T20 Policy Brief



Task Force 06 STRENGTHENING MULTILATERALISM AND GLOBAL GOVERNANCE



Bridging the Gap: Enhancing Measurement of South-South Cooperation from a Practitioners Perspective

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Abstract

Since the first formal allutions of South-South Cooperation (SSC) measurement in Nairobi during 2009, developing countries have directed significant national efforts to quantify their cooperation efforts through multiple country-specific approaches. Nonetheless, agreement on common standards and metrics remains an ongoing process which requires special attention. Currently, various regional and international metrics, such as the Total Official Support for Sustainable Development (TOSSD), the Iberoamerican Integrated Data System for Triangular and South-South Cooperation (SIDICSS), and the Conceptual Framework to Measure SSC (SSC-CF), attempt to address some, or most aspects of SSC. This means information on the matter is fragmented among these different, and sometimes overlapping metrics, complicating data collection and reporting for technical teams. SSC data, if measured properly, has the capacity of addressing issues related to resource allocation and strategic partnerships creation by identifying opportunity areas, effort duplication, and institutional strengths across sectors, ultimately contributing to global development and inequality reduction. To accomplish such a purpose, capacity building for national data collection and reporting is needed, as well as international standardization among current metrics. This policy brief aims to offer a public practitioner's perspective on the current international discussion on the measurement of SSC, and what is needed from the G20 to ensure the stated purposes are accomplished. Specifically, we suggest the G20 to direct efforts to promote international consensus, strengthen national data collection capabilities, facilitate interinstitutional information sharing, and standardize minimum SSC data collection. Furthermore, contributions to establish compatibility among current regional and international metrics are of utmost importance.

Keywords: South-South Cooperation, measurement, national capacity-building



Diagnosis of the Issue:

From Limited National Capabilities and Overwhelmed Technical Teams, to Overlapping International Tools and Political Resistance: What is Really Stopping the Measurement of South-South Cooperation?

In the pursuit of global development, SSC has emerged as a crucial complement to traditional North-to-South development endeavors. Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Ababa Action Agenda of the 3rd International Conference on Financing for Development, SSC has played a pivotal role in fostering inclusive partnerships, mutual understanding, and integration. By engaging partners with similar challenges and tailoring capacity-building efforts to local contexts, SSC enhances the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and contributes to poverty and inequality reduction worldwide (CEPEI 2017, 2).

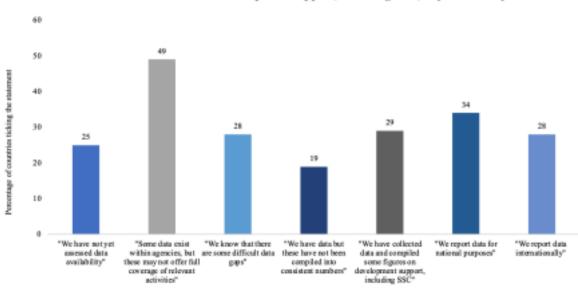
This added value of SSC also means that the effective measurement and reporting of SSC activities has become imperative for informed decision-making, resource allocation, and progress monitoring towards the SDGs.

Several nations have opted to establish domestic mechanisms aimed at disseminating information on SSC, such as Brazil, Colombia, China, Mexico, Qatar, South Africa, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates (Di Ciommo 2017, 11). However, while some countries have mechanisms in place, many lack adequate tools to measure the exchange of skills, resources, and knowledge inherent in development efforts.

A survey conducted by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) showed that, although there is interest to report data on SSC, current national capabilities present a burden of significant importance (United Nations Conference on



Trade and Development 2023). As of July 2023, 74 developing countries from all continents responded to the survey, which concluded that, while a significant number of countries have acknowledged existing data gaps and partial data coverage, others have made strides in collecting and reporting data, both nationally and internationally. However, overarching challenges such as incomplete data compilation and limited coverage persist, highlighting the need for concerted efforts to enhance data collection strategies, improve reporting mechanisms, and address existing gaps (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development 2023).



