



## South-South and Triangular Cooperation

This editorial is based on "[South-South and Triangular Cooperation is more than a diplomatic phrase](#)", which was published in The Hindu on 30/09/2025. The article emphasises that South-South and Triangular Cooperation is an essential, cost-effective, and innovative development model, with India's leadership and partnerships showing how it can create a more equitable and sustainable global future beyond traditional aid frameworks.

**For Prelims:** South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC), [South-South Cooperation \(SSC\)](#), Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA), [India-UN Development Partnership Fund](#), [Small Island Developing States \(SIDS\)](#)

**For Mains:** Role of South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) in Global Development Cooperation, India's Role in Advancing South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC), Major Challenges Constraining the Effectiveness of SSTC

In a **rapidly shifting global order**, **traditional aid frameworks** alone can no longer address the intertwined challenges of **inequality, climate change, and fragile development financing**. **South-South and Triangular Cooperation** has emerged as a **powerful platform** of **solidarity, mutual learning, and innovation**, offering **cost-effective and context-specific solutions**. Yet, despite its promise, gaps in **financing, institutional capacity, and broad-based partnerships** highlight the urgent need to **strengthen this model** for a more **equitable and sustainable future**.

### What is South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC)?

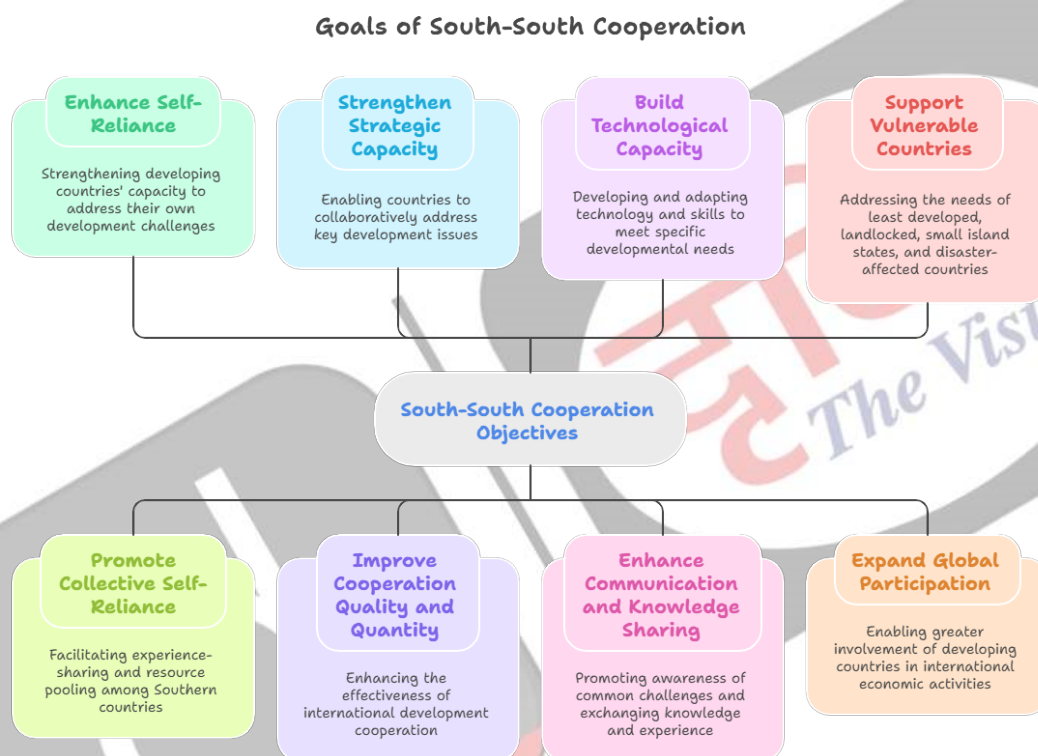
- **About:** It is a **partnership among developing countries** ([Global South](#)) **based on solidarity and mutual benefit, involving the exchange of knowledge, skills, resources, technology, and expertise to promote development.**
  - It **complements traditional North-South aid**, adhering to principles of **national sovereignty, equality, non-conditionality, and mutual accountability**.
  - **Triangular Cooperation (TrC):** A **collaborative model** where **two or more developing countries partner**, supported by a **developed country or multilateral organisation**.
    - It combines the **contextual experience of Southern partners** with the **financial and technical support of Northern/multilateral partners** for effective project implementation.
- **Origin:** The **1978 Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA)** formally defined **South-South Cooperation**, highlighting **priority areas** and support for **least developed, landlocked, and small island developing countries**.
  - Over time, **SSTC** evolved to include **Triangular Cooperation**, where **developed**

**countries or multilateral organisations** provide **financial and technical support** alongside **Southern partners**.

- The **United Nations** has adopted **September 12** as the **International Day for South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC)**.

