

# **South-South and triangular cooperation policy update**



**Informal consultation**

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**World Food Programme  
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## Overview



### 1. Background and context

1. For the past decades, South–South and triangular cooperation (SSTC) has driven partnerships, processes and results with regard to sustainable development among developing countries, often supported by multilateral organizations and developed countries. SSTC is recognized as a means for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and plays a particularly critical role in sharing solutions for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2, on zero hunger.
2. Guided by its 2015 SSTC policy and based on its comparative advantages, WFP has significantly expanded its engagement in SSTC in the past seven years. It has invested in institutional, operational and staff capacity to facilitate learning and broker zero hunger solutions among developing countries. Milestones include the launch of innovative financing modalities; the development of SSTC guidance, training and backstopping services; the establishment of a dedicated SSTC unit at headquarters; corporate coordination through a global SSTC task force; and the creation of new centres of excellence (COEs) in China (2016) and Côte d'Ivoire (2019) to complement the pioneering work of the COE established in Brazil in 2011.
3. As a modality for supporting country capacity strengthening efforts and strategic partnerships, including resource mobilization and joint advocacy, SSTC is fully integrated into WFP's corporate frameworks, including in its strategic plan for 2022–2025, country strategic plans (CSPs) and corporate results framework. In addition, pioneering strategic approaches to SSTC have been developed in thematic areas such as nutrition, school feeding and social protection. There is increasing recognition that SSTC – as part of WFP's "enabling", rather than "delivering" role – can generate substantial benefits at marginal cost, providing a favourable return on investment in terms of development results, partnerships, reputation and resource mobilization, among other things.

### Centres of excellence at the heart of WFP's engagement in SSTC

The WFP COEs are at the heart of WFP's efforts to support developing countries in their efforts to achieve SDG 2 through SSTC. Beginning in 2011, WFP engagement in SSTC was spearheaded by the WFP COE in Brazil and then later joined by the COE in China, established in 2016, and the COE in Côte d'Ivoire, launched in 2019. The China and Côte d'Ivoire COEs are at the forefront of the implementation of WFP SSTC initiatives such as efforts to enhance cooperation between China and African countries on rice value chains with support from triangular partners as the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The Brazil COE, which celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2021, has shared its successful experience in school feeding, nutrition and food security with 70 countries, resulting in the adoption of relevant laws and the implementation of programmes, including the promotion by the African Union Commission of a home-grown school feeding strategy.

4. Globally, WFP is recognized as one of the most innovative and fastest-moving United Nations entities supporting SSTC. WFP has consolidated its corporate reputation as an SSTC partner, supporting countries in their efforts to share their and adopt others' zero hunger solutions through various institutional arrangements, including through the creation of COEs. WFP has been a key contributor to intergovernmental processes such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which features SSTC as a critical means of implementation under SDG 17; the 2019 Buenos Aires outcome document of the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation (BAPA+40); the United Nations system-wide strategy on SSTC for sustainable development 2020–2024 and the annual global South-South development expos. Effective collaboration with WFP's fellow United Nations Rome-based agencies (RBAs) is central to WFP's efforts with regard to SSTC.
5. Countries recognize WFP's **value proposition** as an organization that can facilitate results-oriented, demand-driven and localized SSTC that supports country-led efforts to achieve SDG 2 and SDG 17 with a dedicated focus on the most vulnerable and food insecure populations. WFP's **comparative advantages** as an SSTC broker include its extensive field presence, dynamic global operational footprint, advanced technical knowledge, innovative institutional arrangements, including the COEs, a wide variety of partners that consistently mainstream SSTC in country programming, and technical expertise in thematic areas relevant to zero hunger.
6. WFP still faces challenges in its efforts to engage more systematically and in new areas of demand from the global South. As outlined in WFP's 2021 evaluation of its SSTC policy, more needs to be done to mainstream SSTC across country programming and other corporate frameworks; to improve corporate understanding of the return on investment in SSTC; to enhance evidence generation and learning; to improve strategic and operational guidance; to strengthen staff capacity at all levels of the organization; and to deepen United Nations-wide partnerships and work jointly towards international norms and principles relating to human rights, gender equality and leaving no one behind. The consultations conducted for this policy update firmly corroborated this while also stressing that there is a need for better in-house coordination; more focus on results; better financing and clear added value in terms of brokering solutions from developing countries that are vetted and packaged adequately.

