

Development without strings attached

Unlike North-South development cooperation, India's approach to its peers in the South is unconditional and mutually beneficial

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1. In the last decade or so, the range and quantum of South-South cooperation has expanded significantly. It has also inspired spirited multilateral discussions on harmonising the traditional frameworks of North-South cooperation with the emerging patterns of South-South developmental partnerships. There is, however, a pervasive sentiment among countries of the South that they do not factor in sufficiently the underlying premises of South-South cooperation, the circumstances in which it developed and its unique character.

2. I outline India's experience to illustrate this point. From the time of our emergence as a free nation, we recognised the importance of human resource capacity building as a requirement for economic growth and independent policy making. This recognition informed the course of our cooperation with other developing countries with whom we shared the aspiration of eradicating poverty and under development. The Indian Technical and Economic Assistance programme, ITEC, was launched in 1964 with the objective of sharing our knowledge and skills with fellow developing countries. Over nearly five decades, ITEC and its sister initiatives, the Special Commonwealth Assistance for Africa Programme (SCAAP) and the Technical Cooperation Scheme of Colombo Plan, have contributed substantially to capacity building in many parts of the world. Last year, nearly 9,000 civilians from 161 countries attended courses in diverse disciplines, conducted by 47 Indian institutions: We offer 2,300 scholarships annually for degree courses in Indian universities. We also run special courses at the request of countries or regions on specialised subjects such as election management, WTO studies, parliamentary practices and public-private partnerships. At the India-Africa Forum Summits in 2008 and 2011, we committed to establishing about 100 institutions in different African countries to strengthen capacities. We depute experts abroad to share expertise in areas like information technology, auditing, pharmacology, public administration and textiles research.

3. The core idea is to share the lessons we have learnt and continue to learn, with other countries traversing the same path towards development. This is the spirit in which illiterate grandmothers from various countries are trained in a remote village in Rajasthan, so that they can carry back solar electrification technologies to their remote villages in Africa, Central America, Asia or the

Pacific Islands. The NGO SEWA — Self Employed Women's Association — similarly contributes to women's empowerment in rural Afghanistan through livelihood generating programmes. An earlier example is from our Green Revolution, when we shared with Vietnam research on high-yielding rice varieties through exchanges of scientists and the establishment of a Rice Research Institute in southern Vietnam. Today, Vietnam is a major rice exporter and competes with India in world markets. In their structure and diversity, such programmes do not have many parallels in North-South cooperation.

4. Over the years, we have expanded our development cooperation portfolio through grant assistance to Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal and Sri Lanka for projects in infrastructure, hydroelectricity, power transmission, and other sectors identified by the host government as priority areas for their development. Another strand has been concessional Lines of Credit. Over the last decade or so, over 150 Lines of Credit totalling over U.S. \$9.5 billion have been allocated, financing a wide range of projects from drinking water schemes to power plants to technology parks and railway infrastructure in developing countries.

5. In all these strands of development assistance, our underlying philosophy remains that which underpins South-South cooperation. Our engagement is demand-driven and responds to the developmental priorities of our partner countries. We do not attach conditionalities, we do not prescribe policies and we do not challenge national sovereignty. We promote a mutually beneficial exchange of development experiences and resources.

6. There is an acknowledged historical context to Official Development Assistance (ODA), which distinguishes North-South Cooperation from South-South Cooperation. The focus on South-South cooperation in the prevailing international discourse on aid architecture increasingly glosses over this fact. It conveniently overlooks the reality that developing countries, even the so-called emerging economies, continue to confront major economic challenges of their own, exacerbated by the current global economic situation, which place an inherent limitation on their capacity to contribute to international development cooperation. The assistance which developing countries offer to other developing countries should therefore continue to remain voluntary and free from externally imposed norms drawn from North-South Cooperation. Simply put, whereas North-South cooperation is a historic responsibility, South-South cooperation is a voluntary partnership.

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