▪ **Guiding Principles of South-South Cooperation:**

- **Solidarity-driven:** Rooted in cooperation among developing countries to enhance **national well-being and self-reliance**.
- **Development-oriented:** Supports the **attainment of internationally agreed development goals**, including the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**.
- **South-led agenda:** Initiatives are **determined by countries of the South themselves**, ensuring autonomy in priorities.
- **Core Principles:** Guided by **respect for national sovereignty, national ownership and independence, equality among partners, non-conditionality (assistance without imposing conditions), non-interference in domestic affairs, and mutual benefit through win-win cooperation**.



## How is SSTC Transforming Global Development Cooperation?

- **Empowerment through Solidarity and Equality:** SSTC is based on principles of **mutual respect, solidarity, equality, and shared learning** among **developing countries**.
  - Unlike traditional aid models, it respects **national sovereignty and ownership** without conditionalities, fostering **genuine partnerships among equals**.
  - This approach builds **political and economic self-reliance** in the **Global South**, a key principle since the **1978 Buenos Aires Plan of Action**.
- **Driving Global Economic Growth:** Countries of the **Global South** have contributed to over **half of the recent global economic growth**.
  - **Intra-South trade** now accounts for more than **one-quarter of world trade**, and **foreign direct investment (FDI) outflows** from the South represent a **third of global flows**.
  - SSTC harnesses these dynamics for **shared development outcomes**.
- **Cost-effective, Scalable, and Context-specific Development Solutions:** SSTC offers **locally tailored solutions** to pressing challenges like **climate change, health, and digital finance**.

- The cooperation enables replication of **cost-effective innovations** such as India's **Aadhaar digital ID system** and **UPI payments model** shared with other developing countries.
- Such solutions are grounded in **local realities** and foster **sustainable development**.
- **Enhancing Institutional and Technical Capacities: South-South partnerships** strengthen **institutional capacities, technical knowledge, and resource mobilisation**.
  - For instance, the **India-UN Development Partnership Fund** has backed **75 projects in 56 countries**, advancing areas like **food security (rice fortification), supply chains in Nepal and Laos, and digital governance innovations**.
  - **Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, and Germany** collaborate through a **triangular partnership** on **coral reef restoration**, combining **finance, technical expertise, and community practices** to boost **reef resilience** and **marine biodiversity** in the Caribbean region.
- **Complementing and Expanding Traditional North-South Cooperation:** SSTC is a **supplement**, not a **substitute**, for **North-South cooperation**.
  - **Triangular cooperation** involves **Southern partners** working with **developed countries or multilateral support**, leveraging **combined resources** for **greater impact**.
    - **India, France, and the UAE** have formed a **trilateral partnership** focusing on **solar and nuclear energy, climate change, biodiversity conservation, and defence cooperation** in the **Indian Ocean region**, leveraging **combined resources** for greater **regional impact**.
  - It enables **capacity building** and **innovation scaling** in a way that respects **Southern leadership and priorities**.
- **Mainstreaming SSTC within Global Development Agendas:** SSTC is increasingly **institutionalised** in **UN policies and development frameworks**, with over **60 resolutions and outcome documents** recognising its importance.
  - **United Nations entities** are integrating **SSTC strategies** globally to support **member states** in areas such as **health, climate action, social protection**, and more, reflecting rising **demand from developing countries**.
- **Fostering Regional Integration and South-South Networks:** SSTC promotes **regional integration** and **cooperation** among the **Global South** through enhanced **trade, technology exchange, and collective action**.
  - It creates **collaborative networks** that amplify **shared knowledge** and **development solutions**, which is critical amid **geopolitical instability** and global challenges like the **COVID-19 pandemic**.

## What Role does India play in Advancing South-South and Triangular Cooperation?

- **Leadership in Capacity Building and Knowledge Sharing:** India launched the **India-UN Global Capacity-Building Initiative** to share Indian best practices with other Global South nations.
  - It facilitates **skills training, knowledge exchanges, pilot projects, and institutional cooperation** to accelerate the **SDGs**.
  - Indian technical cooperation programs now support over **75 projects in 56 countries**, particularly in **least developed countries and small island states**.
- **Contributions through the India-UN Development Partnership Fund:** Established in **2017** with a contribution of **\$150 million**, the fund backs **demand-driven, transformational projects** across the Global South.
  - Thematic areas include **climate resilience, renewable energy, health, and gender equality**.
  - Funded projects span **Africa, the Caribbean, and Southeast Asia**, reflecting India's **financial and developmental commitment**.
- **Promotion of Digital Public Infrastructure for Equitable Development:** India leverages scalable **digital tools** like **Aadhaar** and **UPI** to support **digital finance** in partner countries.
  - Initiatives include **digital health platforms** in **Zambia and Lao PDR**, and **supply chain**

