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Development Cooperation Towards the SDGs: The India Model

Malancha Chakrabarty

Abstract

The Russia-Ukraine war has dealt a massive blow to a world already battered by the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) appear farther from reach. The current global scenario demands greater international cooperation for development. Yet, development aid is increasingly getting more securitised, and the imperative is for the international community to leverage cooperation during the current Decade of Action for the SDGs. This paper argues that India's model of development cooperation can serve as an example of sustainable development cooperation for its many advantages over the approaches of other donors. It recommends that India assume greater global leadership for sustainable development.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a huge setback to the global quest for sustainable development. In 2020, for the first time since the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted in 2015, the global average SDG score declined.¹ Analysts attribute the overall drop in the composite SDG score primarily to the increased poverty and unemployment rates during the pandemic. Even high-income countries such as Finland, Sweden, and Denmark—which rank first, second, and third, respectively on the SDG index—are not on-track to achieve all the SDGs.² The socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic on low-income countries, and particularly on their most vulnerable populations (such as migrant workers and women), were far more profound because they did not have the fiscal space to finance emergency response measures nor economic recovery plans.

In February 2021 the Russia-Ukraine war erupted, and quickly dealt a massive blow to the 2030 Agenda.³ The war is not only causing suffering in terms of deaths and displacement, but is also disrupting global supply chains, in turn resulting in economic disruption. The prices of food, energy, and other essential commodities have soared and the world could face mass hunger and famines as blockades of grain exports have exacerbated hunger in some of the most vulnerable countries in the world.⁴

Amidst the challenges that compound the complexities of the global development agenda, it has become amply clear that no country can achieve the SDGs on their own. The imperative is for greater international cooperation, which had been recognised as early as 2016 as a powerful lever to implement the SDGs.⁵ Experts underlined the need to change the old approach to development cooperation—first pioneered by United States (US) President Harry Truman in 1949 for post-War reconstruction—towards a more integrated implementation of the SDGs. As Wu Hongbo, Chair of the 2016 Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) Preparatory Process, said, “We cannot fulfil the transformative potential of the 2030 Agenda with the old approach to development cooperation. The Agenda demands new ways of working and a change of mind-set from all development cooperation actors.”⁶

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) also outlined a set of principles to guide the reorientation of states' development cooperation policies for a successful implementation of the SDGs:⁷

1. Development cooperation should support national efforts and specifically focus on the most vulnerable and marginalised groups such as women.
2. All forms of development cooperation such as capacity building, financial resources, technical collaboration, and policy advice must be scaled up.
3. Development cooperation should help leverage domestic resources and build local capacity.
4. Development cooperation partners must adopt a holistic approach to create coherent policies as opposed to competing policies across sectors.
5. Local authorities and citizens should be engaged in the monitoring and implementation of the SDGs.

A 2021 report by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) lists the advantages of using the SDG framework in development cooperation, among them: greater ability to navigate complex multidimensional challenges using the same language and data; building partnerships around a consensus agenda; and maximising the impact and value for money of every investment.⁸

a With less than ten years to go before the deadline for the 2030 Agenda, the Decade of Action calls for accelerating sustainable solutions to the world's biggest challenges —from poverty and gender inequity to climate change.

Unfortunately, however, there is a long way before the world can harness the potential of development cooperation for the 2030 Agenda even as it is now supposed to be embarking on the Decade of Action.^a The same OECD report found that most partner countries have yet to reorient their development cooperation towards achieving the SDGs. Indeed, in recent years, development cooperation has instead become increasingly securitised. Petrikova and Lazell (2019), for example, argue that Western donors are increasingly using development aid to protect their own security.⁹ Therefore, conflict-ridden countries that are deemed to “threaten” donor countries through a large inflow of migrants or terrorist attacks (such as Iraq, Somalia, and Afghanistan) receive maximum aid from Western countries. Meanwhile, states with “hidden” conflicts such as Chad, Papua New Guinea, or the Central African Republic receive minimal aid from these same donor countries.¹⁰ Key allies in the global fight against terrorism, such as Pakistan and Ethiopia, have also received substantial aid from the West.¹¹