What is the status of data on development support, including SSC, in your country?

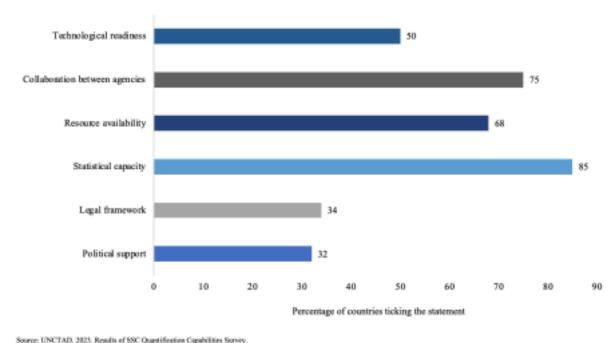
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FIGURE 1. Author's Table from United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2023. Results of SSC Quantification Capabilities Survey. (Brasilia: International Expert Meeting on the Measurement of South-South cooperation, UNCTAD)

This same survey showed a different light on the issue of the measurement of SSC, which has constantly been approached from a political perspective, by showing that most



countries found statistical capacity as the most challenging area for data reporting, followed by inter-agency collaboration and resource availability (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development 2023).



Key areas to be improved for the collection of data

source: Unc. 1705, 2025, results of 55C, Quantiference Capacities Survey. https://unctad.org/system/like/non-official-document/20230711-13_SSCIInael_Session_1_Results_of_SSC_Survey_Rachid_Boshia_UNCTAD.pdf

FIGURE 2. Author's Table from United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2023. Results of SSC Quantification Capabilities Survey. (Brasilia: International Expert Meeting on the Measurement of South-South cooperation, UNCTAD)

Moreover, scholars such as Sachin Chaturvedi (2018) and Laura Trajber (2021) have expressed reservations about efforts made to measure South-South Cooperation. Their arguments center around the diverse array of approaches and implementation disparities observed across different regions and developing powerhouses (Chaturvedi 2018, 3; Trajber 2021, 336), highlighting the inherent challenge in consolidating these varied practices into a singular framework (Trajber 2021, 340). Additionally, they underscore the intricate political dynamics involved and caution against interpreting SSC measurement through conventional North-South paradigms. These perspectives underscore the imperative for approaching SSC measurement with nuanced understanding and advocate for country-led processes that recognize and accommodate the diverse nature of SSC, as demonstrated by initiatives such as the SSC-CF led by UNCTAD.

At the present time, various regional and international initiatives, such as SIDICSS, TOSSD, and the SSC-CF, aim to assess SSC contributions. However, the lack of integration and interoperability among these frameworks hampers accurate measurement and reporting.

Manual data collection processes exacerbate these challenges, straining human resources and delaying reporting. The timing and frequency of data collection also vary across frameworks, adding administrative burdens on reporting entities. Additionally, the absence of standardized methodologies for assessing technical cooperation hinders SSC measurement comprehensively. Without standardized measurement mechanisms, policymakers struggle to identify priority areas, allocate resources effectively, and foster strategic partnerships for global development.

What Role Can the G20 Play on the Measurement of South-South Cooperation?

The Issue Note put forward by the Development Working Group of the G20 regarding Triangular Cooperation, in which multiple developing nations actively participate, highlights

the importance of data collection and assessment and presents a significant opportunity to address the current issues on the measurement of South-South Cooperation. The initiative presented in this issue note involves key elements such as technical meetings aimed at exchanging knowledge, sharing experiences, and identifying best practices in reporting cooperation. It also includes assessing quantitative methodologies and conducting training activities, technical exchanges, and joint initiatives. These already existing proposals serve as an opportunity to open dialogue on the measurement of SSC, and have the potential to revert some of its current issues.

