South-South Data Fund

A multi-donor, multi-project instrument
Terms of Reference

I. Introduction

The South-South Data Fund is a multi-donor, multi-project instrument established to support developing economies in strengthening their capacity to collect, analyze and report South-South cooperation data. Anchored in the United Nations Framework to Measure South-South Cooperation and SDG indicator 17.3.1, the Fund responds to Member States' call for scaled-up capacity-building, tools, and country-led implementation.

The Fund pools resources to support countries of the Global South in their voluntary efforts to measure South-South cooperation. Its longer-term aim is to address the longstanding imbalance in global data on development support, enhancing the visibility and management of South-South Cooperation alongside other forms of development cooperation, beyond the 2030 Agenda.

This need is strongly reflected in country demand and intergovernmental guidance. In a 2023 global UNCTAD survey, 60 countries of the Global South requested support to initiate data collection and reporting. In November 2024, Member States called for scaling up capacity-building at the Second Committee of the General Assembly (A/RES/79/236), requesting UNCTAD to strengthen technical support, tools, and country-led mechanisms, including a platform for methodological development and experience sharing; this call was reaffirmed at the 80th session of the General Assembly in 2025.

The Fund supports coordinated global efforts led by UNCTAD, in collaboration with partners, to strengthen national statistical systems, promote harmonized methodologies, and enhance the visibility and use of South-South data in development policy and international cooperation.

II. Functioning of the Trust Fund

The Trust Fund enables Member States' and other donors' support to activities and projects to strengthen the capacity of countries of the Global South to collect, analyse and report South-South Data, including for SDG indicator 17.3.1.

As a custodian of the UN Framework and co-custodian of SDG 17.3.1, UNCTAD hosts the Fund, coordinating its activities and facilitating collaboration among countries, international organizations and other partners to strengthen harmonized global efforts, according to priorities expressed by countries of the Global South.

The Fund provides a flexible mechanism to support capacity-building, knowledge sharing, technical assistance, and the development of tools and systems for South-South data, in line with priorities defined by the UN Steering Committee on South-South Data.

It is a multi-donor and multi-project Fund to which donors can provide either open or targeted contributions to support the achievement of the Trust Fund goals. The funds can be used either to support countries of the Global South, or to fund directly related activities carried out with or by key partners in collaboration with UNCTAD.

Grounded in the principle of country ownership, strategic priorities are defined by countries of the Global South, while UNCTAD will facilitate periodic briefings and informal consultations with contributing partners to ensure transparency and dialogue, without altering the composition or decision-making authority of the Steering Committee.

III. Programmatic scope and theory of change

Theory of Change

The Fund is based on the premise that strengthening national statistical capacities, supported by harmonized tools, peer learning, and coordinated international support, will enable countries to transition toward systematic production and use of South-South data. This will enhance evidence-based policymaking and contribute to a more balanced global understanding of development cooperation.

Fund impact

The Fund enables developing economies to generate their own South-South data, equipping them with the tools, skills, and institutional systems needed to use this evidence for policy, resource mobilization, and stronger participation in global development governance. Its impact unfolds across three mutually reinforcing areas:

1. Stronger statistical capacity and institutional systems

The Fund strengthens national systems for collecting and reporting South-South data by supporting:

- ❖ Inter-agency coordination mechanisms, ensuring ministries, statistical offices and SSC focal points work together.
- ❖ National and regional training, e-learning, and technical assistance to institutionalize the UN Framework and its Manual.
- ❖ Harmonized data tools and integrated IT systems that streamline data collection, validation, analysis and reporting, including for SDG indicator 17.3.1.

These efforts help countries transition from fragmented information scattered across institutions to coherent national South-South data ecosystems. Over time, countries gain the capacity to generate regular, comparable, and nationally owned data, laying the foundation for an autonomous global South-South Data architecture, led by countries of the Global South.

2. More evidence-based and strategically targeted policies

The Fund strengthens countries' capacities to analyse and use South-South data by supporting:

- Use of South-South data in national planning, budgeting, and cooperation strategies with partner countries and improved coordination across ministries.
- Analysis of South-South cooperation flows vis-à-vis national priorities and global development goals.
- Use of data to enhance resource mobilization, strengthen negotiating positions, and strengthen the country's identity and engagement in development support.

Increased visibility of South-South data helps correct the historical imbalances where North-South flows dominated global narratives. With sound evidence, South-South cooperation becomes a more visible and recognized modality of development cooperation.

3. Enhanced regional and inter-regional collaboration

The Fund supports the creation and functioning of structured collaboration, including a meeting platform and a Community of Practice enabling country-lead in supporting:

- Regular online and annual in-person meetings to enable peer learning and thematic exchanges on methods, tools and policy use of data.
- Co-creation of methodologies, guidance, IT solutions and South-South indicators.

- Joint development of knowledge products and case studies that enhance global visibility of South-South cooperation.

This collaboration strengthens solidarity, ownership and collective decision making about South-South Data and its use among countries of the Global South. As more countries report and use South-South data, they contribute to a more globally balanced picture of development cooperation, increasing their ability to shape global norms and policies.