The US, the world’s largest donor, is often singled out in foreign aid literature as an example of a state that has historically used aid to support its geostrategic concerns.¹² Professor of International Affairs Johanna Spear (2016) has observed that following 9/11, US aid was heavily militarised and massive aid programmes were implemented to support military operations in countries like Afghanistan and Iraq.¹³ Yet, Spear argued, the development outcomes in those countries remained doubtful and the US still failed to achieve its military goals. In their own work, Olivié and Pérez (2021) have also found a similar shift to securitised aid on the part of the United Kingdom (UK), another major donor.¹⁴ Several experts like Nathaniel Myers have argued that long-term development is likely to be undermined if short-term security and political concerns continue to drive aid programmes.¹⁵

Introduction

This paper makes a case for the Indian model of development cooperation to serve as an example of cooperation for the implementation of the SDGs as it has advantages over the current approaches of other donors, whether Western states or those in the Global South. The paper offers recommendations for India's development cooperation in the Decade of Action so the country can make a significant contribution to the achievement of the SDGs. The rest of the paper discusses the advantages of India's development cooperation approach and outlines a set of specific recommendations for better alignment of India's development cooperation with the sustainable development agenda.

“Amidst the challenges that compound the complexities of the global development agenda, it has become clear that no country can achieve the SDGs on their own.”

India's Development Cooperation Ethos

India may often be dubbed as an “emerging donor”, yet the country has not only had a long history of development partnerships, but it has also challenged the very discourse on development cooperation over the years. India embarked on its first development cooperation programme shortly after its independence, with the founding principles being anti-colonialism, ‘third world’ solidarity, and sharing of development experience. Within only two years, in 1949, the country announced 70 scholarship grants for students of other developing countries, particularly in Asia and Africa, to study in India.¹⁶

As a newly independent country with massive development challenges including shortage of skilled labour, India was keen to share its development experience with other developing countries and focused its attention on capacity building in those countries. The Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme would eventually be launched in September 1964, designed to nurture closer relations with other developing countries based on partnership and cooperation for mutual benefit.

The founding principles of India's development cooperation programme were of great normative significance because the post-war global aid architecture was heavily dominated by the West, whose donor-recipient model only deepened inequalities between countries. Historian Clemens Six (2009) had argued that the idea of development cooperation is essentially a reconfiguration of the centre-periphery relationship which was originally established through colonisation. In his own words: “Dichotomies such as developed and not so developed, North and South, First World and Third World, modern and traditional or West and non-West ‘provide the rationale and justification for the practice of some people intervening to develop others and thus also shape those who give assistance and those who must be grateful for it’. In principle, these different binaries need to be distinguished from each other as they include geographical as well as historical and evolutionary terms. What they have in common,

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however, is that they do not simply describe historical, political or economic realities but that they constitute a legitimisation and justification for active intervention in the 'South' or the 'East'."

India's development cooperation programme received little attention from other countries because it was also one of the largest recipients of foreign aid till the 1980s. Things changed in the 1990s, after nearly a decade of liberalisation of the Indian economy and the consequent high growth rates. From being one of the world's largest recipients of foreign aid in the 1980s, India would become a net donor by 2015.¹⁷

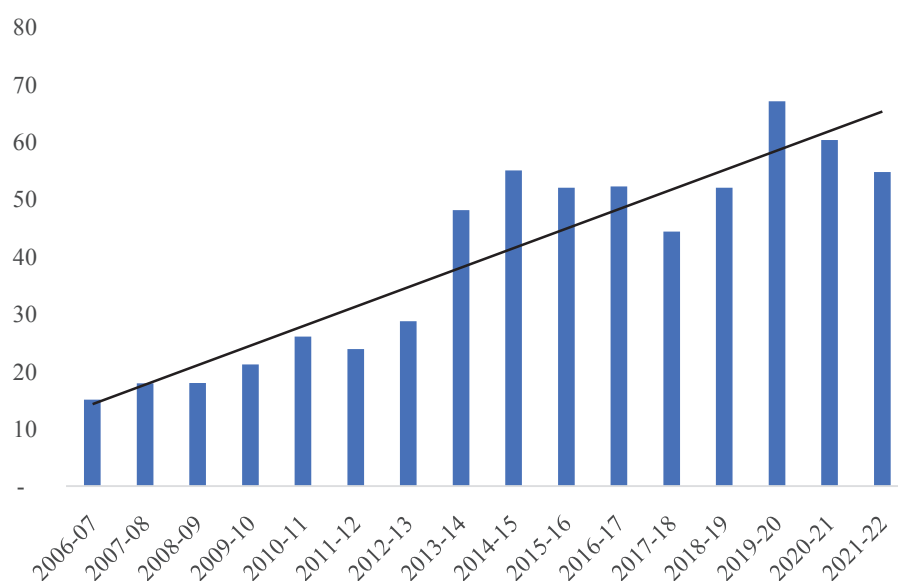
Years earlier, in 2003, India made the strategic decision that it will accept bilateral aid only from six countries, viz. the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, the European Union, and Russia. The decision to limit foreign aid boosted India's image globally and a few years later, in 2008, India's Department of Economic Affairs produced a position paper that defined the fundamental parameters of India's policy of receiving foreign aid. The following were the main observations of the position paper: India was no longer reliant on external assistance for financing its plan outlays; the Indian economy was strong enough to move away from tied aid; bilateral aid should be directed to autonomous institutions and NGOs; and India would further reduce its dependence on foreign aid.¹⁸

