

CONCEPT NOTE

SOUTH-SOUTH AND TRIANGULAR COOPERATION FOR BUILDING REGIONAL CAPACITIES FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION (STI)

Regional Exchange on Global South Models and Approaches

Roundtable Dialogue on the Side of 2024 HLPF | 16 July 2024 | 12:30 – 2:00 PM

10th Floor, Amartya Sen Conference Room, FF Building, 304 East 45th Street, NY

Co-Hosted and Co-Convened by UNOSSC and the UN Multistakeholder Forum for STI/DESA

Hybrid Format (NYC Speakers onsite; Livestreamed; Taped for online release on UNOSSC website)

Zoom Link: <https://undp.zoom.us/j/81234912286>

Regional cooperation is crucial in addressing interlocking development challenges and crises that transcend borders and cascade through neighboring countries in rapid ways, such as climate change, pandemics, disasters and financial shocks. In an increasingly interconnected world, regional cooperation is also becoming more necessary to galvanize collective action on priorities that shape development trajectories of countries in proximity. South-South and triangular cooperation at the regional will be even more necessary to enable and leverage approaches that speak directly to contexts of individual countries and whole regions, are home grown, and propel progress on aspirations that are self-defined, for benefits that are widely shared.

This Dialogue is designed to focus attention on the challenges and opportunities specific to building regional capacities and ecosystems for science, technology and innovation (STI); identify relevant models and approaches from the Global South; facilitate exchange on knowledge, tools and resources; and explore regional and cross-regional cooperation to help accelerate progress on regional priorities in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This Dialogue is intended to contribute to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) processes, help inform thinking on regional dimensions of challenges and opportunities related to STI, and help shape attention to regional South-South and triangular cooperation as means of implementation in the UN Multistakeholder Forum for STI.

CONTEXT

The prospects of many, of whole economies and societies, will depend on how effectively governments and stakeholders respond to persistent development challenges alongside evolving trends such as rapid but uneven technological change. Many developing countries continue to play catch up in areas crucial to their sustainable development, of which one of the most concerning is related to capacities for science, technology and innovation (STI). Countries in special situations, in particular (such as the Small Island Developing States/SIDS and the Landlocked Developing Countries/LLDCs) and regions that face complex and intractable challenges (such as conflict, disasters, debt distress, etc.), require strategic support in building their capacities at a scale and speed equal to the challenge, and in ways that could propel change but pose no additional burdens.

The “global STI divide” continues to widen, as UN Reports underline, requiring more concerted efforts to address multifaceted gaps: The UN Secretary-General has raised concerns around inequalities that accompany uneven technology diffusion, which can further exacerbate social

divides;¹ Member States have underlined the need to act on various fronts collectively, from capacity building on STI for green transitions to reform of global debt architecture in order to build a more inclusive digital future; UN entities have called for “concrete pathways” for developing countries to build capacities and ecosystems for STI as essential to their sustainable development pathways.²

This multilevel and multistakeholder action essential to closing the “global STI divide” will lean on cooperation within and between countries, particularly those in proximity both in geography, experience, and development landscape. Cooperation among Global South countries has been reshaping Global South economies and societies, notably through regional integration efforts, trade and collaboration on transborder issues.³ South-South trade for example has been growing since 2000 by an average annual rate of 9.8%, superseding growth of North-South trade that had been declining since 1995,⁴ contributing to marked improvements in jobs and livelihood prospects of many and the competitiveness of small enterprises as well as whole industries.⁵ Similar upswing in regional cooperation on STI (such as on cross-border technological infrastructure and standards, intellectual property regimes, financial architecture, human capacity building for regional economic corridors, etc.) would have immense implications for SDG acceleration across regions.⁶

