

5. South-South and Triangular Cooperation – International Relation

India hosted 20 “like-minded” Global South nations, on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly 2025, stressing unity amid global crises.

About South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC)

Definition – South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) represents a framework for collaboration among developing countries of the Global South, complemented by partnerships involving developed nations or multilateral agencies. It seeks to promote mutual growth, self-reliance, and equitable participation in global governance through shared knowledge, innovation, and solidarity.

Context – With less than five years left for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, SSTC has emerged as a vital alternative and complement to traditional North-South cooperation, particularly in areas like food security, digital innovation, and climate resilience.

Historical Context – Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA), 1978

Adopted – 1978, at the UN Conference on Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (Buenos Aires).

Significance – It laid the institutional foundation for South-South Cooperation by articulating the principles of equality, solidarity, and non-conditionality among developing nations.

Legacy – The United Nations Day for South-South and Triangular Cooperation (12 September) commemorates BAPA’s anniversary.

Core Vision – To build self-reliant, demand-driven, and mutually beneficial development cooperation among developing countries.

UN International Day for South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC)

Observed on – 12 September every year.

Established by – UN General Assembly to mark the adoption of the BAPA (1978).

Theme for 2025 – “New Opportunities and Innovation through SSTC”

Objective of the Theme – To underline how innovation, digital technologies, and inclusive partnerships can unlock new pathways for collective progress among developing nations.

South-South Cooperation (SSC) – Concept and Mechanism

Definition – SSC is the exchange of knowledge, resources, technology, and solutions among developing countries of the Global South to strengthen collective self-reliance and foster equitable development.

Operational Mechanisms – Conducted through bilateral, regional, and interregional frameworks. Implemented via governmental, institutional, and civil-society partnerships. Encompasses capacity building, technology transfer, policy dialogue, and trade facilitation.

Guiding Principles of South-South Cooperation

Respect for Sovereignty – All cooperation must uphold national ownership and decision-making.

Equality among Partners – No hierarchy or donor-recipient dynamic; mutual benefit is key.

Non-Conditionality – Assistance without political or economic conditions.

Non-Interference – Each partner’s domestic affairs remain independent.

Mutual Benefit and Solidarity – Shared prosperity through cooperative innovation.

Self-Reliance – Strengthening local capabilities to reduce external dependency.

Objectives of SSC (As Outlined in BAPA, 1978)

Promote Self-Reliance – Enhance local capacity for problem-solving and sustainable development.

Strengthen Collective Resilience – Pool and share resources to reduce dependency on the North.

Build Analytical and Strategic Capacity – Encourage policy exchange and joint research.

Enhance Technology Adaptation – Develop capability to modify technologies suited to local conditions.

Improve Development Effectiveness – Ensure better coordination, transparency, and ownership.

Support Vulnerable States – Address special needs of LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS, particularly in disaster resilience and climate adaptation.

Triangular Cooperation (TrC) – Definition and Purpose

Definition – Triangular Cooperation refers to Southern-led partnerships between two or more developing countries, supported by a developed country or international organization that provides financial, technical, or institutional support.

Purpose and Benefits – Allows Northern partners to leverage Southern experiences for greater impact. Enables Southern partners to gain additional expertise, funding, and institutional capacity. Must remain Southern-owned and demand-driven to preserve SSC principles.

India's Leadership in South–South and Triangular Cooperation

1. Philosophical Foundation – Guided by Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam – “The World is One Family.” Promotes solidarity, inclusiveness, and mutual respect, mirroring SSC's ethical foundations.

2. Capacity Building – ITEC Programme (1964) – India's Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) has trained 200,000+ professionals from 160+ countries. Focus sectors – governance, IT, agriculture, health, climate resilience, and renewable energy.

3. Institutional Framework – Development Partnership Administration (DPA, 2012) – Created within the MEA to coordinate development projects. Ensures transparency, accountability, and alignment with partner-country priorities.

4. Financing Mechanism – India–UN Development Partnership Fund (2017) – Supports 75+ projects in 56 countries, focusing on LDCs and SIDS. Implemented through UNOSSC, showcasing India's global leadership in SSTC.

5. Convening Power and Global Voice – Hosted Voice of the Global South Summits (2023 & 2024) to consolidate the priorities of 120+ developing nations. Advocated for African Union's permanent G20 membership, ensuring equitable global representation. In 2025, hosted a high-level meeting of “Like-Minded Global South” countries on the sidelines of the UNGA.

6. Digital Diplomacy – Exported Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) – Aadhaar, UPI, CoWIN – as global public goods. Showcased scalable models for governance, financial inclusion, and health systems.