7. This policy update constitutes an avenue not only for addressing the remaining challenges, but also for guiding WFP's efforts to consolidate its portfolio and respond to new areas of demand by developing countries and interest by members of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD-DAC) as triangular partners in supporting knowledge sharing and mutual learning in these critical times.

## 2. Definitions and key concepts

8. Since the adoption of the 2015 SSTC policy, multilateral definitions for SSTC have remained unchanged. Thus the latest (2016) update of the Secretary-General's framework of operational guidelines on United Nations support for SSTC and the BAPA+40 outcome document use the following definitions:
  - **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 inter-regional 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.*
  - **Triangular cooperation** *involves Southern driven partnerships between two or more developing countries supported by developed country(ies)/or multilateral organization(s) to implement development cooperation programmes and projects.*
9. WFP's support for SSTC is further framed by several concepts, described below.
10. **SSTC is a key modality for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, particularly as a means of implementation, as outlined in SDG 17 and in particular target 17.6. SSTC should therefore enable partners to **leave no one behind** as one of the principles of the 2030 Agenda, by addressing the needs and opportunities of the most vulnerable individuals, groups and countries.
11. **SSTC is expected to contribute to gender equality**, defined by WFP's 2022 gender policy as "the equal exercise of rights, opportunities, resources and rewards by women, men, girls and boys."
12. SSTC primarily contributes to **strengthening country capacity**, defined by WFP's 2022 policy on country capacity strengthening as a process by which, "aligned with national/local priorities, WFP contributes to strengthened national capacities, resulting in effective and impactful in-country systems."
13. WFP-supported SSTC specifically aspires to contribute to **capacity strengthening at the level of policymakers, experts and institutions, as well as grassroots groups**. It promotes access to and use of country-owned tools, skills, knowledge and innovations that can strengthen national programmes and systems needed to achieve SDG 2 and SDG 17. In relation to SSTC, WFP plays a facilitator role rather than serving as a direct provider of expertise to strengthen country capacity.
14. SSTC involves providers, recipients and triangular partners.
15. **Providers are** national stakeholders from developing countries that own solutions that are vetted and captured for the benefit of sharing with others. **Recipients are** partners from developing countries that benefit from the expertise of a providers' solutions. Developing countries might play a **dual role**, i.e., both providing and receiving. **Triangular partners** are traditional development partners (members of OECD-DAC) or multilateral organizations

that contribute complementary resources to South–South exchanges, often providing both financial means and technical assistance.

16. **SSTC is operationalized through modalities**, i.e., concrete ways of implementing SSTC, that include policy dialogues and high-level visits; research partnerships and knowledge products; technical study visits, training and technology transfer; and joint advocacy.

### 3. Principles for WFP's SSTC engagement

17. WFP will engage in SSTC that meets the following principles:

- **Leaving no one behind, especially the most vulnerable:** The main beneficiaries of WFP's engagement in SSTC should be the most vulnerable people and their communities.
- **Gender equality and women's rights:** SSTC brokered and facilitated by WFP must consider gender equality and women's rights at all stages.
- **Local inclusive ownership:** WFP brokers and facilitates SSTC at the national, sub-national and community levels, responding to country ownership, ensuring that all voices are heard and adjusting solutions to local challenges and opportunities.
- **Inclusiveness and balance among countries:** SSTC supported by WFP must be inclusive and based on equality. WFP recognizes that all countries – independent of their stage of development – have relevant experience to share.
- **Focus on adding value:** WFP engages in SSTC when it can add value through its networks, expertise, quality standards, cost-effectiveness and operational capacity, ensuring a high return on investment in SSTC.
- **Innovative high-quality solutions:** WFP supports countries in sharing innovative practices as well as capturing and packaging country-led solutions.
- **Stronger country systems and capacity:** In facilitating SSTC WFP focuses on using and strengthening national systems and institutions.

### 4. Theory of change

18. Building on the overall theory of change for SSTC used in the 2021 SSTC policy evaluation and endorsed by the global SSTC task force in 2021, this policy relies on the following theory of change.