Science, and actions grounded in evidence, are indispensable for eradicating poverty, ending hunger, tackling climate change, reversing biodiversity loss and reducing inequality. Science is the key, and our best hope, for accelerating progress across the Sustainable Development Goals. And this will take shared expertise from all disciplines. This was clear at [the SDG Summit](#) in September 2023 where the role of Science, Technology and Innovation, and the importance of closing STI gaps, was at the centre of discussions.¹¹ Following from the SDG Summit, there is an opportunity to harness the momentum to set in motion the types of transformations called for by science – toward sustainable food systems; toward green and inclusive energy systems; and toward economic systems that reduce inequality, generate decent work, and give value to people and planet.⁷

At the [Summit on STI in September 2023](#), the heads of governments from the G77 and China raised the need for “viable pathways” for developing countries in the face of rapid but uneven technological change. They called for “establishing new platforms” and pointed to South-South cooperation as essential to ways forward. In the Havana Declaration, they urged UN entities (specifically United Nations Regional Commissions, Agencies, Funds and Programs, in particular UNDP, UNESCO, UNCTAD, UNIDO, ITU and the UN Office for South-South Cooperation) “within their respective

¹ UNSG Report on STI 2023,

<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n23/218/81/pdf/n2321881.pdf?token=I5sbR2Om61tFIWTCGh&fe=true>

² <https://press.un.org/en/2023/gaef3587.doc.htm>

³ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/regional-integration/overview>

⁴ <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/why-south-south-trade-is-already-greater-than-north-north-trade-and-what-it-means-for-africa/>; <https://unctad.org/meeting/south-south-trade-partnership-accelerating-sdgs-achievement>

⁵ <https://www.iisd.org/articles/press-release/integrating-sustainability-standards-south-south-trade-policies-can-improve>

⁶ See <https://unctad.org/tdr2022>; <https://press.un.org/en/2023/gaef3587.doc.htm>

⁷ See SDG Summit political declaration <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/SDGSummit2023/political-declaration> para 38(q) on Science, Technology and Innovation.

mandates, to make additional efforts to support developing countries in strengthening institutional frameworks and public policies” related to STI.⁸

At the [Third South Summit in January 2024](#), Member States elevated these same priorities for action and raised in the Outcome Document that “(u)nder these circumstances, we urgently call for joint, and coordinated action-oriented efforts to strengthen multilateralism, (and) better harness and utilize the growing potential of South-South Cooperation” (para 23). They further underlined “the importance and different history and particularities of South-South cooperation” and reaffirmed their view this cooperation modality “as a manifestation of solidarity among peoples and countries of the South that contributes to their national well-being, their national and collective self-reliance and the attainment of internationally agreed development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals, according to national priorities and plans.” They echoed the enduring principles of South-South cooperation (“respect for national sovereignty, national ownership and independence, equality, non-conditionality, non-interference in domestic affairs and mutual benefit”) and its critical importance to building solidarity in an era of complex development landscapes.⁹

Greater attention to the needs of countries in special conditions around STI, and the potential of STI in fact to address those needs, were raised also at the [Fourth Conference for Small Island Developing States \(SIDS4\)](#), where the resulting [Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS \(ABAS\)](#) contains a section specific to STI (Section H). The regional reviews of the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for the Landlocked Developing Countries in the lead up to the [Third Conference for LLDCs \(LLDC3\)](#) also raises STI crucial for delivering on the priority action areas envisioned in the new Programme of Action to be agreed by Member States. The [UN Multistakeholder Forum on STI 2024](#) highlighted the need for policies that could propel even progress on these agendas and commitments through targeted support. It raised that:

- “Small Island Developing States (SIDS) face unique challenges, including vulnerability to climate change impacts and limited resources for technological development. Annual economic losses due to climate-related disasters average 2 to 3% of GDP. Policies might focus on building climate resilience, enhancing digital infrastructure, and ensuring access to renewable energy technologies. Enhancing SIDS’ resilience requires a doubling of current climate adaptation funding to these regions.
- Least Developed Countries (LDCs) require targeted support to overcome structural challenges and harness the potential of science and technology for development. This includes improving digital access, supporting technological entrepreneurship, and investing in sustainable infrastructure.
- Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), face particular challenges in accessing global markets and resources. Policies might focus on improving connectivity, fostering regional cooperation, and developing transport and digital infrastructure. According to WTO, LLDCs face trade costs 1.4 times higher than coastal developing countries, but digitalization can considerably reduce them with potentially outsize socio-economic benefits.”¹⁰