Such a shift did not happen in a vacuum; after all, that period after economic liberalisation was marked by substantive changes in India's overall foreign policy. Political solidarity gave way to pragmatism and economic diplomacy became a central feature of India's foreign policy. India also dramatically expanded the scale of its development cooperation programme in the mid-2000s. In 2003, India launched the India Development Initiative to provide development assistance to other developing countries and concessional lines of credit became one of the main instruments of India's development cooperation (see Box 1). India's budget allocations for technical and economic

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cooperation grew dramatically from INR 15.1 billion in 2006-07 to INR 54.7 billion in 2021-21 in constant 2011-12 prices (see Figure 1). By 2022, India had approved lines of credit worth US\$ 27.7 billion to developing countries in Asia, Africa, Oceania, and Latin America.¹⁹

Figure 1:
**India's Technical and Economic
Cooperation Budgets (2006-07 to
2021-22, in INR billions at constant
2011-12 prices)**



Source: Author's calculations based on data from Annual Reports of the Ministry of External Affairs

Note: Wholesale Price Indicator deflator has been used to convert the budget estimates to constant 2011-12 prices.

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Box 1: The India Development and Economic Assistance Scheme

In 2003, the Indian government announced the India Development Initiative (IDI), which in 2004 would be renamed India Development and Economic Assistance Scheme (IDEAS). Under the scheme, India extends concessional lines of credit to other developing countries to support development projects such as railways, roads and bridges, and power transmission lines. The following are the objectives of the scheme:

1. Capacity building and skills transfer in host countries
2. Trade promotion
3. Infrastructure development in partner countries

The lines of credit are routed through the Export and Import Bank of India and the Development Partnership Administration, created in January 2012, within the Ministry of External Affairs coordinates the lines of credit programme.

Source: EXIM Bank of India and Ministry of External Affairs

India deliberately avoided the donor-recipient model being promoted by the OECD and preferred to call itself a “development partner” whose aim was mutual benefit. India and other southern donors^b shared the view that the institutional structures and processes that governed development cooperation only deepened the unequal power relations between countries and intended to change them. Part of India's desire to minimise its colonial legacy was to challenge the development paradigm as a Western, post-colonial concept and emphasise the primacy of mutually beneficial demand-driven development partnerships.

Early on, India's approach to development cooperation emphasised demand-driven development and respect for sovereignty as opposed to a prescriptive donor-driven model; the assumption is

^b China, India, Brazil, and South Africa are some important ‘Southern’ or ‘emerging’ donors.

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that countries themselves know what is best for them. Over time, India and other southern donors diminished the dominance of the OECD-Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) donors and many of these traditional donors are now working with India in third countries. The UK is one of the finest examples of a traditional donor that has made significant efforts towards working on development projects with India in other developing countries in the form of triangular cooperation,²⁰ and towards this end, in 2015, the two countries signed a “Statement of Intent on Partnership for Cooperation in Third Countries”.²¹

Fahimul Quadir, an expert on international development, has observed that India and other BRICS^c countries have played an important role in redefining the structure of development cooperation which was earlier characterised by conditionalities and inequity between countries. The efforts of the southern donors in changing the conditionality-driven narrative contributed to the prioritisation of the needs of partner countries as opposed to the interests of the donors.²²

While India and other southern donors have provided an alternative paradigm to development cooperation, however, they cannot be defined under a single umbrella akin to the OECD-DAC as their approaches remain varied. For example, India and China are often bracketed together in the literature on development cooperation, yet their styles are very different. China's development cooperation often involves large state-led infrastructure projects for which natural resources are required as collateral. These infrastructure-for-resources deals, also referred to as ‘Angola mode’ as they were first seen in that African country,^d are increasingly being criticised because

c BRICS is an important grouping bringing together five major emerging economies of the world: Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa

d ‘Angola mode’ or the ‘Angola Model’ refers to large infrastructure-for-resources deals in which China offers massive loans for infrastructure development against natural resources of the host state (such as oil, copper, and others). These deals are named after Angola because it was the first country in Africa to sign such a deal with China. Subsequently, many other countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo signed such agreements with China.

