

# Formative evaluation of UNFPA approach to South-South and triangular cooperation



UNFPA Evaluation Office

2020

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# Foreword

In this time of global crisis, solidarity and collaboration across countries and communities is more important than ever. South-South cooperation (SSC) – the exchange of knowledge, expertise and resources among countries of the global South to meet their development goals – has proven to be vital in tackling complex global challenges, such as the current pandemic, climate change or humanitarian emergencies. Over the last 40 years, since the adoption of the Buenos Aires Action Plan, there is a growing awareness across the international community of the importance of SSC to poverty eradication and sustainable development.

UNFPA has long recognized SSC as a key programmatic approach in the achievement of its mandate. Given its global reach and strong partnerships with national governments, civil society actors and local partners on the ground, UNFPA is uniquely positioned to foster SSC initiatives.

This evaluation is the first one ever to be conducted on SSC at UNFPA. It is formative in nature, intended to be forward-looking and utility focused, while supporting organizational learning and evidence-based decision making to enhance UNFPA engagement in SSC at the country, regional and global levels. The exercise covers the period from 2017 to 2020, examining the conceptual framing of SSC at UNFPA and the implementation and results of UNFPA supported SSC initiatives, as well as SSC as a modality for UNFPA programming.

The evaluation highlights that, at the global level, UNFPA has taken important steps to raise the profile of and its capacity for SSC, and has made significant progress with institutionalizing SSC in recent years. Across regional and country offices, the evaluation reports a broad and varied implementation of SSC initiatives as well as institutional measures in place to coordinate and facilitate such initiatives. However, evidence showed that these efforts need to be better systemized and strengthened. It also concluded that SSC has facilitated the achievements of several results across its thematic areas of work, notably in sexual reproductive health and population dynamics. The report further identified additional opportunities for UNFPA to leverage SSC towards advancing its three transformative goals, including in its youth and humanitarian programming.

Taken together, the evaluation suggests that UNFPA should further clarify its conceptualization of SSC, integrating it fully into the strategic frameworks and thematic areas of its work. It also recommends that UNFPA should enhance its SSC implementation at the decentralized level, empowering regional and country offices with the guidance, resources and support to undertake new SSC initiatives and build on the success of existing ones. Alongside this, the evaluation suggests that UNFPA should continue organization-wide efforts to strengthen its skills base in, and awareness of SSC, expand its SSC portfolio to new and emerging opportunities, and share and showcase its experience both internally and externally.

I am confident that the lessons learned and the recommendations highlighted in this evaluation will further support UNFPA in leveraging SSC as a modality to accelerate progress toward the development goals of the ICPD and the 2030 Agenda.

**Marco Segone**  
Director, UNFPA Evaluation Office

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**Valeria Carou-Jones**  
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# Abbreviations and acronyms

<b>ABC</b>	Agencia Brasileira de Cooperacao (Brazilian Cooperation Agency)	<b>ICM</b>	International Confederation of Midwives
<b>APRO</b>	Asia Pacific Regional Office	<b>ICPD</b>	International Conference on Population and Development
<b>ASRO</b>	Arab States Regional Office	<b>ICPD PoA</b>	International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action
<b>BAPA</b>	Buenos Aires Plan of Action	<b>IFAD</b>	International Fund for Agriculture Development
<b>BRICS</b>	Brazil, Russia India, China and South Africa	<b>IICPSR</b>	International Islamic Centre for Population Studies and Research
<b>BiH</b>	Bosnia and Herzegovina	<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>CADRI</b>	Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative	<b>INEGI</b>	Mexican National Institute of Statistics and Geography
<b>CAPMAS</b>	Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (Egypt)	<b>IP</b>	Implementing Partners
<b>CO</b>	Country Office	<b>IPC-IG</b>	International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth
<b>CoE</b>	Centre of Excellence	<b>IPPF</b>	International Planned Parenthood Federation
<b>CPD</b>	Country Programme Document	<b>JIU</b>	Joint Inspection Unit
<b>CSE</b>	Comprehensive Sexuality Education	<b>LACRO</b>	Latin American and Caribbean Regional Office
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization	<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and Evaluation
<b>DFID</b>	Department for International Development	<b>MHM</b>	Menstrual Hygiene Management
<b>ECLAC</b>	United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean	<b>MIC</b>	Middle-Income Country
<b>EECARO</b>	East European and Central Asia Regional Office	<b>MISP</b>	Minimum Initial Service Package
<b>ESARO</b>	East and Southern Africa Regional Office	<b>MoH</b>	Ministry of Health
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization	<b>MoU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>FGM</b>	Female Genital Mutilation	<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>FP</b>	Family Planning	<b>OECD DAC</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
<b>FPOP</b>	Family Planning Organization of the Philippines	<b>ODA</b>	Official Development Assistance
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-Based Violence	<b>P&amp;D</b>	Population and Development
<b>GIS</b>	Geographic Information System	<b>PDA</b>	Personal Digital Assistant
<b>HAC</b>	Healthy Ageing Centre	<b>POPCOM</b>	Commission on Population and Development
<b>HQ</b>	Headquarters	<b>PPD</b>	Partners in Population and Development
<b>IAWG</b>	Inter-Agency Working Group		
<b>IBGE</b>	Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics		
<b>ICCO</b>	Inter Country Cooperation Office		

<b>PPP</b>	Public-Private Partnerships
<b>QCPR</b>	Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review
<b>RO</b>	Regional Office
<b>RPM</b>	Regional Planning Meeting
<b>SIS</b>	Strategic Information System
<b>SOPs</b>	Standard Operating Procedures
<b>SRH</b>	Sexual and Reproductive Health
<b>SRHR</b>	Sexual and reproductive health and rights
<b>SROI</b>	Social Return on Investment
<b>SSC</b>	South-South cooperation
<b>SSCAF</b>	South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund
<b>SSTC</b>	South-South and triangular cooperation
<b>TICA</b>	Thailand Incentive and Convention Association
<b>UCL</b>	University College London
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDAF</b>	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
<b>UNEG</b>	United Nations Evaluation Group
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Fund for Population
<b>UNEP</b>	United Nations Environment Programme
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNOSSC</b>	United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation
<b>WASH</b>	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
<b>WCARO</b>	West and Central Africa Regional Office
<b>WCHD</b>	Women and Children Help Desk
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

# Executive summary

## PURPOSE AND THE OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this formative evaluation was to take stock of initial progress, lessons learned and enabling factors and report on the challenges facing the UNFPA journey in South-South cooperation (SSC) since 2017 as well as to provide evaluative input for the strategic direction of SSC and implementation of the UNFPA South-South Cooperation Strategy within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) and the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). The evaluation is the first one on SSC at UNFPA.

The objectives of the evaluation are to: assess the strategic approach of UNFPA to SSC, including the vision for future direction and how this fits into achieving the strategic plan and its transformative results; assess the appropriateness of the SSC strategy in terms of conceptual framework, principles, implementation mechanisms, monitoring mechanisms and evaluation plan; take stock and provide key learning and inputs to managers regarding the operationalization of the SSC strategy and implementation of SSC interventions at UNFPA; inform the next strategic plan in relation to SSC; and identify SSC approaches at other United Nations organizations that could be adjusted and applied to UNFPA.

The key users of the formative evaluation include the UNFPA Inter-Country Cooperation Office (ICCO), senior management at UNFPA, other UNFPA business units at the global, regional and country levels, the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC), UNFPA partner countries, and other stakeholders in the area of SSC.

## SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION AT UNFPA

UNFPA engagement in SSC aims to support the achievement of the goals of the International Conference on Population and Development as well as the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda. Although UNFPA has considerable experience in SSC initiatives, UNFPA deepened its institutional commitment to SSC with the approval of the UNFPA Corporate Strategy on South-South Cooperation, the introduction of SSC as a stand-alone cross-cutting mode of engagement in the UNFPA Strategic Plan (2018-2021) and the establishment of the Inter-Country Cooperation Office. SSC initiatives are implemented at all levels of the organization throughout all thematic areas of support.

## APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was formative and utilization-focused, intended to inform decisions on SSC strategies and processes at UNFPA and to provide inputs for the next UNFPA strategic plan. It was formative, as it was undertaken at the initial stages of the implementation of the UNFPA South-South Cooperation Strategy and the UNFPA Strategic Plan (2018-2021), where SSC features as a cross-cutting mode of engagement. The evaluation was also transparent, inclusive, and conducted in a participatory manner. The evaluation had an important organizational learning component and aimed to ensure a high degree of engagement and intense consultation and interaction with stakeholders throughout. The evaluation utilized mixed methods and drew on quantitative and qualitative data for data collection and analysis. The evaluation was also gender and human-rights responsive.

The scope of the evaluation included three dimensions. Geographically, it focused on SSC implementation across country, regional, and corporate levels, as well as connections among these levels. Thematically, it covered the conceptual foundations and the implementation of the UNFPA approach to SSC, as well the connections between these two aspects. Temporally, it focused on the years 2017-2020. In order to obtain a better understanding of UNFPA support to SSC, particular initiatives that predate the 2017 strategy were also analysed to provide an in-depth understanding of SSC practice within UNFPA.

The evaluation was framed around three areas of inquiry: (1) conceptual framing of SSC at UNFPA (principle-focused); (2) results to date of SSC initiatives (mandate-focused); and (3) SSC as a modality for UNFPA programming (modality-focused).

The evaluation applied the following methods to collect primary and secondary evidence: ten regional and country-level case studies and a humanitarian case study; global-level key informant interviews; documentary review and an online survey administered to all UNFPA staff. Additionally, a comparative study of SSC within eight United Nations agencies was conducted to inform analysis and recommendations on the way forward for SSC within UNFPA. It encompassed three broad dimensions: institutional frameworks for SSC, implementation and assessment of SSC.

## CONCLUSIONS

### **1. UNFPA has made progress with institutionalizing SSC in recent years**

At the global level, UNFPA has taken fundamental steps to raise the profile of and its capacity for SSC. This includes introducing SSC as a fifth mode of engagement in the UNFPA Strategic Plan (2018-2021), developing an organizational strategy on SSC, and establishing a dedicated unit (ICCO), to implement the strategy. However, there are further opportunities for UNFPA to ensure that SSC is a key strategic modality that is well understood and effectively utilized at UNFPA. The SSC strategy and related guidance would benefit from a more practical application of SSC principles and specific concrete guidance to better contextualize SSC interventions at the country and regional levels. This includes clarification on how SSC can be applied at UNFPA across all its modes of engagement, its thematic areas of intervention and within the framework of its business model.

### **2. There is a very diverse understanding and application of SSC across UNFPA**

While there is considerable familiarity with SSC concepts and principles among UNFPA staff, the understanding and implementation of SSC interventions is varied across regional and country offices. There is a lack of specific guidance to adapt SSC to the diverse operational contexts in which UNFPA works, leading to varied approaches to the design, implementation and follow-up of SSC initiatives. This has further implications for the internal coordination of SSC at UNFPA and its processes of monitoring and evaluating SSC interventions, as well as for the financial and human resources required to successfully undertake SSC initiatives.

### **3. Mechanisms are in place to coordinate SSC initiatives, both internal and external to UNFPA, but there are opportunities to strengthen these further**

UNFPA has established a dedicated unit at the global level and ad-hoc focal point structures at the regional and country levels to better facilitate SSC across and between regions. However, such coordination at the regional and country levels is limited where SSC has been largely driven by the initiative of individual staff, rather than systematically through these institutional mechanisms. Further, there is a limited collaboration between UNFPA thematic areas and other divisions in SSC design and implementation. Further still, a clear understanding and concrete guidance on how to coordinate with external partners on SSC initiatives was found to be lacking.

### **4. Efforts to increase staff capacity and mainstream SSC into the work of UNFPA have advanced, but can be broadened in both the quantity and the type of capacity-development opportunities**

There are some capacity-development tools available to UNFPA staff to build their understanding and skills for facilitating SSC. While the evaluation found these tools were clear and useful to UNFPA staff, they could provide more in-depth and practical guidance on how to implement SSC at the regional and country level, across different thematic areas of UNFPA work, in varied contexts, and within the framework of its business model. In particular, there is a need for strengthened capacity-building in the monitoring and evaluation of SSC experience. This has implications not just for accurately and systematically capturing SSC results, but also for the ability of staff to harness the knowledge from SSC interventions.

### **5. Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and population dynamics are strongly reflected within SSC, and there are additional opportunities for UNFPA to leverage SSC towards development outcomes**

UNFPA has accomplished several results in the areas of SRHR and population dynamics, and SSC on ageing initiatives is seen as a promising area for the future, especially since it is becoming a pressing issue across all regions. Gender equality, however, is an area less addressed by SSC initiatives, while SSC in adolescents and youth, and humanitarian programming remain more emerging and ad-hoc. With this in mind, there is a strong evidence base to continue SRHR and population dynamics SSC programming as well as opportunities for growth of SSC initiatives for adolescents and youth, gender equality and humanitarian programming.

### **6. There are processes and mechanisms in place to manage and facilitate SSC initiatives, but these can be further developed and systematized**

Specifically, the follow-up (tracking results and reporting) to SSC exchanges at the country level is lacking. Past efforts to identify and showcase good practice (for example, the UNFPA South-South Cooperation Good Practice Competition) have proven a valuable exercise. Monitoring and evaluation of UNFPA-supported SSC initiatives is limited and inconsistent, posing a challenge to enhancing SSC effectiveness. Taken together, the strengthening of such processes and mechanisms can lead to a more accurate demonstration of programmatic impacts of SSC, improved use of SSC results, increased visibility and sharing of the UNFPA SSC experience, and an improved availability of and accessibility to evidence-based learning on the UNFPA SSC experience.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Clarify the conceptualization of SSC and further integrate SSC into the strategic frameworks and thematic areas of UNFPA

This will ensure that SSC is effectively and systematically utilized by UNFPA as a key programming strategy to further support ICPD and the 2030 Agenda. This includes providing a clear definition of SSC at UNFPA, the role of UNFPA in SSC, and the potential application of SSC at UNFPA across all modes of engagement, its core mandate areas and within the framework of its business model. This would require the development of a theory of change. SSC should be further integrated into the strategic frameworks of UNFPA, supported with budgetary resources, to ensure that SSC is reflected as an integral way of working to contribute to the three transformative results of UNFPA. Complementing this, UNFPA should clarify the potential opportunities of SSC in all of its thematic areas of intervention, especially deepening the focus in the areas of youth and humanitarian programming and within the new COVID-19 context.

#### Operational requirements

- Review the existing SSC strategy and guidance documents and provide clarifications where needed (for example, the role of UNFPA, typology of interventions, implementation of SSC across different modes of engagement, monitoring and evaluation of results, etc.)
- Develop an overarching theory of change for SSC that could be adapted to different contexts and that clearly connects SSC with international agendas
- Integrate SSC as a key programming strategy into the new UNFPA Strategic Plan (2022-2025), and ensure SSC as a cross-cutting mode of engagement, including the specification of SSC indicators in its results framework and dedicated financial resources in the integrated budget
- Mainstream SSC into other UNFPA strategic frameworks, such as, but not limited to: UNFPA global and regional action plans and budgets, middle-income countries' strategy, etc.
- Include clear and specific guidance on leveraging SSC in all thematic and sector-wide programming strategies.

### 2. Enhance SSC implementation at the regional and country level

UNFPA should clarify the role of the regional office as it is uniquely positioned to facilitate SSC interventions both within and among regions. At the country level, UNFPA should integrate SSC as a core component of country programme planning and implementation, supported by a dedicated budget for SSC. Further, in collaboration with headquarters, regional offices and country offices, UNFPA should further seek to support the establishment of centres of excellence, leveraging these institutions as a knowledge hub to foster exchange and facilitate SSC in a more effective and self-sustaining way. Finally, UNFPA should invest in continuing to build strategic partnerships with other development actors at the regional and country level, including regional bodies (for example, African Union) as well as non-traditional partners at the regional and country levels (for example, ministries responsible for SSC at country level, subnational entities, other non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academia, and the private sector).

#### Operational requirements

- Clarify roles and responsibilities of headquarters, regional offices and country offices in the coordination and facilitation of SSC initiatives
- Integrate SSC into the terms of reference of regional offices and job descriptions of targeted regional office staff
- Allocate dedicated budget for SSC in country and regional programme documents
- Map opportunities for supporting the establishment of SSC centres of excellence in each region, and provide technical and financial support to national agencies that have an interest in and capacity to host SSC centres of excellence
- Identify, establish and strengthen partnerships with government agencies and other partners at country level and regional bodies responsible for SSC.

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Level of importance  
**HIGH**

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Budgetary implications  
**LOW**

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Time frame  
**2021**

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Units responsible  
Policy and Strategy Division, Technical Division, Humanitarian Office, Division of Management Services and regional offices

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Level of importance  
**MEDIUM**

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Budgetary implications  
**HIGH**

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Time frame  
**2021-2023**

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Units responsible  
Regional offices, country offices, with support of Policy and Strategy Division and/or Division for Human Resources as needed

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### 3. Strengthen capacity of staff to effectively facilitate SSC interventions

UNFPA should develop additional in-depth training as well as practical, context-aware guidance and learning events for the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of SSC. Capacity-building for SSC should respond directly to the Inter-Country Cooperation Office, regional and country office needs, and also take into consideration the current capacity of staff across all business units to undertake key activities that improve SSC results. This calls for the development of targeted and more in-depth training, and moreover, the regular scheduling of SSC capacity-building workshops or events to ensure that up-to-date knowledge and opportunities are shared.

#### Operational requirements

- Develop various trainings and learning events to accommodate staff at all levels (for example, basic training on understanding of SSC or higher-level training on how to facilitate SSC across different modes of engagement, how to measure and monitor SSC, etc.), and employ different types and modalities of capacity-building (for example, virtual/online, in-person workshop, peer-to-peer, institutional communication, online communities)
- Integrate SSC awareness-raising and capacity-development activities into annual meetings or events across regions, such as regional planning or leadership meetings
- Gather feedback and track progress on SSC-related learning needs from country and regional offices, and address them by conducting annual reviews
- Increase the capacity of ICCO in targeted activities critical for UNFPA to become a global leader in SSC, including but not limited to: advocacy and communications, systematic analysis of SSC programming activities, etc.

### 4. Improve monitoring and evaluation of SSC interventions, and strengthen efforts in the communication and knowledge management of SSC results

This would enhance organizational learning and accountability. UNFPA should review existing mechanisms to monitor and evaluate SSC interventions in order to be able to regularly and accurately capture results and address current evidence gaps. This should be integrated into the design of the forthcoming Enterprise Resource Planning system. Further, UNFPA should enhance its efforts to communicate SSC results to better demonstrate its programmatic impacts and showcase UNFPA SSC experience to audiences both within and external to the organization. Finally, UNFPA should strengthen its approach to the knowledge management of SSC results in order to improve the availability and access to evidence-based learning on UNFPA-supported SSC interventions and to better facilitate the use of SSC results.

#### Operational requirements

- Establish an improved monitoring and evaluation mechanism for SSC interventions, which can be adapted into the forthcoming Enterprise Resource Planning system
- Provide practical guidance for country and regional offices and thematic divisions to evaluate SSC initiatives either at individual initiative level or as a cluster of initiatives
- Synthesize and showcase validated good practices and lessons learned of UNFPA experience in SSC based on assessments and evaluations managed by country and regional offices
- Develop and utilize knowledge-management platforms and tools both internal and external to the organization to capture and disseminate SSC practices (for example, public-facing platforms, including the UNFPA website, as well as the United Nations system-wide platform on SSC – the South-South Galaxy).

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Level of importance

**HIGH**

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Budgetary implications

**MEDIUM**

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Time frame

**2021-2025**

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Units responsible

Policy and Strategy Division, Division of Human Resources, regional and country offices

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Level of importance

**HIGH**

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Budgetary implications

**MEDIUM**

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Time frame

**2021-2022**

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Units responsible

Policy and Strategy Division, Division of Communication and Strategic Partnerships, Information Technology Solutions Office and Evaluation Office

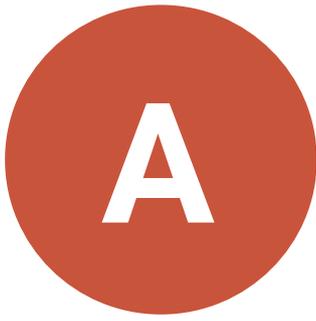
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UNFPA LACRO takes part in the meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Population and Development in Americas.

The evaluation finds that outside of census activities, there is strong support to SSC for population projections and understanding of national statistics.



# INTRODUCTION

This report is organized into four sections.

- **Section A** is an introduction and provides an overview of the global context of South-South cooperation (SSC) and South-South and triangular cooperation (SSTC) within which UNFPA operates, and within which this evaluation has taken place<sup>1</sup>
- **Section B** provides an overview of the methodology utilized, with more detailed information presented in Annex II
- **Section C** presents the findings of the evaluation. The findings are organized under the three areas of inquiry:
  - Principles-focused
  - Mandate-focused
  - Modality-focused
- **Section D** presents recommendations drawn from the conclusions that are based on the analysis of the findings.

## BACKGROUND CONTEXT

### Global context of South-South cooperation and key global milestones

Convened in 1955, the Bandung Asian-African Conference is generally considered the first key milestone in the development of South-South cooperation. The Conference recognized the need for economic cooperation among developing countries grounded in the principles of mutual benefit, respect for sovereignty, non-aggression, and non-interference, to name a few. This recognition of SSC as complementary to, rather than as an alternative to, traditional North-South cooperation continued in several international agreements that followed.

In 1964, the Group of 77 was established, providing a platform for the countries of the South to articulate and promote their collective economic interests and enhance their joint negotiating capacity on all major international economic issues within the United Nations system, and in doing so, promote South-South cooperation for development.<sup>2</sup> Then, in 1978, the

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<sup>1</sup> The difference between SSC and SSTC are explained in the introduction background context and in the Findings section Area of Investigation 1. For consistency, this evaluation report will reference SSC to cover both modalities, and SSTC will be referenced (a) where there is specific information or findings relevant to triangular cooperation and (b) where citing a direct quote that references SSTC, which includes the evaluation questions themselves, as originally articulated as SSTC to be inclusive of SSC and triangular cooperation.

<sup>2</sup> Group of 77 Charter. <https://www.g77.org/doc/>.

Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA)<sup>3</sup> was established, following a United Nations conference on Technical Cooperation Among Developing Countries (TCDC) held in Argentina with 138 participating countries. The BAPA emphasizes national and collective self-reliance among developing countries through the enhancement of their creative capacity to find solutions to shared development problems. The plan also stressed that developing countries should rely on their own efforts towards development, continuing the shift from traditional notions of international cooperation and aid.

In the years that followed, the push for cooperation among developing countries continued at the global stage. In 1980, the United Nations General Assembly convened a high-level meeting to carry out an overall intergovernmental review of TCDC within the United Nations development system, later renamed as the High-level Committee on the Review of Technical Cooperation Among Developing Countries.<sup>4</sup> In the 2000s, the South Summits of the Group of 77<sup>5</sup> held in Havana (2000) and in Doha (2005) also helped to further shape the global framework for South-South cooperation. Further in 2003, the United Nations General Assembly convened a High-Level Committee on South-South cooperation,<sup>6</sup> reaffirming the political importance of SSC globally.

In 2009, the United Nations organized the High-Level Conference on South-South Cooperation in Nairobi. A key product of this conference was the 2009 Nairobi Outcome Document, a United Nations General Assembly resolution, in which South-South cooperation principles were standardized,<sup>7</sup> including principles of demand-driven, equality (also commonly referred to as horizontality),<sup>8</sup> multi-stakeholder participation, national ownership, mutual benefit, and alignment with national development priorities and internationally agreed development goals. The 2009 Document also recognizes capacity development and knowledge sharing as delivery mechanisms for South-South cooperation.

Presently, the growing importance of SSC can be seen in its inclusion in major development agendas, including the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). In 2014, the General Assembly convened a Special Session on the follow-up to the ICPD Programme of Action (PoA) where Member States called for greater international cooperation, including through SSC, in order to realize sustainable development, stressing technical and financial support to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH). They also encouraged the promotion of North-South, South-South, triangular, regional and extra-regional cooperation.<sup>9</sup> The Framework of Actions for the follow-up to the Programme of Action<sup>10</sup> highlights that effective international cooperation, including SSC, “must be grounded in principles of national ownership, system-wide coherence, transparency and accountability”. Similarly, in November 2019, the statement of the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25<sup>11</sup> recognizes that development requires new, innovative and strategic partnerships, which includes leveraging SSC for achievement of the ICPD PoA. This is likewise the case for the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),<sup>12</sup> which call for, among other demands, strengthened global partnerships (SDG 17), including two targets explicitly highlighting South-South cooperation.<sup>13</sup>

Since then, there have been important conferences dedicated to SSC, including the Inter-Ministerial Conference on South-South and Triangular Cooperation in 2018, and the Second High-Level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation in 2019. Notably, the Inter-Ministerial Conference on South-South Cooperation issued the Bali Call for Action, which had a specific focus of SSC in the priority areas of population and development, sexual and reproductive health, gender and

3 The BAPA was endorsed by the UN General Assembly Resolution 33/134 of 19 December 1978.

4 United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/35/202.

5 Available at <https://www.g77.org/summit/summit.htm> and <http://www.g77.org/southsummit2/>, respectively.

6 UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/58/220.

7 UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/64/22.

8 For instance, see Manual of South-South Technical Cooperation Management, ABC/MRE, 2017.

9 ICPD Beyond 2014 High-Level Global Commitments: Implementing the Population and Development Agenda, UNFPA, 2016.

10 Framework of Actions for the follow-up to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development Beyond 2014. Report of the Secretary-General. United Nations A/69/62. 12 February 2014.

11 Nairobi Statement on ICPD25: Accelerating the Promise, 2019.

12 UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/1.

13 Target 17.6: “Enhance North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation on and access to science, technology and innovation and enhance knowledge sharing on mutually agreed terms, including through improved coordination among existing mechanisms, in particular at the United Nations level, and through a global technology facilitation mechanism”. Target 17.9: “Enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all the sustainable development goals, including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation.”

youth. It also stressed the need for the acceleration of international coordination for SSC, capacity development of Southern institutions, the strengthening of multi-stakeholder partnerships (including civil society organizations (CSOs) and faith-based organizations) and support to SSC centres of excellence, together with efforts to gather evidence on what works on SSC through country-led monitoring and evaluation systems. Following this, in 2019, the Second High-Level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation (BAPA+40) was held in Argentina. The BAPA+40 Outcome Document reaffirms the SSC principles presented in Nairobi 2009 and multiple approaches to SSC, as well as its complementary (not competing) nature to North-South cooperation.

