

## Minutes of the Meeting

5th Steering Committee Meeting for the South-South Global Thinkers:  
the Global Coalition of Think Tank Networks for SSC



*Wednesday, 6 April 2022*

### 1. Introduction:

The Executive Secretariate of the South-South Global Thinkers initiative, hosted by UNOSSC and UNDP, convened the 5th Steering Committee meeting on 6 April 2022. The agenda of the meeting was to reflect on the achievements and lessons learned of the project's first phase (Jan 2017-June 2022), and to brainstorm on ideas and way forward for the second phase based on outcomes of the Strategic Project Review, to further influence the policymaking through evidence-based research and insights spearheaded by the think tank networks.

The meeting focused on the following agenda items:

- Review and take stock of progress of the project, its accomplishments, and gaps (2017-2022)
- Contextualize the future of the project by brainstorming new emerging priority areas on South-South and triangular cooperation (SSTC) and policy impact
- Reflect on the operational modality of the project to inform the future business model for the second phase (operation and sustainability).

The meeting was opened by the executives of UNOSSC and UNDP as Executive Secretariat of the South-South Global Thinkers.

Ms. Xiaojun Grace Wang, Deputy Director of UNOSSC, highlighted that UNOSSC has placed knowledge and research as a central pillar of its work. The new strategic framework of UNOSSC (2022-2025) prioritizes the further strengthening of the South-South Global Thinkers initiative and expanding partnerships with Southern think tanks, universities and centres of excellence for increasing the relevance, usefulness and uptake of knowledge and research to further inform policymakers and development practitioners on the value of SSTC and assist them in making informed decisions on their SSTC investment, with the goal of accelerating progress towards the SDGs.

She further added, that the UN system-wide Strategy on South-South and Triangular Cooperation for Sustainable Development 2020-2025, which was supported by all UN Agencies under the coordination of UNOSSC and approved by the UN SG's Executive Committee in 2021 to further enhance the coordination of UN system support to South-South and Triangular Cooperation

(SSTC), has recognized the work of the South-South Global Thinkers and has embedded it as an important research initiative for the UN entities to utilize and build on. UNOSSC, through this initiative, seeks to further boost Member States institutional capacities for South-South cooperation (SSC), by creating additional provisions for knowledge-sharing to inform evidence-based policy planning and programmes.

She reiterated that UNOSSC, in collaboration with UNDP, is committed to continue strengthening the sharing of knowledge and research on SSC in partnership with the think tank communities and academia to advance thought leadership on SSTC. The initiative has been groundbreaking in terms of generating and sharing knowledge, facilitate dialogue, strengthening research collaborations among the think-tanks from across the Global South as well as North while focusing on emerging issues and challenges faced by developing countries that are pertinent to SSC.

Ms. Wang congratulated the think tanks networks on the important work and their contribution to this project which has resulted in the generation of research and dissemination of insights and perspectives from the South that has helped inform many policy dialogues and consultative processes and served as a source of ideas on how best to eradicate poverty and address other transnational challenges faced by many countries in the South.

She also welcomed the two new think-tank networks that have joined South-South Global Thinkers, i.e. Global Think Tank Network on Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development chaired by CASS, and CAREC Think-tank Network (CTTN), chaired by CAREC Institute, and the two new strategic partners, i.e. South Centre and Norec, which will further strengthen and enhance knowledge and research contributions of the global coalition to include expertise in poverty eradication, regional integration and trade, among other topics.

Ms. Faiza Effendi, Chief of the Effectiveness Group, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support (BPPS) in UNDP, in her opening remarks congratulated the partners on completion of another successful year of implementation. She expressed that UNDP is proud to co-host the joint secretariat of the South-South Global Thinkers initiative, emphasizing that this is a unique initiative as it puts together the new and emerging thoughts and evidence-based features from a southern perspective to inform policy and accelerate progress towards the SDGs. She added that the initiative is very much aligned with the high level commitments that have been set in the second high-level UN Conference on SSC held in 2019, as expressed in the BAPA+40 Outcome document, as well as at the 20th Session of the High-level Committee on SSC (2021). She further highlighted that the UNDP's new strategic plan 2022-2025 prioritizes SSTC and considers it as a critical approach for the future of development. UNDP is also developing a new body of work to support on SSTC and seeing how UNDP can be more effective in pulling together communities of practice that can scour information from across the organization, including from the field and at the regional level.