**innovations** in Nepal, showcasing India's **technological leadership** in inclusive development.

- Several **Global South countries** have adopted or piloted **UPI integrations**, including **Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Maldives, and the UAE**, with ongoing expansions to **Qatar, Singapore, and Malaysia**.
- **Institutionalising and Strengthening Regional Networks:** India hosts **Voice of the Global South Summits**, reinforcing its role as a **voice for developing countries**.
  - During its **G20 presidency**, India secured the **African Union's permanent membership** in the G20, enhancing the **political and economic influence** of Africa and other southern countries.
- **Innovative Agricultural and Food Security Initiatives:** Through partnerships with **ICRISAT** and **DAKSHIN (Development and Knowledge Sharing Initiative)**, India promotes agricultural innovation and climate-smart farming.
  - Projects on **rice fortification, supply chain improvements, and sustainable dryland farming** demonstrate India's contribution to **food security** and **agricultural resilience** across the Global South.
  - For instance, in collaboration with **Germany**, India acts as the **knowledge provider** for **agriculture and climate resilience projects** in **Africa**.
- **Advocacy for Global South Priorities in Multilateral Forums:** India actively promotes initiatives such as the UN Day for South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC), emphasising **innovative collaborations, climate resilience, and socio-economic development**.
  - It advocates for **increased funding** and **inclusive governance**, proposing dedicated development funds with allocations exceeding **\$2.5 million for trade policy support**.
    - For instance, **India** was the **first country** to provide **written financial assurances** to the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** to support **Sri Lanka's debt restructuring plan** in **January 2023**.

## What are the Major Challenges Constraining the Effectiveness of SSTC?

- **Fragmentation and Lack of Coordination:** SSTC efforts often suffer from **fragmented initiatives** due to diverse **political systems, economic priorities, and historical contexts** among participating countries.
  - This fragmentation leads to a **lack of cohesive strategies, weak synergy among projects, and diluted impact** on **global development goals**.
  - **Shifts in national priorities or leadership changes** can disrupt ongoing SSTC projects or stall new proposals, affecting **long-term planning and implementation**.
    - For instance, the **Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC)** initiated by India and Japan was derailed **due to reduced political will following the change in government in Japan**.
- **Limited Institutional and Technical Capacity:** Many developing countries lack adequate **financial, technical, and institutional ability** to **design, implement, and sustain SSTC programs**.
  - **Capacity constraints** hamper effective **project execution and scalability**.
  - **Fiscal constraints**, combined with **geopolitical shifts**, create serious challenges for **coordinated and sustained collective action** across the **Global South**.
    - **India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS)**, a platform for **India-Africa partnership**, has faced significant **scheduling delays**, notably **not being held since the third summit in 2015**.
- **Funding and Resource Gaps:** SSTC largely depends on **trust funds, voluntary contributions, and limited financial mechanisms** such as the **India-UN Development Partnership Fund** or the **IBSA Fund**.
  - These sources are often **unpredictable and insufficient** to meet rising **developmental demands**, particularly in priority sectors like **climate resilience, health, and digital infrastructure**.
- **Geopolitical Tensions and Global Power Dynamics:** Rising **geopolitical tensions** and **competition for influence** between **major powers** pose risks to



the **solidarity** underpinning SSTC.

- **External pressures** and **alliances** often complicate **autonomous** and **horizontal cooperation** among **Southern countries**, threatening the **mutual respect** and **equal footing** SSTC seeks to uphold.
- **China's expanding economic and security footprint in Africa** contrasts with the **U.S.'s strategic moves in West Asia**, complicating **South-South Cooperation's** goal of fostering **autonomous and equal partnerships**.
- **Digital Divide and Technological Gaps:** Despite progress in **digital public goods** shared in SSTC (e.g., India's **Aadhaar, UPI**), significant disparities remain in **technology access** and **innovation capacity**.
  - Many **least developed countries** and **small island developing states (SIDS)** face challenges in **digital infrastructure, connectivity, and skilled human resources**, limiting their participation and benefits from **SSTC-led technological cooperation**.
- **Limited Integration of SSTC into Global Development Agendas:** Integrating SSTC into **national policies, UN frameworks, and multilateral development strategies** remains an ongoing challenge.
  - While SSTC's prominence is rising with **UN resolutions** and growing **projects**, consistent **mainstreaming** with adequate **funding, reporting, and evaluation mechanisms** is required to solidify its role alongside **North-South cooperation**.
    - For instance, **developed countries** failed to meet their **2009 pledge** to provide **\$100 billion annually** to the **Global South** for **climate finance**.

