholders' interviewed stated that supporting policy dialogue among countries was one of the main contributions of SSTC. This was confirmed by the evaluation synthesis and the numerous examples found in the country case studies. Policy dialogue took different models such as the **promotion of high-level events** aimed at facilitating learning exchanges **among multiple host** and provider countries and enhancing political commitment. These exchanges are common in Latin America and the Caribbean, where countries such as Nicaragua and Trinidad and Tobago

¹¹ FAO. 2017a. *Evaluation of FAO's Contribution to Strategic Objective 4: Enabling Inclusive and Efficient Agricultural and Food Systems*. Annex 3. <https://www.fao.org/evaluation/evaluation-digest/evaluations-detail/en/c/1051264>

reportedly benefitted from high-level political dialogue to learn about experiences from others.¹² Some additional examples included:

- a) The SSTC project for Sustainable Rice Partnership contributed to the organization of the High-level Ministerial Conference on Rice, held in Senegal in 2018. This Conference proposed eight recommendations, calling for a more collective policy direction and supporting joint implementation and investment for rice self-sufficiency in African countries.¹³
- b) The Forest and Farm Facility programme supported the Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests in convening an international meeting in Mexico City with 100 community representatives from the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Mexico and Nicaragua to share experiences in community land management and forest governance. Participants identified barriers to improving public policies and expressed willingness to communicate with their countries' political leaders for relevant actions.¹⁴
- c) Within the Zero Hunger Initiative for Latin America project, FAO in collaboration with WFP, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) supported six high-level international seminars on conditional cash transfer programmes, facilitating discussions between ministers of social areas, senior executives and experts from academia and international community on the issues related to cash transfers. These events were considered important as they generated knowledge that reaffirms the holistic approach in collectively addressing hunger problems.¹⁵
- d) Within the framework of FAO-China SSC programme, a series of international high-level expert consultation workshops on agricultural market information for trade policy development in East African Countries were organized to identify gaps and needs in market information systems and propose an SSC project activity to strengthen information systems at the regional and country level.¹⁶
- e) The Interregional Workshop on Support of Family Farming, which was supported by a Brazil-funded SSTC project, identified areas of focus to scale up the work at the policy level and promote collaboration across regions to improve results.¹⁷
- f) The Africa Solidarity Trust Fund supported the involvement of the line ministries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC)¹⁸ in the development of a regional response to transboundary pests; this resulted in well-coordinated sanitary and phytosanitary measures such as the regional strategy on maize lethal necrosis disease.

37. A second model of policy dialogue is the **country-to-country** mutual sharing aiming at harmonizing policies formulated by the concerned ministries regarding a common issue. Some examples included:

¹² FAO. 2018. *Evaluación del Programa de Cooperación de la FAO en Nicaragua (2013-2016)*. Roma. <https://www.fao.org/3/I9887ES/i9887es.pdf>; and

FAO. 2016b. *Evaluation of FAO contribution in Trinidad and Tobago*. <https://www.fao.org/evaluation/evaluation-digest/evaluations-detail/en/c/416189/>

¹³ FAO. 2020a. *Final evaluation of the project "Partnership for sustainable rice systems development in sub-Saharan Africa"*. Rome. <https://www.fao.org/evaluation/evaluation-digest/evaluations-detail/en/c/1306715/>

¹⁴ FAO. 2016c. *Mid-term evaluation of the Forest and Farm Facility programme*. Rome. <https://www.fao.org/3/bq504e/bq504e.pdf>

¹⁵ FAO. n.d. *Evaluación del Proyecto Iniciativa contra el Hambre en América Latina y el Caribe*. (unpublished)

¹⁶ FAO. 2016d. *Evaluation of FAO's contributions in the United Republic of Tanzania*. Rome. <https://www.fao.org/evaluation/evaluation-digest/evaluations-detail/en/c/461176/>

¹⁷ FAO. 2017b. *Evaluation of FAO's contribution to the reduction of rural poverty through Strategic Programme 3*. Annex 3: Assessment of progress on access and empowerment. <https://www.fao.org/evaluation/evaluation-digest/evaluations-detail/en/c/853935/>

¹⁸ SADC members are: Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

- a) Within the Morocco-SSTC programme, a series of exchanges were organized with the decision-makers of the Ministry of Agriculture in Eswatini on the strategic directions for the Green Morocco Plan and its applicability and adaptation in the national context, suggesting a strong influence on policy change.¹⁹
38. **Parliamentarian-to-parliamentarian policy dialogues** have also taken place particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, and can potentially trigger long-lasting effects through changes in legislation. For example, through SSC, exchanges and discussions occurred between the representatives of Parliamentary Fronts against Hunger of Guatemala and Honduras. FAO supported the parliamentarians' participation in a series of events, which increased the political visibility of food and nutrition security issues.²⁰

Finding 10. Although FAO has promoted the creation of a comprehensive enabling environment for SSTC, there is room for improvement especially at country level.