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they have failed to deliver on promises to the host countries. These host countries—including Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Ghana—have also suffered the negative environmental impacts of the projects.²³

In recent years, China has also faced criticisms over the sustainability of its loans to developing countries, as well as its poor record in job creation, capacity building, and environmental standards. Scholars like Horn, Reinhart, and Trebesch also assert that much of the Chinese lending to other countries is “hidden” and not reported to either the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank, thus raising serious concerns over transparency.²⁴

For its part, India has wielded the potential of the private sector in its development initiatives, in which capacity-building programmes are a key component. India's flagship scheme, ITEC, has expanded in scale and scope and its budget has increased over the years.²⁵ The total budget allocation for the programme was INR 2.2 billion in 2019-20, and about 12,000 civilian training slots were offered to 160 partner countries across the globe.²⁶ About 98 Indian institutions run training courses in diverse fields such as agriculture, food and fertiliser, engineering and technology, environment and climate change, power, renewable energy, textiles, and artificial intelligence.²⁷ In 2019, India launched the e-ITEC programme to expand further its reach through online courses.

Perhaps the most groundbreaking Indian initiative in recent years is the Pan African e-Network, which was launched in 2007 and ended in 2017. Under the project, whose budget is at US\$ 1 billion, India set up a fibre-optic network to provide satellite connectivity, tele-medicine, and tele-education to African countries, as well as various digital applications such as e-commerce, e-governance, and resource-mapping. The network connected 12 ‘super-specialty’ hospitals of India with 40 patient-end hospitals in Africa. Forty-eight African countries participated in the tele-education component of the PAeNP. Over 24,000 African students obtained degrees in

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various undergraduate and graduate disciplines from various Indian universities through the network.²⁸ By 2017, some 6,700 Continuous Medical Education sessions were conducted for African doctors, nurses and paramedical staff.²⁹

There is also e-VBAB, which was launched in 2018 as an extension of the PAeNP and implemented in 48 African countries. The programme aims to provide free tele-education to 4,000 African students every year for the next five years and continuing medical education to 1,000 African doctors, paramedical staff, and nurses. Under the programme, Indian doctors will also be available to African doctors for consultation.

Low-cost Development Solutions

A crucial advantage of India's development cooperation architecture is its nimble character and its ability to provide low-cost development solutions to the partner countries. While India is often dismissed as a small-scale donor relative to the OECD countries, it is important to note that the bulk of Western aid is often consumed by administrative expenses, consultancy fees, and contracts for the donor countries themselves. Much of Western aid, therefore, is merely recycled back to the donor countries.³⁰ For countries like the UK, Canada, and Denmark, for example, administrative costs alone could comprise over 10 percent of their aid budgets.³¹ A significant part of the aid funds is also spent on wages, which are far higher in foreign-funded agencies that implement the aid programmes. For instance, wage costs in Dutch aid programmes could be as high as 25 percent of the entire aid budget.³²

Indeed, Johannesburg-based NGO, ActionAid International estimates that nearly a quarter of the aid provided by rich countries is used to fund "ineffective" Western consultants who have little knowledge of real development problems.³³ Moreover, countries like France and Australia spend significant proportions of their aid on refugee-related expenditures in their own territories. These funds do not leave the donor country and are not available for development activities in the supposed recipient countries.³⁴

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In 2019-20, India committed US\$ 1.32 billion to international development cooperation.³⁵ Although the allocation is a low 0.3 percent of the country's overall budget, it is a more significant contribution than those of high-income countries such as Australia (US\$ 2.8 billion, 0.22 percent of GDP), South Korea (US\$ 2.5 billion, 0.15 percent of GDP), and Austria (US\$ 1.2 billion, 0.27 percent of GDP), considering India's US\$ 2 billion in credit lines.³⁶ Some analysts also note that a better method of measuring development assistance is calculating in terms of purchasing power parity^e (PPP); after all, comparing development assistance budgets in US-dollar terms ignores the fact that more goods and services can be provided with one dollar in India than in the US.³⁷ Therefore, training costs (which form the bulk of India's development assistance) and costs of Indian goods are far lower than in developed countries. Indeed, in PPP terms, India's development cooperation allocation (about \$ 4.3 billion) in 2019-20 was larger than high-income donor countries like Canada.³⁸