Fund objective

The objective is to strengthen the capacity of developing economies to collect, report, and analyse South-South data so that they can use this evidence to shape national policies, monitor progress towards and beyond the 2030 Agenda, and contribute to global development cooperation debates.

Through this objective, the Fund supports developing economies to:

- ❖ Build strong institutions capable of collecting, analysing and reporting South-South Data for various purposes.
- ❖ Use South-South Data to shape national policies, partnerships, and financing strategies.
- ❖ Strengthen their presence, credibility, and influence in development partnerships, and advance a more equitable and representative global cooperation architecture.

The transformation remains country-led, supported by UNCTAD's custodial role, harmonized tools, and regional and global cooperation platforms.

Outcomes and outputs

The Fund will support activities contributing to three broad outcomes:

1. *Strengthened national statistical systems capacities to produce and report South-South data*.
2. *Increased use of South-South data in policymaking, planning, and development cooperation*.
3. *Enhanced regional and inter-regional collaboration, peer learning, and knowledge sharing*.

Work plan

Detailed outputs and activities will be defined through annual workplans approved by the Steering Committee, taking into account available resources, country priorities, and contributions from partners.

IV. Governance arrangements

Steering committee

1. Objective

The UN Steering Committee on South-South Data serves as the primary governance and strategic oversight body of the Fund.

2. Transparency and accountability

The UN Steering Committee on South-South Data will operate according to its Terms of Reference.

Members of the Steering Committee must recuse themselves from decisions regarding funding allocations for which their specific organization or department is a direct implementing partner or beneficiary.

In addition to self-evaluation, transparent reporting, and sharing of outcomes, independent external evaluations are carried out on donor requests. The Fund will utilize risk-weighted priorities and set aside a 5% contingency reserve to address unforeseen programmatic disruptions or contextual shifts. Use of the contingency reserve is authorized by the Steering Committee, upon recommendation of the Secretariat, in response to unforeseen programmatic disruptions or material contextual shifts.

V. Implementation

Two-window funding architecture

The Fund operates through two funding windows:

- Window I: unearmarked contributions supporting priority activities, including core functions of the Fund, the operation of the Steering Committee, and broader global, regional and inter-regional initiatives.
- Window II: earmarked contributions supporting specific countries, regions, or thematic areas.

While both windows are available, unearmarked contributions are encouraged to ensure flexibility, coherence, and the effective functioning of the Fund, including its governance and partnership activities.

Contributions to Window II are encouraged to be accompanied by unearmarked contributions to ensure systemic impact. The use of both windows will be guided by the Steering Committee to ensure strategic alignment and balanced impact.

Sustainability

The Fund will aim to secure resources over its initial four-year period to support its objectives. A baseline of approximately USD 500,000 per year would support essential operational costs, including project staff supporting coordination, technical input, and reporting; an annual in-person meeting of the platform to review progress and discuss priorities; and an additional in-person meeting of the Steering Committee. Funding above this baseline would enable activities at the regional and country levels, in line with the guidance of the Steering Committee and donor priorities.

Contributions of any size are welcome. Donors are encouraged to consider multi-year commitments, which support predictable planning and the sustained delivery of country-led activities. Pledges are voluntary and may be reviewed or adjusted in dialogue with the Secretariat.

The Fund promotes sustainability by supporting institutional capacity, knowledge sharing, and the development of tools and systems that enable countries to develop and maintain South-South data systems over time.

UNCTAD recovers programme support costs at the standard United Nations rate, or such other rate as may be agreed with individual donors.

VI. Risk management

Assumptions

The success of activities under the Fund depends on the willingness of countries of the Global South to engage in a voluntary, country-led process to collect and report South-South data using the agreed Framework. It assumes sustained political commitment, effective institutional coordination, openness to peer learning, and continued technical support from UNCTAD and partners. It also assumes the appropriate tools and training will be available, and used effectively, and that South-South data will be used to inform policy, mobilize resources, and contribute to global development discussions.

Risk analysis

The Fund will operate in a flexible and adaptive manner, taking into account country-specific contexts and evolving priorities. Implementation will follow UN rules and procedures,[1] with regular review of progress and adjustments as needed.

The Steering Committee will review implementation periodically and provide strategic guidance as appropriate. A limited share of Fund resources may be set aside to support adaptive responses to emerging needs.

VII. Reporting

Progress and financial reports will be provided regularly to the Steering Committee, in line with UN reporting standards.

VIII. Communication and visibility plan

The Fund will implement a robust visibility strategy to acknowledge the multi-donor nature of the instrument, including the following:

- Contributors will be invited to provide opening remarks at the annual Expert Meeting and will be highlighted in policy briefs and case studies showcasing South-South Data-informed decisions.
- The Secretariat will produce on its internet and social media platforms related news featuring testimonials from pioneering and beneficiary countries to demonstrate the value of donor contributions.

[1] In line with UN Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF) best practices, see MDTF-TOR-Final-version-UNDG-approvedl-26.10.15.docx.