39. The benchmarking study pointed out that other UN entities undertake a wider range of activities than FAO to promote an enabling environment for SSTC. These actions include: entering into operational agreements with strategic partners; supporting national SSTC capacities and frameworks; advocacy efforts; fostering policy dialogue in global forums; engaging with non-state actors and regional organizations and initiatives; promoting regional or thematic SSC initiatives; supporting national governments with resource mobilization; and engaging in high policy level with governments, parliamentarians and other stakeholders to attain a favourable policy environment for SSC.
40. FAO has taken several steps to promote an enabling environment for SSTC. It has signed over 20 operational agreements, participated in several global forums, engaged with regional organizations and initiatives, as well as with policy makers and parliamentarians in all regions. In most of the case study countries, however, the implementation of SSTC projects has not been accompanied by activities such as training or awareness raising of local stakeholders on measures to facilitate or foster SSC, and FAO has not been engaged in capacity building of government, parliamentarians or other stakeholders regarding SSTC. The benchmarking study also revealed that some UN-agencies such as UNDP and United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) have linked their SSTC interventions with a tailored national capacity development programme. FAO may consider replicating this approach to SSTC.

Finding 11. FAO has successfully negotiated dedicated trust funds for SSTC, but there is a high dependence on certain countries (notably Brazil and China) and a need to diversify the partnerships.

41. Evidence generated from the synthesis of evaluations found that SSTC has been a crucial instrument to promote regional cooperation, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean²¹ as well as in Europe and Central Asia.²² SSTC is a mechanism that attracts southern developing countries to be involved as a development partner (rather than solely receiver). A key role played by FAO has been to negotiate dedicated trust funds (for more than 15 years) with countries such as Brazil, China and Türkiye. Triangular partnerships with traditional donors are also an important source of extrabudgetary funds and provide technologies and experts.

¹⁹ FAO. 2021. *Évaluation du programme pays de la FAO au Maroc 2017-2020*. Rome. <https://www.fao.org/3/cb7668fr/cb7668fr.pdf>

²⁰ FAO. 2017c. *Evaluación del Programa País Guatemala 2013-2016*. Roma. <https://www.fao.org/3/bd689s/bd689s.pdf>

²¹ FAO. 2019a. *Evaluación del posicionamiento y aportes del programa de la FAO en Cuba 2013-2018*. Roma. <https://www.fao.org/evaluation/digest/evaluation-detail/es/c/1252328/>;

FAO. 2019b. *Evaluación del Programa de FAO en México 2013-2018*. Roma. <https://www.fao.org/publications/card/es/c/CA5333ES/>; and

FAO. n.d. *Evaluación del Programa Mesoamérica Sin Hambre*.

²² FAO. 2020b. *Evaluation of FAO's country programme in Armenia 2016-2020*. Rome. <https://www.fao.org/3/cb1353en/cb1353en.pdf>; and

FAO. 2016e. *Evaluation of the FAO-Turkey Partnership Programme*. Rome. <https://www.fao.org/3/ca4465en/ca4465en.pdf>

42. There is an opportunity to widen SSTC funding, including from high and middle-income countries that have been recipients until recent times, as well as from new multilateral development banks such as the Eurasian Development Bank, Islamic Development Bank, Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa,²³ and Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI).²⁴ The private sector is also cited as a new area where there is an opportunity to mobilize resources to support SSTC. The evaluation found few examples where the private sector had financed SSTC initiatives, for example the Morocco-SSTC Trust Fund (approximately USD 1 million).
43. Host countries are also expected to share the costs of SSTC projects. In this regard, Uganda provides an example of a country committing its own resources to support SSTC. The bulk of SSC in Uganda was financed by the Government of China under the FAO-China partnership, with limited presence of other donors. The government has committed USD 9.6 million to undertake SSTC, a major commitment from a low-income country like Uganda, which other countries could replicate.