## 5. Vision

19. Acknowledging the significant contribution that SSTC can make to the achievement of SDG 2 and SDG 17, as envisioned by its strategic plan, WFP will further support SSTC and enhance its engagement as an SSTC facilitator, broker and matchmaker in traditional areas and new fields of demand.
20. WFP's support for SSTC will be based on clear comparative advantages, meet quality standards and principles, and rely on the potential of SSTC to contribute to WFP's mandate to save lives and change lives, particularly by strengthening country capacity, building diverse partnerships and mobilizing resources.

## 6. Objective and outcomes

21. Complementing WFP's ambition to contribute its best values, this updated policy entails an additional quest to integrate SSTC as a key modality by which to achieve WFP's mandate to save lives and change lives, thus pursuing the objective and outcomes outlined below.

### 6.1 Objective

22. SSTC facilitated by WFP has enabled global South country actors (institutions and individuals) to sustainably adapt and implement zero hunger solutions with a focus on vulnerable groups.

### 6.2 Outcomes

23. **Outcome 1:** WFP is recognized as a trusted and reliable partner by governments benefitting from specialized support for SSTC and the matching of solutions in the area of SDG 2.
24. **Outcome 2:** Country-led SSTC contributes to the outcomes and outputs of WFP's indivisible mandate of saving lives and changing lives, as outlined in its strategic plan for 2022–2025, by strengthening national and local capacity and systems, deepening partnerships and mobilizing resources for achieving zero hunger.

## 7. Strategic focus areas

25. In line with lessons learned since adoption of the original SSTC policy, and responding to areas of new demand from country partners, WFP will focus on the following three strategic areas:

- **Consolidating what WFP does best:** WFP's SSTC portfolio has grown dynamically since 2015. In 2021 alone WFP worked with 62 developing countries on more than 60 projects for which USD 7.5 million was mobilized. However, the policy evaluation and consultations conducted for this policy update show that more investment is needed to expand impact in traditional thematic areas such as social protection, nutrition and school feeding and to incorporate SSTC into WFP's corporate response to global food crises and shocks. Most of the necessary elements – from staffing and resource mobilization to guidelines and in-house coordination – are already in place but require moving from “pilot” approaches to large-scale systematic engagement while ensuring a strong focus on quality and results.

### **Diversifying financing partnerships for SSTC – Cassava value chain in the Congo**

To address the root causes of food insecurity and contribute to reducing the Congo's dependence on food imports, WFP worked with multiple partners to strengthen the country's cassava value chain. Such capacity strengthening efforts were complemented by SSTC initiatives at the grassroots level. The experience started in 2019 with support from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. Through this triangular cooperation the Côte d'Ivoire COE helped to facilitate exchanges with Côte d'Ivoire and Benin to deepen the knowledge and skills of local artisans and smallholder farmers. Between 2019 and 2022 these efforts were complemented with additional funding and expertise from a diverse group of partners, including Canada, the European Union, China, the other RBAs and more recently the India, Brazil, South Africa Facility for Poverty and Hunger Alleviation. The complementarity of funding from triangular and Southern partners constitutes valuable experience in scaling up WFP's collaboration with diverse partners in the area of SSTC.

- **Responding to new areas of demand:** Given the harsh impact of interlinked crises on the most vulnerable people, WFP is experiencing demand for the facilitation of South-South learning in better supply chain management, emergency preparedness, resilience building, climate change, food systems transformation, crisis solutions related to SDG2 and the humanitarian–development–peace nexus. WFP's mandate in these areas is well defined in its current strategic plan. While keeping the focus on traditional areas, WFP will collaborate with partners interested in such new fields where SSTC can make a crucial difference and meets the principles outlined above. In addition, WFP will play a more deliberate role in supporting regional SSTC with platforms and bodies with strong SDG 2 agendas. Innovation and technologies will be integrated into the SSTC portfolio to ensure efficiency and sustainability.

### Responding to new demands – Peer learning for disaster-ready youth

In 2021 and 2022 WFP facilitated peer-to-peer learning on disaster management through SSTC between Bangladesh and Indonesia. Building on the success of the Indonesian Ministry of Social Affairs in engaging young people in disaster preparedness in the last few years, WFP facilitated the identification and documenting of the lessons-learned and best practices for replication in neighbouring countries. The engagement of young people in disaster management is critical to nurturing in the younger generation greater prudence regarding disasters in their environments and, at the same time, including them in disaster preparedness and response. The established network between Bangladesh and Indonesia has provided a foundation for future dialogue and exchange in disaster risk management involving young people as drivers.

