

SUMMARY NOTE

SOUTH-SOUTH GALAXY REGIONAL ROLLOUT WEBINAR FOR UN ENTITIES IN THE ARAB, EUROPE AND THE CIS REGIONS

Co-organized by the UN Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) and the UN Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP), Arab States

02 SEPTEMBER 2021

- This event aimed at increasing UN entities' ownership of the [South-South Galaxy](#) platform; facilitating proactive engagement to knowledge sharing and partnership brokering; and strengthening engagement in national, inter and intra-regional South-South, East-East, and triangular cooperation initiatives.
- **Mr. Zanofer, Ismalebbe, Regional Chief of the UNOSSC Division for Arab States, Europe and the CIS, Istanbul.** This first rollout is part of the Division's efforts to bring relevant HQ processes and initiatives closer to actions both at the regional and country levels, in a more systematic and institutionalized manner. Given some of the developments in the last two years or so, including UN development system (UNDS) reform, the Division sees a great value in leveraging system-wide structures, processes, and mechanisms to facilitate knowledge sharing and exchange of good practices at the regional, sub-regional, or inter-regional levels.
- The Division also has a country-facing window to support requests from Member States, RCs and UNCTs in policy, partners, and institutional and capacity development, including knowledge exchange. Recalling the recent offer extended, through the UNDCO Regional Offices in Istanbul and Amman, to all RCs and UNCTs on conducting [national stocktaking exercises on trends and opportunities for South-South, East-East and triangular cooperation in the two regions](#), noted that the Division will also hold region-specific discussions on the rollout of the [UN System-wide Strategy on South-South and Triangular Cooperation](#) in the coming months.

Context Setting

- **Mr. Adel Abdellatif, Director a.i. of the UNOSSC, New York.** Appreciated the opportunity to co-organize the event with RCP-Arab States. Also, thanked the RCP Europe and Central Asia (RCP-ECA) Secretariat and DCO Regional Offices in Istanbul and Amman for their collaboration and support. These partnerships bode well with UNOSSC's intended direction of travel – *optimizing engagement through regional architectures and processes for a meaningful impact at the country level.*
- During the last four years, the UNOSSC has invested significantly in strengthening policy coherence and institutionalization of South-South and triangular cooperation (SSTC). At the intergovernmental level, the [BAPA+40 Outcome Document](#) has brought the triangular cooperation to the fore for the first time, which was further reinforced by the [UN High-Level Committee on South-South Cooperation](#) during its 20th session this June. At the inter-agency level, UNOSSC coordinated the development of the first UN System-wide Strategy on SSTC, which was approved by the SG's Executive Committee last year, and its Action Plan was finalized this year. One of the five outcomes of the strategy is 'improved exchanges of experiences, know-how and development solutions among developing countries and Southern institutions, professionals, civil society, academia and the private sector'. Thus, sharing practices through platforms like the South-South Galaxy will be crucial.
- Knowledge sharing and consolidation are among the strongest pillars of UNOSSC's work. For decades, governments of the Global South have been requesting the UN to systematically share knowledge, development solutions and good practices, including specific requests for one-stop-shop knowledge portals. The South-South Galaxy platform responds exactly to these long-standing demands from Member States. As noted by the SG in his [2020 QCPR implementation report to the ECOSOC and the GA](#), the Galaxy platform is a 'one-stop-shop' that serves as a "centralized node" for the dissemination of knowledge and information and for taking stock of UNDS efforts with regards to SSC. The report also notes the interests of RCs to increase the awareness of UNCTs and RCOs on SSC tools. As indicated in the System-wide Strategy, policy formulation, policy coherence, regional integration and knowledge sharing constitute the focus of UN system engagement at the regional level. Despite having their own origins, different knowledge platforms across the system do share the ultimate objectives. Thus, it is critical to ensure different knowledge platforms across the system interact and complement better for all partners to leverage.

