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South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTrC) for Sustainable Agricultural Development and Food Security in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) Region: Challenges and Opportunities

Executive Summary

Countries in the NENA region are facing enormous challenges to achieve their goals of eradicating hunger and malnutrition while managing their natural resources in a sustainable manner. The persistent high population growth rates, averaging 2.2 percent for the whole region, and growing urbanization are placing heavy pressure on the demand for food. Large segments of the population in many countries live below or close to the poverty line. FAO's work, in particular, through the Regional Initiatives (RIs), endorsed by the NERC Regional Conference, aims to address many of these challenges including: building resilience, enhancing small-scale agriculture and sustainably increasing water and land productivity.

In addressing these challenges, one country's experiences can support another, and South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTrC) offer an effective means to share knowledge, experiences and good practices, policies, technology and resources on a wide range of development issues.

FAO has a longstanding history in SSTrC and actively facilitates country knowledge sharing through networking, matching supply and demand, and enhancing two-way learning among a wide range of actors. While the NENA region is very diverse in terms of each country's economic development, all countries have something to offer through SSTrC; sharing their development solutions for the benefit of others. Countries such as Morocco, Oman and Saudi Arabia are examples of countries already engaging in SSTrC with FAO. However, while there is increasing demand for SSTrC and a growing number of willing providers of expertise, funding to enable country exchange is often the limiting factor.

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This information note highlights how NENA countries could upscale their engagement in SSTRC to help bridge capacity gaps in food and agriculture. FAO stands ready to support and facilitate policy-makers and practitioners, as well as multilateral and bilateral organizations, to share their experiences, identify cooperation areas and chart the way forward to accelerate SSTRC in and beyond the region.

In particular, NENA countries are invited to showcase their institutions of excellence in agriculture and food security on FAO's online SSC Gateway, provide in-kind contributions, such as their expertise and technologies, as well as finances to scale up SSTRC exchanges in support of development goals.

1. Background

1.1 Growing demand and interest in SSTRC

The demand to share and learn through SSTRC is at an all time high. Both global and regional exchanges between countries are growing, through which development solutions and analysis are shared on what has worked on one country context, and what has not. Based on the principles of mutual benefit and solidarity, SSTRC assist partnerships and foster innovations, connecting a wide variety of stakeholders from governments to the private sector, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and academia.

FAO has over 30 years of experience in SSTRC and has fielded more than 2 000 experts and technicians from 20 provider countries to nearly 80 developing countries. FAO promotes SSTRC as a means to deliver within the Strategic Framework approved by its Members, through the Strategic Objectives (SOs), Regional Initiatives (RIs) and Country Programming Frameworks (CPFs). All FAO member countries, irrespective of their state of economic development, have a role to play. For Low-Income Countries (LICs), SSTRC offer context-specific development solutions that have been tried and tested elsewhere, which can be easily adapted to their local context. For Middle-Income Countries (MICs), SSTRC provide a means to contribute to international development and help raise international visibility. SSTRC also provide cost-effective delivery mechanisms for High-Income Countries (HICs) to implement their international development agendas, helping forge strategic partnerships with new emerging development players.

In brief, SSTRC provide excellent opportunities for all countries to work together to achieve tangible development results.

1.2 Main components of the FAO SSC Strategy

In 2012, FAO developed a new SSC Strategy and put in place a dedicated South-South Cooperation (SSC) Team (TCS1) at headquarters, which, together with Regional SSC Officers, would accelerate its implementation. The key objectives of the SSC Strategy are to:

- facilitate the exchange of development solutions through broadened and strengthened SSC modalities that are demand-driven and responsive programmes at country and regional levels, building national and institutional capacities. Modalities have been broadened beyond the fielding of experts and include study tours, policy dialogue and technology exchange;
- promote knowledge networks and platforms, including existing knowledge platforms and FAO's new online SSC Gateway, which showcases institutions and rosters of experts;
- provide upstream policy support, through policy awareness and advocacy for SSTRC, as well as policy advice and support to member countries;

- foster an enabling environment for effective SSTRC, both within the Organization and in the global development arena. New tools, such as FAO's "Quick Guide to SSC" and the forthcoming e-learning, are helping FAO employees to better support governments in engaging in SSTRC.

FAO is now fully in the implementation phase of its SSC Strategy and engaged in coordinating and promoting this institutional effort.

Since 2012, at global level, the number of SSC partner countries and projects rose steadily, as did the volume of resources mobilized. This reflects the growing role of FAO as facilitator, in particular harnessing the strengths of MICs and their offers of expertise and financing. More recently, the commitments of oil-producing countries have been tempered by fluctuations in their economies, particularly due to the drop in oil prices. Nevertheless, SSC country demands continue to steadily grow.