While many positive gains have been made around these key milestones in the evolution of SSC, there still exists a multitude of definitions for and approaches to SSC. To date, there is no universal agreement on a conceptual framework for SSC that provides clear, standardized definitions and principles, leaving the understanding and application of SSC open for interpretation.

### **Overview of South-South cooperation within UNFPA**

UNFPA engagement in SSC aims to support the achievement of the goals of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) as well as the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda.<sup>14</sup> Both of these international frameworks recognize SSC as an important development instrument and urge the global community to increase its efforts to scale up and enhance this modality's effectiveness. It also responds to the General Assembly Resolution 71/243 of 21 December 2016 on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR), which reiterates that the United Nations system should mainstream and enhance support to SSC.

Within this framework, UNFPA recognizes<sup>15</sup> that SSC is a unique asset for the exchange of appropriate and validated solutions to address shared challenges among countries related to the ICPD agenda. It also understands SSC can be utilized to build solidarity and strengthen trust, both among the Member States as well as with the United Nations agencies involved. In addition, UNFPA recognizes the potential for SSC to mobilize additional financial and in-kind resources from developing countries.

### **Principles and definitions**

In its corporate documents relating to SSC, including its corporate strategy, UNFPA aligns with the internationally agreed principles and definitions of SSC, in particular noting SSC as a demand-driven, reciprocal and ownership-oriented modality for collaborative initiatives among developing countries. In this regard, UNFPA recognizes that SSC initiatives should be implemented in accordance with national priorities, taking into consideration regional and country contexts, needs and specificities. Moreover, its corporate SSC strategy affirms that developing countries have important experiences and solutions to share with other developing countries in the formulation of policy and programming, and in this view, it promotes SSC as a cost-effective strategy given the adaptability of initiatives from one country to other countries of similar realities. In addition, other South-South cooperation principles, such as multi-stakeholder approaches, absence of conditionality, mutual benefit and equality of partners, are also included in UNFPA SSC documents,<sup>16</sup> to align with established international standards (e.g. BAPA/+40, 2009 Nairobi High Level Meeting on SSC, etc.).

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14 Particularly goals 1 (eradication of poverty); 2 (zero hunger); 3 (good health and well-being); 4 (quality education); 5 (gender equality); 6 (clean water and sanitation); 8 (decent work and economic growth); 10 (reduced inequalities); 11 (sustainable cities and communities); 13 (climate action); 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions); 17 (partnerships for the goals).

15 Corporate Strategy on South-South and Triangular Cooperation, 2017; Guidance Note on South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Programming, 2018; and South-South and Triangular Cooperation: Sexual and Reproductive Health, UNFPA and UNOSSC, 2018.

16 Guidance Note on South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Programming, 2017, p. 06.

### South-South cooperation institutional milestones

Although UNFPA has considerable experience in SSC initiatives, they have in large part been ad-hoc, and at times disconnected from long-term goals or country programmes.<sup>17</sup>

To help guide its SSC efforts, UNFPA drafted its first UNFPA South-South Cooperation Strategy in 2010-2013. The Strategy had five specific objectives: (i) develop a common understanding of SSC to ensure consistent strategies within UNFPA; (ii) promote SSC initiatives that support the ICPD agenda; (iii) expand partnerships; (iv) foster resource mobilization; and (v) strengthen coordination within UNFPA and with other United Nations agencies and global partners around SSC.<sup>18</sup>

#### Box 1. Definitions of South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation

South-South cooperation (SSC) is a process whereby two or more developing countries pursue their individual and/or shared national capacity-development objectives through exchanges of knowledge, skills, resources and technical know-how, and through regional and interregional collective actions, including partnerships involving governments, regional organizations, civil society, academia and the private sector, for their individual and/or mutual benefit within and across regions. South-South cooperation is not a substitute for, but rather a complement to, North-South cooperation. It is a demand-driven, reciprocal and ownership-oriented development model for designing and implementing collaborative initiatives among developing countries. As a programmatic mode of engagement, SSC covers the whole range of activities that lead to a successful collaboration – from demand-generation, matching, knowledge-sharing, programme implementation, up to reporting.

Triangular cooperation (TC) is a subset of SSC and has the SSC structure but with the added involvement of a traditional donor country or donor organization (“North”). The traditional donor may play the role of provider of financial resources, goods or services, even as the participating developing countries are also providing resources to the initiative. If there are two or more developing countries in the arrangement, without a “Northern” country, it is still classified as SSC and not as triangular cooperation.

*Source: Guidance Note on South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Programming, 2018*

Building on this document, the UNFPA Strategic Plan (2014-2017) established SSC as a particular area of upstream work to help address countries’ changing expectations and needs regarding the nature of UNFPA support: from direct support provision to bringing in cutting-edge expertise and engaging in high-level technical debates, which includes building partnerships and engaging in SSC.<sup>19</sup>

In this context, and following the recommendation of a Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) report on SSC<sup>20</sup>, the Executive Office established the “South-South Project” in 2015. Supported by two dedicated staff and a specific budget allocation for project activities, the South-South Project aimed to mainstream SSC across all pillars of UNFPA work.

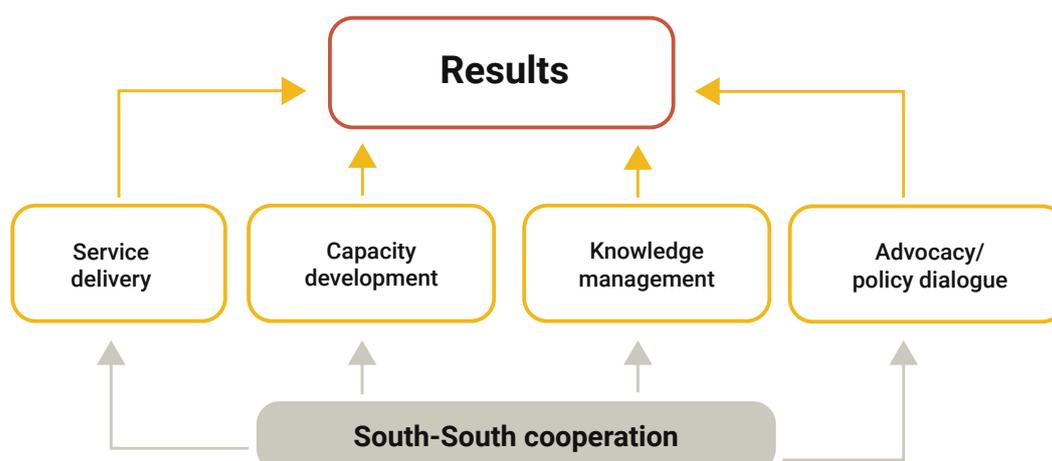
While the Strategic Plan (2014-2017) helped to raise the profile of SSC within the organization, UNFPA developed a new Corporate Strategy on South-South and Triangular Cooperation in 2017, and introduced SSC as a stand-alone, cross-cutting mode of engagement in its subsequent Strategic Plan (2018-2021).

17 UNFPA. Corporate Strategy on South-South and Triangular Cooperation. 2017.

18 UNFPA. South-South Cooperation Strategy 2010-2013. 2010.

19 UNFPA Strategic Plan (2014-2017).

20 JIU/REP/2011/3: Recommendation 3 called “for the establishment of identifiable and dedicated structures, mechanisms and focal points tasked with developing agency-specific corporate policies and support strategies as well as ensuring coordination”.

**FIGURE 1:** South-South cooperation as a cross-cutting programming strategy<sup>21</sup>

Following the new SSC strategy, a new unit, the Inter-Country Cooperation Office (ICCO), to coordinate SSC capacity development, support and reporting at the corporate level, was established in 2017 in the Policy and Strategy Division, with three full-time staff members. A Guidance Note on South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Programming provides broad guidelines on how to operationalize SSC as a new mode of engagement and the different responsibilities of UNFPA units in implementing the SSC strategy.

**FIGURE 2:** UNFPA South-South cooperation key institutional milestones

2010	
2011	UNFPA South-South Cooperation Strategy (2010-2013)
2012	
2013	
2014	20th anniversary edition of ICPD Programme of Action, reinforces importance of SSC
2015	SDGs and SDG 17: SSC viewed as a key modality to accomplish Agenda 2030
	UNFPA SSC project
2016	
2017	UNFPA Strategic Plan (2017-2021): SSC institutionalized as a fifth mode of engagement
	UNFPA Corporate Strategy on South-South Cooperation
2018	UNOSSC / UNFPA publication on South-South Cooperation in Action for SRHR
	Establishment of the ICCO
	UNFPA Guidance Note on South-South Cooperation in Programming
2019	Formative evaluation of the UNFPA approach to South-South and triangular cooperation
2020	

<sup>21</sup> Guidance Note on South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Programming, 2018.

## UNFPA approach to South-South cooperation

In response to the General Assembly resolution 71/243 of the QCPR, UNFPA integrated SSC into its corporate strategic frameworks.<sup>22</sup> Specifically, the Strategic Plan (2018-2021) presents SSC as a way for countries to reorient their engagement based on the UNFPA revised business model, providing for a diversified UNFPA country presence in view of the variety of challenges faced by each country.<sup>23</sup>

While there is no specific guidance on how to apply SSC as a strategic mode of engagement, the Strategic Plan (2018-2021) suggests it can be applied in all of the four colour-coded country quadrants,<sup>24</sup> in various combinations with other modes of engagement, according to country classification.<sup>25</sup> The Strategic Plan also recognizes the interdependence of the modes of engagement,<sup>26</sup> and stresses that there is “no one-size-fits-all approach to development”,<sup>27</sup> but also foresees that countries classified in the pink quadrant, in particular, “will engage in increased South-South and triangular cooperation”.<sup>28</sup> The revised business model of the Strategic Plan also aims at leveraging the interest and capacity of the countries in the global South, particularly of middle-income countries, in lending support to other countries to find solutions,<sup>29</sup> as well as in contributing financial and technical resources needed to achieve ICPD goals and the SDGs.<sup>30</sup> By mainstreaming SSC as an integral part of its business model, UNFPA is attempting to bring SSC “to the next level, from ad hoc, sporadic initiatives to mainstreamed and vital programmatic modality for sustained development”.<sup>31</sup>

### Box 2: Role of UNFPA in South-South and triangular cooperation

- Support countries in the identification of their needs and matching demands with partnerships in areas of common interest
- Facilitate strategic partnerships and finding synergies with SSC champions – governments, funds, international and national NGOs, intergovernmental entities, faith-based organizations
- Provide quality assurance to SSC exchanges and qualifying knowledge so it can be adapted to partners’ contexts, as well as documenting and showcasing SSC experience and lessons learned
- Provide technical and operational support in implementing SSC initiatives
- Monitor progress in the context of country programmes, gathering evidence through research and country-led evaluations, and communicating results to inspire others
- Mobilize resources to enable and scale up SSC exchanges, including by regionally promoting centres of excellence as providers of SSC, and by providing funds and expert personnel
- Support networks and communities of practice, raising awareness and conducting advocacy and policy dialogues.

*Source: Corporate Strategy on South-South and Triangular Cooperation (2017) and Guidance Note on South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Programming (2018)*

22 Strategic Plan (2018-2021), Annex 4, para 30.

23 Strategic Plan (2018-2021), para 45.

24 The Strategic Plan (2018-2021) introduced a large flexibility in deploying the modes of engagement. Under a country classification system, UNFPA grouped its country programmes into four quadrants: red, orange, yellow and pink, based on the needs and the country’s ability to finance its own development. The country classification enables UNFPA to deploy different combinations of its five modes of engagement. UNFPA Strategic Plan (2018-2021), para 45, 47 and 50.

25 “UNFPA will deploy all five modes of engagement for countries in the red quadrant and countries with humanitarian crises, which have the highest needs. For countries in the orange, yellow and pink quadrants, UNFPA will deploy selected modes of engagement, excluding service delivery, that are tailored to meet the specific needs and priorities of those countries.” UNFPA Strategic Plan (2018-2021), para 51.

26 “Modes of engagement are interlinked and may be applied in various combinations to provide tailored solutions to meet national needs.” Strategic Plan (2018-2021), para 51.

27 Strategic Plan (2018-2021), Annex 4, para 7.

28 Strategic Plan (2018-2021), para 54.

29 Strategic Plan (2018-2021), Annex 4, para 31.

30 Guidance Note on South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Programming, 2018.

31 South-South and Triangular Cooperation: Sexual & Reproductive Health, UNFPA and UNOSSC, 2018, pp. 66-67.

In this view, the UNFPA Corporate Strategy on South-South and Triangular Cooperation provides conceptual foundation for its approach to SSC. While it does not have a theory of change, it does include SSC definitions and principles, as well as general guidelines on the facilitation of SSC-related activities. To complement the strategy, a Guidance Note on South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Programming was developed, in which more guidance on the planning, implementation, and reporting of SSC initiatives is provided at a broader level, rather than specific to the different operational contexts in which UNFPA works.

To understand the potential impact and added value of SSC, monitoring and reporting mechanisms were established in the Strategic Plan (2018-2021). This includes a dedicated indicator to track the number of UNFPA offices that use SSC to address countries' priorities (indicator Organizational Effectiveness and Efficiency 1.12).<sup>32</sup> Each country office must annually report on the number of South-South cooperation initiatives the country has received (indicator OEE 1.12a) and provided (indicator OEE 1.12b) as a result of UNFPA support, using the Strategic Information System (SIS)/MyResults system. Additionally, country offices are encouraged to include and report on SSC as an output indicator in the results matrix of country programme documents (CPDs). When SSC initiatives are geared to mobilize resources, they can also be included as an indicator in SIS/My Results. To support these tracking efforts, SSC has been a mandatory activity tag in the Global Programming System (GPS) since 2018. Despite these mechanisms, the Corporate Strategy on South-South Cooperation also recognizes that monitoring and evaluation, together with quantification of SSC expenditures and financial and in-kind resources remain a challenge.<sup>33</sup> Further, it proposes two groups of streamlined indicators: 1) process indicators, which would track the numbers of SSC initiatives promoted or facilitated by UNFPA to support the ICPD agenda and SDG linkages, institutions benefitted/affected by SSC initiatives, individuals trained and technical hours; and 2) impact indicators, which would focus on institutional changes in the country in terms of policy, strategy, organizational skills, knowledge and abilities.

Looking forward, the Corporate Strategy on South-South and Triangular Cooperation envisions UNFPA promoting, supporting and facilitating technology transfers and inter-country exchanges of capacity and knowledge in a more systematic fashion.<sup>34</sup> Accomplishing this would involve additional institutional efforts to produce knowledge on SSC and continuous training of UNFPA staff, as well as improving SSC programme instruments, with the adaptation of procedures, practices and systematized guidance on how to operationalize SSC in the field. Among other measures, the strategy envisages positioning high-capacity national partner institutions as SSC hubs (or centres of excellence) with support from UNFPA offices that have strong experience and capacity in SSC,<sup>35</sup> and proposes developing the capacity of partners and emerging SSC players to engage in SSC. This also implies mobilizing resources – financial and in-kind – from non-traditional donors, regional institutions and multilateral banks such as the New Development Bank of the BRICS,<sup>36</sup> or the private sector.<sup>37</sup>

## EVALUATION PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

The **purpose** of the formative evaluation was to “take stock of initial progress, lessons learned and enabling factors and report on the challenges facing the UNFPA journey in South-South cooperation (SSC) since 2017 as well as to provide evaluative input for the strategic direction of SSC and implementation of the UNFPA South-South Cooperation Strategy within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) and the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)”.<sup>38</sup> The evaluation is the first one conducted on SSC at UNFPA.

32 Strategic Plan (2018-2021), Annex 1 Integrated Results Framework, p. 30. The UNFPA Strategic Plan (2014-2017) already included an established indicator for tracking SSC within UNFPA, which was framed as the percent of field units using South-South cooperation or triangular cooperation to achieve results. UNFPA Strategic Plan (2014-2017), Annex 1 Integrated Results Framework, p.15.

33 Corporate Strategy on South-South and Triangular Cooperation, 2017.

34 Corporate Strategy on South-South and Triangular Cooperation, 2017, p. 11.

35 Corporate Strategy on South-South and Triangular Cooperation, 2017, pp. 13-14.

36 Brazil, Russia India, China and South Africa

37 Strategic Plan (2018-2021), Annex 4, para 60, and Corporate Strategy on South-South and Triangular Cooperation, 2017.

38 Formative Evaluation of UNFPA Approach to South-South and Triangular Cooperation: Terms of Reference. UNFPA, June 2019.

The specific **objectives** of the evaluation are to:

1. Assess the strategic approach of UNFPA to SSC, including the vision for future direction and how this fits into achieving the Strategic Plan and its transformative results
2. Assess the appropriateness of the UNFPA South-South Cooperation Strategy in terms of the conceptual framework, adherence to principles, implementation mechanisms, monitoring mechanisms and evaluation plan
3. Take stock and provide key learning and inputs to managers regarding the operationalization of the UNFPA South-South Cooperation Strategy and implementation of SSC interventions at UNFPA
4. Inform the development of the next strategic plan in relation to SSC
5. Identify SSC approaches at other organizations within the United Nations system that could be adjusted and applied to UNFPA.

The scope of the evaluation had three dimensions:

1. **Geographic:** The evaluation covered implementation at global, regional, and country levels, as well as connections between these levels. The evaluation also focused on SSC approaches at other organizations within the United Nations system that could be of relevance for UNFPA.
2. **Thematic:** The evaluation covered two dimensions: a conceptual one, focusing on the vision, conceptual foundations, and principles; and an implementation dimension, focusing on programming, monitoring, results, capacity, and partnerships, as well as connections between these two dimensions.
3. **Temporal:** The evaluation covered the years 2017-2020 (since the creation of the SSC Unit at UNFPA and the launch of the UNFPA South-South Cooperation Strategy.<sup>39</sup> Particular initiatives that predate the 2017 strategy were also analysed to provide an in-depth understanding of SSC practice within UNFPA.

The primary **intended users** of the evaluation are as follows:

Internal	External
UNFPA Inter-Country Cooperation Office (ICCO)	UNFPA partner countries
UNFPA Policy and Strategy Division (PSD) Technical Division (TD)	United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation
Other UNFPA business units at global, regional, and country levels	Other SSC stakeholders and actors including other United Nations agencies, programmes and funds, and civil society organizations
Other UNFPA business units at global, regional, and country levels	

<sup>39</sup> UNFPA (2017) UNFPA Corporate Strategy on South-South and Triangular Cooperation, and UNFPA (2018) Guidance Note on South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Programming.

## Overview of the evaluation process

The formative evaluation consisted of five phases, each with distinct milestones and deliverables.

**FIGURE 3:** *Evaluation process*

<b>Phase 1: Preparatory</b> June - August 2019	Drafting of the terms of reference
	Recruitment of the evaluation team
	Creation of evaluation reference group
	Creation of document repository
<b>Phase 2: Inception</b> September - October 2019	Desk review of relevant documentation
	Inception mission to UNFPA headquarters in New York, which included: (a) collating materials for document review; (b) initial key informant interviews
	Inception report, which included the evaluation design including approach and methodology: (a) an evaluation matrix along with data collection and analysis methods and tools; (b) a comprehensive stakeholder mapping and analysis for case study selection and interviews; (c) challenges, limitations and mitigation strategies; (d) an evidence database; (e) deliverables and roles and responsibilities of team members
<b>Phase 3: Data collection</b> November 2019 - April 2020	Data-collection process across corporate, regional, and country levels including stakeholder interviews, online survey to all UNFPA staff, in-country visits and desk case studies at all levels, comparative study with external organizations
<b>Phase 4: Analysis and reporting</b> May - August 2020	Findings analysis workshop
	Recommendations workshop with all stakeholders
	Development of evaluation report considering feedback from the different forums
<b>Phase 5: Management response and dissemination</b> October - November 2020	Management response
	Dissemination of the results of the evaluation both internally and externally
	Presentation of evaluation to the UNFPA Executive Board



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UNFPA census observation teams in Mozambique deployed during the 2017 census enumeration period.

The evaluation finds that UNFPA has strong and solid population dynamics in SSC programming, primarily for census activities.



# METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

## EVALUATION APPROACH

The evaluation was formative and utilization-focused, intended to inform decisions on SSC strategies and processes at UNFPA and to provide inputs for the next UNFPA Strategic Plan. It was formative, as it was undertaken at the initial stages of the implementation of the South-South Cooperation Strategy and UNFPA Strategic Plan (2018-2021), where SSC features as a cross-cutting mode of engagement. The evaluation was principles-focused in order to try to respond to one of the key challenges to this evaluation, which is the broad and constantly evolving definition of SSC since its first conceptualization. In addressing this, one of the three main components of this evaluation intends to assess, learn from and improve the conceptualization and framing of SSC initiatives at UNFPA under the framework provided by the SSC principles.<sup>40</sup>

The evaluation was also transparent, inclusive, and conducted in a participatory manner. It had an important organizational learning component and aimed to ensure a high degree of engagement and intense consultation and interaction with stakeholders throughout. The evaluation utilized mixed methods and drew on quantitative and qualitative data for data collection and analysis. It was also gender and human-rights responsive.

### Analytical framework

The evaluation was developed around three areas of inquiry:

- Conceptual framing of SSC at UNFPA (principles-focused)
- Results to date of a sample of SSC initiatives (mandate-focused)
- SSC as a modality for UNFPA programming (modality-focused)

These three areas intend to provide a comprehensive picture of SSC at UNFPA in order to inform decisions, strategy and implementation. Within these three areas, the evaluation criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) are addressed, together with an additional criterion (coordination). The evaluation matrix (Figure 3 in Annex II) provides further detail.

The exercise had two components: 1) evaluation of the UNFPA approach to and implementation of SSC and 2) a comparative study of the approach of eight United Nations agencies to SSC.

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<sup>40</sup> <https://www.unsouthsouth.org/about/about-SSTC/#:~:text=The%20South%2DSouth%20cooperation%20agenda,domestic%20affairs%20and%20mutual%20benefit>

## EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

### Sampling methods and selection of informants

The main sampling method was purposive sampling, a specific type of qualitative and non-probability sampling method selected in response to the formative purpose of the evaluation. The key question in sampling was to find balance among the considerable amount of SSC initiatives, the need to gather relevant and accurate data in a way that illustrates a wide range of circumstances, experiences and viewpoints, and the time available to conduct the evaluation exercise.

An in-depth initial stakeholder mapping and analysis was conducted at the beginning of the design phase and revised throughout data collection. This stakeholder mapping comprised diverse primary groups such as UNFPA, other United Nations agencies, programmes and funds, global South and North governments, civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations and academia. Further information can be found in Annex II.

The sampling process also included the development of two datasets on UNFPA SSTC initiatives and activities and application of sampling criteria for country selection of case studies and the comparative study. Triangulation between different data sources and stakeholder consultations during the inception phase (inception mission and other preliminary interviews) and initial data-collection phase of the evaluation complemented the sampling process. Figure 4 below summarizes the sampling methods and tools used in this evaluation. Full details on sampling are presented in Annex II of this report.

**FIGURE 4:** Summary of sampling methods and tools

Data-collection method	Sampling method and tools
Case studies	Purposive sampling based on selected sampling criteria and two datasets, complemented with snowball sampling and convenience sampling – taking into consideration logistical and security issues - as well as triangulation between different data sources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dataset 1: Mapping of SSTC initiatives (sample frame)</li> <li>• Dataset 2: Atlas/GPS Dataset 2014-2019 (used to narrow the sample frame)</li> </ul>
Global online survey	No sampling. The global online survey was sent to all UNFPA staff
Comparative study	Purposive sampling based on selected sampling criteria (agencies with the most initiatives systematized in both editions of UNOSSC compilations of SSTC good practices)
Key informant interviews	Snowball sampling complementing previous sampling selections for the data-collection methods above.

Given the learning purpose of the evaluation, the sampling criteria for the case studies intends to acknowledge and capture diverse approaches to SSC across experiences, regions, thematic areas, partners, contexts, etc. These criteria are:

- Experience and number of initiatives in SSC as a mode of engagement
- Range of thematic areas across UNFPA key areas of work
- Regional distribution and geographic reach
- Humanitarian/development context
- Participation of OECD DAC and other United Nations partners
- Levels of development in areas of UNFPA mandate according to the UNFPA country quadrant classification<sup>41</sup>
- Logistical issues and security concerns.

<sup>41</sup> The terms ‘country quadrant’ and ‘colour quadrant’ correspond to a country classification system that is based on a country’s need and ability to finance and on UNFPA modes of engagement by setting. The system classifies countries into red, yellow, orange and pink quadrants.

Sampling for the comparative study of SSC in the United Nations system followed its own process, as presented in more detail in Annex II.

**Data collection**

The evaluation applied the following methods to collect primary and secondary evidence:

- 14 regional- and country-level field and desk-based case studies, which consisted of document review and key informant interviews
- A humanitarian case study, which included documentary review and global-level key informant interviews
- Global-level key informant interviews
- An online survey administered globally to all UNFPA staff, intended to supplement the in-depth case studies.
- A comparative study of SSC within eight United Nations agencies, which encompassed three broad dimensions: institutional framework for SSC, implementation of SSC and assessment of SSC to inform analysis and recommendations on the way forward for SSC within UNFPA.

**FIGURE 5:** Case studies included within the evaluation

<b>Regional-level</b>	Asia Pacific Regional Office (APRO)
	East and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO)
	Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office (LACRO)
	West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO)
<b>Country-level</b>	Bangladesh
	Bosnia and Herzegovina
	Brazil
	Egypt
	Ghana
	Indonesia
	Mexico
	Mozambique
	Senegal
	South Africa
<b>Other</b>	Comparative analysis
	Humanitarian case study
	Global interviews
	UNFPA survey

FIGURE 6: Overview of data sources



The evaluation interviewed 239 key informants; 136 were women and 103 were men. Out of these key informants, 122 were internal to UNFPA and the others external, across academia, donors, governments, implementing partners, and other United Nations agencies. A total of 217 documents were reviewed. Furthermore, 372 UNFPA staff responded to the survey. Annexes III and IV present a list of key informants and a bibliography, respectively.