As the Global South countries craft responses and develop strategies for SDG acceleration, they need models and approaches that speak directly to their context and leverage their own home-grown

⁸ <https://unsouthsouth.org/2023/09/28/g77-havana-declaration-focuses-on-science-technology-and-innovation/>

⁹ https://www.g77.org/doc/3southsummit_outcome.htm

¹⁰ <https://sdgs.un.org/tfm/sti-forum>

solutions as they further build their own capacities. Consolidating efforts at the regional level is crucial to build ecosystems of knowledge, expertise as well as infrastructure that could lessen costs for neighboring countries and amplify impact across territories. In Africa for example, the 2024 UN Multistakeholder Forum on STI highlighted that addressing the digital divide, fostering innovative ecosystems, and investing in education and capacity building are crucial. Only 28% of Africa has Internet access, compared to a global average of 59%. Closing this digital divide by 2030 would require an estimated investment of US\$100 billion in digital infrastructure. Policies might support sustainable economic development, leveraging AI and technology to address health, education, and agricultural challenges. However, the energy for such AI needs to be provided by non-fossil fuel energy to avoid lock-in, and the water needed for AI needs to be factored in given that water budgets are often over allocated already.

South-South and triangular cooperation for coordinated regional and cross-regional response is recognized as crucial in ways forward across these transformational agendas and commitments.¹¹ This dialogue will engage experts and sectors that could deepen understanding of regional South-South and triangular cooperation on STI and help inform thinking on potential next steps to foster and support collaborations.

PROGRAMME

Time	Segment
12:30 – 12:45	Welcome and Keynote Message: Dima Al Khatib, UNOSSC Director Framing and Moderation of Roundtable Discussion: Dr. Astra Bonini, Chief of Policy Bureau, UNDESA
12:45 – 1:20	Perspectives from Stakeholders Across Regions (3-5 Minute Remarks) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ted Chen, CEO and Co-Founder of Evercomm (one of Asia’s fastest growing clean tech startup), Asia’s 30 Under 30/Youngest Recipient of Singapore’s Smart Energy Award, (Former Lead on Science and Technology of the UN Major Group for Children and Youth/MGCY) • Mei Lin Fung, Founder of People-Centered Internet (Convener with Google of the Global/Cross-Regional Cooperation for Digital Transformation, currently chaired by Estonia) • Dr. K.N. Gunalan, President, Atlas Initiative for Climate Resilient Infrastructure/Chair, World Federation of Engineering Organizations (WFEO) • Prof. Jinghai Li, Vice-Chairman of China Association for Science and Technology, President of International Panel of Mesoscience • Mr. Sibusiso Mpama, First Secretary at the Permanent Mission of South Africa, Coalition on STI for Africa’s Development • Alessandro Rainoldi, Head of Territorial Development Unit/Fair and Sustainable Economy, Joint Research Center, European Commission (EU/EC)

¹¹ <https://unsouthsouth.org/2024/05/22/sids4-south-south-and-triangular-cooperation-are-a-strategic-tool-for-sids/> and <https://unsouthsouth.org/2024/05/22/sids4-south-south-and-triangular-cooperation-are-a-strategic-tool-for-sids/>

- **Amir Hamza Syed**, Associate Manager, Partnerships, Global Advocacy and Resource Mobilization, Islamic Development Bank (IsDB)