India has become more adept in providing development solutions to other developing countries at a fraction of the cost that Western countries incur, for various reasons. It does not, for example, hire costly consultants and it implements projects based on the needs of the recipient countries. One of the best examples of low-cost development solutions by India is the 'Solar Mamas', where women are trained to become solar engineers and bring electricity to remote districts.^f In 2016, about 800 'solar mamas' from 78 countries, trained through 16 ITEC courses, electrified 50,000 homes in over 500 villages.³⁹

e Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) is a metric used to compare economic productivity or standard of living between countries. Two countries are in equilibrium when a basket of goods is priced the same in both countries, taking into account the exchange rates.

f 'Solar mamas' are women in Africa's rural areas who may not be literate who are taught how to fabricate solar panels, lights and photovoltaic circuits in the Barefoot College in Tilonia Village in Rajasthan. These women go back to their villages with skills and knowledge in electrification.

India's Development Cooperation and the SDGs

The adoption of the SDGs in 2015 is often considered a watershed in the history of development. Unlike its predecessor Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)—which were largely technocratic and applicable to only developing countries—the SDGs were the outcome of a long-drawn consultative process and are universally applicable. Moreover, for the first time, the world agreed to aspirational goals concerning the interrelated and complex social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. While the MDGs focused on addressing development deficits without shifting the paradigm that stressed economic growth to one that considers equity or environmental justice, the SDGs are universal and devote attention to all three dimensions of sustainable development—economic, social, and environmental.

Since 2015, many countries have worked to align their development cooperation strategies with the SDG Agenda. While India does not explicitly mention SDGs as an objective of its development cooperation strategy, its initiatives work on sectors closely connected to the SDGs (see Table 1). For instance, in Africa, as well as in neighbours like Nepal, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Bhutan, India has aided in capacity-building and technical training (SDG 17) under the ITEC Programme. These cover various areas such as education (SDG 4), health (SDG 3), and infrastructural support (SDG 9) in the form of constructing hydropower plants, roadways, and transportation links, thereby opening up new markets for trade.⁴⁰ ORF analyst Swati Prabhu (2021) examined India's development partnerships from 1947 and found that the country's development partnerships have hewed to the global sustainability agenda, even before it was enunciated as the SDGs in 2015.

India's Development Cooperation and the SDGs

**Table 1:
How India's Development Partnerships Align with Sustainability Goals**

Period of India's Programme	Nature of Cooperation	Partner Country	Related SDGs
Phase I (1947 – 1990)	Power Exchange Agreement and establishment of Schools and setting up facilities in Tribhuvan University	Nepal	SDG 7 & SDG 4
	Treaty of Friendship toward infrastructural and ITEC programmes	Myanmar	SDG 9 & SDG 17
	Indira Gandhi Children's Hospital and training of Afghan bureaucrats, doctors and paramedics under ITEC	Afghanistan	SDG 3 & SDG 17
	LOCs amounting to US\$ 63 million linking Bengal-Assam plains to Phuentsholing, and Phuentsholing to Thimpu and Paro	Bhutan	SDG 9
	Cooperation in capacity building, trade and investment, infrastructure, and ensuring the supply of trained teachers	Ethiopia	SDG 17, SDG 9, SDG 3, SDG 8
	Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI) promoting cultural cooperation	Mauritius	SDG 4
	2X20 Tripoli West Power Station	Libya	SDG 7