**Methods for data analysis**

Throughout the data analysis process, the evaluation team ensured validity and reliability through triangulation, the use of standardized data-collection tools, and compliance with OECD DAC and United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) standards.

The following specific analytical approaches were used:

- **Descriptive analysis** helped to understand the contexts within which UNFPA SSC initiatives are being implemented
- **Content analysis** constituted the core of the qualitative analysis. The evaluation team analysed and coded documents, interview transcripts, and observations from the field to identify common trends, themes, and patterns for each of the key evaluation questions and criteria
- **Comparative analysis** examined findings across different initiatives, countries, themes, or other criteria. It was also used to identify good practice, innovative approaches and lessons learned.

All evidence – primary and secondary – was collated in case-study specific evidence databases, which were then merged to form a comprehensive master database of all evaluation evidence. Data from different sources and methods was triangulated. Preliminary findings, developed through an iterative team process, were then verified against the evidence database to ensure a robustness of process and to guarantee that the evaluation findings are fully evidence-based. This process allows the strength of evidence for each finding to be quantifiable.

**Cross-cutting issues and ethical considerations**

**Gender, human rights and youth aspects** are integrated into the evaluation in both content and process. More information on this can be found in Annex II.

**Ethical aspects** considered in the design and implementation of this evaluation are in line with the United Nations Evaluation Group Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation and the UNEG Code of Conduct for Evaluations in the United Nations system.<sup>42</sup>

**Confidentiality** is guaranteed to all informants as all inputs are not attributed, and responses to the survey have only been used in aggregate form. This evaluation report does not include references to individual informants.

**MAIN LIMITATIONS AND MITIGATION MEASURES**

**FIGURE 7:** *Limitations and mitigation measures*

Limitations	Mitigation measures
<p><b>Evolving definition of SSC</b></p> <p>This makes it difficult to definitively frame and define SSC in a commonly understood and consistent manner</p>	<p>The evaluation was a participatory, consultative and transparent process to engage a wide range of stakeholders to better understand and define SSC at UNFPA from various perspectives. In addition to this, a comparative study of a diverse set of agencies within the United Nations system is included, providing insights on their conceptualization, interpretation and approach to SSC</p>
<p><b>Absence of an explicit results framework</b></p> <p>As a process, traditional results frameworks fundamentally do not capture the often intangible results of SSC initiatives</p>	<p>The evaluation utilized broad areas of investigation (principles-focused, mandate-focused and modality-focused) to better understand how SSC contributes to improving results for UNFPA programming</p>
<p><b>Data availability, quality, and reliability challenges</b></p> <p>Due to the diverse understanding of what constitutes SSC within UNFPA, there is inconsistent tagging of SSC initiatives by UNFPA country offices and the absence of a definitive list of SSC initiatives within UNFPA</p>	<p>The evaluation collected data on SSC initiatives from various sources and through various methods to triangulate and corroborate the data available in Atlas<sup>43</sup> and the universe of SSC initiatives. Purposeful sampling was employed (See Annex II for further information)</p>
<p><b>Outbreak of the COVID-19 global pandemic</b></p>	<p>With regard to case studies not undertaken before COVID-19, these were reframed as desk-based case studies and included document review and stakeholder interviews. All these adaptations are detailed In Section 3.2 of Annex II. The findings workshop, and the recommendations workshop were transformed into a series of online meetings and online workshops</p>

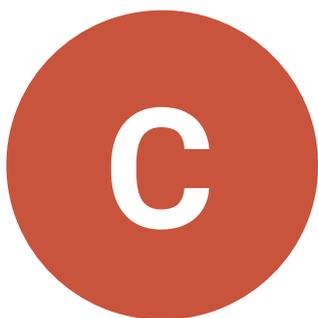
42 <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/100>; <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/102>

43 Atlas is a resource and planning tool used at UNFPA.



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The evaluation finds UNFPA both recognizes and promotes SRHR SSC initiatives, which are particularly effective where there are commonalities of culture.



# FINDINGS

## AREA OF INVESTIGATION 1

Principle-focused: Conceptual framing of South-South and triangular cooperation at UNFPA

**EQ1: To what extent does the UNFPA SSTC strategy provide an appropriate conceptual framework for UNFPA support to SSTC?<sup>44</sup>**

### Findings

1. The recent UNFPA initiatives to institutionalize SSC within UNFPA, including the introduction of SSC as a fifth mode of engagement in the Strategic Plan (2018-2021); the establishment of the ICCO; and the South-South Cooperation Strategy and Guidance Note, have yielded positive results in terms of awareness of SSC and recognition of it as an organizational priority.
2. Corporate SSC documentation aligns with global SSC principles but is not specific enough in the conceptual framing of SSC.
3. While a high number of UNFPA staff report familiarity with the concept and principles of SSC, there is a very diverse understanding of SSC within UNFPA.
4. Corporate SSC documentation provides practical guidance to countries across programme cycle management components – design, implementation, monitoring, reporting, learning and evaluation.
5. In spite of recent advancements at headquarters-level, coordination mechanisms are deemed limited and inconsistent, and there is limited clarity on strategic approach to and purpose of SSC within UNFPA.

**Finding 1. The recent UNFPA initiatives to institutionalize SSC within UNFPA, including: the introduction of SSC as a fifth mode of engagement in the Strategic Plan (2018-2021); the recent establishment of the ICCO; and the South-South Cooperation Strategy and Guidance Note, have yielded positive results in terms of awareness of SSC and recognition of it as an organizational priority. Further actions are required to fully embed SSC at UNFPA.**

The initiatives to institutionalize SSC have raised the profile of SSC within UNFPA and are considered a recognition of SSC as an organizational priority. Combined, these initiatives have yielded positive results in terms of awareness of SSC, but there is still further work necessary for a widespread, clearly understood, and well-positioned SSC framing within UNFPA.

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<sup>44</sup> A1.1 UNFPA conceptualization of SSTC at global, regional, and country levels align with SSTC principles of being demand-driven; respect for national sovereignty; non-conditionality; horizontality and mutual benefit; solidarity. A1.2 UNFPA SSTC strategy provides clear guidance for the design, implementation, monitoring, reporting, and evaluation of UNFPA SSC initiatives. A1.3 UNFPA SSTC strategy establishes mechanisms/structures for the coordination of SSC initiatives. A1.4 UNFPA SSTC strategy is interpreted in a consistent manner across UNFPA offices in regions and countries.

The inclusion of SSC as a mode of engagement in the Strategic Plan (2018-2021) and the establishment of the ICCO within the Policy and Strategy Division, in 2017, have raised the SSC profile within the organization and are perceived as a strong step in the institutionalization of SSC within UNFPA.<sup>45</sup>

The survey conducted among UNFPA staff under the scope of this evaluation shows that nearly 80 per cent of respondents affirmed that they are familiar with the concept and added-value of SSC<sup>46</sup>, and 60 per cent of respondents are familiar with the UNFPA 2017 South-South and Triangular Cooperation Strategy and accompanying guidance. Considering the profile of survey respondents, which consisted mostly of staff not directly engaged with SSTC, those numbers show a high level of awareness of SSTC among staff. Additionally, SSC is expected to be included in resource mobilization and partnership plans, as an annex to every country programme document<sup>47</sup>, and the number of country programme documents that incorporated SSC increased from 64 in 2018 to 73 in 2019, demonstrating a promising trend regarding the uptake of SSC as a programming modality.<sup>48</sup>

ICCO participation, both in global events and at UNFPA regional planning meetings, was also highlighted as a way to raise awareness of SSC in the organization. However, this interaction was reported to be limited by the fact that only senior-level country office staff are usually exposed to SSC in these meetings.<sup>49</sup>

In the many countries that have been working with SSC strategies (some of them for more than a decade), the source of their high awareness of SSC is their long-standing experience in such initiatives. At country level, interviewees from countries that have historically been more actively engaged in SSC reported that the country's SSC practices and narratives predated and, to a certain extent, informed the UNFPA strategy.<sup>50</sup> In Brazil, for example, the SSC partnership with UNFPA dates back to 2002, with SSC being present in the country programme document since as early as its 2002-2006<sup>51</sup> issue. Similarly, UNFPA has been supporting Indonesia SSC in family planning since the 90s.<sup>52</sup> The perception from field interviews in these countries is that this wealth of experience, including that of centres of excellence, would have a lot to contribute to further raising awareness of SSC as a mode of engagement in other country offices and would embed SSC as a strategic choice within UNFPA overall. Nevertheless, the UNFPA South-South Cooperation Strategy is deemed important, since it provides a good framework to strengthen the already existing work in countries that are more familiarized with SSC and encourages other countries to consider SSC as an implementation strategy.<sup>53</sup>

As it will be further discussed in the following findings, a number of respondents highlighted that the corporate guidelines provided by both the UNFPA South-South Cooperation Strategy and the Guidance Note on South-South Cooperation in Programming can be somewhat disconnected from needs on the ground. For example, case studies reveal that both UNFPA staff and partners consider that while SSC is highly regarded as a promising way to mobilize domestic financing and optimize resources, the organizational strategy is seen as difficult to contextualize and implement at country level. For instance, there is still uncertainty in terms of identifying or branding existing or new initiatives as SSC, and in many cases UNFPA staff do not use guidance from the documents in their daily activities. In other cases, they were not the primary source of guidance when submitting proposals to assistance funds; rather, a close dialogue and coordination between country offices was considered key in accessing funds.<sup>54</sup>

45 Documentary review, interviews.

46 This analysis refers to answers given to Question 14 of the survey, and it includes both "agree" and "strongly agree" alternatives that were chosen to each proposed affirmation.

47 UNFPA key informant.

48 UNFPA (2020) Integrated mid-term review and progress report on the UNFPA Strategic Plan (2018-2021) - Annex 6.

49 Case studies: interviews and document review.

50 Ibid.

51 UNFPA Country Programme Document for Brazil 2002-2006. Available at [https://brazil.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/country\\_programme20022006\\_0.pdf](https://brazil.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/country_programme20022006_0.pdf).

52 SSC was then framed as Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (TCDC). Case studies: interview and document review.

53 Case studies: interview and document review.

54 Documentary review, interviews, survey.

Overall, the strategy has been considered an important institutional milestone and a first step in the development of more hands-on programming tools. In the same note, informants in case-study countries reported that current lessons learned from SSC implementation at country level are expected to contribute to future corporate SSC guidance, in a bottom-up flow of information.<sup>55</sup>

**Finding 2. Corporate SSC documentation aligns with global SSC principles but is not specific enough in the conceptual framing of SSC.**

UNFPA corporate documentation aligns with most global SSC principles enshrined in multilateral agreements.<sup>56</sup> Principles of respect for national sovereignty, ownership, demand-driven, equality, non-conditionality, mutual benefits and complementarity to North-South cooperation are also contemplated by the South-South Corporate Strategy and the Guidance Note – although the latter does not frame them as principles but as “comparative advantages”.<sup>57</sup> Principles of solidarity and horizontality are not sufficiently highlighted in the UNFPA SSC corporate documentations even though they were widely referred to by multiple interviewees.<sup>58</sup> However, even the principles highlighted within UNFPA corporate documentation are not thoroughly explained or exemplified in order to guide SSC programming and implementation, thus leading to diverse interpretations across SSC programming.<sup>59</sup>

**Box 3. Conceptual framework: triangular cooperation**

The United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) defines “triangular cooperation” as the “collaboration in which traditional donor countries and multilateral organizations facilitate South-South initiatives through the provision of funding, training, and management and technological systems as well as other forms of support”. In this sense, whenever UNFPA or another international organization is involved in a South-South cooperation arrangement, it would technically become a triangular arrangement. The outcome document of the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, the BAPA+40, recognizes that:

“(…) triangular cooperation complements and adds value to South-South cooperation by enabling requesting developing countries to source and access more, and a broader range of, resources, expertise and capacities, that they identify as needed in order to achieve their national development goals and internationally agreed sustainable development goals. (...) It is a modality that builds partnerships and trust, between all partners, and that combines diverse resources and capacities, under the ownership of the requesting developing country.”

<https://www.un.org/pga/73/wp-content/uploads/sites/53/2019/03/6March-Outcome-document-SSCooperation-6-March-2019.pdf>

It is worth noticing that the role played by developed countries or by international organizations in triangular arrangements is not a leading one, it is rather to complement and facilitate SSC. In this sense, although United Nations entities have different approaches and terminologies (UNICEF and UNIDO for instance have adopted their own concepts of South-South and horizontal cooperation and South-South and triangular industrial cooperation respectively), strictly speaking they would all qualify under the concept of triangular cooperation.

As it is the case with SSC, the term “triangular” has also been the subject of criticism and review: the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC), for instance, has replaced it with “trilateral” cooperation, under the justification that it better reflects the horizontal and equal relationship between parties. The ABC also classifies trilateral arrangements that include both an international organization and a developed country as “trilateral+1”. The BAPA+40 outcome document recognizes the need to better understand triangular cooperation and to provide more evidence and rigorous information on its scale, scope and impact. In this sense, the Global Partnership Initiative on Effective Triangular Cooperation, created in 2016 within the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, has created Voluntary Guidelines for Effective Triangular Cooperation, aiming at identifying and compiling case studies on various funding mechanisms that have proven effective for the realization of triangular cooperation projects.

55 Case studies.

56 Namely the General Assembly resolution 64/222, which adopted the 2009 Nairobi Outcome Document on South-South Cooperation (2009) and the Outcome Document of the High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, the BAPA+40 (2019).

57 Guidance Note on South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Programming. UNFPA, 2018, page 7.

58 Case studies: interviews and document review.

59 Documentary review, interviews.

Case studies reveal that there is a wide recognition that UNFPA plays a broker role and that SSC initiatives are driven by countries, which contributes to increase the ownership of the initiatives as well as the political commitment towards them. The demand-driven, horizontality and mutual benefit principles were frequently referred to as important enablers of the effectiveness of SSC initiatives. However, the evaluation also assessed that such understanding is not consistent across UNFPA regional and country offices. Such different understandings have several implications in terms of programming, implementing and reporting SSSC. Particularly, respondents highlighted that the UNFPA approach to SSSC could benefit from an enhanced conceptual framing of the principles of demand-driven, equality/horizontality and mutual-benefit.<sup>60</sup>

In the case of the principle of horizontality, although, traditionally, the vocabulary of SSC intends to escape the traditional donor-recipient relationship, this still has not been consistently reflected in UNFPA SSC documentation and initiatives. For instance, the Guidance Note is structured around the roles of recipients and provider countries of SSC, while many countries engaged in SSC reported they would rather use terms such as “partner countries” in an effort to avoid a vertical relationship between countries. Interviewed staff have referred to a lack of horizontality between cooperating countries, when one is perceived as “donor”, or as the one that would share its successful experience. Moreover, respondents from country offices and from national partner institutions reported that UNFPA could better clarify the principle of horizontality in SSC, particularly with upper middle-income countries, and thus play an important role in stressing SSC as a two-way process.<sup>61</sup>

The above-mentioned limitation of the guidance and therefore understanding of the horizontality principle is also relevant to the principle of “mutual benefit”, with its underlying assumption that all cooperating countries learn from each other in SSC arrangements. While many national partners mentioned that they engage in SSC also expecting mutual benefits and mutual learning, there is no corporate guidance on how to reinforce this principle and operationalize such mutual learning processes. It is worth mentioning that, within UNFPA, there are some promising practices on how to reinforce mutual benefits that can inform a more detailed approach on how to operationalize SSC principles. In Thailand, for instance, mutual benefits at the technical level were achieved, since Thai institutions engaged in midwifery training benefitted from the SSC initiative in terms of the alignment of the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) and World Health Organization (WHO) requirements for midwifery education (a more detailed analysis on this initiative can be found in Finding 6).<sup>62</sup>

**Finding 3. While a high number of UNFPA staff reports familiarity with the concept and principles of SSC, there is actually a very diverse understanding of SSC within UNFPA.**

As evidenced both by the survey results, in which nearly 80 per cent of respondents declared to be familiar with the concept of SSC, and by country studies and interviews, there is a considerable level of familiarity with the concept of SSC and its principles among UNFPA staff. Nonetheless, when it comes to actually defining and exemplifying SSC, 75 per cent of survey respondents reported that they did not know how to do it. Out of the 25 per cent who did affirm they could define SSC, there were a wide variety of answers, from study visits to intra-UNFPA consultations and knowledge-sharing. This was further demonstrated by UNFPA staff interviewed, who were hesitant in classifying specific activities as SSC.<sup>63</sup>

The evaluation assessed different understandings of SSC that can be generally categorized as follows:

1. **SSC as partnership:** Informants from different countries locate SSC under the more general term of “partnership”. This more loosely defined understanding of SSC accounts for different experiences at country and regional levels, since SSC is often about mobilizing in-kind resources and partnering with countries that are not necessarily familiarized with each other. While it is often viewed as a way to primarily approach new and non-traditional donors, it has also been perceived as a revamping of historic relationships.
2. **SSC as capacity-building:** The perception of SSC mainly as capacity-building among governmental institutions stems from UNFPA strategy that emphasizes government-to-government relations, but also from the practice, as it is a more familiar modality of SSC. Activities related to policy dialogue, for example, were less likely to be identified as SSC.

60 Case studies.

61 Documentary review and case studies.

62 Documentary review, interviews.

63 UNFPA staff interviews, survey.

3. **SSC as intra-UNFPA coordination:** The data-collection process resulted in several mentions of intra-UNFPA initiatives as SSC, including dialogues and consultations among country offices regarding a specific initiative, notably, before it is shared with government partners. While initiatives that are considered preparatory for SSC can be reported as such, it is not clear how to separate them from activities that are strictly intra-UNFPA. Nonetheless, the idea of fostering country office-to-country office coordination to exchange practices and optimize resources resonates with the broader understanding of SSC, and it can translate into closer communication and cost-sharing solutions among neighbouring countries.

In regard to the principle of horizontality, as mentioned previously, the lack of guidance on how to approach this principle in practice has resulted in varied uptake of the term. UNFPA staff interviewed within case studies reported two broad – and different – interpretations:

- The idea that SSC brings together countries with a similar culture and common background: including not only SSC between countries that share the same language or geographic region, but also countries from different cultural backgrounds that share the same development challenges. As it will be shown in Area of Investigation 2, examples of SSC initiatives involving countries from different regions, with different cultures and languages, abound within UNFPA.
- An equal relationship between cooperating countries, with mutual benefits and shared processes of decision-making and accountability. Such interpretation was referred by several respondents in direct contrast to traditional cooperation.

Finally, and to a lesser extent, the evaluation found a relative resistance to the term “South-South cooperation” among interviewed staff from different countries and regions. Respondents reported that the SSC terminology might exacerbate a North-South divide, and that it resonates differently across countries and regions.<sup>64</sup>

Overall, the evaluation uncovered diverse understandings of SSC across UNFPA, which can represent an opportunity to develop a flexible conceptual framework that responds to the specific needs and expectations of UNFPA, allowing room for regional and context framing and adaptation (for further analysis of this, see Finding 5).

**Finding 4. Corporate SSC documentation provides practical guidance to countries across programme cycle management – design, implementation, monitoring, reporting, learning and evaluation.**

A range of 46 per cent to 59 per cent of survey respondents agreed that SSC guidance was clear on different elements of the programme cycle: the lowest response was for guidance on evaluation, at 46 per cent, and the highest was for guidance on programme design at 59 per cent. UNFPA staff from country and regional offices highlighted the need for the corporate strategy to be more operational, with practical guidelines on how to implement it at regional and country level and with a clear narrative on the added-value of SSC as an effective mode of engagement, so as to inform decision-making at the programmatic level.

Existing guidance is perceived as not entirely responsive to experiences in the field or connected to country-level practice, with UNFPA respondents reporting not feeling completely skilled to promote SSC as a mode of engagement. Some interviewees found the online course on SSTC interesting but too theoretical without providing details on concrete instruments to work with SSC, identifying and giving visibility to the value added by it.<sup>65</sup> The case studies conducted reveal that the strategy has been regarded as limited in the following aspects:

- Considering the diverse modalities of SSC within UNFPA
- Providing concrete guidance on how to apply SSC in specific programmatic areas and on how to approach human rights and gender in SSC initiatives
- Clarifying the difference between regional and country approaches to SSC
- Developing mechanisms to provide quality assurance to SSC exchanges.

<sup>64</sup> UNFPA staff interviews.

<sup>65</sup> UNFPA key informants and survey results.

**Finding 5. In spite of recent advancements at headquarters level, coordination mechanisms are deemed limited and inconsistent, and there is limited clarity on the strategic approach to and purpose of SSC within UNFPA.**

Overwhelmingly, interviewees highlighted a lack of structured, institutionalized, or systematized coordination mechanisms for SSC. In accordance, only 43 per cent of respondents to the survey agree that there are clear mechanisms and structures for coordinating SSC initiatives within UNFPA, as well as among external partners.<sup>66</sup>

There is a network of country office SSC focal points and online resources within the internal system “MyUNFPA”, but both the online community and the network of focal points are not consistently active. There are no officially designated SSC focal points at the regional office level. SSC has been added as part of the responsibilities of the resource mobilization and partnership advisors following discussions between ICCO and individual advisors. There is a general perception among UNFPA interviewees that SSC heavily relies on individual interest from senior management, either from the country office or from the host government, otherwise initiatives seem to be deprioritized and discontinued. For instance, the development of a regional platform within LACRO in 2013 was referenced by informants from the region and from outside Latin America as a positive coordination mechanism that fostered the participation of country offices and tried to create cost-effective alternatives for its maintenance.<sup>67</sup> However, this was discontinued more than five years ago. There are examples of effective coordination among ICCO, regional offices and country offices in the identification and preparation of proposals for accessing funds for SSC initiatives and monitoring the process of implementation (as was the case in WCARO).<sup>68</sup>

Both the purpose of SSC within UNFPA and UNFPA leadership on SSC have been deemed limited and, on occasion, even contradictory: despite the recent institutional strengthening of SSC, and the support of several member countries, the Nairobi Statement on ICPD25, finalized in November 2019, only briefly mentions SSC in its introduction, and it is not contemplated in its 12 negotiated commitments. Informants have considered that a stronger push from UNFPA leadership on SSC would enhance the organization’s approach to SSC.

Closely related to the need to enhance the SSC conceptual framework analysed under findings 2 and 3, the strategic thinking that includes UNFPA motivations for investing in SSC is reported to be missing with respondents reporting a lack of clearly defined and articulated strategic purpose.<sup>69</sup> There is no general theory of change for SSC that could be adapted to different regions and contexts. A theory of change would articulate the SSC assumptions and add value, as well as connect with broader international and regional agendas, such as the SDGs and the United Nations reform, as well as specific regional and country contexts. This kind of exercise would make SSC politically more relevant and would avoid it being merely understood as an implementation modality.<sup>70</sup> More specifically, SSC could benefit from having a more articulated and in-depth connection with broader issues and processes, such as the United Nations engagement with middle-income countries, the United Nations reform and the contribution to the 2030 Agenda.

66 Interviews and survey.

67 PALTA was the UNFPA LACRO South-South Cooperation Platform on ICPD. Active from 2013 to 2015, the platform aimed to be an operational mechanism to enhance SSTC on population issues, increasing commitment and technical contribution to the ICPD agenda under a “multilateral umbrella mechanism” managed by LACRO. It was a tool to facilitate cooperation among peer countries providing a source of UNFPA-validated solutions that contributed to the ICPD and MDG agendas.

68 Documentary review and interviews.

69 UNFPA key informants.

70 Documentary review and interviews.

## AREA OF INVESTIGATION 2

### Mandate-focused: Results to date of UNFPA South-South and triangular cooperation initiatives

#### EQ2: To what extent does UNFPA support to SSTC initiatives contribute to UNFPA mandates, further advancing the goals of the ICPD and 2030 Agenda?<sup>71</sup>

##### Findings

6. UNFPA both recognizes and promotes SRHR SSC initiatives, which are particularly effective where there are commonalities of culture.
7. UNFPA has strong and solid population dynamics SSC programming, primarily for census activities, while initiatives related to ageing are a promising area for future SSC.
8. UNFPA has strong gender equality SSC examples, but these are less common than SRHR and population dynamic initiatives and rely less on commonalities of culture than SRHR initiatives.
9. There are still many opportunities for UNFPA to leverage SSC for adolescents and youth outcomes.
10. UNFPA has some positive examples of SSC in humanitarian programming and this shows a clear benefit where there are commonalities of crisis impact, but this has not been fully and systematically leveraged.

It should be noted that the focus of this Evaluation Question within Area of Investigation 2 is centred around results and progress towards results to date of UNFPA SSC initiatives. However, as is explored further in Area of Investigation 3, there is very limited outcome or impact data available for any SSC initiatives across UNFPA. There is some limited output data but the main evidence provided for SSC initiatives within UNFPA is activity-level only.

Many initiatives have no formalized documentation and evidence of the initiative itself (for example, a study visit may be catalogued only by email chains). Further, there is extremely limited follow-up for most initiatives to assess results at different levels of the initiative in countries participating in the exchange and where this does exist, it exists within individual staff testimony and informal written cataloguing such as email exchanges. Therefore, this section utilizes the available data and evidence to build a more thematic and pragmatic view of how SSC is currently being used across different mandate areas of UNFPA, with more of a focus on process and thematic points of interest rather than an assessment of different levels of results.

#### **Finding 6. UNFPA both recognizes and promotes SRHR SSC initiatives, which are particularly effective where there are commonalities of culture.**

SRHR is the most represented mandate area in SSC within UNFPA, as found through the evaluation analysis and confirmed with 56 per cent of respondents in the survey reporting their office implementing SRHR SSC initiatives. The evidence clearly highlights that SSC as a modality lends itself particularly well to SRHR issues where there are commonalities of culture for both more sensitive issues such as access to family planning and eradicating harmful traditional practices (for example, child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM))<sup>72</sup> and for less sensitive issues such as maternal and new-born health and access to comprehensive obstetric care. The commonalities of culture can be both intra-regional or inter-regional.