7. Triangular Cooperation Examples – India–WFP collaboration – initiatives in rice fortification, Grain ATMs, and women-led food security programs. Projects in Nepal and Laos highlight successful South–South–UN triangular models.

8. Regional and Global Partnerships – Platforms like BRICS, IBSA, International Solar Alliance (ISA), and CDRI embed Global South concerns into multilateral structures.

Challenges to South–South and Triangular Cooperation

1. Financing Constraints – Declining global aid for humanitarian and development causes. Many SSC projects remain small-scale due to resource limitations. UNCTAD (2023) estimates a \$4 trillion annual SDG financing gap for developing countries.

2. Institutional Weakness – Lack of centralised global framework to coordinate, monitor, and evaluate SSC outcomes. Weak accountability and transparency mechanisms.

3. Geopolitical Rivalries – India's demand-driven SSC model vs. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) creates competitive tension. BRI's cumulative loans exceed \$800 billion–\$1 trillion, raising debt sustainability issues.

4. Climate and Development Vulnerabilities – Global South faces disproportionate climate risks despite low emissions. Africa emits <4% of global CO₂ but faces the highest climate impact (IPCC AR6, 2022). Only 12% of SDG targets on track (UN SDG Progress Report, 2023).

5. Technological Divide – Unequal access to digital infrastructure and innovation. 2.6 billion people remain offline (ITU, 2023), mostly in low-income countries.

6. Multilateralism Under Strain – EAM Jaishankar (UNGA 2025) warned that multilateralism is weakening as institutions like the UN and WTO face funding cuts and political divisions.

7. Resource Dependence – Concentration of critical minerals – China controls ~90% of rare earth refining – restricts equitable access for the South's green transition.

8. Internal Contradictions – Global South is diverse and unequal – varying incomes, governance models, and geopolitical alignments. Disunity visible in UN votes and policy stances (e.g., differing

positions on Gaza resolutions).

The Global South – Definition and Relevance

Definition – Refers broadly to developing or less developed countries that share common challenges such as poverty, inequality, and climate vulnerability.

Origin – Term first used by Carl Oglesby (1969); gained prominence after the Cold War (1991) as a replacement for “Third World.”

Key Attributes –

1. Collective population share – 85% of global population.
2. Underrepresentation – No permanent UNSC representation; limited influence in IMF and World Bank.
3. Coalitional Platforms – G-77, NAM, and India-led Voice of Global South Summits.

Way Forward for Strengthening SSTC

1. Empowering UNOSSC – UN Office for South–South Cooperation (1974) – Promote, coordinate, and monitor SSC globally. Needs enhanced mandate and funding to evaluate and scale up successful projects.

2. Leveraging Digital Platforms – Expand South–South Galaxy (2019)—UNOSSC–UNDP initiative—to share knowledge, tools, and innovations. Create a global repository for scalable solutions in AI, fintech, and health-tech.

3. Bridging Financing Gaps – Scale up mechanisms like the India–UN Fund, BRICS NDB, and AIIB. Promote blended finance (public + private + philanthropic) and innovative tools like green bonds.

4. Reforming Global Governance – Advocate UNSC permanent seats for Global South, especially Africa and India. Push for IMF quota and WTO reform to ensure fairer global economic representation.

5. Building Institutional Accountability – Develop shared metrics and transparency frameworks for SSC evaluation. Institutionalise Voice of the Global South Summits as annual multilateral forums.

6. Strengthening Climate and Food Security Cooperation – Scale India’s tested innovations — rice fortification, nutrition missions, climate-resilient agriculture. Promote sustainable mineral partnerships for the clean energy transition.

7. Ensuring Equitable Development – Promote development-based diplomacy, avoiding debt-trap financing. Encourage code-of-conduct principles for transparent, demand-driven cooperation.

8. Reinvigorating Multilateralism – Strengthen UN, WTO, and IMF as inclusive platforms for collective problem-solving. Encourage regional blocs (African Union, CARICOM, ECOWAS, MERCOSUR) to maintain unity in diversity.

Conclusion

South–South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) is no longer peripheral, but a central pillar of 21st-century global governance. As multilateralism weakens, SSTC embodies a new model of inclusive globalism, grounded in solidarity, self-reliance, and shared innovation. India’s philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, its leadership in digital public goods, and its role as a bridge between North and South uniquely position it to drive this transformation — ensuring that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development becomes a truly global and equitable effort.

Source – <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/sstc-is-more-than-a-diplomatic-phrase/article70109816.ece>