D. Sustainability

Finding 12. The evaluation found several SSTC interventions that have a prospect of sustainability, especially those focused on system solutions.

44. At country level, the sustainability of results achieved through SSTC depended on a number of factors, chief among which is the presence of enabling conditions. In the Mesoamerica subregion, of the three main processes supported (school feeding; food security and family farming; climate change adaptation and resilience) school feeding shows the highest level of sustainability, mainly due to the existence of solid enabling frameworks, with a high level of ownership, capacities and resources. In Uganda, the evaluation found strong examples of both economic and political sustainability of system solutions.²⁵
45. On the other hand, some producer technology initiatives do apparently yield economic benefits, for example from improved crop varieties and inputs (i.e. they are effective). However, there were not many examples of such initiatives in the case study countries resulting in the widespread upscaling of producer technologies or national endorsement by the government such as the case of the school feeding canteen in Senegal. In some cases, the business model was not necessarily viable. In others, funding is short-term, which limits impacts and the ability of national institutions and implementing partners to take ownership and follow-up of the projects (e.g. in Sri Lanka), or there is insufficient investment (e.g. in Senegal the scaling up of the school canteen model introduced was affected by the short nature of the support and the limited national financial resources).
46. More commonly, financial support is not always sustained beyond the project. For example, in Mongolia the cost-sharing modality between government and the host units (private enterprises and agricultural sectoral associations) fostered the ownership and follow-up on the SSC technical solutions among beneficiaries. However, most of the solutions remained confined to the host units, except for the passive greenhouse cultivation technique that was upscaled, which received government support from customs and VAT exemptions.

E. Integration of cross-cutting themes

²³ The bank has implemented triangular cooperation projects in some sub-Saharan African countries.

²⁴ For example, SSC was included as a potential instrument in the signed agreement with CABEI, which in 2017 agreed to support countries in the facilitation of developing project proposals to apply to the Global Environment Facility (GEF). FAO provided technical assistance in the formulation of proposals, and tried to include cross-country exchange dialogues; but those activities are not recognized, nor are SSTC by CABEI. As banks, what interested them were the funding proposals.

²⁵ For example, the integration of SSC China/Uganda activities and objectives into the Ministry of Agriculture's programmes of work and budgeting. This ensures continuity of SSC modality to the extent that Uganda has a formal commitment to consolidate SSC partnerships within the National Development Plan.

Finding 13. The evaluation found several examples of SSTC interventions that promoted cross-cutting themes such as climate change, nutrition and gender. SSTC strategic documents could be better aligned with corporate strategies such as the Policy on Gender Equality 2020-2030, the Vision and Strategy for FAO's Work in Nutrition and the Strategy on Climate Change 2022-2031.

47. **FAO cross-cutting themes** are not systematically considered in strategic guidance. These documents do not consider human-rights based approaches or the leave no one behind principles, and do not build sufficiently on relevant corporate strategies (Policy on Gender Equality 2020-2030, the Vision and Strategy for FAO's work in Nutrition, and the FAO Strategy on Climate Change 2022-2031). However, the priority areas in the agreements are generally aligned with cross-cutting themes, except for gender which appears in the Türkiye agreement only.
48. As **climate change** has cross-border impacts, it requires collective efforts and cooperation among countries, where SSTC fits well as a model. The evaluation of FAO's support to climate action²⁶ (SDG 13) considered SSTC as an important funding stream for climate change adaptation, and a number of SSTC initiatives are tackling climate change issues. In addition to the initiatives specifically focused on climate change, integration of environmental considerations is seen in a few SSTC projects, such as the Mexico-FAO Trust-Fund for adaptation and resilience to climate change in the Caribbean.
49. In terms of **gender**, the synthesis of evaluations found that some SSTC initiatives have promoted gender equality and women's empowerment, for example through capacity building activities, exchange events and study tours. In Mesoamerica, Indigenous women were a particular priority. Despite some cases where project activities have promoted gender equality, efforts do not appear sufficient and systematic enough. SSTC projects or activities with a more technical nature have focused much less attention on mainstreaming of gender than those projects with socioecological components. For example, the Uganda country case found that gender equality and a gender-sensitive perspective are not adequately taken into account from both a design and an implementation point of view; this is also reflected in the lack of gender-disaggregated baseline data and indicators. Further improvements are needed in how the interventions are planned including systematically conducting gender assessment and vulnerability analysis, specifying gender-specific indicators and targets in alignment with the FAO Policy on Gender Equality, and collecting sex-disaggregated data.
50. Few examples of **youth empowerment** in SSTC activities were found. An example where youth were included are the SSTC project for Sustainable Rice Partnership which aimed to support youth in disseminating new technologies and innovations (but with no specific indicators and targets).
51. Addressing **food security and nutrition** (FSN) is a major theme for SSTC. The Brazil School Feeding Programme and Hunger-Free Latin America and the Caribbean Initiative (IALCSH) are two major SSTC flagships aimed at improving FSN. In Mesoamerica, the three population groups prioritized (Indigenous communities; women, including Indigenous women: rural youth) were selected as they are particularly vulnerable to nutrition insecurity. Another example is Sri Lanka where a nutrition-sensitive approach is well integrated in the design of the national SSC project on the fruit value chain.