71 A2.1 UNFPA supported SSTC initiatives contribute to SRHR outcomes across different modes of engagement (service delivery, capacity-building, knowledge management, and advocacy and policy support). A2.2 UNFPA supported SSTC initiatives contribute to gender equality (including the reduction of gender-based violence (GBV)) outcomes across different modes of engagement (service delivery, capacity-building, knowledge management, and advocacy and policy support). A2.3 UNFPA supported SSTC initiatives contribute to adolescents and youth outcomes across different modes of engagement (service delivery, capacity-building, knowledge management, and advocacy and policy support). A2.4 UNFPA supported SSTC initiatives contribute to population dynamics outcomes across different modes of engagement (service delivery, capacity-building, knowledge management, and advocacy and policy support). A2.5 UNFPA supported SSTC initiatives contribute to humanitarian outcomes across different modes of engagement (service delivery, capacity-building, knowledge management, and advocacy and policy).

72 At UNFPA, child marriage and FGM as issues straddle both SRHR and gender equality mandate areas.

For example, in terms of maternal health, the SSC initiative among Bhutan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Thailand – "Reducing Maternal Mortality and Making Motherhood Safer" – reported important results in the three countries engaged.<sup>73</sup> In Laos, 52 trained administrators and midwifery instructors transferred knowledge and experiences, in alignment with International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) and World Health Organization (WHO) international standards, that resulted in at least 300 trained midwives per year. The trainers have also implemented a number of innovative initiatives, such as: working with doctors to train midwives at health facilities; promoting an exchange of teachers; implementing a breastfeeding project; launching educational videos and micro-teaching projects; and establishing a network of trainers. Increased government budget has been allocated to support institutional capacity of midwifery schools and hospitals and the midwifery curriculum has incorporated ICM and WHO requirements. A Social Return on Investment analysis showed that the total investment co-shared by the three partners for the SSC initiative in Laos (USD 445,923.51) created a value of USD 1,763,362.45. Therefore, each USD 1 invested in the programme created a social value of USD 3.95, representing an almost four-fold return in the investment.<sup>74</sup>

Bhutan allocated more resources towards its maternal health programme. As a result, 59 health personnel from health facilities located in remote areas were equipped with advanced midwifery and emergency obstetric skills. Each of the trained health personnel provided maternal health services and care to around 20-50 cases a month. With UNFPA facilitation, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed covering technical collaboration between Thailand and the Bhutan Institute of Health Workforce and Development.<sup>75</sup>

For Thailand, good practices from these two SSC initiatives has helped to bring about changes in the approaches taken by the Thailand International Cooperation from focusing on short-term and ad-hoc programmes to ones that are considering sustainability.<sup>76</sup>

Moreover, the initiative also produced mutual benefits at the technical level: the experience gained in terms of the alignment of the ICM and WHO requirements for midwifery education has been shared with other Thai institutions providing international training courses on midwifery. It also led to the establishment of the SSC Solution Network for Making Motherhood Safer, technically supported and facilitated by UNFPA, to share and exchange Thailand-based knowledge and experiences with other countries facing a high maternal mortality rate.<sup>77</sup>

Another example in the Asia Pacific region is an SSC initiative in Bangladesh with Papua New Guinea for preventing/reducing unnecessary caesarean sections, which has been hailed as a resounding success. The study visits – to Papua New Guinea and then a return visit by an obstetric specialist to Bangladesh – are reported to have made a significant difference to the labour room protocols for the two main hospitals included within the initiative, with clear results vis à vis the reduction of caesarean sections. For example, in Dhaka Medical Centre the rates of normal vaginal delivery rose from 27 per cent in July 2010 to 51 per cent by December 2019, with contribution to this clearly allocated by all respondents to the Papua New Guinea obstetrician visit in July 2019. Additional benefits highlighted by respondents from the visit include an increase in patient flow, as most pregnant ladies prefer vaginal delivery than c-section; embedding change in labour room protocol with regard to allowing/encouraging different positions (for example, squatting) for labouring women, and embedding change in protocol for dealing with intubation of new-borns when there is obstructed delivery and asphyxiated babies, with immediate management now being completed in the labour ward rather than waiting to transfer to paediatric ward.<sup>78</sup>

In Mozambique, a midwifery SSC initiative aims to enhance the quality of midwifery service provision in the province by strengthening capacities of the Tete Training School through technical assistance from Cuba: the programme draws upon the existing South-South collaboration between the Ministry of Health (MoH) in Mozambique and in Cuba.<sup>79</sup> Although the

73 Information on results is mainly derived from UNFPA (2018) Facilitating Cooperation for Making Motherhood Safer. (Submitted to the 2018 Good Practice Competition on South-South Cooperation).

74 UNFPA (n/d) The Effectiveness of Thailand-UNFPA South-South and Trilateral Cooperation - Social Return On Investment Analysis.

75 Information on results is primarily derived from UNFPA (2018) Facilitating Cooperation for Making Motherhood Safer. (Submitted to the 2018 Good Practice Competition on South-South Cooperation).

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

78 Case study including interviews and documentary review.

79 This was a triangular cooperation initiative, including Mozambique, Cuba, and the Government of Flanders.

Cuban health cooperation has been in Mozambique for many decades, they are usually dedicated to service delivery, so there was resistance from Mozambican doctors and nurses, who used to see them as peers, to the idea of accepting them as “trainers of trainers” during the project. The steering committee acted to mitigate this resistance, developing an integration plan that was implemented in approximately six months, and improved acceptance of the Cuban trainers in the institute – thus, enhancing results in class performance. The initial agreement ends in 2020, and there are advanced conversations for a possible second phase: there will be a project evaluation shortly,<sup>80</sup> but there is a general perception of improvement in the quality of midwife training. UNFPA provides technical support for the project, in partnership with WHO, which includes financial management of the project and responding to some ad hoc needs (for example, the provision of mannequins for practical training in the midwifery laboratory).<sup>81</sup>

For more sensitive areas of SRHR, religious commonalities become key. In Indonesia, the SSC initiative, “Strategic Partnership with Muslim Religious Leaders on Family Planning”,<sup>82</sup> has been effective in terms of increasing the knowledge and awareness of Muslim religious leaders and the broader Muslim community on Islamic views on family planning. The initiative brought together religious leaders from different countries with different perspectives. SSC contributions to the sexual and reproductive health mandate based on the results assessed from such initiatives include:<sup>83</sup> a Fatwa on family and marriage in Islam was issued in Ethiopia in 2013; a Fatwa on family planning, child marriage and gender-based violence (GBV) was issued in the Philippines in 2015; religious leaders in Guinea endorsed a declaration supporting the national family planning programme; and, in Chad, the Declaration of the International Symposium on Islam, Demographic Dividend and Family Wellbeing was endorsed by the Chadian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs.<sup>84</sup>

Similarly, Chad, Guinea, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria and the Philippines have conducted comparable trainings in their own countries, sometimes facilitated by resource persons from Indonesia. In Chad and Guinea, the specific family planning action plans prepared by the trainees during the SSC training in Indonesia received financial and technical support from UNFPA and the national governments for implementation. While in Nepal, the action plan prepared by trainees was transformed by UNFPA Nepal into a funding proposal submitted to the Department for International Development (DFID) for funding. The plan received funding for five years (2016-2020) and is currently being implemented by UNFPA and Marie Stopes International in selected districts.<sup>85</sup>

In countries covered by the 2018 assessment (Chad, Ethiopia, Nepal and the Philippines), the SSC training materials from this initiative are still being used in workshops and community orientation sessions. Similarly, the majority of trainees are still engaged in projects aimed at partnering with Muslim religious leaders in family planning.<sup>86</sup>

In Ghana, the primary SSC initiative is the capacity-building of Muslim leaders with Indonesia, as referenced above. Even though UNFPA Ghana had been supporting inter-religious learning and knowledge-sharing, the programme with Indonesia has strengthened this significantly. The initiative has been described as a good example of inter-regional SSC with similar religious and cultural background. Two primary positive aspects highlighted by respondents in Ghana are: (a) that the study visits combined theoretical content delivered by highly qualified lecturers (including women facilitators) with site visits where they could witness the adherence of the community to family planning practices; and (b) that the training sessions allowed participants to share their experiences.<sup>87</sup>

80 WHO, a partner to UNFPA on this initiative, will be tasked with overseeing the initial and final assessment.

81 WHO is responsible for the initial and final assessments of this project.

82 This is a large-scale SSC initiative within Indonesia providing training to participants from Afghanistan, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Burundi, Chad, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, India, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Sudan.

83 Results assessed by the 2018 evaluation and triangulated with interviews for the current exercise.

84 Case study including interviews and documentary review.

85 Interviews and document review: UNFPA, 2018 Cross-cultural partnerships among Muslim religious leaders to achieve SDG3 through reducing unmet-need for family planning- Submitted to the 2018 Good Practice Competition on South-South Cooperation (SSC).

86 Ministry of State Secretariat, National Family Planning Coordination Board, UNFPA (2018). Programme Assessment - South-South and Triangular Cooperation Strategic Partnership with Muslim Religious Leaders in Family Planning.

87 Case study including interviews and documentary review.

**Box 4. Good Practice: Egypt's Al-Azhar University and contentious sexual and reproductive health and rights issues**

UNFPA supported initiatives with the International Islamic Centre for Population Studies and Research (IICPSR) focused on SRHR and harmful practices (particularly female genital mutilation) within Islamic contexts and the benefits of SSC within specific SRHR and harmful practice contexts (such as Islamic contexts) are clear.

IICPSR was established with UNFPA support in 1975 and is part of Al-Azhar Islamic University, itself a globally recognized Islamic institution. Therefore, both the SSC support (in the form of international “caravans”, seminars, working trips, and hosting study visits to Egypt) and the IICPSR products are considered crucial in changing harmful attitudes based on misperceptions of Islamic teachings for family planning and harmful practices (female genital mutilation and child marriage in particular). IICPSR uniquely unites clear interpretation of Islamic text with medical information to promote progressive and healthy policies for SRHR and gender-based violence. Some of the products IICPSR has developed include publications on the female genital mutilation fatwa in Egypt (introduced in 2007); gender-based violence and Islam; female genital mutilation within Islam; and women and Islam. IICPSR reported that collaboration through UNFPA with Indonesia has been very fruitful with the development of a manual for combating the issue of female genital mutilation.

However, UNFPA reports that IICPSR has a low financial capacity, being a government institution with a centre staffed with retired doctors. The Director of IICPSR is a previous ICPD board member and a previous President of the International Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics. This has a significant benefit in relation to the authority and credibility the centre has around the world. The challenge for this is that IICPSR is not seen as a young or modern institution.

Further, the capacity of IICPSR is “saturated” by not only UNFPA but additionally UNICEF and WHO, both of which also work with IICPSR. IICPSR also does a lot of SSC outside of UNFPA and other United Nations agencies. With financial support from the World Bank, IICPSR conducted a workshop in Cairo with a number of Sahel countries and from this counter-visits were arranged. While a number of initiatives such as these were done outside of UNFPA support, the initiatives were all conducted using publications developed with UNFPA support.

Again, the benefits of SSC within specific SRHR and harmful practice contexts are clear. For example, IICPSR reported that after a six-day study tour to Egypt in 2016, the Grand Mufti of Guinea, who was a supporter of female genital mutilation before the visit, left disavowing the practice.

Other more adjacent areas of SRHR that are covered include menstrual hygiene management (MHM) and comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) for which SSC and South-South learning is critical for progress. For example, in South Africa, the South African Department of Women, supported by UNFPA South Africa and ESARO has become an active advocate for menstrual hygiene management within South Africa and among other African countries. In 2018, both parties co-hosted the 1st Menstrual Health Management Symposium in Johannesburg that resulted in the creation of the African Coalition on Menstrual Health Management.<sup>88</sup> The coalition is mainly dedicated to knowledge and experience-sharing on the subject of menstrual hygiene management, regarding, for instance, the development of regional standards on sanitary products and the connection with water supply, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)-related initiatives.

UNFPA South Africa and ESARO have facilitated encounters between different countries on the subject of WASH and menstrual hygiene management, although not yet in a systematized manner. National stakeholders consider that UNFPA can offer support to the documentation and dissemination of experiences between member countries of the recently launched African coalition on menstrual hygiene management, sharing the South African experience with the national framework for sanitary dignity, experiences from other African countries (Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe) but not exclusively: South African counterparts have had webinars with a Colombian University, facilitated by UNFPA.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Other outcomes of the symposium included: strengthened policy, programme and financial commitment and consensus among partners on programmatic priorities to address key barriers and challenges related to menstrual health management throughout the menstrual life cycle in Africa; launch of a regional coalition on menstrual health management; agreement to convene a regional menstrual health management symposium every two years to report on progress against commitment; and recommendations for strengthened menstrual health management in Africa. Source: Menstrual Health Management Symposium, 2018 (<https://menstrualhygieneday.org/mhm-symposium-report-final/>).

<sup>89</sup> Although the interviewee was not clear if it was facilitated by the South Africa CO or ESARO.

A 2018 ESARO report highlighted that:

“(…) a defining moment for UNFPA in the region was, in partnership with the Department of Women in the Presidency of the Republic of South Africa, hosting the first ever East and Southern African Symposium on Menstrual Health Management (MHM) in Johannesburg, South Africa. This resulted in strengthened commitment of policy makers and practitioners to better respond to the MHM needs of people who menstruate throughout their reproductive life cycle. It concluded with a regional Call to Action. (...) Later in the year, an African Coalition for Menstrual Health Management was established with a leadership structure and strategies for strengthening coordination, evidence-based advocacy and knowledge-sharing to ensure that policy and programmes on menstrual health management are considered within countries’ national strategies”.<sup>90</sup>

Besides facilitating opportunities for experience-sharing, UNFPA is valued as a co-host, since it allows for a more diverse participation, with UNFPA relations with civil society organizations ensuring there is a multi-stakeholder dialogue.<sup>91</sup>

In sum, evidence suggests that SSC is not just a good modality but rather the best modality for a number of SRHR issues, including access to family planning, HIV and AIDS programming, female genital mutilation and other harmful practices, and even issues such as menstrual hygiene management, where learning from other contexts experiencing the same cultural attitudes is so much more effective than any traditional support solely from global North countries.

**Finding 7. UNFPA has strong and solid population dynamics in SSC programming, primarily for census activities, while initiatives related to ageing are a promising area for future SSC.**

Survey respondents highlighted SSC initiatives in population dynamics as the second highest (after SRHR SSC initiatives), with 42 per cent reporting implementing SSC programming in this area. Centres of reference are a primary modality of SSC for population dynamics.

There are several cases of successful census-related interventions within SSC programming in all regions. One example is the “Strengthening capacity in population and housing census” programme between India and other Asian and African countries. While UNFPA India country office reports that it is difficult to assess the strengthened capacities of the national statistical systems and improved quality of census data in partner countries without institutionalized systems for measuring these results,<sup>92</sup> UNFPA support is acknowledged, for example, by official Bhutan publications, as having contributed to preparing reports with population projections, and building the national technical capacity.<sup>93</sup> Despite a lack of data on partner countries, the partnership between UNFPA and the Government of India, has led, with the support from other United Nations organizations, to the establishment of a resource and training centre to cater to in-house and international training on census and surveys. The centre also reflects the fine-tuning of the pool of expertise and training protocols, based on the first-hand experience of the SSC training on census that has been provided so far. As a lesson learned, UNFPA India highlights the importance of a more structured platform to promote the availability of experiences in order to reach more developing countries, as well as the importance of moving towards multi-country trainings to promote economies of scale and cross-pollination of learnings.<sup>94</sup>

In LACRO, UNFPA Brazil has helped to share technological innovations in the 2010 Brazil census with other countries. In 2010, the National Census covered Brazil’s total population of 190 million inhabitants in over 5,500 municipalities distributed across over 8.5 million square kilometres, requiring the deployment of 220,000 field researchers using hand-held personal digital assistants (PDAs) to cover the entire country. The Brazilian census questionnaire is the largest in the world and includes a core of United Nations data and other data related to the Brazilian context. In 2010, the Brazilian data-collection model became

90 UNFPA. Fulfilling the Promise: East and Southern Africa 2018 Annual Report. 2019. Regarding the MHM initiative, also refer to the South Africa country study.

91 Interviews with key stakeholders.

92 UNFPA (2018). Building Capacities on Census Operations in Developing Countries. An Initiative of the Office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India (Submitted to the 2018 Good Practice Competition on South-South Cooperation).

93 National Statistics Bureau, Royal Government of Bhutan, 2019. Population Projections Bhutan (2017-2047) and National Statistics Bureau, Royal Government of Bhutan, 2019. Dzongkhag Population Projections (2017–2027).

94 UNFPA (2018). Building Capacities on Census Operations in Developing Countries. An Initiative of the Office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India (Submitted to the 2018 Good Practice Competition on South-South Cooperation)

entirely electronic. The move from paper-based to electronic represented a globally relevant change of paradigm. Brazil shared this experience and the technology through SSC by providing its PDAs and mobile geographic information system (GIS) software for conducting large-scale, paperless national census in several countries in Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa. The countries benefitted from state-of-art information gathering and processing technologies developed by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE).<sup>95</sup>

This Brazil-UNFPA partnership has evolved to support centres of reference in Africa as a long-term and more effective partner in supporting statistical institutes in Africa. The focus is on their capacity in demographics, staff training and institutional strengthening so that they become autonomous in participating in public policy design and implementation in their own countries. The idea for the centres came as a way of multiplying and disseminating technologies and knowledge, and to be able to offer cooperation that was in high demand by several countries in Africa, and meet as many requests as possible. The centres of reference in Africa are now able to offer training in a systematic way, in a well-planned and modular, progressive fashion, covering all areas and issues related to the different phases of a census.<sup>96</sup> The methods and technology used in Brazil are of great relevance in developing country contexts. Field researchers can collect and send data to databanks where information is consolidated and processed in real time, ensuring greater reliability and faster production and dissemination of results. These SSC initiatives have contributed to partner countries successfully transitioning from paper to digital mapping and is a qualitative leap forward in their capacity to use population statistics, which is also applied in many other areas, particularly in public policy formulation and implementation and evidence-based decision-making.<sup>97</sup>

In addition, as a result of SSC with Brazil and UNFPA, Cape Verde was able to successfully provide technical cooperation and support Senegal through subsequent bilateral SSC, and to disseminate the knowledge and outcomes achieved with Brazil and UNFPA. Furthermore, Senegal translated the census questionnaire that was built as a result of SSC with UNFPA and Brazil and shared it with Haiti. Senegal has reached a maturity point and entered a second phase of the project, in which it is now capable of sharing its own knowledge and practice and has done so already with Cote d'Ivoire and Cameroon. The centre of reference project in Senegal was born as the result of UNFPA-financed study tours to Brazil and Cape Verde.<sup>98</sup>

The Senegal centre of reference<sup>99</sup> project is aligned to internationally agreed development goals, chiefly the 2030 Agenda and the Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. It recognizes that the promotion of a culture of public policy and decision-making based on evidence – prioritized by the African Union – requires availability and use of quality and readily available data as a fundamental element for achieving the SDG of the 2030 Agenda and the goals established in the Agenda 2063. The role of UNFPA was focused on advocacy and support to Senegal in preparation, beginning in 2009, for the 2013 Senegal Census. Later, UNFPA facilitated logistics for the loan and transportation of personal digital-assistant devices (PDAs) from Brazil and provided technical support to training.<sup>100</sup> The centre counts on a training methodology developed and based on the Brazilian experience, which is the point of departure. Training focuses on key points of that methodology, including technological infrastructure, census cartography, design of the electronic survey, training of census personnel, advocacy, communication and dissemination.<sup>101</sup> The Final Evaluation of the Country Programme for Senegal (2012-2016) stated that “the achievements of Output 5 [in population and development] have been substantial”.<sup>102</sup> Countries supported so far by the centre of reference in Senegal include: Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Guinea Bissau, Haiti, Madagascar, Mali and Swaziland.<sup>103</sup> Many countries within and outside the region have already participated in cooperation activities with the centre of reference in Senegal. In Guinea Bissau, the support focused on census infrastructure, cartography and on updating the census project document;<sup>104</sup> Mali was supported through three technical missions by cartography and electronic data-collection experts;

95 Interviews and documentary review.

96 Ibid.

97 Ibid.

98 Ibid.

99 Centres of Reference Collection of Electronic Data (2018) Centers of Reference: Collection of Electronic Data, Brazil – Cape Verde – Senegal – UNFPA [Website] Available at: <http://www.e-census.africa/impact.php?lang=en>. Access 14 March 2020.

100 Interviews and documentary review.

101 Ibid.

102 Case study including interviews and documentary review.

103 Interviews and documentary review.

104 This is a document for planning, organizing and guiding the respective national census.

Madagascar and Ethiopia received support in electronic cartography; Burkina Faso and Swaziland received, each, an expert in development of electronic data applications, and Haiti benefitted from census-support in 2014.<sup>105</sup>

A proposal for the project's second phase with Brazil is currently under negotiation. Partners are studying the possibility of including Egypt to support English- and Arabic-speaking countries. In fact, Egypt itself already has a strong SSC census initiative. UNFPA Egypt supports SSC for census activities with the Egyptian Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS). In 2017, CAPMAS undertook the first electronic census in Egypt: this was completed within six months with preliminary findings disseminated within two months. Many stakeholders considered this to be a remarkable achievement given the population size of Egypt (93.332 million according to the 2017 census) and the size and infrastructure of the country. It was unique in the region in terms of using self-enumeration methodologies and therefore other countries – both within the region and further afield – have shown significant interest in the process and UNFPA has helped to facilitate study visits to this effect, including by Pakistan – planned but not yet conducted at the time of the evaluation – and Vietnam.

CAPMAS SSC initiatives relate to a genuine demand-driven process from other countries interested in what was reported to be a successful and efficient census exercise with UNFPA but within the context of:

- Not having a significant level of UNFPA technical support to CAPMAS within Egypt for the census process – noting that there are no population and development outcomes in the UNFPA Egypt Country Programme Document (2018-2022) because CAPMAS is assumed now to be a sufficiently strong national institution that did not need further technical support
- UNFPA facilitating only, with no clear guidelines of potential support to other countries (without the same levels of infrastructure, educational levels, and socio-political stability of Egypt) seeking to implement an e-census.

Some respondents reported that some areas, such as census, are more attractive to an SSC modality given the requirement for concrete technical expertise.<sup>106</sup>

For Pakistan, UNFPA Egypt provided a convening role, putting UNFPA Pakistan directly in touch with CAPMAS who then shared topics for the e-census process. A study visit was planned, but has not taken place yet. For Vietnam, UNFPA Egypt played a facilitating role with a consultant supported by UNFPA Vietnam to assist the Government of Vietnam with a census visit with CAPMAS to work specifically on sampling methodology. Neither initiatives received any follow-up by UNFPA Egypt country office. During a 2019 ASRO workshop in Amman, CAPMAS presented during an SSC slot on the e-census work with Pakistan (planned) and Vietnam.

Since then, ASRO has facilitated CAPMAS support to Iraq for an e-census. Iraq is currently preparing for its 2020 census. While this exchange has effectively been supported by UNFPA, it is unclear how much UNFPA has supported an understanding of the differences in context between Iraq and Egypt, including levels of conflict and displacement in Iraq (which have a high impact on the ability to do a credible census, particularly with repetitive displacement patterns), insecurity, literacy levels, and infrastructure.<sup>107</sup>

Outside of census activities, there is strong support to SSC for population projections and understanding of national statistics. For example, the Mexican National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) is a leader in its field with a strong regional presence, particularly within the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) statistics, where it presides over the committee of experts for the formulation of SDG indicators. ECLAC is, therefore, frequently approached by other countries from the region, especially through its statistics conference of the Americas. UNFPA also supported several of these regional exchanges. INEGI has engaged in SSC with UNFPA for many years, but in the 1980s and 1990s there was little formalization of these exchanges into more clear mechanisms of SSC. It was restricted to sending missions or receiving missions of technical assistance, and there was no formal cooperation arrangement. Although initiatives are still largely scattered and ad hoc, there are current measures to support an increased coordination of the INEGI

<sup>105</sup> Interviews and documentary review.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Case study including interviews and documentary review

SSC with UNFPA: the study commissioned by the country office with recommendations for strengthening the SSTC of INEGI is an example of UNFPA support to Mexico's response to growing requests for SSC in population and development.

In South Africa, national institutions responsible for population and development<sup>108</sup> receive regular request from developing countries – African and from other regions – to do study visits on specific subjects. These exchanges are mainly done on a bilateral and ad hoc basis, but they are connected with previous international engagements, especially in conferences and meetings of regional and subregional organizations.

For UNFPA, there is a potential to leverage on South Africa's strong statistical systems to strengthen SSC on population and development matters. At the same time, there are specific gaps that could also be addressed through SSC, to improve availability of disaggregated data for issues of migration, social protection and adolescent sexual and reproductive health services.<sup>109</sup> However, SSC exchanges are mainly done between cooperating institutions and statistics agencies – except when its related to reporting to the 2030 Agenda, in which case ministries of foreign affairs are usually involved. UNFPA support to national activities is well recognized, but the role played by the UNFPA country office in SSC in population and development so far has been perceived as discreet. Moreover, these exchanges are not usually referred to as SSC.

#### **Box 5. Properly accommodating the demand-driven principle and corporate priorities**

The exchanges on the healthy ageing centres (Bosnia, Georgia, Macedonia and others) show a multifaceted reality of the demand-driven aspect, and how it can generate tensions with UNFPA. On the one hand, stakeholders highlighted that ageing is a pressing issue in the region and very relevant to the countries engaged. On the other hand, ageing is not a highly ranked corporate priority within UNFPA or even for other development partners that could support scaling up the SSC efforts in the region. This misbalance was reported as hindering the engaged capacity of the country offices to boost the initiative, as well as hampering UNFPA likelihood of promoting sustainable exchanges.