- **Mr. Mounir Tabet, Deputy Executive Secretary of the Economic Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), Beirut.** Speaking on behalf of the Vice Chairs of RCP-Arab States, noted that the UNDS reform of the SG, particularly at the regional level, has placed two (out of the five) transformative areas on knowledge management/sharing and data and statistics. In the Arab region, the knowledge platform - [MANARA](#), is at the final stages. There is a great opportunity to seamlessly integrate the MANARA and the South-South Galaxy platforms so that RCs will continue to have a one-stop-shop for system-wide knowledge assets that can be deployed in support of the Member States to achieve the 2030 Agenda.
- Knowledge shared through the RCP is essentially about 'what' needs to happen in terms of technical knowledge, and 'how' policymakers approach policymaking. The 'how' question is what most policymakers struggle with. In the COVID-19 context, the success of one country's strategy in fighting the pandemic and recovering from it can, undoubtedly, be of use or at least of inspiration to another. It is very clear that every UN entity, as they work with Member States, has one form or another of SSC, even though sometimes without deliberately labelling it that way. The South-South Galaxy is put in place to facilitate and highlight this form of cooperation, and the RCP is ready to continue this cooperation.

South-South Galaxy Presentation and Demonstration

- **Ms. Xiaojun Grace Wang, Deputy Director of the UNOSSC, New York.** Focused on the following aspects of the platform:
 - **Intention and Purpose:** SSC strives to achieve truly horizontal relationships. As such, this form of cooperation can be fully mobilized, and its great potential to support the achievement of the SDGs can be enhanced. However, several challenges remain, including limited access to existing information; capacity gaps between countries and partners in different country typologies; insufficient funding resources; and their accessibility to all partners. **Purpose:** With this original intention, the South-South Galaxy was conceptually born in 2018 and formally launched in late 2019, through intensive consultation with 15 UN entities.¹
 - **Characteristics:** 1) Inclusiveness. It is a global platform open to all partners and aims to eliminate significant entry barriers faced by many partners of the South in accessing reliable and diverse range of information; 2) Efficiency. It is a consolidated one-stop-shop for SSTC solutions for all partners to use and interact; 3) Ownership. It is a neutral broker of partnerships, providing users with direct links to connect to solution owners and organizations to horizontalize exchanges; and 4) Collaboration. It is a resource centre to find institutions, people, advice, and funding channels for SSTC priorities. Its search functions are distinctively facilitated by artificial intelligence and machine learning.
 - **Positioning and branding:** It connects and links with existing SSC platforms of UN entities and other development actors. Only by better connecting all the platforms, we can strengthen collaboration, including inter-agency collaboration, on SSTC within the UN system.
- **Ms. Shams Banihani, Knowledge and Research Specialist of the UNOSSC, New York.** Presented the two pillars of the South-South Galaxy: 1) knowledge sharing; and 2) partnership brokering. The former has a huge database of solutions, good practices, and knowledge products, and can link to the databases of other UN entities. Users can also connect with think-tanks from across the South to develop research and/or to access their research on SSTC. The latter enables users to access existing funding mechanisms that they can directly connect with.² Thus, the platform can add a meaningful value to the UN system. At the regional level, it can support the specific needs identified by RCPs and Issue-Based Coalitions (IBCs) to facilitate SSTC; serve as information hub for cross-regional knowledge exchanges and partnerships; and strengthen regional cooperation by having access to better

¹ Objectives are to: 1) Respond more systematically and effectively to the demand by developing countries to connect and collaborate with potential partners, including through UN system entities; and 2) Provide a space that systematizes knowledge-sharing, and can provide actionable solutions, strengthen capacity, foster valuable partnerships, and spur technical cooperation.