## **2. Findings & recommendations of the strategic project review and recommendations:**

UNOSSC and UNDP made a joint presentation on the findings of the independent Strategic Project Review conducted from July to November 2021, and on the new emerging research priority areas in SSTC (presentation enclosed). Main findings and recommendations of the independent strategic report are provided below. This was followed by an open discussion.

- i. In regard to the achievements of the project, the independent strategic project review acknowledged that the three objectives of the initiative were achieved which included: (1) establishing and expanding the coalition, (2) establishing an online platform that connects the think tank network and Centers of Excellence, and (3) supporting capacity building of the think tank network to provide evidence-based advisory services for informed policymaking and practices.
- ii. The Review concluded that the creation of the coalition contributed to establishing a common understanding on SSC and promoting relevant conversations on data production, evidence-based research, impact assessment, monitoring and evaluation. It has also contributed to the generation and dissemination of a “narrative on SSC,” which was achieved through convening many South-South policy dialogues and consultative processes with the think tank networks that served as a source of ideas on how best to eradicate poverty and address other transnational challenges facing many countries of the South. Through those policy dialogues, think tanks were provided with a platform to share their reflections on important and emerging issues concerning SSTC.
- iii. The Review also acknowledged that the project was successful in the commissioning of many evidence-based research papers which were authored by the think tank networks to inform Members States in making policy decisions on SSC.
- iv. Due to the multidisciplinary knowledge and expertise of the members of the Global Thinkers, the project engaged them in UN consultations and policy dialogues to ensure that Southern voices, perspectives and inputs were shared, and reflected in high-level UN research documents and reports. They have brought insights on how SSC can play a role in addressing pressing issues in the Global South.
- v. The review also outlined several recommendations to reflect in the second phase of the project. Some of them are reflected below, together with additional recommendations suggested by the Executive Secretariat.
  - a) further strengthening, maintaining and enhancing the coalition to enrich the knowledge and research contributions based on thematic expertise and regional distribution.
  - b) Explore ways in which to support institutional capabilities of the Global Thinkers Coalition and the networks themselves
  - c) Continue advancing networks’ leadership in producing evidence-based research and to contribute to the generation and dissemination on narratives of SSC.
  - d) Strengthen the research & policymaking nexus by engaging with governments in policy dialogues at the global, regional and national levels to inform their policies on SSC, and by translating research studies into local languages.

- e) Update the research priority areas according to the new development trends, while maintaining the existing 10 areas that are still of relevance. It should further integrate the component on triangular cooperation.
- f) The new phase should also be aligned with the new UNOSSC Strategic framework and UNDP new global offer on SSTC.
- g) Raise the visibility of the project by better dissemination of research and knowledge generated by the project with UN partners and national counterparts, and share the outreach responsibility with the think tanks for greater visibility.
- h) In regard to financial sustainability, the networks could explore new funding possibilities, and all members should join the resources mobilization efforts.
- i) Engage UN agencies as strategic partners (e.g., explore creating a Strategic Advisory Group with other UN agencies and/or other partners).

### **3. Presentation on the emerging priorities in SSTC and research proposals from think tanks to inform the 2nd phase**

The global landscape on SSTC has evolved since the project's inception in 2016 and the second phase should consider the context in which it will operate, as well as those changes for it to continue to add value to the knowledge base on SSTC. The Executive Secretariat presented a background paper on "Emerging Trends in South-South and triangular cooperation (SSTC)" which analyzes emerging trends in SSTC from the period 2017-2022, especially at global level. Its aim was to provide inspiration to the Steering Committee members to reflect on when identifying potential research priorities to be considered for the second phase of the project. During the presentation, the Executive Secretariat highlighted some critical emerging trends with respects to SSTC that would be a priority for actors in the Global South. The trends are an accumulation of overarching themes of lacking research areas in SSTC which have been voiced by member states and thus documented in various outcome reports and intergovernmental processes on SSC. The identified research priorities have been presented below due to their specific relevance to the development of the Global South and the prioritization of SSTC for manifestation of solidarity, and the attainment of SDGs according to national priorities and plans.

