

# Maximizing the Impact of South-South and Triangular Cooperation in a Changing Aid Architecture Through Evaluation

## Summary of the EvalforEarth Discussion

JUNE 2025

### ABSTRACT

The discussion from 24 April- 29 May 2025 underscored that South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) represents more than just funding to rural and Southern partners-it is a collaborative, learning-oriented pathway toward sustainable development. Effective evaluation in this sphere must move beyond conventional metrics, embracing participatory, context-sensitive, systems-based approaches capable of capturing relational and pedagogical outcomes. Strengthening capacity, co-designing evaluation frameworks with Southern leadership, and institutionalizing evidence into planning are key next steps toward maximizing SSTC's impact.



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## 1. OBJECTIVES OF THE DISCUSSION

- Foster dialogue among evaluators and development practitioners on effectively assessing SSTC, and share practical experiences, methods, and lessons learned.

## 2. GUIDING QUESTIONS

Participants were prompted to reflect on:

1. their experiences with evaluating SSTC;
2. whether their organizations have specific guidance/tools for such evaluations;
3. key challenges encountered in evaluating SSTC;
4. lessons learned to share with peers; and
5. how evaluators can contribute to improving SSTC impact.

## 3. BACKGROUND

- **SSTC** includes collaborative forms of development among Global South countries, often supported by a third party (Triangular Cooperation), built on mutual benefit, solidarity, and national ownership.
- **Global shifts and evolving NorthSouth aid policies** brought SSTC to the forefront as essential complements to traditional aid for attaining Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Agencies such as FAO, UNIDO, and UNICEF utilized diverse evaluation tools—portfolio analyses, theory of change, stakeholder consultations, and Core Standard Indicators—to assess the results of SSTC. There is a need to expand the evaluation toolkit and apply innovative methods that enhance the evaluation practice.

## 4. KEY CONTRIBUTIONS AND INSIGHTS

### 4.1 Common Challenges

- **Lack of standardized guidance:** No unified criteria for assessing the results of SSTC.
- **Intangible outcomes:** Difficult to measure political will, mutual learning, and ownership.
- **Data limitations:** Weak monitoring systems and scarce documentations.
- **Attribution issues:** Complex to isolate SSTC contributions amid multiple interventions.
- **Political sensitivity:** SSTC intertwined with national diplomacy or power dynamics.

### 4.2 Practical Insights from other Agencies

- **CGIAR:** Applied Social Network Analysis (SNA) designated partnership frameworks, and emphasized ethics and legitimacy in jointly-owned science and evaluations.

- **Adaptation Fund:** Embedded SSTC considerations *via* grants, workshops, peer learning, and case studies, with no SSTC-specific frameworks.
- **UNICEF Brazil Trilateral Program:** Documented gender, human rights, and vulnerable-population outcomes in evaluation.

#### 4.2 Innovative Methods and Tools to Assess SSTC

- **Qualitative/participatory tools:** Outcome Harvesting, Most Significant Change, community storytelling, appreciative inquiry, developmental evaluation.
- **Systems-based thinking:** SNA to track knowledge flows and legitimacy, and Latent Profile Analysis for nuanced beneficiary segmentation.
- **Experience-based evaluation:** Involving decision-makers directly in evaluation, from design to sense-making, highlighting contextual and power dynamics.

### 5. CONCLUSIONS

- **Beyond donor-recipient:** Embrace demand-driven, participatory, mutually respectful evaluation methods.
- **Need for frameworks:** Co-created, context-grounded evaluation frameworks reflecting Southern ownership and values.
- **Capturing intangibles:** Narrative, systems, and relational tools to surface learning, solidarity, and trust.
- **Building capacity:** Embed evaluation in design, with training, technical support, and locally led processes.

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#### Resources

**FAO.** 2022. Evaluation of FAO's South-South and Triangular Cooperation

<https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/338540b6-31cc-4148-bbcf-3a1973ccc3e9/content>

**Anand, S. and Carneiro, B.** (2024). Social network analysis for the evaluation of development interventions. Methods note. CGIAR Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service, Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT/CGIAR, Gender and Equity Network South Asia. Rome.

<https://iaes.cgiar.org/evaluation/publications/social-network-analysis-evaluation-development-interventions-methods-note>

**UNICEF.** 2020. Evaluation of the Trilateral South-South Cooperation Programme between the Government of Brazil and UNICEF (2013-2018).

<https://evaluationreports.unicef.org/GetDocument?documentID=16043&fileID=37319>