## What Measures Can Enhance the Effectiveness of South-South and Triangular Cooperation?

- **Establishment of a South-South and Triangular Cooperation Solutions Lab:** The **UNOSSC Strategic Framework 2022-2025** advocates creating a dedicated **Solutions Lab** to facilitate **coordination, co-design, and scaling of initiatives**.
  - This Lab fosters **innovation, knowledge exchange, capacity building, and technology transfer**, aligned with the **SDGs**.
  - It will help overcome **fragmentation** by integrating **expertise and resources** regionally and globally.
- **Tailored Financing Mechanisms and Blended Finance:** To address **funding gaps**, **SSC stakeholders** emphasise the creation of **tailored financial instruments** such as **blended finance, debt swaps, and sustainable financing models**.
  - **Funding modalities** like the **India-UN Development Partnership Fund** and the **IBSA Fund**, which mobilise **predictability and scale**, especially for **climate resilience, health, and digital infrastructure projects**.
  - **Strengthening Institutional and Technical Capacities:** **Capacity building** is key to enhancing **project design, implementation, and sustainability**.
  - **UN agencies** have launched **large-scale training programs** leveraging SSTC to enhance **technical know-how**, such as joint certifications in **disaster risk reduction, health emergency response, and digital governance**, engaging **thousands of participants globally**.
- **Mainstreaming SSTC into the Global Development Framework:** Integrating SSTC **international development agendas** enhances **alignment, coherence, and effectiveness**.
  - Progressive inclusion is seen in many **UN resolutions** and **strategic plans** by UN agencies, promoting SSTC as a **complementary approach** alongside **traditional development cooperation**.
- **Expansion of Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships:** Building **partnerships beyond governments** to include the **private sector, civil society, and academia** expands **resources, innovation, and outreach**.
  - Examples include **collaborative digital platforms** and **renewable energy partnerships** presented by countries like **Türkiye and Portugal**, showcasing **tech-driven initiatives** and **scaling up impact**.
- **Digital Innovation and Technology Transfer:** Scaling **digital public goods** and **technology transfer** addresses **digital divides**.

- **Indian digital identity (Aadhaar)** and **payments (UPI) models** shared with partners illustrate successful **SSTC technological cooperation**.
- Increased emphasis on **digital infrastructure** and **inclusive data governance** enhances **development outcomes** in **less-connected regions**.
- **Empowerment of Women, Youth, and Vulnerable Groups:** Targeting **inclusion-focused SSTC** programs will foster **leadership, digital skills, and participation of marginalised groups**.
  - Programs targeting **youth empowerment** and **women's leadership** leverage SSTC for wider **socio-economic benefits**, ensuring **cooperation** is **equitable** and **sustainable**.
  - Special emphasis should be given to **Small Island Developing States (SIDS)** and the **least developed countries**, which are most vulnerable to **climate** and **economic shocks**.

## Conclusion:

**South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC)** embodies **solidarity** and **shared innovation** among **developing countries**, crucial for advancing **sustainable** and **resilient development** aligned with the **SDGs**. As **environmental expert Dima Al-Khatib, Director of UNOSSC**, observed, "Through **cooperative efforts**, we can pool our **resources** and **expertise** to better adapt to the consequences of **climate change** and pursue **sustainable energy alternatives**." Moving forward, **strengthening institutional capacities, scaling nature-positive solutions, and fostering inclusive partnerships** remain vital to harness SSTC's full potential for a **greener, equitable future**.

### Drishti Mains Question :

Examine how South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) strengthens sustainable development among developing countries and complements traditional North-South aid models.

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### Q1. What is South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC)?

**Ans:** SSTC is a collaboration among developing countries for knowledge, skills, and technology exchange, with Triangular Cooperation involving support from developed countries or multilateral organisations.

### Q2. How does SSTC transform global development?

**Ans:** It promotes solidarity, equality, shared learning, self-reliance, and cost-effective, context-specific solutions across the Global South.

### Q3. What role does India play in SSTC?

**Ans:** India leads through the India-UN Capacity-Building Initiative, \$150 million Development Partnership Fund, digital tools (Aadhaar, UPI), agricultural innovation, and multilateral advocacy.

### Q4. What are the main challenges facing SSTC?

**Ans:** Challenges include fragmentation, limited capacity, funding gaps, political inconsistency, geopolitical tensions, digital divide, and mainstreaming issues.

### Q5. How can SSTC be strengthened?

**Ans:** Through tailored financing, capacity building, policy integration, multi-stakeholder partnerships, digital innovation, and empowerment of women and youth.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

### **Prelims**

**Q.**Consider the following statements: (2016)

1. The Sustainable Development Goals were first proposed in 1972 by a global think tank called the 'Club of Rome'.
2. The Sustainable Development Goals have to be achieved by 2030.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: (b)

### **Mains**

**Q.**“If the last few decades were Asia's growth story, the next few are expected to be Africa's.” In light of this statement, examine India's influence in Africa in recent years. **(2021)**

**Q.**Increasing interest of India in Africa has its pros and cons. Critically examine. **(2015)**

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