India's Development Cooperation and the SDGs

Period of India's Programme	Nature of Cooperation	Partner Country	Related SDGs
Phase II (1990 – 2008)	Under the Second phase LOCs programmes, US\$ 640 million towards sugar industry	Ethiopia	SDG 2
	Centre for Demonstration and Promotion of Technologies (CDT)	Cote d'Ivoire	SDG 1, SDG 8, SDG 9
	School Feeding Programme, healthcare facilities, Small Development Project Scheme, initiation of Salma Power Dam	Afghanistan	SDG 4, SDG 1, SDG 3, SDG 7, SDG 2, SDG 17
	Advanced Information Technology Institute-Kofi Annan Centre of Excellence in ICT (AITI-KACE)	Ghana and ECOWAS	SDG 9, SDG 17, SDG 4
	Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre (RGSC)	Mauritius	SDG 4
	Pan-African E-Network Project	Africa	SDG 2, SDG 4
	Barefoot College under ITEC	Sierra Leone	SDG 5, SDG 7
	43 Road Projects, Arun-3 Hydropower Project	Nepal	SDG 11, SDG 7
Phase III (Post-2008)	Extended LOCs amounting to US\$ 7,000 million towards 31 connectivity projects, High Impact Community Development Projects	Bangladesh	SDG 11, SDG 17, SDG 4
	Regional Connectivity	Sri Lanka	SDG 11, SDG 9
	IBSA Fund-Healthcare access	Cambodia	SDG 3
	IBSA Fund- Facilitating means of irrigation	Laos	SDG 2
	IBSA Fund-Training in modern agricultural techniques	Timor- Leste	SDG 2, SDG 17
	India-UN Development Partnership Fund	SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs	Covering all the 17 SDGs
	International Solar Alliance (ISA)	Developing nations of Africa and Asia	SDG 7
	Coalition of Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)	Asia, Pacific and Oceania	SDG 13, SDG 11
	Vaccine Maitri	Global	SDG 3, SDG 17

Source: Prabhu (2021)

India's Development Cooperation and the SDGs

India's development cooperation approach is also in line with the five ways suggested by the UNDESA, discussed briefly in the Introduction of this paper. The following paragraphs explain how India's development cooperation model fits with the UNDESA's suggestions for the reorientation of development cooperation policies.

Development cooperation should support national efforts and specifically focus on the most vulnerable and marginalised groups such as women.

As underlined earlier in this paper, India's approach to development cooperation has historically been demand-driven and are not tied to traditional donor conditionalities.^g The partner country identifies a project based on its development priorities and submits a request for a line of credit along with a pre-feasibility study or detailed project report to the Indian mission which sends the proposal to the Ministry of External Affairs for approval (See Qadri and Sehgal for line of credit process mechanism).⁴¹ It is the partner country, therefore, that initiates the project and not the development partner. This is in sharp contrast to the supply-driven approach of the DAC donors where the lending programme is decided in the donor country's capital.⁴² In other words, India's lines of credit programme supports national development plans and priorities in the countries where it operates. Moreover, various Indian development initiatives like the 'solar mamas' and SEWA's skill development courses for Afghan women have had a deep impact on the lives of marginalised women in Africa and Afghanistan.⁴³

All forms of development cooperation such as capacity building, financial resources, technical collaboration, and policy advice must be scaled up.

As the foreign aid budgets of developed countries remain stagnant or have even declined, India's has grown rapidly since the early 2000s and its current development assistance commitments are comparable

g 'Traditional conditionalities' were about economic policies of the recipient country. Western aid is often tied to neoliberal reforms and political conditions such as the institution of democracy.

India's Development Cooperation and the SDGs

to many high-income countries (see Figure 1). Mullen et al (2014) estimate that India's development cooperation budget in 2013 was higher than the foreign aid budgets of 23 OECD-DAC donors at that time.⁴⁴ Similarly, the scale of India's capacity-building programmes such as ITEC have grown rapidly in recent years.

Development cooperation should help leverage domestic resources and build local capacity.

Although India's lines of credit programme mandates that 75 percent of the inputs be sourced from India, the country provides exemptions to this rule according to the particular circumstances. India's development cooperation plays a significant role in harnessing the host country's human resources. As mentioned earlier, sharing of development experience and capacity building are cornerstones of India's development partnerships with the Global South. With Africa, for example, Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a visit to Uganda in 2018 underlined how India aims to "build as much local capacity and create as much local opportunities as possible... on terms that will be comfortable for you, that will liberate your potential and not constrain your future."⁴⁵ Capacity building is embedded in most Indian development cooperation projects. For instance, the information and communication technology (ICT) projects in the form of Centres of Excellence across Central Asia, Africa, and Southeast Asia are built on a model that includes hand-holding for up to five years before the project is turned over to local authorities.⁴⁶

Development cooperation partners must adopt a holistic approach to create coherent policies as opposed to competing policies across sectors.

Since India's development projects are selected by the host country based on their needs and priorities, the chances are slim that policies across sectors will end up competing with one another.

India's Development Cooperation and the SDGs

Local authorities and citizens should be engaged in the monitoring and implementation of the SDGs.