A promising new area for SSC interventions in population dynamics for UNFPA is ageing. For example, healthy ageing centres (HAC) in Bosnia and Herzegovina aim to: strengthen health-related self-protection; improve the quality of life and engagement of older persons in the community; and promote partnerships with families and health and social workers. The first healthy ageing centre was initially implemented as an initiative of the NGO Partnership for Public Health and the municipality of Novo Sarajevo, UNFPA country office, and financially and technically supported by the Netherlands. The first healthy ageing centre adapted the Dutch model to the local context and soon became recognized as a good practice by the beneficiaries, their families and the community. After the first healthy ageing centre was opened in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and based on their experience, UNFPA provided financial and technical support for the opening of new healthy ageing centres. UNFPA mainly provides capacity-building to the new healthy ageing centres and has also invested in upstream policy work and advocacy, supporting the development of the Guidelines for Development of Social Policies to be used for drafting entity-level strategies. In 2019, UNFPA also brokered a partnership between the healthy ageing centres in Bosnia and Herzegovina and University College London (UCL), which resulted in a survey to show the health benefits of the healthy ageing centres to their members, comparing data on Bosnia and Herzegovina with long-term results in the United Kingdom to make a case on how governments can save money with the healthy ageing centre model.<sup>110</sup>

SSC on healthy ageing centres began with the interest of North Macedonia and then Georgia. In 2019 the Government of Georgia hosted a regional workshop on healthy ageing that gathered nine countries in the region (including representatives of federal and local governments and non-government organizations), where Armenia, Azerbaijan and Moldova also expressed their interest in implementing the healthy ageing centre model. UNFPA EECARO funded this regional workshop.

108 According to the 1998 Statistics Act, Statistics South Africa, or Stats SA, is responsible for the collection, production and dissemination of official and other statistics, including the conducting of a census of the population, and for coordination among producers of statistics.

109 UNFPA. Republic of South Africa: facts and prospects. Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, 2019.

110 Case study including interviews and documentary review.

Exchanges on healthy ageing centres between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Georgia helped to raise awareness in Georgia of the importance of sustainable services and better frame the approach to the existing centres. It was reported that UNFPA in the country has supported the translation of material and also adjusted it to the specific context in Georgia, creating a local branding. Since ageing is understood as poverty, they decided not to concentrate on ageing, but on health, and came up with the idea of the 60+club – for healthy and active life. Those clubs will promote intergenerational dialogue, since they will be established in the same space as the youth centres. The participating municipalities have already allocated funds for piloting those clubs. Also, it was reported that in the country, Red Cross, which also run centres for vulnerable elderly people, want to adopt the healthy ageing centre model.

In North Macedonia, exchanges helped to enhance the quality of the already existing centres, through the development of a programme tailored for the centres, relying on technical support from UNFPA Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Bosnian NGO Partnership for Public Health and funded by UNFPA North Macedonia. As in Georgia, the interest of the Red Cross in adopting the healthy ageing centre model and moving away from its more charity-focused model was reported.<sup>111</sup>

LACRO is currently looking at experiences on the subject of ageing. Although consultations are still incipient, there is an expectation that this would require inter-regional SSC, to share experiences from the Asia-Pacific region. However, there is also this very useful experience from the Balkan States to share.<sup>112</sup>

In sum, UNFPA strongly supported population dynamics SSC work in all regions. There is limited coordination of all the initiatives across regions, for example, the potential for a second phase of the Brazil-Senegal centre of reference to include Egypt does not seem to currently account for Egypt's own SSC through CAPMAS further afield. LACRO is seeking to expand its ageing programming – which is a common priority for pink quadrant countries – through SSC and is looking to Asia Pacific, but not to the Balkan States where strong ageing SSC programmes exist.<sup>113</sup>

**Finding 8. UNFPA has strong gender equality SSC examples, but these are less common than SRHR and population dynamics initiatives and rely less on commonalities of culture than SRHR initiatives.**

In the survey, just over a third of respondents (35 per cent) reported their office undertaking any gender equality SSC initiatives. Many of the gender equality SSC initiatives are closely linked with or integrated into broader SRHR initiatives and an interesting facet of the gender equality initiatives is that more of them are part of broader United Nations partnerships.<sup>114</sup>

**Box 6. Good practice: Bangladesh gender-responsive police initiative**

The police initiative is a very good example of SSC. The Bangladeshi police force, in coordination with UNFPA, identified a gap in its gender responsiveness. It researched the experience of different countries and selected the Philippines as a good model because the Philippines has a “women and children help desk” model within its police force. The Bangladeshi police force then requested UNFPA assistance to facilitate a learning visit. This is despite the religious differences between the two states. The Bangladeshi police force were also eager to learn more about the Philippines police force’s “magna carta of women”. In Bangladesh there is one overarching law regarding gender equality, but the Filipino magna carta is more sophisticated.

After the study visit, which notably was attended by two superintendents and a ministry colleague responsible for anti-trafficking measures, the Bangladeshi police force are now planning help desks for women in 657 police stations across Bangladesh and have developed proposals for women inspectors, and a model training plan for all officials by including a 13th module in the current training plan. The police force will appoint three new women inspectors and one woman assistant inspector for each help desk for women in all police stations across the country.

111 Case study including interviews and documentary review.

112 Ibid.

113 Ibid.

114 Survey, documentary review, interviews.

For example, Brazil had an Africa-focused SSC initiative entitled “Brazil and Africa: Fighting poverty and empowering women through South-South cooperation”. This was a multi-agency initiative involving UNFPA, UN Women, UNDP and DfID. The project (which ended in 2016) had a common logical framework with three components, and different project components were implemented separately by respective partner agencies. UNFPA and UN Women shared one of them (gender equality and gender-based violence). The International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) and the Centre for Excellence against Hunger in Brazil were partners under two other components. As a consequence of the initiative, Brazilian practices in gender equality and gender-based violence gained visibility and were included in Brazil’s portfolio of SSTC experiences, broadening Brazilian SSTC. UNFPA added value to the initiative by increasing the programmatic quality, given its access to global knowledge, its experiences in gender and its evidence of what works in this area.<sup>115</sup>

Another example of SSC embedded into broader United Nations partnerships is the Spotlight Initiative, which is a global programme launched in 2018 by the European Union with United Nations agencies, including UNFPA. It is centred around SDG 5, gender equality, and aims at contributing to the eradication of gender-based violence, according to each region’s priorities (in Africa it focuses on harmful practices, in the Caribbean on intra-family violence and in Latin America it has focused on the eradication of femicide). Five Latin American countries were selected: Argentina, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico. Each country has to develop a country programme based on the priorities of the region. SSC activities would be a way to scale-up eventual results of these programmes, but these activities are not included in the current budget of the initiative. They would have to be included as part of a second phase.<sup>116</sup>

Gender equality initiatives seem to lend themselves more easily to joint programmes – particularly with United Nations agencies such as UNICEF, UN Women, and UNDP – than other UNFPA mandate areas and so represents an opportunity for strengthening gender equality through SSC partnerships at regional and global levels.

The SSC initiatives that are most closely integrated with SRHR rely more on commonalities of culture. An example of this would be the EECARO-led initiative focusing on a coordinated multisectoral response for gender-based violence, which has the same programming arrangements as the SRHR “Making Pregnancy Safer” project. In this EECARO offered countries the opportunity to engage in a regional project with the technical support of the East European Institute for Reproductive Health to build multisectoral referral systems. This project highlights the regional commonalities within the Balkan States and the desire from governments – even if the proposal came from UNFPA rather than initially being demand-driven by the Bosnia and Herzegovina Government – to share experience with countries with common contexts, history, and culture. The impact of the gender-based violence SSC initiative supported by UNFPA highlighted in the UNOSSC (2019) report are many, and include:

- “(i) the amendment or development of laws and policies; the introduction of protocols and guidelines on the quality and coordination of services in line with the global UN Essential Services Package (ESP);
- (ii) the expansion of services to survivors; the enhancement of capacity of service providers to provide quality services and referrals;
- (iii) in Azerbaijan, Belarus, BiH, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan and Ukraine the global UN ESP and related UNFPA Standard Operating Procedures for Eastern Europe and Central Asia were adapted and contextualised for key sectors on how to respond to GBV, including specific services for survivors;
- (iv) With respect to the humanitarian-development nexus, sector specific SOPs and national regulations for intersectoral coordination and response in emergency situations have been developed and approved in BiH, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia and Serbia.”<sup>117</sup>

In Senegal, the “Husbands’ Schools” intervention in gender equality, including sexual and reproductive health and family planning, is seen as having an effect on national policy as the result of a South-South exchange. This Niger initiative is being shared with, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. The Husbands’ Schools initiative actively engages men in the promotion of reproductive health with the goal of facilitating positive behavioural change at the community level. The schools raise awareness of husbands and increase their knowledge about reproductive health through education, promoting dialogue with their wives regarding family decisions and training

<sup>115</sup> Interviews and documentary review.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> UNOSSC (2019) South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Action on Peace and Development.

husbands as agents of change, particularly among their male peers, and the community at large. The activities are based on knowledge sharing about reproductive health services, such as: prenatal care and contraceptive methods; sensitization and advocacy sessions; developing action plans; and developing partnerships with key stakeholders in the community, including those in health service delivery, local health authorities, health agents, midwives, and traditional and religious leaders. Each school is connected to a health centre in the most vulnerable areas where reproductive health indicators are weak. Non-governmental organizations supervise the schools, offer technical support by providing counselling and information on reproductive health services, and conduct capacity-building and community work. This initiative is a strong example of peer-to-peer learning and horizontality-based SSC among countries sharing common socioeconomic, institutional, policy, geographic and/or cultural backgrounds, including at community level. The evaluation found evidence of positive results for this initiative, which includes a peer-to-peer strategy, as it encouraged a change in the awareness and behaviour of men in their communities on issues about maternal health and family planning. The experience was easily adapted to Senegalese society because Senegal, Niger and other countries in West and Central Africa share a cultural context and social norms.<sup>118</sup>

**Finding 9. There are still many opportunities for UNFPA to leverage SSC for adolescents and youth outcomes.**

In the survey, only a third of respondents (33 per cent) reported any adolescents and youth SSC initiatives and only one was articulated – which was a sexuality education initiative for in-school youth in Zambia. This does not mean that there are no adolescent and youth initiatives, but examples are limited compared to other UNFPA mandate areas (namely SRHR, gender equality, and population dynamics). This reflects the newer and increasing focus on adolescents and youth more generally for UNFPA as compared to other mandate areas.<sup>119</sup>

The examples that do exist within UNFPA highlight the potential of SSC for accelerating genuine adolescent and youth engagement and support to progress. For example, UNFPA China country office has promoted the China-Africa Youth forums as side events of the China-Africa Conferences on Population and Development and at the Nairobi summit. Supported by the Chinese private sector (Beifang International Education Group), the forums include youth representatives from China and from African countries who can exchange experiences on ICPD-related issues.<sup>120</sup> During the third China-Africa conference on population and development held in Accra in 2019, there was a China-Africa Youth Forum side event with discussions held in a TED-talk fashion. The Youth Forum was supported by China and Ghana country offices<sup>121</sup> and it allowed youth representatives from China and from African countries to exchange experiences on ICPD-related issues.<sup>122</sup> Although the biggest representation was from Ghana and China, there were youth representatives from approximately 15 African countries.<sup>123</sup>

Preparations for the Youth Forum included a call for research abstracts and video messages with testimonials on the state of youth in each country. During the forum, the group divided itself in the main sessions to complement the draft declaration that was prepared beforehand. The Youth Forum's outcome document included the need to "continue to deepen the implementation of South-South cooperation, exchange experiences and technologies in solving population challenges."<sup>124</sup> Once the Forum ended, African youth associations and Chinese youth networks kept in contact and consulted each other in the lead up to the Nairobi summit in 2019. The Ghana Country Office Youth Fellowship programme was considered key to strengthening youth engagement in the Youth Forum.<sup>125</sup> Interviewees referred to an experience in Indonesia with the development of a "Youth Development Index" that could be useful to Ghana, and suggested it could be shared through an

118 Interviews and documentary review.

119 The UNFPA Strategic Plan (2012-2017) was framed around four outcomes, one of which (outcome 2) was "Increased priority on adolescents, especially on very young adolescent girls, in national development policies and programmes, particularly increased availability of comprehensive sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health services." This was then carried forward into the Strategic Plan (2018-2021) with the outcome being re-articulated as "every adolescent and youth, in particular adolescent girls, is empowered to have access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, in all contexts".

120 UNFPA (2020). UNFPA China Thematic Review South-South and Triangular Cooperation (2016-2019) Final Report

121 The Youth Forum was also supported by the Chinese private sector (Beifang International Education Group – BIEG).

122 UNFPA China Thematic Review South-South and Triangular Cooperation (2016-2019) Final Report. UNFPA, 2020.

123 Interviews and documentary review.

124 3rd China-Africa Conference on Population and Development Youth Forum Outcome. UNFPA, 2019. Available at: <https://china.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Youth%20Youth%20Outcome%20Document.pdf> (last access April 15th 2020).

125 Interviews and documentary review.

SSC project.<sup>126</sup> Interviewees have suggested that UNFPA helps increase the capacity of youth to engage in SSC, clarifying the concept of SSC so that it becomes more accessible to young people.<sup>127</sup>

The Togo country office approached Ghana country office regarding their programme of Youth Fellowship – it ultimately resulted in the support from Ghana country office to a local Youth Fellow for the Togo country office to start a similar programme.<sup>128</sup>

### Box 7. Good practice: ESARO Safeguard Young People Programme

The Safeguard Young People (SYP) programme is considered the flagship youth programme of UNFPA ESARO, and it has been implemented by UNFPA and its national and regional partners in eight Southern African countries. The first and second phases of the programme (2014-2016 and 2017-2019) were designed to address the sexual and reproductive health and rights needs of adolescents and young people. Funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the SYP programme aims at scaling up comprehensive interventions for youth through a multisectoral, regional and holistic approach. SYP has been implemented since 2014 in the eight Southern African countries with the highest HIV prevalence – Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Several good results were identified in the SYP programme: i) generating strategic information to be used by key stakeholders in advancing the agenda of adolescents and young people's SRHR; ii) regional comprehensive sexuality education resource package for out-of-school young people; iii) The Southern African Development Community Model Law on Eradicating Child Marriage and Protecting Children Already in Marriage. The UNFPA report: A Collection of Good Practices from the Safeguard Young People Programme (UNFPA, 2019) highlights that: "The regional approach described above has fostered South-South cooperation and has saved significant financial and human resources as well as time in the development of comprehensive sexuality education materials with technically sound key messages for each country. The eight SYP countries successfully adapted the materials to their local sociocultural contexts and their governments endorsed the package as the nationally recognized materials for out-of-school young people." At country level, national partners interviewed recognized the value of working with ESARO for results that, although had been initially thought to be for the benefit of the country's youth, were ultimately the subject of study visits from countries interested in learning from the multisector approach: representatives from Botswana and Eswatini, for instance, have undertaken study visits to South Africa.

The case of Bangladesh also highlights the results of a youth forum experience:

"The youth forum experiences in 2012 and 2013, examples of good practice, have been followed up with discussion on how to apply this regional experience to the national level in Bangladesh. At the high-level, inter-ministerial conference on Evidence for Action: South-South Collaboration for ICPD beyond 2012, regional events in Asia strengthened youth capacity by presenting evidence on rights-based programming for vulnerable groups (youths and adolescents, especially girls). Trained youths contributed to the development of the action plan based on the ASRH strategy, which was disseminated to the stakeholders in December 2013. This same group of youths was also engaged in youth consultation for finalizing the SAARC Youth Charter. The experiences strengthened UNFPA support for youth leadership. UNFPA provided consultative support to three youth-led networks: people living with HIV, a sex workers network, and sexually transmitted infection (STI) networks (non-government organizations working for prevention of sexually transmitted infection especially among the youth and adolescents). Through a series of consultative meetings, members of these networks were educated on the connection between HIV and sexual and reproductive health issues so that they could contribute to creating a demand for integrated HIV and SRH services."<sup>129</sup>

<sup>126</sup> Interviews and documentary review.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Country Programme Evaluation of Bangladesh (2012-2016)

In South Africa, UNFPA played a facilitating role in a study visit from South African policy-makers to Brazil, with the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), in the field of adolescent SRHR. UNFPA was also referred to as validating the experiences shared, although in a largely informal manner. There were no mentions of results and follow up activities. The South African experience dealing with adolescents' SRHR within institutions of higher education through an interdisciplinary approach was mentioned as a potential experience to be shared through SSC arrangements.<sup>130</sup>

All these examples highlight the potential of SSC as a modality to promote adolescent and youth outcomes in line with UNFPA commitments.

**Finding 10. There are positive examples of humanitarian SSC and this shows a clear benefit where there are commonalities of crisis impact, but this has not been fully and systematically leveraged.**

Across the different mandate areas, humanitarian initiatives were ranked last within the survey with only 23 per cent of respondents reporting any humanitarian SSC initiatives. This is reflected by the limited humanitarian responses within the case studies. However, there is strong potential for SSC being used to improve the effectiveness of the UNFPA humanitarian response.<sup>131</sup>

As an example, UNFPA respondents highlighted a Colombia-Brazil-Jordan study visit for UNFPA Brazil and Colombia to learn from the UNFPA Jordan Syrian refugee response. The commonality of crisis here is based on crises in neighbouring countries (respectively, Syria and Venezuela) over-spilling into middle-income (and in UNFPA terms, pink quadrant) countries with limited internal humanitarian experience and, for UNFPA, limited service delivery experience. This was a joint initiative with UNHCR.

It should be noted that the Jordan study visit initiative is not technically an SSC initiative because no government or civil society counterparts from Brazil or Colombia were involved. This was therefore an internal UNFPA/UNCHR learning initiative, rather than UNFPA/UNHCR supporting the Brazilian and Colombian governments to learn from the Jordan Government refugee response, which would have defined the visit as SSC. However, the initiative has been included here as it highlights a number of factors that are useful considerations for SSC humanitarian support within UNFPA.

The Jordan study visit demonstrated to Brazil and Colombia UNFPA and UNHCR colleagues the longer-term nature of refugee/migrant displacement in the modern world and therefore the need for a strategy that includes social cohesion between those who are displaced and the host communities, with a sustainability factor built-in. The outcome of the study visit was to develop a policy paper on UNFPA classification and recommendations specific for middle-income, pink quadrant countries that are faced with an emerging crisis on the border and which fundamentally necessitate a shift in working modalities within UNFPA (note again, this is not SSC as it is about internal UNFPA policy stances rather than UNFPA supporting changes in government approaches as requested by governments).

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<sup>130</sup> Higher Health is a national agency that developed a comprehensive methodology to deal with youth SRHR in South Africa. More information at <http://higherhealth.ac.za>.

<sup>131</sup> Survey, interviews and documentary review.

**Box 8: Good practice: Humanitarian initiatives highlighting results and mutual benefits**

APRO facilitated an SSC initiative to strengthen reproductive health in the Syrian Arab Republic with a capacity-building project with Syrian midwives benefitting from study tours to the Islamic Republic of Iran. In November 2017, 16 Ministry of Health Syria staff from the national reproductive health programme and midwifery schools undertook a study visit to Iran to improve skills in reproductive health programme management, family planning services, and monitoring and evaluation. The study visit also allowed the Syrian participants to gain more in-depth knowledge regarding the role of midwives during crises. After seven years of crisis in Syria, sexual and reproductive health, including midwifery services, had severely declined, with more than 50 per cent of health facilities being partially or completely destroyed and the pre-existing cadre of midwives being severely depleted. Capacity-building challenges have been compounded by both a restriction of visas entering the Republic of Syria and a restriction of visas for Syrian personnel to travel to other countries due to sanctions. Therefore, Iran was a sensible choice given the relative ease with which Syrian nationals can enter Iran and the high skills of the health sector there.

Key elements of success highlighted from the initiative included: (a) meeting urgent needs for capacity development in Syria; (b) being demand-driven, with needs identified by the Syrian Ministry of Health and other stakeholders; (c) clear national ownership, with the Syrian Ministry of Health being fully engaged in planning, implementation, and preparation of mission reports; (d) ensuring risk mitigation with regards to visa issues, with Iran a strategic partner choice; and (e) high-level involvement including the Acting Minister of Health and Medical Education in Roan and the Minister and Deputy Minister of Health in Syria.

It was also highlighted that, while this was an exchange primarily intended to benefit the Syrian Ministry of Health participants, the participating health staff in Iran also had a chance to learn of the challenges in Syria and how health service providers had been addressing those challenges to date, so the study visit was considered to result in dual learning and mutual benefit. Also, an agreement between the Government of Syria and the Government of Iran followed to continue the support and exchange.

Lessons identified within the Jordan study visit that are highly relevant to humanitarian SSC considerations within UNFPA include: (a) learning across regions is useful when considering the economic and social status of a country (for example, middle-income) and the type of crisis being faced (for example, influx of refugees/migrants due to a crisis across the border in another country rather than an internal crisis); (b) identification of local partners/civil society organizations for rapid scale-up of direct-service provision outside of the standard health service provision of the country is useful – both for UNFPA and potentially for government counterparts; (c) ensuring readiness/preparedness for coordination structures is important and there was interesting learning for Brazil and Colombia from the study visit of the utility of UNFPA working closely with the Ministry of Health in Jordan for coordination in SRHR and gender-based violence, particularly in terms of being a coordination model of capacity-strengthening and cooperation rather than direct (UNFPA) service delivery; and (d) within UNFPA, this study visit (irrespective of whether it is SSC or not) relied entirely on internal and informal connections between staff members, rather than a more systematized and institutionalized way of recognizing opportunities for sharing and learning.

UNFPA respondents report that SSC vis à vis humanitarian response is complex. Humanitarian crises in general rely on international expertise and particularly in contexts of high conflict such as the Arab States region, where humanitarian principles come into play (humanity, independence, neutrality, and impartiality) humanitarian actors such as non-governmental organizations often turn more to United Nations agencies than to government counterparts. United Nations humanitarian responses have more limited interaction with government counterparts and more engagement with the established humanitarian United Nations system within the country.

However, a flip side to this is that SSC could be considered almost a natural mode of engagement for humanitarian initiatives, particularly for regions that face hazards that are necessarily cross-border. For example, as a regional office, ESARO fosters learning from countries that have experienced dealing with conflict for longer, linking knowledge and practices. Also, ESARO works with regional economic institutions for policy dialogue on humanitarian issues. Humanitarian SSC is also referred to as more conducive of internal coordination and working across agencies.<sup>132</sup>

<sup>132</sup> UNFPA key informants.

APRO has some good humanitarian examples, including the Iran-Syria example as highlighted in Box 8. Another good initiative is the Philippines-Indonesia youth engagement in emergencies initiative, which was implemented to help Indonesia develop guidelines and protocols for engaging youth in humanitarian response, in the same way the Philippines has managed to do. Indonesia and the Philippines share common humanitarian risk factors: a) both being within the Pacific ring of fire and vulnerable to similar earthquakes and typhoons; b) both having large youth populations. Engagement of youth during typhoon Haiyan in 2013 was a starting point for the training, supported by UNFPA. Resource staff (particularly from the Family Planning Organization of the Philippines (FPOP) and International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)) for the training had been youth volunteers during typhoon Haiyan and before:

“The trained peer educators became UNFPA’s and FPOP’s important youth human resource in subsequent disasters, including during: a) Typhoon Bopha, the strongest tropical cyclone to ever hit Mindanao in Southern Philippines in December 2012; b) the armed conflict led by Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) leader Nur Misuari in Zamboanga City in September 2013; and c) the deadly Haiyan Typhoon in November 2013.”<sup>133</sup>

This grounded the training in relevant experience for the Indonesian youth leaders who attended the training.

“On December 8-12, 2014, the Commission on Population and Development (POPCOM) and the Family Planning Organization of the Philippines (FPOP), in partnership with the UNFPA Country Offices in Indonesia and the Philippines, conducted a training workshop for 20 Indonesians (10 Youth Advisory Panel members and 10 humanitarian response programmers) at Lake Hotel in Tagaytay City, Philippines. The activity was in line with the Philippines-Indonesia South-South Cooperation Project on Population, Family Planning, Reproductive Health and Gender, a government-to-government collaborative undertaking intended to exchange lessons and technical expertise between the two countries in specified areas of common concerns.”<sup>134</sup>

In terms of outcomes, the UNFPA Indonesia website demonstrates that since this initiative, the Indonesia country office has been able to produce a number of publications and reports on youth in humanitarian action, some with direct attribution to the Philippines training.<sup>135</sup>

Other humanitarian SSC initiatives rely more heavily on regional platforms rather than bilateral cooperation. For example, the EECA Regional Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG) Platform is a good example of ongoing multilateral SSC collaboration within a region, including government, civil society, non-government organization, and United Nations actors involved in SRHR in emergencies, recognizing the commonalities of crisis within the region:

“The countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia are highly prone to both natural (a variety of natural hazards, including floods, droughts, wild fires, earthquakes, strong winds, and landslides) and manmade disasters, which pose a constant threat to the survival and well-being of the population, particularly children and women. Therefore, in order to better coordinate all efforts on humanitarian response and emergency preparedness, the Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG) on Reproductive Health (RH) in Crises for Eastern Europe and Central Asia was established in 2011 at the 13th annual meeting of the Global Inter-Agency Working Group on RH in crisis.”<sup>136</sup>

133 Interviews and documentary review: UNFPA. Humanitarian Initiative under the Philippines-Indonesia South-South Cooperation on Population, Family Planning, Reproductive Health and Gender.

134 Ibid.

135 For example: 1. Indonesian Youth Leaders Help Define the Role of Young People in Humanitarian Settings, a news report on 6 May 2015 in <https://indonesia.unfpa.org/en/news/indonesian-youth-leaders-help-define-role-young-people-humanitarian-settings>; 2. Operational Guideline on The Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP) for Reproductive Health Implementation in Health Crisis, with attention given to youth participation, produced in 2017, in <https://indonesia.unfpa.org/en/publications/operational-guideline-minimum-initial-service-package-misp-reproductive-health>; 3. Adolescent Guideline Pocketbook in Health Crisis Situations, a 2018 publication in <https://indonesia.unfpa.org/en/publications/adolescent-guideline-pocketbook-health-crisis-situations>; 4. UNFPA Humanitarian Response: Activities and coverages, from October 2018 to March 2019, with a section on fostering youth empowerment and engagement, a 2019 report in <https://indonesia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/FINAL%20CERF%20UNFPA%20Hum%20coverage-March2019%20%281%29%20%281%29.pdf>; 5. Youth Empowerment & Engagement for Community Resilience & Development, a 2019 publication in <https://indonesia.unfpa.org/en/publications/youth-empowerment-engagement-community-resilience-development>; 6. Youth in <https://indonesia.unfpa.org/en/publications/unfpa-humanitarian-response-activities-coverages>; Emergencies, a 2019 publication in <https://indonesia.unfpa.org/en/publications/youth-emergencies>. UNFPA Humanitarian Initiative under the Philippines-Indonesia South-South Cooperation on Population, Family Planning, Reproductive Health and Gender. undated.