² Key milestones since its launch in 2019 include approximately 400 organizations have institutionally registered, including over 80 government agencies, 58 UN entities and their Country Offices, and over 240 development partners (NGO, research institutions, private sector, international financial institutions, regional organizations, etc.). The good practices database has expanded to over 700 and covered all the SDGs. The UNOSSC is working with the g7+ Secretariat to develop a virtual Secretariat for Parliamentary Assembly; with UNDP Timor-Leste to build virtual place to be launched this November; and has facilitated tangible partnerships. Concrete examples include: 1) the Government of Ghana connected with the Government of Bangladesh to learn their innovative solutions in e-governance; and 2) the Government of Colombia connected with WFP on the solutions related to the COVID-19.

knowledge. At the country level, it can facilitate UNCTs and RCOs to support and advice governments on existing South-South knowledge across the UN system and from the countries for cross-border collaboration; support UNCTs and RCOs in documenting and disseminating information; and provide them access to funding opportunities.

- The presentation was followed by a step-by-step demonstration on the South-South Galaxy.

Field Perspective

- **Ms. Gwi-Yeop Son, Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia of the UN Development Coordination Office, Istanbul.** Acknowledged the efforts of soliciting field perspectives through dedicated discussion, recognized usefulness of Galaxy for the RCs and UNCTs, as well as its contribution to sharing of knowledge, expertise, and resources, which has been extensively discussed in the RCP-ECA. In this regard, agreed with the observation about streamlining the Galaxy and MANARA platforms and making the 'one-stop-shop' seamless for RCs and UNCTs for inspiration and learning from what has already worked in other countries and regions and then adapt it to the local context.³
- **Dr. Sabine Machi, UN Resident Coordinator, Georgia.** South-South Galaxy will help countries, including Georgia, to connect, learn and get more potential partners in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Georgia is very interested in SSC, and has, for a long time, chosen different topics, including universal health coverage and public administration reform, on which they wanted to share experience and learn from others. For instance, the UN has supported Georgia in building Public Service Halls for 10 years. So far, delegations from 50 different countries have come to Georgia to learn its functioning and the implementation. Georgia was also among the first-round countries that had conducted a Voluntary National Review (VNR), and was twinned up, by ESCAP, with Uzbekistan in 2020 to share information. It was a great opportunity to see how the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and the RCOs in both countries have worked together to share information on the ways to: 1) conduct and follow up on the VNRs; 2) translate the SDGs into action; 3) find innovative solutions on complicated issues; and 4) seek new ideas and greener solutions needed by all once exit from the pandemic.
- The UNSDCF for 2021-2025 is the central focus of the UN working with the Georgian Government. It is important to maximize programs, projects, and other initiatives to support Georgian national priorities.
- **Ms. Nathalie Fustier, UN Resident Coordinator, Saudi Arabia.** Noted the importance of digital platform as a venue to facilitate knowledge sharing and boost development cooperation, as well as the role and efforts of UNDS in promoting SSTC.
- Saudi Arabia is a high-income country, and well placed as both provider and beneficiary in diverse areas, including education, women's empowerment, information and communications technology, agriculture, renewable energy, green economy, etc. The Kingdom has requested the UN to support the promotion of their solutions. One example in education is that, at the outset of the pandemic, the Kingdom was trying to provide an accessible online education/learning platform to the students, despite the challenges faced. Now, the Kingdom has valuable experience that can be shared with other countries who plan to deliver education services to dispersed populations. SSTC is considered as a key dimension to respond to the Kingdom's national priorities.
- It has been agreed that knowledge and experience sharing are core ingredients of SSTC and can be highly effective tools to enable countries to address common challenges and boost their capacity to achieve their development goals. However, the potential of SSTC is currently underutilized for two reasons: 1) information gap of existing SSTC opportunities and practices; and 2) lack of effective policy coordination and institutional frameworks, as well as specific funding to enable effective cooperation. More structured, systematic, and innovative ways are needed to overcome these challenges. More scalable solutions that countries will use to solve

