The 2022 GSSD Expo Special Event: Digital Innovation and Youth Entrepreneurship through South-South and Triangular Cooperation took place from 12 to 14 September 2022 in a hybrid fashion, with physical presence at the 2022 Global South-South Development (GSSD) Expo in Bangkok and online. It brought together the finalists of the Youth4South Entrepreneurship Competition with the winners of the Global South COVID-19 Digital Innovation Challenge to showcase their projects. All participants demonstrated how their entrepreneurial initiatives and digital innovations are achieving far-reaching socio-economic headwinds by embracing new and innovative approaches to respond to the current health emergencies. It also provided entrepreneurs with a networking opportunity for scaling up digital solutions and mobilizing potential partnerships and funding.

The event was developed as a follow-up to the outcome document of the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation (BAPA+40) (A/RES/73/291) which highlighted and recognized the role South-South and triangular cooperation plays in capacity building, strengthening human resources, and leveraging the role of education and human development to create employment opportunities, particularly in the areas of science technology, innovation, and technical and vocational education.

In response to this, the GSSD Expo 2022 co-hosts, the Government of Thailand, the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), in partnership with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) proposed the joint Special Event to highlight two initiatives related to innovation, capacity development, and youth entrepreneurship for sustainable development in a post-COVID-19 pandemic world: Global South COVID-19 Digital Innovation Challenge and the Youth4South Entrepreneurship Competition.
On day 1 of the Special Event at the 2022 GSSD Expo, digital innovators and young entrepreneurs learned from ITU and UNOSSC experts about the principles of telling a compelling story and the benefits of innovation frameworks to advance development through South-South and triangular cooperation. The session demonstrated through case studies the importance of the use of innovation frameworks and invited participants to practice through the utilization of a set of tools developed by ITU. These tools bring a systems approach to digital transformation, ensuring countries can have sustainable digital ecosystems that foster entrepreneurship and innovation.
In preparation for the Youth4South Entrepreneurship Competition, Day 2 of the Special Event assembled the eight selected initiatives from the Youth4South Leadership program to participate in a closed session to practice their 5-minute pitch for the Entrepreneurship Competition and receive feedback from experts, mentors, and the Digital Innovation Challenge winners.
Following the 5-minute draft presentations for the Youth4South Entrepreneurship Competition, the young entrepreneurs got feedback from mentors and experts, who provided insights and recommendations on building sustainable initiatives and compelling stories to promote, accelerate and strengthen South-South cooperation. They posit that expanding cooperation in the Global South requires creating opportunities for collaboration through projects in developing countries and that it is important to reconsider how information is communicated and to use stories to make an impression. Each young entrepreneur was matched with one of the Global South COVID-19 Digital Innovation Challenge winners to work on improvements after the session.

Day 3 of the Youth4South Special Event started with a panel discussion where experts, mentors and the Digital Innovation Challenge winners highlighted the importance and possibilities of South-South and Triangular cooperation from their experiences in digital transformation. Panelists shared insights about their initiatives, impact and experiences expanding across the Global South on digital transformation and transfer of Information & Communications Technologies (ICTs).
At the final day of the 2022 GSSD Expo, all Youth4South partners gathered at the final round of the Youth4South Entrepreneurship Competition, organized by the GSSD Expo 2022 co-hosts: Government of Thailand, UNOSSC and ESCAP, in partnership with UNFPA, ITU, Office of the Secretary General’s Envoy on Youth, and Shenzhen Federation of Youth Entrepreneurship Promotion.

The call for applications for the competition was launched in December 2021 and received close to 230 applications from 45 countries of the Global South. In March Youth4South organized a cross-border e-commerce training session for young entrepreneurs, and in June, the first part of the competition took place with a shark-style event where 25 shortlisted entrepreneurs had the opportunity to present their initiatives to expert panels. Eight finalist entrepreneurs were selected and today the expert jury will choose the 3 final winners.