Overall, the full potential of SSC can only be unlocked through joint efforts to establish common standards, enhance national reporting capacities, and overcome technical obstacles. The G20, as a platform for dialogue and coordination among developed and developing countries, has the potential to lead initiatives in this regard. By advocating for the harmonization of reporting standards, sharing best practices, and building capacities, countries can strengthen the effectiveness of SSC initiatives worldwide, advancing the 2030 Agenda and promoting a more equitable and sustainable future.



Promoting Harmonization of International Reporting Frameworks

• Current international metrics for measuring SSC, *-IF-TOSSD, SSC-CF-*, and SIDICSS's regional exercise suffer from a lack of interoperability and communication. Each uses different codes for the same information, such as country, modality, sector, SDG focus, etc. Consequently, developing countries such as Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, participating in all three, face significant challenges translating their information across these different metrics.

• In light of present circumstances, the anticipated future scenario is likely to be characterized by the simultaneous presence of diverse, autonomous systems tasked with assessing and overseeing SSC, both nationally and internationally. This phenomenon could be closely tied to the diverse nature of SSC, but also to the reluctance of certain Southern providers to acknowledge the benefits associated with embracing international standards or facilitating public access to information pertaining to the measurement and monitoring of SSC. If this issue remains unaddressed, the proliferation of multiple systems will impede access to developmental data, thereby complicating analysis and compromising the integrity of the data (Di Ciommo 2017, 15).

• On the other hand, the G20 has emphasized international cooperation's importance in promoting transparency and accountability in development finance. For instance, the G20 Leaders' Communiqué from the 2017 Hamburg Summit reaffirmed the commitment to improving transparency in development cooperation, including through harmonized reporting norms and standards. Building on this commitment, the G20 could facilitate discussions among member countries and international organizations to develop consensus-based norms and guidelines for SSC reporting, fostering consistency and comparability in data collection practices.

• Facilitate dialogue among developing countries and representatives of international frameworks to establish equivalencies, data interoperability, and refined reports facilitating data reporting for technical teams.

• Advocate for the development of data interoperability standards to enable seamless exchange of SSC data among South-South countries and international organizations. This could involve promoting the adoption of common data formats, protocols, and interfaces that facilitate data sharing and integration across different reporting systems and platforms.

• Support the development of data interoperability frameworks and guidelines to help countries overcome technical barriers and ensure the interoperability of SSC data at national, regional, and global levels. This can be achieved through multilateral workshops and forums allowing information exchange, discussion of common challenges in reporting, and agreement on enhancing communication between existing international frameworks.

Strengthening National Data Reporting Capabilities

• Internationally agreed metrics and definitions can only prevail if developing countries have sufficient technical and financial resources to ensure accurate data collection.

• A UNCTAD survey of 74 developing countries highlighted the need for technical training, experience sharing, and methodological materials to ensure reporting to the SSC-CF.

• In this regard, the G20 can support capacity building tailored to the specific needs of South-South countries in SSC data collection and reporting. This includes organizing

training workshops, seminars, and webinars on topics such as data collection methodologies, reporting standards, and data management techniques.

• Peer-to-peer learning exchanges can also be facilitated, allowing countries with advanced reporting capabilities to share experiences and best practices with those facing capacity challenges.

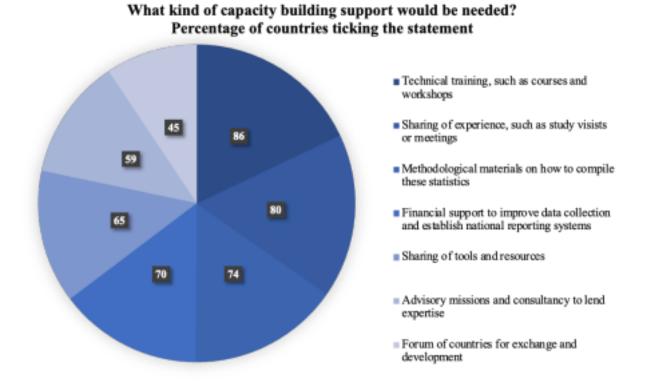


FIGURE 3. Author's Graphic from United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2023. Results of SSC Quantification Capabilities Survey. (Brasilia: International Expert Meeting on the Measurement of South-South cooperation, UNCTAD)

Supporting Knowledge Management Systems

• The G20 has previously supported initiatives aimed at improving data management and information sharing, such as the G20 Anti-Corruption Open Data Principles endorsed in 2019. Building on these principles, the G20 could support efforts to establish knowledge management systems for SSC data, providing countries access to modern data management tools and technologies to enhance data collection, storage, and sharing capabilities.