UN Entities

- **Jean-Paul Adam**, Director of Policy, Monitoring and Advocacy, Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA)
- **Miniva Chibuye**, Economic Affairs Officer, UNOHRLLS
- **Patricia Cortes**, Global Policy Advisor | Regional Policy Specialist for Latin America and the Caribbean, UNWomen
- **Ursula Wynhoven**, Liaison to the UN and Head of the ITU NY Office

1:20 – 1:55

Open Discussion

(Discussants/Participants to also engage with Stakeholders and UN Entities)

- **Dr. Rui Chen**, Deputy Director General, China Center for International Science and Technology Exchange, Secretary General of the World Federation of Engineering Organizations
- **Paulo Gadelha**, Former President of Fundação Oswaldo Cruz (Fiocruz), Brazil; (Former Member of the UNSG Advisory Group on the Implementation of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism)
- **Vanessa Sandra**, [ISC Intelligence](#), [AERAP Africa Europe Science Collaboration Platform](#), Science Summit at United Nations General Assembly (UNGA79) 10-27 September 2024

1:55

Next Steps

- Minerva Novero-Belec, Regional Policy Specialist, UNOSSC
- Wei Liu, Sustainable Development Officer and Coordinator of the UN Inter-agency Task Team on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs (IATT)

2:00

Close

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

From “where you sit” (from the perspectives of your constituency, your region, the work you do):

- What are the **key trends** around STI that you think have immense implications for sustainable development (both positive and negative)?
- What STI-related initiatives in your region are emerging that could serve as “**models**” for replication or adoption? What **features** of those initiatives are most instructive? (Looking at your own initiatives, ones you established or are involved in, what could Global South countries learn from them; where could they also help address needs?)
- How can **multistakeholder partnerships**, particularly South-South and triangular cooperation, be leveraged or strengthened to support technology diffusion and capacity development on STI, particularly at the regional level (with benefits that many countries can tap into).
- What **gaps** stand out in your region and how can they best be addressed? What policies or strategies (including partnerships) could close those gaps?
- What **approaches** look promising for **fostering regional collaboration** amongst scientific communities, industry stakeholders, financial institutions and policymakers to accelerate

development of innovative approaches, technology enabled responses, and science driven solutions to development challenges?

- What **concrete next steps** do you propose to build from today's dialogue? Where do you see entities around the table being impactful?

REFERENCES | RESOURCES

- [UN Office for South-South Cooperation \(UNOSSC\)](#) | [UNOSSC South-South Galaxy](#) | [South-South Flagship Engagement Platforms](#) (UN South-South Day, South-South Expo, etc.)
- [Second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation \(BPA+40\)](#) | [21st High-Level Committee \(HLC\) on South-South Cooperation](#)
- [UN Multistakeholder Forum for STI](#) | [UN Interagency Task Team on STI for the SDGs \(IATT\)](#)
- [Coalition on STI for Africa's Development](#)
- [China Association for Science and Technology](#)
- [China Center for International Science and Technology Exchange](#)
- [European Commission Joint Research Centre](#)
- [Evercomm Singapore](#) | [Asia's 30 Under 30](#) | [Nanyang Technological University](#) | [INTUitive](#)
- [Fundação Oswaldo Cruz](#)
- [International Telecommunication Union \(ITU\)](#) | [ICT Development Index](#) | [ITU-D Digital Transformation](#)
- [Islamic Development Bank \(IsDB\)](#)
- [People-Centered Internet](#)
- [Science Summit at United Nations General Assembly](#)
- [UN Major Group for Children and Youth \(MGCY\)](#) | [Science Policy Interface Platform](#)
- [UN Office of the Special Adviser on Africa](#)
- [UN-OHRLLS](#) | [SIDS4](#) | [LLDC3](#)
- [UNWomen](#) | [Commission on Status of Women \(CSW\)](#)
- [World Federation of Engineering Organizations](#)

Publication

- UN DESA [Policy Brief No. 158](#): How can we accelerate transformations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)? Insights from the 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report
- UNSDG: [Six Transitions: Investment Pathways to Deliver the SDGs](#)