In terms of the thematic issues in the context of emerging trends in SSTC, proposed areas presented included Poverty Eradication, Financial & Technical Cooperation, Climate change & disaster risk Reduction, Vaccine development, production, access & equitable distribution, Toward a Post-COVID-19 Recovery.

The proposed areas under "SSC issues as a modality" included National Capacity Development on SSTC, the role of TrC, Monitoring & Evaluation of SSC/TrC, UN support to SSTC.

### **4. Reflections from the think tanks & partners on the way forward for the development of the second phase:**

The think tanks representatives from each network, along with the funding and strategic partners, acknowledged the fruitful participation under the Global Thinkers Initiative and extended congratulations on the results achieved in the first phase of the project. To inform the development of the second phase, think tank representatives recommended the following:

**i. The unique role of Think Tanks and SSGT in policy-research-whole of society nexus**

The next phase of the project should have a prominent component on uptake of the research and should reflect an operational mechanism on how it will strengthen the relationship with southern governments. It should focus on strengthening engagement with southern governments to ensure how they're using the policy recommendations in the evidence-based research being developed by the think tanks.

In policy research-whole of society nexus, Think Tanks and SSGT play a unique role in connecting research engagement with policymaking, policy creation with policy dissemination (which are separate phases currently) during SSC. Additionally, due to think tanks' proximity with society, including, civil society organizations at community level and with the private sector, and their linkages with governments at national, regional and local levels, think tanks can serve as a bridge to convene discussions on the most key issues concerning social and economic developments and to disseminate the best practices to the society.

- ii. Representative from SAIIA gave an example of Policy Bridge which is a research, advocacy and action think-tank that brings together the think tanks from across the African continent and create a platform for the research that can then also bring in governments in Africa to engage with the research and evidence. As a network of networks, the South-South Global Thinkers can engage with various governmental/ intergovernmental organizations geographically and attract policymakers on how the research can be made readable and adoptable. Various themes such as food systems, health systems, economic growth and jobs can be discussed in a more interconnected manner.

**iii. Innovative solutions in new global challenges**

A representative highlighted the new challenges we are facing such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the uncertainties in achieving the SDGs. Hence, the project should also study and promote innovative approaches as there are limited resources available to achieve the ambitious SDGs. In addition to evidence-based approach, the sharing of ideas should be encouraged through this platform to try and do things differently based on the realities in the Global South.

**iv. Systematization of SSC histories and practices and flagship knowledge product**

Another representative further added that the South-South Global Thinkers initiative can serve as a platform providing systematic knowledge and can initiate an annual flagship knowledge product on SSC (e.g., SSC annual report, including stories, agendas, and others, similar to WB annual report and UNDP's HDR), incorporating innovative solutions to contribute to the provision of the global public goods as an entry point to strengthen South-South cooperation.

In addition, another representative looks at knowledge as much more dynamic things which is developed in cooperation and looks forward to in-person events that could create trust, foster relationships, and increase cultural understanding.

## 5. Emerging priority in SSTC and research proposals from think tanks to inform the 2nd phase

The think tank networks and the strategic partners were invited to present/ propose the research priority areas to be considered for the second phase. These included:

- i. More focus on **triangular cooperation** and the role of the private sector, particularly in the context of achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. For the proposed research area in triangular cooperation, Norec highlighted that it facilitates **TrC partnerships** in the context of its work on the exchange of personnel between developing countries. The research can provide views from the South on Norec's modality of personnel exchange/ knowledge and provide inputs/ feedback on how it can be refined further. Other aspects can include the principal reciprocity i.e. the partners are mutually able to learn, contribute and provide insights on power dynamics, both, in South-South as well as North-South cooperation. Another aspect of exchange of personnel is to create relations as an essential element in creating trust.
- ii. Introducing the newly established global network on poverty eradication under South-South Global Thinkers, CASS proposed two research priority areas: a) **Digital economy**- developing countries should take opportunity of the fourth Industrial Revolution to achieve much better economic prospects in the future. Research in this area can help developing countries to have more references and experiences to compare and to make their choice how they can better nurture their digital economy. b) **Industrialization** as it can help developing countries to create more jobs and have stronger capacity to resist economic crises or risk. Research in this area can provide international expertise and experiences to help southern countries who would like to move forward in the process of industrialization, and also provide technical assistance and policy recommendations.
- iii. The Southern Voice Network member indicated that they have done some research on the **institutional arrangements and the capacities at the national level**, mostly for countries that are engaging in SSTC and highlighted this as one area for continued support, particularly with the lens of innovations in the context