1.3 FAO's role as SSC facilitator

FAO has a pivotal role to play in connecting countries and institutions, but its facilitation role goes well beyond the matching of supply and demand. FAO also provides technical oversight and quality assurance and backstopping support for projects through its network of Decentralized Offices, as well as visibility and world recognition for each country's role in development cooperation. All of these facets place FAO as the preferred SSTRC partner in support of agricultural and rural development, hunger and poverty eradication.

1.4 Ongoing SSTRC projects in the NENA region

Djibouti, Mauritania, and Yemen have all hosted successful SSC initiatives and projects with FAO. In addition, Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) have provided technical and/or financial resources to countries in the NENA region or in Africa. The topics were wide-ranging and the exchange modalities diverse. For example, Morocco signed four Tripartite Agreements (TPAs) with Guinea, Mali, Guinea-Bissau and Swaziland, during 2015, while Oman provided support to Togo.

2. Invitation to NENA countries to broaden their engagement in SSTRC

2.1 FAO's SSC Gateway

The SSC Gateway was launched during FAO's Conference in June 2015. This online tool showcases a wide range of national institutions with expertise in the realm of agriculture and food security. It profiles key areas of expertise and provides links to each institution's Web site and a focal point for further information. In some cases, a roster of experts is also provided. In all cases, institutions are put forward by the governments and some carry the recognition as FAO Reference Centres.

Engaging in the SSC Gateway is a valuable entry point through which countries can engage FAO to facilitate SSTRC. Morocco, for example, has put forward key institutions on SSC Gateway and has also established an SSC Trust Fund (TF) through which it is supporting a number of countries in Africa through fielding experts and offering training courses through its national institutions.

2.2 In-kind and financial contributions

FAO has a wide range of Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with countries that offer their expertise and technology solutions as in-kind contributions. In addition, some countries, such as Morocco (as described), have set up TFs to facilitate exchanges. However, often, funding remains a limiting factor.

In most cases, FAO seeks a cost-sharing solution, which may include:

- host country contribution, providing both direct financial and/or in-kind resources for implementing SSC in their own countries (e.g. Egypt, Jordan and Morocco);
- provider country contribution, where countries establish TFs or fund specific projects, as in the cases of Brazil, China and Morocco;
- Triangular Cooperation (TrC), where funds and/or technical support are supplied by a third party, often traditional donor countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), such as Japan, the Republic of Korea and Spain, or a multilateral organization.

3. Priorities, challenges, opportunities for SSTRC in the NENA region

The NENA region faces enormous development challenges such as the degradation/scarcity of natural resources (especially water and arable land), floods, recurrent droughts and locust risks, all of which impact on food and agriculture production. The region is highly dependent on food imports for basic food needs and highly vulnerable to hikes and volatility in international food prices and to other externalities. Furthermore, a large segment of the population in many countries in the region lives below or close to the poverty line.

Support is required in sustainable production (extension, etc.), marketing (farmers organizations, food quality, etc.), curbing food waste and losses, and job-creation (particularly for the rural women and youth). In addition, better institutional coordination among social development partners is needed.

In addressing these issues, interest in SSTRC is increasing in the NENA region, both in terms of supply and demand, and the development of a regional SSTRC roadmap could help seize the opportunities and overcome the challenges as outlined:

Opportunities:

- the mix of HICs, MICs and LICs in the NENA region provides an opportunity to develop new and innovative forms of development cooperation through SSTRC and should involve gathering offers of technical expertise and matching them to demand;
- regional priorities identified and streamlined as RIs as well as national priorities identified through CPFs offer a nexus to focus SSTRC support;
- high demand for capacity strengthening and institutional building;
- growing interest from a number of countries as potential providers;
- increasing demand for intraregional SSTRC.

Challenges:

- funding to address the growing demand for SSTRC in the region;
- private sector and research and extension institutions buy-in;
- advocacy and communication for SSTRC to raise awareness and secure support;
- engaging more HICs and MICs in the region as providers;
- many NENA countries are heavily dependent on oil production, and their economies are contracting due to low oil prices.

4. Way forward

Central to a regional roadmap to scale up SSTRC in the NENA region, is the need to promote SSTRC through raising awareness and showcasing what has worked. FAO will continue to engage in events and raise the profile of SSTRC opportunities, as well as assist countries to assess strengths and needs and facilitate knowledge-exchange. In addition, FAO offers tools such as the "Quick Guide to SSC", and soon an e-learning to support engagement in SSTRC will be available.

SSTrC clearly have a role in influencing and contributing to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and a focus on strengthening capacities, particularly at institutional level. They will enable countries to make substantial progress in attaining Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). All countries have a role to play and FAO stands ready to facilitate and upscale development solutions between and among countries for the benefit of all.

NENA countries are therefore invited to showcase their institutions of excellence in agriculture and food security on FAO's online SSC Gateway, offer their expertise and technologies (in-kind contributions) and finances to scale up SSTrC exchanges in support of SDGs.

Any questions concerning the content of this paper may be sent to : TCS-Director@fao.org
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