- **Ensuring quality and results:** WFP has increased its focus on quality and results through dedicated tools, an internal matchmaking platform and integration of SSTC indicators into corporate monitoring and reporting. WFP will further invest in quality assurance and results while also ensuring that international principles and norms including respect for human rights, gender equality and leaving no one behind are met through SSTC. Further assessments will address the return on investment in SSTC, specifically to map the relation between impact of SSTC and its marginal cost. WFP will pursue a consistent process of identifying, vetting and packaging zero hunger solutions in partnership with provider countries to ensure that they can be localized and adjusted to achieve results in recipient countries. Quality and effectiveness will be boosted through complementarity with the other RBAs and other United Nations entities.

## 8. Essential enablers

26. Increasing WFP's effectiveness as a broker and facilitator of SSTC in both conventional and new areas of demand will depend on the mobilization and effective use of the essential enablers identified in the strategic plan for 2022–2025. The following seven essential enablers will be activated to achieve the objectives and outcomes of the SSTC policy.
- **Diverse partnerships for SSTC:** WFP will complement existing partnerships with emerging and developed economy countries aimed at garnering additional political support, financing and access to global and regional networks. WFP will consolidate its collaboration with the other RBAs and other United Nations entities, including the United Nations Office for South–South Cooperation, to ensure inter-agency complementarity. Partnerships with international financial institutions will be pursued proactively, as will partnerships with private sector actors and academic institutions.
  - **Quality financing of SSTC at scale:** WFP's SSTC portfolio will be financed in ways that enable speed and effectiveness at scale. Seed funding approaches will be complemented with long-term financing on a sufficient scale and a strong results focus. Financing options will be diversified to expand programmatic engagement with partners from the global South and increase triangular cooperation with OECD-DAC members, among others.
  - **Institutional capability to deliver SSTC results:** WFP will upgrade its institutional and organizational readiness to support SSTC through approaches and tools for further mainstreaming SSTC in areas with high impact potential. Priority areas include the consolidation and specialization of the existing global SSTC task force, and further clarification of the roles and responsibilities of corporate stakeholders.



- **Individual capability to deliver SSTC results:** WFP will invest in its SSTC workforce at all levels of the organization. Particular attention will be paid to staff capacity in country offices, including through tailored training. All efforts will be in line with overall corporate workforce planning efforts and the internal capability development workstream of the WFP's country capacity strengthening policy.

#### **Joint RBA initiative on home-grown school feeding**

During the 2022 global South-South development EXPO, the RBAs – the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and WFP - presented their new joint SSTC initiative on home-grown school feeding. The overall objective of the joint programme is to complement and scale-up ongoing interventions in countries by assessing their progress, outlining their challenges and proposing solutions that have been successfully implemented in other countries and contexts. The programme will initially support five countries, all members of the Global School Meals Coalition founded during the 2021 United Nations food systems summit – Kenya, the Philippines, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe and Senegal – in an effort to strengthen their national home-grown school feeding initiatives.

- **Guidance, tools, and procedures:** WFP will consolidate its full suite of SSTC programme guidance, particularly for CSP mainstreaming, results focus, financing and communication. SSTC reviews and other innovative methodologies with a focus on field support will be rolled out across countries, regions and thematic areas.
- **Communication and advocacy:** WFP will improve its internal advocacy, corporate coordination, partnerships, resource mobilization, learning and accountability with regard to SSTC. In addition, WFP will deepen its global and regional advocacy as a facilitator and matchmaker by consolidating its external positioning in the United Nations system and with member countries, including providers, recipients and triangular partners.
- **Evidence generation and knowledge management:** WFP will consolidate and broaden its work on evidence generation and knowledge management for SSTC, including through the development of a full-fledged monitoring and evaluation tool for SSTC, a research and learning agenda and a shared approach to identifying, vetting and matchmaking for solutions from the Global South. This will ensure consistent internal and external reporting, including the annual reports prepared by the United Nations Secretary-General.

## **9. Pathways for implementation**

27. The implementation of this policy will be framed by a costed plan clarifying the main workstreams and their respective activities and outputs, baseline and required funding and roles and responsibilities. Funding will follow the current logic of a high return on investment, ensuring impact, effectiveness and efficiency at relatively low cost, constituting a relatively small part of WFP's corporate budget. The key companion documents of this updated policy will include:
  - a costed implementation plan that is expected to inform annual workplans of the SSTC unit at headquarters, the COEs and the SSTC-related work planning of WFP's regional bureaux;

- a results framework with indicators covering the workstreams of the implementation plan.