of COVID-19. As way forward on linking the research to policy and practice, these ideas can be pushed forward to governments to share on how they can improve their institutionality and capacities to manage SSC based on the knowledge already been produced under the network. **Digital divide** and **digital governance** were among other areas proposed which require more southern perspectives. Such research should provide innovative thinking on how to govern these digital spaces and ensure that the interests of the Global South are considered at the global level.

- iv. GReCEST proposed the following areas of research i) Analyzing **Southern Development Financial Institutions (DFIs) and unleash their potential** which are critical in supporting Southern countries in achieving the SDGs. DFIs would be pivotal to address the infrastructure bottleneck in the Global South; ii) how to **scale up renewable energy investment**; iii) **Innovation solution**: Due to the new challenges and uncertainties (reduced resources), to achieve SDGs and to deal with diverse national situations encourage and require the Think Tanks network platform to provide a space for more innovative ideas and thinking from the South to achieve the SDGs. Northern ideas still prevail, but they don't always work in the South and the Think Tanks have a big role to play in cultivating innovative ideas based on Southern challenges.
- v. CAREC Institute proposed **climate change** and **regional cooperation** as priority areas to be considered in the context of the Central Asia region. Regional cooperation can help reduce costs and improve resource efficiency and scale up good practices in technology and capacity building and also can attract innovative financing and private sector participation. The third priority area suggested was **digitalization of the economies** as a way forward to build back better for a more inclusive and sustainable ~~recovery~~ economic recovery.
- vi. South Centre proposed the following priority areas: i) **Poverty alleviation** using a multidisciplinary approach that promotes cohesion and overcome inequalities while taking into consideration the protection of the environment and mitigating the impacts of climate change. ii) Examine and map the **initiatives of SSTC during the pandemic** to analyze how SSTC supplements North-South cooperation, investigate the lessons learnt and how SSTC can help in addressing future crises; iii) Explore **the key role of the private sector** including in the Global South, and further study how the private sector can support Southern goals.
- vii. Research areas highlighted by MENAPAR included i) **Governance of SSTC** as the major impediments for SSC in the region includes legal administrative polices and lack of vehicles or resources that would enable SSC across the Arab region. Hence the issues of governance of SSC and TrC becomes important and an area of research to be further explored. Topics under this area can include evidence-based policy making, strategies to enable SSC &TrC, Strategies to enable SSC &

TrC, transnational and global governance for SSC & TrC; ii) The second area can be **Grassroot SSTC initiatives**. This can include developing toolsets for communities' involvement in SSTC, map and compare best practices which can be learned from and replicated.

