

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



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BACKGROUND

For a long time, South-South cooperation (SSC) has been recognized by UNFPA as a key programmatic approach in achieving its three transformative results as well as its broader development agendas. UNFPA SSC initiatives cut across all thematic areas of work, but have been particularly prominent in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) as well as population dynamics programming.

The UNFPA Evaluation Office commissioned an independent formative evaluation of the UNFPA approach to South-South and triangular cooperation, the first to be conducted at UNFPA. The purpose of this exercise is three-fold: to take stock of initial progress, lessons learned and enabling factors; to report on the challenges facing the UNFPA journey in South-South cooperation since 2017; and to provide evaluative input for the strategic direction of SSC and implementation of the UNFPA South-South Cooperation Strategy within the 2030 Agenda and the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD).

DATA COLLECTION METHODS



11 case studies

4 regional
6 national
1 thematic



372 UNFPA respondents to an online survey



239 interviews



Comparative study with 8 UN agencies



217 documents reviewed



KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- UNFPA has taken fundamental steps to raise the profile of and capacity for SSC, and has made significant progress with institutionalizing SSC in recent years.
- The understanding and implementation of SSC is varied across the organization. This has implications for internal SSC coordination mechanisms, the monitoring and evaluation of SSC initiatives, and the financial and human resources required to successfully facilitate SSC.
- Efforts to increase staff capacity and mainstream SSC into the work of UNFPA have advanced, but can be broadened in both the quantity and type of capacity development opportunities. More practical guidance is needed to effectively operationalize SSC at the decentralized level and across different thematic areas.
- UNFPA SSC interventions have accomplished several results particularly in areas of SRHR and population dynamics. However, additional opportunities could be found to leverage SSC towards advancing gender equality and youth engagement as well as SSC in humanitarian contexts.
- There are mechanisms in place (for example, monitoring and evaluation, reporting and follow-up) to manage and facilitate SSC initiatives, but these can be further developed and systematized.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Clarify the conceptualization of SSC and further integrate SSC into the strategic frameworks and thematic areas of UNFPA, which includes developing a theory of change and mainstreaming SSC into key strategic documents and programmatic guidance.
- 2 Enhance SSC implementation at the country and regional levels, through clarifying the roles and responsibilities of business units, dedicating SSC budgets into programme documents and mapping opportunities to support the establishment of SSC centers of excellence.
- 3 Strengthen the capacity of staff to effectively facilitate SSC interventions through more targeted, in-depth and regularly scheduled training and capacity-building events.
- 4 Improve monitoring and evaluation of SSC interventions, and strengthen efforts in the communication and knowledge management of results, in order to better demonstrate programmatic impacts of SSC and showcase the UNFPA SSC experience.