136 UNFPA and IPPF. Report. 3rd Forum Eastern Europe Central Asia (EECA) Inter-Agency Working Group (AWG) on Sexual and Reproductive Health in Crisis. 2014.

The first EECA IAWG forum took place on 20-21 November 2012 in Istanbul with a follow-up, second forum, in November 2013. The 3rd IAWG EECA forum took place in October 2014. It brought together more than 75 participants from 18 countries in the region, including representatives from national governments, non-government organizations and UNFPA country offices. Participants discussed opportunities to further reinforce technical assistance for national stakeholders and governments in order to ensure SRHR in national preparedness and inter-agency contingency plans. There was also knowledge-sharing among participants, with interviews from countries that recently faced emergency situations (Bosnia, Serbia and Ukraine) and sharing of best practices on Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP) preparedness by country champions. In addition several tools and methods to strengthen the sexual and reproductive health response in emergency were presented and discussed such as the MISP calculator, data collection in emergencies, disaster risk reduction – Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative (CADRI), simulation exercises in Uzbekistan, gender-based violence in emergencies. There were also MISP preparedness assessment findings (challenges and wins).<sup>137</sup>

All these examples show the potential of SSC for humanitarian action and there is scope for UNFPA to use these good practices to expand this area of work.

#### **Box 9: COVID-19 considerations**

As the humanitarian crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic continues across the globe, UNFPA has the opportunity to consider how this can accelerate the use of SSC modalities. Many global North response mechanisms for the pandemic – social distancing, constant handwashing – are impractical for many global South and humanitarian contexts (slum areas, refugee camps, etc.) and therefore it is critical that global South countries share experience of successfully addressing the pandemic in ways which are realistic for the contexts. SSC modalities will be important to address this particular humanitarian issue.

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<sup>137</sup> Interviews and documentary review.

## AREA OF INVESTIGATION 3

Modality-focused: Efficiency, effectiveness and coordination of UNFPA South-South and triangular cooperation<sup>138</sup>

### EQ3: To what extent is SSTC an efficient mode of engagement for UNFPA?<sup>139</sup>

#### Findings

11. Given the limited SSC results monitoring, it is not possible to accurately assess the adequacy of either human or financial resources for SSC within UNFPA. However, the evidence points to a general and consistent perception of insufficient human resources and financial resources to SSC.
12. Overall, UNFPA has not differentiated the varying levels of engagement with SSC nor the different types of SSC modalities, which hampers a consistent understanding of SSC processes and results.
13. UNFPA has recently advanced in establishing processes and mechanisms for SSC and its efficiency in facilitating SSC is well regarded by external partners, however there are several bottlenecks related to internal coordination and corporate processes that hamper UNFPA capacity to foster more sustaining and at-scale models of SSC.

**Finding 11. Given the limited SSC results monitoring, it is not possible to accurately assess the adequacy of either human or financial resources for SSC within UNFPA. However, the evidence points to a general and consistent perception of insufficient human resources and financial resources to SSC.**

Overwhelmingly, UNFPA staff reported under-resourcing for both funding and staffing to undertake SSTC initiatives.<sup>140</sup> Overall, analysis of the current staffing highlights challenges related not only to the number of dedicated staff, but also to staff capacities for SSC, coupled with a need for further clarifying of roles and responsibilities. The evidence suggests that limited SSC funding is hindering UNFPA capacity to broker and establish SSC in some areas, as well as to scale up existing initiatives in other areas. A more nuanced analysis reveals that an underlying challenge relates to the lack of timeliness and flexibility of resource allocation, as well as the need to enhance organizational fundraising capacity for SSC.<sup>141</sup>

#### Human resources

Only 35 per cent of survey respondents reported sufficient human resources within their office to undertake SSC initiatives. Human-resource challenges were highlighted in a third of written survey responses. Case studies reinforce such perception, with UNFPA staff reporting challenges related to staff skills and capacities to support SSC (including lack of capacity-building opportunities) coupled with a lack of opportunities to increase understanding of SSC beyond the basic level provided by the online training course, as well as a lack of staff availability to support SSC in terms of dedicated time and overlapping responsibilities.

Moreover, case studies highlight that SSC requires specific skill sets, including brokering, synthesizing information and translating it into transferrable knowledge, along with awareness of, and capacity for, anticipating context-opportunities to leverage relevant exchanges.<sup>142</sup> The current UNFPA initiatives, such as the online training course and SSC sessions during regional planning meetings, have been so far limited in that they highlight what SSC is but give less information regarding

<sup>138</sup> Note that Area of Investigation 3 has 2 evaluation questions, EQ3 and EQ4.

<sup>139</sup> A3.1 Financial resources and human resources allocated to SSC are adequate and consistent. A3.2 Processes/ mechanisms /systems to facilitate SSC initiatives are working. A3.3 Internal coordination between global, regional, country, and subnational levels is systematic.

<sup>140</sup> Case studies and survey.

<sup>141</sup> Interviews and documentary review.

<sup>142</sup> UNFPA key informants.

how SSC is implemented.<sup>143</sup> Indeed, the purpose of the training course and the sessions within the regional planning meetings is to raise general awareness rather than to upskill staff with specific expertise for SSC implementation, which has proven effective, as demonstrated in Finding 1. So, while the online course and the regional meeting SSC sessions have successfully supported raising awareness of SSC, they have still not enabled staff to achieve an adequate level of understanding of SSC or build the capacities needed to undertake SSTC initiatives.<sup>144</sup>

SSC is predominantly perceived as an additional responsibility for regional and country office staff.<sup>145</sup> In most cases, SSC responsibilities and roles are not fully consolidated among thematic advisors and SSC focal points at regional and country office levels, with several implications.<sup>146</sup> Firstly, this impacts the capacity of regional and country offices to deliver more qualified SSC processes (mapping needs, brokering, facilitating, adding technical expertise and documenting experiences) thus hampering UNFPA ability to expand its SSC portfolio and tap into the potential for SSC within regions and particular countries. Secondly, it also hinders the capacity of regional and country offices to address SSC as a cross-cutting issue and transversal mode of engagement.

Nonetheless, it is worth noting that regions and countries have different requirements, and so investment to SSC has also taken different shapes. There are several examples where country offices have invested more in providing the staffing required to adequately respond to their context opportunities. For instance, in UNFPA Brazil, there are two SSC focal points engaged in supporting SSC programming, logistics and administration.<sup>147</sup> Other country offices, like Indonesia and Thailand also have a dedicated focal point for SSC.

Similarly, UNFPA China has deployed significant human, technical and networking resources liaising with other country offices and its regional office (WCARO) to support the development of concept notes and project proposals for the South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund (SSCAF), while brokering with Chinese implementation partners and SSC authorities. This process entailed considerable efforts for translation under short deadlines. Moreover, the China country office provided technical input to the 2019 SSCAF implementation agreement negotiated among different United Nations agencies and funds. In the SSCAF case, the UNFPA country and regional offices have mobilized substantial efforts to develop the proposals (human resources, time, convening partners).<sup>148</sup> Finally, UNFPA Thailand has an SSC focal point and has invested efforts to map and systematize relevant Thai knowledge and resources under the UNFPA mandate.<sup>149</sup> As seen in EQ2, SSC supported by those countries presents evidence of promising results, however, even in such cases, there is a general sense that efforts are only partially meeting the corporate needs required by SSC as a mode of engagement, and more staff capacity is needed in order to bring it to scale.<sup>150</sup>

To put the human-resource challenges at UNFPA for SSC in perspective, other United Nations agencies have similar institutional, organization-wide set-ups for SSC, with a specialized unit dedicated to SSTC and most of them have two to five staff dedicated to SSTC at headquarters.<sup>151</sup> When it comes to decentralized responsibilities, the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP) also have SSTC capacities installed at country level, particularly in China and Brazil, with considerable staff dedicated to SSTC, under different arrangements,<sup>152</sup> reflecting particular countries' engagement in SSC. Finally, all organizations have also assigned

143 As per information at September 2019, two regions have not been contemplated with such informative/formative session during RPM. It is worth mentioning that the integration of SSC into RPMs has taken different shapes. For instance, the WCARO regional planning meeting in December 2018 hosted a three-day meeting entitled "Scaling up through strategic partnerships: leveraging South-South and triangular cooperation".

144 Interviews.

145 Ibid.

146 Case studies

147 Ibid.

148 UNFPA (2020). UNFPA China Thematic Review South-South and Triangular Cooperation (2016-2019) Final Report.

149 Case studies

150 Interviews and documentary review.

151 WFP, UNICEF and ILO. FAO and IFAD stand out, with considerably more staff dedicated at HQ – 5 to 10 and 10 to 15 respectively. Please see the comparative study in Annex X.

152 IFAD has two staff each in Addis Ababa and Brasilia respectively and one to start soon in Beijing to support its field operations. UNICEF China CO currently has an unit exclusively dedicated to SSTC. UNICEF Brazil CO also had, during the period 2012-2016, a South-South Cooperation Unit, with exclusive and specialized staff. WFP counts on three established centres of excellence in Brazil, China and a regional centre in Côte d'Ivoire. The CoE in Brazil employs 29 staff and the CoE in China 23; with over 80 per cent of the team recruited nationally in both centres.

focal points regionally and/or at the thematic divisions in headquarters, but in some cases like the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) or WFP focal points in particular, regions are fully dedicated to SSTC (funded by the regional offices).<sup>153</sup>

### Financial resources

Human and financial resources are inextricably interlinked, as financial resources are required for increasing staffing numbers or providing additional training and capacity-building to existing staff.

Currently data available to analyse resources devoted explicitly to SSC initiatives is limited,<sup>154</sup> although the evaluation raised significant initiatives within UNFPA aimed at understanding the adequacy of resources and efficiency of SSC (see Box 10).<sup>155</sup> Despite the fact that less than a quarter of survey respondents (23 per cent) reported sufficient financial resources, respondents within the case studies of this evaluation were predominantly in consensus that supporting SSC does not require substantial investments compared to many other modalities, but rather timely seed funding to leverage opportunities as they arise, which requires flexibility in budgetary programming. Additionally, what is required is greater corporate fundraising capacity with external partners, including domestic financing, to support SSC initiatives.

#### Box 10. South-South cooperation monetization and cost-benefit analysis: an unfinished debate

This evaluation found several examples of how UNFPA has been tapping into a wealth of knowledge available in numerous public institutions in developing countries through SSC partnerships with increasing investment from global South governments. Brazil provided personal digital assistants and software to support Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal to undertake their censuses and UNFPA has played a key role in supporting such in-kind resource mobilization in the area of electronic data collection.

The Government of Indonesia currently funds 85 per cent of SSC initiatives: in 2012, 80 per cent of SSC was funded by UNFPA and only 20 per cent by the Government. There is further evidence of allocation of national budget to scale up initiatives that result from SSC exchanges in the Philippines and Laos. LACRO has also been able to leverage resources from cooperating countries, which would assign personnel in their ministries of foreign affairs or in their development cooperation agencies to manage the PALTA.

Some country offices have made progress in understanding the adequacy of resources and efficiency through country-level evaluations of UNFPA-supported SSC initiatives (see Finding 14 for more information). UNFPA in Thailand has used the Social Return on Investment (SROI) framework to review the efficiency and effectiveness of the "making pregnancy safer" SSC initiative. The SROI case was developed in order to make the case on South-South cooperation results and effectiveness of SSC and has contributed to encourage the Thai and the Laos governments to increase their financial commitment to the initiative.

Despite those significant examples, comprehensive data on the resources invested and leveraged by SSC is not readily available within UNFPA and there are not consistent corporate requirements and guidelines on how to assess SSC (see Area of Investigation 1 for further information). Without a solid body of evidence on the results, effectiveness and sustainability of SSC initiatives, as well as an estimate of the in-kind contributions, it is not possible to assess the cost-benefit of SSC.

The challenge of assessing SSC is not restricted to UNFPA. Unlike the Official Development Assistance (ODA), the debate regarding the definition of what is understood by South-South cooperation remains inconclusive and SSC practices do not currently enjoy commonly agreed modalities, measurement frameworks or evaluation standards. Other United Nations agencies are also struggling to establish proper mechanisms to assess SSTC. However, Southern countries do agree that SSC cannot be quantified solely through financial flows. Therefore, to assess the

153 Comparative study.

154 Mainly available through self-reported information fed into GPS. However the consistency and accuracy of such information is still weak (see Finding 13). To point out such a challenge the Joint Inspection Unit report (2011) assessed that "programming of funds in most organizations is carried out at the country level, jointly with national authorities, and/or earmarked by donors, and the idea of a numerical target of resource allocation seems to assume a centralized allocation mechanism, rather than a primarily country-based mechanism for programming". Also, unless there are "clear indications in the programme-budget exercise and in technical cooperation funds specifically earmarked for such initiatives" SSC resources estimation is not possible.

155 Additional information for Box 10: PALTA was the UNFPA LACRO South-South Cooperation Platform on ICPD. Active from 2013 to 2015, the platform aimed to be an operational mechanism to enhance SSTC on population issues, increasing commitment and technical contribution to the ICPD agenda under a "multilateral umbrella mechanism" managed by LACRO. It was a tool to facilitate cooperation among peer countries providing a source of UNFPA-validated solutions that contributed to the ICPD and MDG agendas.

cost-benefit of SSC beyond financial flows measurement, there is a need to find a way to properly measure national budget allocation in partner countries, and the value of in-kind contributions, considering previous investments in technology development or capacity development of a southern expert, including against international “pricing”.

As with staffing requirements, regional and country office funding requirements and opportunity vary across respective regions or countries. For instance, country offices in countries that have been championing SSC – such as Brazil, China, Indonesia, and Thailand – reported specific annual allocations to implement SSC from their core budget, which in the case of middle-income countries, provides only limited possibilities to scale up SSC partnerships and initiatives.<sup>156</sup> Other country offices use programme budgets to facilitate exchanges under their country programme document thematic priorities. In both cases, budgetary planning for SSC was reported as a challenge and funding SSC through either core or programmatic budgeting was perceived by respondents as limiting the potential of UNFPA.<sup>157</sup>

The evaluation found no evidence of a specific budget for South-South cooperation at regional levels.<sup>158</sup> Particular initiatives are funded by regional office budget support to specific thematic priorities. For instance, WCARO, through its budget allocated to census programming, supports the centre of reference in Senegal by financing kick-start activities such as needs-assessment missions and experts for preparatory census work.<sup>159</sup> Similarly, ECCARO supported a regional workshop on ageing, which served as a follow-up to SSC exchanges initiated by country offices in the Balkans. APRO reported having earmarked budget for promoting multi-country regional exchanges and capacity-building, although not all areas of the UNFPA mandate are equally funded, and in some cases do not allow multi-country initiatives.<sup>160</sup>

In this diverse scenario, case studies raised several concrete examples of a lack of funding for SSC that were reported as bottlenecks hindering UNFPA capacity to broker SSC (particularly for promoting study visits and to provide translation during SSC exchanges), to kick start cross-region cooperation processes, and to scale up existing initiatives.<sup>161</sup>

On the other hand, UNFPA has been effectively exploring SSC funding mechanisms. Currently, 14 per cent of country offices, in dialogue with ICCO and regional offices, have submitted, or are in the process of submitting, proposals to existing funds such as the Chinese SSCAF, the India-United Nations Partnership Development Fund, or the India Brazil, South Africa (IBSA) Fund.<sup>162</sup> Submitting proposals to those funds required from UNFPA significant coordination efforts (headquarters, regional office and country offices) in order to match potential proposals with each fund's different requirements and priorities. Still, survey results show that funding mechanisms for SSC are not widely known within UNFPA: 96 per cent of the survey respondents were not aware of any specific SSC funding mechanisms even though the Guidance Note on South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Programming (2018) references the few existing ones. The survey's open-ended responses point to the importance of enhancing communication - in a simplified manner - related to fundraising opportunities, as well as strengthening headquarters and regional office support to country offices in fundraising. Such a mismatch can be explained

156 Within UNFPA, core resources are distributed according to an internal classification that takes into consideration a combination of a country's needs and the ability to finance its own development, and is consistent with the Agenda 2030 call to leave no one behind and to address multi-dimensional inequalities between and among countries. Nearly 60 per cent of core resources are allocated to most vulnerable countries in Africa, the least developed countries and the landlocked developing countries. This classification also determines the deployment of modes of engagement. (UNFPA, Strategic Plan (2018–2021)).

157 Interviews and documentary review.

158 Ibid.

159 Ibid.

160 Ibid.

161 Ibid.

162 Information provided by ICCO in September 2020. Countries that have submitted proposals to China SSCAF: Mozambique (2019, USD 1.5M), Nepal (2018, USD 400k) Sierra Leona (2018, USD 2M), Zimbabwe (2019, USD 1.2M). Countries that have submitted proposals to the India-United Nations Partnership Development Fund: Cabo Verde (2019, USD 526,413), Guyana (2019, USD 543,200), Moldova (2019, USD 550k), Paraguay (2019, USD 582,524), Sao Tome & Principe (2018, USD 533,981k), Central African Republic (submitted 2020), Bhutan (submitted 2020), Guinea-Conakry (submitted 2020, joint proposal with WFP), The Gambia (submitted 2019), Zambia (Submitted 2019). Countries that have submitted proposals to the India, Brazil, South Africa (IBSA) Fund: Burundi (2010, USD 1.1M, joint with UNDP), Laos PDR (submitted 2017), Swaziland (submitted 2017). Furthermore, the following country offices have expressed keen interest in working with ICCO to submit proposals to southern funding mechanisms: Cuba, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Kazakhstan, Suriname.

by the fact that particular funding for SSC, such as the ones mentioned, is targeted and UNFPA has prioritized efforts to mobilize proposals more likely to be accepted.<sup>163</sup>

In the same vein, evidence from case studies suggest that UNFPA staff is recognizant of the potential in engaging other development partners and the need to invest more in wider triangular arrangements to scale up SSC initiatives, not only with financial resources but also with expertise. Several examples of how wider triangular arrangements can scale up SSC initiatives were assessed. For instance, under the initiative Strategic Partnership with Muslim Religious Leaders on Family Planning, supported by the Government of Indonesia, additional funding was raised to implement the follow-up actions: from DFID in Nepal and from the Ethiopian Muslim Development Agency in Ethiopia.<sup>164</sup> Likewise, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, University College London supported a survey on the impact of the healthy ageing centres, covering all costs of the survey, except for the volunteers who applied it in Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>165</sup>

#### **Box 11. South-South cooperation funding and resource mobilization in the United Nations system at a glance**

Within WFP, SSC projects have primarily been implemented with seed funding from particular donors. WFP has also established three centres of excellence with different mandates that are mainly funded by host governments (Brazil, China and Cote d'Ivoire). For example, the centre of excellence against hunger in Brazil was established through a trust fund managed by WFP with contributions from the Brazilian Government, which later became a multi-donor arrangement and received contributions from developed countries and private foundations.

For FAO, member-states allocate earmarked funds for SSC and developing countries are the main contributors. FAO has also established trust funds that are mobilized to support SSC initiatives. Finally, SSC initiatives are also funded by regular budget (RB) seed money, complemented by extraordinary budget (XB) funds. Special attention is given to partner countries in-kind support and FAO is currently working on the monetization of SSC contributions in order to make it more visible.

IFAD funding for SSC comes from administrative budget allocations, as well as the Funds' programme of loans and grants. Additionally, it established the IFAD China Facility, with a pledge of USD 10 million in unrestricted complementary contributions from the Government of China to be used to support IFAD SSC activities.

An important SSTC institutionalization milestone within the International Labour Organization (ILO) was the allocation of Regular Budget for Technical Cooperation (RBTC) for SSTC, in 2012. In the last two biennia, ILO allocated RB around USD 1.7 million each biennium to SSC (2016-2017 and 2018-2019) and was able to raise more than USD 20 million as XB from developing countries. As for the distribution of RBTC for SSTC, biannual programming is under the PARDEV unit responsibility by SSTC projects' screening is decentralized, and each regional office has a certain amount to distribute among projects presented in each region. Additionally, headquarters and the International Training Centre of the ILO (ITCILO) are also funded by RBTC to conduct global SSTC initiatives, such as raising awareness and training.

Within the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), SSTC activities are embedded in projects and the latest SSTC strategy foresees that funding for SSTC should be ensured by the UNEP regular budget (through the Environment Fund).

UNICEF launched a call for proposals to set-aside funds for SSC in 2013.

*Source: comparative study.*

Finally, although more than half of the survey respondents do believe that SSC is a cost-effective mode of engagement (59 per cent), coexistent understandings, albeit not necessarily mutually exclusive, impede UNFPA from reaching a consensus and a strategic approach on how to leverage SSC funding. On the one hand, SSC is seen as a source of financial resources, particularly from middle-income countries or as a more cost-effective way of developing capacity. On the other hand, SSC is rather seen as a source of knowledge and expertise, which needs investment, and thus it should not be assessed in terms of

<sup>163</sup> Interviews and documentary review.

<sup>164</sup> UNFPA, 2018 Cross-cultural partnerships among Muslim religious leaders to achieve SDG3 through reducing unmet need for family planning-Submitted to the 2018 Good Practice Competition on South-South Cooperation (SSC).

<sup>165</sup> Interviews and documentary review.

financial revenues, but rather an assessment should focus on results.<sup>166</sup> Such different understandings need to be addressed in order to achieve greater clarity on a value proposition of SSC and to develop a more deliberate funding approach for it. As briefly described in Box 11, within the United Nations system, SSC funding is very diverse, according to each agency's engagement in SSC, as well as its organization-wide funding arrangements. Such diversity, along with the wealth of lessons learned on SSC cost benefit existing within UNFPA (Box 10), can be taken as examples to inform an internal debate on how UNFPA will address SSC funding in the future.

**Finding 12. Overall, UNFPA has not differentiated the varying levels of engagement with SSC nor the different types of SSC modalities, which hampers a consistent understanding of SSC processes and results.**

The UNFPA South-South Cooperation Strategy outlines the UNFPA roles in SSC, but there is limited clarity on the distinction between UNFPA levels of engagement across different degrees of support. This gap has several implications in terms of follow-up processes and monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

The UNFPA South-South Cooperation Strategy (2017) foresees UNFPA engagement at three broad levels:

1. Brokering SSC among Southern partners, through supporting countries to match-make needs and demands, in addition to convening policy dialogue and facilitating partnerships
2. Supporting SSC exchanges operationally and technically, through: providing quality assurance; qualifying and adapting knowledge, providing expert personnel, assisting the progress monitoring and supporting the documentation of processes; and mobilizing resources to enable and scale up SSC exchanges
3. Documenting and showcasing SSC results and lessons learned and fostering knowledge sharing among stakeholders, thereby strengthening capacity development.

As addressed in Area of Investigation 2, UNFPA country and regional offices engage in SSC at all those levels and across all mandate areas. Moreover, initiatives are extremely diverse in terms of the SSC modalities deployed, such as one-off study visits, projects, trainings, policy dialogue, or even resource mobilization (for example, the SSCAF call for proposals).<sup>167</sup> As such, SSC initiatives require different levels of follow-up, monitoring and assessment of impact depending on the role performed by UNFPA and the nature of the initiative. All those aspects are further explored in findings 13 and 14 below.

**Finding 13. UNFPA has recently advanced in establishing processes and mechanisms for SSC and its efficiency in facilitating SSC is well regarded by external partners, however there are several bottlenecks related to internal coordination and corporate processes that hamper UNFPA capacity to foster more sustaining and at-scale models of SSC.**

UNFPA support in facilitating SSC is recognized by partners, but UNFPA staff see processes and mechanisms for planning, reporting, monitoring, evaluating and providing follow-up as major areas for improvement, particularly at country level. At global and regional level, UNFPA has limited corporate processes and mechanisms to broker SSC initiatives, hindering its capacity to match needs and demands, as well as to foster self-sustaining and at-scale models of SSC.<sup>168</sup>

Although coordination has been improved since the establishment of ICCO, institutionalized mechanisms for coordinating SSC still need to be rolled out and utilized systematically. Overall, enhancing internal coordination across all levels is a crucial step to leverage UNFPA as an SSC partner, particularly through enhancing its capacity to: tailor strategic approaches to different regions and countries; establish strategic partnerships and fundraise; and broker SSC both intra- and inter-regionally in a systematic manner.<sup>169</sup>

<sup>166</sup> Case studies and interviews.

<sup>167</sup> Interviews and documentary review.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

### Processes and mechanisms for South-South cooperation initiatives planning, reporting and follow-up

A third of survey respondents believe there are efficient mechanisms for SSC (34.6 per cent) and between 39 per cent and 53 per cent reported having processes in place to systematically plan and implement SSC initiatives at field level, including: mapping of the capacity and interest of national institutions (42.1 per cent); basic logical framework with indicators for measurement (40.3 per cent); mid-term monitoring (41.2 per cent); ex-post evaluation (39.4 per cent); and generating learning and lessons (53.5 per cent). Moreover, 56 per cent of respondents reported that their offices/departments are using SSC as a programming implementation strategy, which demonstrates the growing importance of SSC within UNFPA programming. Despite the survey's relatively positive responses for processes being in place to systematically plan, implement, monitor and evaluate SSC initiatives, case studies provided a nuanced view on the challenges faced at country and regional level regarding SSC implementation processes, which if properly addressed in the future, will enhance SSC mainstreaming.<sup>170</sup>

With regard to **planning** SSC, case studies point to challenges related to identifying SSC opportunities and strategically integrating SSC into programming at country level. Countries that have advanced in integrating SSC in their country programme documents' priorities reported challenges on how to translate SSC commitments into concrete plans of action.<sup>171</sup>

On **reporting** SSC, almost half of survey respondents (43.9 per cent) reported that the UNFPA tagging systems adequately capture SSC initiatives. Case studies raised a more detailed picture of the challenges currently faced, for example: a) reporting SSC within UNFPA internal systems is still uneven and new tagging in Atlas is still not being done consistently; and b) there is low awareness on how to capture SSC initiatives consistently in UNFPA databases and systems including GPS tagging and SIS.<sup>172</sup>

**Follow-up** of the SSC exchanges at country level has also been assessed as a major challenge to enhance SSC effectiveness within UNFPA. When follow-up does happen, it is primarily personal and informal, established by participants but without any institutional support or oversight from UNFPA.<sup>173</sup> This challenge is closely related to the importance of differentiating SSC modalities and UNFPA levels of engagement, as mentioned in Finding 12. Finally, monitoring and evaluation of SSC is a major area for improvement that will be further analysed under Finding 14.