While it is essential to engage local authorities and citizens in the monitoring and implementation of the SDGs, there are genuine capacity constraints in many of the small countries where India implements its development projects. This is an area that requires improvements and host governments must step up their efforts to ensure effective implementation of SDGs.

“As the foreign aid budgets of developed countries remain stagnant or have even declined, India's has grown rapidly since the early 2000s.”

Evaluating the Criticisms of India's Development Cooperation

As India's development cooperation has expanded in scale and scope, so has the literature on the subject. Western scholars have been mostly critical and suspicious of India's development cooperation. A common criticism of India's development cooperation programme rests on the fact that aid from emerging donors is self-seeking, promotes poor policies, and increases the debt burden of poorer countries.^{47,48} These critics also often club India together with China and other "emerging donors" like Brazil and Turkey. However, as observers like Six (2009) argue, the rise of China and India's brand of development initiatives—"self-seeking" as they might be—do not apply the same "pseudo-emancipatory" Western rhetoric and present a unique opportunity for countries to cooperate.⁴⁹

International Relations expert, Eswaran Sridharan outlines five main types of concerns about the growing influence of so-called "emerging donors":

1. The emerging donors might support rogue states like Sudan.
2. They might increase the level of indebtedness in developing countries by free-riding on debt relief provided under the HIPC^h initiative.
3. They might focus on extracting resources.
4. They disregard norms such as those for environmental protection, corporate governance, and labour.
5. They do not encourage the right economic policies as there are no conditionalities associated with development assistance from emerging countries like India.⁵⁰

^h The Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative was launched by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in 1996 to ensure that poor countries do not face unmanageable levels of debt.

Evaluating the Criticisms of India's Development Cooperation

Most of these concerns are exaggerated and there is no evidence to assert that India's development cooperation initiatives contribute to any of the above criticisms in a significant way. Analyst Ngaire Woods (2008) has long acknowledged that Western commentators have been highly critical of emerging donors; she argued that the emerging donors (including India) are offering alternatives to traditional donors, thereby creating competitive pressures in the existing system.⁵¹ Through their initiatives, emerging donors have weakened the bargaining position of Western donors and exposed the outdated standards and processes that they employ.

Recommendations for the Decade of Action

India's development cooperation programme has expanded rapidly over the years and the country is actively contributing to global development goals through its leadership. One of the finest examples of India's leadership at the international level is the International Solar Alliance—a treaty-based inter-governmental organisation that aims to create a global market system to tap the benefits of solar power and promote clean energy applications.ⁱ Given how the country has played an important role in shifting the narrative and architecture of development cooperation, India should assume greater initiative in the implementation of the SDGs in the coming years. Playing such a role is in line with its aspirations for growing a responsible global power. This becomes more relevant at a time when the West and China are locked in geopolitical rivalry and are failing to show enough interest in creating enduring solutions to the world's massive development concerns.

The following paragraphs offer recommendations for India's development cooperation programme.

Conduct impact assessments of India's development partnerships.

India has had a long history of development cooperation and yet there is little research being done on its programmes. Official data on the development impacts of India's development partnerships is also scant. For instance, India's capacity-building initiatives such as ITEC are over 50 years old, but there is no systematic study on the actual impacts of the programme. This is primarily because there is a dearth of open access public data on the programme nor are there any government reports on the development impacts of ITEC. Similarly, there are very few studies on the development impacts of India's lines of credit projects. Several scholars have noted that there is a lack of information on India's development cooperation and whatever information is available in the public domain is not disaggregated

i The Paris Declaration established the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and the ISA has 75 signatory countries including India and France.

Recommendations for the Decade of Action

and normally dispersed.⁵² For an effective development cooperation programme, it is important to evaluate the impacts of existing programmes.

Formulate a White Paper on India's development cooperation programmes.

Many scholars have observed that India's development assistance lacks a strict well-defined set of clear objectives.⁵³ ORF analyst Vikrom Mathur (2021) emphasises the need for India to redefine its 'development cooperation strategy' as a set of activities with clearly defined objectives such as environmental protection, strengthening of public health systems, and eradication of poverty.⁵⁴ Given India's global-power aspirations and its rapidly expanding development cooperation programme, India should formulate a White Paper that would clearly state the objectives of its development cooperation and outline a strategy for mainstreaming the SDGs in such policy.