- viii. Representative from SESRIC, a subsidiary organ of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which is an intergovernmental organization with 57 member countries, highlighted areas of evidence-based research which included the **role of SSC in poverty alleviation**, improving agricultural systems and food security and building resilience against crisis such as climate emergencies and pandemics such as COVID-19. SESRIC also emphasized the need to take into consideration the diverse social-economic and cultural factors which are very specific to the member States and many others in the Global South that have a deep and direct impact on how SSC is practiced at local, national and regional levels to advance sustainable development.
- ix. Representative from the Network of Southern Think-tanks (NeST) presented the following research priority areas i) **Development Cooperation barometer** which intends to track practitioners and stakeholders standpoints towards International Development cooperation agenda, done through regular surveys in continuation to the ones carried out in the first phase. The Development barometer aims at monitoring the Latin American inter development cooperation community perception of the relevance demand and impact of SSTC initiatives in the region, with a special regard to provision of public goods at regional or global level. It can also include survey of broad trends in the post-COVID push for joint R&D initiatives and partnerships for future pandemic preparedness. The survey can also come up with the potential areas of cooperation that government from the South may consider for possible partnership and collaboration; ii) **innovative approaches of agriculture in SSTC** for global food security and poverty reduction particularly in vulnerable countries; iv) **Evaluation of international credit rating agencies** and the consistency and fair application of the indicators of these agencies both positive and qualitative, focusing on the lessons and perspectives of emerging countries with particular focus on Africa ; v) **Engagement of private sector in achieving SDGs**: how can private sector contribute to SDGs? What are the challenges for it in the developing countries (where the institutional settings are weak and even nonexistent)?
- x. The research priorities proposed by the Latin American Initiative for Public Policy Research (ILAIPP) included i) **Post-COVID education gap, digital education and infrastructure**; ii) analyzing the reduction of civic spaces and **civil society participation** with regards to freedom of association, expression and peaceful assembly, iii) **Employment challenges** with regards to informal workers or collaborative economy and the future of new ways of work, iv) **social protection in relation to poverty reduction**.

- xi. The funding partner, Yingke Law firm, congratulated the Secretariat and the partners on the achievements of the first phase of the programme and expressed interest in continued support for the second phase of the initiative.

The representative presented a research area which has been attracting interest from governments, investors, corporate leaders and the public: **Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Investing** is considered sustainable or socially responsible investments. In many countries, public policies increasingly favor investments in energy and infrastructure projects but also for their environmental and social goals by mitigating the impact of climate change, decarbonizing the energy and transportation sectors and improving clean drinking water supplies, improving digital broadband connectivity for underserved or low income communities and tourism development. The members of the network can work together to assist the government to work out the most appropriate laws regulations and policies on key ESG related issues like climate disclosure, management disclosure of social environment and climate risk sustainability and also corporate governance requirements etc.

## 2. Conclusion and next steps

- Ms. Wang from UNOSSC highlighted that going forward, the project can leverage the unique positioning of UNOSSC given its representation at various UN forums where government comes together and launch policies at the UN platforms (at the global and regional level). From these fora, priority areas can be identified where governments/ countries are negotiating and that are relevant for SSC. The initiative can then support collecting existing research, undertaking new research, and communicating research outcomes to the policymakers/ countries, informing them with evidence and analysis on these policy priorities areas.
- She further stated that at the country level, strategic channels of engagement can be leveraged through think-tanks to dialogue with the national government. This can help strengthen the linkage between research, policymaking and policy implementation and how UN can support in this regard.
- With regard to integrating innovation, Ms. Wang informed that UNOSSC, in its new Strategic framework, plans to launch a South-South Solution Lab. The lab will identify scalable solutions and work with policymakers, investors, thinkers, implementers and other stakeholders together to co-create, co-design and test those solutions and bring them to scale through SSC with some seed funding. Think tanks and researchers could be engaged to be part of the co-design to support in advancing those scalable innovations.

In the closure, Ms. Yuko Suzuki Naab from UNDP appreciated the insightful discussion from the think tanks and indicated that UNDP remains committed to support the SSGT networks and

continue to work with UNOSSC and Think Tanks networks. She then wrapped up the discussion with the following key takeaways to feed into the next phase of the project:

- The next phase of the project will explore ways in improving the bridge between research and its uptake for the policymaking and its implementation.
- Explore and look into the vehicles and organizations within the intergovernmental and global level but also at regional level to partner with them to make the research and policy uptake nexus (policy making and its implementation) more impactful.
- Continue explore ideas for expanding the knowledge base through the development of policy briefs and also strengthen strategic communication and advocacy efforts for dissemination and outreach. This would create opportunities to link the generated knowledge and research to achieve policy changes and implementation achievements.

The meeting concluded with a vote of thanks.