### Mechanisms for knowledge sharing and brokering South-South cooperation

Regarding UNFPA broker capacity, national governments and other partners highly appreciate UNFPA technical support in SSC exchanges and acknowledge that the added value of UNFPA in SSC lies in its international network and broker potential. The merit, therefore, of having efficient processes to do this is clear. However, the evaluation also assessed challenges in this area, particularly related to knowledge harnessing, documentation and sharing, all of which are crucial to support SSC matchmaking.<sup>174</sup>

There are limited corporate outlets to access existing knowledge, and only just over a third (34.7 per cent) report utilizing information on SSC from the databases. Moreover, case studies informants repeatedly highlighted the need for a mechanism, such as a repository of practices that could facilitate the matchmaking processes, both inter- and intra-regionally.

In this regard, the evaluation raised existing - past and current - experience within UNFPA that can inform future endeavours aiming at addressing the knowledge-sharing dimension. For instance, the centre of reference project has a website through which countries note their interest in joining the SSC project, with the added advantage of a protocol used for preliminary needs and capacity assessment. The discontinued LACRO South-South Cooperation Platform on ICPD was also highlighted

170 Survey and case studies.

171 Interviews and documentary review.

172 Under SP 2018-2021 there is a dedicated indicator for SSC: "Number of UNFPA offices that use SSC to address countries' priorities" (OEE 1.12). Reporting on this indicator is based on consolidation of inputs from the CO's annual reporting exercise. Therefore, in SIS/My results there are two mandatory indicators to capture the CO's initiatives on SSC: "Number of South-South cooperation initiatives that the country has received during the year as a result of UNFPA support" (OEE 1.12a) and "Number of South-South cooperation initiatives that the country has provided during the year as a result of UNFPA support" (OEE 1.12b).

173 Case studies and documentary review. UNFPA. Annex 5: Results achieved through South-South and triangular cooperation, annual report of the Executive Director of UNFPA, 2019 annual session of the Executive Board. 2018. UNFPA Indonesia 2018 annual report

174 Interviews.

as a positive initiative at regional level. Finally, ICCO has been coordinating efforts with UNOSSC to feed the United Nations global knowledge sharing and partnership-brokering platform - the South-South Galaxy<sup>175</sup> - with SSC solutions facilitated by UNFPA.<sup>176</sup>

Box 12 presents a snapshot on how other United Nations organizations approach knowledge sharing, including web-based platforms and communities of practice, highlighting possible approaches to address the knowledge sharing, which can take different shapes and imply different levels of financial and human investment. It is worth mentioning that concern about avoiding the creation of multiple and overlapping tools was raised,<sup>177</sup> as well as concern about addressing the need for a good practices repository in a smart manner, including issues such as the quality of the information available, and whether that should be focused on learning or achievements, and the collaboration processes it can trigger. A living repository such as this requires not only regularly updated information (and the management costs associated with that) but also communication strategies, so it becomes a reference within the organization.<sup>178</sup>

Finally, during the course of this evaluation, several stakeholders highlighted the need to move towards more self-sustaining and at-scale models of SSC. With that in mind, ICCO is currently considering the establishment of centres of excellence (CoE), which are seen as an essential step to increase the availability of development solutions and for institutionalization of sustainable SSC. Another benefit highlighted is that UNFPA country offices can be risk-adverse in utilizing SSC approaches, and a centre of excellence reduces this reluctance as it represents an indication that there is a sustained, visible, existing opportunity for partnership. Centres of excellence can usually rely on national government funding and are expected to work towards building partnership with other stakeholders and partners. However, sustainability and country ownership of the centres of excellence were raised as particular areas of attention, since some respondents reported previously established, but now discontinued, UNFPA centres of excellence. Therefore UNFPA is expected to develop clear criteria and guidelines for centre of excellence establishment, as well as supporting capacity-building, including on partnership and networking.<sup>179</sup>

**Box 12. A snapshot of United Nations agencies' South-South cooperation knowledge platforms and online communities of practice**

FAO and IFAD have developed public web-based platforms to facilitate knowledge and partnership brokering for SSTC, encompassing good practices, technical guidance documents, and other resources. The FAO South-South Gateway is also established as a marketplace. Both the FAO South-South Gateway and the IFAD Rural Solutions Portal were initially released as a simpler platform seeded with member-countries' successful solutions, and are now being enlarged to host solutions from other partners. IFAD has two grants in place focusing on sourcing solutions from Africa, Latin America and Asia. Still, FAO and IFAD understand showcasing and encouraging the uptake of solutions is a challenge that won't be met with only the platforms available.

WFP is currently testing a beta version internal tool, mainly focused on providing readily available offers and demands of country offices, as well as contact of focal points to explore those. WFP decided to make this, initially, as an internal and light tool, so it wouldn't overload country and regional offices with requests to upload content and to test country offices' satisfaction with it before scaling it up.

UNICEF, WFP and ILO have all established online communities of practice. UNICEF, in partnership with UNOSSC and IPC-IG, promotes an online Community of Practice on South-South Cooperation for Children (CoP-SSC4C). This functions as a repository of good practices and brings together SSC practitioners. WFP also has established an informal channel for information exchange among SSTC at technical level (WFP community on South-South and triangular cooperation). The ILO South-South Meeting Point is an interactive space to engage and exchange to further the advancement of the ILO agenda. It also functions as a knowledge-sharing platform providing access to a wealth of knowledge and resources related to SSC and decent work.

175 <https://www.unsouthsouth.org/south-south-galaxy/>.

176 Interviews and documentary review.

177 In that sense, moving forward it will be important to align UNFPA systems and particularly repositories of good practice with South-South Galaxy and utilize this existing UN-wide platform as much as possible.

178 Interviews and documentary review.

179 Ibid.

As for other United Nations organizations, WFP and IFAD have centres of excellence hosted by Southern countries supporting SSC in their respective mandate areas and can provide several lessons learned on this kind of approach. For instance, IFAD supported the establishment of SSTC knowledge centres in Brazil, China and Ethiopia. For IFAD, the rationale behind the centres' establishment is that the centres should be placed in countries well positioned to foster partnerships and rally more support for SSTC in different regions and promote opportunities for middle-income countries to finance development interventions in other middle- and low-income countries. WFP has three centres of excellence, established since 2011, exclusively dedicated to SSTC in different areas of expertise (under SDG2 and SDG17), and funded by host governments Brazil, China and Côte d'Ivoire. Currently, 52 per cent of the country strategic programmes approved included the WFP centre of excellence in Brazil (the first one established) as the preferred partner for utilizing systematic approaches to national capacity development.

### Mechanisms for coordination

Although almost half of the survey's respondents believe that UNFPA has established effective mechanisms for coordination and support for SSC programming and implementation at the global, regional or country levels (47.3 per cent, and 43 per cent and 51 per cent respectively), only one third of survey respondents (35 per cent) believe there is clarity of roles at headquarters and regional levels, while another third (33 per cent) disagree with that (and the remaining 32 per cent did not know how to answer). Those figures are strongly supported by findings from all case studies, which provide further details on the main bottlenecks and expectations for enhanced coordination and the specific roles to be performed by each level, as detailed below.<sup>180</sup>

At global level, participation of ICCO during regional planning meetings was well regarded by UNFPA staff, however it was seen as limited in its ability to effectively address SSC mainstreaming into programming challenges. Main coordination challenges and bottlenecks consist of:<sup>181</sup>

1. The need for a more proactive role from headquarters to tap into inter-regional cooperation potential, in terms of identifying opportunities among regions and sharing information in different areas
2. The need for a corporate coordination effort to develop tailored approaches to different regions, countries and subjects, addressing – in a strategic and coherent manner – regional particularities, engagement with middle-income countries and cross-cutting issues, such as human rights or humanitarian issues
3. The need for increased support for regional and country offices to fundraise and access specific SSC funds and establish partnerships.

It is worth noting that the ICCO was established by the UNFPA Executive Director in October 2017, but it did not become fully staffed until 2018, the same year in which UNFPA issued the Guidance Note on South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Programming detailing the responsibilities by different UNFPA offices. Currently, resource mobilization and partnership advisors at the regional office level are responsible for SSC but this was added post facto to their job descriptions and is more of a goodwill function than one fully embedded within the role. At country level, there are SSC focal points in several country offices.<sup>182</sup>

**At regional level**, there is a wide perception within UNFPA staff that regional offices could be more proactive in brokering SSC exchanges intra-regionally. The regional office is perceived by respondents as uniquely placed to perform a knowledge-broker role, but currently at regional level, processes to facilitate and broker SSC initiatives are mainly through sharing information on good practices in an ad hoc and case-by-case manner. A more proactive and systematic broker role would require a closer and more sustained dialogue on SSC between regional and country offices, including not only SSC focal points but also thematic advisors. Country offices expect regional offices to provide strategic thinking on SSC in the region, promoting policy dialogue and supporting an enabling environment for countries to engage in SSC with UNFPA, such as advocating for

<sup>180</sup> Survey and interviews.

<sup>181</sup> Interviews and documentary review.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

SSC, fostering memorandums of understanding, liaising with regional bodies, communicating results and making UNFPA SSC stories visible to others.<sup>183</sup>

Encouragingly, there are several examples across regions of how such a role could unfold by regional offices in a more systematic manner. LACRO, for instance, has previously promoted face-to-face meetings with SSC focal points in the region, which was considered a facilitating factor for increasing knowledge-exchange and fostering mutual learning among national institutions. It also used to foster a South-South Cooperation Platform on ICPD (active from 2013 to 2015), repeatedly referred to as a good practice. Finally, LACRO signed general SSC memorandums of understanding with member countries from the region in order to facilitate and make exchanges between national institutions more expedite. WCARO has been engaged with the country offices' census focal points in monitoring countries' census implementation needs and challenges, as well as in identifying the necessary expertise within countries to satisfy the regional demand of the new census in the region. On a different note, to support exchanges on ageing initiatives in the Balkans, EECARO stepped in: (i) to support the regional workshop organization, initiated by UNFPA Bosnia and Herzegovina and UNFPA Georgia; and (ii) to connect University College London with UNFPA Bosnia and Herzegovina. Finally, the African Coalition on Menstrual Health Management, for example, was identified as a source of knowledge exchange as the result of a coordinated effort between the South Africa country office and ESARO, which is involved in the regional aspect of the aforementioned network. Those examples also reveal how enhanced leadership of regional offices can add value to SSC within UNFPA.<sup>184</sup>

**At country level**, most of the evidence from case studies points to country office-to-country office coordination working efficiently, although not without bottlenecks. The "Making Motherhood Safer" initiative (Thailand- Bhutan – Laos) had clear roles and responsibilities among the different country offices, constant communication and information sharing, and support from representatives through high-level engagement with government officials and departments. In this case, country offices had an instrumental role in facilitating and leveraging multiple actors and partners, with joint advocacy efforts to align the SSC initiatives with the country programme action plans as well as with national programmes on maternal health.<sup>185</sup> UNFPA China's work on facilitating proposals to SSCAF was well regarded by stakeholders and highlights included: (i) good and timely communication; and (ii) liaison with Chinese partners for clarifications, collaborative approach, technical feedback and translation.<sup>186</sup> The Strategic Partnership with Muslim Religious Leaders on Family Planning initiative in Indonesia was implemented in coordination with at least 19 UNFPA country offices across Asia and Africa,<sup>187</sup> which were responsible for identifying participants and providing funding support. It is also the country offices that are currently providing follow-up, however this is not the case for every country participating in the training.

Bottlenecks, at country level, relate to the lack of clarity on the full-range of roles that country offices could be performing to leverage SSC. Examples of this lack of clarity include: what are the different responsibilities of country offices during the whole SSC initiative project cycle? What kind of follow-up should be in place when liaising with counterparts during initial negotiations? Should country offices have a more advocacy-related role to ensure momentum and buy-in for the initiative? Furthermore, most of the case studies reveal that brokering SSC within UNFPA still relies on individuals' initiative and personal connections rather than on institutionalized systems. On the one hand, individual efforts and commitment can be leveraged, not only as an acknowledgment, but also to foster institutional learning based on practical experience. On the other hand, the limited use of institutionalized systems and processes to broker and facilitate SSC hinders UNFPA potential to achieve at-scale outcomes through SSC.

183 Case studies.

184 Interviews and documentary review.

185 UNFPA (2018). Facilitating Cooperation for Making Motherhood Safer (Submitted to the 2018 Good Practice Competition on South-South Cooperation).

186 UNFPA (2020). UNFPA China Thematic Review South-South and Triangular Cooperation 2016-2019: Final Report.

187 Afghanistan, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Burundi, Chad, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, India, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sudan, and Sri Lanka. Source UNFPA, 2018 Cross cultural partnerships among Muslim religious leaders to achieve SDG3 through reducing unmet-need for family planning- Submitted to the 2018 Good Practice Competition on South-South Cooperation (SSC).

### Box 13. Rome-based agencies lessons learned on coordination and mainstreaming South-South cooperation into programming

Lessons learned from other United Nations agencies show that formal and written guidance is useful, but should not be overrated since regular engagement among all levels (headquarters, regional and country offices) is the most useful way to mainstream SSC into programming. The Rome-based Agencies provide important lessons learned on mainstreaming SSC: (i) working closely with the Programme Division to ensure the relevance of SSC in supporting the agencies' priorities; (ii) direct engagement and support of the headquarters SSC units during regional and country offices' programming exercises; (iii) ensuring that headquarters SSC units are seen as facilitators and not as stand-alone units with a mandatory approach to be implemented by country offices, (iv) the need to address countries' particularities and different requirements (institutional, technical and political); and (v) the need to make SSC practical to country offices.

Finally, cutting across all levels, there is an overall lack of evidence on existing coordination within thematic areas and among SSC focal points. Regarding the former, the evaluation found limited evidence related to an effective technical collaboration within thematic areas and other divisions. It is worth noting that the comparative study of United Nations agencies assessed that in order to ensure the relevance and alignment of SSC with corporate, regional and country priorities, mainstreaming SSC requires close collaboration and coordination among several divisions, including thematic, operations, resource and partnership mobilization, knowledge management and communication (Box 12). Regarding the latter, although headquarters reported the existence of a community of practice on SSC, case studies also highlight the lack of formalized planning and consultations spaces to discuss SSC across all levels, where information exchange and greater awareness on common areas of interest could take place, and that country offices expect a more horizontal coordination with headquarters and regional office. This coordination would move country offices from an engagement based on information request and guidance issuance towards a more collaborative one, including through taking part on strategic discussions on SSC more systematically.<sup>188</sup>

### EQ4: To what extent is SSTC a modality that has helped to enhance UNFPA programming and implementation?<sup>189</sup>

#### Findings

14. There is a clear lack of systematic monitoring, documentation and evaluation of SSC experience and results at all levels.
15. There is inconsistent evidence to show that UNFPA has specifically utilized SSC modalities to promote linkages between mandate areas or to promote synergies for ICPD, the Agenda for Humanity, and the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (triple) nexus.
16. SSC is at its core a partnership strategy and it has proven itself as an effective strategy with national counterparts. However, UNFPA could do more to strengthen partnerships and external coordination through the use of SSC at the global, regional and country levels.

#### Finding 14. There is a clear lack of systematic monitoring, documentation and evaluation of SSC experience and results at all levels.

The UNFPA SSC Good Practice and the publications with UNOSSC are useful to document practices and increase SSC visibility but, at the same time, they are considered limited, since they do not cover the full-range of UNFPA supported SSC. There is limited SSC documentation, systematization, and internal and external dissemination. Moreover, some UNFPA staff are not fully aware of existing criteria and guidance to harness and document good practices. There are good - but few - examples

<sup>188</sup> Interviews.

<sup>189</sup> A4.1 UNFPA documents and harnesses existing evidence on SSC best practices and lessons learned. A4.2 UNFPA supported SSC initiatives enable linkages between UNFPA mandate areas. A4.3 UNFPA supported SSC initiatives generate synergies for the ICPD, and Agenda for Humanity including the new way of working across the triple nexus. A4.4 Partnerships at the country level are leveraged and strengthened.

of SSC evaluations within UNFPA, and monitoring and evaluation is seen as a pressing and challenging issue that needs to be addressed in order to better capture SSC effects, improve learning processes and communicate results.<sup>190</sup>

The UNFPA South-South Cooperation Good Practice Competition was commended by recipients, not only as an incentive for country offices to document experiences, but also to increase visibility of SSC, share information in an innovative way and contribute to developing lessons learned. However, this is an isolated corporate effort and, overwhelmingly, case studies point to SSC documentation as an area that needs to be strengthened, including systematically: (i) documenting UNFPA-supported SSC; (ii) continually harnessing member countries good practices and lessons learned; and (iii) assessing SSC results. Moreover, it is worth noting the lack of adherence of country offices to the Good Practice Competition process: at country level, UNFPA staff reported they were not aware that an SSC initiative from their country featured on the best-practices publication that resulted from the competition.<sup>191</sup>

Almost a half of the survey respondents (44 per cent) reported documenting SSC lessons and results adequately and some initiatives do have publications presenting project experience, goals, strategies and/or lessons learned, such as the SSC projects with Brazil.<sup>192</sup> Also, within the scope of particular initiatives, UNFPA supported the development of several knowledge products to be used as background information or training material for SSC exchanges, such as in the case of the Strategic Partnership with Muslim Religious Leaders in Family Planning in Indonesia<sup>193</sup> and the healthy ageing centres in Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>194</sup> At the global level, publications with UNOSSC are an important record of UNFPA SSC initiatives that are widely communicated. Notwithstanding those good examples, documenting SSC initiatives is not a systematic practice. Case studies highlighted that there are limited or no records available on many SSC initiatives, and the existing information on the initiatives is partial and scattered in presentations, press releases or email chains. The absence of coherent and consistent documentation and systematized information is a major stumbling block not only for facilitating and communicating SSC but also for institutional memory and also for learning.

#### **Box 14. Documenting good practices: The Thailand safe motherhood package**

Thailand undertook an innovative approach of packaging Thai government knowledge in order to facilitate the set-up of its SSC exchanges. This was intended to support communication of the knowledge the Thai Government has to offer. The country office considered areas within the UNFPA mandate with good results in Thailand and undertook a capacity-development needs assessment with partner countries and systematized and published the SSC offerings in those areas. These were: the demographic dividend, the universal coverage scheme, midwifery capacity-development, population and development, and safe motherhood. With regards to safe motherhood, an extended package was provided, with not only what Thai SSC has to offer, but also a quality assurance tool to help in selecting those Thai institutions and experts that may assist Thailand's SSC, and a list of potential organizations and governments that are interested in maternal and reproductive health programmes and that can potentially become key resources to Thailand's priority countries. Those knowledge products are currently being distributed by the diplomatic channels of the Thailand Incentive and Convention Association (TICA).

190 Interviews and documentary review.

191 Ibid.

192 For instance: Centers of Reference Collection of Electronic Data (n.d.) A Platform for the Exchange of Experiences and the Joint Construction of Innovative Approaches [Online] Available at: [http://www.e-census.africa/doc/presentation\\_en.pdf](http://www.e-census.africa/doc/presentation_en.pdf) Access 22 November 2019; UNFPA, ABC/MRE (2010) *Cooperação Sul-Sul em Guiné-Bissau* (in Portuguese). Available at: <https://brazil.unfpa.org/pt-br/publications/coopera%C3%A7%C3%A3o-sul-sul-em-guin%C3%A9-bissau>. Access 22 November 2019; UNFPA, UN WOMEN (2017) *Project Gender Equality: Innovations and Potentials in Trilateral South-South Cooperation*. Available at: <https://brazil.unfpa.org/pt-br/publications/projeto-brasil-e-africa> Access 22 November 2019. Centers of Reference Collection of Electronic Data (2018) Centers of Reference: Collection of Electronic Data, Brazil – Cape Verde – Senegal – UNFPA [Website] Available at: <http://www.e-census.africa/impact.php?lang=en>. Access 22 November 2019.

193 UNFPA Indonesia supported several knowledge products: (i) *Strategic Partnership with Muslim Religious Leaders on Family Planning* (course brochure); (ii) *South-South and Triangular Cooperation. Sharing Indonesia's best practices on population and family planning with the world* (brochure); (iii) *Family Planning, Reproductive Health and Gender: Islamic Perspective* (guidelines); (iv) *Strategies and Approaches in Partnership with Muslim Religious Leaders on Family Planning* (guidelines); (v) *Who says Family Planning is Haram?* (book); (vi) *Syar'1 Laws (Islamic Teachings) on family planning* (Booklet); and (vii) *Sharing Indonesia's Best Practices with the World* (video).

194 UNFPA Bosnia supported two surveys on the impacts of HAC (one in partnership with the Ministry of Social Development and the other with University College London). UNFPA/PPH (2016) *Survey of Effects of Centres for Healthy Ageing on Older Persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina*.

On harnessing and documenting SSC good practices, the evaluation found interesting examples, such as the Thai safe motherhood package (Box 14) and the UNFPA support to Partners for Population and Development (PPD) to document and disseminate best practices from PPD member states.<sup>195</sup> However, these are ad hoc documentation initiatives. Although 43 per cent of the survey respondents affirmed that UNFPA adequately documents SSC lessons learned and knowledge, aside from the examples mentioned above, the evaluation did not find evidence of UNFPA effectively harnessing and documenting good practices. Additionally, an important lesson learned provided by PPD on documenting and disseminating best practices is that more efforts are required to support the uptake of lessons learned and policy changes in other countries, such as advocacy and policy dialogue strategies, including through organizing workshops to discuss the knowledge and lessons learned.<sup>196</sup>

Monitoring and evaluation of SSC was also identified by UNFPA and partners as a gap that needs to be addressed in order to better capture SSC effects and improve learning processes, as well as to communicate results and make the case on SSC, encouraging national governments and other partners to invest more in the initiatives.<sup>197</sup> At country level, the evaluation found that some SSC initiatives have been evaluated, although even some flagship partnerships have not been evaluated to date. China, Indonesia and Thailand, for instance, invested in evaluating their SSC experiences. UNFPA China recently commissioned a thematic review of SSC, implemented under the Eighth Country Programme for UNFPA cooperation with the Government of China. In Indonesia, each of the three initiatives supported by UNFPA has been or will be evaluated by the end of the year (2020). Thailand reviewed the efficiency and effectiveness of the “Making pregnancy safer” initiative using the Social Return on Investment (SROI) framework previously referenced.<sup>198</sup>

At global level, the indicator for SSC in the UNFPA Strategic Plan (2018-2021) is a quantitative activity-level indicator (number of countries using SSC as a modality).<sup>199</sup> Although, the 2017 Corporate Strategy on South-South Cooperation proposed two groups of streamlined indicators to assess, not only SSC performance, but also contribution to national capacities development, this was not translated into operational guidance in the Guidance Note on South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Programming (2018). Even so, the evaluation assessed that SSC is being integrated in thematic or corporate evaluations. For instance, a search in the UNFPA evaluation repository retrieved 22 evaluations that mentioned SSC, out of which 11 presented some specific analysis on SSC,<sup>200</sup> although such analyses are uneven in terms of depth and the SSC aspects tackled. Finally, case studies reveal that country programme document evaluations, particularly on those countries that are more engaged in SSC, are incorporating SSC in their analysis.<sup>201</sup>

However, monitoring progress towards outputs, outcomes or impact is not systematic. For example, some countries reported that, currently, monitoring is mainly taking place through mission reports or meetings. Overall, monitoring and evaluation instruments are perceived as unavailable or lacking the qualities that would ensure their utility and appropriateness to SSC particularities, both at country programme and project level.<sup>202</sup> Some of the challenges raised refer both to operational and political aspects of monitoring and evaluation of SSC. Operationally, monitoring and evaluation of SSC must properly resolve the attribution versus contribution debate and properly reflect SSC outcomes dimensions (such as raising awareness or capacity development), as well as providing the means for monitoring results in different countries and regions. Politically, SSC monitoring and evaluation is a sensitive issue. On the one hand, attributing results from UNFPA actions would not be consistent with promoting SSC as a partnership strategy. On the other hand, as a strategy and modality of engagement, for

195 About 11 best practices (in Bangladesh, Egypt, Gambia, Ghana, India, Jordan, Kenya, Morocco, Thailand, Tunisia and Viet Nam) produced with support of UNFPA and disseminated among the countries. Last year 2 best practices from Tunisia (mobile strategy for family planning, maternal new born, child health and adolescent) and Kenya (policy and communication best practice in Kenya) were published and this year 2 more best practices are planned.

196 Interviews.

197 Ibid.

198 Case studies.

199 Interviews.

200 Mid-Term Evaluation of UNFPA Strategic Plan Goal 3 - Gender Equality (Phase 1); Mid-Term Evaluation of UNFPA Strategic Plan Goal 3 - Gender Equality (Phase 2); Thematic Evaluation of UNFPA Support to Maternal Health (2000-2011); Evaluation of UNFPA support to population and housing census data to inform decision-making and policy formulation 2005-2014, Volume 1; Evaluation of UNFPA Support to Adolescents and Youth 2008-2011, Volume 1; Evaluation of the architecture supporting the operationalization of the UNFPA Strategic Plan, Volume 1; End Line Evaluation of the H4+ Joint Programme Canada and Sweden (SIDA) 2011–2016; Formative evaluation of the UNFPA innovation initiative; Corporate Evaluation of UNFPA support to the prevention of, response to and elimination of gender-based violence and harmful practices (2012–2017), Volume 1; Joint Evaluation of UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage; Lessons learned from UNFPA Country Programme Evaluations 2014-2015.

