

South-South and Triangular Cooperation Solutions Lab of the UN Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC)

Frequently Asked Questions (Draft; 30 July 2024)

1. What is the UNOSSC Solutions Lab?

Answer: This is a pilot initiative designed to address complex development challenges faced by developing countries through South-South and triangular cooperation. The Lab is one of the core service lines of the UNOSSC Strategic Framework (2022-25). It aims to facilitate the coordination, co-design, incubation, and scaling up of innovative solutions that promote knowledge exchange, capacity development, and technology transfer while contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The concept of the Lab was developed in-house after a thorough review of the existing Labs, lessons learned, and innovation outfits primarily from within the UN system and from outside.

2. What are the main objectives of the Solutions Lab?

Answer: The main objectives are:

- To increase the capabilities of developing countries to make sound South-South and triangular cooperation decisions, based on evidence.
- To incubate existing and new ideas for practical applications and replicable use cases.
- To create, assess, and develop new policies to accelerate South-South and triangular cooperation.

3. Who are the clients, partners, and beneficiaries of the Solutions Lab?

Answer: The main clients, partners, and beneficiaries include national governments, national development cooperation institutions, United Nations agencies, regional organizations, international organizations and financial institutions, academic and research institutions, South-South cooperation networks, the private sector and technology providers, philanthropic foundations, and civil society organizations.

4. What types of innovative solutions does the 2024 Innovation Challenge support?

Answer: The 2024 Innovation Challenge supports two distinct types of solutions:

- Existing innovative solutions that are tested and reflect South-South and triangular cooperation aspects.
- New solutions that are generated in consultation with governments, United Nations entities, and partners.

5. What thematic areas are prioritized for the 2024 Innovation Challenge?

Answer: The prioritized thematic areas include:

- Accelerating the adoption of and investment in renewable energy
- Enhancing agricultural productivity and climate resilience
- Financial inclusion and use of digital platforms
- Better-informed urban planning decisions

6. How does the Solutions Lab identify and prioritize the thematic areas of focus?

Answer: The Solutions Lab identifies and prioritizes thematic areas of focus through a thorough analysis of the needs expressed by member states in various recent resolutions on South-South and triangular cooperation, outcomes from global forums, and key policy dialogues. Also, the Lab will be generating and gathering demands from the field, including from the UN Country Teams on the ground. The Lab routinely assesses pertinent intergovernmental resolutions, reports, and outcome documents to discern and delve into the intricate development challenges of developing countries. Foresight techniques and consultations with key stakeholders help spotlight specific policy challenges and evolving trends, ensuring that the selected thematic areas are aligned with the most pressing and relevant needs of governments.

7. How does the application process for the Innovation Challenge work?

Answer: Interested applicants can apply through the open call published on the UNOSSC page. Applications must be submitted online via the UNOSSC's [South-South Galaxy](#) platform. Queries should be sent to solutionslab@unoss.org. Only one application per applicant is allowed, and re-submission after the deadline is not permitted. Complete applications are required for evaluation, and shortlisted applicants might be invited for a presentation.

8. How many applications can the UNOSSC Solutions Lab support at a time?

Answer: The number of applications the UNOSSC Solutions Lab can support at a time depends on the resources mobilized by UNOSSC and its partners, as well as the available budget for the Innovation Challenge. While there is no fixed limit mentioned, the selection process is competitive, and only those applications that meet the criteria and are positively evaluated will receive support. The Lab focuses on providing tailored support to each selected solution, ensuring they receive comprehensive assistance for successful implementation and scaling.

9. What are the selection criteria for evaluating innovative solutions?

Answer: The evaluation criteria for innovative solutions include:

- Degree of innovation.
- South-South and triangular cooperation impact.
- Innovation risk.
- Market size and access.
- Alignment with specific SDGs.
- Contribution to South-South and triangular cooperation.
- Project team qualifications.
- Methodology and planning approach.
- Deliverables and project costs feasibility.

10. What kind of support does the Solutions Lab provide to selected solutions and what is the role of the partners?

Answer: The Lab provides various types of support including data and research support, policy and institutionalization support, brokerage and co-funding support, and integration and scaling up of successful innovations. It also offers capacity development through an interactive learning platform. The key partners of the Lab will play a key role in providing knowledge support, as well as methodological and other support required by the owners and developers of the solutions. Access to innovation infrastructure and ecosystem is also possible through the partners of the Lab.

11. What is the maximum amount of financial awards available for the selected innovative solutions?

Answer: Awards of up to US\$40,000 (in-kind contributions) are possible on a competitive and case-by-case basis. In-kind contributions by partners, including through the advisory services, access to knowledge and information, access to innovation ecosystems etc. will be provided on a case-by-case basis and as a result of a competitive process.