The event started with the opening remarks of:
Ms. Prinat Apirat, Deputy Director-General, Department of International Economic Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Thailand

Ms. Apirat stressed the importance of addressing the triple challenge of soaring food prices, surging inflation and climate change in now 8 years to achieve the commitments of the 2030 Agenda. All members of society need to be committed and work together towards the SDGs and youth are leading the way in embracing digital technologies. They are the change-makers in adopting sustainable business practices. Royal Thai Government supports youth empowerment to ensure that young voices are heard and have a real impact in shaping policies.

Ms. Xiaojun (Grace) Wang, Trust Fund Director and Head of Delegation, United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC)

Ms. Wang highlighted that UNOSSC is deeply committed to the empowerment of youth as new champions of South-South and triangular cooperation. Since 2017, the Youth4South Advanced Youth Leadership Programme has been promoting South-South and triangular cooperation
initiatives, projects, and activities that support youth leadership and capacity development for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It was created to support the exchange of knowledge and mutual learning among young people globally. UNOSSC will continue to provide capacity development opportunities for youth to learn, adapt and apply South-South and triangular cooperation tools and methods in scaling up sustainable development solutions and projects in their home community, institution, and country contexts.

Mr. Jonathan Wong, Chief of Technology and Innovation, Trade, Investment and Innovation Division, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP)

Mr. Wong indicated that there is a need to rethink for a new economy, to better for society and the environment. UNESCAP is focusing on business innovation for the SDGs and has been supporting countries to put in place incentives and strategies that support businesses to think about people and the planet alongside profit. New young entrepreneurs have the opportunity to see business as a force for good, to tackle the social and environmental challenges of our time.
Ms. Atsuko Okuda, Regional Director, Regional Office Asia & Pacific, International Telecommunications Union (ITU)

Ms. Okuda mentioned that between 2019-2021 780 million people joined cyberspace. ICT can enhance education, reduce unemployment, and deliver benefits. The first Generation Connect Youth Summit was held in June 2022 in Kigali Rwanda. Achieving inclusive digital transformation requires a paradigm shift for youth to benefit from the transformative power of ICT. She hopes that the Youth4South entrepreneurship competition advances digital empowerment of youth and further promotes South-South and triangular cooperation to close the digital innovation divide.

Ms. Duangkamol Ponchamni, National Programme Officer, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA Thailand)

Ms. Ponchamni stressed that UNFPA puts youth in high priority to make sure that the full engagement and participation of young people is in everything they do. The new generation is the
new hope of global sustainable development. Innovations and ideas from young people are most welcome and are highly considered in UNFPA programmes and policies, and the fund will maintain its support to Youth4South so the voices and participation of young people of the Global South continue.

Mr. Chen Daixing, Chairman of Shenzhen Federation of Youth Entrepreneurship Promotion (Video message)

On behalf of the Shenzhen Federation of Youth Entrepreneurship Promotion, Mr. Chen congratulated the co-organizers of the GSSD Expo 2022 and in particular UNOSSC for being a knowledge-gathering platform of the Global South in scientific and technological innovation. Youth creates, collaborates and drives change. Since 2017, with the support of UNOSSC, the Shenzhen Federation of Youth Entrepreneurship Promotion has hosted the International Youth Innovation Conference, attracting young people from over 100 countries to participate, show innovation and build partnerships.
Ms. Jayathma Wickramanayake, UN Secretary General’s Envoy on Youth  (Video message)

The UN Secretary General’s Envoy on Youth reminded all that to address today’s global challenges it is important to create resilience, creativity, and innovation. Young people of today are utilizing technology and innovation to address the challenges in their lives and communities. The UN Youth Strategy Youth 2030, the UN aims to be a leading example in acknowledging young people as equal partners and championing innovation in partnership with youth. Youth4South is a great initiative that can strengthen SSTC by engaging youth as future leaders in countries of the Global South.

The event proceeded with a shark-style competition featuring the 8 finalists of the Youth4South Leadership Programme to pitch in 5 minutes their initiative in front of a jury and an audience of multiple stakeholders including representatives from government, intergovernmental organizations, NGOs, private sector, start-ups, research institutions, and academia.