²⁶ FAO. 2021. *Evaluation of FAO's support to climate action (SDG 13) and the implementation of the FAO Strategy on Climate Change* (2017). Rome. <https://www.fao.org/3/cb3738en/cb3738en.pdf>

V. Conclusions and recommendations

52. The evaluation concludes that FAO has made significant progress in facilitating SSTC. Stakeholders recognize FAO's credibility and trustworthiness as a provider of technical assistance and backstopping around SSTC. The analysis suggests that FAO has focused SSTC on development projects supporting learning and technology exchanges as well as establishing platforms for networking, and less so on humanitarian projects or in promoting an enabling environment for SSTC.

Recommendation 1. As its humanitarian response work expands, FAO should consider how to leverage SSTC as a mechanism to implement emergency and resilience projects.

53. The analysis suggests that several SSTC interventions were designed to meet local needs, adapted to local contexts, and leveraged learning from prior projects or other programmes. However, this was not true of some interventions. Some SSTC projects were too ambitious given the time and resources available, and/or lacked a deep engagement with a broad range of stakeholders, especially non-government actors, which resulted in projects with a lower likelihood of being impactful and sustained.

Recommendation 2. FAO should systematically consider context-specific issues and local needs in the design of SSTC interventions. Some suggested actions include ensuring appropriate context analysis, considering synergies with other FAO projects and/or partners' initiatives, wider engagement with non-government actors, and improving access to documentation on results and lessons learned.

54. The analysis suggests that several interventions have been particularly successful, especially with regard to supporting system solutions. It also shows that sustainability is affected by the level of ownership, capacities and resources.

Recommendation 3. FAO should place greater focus on supporting the creation of an enabling environment both within and outside FAO for SSTC, in order to ensure greater ownership and enhanced prospects of replication. Some suggested actions include providing targeted capacity building to personnel and government staff involved in SSTC, and advocating for greater priority to SSTC interventions at country office level.

55. FAO has a track record of implementing SSTC in support of institutional collaboration and policy dialogue in a wide range of technical areas. There is, however, a high dependence on certain donor countries and a need to diversify the partnerships. In addition, SSTC strategic documents do not make adequate reference to relevant corporate initiatives such as the Policy on Gender Equality 2020-2030, the Vision and Strategy for FAO's work in Nutrition and the FAO Strategy on Climate Change 2022-2031.²⁷ The analysis suggest that an updated guidance could facilitate an even greater focus on these important cross-cutting themes within partners' agreements and projects.

Recommendation 4. FAO should revamp its strategic guidance, communication and resource mobilization efforts in order to better incorporate cross-cutting themes, improve awareness and diversity partnerships.

²⁷ The science and innovation strategy was approved in June 2022, and was thus not covered in the evaluation.

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Ian Goldman – *Lead Consultant*
Natascia Palmieri
Melissa Pomeroy
Abdoulaye Sye
Wenxin Zhang
Arwa Khalid – *Evaluation Manager*

Country case studies

Abdelmadjid Boulassel - *Algeria*
Rashad Huseynov - *Azerbaijan*
Samuel Niki-Niki – *Democratic Republic of Congo*
Carlos Gofrey - *Colombia*
Mauricio Quesada - *El Salvador*
David Grajeda - *Guatemala*
Erdenechimeg Tserendorj - *Mongolia*,
Obert Mutumba - *Namibia*
Piroshini Trikawalagoda - *Sri Lanka*
Abdoulaye Sye - *Senegal*
Edward Mwesiwa - *Uganda*

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Shannon Clay proofread the report.