³ Extract from the written statement that could not be delivered fully due to time constraints. In the ECA, the in-country role is mostly in terms of convener/advocate, and as a knowledge broker and partnership builder. It is hoped that the South-South Galaxy platform will become a knowledge management tool for us to continue in doing so, and that it can help us have a more systematic and coherent approach to knowledge sharing and partnership brokering. This will help us better support countries' demand to connect, learn and collaborate with potential partners to in implementing SDGs. In ECA, 14 out of 18 UNCTs reported to have provided support on SSC in 2020, but only 8 out of 18 reported taking a collective approach to SSC. We would like that number to increase so that we can harvest the potential of SSC to achieve the SDGs at the country level, in a more coordinated manner.

similar challenges are to be identified. In this regard, digital platforms, such as the South-South Galaxy, are believed to represent a significant opportunity in knowledge sharing and partnership brokering, which help match demands and supplies on SSTC, and facilitate cross-border and cross-region exchanges.

User Perspective

- **Mr. Bobby Olarte, Senior Advisor, Inter-Country Cooperation, Policy and Strategy Division of UNFPA, New York.** Being a leading entity in utilizing the Galaxy platform and engaging on SSC, UNFPA views the platform as an innovative part of collaboration and knowledge sharing, needed for the organization to achieve its programmatic goals. The platform is “not branded to any one owner”; instead, it is inclusive, empowering any participating organizations to use for their needs. So far, UNFPA has contributed 63 good practices. The platform’s thematic search feature is particularly useful. It allows a UNFPA programme officer to find good practices in any of the thematic areas from all the registered organizations that have contributed to the same topic. Equally important, the officer is informed of others working on the same topic, including from outside the UN. The documentation template available on the platform is being used in reporting UNFPA’s good practices on SSTC, and the major partners of UNFPA are also encouraged to do the same.
- UNFPA considers SSTC as one of the six accelerators to achieve results under the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025. An [independent formative evaluation](#) of UNFPA’s approach to SSTC recommended, among others, strengthened knowledge sharing of SSTC results by disseminating good practices to public-facing platform, specifically mentioning the South-South Galaxy. In response, the use of the platform has been integrated into the guidance note on the SSTC programming and in other organizational norms.

Discussion

- Colleagues from UNFPA and UNDP Moldova COs, and WMO Regional Office for Europe engaged on the usefulness of the Galaxy, finding good practices, and seeking partnerships, accessing triangular cooperation-related information, expert pool, links between the Galaxy and MANARA platforms, uploading contents, quality assurance, etc.
- **Ms. Laila Baker, Regional Director for Arab States of the UN Development Coordination Office, Amman.** Commented that the South-South Galaxy is a great example of how the ‘whole is much greater than the sum of its parts’. Notably, the platform is not the intermediary, but the catalyst. As the connector, you allow for people to make their own informed choices. We have had less success in translating CCAs into what a real development cooperation would like and where governments would be receptive to the types of support we would like to provide, particularly on some of the difficult issues. The Galaxy, thus, offers solutions where governments can connect to each other as well, without us in the middle, but being the facilitators of that. One possible next step for Galaxy would be to bring up-to-date information and leverage the ability of the UN to convene and inform all stakeholders of what the Galaxy can offer, using the RC System and RCOs with the support of DCOs.
- **Ms. Xiaojun Grace Wang** reflected that the nature of Galaxy is the space for collaboration on the ground and that the platform keeps improving its functionality modules to suit additional purpose. For instance, the platform is adding the online exhibition hall module to the next Global South-South Development Expo, as per request from the host Government of Thailand and the ESCAP. In terms of streamlining South-South Galaxy and MANARA platforms, expressed willingness to further discuss with the MANARA designing team to understand the commonalities and the criteria of measuring the success of knowledge sharing on the platform. Institutionally registered users of Galaxy are always requested to provide the URL to the knowledge they shared, this way the platforms can also be technically connected and content-wise synergized.

Next Step

- Building on some of the conversations during this event, the Division for Arab States, Europe and the CIS will reach out in the coming months to plan for region-specific discussions on the implementation of the System-wide Strategy, of which the South-South Galaxy and knowledge management are important pillars.