• Facilitate dialogue and cooperation among Southern provider countries to promote correspondence and convergence of reporting codes and standards through regional workshops, consultations, and working groups.

• Technical assistance and expertise should be provided to help countries develop standardized reporting codes and methodologies reflecting their unique contexts and priorities while ensuring consistency and comparability in SSC data.

Fostering Communities of Practice and Experts

• Encourage the creation of Communities of Practice and Communities of Experts focused on SSC measurement and reporting, serving as platforms for knowledge exchange, capacity building, and collaborative problem-solving among practitioners and policymakers.

• Provide funding and logistical support to establish and operate these communities, ensuring their sustainability and effectiveness in promoting collective learning and consensus-building.

Scenario of outcomes

Improved Data Interoperability

Advocating for the development of data interoperability standards and supporting the establishment of frameworks and guidelines for SSC data could enhance data exchange and integration among South-South countries and international organizations. This could streamline the reporting process, improve data accuracy, and facilitate comparative analysis across regions and sectors.

However, achieving this interoperability may require significant investments in technology infrastructure and resources, posing a challenge for developing countries with limited budgets and technical capacities. Furthermore, ensuring the compatibility and alignment of diverse reporting frameworks and methodologies could be complex and time-consuming, potentially delaying progress towards harmonization.

Enhanced National Data Reporting Capabilities

Strengthening national data reporting capabilities through capacity-building initiatives can lead to more accurate and comprehensive data collection. This means empowering developing countries to better monitor and evaluate their SSC activities, identify areas for improvement, and align their efforts with the SDGs.

Nonetheless, implementing these initiatives may require substantial financial investments and long-term commitments, which could strain already limited resources and divert attention from other development priorities. Moreover, ensuring the sustainability and scalability of capacity-building efforts across diverse contexts and regions may pose logistical challenges.

Additionally, addressing underlying structural barriers to data collection and reporting,

such as insufficient infrastructure and institutional capacity, may require broader policy reforms and systemic changes that extend beyond the scope of capacity-building initiatives alone.

Support for Knowledge Management Systems

Supporting knowledge management systems for SSC data could improve data management and information sharing capabilities, facilitating collaboration and coordination among countries and organizations. By providing access to modern data management tools and technologies, such as cloud-based platforms and data visualization software, countries could enhance their data collection, storage, and sharing capabilities, enabling more efficient and transparent communication among stakeholders.

Nonetheless, establishing and maintaining these systems may involve complex technical challenges and require ongoing maintenance and updates, potentially creating additional burdens for already stretched technical teams and limited financial resources. Additionally, addressing concerns related to data privacy, security, and ownership may require additional efforts to safeguard sensitive information.

Fostering Communities of Practice and Experts

Encouraging the creation of communities of practice and experts focused on SSC measurement and reporting could foster knowledge exchange, capacity-building, and collaborative problem-solving among practitioners and policymakers. By providing platforms for peer-to-peer learning, information sharing, and best practice dissemination, these communities could facilitate the development of innovative solutions and approaches to address common challenges and barriers to SSC measurement.

However, sustaining these communities may require continuous financial and



logistical support, as well as active participation and engagement from stakeholders. Ensuring the inclusivity and representativeness of these communities could be challenging, particularly for countries with limited access to resources and expertise.

Additionally, fostering collaboration and cooperation among diverse stakeholders with varying priorities and interests may require careful facilitation and mediation to ensure productive dialogue and consensus-building.



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