Annex: List of participants:

|   | <b>Name &amp; Designation</b>  | <b>Think Tank/institution</b>  | <b>Think Tank Network</b>   |
|---|--|--|---|
| 1 | Prof. Justin Yifu Lin, Dean, Professor and Honorary Dean of National School of Development at Peking University, China | Institute of New Structural Economics/ Peking University, China  | The Global Research Consortium on Economic Structural Transformation (GReCEST)    |
| 2 | Professor Jiajun Xu  | Executive Deputy Dean, INSE  | GReCEST   |
| 3 | Ms. Ana Patricia Muñoz<br>Executive Director   | Grupo Faro, Ecuador  | Latin American Initiative for Public Policy Research (ILAIPP)                     |
|   | Maria Caridad Ortiz  | Grupo Faro, Ecuador  | ILAIPP  |
|   | Margarita Beneke   | Fusades, El Salvador   | ILAIPP  |
| 4 | Andrea Ordóñez, Director   | Southern Voice   | Southern Voice  |
| 5 | Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya,<br>Distinguished Fellow  | Centre for Policy Dialogue and Center for Global Development (CGD) Bangladesh  | Southern Voice  |
| 6 | Ms. Luara Lopes, Researcher  | Articulação SUL, Brazil  | NeST Latin America  |
| 7 | Prof. Xiuli, Professor and Dean  | College of International Development and Global Agriculture (CIDGA)/China Institute for South-South Cooperation in Agriculture (CISSCA)/ China Agricultural University | NeST  |
|   | Dr. Andre de Mello e Souza, Fellow   | The Institute for Applied Economic Research (Ipea), Brazil   | NeST  |
|   | Ms. Luanda Mpungose, Outreach and Partnership Manager  | The South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), South Africa   | NeST  |
|   | Ms. Elizabeth Sidiropoulos, Chief Executive  | SAIIA  | NeST  |
| 8 | Dr. Ra'ed Benschams, Director General and President of MENAPAR   | Bahrain Institute of Public Administration (BIPA), Bahrain   | Middle East and North Africa for Public Administration Research network (MENAPAR) |
| 9 | Dr. Sofiane Sahraoui, Director General   | The International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS)  | MENAPAR   |

|   |  |   |   |
|---|--|---|---|
| 10  | Khalid Umar, Chief of Strategy and Planning                                  | CAREC Institute   | CAREC Think Tank Network  |
| 11  | Narmina Gasimova, Grants and Programs Director                               | Center for Economic and Social Development (CESD), Azerbaijan   | CAREC Think Tank Network  |
| 12  | Dr. WANG Lei   | Director-General of the Bureau of International Cooperation, Chinese Academy for Social Sciences (CASS), China      | Network of think tanks on "Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development" |
| 13  | Mr. CUI Jianmin  | Director-General of the Bureau of Scientific Research Management, Chinese Academy for Social Sciences (CASS), China | Network of think tanks on "Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development" |
| 14  | Yuefen Li, Senior Advisor on South-South Cooperation and Development Finance | South Centre  | South Centre  |
| 15  | Ms. Tazeen Qureshi, Researcher   | Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC), Turkey  | SESRIC  |
| 16  | Dr. Cem Tintin, Researcher   | SESRIC  | SESRIC  |
| 17  | Helge Espe, Senior Adviser   | Norwegian Agency for Exchange Cooperation (NOREC)   | -   |
| 18  | Ms. Lin (Linda) Yang, Executive Chairwoman and Global President              | Yingke Law firm, China  | -   |
| <b>Executive Secretariat (list in alphabetical order)</b> |  |   |   |
| 1   | Ms. Faiza Effendi, Chief of Effectiveness Group                              | UNDP  | -   |
| 2   | Ms. Jiajun Lai, SSTC Fellow  | UNDP  |   |
| 3   | Ms. Jiangting (Tina) Hao, Programme and Policy Analyst                       | UNDP  | -   |
| 4   | Ms. Juliana Gargiulo, Policy Specialist                                      | UNDP  | -   |

|   |   |        |   |
|---|---|--------|---|
| 5 | Ms. Naveeda Nazir, Community of Practice Facilitator  | UNOSSC | - |
| 6 | Ms. Shams Banihani, Knowledge and Research Specialist | UNOSSC | - |
| 7 | Ms. Xiaojun Grace Wang, Deputy Director               | UNOSSC | - |
| 8 | Ms. Yuko Suzuki Naab, Global Policy Advisor           | UNDP   | - |