Often dubbed as an “emerging donor”, India has a development cooperation programme that is as old as its history as an independent country. India has also consistently challenged the development discourse over the decades. The post-war development paradigm was dominated by the West which in many ways was a continuation of the colonial relations of powers. The principles of anti-colonialism, ‘third world’ solidarity, and sharing of development experience found favour with other developing countries in Asia and Africa though the real impacts were limited during this phase because India was itself a recipient of significant amounts of aid.

India’s development cooperation programme expanded massively from the 2000s on the back of strong economic growth, and today its development cooperation budget is comparable to those of some OECD countries. The scale of India’s development cooperation activities in the neighbouring countries and in Africa has grown remarkably and its projects are making an important contribution to the achievement of SDGs. These initiatives promote the principles of mutually beneficial demand-driven development and respect for sovereignty.

Indeed, the rise of India and other southern donors has contributed to significant changes in the international development paradigm. Given the massive development challenges that the world is now facing, India must rise to the occasion and play a more significant role in the attainment of the SDGs. The Indian government should release more information on India’s development initiatives in the public domain, conduct impact assessments of its projects, and mainstream the sustainable development goals in its development cooperation strategy. [ORF](#)

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Appendix 1: List of ITEC Partner Countries

1. Afghanistan	33. Colombia	65. Iran	97. Mozambique	129. Somalia
2. Albania	34. Commonwealth of Dominica	66. Iraq	98. Myanmar	130. South Africa
3. Algeria	35. Comoros	67. Jamaica	99. Namibia	131. South Sudan
4. Angola	36. Congo (Republic of)	68. Jordan	100. Nauru	132. Sri Lanka
5. Anguilla	37. Cook Islands	69. Kazakhstan	101. Nepal	133. St. Kitts & Nevis
6. Antigua and Barbuda	38. Costa Rica	70. Kenya	102. Nicaragua	134. St. Lucia
7. Argentina	39. Cote D'ivoire	71. Kingdom of Eswatini (Formerly Swaziland)	103. Niger	135. St. Vincent & Grenadines
8. Armenia	40. Croatia	72. Kiribati	104. Nigeria	136. Sudan
9. Azerbaijan	41. Cuba	73. Korea (DPRK)	105. Niue	137. Suriname
10. Bahamas	42. Democratic Republic of Congo	74. Kyrgyzstan	106. Norway	138. Syria
11. Bahrain	43. Djibouti	75. Laos	107. Oman	139. Tajikistan
12. Bangladesh	44. Dominican Republic	76. Latvia	108. Palau	140. Tanzania
13. Barbados	45. Ecuador	77. Lebanon	109. Palestine	141. Thailand
14. Belarus	46. Egypt	78. Lesotho	110. Panama	142. Timor Leste
15. Belize	47. El-Salvador	79. Liberia	111. Papua New Guinea	143. Togo
16. Benin	48. Equatorial Guinea	80. Libya	112. Paraguay	144. Tonga
17. Bhutan	49. Eritrea	81. Lithuania	113. Peru	145. Trinidad & Tobago

Appendix

18. Bolivia	50. Ethiopia	82. Macedonia	114. Philippines	146. Tunisia
19. Bosnia-Herzegovina	51. Fiji	83. Madagascar	115. Poland	147. Turkey
20. Botswana	52. Gabon	84. Malawi	116. Qatar	148. Turkmenistan
21. Brazil	53. Gambia	85. Malaysia	117. Republic of Sao Tome	149. Turks & Caicos Islands
22. Brunei Darussalam	54. Georgia	86. Maldives	118. Romania	150. Tuvalu
23. Bulgaria	55. Ghana	87. Mali	119. Russia	151. Uganda
24. Burkina Faso	56. Grenada	88. Marshall Islands	120. Rwanda	152. Ukraine
25. Burundi	57. Guatemala	89. Mauritania	121. Samoa	153. Uruguay
26. Cambodia	58. Guinea	90. Mauritius	122. Senegal	154. Uzbekistan
27. Cameroon	59. Guinea-Bissau	91. Mexico	123. Serbia	155. Vanuatu
28. Cape Verde Island	60. Guyana	92. Micronesia	124. Seychelles	156. Venezuela
29. Cayman Islands	61. Haiti	93. Moldova	125. Sierra Leone	157. Vietnam
30. Central African Republic	62. Honduras	94. Mongolia	126. Slovak Republic	158. Yemen
31. Chad	63. Hungary	95. Montenegro	127. Solomon Islands	159. Zambia
32. Chile	64. Indonesia	96. Morocco	128. Somalia	160. Zimbabwe

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