Members of the jury with representatives of UNOSSC, ESCAP, ITU, UNFPA, UNDP and academia

Youth4South Entrepreneurship Competition finalists at the GSSD Expo included:

1. Cassetex, by Gopal Kumar Mohoto (Bangladesh)
Gopal is an engineer, entrepreneur, and researcher on renewable energy in Bangladesh. He presented Cassetex which brings sustainable and innovative solutions for the future of energy and mobility. He has been creating energy solutions and transforming the energy sector away from grid dependence to off-grid, micro-energy, and community-based distributed energy.

2. AkoFresh, by Mathias Charles Yabe (Ghana)

Mathias is a food systems and technology enthusiast, who presented Akofresh that aims to make food systems stronger, fairer, and more sustainable in local communities in Ghana. Since 2018, his mission has been to help make food systems resilient through the introduction of climate-smart solutions in local communities to help improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers.
3. Tete’s African Interiors, Ruth T. Farkollie (Liberia)

Ruth is an entrepreneur, afro-fashion enthusiast, and social media marketer who presented Tete’s African Interiors driven by the desire to empower young girls lacking basic job creation skills and provide opportunities for them. She holds a BA, double majors, Business Administration (Marketing) and Corporate Communications (Public Relations), with a minor in Philosophy and Law from Lycoming College in Pennsylvania, USA.

4. aQysta, by Pratap Thapa (Nepal)

Pratap grew up in a small village in Nepal, which led him to the idea of developing the Barsha pump and Aqysta. Pratap is an Industrial Engineer with a master’s degree in Management of Technology from the Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands with a specialization in Economics and Finance.
5. WiCode for Kids, by Sarah Jane Fabito (The Philippines)

Sarah advocates for education, youth and women empowerment, and civic engagement. She is the Executive Director of Women in Tech - Batangas chapter in the Philippines and presented **WiCode for Kids** aiming to inspire and help young girls to build their confidence in tech. Previously she served as the Alliance Convenor of the National Youth Volunteers Coalition.

6. Elzian Agro, by Lilan Dayananda (Sri Lanka)

Lilan presented **Elzin Agro**, an initiative that has developed award-winning innovative solutions to Precision Agriculture and contributed to ending hunger in all its forms. He holds a special degree in Business Management from the University of Kelaniya and is a certified organic agribusiness practitioner.
7. Tilli, Kavindya Thennakoon (Sri Lanka)

Kavindya was born and raised in a close-knit community in Deraniyagala, Sri Lanka which sparked her passion for transforming learning outcomes to bridge the educational divide that she saw first-hand. She presented Tilli, a play-based, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) tool designed for 5 to 10-year-olds. She is a graduate and a Dean’s Fellow at the Stanford School of Education.

8. Nairobi Legal Insights, by Rogers Githinji (Uganda)

Githinji, a specialist in International Financial Law and Regulation and awaiting admission to the Bar as an advocate of the High Court of Kenya, presented Nairobi Legal Insights, a platform for
bringing the law to the common people in a language they can understand. He holds a bachelor's degree in Law, and a diploma in business management from Strathmore University, Kenya.

Lastly, the 3 final winners of the Youth4South Entrepreneurship Competition received an honorific award certificate on behalf of organizers in a ceremony at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand on 14 September.

The certificates included seed funding from the Government of Thailand of USD 3000 to the winner, USD 2000 to first runner up and USD 1000 to 2nd runner-up. The following were the winners:

- Winner: Kavindya Thennakoon, Tilli (Sri Lanka)
- 1st Runner up: Gopal Kumar Mohoto, Cassetex (Bangladesh)
- 2nd Runner up: Rogers Githinji, Nairobi Legal Insights (Uganda)

Overall, the 3-day Youth4South Special Event offered opportunities to young digital innovators, development practitioners and entrepreneurs on knowledge exchange, interaction with South-South networks, capacity building, and showcasing of solutions and innovations on a broader level.
to tackle the challenges brought upon by the COVID-19 pandemic and keep advancing towards the 2030 Agenda.

All Digital Innovation Challenge and Youth4South Entrepreneurship Competition finalists who participated in the Youth4South Special Event will have the opportunity to showcase their work in the UNOSSC South-South Galaxy partnership platform and will also be included in an ITU-UNOSSC Digital Innovation and Youth Entrepreneurship Network that will offer opportunities to connect and expand partnerships and participate in future training, fellowships and events.