201 Desk review conducted for case studies.

202 Interviews.

which UNFPA clearly needs to demonstrate efficiency and effectiveness, there is a requirement to prove how SSC contributes to overall strategic plan indicators.<sup>203</sup>

Importantly, it is worth mentioning that monitoring and evaluation for SSC is a common challenging area within the United Nations system. Most United Nations agencies do have specific quantitative indicators being monitored at corporate level, however these do not necessarily address SSC contributions to development results. Currently, WFP and UNICEF provide guidance on how to capture more qualitative data on SSC contribution and the Rome-based agencies are working together to develop guidelines and methodology for evaluation of SSC. However, there is no agreed format for systematically capturing qualitative results and monetary contributions.

**Finding 15. There is inconsistent evidence to show that UNFPA has specifically utilized SSC modalities to promote linkages between mandate areas or to promote synergies for ICPD, the Agenda for Humanity, and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.**

UNFPA-supported SSC initiatives have clearly promoted synergies with the ICPD agenda and, to a lesser extent, linkages among mandate areas, especially linking with the adolescents and youth agenda. However, there is no explicit evidence of UNFPA utilizing SSC for furthering links to the Agenda for Humanity, although this is potentially implied within the links to ICPD. There is no evidence, explicit or implicit, of UNFPA leveraging SSC for working across the triple nexus.<sup>204</sup>

Although 67 per cent of survey respondents believe SSC is an effective mode of engagement to promote both linkages across different mandate areas and synergies for working across the triple nexus, case studies reveal that UNFPA-supported SSC initiatives have contributed more to promoting linkages between mandate areas, and to the ICPD agenda, than to the Agenda for Humanity or working across the triple nexus.

With regard to synergies with the ICPD agenda: as highlighted in Finding 6, SRHR is the most represented mandate area in SSC within UNFPA. Case studies highlighted potential areas where SSC could contribute to promote even more synergies for the ICPD agenda, such as supporting countries to monitor and report together on ICPD to regional and subregional institutions or by having a strategic approach to key SSC players and ensuring that the ICPD agenda remains visible within regional SSC agendas.

In terms of linkages between mandate areas, there is an important prevalence of initiatives linking with adolescent and youth agendas, such as:

- The SSC between Indonesia and the Philippines enabled the linkage between reproductive health and adolescents and youth areas
- SSC supported by Brazil with Guinea Bissau enabled linkages among gender-based violence, health promotion, and sexual and reproductive rights of adolescents and youth
- The healthy ageing centre supported by Bosnia and Herzegovina, contributed to the development of the 60+clubs in Georgia, which will promote intergenerational dialogue, since they will be established in the same space as the existing youth centres
- In Ghana, the multi-level portfolio of cooperation with China enables linkages among UNFPA mandate areas: although it concentrates on issues of population and development, it encompasses initiatives on adolescents and youth, and SRHR.

There was no specific evidence on UNFPA-supported SSC links to the Agenda for Humanity or working across the humanitarian-development-peace (triple) nexus. While linkages with the Agenda for Humanity can be implied through the synergies between ICPD and the Agenda for Humanity, the lack of evidence on SSC working across the triple nexus

<sup>203</sup> Interviews and desk review.

<sup>204</sup> This finding is not based on the premise that SSC is expected to promote linkages between mandate areas, since this is not a specific focus of SSC or national government's priority. However, as a cross-cutting programming strategy within UNFPA, this particular premise was included in the evaluation matrix as to demonstrate its value added and to explore its potentialities for achieving UNFPA mandate.

highlights a future potential opportunity. UNFPA humanitarian SSC is more limited than more established mandate areas such as SRHR and population dynamics (see Finding 10) and any future increase in SSC as a UNFPA humanitarian modality could account for the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, recognizing the existing strength of linking adolescent and youth initiatives with other mandate areas (and recognizing the inherent benefit of working with adolescents and youth for strengthening the triple nexus).

**Finding 16. SSC is at its core a partnership strategy and it has proven itself as an effective strategy with national counterparts. However, UNFPA could do more to strengthen partnerships and external coordination through the use of SSC at the global, regional and country levels.**

There is strong evidence that SSC is an effective partnership strategy at country level, particularly with national counterparts. To a lesser extent, SSC has also contributed to UNFPA synergies within the United Nations system, particularly with UNICEF, WHO and UN Women. Despite this promising scenario at country level, concrete guidance on how to coordinate with external partners is still lacking. There is limited evidence on sufficient push, at regional and global level, to strengthen partnerships and external coordination. Unexplored opportunities – and challenges - with subnational entities, private sector and civil society or grassroots organizations exist.<sup>205</sup>

On a very positive note, three quarters of survey respondents (75 per cent) reported that SSC has enhanced partnerships. Likewise, at country level, case studies reveal that SSC has significantly contributed to enhance relations with national counterparts. National governments and implementing partners interviewed reported SSC contributing to strengthening partnerships and fostering closer relations among national stakeholders with regard to UNFPA mandate areas. However, investing in forging a wider spectrum of partnerships could add value not only with financial resources but also with expertise in different areas. UNFPA country offices have solid and longstanding relations with many line ministries, such as ministries of health. However, there is limited evidence that UNFPA country offices are currently systematically reaching out to those line ministries, which usually oversee SSC, such as ministries of planning/finance and ministries of foreign affairs. Respondents at country level do have a sense that engaging with those ministries, and influencing decision-making, could help to mobilize resources to SSC and ensure that UNFPA mandate-related agendas are reflected in member countries' SSC agenda. Indonesia and Thailand offer evidence on how such outreach has leveraged partnerships, since both countries have established clear and stable coordination mechanisms among UNFPA country offices, ministries of foreign affairs, and implementing partners, contributing to leverage not only financial and technical resources, but also political endorsement for their SSC initiatives.<sup>206</sup>

Notwithstanding those examples, a clear understanding and concrete guidance on how to coordinate with external partners is limited. Case studies highlight that in order to enhance partnerships, UNFPA internal coordination is important in order to approach partner country counterparts. Firstly, internal coordination is needed to ensure a strategic approach, based on a unified message to partner country counterparts. Secondly, it is important to assure that the procedures and agreements established with member countries are reflected by UNFPA as a whole, at country, regional and global levels.<sup>207</sup>

With regard to synergies with other United Nations agencies, UNFPA currently co-leads the SSC Inter-Agency Group and, at global level, UNFPA coordination with UNICEF and WHO ensured the inclusion of health in the BAPA+40 outcome document.<sup>208</sup> Evidence found at country level reaffirms the alignment at global level. For example, an ESARO maternal and perinatal death surveillance and response workshop, bringing together expertise from Africa and beyond, including Bangladesh, was organized jointly by UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO and this was reported as having strengthened collaboration between those agencies at country level. In Egypt, UNFPA and UNICEF have together utilized IICPSR and the SSC modality to strengthen the joint female genital mutilation programme.<sup>209</sup>

205 Interviews.

206 Survey and case studies.

207 Partner and UNFPA key informants.

208 UNFPA (2020) Integrated mid-term review and progress report on the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2018-2021 - Annex 4.

209 Interviews.

Furthermore, the evaluation assessed promising examples regarding partnerships with other traditional donors. In Mozambique, the midwifery initiative in the Tete province facilitated by UNFPA was established as a triangular arrangement, whose main donor was the Government of Flanders. Also, this project actually influenced a separate initiative with WHO to change the curriculum for midwives and include more hands-on activities. In Brazil, the project “Brazil and Africa: Fighting poverty and empowering women through South-South cooperation”, was jointly implemented between UNFPA, UN Women and UNDP, supported by DFID, in a ‘trilateral+1’ arrangement as per the terminology used by the Brazilian Cooperation Agency. Still, despite these promising examples, partnering and coordinating with other United Nations agencies and traditional donors was not seen as an extensive practice across all case studies and UNFPA does not currently have a clear strategy and practical guidance to support an enhanced investment in wider triangular arrangements to scale up SSC initiatives.<sup>210</sup>

The evaluation found limited evidence of SSC integrating UNFPA relations with regional bodies, although this has been reported as a promising opportunity, particularly in African regional and subregional bodies. Respondents report SSC could become a strategic mechanism for boosting integration processes in UNFPA areas of mandate and vice-versa.<sup>211</sup>

At global level, the only long-standing partnership mapped by the evaluation is the one with Partners in People and Development (PPD). PPD is perceived as having a solid background on SSC and a strong convening capacity.<sup>212</sup> For instance, UNFPA collaboration with PPD resulted in voluntary commitments by over 40 countries at the Nairobi Summit (2019) to engage in South-South and triangular cooperation to accelerate achievement of the three transformative results. In the same vein, the Bali Call for Action (2018) was endorsed by more than 26 countries that committed to promote South-South cooperation to advance the ICPD agenda. Increased collaboration opportunities between PPD and UNFPA were identified at country level, strengthened collaboration could lead to more effective strategies for advocacy, while at global and regional level, PPD could benefit from UNFPA support to leverage its global advocacy influence through its representation at global and regional bodies.<sup>213</sup>

Still, there is a general sense that global partnership efforts could be enhanced, exploring the wide range of partners’ profiles, such as private foundations, philanthropies, multilateral banks, trust funds and traditional donors. To take advantage of these opportunities, UNFPA would need to affirm its leadership of and commitment to SSC and to raise the profile of its SSC work.<sup>214</sup>

Additionally, there are partnerships that have not been extensively explored by UNFPA at country level, such as with subnational entities, private sector and civil society or grassroots organizations. Subnational entities are well suited to share development solutions since they provide services to end-users, such as seen in the Bosnia-supported exchanges on healthy ageing centres. However, since SSC is usually under the mandate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or other national-level ministry, this kind of cooperation entails engagement with multiple levels of the executive power, thus hampering the facilitation of the SSC initiatives.<sup>215</sup>

Regarding the private sector, there is no evidence of UNFPA currently leveraging private-sector opportunities for SSC. Respondents reported that there could be opportunities to engage with it, since SSC is mainly centred on public-sector partnerships, private-sector involvement should be justified with evidence of its contribution to results and its eligibility criteria should be clearly defined.<sup>216</sup>

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210 Case studies.

211 Partner and UNFPA key informants.

212 Ibid.

213 Key informant interviews.

214 Partner and UNFPA key informant interviews.

215 Ibid.

216 Ibid.

Finally, on civil society organizations and grassroots-level engagement, the few examples provided by the case studies show that engaging such stakeholders can help in building bridges between participants in SSC, especially when the SSC initiative has a strong participatory aspect or if civil society organizations were responsible for any kind of service-delivery (such as in the case of the civil society organizations engaged in the Strategic Partnership With Muslim Religious Leaders on Family Planning initiative in Indonesia, or the Husbands Schools initiative in Senegal, or the healthy ageing centres in Bosnia and Herzegovina). This could also help UNFPA reach target populations, particularly in rural areas, thanks to strategies based on community-based approaches. However, challenges to engage civil society more systematically refer to the fact civil society organizations usually need to be funded to take part in SSC initiatives, and their participation needs to be justified and also count on clear eligibility criteria.<sup>217</sup>

Overall, country-level partnerships are strong at the national levels with traditional UNFPA line ministry counterparts. However, there are some missed opportunities for strategic partnerships with SSC-specific coordination and oversight agencies and ministries, as well as with some subnational entities that could be useful for further reach and advancement of the ICPD agenda.

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217 Ibid.



© UNFPA Jordan.

UNFPA supported women and girls oasis for Syrian refugees in the Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan. UNFPA Brazil and Colombia undertook a study visit to UNFPA Jordan to learn from the Syrian refugee response.

The evaluation finds that there are positive examples of humanitarian SSC and this shows a clear benefit where there are commonalities of crisis impact, but this has not been fully and systematically leveraged.



# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary purpose of this evaluation is formative, to provide insights for learning and improving the design and implementation of SSC at UNFPA and not to focus on assessing achievements.

This chapter presents a set of conclusions and recommendations to UNFPA business units. The recommendations address issues raised in the conclusions which are based on the analysis of the findings.

## CONCLUSIONS

### **CONCLUSION 1: UNFPA has made progress with institutionalizing SSC in recent years.**

At the global level, UNFPA has taken fundamental steps to raise the profile of and its capacity for SSC. This includes introducing SSC as a fifth mode of engagement in the Strategic Plan (2018-2021), developing an organizational strategy on SSC, and establishing a dedicated unit, the ICCO, to implement the strategy. These developments, along with others, demonstrate a continuing trend of SSC progress at UNFPA. This evaluation also highlights the fact that there are further opportunities for UNFPA to explore, building on the momentum and positive gains thus far to ensure that SSC is a key strategic modality that is well understood, and more importantly, effectively utilized at UNFPA to further the ICPD and 2030 Agenda, and within the context of United Nations reform. The SSC strategy and related guidance, while they provide a broad understanding of SSC concepts and principles, would benefit from a more practical application of SSC principles, and in particular, specific concrete actions/guidance to better contextualize and adapt SSC interventions at the country and regional levels. This includes clarification on how SSC can be applied at UNFPA across all its modes of engagement, its thematic areas of intervention and within the framework of its business model. Further, there are some examples of SSC good practice that UNFPA can draw upon, systemize and expand on to further mainstream SSC into the work of UNFPA, and ultimately, improve SSC programmatic impact across the organization.

**Based on findings 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 14**

**CONCLUSION 2: There is a very diverse understanding and application of SSC across UNFPA.**

While there is considerable familiarity with SSC concepts and principles among UNFPA staff, the understanding and implementation of SSC interventions is varied across regional and country offices. The corporate strategy for SSC envisages the role of UNFPA in three types of engagement: acting as a broker for SSC among Southern partners; supporting SSC exchanges operationally and technically; and/or documenting and showcasing SSC results to foster knowledge sharing among partners. However the strategy does not provide clear guidance on the level of engagement by UNFPA or the resources required for such engagement. Moreover, there is a lack of specific guidance to adapt SSC to the diverse operational contexts in which UNFPA works and the specific role of regional and country offices in SSC implementation is unclear, leading to varied approaches to the design, implementation and follow-up of SSC initiatives. This has further implications for the internal coordination of SSC at UNFPA, its processes of monitoring and evaluating SSC interventions, and for the financial and human resources required to successfully undertake SSC initiatives.

**Based on findings 3, 4, 12, 13, 14, 16**

**CONCLUSION 3: Mechanisms are in place to coordinate SSC initiatives, both internal and external to UNFPA, but there are opportunities to strengthen these further.**

To effectively support the coordination of SSC initiatives, UNFPA has established a dedicated unit at the global level and ad-hoc focal point structures at the regional and country levels to better facilitate SSC across and between regions. However, this evaluation found that such coordination at the regional and country levels is limited where SSC has been largely driven by the initiative/leadership of individual staff, rather than systematically through these institutional mechanisms. Further, there is a limited collaboration within/between UNFPA thematic areas and other divisions in SSC design and implementation. One UNFPA comparative advantage in supporting SSC is its global network and broker potential, however its reach and capacity is limited due to the unclear roles and responsibilities of headquarters as well as regional and country offices in coordinating these initiatives. Further, a clear understanding of, and concrete guidance on, how to coordinate with external partners on SSC initiatives was found to be lacking. With regard to synergies with other United Nations agencies, UNFPA is active in an SSC inter-agency group as well as joint initiatives on SSC with other United Nations agencies. However, the coordination is not consistent across all regions and there is no clear strategy or practical guidance to support an enhanced investment in these wider arrangements to scale up SSC initiatives. Further, the evaluation identified additional opportunities for cross-learning from UNFPA experience in SSC, for instance, as a mechanism for advocacy and mobilizing strategic partners within communities in partnership with civil society and faith-based organizations, traditional communicators and community leaders.

**Based on findings: 5, 13, 15, 16**

**CONCLUSION 4: Efforts to increase staff capacity and mainstream SSC into the work of UNFPA have advanced, but can be broadened in both the quantity and the type of capacity-development opportunities.**

To date, there are some capacity-development tools – online training courses and programmatic guidelines – that are available to UNFPA staff to build their understanding and skills for facilitating SSC. While the evaluation found these tools were clear and useful to UNFPA staff, they could be further developed to provide more in-depth and practical guidance on how to implement SSC at the regional and country level, across different thematic areas of UNFPA work, in varied contexts, and within the framework of its business model. In particular, there is a need for strengthened guidance and capacity-building tools in the monitoring and evaluation of the SSC experience, an area of SSC implementation that the evaluation found lacking at all levels. This has implications, not just for accurately and systematically capturing SSC results, but also for the ability of staff to harness the knowledge/lessons learned/good practice from past SSC interventions to inform their future efforts in SSC.

**Based on findings 3, 4, 11, 14**

**CONCLUSION 5: SRHR and population dynamics are strongly reflected within SSC, and there are additional opportunities for UNFPA to leverage SSC towards development outcomes.**

UNFPA has accomplished several results in the areas of SRHR and population dynamics. The evaluation also found that SSC on ageing initiatives is seen as a promising area for the future, especially since it is becoming a pressing issue across all regions. Gender equality, however, is an area less addressed by SSC initiatives, while SSC in adolescents and youth, and humanitarian programming remains more emerging and ad-hoc. With this in mind, there is a strong evidence base to continue SRHR and population dynamics SSC programming as well as immense opportunities for growth of SSC initiatives for adolescents and youth, gender equality and humanitarian programming. In particular, SSC for adolescents and youth initiatives has clear linkages to peer-to-peer learning methodologies already used within youth programming and the digital forums established can work well with youth populations. SSC for humanitarian initiatives has a clear potential for middle-income countries experiencing displacement across borders, and moving forward, for a COVID-19 response across all global South countries. Finally, SSC could be leveraged more effectively for cross-mandate promotion and working across the triple nexus.

**Based on findings 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15**

**CONCLUSION 6: There are processes and mechanisms in place to manage and facilitate SSC initiatives, but these can be further developed and systematized.**

While there are processes and mechanisms in place to support SSC initiatives (for example, monitoring and evaluation, reporting, knowledge management, etc.) that are regarded as efficient overall, the evaluation points to key opportunities for enhancing these systems. Specifically, the follow-up (tracking results and reporting) of SSC exchanges at the country level is lacking, resulting in gaps in capturing SSC effectiveness and learning for future initiatives. Past efforts to identify and showcase good practice (for example, the UNFPA South-South Cooperation Good Practice Competition) have proven a valuable exercise and an incentive for country offices to showcase their work. Monitoring and evaluation of UNFPA-supported SSC initiatives is limited and inconsistent, posing a challenge to enhancing SSC effectiveness. Taken together, the evaluation suggests the strengthening of such processes and mechanisms can lead to a more accurate demonstration of programmatic impacts of SSC, improved use of SSC results, increased visibility and sharing of UNFPA SSC experience, and an improved availability of and accessibility to evidence-based learning on the UNFPA SSC experience.

**Based on findings 12, 13**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### RECOMMENDATION 1: Clarify the conceptualization of SSC and further integrate SSC into the strategic frameworks and thematic areas of UNFPA

While the current UNFPA Corporate Strategy for South-South and Triangular Cooperation helps to broadly understand and guide SSC interventions, UNFPA should further clarify its conceptualization to ensure that SSC is effectively and more systematically utilized by UNFPA as a key programming strategy to further support ICPD and the 2030 Agenda. This includes providing a clear definition of SSC at UNFPA, the role of UNFPA in SSC interventions, and the potential application of SSC at UNFPA across all modes of engagement, its core mandate areas and within the framework of its business model. This would also require the development of a theory of change to provide a more articulated connection between SSC and broader development issues and processes, such as United Nations engagement with middle-income countries, United Nations reform and contribution to the SDGs. In addition, SSC should be further integrated into the strategic frameworks of UNFPA, supported with budgetary resources, to ensure that SSC is reflected as an integral way of working to contribute to the three UNFPA transformative results. Complementing this, UNFPA should further clarify the potential opportunities of SSC in all of its thematic areas of its interventions, especially deepening the focus in the areas of youth and humanitarian programming and within the new COVID-19 context.

**Based on conclusions:** 1, 2, 3, 5

**Level of importance:** High

**Budgetary implications:** Low

**Units responsible:** Policy and Strategy Division, Technical Division, Humanitarian Office, Division of Management Services and regional offices

**Time frame:** 2021

**Operational requirements:**

- Review the existing South-South Cooperation Strategy and guidance documents and provide clarifications where needed (for example, the role of UNPFA, typology of interventions, implementation of SSC across different modes of engagement, monitoring and evaluation of results, etc.)
- Develop an overarching theory of change for SSC that could be adapted to different regions and contexts and that clearly connects SSC with broader international agendas (for example, SDGs, United Nations reform)
- Integrate SSC as a key programming strategy into the new Strategic Plan (2022-2025) and ensure SSC as a cross-cutting mode of engagement, including the specification of SSC indicators in its results framework and dedicated financial resources in the integrated budget
- Mainstream SSC into other UNFPA strategic frameworks, such as, but not limited to: UNFPA global and regional action plans and budgets, middle-income countries' strategy, etc.
- Include clear and specific guidance on leveraging SSC in all thematic and sector-wide programming guidelines and/or strategies (for example, youth, census, gender equality, humanitarian programming).

**RECOMMENDATION 2: Enhance SSC implementation at the regional and country level**

Since the establishment of the ICCO, the facilitation of SSC has greatly improved, however there are still opportunities for UNFPA to enhance its implementation of SSC at the regional and country level. At the regional level, UNFPA should clarify the role of the regional office, as it is uniquely positioned to facilitate SSC interventions both within and between regions. At the country level, UNFPA should integrate, as appropriate, SSC as a core component of country programme planning and implementation, supported by a dedicated budget for SSC within its country programme documents. Further, in collaboration with headquarters, regional and country offices, and in partnership with other stakeholders, UNFPA should continue support to, and further seek to support, the establishment of centres of excellence/reference, leveraging these institutions as knowledge hubs to foster exchange and facilitate SSC in a more effective and self-sustaining way. Finally, UNFPA should invest in continuing to build strategic partnerships with other development actors at the regional and country level, including regional bodies (for example, the African Union) as well as non-traditional partners at the regional and country levels (for example, ministries responsible for SSC at country level, subnational entities, other non-governmental organizations, academia, and the private sector).

**Based on conclusions:** 2, 3, 4

**Level of importance:** Medium

**Budgetary implications:** High

**Units responsible:** Regional offices, country offices, with support of Policy and Strategy Division and/or Division for Human Resources as needed

**Time frame:** 2021-2023

**Operational requirements:**

- Clarify roles and responsibilities of headquarters, regional offices and country offices in the coordination and facilitation of SSC initiatives
- Integrate SSC into the terms of reference of regional offices and job descriptions of targeted regional office staff
- Allocate a dedicated budget for SSC in country and regional programme documents
- Map opportunities for supporting the establishment of SSC centres of excellence in each region, and provide – as feasible - technical and financial support to national agencies that have an interest in and capacity to host SSC centres of excellence/reference
- Identify, establish and/or strengthen partnerships with government agencies and other partners at country level, and where applicable regional bodies/organizations responsible for SSC.

**RECOMMENDATION 3: Strengthen capacity of staff to effectively facilitate SSC interventions**

Building on the success of existing SSC capacity-building and guidance tools, UNFPA should develop additional in-depth training as well as practical, context-aware guidance and learning events for the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of SSC. Capacity-building for SSC should respond directly to the Inter-Country Cooperation Office (ICCO), regional office and country office needs, and take into consideration the current capacity of staff across all business units to undertake key activities that improve SSC results (for example, measurement and monitoring of SSC, implementation of SSC across different modes of engagement, advocacy and outreach, etc.). This calls for the development of targeted and more in-depth training, and moreover, the regular scheduling of SSC capacity-building workshops or events (virtual and/or in-person) to ensure that up-to-date knowledge and opportunities are shared. To complement these efforts, UNFPA should also clarify existing guidance on SSC implementation, specifying a more practical application of SSC principles as well as concrete, operational actions to mainstream SSC into the work of regional and country offices.

**Based on conclusions:** 2, 3, 4, 6

**Level of importance:** High

**Budgetary implications:** Medium

**Unit responsible:** Policy and Strategy Division, Division of Human Resources, regional and country offices

**Time frame:** 2021-2025

**Operational requirements:**

- Develop various trainings and learning events to accommodate staff at all levels (for example, basic training on understanding of SSC or higher-level training on how to facilitate SSC across different modes of engagement, how to measure and monitor SSC, etc.), and employ different types and modalities of capacity-building (for example, virtual/online, in-person workshop, peer-to-peer, institutional communication, online communities)
- Integrate SSC awareness-raising and capacity-development activities into annual meetings or events across regions, such as regional planning or leadership meetings
- Gather feedback and track progress on SSC-related learning needs from country and regional offices, and address them by conducting annual reviews
- Increase the capacity of ICCO in targeted activities critical for UNFPA to become a global leader in SSC, including but not limited to advocacy and communications, systematic analysis of SSC programming activities, etc.

**RECOMMENDATION 4: Improve monitoring and evaluation of SSC interventions, and strengthen efforts in the communication and knowledge management of SSC results**

To enhance organizational learning and accountability, UNFPA should review existing mechanisms to monitor and evaluate SSC interventions in order to regularly and accurately capture results and address current evidence gaps. This should be integrated into the design of the forthcoming Enterprise Resource Planning system. Further, UNFPA should enhance its efforts to communicate SSC results to better demonstrate its programmatic impacts and showcase the UNFPA SSC experience to audiences both within and external to the organization. Finally, UNFPA should strengthen its approach to the knowledge management of SSC results in order to improve the availability of and access to evidence-based learning on UNFPA-supported SSC interventions and to better facilitate the use of SSC results.

**Based on conclusions:** 3, 6

**Level of importance:** High

**Budgetary implications:** Medium

**Unit responsible:** Policy and Strategy Division, Division of Communication and Strategic Partnerships, Information Technology Solutions Office and Evaluation Office

**Time frame:** 2021-2022

**Operational requirements:**

- Establish an improved monitoring and evaluation mechanism for SSC interventions, which can be adapted into the forthcoming Enterprise Resource Planning system
- Provide practical guidance for country and regional offices and thematic divisions to evaluate SSC initiatives either at individual initiative level or as a cluster of initiatives
- Synthesize and showcase validated good practices and lessons learned of UNFPA experience in SSC based on assessments and evaluations managed by country and regional offices
- Develop and utilize knowledge-management platforms and tools both internal and external to the organization to capture and disseminate SSC practices (for example, public-facing platforms, including the UNFPA website as well as the United Nations system-wide platform on SSC - the South-South Galaxy).





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