## **10. Policy coherence within WFP's strategic framework and the United Nations system**

### **10.1 WFP strategic framework**

28. This policy's outcomes are expected to contribute explicitly to strategic outcome 4 of the strategic plan for 2022–2025 by enabling national stakeholders to strengthen their capacity, programmes and systems for food security and nutrition through SSTC. The focus of SSTC as a modality for promoting country capacity strengthening, fully in line with the country capacity strengthening policy as updated in 2022, will be deepened as part of country-level work. At the same time, this policy update also provides clear direction for further mainstreaming SSTC across key thematic areas in strategic outcomes 1–3 through capacity strengthening at the technical and grassroots levels. Areas such as nutrition, school feeding and social protection call for a systematic use of SSTC in their policy implementation plans, on which the implementation of this policy will build. SSTC is also included under the strategic plan for 2022–2025 as a key partnership enabler for WFP to achieve its strategic results through resource mobilization and joint advocacy.
29. While this policy will mobilize further support for SSTC in the changing lives agenda, particularly among middle-income countries, it will also generate flexible directions for WFP's engagement in new areas of demand such as in fragile and conflict-affected states with opportunities to strengthen national capacity to achieve zero hunger.
30. Operationally, this policy will be implemented in full alignment with existing WFP frameworks such as the gender policy (to ensure gender quality and women's empowerment), the country capacity strengthening policy, the CSP policy (for mainstreaming SSTC in country programming and reporting) and in coherence with other corporate policies such as the people policy (for staff capacity development) and the evaluation policy (for results framework, monitoring and evaluation).

### **10.2 United Nations System**

31. The implementation of this policy is embedded in wider efforts of WFP to contribute to more effective support of the United Nations system for SSTC in line with existing multilateral agreements on sustainable development (2030 Agenda), development finance (Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development), support for small island developing States (SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway) and disaster risk reduction (Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030) and climate change (Paris Agreement), among others. Multilateral commitment to SSTC was renewed through the BAPA+40 outcome document and further operationalized in the United Nations system-wide SSTC strategy. This policy update is one of the first United Nations entity SSTC policies being fully aligned with the latter strategy, and its implementation will thus contribute to inter-agency effectiveness in supporting SSTC. In practice, coherence and complementarity with the United Nations system will help to accelerate all essential enablers for the success of this policy, particularly in the areas of partnerships, guidance, evidence generation and advocacy.

## 11. Risk management

32. WFP's engagement in and support for SSTC recognizes that for many developing countries SSTC is inherently part of their legitimate international agendas. That said, the potential risks of engaging in SSTC will be effectively mitigated and managed by anchoring corporate work on SSTC in the principles outlined above and further fine-tuning the operationalization of those principles throughout the full cycle of partnerships and projects. The latter includes specific tools such as SSTC needs assessments in the context of CSPs; country- and regional-level South-South reviews; risk analysis guidance for country offices; consistent vetting of solutions; and an additional push for quality, results, transparency and learning. Ultimately, the diversification of partnerships, the increased effectiveness of tools and the continued specialization of staff envisaged by this policy will not only lead to a thriving SSTC portfolio but also contribute to further minimizing risks.

## 12. Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

33. The implementation of this policy will be framed by a policy results framework clarifying goals, milestones and indicators for each of the workstreams of the implementation plan. To the extent possible, the indicators will be aligned with the corporate results framework and the United Nations system-wide results framework. Based on the results framework, **monitoring** of the policy implementation will be conducted annually and is expected to feed into both internal and external **reporting** streams, the latter including the annual reports of the Secretary-General on the state of South-South cooperation.
34. **Evaluation** of the policy will be scheduled and conducted towards the end of the policy cycle, in line with existing corporate evaluation plans and under the leadership of WFP's Office of Evaluation.

**Acronyms**

BAPA+40	second High-level United Nations Conference on South–South Cooperation
COE	centre of excellence
CSP	country strategic plan
OECD-DAC	Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development
RBAs	Rome-based agencies
SAMOA	SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SSTC	South–South and triangular cooperation