12. How does the Solutions Lab ensure visibility and popularization of its activities?

Answer: The Lab ensures visibility and popularization through the development of a dedicated web platform linked to the South-South Galaxy platform, active social media engagement, content creation including articles, policy papers, infographics, and videos, and participation of Lab experts in public events, workshops, and policy dialogues.

13. What is the usual duration of an incubation period for projects supported by the Solutions Lab? What happens after the incubation period?

Answer: The usual duration of an incubation period for projects to be supported will range from 6 to 12 months. Exceptionally, projects may request an extension of their duration if necessary. After the incubation period, solution owners will receive additional support in terms of the development and implementation of the replication/scaling-up plan. Partners of the Lab will also play a crucial role in ensuring replicability. The ownership aspect is also critical determinant of the success of the testing and scaling-up.

14. What methodological approaches does the Solutions Lab take into consideration?

Answer: The Solutions Lab employs various methodological approaches to ensure effective support and implementation of innovative solutions. These include:

- Foresight techniques to identify evolving trends, obstacles, and opportunities.
- Evidence-based research and policy strategies to foster idea exchanges and grounded decisions.
- A dynamic Learning Platform to connect local and regional knowledge and expertise.
- Policy dialogues on innovation and cutting-edge technologies.
- Networks of researchers and practitioners focused on intricate and intractable development challenges.
- Integration of data collaboratives encompassing a mix of conventional and contemporary data types, such as big data and thick data.
- Focused research in prioritized thematic areas, leveraging partnerships with think tanks, academia, and research institutions.

- Support for the incubation of both existing and new solutions through ideation, co-design, and adaptation to new contexts.

15. What is the portfolio approach adopted by the Solutions Lab?

Answer: The portfolio approach adopted by the Solutions Lab involves supporting a broad range of interconnected solutions rather than focusing on a single solution to address complex development challenges. This approach recognizes that intricate problems require multidisciplinary and non-linear strategies. Therefore, the Lab prioritizes solutions that can be part of a larger portfolio, which includes multiple, complementary solutions working together to achieve broader developmental goals. This ensures a holistic and comprehensive response to development challenges, enhancing the scalability and sustainability of the innovations supported by the Lab.

16. What are the key components of the monitoring and evaluation plan for the Solutions Lab?

Answer: The monitoring and evaluation plan for the Solutions Lab is meticulously designed to ensure effective implementation and impact assessment of its initiatives. This plan encompasses several key components, each contributing to the overall success and scalability of the Lab's solutions.

Firstly, strategic guidance and oversight are provided by a Steering Committee, which offers strategic direction, oversees implementation, and ensures transparency and accountability. The committee includes diverse stakeholders.

A significant aspect of the plan is rigorous evaluation and impact assessment. The Lab emphasizes measuring and evaluating the impact of solutions on development challenges, providing guidelines for impact measurement. An initial assessment of 1-2 incubated solutions is conducted to evaluate their effectiveness and potential for broader application.

Data and research support is another crucial component. The Lab establishes data collaboratives to aggregate and analyze data related to South-South cooperation outcomes, innovation ecosystems, trade and investment flows, digital technology transfers, sustainability initiatives, and digital inclusion. Research and data leads will conduct thorough research, providing actionable insights to inform evidence-based policymaking and solution generation. Capacity building and knowledge sharing are facilitated through an interactive learning platform, possibly AI-assisted, tailored for member states and partners. This platform offers a focused curriculum designed to foster dynamic learning and collaboration, enhancing the capabilities of stakeholders to implement evidence-based policies and solutions.

The Lab follows a structured workflow for incubating existing and new solutions, involving ideation, solution design, pilot testing, iterative refinement, and scaling based on feedback. Specific action plans for scaling successful innovations are defined, integrating these solutions into national, regional, and sub-regional policies and programs. Partnership and resource mobilization play a vital role in the plan.

The Lab formalizes new partnership agreements with United Nations agencies, development organizations, and academia to support implementation. A resource mobilization plan will also be developed to sustain and expand Lab initiatives.

Lastly, popularization and communication ensure the visibility and popularization of the Lab's activities. This is achieved through the development of its brand, active online engagement, social media presence, content creation, and partnerships with visible institutions.

17. Who are the current partners of the Lab?

Answer: The current cohort of partners are:

- [IAEA](#) – International Atomic Energy Agency
- [WFP](#) – World Food Programme
- [UNECE](#) - United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
- [Masdar City](#)
- [GORD](#) – Gulf Organization for Research and Development